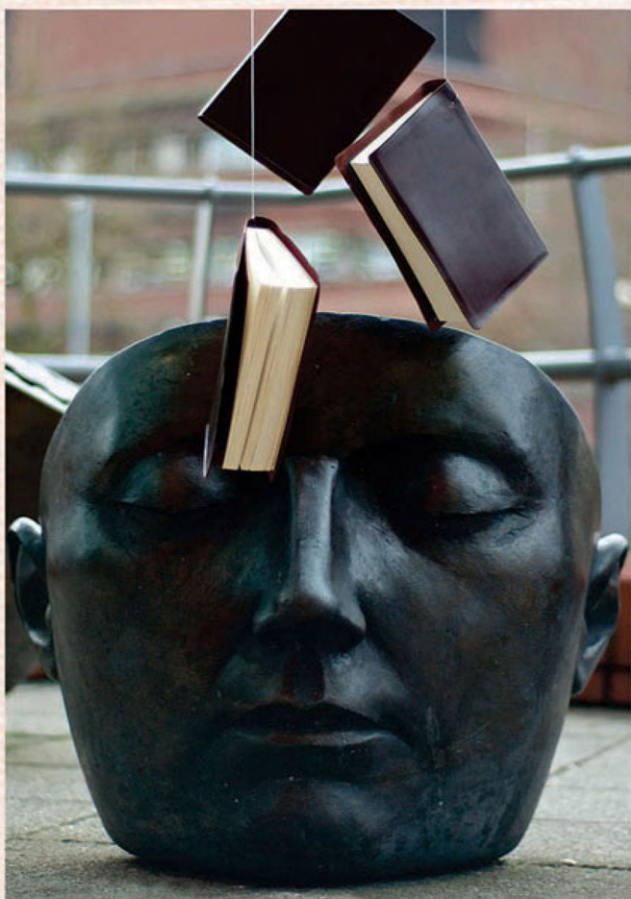


REASSESSING THE TWENTIETH- CENTURY CANON

FROM JOSEPH CONRAD TO ZADIE SMITH



EDITED BY NICOLA ALLEN
AND DAVID SIMMONS



Reassessing the Twentieth-Century Canon

Also by Nicola Allen

MARGINALITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY BRITISH NOVEL

Also by David Simmons

THE ANTI-HERO IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL: From Joseph Heller to Kurt Vonnegut
NEW CRITICAL ESSAYS ON KURT VONNEGUT

Reassessing the Twentieth-Century Canon

From Joseph Conrad to Zadie Smith

Edited by

Nicola Allen

University of Wolverhampton, UK

and

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*To Philip Tew, whose encouragement and enthusiasm
remain an inspiration*

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Introduction

Nicola Allen and David Simmons

The twentieth century was not exactly filled with optimism when it came to the novel. The form was believed to be in crisis at several points; with various noted critics suggesting that it was 'dead' or at the very least 'irrelevant'. José Ortega y Gasset's *Decline of the Novel* (1925) was the first in a series of meditations on the subject of the novel's future, largely aimed at predicting, documenting and analysing its demise. Walter Benjamin continued this trend when only five years later in his 1930 essay *Krisis des Romans* (Crisis of the Novel) he suggests that the novel is 'the most extreme and vertiginous, the last and most advanced stage of the old bourgeois *bildungsroman*' (304). In the 1950s and 1960s, contributors to the discussion included Gore Vidal, Roland Barthes, and John Barth, and in the 1970s (amongst others) Tom Wolfe predicted that journalism would displace the work of novelists, who (he felt) had become disconnected from the social realities of American post-war life. He characterised authors in an unremittingly caustic tone, as: 'all crowded into one phone booth . . . doing these poor, frantic little exercises in form' (94). Indeed, in a century that famously saw a proliferation of different movements and schools within literature the prediction that the novel was at an end, or was somehow stunted by what were perceived to be narrow Victorian bourgeois roots, sometimes seemed to be the only shared belief amongst any (though never all) practitioners and commentators on the form.

While critics throughout the twentieth century discussed the novel's (lack of) continuing relevance based on its plot ties to the lived experiences of a decidedly Victorian, decidedly middle-class existence, more recent criticism has suggested that the form itself might be exhausted. In his influential book *After the War: The Novel and England Since 1945* (1993) literary critic D. J. Taylor lambasts twentieth-century fiction by comparing it to its Victorian ancestor, and finding it wanting. In the introduction to his book Taylor reminisces about one afternoon when he sat alone in his father's study 'discovering', for the first time, the delights of Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1848). Taylor proposes perhaps a rather romanticised

notion that the reading experience should be akin to the 'discovery' of a 'hidden treasure', an experience which he feels has been lost in the twentieth century, and he attacks what he regards as the illegitimacy of the descendants of the greatest examples of Victorian fiction, railing against the work of contemporary authors such as Martin Amis and labelling them: 'the bastard great-grandchildren of a once unsullied family'. He insists of Victorian writers such as Dickens that 'no modern writer – certainly no modern *English* writer – can hold a candle to them' (p. xiv).

Fuelling Taylor's critique is the concept, common to many of the otherwise often diverse individuals and groups who attacked or expressed anxiety concerning the novel throughout the twentieth century, that the writing of literature has become a 'profession' – something carried out by eminently respectable middle-class individuals who are intent on making a living – rather than being driven by more noble desires to challenge hegemonic and ideological structures and create work of great critical and artistic merit. Yet, it is important to note that a wealth of critical material exists which explores prose writing in the twentieth century and the important developments in technique, form and content taking place in the novel during this period. Richard Bradford's, *The Novel Now: Contemporary British Fiction* (2007); and Nick Bentley's *Contemporary British Fiction* (2008) both discuss the novel within the context of twentieth-century developments. While John Brannigan's *Orwell to the Present: Literature in England, 1945–2000* (2003) and Katharine Cockin and Jago Morrison's *The Post-War Literature Handbook* (2010) as well as Brian Finney's *English Fiction Since 1984: Narrating a Nation* (2006); Jago Morrison's *Contemporary Fiction* (2003) and Dominic Head's *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950–2000* (2002) offer cogent readings of literature during the last fifty years of the twentieth century, documenting a wealth of post-war innovation in the form. There have been then no shortage of significant individuals and critics who have sought to defend the twentieth-century novel or who regard it as worthy of study and have created a significant (and rapidly expanding body) of academic work on the fiction of the last century.

In addition to those listed above, Alan Sinfield's *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (2004) as its title implies, suggests a symbiotic relationship between literature (and especially prose fiction) and the broader political and cultural life in post-war Britain and thereby insists upon the continued importance and relevance of the novel as a force to explain, describe, and perhaps even, drive change. Sinfield's book ends with a discussion of Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993), which situates the novel at the forefront of a new kind of existentialism. Similarly, in the US Kathleen Fitzpatrick in *The Anxiety of Obsolescence* (2006) refutes many of the claims made by Gassett and others, proposing that comments about the death of the novel are part of an attempt to entrench it as an elitist art form, separate from television and film.

Perhaps, most significantly, in *The Modern British Novel* (2001) the noted literary critic Malcolm Bradbury also takes an oppositional view to Taylor and his ilk. Looking at the state of the novel as we approach the end of the millennium Bradbury refuses to share the kind of pessimism that has provoked others to a denunciation of the form. There is, he claims, after 100 years of the modern novel, no signs of exhaustion. On the contrary Bradbury believes there is growth and renewal, enough of both to take us confidently forward into the third millennium. For Bradbury the novel not only survived in the twentieth century, it actually prospered:

In the twentieth century the novel acquired a new experimentalism, a new psychological complexity and a new raunchiness. Today, as popular commercial product and a form of inquiring art, it is everywhere . . . The novel over the twentieth century served many functions, at many levels; it attracted to itself many great writers, and many kinds of writing. (p. xii)

Bradbury's statement makes grand claims for the twentieth-century novel, but these are fairly consistent with the ways in which the form has been perceived during the last century. Perhaps we might wish to complicate some of the claims – the newness to which he alludes could also be regarded (in a longer context) as a return to pre-Victorian realist tropes within the form; nonetheless, we might wish to construe such 'developments' within the form. This collection gathers together essays which demonstrate an implicit agreement with Bradbury, the chapters in this book similarly dispute the notion that the novel reached its natural end-point during the twentieth century; they chart the development of long prose fiction, and in so doing, suggest myriad ways in which the novel continued to metamorphose and transform itself, being adapted, developed and (in some of its incarnations) actually growing in status and in aesthetic credibility – finally solidifying its position as one of the principal art forms of the Western world.

In many ways the twentieth-century canon is fraught with the same pressures and fissures brought about by the many (sometimes divergent/competing) movements, both aesthetic and cultural, which are often used to define the century more broadly. The increasing awareness of the lack of representation in conventional art-forms for groups from ethnic minorities, women, lesbian, gay and bi-sexual readers and writers, the working classes and other minority groups was fuelled by culturally based movements that originated in post-war consensus politics. Many of these movements came to fruition in the widening of access to higher education that began in the 1960s and 1970s and found support within the more inclusive publishing industry and academy – one which incorporated and included texts which were the products of the popularisation of ideologies such as Marxism, Feminism and Gender Studies, Postcolonial studies, and the advent of the broader interest in critical theory within the academy. This

also came to incorporate the ‘fashions’ and trends of the late twentieth-century ‘Postmodern’ aesthetics, and later included revolts against these movements. Such developments made for a lively and productive twentieth-century academy, and, ultimately, impacted on what is, for the most part, a much more socially diverse canon than that of the century before.

Marginalisation – through gender, class, race, sexuality and national affiliation – became pivotal themes through which twentieth-century fiction sought to address broader cultural trends; and the fact that the twentieth-century canon is so hotly contested in many ways reflects the opening out of the form (and the academy) that happened in this (all be it too brief) widening of academic and novelistic discourse, and the variety of voices represented therein. Indeed, the twentieth century was witness to a proliferation of small presses from the now famous modernist presses such as Sylvia Beach’s Shakespeare and Company, Harriet Shaw Weaver’s Egotist Press, the Black Sun Press and Hogarth Press to later presses such as Exact Change, FC2, and Graywolf Press in the US. In the UK, Onlywomen Press specialised in lesbian writing, and Sheba showcased black, working-class and lesbian writers. Virago similarly championed modern classic texts in its series of the same name, which showcased fiction by female authors that had sometimes been overlooked at the time of their initial publication, or had since fallen into partial obscurity (such as works by Sylvia Townsend Warner and Leonora Carrington) but which Virago considered could now be given the epithet ‘classic’. More recently these independent presses have sometimes become imprints within larger publishing houses but many remain independent. Though perhaps the limited extent to which either Townsend or Carrington are taught within the academy (and the subsequent impossibility of their inclusion in a collection that is geared around the most widely taught texts) suggests that there is still work to be done when it comes to the formation of a truly representative canon. Indeed, this democratisation of the canon has been perhaps less far-reaching than many had hoped. For example, a number of sources have proposed that one of the most important events in the twentieth century for the novel was Allen Lane’s ‘paperback’ revolution, which began in 1935 with the establishment of Penguin Books (through which Lane sought to sell quality fiction for the same price as a packet of cigarettes). This endeavour that combined with ever growing literacy rates in the twentieth century meant that for the first time literature was both desired by and (relatively cheaply) available to the masses; this did not mean that the processes surrounding the formation of the twentieth-century canon can be considered to be much more inclusive than any previous era; for example, a 2009 survey revealed that working-class students make up only nine per cent of the students at Oxbridge (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/oxbridge-colleges-fail-to-attract-workingclass-students-576302.html>). It would be remiss to propose that the ingrained partiality present in Western hegemonic

cultural systems does not impact upon the kinds of texts that still make it into the canon. Nevertheless, the twentieth century saw greater strides taken towards liberating the canon from being the sole preserve of middle-class white men than ever before.

During the twentieth century the very availability of the novel made its content cause for concern. D. H. Lawrence's banned novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) threatened once again (as Joyce had done before him) to bring sexually explicit content to the masses. By the 1930s and the 1940s, as part of the wider Naturalist movement in US fiction, John Steinbeck produced a series of documentary style texts that sought to expose the hardships faced by the poor and dispossessed working classes, but to do so in ways that eschewed Victorian romantic idealism and often found disfavour with those moral guardians that wished to see the hegemony remain unchallenged. By the latter half of the twentieth century writers such as Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson and Hanif Kureishi were producing fiction that was still cause for shock. Like Lawrence before them, these writers continued to deliberately defy categorisation at the level of form as well as causing controversy because of their subject matter. In the US the popular interrogation of deep-seated gender and racial inequalities during the 1960s had created a space for writers such as Toni Morrison, whose work often brings together these twin strands to focus on issues of representation itself.

Many of these authors were met with a great deal of support amongst emergent academic movements (such as Women's and Postcolonial studies) within the wider academy during the twentieth century. Even figures who have come to symbolise the conservative nature of the academy such as F. R. Leavis exhibited a certain kind of radicality in the early part of the twentieth century; Leavis famously drew the attention of the British authorities when he proposed to teach passages from James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) whilst it was still banned in Britain. Leavis perhaps therefore finds a place within a broader trend within the study of twentieth-century fiction whereby practitioners and commentators would often consciously seek to reclaim and validate lost, 'overlooked' or controversial writers as a means of substantiating their own ideological platform. Alice Walker's 'In Search of Zora Neale Hurston' (1975) provides one such example of this. Walker reclaimed Hurston's work as an early example of black female fiction, which, although it had been initially overlooked by the canon, was reinvigorated and reclaimed by Walker who believed that Hurston's writing continued to resonate with the experiences of black women writers of the 1970s. These examples of reclaimed voices are evidence that much progress has been made in democratising the canon but they are also suggestive of a broader need to continue to reclaim once marginalised voices from the past. Indeed in selecting to include only the most taught texts in UK and US institutions this collection found itself limited from furthering such a cause. Furthermore, in seeking to present an accurate picture of the texts that are

currently taught in universities this collection does not suggest the broad and eclectic canon that we would like to see and that, in reality (perhaps now more than ever) still needs to be fought for.

Instead, this collection aims to deliver a critically informed ‘snapshot’ of twentieth-century texts that are widely taught in the Anglophone University system. It cannot, and does not, claim to be exhaustive, however, one of the driving motivations behind this collection was to provide undergraduate students with a comprehensive selection of essays that they might take forward with them as they explore and engage with what is an interesting and much contested body of writing. It is hoped that the chapters herein will offer intellectually rigorous analyses of established canonical works by a germane variety of writers. In any such collection there are of course notable omissions, and in compiling this particular text we chose to exclude writing by Irish and Canadian novelists, not because they should be deemed as any less canonical than those that we include, but because of the wealth of excellent critical material on such writers that already exists in the works of critics such as David Pierce and William H. New; and because it seems time to respect the uniqueness of writer’s respective canons, rather than to simply subsume them into the categories of British and American fictions. This book also collates original critical material that moves the debates surrounding canonical texts forward in some manner and includes new applications of philosophical and critical thinking to the twentieth century’s most established texts. The innovative nature of the approaches that are taken in each chapter represent the very latest thinking by leading scholars in their respective fields; who, cognisant of established knowledge, are able to shed new light on a selection of widely discussed and written about novels.

The chapters in the book are presented chronologically, and we start at the beginning of the twentieth century with David Bradshaw’s chapter ‘Snags in the Fairway: Reading *Heart of Darkness* (1902)’ which considers Conrad’s often controversial novel. In this chapter, Bradshaw outlines the contribution Conrad’s text makes to readers’ understanding and expectation of narrative in the twentieth-century novel, regarding texts such as *Heart of Darkness* as key when it comes to defining the twentieth century novel’s uniqueness from its predecessors. Bradshaw suggests that Conrad’s novel distinguishes itself from nineteenth-century texts, not because of what it conveys, but rather, by what it does not reveal to the reader: ‘it was in coming to terms with unreliable narrators like Marlow [. . .] that the need for textual disambiguation began to muscle in on the gentle art of reading and the novel as we know it today began to take shape’. By the 1920s that shape had begun to reveal itself, and In “‘Hasn’t got any name”: Aesthetics, African Americans and Policemen in *The Great Gatsby*’ Nicolas Tredell revisits F. Scott Fitzgerald’s masterpiece of American Modernism. Tredell reminds the reader that, as with many of the novels discussed in this collection; the

text leaves not just its own presence on the world, but also a vast critical, pedagogic and publishing industry. Indeed, in the case of *Gatsby*, the novel even supports a leg of the tourist industry, with fans still attempting to trace the road to West Egg. Tredell emphasises that despite the various industries the text 'supports', and the numerous ways in which critics have engaged with *Gatsby* in the twentieth century; the novel's dramatisation of the promise of a more open society may be its most significant lasting legacy.

In the first of our essays to address British modernism at its height, entitled 'Urban Spaces, Fragmented Consciousness, and Indecipherable Meaning in *Mrs Dalloway*' Andrew Harrison demonstrates the relevance of the relationship between the spatial and the temporal within Woolf's famous work. Focusing on the nature of Clarissa's partial rendering of her world, Harrison argues that the novel's political content cannot be separated from the ambiguous nature of its central character and her mediating consciousness. Richard Brown's chapter 'D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in the New Century: Literary Canon and Bodily Episteme' focuses on another author often included in the roll call of great British modernists. The chapter places Lawrence's novel in the context of the work of twentieth-century thinkers such as F. R. Leavis and Michel Foucault. Brown discusses one of the most infamous books of the twentieth century and acknowledges *Lady Chatterley's* place as one of the defining texts of the last century, highlighting the novel's influence on constructions of masculinity, language and taste.

Richard Jacobs' chapter '*A Handful of Dust*: Realism: Modernism/Irony: Sympathy' considers Waugh's fourth novel in the light of its realist as well as its modernist counterparts and demonstrates the eternal appeal of the novel as well as detailing its close fit with the difficult age of its conception. Jacobs assesses the text's impact on the reader and analyses some of the novel's intertextual and inter-canonical relations. Susie Thomas also discusses a text that has begotten more than one film, when she revisits Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* (1938) in her chapter 'Studied Ambivalence: The Appalling Strangeness of Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*'. Thomas suggests that Greene's obsession with the Brighton trunk murder should be regarded as confirmation of Greene's belief in the worthiness of the unconscious as a source of inspiration, rather than as evidence of some aspect of his character. She suggests that the text not only resonates with the era of its conception, but speaks also to a contemporary generation which perhaps freed from religious constraint still remains contained by the ever present threat of the ASBO and an endemic fear and suspicion of the young.

In Chapter 7 of this collection, Jennifer Butler Keaton revisits Steinbeck's epic novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) to provide a stimulating reading of the novel that situates it within the canon as a literary artefact, rather than simply a compassionate polemic. Butler regards the text as an example of a Bakhtinian dialogic engagement with sociological themes, reminding the reader that Steinbeck and Mikhail Bakhtin shared a belief in the potential

for language to provide the oppressed with opportunities to reclaim their voices. Keaton seeks to remind us that social activism and literary merit are not mutually exclusive. The implicit social impetus behind many examples of the novel in the twentieth century is also discussed by Linda Wagner-Martin in her chapter on William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942). Wagner-Martin traces the book's history alongside the U.S.'s journey to racial maturity, proposing that *Go Down, Moses* speaks to an abiding need to recognise, and attempt to right, implicit and explicit injustice whenever it appears.

The years following the end of the Second World War witnessed writers' engagement and responses to a world that seemed to some estranged and forever changed. In Britain the city of London (as well as other urban centres such as Coventry) had suffered badly in the Luftwaffe's bombing campaigns, many parts of the capital had been all but destroyed and writers such as George Orwell found inspiration for futuristic dystopian narratives in the bombed out landscapes that the Blitz produced. Lawrence Phillips provides a stimulating psycho-geographical reading of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948) in which he regards Orwell's London as the city of perpetual resistance against the forces of totalitarianism represented by Big Brother. The city itself forms part of the 'proles' resilience to the effects of their corrupted and corrupting government.

The immediate post-war period also saw immense social change in Britain as the Welfare State aimed to even out some of the worst social inequalities present within society. A new breed of writers came to the fore, and brought with them an emphasis on the 'middlebrow' text, which was often aimed at entertaining rather than elevating the mind of its reader. Kingsley Amis is perhaps the most (in)famous proponent of this style of writing in Britain and Nicola Allen and Wasfi Shoaqairat discuss the social aspect of *Lucky Jim* (1954) within the context of a Batailleian understanding of the role of laughter in rebellion.

The next three chapters all examine the work of noted writers who emerged, to varying degrees, out of the tumultuous changes taking place in American society during the middle of the twentieth century. R. J. Ellis's chapter on Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* discusses a much mythologised and sensationalised novel, the central idea of which has become widely romanticised by many who have not necessarily read the text itself. Ellis explores how a canonical reading of Kerouac's novel feeds on its mythical status and interrogates the text's relationship to constructions of the post-war generation's sense of identity. David Simmons revisits Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) in the light of the current re-ignition of interest in the immediate post-war period, brought about by the gradual erosion of the established critical hegemonies of postmodernism and post structuralism. Simmons focuses on Kesey's countercultural hero Randle P. McMurphy and offers a reading which repositions the novel as a counterpoint to the supposed individualism of many of those within the Beat generation. Finally,

Gloria L. Cronin charts Saul Bellow's move from left-leaning to neo conservative ideologies in the novel *Herzog* (1964) and provides insight into the novel's reception since its initial publication. Like Ellis and Simmons' respective chapters, Cronin similarly provides a convincing case for Bellow's text to be regarded as 'a rich repository of morphing and troubled American masculinities', which are constructed in all their complexity using techniques outside of the realist's toolbox.

In her chapter on Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* (1981) Claire Allen re-values a text that stands outside the boundaries of realism. Allen argues that it is time to revisit Gray's most famous novel, in order to investigate its postmodern experimental techniques from a twenty-first century perspective, and to consider *Lanark* in light of developments within critical and theoretical approaches to postmodernism.

Perhaps one of the abiding legacies of twentieth-century fiction is the rise of serious fantasy, especially as it is embodied in the magical realism employed by authors such as Angela Carter whose work routinely encompasses both the events of everyday life and the dimensions of the imagination. In 'Gender Vertigo: Queer Gothic and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*' (1984) Sarah Gamble demonstrates that the character of Fevvers, and by extension Walsler, can be read in the context of twentieth-century debates surrounding the relationship between the gothic monster and the human, she argues that Carter's characters resist clear-cut dualisms in order to situate themselves within the messiness of an evolving intelligibility that we can perhaps situate within a postmodern framework. The prescience of postmodern ideas and thinking to the late twentieth-century novel also feature prominently in Martyn Colebrook's chapter on *White Noise* (1985). Colebrook cogently analyses one of Don DeLillo's most discussed novels through the prism of postmodern theory, proposing that DeLillo interrogates the contemporary media infused landscape to comment upon the effects the influx of technology is having on our identities as autonomous individuals in late-capitalist society.

In her chapter on Jeanette Winterson's novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) Sonya Andermahr revisits perhaps one of the most written about texts of the late-twentieth century. A landmark publication in many ways, the novel has been much discussed since its publication in 1985. Andermahr makes a case for its deserved status as a 'classic' text and regards the text as a seminal 'creation' narrative that both sits within and yet sometimes breaks free from a postmodern aesthetic. Gina Wisker revisits another text considered as central in the exploration of minority issues, Toni Morrison's most famous novel, *Beloved* (1987). Wisker highlights how the novel's insistence upon layering narratives and its relationship to the complex history of slavery and concepts of motherhood make it a text that is vast in its scope and ambition, and yet does not stop at the level of polemic, but in fact challenges our reading practices. Wisker argues that in

Beloved Toni Morrison troubles the way we might be used to reading, and enables a profound new vision of what the novel might encompass to come to the fore. In her chapter, 'Embracing Uncertainty: Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*' Susan Alice Fischer also reassesses a novelist whose work has often been regarded in terms of its attitudes towards race and liberalism in the western world, Fischer highlights the radical role that laughter plays in Kureishi's two most seminal novels. In keeping with many of the novels included in this collection which utilise comedic means to convey a serious message, Fischer suggests that Kureishi uses humour to reinvigorate the form of the novel and to prioritise pleasure in the reading experience whilst simultaneously engaging the reader in an exploration of some of the most culturally sensitive issues that the twentieth century had to offer.

Author and critic James Wood coined the term 'hysterical realism', when reviewing Zadie Smith's millennial novel *White Teeth* (2000) in his article '*Human, All Too Inhuman,*' *The New Republic Online* (30, August 2001). Wood uses the term to define novels that engage primarily with ideologically driven, issue-led narratives and are (in his view) less concerned with 'feeling' and more concerned with ideology. Smith responded with a reply in *The Guardian*, on 13 October 2001 entitled 'This is how it feels to me' in which she outlines her parameters for realism:

there are still books that make me hopeful, because they function as human products in the greatest sense. Bellow's *Seize the Day*, Melville's *Bartleby*, Nabokov's *Pnin* – works that stubbornly speak and resonate, even in these image-led, speechless times. But it is a trick of the light that makes us suppose these books exist in soulful opposition to more recent examples of 'dialectical devilry'. These books are works of high artifice, and there isn't a decent novel in this world that isn't; their humanity derives from their reverence for language, their precision, their intellect and, more than anything, from their humour. (<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/oct/13/fiction.afghanistan>)

In his chapter on *White Teeth* (2000) Philip Tew revisits this famous millennial novel and suggests a reading of Smith's work that seeks to understand its dual celebration and interrogation of the complex 'muddle' of contemporary British identity. Tew embarks upon a comprehensive reading of the text, seeking to move beyond the essentialisms concerning ethnic identity that previous (primarily postcolonially) focused readings have encouraged. Tew cites Smith's own insistence that her work is 'not really one thing, it's lots of different things' (Gerzina 267), and suggests that in addition to her discussion of race, other cultural interests and observations have informed Smith's text which should not be elided in favour of a dominant cultural reading practice.

Tew's chapter indicates that the boundaries and limits of the twentieth-century novel, as well as those of the tools we use to discuss it, are still being fought over. The twentieth-century novel still owes much to its predecessors and perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of this collection is Tew's suggestion that on the eve of the new millennium while the novel was still a site for polemical activity, this does not negatively impact on the literariness of the political text. In his review of *White Teeth* Wood noted Smith's quasi-Dickensian style, and perhaps in some ways this aligns her to the kind of tradition that Taylor longs for, and suggests that despite the cries of its demise, despite the attempts to radicalise the form, in one key respect a line of inheritance can be discerned between nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century ideals concerning the socially transformative potential of the novel. This all hints at a readership ready to engage with the twentieth-century novel on fresh terms – ready to transgress boundaries of popular and high/serious fiction and prepared to push the novel into new and exciting directions but with an established aim at heart. As Zadie Smith, our final twentieth-century author notes, now, more than ever, 'literature is – or should be – a broad church' (<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/oct/13/fiction.afghanistan>).

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1

Snags in the Fairway: Reading *Heart of Darkness*

David Bradshaw

Although there are many ‘infernal sly old snag[s]’¹ for the reader of *Heart of Darkness* to negotiate, like Marlow’s navigational challenge on the treacherous River Congo, there is always a way forward for the alert and probing reader. Even before Marlow’s tricky and tenebrous tale has begun, for example, the frame narrator provides us with a means of shedding light on it. The crew of the *Nellie*, he discloses, are ‘tolerant of each other’s yarns – and even *convictions*’ (3; italics added), so when he launches into his full-throated panegyric on the River Thames in the sixth paragraph of the novella, it may be supposed that his friend Charlie Marlow approves of what he says. As he warms to his account of the Thames as a launch pad of imperial ambition, the frame narrator’s sentiments become increasingly lofty, his language grows ever more purple and his chest ever more puffed out with national pride, yet it is crucial to bear in mind that the British pluck and plundering he celebrates are entirely of a piece with the single-minded ruthlessness that has driven Kurtz ever deeper into the interior of the Congo on behalf of his Belgian paymasters:

Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth? . . . The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires. (5)

On the basis of this passage alone the reader might wish to conclude that one of the most unshakeable ‘convictions’ shared by the crew of the *Nellie* is a belief in the British imperialist mission, whether prosecuted by ‘sword’ or ‘torch’, and his jingoistic cast of mind also explains why the frame narrator concludes the novella’s second paragraph by referring to London, proudly, as not only ‘the biggest’ but also ‘the *greatest* town on earth’ (3; italics added).

Moreover, the notion that the frame narrator’s ideological leanings might well illumine Marlow’s is given a considerable boost when Marlow himself

begins to speak: he commences his tale of African exploitation by evoking the Roman invasion of Britain. Marlow draws a vivid picture of ‘civilised’ Romans encountering Celtic ‘savages’ in surroundings that would have seemed incomprehensibly alien to them and yet which sound remarkably like a cold-climate version of the Congo Free State, the vast personal fiefdom of King Leopold II of Belgium, which Conrad journeyed within between January and June 1890 and which disturbed him so profoundly: ‘Here and there a military camp lost in a wilderness . . . cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile and death – death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush’ (6). In the late nineteenth century much was made of the British Empire being the Roman Empire *redivivus*, so the fact that Marlow begins his tale about the ‘Scramble for Africa’ by bringing to mind the Roman conquest of Britain is noteworthy in itself, but he goes on to make an important distinction between the Romans and the Victorian Britons. What saves ‘us’, the British, Marlow argues, is our ‘devotion to efficiency’. The Romans, he suggests, were more conquerors than colonists, out for what they could get, whereas British empire-building has a more grand and noble purpose. ‘The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretence, but an idea . . .’ (7). And what is this ‘idea’? Well, when Marlow sneers at the Eldorado Exploring Expedition because ‘[t]o tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe’ (30), we might be tempted to conclude that his use of ‘idea’ and ‘moral purpose’ are interchangeable. And if this is so, is Marlow’s desperate desire to rescue Kurtz from himself and his Belgian employers at least partly explained by Kurtz’s almost British sense of ‘moral purpose’ in Africa? ‘Each station’, Kurtz believes, ‘should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course but also for humanising, improving, instructing’, an elevated and almost ‘British’ vision of the colonial project that is dismissed as a ‘pestiferous absurdity’ (32) by the Manager of the Central Station, but which lies close to Marlow’s heart.

As he sits in the Company’s waiting-room before his interview (and note how Marlow’s progress from the outer room in which the two women sit knitting via the waiting-room to the inner ‘sanctuary’ of the ‘great man himself’ (10) anticipates his three-stage journey from coast to Kurtz) Marlow cannot fail to observe ‘a large shining map’ (10) of Africa on the wall. Predictably, he relishes ‘the vast amount of red’ on show – ‘good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done in there’ (10) – and is utterly contemptuous of the colonialist aspirations of other European nations. No country is mentioned by name at this point in the novella, but Conrad’s first audience would have been thoroughly familiar with the cartographical colour-coding Marlow describes, so that when he says in reference

to the map 'I was going into the yellow. Dead in the centre. And the river was there . . .', readers would have known that his destination is the Congo Free State and that the city in which his interview is about to take place must be Brussels.

As a boy, we are told, Marlow had 'a passion for maps' (7), he would 'lose [him]self in all the glories of exploration' (8), and it is striking that even after witnessing the chaotic ineptitude, casual viciousness and sheer brutality of the Outer, Central and Inner Stations, his core belief in the 'glories' of the imperialist endeavour remains remarkably unshaken. Returning to the coast on his steamer and with Kurtz discoursing beside him, Marlow envisages the stretch of river they are floating down as 'the forerunner of change, of conquest, of trade, of *massacres*, of blessings' (68; italics added). The eldorado of Africa and the genocide of Africans are all too easily elided in his mind and this quintessential colonialist mishmash (massacres and conquest; trade and blessings) sounds more like another sound bite from the gung-ho frame narrator or a titbit from the unhinged Kurtz's report for the Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs than the balanced reflection of a man who genuinely believes that British colonialists are motivated by a more righteous calling than were the Roman invaders of Britain.

Sailing down the west coast of Africa on his way to Kurtz, Marlow belittles the colonialist ventures of Britain's continental competitors. He mocks the French and Germans with equal gusto, summing up their settlements in the Ivory Coast and Little Popo (at that time the capital of German Togo) as no more than 'a sordid farce' (13), before going on to describe a French man-of-war firing aimlessly 'into a continent': 'Pop, would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech – and nothing happened' (14). The utter inanity of this bombardment prefigures other acts of brainless ineffectuality in the novella, such as the 'objectless blasting' (15) at the Outer Station and the jittery pilgrims 'squirting lead' (45) into the jungle, both of which are presumably carried out by Belgians. Yet the main reason Conrad does not make their nationality explicit, I would argue, is not just because the coloured map has done that for him, but because Conrad, unlike Marlow, did not wish solely to denounce the horrors of the increasingly infamous Congo Free State (as he had done explicitly in 'An Outpost of Progress' (1898)), but to critique the mess, mayhem and hypocrisy that lay at the dark heart of the African scramble *tout court*. The guiding irony of the novella is Marlow's racist conviction that British colonisation is efficient, purposeful, principled and exemplary, whereas Britain's continental rivals are no more than incompetent ninnies. Conrad, on the other hand, was aware that all European colonisation in Africa was being driven by a craving for commodities, territory and prestige, and that any degree of intervention by the European powers brought with it not just disruption but often devastation.

Nevertheless, while Conrad's critique of imperialism takes in Europe as a whole, *Heart of Darkness* was one of the key texts that helped to expose the particular vileness of the Congo Free State, and alongside the yellow-coloured area of map with its great, snaking river, Conrad provides other details about the Company's Belgian provenance that would have struck a chord with a contemporary reader but which are rather less resonant today. For example, one of the few colleagues Marlow warms to in Africa is the 'lank bony yellow-faced' (29) foreman of the Central Station. We are told that 'the passion of his life was pigeon-flying. He was an enthusiast and a connoisseur. He would rave about pigeons' (29). This hobby and the foreman's obsessive interest in it could not have indicated his nationality more precisely: modern pigeon-racing had its origins in Belgium and by the late nineteenth-century the pastime was synonymous with that country. Similarly, when Marlow returns to 'the sepulchral city' (25, 70) of Brussels he makes uncomplimentary remarks about both its cuisine and its beer, two things for which the city was (and is) actually renowned.

Marlow's scornful attitude towards continental Europeans, and above all Belgians, is almost as striking a feature of the text as his derogatory comments about black people and may be sourced to the same sorry showcase of late-Victorian bigotry. The 'plumpness' (10) of the Company's chief executive, for example, sets an appropriately tubby model for his employees in Africa: they are perfectly moulded to serve a 'flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly' (16; see also 21). Equally appropriately, the work-shy time-waster who accompanies Marlow on his overland trek to the Central Station is described as being 'rather too fleshy and with the exasperating habit of fainting'. When he catches a fever he has to be carried in a hammock, which proves an ordeal for those who must lift him up as he weighs 'sixteen stone' (20), while the leader of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition 'carrie[s] his fat paunch with ostentation on his short legs' (31). Yet another 'pilgrim' is described as 'a little fat man with sandy hair . . . who wore . . . pink pyjamas tucked into his socks' (39–40), and in general Marlow's Belgians are 'unwholesome' (41) and effeminate, with even the chief accountant, who is at least dedicated to his job, pilloried as a 'scented' (18) 'hairdresser's dummy' (18). Interestingly, Marlow's short, effete and podgy Belgians seem to have been drawn from the same stock prejudice that prompted Agatha Christie to make her dapper Hercule Poirot so attentive to his toilette, and they are but one of the many racial stereotypes that mill around within Marlow's Anglocentric head: 'jolly lager-beer' (10) drinking Germans are also to be found in that constricted cranial space.

The Outer Station is a scene of 'inhabited devastation' (15), and from Marlow's perspective, a proud citizen of the first country to develop a national railway network, nothing could be more indicative of Belgian lack of backbone than a railway track going nowhere and a railway truck lying abandoned 'on its back with its wheels in the air. One was off' (15).

Similarly, Marlow tells us that the Manager of the Central Station 'had no genius for organising, for initiative, or for order even' and his Station is in a 'deplorable state' (22). Charlie Marlow, on the other hand, ever conscious of his nation's work ethic, engrosses himself in his salvage of the steamer in an effort to keep his 'hold on the redeeming facts of life' (23). Indeed, according to Marlow, all the sound and substantial work in the novella is accomplished by men who are English or who have a degree of Englishness in their make-up. The large canoe shipment of ivory which arrives at the Central from the Inner Station, for instance, has been in the charge of 'an English half-caste clerk' (32). Dismissed as a mere 'scoundrel' by the Belgians, Marlow feels this young man has 'conducted a difficult trip with great prudence and pluck' (32). A similar 'singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work' (38) is evident in the pages of *An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship* written by a 'Master in His Majesty's Navy', a volume that Marlow handles with 'the greatest possible tenderness' (37), while the devoted harlequin's taste for 'English tobacco' (63) endears him in a brotherly way to the pipe-smoking Marlow, who is ever ready to contrast the spunk, focus and determination of the British with the chubby flaccidity of their Belgian counterparts and the cluelessness of other continental nations.² In this respect it is important to bear in mind that although Kurtz has been 'educated partly in England' (49) and '[h]is mother was half-English' (49), he has become, in his fanatical craving for ivory and general moral abandonment, the degenerate embodiment of a continent: 'All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz' (49). And to his un-making, as the patchwork clothing of his faithful harlequin makes plain: 'blue, red, and yellow – patches on the back, patches on the front, patches on the elbows . . . ' (52). The harlequin's particoloured attire is the shabby counterpart of the colour-patched map in Brussels that details the African possessions of the European powers.

However, Marlow's conviction that the British do things properly while her continental competitors are incompetent, self-serving amateurs shows him to be sublimely unaware of or simply unmoved by the intense questioning of Britain's national efficiency that had been gathering pace during the last quarter-century. As G. R. Searle and others have shown, 'efficiency' had become a charged word by the *fin de siècle* and it was imbued with even greater poignancy following the debacle of December 1899, when Boer guerrillas inflicted three defeats on units of the supposedly peerless British Army in the space of a week. In fact, it took the British three long years to defeat the Boers and Arnold White's *Efficiency and Empire* (1901) was one of a number of anguished responses to what was widely perceived as nothing less than a national calamity. By the time *Heart of Darkness* re-appeared in book form in 1902, in other words, few within the governing class were prepared to believe, as Marlow believes whole-heartedly, that the British were paragons of 'efficiency'.³

With *Heart of Darkness* open before him, Chinua Achebe accused Conrad of being a 'thoroughgoing racist',⁴ but while it is simply undeniable that the novella is riddled with offensive language and despicable slurs about black people, should it be Conrad who stands indicted of racial intolerance? It is Marlow, after all, who frequently uses the word 'nigger' (e.g., 9, 19, 23, 24, 26, 30, 45, 66) and repeatedly voices racial prejudices that were all too common at the time. Some Africans are said to have faces 'like grotesque masks' (14), while others have a 'rascally grin' (16) and 'rolling eyes' (35, 40): even the helmsman, dying in agony, is described as having a 'menacing expression' (46). Kurtz's 'witch-man' is demonised as 'fiend-like' (65) by Marlow, the African jungle is felt to be coeval with 'the earliest beginnings of the world' (33), and the cannibals on his steamboat are said to belong to 'the beginnings of time' (40). Indeed, Marlow seems to regard Africa and its indigenous peoples not just as out of step with the march of nineteenth-century progress, but pariahs from the family of evolved mankind. He even goes so far as to compare his transit from the Central to the Inner Station as being like a journey 'on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet' (35). The jungle is said to draw Kurtz to its 'pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts' (65) and to shelter mere 'rudimentary souls' (50), 'monstrous' (36) and 'inhuman' (36) creatures more akin to 'prehistoric man' (35) than *Homo sapiens*. As the cries of the tribal witch-men, 'words that resembled no sounds of human language' (67), and the 'deep murmurs' of their fellow tribesmen create what Marlow can only describe as a 'satanic litany' (67), Kurtz's 'barbarous and superb' (67) paramour is more than likely shot by the departing pilgrims (67). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that this appalled (and appalling) contempt for black people is another 'conviction' shared by all five men on the *Nellie*. 'Perhaps you will think it passing strange this regret for a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara' (50), Marlow says to his companions on the yawl, referring to the helmsman whose blood has filled his shoes and whose functionality he misses, if not the man himself.

So the obvious response to Achebe's highly influential reading of the novella, and one that a number of critics have expressed in a number of ways, is that it is not Conrad who spouts the many slights and smears about Africans in the text, but Marlow. His inability to think of Africans as human beings from the same planet as himself is typical of a European colonialist mindset that led to genocidal massacres not just in the Congo Free State but elsewhere in the world, such as the piecemeal extermination of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the British colony of Tasmania in the second half of the nineteenth century, while Marlow's own presence in the Congo and his employment on a steamer that also carries a British Martini-Henry military rifle, exposes, once again, if not the complicity of the British in the horrors of the Congo (and we must not forget that the City of London

was even more of a global financial centre in 1900 than it is today, and was the conduit through which the wealth of the Congo was channelled to and from Belgium), then at least the frailty of Marlow's distinction between proper and improper colonialist conduct. While a reader does not have to penetrate too deeply into *Heart of Darkness* to discover why Achebe feels so affronted by it, it is Marlow whom he should have placed in the dock, not Conrad. Marlow doesn't actually kill any Africans in the novella, as do the Belgians and Kurtz, but on the evidence of his sustained denigration of black people he is unlikely to have thought twice about it had the opportunity arisen. And while this kind of speculation takes us beyond the text, it is similar to Achebe's intervention, which has had such a profound impact on both the reputation of the novella (especially in the USA) and the way it has been read over the past thirty years. (For a useful overview of how critics have grappled with the vexed issue of *Heart of Darkness* and race – including the valuable contributions of Brantlinger's *Rule of Darkness* (1988) and Firchow's *Envisioning Africa* (2000) to the debate and other relatively recent approaches to the book of a political, philosophical, historicist, biographical, deconstructionist, postcolonial, contextual, feminist and masculinist hue, and in particular the landmark engagement with the novella by Ian Watt (1980) – see Goonetilleke (51–69).)

Consistent with his repeated stress on the alien horror of the Congo Free State, Marlow has a noticeably 'stay-at-home' (5) imagination. For instance, he says the dress worn by one of the women who sit knitting in Brussels is 'as plain as an umbrella-cover' (10); the chief accountant's books are 'in apple-pie order' (18); the 'two-penny-half-penny river steamboat' (12) clangs under his feet 'like an empty Huntley & Palmer biscuit-tin kicked along a gutter' (29), while a reach of the River Congo is described as having 'high sides like a railway cutting' (39). Furthermore, Marlow describes the chanting of the Africans as '[coming] out from the black flat wall of the woods as the humming of bees comes out of a hive' (63), his choice of the homely 'woods' to convey the vast immensity of the Congo jungle providing a particularly revealing insight into his right-little-tight-little mind. Other similes catch the eye for what they might reveal about Marlow's personal history. He says at one point, for example, that the 'woods were . . . heavy like the closed door of a prison' (56). Does this and the analogy he chooses for each of his shipboard friends having two addresses – 'like a hulk with two anchors' (47) – suggest that he may have a criminal background? And does this in turn help explain why 'the ships wouldn't even look at [him]' (7)? Quite possibly, because the jaundiced and sunken-cheeked Marlow is curiously out of place among his professional companions, each living with 'a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal' (47; see also 49). They are affluent City types and Marlow is a ship-less mariner-cum-loafer (hardly the British work ethic personified) before he discovers zeal

and purpose in recovering Kurtz and the imperialist 'idea' he has brought into disrepute.

Marlow seeks to transform Kurtz into an enigma, to throw a haze of verbiage over his unspeakable savagery, because he wants to save not only the man but the moral concept of empire-building, and it is the frame narrator, once again, who prepares the reader for Marlow's rhetorical wiles and verbal ruses by schooling us to question the reliability of authority figures from the beginning of the novella. So while the opening paragraphs of *Heart of Darkness* are notable for their precise use of nautical terminology – 'yaw!', 'flood', 'mizzen-mast', 'come to', 'offing', 'sprits', etc. – the bare truth is that the frame narration and the tale by Marlow it encompasses will only be told because of the incompetence of the *Nellie's* crew. The 'cruising yawl' has been forced to 'come to' because they have misjudged the tide, which is now rushing up the Thames from the English Channel, whereas the crew had intended to sail down river towards the open sea. Wholly reliant on the tide and wind, the *Nellie* is stationary throughout the tale, losing the 'first of the ebb' (77) at the end. These are not the kind of blunders one would expect from a quintet of seasoned sailors held together by 'the bond of the sea' (3), but we are also told, significantly, that although on 'the whole river there was nothing that looked half so nautical' as the captain of the *Nellie*, he is in reality a bigwig in the City and he only '*resembled* a pilot' (3; emphasis added). He stands on the prow of the anchored *Nellie* looking as immaculately turned out as he is pathetically redundant and in his combination of apparent authority and actual unreliability he could not be a more fitting figurehead for the novella as a whole. Indeed, the bungling crew and the jingoistic frame narrator stand at the portals of this tale like the heads on the stakes at the Inner Station: they warn those who approach it to beware. And just as the captain resembles a pilot, but lacks the authority of one, Marlow, we are told, '*resembled* an idol' (3); but he does not embody or disseminate the truth, like a deity; he is more like an 'idol' in the Biblical sense of the word: a false god. He says he 'can't bear a lie' (27) yet he is intent on propagating them, and far more significant than his fib to the Intended is his interception of Kurtz as he crawls away from the steamer on all fours and his removal of the 'valuable postscriptum' to Kurtz's 17-page report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs (71). Marlow is determined to do more than censor and sanitise Kurtz; he wants to redeem the man and the imperialist 'idea' that drew Kurtz to Africa in the first place.

According to Marlow, Kurtz's 'sympathies were in the right place' and perhaps this is why he regards his report as 'a beautiful piece of writing' (50), only marred by its postscript: 'Exterminate all the brutes' (50). He places particular emphasis on Kurtz's eloquence, yet the reader is given precious little evidence of this. The snatches of Kurtz's conversation that Marlow reports are on the whole banal, yet we are told that the pages of his report are

‘vibrating with eloquence’. The terse barbarity of the postscript, however, makes this less credible – and not least because it is almost certainly Kurtz’s ghastly recommendation to his superiors as to how they should continue his endeavours after his death. Kurtz’s final words are equally unambiguous once Marlow’s mystification of them has been set to one side. ‘The horror! The horror!’ (69) *could* be ‘a judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth’ (69), ‘an affirmation, a moral victory’ (70), as Marlow wishes us to believe, but from all the textual evidence at our disposal it is far more likely to be the last, bitter outburst of an unregenerate racist bigot (like Marlow himself), a man painfully conscious of having lost his ‘civilized’ bearings in the ‘savage’ interior of the so-called ‘Dark Continent’.

Kurtz is a workaholic, ‘an extremist’ (72), who has long lost sight of the distinction between purposive exploration and murderous appropriation, a man whose appetite for his job has degenerated into an insatiable mania for ivory. Yet to what use is all this ivory put? Well, at the beginning of the novella there is a reference to dominoes (‘bones’, 3), which at that time tended to be made of wood or ivory, at the end of the tale, there is mention of the Intended’s piano with its presumably ivory keys, and roughly around the middle of the text Marlow tells us that Kurtz’s bald head was ‘like . . . an ivory ball’ (48), reminding us that another use of ivory at this time was the manufacture of billiard balls. The violence and disruption involved in removing the ivory from the Congo and the sometimes trivial uses to which ivory was put (and especially in Britain, where billiards was particularly popular at the end of the nineteenth century) could not offer a more damning indictment of European depredations in Africa. Fittingly, when Marlow first encounters the sallow and fading Kurtz he looks like ‘an animated image of death carved out of old ivory’ (59) and immediately before he utters his final words a tormented mix of emotions plays across his ‘ivory face’ (69).

Marlow has sworn ‘not to disclose any trade secrets’ (10, 57) and the renegade monstrosity of Kurtz is the biggest trade secret of them all: “‘Mr Kurtz’s reputation is safe with me’” (62), he says at one point. Kurtz’s greatest fault, perhaps his only fault in Marlow’s eyes, is that he has strayed way beyond ‘permitted aspirations’ (65); he has taken to excess what Marlow has taken to heart. But is anyone listening to Marlow as he tells his tale? Or does Conrad further signal his distance from the seaman’s words, his racism, and his blindly patriotic outlook, by suggesting Marlow’s audience is less spellbound than slumbering during his yarn? For although the crew’s miscalculation of the tide at the beginning of the novella is grossly inept, it could well be that their failure to catch the first of the ebb at the end has a more mundane explanation. Rather than being wrapped up in Marlow’s story, it seems possible that no fewer than three of his four associates have been put to sleep by it. The frame narrator assures us that the crew of the *Nellie* is accustomed to hearing about Marlow’s ‘inconclusive experiences’ (7), but, quite possibly, this does not prevent all but the frame narrator himself from nodding off

soon after Marlow's tale has begun. That not one of them 'took the trouble to grunt even' (5) following Marlow's delphic opening statement may be a sign of the crew's breathless expectancy, but it could just as easily indicate either that they are asleep already, or their speechless dismay at the onset of another of his wordy stories. Marlow's is 'the speech that cannot be silenced' (36) and his companions know full well that he will continue to speak whether they are listening or not. Certainly, all but the frame narrator could well be dozing towards the end of Part I of the novella: 'There was not a word from anybody. The others might have been asleep' (27). Apart from a bit of enigmatic grunting, an ambiguous sigh and an interjected 'absurd' (47), Marlow receives no feedback whatever from his auditors, and he self-centeredly assumes that these noises indicate his listeners' dissatisfaction with certain details of his monologue rather than their uninterest in the whole of it, while his tale's conclusion is marked by an equally tell-tale silence during which '[n]obody moved for a time. "We have lost the first of the ebb," said the Director suddenly' (77). 'Suddenly' may indicate he has suddenly woken up. The frame narrator tells us that for Marlow:

the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (5)

Just like today, 'moonshine' was a synonym for 'moonlight' at the time the novella was written, but it was also being used increasingly to mean 'foolish or visionary talk'. By suggesting that Marlow's audience prefer to shut their eyes rather than open their ears, Conrad may be underlining his authorial view that his Buddha-like seaman is but a trafficker in moonshine.

Just as his narrative inspires a 'faint uneasiness' (27) in the mind of the frame narrator, so the reader is given many indications of Marlow's less than perfect ability to read his own experience. He says '[t]he essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface, beyond my reach and beyond my power of meddling' (38), and for once he is being frank with the reader. *Heart of Darkness* centres on the dog-eat-dog world of middle management. The manager of the Central Station ends up as top dog because, unlike Kurtz, he never becomes ill. He survives as the fittest in a Darwinian struggle which Marlow observes but never quite sees. 'Today', the brickmaker tells Marlow, '[Kurtz] is chief of the best station, next year he will be Assistant-Manager, two years more and . . . but I daresay you know what he will be in two years' time' (25). Marlow observes that intrigue, slander and malice are rife among the Belgians; that they are motivated solely by the lure of percentages and that there is an 'air of plotting' (24) about the Central Station; he notes that 'constant quarrels . . . about precedence' lead the manager to order 'an immense round table' (22) at which he presides as first among unequals,

but Marlow overlooks the skulduggery which stares him in the face: the plot to deprive Kurtz of life-saving medicines until it is too late for them to be of any use. He tells us that 'nothing came' of the Belgians' 'backbiting and intriguing against each other' (24), but how wrong he is. He tells us that he did not see the true significance of the sunken steamer at the time and the reader wonders whether he has quite grasped its real meaning in retrospect. By nature cautious and calculating, the manager's view is that 'Mr Kurtz's methods [have] ruined the district' (57). His solution is to sabotage the steamer in the hope that by the time it is salvaged and the rescue party reaches the Inner Station, Kurtz will have died of his illness. The manager's guess is that it will be about three months before Marlow can raise and repair the wrecked steamer. 'That ought to do the affair' (23), he reflects ominously. The truth, as the Russian harlequin tells Marlow further on in the novella, is that Kurtz has been 'shamefully abandoned' (58).

Marlow's need for rivets, both metal and mental, is chronic. When he becomes too insistent about his need for more of the iron kind the manager suddenly draws his attention to the rogue hippo that is alleged to stalk the Central Station at night. Marlow tells his comrades that he 'wasn't disturbed' (28), but he does not seem to have realised that the manager is hinting that he might 'accidentally' find himself being trampled by the beast unless he becomes less zealous in his salvage of the steamer; significantly, there are innumerable rivets at the Outer Station but none at the Central Station, despite Marlow's repeated pleas for them. And the more insistently Marlow demands rivets, the more the Manager emphasises the threat of the hippopotamus: 'No man – you apprehend me? –', the Manager observes to Marlow, 'no man here bears a charmed life' (28). But still Marlow does not seem to see what he is driving at, whereas one of the main reasons Kurtz attempts to crawl back to the Inner Station from the steamer is because he is all too aware of the danger which awaits him at the Central Station, where the 'old hippo' (28) would be the least of his worries. With the dying Kurtz on board and the steamer bound down river, Marlow comments that the manager 'took us both in with a comprehensive and satisfied glance: the "affair" had come off as well as could be wished' (67). But the reader senses that Kurtz has not been taken in like Marlow has been taken in. His opaque and wordy arabesques mask not just his determination to salvage Kurtz and the imperial 'idea', but also his failure to comprehend the 'covert plot' that has unfolded around him.⁵

Heart of Darkness flickers between illumination and obscurity, darkness and light, and 'registers its manifold preoccupations in a title which by signifying a geographical location, a metaphysical landscape and a theological category, addresses itself simultaneously to Europe's exploitation of Africa, the primeval human condition, an archaic aspect of the mind's structure and a condition of moral baseness' (Parry, 20). Yet the sequence of descriptive switchbacks at the opening of the novella that contrast the 'luminous'

offing (3) to the east of the moored *Nellie* with the gloom gathering over the 'monstrous town' of London to the west of it suggest Conrad may also have shaped his African tale with a more specific African context in mind. In late 1890, the year in which Conrad journeyed up and down the Congo and in which the explorer H. M. Stanley published *In Darkest Africa*, London had been denounced as the vicious heart of 'Darkest England' by William Booth, first General of the Salvation Army. The controversy generated by Booth's *In Darkest England* continued to engage public interest for much of the ensuing decade and it was still lingering in the air when Conrad began writing his tale in 1898. *Heart of Darkness*, it seems more than likely, is at one level a contribution to the *Darkest England* rumpus.

As well as decrying Britain's failure to deal with its grotesque social problems at home at a time when it was vigorously exporting British values abroad, Booth's book, among other things, sets out his proposal to remedy vice and poverty by means of city and farm colonies for the homeless, the fallen and the destitute. T. H. Huxley, 'Darwin's Bulldog', on the other hand, was a vigorous opponent of any form of social interventionism and vilified Booth's scheme in letters to *The Times* from December 1890 to the end of January 1891 that were published in book form later in 1891 under the title *Social Diseases and Worse Remedies* and were also reprinted in his *Evolution and Ethics* (1893). The *Darkest England* controversy, therefore, was in full spate when Conrad arrived back in London from the Congo at some point in January 1891.⁶ Almost immediately, he suffered some kind of nervous breakdown, and he remained either in hospital or convalescent in London until May 1891, but he could not have failed to be aware of the furore Booth's book had caused and it is this controversy, quite possibly, that accounts for the fact that no fewer than five of the novella's first seven paragraphs conclude with the frame narrator's gaze (and so the reader's attention) being tugged away from the brightly illuminated offing to the murkiness which thickens over the heart of the Empire. By choosing a frame narrator who breaks off from monitoring this gathering gloom to sing the praises of the imperial Thames and extol the deeds of those who have sailed down it to make London the 'greatest' town on earth, before turning his eyes to the gloom once more, Conrad introduces his anti-imperialist theme. In his narrow-minded ability to switch undisturbedly from gloom to glory and back again the frame narrator personifies the kind of chauvinistic Englishman who could exult in the adventures of those 'messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire' (5) who had helped build the Empire, yet who is blind to the evils in his own back yard. Marlow's mind works in exactly the same way: he condemns the Belgians and other continental Europeans at every opportunity, yet is oblivious to the shortcomings of the British Empire and the inefficiencies and social evils at its heart. Marlow, in fact, was just the kind of blinkered, empire-obsessed Englishman that *In Darkest England*, at one level, was aimed at.

The 1899 magazine version of the novella was called 'The Heart of Darkness' but by the time it was revised and reprinted in 1902 the definite article had been dropped. Like its early reviewers, some readers may be content to link the title solely with the dark and impenetrable Congo jungle that lies at the heart of equatorial Africa: Kurtz's Inner Station is situated, we are told, at 'the heart of an impenetrable darkness' (47) or, more simply, at 'the heart of darkness' (35, 67). Alternatively or in addition, the title might be taken to refer to Kurtz and 'the barren darkness of his heart' (68), the 'impenetrable darkness' (68) of his final days. Then again, it could refer to Brussels. When Marlow returns to the city it seems to him a necropolis, 'a city of the dead' (11). The street in which the Intended lives is said to be 'as still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetery' (73) and the piano in her family's drawing-room stands in a corner 'like a sombre and polished sarcophagus' (73). The word 'sarcophagus' means 'flesh-eating', ghoulishly re-uniting the Intended with the ravening Kurtz, his mouth wide open on his stretcher, giving him 'a weirdly voracious aspect as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him' (59). When Marlow arrives in front of the Intended's house he recalls this vision of the open-mouthed Kurtz and goes on to bring to mind the circumstances of his removal from the Inner Station and of a drum beating 'regular and muffled like the beating of a heart, the heart of a conquering darkness' (73). Finally, as we have seen, at yet another level the title may draw the reader's eye to the novella's other capital city, London, the dark heart of England and the British Empire. But if darkness in this novella is far more impenetrable than some wispy period brume and envelopes all these meanings at once, it cloaks, above all, the dark heart of Charlie Marlow. And it was in coming to terms with unreliable narrators like Marlow and in attempting to circumvent the snags he brings to the narrative fairway (such as his deliberately jumbled chronology and his persistent use of obscure and billowy phrases) that the need for textual disambiguation began to muscle in on the gentle art of reading and the novel as we know it today began to take shape.

Notes

1. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Paul B. Armstrong, Norton Critical Edition, 4th ed. (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2006), p. 34. All further page references are to this edition of the novel and are incorporated in the main body of the essay.
2. On 'Marlow's Victorian Ethic' of Work, see Watt, pp. 148–51.
3. See Suzanne Raitt, 'The Rhetoric of Efficiency in Early Modernism', *Modernism/Modernity*, 13, No. 1 (Jan. 2006), pp. 89–105, and Evelyn Cobley, *Modernism and the Culture of Efficiency: Ideology and Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

4. In the first version of his critique, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, *Massachusetts Review*, 18 (1977), pp. 782–94, Achebe denounced Conrad a 'bloody racist'. The revised version of Achebe's essay is reprinted in the Norton Critical Edition of *Heart of Darkness*, pp. 336–49.
5. See Watts, esp. pp. 119–21.
6. For a comprehensive account of Conrad's Congo journey and its devastating personal aftermath, see Najder, pp. 123–46.

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2

'Hasn't got any name': Aesthetics, African Americans and Policemen in *The Great Gatsby*

Nicolas Tredell

In the final years of the last century, a Guide to *Gatsby* criticism concluded that 'it is difficult to imagine a time when there will not be readers and critics who will want to take the road to West Egg, past the valley of ashes, to Gatsby's blue lawn and to the compelling vision of the fresh, green breast of the new world' (Tredell (1997), 166). As we move into the second decade of the twenty-first century, there are still plenty of readers and critics taking the *Gatsby* road, even though they are likely to be aware, or to discover, that it is a highway with many hazards, perplexing forks and misleading or absent signposts. *Gatsby* certainly remains a canonical text, in the sense that it is still widely taught, written about, discussed, quoted and used as a benchmark – to claim that a novel is an up-to-date version of *Gatsby* endows it with instant charisma. A vast critical, pedagogic and publishing industry rests on this slender work which hardly seemed set for canonical status in Fitzgerald's lifetime – eight copies still languished unpurchased in the publisher's warehouse at the time of his death in 1940. Its canonical standing has recently been confirmed by the publication, in the Modern Language of America's 'Approaches to Teaching World Literature' series, of *Approaches to Teaching Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby* (2009) which collects essays from twenty-four contributors on topics which include 'Teaching *The Great Gatsby* in the Context of World War I', 'Using a Heraclitean Approach in Teaching *The Great Gatsby*', 'Teaching the Medieval in *The Great Gatsby*' and 'Using Music to Teach *The Great Gatsby*'. The fertility of *Gatsby*, its openness to a variety of interpretative approaches, is also exemplified by Lois Tyson's *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (2nd edn, 2006), which uses *Gatsby* to illustrate the eleven critical perspectives which it aims to explicate, from New Criticism to Postcolonial Criticism. But it is Tyson who also identifies a problem with *Gatsby* which might seem to compromise its canonical status:

Almost all the theories I used [in this book] have led me to conclude, in effect, that the novel is ideologically flawed in some way. If I put all these flaws together, I come up with a statement something like this: 'The

Great Gatsby is a classist, sexist, homophobic, racist, colonialist novel that romanticizes the evils of capitalism [and] glorifies dysfunctional love.' (455)

Faced with these perceived ideological flaws, Tyson summons aesthetics as a counterweight. Yes, *Gatsby* is 'ideologically appalling, a fact we mustn't forget'; but it is also 'one of the most moving', 'exquisitely written', 'lyrically beautiful' and 'masterfully crafted' of literary works. Rather than seeking to escape or resolve this 'contradiction', Tyson tries 'to sustain' it as she continues 'to appreciate both the incomparable artistry of *The Great Gatsby* and the theories that show me the multiple layers of its disquieting subtext' (455, 456).

For Tyson, then, the identity and interchangeability of beauty and truth which is affirmed at the end of Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' – an equation which might have appealed to Fitzgerald, a keen Keatsian – is replaced by an irresolvable estrangement. Beauty has no cognitive function and political and ethical truth cannot partake of the aesthetic. To some extent, this is a fruitful contradiction but it also seems, finally, like an abstraction from a complex reading experience in which the ideological and the aesthetic are intermixed. It is useful here to invoke a concept which Hugh Grady has applied to a text not wholly different from *Gatsby*, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:¹ that of 'impure aesthetics' – 'aesthetics conceived as creative of an imagined realm separate from empirical reality, but one that draws its materials from that reality' (275). An approach based on this idea contributes to 'a new appreciation of the specifically aesthetic content' of a work and 'a deeper understanding of [its] imbrication [. . .] with the social, the political, and the historical, in its original context and in our own' (277). Such an approach also makes it possible to think about 'art's utopian potential – its ability to create visions of the nonexisting, to embody desire and not just received ideas' (276) – a potential which is surely very relevant to *Gatsby*, which both examines and enacts the capacity of the imagination to create visions of possibility and embody desire even as it shows how vision and desire may be compromised, by received ideas and a range of other forces. *Gatsby*'s 'extraordinary gift for hope' (6), his sense that 'the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing' (77) become, at the end of the novel, not only an individual but also a collective endowment ('tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out *our* arms further' (141, italics added), even if it is constricted by its exclusion of ethnic others (symbolized by the 'obscene word' which Nick erases from the 'white' steps of *Gatsby*'s deserted house (140; see Will (2005)) and by the exploitation of the natural environment (the 'vanished trees which had made way for *Gatsby*'s house' (140)). *Gatsby*'s profligate parties, shadowed by violence and corruption, nonetheless adumbrate a liberating mode of multitudinous sociability that transcends parochial limits.

An 'impure aesthetics' approach helps in grasping the intermixture and interanimation of the ideological and the aesthetic in *Gatsby*. Moreover,

it helps to open up the aesthetic range of *Gatsby*. For *Gatsby* is not only 'beautiful'; its beauty, like that of Rilke's beauty in the *Duino Elegies* which is 'nothing / but beginning of Terror we're still just able to bear' (60) moves towards the sublime; and the novel can also encompass an aesthetic of trauma and tragedy, and of the uncanny and the absurd. These aesthetic modes are linked with the ideological concerns of *Gatsby* and this essay pursues those linkages in two areas of the novel: its representations of African Americans and of the police.

Gatz and Gates

One of the bravura aesthetic passages in *Gatsby* is also one of the most ideologically charged: the description, in chapter four of *Gatsby*, of Nick Carraway's famous ride into New York in 'Gatsby's gorgeous car' (51), driven by the thirty-two-year old man who himself, Nick remarks near the start of the novel, had 'something gorgeous about him' (6). The dominant aesthetic mode in this description is, of course, a modernist, kinetic one; we enter a travelling kaleidoscope of colour and angle and light. But there are moments which, if one stopped the car, froze the frame, could exemplify an aesthetic of contemplative stasis, the reiterated experiencing of an ordinary moment of desire, like looking at Keats's Grecian Urn: 'The city seen from the Queensboro bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world' (55). It is this combination of a kinetic and static aesthetic that helps to account for the exhilaration of the passage. A combination of stasis and kinesis is evident, however, not only in its aesthetics, but also in its epistemology. There are moments when it seems possible to know the truth with certainty but at other moments the prospect of authoritative knowledge appears to dissolve in flux. During 'that disconcerting ride' (51), Gatsby offers to tell Nick nothing less than 'God's truth' about his life and then constructs an autobiography which combines a crass or perhaps deliberate mislocation of San Francisco in the middle-west;² a brisk bricolage of cultural clichés ('it was like skimming hastily through a dozen magazines' (53)); and plausible artefactual evidence (the Montenegrin medal, the Oxford photograph). This makes Nick, in one of the recurrent oscillations of his feelings about Gatsby, fluctuate between incredulity and total belief.

As they near the city, however, Gatsby, whatever doubts his backstory may have raised, gives positive proof of his present connections. As his car, entering the urban labyrinth, 'twist[s] among the pillars of the elevated [railway]', Nick hears 'the familiar "jug-jug-*spat!*" of a motor cycle' and 'a frantic policeman' draws alongside the glorious chariot. Slowing down, Gatsby takes a white card from his wallet and waves it before the policeman's eyes; the latter immediately says 'Right you are', tips his cap and assures Gatsby he will know him next time (54) – a state of epistemological certainty in regard to

Gatsby never vouchsafed to Nick during his New York summer, when he can never be sure that he will know who Gatsby is next time, or even from one minute to the next. Nick, a Yale man, asks Gatsby whether the white card was the Oxford photograph, apparently making the questionable assumption that evidence of distinguished academic affiliation would be enough to establish an identity worthy of respect in the policeman's eyes; but Gatsby tells him that he was once able to do the police commissioner a favour, and the latter sends him a Christmas card every year. The possibility that Gatsby might be humbled by a close encounter with the police, that his triumphal progress into New York might be interrupted, is smoothly averted.

Reading this passage at the start of the second decade of the twenty-first century might bring to mind a more recent real-life close encounter between an upwardly mobile American with academic credentials and the police. On 16 July 2009, the fifty-seven-year old African American Harvard critic and scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. – like Gatsby, an example of an American success story, but a real rather than fictional one – was arrested at his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts by Sergeant James Crowley, who was responding, with a colleague, to a 911 call reporting men breaking and entering the residence. Gates had returned from a trip to China and, finding his front door jammed, tried to force it open with his driver's help. The details of what exactly happened between Gates and the police will always remain controversial, but clearly Gates had no Christmas card from the police commissioner, or any similar document, to establish an identity that would ensure that the police officers concerned saluted and moved on. He did apparently show his Harvard I.D. but this evidence of his membership of an elite academic institution seemed to be as ineffectual as Gatsby's Oxford photograph might have been if he had shown it to the motorcycle policeman. But Gates, like Gatsby, was not without influential connections; not least a third, and pre-eminent, example of an American success story: the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama. Asked at a press conference of 22 July 2009 about the incident, the day after a charge of disorderly conduct against Gates had been dropped, Obama remarked that the police action was 'stupid' – a comment that elevated the growing public debate about the incident to national proportions and to the highest political level.

To bring together the encounters with the police of Gatsby and Gates is to highlight the differences and similarities between the moment of *Gatsby* and that of early twenty-first century America. Both Gatsby and Gates – and of course, and perhaps supremely in the present time, Obama – are symbols of American possibility, of the American dream. In his victory speech, Obama instanced his electoral triumph as an example which should convince 'anyone out there who doubts that America is still a place where all things are possible'. All three changed their names, though Gatsby's entailed a rejection of his biological father, that of Gates affirmed an identification with the biological father, and that of Obama hovered between the two

poles: James Gatz became Jay Gatsby at the moment which will lead to him pledging himself to the first of his surrogate fathers, Dan Cody (76); Gates changed his name from Louis Smith Gates to Henry Louis Gates, taking on all three of his father's names (205–6); and Obama, while a student at Occidental College, Los Angeles, stopped using the nickname Barry, which his father had also used in the USA, and began to be known by his given forename, Barack (104). Gatsby, Gates and Obama also have in common the occupancy of houses to which their right has been questioned. Gatsby's 'huge place' (71), the stage set for his extravaganzas, is one which has been obtained by illegal means and it cannot, in Tom's eyes, erase a past in which Gatsby's only possible access to a house that was not only large but also an authoritative sign of membership in an elevated social class – a house like that of Daisy's family home in Louisville – was as a delivery boy ('I'll be damned if I see how you got within a mile of her [five years ago] unless you brought the groceries to the back door' (102)). And for Henry Louis Gates, according to the literary critic and theorist Stanley Fish, it was not the first time his right to occupy a house had been doubted. Writing in the *New York Times* on 24 July 2009, soon after the Gates contretemps, Fish recalled that one of Gates's first actions when he came to Durham, North Carolina, about twenty years ago, to take up a position at Duke University, was to buy 'the grandest house in town (owned previously by a movie director)' – a rather Gatsbyesque move. Of course, Gatsby's house was bought with the fruits of crime whereas Gates's purchase was bankrolled by the legal and relatively unexceptionable proceeds of teaching literature. Furthermore, Gatsby's acquisition of a grand house is to be understood in the light of his desire to become the kind of person whom Daisy might marry and to put himself into geographical and social proximity to her: as Jordan tells Nick, 'Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay' (62). One of the lights in which Gates's purchase might be seen is provided by a fact to which his memoir, *Colored People* (1995), refers at least four times (12, 21, 27, 202): that in his native city of Piedmont, West Virginia, people of colour were not allowed to own property until the 1970s, a state of affairs that meant he spent his childhood in rented homes and that particularly irked his mother, who 'came to believe early on that the key to wealth and comfort in America was owning property' (202). But Gates's purchase of the grandest house in Durham did not, according to Fish, ensure his recognition as its rightful owner: during the renovation which Gates initiated immediately after he had bought the house, workers and delivery truck drivers 'would often take Gates for a servant and ask to be pointed to the house's owner' (*New York Times* (24 July 2009)). And whereas Obama's occupancy of the White House is, in the nature of the American constitution, necessarily temporary, there are those who doubt his right to occupy it – for example, as Fish points out, those who tried to demonstrate that Obama was born in Kenya and was not really a US citizen.

While Gatsby in July 1922, in contrast to Gates in July 2009, was able to pass himself off to the police as a man to be respected, he finally foundered on the hard rock of class and old(ish) money, Gates, bristling with scholarly and academic credentials, found that these initially counted as nothing in an encounter with the police, even if he was quickly able afterwards to deploy the class and media power which his professional, intellectual eminence and social connections gave him. Both Gatsby and Gates then, are examples, not only of possibility, but also of the multitudinous barriers which can set limits to it. It remains to be seen what the limits may be to the sense of possibility embodied in Obama on the day of his election victory. Both Gates and Obama, however, exemplify the end of a process feared by Tom Buchanan during the drunken afternoon at the Plaza Hotel which precedes the climax of Gatsby's tragedy: 'Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white' (101). But even Gatsby, who signifies the beginning of that process for Tom, might exemplify the end Tom adumbrates. A significant strand of recent criticism – see, for example, Meredith Goldsmith (2003) and Carlyle Van Thompson (2004) – has linked Gatsby with narratives of 'passing', of the attempt of 'light-complected' African Americans to 'pass' as white (the adjective 'light-complected' is a favourite of Gates in *Colored People*). Gatsby could literally be passing – as Thompson points out, we know nothing 'about the race or ethnicity' of his mother (88); but it is not necessary to posit a specific ethnic origin for Gatsby to suggest that he is trying to pass socially, letting 'the invisible cloak of his uniform' hide his origins during the war when he first gets to know Daisy (116), and then striving to pass as a member of the wealthy upper class who would be acceptable as Daisy's husband.

Jay Gatsby is a kind of mimic man; Goldsmith compares him to the 'parvenu protagonists' who attempt to imitate 'racial and national identities', 'through the apparatus of speech, costume and manners', in the works of African American novelists such as James Weldon Johnson, Walter White and Nella Larsen and such Jewish-American writers as Abraham Cahan, Anzia Yezierska and Mary Antin (444). Gatsby's performances, often breathtaking in their daring and scope, do not, finally, quite come off; his modes of behaviour sometimes reference the past rather than the present and sometimes, more scandalously, they imitate, as Goldsmith suggests, 'African-American and ethnic modes of self-definition' (443). In the contexts in which he is eager to impress, his behaviour, like his 'elaborate formality of speech', 'just miss[. . .] being absurd' (40). And this element of vertiginous performance in Gatsby, the sense of a tightrope walker who, for all his apparent poise, often comes dangerously close to missing his footing – and does of course miss it, hopelessly wrong-footed by Tom, in the debacle at the Plaza Hotel – contributes to a sense of the uncanny in the novel. Even when the performance is at its best, Gatsby is never quite at

home in his roles, just as he is never quite at home in his house. Springing 'from his Platonic conception of himself' (77), Gatsby lacks the support of any family or community and can seem to lack substance.

In *Colored People*, Gates expresses a qualified admiration for people who claim, in all seriousness, 'that they have transcended any attachment to a particular community or group' but says that he 'always want[s] to run around behind them to see what holds them up' (xv). Ever since Maxwell Perkins's observation, in response to the earlier version of *Gatsby*, that Gatsby is 'somewhat vague' (xvii), a significant proportion of readers and critics have evinced a similar desire to run around behind Gatsby to see what holds him up. Moreover this desire is strengthened by those quasi-Brechtian moments in which Gatsby seems to draw attention to his own artifice by taking it to extremes (his brightly coloured suits, his extravagant car) or by deliberately subverting it (locating San Francisco in the Middle West). These elements in Gatsby's performances – their uncanny, absurd, self-subverting qualities – contribute to the aesthetic quality and complexity of Fitzgerald's work. Like the novel of which he is the eponymous hero, Gatsby is by turns, and sometimes simultaneously, beautiful, sublime, kinetic, static, uncanny, absurd and self-subverting.

Crossing Blackwell's Island

Shortly after the encounter with the motorcycle cop in *The Great Gatsby*, Nick and Gatsby cross the Queensboro Bridge in triumph but their progress is perturbed by a harbinger of death and ethnic difference: a dead man passes in a hearse, followed by two carriages with drawn blinds for the family and 'more cheerful carriages' from which the friends of the deceased 'looked out at us with the tragic eyes and short upper lips of south-eastern Europe'. Here tragedy, as an aesthetic experience and genre which echoes existential loss, is explicitly referenced in the adjective 'tragic' but set at a distance, associated with a European provenance and a different ethnicity. Nick is able, with gracious condescension, to be 'glad that the sight of Gatsby's splendid car was included in their somber holiday' (55). The next encounter seems more difficult to handle. It takes place as Gatsby's car crosses Blackwell's Island and the verb 'crossed', as Bryan R. Washington indicates (43), seems especially significant at this point where Nick and Gatsby are crossing into a zone where ethnic stereotypes will be momentarily inverted. The name of the island is also significant. By the year in which *Gatsby* is set, 1922, Blackwell's Island had in fact been renamed 'Welfare Island' and contained a charity hospital and penal institution; but the retention of the older name whose first syllable would have been, at the time, a derogatory racist term and whose second syllable could imply prosperity could be seen, as Carlyle van Thompson suggests, as alluding to 'the upper-middle-class black people who do "well" socioeconomically' (93).

The name also functions to cue the sight that immediately follows: a limousine 'driven by a white chauffeur, in which sat three modish Negroes, two bucks and a girl' (55). Here the white/black hierarchy is dramatically inverted; moreover, not only do the African Americans have a white chauffeur, but they are also 'modish', in the fashion, unlike Nick, or indeed Gatsby, whose attire is, it may be, too vulgar, loud and feminized (his pink suit). The term 'bucks' also implies that the African American males in the limo are sexually potent, an implication which both mobilizes a racist myth and marks out, by contrast, the uncertain masculinity of Nick and Gatsby. The contrast is sharpened by the term 'yolks' which, linking with 'eggs', endows the African Americans with a potential fertility which seems denied to the two men in the monstrously long car who have such difficulties with girls. The uneven male-female ratio in the limo might also suggest, mobilizing a sexist myth, that these men dominate the woman in their lives in a way which is much more difficult for Nick, or Gatsby, or even Tom.

Nick tries to put the African Americans in their place by laughing at them and processing his perception through a racist stereotype of rolling eyeballs that might have come from a story by a writer who much influenced Fitzgerald in the writing of *Gatsby*, Joseph Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' (1899; 1902): 'I laughed aloud as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled toward us in haughty rivalry' (55). But this burst of laughter is unusual for Nick and suggests a heightened state of excitement and disinhibition. The phrase 'I laughed' occurs only twice in *Gatsby*, and this is the sole occasion on which Nick amplifies it by adding 'out loud'. When the phrase appears earlier in the novel, it denotes Nick laughing in response to Daisy's laugh (10), and on the two other occasions on which Nick laughs, he does so with others, once at a Gatsby party ('everybody laughed' (41)) and once with Jordan as Tom drives them to New York in Gatsby's car (95). But as they cross Blackwell's Island, there is no sign of Gatsby laughing at the African Americans in the limo, perhaps because he is, in his extravagant self-display, not so far from them as Nick might like to think. In this respect, it is significant that, earlier in the journey, Nick has come close to laughing at Gatsby himself; it was only '[w]ith an effort' that he 'managed to restrain [his] incredulous laughter' at Gatsby's tale of living 'like a young rajah' and 'trying to forget something very sad that had happened to [him] a long time ago' (52); This suggests that Nick has come close to placing Gatsby in the same category as the African Americans, as over-the-top performers; the African Americans release a laughter that Gatsby has already threatened to provoke, and in laughing at them, he is also laughing at Gatsby.

Moreover, Nick's uneasy laughter shifts immediately into a sense of possibility into which his sight of the African Americans seems to have fed: 'Anything can happen now that we've slid over this bridge,' I thought; 'anything at all . . .' (ellipsis in original). It is still Gatsby who pre-eminently embodies this sense of possibility for Nick: 'Even Gatsby could happen,

without any particular wonder' (55); and, just as Gatsby's car upstages the African American's limousine, so Gatsby himself is elevated by Nick into a superior symbol of the remarkable; but the African Americans nonetheless seem to function in a similar symbolic way and might be seen, today, as a harbinger of a social change which would issue, on 20 January 2009, in an African American president making his way to the White House in a motorcade.

Death on Main Street

The African Americans in the limousine do not attract the attentions of the police, but there is one significant encounter between an African American and a motor cycle policeman in *Gatsby*. It occurs in chapter 7, in the section in which Nick describes the immediate aftermath of Myrtle's death. In this part of the novel the aesthetics of trauma and tragedy prevail. In Wilson's garage, the motor cycle policeman is taking down names 'with much sweat and correction' (108) and his problems in spelling the name of a witness – he gets as far as 'Mavrog' – are highlighted in Nick's narrative.³ This could seem patronizing on Nick's or Fitzgerald's part – the Ivy League man employing the stereotype of the dumb cop – but it could also be seen as portraying the difficulties of a conscientious, hardworking police officer in a society full of onomastic complications which relate to wider complications in regard to identity. But the policeman never completes the spelling of 'Mavrog's' surname because Tom Buchanan, exercising both physical and class power, interrupts him, temporarily usurping his role and putting himself in the position of interrogator. When the policeman takes up his questioning again, he does so in response to Michaelis's observation that there were two cars, '[o]ne comin', one goin' and then makes another onomastic query, about the name of the place they are in, which is truncated even more abruptly than his notation of 'Mavrog's' name by the response: 'Hasn't got any name' (109). This absence of the name of a place – a place crucial to the novel – is significant in a novel with so many names of places and people.

It is not, however, quite the case that the place is entirely anonymous; Nick has earlier christened it with a sort of generic name when, near the start of chapter 2, he calls it 'a kind of compact Main Street ministering' to 'the waste land' of the valley of ashes (22). In the intertextual field of 1920s American fiction, the use of the term 'Main Street' resonates with one of the inaugural novels of the decade, Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott* (1920), a book which focuses on that kind of hinterland briefly and negatively registered in the 'wheat', the 'prairies' and the 'lost Swede towns' which Nick invokes in his memories of going home from prep-school and college but which are dismissed in advance, by a pre-emptive 'not', from his idea of the 'middle-west' (137). Lewis bitterly satirizes Main Street

but inevitably, by focusing on it as the topic of his long novel, by vivifying it through evocations of place and character, by making it the place which stirs Carol's energies but which she cannot reform and to which she eventually returns, he endows it with a distinctive presence.

In *Gatsby*, by contrast, Fitzgerald attenuates Main Street to 'a small cement block of yellow brick' (22). Since Fitzgerald had, two years before, written a play, *The Vegetable or from President to Postman* (1923), which 'specifically invokes' L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* (Wixson, 14), this yellow brick block might be the 'yellow brick' road to Oz (Baum, 15) cut off at both ends, going nowhere, turned into a kind of anticipatory echo of a Carl Andre sculpture, reduced to a minimalist rectangle which cannot compete with the city seen from the Queensboro Bridge, 'rising up across the river in white heaps and sugar lumps' (54). Furthermore, yellow is the colour of an alien race in T. Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color Against World-White Supremacy* (1920), which is generally held to be the book to which Tom Buchanan refers when he cites "'The Rise of the Coloured Empires" by this man Goddard' (14). Yellow may also, as Carlyle Van Thompson suggests, figure as a sign of miscegenation, as in the pejorative term for pale blacks, 'high yella' (97). The denigratory invocation of 'Main Street' in *Gatsby* functions, perhaps, both as an implicit attack on Lewis's choice of subject matter and a sign of the impotence of Main Street when it is brought into close proximity with the city and with Wall Street. This impotence is humanly figured in George Wilson, who is economically impotent and who is also, it is implied, sexually impotent; the man who, Myrtle believed before their marriage, knew something, not only about gentlemanly codes of behaviour but also about the processes that lead to procreation, but whom she now sees as incapable even of masochistic fetishism ('I thought he knew something about breeding but he wasn't fit to lick my shoe' (30)).

The absence of anything other than what is, in the intertextual web of *Gatsby*, a belittling generic name for the yellow cement block that borders the valley of ashes, is symptomatic of the unequal power relations the novel depicts, and in this respect it links up with the absence of anything other than a racially generic designation for the figure who enters the text immediately after the policeman is told that the place they are in '[h]asn't got any name'. This is a 'pale, well dressed Negro' who 'step[s] near' (109) – nearer, perhaps, in this confused post-accident situation than he might otherwise do to white people, particularly a white policeman, in this era. His paleness, however, might help to make such proximity more acceptable, bringing him closer in complexion to whiteness (suppose the African Americans in the limousine which Nick saw crossing Blackwell's Island had turned up at this point as witnesses to the accident or its aftermath – the dynamics would be very different). That paleness could also, of course, suggest that he might be an incarnation of the intermarriage – or at least intercourse – of black and white so feared by Tom Buchanan. In other

respects, however, he might seem a more assimilated figure than Gatsby; his sartorial style, given what we might infer to be Nick's criteria of being 'well dressed', is rather old-fashioned: no caramel or pink suits, no brightly coloured shirts.

Nonetheless, this African American is perhaps dangerously observant, correctly identifying the colour of the car that killed Myrtle. The policeman asks him to come closer and to give his name, but the questioning is interrupted by Wilson saying 'You don't have to tell me what kind of car it was' (109) – he does not need to know about the car because, at this point, he thinks he knows the name of the driver – Tom Buchanan – though Tom acts quickly to dispel this idea. We never do learn the African American's name, another significant absence in this onomastically profuse novel in which names are so plentiful and important, and he is never mentioned as a witness at the inquest, although his correct identification of the colour of the 'death car' and his remark that it was travelling at fifty or sixty miles an hour when it passed him, might have seemed to qualify him to make an appearance. We have, however, already been told in an earlier flashforward that Michaelis, the Greek owner of the all-night restaurant, was the principal inquest witness, and we learn at the start of chapter 10 that Myrtle's sister Catherine also took the witness stand; but no other witnesses are mentioned. Ralph Ellison has remarked:

How ironic it was that in the world of *The Great Gatsby* the witness who could have identified the driver of the death car that led to Gatsby's murder was a black man whose ability to communicate (and communication implies moral judgement) was of no more consequence to the action than that of an ox that might have observed Icarus's sad plunge into the sea. (503)

Whether the 'black man' could have identified the driver is open to question; the 'text suggests that the eyewitness saw the car, rather than the driver', as Goldsmith points out (462); and it might be difficult to achieve a watertight identification of a driver in a car going at fifty or sixty miles an hour – though the eyewitness might have at least been able to identify the driver's gender and thus exculpate Gatsby. But it remains the case that a potential source of further information and clarification is not pursued. The 'pale, well dressed Negro' disappears from the story, and his disappearance parallels those other characters sometimes endowed with paleness – Gatsby himself and George Wilson – who are physically absent through death at this stage of the novel.

The last mention of this African American, however, creates a momentary link between him and Nick; they are the only people near enough to Tom to hear him telling Wilson that he was not driving the yellow car (as he had been when he was driving into town, after exchanging cars with Gatsby,

and stopped at Wilson's garage for gas). Tom's words to Wilson constitute another piece of significant evidence and the fact that it does not seem to come up at the inquest extends the link between the African American and Nick: neither takes the witness stand to say what he knows. The African American's knowledge is only fragmentary but it could still have opened cracks in the cover-up story which is being presented at the inquest; Nick, of course, knows much more, more than anyone else, and he could explode the cover-up story in a few minutes; but he too stays silent. The absence of the African American and of Nick from the witness stand means that each is, in his way – the African American inadvertently, Nick consciously – contributes to shielding the Buchanans, omitting them from the story of the deaths of Myrtle, Gatsby and Wilson so that their rich, careless way of life may continue. Nick and the nameless African American are, in a sense, secret sharers even though they only come together for a brief span of time and neither learns the other's name. Both share in a knowledge which is not disclosed to the proper authorities.

The police and the polis

The police do not penetrate the smokescreen which Tom starts to release almost immediately after Myrtle's death. They are certainly present at the crime scene: on the day and night of Gatsby's death, and on the following day, there is, as Nick puts it at the start of chapter 9, 'an endless drill of police and photographers and newspaper men' (127). This triplet is repeated a little later in the chapter, to emphasize, by contrast, the absence of any communication or visit from Daisy, Wolfshiem, or Gatsby's other associates: 'neither a wire [from Daisy] nor Mr. Wolfshiem arrived, no one arrived, except more police and photographers and newspaper men' (129). Despite the reiterated presence of the police, and of other potential agents of accurate representation, photographers and newspaper men, there appears to be no intense investigative activity to establish the facts of the case. It is possibly a police officer who provides a version of events which is convenient for Tom: 'Someone with a positive manner, perhaps a detective, used the expression "mad man" as he bent over Wilson's body that afternoon, and the adventitious authority of his voice set the key for the newspaper reports next morning' (127).⁴ The figure of the detective emerges in later nineteenth-century fiction as the agent of truth; but here, an unnamed person who may be a detective, provides, in encapsulated form, an exculpating fiction. It could be that the police do not push their inquiry too far, or even promote a heavily censored version of events (if the person with 'a positive manner' is indeed a police detective) because probing inquiries could disclose connections that might be embarrassing for the authorities – what was the favour which Gatsby did for the police commissioner, and is there a hint of possible police corruption here? There is, of course, no conclusive evidence of such

corruption in the text of *Gatsby*, but there is a strong sense of a cover-up that is perhaps partly inadvertent and partly deliberate; and the text does show that the greatest culprit, the one who knows most but stays silent, is Nick.

That Nick does not tell the police what he knows is significant because, in the first chapter of the novel, he thinks of the police as an agency that might be summoned to control a disturbing situation. When he is at Tom and Daisy's with Jordan, the phone rings again at the end of the meal and everyone thinks that it is Tom's mistress (Nick does not yet know her name) on the other end of the line, Nick observes: 'To a certain temperament the situation might have seemed intriguing – my own instinct was to telephone immediately for the police' (16). Here the police are seen as an exterior agency which is necessary to enforce morality because people at a high social level such as Tom can no longer regulate themselves. But when Nick does presumably telephone for the police, after the deaths of Gatsby and Wilson, he hinders them by not telling them all he knows. The sense of the police as an agency that could be necessary to enforce codes of behaviour that people such as Tom cannot be relied upon to observe themselves is also invoked in Myrtle's account to Nick of how she first met Tom on the train to New York and how, when they came into the station, 'he was next to me and his white shirt front pressed against my arm – and so I told him I'd have to call a policeman but he knew I lied' (31). Here is a situation which could potentially be one of sexual harassment, a matter for the police, if Tom's attentions had been unwelcome to Myrtle. But in the case of both Nick and Myrtle, the idea of calling the police is a notional one.

There is one other reference to the police in *Gatsby*, not to a policeman but to a police dog. In chapter 2, when Myrtle insists on buying a dog, she first of all tells the dog seller 'I'd like to get one of those police dogs' (24). According to Ronald Berman, Myrtle is buying according to a plan and the dog is the final component in the self she wants to construct. 'The dog makes the apartment and Myrtle complete, exactly as she has seen matron and pet in advertisements' (64). This may be so, but it does not explain why she first of all fixes on the idea of a 'police' dog, a dog which would be, at least implicitly, functional as well as decorative. The desire for a 'police' dog might suggest the wish for some force which could protect her and police the boundaries between classes which she wants to uphold in order to highlight her own supposed rise to a superior social position. As with Nick's desire, in chapter 1, 'to telephone for the police', there is here a sense of an external enforcement agency – even if this time embodied in a canine representative – which is necessary because established social codes are less effective than they once were.

These references in *Gatsby* to the police might provide a further link between the novel and T. S. Eliot's major Modernist poem, *The Waste Land* (1922). Eliot's working title for the poem, in the typescript revised by Pound and published in 1971, was 'He do the Police in different voices' (4, 5, 10,

11), a quotation from chapter 16 of Charles Dickens's novel *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5) which refers to the ability of Sloppy, a foundling, to assume different voices when reading out the newspaper reports of court cases (246). Eliot's title incorporated a pun on the Greek word for a city state, 'polis' and thus offered an implicit comment both on the technique of the poem – its use of different registers to represent the modern city (and, through that, the modern state) – and on the fragmentation of modern urban life. Fitzgerald would not have known of Eliot's original title when he was writing *Gatsby*, but it is possible to make an intertextual link between Eliot's play on 'police'/'polis' and the references to the police in *Gatsby*'s representation of the modern polis. The breakdown and fragmentation of the manners of the polis as portrayed in *Gatsby* makes the police (in Nick's perspective) more necessary than ever, but in the novel, they are shown as having limited power to bring malefactors to justice; whether it is for a possible traffic offence or manslaughter. Offenders are sometimes brought to book but these are peripheral figures.⁵ As Gatsby tells Nick, the police cannot get Wolfshiem himself for fixing the 1919 World's Series – 'He's a smart man' (58) – or for any other crime: none of the central characters goes to jail, or even gets arrested, in the novel. Perhaps it is this ineffectuality of the police, as Nick perceives it, which contributes to his desire, when he comes back from the East after the Gatsby debacle, for a more militarized, authoritarian, potentially fascist global order: 'I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever' (5).

The Great Gatsby, however, in its impure aesthetics, its juxtapositions of the beautiful, sublime, utopian, uncanny, absurd, tragic and traumatic adumbrates another possibility: of a society whose order emerges from its openness and difference rather than from its exclusiveness and uniformity, in which the vision of possibility crossing the Queensboro bridge is not the preserve of Nick Carraway but is available to all. It is *Gatsby*'s dramatization of this promise – and of the risks and traumas which its pursuit may entail – which are likely to give the novel continued aesthetic presence, thematic significance and canonical force in the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. See, for example, Anthony Berret in Bryer and VanArsdale (2009) on the Wedding March which Gatsby, Tom, Daisy, Nick and Jordan hear from their rented room in the Plaza Hotel in chapter 7 of the novel: 'did [Fitzgerald] want the reader to recall that this march is part of Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, incidental music to accompany Shakespeare's play? The word *mid-summer* appears twice in *Gatsby* [once when Nick takes up with Jordan Baker again (47) and] once in the scene when Gatsby and Daisy meet again [73], and Daisy watches for ['the longest day of the year' (13)]. Shakespeare's play operates on a contrast between

- town (Athens) and forest (where strange things happen, mainly to correct a bad marriage arrangement). Do the New York/Long Island contrast and love themes in *Gatsby* echo this?' (198).
2. Richard Godden remarks that the 'creator of a criminal network operating bond-fraud on a national scale can surely manage better lies than the one about San Francisco?' (343–4) and Richard Lehan observes that it 'seems implausible that Gatsby, who three times circled the continent with Dan Cody, would not know the location of San Francisco' (132).
 3. Some extant editions of *Gatsby* refer to the Greek café owner, who is usually called 'Michaelis', as 'Mavromichaelis' on one occasion (e.g. Oxford World's Classics (1998), 109; Penguin Classics (2000), 131). This can contribute to the impression that 'the man' whose name the policeman is taking down is Michaelis himself, but Matthew J. Bruccoli points out that they are different: the café owner 'was named *Mavromichaelis* in the manuscript. Fitzgerald changed it in proof to *Michaelis* but missed this appearance. The man whose name the policeman is taking down on pages 108–9 is not Michaelis; he is another witness – referred to as 'the man' [109] – whose name begins *Mavrog* – .' (Cambridge University Press edition, p. 152, note to p. 107, line 21).
 4. The idea that Wilson was a 'mad man' (127) is echoed by Gatsby's father, who uses the same phrase – 'It was a mad man [. . .] He must have been mad' (130). At this point Nick, who could show Mr Gatz the method in Wilson's madness, changes the subject by asking if Mr Gatz would like some coffee.
 5. One of the guests at Gatsby's parties named in Nick's list, Snell, 'went to the penitentiary' (49). The five people responsible for the fatal shooting of Rosy Rosenthal were electrocuted, although Becker, the only one of the executed men named in Fitzgerald's text (56), was, in historical actuality, Charles Becker, a police lieutenant (see Bruccoli's note in *Gatsby*, 195), indicating the implication of a member of the police in this crime. Tom's friend Walter Chase spent a month in jail for his involvement in Gatsby and Wolfsheim's sale of grain alcohol in the drugstores they had bought (104) – since it was legal for drugstores to sell alcohol for medicinal purposes, they provided an ostensibly legitimate outlet for illicit booze.

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3

Urban Spaces, Fragmented Consciousness, and Indecipherable Meaning in *Mrs Dalloway*

Andrew Harrison

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* begins with the image of opening doors, immediately connecting the spatial with the temporal, as the middle-aged Clarissa's voyage out into the streets of Westminster on a bright morning in mid-June 1923 invokes the parallel time-frame in which her eighteen-year-old self opened the French windows at Bourton on a similar June day in 1889, plunging into the fresh country air. Inside her house, the rooms are being prepared for her evening party, with the doors taken off their hinges, while outside she walks the city streets to Mulberry's florist shop, where she will buy flowers to round off the preparations. The vivid spatial image of swinging hinges, and of thresholds crossed, is inseparable from the temporal process of remembering; in fact, the process of crossing and re-crossing thresholds works on both levels, as Clarissa crosses Victoria Street, walking through St James's Park into Piccadilly and along Bond Street, moving between scenes of urban bustle with a brief rural interlude, just as she anticipates Peter Walsh's imminent arrival at her party by recalling certain hurtful phrases he had uttered at Bourton. Her mind moves with her body from a feeling of satisfied elation at the early summer morning to the sombre remembrance of past experience and its associated feelings of dissatisfaction, and back to the present moment, as she pushes through the swing doors of the florist shop.

These opening pages seem to offer a condensed instance of Woolf's experimental style and interest in memory, consciousness and the fluid formation of individual identity. Clarissa's walk to buy the flowers draws together reflections on all the major characters in the novel (Peter Walsh, Sally Seton, Hugh Whitbread, Doris Kilman, Clarissa's husband Richard, and her daughter Elizabeth); its undulating spatial and temporal perspectives, 'like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave' (*MD* 3), provide an early key to what Susan Dick terms its 'radial form' (Dick 38). Critics invariably cite Woolf's own spatial images for her method of characterization in the novel: she referred in her diary to the 'caves' she dug behind her characters, which would 'connect' in the 'present moment', and the 'tunnelling process, by which

I tell the past by instalments, as I have need of it' (*Diary II* 263, 272). Clarissa's imaginative expansions and contractions operate like the widening leaden circles of sound emitted by Big Ben, radiating out from a monolithic but unreal named centre and dissolving in the air. The intense moments and fragmentary phrases which return to haunt her like the half-hourly chimes of the clock lend structure to the novel and to our sense of 'Mrs. Dalloway . . . Mrs. Richard Dalloway' (*MD* 11).

In recent years, however, the interconnections between the spatial and the temporal in Woolf's work have received renewed attention, addressing an overbalance of interest in Woolf's feminism, modernist aesthetics and writing practise with an appreciation of several important social and historical contexts to her works.¹ This new research is producing fresh insights into Woolf's relation to (for instance) technology.² Unfortunately, in discussing the author's engagement with urban spaces, there is still a noticeable tendency in critics to reinscribe her feminist concerns onto the cityscape, viewing its inhibiting structures as mere patriarchal impositions, easily subverted by an intuitive and sympathetic feminine counter-culture. For example, in her reading of *Mrs Dalloway*, Youngjoo Son (drawing on an earlier essay by Masami Usui) uses the symbolism of the chimes of St Margaret's shadowing those of Big Ben to describe an anti-authoritarian utopian undercurrent in the novel.³ Likewise, in her recent book, *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing*, Wendy Gan has argued that 'the public space of the city' in this period could offer middle-class women 'a refuge of public privacy away from the oppressiveness of home', with its 'enforced solitude' and 'fixity of identity' (Gan 17). Applying this insight in a brief reading of *Mrs Dalloway*, Gan argues that Clarissa Dalloway displays 'a deep self-involvement when walking in the city', and she views this self-involvement as a liberating form of privacy, allowing Clarissa to remain both 'insular and undisturbed'. For Gan, the 'urban mantle of privacy . . . allows Clarissa to be herself', or at least to experience 'the multiplication and fragmentation of selves', while home is a place of 'solidity and banality' (Gan 56, 58–9).

The essentially feminist arguments of both Son and Gan draw on Woolf's later, 1927 essay entitled 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure', where the city is described as providing a release for women from the fixed identities of home.⁴ However, in reading Clarissa's experience of streets and domestic spaces through the later insights of her creator, they overlook the many critical hints which effectively distance Woolf from her bourgeois protagonist. Thus, while Gan identifies in Peter Walsh's rude awakening from his fantasies about the beautiful female stranger in the street a critical engagement with the figure of the flâneur, or a parody of 'the romance of the *passante*' (Gan 54), she views Clarissa's ruminative interiority not as a source of potential error in need of an external check, but of a subtle, fragmentary subjective freedom and self-realization.

It is possible, however, to embrace Gan's broader point about the forms of privacy afforded women in the modern metropolis while also recognizing that the potential it offered for momentary self-realization entailed for both genders a deceptive blurring of the boundaries between private fantasies and social realities, or rather the subjective self and the social power structures within which that self operates. Applying this lens to the novel, we might see it not as a celebration of female self-realization on the city streets, but as an exploration of those external structures which underpin the new urban subjectivism, nurturing yet also checking our utopian flights of imagination.

In this essay I want to dwell on those moments when the ornate radial structure of *Mrs Dalloway* gives way to instances of disruption: when the deliberately constructed caves and tunnels are intersected by reminders of a troubling social reality, or a darkness which lies outside the light shed by the 'luminous halo' of consciousness (*Essays IV* 160). By focusing on the anti-utopian elements in the novel, I hope to show that it consistently off-sets its visionary moments through its concentration on the modern city's mysterious power structures. Instances of subjective connection are thrown into question by the novel's engagement with dominant spatial tropes of division and hierarchy. I will ultimately suggest that a concentration on urban spaces and the fragmented urban subjectivity of Clarissa Dalloway necessarily causes us to relativize her shaping insights, complicating our understanding of the novel's political vision.

The first significant moment of disruption in the novel occurs shortly after Clarissa enters the florist shop, as she chooses flowers with the assistant, Miss Pym, still troubled by her reflections on Doris Kilman:

As she began to go with Miss Pym from jar to jar, choosing, nonsense, nonsense, she said to herself, more and more gently, as if this beauty, this scent, this colour, and Miss Pym liking her, trusting her, were a wave which she let flow over her and surmount that hatred, that monster, surmount it all; and it lifted her up and up when – oh! A pistol shot in the street outside! (*MD* 14)

Clarissa's dreamy crescendo is suddenly halted by the noise of a backfiring car in the street. In a symphonic instant, the eyes of all the people in the street turn to the vehicle, as voices speculate on the identity of its important passenger: 'Was it the Prince of Wales's, the Queen's, the Prime Minister's?' (*MD* 15). They cannot grasp the identity of the person within because a blind has been drawn in the car window. The pistol shot is the first of many motifs connecting Clarissa's situation to that of Septimus Warren Smith, the traumatized young war veteran struggling to come to terms with the death of his officer-friend, Evans.

This interruptive moment in the novel leads to a shift of focus from Clarissa to Septimus, as he struggles to cross the street. We are suddenly

made aware of a dominant source of power in the city, embodied in the gliding of the car through Piccadilly, or the movement of the aeroplane in the sky over Buckingham Palace, its smoke-stream spelling out the name of some consumer product, equally mysterious to the amassed onlookers (perhaps 'Glaxo', 'Kreemo', or 'toffee'). The disturbing image of monarchic or parliamentary prerogative, or of the powers of commerce and advertising, '[boring] ominously into the ears of the crowd' (*MD* 21) makes us aware of something outside the range of Clarissa's thoughts, but which underpins her dreaminess. Through the disruptive motorized intermediary of the car and the plane, we are reminded of the structure of the government her husband serves, and the disturbing momentum of a society which sent Septimus to the Western Front. Early in the novel there is a telling reference to 'discreet old dowagers . . . shooting out in their motor cars on errands of mystery' (*MD* 5). Sir William Bradshaw, the Harley Street doctor who comes to embody the coercive power of the British Establishment, is later identified through the motor car parked outside his house: 'low, powerful, grey with plain initials interlocked on the panel'. The car allows Bradshaw to travel 'sixty miles or more down into the country' (*MD* 103), visiting the patients at his nursing home in Surrey: an image of stealth in mobility which the novel sinisterly connects to British missionary zeal in 'the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa' (*MD* 109).

According to Anna Snaith, Woolf's multi-perspectival treatment of the backfiring car playfully subverts the symbol of power by stripping it of a name and dispersing it among various subjective observers. Snaith argues that the scene is constructed 'around a vacant centre': 'The voice of authority is silenced, left without identity' (Snaith 73–4). We might doubt, however, whether the force of this deconstructive gesture really manages to undermine the objective but mysterious structures of power in the novel. The inhabitant of the car *deliberately* obscures his or her identity by drawing the blind, and the subjective responses of the onlookers arguably reveal not a subversive irreverence toward the car but a sinister kind of enthrallment. The car's timely reminder of the innate but compelling power structures in English society and the wider British Empire relativizes Clarissa's solemn and exhilarating feeling of being 'invisible; unseen; unknown' among the crowds of people in Bond Street (*MD* 11). If Clarissa is condemned to be 'Mrs. Richard Dalloway', throwing parties for her husband's wealthy and influential friends, then how much worse to be 'Mrs. Septimus Warren Smith', transplanted from Milan to London and witnessing the mental collapse of her shell-shocked husband, subjected to the stifling attentions of Holmes and Bradshaw; or to be born 'Doris Kiehlman' and to have to change one's name, being turned away from teaching jobs because of the anti-German feelings in war-time and the war's immediate aftermath?

Another of the disruptive moments occurs when Clarissa returns home to find a note on the telephone pad in which Lady Bruton invites Richard

Dalloway to lunch later that day. The note, which subtly contravenes unwritten social codes in its exclusion of Richard's wife, makes Clarissa aware of her age, and it leads her to reflect with a brooding obsessiveness on the ebbing away of life's glamour and passion: 'the shock of Lady Bruton asking Richard to lunch without her made the moment in which she had stood shiver, as a plant on the river-bed feels the shock of a passing oar and shivers: so she rocked: so she shivered' (*MD* 32). The mood informs her perception of her surroundings:

Like a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower, she went, upstairs, paused at the window, came to the bathroom. There was the green linoleum and a tap dripping. There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room. Women must put off their rich apparel. At midday they must disrobe. She pierced the pincushion and laid her feathered yellow hat on the bed. The sheets were clean, tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side. Narrower and narrower would her bed be. (*MD* 33–4)

The mobile imagery of the passage follows her movements as she walks up the stairs, passing the window and the bathroom before arriving at the bedroom. Her eye pounces on the detail of the dripping tap as if hungry for depressive symbols. The idea of bathing generates the metaphor of disrobing, shedding richness and glamour, while she perceives her bed as tight and narrow (a prelude to reflections on her earlier attraction to Sally Seton, and her sexless marriage to Richard). The episode ends with her insight that what she lacks is not beauty or intelligence, but 'something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together' (*MD* 34). Although she can only 'dimly perceive' this truth, it receives some support from Peter Walsh's later reflection that '[t]here was always something cold in Clarissa' (*MD* 53).

It is not a question of Clarissa being solipsistic; indeed, her mind frequently seems full of the words of others, chastising her for perceived weaknesses. Rather, her mind is only conscious of a small social round, and the novel is able to indicate the extent of her ignorance through its shifts of emphasis. An ironic light is later shed on Clarissa's depressive response to her exclusion from Lady Bruton's invitation to lunch, since Lady Bruton's invitation turns out to be motivated not by a simple social instinct at all, but by a desire to advance her own political schemes. She invites Richard and Hugh Whitbread to lunch in order that they might advise her and help her to write a letter to the *Times* in support of her 'project for emigrating young people of both sexes born of respectable parents and setting them up with a fair prospect of doing well in Canada' (*MD* 119). Like Sir William Bradshaw, Lady Millicent Bruton is one of those privileged few who aim to 'propagate their views' (*MD* 109). Once again, the drift of Clarissa's thoughts is set against a powerful and disturbing political structure which she inhabits, but whose significance she cannot grasp.

This focus on the mismatch between Clarissa's thoughts and the wider social context in which she operates is a recurring feature of *Mrs Dalloway*, and it is echoed in the experience of the other important characters who are struggling to reinvent themselves in the post-war period. The novel is structurally preoccupied with the mind's powerlessness when confronted by changing social habits and historical circumstances: it is concerned with the mind's attempts to accommodate or counteract them. We might think here of Peter Walsh's detailed reflection on the liberalizing changes to English society during the five years when he was away in India, 1918–1923 (*MD* 78–9), and his readiness to embrace the change in sexual attitudes, or of Septimus and his continual recourse to his pre-war attachment to his literature tutor, Miss Isabel Pole, and his lost friendship with Evans. While Peter, who rather likes 'great motor-cars' and has a 'turn for mechanics' (*MD* 53), seems able, in spite of his continued mourning for Clarissa, to adapt to change, both Septimus and Clarissa invest their identities in places or periods from which they are separated by decisive events (the Great War and marriage), and they respond to the unreality of the present time by inhabiting powerful imaginative worlds. So, while Peter responds to his tearful meeting with Clarissa by giving in to his feeling of displacement and following a woman 'across Trafalgar Square in the direction of the Haymarket', surrendering 'only of course for an hour or so' to a youthful longing for excitement (*MD* 57), Septimus and Clarissa seem intent on counteracting the changed conditions around them. Septimus's hallucinations show his writerly imagination running riot, throwing together vivid scenes, poetic phrases and prophetic insights in a pathetic attempt to find pattern and meaning in things. The extent of Septimus's mental alienation from the pre-war world is realized in a suggestive image of his altered reading habits: in the first flush of his love for literature, Shakespeare had proved a source of 'intoxication', whereas in the present time his appreciation has 'shrivelled' and he now detects 'the message hidden in the beauty of the words', feeling that Shakespeare 'loathed humanity – the putting on of clothes, the getting of children, the sordidity of the mouth and the belly!' (*MD* 97). An uncritical immersion in literature gives way to a paranoid projection of his inner chaos.

Clarissa's privileged social position in the novel belies her similar emotional attachment to the past, and her commitment to a dreamy escapism. The 1890s time-frame represents for Clarissa a passionate, if conflictual, existence before the 'catastrophe' of marriage and her move to the city. The cataclysmic change is again realized through a description of the changes in her reading habits. At Bourton, she and Sally Seton had read Plato, Morris and Shelley, flirting with the forbidden fruit of socialist thought, while in the present Clarissa reads Baron Marbot's *Memoirs*, detailing the retreat of Napoleon's armies from Russia (a fitting symbol of her own retreat into the past, away from the implications of her current life and up to her isolated attic room). She is forced to reflect that 'she scarcely read a book now'

(*MD* 9); the drift of her life seems to be reflected in the title of one of the books she views in Hatchards' bookshop in Piccadilly ('Jorrocks' *Jaunts and Jollities*' [*MD* 10]), or in the copies of *Tatler* strewn around White's Club in St James's Street (*MD* 20). The motor car, aeroplane and telephone which at different times disturb Clarissa's chains of thought in the novel, bringing mystification or unwarranted depression, suggest the extent of her mental displacement from the knowable and secure world of her late Victorian youth to the post-war world of her middle age. Not only have manners and morals changed dramatically over that period of three decades and more, but the sense of space has shrunk as modern means of travel and communication have led to an acceleration in the pace of life. In Bourton, Richard Dalloway rode a bicycle, daily life was structured by 'letters, scenes, telegrams' (*MD* 70), and the most important social interactions happened in secret in the vegetable garden or by the fountain; by contrast, London in June 1923 is characterized by 'the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging . . . the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead' (*MD* 4). We might add to this list the green trumpet gramophone which even the Warren Smiths can afford to own (*MD* 155) and the motorized ambulance, which Peter Walsh considers 'one of the triumphs of civilization' (*MD* 165). In what the text terms 'this late age of the world's experience', Clarissa 'never wrote a letter' and Peter Walsh only writes letters which are 'dry sticks' (*MD* 10, 7).

The paradigmatic modern experience is one of immersion in the moment: 'to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing . . . what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab' (*MD* 9). The polyphonic white noise of the capital serves to obscure its power networks and communicative structures: a fact encapsulated in jarring juxtapositions of the private and the public ('The mothers of Pimlico gave suck to their young. Messages were passing from the Fleet to the Admiralty' [*MD* 7]). Although Clarissa experiences a feeling of elation and freedom through her immersion in the city streets, the price of this elation is precisely the loss of the more knowable and graspable social world of her youth. Sally Seton's acts of transgression – walking naked across a corridor to fetch a sponge; smoking cigars in her bedroom; raising the spectre of pre-marital pregnancy over dinner – only have meaning and allure in a world where everyone knows the unwritten codes (like Ellie Henderson's sense that skirts should not be tight, nor fall 'well above the ankles' [*MD* 186]). Sally's passionate defence of women's rights in the face of the chauvinistic Hugh Whitbread is briskly contextualized by Peter Walsh in 1923, when he remembers 'an argument one Sunday morning at Bourton about women's rights (that antediluvian topic)' (*MD* 80). Clarissa's psychological adherence to anachronistic codes is subtly revealed in the intensity of her response to Lady Bruton's telephone message: she is emotionally bound to earlier forms of behaviour, even while she enjoys the superficial freedoms of the modern metropolis.

The novel continually emphasizes this historical fragmentation in Clarissa's consciousness, and her fundamental inability to grasp her modern social world, or to respond to it in an appropriate fashion. The historical chasm separating youth from middle age, or Bourton from Westminster, is realized spatially in the figure of those London parks which the characters cross in the course of their travels through the city. Parks operate in the novel like tunnels: they are liminal spaces connecting characters to each other, and connecting individuals to their past experiences. As Peter Walsh enters Regent's Park, he immediately has recourse to his childhood: 'odd, he thought, how the thought of childhood keeps coming back to me' (*MD* 60). He falls asleep on a bench, only to awake with a start and recall in extraordinary detail 'Bourton that summer, early in the 'nineties, when he was so passionately in love with Clarissa' (*MD* 64). The extent of his temporal displacement is emphasized by his amazement at the long summer evening (*MD* 177): although Daylight Saving Time had first been implemented in Britain on 21 May 1916, since Peter left for India after the war, this is the first time he has witnessed its effects on civilian life in England. When Clarissa enters St James's Park at the start of the novel, she particularly notes the special feeling on crossing this spatial threshold: 'But how strange, on entering the Park, the silence; the mist; the hum' (*MD* 5). An oasis of rural continuity in a city riven by change, the park acts on Clarissa's senses just as Proust's madeleine had acted on the narrator of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, conjuring up 'scene after scene at Bourton' (*MD* 7).

Parks are potentially classless spaces in the novel, offering the opportunity for chance meetings between characters from different social constellations. Yet the novel offers a powerful spatial embodiment of the 'separate spheres' ethos. Clarissa happily speaks with Hugh Whitbread shortly after she enters St James's Park, but she registers no other presence; on the other hand, Peter Walsh, who must approach Hugh or Richard Dalloway to secure a position, sees Septimus and Rezia, but does not talk to them. For a character like Elizabeth Dalloway, who was born into the wealthy and powerful Westminster set, but is starting to question its limits, the map of London signifies different permissible and proscribed zones. Westminster, her home, is associated with public service and 'of course, there was in the Dalloway family the tradition of public service'. By contrast, the Strand and Fleet Street, into which she rebelliously ventures on the omnibus, stand for business and private enterprise. She enters this space with some trepidation:

She looked up Fleet Street. She walked just a little way towards St. Paul's, shyly, like some one penetrating on tiptoe, exploring a strange house by night with a candle, on edge lest the owner should suddenly fling wide his bedroom door and ask her business, nor did she dare wander off into queer alleys, tempting by-streets, any more than in a strange house open doors which might be bedroom doors, or sitting-room doors, or lead

straight to the larder. For no Dalloways came down the Strand daily; she was a pioneer, a stray, venturing, trusting. (*MD* 150–1)

The imagery of the excerpt reveals how Elizabeth perceives her trespass into this part of London as slightly indecent. She is 'penetrating on tiptoe': tentatively experimenting with a male role by considering a career as 'either a farmer or a doctor' (*MD* 150).⁵ These careers carry with them, of course, a disreputable association with lower bodily functions, and with bedroom visits.⁶ By straying upstairs to the bedroom or downstairs to the larder she will be traversing those binding codes which keep servants out of the sitting room and masters out of the pantry. In her tightly circumscribed approach to social rebellion she reveals just how much she has internalized her mother's values: as Lady Sally Rosseter, née Seton, notes, 'Clarissa was a snob at heart – one had to admit it, a snob' (*MD* 208).

If the parks act as regulated contact zones in the novel, then the rigid vertical organization of English society is realized in the depiction of staircases, which also facilitate connections, but only in reference to hierarchical structures. E. M. Forster exploits the symbolic value of staircases when he refers in Chapter Six of *Howards End* to the 'narrow, rich staircase' of Wickham Place, which represents the upwardly-mobile cultural life inhabited by the Schlegels and their circle, excluding Leonard Bast and the clerk class: 'They had all passed up that narrow, rich staircase at Wickham Place, to some ample room, whither he would never follow them, not if he read for ten hours a day' (Forster 58). In *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa is described through Peter Walsh's critical focalization as occupying the same elevated promontory: 'How he scolded her! How they argued! She would marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of a staircase' (*MD* 7–8). The symbolism of high and low places operates throughout the novel. In parallel scenes, Clarissa shouts over the banisters and down the staircase to the retreating figures of Peter Walsh, and Elizabeth with Doris Kilman. Both Walsh and Kilman symbolically occupy lower social positions in the novel. However, while Clarissa acts on impulse to remind Peter of 'my party to-night!' (*MD* 52), she asks Elizabeth to recall 'our party to-night', her altered pronoun deliberately excluding 'the odious Kilman' (*MD* 138, 139). Peter Walsh may be a somewhat disreputable outsider, but he still commands the respect of his fellow guests in the dining room of his London hotel, with 'his way of looking at the menu, of pointing his forefinger to a particular wine, of hitching himself up to the table, of addressing himself seriously, not gluttonously to dinner' (*MD* 175). By contrast, in Regent's Park, Peter thinks of Septimus Warren Smith as merely 'the young man in the overcoat' (*MD* 77). In the climactic scene at the Bloomsbury lodging house of the Warren Smiths, Dr Holmes brushes Rezia aside and climbs the stairs, while Septimus throws himself out of the window and down onto his landlady's railings. While Clarissa twice connects with a lady who looks across at her

from an adjacent house, Septimus is stared at by a man 'coming down the staircase' (*MD* 164).

The novel's use of hierarchical spatial tropes should cause us to question the nature and significance of Clarissa's final feeling of 'connection' with Septimus after she hears news of his suicide through Lady Bradshaw: 'She felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself' (*MD* 204). If Clarissa and Septimus are aesthetically and thematically drawn together through the juxtaposition of their separate plotlines and similar meditations on the problems of sex and marriage, they are also separated by a less conscious, but equally structural, emphasis on the inequities of class and deep-seated social divisions. In one of Clarissa's flashbacks, she recalls riding on the top of an omnibus with Peter Walsh, reflecting on her dissatisfaction at her ignorance of the lives of the strangers walking below: 'It was unsatisfactory, they agreed, how little one knew people . . . Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some women in the street, some man behind a counter – even trees, or barns' (*MD* 167). The progression in her thinking from street women to a shopkeeper to inanimate objects says much about the extent of Clarissa's imaginative connection with the working people below her. The affinities she dimly senses here seem odd in more ways than one. We might recall Clarissa's dismissive focalized reference early in the novel to 'the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall)' (*MD* 4), or remember the fact that her daughter 'had never thought about the poor' (*MD* 143). Anna Snaith refers to *Mrs Dalloway* as 'anti-authoritarian because all narratives are valid. There is no hierarchy of meaning' (Snaith 76), but it is difficult to see how the perspectives of Edgar J. Watkiss (with his loud and humorous reference to 'The Proime Minister's kyar' [*MD* 15]) or 'Moll Pratt with her flowers on the pavement' (*MD* 20), or the anonymous 'men without occupation' (*MD* 21) outside Buckingham Palace, can have any serious claim on our sympathy or attention.

While we recognize the gravity of Clarissa's epiphanic imaginative connection with Septimus at her party, then, we should also realize how this moment cuts against the powerful tropes of separation in the text. Reading through the complex, and in places obscure, train of Clarissa's solitary thoughts in the little room 'where the Prime Minister had gone with Lady Bruton' (*MD* 201), we need to balance her perceptive insights against the background of her earlier insensitivity. Clarissa can 'see' Septimus's fall from the window, 'with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness' (*MD* 202), and she can intuit his plight at the hands of Sir William Bradshaw, but to what extent should we believe in her ability to understand his situation and interpret his actions?⁷ How should we interpret the announcement that 'She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living' (*MD* 204)?

These questions lead us to the central issue we must confront in assessing the political implications of *Mrs Dalloway*. How are we to understand the

character of Clarissa Dalloway? If we accept Clarissa's inability to 'see life steadily and see it whole' (Forster 58), how should we relate to her particular perspective in the novel? Critics have puzzled over this question since the novel's publication in 1925,⁸ and the ambiguity of Clarissa's presentation has been reflected in different ways in much of the subsequent criticism. Some uncertainty in the text's treatment of its main character is suggested by comments made by Woolf herself shortly after its composition. She claimed to find Clarissa 'in some way tinselly', and declared 'some distaste' for her (*Diary III* 32). At one point we are directly informed, in a sentence which seems to merge focalization and authorial verdict, that her eighteen-year-old self 'knew nothing about sex – nothing about social problems' (*MD* 36). The statement seems just as applicable to Clarissa at the age of fifty-one. She cannot decide whether her husband, in his committee, is debating the condition of Armenians or Albanians (*MD* 131), but the novel alerts us to the importance of that distinction by showing us the edges of her perceptions. As Trudi Tate has suggested, Clarissa's ignorance of political (and other) matters should trouble feminist readers, since her portrayal in the text is clearly ambivalent. Though some recent commentators on the spatial politics of *Mrs Dalloway* seem inclined to view Clarissa as a vehicle for Woolf's feminist reflections on the possibilities for urban self-realization, Tate is right to note that her depiction in the text is 'simultaneously sympathetic and satiric'. In her words, 'The text constructs [Clarissa Dalloway] quite explicitly as someone with whom we identify *and* whom we are forced to judge. If we fail to address both aspects of her function, then we miss much of the text's political force' (Tate 470, 479).

In conclusion, it may be worthwhile thinking of Clarissa Dalloway in her London setting as akin to Tiresias, the blind seer in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, who 'although a mere spectator . . . is yet the most important personage . . . uniting all the rest' (Eliot 70). Like Tiresias, Clarissa '[throbs] between two lives' (Eliot 59) in her weary marital frigidity and her idealistic yearning for the young Sally Seton; she brings all the characters together at the party, and she unites the two plots through her identification with Septimus. Clarissa is a blind seer in a more significant sense, too, since the novel is at pains to identify not only her moments of insight, but also the moments of snobbishness or insensitivity, and instances when her vision is obscured, or when the meaning of something eludes her. Clarissa is not, of course, alone in seeing the world partially, or projecting her own fantasies onto the world around her, but as the novel's central consciousness, and the sympathetic representative of a waning conservative elite,⁹ we are liable to afford her thoughts and utterances an authority which none of the other characters can claim. The novel's political content cannot be separated from the ambiguous nature of its central character and her mediating consciousness. Indeed, her relativizing potential might be said to redeem the novel's problematic formal insistence on the 'doubling' of Clarissa and Septimus,¹⁰

emphasizing the conflict between aesthetic cohesion and social division played out in its pages. To reduce the novel to a demonstration of subversive feminist utopianism is to sidestep its formal engagement with the divisive politics of urban space, and to overlook its troubling, and unresolved, engagement with both sympathy and complacency, insight and ignorance, rebellion and conservatism.

Notes

1. See, in particular, the essays in Snaith and Whitworth.
2. See, for example, Leena Kore Schröder's "Reflections in a Motor Car': Virginia Woolf's Phenomenological Relations of Time and Space", and Jane Lewty's 'Virginia Woolf and the Synapses of Radio', in *ibid.*, 131–47 and 148–63 respectively, and Caughie.
3. See Son 183–5 and Usui.
4. Virginia Woolf, 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure', in *Essays IV* 480–91.
5. We might compare Elizabeth's suggestive language here to that of her mother, when she tries to imagine 'what men felt' for women: 'It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores!' (*MD* 34–5).
6. Cf. D. H. Lawrence's *The Lost Girl* (1920), in which Alvina Houghton's decision to train as a maternity nurse induces outrage in her father: 'I can't understand that any young girl of any – any upbringing, any upbringing whatever, should want to choose such a – such an – occupation. I can't understand it'. Lawrence 30.
7. At least one contemporary reviewer of the novel, P. C. Kennedy in the *New Statesman*, 6 June 1925, found Clarissa's imaginative connection with Septimus at the party unconvincing: 'the artificial link is purely redundant, purely improbable, purely pointless'. *Critical Heritage* 165.
8. Lytton Strachey was among the first readers of the novel to note a 'discrepancy' in Woolf's handling of Clarissa Dalloway. In her journal entry for 18 June 1925, Woolf reports his response: 'he thinks she is disagreeable & limited, but that I alternately laugh at her, & cover her, very remarkably, with myself'. *Diary III* 32.
9. In his groundbreaking study of the historical contexts to Woolf's fiction, Alex Zwerdling argues that *Mrs Dalloway* criticizes a dying old order in England in the post-war years, and the decline of political conservatism; the novel strategically employs Clarissa as its central consciousness, since she inhabits that stymied culture (to her detriment), while also seeing its limitations and flaws. Zwerdling suggests that Clarissa is a divided character, combining the unsympathetic core values of old order figures like Hugh Whitbread or Millicent Bruton with the empathetic qualities of outsiders like Sally Seton and Peter Walsh. See Zwerdling 120–43.
10. Woolf described Septimus as Clarissa's 'double' in her Introduction to the 1928 American Modern Library edition of *Mrs Dalloway*.

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4

D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in the New Century: Literary Canon and Bodily Episteme

Richard Brown

Lady Chatterley's Lover is probably D. H. Lawrence's most famous book.¹ Almost everyone knows it is a controversial novel. In fact it is one of the best-known of those novels in English that are famous for *being* controversial. It would surely be a bit naive to assume that this doesn't impact on the history of the discussion of Lawrence in university English departments where the best known academic criticism used to shy away from *Lady Chatterley* and prefer several of Lawrence's other novels when it came to studying his work. In our more biopolitical century the situation is somewhat different, maybe even reversed. Many of the things that once made *Lady Chatterley* seem controversial or outrageous may now make it seem all the more interesting and urgent to study. We are not as shocked by its subjects as readers once were, or at least not in the same ways. We are more, not less, interested in the politics of literary and cultural history and of course in sex. In those contexts hitherto less noticed aspects of the novel can also come to the fore and offer intriguing and significant directions for the current and future discussion of the book that parallel movements of interest in the period and in the subject as a whole. For these reasons even if we do not think *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is Lawrence's greatest novel we recognise it as one of the key books of its century and we may now turn to it first in ours.

From F. R. Leavis to Richard Hoggart and Michel Foucault

To help me expand and develop this point I would like to offer a brief history of its place in the canon, invoking the notion of an 'epistemic shift'. This is a notion that has long been familiar to academics in literary and cultural studies but is still one that can usefully be explicated here and applied directly to the subject at hand. Since 'epistemology' is the theory or science of knowledge, by a reverse logic, an 'episteme' might be thought to be the unit of that knowledge which it studies. Typically the term is used by historians of knowledge and especially by those who like to see forms of knowledge as more or less connected into some kind of system at any given

moment in time. Best known among such historians in the Humanities and Social Sciences in Europe at the end of the last century was Michel Foucault. The *OED* cites Foucault's two classic works *The Order of Things* (in English and French) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* when it glosses the word in this sense.²

This is especially convenient for my argument because another well-known aspect of Foucault's thought that relates to the epistemic shifting that makes up early twentieth-century modernity is also highly relevant to the case. Foucault was also the author of, amongst other things, a controversial and pioneering *History of Sexuality*, one that challenged the assumed break between 'Victorian' and 'Modern' attitudes to sex that had become popular in English and American writings of the 1960s.³ In place of this Foucault offered a longer historical perspective that redefined modernity and reached back to the Enlightenment and ultimately to Classical Greece. Instead of the change from Victorian repressions to modern liberality, which sixties liberalism tended to invoke, Foucault saw an accelerating continuum of knowledge and consequently power, which included the sexual confessional and the newly emerging sexual sciences of the *fin de siècle* with their taxonomies of the perverse. Foucault quoted Lawrence himself to prove his point about sex and how it had become subordinated to the regimes of 'sexuality'.⁴

According to this model modernity becomes increasingly sexualised and moreover the human subject is increasingly governed by the management of sexual knowledges. Manifestly it is an idea of modernity which is related to one of the other best-known theories of modern art, that of Walter Benjamin, for whom the erosion of the sacred significance of art through the modernising processes of industrialisation, mechanisation, mass production and democratisation produces a new register of artistic significance that is based on politics and the political.⁵ In Foucault the focus of interest and meaning in this modern 'episteme' would be less on the political (in Benjamin's senses) and more on the biopolitical realm of sexuality and the body.

Seeing how this bodily episteme related to the study of English involves much of the recent history of the subject. One of the mini-'epistemes' that most defined the study of English Literature in English Universities when Lawrence was first discussed was associated with the work of F. R. Leavis in Cambridge in the 1930s and after. The well-publicised controversy around the non-appointment of Colin MacCabe in 1981 showed the extent to which a Cambridge-based scholar of modern literature felt the need to throw off the entire Leavisite inheritance in favour of a mix of continental European cultural, political and psychoanalytic theory to defend his interests in James Joyce and the cinema. The controversy showed Leavisism to be an 'episteme' ruled by a set of values which was shifting and it is one that is revealed when we look back at Leavis's extreme preference for Lawrence over Joyce in *The Great Tradition* (where Lawrence is hailed as 'the great genius of

our time' and Joyce as a 'dead end') but more relevantly for us here when we look back at his treatment of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in the book he wrote on Lawrence.⁶

For Leavis, in *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist* (1955), *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* were the novels which 'most demand attention' (18), the former for its 'social and cultural history' and pre-eminently the latter for its 'rare power of having maintained a living fidelity to the concrete' (163), for its 'having touched the whole pulse of social England' (181) and having evoked 'the deeper life of the psyche' (198). By contrast, though he quoted Lawrence's powerful polemical defence of the book, 'A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', and voiced approval of the defence of the physical life which is announced in it, he barely treated that novel itself (which was still at that time censored in England) beyond quoting from the pages in Chapter XI where Connie rails against the degradation of Robin Hood's England in her horrified vision of the industrialised village of 'Tevershall'.

Leavis did not apparently much like *Lady Chatterley*, though why that is he leaves largely unsaid in the book, somewhat disingenuously claiming that the pamphlet seemed to him to 'compel more certainly a wholly approving judgement than the novel it defends' (73). In an article in the *Daily Telegraph* explaining why he did not join the defence witnesses at the trial he said it was because it was 'a bad book'.⁷

We might compare *Lady Chatterley* with *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* and find it wanting in some ways, but many of its core values are deeply congruent with those other books and with those which Leavis himself sought to promote especially in such works as *Culture and Environment*, his 1933 study of the work, community and popular culture of modernity written with Denys Thompson.⁸ So one can only assume that the extent and manner of its privileging of the bodily and the sexual over the cultural and educational were among the problematic elements.

When, after the trial, Penguin published the 1961 mass market edition of *Lady Chatterley*, Richard Hoggart, who had defended the novel at its trial, wrote the introduction. Hoggart's argument neither refers to Leavis nor resembles his approach to Lawrence but implicitly contrasts many of its assumptions. For Hoggart the comparison for *Lady Chatterley* is not with Lawrence's other novels nor with the canonical tradition of the nineteenth century but rather with such contemporary pulp fictions as the pseudonymous Paul Renin's *Can a Man Forgive* (1947) and Luke Paradise's *The Corpse Wore Nylon* (1950), from which he quotes a long extract which luridly depicts a rape.⁹ These were two of the texts which Hoggart had been forced by his publisher to disguise or creatively parody in *The Uses of Literacy* to avoid being censored himself but here he quotes them directly and gives their actual titles.¹⁰ Hoggart's introduction directly compares the way these books deal with sex and by implication argues that Lawrence does it better than they do. It is the sex that makes *Lady Chatterley* a good book now.

In the grand frame I have outlined, Leavis and Hoggart might be thought to represent contrasting strategic positions on the book in relation to the Foucaultian 'epistemic shift'. For Leavis, cautiously extending the boundaries of an ethical literary value, *Lady Chatterley* is still a bit beyond the borderline of what is acceptable in the institution. For Hoggart, facing a different set of challenges, it presents an opportunity for widening access to literary and cultural value that should be urgently embraced. Alongside the Foucaultian shift that underlies this contrast, there is a fascinating and significant movement from issues of 'literature' to those of 'literacy' which needed to be faced. On a simpler and more regional level, Hoggart (first at Hull University, then at Leicester) implicitly speaks of and for the North of England and, whilst much of modernism is implicitly London and Bloomsbury centred, and traditional academia London and Oxbridge focused, most English readers will quickly register *Lady Chatterley* as having the distinction of being one of English literature's most recognisably Northern classic books. This regional focus brings particular attention to a whole series of issues to do with the industrialisation of the landscape and the human body, and work.¹¹

Subsequent criticism and reception of Lawrence and *Lady Chatterley* has rehearsed and reflected this in ways far too various to do anything more than briefly sample here. To take one American academic history of the novel in which *Lady Chatterley's Lover* forms a central example, we might select *The Death of Literature* by Alvin B. Kernan.¹² For Kernan the Chatterley trial deserves a whole chapter, in which the various defences of literary merit from the trial provide the basis for exploring the precarious and developing definitions of literature in the academy.

Another recent contribution to the debate about modernism and sex which draws heavily on *Lady Chatterley* and further complicates and internationalises the Hoggartian model, comes from the critic Allison Pease who suggests that modernism's involvement with the history of censorship was not accidental but that modernism programmatically legitimates the inclusion into the literary area of the kinds of sexual material previously preserved for excluded or policed genres of writing like pornography.¹³ For Pease Lawrence's novel, like pornography, constructs the body in sexual pleasure as an aesthetic ideal and the main problematic element about this in Lawrence's case is his simultaneous disavowal of pornography itself.

Lawrence's novel is frequently treated not despite but because it is about sex. A look through *The Year's Work in English Studies* for recent treatments finds an account of an article in *Modernism and Modernity* by Loren Daniel Glass '#\$%^&*!?: Modernism and Dirty Words'.¹⁴ Glass discusses Barney Rosset's struggle to publish *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in America and in the process develops a broader discussion of its use of 'dirty' words, their history and their function in the early twentieth century as markers of anxiety about social change. The essay's attempt to 'establish the centrality of

so-called dirty words [. . .] for any understanding [. . .] of Anglo-American modernism more generally' is, described by the reviewer, Andrew Harrison, as 'quite absurd'.¹⁵ And yet the end of Chapter XI in which Connie and Mellors playfully and affectionately enjoy a lesson in the English vernacular terms for the sexual body parts in a Northern dialect which they both realise is partly made up, or the sections of Chapter XIV where they name their body parts John Thomas and Lady Jane, are passages of the novel which readers may love or hate these days but ones which could be recommended to anyone who is curious about Lawrence to help them develop an interest in what is distinctive about the book. I find these scenes enduringly intimate and funny and complex and they connect deeply in the English tradition to the punning English language lesson undertaken by Katherine the French princess in Act 3 scene 4 and Henry V's robust wooing of Katherine in Act 5 scene 2 of Shakespeare's play as they do to international modernism with the playful use of coded body words for body parts used by James Joyce in the 'Penelope' episode of *Ulysses*.¹⁶ In both these cases I would argue the 'dirty words' aren't blunt or reductively descriptive in their usage, as might be assumed, but the fluidity and instability of referentiality itself is at the bottom of their effect.

It is not only in the history of vernacular 'dirty words' that Lawrence's novel played its part but also in that of other emerging and problematic languages for aspects of sexual experience with which even legitimate medicine was slowly coming to terms at the time. Elsewhere in the *OED* for example we find the editors acknowledging the part played by *Lady Chatterley* in the history of the definition of the orgasm, citing Connie's reflections on the kind of orgasm she has with Michaelis in Chapter III ('She still wanted the physical, sexual thrill she could get with him by her own activity, his little orgasm being over') alongside the comparatively negligible passing reference to 'vascular turgescence' among the discussions of diseases of the nails and the like in Jonathan Hutchinson's *Archives of Surgery* for 1899.¹⁷

Many millions of readers will have read this passage and the successive chapters of *Lady Chatterley* which give their account of the first sex of Connie and Mellors in Chapter X, their developing love-making in the hut in Chapter XII, after eurythmic dancing in the rain in Chapter XV, and when they share their controversial 'night of sensual passion' on the eve of her departure for Venice with Hilda in Chapter XVI directly because of their contributions to articulating the embodied experience of sex, including orgasmic pleasure in a variety of forms. However excited, outraged (like the 1970s generation of feminists such as Kate Millet who specifically chose Lawrence to take to task¹⁸), embarrassed, bemused, or, hopefully these days rather more *amused*, they might have been by this, it will have enhanced their ability to articulate their experiences of sex or, in a more Foucauldian language, to negotiate their subjectivity within the frame of this new biopolitical frame.

Language and 'cerebrating makeshifts'

So, for good or ill, literary history and epistemic shifting mean that we have *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as a canonical text and that is probably more because, than in spite of, its famous focus on sex. Looking at the text broadly as a symptom of literary history and epistemic shifting alone, though, may not take us all that far into it and overly determined responses to certain themes in it can produce a situation where the reader's approach is narrowed and curtailed. At the best of times what we call *double entendre* has a tendency to quickly become a '*single entendre*'. And since the kind of epistemic shifting we are talking about may well have shifted some way beyond the thresholds once marked by the book, an active reading of it beyond the terms of the censorship debate in ways that consciously deflect or refresh a reader's expectations, can offer the best strategy. It can also be refreshing to try to read a novel so often supported by explicit authorial intention and one that is at the centre of an authorial academic industry, beyond the expectations of that authorial frame and alongside its modernist contemporaries, even if Lawrence is often seen as marginal to that modernism.

To counteract epistemic overdeterminism we can see that *Lady Chatterley* often now earns and holds its place in the early twenty-first century canon in terms of a variety of contemporary concerns that more obliquely engage the sexual, such as the theme of language and the fallacy of reading Mellors as a symbolic 'natural' man. Reading the text in its contexts of the 1920s rather than those of the 1960s and 70s, especially now that the recent upsurge of modernist cultural studies, refreshes our sense of 1920s 'modernism' as a subject matter as well as a literary form. We might in the course of this also find ourselves exploring further shiftings of the bodily episteme through the novel's treatments of the body, disability, the environment and work.

James Joyce once jokily referred to Connie as 'Lady Chatterbox'.¹⁹ It's not that she is an especially talkative character that is the interesting point here so much as that the novel can come to life for readers when they approach it as if its central subject is language. As Michael Bell says, it's a novel where 'talk and sex are endlessly juxtaposed, superimposed, compared to or substituted for each other'.²⁰ This is evident in the smart, 'free', pre-World-War-I conversation between the sisters about men and sex that opens the novel; much as the conversation between Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen opened *Women in Love*. For the sisters with their 'aesthetically unconventional' international, Fabian, pre-Raphaelite education, it 'was the talk that mattered supremely' (7). They are interested in sexual pleasure as an 'inevitable' part of the cultured discussion and construe it in surprisingly linguistic terms:

a queer vibrating thrill inside the body, a final spasm of self-assertion, like the last word, exciting, and very like the row of asterisks that can

be put to show the end of a paragraph, and a break in the theme. (*Lady Chatterley*, 8)

We get a clear picture of the bohemian mores of the age here and one that is drawn from the young women's points of view. Strikingly though, sex is somehow *like* or is a part of language and it is this self-consciously modernistic analogy which begins an extended treatment of the language theme, not only in its spoken but its written and indeed printed form.

Connie's marriage briefly flourishes before the disaster of Clifford Chatterley's being 'smashed' in the war and she, though at first happy enough to support him, finds herself growing restless and susceptible to the encouragements of those, including her father and Clifford himself, who suggest she take a lover. Michaelis is the lover she takes first, a successful (or success-worshipping) Irish playwright from Mayfair, who visits their country home of Wragby along with a group of other intellectuals whom Clifford invites to help build his literary reputation. The 'cronies' as she calls this group discuss sex as she listens on and Charlie May and Tommy Dukes come up with the jazz-age idea that sex is 'just another form of talk' (33–4). However Connie is highly sensitive both to sex and to conversation and it is how Michaelis talks about the non-simultaneous orgasms of their love-making at the end of Chapter V that puts an end to their affair. The more modern the analogies for sex in Connie's mind – 'water-ice', 'cocktails' (64) – the more restless she becomes and the more she becomes attracted to the physical presence of the gamekeeper.

It is the first sight of Mellors's body that brings them together, and then the powerful associations of the spring and the chicks and the touch of their bodies in which her 'knee', 'shoulder', 'back' and 'loins' (115–16) are separately named into a physical existence that her surprisingly *postmodern* sense of being restlessly located in a 'simulacrum of reality' (18) had denied. Mellors's body parts are made strangely conscious here ('the hand knew, too, how to unclothe her where it wanted', 116) as they become physically intimate with overwhelming associations of naturalness and inevitability, his 'heart' attempting to protect her before 'the Mammon of mechanised greed did them both in' (119).

Yet it is also very clearly the contrast between his language use and that of the other characters that intrigues and attracts her. What is more, the sheer *unnaturalness* of Mellors as a character is explored through his use of language. The recognition of this both develops the theme of language and reveals the book's modernity in ways that can surprise the assumptions which many first-time readers still bring to the text.

Mellors is defined by his words. On his first entry, the narrative clearly observes his falling into the 'broad drag of the dialect' when 'there had been no trace of dialect before' and that 'he might almost be a gentleman' (47). Clifford tells the story of his complex background, educated and advanced

in rank to Lieutenant during the war before adopting the gamekeeper role after it (47–9 and then in Chapter VIII 92–3). Connie notes his slipping into the vernacular and that he is a ‘curious kind of person’ (68) just as he realises that she is not quite the stereotyped lady but ‘nicer than she knows’ (68)²¹ and she notices when he uses the vernacular and when not, which is clearly known by Clifford to be ‘by fits and starts’ (92). She asks him outright ‘Why don’t you speak ordinary English?’ (95) but doesn’t get a reply. During their intimate dialogue at the end of Chapter XII it is the awkwardness, artificiality and *learned* quality of the dialect rather than its natural or authentic quality that underpins its use. This challenge to the assumption that Mellors is natural or authentic in any simple way can still surprise new readers though it has been recognised, and occasionally connected, for instance, to the divided dialect of his upbringing which is mentioned in the poem ‘Red Herring’.²² Once registered, it quickly becomes the more consistent and significant thing about him. We get further background on his education and first marriage from Ivy Bolton in Chapter X (145) and from his own mouth (200–2). We see the books on his shelf as Connie realises he was ‘a reader after all’ (212) and the sense that his story makes him a composite and constructed figure more than a natural being comes to a head in Chapter XVI where Connie’s sister Hilda, having met Mellors and seen his ‘smallish, sensitive, loose hand’ puts a more negative gloss on it claiming that ‘He was no simple working man, not he: he was acting! acting!’ (243)

In the final chapter where Mellors writes to Connie he does so in his phallic persona as ‘John Thomas’ but nevertheless in a fluent, educated English written style without dialect. In this letter too and its emotive conclusion, the novel’s thematic exploration of the gaps and connections between language and reality, between language and the body and of the value of touch has (almost) the last word, when he writes: ‘so many words, because I can’t touch you. If I could sleep with my arm round you, the ink could stay in the bottle’ (301). The unnaturalness or performed quality of Mellors’s personality which the novel describes and which forms part of Connie’s reaction to him, seems at odds with the valuation of the natural over the artificial that Lawrence’s novel would normally be assumed to propound. When Tommy Dukes returns to Wragby in Chapter VII to complain of a modernity in which: ‘We’re not men and the women aren’t women. We’re only cerebrating makeshifts, mechanical and intellectual experiments’ (75), it seems odd to think that Mellors is, at least in part, a kind of cerebrating makeshift too. Yet it gives the novel a suggestive connection to the complex explorations of selfhood amongst its modernist contemporaries to think so.

Young in the 1920s

If developing an awareness of Lawrence’s modernist contexts and contemporaries can make Mellors a more interesting character then it can do the

same job with Connie and with Clifford and the novel's themes which centre on them too. One shift in the bodily episteme noted by Jean Baudrillard in America in the 1980s was from a concern with sexual liberation (as such), to one with 'finding one's gender'.²³

So strong was the critique of Lawrence mounted by 1970s feminism that we might easily forget the extent to which there was also a vigorous and outspoken feminism of the 1910s and 20s with which Lawrence was engaged even if controversially so. As we have seen, Lawrence's narrative strategy is to centralise the experience and consciousness of his female protagonists and Hilda and Connie are presented as self-modernising women of their time. They might be thought to be versions, of the 'it' girls of the 20s era (albeit more deeply-educated versions), modern in their education, distrustful of inherited assumptions about marriage and affection and frank in their pursuit of experience including the experience of sex.²⁴

There is an *avant-garde* or at least periodising quality about the book in this regard that we might bring out by recalling a character like Olive Strangeways (glimpsed in Chapter VII) 'reading a book about the future' which advocates test-tube babies (74). We might also here employ a comparison with Mina Loy, one of the bolder feminist and Futurist writers of the age, who, like Lawrence, combined interests in literature and the visual arts. Though they are by no means identical there is a refreshing link to be made between Connie's 'visionary experience' of Mellors bathing in Chapter VI (66) and some of the early poetry of Mina Loy. There is, for instance, Loy's poem about the Italian Futurist poet, propagandist and performer Filippo Tommaso Marinetti who was briefly her lover: 'Sketch of a Man on a Platform':

Your genius
So much less in your brain
Than in your body²⁵

They have in common a sense of the importance of the body as a site of meaning and a reversal of the usual gendered orientation of the erotic gaze. Lawrence would have come across Loy's work, such as her poem about Brancusi which was published in the same issue of *The Dial* as Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Loy went to art school in Paris, met Marinetti and another Futurist Giovanni Papini in Florence and travelled to Mexico, with Dadaist poet and boxer Arthur Craven, more than a decade before Lawrence went there himself, so there might even be a trace of her in the character of Kate in *The Plumed Serpent*. Her Futuristic 'Feminist Manifesto', though not published at the time, can serve now as a startling benchmark and reminder of the life-style modernity of 1920s *avant-garde* women, many of its ideas sparkily animating aspects of Lawrence's cronies' debates.²⁶ Odd though it seems to say, in view of his much-discussed lapses, there is an exemplary

dynamic in some aspects of Lawrence's gender politics, in his record of these life-style debates, his re-orientation of the gendered gaze, his critique of voyeurism and in the key ideas of tenderness and the democracy of touch that underpin the novel whose earlier title was 'Tenderness'. The links between sex, gender and politics are inscribed in the 'sense of rebellion [that] smouldered in Connie' (72) and her annoyance at those men who, as she sees it, 'have defrauded a woman even out of her own body' (71) seem modern enough.

When Connie takes her clothes off and looks at herself in the mirror and begins to repossess herself and her bodily regeneration at the start of Chapter VII she performs a scene of self-recognition, self-fashioning and self-empowerment that echoes throughout modernist writing and after it into the postmodern continental psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan and his 'mirror phase' in which the self comes to a dynamic constitution of itself as whole emerging from a repressed childish phase of seeing the body only as a series of disintegrated parts. Becoming a self is always thus a self-modernising process suspended between fragmentation and integration for Lacan and recalled throughout literary modernism.

To take just one comparison with a classic modernist text, there is the scene in Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs Dalloway*, which had been published just a few years before in 1925,²⁷ where the heroine, early on in her daily round, registers that 'Women must put off their rich apparel. At mid-day they must disrobe' and experiences a moment of 'some astonishing significance', 'a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed',²⁸ a meaning that contrasts for her with a momentary domestic vision of her husband, for all his power in the political world, stumbling upstairs with his hot-water bottle.

Woolf's sharp and semi-surreal metaphor of the 'match burning in the crocus' resonates, as well as contrasts, with Lawrence's novel, from Connie's 'burning' to his description of Mellors as a 'lonely pistil' (85) and then 'Burning Pestle' (227) to the flourishing indigenous botany which fills his text with crocus (85), daffodils (85–6), wood-anemone (93) and, as the spring growth progresses, the dandelions, daisies, catkins, celandines, primroses, hyacinths, forget-me-nots and columbines as images of the spring growth of the woodland environment spread through the text (165).

Of course there are lots of differences between Clarissa and Connie and what they feel about themselves and what they want to do about it, too many for me to even try to indicate here, but quite directly relevant to our notion of the epistemic shifting of the time is the way both texts find in the meaning of the mirroring of the body, an idea of significance or of meaning itself. Clarissa's 'astonishing significance' and 'inner meaning' seems directly echoed in Connie's sense that her body was becoming 'meaningless' (70), the word repeated with the familiar insistence of Lawrence's prose style.

Invoking Loy and Woolf does something to indicate the extent to which Lawrence's novel can be refreshed by the renewed company of its female contemporaries and maps into the gender debates of its time where the contrasts between, for example, such culturally and sexually rebellious figures as Loy or *The Egoist's* editor Dora Marsden and the more politically focussed suffragists such as the Pankhursts is just one of the oppositions marked out in the contrast between the characters of Connie and her sister Hilda (who comes to distrust men in favour of what she sees as a more 'complete intimacy' free from the taint of what she calls 'slavery' 253) that structures the novel.

Connie's rebellion is obviously different in kind from the more routine fashions which Tommy Dukes satirises as 'Fellows with swaying waists fucking little jazz girls with small boy buttocks like two collar-studs' (39), a phrase picked up in turn as a symptom of modernity in Catherine O' Driscoll's recent *Modernist Cultural Studies*.²⁹ Yet some juxtaposition with her contemporaries within and beyond the novel can liberate Connie from symbolic universalism into a more defined location within contemporary debates about women and sex. As one of the convention defying women of her time, Connie is, like the title of the autobiography of the prolific novelist lover of W. B. Yeats (and long-time chairwoman of Shrewsbury Town Football Club) Ethel Mannin, 'Young in the Twenties' with all the ethical and cultural baggage which that represents.³⁰

Of course it is the courage and the passion of the lovers that holds the centre stage. Indeed so powerfully romantic and regenerative is its main narrative that we might almost ignore the extent to which the novel charts a world of marital breakdown and divorce, which includes Mellors and Bertha Coutts, Ivy Bolton and her first husband (lost in a mining accident) and Hilda and her husband as well as Connie and Clifford. It is the period *entre deux guerres* when according to Jean Rhys's *Good Morning Midnight* the young people are 'mad for pleasure'.³¹ *Lady Chatterley* may be especially shocking since in it the experimental bohemian morals and discussions of Paris and London are transplanted to the upper classes in provincial England ('at once cosmopolitan and provincial', 6) where the mores of Jane Austen more than those of Marinetti may still have been assumed to be the rule. Whether identified with lust-worshipping Futurists or austere suffragists within or outside the text, Connie's self-mirroring and self-construction says much about the self-modernising agenda of its times.

War trauma, disability and work

Romantic readings of *Lady Chatterley*, which focus only on one of its couples do not always sit well, though, with fuller historical reading in terms of modernity which might be accessed through more concentration on the equally interesting, if not so immediately attractive, figure of Clifford

Chatterley. What is more, Clifford's character and situation can speak to the inscription and the shifting of the bodily episteme just as much or even more than those of Mellors and Connie. The novel is set in a historical moment that is defined from the start by the First World War and its aftermath of which the 'bruise which only slowly deepens its terrible ache' (49–50) is a prime symbol more embedded and more pointedly bodily than the 'bitterness of the war' that Lawrence said he wanted to present in *Women in Love*.³²

The still larger biopolitical symbol may be Clifford's physical disability and for many readers this may now form as problematic an aspect of the book as Lawrence's representations of sex and gender once did, in an age that has been called by one of its most prominent disability theorists, Lennard J. Davis, one of 'dismodernism'.³³ We need only compare the familiar outraged and sympathetic structure of feeling that underpins the picture of the disabled war veteran in Wilfred Owen's poem 'Disabled',³⁴ with the more complex range of issues surrounding Clifford in *Lady Chatterley* that often cause him to come across in a negative light at least from Connie's point of view.

As well as the war, England, especially Northern England, is shown as suffering deeply from the effects of industrialisation and mechanisation in Lawrence's novel. Clifford's disability and also his conspicuous motorised invalid carriage ('a bath-chair with a small motor attachment' 5) which 'chuffed' and 'puffed' and 'pugged' around the novel (41, 184, 186) is made to do much of the work of speaking of that suffering too. Lawrence had himself worked as a clerk in a surgical appliances factory (and used the experience in *Sons and Lovers*) so he may well have been familiar with available models of bath chair.

The division and mutual alienation of the social classes, the destruction of the natural environment and the modernisation of work are all symptoms of the social situation that the England of the General Strike era fed into Lawrence's vision, seen in its starkest form in Connie's car drive through the 1920s 'Waste Land' of Tevershall in Chapter XI of the novel and the 'utter negation of natural beauty' and 'utter death of the human intuitive faculty' which she observes. As in one common reading of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the England Connie sees is, by contrast with 'Shakespeare's England', one of 'half-corpses': 'producing a new race of mankind, over conscious in the money and social and political side, on the spontaneous intuitive side, dead, but dead' (153).

It is in the chapter following this vision that the wheelchair begins to become a problem for Connie. Until that point it has arguably been one of the more positive symptoms of modernity in the novel, from the first page announcing a proud triumph over human limitation that the progress of mechanical technology might bring and enabling Clifford to continue with his work of managing the estate after the death of his father and elder brother during the war. As a symptom of technological progress seen as a

transcendence and enhancement of the body's limits the motorised bath chair fits neatly with the discussion of the 'prosthetic' aspect of modernity treated by Tim Armstrong in his *Modernism, Technology and the Body* and it is a suitably ambivalent symbol of modernity, especially in the transitional Chapter XIII, when his wheelchair fails to mount the hill in the wood and Clifford is forced to seek out Mellors's help and Connie is placed in a situation where she cannot help but compare the distinctive potencies of the two men to Clifford's disadvantage.

The cosmetic reconstruction of the broken or wounded body of the ex-servicemen is discussed by Sander L. Gilman in *Making the Body Beautiful* and reading through cultural texts Gilman mostly sees this wounded body and mind as a sign of masculinity and heroism. It is, for example, for Jake Barnes the stoical, embittered war-wounded writer-narrator of Ernest Hemingway's *Fiesta/The Sun Also Rises* published in 1926 and closely connected to Lawrence's writings of the time.³⁵ But it is not quite so for Clifford it would seem.

The progress of technology was in some ways an expression of the empowered masculinity of the First World War era but also might point to disturbing erosions of it. Technology associated with new mechanised weaponry like the 'landship' or tank was part of the triumph of the new but also proof of the outdatedness of the structures of physical bravery and chivalric value and code that had accompanied traditional forms of war. Trudi Tate, who has written on the tank, does not note the occasional resemblance between Clifford's bath chair (such chairs were typically steered by a tiller) and the 'landship' in the book (185) but she does note that Clifford is remarkably untroubled by his war trauma so that he 'can then function as a symbol (mind without body; reason without passion) without demanding too much sympathy from the reader.'³⁶

Should we take that lack of sympathy for granted? Morag Shiach, for example, begins by saying that *Lady Chatterley* is 'famously about sex' but decides rather to discuss it as a novel about work – producing a subtler and more sympathetic portrait of Clifford both as a war-veteran and a writer more than as a stereotypically heartless and exploitative industrialist. He is therefore a character potentially identifiable with Lawrence himself as is Mellors, one suffering from neurasthenia brought on by work.³⁷ Lawrence himself was often, of course, ill. There's another reading of *Lady Chatterley* outside of the dynamics of the legitimated passion of the lovers which might take an interest in Clifford and indeed his relationship with Ivy Bolton as, however unconventional and unromantic it might be, an aspect of their mutual economic and political empowerment that Connie and Mellors cannot somehow attain.

At the start of Chapter XIII the discussion of Clifford's wheelchair as superior to the horse and as comparable to the motor car introduces a reference to the 'Ford car' which may be interesting not just as reference to the Ford

product (the first Model T came into production in 1903) but also to the well-known system of improved industrial productivity known as 'Fordism' with its production lines of specialised and mechanised labour that maximised productivity, and increased profit. Such questions of work can bring us full circle to the discussions of modern culture in Walter Benjamin and Leavis and Thompson that I raised earlier in relation to the canon.³⁸ As far as Lawrence is concerned, Clifford, like Gerald Crich in the earlier novel, takes an active modern interest in the improved management of the mines and is especially interested in new machines as a way of compensating for his own disability and implicitly the shortcomings of all human labour and as a way of empowering himself. But Clifford like Gerald Crich is ultimately both master and victim of the industrial system, of systems of masculinity and the mechanised supports and extensions to bodily capability which he and his wheelchair represent.

Clifford's disability speaks, then, to themes of war and work and as a final feature of the shifting bodily episteme with which I began. For most readers now, disability will certainly figure most strongly as an important bodily condition in itself rather than as a symbol of something else and it is pre-eminently a condition where issues of cultural representation come into play. At first Connie has wanted to be sympathetic to Clifford's physical disability but Michaelis scoffs at a fellow who is going 'to trade on his disabilities' (53) and, for many readers the extent to which Connie or even the novel seem to come around to this aspect of his values will make it difficult to approach.

Lennard J. Davis, writing on the curiously fractured body of the Venus de Milo in his *Enforcing Normalcy*, produces a subtle explanation of the creation of the idea of the 'disabled body' and the reactions against it of the supposedly normal in terms of the repressed fragmented body of Lacanian psychology that precedes the making of identity and wholeness for all.³⁹ From within this frame there might be a profound connection to be drawn between Clifford's disabled body and the fragmented linguistic and cultural identity of Mellors and Connie's moment of self-creation in front of the mirror that we have seen as differing reactions to the bodily episteme. From such contemporary perspectives the triumphant couple may even be seen as being as much or more vulnerable to the enforcement of normalcy as Clifford. Interestingly, Davis seems not yet to have produced an extended analysis of *Lady Chatterley* itself though he recalled during his education: 'I discovered the dirty books – in this case *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and Edmund Wilson's *Memoirs of Hecate County* – and read them as carefully as I read any text. It was through these works that the distance between reality and fiction became dangerously narrow.'⁴⁰

Deliberately narrowing that distance still further we might note that in the 'real' twenty-first century North-East Midlands, the place which Lawrence made the Chatterleys' wood is still there, still full of flowers and trees and marked by signs Clifford himself might approve prohibiting trespass. But

there is a footpath that provides a good long walk around it and now the railway is grown over and some of the coal mine shafts are replaced by leisure pursuits including carp fishing in the lake. There is a public car park and reasonably good disabled access in the pub nearby. Meanwhile part of the wood is 'trespassed' by no less a modernity than that of the M1 Motorway and by its endless passage of Ford and other cars which will mostly pass through this famous fictional world quite unaware that they are doing so. The twenty-first century scene may certainly remind us that the challenges of maintaining the precarious balance between the conservation of the natural environment and the wheelchair of progress have hardly eased up in the century that has gone by since Lawrence's day even if they are reconfigured differently and that the negotiation between the natural and human environments may be another aspect of the shifting biopolitical episteme.

* * *

By way of conclusion we might turn to another well-known aspect of the thought of Michel Foucault about cultural modernity that frequently underpins the contemporary literary- and cultural-critical episteme: his idea of the author.⁴¹ Foucault is not interested in biography in the literal sense, still less in elevating what the historical author him or herself might have to say about the literary works they produced over the views of the reader or critic. The authorial or 'author-function', for him, is defined by what that author has come to represent through their works and the discussion of those works, by what he calls the authorial 'name'.

It seems that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* can now occupy the more prominent place in the modern literary canon because it more closely reflects that Lawrentian name. It is one of the defining books of its century and ours and that is in part because of the epistemic shifts of modernity towards an ever greater emphasis on sex and the bodily as the centre of meaning but it may also anticipate accompanying shifts that allow a wide range of other concerns to come to the fore. We still need to read *Lady Chatterley* without being entirely enclosed by the pressures of these shifts or by reductive assumptions about the Lawrentian and if we do so we can find it a novel which is both intriguingly located in the debates of its time and capable of speaking directly to ours. And it still may not even be Lawrence's best novel after all.

Notes

1. D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* Cambridge 1993 ed. Michael Squires (London: Penguin, 1994).

2. *OED* online accessed 15 March 2010. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* [1969] trans. (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970, X. iii. 365 and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, [1969] trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), IV. vi. 191.
3. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1 An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1979).
4. *The History of Sexuality*, p. 157. For more on Lawrence's novel and Foucault see David Ayers, *English Literature of the 1920s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) or David Kellog, 'Reading Foucault Reading Lawrence: Body, Voice and Sexuality in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*' in *D. H. Lawrence Review* 28.3 (1999), 31–54.
5. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (Fontana, 1972).
6. F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* [1948] (London: Peregrine, 1983), pp. 35–7. F. R. Leavis, *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1955).
7. F. R. Leavis, 'The New Orthodoxy' *Daily Telegraph* 17 February 1961. For a further discussion of this and of Shaw's contrasting idea that it should be required reading, see Rachel Bowlby, 'But She Could Have Been reading *Lady Chatterley*: The Obscene Side of the Canon' in *Shopping with Freud* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 25–45.
8. F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and Environment* (London: Chatto, 1964).
9. D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, with an Introduction by Richard Hoggart (Penguin, 1961), pp. v–vii.
10. See especially *The Uses of Literacy*, pp. 213–16. See also Sue Owen 'The Abuse of Literacy and the Feeling Heart: The Trials of Richard Hoggart' in *Cambridge Quarterly*, 34.2, 2005, pp. 147–76.
11. Woolf's famous objection to Arnold Bennett seems to inscribe a North–South divide in English modernism from 1910.
12. Alvin B. Kernan, *The Death of Literature* (New Haven: Yale, 1990).
13. Allison Pease, *Modernism, Mass Culture and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 160–7. 'Lawrence effected the incorporation of pornographic vocabulary and actions into serious literature, high art, through attempting to re-inscribe aesthetic disinterest as a mode of bodily being' (p. 164).
14. Loren Daniel Glass, '#\$%^&*!?: Modernism and Dirty Words,' *Modernism and Modernity* 14: ii (2007), pp. 209–23.
15. *The Year's Work in English Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) Volume 87, No.1.
16. G. Wilson Knight forged a link between Lawrence and Joyce whilst Professor at Leeds at the time of the trial with his discussion of the word 'bottom' and its cognates, in 'Lawrence, Joyce and Powys', *Essays in Criticism* XI, 4, 1961.
17. Jonathan Hutchinson, *Archives of Surgery* Volume 9 (London: West, Newman and Co., 1899), p. 129.
18. Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago, 1977), pp. 237–45.
19. Letter to Harriet Weaver 27 September, 1930 (*Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Stuart Gilbert, London: Faber, 1957, Volume 1, p. 294). Critical of the 'usual sloppy English' of the start, he got Stuart Gilbert to read parts of *Lady Chatterley* to him in Paris in December 1931 (apparently Connie's vision of Mellors bathing in Chapter VI or else the scene in the rain in Chapter XV) and presents himself to Harriet Weaver as critical of its tendency to 'propaganda' (*Selected Letters of James Joyce*, Faber, 1978), p. 359.
20. Michael Bell, *D. H. Lawrence: Language and Being* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 209.

21. Mellors can be seen as 'a man who has passed beyond class distinction to an individual self-awareness' (R. P. Draper) whereas Connie 'shuffles from one realm to another' (Julian Moynahan, *The Deed of Life*, Princeton, 1963, p. 141).
22. See for example Margaret J-M. Somnez, 'D. H. Lawrence's Language of Real Men? Style and Dialect Shifting in *The White Peacock* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*' in Nurten Birlik (ed.) *D. H. Lawrence and His Work* (Ankara: Middle East Technical University, 2003), pp. 31–46.
23. Jean Baudrillard, *America*, translated by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1988), p. 46.
24. One contemporary point of reference is Clara Bow, star of the film *It* (1927), though serving mainly as a contrast, since Mellors voices negative views about the 'celluloid women of today' (p. 119), Connie hates the 'plaster and gilt horror of the Tevershall cinema' (p. 152), and Lawrence himself complains of the 'counterfeit emotion of the radio and the film' in the 'A Propos' (pp. 312 and 315–16). Clifford sees Connie at the end as 'one of those half-insane, perverted women who must run after depravity, the *nostalgie de la boue*' (p. 296).
25. Mina Loy, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), p. 19.
26. See Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1996).
27. Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 33–5.
28. *Mrs Dalloway*, pp. 33–5.
29. Catherine O' Driscoll, *Modernist Cultural Studies* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2010), pp. 72–4, 82.
30. Ethel Mannin, *Young in the Twenties* (London: Hutchinson, 1971).
31. Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* [1939] (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 75.
32. D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 485.
33. Lennard J. Davis, 'The End of Identity Politics and the Beginning of Dismodernism' in Lennard J. Davis (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 231–42.
34. Wilfred Owen, *Collected Poems* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), pp. 67–8.
35. Sander L. Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful: A Cultural History of Aesthetic Surgery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
36. Trudi Tate, *Modernism, History and the First World War*, pp. 102–3
37. Morag Shiach, 'Work and Selfhood in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*' in Anne Fernihough (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to D. H. Lawrence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 87–102.
38. Walter Benjamin critiques the negative attitudes to popular culture in Aldous Huxley's *Beyond the Mexique Bay* (London: Chatto, 1949), which itself draws on Leavis and Thompson.
39. Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 126–57. The chapter is included in the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001), pp. 2398–421.
40. Lennard J. Davis, *Resisting Novels* (London: Methuen, 1987) p. 8.
41. Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (London: Penguin, 1984), pp. 101–20.

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5

A Handful of Dust: Realism: Modernism/Irony: Sympathy

Richard Jacobs

I

On the Sunday morning of his weekend visit to Hetton, John Beaver tells Brenda's fortune with cards.

Oh yes . . . there is going to be a sudden death which will cause you great pleasure and profit. In fact you are going to kill someone. I can't tell if it's a man or a woman . . . yes, a woman . . . then you are going to go on a long journey across the sea, marry six dark men and have eleven children, grow a beard and die. (36–7)

Brenda's response is: 'Beast. And all this time I've been thinking it was serious' (37). In one sense it could not be more serious, for here, in typically refracted and grotesque form, is the novel in miniature, as well as the first in its menagerie of beasts. There is John Andrew's death, from which Brenda profits, or thinks she will profit, in her decision to leave her husband and her home; there is Tony's resultant long journey across the sea and later 'stiff growth of beard' (173); there is Mr Todd's profligate and bigamous fathering of 'most of the men and women' on his savannah (212); and there is Tony's presumed death and his actual living death. Here, too, is the first of the novel's skilfully patterned instances of card-games and fortune-telling (merging with the beast motif in the game of Animal Snap played out at the novel's centre), which derive from Madame Sosostriis in *The Waste Land* (1922), the text which Evelyn Waugh evokes in the novel's title and epigraph.

Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* (1934), his fourth novel and widely agreed as his best, recounts the betrayal of Tony Last by his wife Brenda, bored after seven years of marriage and drifting into adultery with the callow John Beaver. Tony's consequent refusal to play the expected role of guilty party leads to bitterly unexpected and cruelly ironic consequences at the novel's shocking end. This chapter will explore the relations between *A Handful of Dust* and its literary predecessors, in the realist as well as the modernist

canon (Eliot, Conrad, Dickens, Flaubert). The first section will look at the range of ironic techniques deployed in the novel, their function and effect; the second section will consider the engagement of the reader's sympathies; and the third section will turn to intertextual and inter-canonical relations.

Waugh used the proleptic technique, as in Beaver's fortune-telling, locally and with more of a self-conscious shock-effect in his earlier novels. Notorious examples include the schoolboy Tangent asking 'Am I going to die?' (*Decline* 71) after being wounded in the foot by a starting-pistol (he does) and Prudence replying 'so you shall, my sweet' to Basil Seal's 'I'd like to eat you' (*Mischief* 180) as they make love (he does). In *A Handful of Dust* these moments, rather than local and single, are multiple and cumulative and the effect is a more sombre inevitability, closer to the use of the technique in Shakespearean tragedy. So when, within half a dozen pages, John Andrew prays at church 'Please God make me see the kill' (96), his father writes to his mother 'I hope he doesn't break his neck' (101), his nanny says to him 'You won't see any death' (102), and when he pleads to stay at the hunt with 'there mayn't *be* another day. The world may come to an end' (104) – after these, the reader in effect knows that 'John's fate was decided' (105) which are the words used moments before the catastrophe.

This is the first aspect of *A Handful of Dust* that calls for comment when thinking about its place in the canon. This chapter will examine its structural and formal intricacy, its extreme narrative economy, its highly patterned deployment of prolepsis, repetition, paralleling, juxtaposition and cutting-techniques (as in cinematic as well as dream-narrative), the word-play behind the cool, understated surface of the prose (Mrs Beaver will 'look about for another suitable house to split up' (54)): in a word, its textural polish. For Waugh, issues of texture and structure were the key lessons from modernism, as he made clear in 1930: 'Modern novelists taught by Mr James Joyce are at last realizing the importance of re-echoing and remodifying' (*Order* 83). The specific formal techniques, illustrated below in turn, have one end in common: to cause maximum pain for the reader. For instance, Mrs Rattery describes her elaborate solitarily played card-game as 'heart-breaking' because of a 'stubbornly congested patch at one corner', and this is a painful re-figuring of the congestion at the corner of the road that led to John Andrew's death six pages earlier. In the same heart-breaking game there is the 'six of diamonds out of place' (112) and keen readers of early Eliot (as Waugh was) will connect that to the fortune-telling by cards in 'Fragment of a Prologue' where 'the six' signifies 'A quarrel. An estrangement. Separation of friends' (Eliot 125).

There is a ruthlessness about the deployment of irony in this novel that has analogues elsewhere in early Waugh but never to this relentlessness of effect, and it is a ruthlessness that corresponds to the ruthless plot and – in the nicest possible way – the ruthlessness of its characters. Images of eating and animality are threaded throughout, from Mrs Beaver, purveyor of

chic, who 'gobbled' her yoghurt, to Reggie St Cloud, member of the House of Lords, who spoke 'blandly' and 'ate in a ruthless manner' (7, 150, 149). These are people who have learned what comes to Tony in his delirium: that it is necessary to 'kill in the gentlest manner' (211). The textual ancestry of this depiction of well-mannered ruthlessness includes Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* (1920), another bitterly realised social satire, where the tribal community of old New York expel their kinswoman by 'taking life "without effusion of blood"' (Wharton 201). The tribalism in *A Handful of Dust* is a harshly portrayed version of the Bright Young Things in Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930): here it's 'Polly and Daisy and Angela and all the gang of gossips' (59). Gossip, for this tribal gang, is relayed by telephone, as in Polly's first question on the telephone after her party: 'Good morning, darling, what's the dirt today?' (53) The Wharton novel, set in the 1870s, was probably the first to include the telephone as emblematic of modernity. The emotional impact of Waugh's novel, anticipated in this respect, but only in a limited way, by *Vile Bodies*, is significantly structured by telephone conversations, examined in more detail below, and which together emblematised the impersonalised communication of modern man.

None of Waugh's early novels are long but many writers would have made this novel more ample, leisurely and discursive. This is a function of the extreme economy of the narrative voice. Ian Littlewood refers, in relation to narrator as well as characters, to the 'refusal to be shocked, disoriented, embarrassed or involved' (14). The stripping back of scene setting, for instance, to the two-word paragraph 'Next morning' (124) after the horror of John Andrew's death enacts a kind of distaste for narrative itself in its usual elaborations. In the ancestry here is Eliot's 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' with the austere first lines of its stanzas, 'Twelve o'clock', 'Half-past one' (Eliot 26), as well as the two-word paragraphs 'He travelled' and 'He returned' in the penultimate chapter of Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* (*Education* 411). The moments leading up to John Andrew's death are introduced by the extraordinary words, 'Then this happened' (105), which seem almost brutally awkward, as if refusing to play by the normal narrative rules. David Lodge writes of Waugh's 'vision of . . . anarchy' remaining 'objective – morally, emotionally, and (perhaps most important) stylistically' (5). The economy is developed from Waugh's earlier three novels but it has much more point and attack here, enacting a response to the stripping back of feelings, communications and human relations that the novel dramatises. Martin Stannard puts it well: the novel 'documents nothing more assiduously than the inability to communicate or share experience' (Stannard 379).

One unsettling technique Waugh deploys in terms of economy is to exclude passages of dialogue which, in retrospect, the reader knows must have taken place and which carry crucial plot developments. Thus, when Beaver returns after his visit to Hetton and casually tells his mother that Brenda 'talked of taking a flat in London' (40) we feel betrayed in having to learn that through

him. The same effect is achieved on New Year's Eve when, after Tony went home early from a party, 'Beaver and Brenda returned together in the back of a car' (64). Next morning Brenda tells Tony of her plan to attend lectures in London. This must have been hatched during those intimacies. *Madame Bovary* (1857) comes instantly to mind: that is, Emma's notorious back of a carriage trip with Leon through the streets of Rouen and the spurious piano-lessons which then regularise their sexual liaisons. But the economy of Waugh's narrative denies us access to what Flaubert allows his readers. The narrative economy in *A Handful of Dust* extends to the issue of mere syntax and sentence structure. To the novel's opening question (Beaver's 'Was anyone hurt?') his mother replies: 'No one, I am thankful to say', said Mrs Beaver, 'except two housemaids who lost their heads and jumped through a glass roof into the paved court. They were in no danger' (7).

The syntax, and particularly the deliberate placing of 'said Mrs Beaver', which has the effect of relegating what follows to an afterthought, enacts the cruel indifference to housemaids, dehumanises them. It is worth a moment to add that cruel indifference to maids and servants is not Mrs Beaver's prerogative only: in one of the novel's more casual details of plot, Brenda casually dismisses Grimshawe, her long-standing personal maid, in the middle of the 1930s slump, as soon as she acquires the flat. And the repellent Dan, in Brighton, repels because of his first statement, an order to the hotel staff: 'Take em up and get em unpacked and quick about it' (140).

The answering of a question with 'no one' is echoed thirty pages later when, this time, Beaver is the object of the enquiry. Brenda's sister asks her 'Who's been to stay?' and Brenda replies: 'No one. We had a friend of Tony's called Mr Beaver last weekend' (41). We are invited to compare the brutal indifference in the one example to the guilty evasion in the other, where the afterthought is a pretence: in terms of Brenda's wilful indifference towards Tony and his feelings, the comparison becomes even more pointed. It is, after all, Mrs Beaver alone who realises that it was time Brenda 'began to be bored' (9). And as soon as young married women's boredom is mentioned we are taken to *Bovary* again: as soon as he meets her, Rodolphe recognises Emma's boredom.

These two instances of 'no one' proleptically point forward to the painfully repeated, almost choric refrain at John Andrew's death: "'It wasn't anyone's fault", they said' (107). This follows the novel's most famous sentence: 'Everyone agreed that it was nobody's fault' (106). Those last two words were the original title of *Little Dorrit* (1857), which Tony is about to read when we last see him. In the doctor's words, 'no one to blame, though' (107), which takes us to Emma Bovary's suicide letter: 'Let no one be blamed' (*Bovary* 282).

Two further syntactically strategic sentences provide an economical demonstration of the casually callous world of Brenda's associates. "'God, what a party", said Marjorie, waving brightly to them all' (42). The second example has Brenda and her women friends returning from Hetton with the

button-holes that Tony had been at pains to select, despite his distaste for them. As above, the adverbial phrase pretends to be a mere appendage: “‘My poor Brenda”, said Veronica, unpinning her carnation and throwing it from the window into the side of the road’ (84).

The instances of proleptic patterning, to which we now turn, act like a kind of grip on the novel’s sub-structure, with the effect of making the protagonists seem trapped in the impersonal machine that is the novel’s form. At the start of the Hetton scenes Brenda, reading Tony the serial from the newspaper, catches him out not listening and says: ‘I *knew* it [. . .] I shall never read to you again’ (20). This light joke has a long reach, connecting as it does to Tony trying to threaten Mr Todd with: ‘I have read for the last time’ (218). It is the clash of tones, reflected in the stiff attempt at formality in Tony’s language, which includes the quiet play on his own name that is so jarring. The comic telephone exchanges between the drunken Tony and Jock and the resentful Brenda, though providing a fortunate excuse for her affair, are themselves anticipated by the scene in which Brenda calls Beaver after their first evening together, getting him out of bed and up and down two flights of stairs just to say good night to him (‘goodnight, bless you’), which he clearly resents (52). ‘Goodnight, you sweet’ (60) is what Brenda later says on the telephone to Tony.

The much-celebrated mistaking of names at the novel’s heart where Brenda hears the news of John Andrew’s death and, realising that it is not John Beaver, says ‘Oh, thank God’ and then bursts into tears (119) is itself proleptically prepared for, its impact thus sharpened further. With the news of the death on its way to Brenda, Tony says to Mrs Rattery: ‘with Brenda John always came first . . . naturally’ (that last word is particularly loaded) and ‘she’s seen so little of John lately. She’s been in London such a lot. I’m afraid that’s going to hurt her’ (110). Waugh is also at pains to prepare in a particular way for the scene, with important consequences for the reader’s sympathies when we hear that Brenda has ‘been worrying all day thinking [Beaver]’s had an accident’ (117): it is as if this goes at least some way to allow for her terrible mistake later.

Getting names wrong is a bitter joke hitherto associated with Jenny Abdul Akbar, whose predatory interest in Tony emerges as an indifference to learning his name (she calls him Teddy); furthermore she calls John Andrew Johnny-boy and later Little Jimmy. John Andrew says to her: ‘You are funny with names’ (89). The sentence carries a sharp charge when his mother is funny with names in a very different sense. A further twist of the knife has Brenda herself, discussing Jenny’s efforts with Tony and John Andrew’s startlingly eroticised fascination for her, saying: ‘She’s got the wrong chap’ (91). At the news of the death she gets the wrong chap. The childish slang, as always in Waugh, has bitter force, as in the chapter-heading ‘Hard Cheese on Tony’. ‘Nasty medicine’ (212), says Tony, when Mr Todd, a father-figure, makes him take it; the childish slang is touching, as Tony then begins to cry,

but it also returns us to Mrs Beaver and her gobbled morning-yoghurt, and saying to her son: 'Heavens, how nasty this stuff is. I wish you'd take to it' (7).

In terms of repetitions, once we read that Brenda, in kissing, rubs against Tony's cheek in 'a way she had' (19) it becomes almost a matter of logical necessity that within thirty pages she will kiss Beaver and rub against his cheek in 'the way she had' (49), the shift from 'a' to 'the' quietly underlining the betrayal. In a perceptive article, Ann Pasternak Slater calls this an example of 'the right thing in the wrong place' (Pasternak Slater 52). Brenda's way of kissing is described as 'like a cat' (19) and, later, Jenny proposes curling up in front of Tony 'like a cat' (87). In terms of literary ancestry, Jenny has a 'sharp red tongue' (86), is the only character who is heard speaking 'sharply' (89), and is observed running her tongue over her lips while collecting melted butter. All this takes us to the cat in Eliot's 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' which 'Slips out its tongue / And devours a morsel of rancid butter' (Eliot 27). The sharp red tongue and the predatory sexual appetite are vampiric, and in this way Jenny prepares us for the vampire-bats in the Amazon.

When the third chapter ('Hard Cheese on Tony') ends with the observation that Tony 'had got into the habit of loving and trusting Brenda' (126) the expectation is that the phrase will be repeated, though that hardly prepares the reader for the incongruity of it being attached to Tony's divorce lawyer, after the wounding understatement, 'It was thought convenient that Brenda should appear as the plaintiff. [On the novel and divorce-law reform see Lurcock in Works Cited.] The lawyer warns Tony that they must prepare for all contingencies, 'for he had not had Tony's opportunities to contract the habit of loving and trusting Brenda' (131). The endearment 'my beauty' is used twice in his novel, and to my knowledge nowhere else in Waugh. Brenda says it to Beaver (60), thereby masculinising herself as Emma Bovary does with Leon whom she treats as a mistress; it is a very painful repetition when Ben then says it to John Andrew (102), who says he likes Ben '*far more*' than his mother (25).

The paralleling technique can have a startling effect. A (particularly provocative) parallel, is set up between Marjorie's malevolent and 'very unrepaying' Pekinese dog Djinn (the name takes us back to Emma Bovary's beautifully sleek and communicative greyhound Djali) and the benevolent but maligned Colonel Inch. Djinn is seen 'gazing moodily at the asphalt'; he then 'got lost and was found a few yards away [. . .] staring at a shred of waste paper' (41). (Emma's Djali, of course, gets genuinely lost and disappears from the novel.) Colonel Inch would regularly lose his own hunt and be 'found [. . .] morosely nibbling ginger-nut biscuits', 'quite lost' and 'staring about him in the deepening twilight' (101).

Reggie St Cloud and Therese de Vitre are bizarre reflections of each other. Reggie 'carried his burden of flesh as though he was not yet used to it; as though it had been buckled on to him that morning for the first time and he were still experimenting for its better adjustment; there was an instability

in his gait' (147). This 'fat young man' (150), representative of all that is holding Tony down, is as it were transfigured into the 18 year-old Therese, representative of all that might, in a different kind of novel, set Tony free: she 'had not long outgrown her schoolgirl plumpness and she moved with an air of exultance, as though she had lately shed an encumbrance and was not yet fatigued by the other burdens that would succeed it' (166). In a particularly unsettling way, Milly's daughter Winnie, dubbed by Jock 'the Awful Child of popular fiction' (136), is a transfigured John Andrew of whom the doctor who attends after his death says he was 'awfully fond' (107).

'Transfigured' is the word that is used for Tony's vision of the mythical City – 'a transfigured Hetton' (164) – and trans-figuring becomes the structural principle driving the extraordinary pages that cut between the Brazilian jungle where Tony is in delirium and London, the un-transfigurable city, obstinately real, unlike Eliot's London, the 'Unreal City' (Eliot 65). The cutting is done to cause maximum pain and, again, it is the economy of the method, the stripping back of the usual narrative baggage, that does the work. The cutting technique has been anticipated earlier in the novel by telephone scenes. On the first evening in her flat Brenda phones Tony, who has sent her flowers.

'It wasn't you, was it?'

'Yes . . . as a matter of fact.'

'Darling, I did so hope it was . . . how like you.'

'Three minutes, please.'

'Must stop now.'

'When are you coming back?'

'Almost at once. Good night, my sweet.'

'What a lot of talk', said Beaver. (60)

Beaver had been 'playfully' trying to disconnect this call (60). At the start of the disastrous evening in London a message from Brenda summons Tony to the telephone in his club: 'Darling', he said. 'Is that Mr Last? I've got a message here from Lady Brenda' (69). The 'darling' who speaks is Beaver. After that drunken evening Brenda phones and Tony tries to get her to cancel one of her appointments:

'You couldn't possibly chuck lunch or one of the lectures?'

'Not possibly, darling.'

'I see. You are an angel to be so sweet about last night.'

'Nothing could have been so fortunate,' Brenda said. (78)

And we realise with a jar that she was then speaking to Beaver and the telephone has been put down; but we have no idea by whom or when.

The juxtapositions and cutting between Brazil and England have the sharpest effect once Tony develops fever. In the jungle 'It was late afternoon when [Tony] first saw Brenda [. . .] But she did not answer him. She sat as she used often to sit when she came back from London, huddled over her bowl of bread and milk' (195–6). This points forward to Mr Todd avoiding Tony's request for a boat to leave: 'Mr Todd bent over the plate [. . .] but made no reply' (216).

The most jarring of these cuts comes when Tony in Brazil and Brenda in London are shown simultaneously crying, both helpless and alone. It is doubly poignant as the two of them are merged in a common activity, as if children bonded in a common misery: 'lying there, wrapped in his blanket, he began to cry' (201), as if truly together for the first and last time in the novel. The cut that then occurs is quite dazzling in its literalising of Tony's delirium: 'Now at last she broke down and turning over buried her face in the pillow, in an agony of resentment and self-pity. In Brazil she wore a ragged cotton gown of the same pattern as Rosa's. It was not unbecoming. Tony watched her for some time before he spoke' (202).

It is as if the narrative is determined to be so scrupulously, gravely neutral as to be relinquished of its obligation to comment or evaluate at all. This is narrative as absence. In the light of our final example, another moment in *A Sentimental Education* comes to mind. 'Now the mob was attacking the guard-house at the Chateau d'Eau, to liberate fifty prisoners who were not there' (*Education* 285–6). When Mr Todd finds the wildly delirious Tony the narrative observes: 'Then he began to talk to someone at Mr Todd's side, who was not there' (210).

II

A Handful of Dust should be assessed by the extent to which Waugh is able to evoke sympathy from the reader not only for Tony but also for Brenda. The range of ironic techniques explored above may seem to preclude, for the reader, anything other than a sense of futility in a bleakly cold, albeit brilliantly executed and often wildly funny, cruel black comedy. A book written (first in Russian) just a year earlier, Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark* (1932), another novel in the European adultery tradition – man leaves wife and daughter for young schemer, daughter dies, he stays with his mistress, he eventually dies in grotesque circumstances – is just that, a cold and cruel black comedy in comparison with the Waugh and with the canonical Nabokov novels that followed it.

The issue of sympathy in *A Handful of Dust* is delicately balanced from the start. In the second chapter Brenda listens to Tony soliloquising about Hetton:

'It's a definite part of English life which would be a serious loss if . . .'
Then Tony stopped short in his speech and looked at the bed. Brenda

had turned on her face and only the top of her head appeared above the sheets.

'Oh God,' she said into the pillow. 'What have I done?'

'I say, am I being pompous again?' (21)

That last question is typically revisited when Tony asks Milly in Brighton 'am I being a bore?' (140). Once Tony and Brenda have made up, the narrative adds: '(These scenes of domestic playfulness had been more or less continuous in Tony and Brenda's life for seven years.)' (21) Brenda's submerged cry is her Emma Bovary moment, her version of the anguished 'Why in the world did I ever get married?' which Emma 'would ask herself again and again' in her solitary walks with Djali during the first months of her marriage (41). For Brenda the sting in those delicately tonal brackets is the last two words that give a sudden and painful glimpse of her life – how she has been acting with what are later called her 'pretty ways' (27) – for seven years. After 'What have I done?', and the clear sign that this is a question Brenda, like Emma, has asked again and again, and for so long, it comes as a surprise to read, in George McCartney's well-regarded book on Waugh's ambivalent relationship with modernism, the assessment that there is nothing in the novel 'to indicate what Brenda may be feeling beyond a vague boredom' (McCartney 81).

Brenda is 26: she was courted by Tony aged 18 and married him aged 19. Mrs Beaver says 'people used to be mad about her when she was a girl' (9) and her obtuse and sentimental mother says she was always 'excitable' (130). Brenda talks of having given 'girlish' speeches for the Mayor (20). There is no mention of her father, beyond a mention of his name. The suggestion is that she has been indulged as the beautiful teenager (the more beautiful and the older of two sisters) and that this continues to be her role in her marriage. The reader sees no sign of her as a maternal presence for her son. Indeed, she sometimes seems hardly solid at all, which is the word used about her 'more solid' sister (40); Mrs Beaver refers to her 'very fair, underwater look' (9) and, in a remarkable parenthesis which again is tonal and shows the influence of early Eliot, she is '(a nereid emerging from fathomless depths of clear water)' (19). In contrast, George McCartney reads this as evidence of Brenda being 'provocatively opaque' (McCartney 81). Elsewhere she is 'fresh and fragile' (40), as if the second word naturally follows from the first.

Used to being indulged, courted, as if etherialised, she drifts into the affair with Beaver, on an impulse, as if as a game – 'I happen to have a fancy for him, that's all' (52) – a game in which she will play for once the dominant partner or parent, teaching both Beaver and Tony the rules as she goes along. She refers to Beaver as a 'cub' (53) and calls herself, a year older than he, 'an old married woman' (48). Beaver appropriately says to her 'You are one for making people learn things' (78). In a telling instance of this new game it is said that 'Brenda had begun to forget how amusing [Tony] could be' (96). In effect, she is a child with a new toy. After exhausting days in

London she becomes a 'waif' (40), a 'Barnardo case', and is pictured 'nursing her bread and milk' (45), which is her son's evening meal. At the news of John's death she's 'like a small well-brought-up child introduced into a room full of grown-ups' (118). This has important consequences for our sympathies, especially when she is increasingly abandoned by Beaver and her friends – 'It was August and she was entirely alone' (201) – and ends in despair and crying like an abandoned child.

Tony and Beaver are also not properly adult. Beaver lives with 'mumsy' (7) and she easily persuades him (in effect) to leave Brenda. In a detail that comes close to eliciting some indirect sympathy for this 'rather pathetic' young man (41), we hear of the objects in his bedroom, none of them really his, kept in 'symmetrical order', all of which 'had stood in his father's dressing-room' and all 'suggestive of expensive Edwardian masculinity' (8). This is a mother's-boy with an aggressively masculine father whose dominance he still, almost literally, lives under. In a very telling detail Beaver is said to write with 'a large school-girlish hand' (63). His father's objects are evoked again a few pages later when we hear of the parallel objects in Tony's bedroom and the contrast has some poignancy: Tony has amassed objects 'representative of every phase of his adolescence' (18). The list presented includes a photograph of Brenda and John after the christening, and this too is subsumed as belonging to a phase of his adolescence as if Tony is still in it.

The glimpses we are given of Tony's early life, as the novel moves towards its ending – those bracketed fragments of memory, one of them nicely described by Valentine Cunningham as of 'pre-lapsarian cycling holidays' (Cunningham 352) – have the effect of structuring our sense of Tony as still held within those moments. They increase our sense of his isolation, as if he is a victim not only of the plot and the ironic patterns explored above, but of his own past and, in particular, his own inherited pseudo-Victorian ideals. The two roles that betray Tony most painfully have been well described by Jed Esty in a fine study of modernism and national culture: 'first as a manor house gentleman in the era of suburbanization, then as a would-be jungle hero in the era of imperial decline' (Esty 222).

Tony's 'madly feudal' attachment to Hetton (41), with his sense of 'duty towards one's employees, and towards the place too' (21), is (as the use of 'one' suggests) also a kind of game that he has inherited from his ancestors, seriously felt, but one that has him 'posing as an upright, God-fearing gentleman of the old school'. Brenda 'teased him' on such occasions and 'Tony saw the joke' (32), but that's the role he plays and it is part of his pseudo-medieval and Victorian-Gothic refusal of real adulthood. That said, Stannard's description of this decent man, alone in the novel in being devoted to family and home, as 'lamentably weak' seems, in the light of his principled refusal to play the role expected of him by Brenda's family, very severe (Stannard 381).

The bedrooms in the Victorian-Gothic Hetton have Arthurian names, and it is not difficult to see the ironic appropriateness of these to the protagonists

who sleep in them, or to connect the Arthurian Grail-legend with Tony's medieval-inspired search for the lost City. But the most poignant detail has Tony returning to Hetton after the debacle in London and its chastening aftermath: 'That night he went into Brenda's empty room to sleep' (79). The room is Guinevere where his parents were said to be 'inseparable' (18). In effect, this is the sad little boy climbing into his parents' (empty) bed, from his own bedroom where as a child he was 'subject to nightmares' (18). It also takes us again to Tony, alone, lost and sick in Brazil: 'lying there, wrapped in his blanket, he began to cry', benighted by a 'constant company of phantoms' (201). And within a few pages he will enter his final nightmare with the last of what Jeffrey Heath in his important book calls 'mimicking shadows' (Heath 46), a parent from whom he will never escape.

This sense of the protagonists being children, locked into their various games (Animal Snap the most telling miniature version), makes one ask if there are any proper adults among the protagonists. There is one, Mrs Rattery, dubbed the Shameless Blonde but a skilled aviator, horse-rider (she rides astride like a man, and earlier she joins the workmen stripping the ceiling), whisky-drinker and solitary card-player, detached, self-sufficient, benevolently indifferent and in a sense presiding over the novel as proxy-novelist. What follows is another very expressive use of parentheses.

(Mrs Rattery sat intent over her game, moving little groups of cards adroitly backwards and forwards about the table like shuttles across a loom; under her fingers order grew out of chaos; she established sequence and precedence; the symbols before her became coherent, inter-related.) (111)

Mrs Rattery represents Waugh as novelist and, in the ironic way we can have expected, her literary ancestors include the ageless and sexless Tiresias presiding over *The Waste Land*, and the ominously knitting Fate-women at the start of *Heart of Darkness*.

III

Early Eliot in literary modernism and *Madame Bovary* in literary realism are the ancestors with which this novel seems most concerned to align itself. Dickens can be seen as a more anxiously felt literary-Oedipal father, with his novelistic roots in the Gothic. Waugh read or probably re-read *The Waste Land* and other early Eliot poems in 1926 and found them 'marvellously good' (*Diaries* 242). In 1930 Waugh praised his friend Henry Green's novel *Living* (1929) in connection with Eliot:

I see in *Living* very much the same technical apparatus at work as in many of Mr T. S. Eliot's poems – particularly in the narrative passages of *The Waste Land* and the two *Fragments of an Agon*. (*Order* 83)

The second fragment has Sweeney saying to Doris 'Yes I'd eat you' in a 'nice little [. . .] stew' (Eliot 130). This is a source for *Black Mischief* (1932) where Basil Seal eats his lover Prudence – in a cannibal stew. And four years after the novel, Waugh is describing the streets of London as fit only to serve 'as vast ashtrays for the stubs of a million typists' (*Order* 61), where the language is Eliot's. But that disgust for raw humanity, pervasive in Eliot, sounds strident and unconvincing in Waugh: the instinctive sympathy that the novel finds for its protagonists in their suffering, explored above, is where Waugh and Eliot diverge. This sympathy in the novel is what William Myers calls the 'sudden intrusion of the human element', and it's a human sympathy that is conspicuously absent from *The Waste Land* (Myers 42).

Nonetheless, the novel's title invites the reader to consider its world as un-regenerative and barren, a world whose genie (Djinn) stares at a shred of waste paper, a world where Madame Sosostris sees in her Tarot cards 'crowds of people walking round in a ring' (Eliot 64) and the delirious Tony angrily objects that his (non-existent) listeners are 'walking round in a circle' (211). It is a world desperate for a sign, as in Eliot's 'We would see a sign!' (Eliot 39) and in Waugh's choric 'But there was no sign [. . .] But there was no sign' (198). There is no sign of a village, let alone a City to replace Tony's lost Gothic world that had 'come to grief' and from which 'the cream and dappled unicorns had fled' (153). Eliot, desperate to 'redeem / the time' had 'jewelled unicorns draw[ing] by the gilded hearse' (Eliot 100).

The novel's epigraph from *The Waste Land* ('fear in a handful of dust') suggests a mortality-terror (ashes to ashes, dust to dust) and a more generalised intimation of terror as the only appropriate response to the attenuations, entrapments and anomie that Waugh's novel articulates. This generalised terror was noticed by Waugh's most astute early critic, Edmund Wilson, when he described it as 'the whole motivation of the book but of which the characters are not shown to be conscious and upon which one cannot put one's finger in any specific passage' (Wilson 143). The debt to Eliot also includes the novel's relations with the earlier modernist *Heart of Darkness* (1902) which provides the epigraph for *The Hollow Men* ('Mistah Kurtz – he dead') (Eliot 87). The Conrad novel stayed with Waugh through his career; its influence is also clear in the autobiographical *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957) where a journey on board a ship turns into an allegorical journey into Pinfold's dark inner demons. Jerome Meckier, among many other readers, links Waugh, Dickens and Conrad together, connecting for instance Tony's shattering disillusion, his 'epiphany' (Meckier 186), with Kurtz's last terrible words.

Mr Todd is a version of Mr Kurtz, as the names suggest (Tod is German for death, and Kurtz suggests curt or short). Kurtz can be read as mere eloquence, a voice in a hollow body: 'he electrified large meetings [. . .] He could get himself to believe anything – anything' (Conrad 104). Kurtz is, in effect, an embodiment of the performative principle, a 'barren darkness' hidden in 'the magnificent folds of eloquence' (85). He is very pointedly

described as 'essentially a great musician' (89). He is also like a novelist, one that could electrify large meetings with his eloquence (Dickens as actor, say): he is mouth as compulsive performance. Mr Todd is, in effect, an embodiment of reception theory, a 'flagrantly Dickensian character [. . .] demanding to be feasted on Dickens to the end of his days' (Myers 45). Despite his parental power over Tony, Todd is also a grotesque return to the obstinately demanding Winnie, the Awful Child. As Jonathan Greenberg argues in a psychoanalytic reading, Todd is 'infantile and needy; he demands to be read to like a stubborn child' (Goldberg 364): he is mouth as insatiable neediness.

Put another way, Kurtz is man as modernist emptiness and Todd is, as Douglas Lane Patey adroitly observes when noticing the 'metaliterary turn' at the novel's close, an ironic representation of realism's 'ideal humanist reader [. . .] whose emotional receptivity and sympathetic understanding' are 'exactly what Dickens trusted would foster [. . .] moral amelioration' (Patey 123). But there is nothing morally ameliorated about the murderously insane Mr Todd. This issue has been most tellingly expressed by Jed Esty in terms of imperialism:

Waugh cuts right to the absurdity of a culture that is frozen into repetitions of a nineteenth-century identity disseminated to every corner of the planet. Last's fate as a zombified reader captures one aspect of the British Empire's legacy to English culture: a forced diet of the fetishized markers of a vanishing Englishness. (Esty 222)

The debt to *Bovary* is less easy to anchor in Waugh's biography but it seems clear that Waugh's ambitious fourth novel is designed to lock directly into the European novel's treatment of adultery as the master-plot of plots. The contention here is that the ambitiousness and distinction of this novel asks us to connect it not with others by Waugh (and any serious assessment of Waugh and the canon is hampered by what has to be recognised as the *Brideshead* factor – the sentimentalised Oxbridge snobbery of that novel signifying 'Evelyn Waugh' in the popular cultural imagination) but with two very different early twentieth-century novels, Wharton's realist *The Age of Innocence* (1920), satiric and edgily nostalgic, and Ford's modernist masterpiece *The Good Soldier* (1915), where adultery and a disappearing culture are subtly counterpointed in richly ironic narrative complexity. Writing his novel, Waugh knew how good it was and how different from his first three novels: 'I peg away at the novel which seems to me faultless of its kind. Very difficult to write because for the first time I am trying to deal with normal people instead of eccentrics' (*Letters* 83).

'Normal people' reminds us of the Flaubertian ambition to realise, with sympathy as well as disgust, the sheer ordinariness of boredom and habit and the flight from them into fantasy and game-playing. The name Beaver itself seems chosen, not only as an ironic evocation of animals famous

for building homes, whereas the gobbling Mrs Beaver – nicely described as ‘perpetually busy with a fretful rodent voracity’ (Garnett 110) – looks to split up houses, but also as flickering wordplay on the word ‘Bovary’. The connection with *Bovary* and boredom is clear from the start and there is a delicate allusion on the very first page. We hear of housemaids breaking glass while Mrs Beaver gobbles her nasty morning yoghurt with a spoon: this is an attenuated and impoverished version of the scene at La Vaubyessard in *Madame Bovary* where a servant breaks window-panes while Emma is in rapture ‘eating a maraschino ice [. . .] her eyes half-closed, the spoon between her teeth’ (47). Compared to the grand fantasies and voluptuously eroticized passions of Emma’s early relations with Rodolphe and then with Leon, Brenda like, eventually, Emma finds herself ‘rediscovering, in adultery, all the banality of marriage’ (*Bovary* 258). ‘But it was only Brenda’ (181) is the response in the Beaver household when Brenda phones towards the end.

In emotional as well as socio-political and economic terms this is a world in ‘slump’ (8), the word used in reference to Beaver’s unemployability. When Beaver asks his mother to get Brenda a job and is asked why he replies ‘Just like everybody else, short of money and nothing to do’ (180). This is not a novel that deals with the raw realities of the economic depression of the mid 1930s but there is a deft current of submerged reference to its human cost. Reading the newspaper to Tony at the start of the novel Brenda casually refers to ‘Two more chaps in gas ovens’ (20): a historian of the period notes that ‘Home Office statistics in the early 1930s indicated that two unemployed men were committing suicide every day’ (Stevenson 287). And in one of the novel’s bleakest sentences, ‘All over England people were waking up, queasy and despondent’ (19).

The novel of the 1930s is haunted by the search for the father, as exemplified, at the start of the period, by Henry Green’s *Living* (1929), a novel that delivers, in idiosyncratic modernist brilliance and with sympathetic intensity, the raw realities of working-class lives (Jacobs 392–3). Towards the end of that novel, as a young couple are journeying to find the man’s father, the woman’s substitute-father is seen restlessly unable to read *Little Dorrit*.

Dickens’ powerful indictment of imprisoned hopes, the dark heart of Victorianism, is the novel that Tony is about to read to Mr Todd after we learn of his now terminally imprisoned hopes. Dickens frames Waugh’s novel, from Pecksniff, mentioned derisively at the start of the second chapter, to Dorrit at its climax in Brazil. Dickens for Waugh was, in effect, a signifier for his own father, Arthur Waugh, publisher of the Dickens novels for Chapman and Hall. Modernism and Eliot, as Stannard observes, were deployed by Waugh as ‘the language of reaction against his father’ (82). Arthur used to read Dickens to his family. Tony used to read to Brenda till she admitted it was ‘torture to her’ (214). Tony used to read to his son.

Mr Todd's father used to read Dickens to him. But there are no functioning father-figures in *A Handful of Dust*. Reggie St Cloud, the 'Head of the Family', spends his time 'desecrating' tombs (147). The Reverend Tendril is a comic irrelevance (and his niece's motor bicycle was the catalyst for John Andrew's death): in his most extreme delirium Tony is pointedly said to be 'caught up in [. . .] tendrils' (205). So it is all too appropriate that the absent father is materialised as Mr Todd, father of 'most of the men and women', with Tony as the son, 'the old boy' as the gang of women called him, tortured by having to read to 'the old man' (212, 68, 214). And the novel that he is reading ends with a young couple walking in the streets of the City, 'inseparable and blessed' (Dickens 688): free from prison, in love, and married.

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6

Studied Ambivalence: The Appalling Strangeness of Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*

Susie Thomas

'The water washed round the piles at the end of the pier, dark poison-bottle green, mottled with seaweed, and the salt wind smarted on his lips.

(Green 22, emphasis added).

Michael Shelden's *The Man Within: A Life of Graham Greene* seriously proposes Greene as a suspect in the unsolved case of a pregnant young woman whose torso was found in the left luggage office of Brighton station in June 1934. Shelden's evidence is culled from *Brighton Rock* and other fictions of the 1930s as well as the 'dream diary' which Greene kept between 1965 and 1989, in which he continued to record nightmares of being found guilty of murder and of incriminating body parts being discovered in railway stations (244–51). There is something slightly absurd about Shelden's accusation but it illustrates, not the virulent misogyny for which Shelden condemns Greene, but the powerful effect that *Brighton Rock* exerted on an otherwise sober academic, previously best known for his biography of George Orwell. Indeed Greene, who described himself as a manic depressive, seemed to provoke extreme reactions in others. His authorised biographer, Norman Sherry, devoted an unprecedented 1984 pages to his almost reverential account of the man he called 'one of the truly great writers of our time . . . whose life straddled the century'.¹ Greene's obsession with the Brighton trunk murder shows, neither his diabolical cunning nor his genius, but just how much this consummate professional, who regularly produced 500 words a day, trusted to his unconscious as a source of inspiration, and how deeply *Brighton Rock* was engraved on it. Forty years later Greene recalled: 'I have never again felt so much the victim of my inventions' (*Escape* 79). It is a novel that tends to haunt readers too, long after they have put it down.

The incipit (or opening line) of the novel announces the death of an inky-fingered and down-at-heel journalist who has become mixed up with rival racetrack gangs in an English seaside resort: 'Hale knew, before he had been in Brighton three hours, that they meant to murder him' (5). 'They'

are Pinkie and his mob, Spicer, Dallow and Cubitt, who are avenging the death of their former boss, Kite. The frightened Hale latches on to Ida, whom he meets in a pub, but while she is having a quick wash and brush up in the ladies' lavatory, he is abducted and murdered. (Things go wrong fast in Greenland.) The beery, bonhomous Ida turns amateur sleuth in order to avenge Hale's death. The baroque plot has many twists and turns: Ida discovers Pinkie has married a young waitress, Rose, because she is a potentially incriminating witness (and a wife cannot be forced to give evidence against her husband). Ida pursues Pinkie until he plunges to his death, thereby saving Rose from the 'suicide' that Pinkie had planned for her; but Rose is left (probably) pregnant and perhaps about to face the 'worst horror', that Pinkie never loved her at all. Greene later referred to the novel with characteristically obfuscating irony: '*Brighton Rock* began as a detective story and continued, I am sometimes tempted to think, as an error of judgment.'² He originally published it as one of his plot-driven 'entertainments' before reclassifying it as a serious novel. Critics have identified Rose and Pinkie's Catholicism as the new, serious element and designated *Brighton Rock* as the first of Greene's Catholic tetralogy (followed by *The Power and the Glory* (1940) *The Heart of the Matter* (1948) and the aptly named *The End of the Affair* (1951)).

Despite a wealth of exegesis, *Brighton Rock* still defies classification. Even as a detective story, a form which typically ties up loose ends and restores order, it leaves the reader baffled: we know immediately whodunnit (Pinkie) and why he did it (revenge) but, despite the many clues that are scattered across the pages, we never find out exactly how the murder was committed. Several critics have ingeniously suggested that Pinkie rams a stick of Brighton rock down Hale's throat, which then dissolves in the body so that the police conclude he died a natural death and close the case (Shelden 235). This makes it the perfect murder. But anyone who has ever sucked on this seaside sweet knows that it does not melt that easily. Greene plays with the reader, making sure that we can never know how the deed was done: even Pinkie's pursuer, Ida, is not sure whether Hale was murdered or killed himself or was simply terrified to death. As Pinkie says to Dallow: 'You know we killed him and the doctors knew he died natural. Work it out for yourself. I can't' (115). Bernard Bergonzi suggests that Greene, 'the notorious joker [. . .] deliberately withheld a convincing final explanation' (83–4).

This radical uncertainty runs all through the novel like the lettering in a stick of Brighton rock, which may or may not be the murder weapon; and may or may not be a metaphor for unchanging human nature, as Ida categorically insists: 'bite it all the way down, you'll still read Brighton' (198). According to Steve Chibnall it is Pinkie's personal symbol: 'he has expressed his latent homosexuality by using a pink phallic object in a grim parody of fellatio' (63). Brighton rock is also Greene's metaphor for reading: the sugared letters are hard, indelible and immutable and their meaning remains

finally impenetrable. This contrasts with Virginia Woolf's sky writing metaphor in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) in which the letters (advertising Kreemo toffee) are fluffy and ephemeral and interpreted by the onlookers subjectively: as a sign of God's existence, as a symbol of scientific thought, or provoking a longing for foreign parts. In *Mrs Dalloway* diverse meanings are attached to floating signifiers, all apparently with the author's blessing.³ We are accustomed to associating literary modernism with the indeterminate and the ambiguous but Greene eschewed self-conscious experimentalism in favour of apparently straightforward popular genres. Nonetheless, in *Brighton Rock* he created a readily accessible but ultimately indecipherable text: it is both a page-turner and impossible to pin down. In what follows I explore some of the many ways in which it can be read: as an autobiographical text, an exposé of the evils of poverty, a tale of sexuality and the body, a children's story, a Catholic novel, and as a product of the 1930s which seems particularly relevant to today.

Into the can(n)on's mouth

If the fact that people want to read a novel and keep talking about it makes it canonical then *Brighton Rock's* position is assured. However, although Greene's work has attracted considerable critical commentary, it has never acquired academic respectability. David Lodge has summed up Greene's liminal status succinctly: his 'critical reputation was always insecure. He was accused, on the one hand, of pushing Catholicism, and, on the other, of a heretical and idiosyncratic religious outlook; he was condemned for his use of melodrama and of popular forms such as the thriller; he was seen as too popular to be a serious candidate for the canon.'⁴ Greene's work did not satisfy the Leavisite criteria, of high moral seriousness and felt life, which were dominant in Britain in the mid-twentieth century. Queenie Leavis considered Greene derivative of, and far inferior to, Joseph Conrad, who was indeed an early influence, although sloughed off by the time he came to write *Brighton Rock* (140). Greene was perhaps not only too popular but too prolific to be taken seriously, producing 'a staggering number of film reviews (some 425), two travelogues, three autobiographical memoirs, three collections of short fiction, three volumes of critical essays, four children's books, eight stage dramas, twelve screenplays, and twenty-two entertainments and novels' (Nordgren 2005).

This abundance makes anointing one novel as canonical extremely difficult. Unsurprisingly, there is no critical consensus about the status of *Brighton Rock*; a point that is neatly illustrated by two contrasting recent studies. Murray Roston's *Graham Greene's Narrative Strategies: A Study of the Major Novels* (Macmillan, 2006) does not even include it, while Bernard Bergonzi's *A Study in Greene* (Oxford, 2006) singles it out as a masterpiece: 'Greene's finest novel and among the outstanding works of British fiction of

the twentieth century'(101). Greene too offered almost bi-polar estimations of his novel, describing it both as 'an error of judgement' (quoted above) and as 'the best I ever wrote' (*Escape* 79). It is tempting to suggest that a book about ambivalence which inspires so much disagreement must be the best candidate for posterity.

Greene's contradictory comments also alert us to the need to follow D. H. Lawrence's dictum: 'Never trust the artist. Trust the tale' (8). Greene, an intelligence officer during the war (and a secret agent for long afterwards, if Sheldon is to be believed) was a man of many masks. One of the very few constants he espoused (even after he had given up a belief in God) was that the child makes the man or, rather, that adults are recovering children. Greene spent years trying to come to terms with his public school upbringing and, in a wonderful example of literary alchemy; he bestowed the 'hell that lay about him in his infancy' (68), on Pinkie.

The Boy on the couch

He looked with loathing into the past – a cracked bell ringing, a child weeping under the cane – and repeated, 'I'm not afraid.'

(Greene 239)

Graham Greene underwent psychoanalysis at the same age (17) as Pinkie commits his first murder. In *A Sort of Life* (1971), the memoir Greene wrote as therapy during a period of depression in his sixties, he notes that analysis did not 'cure' him but it allowed him to return to school 'with the proud sense of having been a voyager in distant seas': 'it was a life transformed' (*Sort* 77). *A Sort of Life* is dedicated to his siblings, whom he calls 'the survivors'. Like Dickens' obsession with the Marshalsea prison, Greene returned repeatedly to the scene of the crime (but this was his school in Berkhamsted not, as Sheldon suggests, Brighton station). Just as Dickens was permanently scarred by the shame of his father's imprisonment for debt and his own transformation into a grubby labouring boy, Greene was traumatised (it is probably not too strong a term) by the divided loyalties of being a boarder at the school where his father was headmaster. Physically puny, he was constantly bullied by his fellow pupils, who suspected him of being his father's spy, but he could say nothing because he was bound by a code of schoolboy honour not to squeal. Many of Greene's contemporaries, most famously George Orwell, wrote of the horror of English public schools. They offered a classical education and a fast track to the top, but were also hierarchical, militaristic, philistine, punitive, competitive, not to mention generally smelly and completely lacking in privacy. The horror was compounded for Greene by the fact that there was no escape because school was also his home. Moreover, he described his mother as 'aloof' and his father as 'Quisling'

(a fascist collaborator (*Sort* 59)). After several botched (and doubtless self-dramatizing) suicide attempts Greene ran away from home, at which point his parents took his unhappiness seriously enough to take the highly unusual step of sending him to London to live with the psychoanalyst Kenneth Richmond and his wife for six months, where he recovered.

At Berkhamsted, the dividing line between home and school was marked by a green baize door: 'If you pushed open a green baize door in a passage in my father's study, you entered another passage deceptively similar, but none the less you were on alien ground' (*Sort* 46). On one side of the door it was domestic and safe; the other side was strange, and terrifying.⁵ It is a memory he returns to again and again and frontiers, whether national or domestic, became a hallmark of Greene's fiction (as we will see in *Brighton Rock*) just as prisons, real and metaphorical, dominated Dickens' imagination.⁶ For both Dickens and Greene, the child character is often called on to assume adult responsibility in a world in which parents fail to protect their offspring. For Greene too 'a child learns about injustice early' and Greene believed that his experience of being bullied meant that he 'belonged on the side of the victims, not of the torturers' (*Sort* 45, 47). Although Dickens did not sentimentalise children, he saw the child as naturally good. Greene knew from his own experience that children are both intensely vulnerable and, in certain situations – whether public school or slum – capable of extreme cruelty and violence; that victims can become torturers. Greene's Mexican travel book, *The Lawless Roads*, begins with his memories of school: 'one was aware of fear and hate, a kind of lawlessness, where appalling cruelties could be practised without a second thought; one met for the first time characters, adult and adolescent, who bore about them the genuine quality of evil' (14). Pinkie enters *Brighton Rock* trailing clouds of evil behind him like a figure from a medieval Morality play or a Jacobean drama but he is also a terrified child.⁷ Greene inverts the Romantic idea, expressed in Wordsworth's Immortality Ode, that '[h]eaven lies about us in our infancy'; in Pinkie's infancy, 'hell lay about him' (68). His upbringing in the slums of Brighton deprived him of natural goodness early on. When he is forced to go back there and he sees children playing in the street (the boys with guns; the girls watching 'surlily'; a child with a leg brace being pushed) he feels 'the dreadful appeal of innocence' but also knows that '*there* was not innocence; you had to go back a long way further before you got innocence' (141).

Greene vigorously denied that there was anything of himself in Pinkie.⁸ But the dynamics of fear, betrayal and torture at the heart of *Brighton Rock* mirror the 'flight, rebellion and misery during those first sixteen years when the novelist is formed'. Pinkie can conceive of hell ('Of course there's torments' (52)) but has no conception of heaven, because nothing in his wretched and loveless life could supply even a remote analogy. Greene recalled that he 'began to believe in heaven because I believed in hell, but for a long time it was only hell I could picture with a certain intimacy'

(*Lawless* 14). The difference between Greene and Pinkie's childhoods is not simply one of class but that Pinkie has only known life on one side of the green baize door. There is no escape for him except through 'murder' (143). Greene found a father figure in Kenneth Richmond, who showed him a way of channelling his fears creatively and who encouraged him to become a writer as a way out of his adolescent hell. But Pinkie has no education, he is condemned to the slums of Paradise Piece and the only one to show him a way out is a petty gangster. One bitterly cold night on the end of the pier (when Pinkie may have been close to suicide) Kite picked him up and brought him back to Frank's boarding house: 'God knows why – [. . .] perhaps because a man like Kite needed a little sentiment like a tart keeps a Pekinese' (218). This may suggest repressed homoerotic attraction but it is the nearest thing to fatherly affection Pinkie ever receives: he models himself on this knife-wielding misogynist until he too becomes sealed in a habit of hate.

Critics often seem surprised that Greene tries to evoke sympathy for Pinkie, who is repeatedly described as Evil (with a capital E), as if this were evidence of Greene's warped morality. But if the reader does care, this is not necessarily sympathy for the devil but rather because Greene consistently describes Pinkie as a terrified *and therefore* sadistic schoolboy. The Brighton mob, like boarding school, is a male world: hierarchical and competitive, with its own code of loyalty in which the unforgivable crime is to be a squealer (85, 242). The physically puny Boy (as he is known) needs the brute strength of Dallow: 'he felt as a physically weak but cunning schoolboy feels who has attached to himself in an indiscriminating fidelity the strongest boy in the school' (59). He constantly has to keep up a front: any sign of weakness and he is done for. When he is unexpectedly beaten up by Colleoni's rival gang it was 'as if one of the bullied brats at school had stabbed first with the dividers' (106). He is terrified of what Dallow and Cubitt will think of his humiliation: 'he had wept, begged, run' (107). Just before his death, his apotheosis into terrified schoolboy is complete. Rose catches a glimpse of his face: 'like a child's, badgered, confused, betrayed: fake years slipped away – he was whisked back towards the unhappy playground. [. . .] [H]e shrank – shrank into a schoolboy flying in panic and in pain, scrambling over a fence, running on' (243).

Peter Pan, Punk and the Asbo generation

In the hole were murder, copulation, extreme poverty . . .
(Greene 123)

In his second volume of memoirs, *Ways of Escape* (1980), Greene described Pinkie as 'the great champion of justice': 'The Pinkies are the real Peter Pans – doomed to be juvenile for a lifetime. They have something of the fallen angel about them [. . .] The outlaw of justice always keeps in his

heart the sense of justice outraged – *his* crimes have an excuse and yet he is pursued by the Others. The Others have committed worse crimes and flourish. The world is full of Others who wear the masks of Success, of a Happy Family. Whatever crime he may be driven to commit the child who doesn't grow up remains the great champion of justice. "An eye for an eye" (72).

This is of course one of Ida's mottos and most readers assume that she is the champion of justice in the novel. As the detective, it is her role to distinguish right from wrong but Ida's justice is primarily about maintaining the status quo: 'law and order, capital punishment' (77). Pinkie, in contrast, is the focus for the expression of a deep-seated rage at the social inequality of the 1930s in particular and at the violence of capitalism in general. Ida accepts poverty as part of life ('the world's all dandy' (91)); it is Pinkie who provokes the reader to a sense of outrage at the vacant lots: at 'the houses that looked as if they had passed through an intensive bombardment, flapping gutters and glassless windows, an iron bedstead rusting in a front garden' (90). When Pinkie goes to Rose's squalid home the reader is tempted to concur with him that 'nobody could say he hadn't done right to get away from this, to commit any crime . . .' (143); and to see such crimes as acts of class revenge. Although there are no Happy Families in *Brighton Rock*, the novel does suggest that those who wear the mask of Success have indeed committed worse crimes and been allowed to flourish. Colleoni, the boss of the rival mob, no longer has to get his hands dirty; he stays in the gilded suite named after Napoleon the Third and gets others to do the carving. The police are in his pocket, as Pinkie discovers: "Fine," the Boy said. "A bogy doing Colleoni's job for him" (67). Indeed Colleoni has made so much money that he has become eminently respectable; he is about to join the Establishment by going into politics: 'The Conservatives think a lot of him' (159).

Neil Nehring points out that the Punk movement thought a lot of *Brighton Rock*. The 1978 biography of the Sex Pistols by Fred and Judy Vermorel 'liberally quotes Greene to create a parallel between his sociopathic hero, Pinkie Brown, and Johnny Rotten, the Sex Pistols' singer. Most horrific is the linkage of accounts of razor attacks on both; more pointedly Pinkie's 'face of starved intensity, a kind of hideous and unnatural pride,' is paired with a music periodical's description of Rotten: 'his eyes looked so glazed . . . that you seriously wonder if there isn't some pathological monster straining inside him to get out' (225). According to Nehring, Graham Greene's hell is right here on earth and *Brighton Rock* demonstrates his anarchist leanings.

The baton of Pinkie's 'awful resentment' ('why shouldn't he have had his chance like all the rest, seen his glimpse of heaven if it was only a crack between the Brighton walls . . .' (228)) was picked up by the Punks, the victims of depression in the 1970s, and would seem tailor made for today's Asbo generation on the council estates, with failing schools and rampant unemployment, which still surround Brighton (Whitehawk's school was considered so appalling it has been closed down). One of the reasons why

Brighton Rock shocks us 70 years on is because Pinkie is still only 17 and Rose 16 at the end of the novel. He has murdered twice and she has married him knowing full well that he is a killer; she is also (possibly) about to become a teenage mother. At the same time as it radically undermines fantasies about childhood innocence, the novel conveys powerfully the child's rage at injustice. The fact that Pinkie is both a victim and an abuser provides a perspective on our contemporary ambivalence about children in a tabloid culture which demonises boys as feral and girls as sluts; in which abused and neglected children who take to knives or get pregnant are reduced to symptoms of moral breakdown in Broken Britain rather than as casualties of a capitalist system.

Nobody could accuse *Brighton Rock* of exhibiting signs of bleeding heart liberalism (indeed Ida is mocked for this) but Greene is clearly on the side of the children of the poor, however vicious or slavish. Greene also seems to suggest that there is a gender divide, evident in the scene of the children in the street quoted earlier (the boys play with guns, the girls watch 'surlily'). Pinkie's aggression turns outwards and is expressed by knives and the bottle of vitriol that he fondles in his pocket (rather like the anarchist Professor with his bomb detonator down his trousers in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*). Rose loves him sullenly despite the pinches and the threats. Pinkie is both tortured and torturer but Rose seems at first glance to be simply a victim. She is connected with other teenage girls whose brief obituaries are buried in the pages of the novel: Peggy Baron, burnt and blinded by vitriol after getting mixed up with the Brighton mob (49); Violet Crow 'violated and buried under the West Pier in 1936' (142); Molly Carthew who 'killed herself. Despair' (114); and the pregnant Annie Collins, aged 15, who committed suicide 'on the railway track up by Hassocks' (165). But on several occasions Rose proves more formidable than Pinkie expects, which contributes to the sense of loyalty he starts to feel for her. Despite Rose's own innocence, she quickly identifies his lack of sexual experience when he 'inexpertly' kisses her: 'You haven't had many girls, have you?' (112). And she arguably makes a kind of existential choice to commit herself to Pinkie, appearing to acknowledge the possibility that he may not love her, in her exchange with Ida: "'He doesn't love you.'" / "I don't care," the childish voice stubbornly murmured. / "What do you mean, you don't care." / "I love *him*!" (123). And although she very nearly becomes the subject of a brief obituary, she does in fact survive; she may be pregnant (as Ida never has been and, at her age, is unlikely to be) but perhaps 'the worst horror of all' (247) will not kill her. Although Rose may not be the heroine of the novel, she proves to be more than merely an innocent victim.

Pre-war editions of *Brighton Rock* also exhibited a darker side to Greene's rage at the Other who wears the mask of Success. Colleoni is a 'small Jew' with an 'old Semitic face'; sniffed at by little Jewish bitches; his second in command, Crab, was a Jew once 'but a hairdresser and a surgeon had altered

that' (82). Although Bergonzi suggests that these references are merely examples of the casual and unthinking anti-Semitism which was pervasive in the 1930s, the novel's evocation of an international conspiracy of Jews wielding secret and corrupt power would not have been out of place in a piece of Nazi propaganda (89). In this context the fact that Colleoni stays at a hotel called The Cosmopolitan is sinister: 'he looked as a man might look who owned the whole world, the whole visible world that is, the cash registers and policemen and prostitutes, Parliament and the laws which say "this is Right and this is Wrong"' (65). After the war, Greene silently turned Colleoni into an Italian and deleted the anti-Semitic references, except for the remark about Crab being 'altered'. It is almost as if Greene left this in as a metaphor for his own excision of 'Jewishness' from the novel.⁹

Modernists and Rockers

In his powerful polemic, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia*, John Carey argues that 'the principle around which modernist literature and culture fashioned themselves was the exclusion of the masses, the defeat of their power, the removal of their literacy, the denial of their humanity' (21). Carey accuses Greene of committing crimes of pride and prejudice against common humanity in *Brighton Rock* and claims that 'loathing of what the masses have done to England reverberates throughout the novel'. According to Carey, Ida is 'the character in the novel on whom Greene's distaste for mass civilization focuses' (83). Carey argues: 'To the ordinary reader she might seem the heroine of the novel. But Greene's point is that Pinkie, being a Catholic, and evil, is more real than Ida, and spiritually her superior' (83). Greene is not only disgusted by her fleshiness, 'she is sentimental, likes cheap drama and pathos, and cries in cinemas. She reads best-sellers – Warwick Deeping; Priestley's *The Good Companions*'. Carey concludes that Ida's inferiority to a murderer is a deliberate affront to readers: 'a gesture of intellectual defiance, aimed at the complacent, materialistic masses' (84).

I will return to the question of the (supposed) spiritual superiority of corrupt Catholics later, but first it is worth asking whether Carey is right to see Greene as unequivocally contemptuous of mass civilisation. For a start Greene was not a modernist and, while he may not have had much respect for J. B. Priestley,¹⁰ he was a great admirer of popular novelists such as Rider Haggard and John Buchan; moreover, he himself wrote bestsellers. Although it seems as if there is no crime that Greene has not been accused of by his detractors, it would be almost diabolically cynical to use a mass form to deny the masses any humanity. In any case, I do not think the charge will stand up. In contrast to Carey, Brian Diemert in *Graham Greene's Thrillers and the 1930s* proposes that Greene's embrace of genre fiction was primarily a reaction against the High Modernists' contempt for

popular culture. Like Auden and Isherwood in the 1930s, Greene wanted to create a serious literature without being highbrow; to be profoundly entertaining. He certainly did not want to emulate the manner of Virginia Woolf (whose narrative technique he did not admire). Instead, *Brighton Rock* is cast in the form of a thriller, which he infused with a radical political and social significance (Diemert 14). Moreover, Greene spent much of his life in the cinema, as a reviewer of (mainly) Hollywood movies and as a writer of screenplays for mass audiences. The film that makes Ida weep is George Cukor's adaptation of Dickens' *David Copperfield*: inevitably it simplifies a great (if occasionally sentimental) novel but the film is also a popular classic.¹¹ Greene recognised that 'films have got to appeal to a large indiscriminating public' but, as Steve Chibnall argues: 'the kind of cinema he wanted to create would eschew a path to popularity paved in soothing, muted inoffensiveness, in favour of one lined with honest vulgarity and dramatic tension' (28–9). A more nuanced thesis than Carey's might state that Greene (like the philosophers of the Frankfurt School) was opposed to an anodyne commercial culture designed to make us feel that life is not so bad, and favoured a popular culture that stirred up trouble and challenged bourgeois conventions. It is Ida's bourgeois complacency to which Greene objects, not her love of singing popular ballads after a couple of pints of Guinness in the bar.

Greene has fun satirising junk commercial culture, for example on the pier, as the lonely Cubitt finds consolation in slot machine true romance. Reading 'Cupid's Wings, Amor Lane', printed on pink cardboard, Cubitt 'was deeply moved': 'it was literature: it was the way he'd like to write himself' (156). But Greene also suggests something more complex about mass culture: the reverse of the Flaubertian irony that genuine emotion is debased by the currency of romantic cliché; that we cannot find an authentic vocabulary to express what we really feel. On the contrary, in *Brighton Rock*, the first time Pinkie experiences real feeling for Rose is in the cinema, 'slumped grimly in the three and sixpenny seat'. As he watches the 'two main characters make their stately progress towards the bed-sheets', in what seems to be a generic romantic melodrama, Pinkie's carapace begins to crack despite himself: 'suddenly, inexplicably, the Boy began to weep. He shut his eyes to hold in his tears [. . .] – it was like a vision of release to an imprisoned man. He felt constriction and saw – hopelessly out of reach – a limitless freedom: no fear, no hatred, no envy' (179). So Ida is not the only one who cries in cinemas, and an epiphany can be had in the cheap seats.

Greene's depiction of Brighton is similarly ambivalent. This seaside resort is the place where the masses have fun, where 50,000 day-trippers come to 'extricate . . . the grain of pleasure'. But Brighton is not simply a 'loathsome' example of what the masses have done to England. It provides a breath of fresh air for the workers who visit it, as it did for Greene when he was sent there as a child to convalesce, and later when he stayed there to overcome

writers' block. There is a genuine excitement and vitality in the novel's opening description:

They came in by train from Victoria every five minutes, rocked down Queen's Road standing on the tops of the little local trams, stepped off in bewildered multitudes into fresh and glittering air: the new silver paint sparkled on the piers, the cream houses ran away into the west like a pale Victorian water-colour; a race in miniature motors, a band playing, flower gardens in bloom below the front, an aeroplane advertising something for the health in pale vanishing clouds across the sky. (5)

The Brighton that Ida 'knows' is the one that Greene knew (which is still almost recognisable today): 'two girls in beach pyjamas, the buses going by to Rottingdean, a man selling papers, a woman with a shopping basket, a boy in a shabby suit, an excursion steamer edging off from the pier, which lay long, luminous and transparent, like a shrimp in the sunlight' (72). Greene said that he had to curb his enthusiasm for similes, because they slowed down the plot – he called it shooting leopards – but luckily many survived to stalk the pages of *Brighton Rock* (Sort 138).

But as so often in Greene's work, the landscape is divided by a frontier, which is largely invisible here but still deadly. Unobserved by the holiday-makers, there is another Brighton and the 'border' between them is marked by the 'battlements' of the Salvation Army Citadel (140). Behind the glitter of the sea, the promenade and the pier, lie the slums of Paradise Piece and Nelson Place. The focus of Greene's attack is not on the pleasure-seeking hordes but on the contrast between the grand facades of seafront hotels (sheltering 'respectable' criminals) and the moral squalor epitomised by the violated bodies of young girls buried under the West Pier or abandoned by the railway line. The novel exposes this other Brighton, what Greene called 'the shabby secret behind the bright corsage, the deformed breast' (140).

Ida too is a more complex character, and Greene a more conscious and controlled writer, than Carey credits either with being. Yes, she is a representative of conventional bourgeois morality: 'she belonged to the great middle law-abiding class, her amusements their amusements, her superstitions their superstitions' (80). Her compassion is like a 'rank cheap perfume' (233) and her aphorisms about wanting justice and not letting the innocent suffer come 'clicking out like a ticket from a slot machine' (199). There may even be a hint of T. S. Eliot's Lil from *The Waste Land* in Ida who is mistakenly called Lily by the men in the bar at the beginning of *Brighton Rock*. Ida consults the Ouija board, like the superstitious women who consult Madame Sosostris and her wicked pack of cards in Eliot's poem. But Ida was also inspired by Mae West, who hardly seems a likely candidate for one of the living dead in *The Waste Land*.

Critics such as Carey and Shelden assume that to find Ida remotely sympathetic is to read against the grain of Greene's intentions. When Ida was made into the heroine of the stage adaptation of *Brighton Rock* (by adopting Rose at the end) Greene objected: 'Ida is the real villain of the piece' (Qtd, Chibnall 20). Certainly, Ida's bourgeois family values are not endorsed in the novel. When she says that Rose needs her mother the reader winces at the irony because Greene has shown us Rose's moody mother acquiescing in her sale. Ida's characterisation creates a profound ambivalence in the reader, which is often embodied in the difference between what the narrator says about her ('cheap' is the defining adjective) and what the novelist shows us, for example an act of unobserved compassion and common decency, when Ida gives a quid to the shabby genteel Charlie Moyne ('poor old geezer' (39)). If we find Ida sympathetic this is not despite Greene; the author knows that we will find her both attractive and repellent, just as we are both sympathetic to and appalled by Pinkie.¹²

If Green drew on his childhood misery to create Pinkie there is also something of the adult Greene in Ida. He too was a pleasure-seeker (for confirmation simply consult Shelden's index under 'Greene: sex' and credit half of it). No doubt, like Ida, he relished 'the soft gluey mouth in taxis' (37). During his career as a journalist Greene reported from many scenes of injustice: Batista's Cuba, the Belgian Congo, Papa Doc's Haiti, Vietnam, Nicaragua. Like Ida he wanted to ask questions about what was really happening. According to Sherry he was motivated to do so in part by boredom: 'his manic-depressive nature forced him to seek stimulation and diversion through events reflecting the dangerous extremes of the day' (xv). Like Ida, perhaps he enjoyed exposing injustice: 'it's exciting, it's fun, it's living' (37).¹³

'Such tits'

Kite died 'talking all the time about someone's tits'.

(Greene 109)

The ambivalence in Greene's creation of Ida's character is political: her complacent bourgeois values clash with Pinkie's rage at poverty and injustice. But the constant references to her breasts suggest that this ambivalence verges on the Oedipal. Ida is both maternal and erotic. Hale's first thought is: 'You thought of sucking babies when you looked at her' (7). She has 'big breasts', he thinks, and 'she could save my life' (9). Ida seems to be everyman's dream: 'She smelt of soap and wine: comfort and peace and a slow sleepy physical enjoyment, a touch of nursery and the mother, stole from the big tipsy mouth, the magnificent breasts and legs, and reached Hale's withered and frightened and bitter little brain' (17). One by one, the members of Pinkie's gang are drawn to her. Cubitt, like Hale, seeks solace from her 'large friendly bosom' (160); when faced with Ida's 'big breasts ready for any

secrets,' Dallow also succumbs (233). The narrator, of course, feels nothing but contempt: 'She bore the same relation to passion as a peepshow' (146).

The male characters in *Brighton Rock* long for a mother and seem, to a man, to be terrified of sex. Poor Philip Corkery quakes in his pyjamas at the prospect of Ida in 'Bacchic and bawdy mood' (145). Will he be able to live up to her expectations? At the hotel 'she gazed around the big padded pleasure dome of a bedroom with bloodshot and experienced eyes' (146). The reader is not surprised that Corkery turns out to be a disappointment: 'Men always failed you when it came to the act. She might as well have been to the pictures' (151). Kite, Dallow, Spicer, and Cubitt are all bachelors. Dallow has an affair with Judy but does not seem to get much pleasure from it: 'I started something there all right . . . I sometimes wish I hadn't' (216).¹⁴ Apart from Pinkie the only other married men in the novel are the blind and cuckolded Frank, Rose's miserable father, and the seedy lawyer, Prewitt, who married for 'uncontrollable passion' twenty years before. Now his wife lives like a mole in the cellar and Prewitt's only pleasure is to watch 'the little typists' through the window and he has to resist the urge to expose himself 'shamefully' in the park' (211).

Pinkie is haunted by the primal horror of having witnessed the Saturday night ritual of his parents having sex: 'He was filled with hatred, disgust, loneliness: he was completely abandoned: [. . .] for the space of a few moments he was dead' (186). Although Freud thought that the child's narcissistic injury at being excluded from the primal scene is a universal experience which does not necessarily cause a psychic scar, it takes Pinkie most of the novel to get over it. Pinkie's contempt for women and sexuality is based on a terror of sex and his bitter virgin's fear that he will not pass the masculine sexual test: 'That was what they expected of you, every polony you met had her eye on the bed: his virginity straightened in him like sex. That was how they judged you' (90) He fails miserably, on his first attempt with Sylvie in a back of a Lancia (135).

Witnessing (without understanding) his parents copulation, he conceives of sex in sadomasochistic terms: 'his father panted like a man at the end of a race and his mother made a horrifying sound of pleasurable pain' (186). Pinkie is always pinching Rose in order to work 'himself into a little sensual rage' (51). He also thinks of intimacy as a threat to his autonomy. At first Pinkie is appalled by Rose's lack of desirability: she is 'as immature, simple, as ignorant as himself' (119). But gradually he begins to feel a connection that is more than narcissism: 'they were made for each other' (126). He begins, despite himself, to feel a kind of loyalty to Rose. When Cubitt calls Rose a duchess 'an extraordinary indignation jerked in the Boy's brain and fingers. It was almost as if someone he loved had been insulted' (149).

Virginity is another kind of frontier in *Brighton Rock* for both Pinkie and Rose. Pinkie tries to delay the awful moment: they go for a drink with the others; he tries to book a room at the Cosmopolitan; he takes her to the

pier, where in panic and rage he records his message of love: ‘Goddamn you, you little bitch’. But this hatred is not the sole emotion he feels for Rose (although she could hardly be blamed for taking his words at face value when she plays the record). After their wedding night, he has ‘an odd sense of triumph’: ‘he had exposed himself and nobody had laughed’. It renews his confidence (‘he could face anyone now) and ‘a faint feeling of tenderness woke for his partner in the act’ (182). Rose too feels as if she has crossed a border into another country: she had ‘past the customs’ and ‘signed the naturalization papers’ (192). It is a liberation: ‘She was accepted. She had experienced as much as any woman’ (193).

Perhaps the tragedy of the novel is that Pinkie never has time to overcome his ambivalence. After that first night with Rose, he has a dream: he is in a playground and ‘sick with fear’ when he sees Kite’s reflection in a mirror: ““Such tits,” Kite said and put a razor in his hand’ (186). Pinkie almost overcomes this association of sexuality with violence: ‘he had held intimacy back as long as he could at the end of a razor blade’ (133). Although Greene suggests that there is a possibility of redemption (between the stirrup and the ground) he is not a sentimentalist and sexual healing cannot overcome the habit of hatred of a whole lifetime. In the pages before he attempts to manipulate Rose into committing suicide Pinkie repeatedly fights off ‘a sort of tenderness’ (220); a ‘terrible tenderness’ (224), ‘tenderness stirred, but he was bound in a habit of hate’ (231), ‘again he felt the prowling presence of pity’ (231). When the two upper class swells laugh at Rose, Pinkie is defensive: ‘Tenderness came up to the very window and looked in’ (237). As he drives through the rain he withstands the ‘enormous emotion [. . .] with all the bitter force of the school bench, the cement playground, the St Pancras waiting room, Dallow’s and Judy’s secret lust, and the cold unhappy moment on the pier. If the glass broke, if the beast – whatever it was – got in, God knows what it would do’ (239). We never have a chance to find out.

‘Now I was discovered to be – detestable term! – a Catholic writer’ (*Escape*, 74).

There is perhaps a Catholic element to Greene’s disdain for pleasure in the novel, which is made to seem thin and unsatisfying in comparison with passion (which is pleasure intensified by the prospect of damnation). Greene converted to Catholicism after he met the woman who was to become his wife, who was herself a convert. Although he became a Catholic in 1926, ten years before the writing of *Brighton Rock*, this was the first novel in which Catholicism became a major theme. According to Greene this was a weakness: the novel is concerned with a ‘too obvious and open’ discussion of ‘the distinction between good-and-evil and right-and-wrong and the mystery of “the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God”’ (*Escape* 76–7). However, while these preoccupations are very much apparent, nothing about them

seems obvious. Indeed there has been considerable controversy about the nature of Greene's Catholic beliefs. Conor Cruise O'Brien did not think he was the 'right kind' of Catholic: 'too dark, complex, paradoxical' and individualistic (Qtd, Sherry 733). In *Graham Greene's Catholic Imagination*, Bosco notes that Greene has been called a Manichean, Jansenist, Pelagian, Quietist and existentialist (4). Some critics divide Greene's work into Catholic and post-Catholic novels; while Bosco claims that for 46 years Catholicism was the pattern in the carpet of all Greene's writing.

The only indisputable aspect of Greene's use of Catholicism is that a belief in God is not comforting but serves as a means of raising the stakes, of intensifying the drama of individual existence. Greene argued that after the death of Henry James 'a disaster overtook the English novel': 'with [his] death the religious sense was lost to the English novel, and with the religious sense went the sense of importance of the human act. It was as if the world of fiction had lost a dimension: the characters of such distinguished writers as Mrs Virginia Woolf and Mr. E. M. Forster wandered like cardboard symbols through a world that was paper thin' (Qtd, Bosco 5). Challenging the accepted view of James as a novelist without a religious sense, Greene argued that on the contrary James's work was preoccupied with the presence of evil.

Pinkie's actions mark him out as a prime candidate for damnation. After his death, Rose goes to a priest (not for absolution) but because she is troubled by the fear that she has saved herself while Pinkie will be damned. The priest says that 'a Catholic is more capable of evil than anyone' but also that if Pinkie loved her that shows that there is some good in him and that no soul is cut off from mercy (246). George Orwell objected strongly to the concept of the 'sanctified sinner': 'Greene appears to share the idea, which has been floating around since Baudelaire, that there is something rather *distingué* in being damned; Hell is a sort of high-class night club, entry to which is reserved for Catholics only, since the others, the non-Catholics, are too ignorant to be held guilty, like the beasts that perish' (107). Orwell speculates that this 'cult of the sanctified sinner' was probably a reaction against Chesterton (whose Father Browne is insufferably good). He also suggests that it is (what Dickens would have called) dandyism: 'when people really believed in Hell, they were not so fond of striking poses on its brink' (107)

Orwell argues that the doctrine of *corruptio optimi pessima* (the corruption of the best is the worst) has the effect of suggesting that 'ordinary human decency is of no value' (107). It is a legitimate criticism but, as I suggested earlier, the problem with ordinary human decency in *Brighton Rock* is that it is too closely allied with bourgeois convention, habit and complacency. Greene believed that it was the job of the writer to be on the side of the victim; the orthodox good character had no hold over his imagination. When the priest utters the disturbing lines about the 'appalling strangeness of the mercy of God' at the end of the novel, it is both a reminder to the bourgeois reader not to be smug and a gesture of solidarity with other sinners.

The most powerful aspect of Greene as a Catholic novelist is that he harnesses a belief in God in order to lambaste a corrupt and cruelly indifferent society. Greene's Brighton in the 1930s is a fallen world and Pinkie is a fallen angel who will not accept that the hell of extreme poverty was ordained for him by God. The reader does not have to choose between seeing *Brighton Rock* as either a Catholic or a political novel; it is both. Later Greene seemed to think that the two should be kept separate and he told his fellow novelist and Catholic convert, Evelyn Waugh, that he was planning to write a political novel rather than 'always about God'. Waugh responded: 'I wouldn't give up writing about God at this stage if I were you. It would be like PG Wodehouse dropping Jeeves halfway through the Wooster series'(Qtd, Ker 148). God served Greene very well in *Brighton Rock* but after *The End of the Affair* he found that he did not always need him.

***Brighton Rock* afterlife**

Ironically, when the Boulting Brothers were about to release the 1947 film version of *Brighton Rock*, the studio wanted to change the name to *The Worst Sin*. They were concerned that nobody would have heard of either Brighton or its rock candy. Today many readers may feel that a Catholic sense of sin is perhaps the least interesting aspect of both the novel and the film. Greene's title has spawned a host of imitators including Alex Wheatle's powerful urban crime novel, *Brixton Rock* (1999), which relocates the action to the racially divided council estates of South London (more amusingly, there is also a ganja boxing film, *Brighton Wok*). The novel is perennially significant: in 1947, the Boy was the child of the bombsites; in the 1970s the Punks saw themselves as the descendants of Pinkie and Rose: his 'army of friends' (200). Soon there is to be a new film version, by Rowan Joffe, who updates it to the 1960s; the era of mods and rockers and Quadrophenia. Joffe has said of his adaptation: 'We're making *Brighton Rock* as contemporary as we possibly can because the story feels "modern". It's too alive, too vibrant and too relevant to be contained in the late 30s.'¹⁵ While Helen Mirren is likely to prove a more convincing Ida than Hermione Baddeley (whom Greene complained was too mumsy), *Brighton Rock* seems not only relevant to the 1960s but absolutely alive now. It is a wake-up call to our too contained Asbo generation.

Notes

1. Sherry's reference to Greene in his interview with Don Swain (22 June 1989). Available online at: <http://wiredforbooks.org/normansherry/index.htm>.
2. Greene, Introduction to Collected Edition, p. vii.

3. As if to invoke *Mrs Dalloway* only to set it aside, a sky writing plane features in the first paragraph of *Brighton Rock* but it is a more familiar sight by the 1930s and Greene, like the busy bank holiday crowd, does not dwell on what it says – it is simply ‘an aeroplane advertising something for the health’ – and its script quickly dissolves into evanescent visual impressions of ‘pale vanishing clouds across the sky’ (5).
4. Lodge quoted by Nicolas Tredell in *PN Review* 86 (July – August 1992), vol. 18, no. 6.
5. Greene, who was a great admirer of R. L. Stevenson, would surely have relished the coincidence that in Stevenson’s seminal thriller about Good and Evil, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the border between Jekyll’s cabinet (where he conducts his experiments) and the domestic area of the house is marked by a ‘red baize door’.
6. For more on this see Maria Couto, *Graham Greene: On the Frontier*.
7. For more on Jacobean revenge drama see Bergonzi, 90–91.
8. In an interview with Marie-Francoise Allain he vigorously denied any similarity between himself and Pinkie (24). But in *A Sort of Life* Greene says that the only criticism which is of any interest is one that would surprise the author (132).
9. For a detailed discussion of Greene’s anti-Semitism in this and other prewar novels see Lowenstein, *Loathsome Jews*.
10. This may have had something to do with Priestley’s threat to sue Greene for libel if Greene did not make changes to the satirical portrait of the best-selling novelist, Quin Savory, in *Stamboul Train* (Shelden, 164–65).
11. It is interesting that Greene references this particular Dickens novel in which evil is closely connected to the violation of young women (particularly Steerforth’s seduction of Little Emily).
12. There are even moments when the narrator seems to be on Ida’s side. As she walks through London (not Mrs Dalloway’s exclusive Bond Street but multicultural Seven Dials) she engages in the life of the street: ‘the negroes were hanging round the public house doors in tight natty suits and old school ties, and Ida recognized one of them and passed the time of day’ (37). Ida’s point of view is inclusive and good-natured. We compare this to the way the children recoil from the negro in *Pavilion Gardens* (99).
13. Nicolas Tredell suggests that there may possibly be an ambivalent link between Ida and Joyce’s Molly Bloom: ‘One of Ida’s metonymies for “life” is “sunlight on brass bedposts”’ (36) and this calls to mind Molly’s jingling brass bed; Molly also shares an ample mammary endowment with Ida: cf. this passage from *Ulysses*: ‘She set the brasses jingling as she raised herself briskly, an elbow on the pillow. He looked calmly down on her bulk and between her large soft bubs, sloping within her nightdress like a shegoat’s udder. The warmth of her couched body rose on the air, mingling with the fragrance of the tea she poured’ (Bodley Head 1992 edn, 76). Greene’s representation of Ida might be part of his anti-Modernist campaign – but since Molly is also the creation of possibly the greatest ‘perhapsed Catholic’ author in Anglophone writing, Greene’s implicit allusion to her might not be wholly hostile – ambivalence again!’ (Email to author.)
14. Dallow seems to be single now but has been married – as he says to Pinkie on the Boy’s wedding day, ‘I know how you feel [. . .] I was went married once myself. It kind of gets you in the stomach. Nerves. Why, [. . .] I even went out and got one of those books, but it didn’t tell me anything that I didn’t know. Except about flowers. The pistils of flowers. You wouldn’t believe the funny things that go on among flowers.’ (164).

15. Quoted in 'Film: The British are Coming', *The Independent* (8 January 2010). <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/film-the-british-are-coming-1861050.html>

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7

“Come Down from Your Thinkin’ and Listen a Minute”: The Multiple Voices of *The Grapes of Wrath*

Jennifer Butler Keaton

When John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* was published in 1939, readers embraced the novel’s plea to end the mistreatment of migrant workers who had been forced to leave their homesteads and travel west for jobs. The novel’s protagonists, the Joad family, revealed to Americans the injustice of the wages and working conditions on large farms, as well as the cruelty toward and dehumanization of these workers. The polemical power of Steinbeck’s novel contributed to its overwhelming popularity, the Pulitzer Prize it earned for Steinbeck, the success of John Ford’s film adaptation, and the book’s place in the literary canon. However, that same power has also been a major source of complaints about the novel: many critics see *The Grapes of Wrath* as a historical relic, a work that had a major effect on American society during its time but that suffers under literary analysis. For instance, Harold Bloom, in the introduction to his 1987 edited collection on Steinbeck, says that the author “is not an original or even an adequate stylist” (4). He defends *The Grapes of Wrath*’s placement in the canon only because “Compassionate narrative that addresses itself so directly to the great social questions of its era is simply too substantial a human achievement to be dismissed” (5). As Robert Demott summarizes the critical interpretation of the novel, “*The Grapes of Wrath* has been less judged as a novel than as a sociological event, a celebrated political cause, or a factual case study” (xxiv).

It is true that Steinbeck was more concerned that *Grapes* reflect the migrant workers’ plight than contain any literary value. In the journal he kept while writing the novel, Steinbeck wrote, “Honesty. If I can keep an honesty it is all I can expect of my poor brain” (Demott 29–30). Because of his background as a journalist, John Steinbeck took a very mimetic approach to his writing, insisting on representing reality as accurately as possible. In addition to his pursuit of honesty, Steinbeck also had a particular goal in writing the novel. Before writing *Grapes*, Steinbeck drafted *L’Affaire Lettuceberg*, which also dealt with labor issues and critiqued the greed of the powerful. However, Steinbeck was disappointed in the book and destroyed the manuscript. In the biography *John Steinbeck*, Jay Parini suggests that the discarded

novel failed to examine labor issues with an even hand, as Steinbeck “had apparently taken a satirical approach in that story, ridiculing the bankers and businessmen and antilabor forces that combined against the interests of the migrant workers” (201). Steinbeck did not object to *L’Affaire* being “a mean, nasty book” but rather to its failure to serve his desired purpose, saying in a letter, “I don’t care about its literary excellence, understand, only whether it does the job I want it to do” (qtd. in Benson 376).

Does the fact that *The Grapes of Wrath* functions as mimetic literature and had a specific social goal undercut its literary value? In this chapter I argue that Steinbeck uses complex literary strategies to accomplish his goal of accurately representing the dynamics between different groups of people and to create public outrage over the treatment of migrant workers. These strategies come to light when examining the work through the lens of the dialogic theory of Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. Through his theories of dialogism, Bakhtin identifies the different voices present in any given discourse and examines the interaction between those voices. Bakhtin wrote *Discourse in the Novel*, which applies dialogic theory to the medium of the novel, only a few years before the publication of *Grapes*, but because Bakhtin had been exiled by Joseph Stalin’s communist regime, *Discourse* was not published until 1975 and was translated into English in 1981. Since Bakhtin’s dialogic theories are relatively new to the world, and even newer to the English-speaking world, scholars still have much work to do in applying these theories to American authors, such as Steinbeck.

Steinbeck and Bakhtin provide an intriguing pair for comparison because they both wrote in reaction to the extreme political, economic, and social situations of their time. While Bakhtin was facing the rise of Stalin and his communist dictatorship, Steinbeck responded to the relentless capitalism of the Great Depression. The men also expressed similar philosophies, rejecting specific world views in favor of acknowledging multiple perspectives. Neither man aligned himself with a particular political ideology, and both avoided using what Bakhtin called authoritative, or monologic, discourse in their writing, which he describes as language that “demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own” (*Discourse* 242). Examples of authoritative discourse can be seen anytime a person presents an opinion as an absolute truth, without providing a reason for the listeners or readers to agree and without acknowledging other viewpoints. On the other end of the spectrum is Bakhtin’s concept of internally persuasive discourse, which “is, as it is affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with ‘one’s own word.’ [. . .] The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is *not finite*, it is *open*; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer *ways to mean*” (*Discourse* 346). In other words, internally persuasive discourse aims to take into account the audience’s point of view, by presenting an open discourse with which the audience is invited to engage.

Bakhtin's dialogic theory divides texts into the different languages contained therein. To Bakhtin, however, languages were not defined or distinguished by grammatical structures. Instead, he viewed "language as a world view" (*Discourse* 271). Each different perspective or ideology represented within a text is its own distinct language, and the distinction between the languages include class, authority, profession, political views, and – as later scholars pointed out – gender. The combination of multiple points of view within a discourse is what Bakhtin labels as heteroglossia. *The Grapes of Wrath* is heavy with heteroglossia, as the voices of the various characters constantly interact – sometimes cooperating, sometimes dominating one another, and often just ignoring or misunderstanding each other completely. For instance, among the voices of the characters, Ma presents a fascinating study of the gradual emergence of the female voice as the Joad family is forced from their traditional homestead and the gender roles that came with it. Early in the novel, Ma obediently defers to male family members to make decisions, but as they approach California, she begins to voice her opinions. At first, she confronts harsh opposition from the men, once even wielding a jack handle as a weapon to get her way. By the end of the novel, however, Ma is the undisputed leader of the family.

Other distinctions of language among the Joad party include age, religion, and life experience (Tom's perspective, for instance, is changed by his time in jail). But to only examine the voices of the characters in *The Grapes of Wrath* is to ignore a huge part of the book, as well as a major element of Bakhtin's dialogic theory. Bakhtin recognizes the value of analyzing the characters' voices only, but insists that such an approach fails to take into account the importance of the narrative voice in the novel:

And it is possible [. . .] to select those purely dramatic elements of the novel that lower the narrational aspect to the level of a commentary on the dialogues of the novel's characters. But the system of languages in drama is organized on completely different principles, and therefore its languages sound utterly different than do the languages of the novel. There is no all-encompassing language, dialogically oriented to separate languages, there is no second all-encompassing extra-plot (not dramatic) dialogue. (*Discourse* 266)

Because Steinbeck's writing does include an "all-encompassing language" – the language of the narrator – no dialogic analysis of his work can be complete without taking the narrative voice or voices into account. The narrative voice is especially prominent in *Grapes* because of the structure of the novel. Only half of the chapters in the book follow the journey of the Joads, while the other chapters, often called interchapters, place the Joads' story into a larger context. Sometimes the interchapters show the struggles of migrant workers as a whole, and sometimes they provide opposing perspectives,

which, juxtaposed with the Joads' story, emphasize the extent of the Joads' dilemma while also revealing its complexity. Chapter 5, for instance, functions in all of these capacities through its generalized portrayal of the relationship between land owners and tenants and through its more specific depiction of an argument between a farmer and a tractor driver for the bank (both of these scenes will be explored later in this chapter). Although these interchapters often contain their own narratives, they almost always provide the narrator's view of the events, adding an element of social commentary. The voice of the narrator, though it may seem to exist just to relay a story, is always more than simply a medium. As Bakhtin says, "there are no 'neutral' words and forms – words and forms that can belong to 'no one;' language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents" (*Discourse* 293). Therefore, the fullest dialogic analysis takes into account the interaction between all the character and narrative voices.

One of the more interesting aspects of *Grapes* is the narrator's treatment of voices that oppose the protagonists. Steinbeck's statements about *L'Affaire* suggest that the voices of the antagonists were not fairly represented in the discarded novel, and that any dialogue from the antagonists very likely represented Steinbeck's view of businessmen rather than the actual perspective of those characters. In *Grapes*, Steinbeck occasionally uses the same device to illustrate the mistreatment of migrant workers. For instance, when one service station attendant expresses sympathy for the plight of the Joads and the other "Okies" traveling west, a fellow attendant comments, "Them goddamn Okies got no sense and no feeling. They ain't human. A human being wouldn't live like they do. [. . .] Almighty, they don't know any better than what they got. Why worry?" (301). This scene provides a very different perspective on the Okies' situation, showing the point of view of someone who does not sympathize with the Joads but rather chooses to reject their humanity in order to avoid feeling guilt, pity, or responsibility. In saying "Why worry?" the attendant reveals that he is rationalizing away any personal responsibility. Although the attendant's point of view is present in this chapter, it is not shown as being valid. This scene occurs approximately midway through the novel and is juxtaposed against 300 pages of sympathetic portrayal of the Okies that show that they do indeed have "sense" and "feeling." The attendant's words therefore do not hold much weight other than showing how misunderstood the Okies are, which makes the utterance serve the narrator's objective rather than the character's.

This attendant's comment is an example of one of Steinbeck's most employed dialogic devices: the hybrid construction. Bakhtin says that the hybrid construction is "an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages,' two semantic and axiological systems" (*Discourse* 304). When the attendant insults the Okies, the words "are permeated with the

ironic intonation of the author; therefore the construction has two accents (the author's ironic transmission, and a mimicking of the [. . .] character)" (*Discourse* 318). Steinbeck arranges the voices to provide a narrative perspective that does not require explicit expressions of opinion. He makes the wrongness of the attendant's opinion of the Okies obvious to the reader without ever having to say that it is wrong. Placed in the context of the novel's descriptions of the Joads' struggles, these comments become nothing more than the ramblings of someone who is selfish and out-of-touch.

The invasion of the "ironic intonation" of the narrator onto the voice of a character is not the only way Steinbeck uses hybrid construction to encourage readers to reevaluate the validity of particular utterances. The interchapters provide the voice of the narrator more explicitly, but they are still heavily hybridized. The interchapter that directly follows the incident with the gas station attendants reflects on California's history and reinforces the narrator's objective through the imitation of an attitude similar to the attendants'. Steinbeck's narrator often adopts personas that represent particular groups of people or particular viewpoints, without assuming the voice of a particular character. In this interchapter, the narrator explains how Americans took over the once Mexico-owned California and discusses how the establishment of farming as an industry created the labor crisis. He describes the situation that the Joads are entering, saying, "They imported slaves, although they did not call them slaves: Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Filipinos. They live on rice and beans, the business men said. They wouldn't know what to do with good wages. Why, look how they live. Why look what they eat" (316). The speaker ironically expresses a viewpoint similar to the attendant's, but he is also an omniscient narrator who places the dilemma at hand into a historical context. Not only does the narrator equate the treatment of the migrant workers to that of slaves, he also shows that the current situation is part of a gradual depreciation of the workforce's perceived value. All the while, this passage further emphasizes the absurdity of the attendant's statement. Just between these two passages, several voices present themselves and interact in multiple ways, the ultimate effect being the reinforcement of the injustice of the Okies' situation.

The gas station attendant is only one example of a voice that opposes the protagonists and that, through placement within the novel or hybridization with the narrator's voice, appears without sympathy. Steinbeck also presents the views of those who, on the surface, appear to be responsible for the families' poverty and homelessness. However, in contrast to Steinbeck's approach in *L'Affaire*, the author also provides the motivations of those characters, thereby showing that they have valid points of view. For instance, one interchapter, Chapter 5, describes a typical meeting between a farming family and the landowner who is forcing them off the land. It would have been easy for Steinbeck to portray the landowner as an enemy who is only concerned with his personal wealth and who feels no concern

for the fate of the family, but Steinbeck instead portrays the owner's duty as a burden. The narrator says of the owners, "Some of the owner men were kind because they hated what they had to do, and some of them were angry because they hated to be cruel, and some of them were cold because they had long ago found that one could not be an owner unless one were cold" (42). In this hybrid construction, in which the owners' voices are presented through the narrator's, no hint of irony is apparent. Steinbeck also does not juxtapose the owners' voices with other voices that contradict them. For all the pain the owners' actions cause the farming families, Steinbeck portrays the owners sympathetically and not as the real root of the problem.

Even in the cases of those voices that Steinbeck does present ironically, later narrative exposition often adds another dimension to how such voices fit into the bigger picture. In Chapter 21, another interchapter, the narrator gives an overview of the fear that the migrant workers instill in the towns they travel to:

In the West there was panic when the migrants multiplied on the highways. Men of property were terrified for their property. Men who had never been hungry saw the eyes of the hungry. [. . .] And the men of the towns and of the soft suburban country gathered to defend themselves; and they reassured themselves that they were good and the invaders bad, as a man must do before he fights. They said, These goddamned Okies are dirty and ignorant. They're degenerate, sexual maniacs. [. . .] The local people whipped themselves into a mold of cruelty. (385–6)

In this passage, the narrator describes the motivations behind the hostility that migrant workers have faced in California, hostility that the narrator has to this point portrayed negatively. After all, what kind of people would want to make things worse for families who have already been through so much? Although the narrator does not approve of the hostility – he still describes it as "cruelty" – he avoids vilifying those who espouse that attitude. Instead, the narrator explains the desperation and fear that drives the cruelty, even going so far as to call it something "a man must do." Steinbeck uses this interchapter and the voice of his narrator to provide a new way for readers to look at previously unsympathetic attitudes, such as that of the service station attendant.

The Grapes of Wrath sometimes presents the voices that oppose the protagonists ironically, but at other times, as in Chapter 21, portrays those voices as being legitimate and understandable points of view. Perhaps this contradiction in the presentation of these voices stems from what Parini calls Steinbeck's "duality of attachments":

He had a peculiar and noble sympathy for those who were cheated out of their natural birthright and dignity. Injustice drove him wild; as his sister

Beth says, "Even as a child John sided with the underdog." These radical or, more precisely, liberal sympathies bound him, psychologically, to the present struggle, whatever it might be; on the other hand, his philosophical and spiritual drive led him to posit a utopian moment, "the peace of a classless community." All progressive politics depend on this duality, and Steinbeck (in his most activist period) seems to have drawn great energies from this unusually generative conflict. (169)

On the one hand, Steinbeck's main objective in *The Grapes of Wrath* is to illustrate "the present struggle" – that is, the plight of the Joads and the real-world migrant workers they represent – by giving voice to a world view and a way of life that were being largely ignored. However, because of his "duality of attachments," Steinbeck also provides context for the struggle, showing how various different voices fit into the world in which the struggle is occurring. The world he presents is not the "classless community" he strives for, but by showing that even contradicting viewpoints often stem from similar attitudes of self-preservation, he creates potential for bridging the gap between the different voices. Bakhtin points out that the "author is not to be found in the language of the narrator" but rather in "the dialogue of languages" (*Discourse* 314). If readers look at the entire novel as being a world view, with the interaction between all the different voices creating the ultimate authorial voice, then Steinbeck's duality of attachments creates two world views, with the novel being on the side of the struggling workers while also, for the most part, trying to avoid vilifying the other voices. This split world view is divided just as the chapter format is divided, with the Joad chapters providing an intimate focus on the specific plight of the family, and the interchapters providing a more distant and expansive perspective on the situation by placing the Joads' story in a larger context.

Bakhtin says of the interaction between voices that "languages do not exclude each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways" (*Discourse* 291). Another way for languages in a novel to intersect is for a character to serve as the voice of the narrator. In *Grapes*, this character is Jim Casy. In *The Novels of John Steinbeck: A Critical Study*, Howard Levant points out that Casy serves no "forthright narrative function," but rather exists as an allegorical Christ figure and to "make moral statements." Levant goes on to argue that Steinbeck is successful in his use of this character, saying, "If the novel is to have more significance than a reportorial narrative of travel and hardship, Casy's spiritual insights are a necessary means of stating a convincing philosophical optimism" (103). Casy is an ex-preacher who no longer believes himself worthy to perform ministerial duties but still searches for ways to serve humanity. He was unable to resist his sexual urges for the women he preached to, but he loves people "fit to bust" and only wants "to make 'em happy" (32). He frequently expresses his philosophical

opinions on various issues and does not exhibit the same intense sense of privacy that often restricts the family's speech.

Casy is not one of the Joads or even one of the migrant workers, but rather is an observer just as the narrator is. In his observations, Casy frequently echoes the sentiments of the narrator, serving as the narrator's mouthpiece within the Joad narrative. For instance, when a different gas station attendant complains about migrant workers trying to trade their possessions for gas instead of paying, Casy says, "It ain't the people's fault [. . .]. How'd you like to sell the bed you sleep on for a tankful of gas?" (172). In this reply, Casy echoes the main theme of a previous interchapter in which the narrator addresses the heartbreak of migrant families who have to sell or leave behind nearly all of their possessions in order to make the trip to California. Steinbeck gives a general voice to the migrating families, saying, "Maybe we can start again in the new rich land [. . .]. But you can't start. [. . .] The bitterness we sold to the junk man – he got it all right, but we have it still" (119). Casy is the only character within the Joad narrative to explicitly describe this particular hardship in a manner similar to the narrator.

Casy's tendency to talk about the western migration beyond just how it is affecting the Joads also parallels the voice of the narrator. At one point during the Joads' journey, Casy tells Tom his views on the migrant worker situation:

"Tom, they's hundreds a families like us all a-goin' west. [. . .] They's stuff goin' on and they's folks doin' things. [. . .] An' if ya listen, you'll hear a movin', an' a sneakin', an' a rustlin', an' – an' a restlessness. They's stuff goin' on that the folks doin' it don't know nothin' about – yet. They's gonna come somepin outa all these folks goin' wes' – outa all their farms lef' lonely. They's gonna come a thing that's gonna change the whole country." (235–7)

In addition to his wider outlook, Casy's insistence that the plight of the migrant workers is "gonna change the whole country" directly reflects the opinions the narrator expresses in interchapters and, in fact, the polemical message of the novel. For instance, in one of the last interchapters, the narrator describes the anger of the starving families, saying, "In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage" (474). Not only is this statement significant because it is the only instance of the book's title within the novel, but it also presents a sense of imminence that echoes Casy's insistence that America is on the brink of a transformation.

In addition to the concepts of heteroglossia and hybrid construction, another vital issue in any dialogic study is whether a particular work uses authoritative or internally persuasive discourse. Steinbeck offers his own commentary on authoritative discourse in *The Grapes of Wrath*, in a passage

in which Tom comments on Casy's loquaciousness. Tom begins, "For a fella that don't preach no more – ", and Casy interjects, "Oh, I'm a talker! [. . .] No gettin' away from that. But I ain't preachin'. Preachin' is tellin' folks stuff. I'm askin' 'em. That ain't preachin', is it?" (128). In this statement, Casy defines "preachin'" as an authoritative, monologic discourse, one that makes statements about right and wrong that cannot be questioned. Casy, however, wants to learn from the people, as he explains in one of the first real speeches of the novel, in which he insists that he needs to go to California, saying, "I ain't gonna try to teach 'em nothin'. I'm gonna try to learn" (128). Later in the same chapter, the narrator describes a scene where the Joad family gathers to discuss their plan for the journey, saying, "Only the preacher was not there. He, out of delicacy, was sitting on the ground behind the house. He was a good preacher and knew his people" (136). Only a few pages after Casy insists that he is no longer a preacher, the narrator not only reattaches the label Casy had shrugged off, but specifically calls him a "good preacher." The voice of the narrator enters the Joads' narrative to both contradict and reinforce Casy's voice; he claims that Casy is a preacher despite the character's insistence otherwise, but in placing such confidence in the character he adds authority to Casy's voice. Through his interactions with the voices of the characters, Steinbeck's narrator questions what it means to be a man of God, a redefinition reinforced when Casy's eventual sacrifice makes him a Christ figure, as he echoes Jesus by telling his murderers "You don't know what you're a-doin'" (527). Steinbeck implies that what makes Casy "a good preacher" is, in fact, the very behavior that Casy insists is not preaching: his avoidance of "tellin' folks stuff," or speaking authoritatively (128).

The narrator's praise of a character who avoids authoritative discourse would seem to imply a certain disdain for that type of communication, but does Steinbeck's writing reflect such an attitude? Steinbeck is, in fact, internally persuasive rather than authoritative in his insistence that major societal problems exist and must be addressed. In his sympathetic portrayal of people suffering from these problems (such as oppression of female voices and economic unfairness), Steinbeck shows readers why they should change the way they think about certain social issues instead of simply telling them that they should. He also frequently presents conflicts without endorsing or vilifying either side. For instance, an early interchapter explores the work of a man – who had once been a displaced farmer himself – who is now employed by the "big shots" to drive one of the tractors that are plowing through the farms of his neighbors and friends (51). A farmer asks the tractor driver, whom he recognizes as being "Joe Davis's boy," "Well, what you doing this kind of work for – against your own people?" The driver responds by saying, "Three dollars a day. I got damn sick of creeping for my dinner – and not getting it. I got a wife and kids. We got to eat. Three dollars a day, and it comes every day" (50). The farmer – and the narrator,

by extension – does not blindly accept the driver's excuse. Instead, the farmer points out that, by insuring his own livelihood, the driver is destroying the livelihoods of others. However, the tractor driver insists that "Big shots won't give you three dollars a day if you worry about anything but your three dollars a day" (51). The tractor driver is shown to have the same motives of self-preservation as the farmer; they both value their own family's well-being over the other's. Although this scene takes place in an interchapter, the argument is presented in a straightforward manner without the intrusion of the narrator. Bakhtin, in discussing the role of the author in the novel, says that the author exists "as a third party in a quarrel between two people (although he may be a *biased* third party)" (*Discourse* 314). This conversation between the tenant and the tractor driver serves as an apposite example of the author as third party. The narrator may be biased, giving more weight to the tenant's argument, which is to be expected since the tenant more closely reflects the protagonists' situation. But the narrator does not definitively endorse either side in the argument, and readers are left to decide on the matter themselves.

With so many voices constantly interacting, *Grapes* does not present an either/or scenario when determining whether the novel is authoritative or internally persuasive. For instance, *Grapes* frequently addresses the importance of having an emotional and physical connection to the land as opposed to simply "owning" land, and the novel clearly favors those with that connection, as both the Joad chapters and the interchapters support it. *Grapes* also has a running theme of people repeatedly denying responsibility for their actions, instead insisting that someone or something else is actually to blame. For instance, the tractor driver tells the tenant that he has no choice but to tear down his friends' homes because it is the only way he can earn his three dollars a day. Earlier in the same interchapter, when a land owner is evicting a farming family, the blame falls squarely on the "system". As the tenant desperately looks for someone to blame, the owner repeatedly insists that the bank is responsible, and that "the bank is something more than men [. . .]. It's the monster. Men made it, but they can't control it" (45). This interchapter leaves it unclear whether the owner is accurate in his description of the bank or if he is just searching for a scapegoat to alleviate his own guilt in the situation.

Louis Owens points out in *John Steinbeck's Re-vision of America* that a major commonality in many of Steinbeck's works is the "theme of commitment," which he says "is the chief ingredient in the creation of the Steinbeck hero," especially in *The Grapes of Wrath* (102). In the context of this dialogic analysis, Steinbeck's theme of commitment becomes an example where the voice of the author can be gleaned from his body of work. While Steinbeck consistently blames faulty systems – rather than specific people – for the tragic events detailed in his works, he also implies that the only way to fix those systems is through the actions of people who are committed to

the wellbeing of all of humanity. Steinbeck uses an internally persuasive method of convincing his readers of the reality of various social problems, and he uses similar methods for presenting the theme of commitment. Ma's determination to keep her family together along with Casy's commitment – concluding with his Christ-like sacrifice – to the migrant workers both emphasize this theme. Seeing Casy's sacrifice causes a change in Tom, too. By his own admission, Tom starts “talkin’ like Casy,” and he says that he has come to agree with Casy that “a fella ain’t got a soul of his own, but on’y a piece of a big one” (572). By pointing out Casy's influence on him, Tom recognizes his own hybridization with the preacher's language.

The concept of all humans being pieces of one big soul suggests an interdependence among all people, one that would require a great deal of commitment to others to maintain. Tom tells Ma that he must leave the family in order to fight against the injustices that have led to starving and homeless families and the deaths of people like Casy. He goes on to give one of the most well-known speeches in American literature:

“I’ll be ever’where – wherever you look. Wherever they’s a fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. Wherever they’s a cop beatin’ up a guy, I’ll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I’ll be in the way guys yell when they’re mad an’ – I’ll be in the way kids laugh when they’re hungry an’ they know supper’s ready. An’ when our folks eat the stuff they raise an’ live in the houses they build – why, I’ll be there.” (572)

Not only does Tom promise solidarity with those who suffer, but the positive progression of the speech suggests his commitment to a particular outcome, where children always have supper and families can sustain themselves through their farming. In “The Rhetoric of American Protest: Thomas Paine and the Education of Tom Joad,” Kurt Hochenauer says of this speech, “By turning his anger outward to benefit a larger community, Tom makes a final commitment to his society” and that “Tom Joad has transcended his own personal constraints, and has embraced an all-encompassing mythology – the story of American protest” (392, 393). Steinbeck had already emphasized the importance of commitment by having the character who most represented the narrator's voice, Casy, dedicate and sacrifice his life to help migrant workers. By having the novel's primary protagonist come to the same conclusion as Casy, Steinbeck solidifies commitment as the principal theme of *Grapes*.

Steinbeck's consistent endorsement of certain points of view – such as the prioritizing of a connection with the land and the idealizing of active commitment – is authoritative in that the author leads readers to particular conclusions instead of leaving the issues open-ended. This authoritative quality might suggest that Steinbeck failed to eliminate the heavy-handedness that plagued *L’Affaire Lettuceberg*. However, even when

readers are led to a specific conclusion, Steinbeck still makes his case through heteroglossia rather than through monologic statements. Although the narrator's voice does occasionally rise to the top of the stratified hierarchy of voices contained in the novel, those other voices are always below it, supporting the narrator's agenda. Without those other discourses, *The Grapes of Wrath* would have been no different than *L'Affaire*, in which only pro-labor voices were presented sympathetically. Instead, Steinbeck created a novel that is internally persuasive because it gradually builds up to its conclusions through the presentation of multiple points of view.

At one point in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Tom, perplexed by Casy's thoughtful and talkative nature, asks Casy to "come down from your thinkin' and listen a minute," and Casy replies, "Listen all the time. That's why I been thinkin'. Listen to people a-talkin' an' purty soon I hear the way folks are feelin'" (340). Throughout the novel, Steinbeck displays not only how listening to individuals' voices can reveal their feelings, but also how combinations of voices can reveal human truths, especially when as many voices as possible are included. Clark and Holquist state that "Bakhtin's early work expresses most clearly the task which occupied him throughout his life, that of turning his dialogism into a full-fledged world view" (ix). Similarly, Steinbeck, through his experimentation with heteroglossia, encourages the world view that the best strategy for solving societal problems is to make sure all voices are heard.

In *Discourse in the Novel*, Bakhtin explains what he believes is the purpose of studying language:

Discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse [. . .] toward the object; if we detach ourselves completely from this impulse all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given word in life. *To study the word as such, ignoring the impulse that reaches out beyond it, is just as senseless as to study psychological experience outside the context of that real life toward which it was directed and by which it is determined.* (*Discourse* 292)

Just as Bakhtin saw little purpose in words that had been severed from their attachment to social situations, Steinbeck also tied his writing to his social objectives, saying, "My whole work drive has been aimed at making people understand each other" (qtd. in Demott xl). Both men saw language not as simply a way to express ideas or as a set of symbols to be arranged eloquently by poets, but as a complex and flexible system that not only reveals the social stratification among its speakers, but also is the key to any restructuring of that stratification. Steinbeck wrote of *L'Affaire*, "I don't care about its literary excellence, understand, only whether it does the job I want it to do" (qtd. in Benson 376). Steinbeck and Bakhtin shared a belief in the potential for language – and, in Steinbeck's case, the responsibility of

writers – to provide the oppressed with opportunities to reclaim their voices. Robert Stam says that Bakhtin encouraged “the subversive use of language by those who otherwise lack social power” (18). If *The Grapes of Wrath* is guilty of social activism, it is a charge that neither Steinbeck nor Bakhtin would object to, nor does it invalidate its status as a dialogic experiment that successfully changed public perception not through monologic propaganda, but through the intricate relationships of multiple voices.

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8

Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* Revisited

Linda Wagner-Martin

When Faulkner's novel appeared in 1942, the title page was completely misleading. *Go Down, Moses and Other Stories* – though it was reasonably well reviewed – had never been intended as a story collection. As Faulkner wrote later to his agent, "I remember the shock (mild) I got when I saw the printed title page . . . nobody but Random House seemed to labor under the impression that GO DOWN MOSES should be titled 'and other stories' . . . Moses is indeed a novel" (Blotner 1102). For the author, however, continuously short of money, worried about the Second World War, and facing another return to scriptwriting in Hollywood, his latest book and its reception would neither keep him awake at night nor make him wealthy.

For anyone who watched the reviews, however, the range of response was surprising. There were some good reviews, in the midst of the carping about whether or not the book was a novel. Milton Rugoff acclaimed "The Bear" as great a work as Melville's *Moby Dick*.¹ The privileging of Ike McCaslin and his philosophy of renunciation began with Lionel Trilling's influential review in *The Nation*. But for the most part, *Go Down, Moses* was never included in the "Big Five" Faulkner line up: his great novels were consistently said to be *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *The Hamlet* (books published between 1929 and 1940).

Critical interest in *Go Down, Moses* began to change a decade after Faulkner's death (1962) and a decade after the United States began to come to racial maturity. During the 1970s, critics started to see *Go Down, Moses* as one of Faulkner's first extended commentaries about white and black families in the South; and more to the point, as a text about the secure white families like the McCaslins and their black "shadow" families which for centuries had been ignored. Even though Cleanth Brooks had said as early as 1963 that "The judgment passed upon slavery generally in *Go Down, Moses* is a withering one" (248), few readers had followed his somewhat understated lead. An established author's treatment of race was seldom the focus of critical interest.

Part of the interpretative problem was that, even for a writer known as the most innovative of America's modernists, Faulkner's writing strategies in

Go Down, Moses seemed new. Instead of extensive stream of consciousness, there was what seemed to be the ribald Southern humor of the opening segment, "Was." Instead of the contrapuntal dialogue scenes heavy with innuendo, there was the meditative sonority of Ike's soliloquies – and of the hunting story, "The Bear." Instead of an overall tapestry of hectic juxtaposition, there was the relentless hammering of Rider's grief for his wife in "Pantaloon in Black," the "inferior" segment that, according to Trilling, had no business being included in the book (632).

In 1942, when *Go Down, Moses* was published, readers resisted. They had spent fifteen years learning to "read" Faulkner's works (and they did not yet have the incentive of his having won the Nobel Prize for Literature, which came in 1949). They did not yet have before them Richard Poirier's contention that most great literature requires new reading skills (77), or David Madden's matter-of-fact analysis:

The techniques fiction writers use are in themselves expressions of meaning and conveyers to the reader of experience; that is true especially of innovative writers One may see in Faulkner's careful and full revisions the stress he placed on the use of innovative techniques that in themselves would express the emotional, imaginative, and intellectual meaning. (109)

That Faulkner's work seemed to be tied inherently to the South also created difficulties for a range of readers. Admittedly, the South was a bifurcated set of cultures. When Richard King wrote about the uses of memory in literature, for example, he admitted that Faulkner's writing gave readers the dilemma of being forced "to call into question the value of culture altogether, to suspect that the claims of the past are deadening, life-threatening claims." And if this is the state of mind concerning the cultures of the South, then of what value is memory: "How can we remember and represent what is dismembered and absent?" (138).² David Minter links the complexity of Faulkner's vision to not only this bifurcation of the South but to the narrative strategies he was, in response, compelled to choose. In Minter's assessment, once Faulkner realized that no story was ever finished – nor was that story a linear one – he had to convey "signs simultaneously of what was possible, approximations of supreme order and closure, and of what was impossible, namely, the attainment of perfect order and closure." Minter calls this Faulkner's "discovery of the reiterative bent of his imagination" (132). And Minter calls the author's style in *Go Down, Moses*, his recreation of "a medleyed voice" (147).

The issue of whether or not Faulkner had sympathy for his black characters existed during the 1970s as a conundrum best explained through further study of his narrative techniques. In work by Joanne V. Creighton, J. E. Bunselmeyer, James Early, and other textual critics, however, the shape

of Faulkner's aesthetic was of more interest than his racial commentary. Dirk Kuyk, Jr., emphasized the Negro spiritual of the title and the novel's balancing on ritual ("like threads in the book. Small-scale, finite patterns of action, they are twisted into the strands of the plots," 184). For any casual reader, Kuyk's text can be seen as a study of Faulkner's aesthetics but he also emphasizes that ownership – of land, of human beings – is being questioned in *Go Down, Moses*, and concludes on the basis of the novel that "sharing must eventually supplant ownership" (188).

Race and folklore: "Was" and comedy

Perhaps because Faulkner's 1940 novel *The Hamlet* had been read as a comedy (with a sense of relief from even the most traditional critics – despite some macabre and even lewd plot devices), many readers saw the opening of *Go Down, Moses* as possessing a similarly comedic start. After the single-sentence description of Ike McCaslin ("uncle to half a county, father to no one" 3), the narrative presents the frustration of Buck and Buddy McCaslin when they learn that Tomey's Turl has escaped – to run to Tennie, his beloved on the Hubert Beauchamp place. The novel begins with a frantic (and unsuccessful) hunt, the mixed-blood McCaslin heir (who is three-fourths white) chased by dogs as he runs to the Beauchamps: the hunt as comedy is an ironic start for what seems to be a nostalgic memory of life in Mississippi, life among the McCaslins, white and black. At odds with the book's title, at odds with what any reader would have known about how unsportsmanlike hunting people in the untrackable woods could be, the presumed comic "Was" provides not comedy but an ironic distancing from the tragedy of race that readers might have expected in 1942.

The chase is funny. The repartee between the bachelor twins Buck and Buddy sounds as if Mark Twain were writing it (one of Faulkner's touchstones for comedy was Twain's essay "How to Tell a Story"). The slowly revealed plot of Sophonsiba Beauchamp as she aims to "catch" Buck's behavior is wry and comic. Faulkner's emphasis on his role adds a more palatable texture to the race story (as does the reader's knowledge that Ike is the son of the Buck–Sophonsiba marriage, and that he is only recounting this particular chase and its outcome: the real narrator is Cass McCaslin, who was a boy of nine at the time of the narrative, whereas Ike, obviously, was not yet born).

The varieties of the "hunt" are also funny; Sophonsiba plays the British landed gentlewoman with her colored silk trophy and her prim manners. The dogs are after the fox interminably, including in the bedroom when the twins are looking for their single, shared necktie. The reader is surrounded by the motion of these various hunts, but as Thadious Davis has pointed out repeatedly, this is a book about "masculinist sport and games interconnected with property and law" (129). It is a book about power, white people's power,

and all the critical attention to Ike McCaslin and his struggles over property cannot disguise the fact that the narrative center of the novel – emotionally and narratively – is Tomey's Turl (whose love for his Tennie also provides the basis for Rider's grief at Mannie's loss in "Pantaloon"). In Davis's radical reading of *Go Down, Moses*, she provides the missing center of conflict that repeats some of the strategies that Faulkner had used throughout his 1929 novel, *The Sound and the Fury*, a book about Caddie Compson who seldom appears in the text – and seldom has any language for what happens in that work. Davis suggests that:

I locate Tomey's Turl, rather than Isaac McCaslin or his ancestor Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin, as a figure of transgression and hybridity at the center of this project. His given name is Terrell, but that he is most often called Tomey's Turl seems appropriate because that name retains his social history, positions him outside of McCaslin domination, and refigures his mother who died giving birth to him . . . Born in slavery in June of 1833, "*yr stars fell*," Tomey's Turl is the son of Tomasina and the grandson of Eunice. (130)

Davis goes on to spell out the ancestry of both this character, a slave, and of Ike McCaslin: "Tomey's Turl is both the son and the grandson of Carothers McCaslin, who violates his own daughter Tomasina and fathers her son". The naming of Tomey's Turl creates a word game reminiscent of the Sphinx's riddle. "His lineage is embedded in the 'facts' recorded riddle-like in the McCaslin commissary ledgers and 'decoded' by another grandson of Carothers McCaslin, Ike McCaslin, who functions as a detective solving a crime puzzle" (131).

Because much of the "decoding" of this history has been seen as dependent on the white McCaslin family, Davis's focus here on the slave character, the victim of the egregious sins of the white father (and grandfather) brings important emphasis to *Go Down, Moses*. It calls readers to attend to the black folklore that dominates the text (not only the hymns and the strong characters as Faulkner presents them all), but to see that the strands of narrative – for all their white speakers – repeatedly underscore and expand upon the lives of the black characters.

The erstwhile comedy of "Was" becomes embodied in the poker game (games, as Buddy must save Buck from Hubert in the second sequence). Modeled perhaps on a painting Faulkner much admired, Paul Cezanne's *The Card Players*, in which the intricacy of what each man held, was his bet real or bluff, and the indeterminacy of some hands being left unknown carried forward the sense of games and rules, known to only certain players. But at the center of even the poker games sits Tomey's Turl, chosen to be dealer in these all-important transactions. Innocent as Cass as he watches the dealings, innocent of power as Tomey's Turl is, the narrative of the card game is

far from innocent. By having either Buck or Buddy at the table (not both), Faulkner coalesces the two into a single identity in Hubert's mind. Hubert, frightened of having to play either of them, becomes aligned with them because they are the landowner white men involved in a high stakes game. The three white characters are, then, aligned against Tomey's Turl, who gives the explanation for both his running away and his complicity with Sophonsiba's plot in his seemingly off-handed remarks to Cass, "anytime you wants to git something done, from hoeing out a crop to getting married, just get the womenfolks to working at it. Then all you needs to do is set down and wait. You member that" (13).

Just as the hunt positions Tomey's Turl as the black male threat to the order of the white man's world – he cannot be caught; he comes into civilization on his own terms, and he is a sexual being – so Faulkner uses female characters as the nexus of his humor. Despite what Tomey's Turl has told Cass, despite Sophonsiba's eventual marriage to Buck, Faulkner shows the idyllic quality of men's lives which are lived without women.³ The South Faulkner gives the reader, imaged in the various plots within "Was," is a *mélange* of appearance and reality. Seen through Cass's eyes, the South retains its honor and comfort; life is less ramshackle than Faulkner shows it to be in the adult reader's perception. The two-leveled narrative carries information about male culture in the South just as it carries information about the decline of the southern aristocracy. When Buddy rescues Buck from the marriage trap, bluffing his way into the straight that so frightens Hubert, Cass sees it as a tribute to his uncle's poker skills. The reader might see it as well as the true McCaslin willingness to use chicanery to get whatever they want. But primarily, what Cass learns from the only glimpse into his past that he narrates for the reader, is that men stick together, men face out against the social customs that would force them into marriage and paternity. He learns from this, and from other male behavior, that singleness is the desired state, that male bonding is the all-important connection, and that, in some cases, even a black male slave is preferable to a white woman. The ridicule that Miss Sophonsiba takes in the text is quite outspoken; she becomes the consistent comic ploy.

Transferred as it is to Ike's own life in later segments of the novel, a man's disdain for his wife's sorrow when she pleads for children stems from his conditioning to see that all women use men for their own ends. Ike translates her tears as she wishes to continue her family line; he interprets her wish for a child as a continuation of her insistence that he claim the land that would have been his inheritance from his family, again so that the child would inherit McCaslin property.⁴ By writing his own economic text to interpret woman's desire, Ike shows that his education has been faulty. He views life as a panorama of romantic shows, men chasing other men to force them to cohabit with women (as the plot to sell Tomey's Turl, or to sell Tennie the other direction, suggests); and men rescuing each other from the

handcuffs of marriage, not only Buddy's rescuing Buck but both McCaslins' rescuing Tomey's Turl from being sold to Hubert.

At the close of the two poker games, Hubert can return to his waiting sister and apologize that the games had gone against him. He has the perfect excuse – both Buck and Buddy are better at poker than he. And Faulkner's denouement to "Was" shows as well that the reputation of Buck and Buddy for being poker sharks is another fabrication of Southern legend, of these twinned and inseparable brothers who defy all convention in their disreputable life styles. Buddy cooks and is the wife of the pair; Buck manages. In truth, neither does much, but their façade of bachelordom allows them to do whatever they want.

In young Cass's eyes, "Was" makes clear that Buck and Buddy can do no wrong. Cass's life – and Ike's by implication, becomes the male-defined odyssey of men bonded through their experiences in nature. The autumn hunting season, taken out of contemporary time and moved back – in geography as well as in custom – fifty years, becomes the high point of each of Ike's long years. He lives to go on the hunt, though eventually he cannot even go into the field. His life has crystallized around this male activity: he erroneously thinks that this is the important part of a man's life. Much of the narrative of Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, then, becomes an attempt to educate Ike McCaslin.

"Pantaloons in Black" and the mystery of the human heart

Among commentary about *Go Down, Moses* (beginning with reviews and continuing forward), a persistent question is, Why Rider? The protagonist of the third segment of Faulkner's novel seems unconnected to the McCaslins. So if the novel is an intricate expose of the McCaslin family, why did Faulkner include "Pantaloons" at all?

The pantaloons, the fool for love from French and Italian literature, gives Rider, a black man working in the timber and the lumber yard, a classic mask for his earth-shattering grief at the time of his young wife's death. In his madness, Rider finds himself complicit with the hostile white culture, who cannot understand his sorrow, and he searches for ways to, in effect, kill himself.

Part of the difficulty readers have with Rider and his insurmountable grief is its contrast to the emotional distance they have experienced with Ike McCaslin.⁵ It is also because of the poignant stillness that this segment radiates. In the words of James A. Snead, Rider's agony is set against the busyness of much of the novel – the "overriding metaphors of the bear-hunt, the slave-hunt, and the treasure-hunt" (180). Juxtaposed with such activity, which forces the reader's attention towards plot rather than character, Rider's "Wordsworthian" sorrow (in the words of Cleanth Brooks) seems almost unbelievable. Brooks says simply that Rider displays a "capacity for

grief and an intensity of emotion that put to shame the man of cultivated sensibility" (254). Structurally, both the intensity of grief and the inability of the white culture to comprehend that grief parallels the emotional intensity of the title story, "Go Down, Moses," which Faulkner chooses to close the novel. In that segment, the grief of both black women and white over the execution of Samuel Worsham Beauchamp, alias "Butch," remains inexplicable to the white male observers. What resonates for the reader is the consciousness of a grief that cannot be palliative. The way to alleviate some of that sorrow is through the ages-old hymns like "Go Down, Moses": the language of sorrow is sound, not words.

"Pantaloon in Black" is Faulkner's most eloquent evocation of human pain, and since Rider is a working man, a strong physical presence, Faulkner gives us his Herculean rage in graphic imagery: "flinging the dirt with that effortless fury"; "handling himself at times out of the vanity of his own strength logs which ordinarily two men would have handled with canthooks"; "the man [Rider] moving almost as fast as a horse could have moved"; "rode the log down the incline, balanced erect upon it in short rapid backward-running steps" and a closing sequence from jail, "throws the cot against the wall and comes and grabs hold of that steel barred door and rips it out of the wall, bricks hinges and all, and walks out of the cell toting the door over his head like it was a gauze window-screen" (133–53). Before the anguish of loss, however, Faulkner has been equally descriptive about the dailiness of the couple's happy life, fueled with the good money Rider is capable of earning. A common Saturday for Rider and Mannie involves the following:

The first hour would not have passed noon when he would mount the steps and knock, not on post or doorframe but on the underside of the gallery roof itself, and enter and ring the bright cascade of silver dollars onto the scrubbed table in the kitchen where his dinner simmered on the stove and the galvanized tub of hot water and the baking powder can of soft soap and the towel made of scalded flour sacks sewn together and his clean overalls and shirt waited, and Mannie would gather up the money and walk the half-mile to the commissary and buy their next week's supplies and bank the rest of the money in Edmonds' safe and return and they would eat once again without haste or hurry after five days – the sidemeat, the greens, the cornbread, the buttermilk from the well-house, the cake which she baked every Saturday now that she had a stove to bake in. (134)

In this single sentence, the author conveys the pace of the pairs' satisfaction with their living. Then in contrast to this tranquil rhythm, Rider bereaved is Rider without breath. As he hyperventilates, his distorted sense of himself becomes jagged: he "just can't quit thinking" (154) and after burying his

wife, he disappears into the forest for his pre-death meditation. His death comes less than three days later, after he has found a way to murder the crooked white overseer-dealer, and then is hanged by that man's relatives.

Rider's vision of Mannie walking in their house is one of the unsettling effects of her death, but his grief is not other-worldly. It is, rather, of a piece with the sorrow that stems from his all-too-human loss. And it ties into the somewhat controversial dedication Faulkner wrote for the novel: "To Mammy/CAROLINE BARR/Mississippi (1840–1940) Who was born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint or calculation of recompense and to my childhood an immeasurable devotion and love" (preface page). To separate this language from the characterization of Ike McCaslin's wife (and Ike himself) in the novel creates a kind of parallel with Faulkner's idealization of Rider and Mannie's love: no calculation of recompense, a love without stint, an immeasurable devotion. "Pantaloon in Black" becomes Faulkner's love letter to the small black woman who reared him, devotedly.

During the decades since the novel appeared, however, decades marked by various periods of race consciousness and gender awareness in the US, the author's dedication to his Mammy has been considered patronizing. For the fullest description of why this dedication was so meaningful to Faulkner (and why he seemed to have no self-consciousness about either the dedication or his giving the burial service for Caroline Barr in his own home), Judith L. Sensibar's *Faulkner and Love* (2009) places the author's growth to thinking more progressively about race – even or especially race in the South – in full context.

Sensibar draws from various psychoanalytic readings of Faulkner as child and then as adult and lover – troubled by his attraction to dark women, distant from more suitable white women – to explain why the early childhood patterns of physical comfort were, for him, raced, and why they gave rise to lamentations. As this biographer explains, Faulkner's "eulogy is central to the argument of this novel. It is part of what transforms *Go Down, Moses* into his first elegy for this black woman, one that mourns a loss he could never consciously acknowledge":

Racialized maternal loss and its devastating effects on identity formation are the ghosts that haunt the psyches of Faulkner's white fictional children and adults. This is a fact that *Go Down, Moses* never lets readers forget. I am using maternal loss here to signify both the loss of the black "mother" and the whole constellation of familial relations that are also destroyed when the white child accepts his education into racism. (90)

Rather than make any attempt to find the model for Rider and Mannie, Sensibar more cogently sees that narrative as the elaboration of Faulkner's pain: just as the character of Caddie in *The Sound and the Fury* was said to

have grown from the image of a young girl with muddy drawers climbing a tree, so Faulkner's great story of loss, absence, and resulting madness may well have grown from the author's private – and certainly non-fictional – grief.

“The Bear” – Part IV

Critics agree that “Pantaloon in Black” was among the first segments Faulkner wrote for his 1942 novel, and that the added fourth part of “The Bear” (after its original publication as a story) was the last segment – the concluding piece that opened out the riddles and mysteries of the cumbersome narrative and simultaneously answered most of the reader's questions. A complicated tapestry of motifs and tropes, *Go Down, Moses* touched the sins of the white South while it etched patterns of the violations of the black South. As Hans Skei had pointed out in the 1990s, “The strength of Faulkner's best short stories [‘The Bear’ and its fourth section] is their combination of the realistic, detailed everyday world, *and* the sudden, at times epiphanic, experience of the self in a much larger context” (65). As Ike reads the almost illegible ledger, what most critics assume is the master narrative for the novel, his tenuous progress through the barely disguised “facts” of the McCaslin history becomes the reader's own hesitant progress to understanding. The reader thus parallels Ike's coming to that same horrific knowledge.

The iconic character that supports our first tentative, then angry, reading of the ledger is Eunice, Tomasina's mother, who eventually commits suicide. In *Go Down, Moses*, her never-expressed story creates a scaffolding for the “Delta Autumn” woman's equally poignant dialogue with Ike McCaslin – as well as for much else. Bereft of language, Eunice's behavior translated by others into the sub literate expression within the ledgers, still managed to serve notice to the white patriarchy that her days of servitude were over. Her silence condemned the actions she saw around her. Like Rider, Eunice insisted by her death that she would no longer accept other people's narrative in place of her own.

Following feminist readings of Faulkner's works, the character of Eunice became key to the impact of the novel as a whole. But as critic Minrose Gwin has written so authoritatively, *Go Down, Moses* in all its parts continuously avoids definitive statements. Faulkner's “gaps” are consistently linked with the African American women characters.⁶ For all the brilliance of the author's achievement in the novel, Gwin ends her essay with apt questions, based on her lack of success as reader in filling in those troublesome gaps:

I am still wondering what Tennie Beauchamp was thinking when she watched Hubert Beauchamp's unnamed mistress get sent packing down the road. I would like to learn what young Molly Beauchamp held in her mind when she was nursing those two babies, and whether Tomasina

ever knew why her mother drowned herself. I want to know if Nat ever got her porch and well. I want to know the "Delta Autumn" woman's name. (96)

During the 1980s and the 1990s, partly because of feminism, critics accepted the powerful recasting of the McCaslin history that Part four of "The Bear" made possible. But then, as if the ease of agreement about the convolutions of Faulkner's novel – centered as it was in the shadowy silences connected with the lives of both Eunice and Tomasina – was somehow in itself offensive, Noel Polk and Richard Godden began unpacking the contents of the scenes in which Ike read the ledgers. As Polk describes their work in 2002:

We argued that Isaac's reading of those family ledgers is in fact a deliberate if not completely conscious *misreading*, a *misinterpretation* of a document that provides him the excuse he needs to renounce. It's a misreading 'not completely conscious' because of a crucial fact about his father that he tries to but cannot suppress from his reading, a fact both hidden and revealed in the ledgers. (164)

Polk and Godden's contention is that the brothers Buck and Buddy are linked through their homosexuality – and their homosexual relationship, as evinced in the narrative about Percival Brownlee, the homosexual slave Buck had purchased (165). In their reading, the McCaslin name is better defended through a screen of miscegenation than it is through queer behaviors, and therefore Ike grasps onto what would still be excused as honorable history in southern eyes.

John T. Matthews' assessment as late as a decade ago was that critics were not even yet claiming a stable "place" for *Go Down, Moses* in the *oeuvre* of Faulkner's writing. Faulting the novel for what he terms its "garrulity," finding that its narrative complexity "seems to overwhelm it," Matthews yet insists that the centrality of the title story, "Go Down, Moses," with its chronicle of Butch's death, funeral, and – throughout – victimization, is truly the core image of the novel (21). This short story provides, in Matthews' words, "Faulkner's studied conviction that economic exploitation and racial oppression composed a double coil around the modern South" (25). By providing a complementary grid, an economic one, for interpreting the crimes of slavery, Matthews helps to broaden the appeal of *Go Down, Moses*, and move it from a historical commentary into the twenty-first century in ways that only enhance the power of Faulkner's 1942 novel.

Appearing as it does on many graduate school reading lists, taught in countless literature courses that combine stylistics with race theory, included nearly always in lists of the "great" Faulkner novels, *Go Down, Moses* has won a great deal of critical acclaim in its almost seventy years of existence. The irony of its changing critique is, at least in part, that the

text itself – like its author’s intention – has never undergone change. What *Go Down, Moses* speaks to is the need for readers to recognize, and attempt to right, implicit and explicit injustice when it appears in the language (or, perhaps, in the silences) of Faulkner’s unforgettable characters.

Notes

1. Besides the disappointment over its form (still just “stories” said Malcolm Cowley in his *New Republic* review for June 29, 1942, p. 90), critics complained about “sentimentality” (Kate O’Brien, *Spectator*, October 30, 1942, p. 418), about Faulkner’s obvious “artistic exhaustion” (Philip Toynbee, *New Statesman and Nation*, October 31, 1942, p. 293), and about his usual emphasis on “miscegenation, rot, murder, and ruin” (John Temple Graves, *Saturday Review*, May 2, 1942, p. 16).
2. King illustrates this premise by differentiating between Ike McCaslin and Quentin Compson, pointing out that the McCaslin family is “fundamentally flawed.” It has not grown weak, as has the Compson’s; it remains “still too strong.” The phrase “Fathers will” can be read many ways (152); to this the Morris’s reading of this novel as well as of *Absalom, Absalom!* emphasizes that “sins of racial violence are supplementations of the primal sin against the father, the violation of the prohibition of sexual union with the (m)other. Racism is a version of paternalism” (231).
3. During the 1980s and 1990s, extensive criticism was published about the roles women play in the novel as a whole (see Gwin, Roberts, Muhlenfeld, Sensibar, Wagner-Martin, and others).
4. Written to close the new fourth part of “The Bear,” the brutal narration of Ike’s unnamed wife’s use of sex to bribe him to accept his family property is one of the most chilling scenes of *Go Down, Moses*.
5. Louis Rubin, Jr., recognizes that Ike’s relinquishment of his property is “a retreat from involvement in the world” (88); Daniel Hoffman says bluntly “the blacks in Yoknapatawpha county are capable of qualities of love unattained by the whites” (134); Leon Forrest ties the difference between the character of Rider in his grief and Ike in his nostalgia about memories of grief to Faulkner’s “willingness to confront the racial agony of the South, and to eloquently lift this travail to stage center” (212).
6. There is extensive commentary on Lucas’ role in “The Fire and the Hearth” over Molly’s playing the wet nurse to Zack Edmonds’ child Roth as well as to her own. Here Lucas is featured as black man subordinated to all white men: this lengthy section, however, pays scant attention to Molly as character.

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9

Time, Space, and Resistance: Re-Reading George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Lawrence Phillips

If, having fixed the original form in our mind's eye, we ask ourselves how that form comes alive and fills with life, we discover a new dynamic and vital category, a new property of the universe: reverberation.

Eugène Minkowski, *Vers une Cosmologie* (1936)

It has long been a critical commonplace to observe that the narrative environment of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948) is strongly influenced by the 'blitzed' landscape of immediately post-war London, and then little critical attention is paid to the subtle contribution of narrative setting, place and space in the novel. The temptation within such readings is often to simplify what is a rich and complex novel – a risk perhaps of being identified with the dystopian genre – particularly so in the way place and environment convey an, albeit ambivalent, promise of hope that carefully tugs against the devastating re-education of Winston Smith and the closet rebel Julia. This critical stance is exemplified in Bernard Bergonzi's observation that it is a 'limitation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that it cannot be read out of the context of its origins in the way that *Animal Farm* (1945) can' (100). George Woodcock takes this contextual emphasis further by directly relating Orwell's wartime experience of London to the novel:

But in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, with true polemic genius, Orwell made a virtue of his weakness of invention by setting the dread world of the future in an even more decayed version of the wartime London in which he and I walked in the last decades of his life. There are the rundown, unrepaired 1930s blocks of flats, the tumbling shored-up buildings, the vacant lots with fireweed, the rockets unpredictably crashing down, and even, served in the canteen at the Ministry of Truth, a stew with 'amongst its general sloppiness, cubes of a spongy pinkish stuff that might have been a preparation of meat,' which astonishingly resembled a wartime dish that

Orwell and I and some of our friends would eat when we went for lunch to the Bodega in Fleet Street. (24)

By emphasising the verisimilitude of setting and experience, Woodcock also ties the novel remorselessly to context but takes this strategy of limitation further by introducing a biographical element. In turn, he feels the need to acknowledge technical flaws in Orwell's 'invention'. Both Bergonzi's and Woodcock's observations carry the implication that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is at the very least a flawed and, in comparison to *Animal Farm*, the lesser work. Ironically, Orwell has even been criticised for an inaccuracy of context, a lack of alignment of the novel with 'the historical and political circumstances to which it alludes' (Sinfield, 101). But in a novel that presents a society predicated on control – of people, ideas, and history – the incompleteness of the control of space is perhaps a surprisingly consistent feature of the narrative alongside a comparable inability to effectively limit the potential of memory. These tactics, I will argue, are acts of desperation, of panic rather than a vista of totalising control; the state apparatus of INGSOC exists to repress the consequences of a fractured and imprecise impression of control rather than to signal its completeness and the hopelessness of resistance. Moreover this limited control is carefully replicated within the narrative. This promises more than a second-rate dystopia defined by and limited to its historical context. Instead, what emerges is a novel of aesthetic complexity and subtlety evident from the fascinating manipulation of narrative and narrated space.

Of course any text has encoded within it author experience but it is an abstracted experience that is no longer defined by its original experiential context even if that were absolutely recoverable in the first place. Likewise, while context is significant it is also abstracted within the text, it cannot be the absolute limiting factor of art; there is always a facet of the text that defies such definition. This is, no doubt, why Henri Lefebvre writing from a solid Marxist-materialist tradition distrusts the literary text in his discussion of the production of space:

Clearly literary authors have written much of relevance, especially descriptions of places and sites. But what criteria would make certain texts more relevant than others? . . . The problem is that any search for space in literary texts will find it everywhere and in every guise: enclosed, described, projected, dreamt of, speculated about. What texts can be considered special enough to provide the basis for a 'textual analysis'? (15)

Yet literary texts are *representations* of space as much as they are representations of context and therein lies the problem for Lefebvre. A representation considered as an abstraction, or a discourse, or metaphor even, sits uneasily within a materialist philosophy. This is why Lefebvre is as equally

discomforted by the conceptual gap that opens up with the inevitable relationship between conceptual space and actual space: 'The quasi-logical presupposition of an identity between mental space (the space of the philosophers and epistemologists) and real space creates an abyss between the mental sphere on one side and the physical and social spaces on the other' (6). Lefebvre articulates from a different perspective a notion that is also troubling Bergonzi and Woodcock; by seeking to define *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by historical or biographical context they neatly sidestep dealing aesthetically with a problematic, thence challenging, text. The 'abyss' identified by Lefebvre is, arguably, where art unfolds a status that both Bergonzi and Woodcock would deny *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – in terms of 'limitation' (Bergonzi), or 'weakness of invention' (Woodcock) – by perusing its social and historical context. However, the linguist Paul Werth observes that 'conceptual space is modelled on actual space' and 'this concerns our mental representations of places and routes; finding our way through the physical world reported by our senses must depend on mental maps' (7). This is a conundrum interrogated through *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Not only is this a challenge to the reader in terms of the London of the text, or a naive belief in the factual nature of history and an overstated sense of the power of surveillance, but the very basis of the struggle between Winston Smith and the Party who are engaged in a battle of definition between mental space and 'real' space; or the 'mental sphere on the one side and the physical and social spaces on the other'. This discursive struggle encompasses each of these arenas: the Party seeks to control epistemological space through its control of the historical record (Winston counters by asserting memory), physical space through the panoptic power of the view screen (Winston counters by hiding, stealth and evasion), and social space by seeking to control the social interactions of Party members at least (which the love between Winston and Julia effectively subverts). It is a struggle though rather than a foregone conclusion because as much as the forces aligned against Winston seem formidable, the totality of those forces is severely limited even if they triumph at the conclusion of the novel.

Indeed, it is worth considering on whose terms that triumph takes place. It is a presiding irony of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that when Winston decides to commit a physical act of defiance it is through the initiation of a diary. This first act is of course both the beginning of the novel but really the beginning of the end for Winston. The physical committing of the act draws him remorselessly into the clutches of the Party. The novel is not, then, the story of Winston's rebellion but of his capture. Given that he is thirty nine and it is clear that he has harboured doubts about the 'truth' asserted by the Party for some considerable part of those thirty nine years, this is a story about the end of a successful period of rebellion if success is to be measured by the evasion of detection and capture. Winston has been left free to think what he will for the vast majority of his life. By contrast, the beginning of his end

is quite deliberately calculated as he reflects after writing repeatedly on the page, 'DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER':

He could not help feeling a twinge of panic. It was absurd, since the writing of those particular words was not more dangerous than the initial act of opening a diary, but for a moment he was tempted to tear out the pages and abandon the enterprise altogether. He did not do so, however, because he knew that it was useless. Whether he wrote DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER, or whether he refrained from writing it, made no difference. Whether he went on with the diary, or whether he did not go on with it, made no difference. The Thought Police would get him just the same. (20–1)

What is intriguing about this passage, and Winston's decision to start a diary, is that it is a conscious act. Knowing the consequences he chooses to start the diary and, defying his panic, continues with it. Starting the diary does make a difference as he exercises choice; much like later it is clearly he who has captured the attention of Julia and O'Brien. While he goes on to reflect that 'thoughtcrime was not a thing that could be concealed for ever', he had done so for many years. While choosing not to acknowledge the decision to himself – indeed, he prefers to reflect he would have been captured anyway – the initiation of the diary is an open act of defiance in a way that his unexpressed thoughts were not. This is not solely because the diary and his writing are a physical artefact; it is a text that embodies an alternative discursive space to that dominated by the Party. It provides an independent means for Winston to structure and focus his thoughts, in Werth's terms a 'mental map'. Moreover such maps 'are built up not only from what we can perceive . . . but also on our memory of previous occasions, our knowledge of similar situations, and inferences that we can draw between all of these sources' (7). Winston has initiated a thought process to coalesce his ideas, memories, and interpretation of the physical manifestation of the discursive world around him.

Diaries have a contentious relationship to formal history. The former, by definition, are an impressionistic, subjective record of near events that includes factual material. The latter is typically presented as an objective interpretation of factual events and information. Winston's choice of a diary brings this apparent opposition to the fore. Contrasted with his job of falsifying the factual record of the past, his diary gives prominence to memory and feelings. Moreover, while his feelings are near events as he is only now exploring them, his memories are not since he most powerfully dwells upon his childhood. This is therefore a diary of emotions; an emotional history to counter the Party's manufactured past. Yet Winston's dedication to the diary reveals an only limited conceptual understanding of his actions: *'To the future or the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are*

different from one another and do not live alone – to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone' (28; italics original). What is done cannot be undone; merely the record of it can be expunged. On the one hand Winston has stumbled upon the limits of the Party's control of the past when confronted with memory, but then reveals himself to be very much a product of the Party's ideological training in his belief that the truth, meaning, is immutable. While he notes the loss of structure – 'You remembered huge events which had quite probably not happened, you remember the detail of incidents without being able to recapture their atmosphere, and there were long periods to which you could assign nothing, (32) – nothing the Party could muster has quite the profundity of the memories of his mother which the discipline of the diary enables him to reassemble sketchy as they might be. Yet the diary is not the only structuring principle available to Winston. While the names of countries had been changed and the borders on maps redrawn, 'London, he was fairly certain, had always been called London' (32). It is significant then that emergent memories of his mother are very much conditioned by their location in London:

One of his early memories was of an air raid which appeared to take everyone by surprise. Perhaps it was the time the atomic bomb had fallen on Colchester. He did not remember the raid itself, but he did remember his father's hand clutching his own as they hurried down, down, down into some place deep in the earth, round and round a spiral staircase which rang under his feet and which finally so wearied his legs that he began whimpering and they had to stop and rest. His mother, in her slow, dreamy way, was following with his baby sister – or perhaps it was only a bundle of blankets that she was carrying: he was not certain whether his sister had been born then. Finally they had emerged into a noisy, crowded place which he had realized to be a Tube station. (33)

The deferred realisation of location in this passage intensifies the disorientation of the event. The child's view of the bizarre descent underground, the panic, the weariness, but the significance of feeling as opposed to factual evidence signifies the importance of the event to Winston. There are no dates and little information other than the mention of the atomic bomb which while intriguing to the reader is a commonplace to Winston. The location, a Tube station being used as an air raid shelter, immediately recalls the use of the deep-cut underground stations in this way during the Second World War, but it is also a generic London space so much so that the child Winston's realisation of where they were is almost banal given the extraordinary disorientation of their journey to the platform level. Yet this shapes the memory into a recognisable activity in an identifiable place from a jumble of emotions. The impressions become a memory in which he can *be* with his family in however fraught and desperate circumstances. The memory

itself, even if quite uninformative viewed factually, is important to Winston on those grounds and is inimical to the aims of the Party. Like the activity of writing the diary, mapping his memories through the fabric of the city stimulates recollection and brings such impressions into focus as memories.

The city itself serves Winston much like the textual discipline of the diary becoming the means to coalesce, shape and focus memory. As Anthony Vidler observes: 'Space . . . has been increasingly defined as a product of subjective projection and introjections, as opposed to a stable container of objects and bodies' (1). The Party has limited control over physical space and virtually no control over subjective, mental, space unless it affects physical behaviour in which case it can be detected, much like the diary the London that surrounds Winston in many respects stimulates and helps codify his thoughts creating a mental map for some of his more significant questions. As well as working in tandem with his text, the diary, to recover memories of his own past, the city also provokes questions about the Party's control of the historical record and thence their version of the past. Winston's view from the window of his flat early in the novel sets the terms for this questioning:

Winston kept his back turned to the telescreen. It was safer, though, as he well knew, even a back can be revealing. A kilometre away the Ministry of Truth, his place of work, towered vast and white above the grimy landscape. This, he thought with a sort of vague distaste – this was London, chief city of Airstrip One, itself the third most populous of the provinces of Oceania. He tried to squeeze out some childhood memory that should tell him whether London had always been quite like this. Were there always these vistas of rotting nineteenth-century houses, their sides shored up with baulks of timber, their windows patched with cardboard and their roofs with corrugated iron, their crazy garden walls sagging in all directions? And the bombed sites where the plaster dust swirled in the air and the willow-herb straggled over the heaps of rubble; and the places where the bombs had cleared a larger patch and there had sprung up sordid colonies of wooden dwellings like chicken-houses? But it was no use, he could not remember: nothing remained of his childhood except a series of bright lit tableaux occurring against no background and mostly unintelligible. (8–9)

On the one hand this passage seems to support Woodcock's proposition that Orwell relied heavily on the ruins of post-war London for his setting, and certainly the shored-up houses, the gaps left by the bombs and even the shanty towns that had been built in response to the immediate post-war housing crisis are present. The precise detail of the willow-herb (*Epilobium angustifolium* or fireweed) which thrives on ground subjected to fire adds to this impression. However, the purpose of the passage is not to reinforce

this resonance for the reader. The propaganda of the Party is based on an insistence of constant material progress since the revolution. The city that confronts Winston belies this assertion. While the Party may be dedicated to obsessively rewriting the recorded record, the material world around Winston prompts the equally insistent question: 'has it always been quite like this'. The idea of decay is simply inimical to the Party line but out of the window here it is. Moreover, London offers a physical record of buildings that pre-date the Party's revolution such as the 'rotting nineteenth-century houses' and 'sagging garden walls' which are still in use. Winston's block of flats, Victory Mansions, is itself part of this pre-revolution fabric and visibly crumbling. The material spaces around Winston and every other inhabitant of the city force a consciousness of decline in dramatic contrast to the Party line. Thence the need for *doublethink* of course, but that need is little more than a reflection of the contradiction that is the condition of existence in INSOC's London. It also clearly does not work otherwise Winston confronted with the view of the city from his window would not try 'to squeeze out some childhood memory': it makes him think. As Frederic Jameson argues: 'the ideal schizophrenic's experience is still one of time, albeit of the eternal Nietzschean present. What one means by evoking its spatialization is rather the will to use and to subject time to the service of space' (154). The 'time' of the Party's history exists as pure abstraction, as pure text, and thus eminently and perpetually malleable; a past continually rewritten according to the dictates of the present. The only way to manage the perpetual contradictions this creates is the schizophrenic practice of *doublethink*. Time articulated *in* space, grounded in the material, is a direct challenge. To recall Werth, this encourages a 'mental map' built up not from what is perceived but what is remembered which forces the need for knowledge. Winston's perception of the physical age of the city and his sense of its palpable decay initiates the demand on his memory which, while not immediately responsive, ultimately brings to the surface of his consciousness his family in a pre-revolution London seeking shelter in the city's Tube system.

The city also exerts an attraction of the Party's own making. Alongside the crumbling fabric of the city there exists the relative scarcity of the basic necessities of urban life which in Winston's case leads to the purchase of the diary: 'He had seen it lying in the window of a frowsy little junk shop . . . and had been stricken immediately by an overwhelming desire to possess it. Party members were supposed not to go into ordinary shops ("dealing on the free market", it was called), but the rule was not strictly kept, because there were various things . . . which it was impossible to get hold of in any other way' (11). Yet by tacitly allowing members of the Party to traverse the city through necessity rather than simply look upon it as a passive landscape, the power of the city space to encourage questioning and thence memory is immeasurably enhanced. By traversing the city, Winston and his colleagues gain some measure of the relative freedom of the proles. This everyday

experience of the city embodies (quite literally) the potential for resistance to and subversion of constraint and control. As the French academic Michel de Certeau argues in his influential study of space and everyday life:

The ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below,' below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmanner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness. The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other. (93)

Much of what de Certeau suggests as the urban experience, of networks, moving and intersecting contradict a society predicated on control and surveillance. The lived experience of the city is one of creation, of giving meaning through practice, patterns the Party fitfully tries to disrupt through air raids. It is a catalyst for encoding Winston's own jumbled recollections into the shape of memory.

The need to venture into the city leads Winston to the diary and thence his deliberate material rebellion. And he is persistently drawn back, most notably in search of other memories from the time before the eternal present of the Party. This draw recalls Ferdinand Braudel's famous observation that, 'Towns are like electrical transformers. They increase tension, accelerate the rhythm of exchange and ceaselessly stir up men's lives' (382). As a result, Winston is stirred up enough to seek out an exchange of memory and experience with the proles, those 'ordinary practitioners' to whom the Party is a less overt controlling mechanism. Constantly fed an exceptionally insipid machine-manufactured popular culture, pornography, alcohol, and the selected assassination of those showing leadership potential, their potential is considerably dampened but it remains a leitmotif of Winston's rebellion, '*If there is hope*' he writes in his diary, '*it lies in the proles*' (64; italics original). Conscious that 'Within twenty years at the most . . . the huge and simple question, "Was life better before the Revolution than it is now?" would have ceased to once and for all to be answerable' (83), Winston once again ventures into the city and enters a prole pub and engages in conversation with an old man in an attempt to both access the memory of the past held by the proles and to act on his faith in them. It is not a success. For one thing it is apparent that Winston has a complete inability to modify his

spoken register, an outcome of the effective separation, and thence alienation, of the classes that the identification of inner and outer Party members and the proles represents. For another, his job falsifying the official record while on the one hand egregious also makes him an intellectual. To falsify history one has to be something of an historian which determines how he frames his questions – completely over the head of the old man – and leads to frustration with the result that: ‘A sense of helplessness took hold of Winston. The old man’s memory was nothing but a rubbish-heap of details. One could question him all day without getting any real information. The Party histories might still be true, after a fashion: they might even be completely true’ (82). Yet what Winston describes is exactly the nature of his own memories. The old man’s ‘mass of details’ are triggered by specific experiences in identifiable places. The word ‘lackey’ triggers the memory of an incident in Hyde Park; another about the class arrogance of the wealthy provokes another on ‘Boat Race night’ in Shaftsbury Avenue (81–2). Expecting a fully-formed historical narrative, Winston misrecognises lived experience as memory made comprehensible by city locations much like the memory of his family sheltering in the Tube station. Time and patience would elicit the information he wants, but he lacks the ability and arguably the conceptual framework either to recognise or interpret the information he has gathered. Thanks to the importance the Party places in the historical record as a means of controlling the past, present and future he is unable to recognise a counter discourse based on memory even though his own practice, his rebellion, begins to map one.

What he fails to see in others he continues to demonstrate in his own process of memory recovery and questioning actuated by the city. A potent textual symbol of this is the significance of the nursery rhyme ‘Oranges and Lemons’ triggered by Winston’s recognition of a city building, the church St Clement Danes, represented in a picture hanging in the room over Mr Charrington’s shop. In fact it is Charrington who provides the first two lines of the rhyme that so fascinates Winston: ‘Oranges and lemons, say the bells of St Clement’s/You owe me three farthings, say the bells of St Martins’ (88). As we learn later Mr Charrington is a member of the thought police and this is part of a strategy of enticement that will lead to Winston and Julia’s arrest as was, no doubt, the earlier sale of the diary. Yet, as already noted, Winston, even if only subconsciously, has chosen to give his dissent material form so this process is oddly consensual. This does not diminish the symbolic import of the rhyme. It is, of course, already an encoded collective memory, or perhaps more specifically, a manifestation of a form of folk history. It is itself a mental map embodying a social network built around the City of London’s medieval churches and it is a consciousness of this – even if the original meaning in unlikely to be accessible to Winston – that draws him to it. Misrecognising this in the old man’s reminiscences, he does seem to have learnt something significant from the

encounter. He is grasping at a social network, an encoded memory, from a pre-Revolutionary London:

Winston wondered vaguely to what century the church belonged. It was always difficult to determine the age of a London building. Anything large and impressive, if it was reasonably new in appearance, was automatically claimed as having been built since the Revolution, while anything that was obviously of an earlier date was ascribed to some dim period called the Middle Ages. The centuries of capitalism were held to have produced nothing of any value. One could not learn history from architecture any more than one could learn it from the books. Statues, inscriptions, memorial stones, the names of streets – anything that might throw light upon the past had been systematically altered. (88)

There is something instinctual about Winston's attraction to the rhyme. It is what it stands for as a synecdoche for an entire lost way of life in the city, rather than the recovery of its absolute meaning 'that might throw light upon the past'. The material history embodied in architecture and the city's street grid ultimately preserves more than the rewritable textual history. It anchors encoded memories like the rhyme or people's memories. In this the rhyme is the textual equivalent of the pre-Revolutionary buildings. Instinct also informs Winston's attraction to Charrington's room: 'the room awakened in him a sort of nostalgia, a sort of ancestral memory. It seemed to him that he knew exactly what it felt like to sit in a room like this, in an arm-chair beside an open fire with your feet in the fender' (86). Instinct is of course pre-rational and an open rebellion against the discursive (ir) rationality that the Party dominates. It is also the initial basis of Winston's and Julia's relationship, first as sex and then their self-identification as a couple. Indeed, one might unfetter Raymond Williams' phrase (which owes something to Orwell's writing) and observe that Winston has identified a structure of feeling in the texts (in de Certeau's sense) and fabric of the city.

Of course the symbolic weight of the rhyme is Janus-faced since Winston never learns of the children's game that attends the singing of the song. A group of children decide to play 'Oranges and Lemons'. Two children become the 'chopper' by holding hands and forming an arch. They secretly decide which one of them is 'Oranges' and which one is 'Lemons'. The other children go through the arch in a line, circling round behind the arch, and going through again, singing the rhyme as they go. At the last line of the rhyme the 'choppers' bring their arms up and down in a chopping motion over each child that goes through. The game can get quite nerve-racking for the children at this point, and they often run through as fast as they can. The child caught in the middle at the last word of the rhyme is out. This is of course a parable of the 'game' that Winston has entered with the Party and anticipates his eventual capture. Significantly it is O'Brien, his future

torturer/re-educator, who completes the stanza that Mr Charrington, the agent of the thought police, begins. His 'Yes, I knew the last line' (158) signals he foresees the end of the game. However, it is a game that Winston has entered willingly. So has Julia by abandoning her policy of transient rather than permanent relationships. Like the child playing out the rhyme, they are caught by being tethered, caught in the middle as the last word of the rhyme is out. Goldstein's book operates in this way as well by finally giving Winston what he wants; an explanation of the 'system' encoded in the medium, formal social history, that he has internalised. In this respect, the immobility of the flat above Mr Charrington's shop is on the one hand their doom, but by exercising choice, by choosing to give material expression to a rebellion they had been harboured internally for years, it is also a kind of martyrdom. Once taken up by the apparatus of the Party the remainder of the novel is a remorseless lesson in physical and psychological torture and it is this that conditions memory of the novel as a whole. Yet by ignoring the conscious and deliberate physical rebellion of Winston, by allowing the destruction of Winston's identity to determine the implication of the novel is to ignore the potential for hope that it also embodies. By choosing this path he and Julia enact a ritual which reasserts a life in the city based on memory and association rather than domination and control. This iteration is ultimately suppressed, but the iterative capacity of the process itself, ensures that in its repetition it still survives. The Party has failed to eradicate the threat, it merely contains it. Mr Charrington's shop must be one of many forms of trap the Party maintains in the city on the off-chance of snaring those of the Party who are drawn into the city by choice or necessity and become 'ordinary practitioners' writing their stories through the city. While Winston and Julia are captured, how many more remain walking the city? So long as people are drawn into the city by necessity, or memories, or just to escape, the process will continue. It may not of itself overturn the Party, but it ensures that its rule of objective *and* subjective, material *and* abstract space is not complete. Ultimately, the city encodes in its street plan and palimpsest of buildings a form and structure of life that was not created by the Party. Despite the looming totalitarianism of the towering ministry buildings, so long as its streets are walked, so long as people are both actually and symbolically in motion tracing the text of the city, they remain in de Certeau's words, 'below the thresholds at which visibility begins' and beyond Big Brother's myopic gaze.

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10

Lucky Jim: The Novel in Unchartered Times

Nicola Allen and Wasfi Shoqairat

Kingsley Amis' satire on academic life, *Lucky Jim* (1954) was published at a time of almost unprecedented and (as yet) never repeated social upheaval in Britain. Clement Attlee's landslide Labour victory in 1945 had led to the introduction of a comprehensive program of reform, including the introduction of the National Health Service, child benefit and old age pensions, an increase in the amount of social housing and the nationalisation of several of Britain's industries. His government also presided over the decolonisation of a large part of the British Empire. This transformation of British society was intended to be profound; the labour party manifesto of 1945 states that 'The nation needs a tremendous overhaul' (Labour Party Manifesto 1945) and changes in the political landscape were soon accompanied by changes in the artistic and cultural life of Britain. The so called 'Angry Young Men' popularised 'kitchen sink' realism as the Modernist era fell into decline. David Lodge describes this as a struggle between 'contemporaries' (Kingsley Amis, John Braine, Alan Sillitoe etc.) and 'moderns' (William Golding, Iris Murdoch, Lawrence Durrell etc.) and he notes in *Language of Fiction* (1966) that the immediate post-war era represented a debate on 'the meaning of the word 'life'. Lodge explains that 'Life to the contemporary is what common sense tells us it is, what people *do* [. . .] To the modern, life is something elusive, baffling, multiple, subjective' (245).

Lodge places *Lucky Jim* very firmly into the category of a 'contemporary' rather than a 'modern' text, rightly noting that the book prioritises 'common sense' over everything else. Its tag line that: 'nice things are nicer than nasty ones' (140) stands as testament to this thesis. As Lodge argues, however, the book is more than simply an example of the triumph of a 'contemporary' style over a 'Modern' one. Instead, it seems to embody something of the relationship between England's past as a culturally dominant, imperialist force and its uncertain, Americanised, and yet (still) culturally distinct future.

Amis' first novel represents a more sustained engagement with its age than perhaps any of its contemporaries. *Lucky Jim* owes its genesis to the confluence of three epochal moments in Amis' life; firstly Amis's visit in 1946 to

the Senior Common Room at Leicester University, secondly, The Education Act of 1944, and thirdly, the advent of the 'redbrick' university. The first of these events are a matter of personal history, whilst the second and third are of wider, national importance, and were themselves designed to challenge and radicalise the established social order. While these moments in twentieth-century British history form the backdrop for the novel, they are, in fact, rarely explicitly discussed by any of the characters, and yet the underlying structuring principle of *Lucky Jim* is undoubtedly that of a 'fish out of water'. The plot details the life of Jim, a working class grammar-school boy, who has become a university lecturer and is now finding it difficult to make sense of the academic world. Jim is struggling to secure his position at the university, and is finding it almost impossible to develop a personal life away from his working-class 'roots'. He is emotionally blackmailed by Margaret, a fellow lecturer who exploits Jim's naivety and his sense of duty when she fakes a suicide attempt in order to trap Jim into a relationship with her. Jim is also attracted to his boss's son's girlfriend, Christine, but implicitly feels that she is somehow 'out of his reach': 'The sight of her seemed an irresistible attack on his own habits, standards, and ambitions: something designed to put him in his place for good' (39).

The novel encompasses, in almost equal measure, a centuries old practice of English comedic fiction which dates back to Restoration drama and a uniquely twentieth-century, primarily American genre; that of the campus novel.¹ Yet, even though the novel forms a very early version of the genre, it does much to prove itself distinct from its American counterparts. Amis displaying an unwavering, and very stereotypically English preoccupation with issues of class that distinguishes his novel from the rest of its ilk; he switches the focus, and the source of the comedy onto the staff of the history department, rather than the students, and he typically eschews the kind of experimentation that we find in the other most famous 'break-away' example of the genre, Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* (1957), in favour of an English comedic tradition. Blake Morrison quotes Amis in *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s* (1980) describing his novels (in direct opposition to any form of experimentalism) as: 'believable stories about understandable characters in a reasonably straightforward style. No tricks, no experimental foolery' (299). Amis' deliberately anti-experimentation stance distanced him from many of his contemporaries, such as Eva Figs, B. S. Johnson and Christine Brooke-Rose, and yet his typically and deliberately provocative disavowal of experimentation did not prevent Amis from exploring and stretching the novel as a literary form.

Journalist Aida Edemariam also regards Amis' novel as more than an example of one man's insistence on an anti-experimental style; she regards his text as the begetter of an English tradition, proclaiming *Lucky Jim* to be the 'template' for the campus novel's mutations from its American genesis into its British incarnation.² Lodge and Edemariam are not alone in regarding

Lucky Jim as the quintessential British campus novel of the twentieth century. Amis utilises comedy in the novel as a means for delivering his satiric attacks on the university community. He challenges some of the conventions of the form but his novel still constitutes a recognisable 'campus novel'; the action being largely confined to the events that concern a small number of colleagues in the history department at a 'Red Brick' institution.

From a practical point of view, the attractions of the campus for an author wishing to provide the reader with a microcosm of a society that is both complex and in flux are easy to define, Edemariam explains:

It is a finite, enclosed space, like a boarding school, or like Agatha Christie's country-houses (the campus murder mystery being its own respectable sub-genre); academic terms, usefully, begin and end; there are clear power relationships (teacher/student; tenured professor/scrabbling lecturer) – and thus lots of scope for illicit affairs; circumscription forces a greater intensity – revolutions have been known to begin on campuses, though that doesn't seem to have happened for a while. And it's all set against the life of the mind. (Edemariam)

Yet, Amis breaks with many of these conventions despite his novel being an early example of the form. *Lucky Jim* contains only vague references to the students of his campus; they do not form the predominant focus of the social satire. Instead the narrative is especially critical of the senior members of the department, whom he depicts as privileged individuals who endeavour to maintain the academic status quo in their favour through the exploitation of junior colleagues. Academia itself comes under vigorous attack within the novel; Jim ponders his own research, and is unsettled by what he finds there: 'It was a perfect title, in that it crystallized the article's niggling mindlessness, its funereal parade of yawn-enforcing facts, the pseudo-light it threw upon non-problems' (14). The novel refuses pretention to a degree that sometimes leaves even its focalised central character as little more than a target for the novel's biting satirical attacks. Jim is not only uncomfortable in his role as junior academic, he is as aware of his own failings as he is critical of those around him.

The novel is focalised through Jim and he often articulates his frustration with the potential discrepancies that are inherent in the relationship between the cultural practices that are prized by academia (such as a knowledge of Latin or an appreciation of Mozart) and the practicalities of doing a job of work. Jim's basic, yet practical philosophy that: 'nice things are nicer than nasty ones' (140) is set against the rambling, pretentious preoccupations of Jim's boss Professor Ned Welch, who delights in showing up other people's lack of sophistication:

'They made a silly mistake though,' the professor of History said, and his smile, as Dixon watched, gradually sank beneath the surface of

his features at the memory. 'After the interval we did a little piece by Dowland,' he went on; 'for recorder and keyboard you know. I played the recorder, of course, and young Johns . . . played the piano. . . . Well, anyway the reporter chap, must have got the wrong story, or not been listening or something. Anyway, there it was in the *Post* as large as life: Dowland, yes, they'd got him right; Messers Welch and Johns, yes; but what do you think they said then?'

Dixon shook his head. 'I don't know professor,' he said in sober veracity. No other professor in Britain he thought, set such store by being called professor.

'Flute and piano.'

'Oh?'

'Flute and piano; not recorder and piano.' Welch laughed briefly. (1)

These constitute the opening lines of the novel and episodes such as this, (which recur throughout the novel), serve to emphasise Jim's status as an outsider and ensure that the reader is constantly aware of the text's interaction with both the specific changes happening within the post-war education system in Britain, (Jim does not have a familial history of attending university to draw upon, and has to learn as he goes along) as well as a more implicit preoccupation with pondering the nature of societal change. Amis works hard to set the novel up from its opening lines as one in which the reader is also posited as an outsider to the world of his boss (Welch).

In Amis's vision, luck presupposes human attempts at design in such a way that Jim can be supplied with an unlikely happy ending, this in itself may satisfy the reader's human desire to see the 'underdog' triumph; but the book's emphasis on luck (the novel's title reinforces and reminds the reader that Amis is in no doubt about what it is that one needs in order to triumph in the new Britain) leaves the reader uncertain as to how s/he should read Amis' rendering of the triumph of the everyman over the moribund, perverse and supposedly dying 'system' that the Welchs represent. The comedy within the novel usually describes a movement from an oppressively stable world into one of chaos and violence, but interestingly, the narrative voice remains ambivalent towards both worlds. Jim's almost constant hangovers form a handy symbol for his inability to move forward and his painful experiences of the present.

The light did him harm, but not as much as looking at things did; he resolved, having done it once, never to move his eyeballs again. A dusty thudding in his head made the scene before him beat like a pulse. His mouth had been used as a latrine by some small creature of the night, and then as its mausoleum. During the night, too, he'd somehow been on a cross-country run and then been expertly beaten up by secret police. He felt bad. (61)

To put it figuratively (although not poetically) – the new dawn is constantly undermined by the ‘hangover’ from the night before. In *Kingsley Amis* (1989) Richard Bradford describes how *Lucky Jim* contains a narrative which embodies as well as describes a multiplicity which Amis suggests results from the contradictions inherent in an era that attempts to achieve ambitiously liberal and socially progressive levels of social change, whilst preserving a kind of ancient heroic ideal. For Bradford, the novel itself tends to the multiple perspective, and he suggests that the novel seems to struggle to contain more than one competing version of Jim:

It is as though there are two Jims: one inside the narrative, struggling with his own impatience, frustration and feelings of contempt; the other controlling and orchestrating the narrative, ensuring that the reader will share his perspective – on the idiocies of the Welchs and the pretensions of Bertrand and Margaret. (12)

This comment suggests that equally multifarious readings are possible, and the history of the critical attention that the novel has received (being loved and hated in almost equal degree) bears this out. Since its original publication, Amis’s novel has been the subject of much praise, even from those who would, in later years; posit themselves (with Amis’s own agreement) as his opposite numbers politically.³ Gareth Jenkins notes of Amis in the quarterly journal of the Socialist Workers Party: ‘His ear for voices, for mimicry of a certain type of speech, gave his early fiction – particularly *Lucky Jim* – real energy’ (<http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj70/amis.htm>). Eric Jacobs notes in *The Spectator’s* obituary: ‘He was above all quick-minded, verbally agile, terribly funny, a vigorous persecutor of bores, pseuds and wankers and a most tremendous mimic’ (*Spectator*, 28 October 1995, 28).

This praise for Amis and for *Lucky Jim* is tempered, however, by the fact that in his later life, Amis himself, and his most famous text, have (often retrospectively) been subject to sometimes scathing attacks from authors and critics alike. Writing in 2005, Alice Ferrebe suggests in *Masculinity in Male-Authored Fiction, 1950–2000: Keeping it Up* (2005) that Amis’ novel is part of a backward looking trend that only appears ‘new’ when the reader merely undertakes a superficial reading of the text:

In an era of accelerated social change, the text of *Lucky Jim* [. . .] work[s] to reinscribe masculine superiority by inculcating masculine principles of selfhood through [its] narrative technique. This project is amplified by an interpretative community intent upon reading the literary heroes of contemporary works as in some way ‘new’ and excitingly realist, when the values they represent are in fact profoundly traditional and protectionist. (38)

Amis' novel has in recent years come under repeated attacks of Ferrebe's kind by critics who insist upon regarding his fiercely individualist stance as being innately gendered. A. S. Byatt criticises the novel for being both sexist and anti-intellectual: 'I don't see why the campus novel has to consist of farce, I find it baffling' (quoted in Edemariam). Byatt has much more time for what she calls 'true' comedy, in Terry Pratchett's *Unseen University*, or in Lodge's *Nice Work* (1988), which she feels have more respect for a profession based on serious thought. It has similarly been noted by critics such as Dominic Head that the book is not as radical as it might first appear. Head reminds us that Jim's deliberately philistine philosophy that 'nice things are nicer than nasty ones' (140) although intended to represent 'common sense' can easily be regarded as being too simplistic.⁴

In an interview with Edemariam, Lodge defends the novel suggesting that it would be better regarded within the much older British tradition of the pastoral, than alongside its American cousin the campus novel:

This is an older tradition, again. 'I compare it to pastoral,' says Lodge. 'If you think of a comedy such as *As You Like It*, you get all these eccentric characters, all in one pastoral place, interacting in ways they wouldn't be able to do if they were part of a larger, more complex social scene. There's often an element of entertaining artifice, of escape from the everyday world, in the campus novel. Quite interesting issues are discussed, but not in a way which is terribly solemn or portentous. (Edemariam)

Whilst it is disingenuous to forgo or discount the problematic nature of the novel (perhaps especially for female readers), or its almost untenable position as an engagement by a highly educated mind with what amount to philosophical issues in a way that seeks to align itself with a (hypocritically) purely anti-intellectual stance, Lodge is right to defend it as an almost unique example of the resurgence of an older English tradition which seeks to realign elements of the farce with a deliberately anti-experimental, neo-realist style, and which acknowledges its debt to, but ultimately works against both the provincial English and American Campus novels.

In recent years a number of critics have begun to acknowledge a certain duality in the text. Alan Sinfield notes that: 'Lucky Jim (1954) features both subversive irreverence and a fantasy of social advance' (232). It is this duality that seems to be both the cause of the controversy surrounding the text and an integral part of its appeal. In that it manages to encompass both traditional and potentially radical aspects it somehow anticipates the era of Welfare capitalism whilst also looking backwards in certain of its set pieces to the traditional stage farce of previous centuries. It seems to call for a less moribund meritocracy, and in this appears to be in step with contemporaneous socialist movements of the post-war era, whilst all the time it implicitly hints at what the author seems to already believe will be the inevitable

failure of such an ideal. The comedic elements of the book are the key to its success but they also belie the complex, epochal nature of the historical moment of its conception, and chart Amis's (often complex) reactions to the changes that he observes, as well as bearing witness to the author's frustration that amidst so much change, so much remains the same. Jim finds himself in a new university which seems to have eschewed the new meritocracy and rigidly sticks to the old class system:

How had [Welch] become Professor of History, even at a place like this? By published work? No. By extra good teaching? No in italics. Then how? As usual, Dixon shelved this question, telling himself that what mattered was that this man had decisive power over his future. (8)

The novel serves as Amis' own wry acknowledgement of a process that George Orwell describes in *England Your England* (1941) in a somewhat more consolatory tone during the height of bombing during the Second World War:

The country houses will be turned into holiday camps, the Eton and Harrow match will be forgotten, but England will still be England, an everlasting animal stretching into the future and the past and, like all living things, having the power to change out of recognition and yet remain the same. (159)

For Orwell, who was writing whilst 'highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me' (138) the idea of an eternal England, which transcends even the deepest traditions of the privileged English classes, is a possible means of consolidating the emotional fight against the rise of Fascism in Europe. For Amis, this same eternal quality to the traditions of Englishness is a complex issue, and whilst it may be appealing in certain circumstances it also potentially forms a barrier to real social change. In *What Became of Jane Austen? and Other Questions* (1970) Amis suggests that:

The ideal of brotherhood of man, the building of the Just City, is one that cannot be discarded without lifelong feelings of disappointment and loss. But, if we are to live in the real world, discard it we must. Its very nobility makes the results of its breakdown doubly horrifying, and it breaks down, as it always will, not by some external agency but because it cannot work. (207)

Jim's inability to find a reaction that he feels adequately expresses his feelings: 'all his faces were designed to express rage or loathing. Now that something had happened which really deserved a face, he had none to celebrate it with. As a kind of token, he made his Sex Life in Ancient Rome face'

(250) is symptomatic of the text's wider acknowledgement of the uncharted territory that Amis has Jim embark upon.

Sinfield suggests that Amis 'aspired to rise in society rather than to change it' (232) and this is no less true of Jim, but Amis reinscribes this lack of political or collective action in his protagonist in terms of a personal and individualist agenda. The novel suggests that since Jim finds himself in a world that will not provide him with the order and justice that he has been promised, then the resulting sense of individualism that this induces will have to suffice as a means of rebellion. Amis suggests that Jim often seeks a community that he feels he can belong to, and perhaps would become involved in some sort of collective action should the opportunity arise; though his redistributionism remains politically vague, he does counter Bertrand's right wing attacks on 'soak the rich' policies with the comment, 'If one man's got ten buns and another's got two, and a bun has got to be given up by one of them, then surely you take it from the man with ten buns' (51). Jim fails to find a peer group that will accept him however; until Gore-Urquhart and Christine Callaghan rescue him from his isolation at the academe. Whilst Jim shares a taxi home with Christine, Amis reveals to the reader the level of isolation that Jim habitually feels. The taxi ride provides Jim with a level of human contact which is so unfamiliar to him that he can not quite believe it is real. As Christine falls asleep resting on Jim's shoulder it is not only his desire for her that fuels his initial incomprehension of the situation, but rather a general lack of human warmth in his day to day contact with his colleagues and peers:

Dixon's heart began to pound a little. He now had all the evidence he wanted that she was there; he could sense her breathing, her temple against his jaw and her shoulder under his hand were warm, her hair smelt of well brushed hair, he could feel the presence of her body. It was a pity it wasn't set off by the presence of her mind. It occurred to him that she's done this merely as a manoeuvre to arouse his desire, and arouse it for no purpose other than somehow feeding her vanity. Then he rejected so familiar and contemptible a notion. . . . More than ever he felt secure: here he was, quite able to fulfil his role. (146)

This passage charts a change in Jim's perception of himself, as he moves from suspecting fraud on the part of Christine: 'It occurred to him that she's done this merely as a manoeuvre to arouse his desire, and arouse it for no purpose other than somehow feeding her vanity' (146) to a comfortable acceptance of his new role (as her partner) which he feels he can fulfil.

In the end Jim does not 'break into' the world of academia, but rather circumvents this world in order to take up a prestigious position working for the famous Gore-Urquhart; a position that Bertrand Welch (the Professor's son) had hoped to secure for himself. However, Christine's uncle, who

reveals a tacit respect for Dixon's individuality and attitude towards pretension, offers Jim the coveted assistant job in London. Jim literally has the last laugh, at the end of the book when he and Christine bump into the Welchs on the street; Jim cannot help walking right up to them, with Christine on his arm, and exploding in laughter at how ridiculous they seem. Gore-Urquhart explains to Jim why he chose him over Bertrand: 'I think you'll do the job all right, Dixon. It's not that you've got the qualifications for this or any other work, but there are plenty who have. You haven't got the disqualifications, though, and that's much rarer' (234). As such, Jim's triumph over the Welchs and his personal 'happy ending' replete with the obligatory 'getting the girl' forms an attack on the world of middle class privilege masquerading as 'culture'.

In this attempt to radicalise the otherwise personal space of the novel, Amis' text is symptomatic of a larger trend. Sinfield explains thus:

Established writers appreciated that they were being challenged [in the 1950s] through class and culture together. In *Encounter* Spender wrote of 'a rebellion of the lower middle brows' (November 1953), and Evelyn Waugh complained about 'the new wave of philistinism . . . grim young people . . . coming off the assembly lines' (December 1955). Somerset Maugham, in the *Sunday Times* in the same month attacked grant-aided students such as the protagonist of *Lucky Jim*: 'They have no manners, and are woefully unable to deal with any social predicament . . . They are scum.' (233)

As a first generation graduate, who finds that his tastes, income and cultural habits do not match his surroundings Jim is pushed to the margins of the academe and has to battle just to stay in the precarious position of junior lecturer, which itself provides very little income and almost no job security. The (limited) social mobility that he feels it is his duty to accept, involves complex emotional responses on the part of the novel's protagonist. In addition to the constant threat that he might be 'thrown out' of the university, and dismissed from his newly elevated social status, Jim also has to fight his own urge to 'run' or to sabotage his own 'success':

If Welch didn't speak in the next five seconds, he [Jim] would do something to get himself flung out without question – not the things he'd often dreamed of when sitting next door pretending to work. He no longer wanted, for example, to inscribe on the departmental timetable a short account, well tricked-out with obscenities, of his views on the Professor of History, the Department of History, medieval history, history, and Margaret and hang it out of the window for the information of passing students and lecturers, nor did he, on the whole, now intend to tie Welch up in his chair and beat him about the head and shoulders with a

bottle until he disclosed why, without being French himself, he'd given his sons French names. (85)

The narrator, here, charts a movement from a fairly 'civilised' revolt in the form of writing inflammatory material to one that is physical and violent but which also relies on the evocation of laughter in the reader. We are reminded that this is no longer what Jim actually wants to do but the exaggerated comedy forms a 'safe' way into an acknowledgement of his desire for rebellion. In the passage above we can see an example of this kind of movement from the sphere of the known into the unknown world of Jim's imagined physical rebellion against his boss. Amis uses laughter and the comedic to offer an alternative world, all be it an imagined one. As the novel progresses Jim's escapades become more outrageous and potentially more damaging to himself until he positively self destructs during the 'Merrie England' lecture. Professor Welch and his friends are devotees of the Merrie England legend,⁵ and Jim's lecture turns into a debunking of the whole concept (a position almost certainly reflecting that of Amis). Jim ends by suggesting in a rather nihilistic tone that:

'The point about Merrie England is that it was about the most un-Merrie period in our history. It's only the home-made pottery crowd, the recorder playing crowd, the Esperanto . . . ' He paused and swayed, the heat, the drink, the guilt at last joined forces in him. (227)

Jim's apparent disregard for the world of academia and the pursuit of a supposedly more 'worthy' type of knowledge, particularly his penchant for rejecting previously revered cultural figures such as Mozart, and his attitude towards Professor Welch, whom he believes has not earned the privileges that he enjoys ('How had he [Welch] become professor of history, even at a place like this? By published work? No. By extra good teaching? No in italics. Then how?' (8)) implicitly links Jim with a more radicalised version of the world.

The laughter that is engendered in the novel allows Amis to produce a space of possibilities which then draws attention to the lack of those possibilities in Jim's 'real' world: as French philosopher Georges Bataille notes: 'In every case when we laugh we pass from the sphere of the known, from the anticipated sphere, to the sphere of the unknown and of the unforeseeable' (Bataille 135). Thus, laughter becomes a weird and wonderful tool – allowing an otherwise almost impossible break from 'the order' but then the question ultimately remains – how much further does an individual want that break to extend? Jim constantly imagines a complete fracture from the reality of his present position only to immediately undermine the possibility of such an escape: 'More than ever it was the moment to dart into the street and fail to return. But economic necessity and the call of pity were a

strong combination; topped up by fear, as both were, they were invincible' (26). Here, it is not just that economic necessity make this desired disappearance unsustainable, Amis reminds us that 'pity . . . topped up by fear' (26) combine to make it too frightening a prospect to realistically consider taking action.

There is then a bifurcation of effect in *Lucky Jim*. Amis's novel appears to represent a world of unprecedented change, whilst simultaneously encompassing the author's feelings of rage, fear and frustration at how little has actually changed. *Lucky Jim*, becomes then a safer outlet for Bataille's insistence that: 'The strangest mystery to be found in laughter is attached to the fact that we rejoice in something that puts the equilibrium of life in danger – we even rejoice in the strongest way' (Bataille 144).

Lucky Jim is nothing if not a safe place in which to articulate an endorsement of this kind of rejoicing at something that puts the equilibrium of life in danger, whilst also encompassing an acknowledgement that this can usually only happen in the imagined space of the novel. Amis notes the importance of this function of laughter in a letter of 19 June 1946 to Philip Larkin:

I enjoy talking to you more than anybody else because I never feel I am giving myself away and so can admit to shady, dishonest, crawling, cowardly, unjust, arrogant, snobbish, lecherous, perverted and generally shameful feelings that I don't want anybody else to know about; but most of all because I am always on the verge of violent laughter when talking to you. (*The Letters of Kingsley Amis* 73)

A comparison with Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pnin* can prove useful here. Nabokov's novel came just one year after *Lucky Jim* and is set in the same calendar year that Amis's text was first published, yet in so many ways it marks a significant departure from Amis' fervently non-experimental stance, and rather peculiarly, despite its insistence upon experimentation as a route out of the provincial novel's potential for stagnation, in itself can be seen in terms of a return to some of the staples of the genre. Chapter 6 of *Pnin* begins with the lines:

The 1954 Fall term had begun . . . Again in the margins of library books earnest freshmen inscribed such helpful glosses as 'Description of nature', or 'Irony'; and in a pretty edition of Mallarmé's poems an especially able scholiast had already underlined in violet ink the difficult word oiseaux and scrawled above it 'birds'. (102)

In his introduction to the Everyman's library edition of *Pnin* (2004) David Lodge describes the passage above as 'a kind of campus novel in miniature' (xiii). He goes on to suggest that 'Aficionados of the campus novel will hug themselves with glee at this beginning. Academic institutions are in a

sense always the same' (xiii) and so, by implication are campus novels; in Nabokov's sketch of university life, it is the students (and in particular their scholarly naivety), rather than the staff, that form the basis of the comedy. These lines create a world for the reader which is easily recognisable and quite carefully stratified. As Edemariam notes, this style persists within the campus novel well into the late twentieth century and beyond:

The details of the scene change; the first paragraph of Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, for instance, is saturated with late 20th-century excess: 'The station wagons arrived at noon, a long shining line that coursed through the West campus . . . students sprang out and raced to the rear doors to begin removing the objects inside . . .' Or, as Malcolm Bradbury put it in the first line of *The History Man*: 'Now it is autumn again; the people are all coming back.' (Edemariam)

The rest of Nabokov's novel forms something of a departure from the stock imagery which is evoked by the lines quoted above. Both *Pnin* and *Lucky Jim* therefore, however radically different they might first appear to be, *Pnin* with its formal and aesthetic experimentalism, and Amis's famous anti-experimental stance, contain passages which would largely fit with critic Bernard Bergonzi's concept of the wider changes that comedy in the novel underwent in the twentieth century:

The tradition of nineteenth-century realism, which underlies most contemporary fiction, depended on a degree of relative stability in three separate areas; the idea of reality; the nature of the fictional form; and the kind of relationship that might predictably exist between them . . . it goes without saying that for many twentieth-century novelists and critics this assumption is no longer credible. (quoted in Bradbury 3)

Amis' text follows the traditional pattern of a comedy based upon realism to a point, and contains the happy ending that Amis felt his readers deserved, but this happy ending is not 'achieved' by virtue of the heroism of the novel's protagonist, rather it is a matter of luck alone. Thus (as Bergonzi suggests twentieth-century novelists often do) Amis subtly destabilises the tradition in which he situates his novel, evoking the easily rationalised world of formulaic comedy, in order to show a mismatch between this and the 'real' world, which he wishes to condemn for its petty snobbishness and inequalities. When Margaret Drabble concludes *A Summer Birdcage* (1963) with the suggestion that it is impossible for her female author protagonist to write a text like *Lucky Jim* (insinuating that this is because she is female and therefore cannot live in the world that the text evokes) Drabble rather misses this element of Amis' text. Surely Amis's text always implicitly suggests that the events of the novel are not

open to anyone living outside of the world of the novel in the first place, regardless of their gender.

Head notes: 'Jim Dixon of course is ill-suited to academia, but operates as an outsider, wreaking comic havoc from within institutional life. [. . .] *A Summer Birdcage* [. . .] gently rebukes the mode of farce, the luxurious option employed by Kingsley Amis' (87). Head suggests that Drabble's text reminds the reader that there is a double standard here that relies upon the idea that Jim has more freedom as a man than Drabble's protagonist, Sarah Bennett, does, as a woman, despite the fact that Sarah is more academically able and is more engaged with her subject than Jim. This in itself relies upon the reader understanding farce in such a way that it becomes almost devoid of anything other than the 'luxurious' comedy that Head refers to.

This stance (taken by Drabble and described by Head) denies the undoubtedly political elements of Amis' farce and unfairly prioritises gender inequality above issues of class. It also refuses to view the novel in its true, complex context. Amis eschews experimentalism in favour of farce, but the novel also contains an acknowledgement of the fact that the formulaic conventions of farcical comedy separate it from the limitations of the 'real world'. Thus, the novel implicitly acknowledges that although the happy ending is essential in order to fulfil the requirements of the form, it in no way expresses a statement about 'real world' possibilities any more than the conventions of sci-fi or any other 'fantasy' genre would. Rather, like these genres, Amis's farce allows for the exploration of ideas that are not presently possible in reality. A 'real world' version of Jim's success is as impossible as Sarah's in *A Summer Birdcage*. Instead of employing farce for purely a-political comedic purposes Amis utilises the formulaic, traditional and deliberately anti-experimental aspects of *Lucky Jim* in order to demonstrate the restorative and maverick options that the traditional (expressly non-experimental) form can offer, the gaps between what is believable and what is not, form a politicised, complex commentary that moves beyond the closure that the conventional happy ending might seem to imply.

Notes

1. Until the 1950s university novels were not that common. Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson*, for example, had appeared in 1911. Yet, with the emergence of a newly educated readership, three such novels appeared in the 1950s and became well known: *The Masters* (1951) by C. P. Snow, *Lucky Jim*, and *Eating People is Wrong* (1959) by Malcolm Bradbury. The campus novel itself was born out of the post-war years, with the publication of texts such as Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1952), Randall Jarrell's riposte to McCarthy's text *Pictures From an Institution* (1954), and Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* (1955), but as a genre it enjoyed a rather short-lived popularity and had declined, in terms of both esteem and the number

- of examples being published by the dawn of the millennium. Amis' choice of a peculiarly American genre is perhaps rather apt, given America's cultural dominance in the post-war twentieth century international sphere
2. See Aida Edemariam's article 'Who's afraid of the campus novel?' *The Guardian*, Saturday 2 October 2004 available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/oct/02/featuresreviews.guardianreview37>
 3. As a young man at Oxford, Amis briefly joined the Communist Party. He later described this stage of his political life as 'the callow Marxist phase that seemed almost compulsory in Oxford'. (See 'Amis's Socialism and the Intellectuals', cited by Leader, 2006, p. 366). Amis remained nominally on the Left for some time after the war, declaring in the 1950s that he would always vote for the Labour Party. (Leader, 2006, p. 366). But he eventually moved further right, a development he discussed in the essay 'Why Lucky Jim Turned Right' (1967); his conservatism and anti-communism can be seen in such later works of his as the dystopian novel *Russian Hide and Seek* (1980)
 4. See Dominic Head's *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950–2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 5. 'Merry England', or in more jocular, archaic spelling 'Merrie England', refers to an English autostereotype, a utopian conception of English society and culture based on an idyllic, pastoral way of life that was allegedly prevalent at some time between the Middle Ages and the onset of the Industrial Revolution.

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11

Six Myths of *On the Road*, and Where These Might Lead Us

R. J. Ellis

Jack Kerouac and *On the Road* (1957) are invested in so many layers of sensationalized myth that it has become difficult to grasp anything about them not shaped by this celebrity. The novel, just like Kerouac's life, has assumed an iconic status, defined by a reputation which derives from a reading that is partial: both incomplete and one-sided. It is a reading that centres upon the book's reputation as an autobiographical text typed out in a spontaneous rush on a continuous scroll of paper, depicting a new life-style, centred upon cars, driving, sexual promiscuity, and the celebration of wild (jazz) music. What more, one might ask, might any reader ask for, in the decades following World War Two, as increasing car ownership, a rise in casual sex and new forms of fast music all insinuated themselves increasingly insistently into the weft and weave of the world's western cultures? This essay wants to explore how this canonical reading feeds on the related myths its themes address, rather than on how the novel carefully deconstructs and interrogates these cultural changes and how it represents performatively post-war identities in change but not transformed. Whilst *On the Road* certainly deals with the sort of post-war speediness that was to lead to Paul Virilio formulating his theory of the ride, the journey, the drive, it is worth recalling the Interstate Highway Act was not passed until 1956 (Virilio, 1986). Things are just not as simple as the dominant, mythologized, speed-based, Wild Western-infused reading of the text suggests. *On the Road's* canonical reputation needs adjusting.

One way of defining this is to examine a widely-syndicated photograph of Kerouac taken by a photographer from *Mademoiselle* magazine just after he came down off Desolation Ridge in the Cascade Mountains, following twelve week's employment in a fire-watch look-out for the Forestry department in 1957. In this photograph Kerouac looks like the very image of a Beat rebel, with his long, dishevelled hair and check shirt. But his appearance was such because he had just returned from his lengthy mountain fire-watch, and the photographer, who had detected the tide of attention flowing towards the Beats, captured a far-from-typical picture of Kerouac. However,

it fitted the growing image of the “Beat rebel” and in particular the way this rebellion was beginning to be constructed in the media – making the Beats ideologically suspect. Indeed, they were soon to be re-christened Beatniks – named after “sputnik” (launched in 1957), in a re-labelling intended to discredit them by associating them with Russian communism. What is hardly ever seen in reproductions of this picture is a large crucifix that Kerouac was wearing (given to him by Gregory Corso at their reunion after his fire-watch interlude). This was – and is – almost always cropped out by editors, since it fails to fit the stereotype of the un-American rebel.

Kerouac was enraged by this censorship, viewing it as a denial of his identity. But his Roman Catholicism failed to fit the media construction of the Beatnik, and was not the reason why this “king of the Beats” was to become lionized. Kerouac was so depressed by his image that it accelerated his decline – indeed, he was eventually reduced to stating that “I can’t stand to meet anyone anymore. They talk to me like I wasn’t me”.¹ I want to delve beneath the mythic representation that flows from this, by critiquing six myths about *On the Road* that help underpin this image.

First, let us take the claim that Kerouac composed the scroll in a rush of inspiration in a process of spontaneous composition, drawing on his incredible memory and fuelled by either coffee (in Kerouac’s own account) or Benzedrine, according to Ginsberg (whom Kerouac sought to refute when making his claim about coffee).² This myth at first seems to stand up well. Kerouac did compose *On the Road* – in his estimate, a novel of 250,000 words – over a twenty-day period in 1951. There are accounts of how Kerouac was soaked in sweat as he typed away on his Underwood (Haverty Kerouac, 2000: 202). But it is worth recalling that Kerouac, as well as being very accurate, was also a lightning fast typist, capable of over 100 words per minute – that is to say, up to 6000 words per hour. Over a twenty day period, going flat out for six hours a day, Kerouac could well have written a novel three times as long. He simply was not typing flat out. In the same way, though he certainly relied heavily upon his acute memory, he additionally drew upon the journals that he had kept during his travels, and he also referred to letters from his friends – particularly Neal Cassady.³

When re-evaluating this first myth, we also need to dismiss the claim that *On the Road* owes its characteristics and genesis to a drug – whether this be caffeine or Benzedrine. Coffee was certainly used to sustain him, and he may possibly have used some Benzedrine – though much less than Allen Ginsberg later implied. But the novel does not owe its genesis primarily to these stimulants; rather it is the product of Kerouac’s preceding hard practice at typing out what he wanted to write swiftly and accurately.

A second myth is that he composed *On the Road* by typing it on a continuous roll of tracing paper so that he never had to break off from typing in order to feed paper into the platen. This myth is standing up poorly. The scroll in fact consists of eight short rolls of tracing paper taped together. It

also seems more probable that he typed out the novel on these eight rolls before they were taped together, using standard sticky-back plastic tape, after he had typed them up. Each separate sheet of the scroll is numbered, and this numbering was most likely added in order to aid the final act of assembling the scroll.⁴ Furthermore, the scroll shows clear signs that Kerouac constantly had to pause to adjust the position of the rolls of paper in the platen. What was going on was far from non-stop typing.

A third myth tells us that Kerouac abhorred making any revisions to the scroll. This is certainly untrue. There are many deletions, crossings out, pencil marks and additions to the scroll. It also seems probable that Kerouac began to retype the scroll on bond before doing anything else – before, even, taking the scroll to a publisher. In other words, Kerouac always recognized that revisions would be needed and he may well have started to do this even as he typed out the scroll.

It is also probably inaccurate to say that as soon as the issue of revision was raised Kerouac would roll up the scroll and stride out of the room. If, as seems probable, the idea of revising the typescript was brought up by Robert Giroux at Farrar Strauss and Giroux, Kerouac did not storm off. The famous meeting was quite long and it is even possible that Kerouac also took a second version of the novel along, already retyped onto ordinary paper (Theado, 2009: 8–34). More important to this meeting was Giroux's lack of conviction concerning the novel's quality – which certainly would have disturbed Kerouac. Perhaps the reason why this myth has taken hold so firmly is that in 1958 and 1959 Kerouac published "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" and "Belief and Technique for Modern Prose", which both make much of the need to compose without after-thinking (Kerouac, 1958; Kerouac, 1959). But both these short reflections on the writing process were published after *On the Road* was released. Both are tainted by hindsight, and refer not to *On the Road* so much as some of the more radical experimentation to be found in, say, *Visions of Cody* (1972), *Old Angel Midnight* (1993) and other work – for example his poetry of this time,⁵ though the original composition of some of these did fall hard on the heels of the scroll's composition.

A fourth myth claims that the final version of *On the Road* is different from the scroll, to which Kerouac had referred when typing out his final version, only because during the final stages of its preparation for publication a whole raft of changes were smuggled through behind Kerouac's back. This seems to be much exaggerated. Some editorial changes of this sort were made – in an inevitable process – and Kerouac led such a peripatetic life-style at the time that the copy-editor, Helen Weaver, found him hard to contact. But it is also true that he was closely involved for most of the time, that Weaver herself felt a substantial allegiance to the integrity of the text upon which she worked, and that Kerouac, in Malcolm Cowley's words "did a good deal of revision, and it was very good revision . . . [though] he would never admit to that".⁶

Fifthly, we must reassess the claim that Kerouac was in search of total honesty and absolute authenticity – a quest leading him to produce a very different way of writing – a “heart-breaking fire ordeal where you can’t go back”, in Kerouac’s own words (Kerouac, 1965: 238). What Kerouac found was that such total authenticity was just not there, available, waiting to be seized. Rather, any such romantic quest was constantly frustrated by a raft of social, personal and publishing constraints, pre-shaping “meaning” so that it constantly had to be re-negotiated. Authenticity, Kerouac found, remained elusive, even mythical, even as he sought to transcribe it.⁷ And the writing mode and narrative constructs that he evolved was just not so totally new.

This is manifest in how even the scroll exhibits a clear structure. *On the Road*’s detailing of four round-trips by Sal interweaves *bildungsroman* and buddy motifs within a picaresque form, pivoting around a vortex-movement, as the description of each trip Sal undertakes becomes progressively more cursory and his friendship with Dean more fraught. Furthermore, Sal’s attempts to find an undefined “IT” fail, and his trips always end in deflated returns to New York. What all this points to is that *On the Road* is a more carefully-structured novel than is generally recognized, operating within recognizable paradigms. Similarly the way it is written owes much to Kerouac’s high regard for Proust and, in particular, Dostoyevsky, not to mention James Joyce. Plainly the influence of *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615) is also substantial, as is that of *Moby Dick* (1851), as *On the Road* explores the insane adventures of a mad[dened] leader and his more cautious companion. Kerouac’s writing style, relatedly, was also not unique but an adaptation, shaped by his encounters with Burroughs’s flattened-out writing style, and the prose directness of the untutored correspondence of Neal Cassady (the latter the more dominant, because of the recent impact of some of Cassady’s correspondence upon Kerouac).⁸ What Kerouac was producing was an amalgamation of various influences – and these influences were legion, as anyone who has seriously studied Kerouac soon recognizes.⁹

Sixthly, we might want to note that (as Oliver Harris has pointed out to me) by referring to the roll of paper on which Kerouac typed out *On the Road* as the “scroll” we mythologize it, for Kerouac himself never used the word, nor did his friends in correspondence with him at the time. The label “scroll” carries with it the connotations of a sanctified and holy text, which is exactly what we are driven to regard it as, so long as we buy into the five myths that I have laid out above.

I must finally concede, however, that there is more than a residue of truth in these six stories: Kerouac may not have been typing flat-out, but the composition of *On the Road* as (more or less) a single paragraph is extraordinary, and when unrolled, as both Ginsberg and Kerouac recognized, it does resemble the road itself unrolling for the reader. Even if not typed out on one continuous 120 foot roll, it was nevertheless typed out in twelve to

twenty feet lengths, as Kerouac explored a new mode of composition: the muscular rush Kerouac sought emerges in the direct and often breathless prose style the scroll helped make possible. It is true that the scroll was to be revised substantially, but it is also true that, given the long lapse of time – from 1951 to 1957 – the differences between the scroll and the published novel are few. Kerouac's editor at Viking, Malcolm Cowley's recognition of the extraordinariness of the writing contributed to this continuity, but even more so did Kerouac's resistance to change. Having conceded this, it is also correct to say that – however "good" Kerouac was at "revision" – Kerouac was also helped by Cowley: some of the changes that emerge between the scroll and the published novel seem to be the work of collaborative discussion between Kerouac, Cowley and perhaps Weaver.

What we end up with, then, is in many ways, a book that is, despite its unusual gestation, more conventional than one would expect, yet also a book that carries more than a trace of its author's visionary typing marathon. It is, if you like, a typescript roll which is also something of a scroll. Yet saying all this does not even begin to scratch the surface of the complexity of the novel's compositional history.

This history complicates any response to *On the Road* – not least because Kerouac worked on the text for such a long period that it became something of a historical novel, so helping Kerouac himself become aware, self-reflexively, of the ways in which, as he revised and added to his 1951 version, markedly different *On the Roads* were coming into being – not only because of his constant rewriting, but also because of what others learned of these and then made over into myths. Kerouac widely broadcast amongst his acquaintances the fact that he had composed the novel in a three-week rush of writing. He also later gave an interview with Alfred Aronowitz published in the *New York Post* on 10 March 1959, which quoted him as claiming that it "took me 21 days to write . . . on one long roll of paper with no periods, no commas, no paragraphs, all single-spaced" (Aronowitz, 1959: 4). This interview is frequently cited at face value, even though the *On the Road* scroll is quite conventionally punctuated. Yet, the extended version of this interview, published in 1970, eleven years after the *Post* first ran the interview, reveals a different story: what Kerouac said in 1959 is, in fact: "I wrote *On the Road* on a roll of Cannastra's drawing paper . . . It was . . . all one big paragraph. I had to retype it so they could publish it. . . . that's the way to tell a story – just tell it!" (Aronowitz, 1970: 103). There is no mention here of punctuation being omitted. Simply put, some punctuation was always present – but in 1959 a myth of spontaneous outpouring was born and still persists. Indeed, some of Kerouac's later alterations show traces of his awareness of how this myth was growing even before the book was published. The addition of the words "exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes 'Awww!' What did they call such young people in Goethe's Germany" (Kerouac, 1957: 9) adds

little to the famous words, “and I shambled after as usual as I’ve been doing all my life because the only people who interest me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones that never yawn, or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like roman candles” (Kerouac, 1952: 113). One can see what Kerouac is doing: adding to Sal’s following of a rambling stream of thoughts a few new meanders evoking spontaneity (when, perhaps, the original sentence needed tightening up, if anything, stripping out such dubiously elitist sentiments as “never yawn, or say a commonplace thing”). Yet *post hoc* diffusion results instead. Kerouac also widely broadcast pre-publication the idea that his publisher had commented that a continuous scroll would be difficult to revise and that this was something he did not want to do (particularly because he believed *The Town and the City* (1950) had suffered from his publisher’s alterations) even as he worked hard at numerous revisions. Alongside this confusing, deceitful self-publicity, the Beats, as a loosely-affiliated group, were gaining fame, and even notoriety, especially by participating in a 1955 reading at San Francisco’s 6 Gallery, contributing to the novel’s growing reputation. By August 1957 the *San Francisco Chronicle* journalist William Hogan was noting the enormous amount of pre-publication attention *On the Road* was receiving (Hogan, 1957: 28). Yet also, between 1951 and 1957, especially at first, the revised writing Kerouac was producing for an expanding *On the Road* was often markedly more experimental than that found in either the scroll or the final version of the novel. John Clellon Holmes recalls how Kerouac at the time was “writing long, intricate Melvillean astonishing sentences obsessed with simultaneously describing the crumb on the plate, the plate on the table, the table in the house, the house in the world” (Holmes, 1968: 78) in the process of trying to capture a line of thought:

[Cody was] estimating how he himself got there, not only the world but the bench, not only the bench but the part of the bench he filled out. Not only that but how he got there to be aware of the saliva and the part of the bench his ass filled out, and so on in the way the mind has; at all of which now because it wasn’t his best idea of what to do in a poolhall . . . even in the roaring noise and even though among all these Saturday feet he couldn’t quite see the exact spot he had studied, though he knew there were new cigarette butts and spit on the spot now . . . (Kerouac, 1960: 39–40)

This last sentence unrolls for another seven lines, in what is (as Holmes senses) something of a parodic copy of Proust:

[I] would recall for each room in succession the style of the bed, the position of the doors, the angle at which the daylight came in at the windows,

whether there was a passage outside, what I had in my mind when I went to sleep. (Proust, 1913: 6)

Kerouac wrote so much material in this sort of experimental mode that he was finally compelled to separate much of it off, leaving it out of *On the Road* and incorporating much of it into another book, *Visions of Cody* – largely completed in 1952 but only published in excerpted form in 1960 and not in full until 1972.

At the core of *Visions'* experimentation are the lengthy tape-transcript sections, recorded by Kerouac with Neal Cassady in (drug-fuelled) conversation and transcribed more-or-less faithfully. These tape transcripts, and the companion "Imitations of the Tape" section, make up a large part of *Visions of Cody* – over 150 pages. If set to one side, a much shorter *Visions of Cody* remains, conspicuously ending with a revamped, compressed, helter-skelter, experimental version of the travels of Kerouac and Cassady: *On the Road* on speed, as it were. As Kerouac (narrating as Jack Duluoz) explains in *Visions of Cody*, what he wants to do with this speeded-up version of *On the Road* was to tell "the voyages again . . . each in one breath" (Kerouac, 1972: 337).

Excerpts from Visions of Cody (1960), published very much earlier than the uncut version (which did not come out until 1972), is generally dismissed as second-best: a bowdlerized text, worth little attention. Kerouac, however, carefully signed every single issue of the 1959 print run of 750 copies, which suggests some degree of *authorization*.¹⁰ *Excerpts from Visions of Cody* deserves much more notice than it usually receives. Indeed, this "rescue text", as *Excerpts* might be called, given that the uncut work was deemed unpublishable (Ginsberg in 1952 called it "a holy mess . . . [Kerouac] did everything he could to fuck it up"),¹¹ even claims that *it itself*, rather than *On the Road*, offers the "complete Cody". The background to and origins of Neal Cassady are extensively explored in *Excerpts from Visions of Cody* (almost as much as in the full 398 page version). Furthermore, the 1959 *Excerpts* preserve most of the best of Kerouac's writing in the full *Visions*. For example, the most interesting segments of the otherwise over-long tape transcripts, in which Duluoz and Cody discuss the loss of spontaneity that inevitably occurs in the process of transcription, still feature in *Excerpts*, alongside much of the "Visions of Neal" notebooks that Kerouac wrote in 1951–52.

So, when celebrating *On the Road's* achievement, *Excerpts from Visions of Cody* demands attention as an important supplement. But the full 398 page, 1972 version of *Visions* – again, like the 1959 version, largely completed in the three to four years surrounding the composition of the scroll – provides further insight into Kerouac's most famous text. In the 1972 *Visions of Cody*, the homosocial dimension to Sal Paradise's attraction to Dean – or, in this instance, Duluoz's attraction to Cody – becomes very much more apparent, famously in the "fag Plymouth" scene shared by both books.

In the 1957 *On the Road* the Plymouth's driver is portrayed, in some highly negative stereotyping, as a timid, skinny homosexual. Cassidy unsuccessfully seeks to manipulate this "effete" homosexual to his pecuniary advantage, but without offering anything other than an ambiguous commitment readily reneged upon if the homosexual's money is not forthcoming. The 1957 *On the Road* is in fact somewhat oblique about what is going on. It notes how the "fag" began by saying he was "very glad we had come along because he liked young men like us, and would we believe it, but he really didn't like girls and had recently concluded an affair with a man in Frisco in which he had to take the male role and the man the female role", so establishing that he is a homosexual. But when the "fag" asks "what Dean thought about all this", things are a lot less clear. Though Dean warns the "fag" first "that he had once been a hustler in his youth" and asks him "how much money he had", nothing happens:

The fag became extremely sullen and I think suspicious of Dean's final motives, turned over no money and made vague promises for Denver. He kept counting his money and checking on his wallet. Dean threw up his hands and gave up. "You see, man, it's better not to bother. Offer them what they secretly want and they of course immediately become panic-stricken." (1957: 209)

The 1972 *Visions* takes things much further, depicting Cody as subjecting the homosexual to vigorous anal intercourse: "Warning him first that he had once been a hustler in his youth, Neal proceeded to handle the fag like a woman, tipping him over legs in the air and all and gave him a monstrous huge banging" (1951 [2007]: 307). This act is framed by many of the more oblique words found in the 1957 version,¹² but the scroll's central image of a "monstrous huge banging" still carries an impact. However, *Visions of Cody* is by far the most direct, most graphic and least restrained:

That night the gangbelly broke loose between Cody and the skinny skeleton, sick: Cody thrashed him on rugs in the dark, monstrous huge fuck, Olympian perversities, slambanging big sodomies . . . subsided with him for money; the money never came. He'd treated the boy like a girl! "You can't trust these people when you give them (exactly) what they want." . . . at one point Cody has thrown him over legs in the air like a dead hen. (1972: 358-9)

Perhaps it is after all not so surprising that *Visions of Cody* was not to be published until 1972. The change between 1957 and 1972 over what could be acceptably published plainly played a part in creating this pronounced difference (the trial of *Naked Lunch* (1959), just to take one dramatic example, had occurred in 1965).

Just as telling as this increase in graphic directness is the way that the depiction of the narrator's response changes. In *On the Road* we are only told that "I was in the bathroom" (1957: 209). In the scroll version, however, the narrator is watching: "I was so non-plussed all I could do was sit and stare in my corner" (1951 [2007]: 307). This, of course, is the version that Kerouac was no longer seeking to publish. However, he was still seeking a publisher for *Visions of Cody*, and now his narrator no longer stares, but instead tells us he only peeks: "that made me sick . . . I sat in the castrated toilet listening and peeking" (1972: 358–9). It is only the scroll version that depicts the narrator staring rather than hiding ("in the bathroom") or "peeking". Kerouac's difficulty in facing up to his bisexuality, carefully hidden in the 1957 published *On the Road*, becomes quite apparent in this contrast.

Kerouac was, however, prepared to face up to the bisexuality of his friend, as the censorship constraints causing gender uncertainties to fall to the cutting room floor some time between 1952 and 1957 steadily weakened. So, in 1960 Cassady's (Cody's) ambiguous sexuality is baldly revealed:

Cody . . . loves to mimic women and wishes he was a sweet young cunt of 16 so he could feel himself squishy and nice and squirm all over when some man had to look and all he had to do was sit and feel the soft shape of his or her ass in a silk dress and that squishy all over feeling . . . and finger himself and wait for hubby who has one sixteen inches long. (1959: 109–10)

Such extrapolations between *On the Road* and *Visions of Cody* are legitimated by the way in which the latter is enmeshed with *On the Road*. Both were composed in the late 1940s/early 1950s, and both deal with a society still coping with the return of World War Two veterans. This helped render sublimated homoerotic interactions more acceptable after the war than before it, as when, for example, buddy relationships were very commonly foregrounded in popular cultural forms (in Westerns, war stories and movies, and some "screwball" comedies). Sal's and Dean's relationship in *On the Road* and *Visions of Cody* engages with such mainstream cultural trends, but the scroll, to an extent, and *Visions*, forthrightly, casts an acid light on their evasions.

Ironically, such changing attitudes to homosexual relations in the late 1940s were also accompanied by the development of a medical model of homosexuality as pathological, whilst increasing demands for female autonomy caused further anxiety – laying the grounds for a more punitive, McCarthyite-fuelled level of intolerance in the 1950s. Even so, though a post-war "baby boom" soon developed and home-making became increasingly mass-commodified in suburban developments, often in large "Levittown" estates, not unlike the one where the Cassadys ended up living, disruptions to such domestic order persisted. A substantial minority

would not assume their ascribed gender-roles, home-building stereotypes or sexual identities. This minority was left adrift in what was often a repressive climate, compelled to congregate where “deviant” behavior survived, especially in larger cities. The field of sexuality in this post-war period was complex and contradictory, and this is the context in which to view its representation in the early versions of *Visions of Cody* and *On the Road*. Though such fluidity was short-lived, as the birth-rate rose and as more passed through college, benefiting from the GI Bill of Rights and as what the dominant culture represented as “traditional” norms broadly reasserted themselves, when Kerouac rushed into his rapid typing-out of *On the Road* in 1951, he was very much recording what was still a *contemporary* allure – in a moment during which other Jacks and other Neals negotiated their lifestyles and sexuality uncertainly and inchoately. In this sense the scroll *On the Road* offers a troubled, unreliable diagnosis of a key aspect of such unstable, shifting post-war realignments. Yet by the time it was published in 1957, half a decade later, *On the Road* had become something of a historical novel, and one, of course, inevitably affected by this later temporal framing. The suburbs and the Southwest, the South and the west Coast had grown in affluence, somewhat at the expense of the vitality of the East’s and mid West’s city centres, and systematic efforts had been made in terms of cultural promotion and policy measures to restore and maintain ideologically and materially conventional gender and sexual boundaries.¹³ This reframing impacted upon how the 1957 novel’s exploration of the topics of sexuality, class and conformity could be couched – it was to become much more cautious, in a more entrenchedly conservative, post-McCarthy period.

The sort of risky directness the scroll features, as, for example, it depicts Evie Parker standing up to the cops whilst Jack and Neal almost look forward to “getting the hose in the backroom” (Jack Kerouac, 1952: 348), was excised, and almost all the radical literary experimentation later largely collected in *Visions* was excluded – such as the extraordinary “Imitation of the Tape” section, in which a series of pastiches and parodies imitating various writing styles (including William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway) self-reflexively recognize their failure to do any better at revealing Cody than the transcripts, as all attempts become a “mo-dific-ation” of the ordinary experience, itself always already a modifying. *Visions* explicitly and repeatedly recognizes the futility of its attempt to deliver the “complete” Cody (Kerouac, 1960: 36). The claim that Kerouac naively searched for authenticity by embracing spontaneity needs to be rejected – not least because it runs exactly counter to what *Visions of Cody* asserts is achievable.

The extent to which *On the Road* in its 1957 guise is very far removed from being a spontaneous outpouring can be readily conveyed by examining the book’s ending closely. Famously, Carr’s dog, Potchky, chewed off the end of the scroll, which had to be recomposed later. Kerouac noted in handwriting

on the end of the scroll, 'DOG ATE (Potchky – a dog)' (1951 [2007]: 401). The new ending Kerouac had to add shows clear signs of how Kerouac's later editing made the novel less hard-hitting than the 1951 scroll: Sal's narrative in the published, 1957 version finally dissolves into sentimental nostalgia – heavily influenced by Thomas Wolfe and drawing upon an exchange with one of Neal Cassady's children in 1954 (after the scroll was completed and its ending eaten). In *Some of the Dharma*, Kerouac notes a conversation he had with Neal and Caroline Cassady's children:

"Why is the mountain sitting there?" (man asks children)

Jamie: "Because nobody's on there and we're not supposed to climb on it because the dirt'll fall off."

"Who made the mountain?" (man)

They: "God made it"

Man: "Who is God?"

Cathy: "Us" And right then Cathy said: "He wants to play with the fence."

Man: "Who?"

Cathy: (showing Bear toy) "Me. Dont you know that I am Poo Bear?"

God is Poo Bear. (Kerouac, 1997: 17–18)

We know this conversation took place in February 1954, when Kerouac was staying with the Cassadys in San Jose, because in a May 1954 letter sent to Carolyn Cassady, after Kerouac had returned to the east coast, he wrote: "Let me know about the little ones who know that God is Pooh-Bear" (Kerouac, 1995b: 111). If Kerouac came to think of God as "Poo[h] Bear" after talking to the Cassady's children, then the idea could not have been part of the 1951 scroll version of *On the Road*, but only added to the manuscript at least three years later. The 1951 version therefore could not have ended like this:

don't you know that God is Pooh Bear? The evening star must be drooping and shedding her sparkler dims on the prairie, which is just before the coming of complete night that blesses the earth, darkens all rivers, cups the peaks and folds the final shore in, and nobody, nobody knows what's going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old, I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of old Dean Moriarty, the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty. (1957: 309–10)

The plangent tone of this passage differs markedly from the tone of the scroll typescript, which is generally more direct and descriptive.

Indeed, *On the Road*, is almost conservatively well structured. At its core, the twin[n]g of Sal and Dean draws substantially upon conventional buddy relationships, as Kerouac deftly reworks elements of the picaresque

bildungsroman form. To argue that this cannot be the case, because the book is autobiographical and that *this* (the book's narrative) is *what really happened*, portrayed *exactly* as it happened, cannot stand up. Kerouac himself did not hold to this view, taking his cue from Marcel Proust's: "The picture . . . in our own minds which we believe to be . . . authentic . . . has in reality been refashioned by us many times over" (Proust, 1913: I: 675). As *Visions* repeatedly makes clear, "authenticity" is illusory. Sal's encounters with this impasse establish just why he ends up almost ignominiously retreating from exposure to the demands of the postwar road in the back of that archetypal US consumer icon, a Cadillac, hired by his friend, Remi:

"D'you think I can ride to Fortieth Street with you?" [Dean] whispered. "Want to be with you as much as possible, m'boy, and besides it's so darned cold . . ." I whispered to Remi. No, he wouldn't have it . . . So Dean couldn't ride uptown with us and the only thing I could do was sit in the back of the Cadillac and wave . . . Dean, ragged in a motheaten overcoat he brought specially for the freezing temperature of the East, walked off alone, and the last I saw of him he rounded the corner of Seventh Avenue, eyes on the street ahead, and bent to it again. (Kerouac, 1957: 308-9)

Postwar America is deeply alienating: the American West, now always-already informed by the commodity code, has become a space where "rotted . . . covered wagons" sit "near a Coca-Cola stand", and Sal is swept off in the epitome of conspicuous consumption, leaving Dean behind. That Dean's signifier of movement, his hitchhiker's thumb, is broken in the latter third of the book is plainly symbolic. Sal may have asserted early in the novel that Dean knows he has "gotta go", but *On the Road* has clearly established by its end that no escape is now possible from "Paper America" (Kerouac, 1957: 106). Kerouac, Lucien Carr noted, had "an emotional awareness of class",¹⁴ and this theme is often overlooked in a book where class wars keep breaking out: between Dean and the White/Temko set in Denver (54); between "college-boy" Sal and the Chicana cotton-picker, Terry (82-109); between the "fat" middle class businessmen celebrating Wild West Week and the Native Americans "solemn[ly]" watching them with "stony eyes" in Cheyenne (32); between the paedophilic "moneybag Americans", Sal, Dean and Stan and the South American prostitutes in their Gregoria "pornographic hashish daydream" (276, 281, 283); and between, ultimately, Dean and a surprisingly-often besuited Sal. In this terrain, the book punctures one further myth, that of escape – from all these postwar socio-economic developments – into a now-bankrupt myth of freedom. Sal learns it just is not possible; mobility is increasingly coming to mean social mobility, upwards: *getting places*. Dean, beaten down, is getting nowhere in his constant movement.

Notes

1. Jack Kerouac, quoted in Dittman, 2004: x.
2. The debate continues over the role of coffee and amphetamines and their rival claims. See, for example, Beatty, 1957, reprinted in Maher, 2005: 51; Haverty Kerouac, 2000.
3. See Sandison and Vickers, 2006, for an account of this sort of borrowing.
4. This numbering was seen by me during the scroll's unrolling at the start of its display at the Barber Institute at the University of Birmingham, December 2008. Further details were provided in conversation with Jim Canary, the scroll's curator during its display. Part of what follows is the consequence of conversations held by the author with Jim Canary, with Matt Theado, and with Oliver Harris during December 2008, most specifically at a conference held in the University of Birmingham at that time. My thanks to these interlocutors.
5. See for example, "San Francisco Blues" (1954), reprinted in Kerouac, 1995a.
6. Malcolm Cowley, quoted in Gifford and Lee, 1979: 206.
7. For a discussion of "authenticity", see Griffiths, 1995: 237–41, London: Routledge.
8. See Cassady, 2004: 17–285, especially the "Great Sex Letter", 7 March 1947, pp. 17–19, and the "Joan Anderson Letter", 17 December 1950, pp. 244–55. After receiving such letters as these, particularly Cassady's "Joan Anderson letter", Kerouac began writing letters in a related style. See Kerouac, 1995: 246–306.
9. See, for example, Nicosia, 1983 and Ellis, 1999.
10. Hindsight is probably at work again. At the time Kerouac is rubbishing the 1959 version of *Visions of Cody*, somewhat strapped for cash, he is also anxious to bring out the full *Visions of Cody* as a new book.
11. See Allen Ginsberg, Letter to Neal and Carolyn Cassady, 3 July 1952, in Ginsberg, 2008.
12. The fag began by saying he was very glad we had come along because he liked young men like us, and would we believe it, but he really didn't like girls and had recently concluded an affair with a man in Frisco in which he had take the male role and the man the female role. . . . The fag said he would like nothing better but to know what Neal thought about all this. . . . And after all that the fag turned over no money to us, tho he made vague promises for Denver, and on top of that he became extremely sullen and I think suspicious of Neal's final motives. He kept counting his money and checking on his wallet. Neal threw up his hands and gave up. "You see, man, it's better not to bother. Give them what they secretly want and they of course immediately become panic-stricken" (1951 [2007]: 307).
13. See Kuznick and Gilbert, 2001, particularly their introduction (pp. 1–13) and the essay by De Hart, pp. 124–55.
14. Lucien Carr, quoted in McNally, 1979: 67.

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12

‘Hundred-per-Cent American Con Man’: Character in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*

David Simmons

Though Christopher Gair points out in *The American Counterculture* (2007); that ‘oddly . . . recent studies of 1960s counterculture have largely erased literature from its history,’ (142) Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962) has proved to be something of an exception to this rule. Indeed, the last few years have seen the publication of what amounts to a groundswell of academic work concerning Kesey’s novel. The current resurgence of attention that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* has attracted is perhaps a result of a concurrent re-ignition of interest in the immediate post-war period and its literature, brought about by the gradual erosion of the established critical hegemonies of postmodernism and post-structuralism. As these categories have been challenged, especially in an Anglo-American context, the desire to fill the interpretative void left behind has led a range of academics to reassess Kesey’s novel, offering a more comprehensive positioning, which contextualises the text as a significant, socially informed, literary object. It is noticeable that an increasing amount of recent criticism on the novel speaks to a wider understanding of an American canon in which texts exist as human and cultural artefacts.

Though there has been a steady trickle of output on the novel in every decade since its publication in the 1960s, critical interest in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* has only recently grown to the extent that it is possible to suggest that a concerted re-evaluation of Kesey’s text is taking place. The 1990s saw the publication of George J. Searles’ edited collection *A Casebook on Ken Kesey’s One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1992), and Barbara Tapa Lupack’s *Insanity as Redemption in Contemporary American Fiction* (1995), however, it was not until the 2005 Penguin Modern Classics reissue of the novel that this renewed sense of critical interest in the text was fully consolidated. Though Robert Faggen notes towards the beginning of his introduction to the republished edition, that Kesey’s ‘temperament was too anarchic and mischievous to recommend a sociological or political agenda,’ (x) he nevertheless proceeds to approach the text from a culturally focused viewpoint. Indicating a desire to move away from the often more aesthetic concerns

of post structuralism and postmodernism, Faggen discusses the relevance of historical events to the construction of Kesey's novel; including the development of the atom bomb, the McCarthy witch hunts, post war developments in psychiatry; 'the sociological literature of the 1950s' (xii), and the Kinsey report. Faggen's introduction also contains a renewed focus on character, with the critic detailing the ideological significance of Chief Bromden, Big Nurse and McMurphy. Indeed, despite the writer's comments at the beginning of his introduction, Faggen's conclusive assertion that 'In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey turned the mental ward into a symbol of the tricks of control afoot in postwar American society,' (xi) indicates that his concerns lie with identifying the social and political momentum behind the novel. In this chapter, I will argue that this constructivist approach has come to define the nascent body of contemporary criticism on the novel, providing a noticeable point of departure from some of the previous work published about, not only Kesey's text, but literature of the period more generally.

It is worth stating here that much of the criticism of the US novels produced during the 1960s and 1970s tended to focus on offering a post-structuralist, postmodernist reading of the novel born from the kind of deconstructionist theory found in Jacques Derrida's 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' (1966) and Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author' (1968). Indeed, such was the success of these two thinkers that many of the central principles of their work came to dominate subsequent literary discussion. Deconstructionist theories are most prominently embraced in the concepts of 'Metafiction' and 'Surfiction' that Raymond Federman and Robert Scholes popularised during the 1970s. Yet the deployment of these terms amongst the work of noted critics, such as Federman, Scholes, Ronald Sukenick, Tony Tanner, and (more recently) Helen Weinberg, worked to emphasise the fragmentary, often nihilistic qualities of the post-war American novel, suggesting that its primary purpose was to reflect, and in doing so reinforce, the passivity engendered by a particular, absurdist view of contemporary society; as Weinberg proposes: 'The focus of this novel's world view is on this disjunction. To live acquiescent to the terms of this world is to be passive; to allow the nonbeing of worldly routines and reasons to encroach upon the life of the self and its possibilities for true being is to become a victim'(4).

Such post-structuralist criticism suggests that the protagonists of the post-war novel exist in the absurd tradition of Kafka's characters, embodying similar qualities such as 'arrest, guilt, self-victimization, alienation, and the inability to use freedom positively and creatively' (Weinberg, 5). Yet, while this stance seems to speak to something that is reflected in the work of some major post-war American writers, such as Thomas Pynchon and John Barth, it also risks sidelining the positive and socially engaged elements of equally important work by authors such as Kesey, Kurt Vonnegut, Joseph Heller and Thomas Berger.

This is not to say that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* does not pose some difficulties for a twenty-first-century reader. In particular, critics have pointed out the novel's often seemingly negative depiction of both African Americans and Women, a bias that echoes the ideological underpinnings of sectors of the 1960's American counterculture whose own peculiarly conservative views on issues such as race and gender often seemed at odds with the professedly radical politics of liberation they espoused; as Doug Rossinow notes of this dichotomy in relation to the New Left's attitudes towards women: 'in their quest for sexual authenticity they often cast women in the role of sexual helpmeets, albeit newly uninhibited ones' (Rossinow 117). While parts of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* undoubtedly appear to share such a prejudiced viewpoint, with the protagonist being foregrounded as a distinctly white masculine and heterosexual saviour, the nimble critic might offer both the novel's sympathetic portrayal of Bromden's partial Native American ethnicity, and the favourable presentation of the Japanese-American nurse and the prostitutes that are brought onto the ward by McMurphy, as pertinent examples which help to counter overly hostile accusations regarding the novel's problematic sexism and racism.

While taking issue with *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest's* sexual politics, in *The American Counterculture* Gair offers a reading that follows some of the work done by Faggen in bringing the social impetus behind Kesey's text to the fore. Gair's analysis depicts the text as a pivotal example of both the counterculture's desire to question social conformity, and representative of the movement's evolving methodologies; noting that the novel stands as 'an example of the counterculture's changing strategies for resisting social control' (152). Gair goes further in teasing out the political elements of the text, discussing both the central character's role as a kind of countercultural Christ figure and the novel's engagement with a drive towards a more humanitarian reconfiguration of American society, which would allow for the realisation of the full human potential of the self. Indeed, so great is the novel's engagement with the utopian concerns of the counterculture, that Gair is able to suggest that, with the ending of the book, Kesey offers us 'possibly the most optimistically utopian vision of the nation's future to emanate from the counterculture' (154). Gair rereads the novel's climax – in which McMurphy attacks Nurse Ratched, is then lobotomised, and subsequently smothered to death by Bromden – as an embodiment of the counterculture's own desire to achieve liberatory action, freeing them from the constraints of technocratic hegemonic systems so that they might return to a more utopian engagement with the land.

Aligning himself with the contemporary wave of criticism that re-evaluates and foregrounds the socially engaged aspects of Kesey's text, Scott McFarlane in *The Hippie Narrative* (2007) articulates, explicitly, the move away from previously entrenched postmodernist and post-structuralist approaches, devoting an entire concluding chapter of his book to examining

the continuing 'energeia and profluence of traditional narrative' in post-war writing. McFarlane proposes that 'rather than engage in a postmodern discursiveness' (235) in which a 'being-within way of thinking . . . is held captive to a sometimes indecipherable, discursive language,' (236) the critic and reader should attempt to recognise that the 'the genuine cultural production of a literary work is inherently constructivist' (236). According to McFarlane, this emphasis on the creativity involved in the production of the novel as a form was shared by the counterculture, whose movement sought to adopt such a sentiment in their day to day lives: 'The Hippies of the late' 60's were railing against mainstream society in a highly deconstructivist manner, but . . . the phenomenon evolved into one where those Hippies found constructivist adaptations' (233).

Given the nature of McFarlane's approach to literature in general, it is not surprising that his specific reading of Kesey's text is one that focuses on the importance of narrative and the novel as a cultural artefact. Indeed, to an extent, McFarlane singles out *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*; seeing the novel as an exemplar of these trends. He notes that '*Cuckoo's Nest* is more deliberately and traditionally crafted' (23) than some of the other texts he discusses, stating that 'the novel was also, very much, a product of its time' (26). McFarlane proceeds to draw out a number of the novel's cultural points of reference, believing, as he does, in the pertinence of a more culturally informed interpretation: 'Any analysis of *Cuckoo's Nest* should factor in the societal-historical of the time period' (31). McFarlane pays particular attention to the novel's autobiographical elements and suggests that previous critics have chosen to overlook Kesey's incorporation of some of the problematic issues facing his hometown of Oregon in the book: 'Often missing in discussion about *Cuckoo's Nest* is how profoundly his work reflected the societal pressure of modernization in the Pacific Northwest' (27). McFarlane concludes his chapter on *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by expanding his reading of the novel as autobiographical, proposing an intrinsic link between Kesey's own social consciousness and his construction of the text, drawing out biographical connections between the novel's author and its central, rebellious character: 'Kesey captured – through his metaphorical depiction of an insane asylum – much broader societal forces institutionalizing the human spirit . . . Kesey assumed a McMurphyesque role in working to catalyze a style of life that challenged the sterility and conformity of modern America' (35–6)

In my own book, *The Anti-Hero in the American Novel: From Heller to Vonnegut* (2008) I share this desire to reread Kesey's novel in a more politically and culturally informed manner. Taking issue with the dominant image of the 1960s novel as being best understood in terms of experimentalism, which can often elide the more socially engaged aspects of the novel, I argue that, due to an over reliance on a system of convenient taxonomies engendered by the dominance of post structuralist and postmodernist analysis, what has been produced is a significant, yet also partially distorted, account of literature

from the post-war era. These approaches to the post-war novel have tended to focus on particular literary techniques conducive to post-structuralist and postmodernist readings, such as; ironic narrative voice, the use of nihilistic humour, and the decomposed and decentred subject. While these elements are certainly present within a text such as Kesey's, it is misleading to consider these aspects in isolation. Perhaps, in their attempts to focus on particular (partisan) readings that seek to define the period's literature through hegemonic critical discourses, scholars have inadvertently neglected or passed over many of the other (often equally central) aspects of the text. Indeed, rather than negate the validity of viewing a text such as *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* through a more culturally informed lens, the previous dominance of such a comparatively narrow approach to the post-war US novel, almost calls out for it, confirming the need for a more fully-rounded understanding that accounts for the reasoning behind the novel's production.

The need for a more culturally cognisant reading informs my approach to the *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in this chapter. Consequently, I read Kesey's work against such established critical interpretations of the postwar American novel by focusing upon its more social, political and humanist properties. Written during the 1960s and tapping into many of the concerns of the contemporary counterculture, this chapter will examine the ways in which *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* explores issues and themes pertinent to the movement such as identity politics, the changing nature of heroism, and the seemingly corrupt nature of those in authority.

The novel is set in an Oregon asylum ruled over by the authoritarian 'Big Nurse', a tyrannical and matriarchal figure who controls every aspect of her male patients' lives through fear and intimidation. The Big Nurse allows her orderlies to abuse the patients on the ward; in fact she actively encourages it, and uses electro-shock therapy as a means of administering punishment to patients who disobey her totalitarian rule. Amongst those in the hospital is the initially mute, and paranoid, Native American-Indian, Chief Bromden. Bromden is of mixed ethnicity, being the child of an alcoholic American-Indian father and a domineering white mother. Even though he is mute, Bromden narrates the novel for the reader, the action of which concerns the arrival of a new patient, Randle P. McMurphy (who is known to the patients simply as McMurphy), who will gradually set out to challenge the Big Nurse's iron grip on the other male psychiatric patients under her 'care'.

McMurphy's innately subversive nature leads him to rebel against the many petty rules which Big Nurse has implemented in order to maintain control over her patients. He does this by gradually restoring a sense of self worth and dignity to the other patients, and beginning a series of small rebellions (over toothbrushing times and TV watching habits) that begin to erode the Big Nurse's control. While McMurphy is ultimately lobotomised for his disruptive actions; his rebellion is still a triumph as his actions and his attack on her at the end of the text cause the Big Nurse to lose control

over the other men on the ward. McMurphy's success is most obvious in the Chief's escape from the hospital. Once he has smothered McMurphy, Bromden manages to escape when he finally succeeds (where McMurphy had previously failed) in lifting the heavy shower room control panel off the ground and throwing it through a nearby window. The act is inspired by McMurphy while also suggesting that Bromden has moved beyond his previous dependence on the character, indeed, Bromden momentarily tries on McMurphy's cap before feeling 'suddenly ashamed of trying to wear it' (308). At the end of the novel we are led to believe that Bromden's rebellion has progressed to the next, independent stage. The implication of the novel's closing sentence – 'I been away a long time' (310) – would appear to be that Bromden is now able to consider, for himself, what direction his life will take. Indeed, the Chief's actions at the end of the novel represent a desire to state the importance of the individual maintaining control over their own identity and (therefore) their destiny in the face of society's attempts to control and mould it.

This declaration is a far cry from the opening of the novel. We are initially introduced to Bromden as the orderlies on the ward mock him. Many of the Nurse's staff regard Bromden as a child and treat him like an object: 'Chief Broom'. We soon learn that this abuse is not particular to the Chief and that the staff at one time or another have mistreated all of the patients on the ward as a result of Big Nurse's practice of only employing those who 'she's damn positive . . . hate enough to be capable' (28) of meting out her unique levels of punishment and abuse. Rape is institutionally sanctioned and the orderlies habitually induct new inmates onto the ward by mistreating them. Such a practice serves as a means of dehumanising the patients, not only in the eyes of the staff, but more importantly, in the patient's minds, and therefore enables Big Nurses' control over them to be more total and effective. The Chief tells us about Ellis and Ruckly, two patients whose minds have been irreparably damaged by electro-shock 'therapy' and about Mr Taber, a former patient whose refusal to endure the abuse dealt out by the staff led to him being given a frontal lobotomy. In a mirror of both the counterculture's distrust of hegemonic institutions, and wider work being carried out (such as that of R. D. Laing) that challenged previously established conceptions of mental illness, the novel foregrounds the control that the institution wields over its patients as both absolute and unchallenged; and the reader is encouraged to see how thin the line between punishment and therapy is in an institution which exists to 'normalise' those marginalised by society.

The opening of the novel is indicative of the text's preoccupation with identity and the various ways in which hegemonic institutions attempt to control us by physically and ideologically marginalising any alternatives to the mainstream or 'norm'; denigrating certain peoples and lifestyles; as McMurphy exclaims at one point of his own positioning by those in power 'but you know how society persecutes a dedicated man' (20). The

Chief suggests that those who work on the ward are only a small part of a much larger organisation which both watches and controls individuals; curtailing their freedom. Bromden calls this organisation 'The Combine' and suggests that it operates as a society-wide mechanism that is trying to make everyone and everything in American society the same: 'like, for example – a train . . . laying a string of full-grown men in mirrored suits and machined hats, laying them like a hatch of identical insects' (225).

As the story progresses we learn that the Chief's conflicted sense of who he is, is not only due to his being undermined by those in authority but that his paranoia is also the result of an internal crisis, which is at root concerned with his mixed race ethnicity. As a half-white, half Native American the Chief seems torn between two ways of being. Unable to find an identity that he feels comfortable with, the Chief instead acts as he thinks others expect him to: 'I was just being the way I looked, the way people wanted. It don't seem like I ever have been me' (151). The Chief's identity crisis represents both the internal conflict that was brought to public attention by Laing in *The Divided Self* (1960); that posits the possibility of there being a splintered rather than singular self at the heart of most individuals; as well as directly representing a larger issue concerning the destruction of Native American Indian identity. We are told that the removal of the Chief's father from his land was partially instigated by his white mother who became the dominant force in the relationship. This event lead the Chief to take his mother's surname instead of his father's, an act that symbolically emasculates the father figure and is symptomatic of white assimilation of indigenous cultures, whilst also highlighting Kesey's engagement with the concept of the emasculating effect of mid-late twentieth century capitalist-led constructs of the processes of civilisation.

The other patients share the Chief's confused sense of identity, they are similarly oppressed by The Big Nurse, who controls the patients with impunity, instilling in them a belief that they are abnormal and need to adjust in order to fit into 'normal' society, as one of the patients sarcastically states 'Not talk me into it, no. I was born a rabbit. Just look at me. I simply need the nurse to make me *happy* with my role' (61). Harding, in particular, is important here, with the novel implying that he is a closet homosexual unable to declare his homosexuality for fear of ridicule by wider society.

While the Big Nurse manipulates any sense of identity the other patients may have, she is largely unable to control McMurphy in this manner. The appearance of McMurphy is markedly different from our introduction to the Chief. While Chief Bromden is presented as a repressed and downtrodden character, McMurphy's individuality lends him strength of personality and a level of belief in himself that the other patients initially lack. The Chief says that McMurphy 'sounds like he's way above them, talking down, like he's sailing fifty yards overhead, hollering at those below on the ground. He Sounds Big' (10) and suggests that he is this way because 'He hadn't let

what he looked like run his life one way or the other, any more than he'd let the Combine mill him into fitting where they wanted him to fit' (151). In opposition to the detrimental practises of The Big Nurse, McMurphy tries to restore the other patients' confidence, turning them from 'rabbits' back into men. He does this by encouraging the men to believe in their own self-worth and through teaching them that it is Nurse Ratched who is in the wrong: 'all you guys. What the hell is the matter with you? You ain't as crazy as all this' (55). McMurphy's independent actions and the positive effects that these actions have on the other patients suggest that a strong sense of 'who we are' is important to our personal well being.

Reflecting the anti-authoritarian ethos of the 1960s, Kesey's novel suggests that twentieth-century American society tries to control the actions of its citizens through oppressive practises. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* we are presented with numerous examples of those who hold power attempting to tell characters with less power how to behave; even in the most private and intimate spheres of their lives. Most obviously this occurs through the characters of the Big Nurse, and her unnamed band of orderlies, who are effectively employed for the sole purpose of controlling and subduing the 'undesirable' personality traits of the patients. While the structure of the hospital system means that the staff must tell those under their care what to do, the novel suggests that Nurse Ratched goes beyond mere supervision and instead seeks to rule over all elements of the patients' lives for her own perverse and questionable ends.

While the majority of the suppression in the novel takes place on the ward as a direct result of the Big Nurse's practices we are also presented with examples outside of the hospital where oppression has taken place; Billy Bibbit's emotional development as a young man has been repressed by an over-protective mother, while Harding has repressed his own homosexuality for fear of the negative repercussions of 'coming out' in a society that still frowns upon being gay. The novel repeatedly provides us with examples of minorities being criticised or treated poorly by the majority within society, as Harding notes: 'the great voice of millions chanting "shame. Shame. Shame." It's society's way of dealing with someone different' (241–2). Chief Bromden is a pertinent example of this. The Chief recollects his childhood and the manner in which white society (including his own mother) tried to oppress his father and the tribe of Native American's of which he was chief. Such is the effect of White oppression that the Chief chooses to withdraw from the world by pretending that he is deaf and dumb.

Indeed, whether or not we choose to read the hospital ward as a representative microcosm of wider society, the novel seems to be heavily critical of what it believes is the repressive nature of post-war America. A sentiment that is made overt in Chief Bromden's belief in 'The Combine', a secret state sanctioned organisation that is trying to engineer society so that everyone looks the same, lives the same lifestyle and behaves in the same way.

McMurphy, the (anti-) hero of the story comes on to the ward to free the other patients from the Big Nurse's oppressive regime. McMurphy it seems has escaped the oppression of society if only due to his refusal to be a part of it, the Chief notes: 'logging, gambling, running carnival wheels, travelling lightfooted and fast, keeping on the move so much that the Combine never had a chance to get anything installed' (75). However as the novel progresses we learn that McMurphy has also suffered from oppression. Growing up, McMurphy has been in and out of prison and work farms as punishment for his refusal to conform to society's rules. Furthermore, the novel implies that the total reliance that the other patients develop towards McMurphy and their unquestioning belief that he will save them becomes in itself an oppressive (rather than a liberating) force, leaving the character trapped into a course of action that will eventually lead to his death.

McMurphy has only been able to retain his 'sanity' through the realisation that it is those in authority that are in the wrong, rather than he. Secure in this knowledge he subsequently leads the other patients to freedom by getting them to realise this too. Indeed, it is an irony that by the end of the story we view many, if not all of the patients on the ward as being less 'sick' than those who have oppressed them for so long.

The idea of heroism is an important element in *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. The novel contains a subtle but in-depth exploration of how we construct our heroes, what it means to be 'heroic', and the results of this process on those who are singled out for such adulation. The novel's ending, which sees Bromden take account of his own destiny is suggestive of the need to move beyond simple hero worship. McMurphy can only start a rebellion; but the novel suggests that that resistance must be maintained by the individual's realisation of their ability to take charge of their own destiny; only then can the power of the combine be challenged in any sustained manner.

Though a more complex engagement with established concepts of heroism became a frequent component of many novels written in the post-war period; as critic Ihab Hassan notes, 'the anti-hero seems nowadays to hold us in his spell' (Hassan 21), the figure's significance nevertheless seems to have been lost amongst the competing literary critical movements of the time. For, while the work of noted American literary critics; such as Leslie Fiedler (*Love and Death in the American Novel* (1961), *Waiting For The End* (1967) and *The Return of the Vanishing American* (1968), Raymond Olderman (*Beyond The Wasteland* (1972), Robert Scholes (*Fabulation and Metafiction* (1979) and Tony Tanner (*City of Words* (1971), present us with a comprehensive analysis of many of the more innovative aspects of the contemporary literary scene, in their focus on more fashionable novelistic techniques such as Metafiction, Surfiction and Black Humour, such critics appear to have assimilated the unique properties of the hero or anti-hero figure that we find in so many post war novels without singling it out for special attention. Another reason for this paucity may be that the figure's intrinsic

relationship to the contemporary age which has so 'transformed human life, that the long-inherited, timeless symbols [have] collapsed' (Campbell 387), indicates an aspect of flux to the heroic, which would have proven difficult to chart by critics working contemporaneous to such developments. If the figure is innately malleable, as a result of its changing function, then a universal definition inevitably becomes problematic. Nevertheless, many writers' exploration of what constitutes a suitable heroic model testifies to the continuing centrality of character in the post war novel and the often politically and socially informed nature of the form. Given contemporary critics' lack of commitment to investigating this propensity, it cannot be denied that the significance of this engagement with the heroic deserves a degree of reassessment.

Right from McMurphy's initial appearance we are told how the other characters conceive of him in a (anti-) heroic mould. Chief Bromden thinks that McMurphy is a giant sent to rescue them from the Big Nurse and notes that the rest of the patients 'get a big kick out of going along with him' (20–1). As the story progresses McMurphy takes on the appearance of a religious or spiritual hero, analogous to the figure of Jesus Christ. Harding suggests that McMurphy could 'work subconscious miracles' (51). McMurphy organises a fishing trip for twelve of the other men 'his dozen people' (195), and upon being given electro-shock therapy on a cross-shaped table he jokingly asks the attendant whether he gets 'a crown of thorns' (222). In addition to these religious allusions the plot of the novel, in which McMurphy sacrifices his own life for the good of the other men has obvious echoes of the Biblical story of Jesus.

While the traditional hero is often a superhuman individual marked out by his superior strength or physical prowess Kesey's novel frequently highlights how normal McMurphy is. Perhaps most significantly at one point in the early part of the novel McMurphy is unable to lift a heavy control panel off of the ground. While we are never convinced that he will be able to achieve such a Herculean feat his declaration to the other patients that he 'tried though,' has its own heroic significance given the manner in which McMurphy encourages the men to stand up for themselves to the Big Nurse.

McMurphy's subversive actions and anti-establishment attitudes would appear to mark him out as an anti-hero, a common figure in American novels of the 1960s. McMurphy seems to fuse a range of uniquely American rebellious yet heroic motifs; as Gair comments, McMurphy can be seen as 'a cross between the archetypal cowboy and Marlon Brando's Johnny from *The Wild One*' (152).

Indeed, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* explores America's relationship with the anti-heroic. Once the Big Nurse learns of the patients' adoration of McMurphy she attempts to discredit him. She tries to downplay McMurphy's heroism by ridiculing the idea that he is saviour-like: 'And yet,' she went on, 'he seems to do things without thinking of himself at all, as if he were a martyr or a saint. Would anyone venture that McMurphy is a saint?' (207). However, such is the patients' love of McMurphy that when the Big Nurse

tries to suggest McMurphy is manipulating them for the worse the patients refuse her suggestions: 'I feel *compelled* to defend my friend's honor as a good old red, white, and bluehundred-per-cent American con man' (209). Harding's comments imply that the patients both realise and embrace McMurphy's supposed moral failings. Though the hero conventionally embodies the values of the establishment that he belongs to, the novel's depiction of the hospital ward as a corrupt, abusive, and dehumanising place means that we, like the patients, have little problem in siding with McMurphy over the Big Nurse and her staff. As I note in *The Anti-Hero in the American Novel*:

Though McMurphy may indeed be more of a sinner than a saint, in the traditional sense of the term, his anti-establishment stance offers the patients a means of personal and spiritual fulfilment otherwise unattainable from the oppressive behavioural codes of a society that has worked to ostracize and depersonalize them. (Simmons, 132)

Interestingly, the novel also suggests that the patient's worshipping of McMurphy has negative results for him. As the story reaches its conclusion Chief Bromden realises that the role of hero might have more drawbacks for McMurphy than he and the other patients initially thought: 'I wondered how McMurphy slept, plagued by a hundred faces like that, or two hundred, or a thousand' (219). The suggestion that McMurphy is in some senses trapped by the demands that the patients make of him becomes more evident as the novel progresses, until it becomes apparent in an incident in which McMurphy has a chance to escape from the ward but refuses; the Chief suggests that this can be attributed to McMurphy's sense of duty to the other patients on the ward: 'It was like he'd signed on for the whole game and there wasn't any way of him breaking his contract' (243).

Though, he perhaps 'loses' his personal battle against her, being lobotomised at her command, McMurphy is successful as a hero, in that he saves the other patients from the control of Big Nurse. McMurphy thus fulfils a mythic (Christlike) function within the text. His real purpose was to effect others, rather than to save himself. By the end of the novel he has managed to pass on his life-affirming sense of self-belief and self-worth to the other men. This positive message enables the patients to overcome their fear of the Big Nurse and face the prospect of leaving the hospital for good. It is significant that all of the major players in the novel, McMurphy, Bromden, and the other patients, are no longer fearful of Big Nurse's rule at the end of the text; as Bromden tells us: 'She couldn't rule with her old power anymore . . . she was losing her patients one after the other' (305).

In his move from self-interest to inspiring those around him, McMurphy seems to embody a particularly countercultural and humanist desire for a greater sense of self-realisation and actualisation; as Gair notes 'McMurphy acquires a sense of responsibility to the community, in which he is willing to sacrifice himself to the greater good' (153). Extrapolating from Gair's

interpretation of the novel's central character as socially engaged, we might say that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, when re-evaluated in a more culturally informed context than has previously been afforded, might be seen as offering a potential model for the refashioning of society, one that repositions the individual's rebellion as a catalyst for larger change, advocating a move towards a greater sense of communality in line with the contemporary countercultural movement. Much as the novel itself espouses a democratic, humanist philosophy that seeks to recognise and promote the idea of multiplicity, so in our own approaches to the text we must be careful of inadvertently closing down the possibility of multiple lines of interpretation too.

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13

Herzog's Masculine Dilemmas, and the Eclipse of the Transcendental "I."

Gloria L. Cronin

Saul Bellow's arrival during the Jewish decades

The post-Holocaust decades of the 1940s and 1950s found Saul Bellow a relatively inexperienced writer passionately committed to humanistic agendas, and increasingly less convinced that utopian radical politics held the answer to mankind's ills. As his left-leaning political idealism faded he made his withdrawal from the *Partisan Review* crowd and steadily became an entrenched neo-conservative. He intended to make his mark on American letters, score heavily in the international literary arena, write the great American novel, and mount a passionate defense of the human soul. If he could simultaneously supplant the monumental Hemingway, all to the good. He rode into American literary history on the tidal wave of the "Jewish Decades" of the 1940s and 1950s that breached forever the WASP hegemony in American letters. By 1976 he had won the Nobel Prize for Literature, and Ernest was gone.

Herzog (1964), the great masterwork of Bellow's "middle period," still regarded as his *magnum opus*, is aimed primarily at dispensing once and for all with European philosophical skepticism and reestablishing the case for Jewishly nuanced humanism (Boroff, Brodin, Gill, Grady, Hyman, Klein, Maddocks, Malin, Prescott, Ribalow, Richler and Saporta). Up to this point in his career Bellow wrestled with the viability of liberal humanism, the lost transcendent, God, and Modernism. For much of this time he was disaffiliated from the Judaism of his childhood, and therefore without the help of traditional religion. He turned instead to literature, metaphysics, and the social sciences, only to realize after two decades he had been looking in the wrong place. By the time he wrote *Herzog* he was hell bent on holding the feet of the nay-saying European intellectuals and Western metaphysics to the wicked and witty fire of his intellect as he thunderously and comically accused them all of engineering the near moral and spiritual bankruptcy of Western culture. Bellow's deadly serious, if comic, de-fanging of such modernist architects of doom as Nietzsche, Spengler, Freud, Schopenhauer, Heidegger,

Sartre, and Camus is now the most written about critical account in 45 years of literary criticism, with regard to *Herzog*.

The initial reception

British, European and American critics alike hailed the arrival of *Herzog* as a world-class literary achievement, and Bellow himself as the new preeminent American writer. He was immediately placed in the great tradition of St. Augustine, Milton (Baruch), Sterne, Fielding (Brooks and Hill), Smollett, Dostoevsky (Chavkin and Wilson), Twain, Flaubert (Weinstein), Tolstoy (Colbert), Dickens (Wood), Whitman (Van Egmond), Melville (Rose), Conrad, Lawrence (Rose), Dreiser, Eliot (Pinsker, Poirier and Vogel) and Joyce (Blufarb, Galloway and Read). *Herzog* himself was hailed as a modern confessional hero (Axthelm), an essential American Everyman (Walker), a Yiddish *schlemiehl* (Shulman), a defeated American Adam (Atkins), a contemporary picaro (Elgin) and flaneur (Cardon and Dell'Amico). Many recognized the moral and cultural interrogation of Modernism (Cronin) Bellow was undertaking, and immediately pegged *Herzog* as a victim of Western history gone bad (Aldridge, Bradbury, Cronin, Galloway, Newman, Rovit, Singh) – a classic Freudian narcissist, a Jewish victim (Blufarb and Bradbury), failed romantic (Chavkin and Gerson) and defeated moral philosopher (Cixous). Additionally, Bellow was hailed for his brilliant wedding of Yiddish linguistic nuances (Wisse), high metaphysical comedy (Read), refusal of Eliotic Wasteland ideology (Cronin), and apocalyptic nihilism (Bradbury), brilliant satire on pedantry, and appropriation of the eighteenth-century epistolary forms (Brooks and Hill) – all served up in spicy Yiddish-inflected American street language (Bienen). He was even named the penultimate practitioner of the psychological novel (Cordesse), and the preeminent novelist of the post-war American city scene (Baumgarten).

Despite the inevitable over-enthusiasm of some early reviews, this picture of Bellow's place in the literary canon and *Herzog* as a world class masterpiece has not substantially changed. Critics, long anxious to anoint the successor to Hemingway, greeted the book as the great *summa* or *odyssey* of Modernism. In it many recognized Bellow's remarkable achievement in producing a uniquely urban American voice, compounded of high learning, everyday wisecracking street speech, and Yiddish intonations that would hold Anglo-American writers in its thrall for the rest of the century (Amis). Others saw him producing an updated Leopold Bloom by way of challenging Joyce's *Ulysses*. David Galloway captures the critical consensus best when he calls the book "a microcosm of the absurd world in which many modern heroes are compelled to function," and then adds that in this case "to the harshness and impersonality of external reality is added an injured heart," injured not only by those who have betrayed him, but injured by its very owner, for "he, *Herzog*, had committed a sin of some kind against his

own heart, whilst in pursuit of a grand synthesis" (Galloway 68). Like the majority of critics, Galloway resorts to Herzog's own explanation of how he had tried to figure out:

What it means to be a man. In a city. In a century. In transition. In a mass. Transformed by science. Under organized power. Subject to tremendous controls. In a condition caused by mechanization. After the late failure of radical hopes. In a society that was no community and devalued the person. Owing to the multiplied power of numbers which made the self negligible. Which spent military billions against foreign enemies but would not pay for order at home. Which permitted savagery and barbarism in its own great cities . . . On top of that, an injured heart and raw gasoline poured on the nerves. (201)

Melvin Maddocks, despite the overwhelming success of the novel and his own admiration of it, located part of the success of *Herzog* to its timely appearance during a hiatus in American literary life in which everyone eagerly awaited a successor to Hemingway. Looking back he writes:

Since World War II there has been an urgent instinct among US critics and readers to choose a successor to Hemingway as the champion of the American novel. The first candidates were the war novelists, and for a brief period Norman Mailer seemed the logical contender. When he failed to adapt to what for lack of a better term might be called the civilian novel, there was no major panic. Surely another young novelist was typing away in obscurity, worthy to emerge and seize the prize. When no commanding new talent did appear, a certain nervousness became general. The reputation-makers uneasily marked time by rearranging the prewar reputations. The orders went out: drop Hemingway to number two behind Faulkner. Bring Fitzgerald into glamorous contention. Saul Bellow's sixth novel is appearing. It is a good novel almost certain to be overrated. There is every indication that Mr. Bellow is going to be the next name submitted to the American public as champ, and there is every possibility that he may last longer than most, before those who overinflate take their usual revenge by being the first with the pinpricks. What "Herzog" may well do in the future is serve as landmark for a change in posture by the American novelist. No mean achievement. (Maddocks 7)

Regardless of Maddock's "hiatus" theory and the general circumstances of American literary history, Bellow's previous literary achievements substantially helped to position *Herzog* as a landmark literary event that quickly impelled the author toward Stockholm and the Nobel Prize in 1976. Furthermore, the novel remained on the *New York Times* best-seller list for the entire year of its publication. To this day it remains not only Bellow's

masterwork, but a work which regularly appears in lists of major twentieth-century American novels.

Three traditional critical narratives

Three major critical narratives have subsequently emerged as the enduring recurring interpretations of the novel. The first conflated Bellow's protagonist and the book with Bellow's own psychological profile and current divorce crises. The second and by far the most currently popular critical narrative detailed Bellow's penultimate dragon battle with the European father-philosophers. The third, and by far the most rapidly and recently developing narrative, has been the biographical/critical story of Bellow's hard won recovery of the transcendent, and a semblance of the religion of his forefathers.

1 Bellow's marital catastrophe

The earliest set of critics to weigh in on *Herzog* insisted with Chicago-insider pride that at the heart of the novel lies Bellow's profound shock at discovering, a year after his separation from Sondra (Alexandra Tschacbasov), his second wife, her affair with their mutual friend, Jack Ludwig. Apparently Bellow had been the last of their circle to know he had been deceived. They characterized the novel in light of these facts, identified Gersbach as Jack and Madelaine as Sondra. They insisted further that the novel was the self-pitying record of Bellow's deep depression, all tricked out in the form of an intensely narcissistic and self-justifying hero who was tearful, cuckolded, and utterly humiliated. Thereafter, as this critical story goes, Moses Herzog is essentially precipitated into intellectual and spiritual crisis by the failure of his marriage, failure in the classroom, failure with women, failure to achieve grand academic synthesis and failure of faith. Then there are his hysterical letters to God, the long dead, the recent dead, the living, and the modernist philosophers. Herzog/Bellow they argue has been overcome "by the need to explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends" (2) and refute the unflattering narcissistic protestant-Freudian assessment of himself provided by Edvig his analyst. While Bellow certainly lent a great deal of himself and his current marital miseries to this novel, he does so in the service of a far greater purpose than to vent and memorialize his personal humiliation. The journey is an intellectual and spiritual one of biblical proportions whose biographical details are incidental to their value as markers of the contemporary masculine condition.

2 Battling with the Modernists

Herzog represented a landmark novel to the majority of critics (Brodin, Gill, Goran, Klein, Maddocks, Prescott, Pritchett). In it, they have argued

for nearly 45 years that Bellow codified for once and for all his passionate defence of embattled twentieth-century humanism, and his powerful refutation of European modernist nihilism. This dominant and endlessly elaborated critical narrative shows no sign of being dislodged. While *Seize the Day* and *Henderson The Rain King* (1959) begin to focus Bellow's intellectual quarrel with Modernism and the social sciences, *Herzog* (1964) extends the critique to the entire modern philosophical tradition, and finally to the book's major event – Herzog's escape from such a tradition. As the book opens Herzog seems to have regained his Jewish identity, purged himself of violent anger, abandoned his latest mistress, and even repented of his sexual adventuring, bad fathering, and pathetic dandyism. By now he has had a profound education in the realities of human nature, rediscovered nature itself, the heavens, solitude, and the sublime – all on his run-down Ludeyville estate. After being in constant physical and mental motion for most of the novel, he is finally seen at rest in a hammock, contemplating the mystery of the night sky.

However, prior to this he has been precipitated into thoughtfulness by the failure of his most recent marriage, and appalled at what he calls the miserable Protestant-Freudian assessment of himself provided by his analyst, Edvig. Edvig reduced his love for Madelaine to a diagnosis of hysterical dependency, and his personality as narcissistic and anachronistic. He bursts out in a tirade against the “creeping psychoanalysis of ordinary conduct” (99). From there he goes on to condemn thinkers like Shapiro and Banowitch who accept psychoanalytical premises and all political power struggles as paranoid personality theory. Their “curious creepy minds,” he complains, always work on the premise that “madness always rules the world: and that mankind resembles a lot of cannibals running around in packs gibbering, bewailing its own murders, pressing out the living world as excrement” (77). He complains that Hobbes and Freud have not been our best benefactors and calls for a moratorium on further academic definitions of humanity which reveal: “A lousy, cringing, grudging conception of human nature” (58). Thinkers like Dewey and Whitehead he accuses of concluding that we cannot find happiness within ourselves because we distrust our own natures and take recourse in religion or philosophy. Nietzsche he indicts for unleashing the Dionysian spirit and calling modern cultural history a fall from classical greatness. Nietzsche's ideas, he roars, are no freer from perversion, nor closer to enlightenment than those with whom he quarrels. He blames Heidegger for the idea that we have fallen into the “quotidian” and asks scathingly, “When did this fall occur? Where were we standing when it happened?” (49) Spengler's historicism still infuriates him and he remembers reading in his youth in *The Decline of the West* (1918) with its anti-Semitic idea that all Jews are an archaic race of Magians for whom all heroic and romantic traditions have failed.

Herzog also attacks modern physics with its theories of entropy, as well as the gloomy forecasts from modern genetics, demography, sociology, and statistics. He decries the destructive notion of the biological or genetic predestination of the Self through logical application of Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest. Herzog goes from there to a scathing examination of Jean Wahl's theory of de-transcendence, and a condemnation of Rousseau. When he finally comes to the end of his anti-modernist diatribes he is purged and spent. Only then he is able to turn from failed metaphysics to the sublime and declare that "the light of the truth is never far away, and no human being is too negligible or corrupt to come into it" (314).

3 Reclaiming self and soul

Corollary to this almost standard metaphysical account is the designation of *Herzog* as Bellow's late-life Augustinian spiritual autobiography – the narrative of Herzog/Bellow's return from modernist metaphysics to the religion of his childhood and things of the spirit. Consistent with the period of the book's preparation, we know only recently from family testimony offered after Bellow's death in 2005 that he had returned by the late 1950s to the religion of his childhood. He also re-instituted much of Jewish ritual life at family gatherings. Most look to Bellow's subsequent interviews and other personal statements in order to ground this narrative. It has been significantly added to by his relatives and closest friends, all of whom are free to comment now he is gone. However, the first public signal of Bellow's long spiritual recovery came in 1973 in the classroom of Professor Sanford Pinsker. Bellow amazed all present by saying, "I think a person finally emerges from all of this nonsense [modern intellectual ideas] when he becomes aware his life has a much larger meaning that he has been ignoring – a transcendent meaning. And that his life is, at its most serious, some kind of religious enterprise, not one that has to do with the hurly burly of existence" (Pinsker 96). In 1977 he told interviewer Jo Brans that he had:

become aware of a conflict between the modern university education I received and those things that I felt in my soul most deeply. I've trusted those more and more – you see, I'm not even supposed to have a soul. The soul is out of bounds if you have the sort of education I had. . . . I read Marx and Bertrand Russell and Morris Cohen. I read the logical positivists. I read Freud and Adler and the Gestalt psychologists and the rest. And I know how a modern man is supposed to think. . . . The fact is there are deeper motives in a human being, which I don't like to call Unconscious, because that's a term preempted by psychoanalysis, but I say to myself, "I have always behaved in such a way that I cannot

escape the conclusion that I believe things I'm not consciously aware of believing. That I have hopes I can't justify." (Brans 142)

He then explained even more compellingly:

There are persistent ideas, the truth of which we recognize when we meet them in literature. You read Tolstoy – it's not uncommon that a character of Tolstoy will hear an inner voice. We all know what it is. We immediately recognize it. We know the soul of a child speaks to a child. We've experienced it ourselves, only there's no room for it in the new mental room we have constructed which is less and less a world and more and more a prison, it seems to me. (Brans 143)

By 1979, he could tell interviewer Maggie Simmons that "we receive epistemological guidance of which we are unaware, and [that] . . . we actually have infinitely deeper and better ways of knowing than those we've been educated in" (Simmons 167). Like Sisyphus he had first had to roll the rock of metaphysical despair back up the proverbial ontological mountain, even if it meant keeping company for a while with three unlikely anthroposophist gurus of the transcendent, Wilhelm Reich, Rudolph Steiner and Owen Barfield. Though he would eventually plough them under to create his quixotic, wondrous, comic characters, their romantic theories of a "beyond" served for a while to carry him through a religious crisis. Tilting at spiritual windmills with ludic philosophers, meditating on the night sky from his tatty deck chair, and communing in ancient biblical fashion with owls and mice, all alone on his Ludeyville estate, was a better game plan to Herzog/Bellow's mind than succumbing to "intellectually-engineered European skepticism" (Brans 142). He then insisted to all family, friends and colleagues who would listen:

But we know all these [spiritual intuitions] things when people talk to us about them. Our immortal hopes we know. We understand what they are. We don't dismiss them out of hand. And it's not just ancient superstition, it's because there is some unacknowledged information that we have. (Brans 143)

In 1984, after having been for a considerable time re-grounded in his own version of his ancestral religious traditions, he told interviewers Gray, White, and Nemanic:

My Jewish history gives me an entirely different orientation. The heavens in all their glory can open up above a ghetto sidewalk, and one doesn't need Gothic or Renaissance churches, Harvard University or any of these places . . ." (Gray, White and Nemanic 220–1)

But it was only recently from the vantage point of very advanced age that Bellow gave his most intimate accounts of his spiritual recovery:

So I suppose you might say that insofar as it is true that there is some sort of religion working in me . . . I ask myself if it would be dishonorable to put the thing this way. That is, would it discredit my religious faith, such as it is, or my artist's faith? Then there is some connection between them. (Manea 160)

He then told Manea that he had long ago stopped looking for epistemological finality:

I stopped arguing with myself about belief in God. It's not a real question. The real question is how I have really felt all these years, and all these years I have believed in God; so there it is. What are you going to do about it. (Manea 161)

Speaking specifically of his mid-career anthroposophical and theosophical novels Bellow explained:

Is there, in fact, any basis for religion other than the persistence of the supersensible? Science with the aid of modern philosophy – what we call the positive outlook – has driven the “invisible” into the dark night where enlightenment says it belongs. Together with it, in our simple-mindedness, we drive away revelation as well, and with revelation we drive out art, also we drive out dreaming. (Gray, White and Nemanc 222)

Bellow's spiritual explorations were not just cranky contrarian intellectual exercises designed to confound modernist and post-positivist philosophers. They were positions of belief always spoken openly among friends and family. On the occasion of his father's death in 2005 son Adam Bellow revealed to the *New York Times*:

My father believed strongly in the soul – in its powers, its eternity, and above all its connection with loved ones. He believed that parents and children were parts of the same soul, and that we are reunited with our family after death. When he talked about this I used to listen respectfully and inwardly roll my eyes. Now that he is gone, however, I finally begin to understand what he was talking about. (Bellow A21)

In 2009, just four years after Bellow's death, his beloved surrogate son, the British writer Martin Amis, told the *Sunday Telegraph* interviewer how he had once asked Bellow if he believed in an afterlife. Apparently Bellow replied: “Well, it's impossible to believe in it because there is no rational ground, . . .

But I have a persistent intuition . . . call it love impulses. What I think is how agreeable it would be to see my mother and my father and my brothers again, to see my dead' (qtd in Sanderson 12).

Recalling how early he had made this scarcely popular writerly decision Bellow told Norman Manea not long before he died: "When I decided my way in life, I knew that society would be against me. I also knew that I would win . . . And that it would be a small victory" (Manea 131–211). In this accounting it would appear that his spiritual quest was always the true goal of the fiction.

Fellow religious novelist and fellow Pulitzer Prize winner Marilynne Robinson recognized Bellow's genius when she wrote on the occasion of his death: "He was a writer of the highest seriousness. . . . The scale of his interests, of his meditations, were in the highest traditions" (Robinson 14). I suspect that in this post postmodern and perhaps post secular moment in Anglo-American literary history that *Herzog* will now be revisited by post secularists who will read it primarily as a watershed mid-twentieth-century religious text pointing past Modernism, post positivism, and postmodernism to the post secular moment.

Historic Western masculine dilemmas: a new reading

With these three critical accounts of *Herzog* in mind, I now wish to turn attention away from biographical, metaphysical and religious issues back to the rough ground of social realism and the fraught subject of masculinity in Bellow's novels. From the perspective of thirty or more years of feminist and now masculinist studies of all kinds, I want to argue that masculinity has been an under reported issue throughout the literary criticism of the entire Bellow canon. In novel after novel Bellow provides us with amazingly precise analyses of innumerable American masculine types – gentile, Jew, immigrant populations, mafioso, underclass, upper class, legal types, business types, and every occupation imaginable. While his failure to depict American femininity is a monumental one, the sheer number of masculine types who speak themselves through Bellow's texts suggests that masculinity and its American twentieth-century dilemmas interested him greatly as one of the late twentieth-century's most important stories. Androcentric anti-feminist, and even misogynous though they all are, Bellow's male protagonists nearly all compel our love, humor and forgiveness – perhaps, however, with the exception of the significantly less appealing Herzog. Comic ironic productions all, from Joseph (*DM*) to Eugene Henderson (*HRK*), Charlie Citrine (*HG*), Kenneth Tractenberg and Uncle Benn Crader (*MDH*), we feel for them as they reach for moral seriousness, while endlessly confronting their failure to parent, husband, sustain male friendships, sustain romantic liaisons, or prevail in erotic encounters. Endlessly bewildered, damaged, and enraged by turns, they yearn for their families of childhood

and ultimately fail even to reproduce those. However, Herzog also wrestles with the equally vexing problem of his conflicted Jewish American sexual and masculine angst. Working through mental and emotional trauma he provides us with what Mark Schechner has ironically and colorfully called “arabesques of lamentation” in which he becomes manic and even “beserk” (Schechner 121–58). Herzog’s fractured masculinity is of a piece with the well established late twentieth-century Jewish American preoccupation with the erotic, with its ubiquitous adulterers, comic *schlemiels*, *eine kliene menschen*, and Jewish obsession with and terror of gentile women. These characters and themes can be traced in Jewish American literature from I. B. Singer to Abraham Cahan to Saul Bellow, to Philip Roth, to Woody Allen, Marge Piercy, Susan Sontag, and more recently Jonathan Safran Foer. In writer after writer, including Bellow, Jewish male, and gentile female sexual stereotypes appear, including: the Jewish sexual *schlemiel*, the Jewish American Princess, Jewish erotomaniacs, male champions, Portnoy-like mother haters, gentile haters, female haters, neurotics, sexually perverse Eastern Europeans, *shiksa*-obsessed Jewish immigrants. Throughout the entire twentieth- and twenty-first-century tradition of Jewish American literature the triple issues of problematic Jewish masculinity, American modernity, and Jewish American assimilation recur in a near fatal matrix.

From ancient Biblical times to rabbinic culture of the Middle Ages, the era of the Kabbalah, eighteenth-century Hassidism, nineteenth-century Zionism, and finally modern American Jewish culture, Eros and its various renunciations, displacements, sublimations, and liberations have always preoccupied the architects and caretakers of historic Judaism. In his densely researched and provocative *Eros and the Jews From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (1997) David Biale traces what he calls the “dilemmas of desire” that have resulted from traditional Judaism’s “deep hostility to eroticism and the body” (Biale 1) and its subsequent encounter with American secular modernity. He talks of modern gentile culture’s fascination with the sexuality of the Jews, “marked by wildly conflicting beliefs” involving whether or not Christians have a healthier response to sexuality than do Jews, or vice versa (Biale 1). Some, he argues, see Judaism as a chaste and therefore ethical religion, while others see only a counter mythology of sexual prodigiousness.

In their immigrant anxiety to harmonize with American culture America’s male Jews anguish along the age-old dilemma of pleasure versus procreation, always beset by the hyper-erotic models of American mass culture and Hollywood, America’s Jews are inevitably depicted in the national literature along the axis of the erotic-neurotic. Most of these writers, including Bellow, says Biale in chapter 9 “Sexual Stereotypes in American Jewish Culture (204–30)” reach back for the *fin de siècle* Hebrew and Yiddish theater versions of anti-heroic, impotent, luckless sexual *schlemiel* consumed with sexual self-doubt, obsessed with gentile women, possessed of an outsized libido, smitten with guilt, and rarely able to consummate desire. Suffering

all of the masochism stemming from the chaste proscriptions of traditional Judaism, and political impotence instilled during the long Eastern European experience, they typically appear fumbling, sexually ambivalent, emotionally blocked, easily dominated, cursed with aggressive women, passive, and erotically inept. Inevitably they are attracted to the exotic, the different in what amounts to a broken Self–Other dialogue. Or, they are seen transmuting their sexual ineptitude and anxiety into flamboyant consumerism and dandyish clothing in particular. It is these stereotypes Abraham Cahan, Woody Allen, Philip Roth, Saul Bellow, and a host of Jewish comic writers and novelists are tapping into in all of their works because this comic psychological code is already known to the Jewish readers and consumers of Jewish literature and comedy.

Herzog becomes, in Bellow's crafting, the quintessential historical vessel for all of these troubling Jewish, modern and American masculinities. The comic or outrageous sexual performance dimensions of Jewish masculinity, long a staple feature of twentieth-century Jewish American literature, are not the only ones Bellow is interested in. The compelling and dominant WASP model of American masculinity, descended from the Classical and Christian tradition he sees is the equally daunting challenge to the mostly Eastern European Jew well accustomed to the comic self-ironic identification with the Yiddish *kliene mensch* or the comic stock figure of the luckless easily stepped on "little person." Anglo-American masculinities are, as Bellow is quite aware, of the descendants of this Classical and Christian tradition, historically compounded as they are of such types as the pioneer, explorer, hunter, revolutionary, patriot, warrior, Dionysian, athlete, power-broker, scientist-engineer, self-made man, and prodigious womanizer – none of them consistent with Jewish Eastern European masculinity. The philosopher, poet, non-athlete intellectual man of books and ancient worship does not feature at all in this daunting and distinctively non-Jewish model.

The Classical tradition of heroic masculinity out of which WASP American masculinities are descended is what postmodern cultural historians call now the "dominant fiction" of male supremacy – that heroic male who is the alpha and omega of patriarchal authority, Truth, Reason and Civilization. This privileged heroic and originally European classical masculinity is an aesthetic celebration of male beauty that has been the radiating projection of the male individual transcendent "I" throughout Western and now American culture. It is the iconic Western masculinity of history painting and sculpture whose principle purpose is to keep its "feminine" (read also Jewish) "Other" at bay. It is the linchpin of the system invested with power and dominance. Such a figure, Greek, Roman, or Christian or American disqualifies all other masculinities, especially Jewish ones, not to mention femininity itself, which all represent ontological "lack." Traditionally it represented the dominant class, who commissioned, produced, sold, criticized, celebrated and received it. It is a concept of the masculine forged in

the Western “male imaginary” – that is until about the time of the French revolution and the simultaneous inception of American history. From that moment down into American modernity it is a troubled model of masculinity in steady eclipse, and increasingly by its own de-authorization. It is also in cultural metastasis. From its unified classical model it adapted into multiple masculinities, including Jewish American, African American, Native American, Hispanic American, homosexual, metrosexual, transsexual. It also had to contend with historically altered or historically retrieved femininities. Herzog is the iconic historical repository of these many troubled late twentieth-century masculinities and as such Bellow uses him to reflect masculinity in mid twentieth-century Western and American history. The epochal change in the late nineteenth-century European Jewish world about to escape its *shtetl*, boundaries for America and beyond put Jewish males into the mainstream WASP American culture where its masculinities were already in disarray. Post WWII literature provides countless vulnerable anti-heroes, and a profusion of troubled Jewish males outside of Sam Browne’s version of WASP America.

Herzog is perhaps the repository of all of these confused models of masculinity, playing behind the luckless “little men” of Bellow’s great novel. Cuckolded and intellectually defeated, Herzog cannot keep a woman, raise his child, close the deal with his academic synthesis, cut a heroic figure, use a gun, or prevail economically. He is by turns whining, outraged, narcissistic, dandyish, orphic, Joblike, infantile, and the emotional “potatoe love” child of Jews. He might temporarily be seen, at the outset and conclusion of the novel, as contented and orphically entranced, but only at the expense of being outcast and alone. He is victim to the classic ancient dichotomy of religious Judaism and Christianity, sexual or celibate, with its patriarchal sex for marriage and procreation only, or celibacy model. He is also that quintessential non-synthesis of mobile and inherited contemporary American masculinities now steadily losing the battle to independent womanhood. Significantly, all of Herzog’s lovers and relatives, Zinka, Libbie, Daisy, Sono, Wanda, Ramona and Madelaine, are shrewd and successful “operators” and business women. In addition to his historically representative marital intellectual and spiritual condition is his condition as the inheritor of many masculinities he simply cannot inhabit successfully. Ontologically speaking Herzog is that moment in twentieth-century literature which now registers the absence of the no longer the luminescent “I” of earlier Western history a “lack,” in postmodern terms. He is neither patrician, pioneer, business maven, sportsman, or man of wealth. Symbolically then, his great synthesis of Romanticism, at whose center lies that very transcendental “I,” has defeated him. He is now the absurd, maybe liberated moment of its final absence.

Most indicative of Herzog’s masculine dilemmas are his failed relationships with women. In the tradition of twentieth-century Jewish literature and comedy he is misogynistic, adolescent, narcissistic, and fascinated with

exotic orientals, gentiles, and foreign sexual vampires. As a son Herzog has misogynistically failed to value his mother and aunts, a failure he is now trying to correct. Naomi Lutz, his adolescent love, still the subject of his total adoration, was the only woman who ever made him feel safely within life. His is still an adolescent, arrested sexuality. All subsequent women have confused, damaged, and finally overwhelmed him. Herzog writes, "*Will never understand what women want. What do they want? They eat green salad and drink human blood?*" (42). Worked over most recently by an infantilizing Oriental lover, he next falls prey to an exotic gentile self-styled courtesan, followed by an aggressive adulterous wife. Finally he is passive and terrified, having traversed the full distance between the two ancient and enduring extremes – sexual savant to religious celibate.

Sono, Herzog's exotic oriental lover, quickly identifies his deep-seated misogyny and infantile narcissism. She patronizingly tells him he must come to a woman with the "pride of the peacock, the lust of the goat, the wrath of the lion and the wisdom of God" (188). It is a confusing array of elemental non-Jewish sexual stereotypes. While handing him this awful mythic expectation she is always soaping his feet, massaging his body, singing to him in the bathtub, and generally playing the oriental courtesan to his male narcissist and needy infant. Herzog is more than a little disturbed at having to live up to the dandy, the lustful goat, the primitive lion and God himself to please Sono's impossible and ironically biblical sexual fantasies. He is also disturbed by the cracks in his own fantasy of the oriental lover – the knowledge that Sono is a savvy war refugee, is possessed of a graveyard sense of humor, full of gossip and intrigue, who naughtily imitates fat ladies, and is given to wearing elaborate masking makeup. He never considers her as a woman and friend, merely as an oriental "lover," and when she is gone he never misses her.

Ramona, his recently departed *shiksa* vampiress, has left him sexually damaged because of her transparently professional sexual monkeyshines, pride, anger, excessive rationality, mistrust of emotion, scheming heart, power plays, competitiveness, tongue-lashings, savagery, and icy rages. A dominatrix, she renders him passive and emotionally unable to connect with her romantically. She is first and foremost an American business woman who fancies herself an exotic Spanish courtesan. To the faltering Herzog she is the living representation of the deathly erotic gentile woman who must be both sexually dominated and spiritually evaded. He calls her a "wily serpent," and ultimately feels feminized and rendered passive by this manipulative sexual priestess. Now, many years later, he finally evades her by writing her a letter of his current healed ecstatic state: "The light of truth is never far away, and no human being is too negligible or corrupt to come into it" (314). Herzog represents that historically emblematic wavering figure of the twentieth-century American Jewish male caught between the impossible and unresolved poles of the erotic gentile temptress and the

ancient Judeo-Christian religious code of sexual sublimation. Herzog is now at the far pole of sexual isolation and religious celibacy – for the moment.

Most recently Herzog's masculinity has taken its final plunge because of Madelaine, his unfaithful wife, who cuckolds him with his best friend, takes his child, and complains about his sexual selfishness, his ghetto Jew mentality and his violence. Finally she demands his money. He thinks of her as a frightening paranoiac, and a destructive, faithless bitch. He recalls that she hates the ghetto Jew in him so much that she prefers a gimpy gentile man with a wooden leg to the able-bodied and intellectual but Jewish Herzog. The final message of these sexual relationships is the ancient historic dichotomy – Herzog is a man divided. He can never find sexual and spiritual peace in the same bed. Wandering across town like the ubiquitous Leopold Bloom, he finds himself sexually unhinged in the wake of his marital disaster. In the men's outfitters he allows a sneering salesman to shamelessly pander to his damaged midlife pride, and despite his pudgy figure he finds himself buying clothes that would look absurd on a younger man – further evidence of his masculine confusion.

Throughout all of Bellow's novels sexually transgressive Jewish male protagonists like Herzog attempt to elude, modify, embrace and rarely transcend their inherited masculinities. As assimilating Jewish male intellectuals, they still possess a counter-cultural Jewish model of sexual restraint accompanied by the taboo against gentile women. In contradistinction to the prevailing WASP Anglo-American male repertoire of masculinities, men like Herzog are instead simultaneously passive, intuitive, visionary, dreaming, orphic, and abnormally sexually driven. Having now immersed themselves into the American masculine narcissism and the romantic tradition of radical individualism, capitalism, and the whole masculine American experience from the Puritans to the Cold War, they now also possess self-destructive and competing WASP codes of masculinity. Their historically Jewish endowment of the tribal, the familial, the poetic, and the spiritual seems to be at serious odds with modern models. It is this lost Jewish spiritual dimension of his masculine heritage that Herzog gratefully reclaims in the wilderness of his Ludeyville estate. Accordingly the book opens with the manic grieving and unhinged behavior over, and Herzog temporarily at peace, wondering happily if he has finally lost his mind; his Western rationalism, as the final arbiter of his masculinity. Lying in a hammock he realizes that when he "Opened his eyes in the night, the stars were near like spiritual bodies. Fires of course: gases – minerals, heat, atoms, but eloquent at five in the morning to a man lying in his hammock, wrapped in his overcoat" (1). The eloquence of nature is matched equally by his own eloquence in expressing how spiritually expressive his natural world has become as he listens to crows and the barn owls, and walks about observing his garden with new eyes from a "corner of his mind," open now to the "external world of transcendental signification." He says he "looks keenly at everything but felt half blind"(2).

Far from the metaphorical city of gentile destruction, he enters the state of spiritual dreaming, although one quite removed from Freud's notions of the dreaming Unconscious and its roiling unbounded Id. From his life of overweening and preening hypersexuality Herzog now reclaims the realms of the soul. However, he is still a man divided between head and heart, solitude and society, sex and celibacy, family and self, the mundane and the mystical. His temporary peace comes at the cost of aloneness and unresolved, sexual striving.

Herzog is a massive *mea culpa* on his acquiescence to traditional American masculinities, his fathering, selfish marital behaviors, remoteness as a sibling, and ingratitude as a child. "What he had to suffer, he deserved; he had sinned long and hard; he had earned it. This was it" (8–9). He has come to the realization of his traditional Jewish masculine Other that "There is someone inside me. I am in his grip. When I speak of him I feel him in my head, pounding for order. He will ruin me" (11). Furthermore, it is not only these Jewish Fathers pounding in his head who want to destroy him, it is also the bad Fathers of European philosophy and the WASP fathers of American masculinity. The very surfaces of the text reveal his conflicted state – the wild punctuation, italics, parentheses, switches in point of view, quotations, hysteria, ellipses, mental asides, prayers, invective, and tearful nostalgic reminiscences.

Thinking of his WASPishly Americanized brother Shura, he notes that he has "asked for nothing better than to prosper in the belly of the Leviathan and set a hedonistic example to the community" (78). Herzog prefers instead "potato love" or Jewish familial sentimentality. Shura is too American, daunting with his fancy suits, vicuña coat, Italian hats, flashy rings, and limousines. For him universal concerns or religious intimations are an idiocy. Shura embodies the worst Dionysian model of excessive Anglo-American sexuality, sensuality, and material consumption. In contrast Herzog prefers the old world man of Jewish sensibility and feeling. When his friend Alex Szathmar gives Herzog an affectionate kiss he feels the old family "potato love," followed immediately by a vision of the air around him, and bright reflections on water which prompt him to say "Praise God – Praise God." "His breathing had become freer. His heart was greatly stirred by the opening horizon; the deep colors; the faint iodine pungency of the Atlantic rising from the weeds and mollusks; the white, fine heavy sand; but principally by the green transparency as he looked down to the stony bottom webbed with golden lines" (91). It is a partial rejection of a homophobic masculine isolation, individualism, and emotional stoicism. Like Natty Bumppo of old he walks between rotted stumps, moss, fungi, and leaves following a deer trail. For now he is sustained by silence and calm. He no longer wishes in hypermasculine fashion to shoot Gersbach, steal June back, or revenge himself on Madeline.

Clearly Herzog is an examination of the multiple American masculinities first-generation assimilating Jewish males have become heir to. But it is also

a historical reprise of the multiple masculinities the American male of any ethnic origin is historical heir to at the middle of the twentieth-century. Adrienne Rich once wrote:

Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. . . . a radical critique of literature feminist in impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, and how we can begin to see – therefore live – afresh. (Rich 18)

The same is true of masculine assumptions, traps, and liberations. *Herzog* is that androcentric text which among many other things reveals the impossible construction of Jewish American masculinity, now trying to graft itself into or evade the remnants of the transcendental “I” of Classical and Christian culture playing out in contemporary America. Self ironic and historically aware, the novel enacts and reveals a brilliant taxonomy of masculine types and styles, each rooted carefully in Bellow’s peculiar brand of social realism and historical awareness. The historicity of Herzog’s masculine dilemmas, manic self-destructiveness, temporary recovery, and ultimate non-resolutions are all part of it. Herzog might have temporarily quieted his soul, but he is yet to find an appropriate sexual relationship and a satisfying masculinity. His erotics of American twentieth-century Jews and non-Jews reflects the larger troubled sociological picture of American/Jewish masculine negotiations, and well as the ancient and unresolved Judeo-Christian one of soul only at the expense of body that haunts modern Judaisms and Christianities. Herzog, it seems, can only have one at the expense of the other. Herzog is an American post WWII classic that has by now become permanently entrenched in the canon. With his eclectic trademark historicism Bellow has not only managed to provide a reprise of nay-saying European metaphysics, but an allegory of the loss of God and the final disappearance of the transcendental male “I” of Western civilization. As such it is a rich repository of morphing and troubled American masculinities.

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14

Beyond Postmodernism in Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*

Claire Allen

The year 2014 marked the eightieth birthday of Alasdair Gray, “one of Scotland’s foremost writers and now widely seen as the grand old man behind the recent Scottish literary and cultural revival”¹ (Dietmar Böhnke, 1). The time span of Gray’s work has seen many changes in both the cultural and political identity of Scotland, such as the Scottish parliament gaining independence from London (1999), as well as a great rise in the success (both literary and commercial) of the country’s younger writers, including James Kelman, Irvine Welsh and A. L. Kennedy, to name but a few. This chapter hopes to contribute towards rereading the canon by revisiting one of Gray’s most famous novels, *Lanark* (1981) just over thirty years after its first publication, in order to investigate Gray’s postmodern experimental techniques from a twenty-first century perspective and to consider *Lanark* in light of developments within critical and theoretical approaches to postmodernism.

Within Gray’s body of work we have a unique, even eccentric, approach to writing. Gray’s style defies easy categorisation or even summary, as many critics have pointed out, including Robert Crawford, Thom Nairn, Phil Moores, and Dietmar Böhnke. Moores’ summary of Gray’s work highlights the many contradictions within his style, aligning Gray with realism and modernism, referring to him as “redoubtably modernist” (xi), whilst noting that he is a writer of fantasy of the postmodern. Böhnke, however, suggests that Gray has “established a reputation as an experimental, ‘postmodern’ writer” (1). As Moores’ analysis and the inverted commas around Böhnke’s definition suggest, the postmodernism of Gray’s writing is somewhat a contentious issue. Böhnke notes Gray “freely mixes realism with fantasy, social and political commentary with parody and playfulness, local concerns with universal issues, humour and irony with a serious message” (1) highlighting how there are many aspects to Gray’s writing which need to be carefully considered. What is clear is the need to avoid any simplified analysis of *Lanark*, as Böhnke suggests, and to recognise “the importance of complexity, pluralism and difference, even contradiction; the necessity to be aware of

'shades of grey' as opposed to black and white explanations, and to eschew monolithic/hegemonic 'discourses'" (2).

Fellow novelist Jonathan Coe similarly highlights how, despite its use of experimental narrative devices, and the many features which can be aligned with postmodernism, we can also read Gray's text as being akin to many classic pieces of literature as Gray's work is not so alien as first appearances may suggest, and in fact draws on a traceable history of texts which approach a kind of metafictional quality as a means of making comment on the political and philosophical state of man. Coe positions Gray within a tradition that predates twentieth-century postmodernism: "Alasdair Gray found a way of reconciling all the strongest virtues of classic fiction" (65). Though for Coe there remains also an association with postmodernism through the manner in which Gray draws on the literary past, "with a thoroughly self-questioning and (damn! just when I thought we'd managed to avoid the word) postmodern sensibility" (65). Coe's curse here reinforces how difficult it is to firmly locate Gray's work, as, although he finally concedes and uses the term postmodern, it is clearly a complex issue for him to evoke a term that he feels is a half-truth, which (whether intentionally or not) hides or masks a longer history.

Coe's difficulties with a reading of *Lanark* that situates it solely within the postmodern are clearly not unfounded. The novel expresses concerns about artistic endeavor and identity which are comparable to those articulated by Frederick Jameson as being endemic to the postmodern era (15). However, within *Lanark*, such techniques can be read beyond a simple assertion of the consequences of a postmodern fragmented identity; they can also be aligned specifically to a working class Scottish identity. The character of Thaw (a working class Glaswegian) is battling to try to achieve an identity as an artist, but Gray expresses this quest through the dual narratives of Thaw/Lanark, rather than more realist, conventional means. We can read Thaw/Lanark's struggles in relation to geographic and class positioning, as Gray reflects: "Young artists couldn't make a living by painting easel or murals in 1950s Scotland. Nearly all art students became teachers, apart from a few who got into industry or advertising or became housewives. I supposed I would have to survive by some kind of compromise like that, but I had no intention of letting Thaw do so" (Gray, 'Tailpiece' 569).

Heeding the warnings issued above, this chapter aims to keep in mind the specifically and carefully located geographical and class aspects of Gray's novel, which, although transcended by the dual quests of the two protagonists – the eponymous Lanark and Thaw – never fully allow for a non-essentialized reading of the characters' identities, and thereby compromise the novel's status as a truly postmodern text. Thus, in this chapter I do not attempt any kind of re-classification of Gray's work. However I do reconsider the various postmodern aspects of *Lanark* and to think about Gray's techniques in light of the discussions surrounding postmodernism which have developed over the last thirty

years. There are of course an entire plethora of definitions of postmodernism in terms of theory as well as application to text. I wish to consider Gray's post-modern techniques from the perspective which seems to have been gaining much ground in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, that is the notion of moving beyond postmodernism's early, sometimes referred to as 'vulgar'² stage. This theoretical approach is yet to be aptly named, with terms such as 'second phase', 'beyond' or 'post-postmodernism' being suggested.³ As such I hope to build on Böhnke's approach to Gray's work, which argues that "the distinction of different "postmodernisms" as opposed to one monolithic system of postmodernism is surely preferable" (26–7).

Postmodernism and post-structuralist trends in critical theory have often been thought to problematize conceptions of individual and social identity. Postmodernism has dominated much critical thinking since the middle of the last century and is a term which by its very nature defies easy definition. Fredric Jameson makes such a point about the elusive nature of a single definition of postmodernism in *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991): "The problem of postmodernism – how its fundamental characteristics are to be described, whether it even exists in the first place, whether the very concept is of any use, or is, on the contrary a mystification – this problem is at one and the same time an aesthetic and a political one" (55). Gray's work has often been classified as postmodern, and it is easy to see why.

Lanark opens with book three, immediately disrupting readers' notions of time and place, challenging realist conceptions of temporality. Within Gray's work both writing and reading practices are brought into question, narrative is interrupted by the author, we are presented with a list of plagiarisms, and there are many typographical abnormalities with several story lines running at once on the same page. However, as Phil Moores suggests, it is far too simplistic to directly align Gray's work with postmodern experimentation:

The ease with which Gray plays with the form of the book and the novel, while never experimenting for the mere sake of it, is impressive; typographical games, mock erratum slips, an index of plagiarisms and professorial notation all engage the reader in an interchange, sometimes playful, sometimes dramatic, but without ever distancing them from the emotional story they are being told. (Moores, x)

Gray himself is openly skeptical about postmodernism. In a letter to Böhnke (*Shades of Gray*) he notes the innate problems of definition: "All postmodernist debates and criticism I have encountered devoted so much energy to defining what postmodernism was that they had no time to illuminate anything else" (250). This is perhaps one of the key areas in need of exploration, as opposed to simply defining postmodernism, Grey urges his readers to consider more than just the definition of a term, instead he asks us to think about the contexts and pretexts of that which we call postmodernism.

Nick Bentley, in *British Fiction of the 1990s* (2005), charts postmodernism's development from "the first phase [which] corresponds roughly to the 1960s and 1970s" to a second phase in the 1980s (4). In particular Bentley suggests that the later phase questions "the liberatory potential of postmodernism's skepticism towards 'grand narratives'" (4). Postmodernism in its first wave, in part, represents a democratization of culture because the centre is challenged along with the idea of "absolute truths".⁴ However, Bentley notes a growing skepticism about postmodernism towards the end of the twentieth century among literary and cultural theorists such as Fredric Jameson, bell hooks, Seyla Benhabib, John O'Neil, and Terry Eagleton. bell hooks notes in 'Postmodern Blackness' (1994) how a complete rejection of dominant forms in the new celebration of "difference" (that postmodernism in part embarks on) can have complicated consequences for those previously marginalized.⁵

"Post-postmodernism" and "second wave" postmodernism are terms which have only recently come into usage within literary criticism and are still very much in the process of being developed and argued over, such as in the work of Gavin Keulks ('W(h)ither Postmodernism' 2006 and 'Winterson's Recent Work: Narrating Realism and Postmodernism', 2007), Garry Potter and José López (*After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism*, 2001) and Klaus Stierstorfer (ed.) (*Beyond Postmodernism: Reassessment in Literature, Theory, and Culture*, 2003). Attempts at defining the post-postmodern are as equally contentious and difficult as attempts to define its predecessor. One meaningful theme recurrent within these attempts is the notion that trust, dialogue, performance or sincerity can work to transcend postmodern irony. Raoul Eshelman offers such a definition in *Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism* (2008). It is such a desire to move beyond postmodern irony and reengage with more "classical" processes of storytelling, yet maintaining the desire to express the marginal or previously subjugated which is beginning to emerge as a definition for late twentieth and early twenty-first century literature.

There is a discernible trend among contemporary authors, such as Martin Amis, Jeanette Winterson, Andrea Levy and Sarah Waters (to name but a few) to use narrative, storytelling techniques and characterization that can be interpreted as a significant move away from the narrative and stylistic experimentalism of what Böhnke refers to as postmodernism's 'vulgar' and nihilistic phase (46). Can we read Gray's work as having elements akin to post-postmodernism as well as the postmodern? Although problematic, due to the many experimental narrative devices within the text – such as the non-linear ordering of the novel, as Randall Stevenson elucidates, Gray's work has an interesting relationship with postmodernist experimentalism, as Stevenson begins to align Gray with the post-postmodern due to an essential attitude and overt polemic which is expressed within his work:

[T]he playful list of references and plagiarisms in the Epilogue is almost superfluous – though as Gray explains, it does function as a timely, if partial

deflection of criticism, making a virtue, or a joke, of necessity. It also shows Gray highly self-conscious about using self-conscious forms of fiction: postmodernism, once largely directed by the urge to parody and subvert conventional forms of writing, becomes in its turn a recognized, accepted form to be parodied and played with itself. Perhaps this makes Gray a post-postmodernist, though that might really be a term to puzzle him. (55–6)

Even though thinking beyond the postmodern here is presented in a somewhat jovial manner, something to “puzzle” Gray; we can start to think about *Lanark* in terms beyond a postmodern pastiche and sense of depthlessness. Stevenson notes there is a self-conscious and satirical element within Gray’s text which problematizes any ‘straight forward’ reading. In order to fully explore the question of the types of postmodernism within *Lanark* we must first identify the ostensibly postmodern elements of the novel.

In *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1984), Jameson raises issues of personal and national identity, suggesting that the creation of modes of identity is closely linked with society and the world we experience around us (*Postmodernism*, 26), thus rejecting the modernist standpoint that suggests that the ‘self’ can be thought of as essential or timeless. Instead Jameson suggests a more fluid, fragmented structure. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Trans v.I 1977, v.II, 1987) likewise highlight how the individual has become disentangled from the “modernist notion of the unified, rational and expressive subject” which is substituted by “a postmodern subjectivity which is decentered, liberated from fixed identities and free to become dispersed and multiple” (summarized by Tim Woods, 1999, 32).

The destabilizing of the temporal unification that would constitute a narrative of personal identity is textualised within *Lanark*, in which the past and the present are often contestable ground, fought over by the figures within the novel. The novel opens with the character Lanark immediately being displaced by his unexpected and unexplained existence in Unthank, as the circumstances of his existence, arrival and purpose elude him. Lanark attempts placement through his desperate search for sunlight in order to achieve an idea of time and thus create a past, present and future, and therefore a sense of who he is and what he is doing:

“But why do you like daylight? We’re well lit by the usual means.”

“I can measure time with it. I’ve counted thirty days since coming here, maybe I’ve missed a few by sleeping or drinking coffee, but when I remember something I can say, ‘It happened two days ago’, or ten, or twenty. This gives my life a feeling of order.” (*Lanark*, 5)

But this attempt at understanding and constructing a positive single identity with a ‘feeling of order’, is quickly flawed as Unthank’s surreal dark skies

offer only glimpses of sunlight, with conventional realities of sunlight and dawn exhibiting almost alien status:

“Can’t you see it? Can’t you see that . . . what’s the word? There was once a special word for it . . .”

Rima looked in the direction of his forefinger and said coldly,

“Are you talking about the light in the sky?”

“Dawn. That’s what it was called. Dawn.” (11)

The problematized concepts of identity presented by *Lanark* seem to reflect a postmodern critical position as established by Jameson, Deleuze and Guattari. The novel is clearly not depicted within the usual realist time frame, denying the reader the opportunity to draw upon the characters’ past and present, making the readers’ understanding of the characters problematic as conventional methods are denied. This reflects the fragmentation which Jameson identifies as a symptom of postmodern culture in which history and the past have been rejected and meaning becomes fractured. However, even though the order which each book appears does not follow a conventional linear structure and the narrative is often interrupted by other voices,⁶ the story of *Lanark* is not presented as “heaps of fragments”, thus an alternative reading to postmodern alienation can be read into this device. There are clear hints that the fragments of the novel are not as unrelated as they may at first appear. The oppositional worlds of fantasy and ‘realism’ clearly contain the potential to become one and/or the same. There are several instances in which the same character seems to appear in the book multiple times with different names. The most obvious example of this being Lanark/Thaw, there are several similarities that suggest parity between these characters: the possibly interchangeable eczema for dragonhide; Thaw imagines that food is human flesh, and Lanark experiences this as a reality within the institute. In addition to these tangible points of convergence there is a general feeling of *déjà vu* for the reader as the events within the two worlds also take on striking similarities: the questioning of time in *Unthank* is echoed in *Glasgow* – whereas *Unthank* has no clocks in *Glasgow* Thaw is told of time’s unreliability: “None of the clocks in this house can be relied on, least of all the ones that go” (273).

Yet, just because there are fantastical elements, this of course does not innately mean that the text can not be postmodern. The fantasy elements may be reflecting the schizophrenic nature of ‘self’ in the postmodern world. Malcolm Bradbury suggests the use of two worlds has become a prevalent device for the postmodern writer due to the confused state of past and present: “The laws of time and space were altering too. Life seemed lived between two worlds, the dying world of the old and the shapeless world of the new” (*The Modern British Novel*, 1994, 456). This appears to be partly what Gray offers as *Glasgow* seems to be dying, there is no hope for the young, such as Coulter who believes he is becoming part of the machinery

in the work place: “You stop thinking. Life becomes a habit. You get up, dress, eat, go out tae work, clock in etcetera etcetera automatically, and think about nothing but the pay packet on Friday and the booze-up last Saturday. Life’s easy when you’re a robot” (216). The prospects for Thaw appear even worse, as he eventually commits suicide. A similar sense of doom pervades *Unthank*, which remains a forever disjointed and surreal world, in which systems of order are forever being developed and then proven to be flawed and abandoned.

Through the creation of two worlds, Gray offers the reader different ways of understanding the same events. Such a concept clearly raises issues of identity, highlighting its problematic and unstable nature, as if there are multiple ways of seeing things, then how can one, true, stable ‘self’ ever be identified? Thus Gray highlights in his text the problematic nature of existence and the creation of identity in a seemingly postmodern manner. However, this is not the sole interpretation of such a strategy on offer. Gray’s experimental narrative techniques also have the effect of reinforcing the political aspects of his work. *Lanark* is clearly a vehicle for Gray’s political endeavor and socialist, anti-capitalist politics, in which, the fantastical and postmodern elements further his political statements, giving them greater impact than previous, less experimental writing. Stevenson notes the comparison between Gray’s work and that of D. H. Lawrence, but highlights how Gray’s concerns about the exploitation of people are expressed more overtly through the fantastical elements in his texts:

Gray, throughout *Lanark*, concerns himself with what is only a later, expanded version of the industrialized capitalism which horrified [D. H.] Lawrence⁷ [. . .] *Lanark* expands these possibilities still further, into nightmare and fantasy. Technology enables ‘the creature’ – ‘a conspiracy which owns and manipulates everything for profit [*Lanark*, 410] to make entirely literal what used to be only metaphors of commodification and consumption: men and women, in the institute, are actually turned into food and eaten. (51)

The abuse and use of people to fuel the system is clearly a critique of a capitalist endeavor in which the many are exploited by the few.⁸ Thus, we can see socialist ideologies within Gray’s technique of blurring the boundary between fantasy and reality. Such blurring, along with the repetition between the two worlds can therefore be read not only as a postmodern reaction to a fragmented world, but as also having a political impetus (a point which I will explore in more detail below). However, in order to explore this fully we must further investigate the fantastical elements of the novel and situate them in relation to Gray’s particular postmodern politics.

Within the late twentieth century, we can chart a rise in postmodernism alongside a rise in fantasy and sci-fi writing. If we can understand that in a

postmodern world, as described by Lyotard, Baudrillard and Jameson, language has become detached from a secure representative function, as the writing of Ferdinand Saussure proposes (1916), showing signifier and signified, world and word related only arbitrarily; that 'time has exploded' as Italo Calvino (*If on a Winter's Night*, 1982) suggests; and that reality is a fiction – then we can see some parallels between postmodernism and sci-fi and fantasy. Stevenson notes: "If reality cannot be wholly known, nor language any longer conceived as tightly connected to it, why should not words be used to create other worlds?" (57). Brian McHale furthers the discussion of the association between sci-fi and postmodernism suggesting "the two ontological sister genres, science fiction and postmodernist fiction, have been pursuing analogous but independent courses of development . . . along parallel but independent tracks" (65, quoted by Stevenson, 57). The blurring of the distinction between sci-fi and postmodernism is a common trend within the work of late twentieth-century writers such as Christopher Priest, Doris Lessing and Angela Carter, and as Stevenson notes, such a grouping offers an apt location for Gray's text: "it is really in this recent context of combined science fiction and postmodernist forms that *Lanark* belongs" (57).

We can see how the fantastical elements within Gray's work, such as the 'machine' the oracle describes in Book Three, that processes human flesh into energy, is acting as a metaphor for Gray's critique of society's exploitation of each other, as the repeated phrase "Man is the pie that bakes and eats himself" (101) exemplifies. Thus the eponymous Lanark enters into a fantastical dystopia which exaggerates all of the horrors faced by Thaw. Stevenson highlights how the fantasy world Lanark is part of works to 'make large' the socio-political critique of the 'reality' of late twentieth-century working class Scotland experienced by Thaw: "Fantasy is nevertheless very particularly used by Gray, not as an escape but as satire [. . .] Gray's dystopian vision uses fantasy to enlarge and make objective some of the problems of this history, emphasizing how urgently they need to be addressed" (Stevenson, 57). Thus, fantasy is used alongside social realism to foreground the harsh realities of working class existence. The Oracle's comments at the end of Book Three: "it is like all machines, it profits those who own it, and nowadays many sections are owned by gentle, powerless people who don't know they are cannibals and wouldn't believe if you told them" (102) reinforce this so strongly because these words so closely echo Coulter's experience of working in a factory, in which his life is metaphorically 'eaten up' by the capitalist 'machine' of his workplace, as his social situation has caused him to "stop thinking" and barely exist (216).

The satirical elements of the text and the use of parody problematize locating the text within postmodernism's first phase. Jameson describes a lack of authorial identity within postmodern style, famously quoting the work of Andy Warhol, in particular the replication of soup can labels. Jameson suggests the artistic necessity for unique talent to produce something original

in the postmodern era has faded – and thus too has the ability for parody. He suggests that it is pastiche which gains prominence as this involves a simpler copying of styles, rather than parody, which requires a deeper understanding of the past. Yet *Lanark* offers a socio-political critique, with the repetition of events across two worlds foregrounding a sense of history and the past. It is difficult to read the text as pastiche, but rather the fragments of the novel work together to create a satire of contemporary life.

J. A. Cuddon highlights how European literature's relationship with satire has long had a polemic facet: "The satirist is thus a kind of self-appointed guardian of standards and truths; of moral as well as aesthetic values" (780) noting that those associated with the "golden age of satire" did not lay challenges for the mere sake of the challenge, but rather were looking for change:

We find Pope satirizing materialism, excess and bad writing, Swift ferociously attacking hypocrisy, pride, cruelty and political expedience. Voltaire ridiculing credulity, religious humbug and native optimism, and Dr Johnson, with somber magnificence, arraigning the world of folly, vanity and affectation. With their moral weight and unblinking scrupulosity of truth, such men sought to be the cleansers and guardians of civilization. (Cuddon, 783)

These accounts of satire offer an appropriate reading of *Lanark*. Gray's text is not just to shock or describe postmodern alienation, but rather has a clear polemic strategy. *Lanark* was published just after Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979, a time during which the gap between the richest and poorest in society was ever growing, when capitalism and the free-market were expanding, but there are limited opportunities for Thaw and his childhood friends. They become meaningless cogs in the machine, or "robots" (216) in a system Thaw does not want to be part of: "I had to read poetry and hear music and study philosophy and write and draw and paint" (211). He feels alien because of his love of the arts and isolated from those around him as society is not set up for him to function within it: "They think you can be an artist in your *spare* time, though nobody expects you to be a spare-time dustman, engineer, lawyer or brain surgeon" (211). Even those trying to help him do not quite understand, such as the suggestion by his old headmaster to work towards becoming a librarian, to Thaw "sounds hellishly like Heaven, or a thousand pounds in the bank, or a cottage with roses round the door, or the other imaginary carrots that human donkeys are shown to entice them into all kinds of nasty muck" (211). Seemingly, Thaw is as trapped as his friends, even though he chooses art school over factory work, he similarly has nowhere to go, rejecting all the 'carrots' he sees in front of him, because he believes they will only lead to a compromise and not result in the life he craves, but simply perpetuate the 'muck' of existence. Thaw and his friends are aware of the injustice which surrounds them as they struggle through

their working class existence, whilst others prosper, as Coulter recalls: “the sight of Duke set me back a good three weeks. I have nae recovered from it yet. Why should he be enjoying a dram in a comfortable train while I . . . ach!” (216). Both Thaw and Lanark are aware of the power of beautiful things, such as music and poetry as well as the value of such things beyond capitalist materialism: “not the wealthy in coins and banknotes – that sort of wealth is only coloured beads to keep the makers servile. The owners and manipulators have smarter ways of banking energy. They pay themselves with time: time to think and plan, time to examine necessity from a distance” (*Lanark*, 410). Lanark knows what is really important, just as Thaw knows that it is time that is most precious to him. Both reach a kind of personal epiphany that encompasses but also surpasses the politics of the movement.

Gray’s “personal philosophy” (Böhnke, 245) is one of the most significant aspects of his work, on a par with the postmodern, nationalist and science-fiction elements. However, as Böhnke notes: “while the ‘postmodern’ quality of his writing (in several respects) has been established, this philosophy seems to sit more uneasily with the concept” (245). Böhnke highlights that “there is a strong association of postmodernism with the left, although its relation to Marxism is ambiguous” (32), further highlighting how many neo (Marxist) critics, including Jameson are “ambiguous about” postmodernism, or even hostile towards it (especially Terry Eagleton), noting how: “Laurence Cahoon specifically links the decline of Marxism to the rise of postmodernism and calls the latter ‘a waywood stepchild of Marxism’” (33). Therefore when defining Gray’s postmodernism the political aspects and socio-cultural positioning of his text need to be considered. The Marxist elements in his work do not have to be antithetical to a postmodern reading, as there are clearly different political approaches within postmodernism and not all postmodern thinkers reject metanarratives such as political ideology.⁹ A full critique and analysis of the experimental devices within *Lanark* is required, reinforcing Moores’ point (quoted above) that the techniques used by Gray can be read beyond superficial play.

At one point in the novel a young Thaw tries to explain a drawing that he has just completed to his father, but this is very different to the interpretation offered by the third person omniscient narrator:

He drew a giant with a captured princess running along the brown line, and since he couldn’t draw the princess lovely enough he showed the giant holding a sack. The princess was in the sack. His father looked over his shoulder and said, “What’s that you’re drawing?”

Thaw said uneasily, “A miller running to the mill with a bag of corn”. (122)

Thaw’s alienation from those around him is highlighted here; from a very young age he feels the need to lie to his father about his artistic fantasies, thus furthering Gray’s engagement with expressing the difficulties for an artist growing up in a working class community. However, the above

scenario also draws attention to the pragmatic difficulties of representation, as Thaw acknowledges the impossibility of truly representing the princess, showing the multifaceted nature of representation, and its inability to construct a single ultimate meaning. Again, it is a postmodern concern to draw attention to the superficial nature of representation, as discussed above. Jameson draws attention to the postmodern lack of depth and superficiality and thus an ultimate rejection of the notion of representation, as we move away from one single understanding and interpretation to “collage” style in the postmodern era (29).

Gray provides a kind of multi-screen experience within the world of the novel, as he splits the page in order to manifest multiple narratives running simultaneously. This technique provides an effect that is similar to Jameson’s description of the viewer of a ‘postmodern’ pop video, as both are required “to see all the screens at once” (31). However, though such experimental narrative techniques and concerns about representation can be found within many postmodern texts, much earlier Laurence Sterne famously addresses the difficulties of representation and draws the readers’ attention to the objectivity of aesthetics overtly in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–67) through many typographical devices which deviate from the linear, realist, prose novel form, such as providing the reader with a blank page in order for them to draw their own representation of the beauty of widow Wadman (376–7), or the use of ‘squiggles’ in order accurately convey “a flourish with his stick” (490).

Gray draws attention to his use of intertextuality for the creation, and understanding of a text to an excessive amount as a list of plagiarisms actually become part of the novel, appearing alongside the narrative of the epilogue (which appears four chapters before the end of the novel). Jameson highlights intertextuality as a symptom of the postmodern era; he sees its use as: “a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of a new connotation of ‘pastness’ and pseudo-historical depth in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces ‘real’ history” (20). Many contemporary writers often associated with postmodern stylistic techniques, such as Angela Carter in *Wise Children*, Jeanette Winterson in *Sexing the Cherry* and Salman Rushdie in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Satanic Verses* use intertextuality to conjure shared images in readers’ minds. This often draws on a mass culture, pop songs and films, as such references are readily available. This, for Jameson reflects a demise of individual identity, as the cultural dominant is one without a historical knowledge. The artist’s identity appears threatened through what Jameson sees as the demise of “High modernist ideology of style” (17), suggesting that there is no longer the possibility for the artist to create their own, recognizable identity, but culture can only turn to the past, as all that is available are an: “imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a new global culture” (17–18).

Through a heightened awareness of the use of intertextuality, the identity of author, as well as reader, becomes increasingly problematic. The author's status as definitive creator, and the reader's role of passive absorber are challenged through the acceptance of vast amounts of borrowings during the creation of the text, thus creating the text as something not completely original, and the reader is forced to play a larger role in the creative process, relying on them more for their ability to interpret the internal references. Janice Galloway highlights the subversion of the readers' role throughout *Lanark* in her introduction to the novel 'Something to Say': "From the beginning, it demands its reader to be an active participant in the imaginative process, not a passive recipient of others' ideas" (x).

Gray raises issues of authorial identity most clearly in the Epilogue in which Lanark meets 'the author'. Bradbury notes this technique developing within much fiction, such as Martin Amis' *Money*, as conventional ideas of 'identity' are explored (407). The God like status which can be associated with the authorial role is clearly debunked within *Lanark*, as the reader is presented with a far from grand, almost demonic figure, "His face, framed by wings and horns of uncombed hair" (480). Thus, the author's status as outside the text is brought into question and the novel's own artifice foregrounded:

"You clearly don't realize who I am. I have called myself king – that's a purely symbolic name, I'm far more important. Read this and you'll understand. The critics will accuse me of self-indulgence but I don't care."

With a reckless gesture he handed Lanark a paper from the bed. It was covered with childish handwriting and many words were scored out or inserted with little arrows. Much of it seemed to be dialogue but Lanark's eye was caught by a sentence in italics which said: *Much of it seemed to be dialogue but Lanark's eye was caught by a sentence in italics which said.* (original emphasis 481)

Here, not only is Gray drawing attention to the novel's own artifice, but discussing author and reader roles. He offers a commentary upon the conventional ideas of author which he is flouting, and acknowledging that a novel is being created, through drawing on examples of other literary texts:

"I am your author."

Lanark stared at him. The author said, "Please don't feel embarrassed. This isn't an unprecedented situation. Vonnegut has it in *Breakfast of Champions* and Jehovah in the books of Job and Jonah."

"Are you pretending to be God?"

"Not nowadays. I used to be part of him though. Yes I am part of a part which was once the whole. But I went bad and was excreted. If I can get well I may be allowed home before I die, so I continually plunge my beak into my rotten liver and swallow and excrete it. But it grows again." (481)

The freedom Jameson suggests that the postmodern era affords its artists does therefore seem to be represented in some of the characteristics of the postmodern text, it allows for the challenging of form, and a new freedom in the relationship of author and reader to text. However, as the quote above highlights, meeting the author within the texts is far from a new device, and thus does not necessarily align the text solely with the postmodern.

Gray's text laments the loss of, and difficulty in attaining, an artistic identity, thus aligning his work with a left-leaning view of the negative effects of postmodernism – as articulated by theorists such as Jameson, therefore aligning his postmodernism with what Bentley terms second wave (4). The novel highlights the negative impact of the system, as represented by the art institute and the government, especially in terms of Thaw's demise and the institute's 'use' of the lower sections of society by the others for energy and food. Thus *Lanark* offers a critique of socio-economic systems and consequences through the use of devices associated with postmodernism. But to simply read the text as postmodern is problematic, as this risks ignoring the complexities of the novel in order to suit broader critical hegemonic taxonomies. Gray's text clearly is not nihilistic, depthless pastiche, but is closely aligned to parody and satire; it demonstrates an acknowledgment of the past as well as attempting to highlight a need for change. Thus, as Moores (quoted above) notes, the experimentation within *Lanark* represents a complex postmodernism, in which ideology is expressed and reinforced through non-conventional narrative techniques, perhaps forming an example of what is now being (no less controversially) termed post-postmodernism.

This, of course, remains a contentious issue, in part because the debate about any notion of 'after' is still in its infancy. Bentley's definition of 'second phase' (4) also seems appropriate, as whilst *Lanark's* narrative devices overtly express the marginal position of Scotland's working class, it remains overtly experimental in style. Gray has not quite moved towards a reengagement with classical storytelling styles, as the structure of the novel draws attention to a move away from linearity in order to highlight the artifice of realism, whereas authors more closely aligned with post-postmodernism are noted (particularly by Keulks) as moving away from such narrative experimentalism. It is clear that no single taxonomy provides a fully accurate description of Gray's text and that *Lanark* continues to defy categorization.

Notes

1. Böhnke places this revival in focus on Scottish literature and culture, in part, in a political context, suggesting that it: "preceded and accompanied the political developments which led to the (re-)establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999." (1). Sadly, I do not have space here to investigate further the particular political context of Scottish devolution, but rather wish in this chapter to focus on

- other issues. As Böhnke notes, the ‘new’ of this literary renaissance is now more mature, entering into its 30s.
2. Böhnke refers to ‘vulgar’ postmodernism as the “version of relativist nihilism which is so often taken for the whole concept by its critics” (46), as does Keulks during his discussion of Martin Amis’ work (2007, 158).
 3. I will outline the different theoretical approaches being suggested in more detail below, as not only does the term vary, but also the ‘after’ postmodernism’s first incarnation has various incarnations in many theorists’ works.
 4. As Homi K Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* suggests, such “grand narratives” of “truth” have been vigorously contested by contemporary writing, which has led to the processes which create such accepted ideas of knowledge being revealed, along with and the narratives of those, who were previously subjugated.
 5. hooks suggests that one needs to make a careful consideration of the implications for the marginalized of any critique or destabilising of the notion of identity. She is keen to note that a debunking of the notion of “identity” may in fact have contradictory effects from the supposed liberatory potential: “Any critic exploring the radical potential of postmodernism as it relates to racial difference and racial domination would need to consider the implications of a critique of identity for oppressed groups” (NPg).
 6. Such as the writings of Lanark after Sludden tells him to become a writer (Book Three Chapter Three); the recounting of Thaw’s imagination in his stories and fantasies (Book Two); and the seeming taking over of the ‘the oracle’ during the Interlude.
 7. Stevenson specifies his example in terms of the fears of mechanization that he is discussing, highlighting how Lawrence’s concerns are summarized in ‘The Industrial Magnate’ chapter of D.H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love* (1921):

Everything was run on the most accurate and delicate scientific method, educated and expert men were in control everywhere, the miners were reduced to mere mechanical instruments . . . [in] a new order, strict, terrible, inhuman . . . a great and perfect system that subjected life to pure mechanical principles. (259–60)

8. Some famous examples include those from the nineteenth century as writers were reacting against industrialization, such as Charles Dickens in *Hard Times*, Elizabeth Gaskell in *Mary Barton* and William Morris in *News From Nowhere*, texts which highlight the damaging effects on people of a capitalist mentality.
9. Jean-François Lyotard defines postmodernism in relation to modernism: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards meta-narratives” (*Postmodernism: A Report on Knowledge*, xxiv).

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15

Gender Vertigo: Queer Gothic and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*

Sarah Gamble

Introduction

Angela Carter's penultimate novel, *Nights at the Circus*, published in 1984, is commonly regarded as representing a change in both style and approach on the part of its author, replacing the dark, violent and pornographic narratives with which she had become identified with something more optimistic, airy, humorous and – ultimately – *kinder*. It is a view summarised by Merja Makinen who, in an essay published in 1992, sets up a contrast between the 'disquietingly savage analysis of patriarchy of the 1960s and 1970s, such as *The Magic Toyshop*, *Heroes and Villains*, *Passion of New Eve*; and the exuberant novels of the 1980s and early 1990s, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* (Makinen 3).

Considered in the context of genre, Carter seems to be leaving her Gothic antecedents behind; a decision that appears to be symbolically represented in *Nights at the Circus* by the encounter between the novel's heroine, the winged trapeze artiste Fevvers, and the self-styled magician Mr Rosencreutz. Kidnapped from a brothel of freaks and grotesques, Fevvers finds herself in familiar literary territory: 'a mansion in the Gothic style, all ivied over, and, above the turrets . . . a fingernail moon with a star in its arms. Somewhere, a dog howling' (Carter, *Nights* 74). Mr Rosencreutz intends to sacrifice Fevvers in a sex-magic ritual in order to recover his lost virility, thus placing her in the stereotypical role of abducted Gothic heroine, but Fevvers' determination not to be bound within the plotlines of the Gothic is evinced when she, quite literally, takes flight from the house of Rosencreutz, sustaining nothing more than 'a flesh wound on the ball of my right foot' (Carter, *Nights* 83). In an essay discussing the influence of Edgar Allan Poe on Angela Carter's fiction, Gina Wisker cites Fevvers as the exemplification *par excellence* of Carter's desire to challenge as well as to appropriate Poe's Gothic texts, 'offer[ing] an alternative to the constraints and tyrannies which are the subject of conventional horror' (Wisker 196).

In this argument, I wish to offer a slightly refocused reading of *Nights at the Circus* which, while not contradicting the view that it is certainly more carnivalesque and overtly comic than its predecessors in Carter's *oeuvre*, argues that this does not necessarily constitute a rejection of the Gothic *per se*. While it may dismiss the stereotypical paraphernalia of the mode (ivied castles, fingernail moons and sacrificial altars, for instance) I would maintain that the Gothic has not been ousted from the narrative at all, but merely displaced onto less obvious locations. Wisker comes close to recognising this in her argument that it is in her portrayal of women that Carter takes most obvious issue with Poe, replacing his victimised, dying heroines with female figures that have 'the last liberated laugh' on those who would seek to disempower them (Wisker 182). This implies not only that Fevvers is a radical redefinition of – rather than a departure from – the Gothic heroine, but also that *Nights at the Circus* as a whole is a continuation of a project in which Carter herself was consistently engaged from the beginning of her writing career; that of imagining ways in which women might challenge the social script allocated to them within patriarchal culture; and, more specifically, within the Gothic text.

Queering the Gothic / gothicising the queer

It is primarily through her portrayal of gender that Carter draws upon the perverse energies of the Gothic in this novel. Fevvers' profession as an *ari-élite* is central to this, her extraordinary, impossible, act 'queering' both the (primarily male) gaze and her own performance of femininity, which challenges stable categories of 'woman'. While the novel's stress upon performance as its central motif has frequently been taken as an indication that the carnivalesque has superseded the Gothic as a dominant generic trope in Carter's work, in actuality it is in its performativity that the text is also at its most Gothic.

As Mair Rigby points out, an affinity has always existed between Gothic studies and queer theory, in that while 'the Gothic is always already queer; queer theory is also always already Gothic' (Rigby 46). She observes that many significant queer theorists, such as Judith Halberstam and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, have also worked within the field of Gothic studies, indicating the extent to which the two areas of enquiry are closely intertwined. For Rigby, the Gothic is 'a genre that persistently explores the meaning of queerness' (Rigby 47), its compulsion to uncover repressed secrets and enduring fascination with the taboo leading it towards the representation of covert sexual identities and alternative configurations of desire, thus 'open[ing] a space for recognising the construction of "queer" bodies as uncanny, that is, as bodies of knowledge that are supposed to be repressed but which persistently come to light' (Rigby 50). Additionally, the terminology of the Gothic has become intrinsic to queer academic discourse, giving

'queer theorists a language (metaphors, allusions, tropes, and figures) which they have drawn upon to speak about queer experience and produce critical narratives' (Rigby 54).

Published in 1984, *Nights at the Circus* pre-dates the rise of queer theory in the early 1990s, but the novel anticipates some of its central strategies, and hence its Gothic possibilities. Carter's focus upon the inescapably queer body of Fevvers indicates that the uncovering of dissident identities is her central concern, and her stress upon performance can be aligned with Judith Butler's influential theory of gender performativity, a concept that has come to form the cornerstone of queer studies.

The notion of performativity cuts gender loose from any grounding in the 'natural' biological body, with the result that 'Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*' (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 140). Unlike some of her peers, Judith Butler has not arrived at queer theory by way of the Gothic, but she describes both gender systems and their undoing as if she were telling a ghost story:

Gender is . . . a norm that can never be internalized; 'the internal' is a surface signification, and gender norms are finally phantasmic, impossible to embody. If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the spatial metaphor of a 'ground' will be displaced and revealed as a stylized configuration, indeed, a gendered corporealization of time. The abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional *discontinuity*, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this 'ground'. The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 141)

Thus, Butler presents gender identity – *any* gender identity – as spectral; existing only and forever at the moment of (en)action, it is a mere illusion sustained by nothing more than the force of a culture's absolute belief. Nevertheless, to be spectral is not necessarily to be ephemeral, for engagement with 'the possibilities of gender transformation' is not an act of exorcism that allows the subject to arrive at an 'authentic' sense of gender – instead, the acts of 'doing' and 'undoing' gender *ghost each other*. As Butler argues in a more recently published work, *Undoing Gender*, while gender may be 'phantasmic', it nonetheless 'figures as a precondition for the production and maintenance of legible humanity' (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 11). To reject

or rework it is to become unintelligible, culturally unrepresentable – and thus to be spectralised anew.

To find that you are fundamentally unintelligible (indeed, that the laws of culture and of language find you to be an impossibility) is to find that you have not yet achieved access to the human, to find yourself speaking only and always *as if you were* human, but with the sense that you are not, to find that your language is hollow, that no recognition is forthcoming because the norms by which recognition takes place is not in your favor. (Butler *Undoing Gender* 30)

The significance of Fevvers' 'notorious and much-debated wings' (Carter 7) can be interpreted in many ways, but in this context they can be read as visible signifiers of gender disruption which render her less than fully human, baffling any simplistic attempt to signify her as 'woman'. The result is that she remains an unclassifiable enigma – in Butler's terms, 'an impossibility'. The fact that they form the crux of her trapeze act is also significant, for the freakishness that they represent assumes a metonymic relationship with the freakishness inherent in *all* female *aerialistes* who, through their muscularity and athleticism, transgress the cultural codes governing femininity. As Peta Tait observes, trapeze artists have always been compared to birds, 'present[ing] trained, disciplined physiques working with precision that promised to fulfil a long-imagined human potential for flight' (Tait 16), and discourses of monstrosity were never far away when describing women performers engaged in 'immodest muscular action' (Tait 21). Such women were caught up in complex negotiations regarding societal assumptions concerning gender, since 'Ariel acts theatrically played with, but ultimately questioned, social beliefs in the natural fragility and inferiority of female physicality. In presenting a strong muscular athletic physique, aerialists seemed to defy nature' (Tait 38).

Ghosting texts, ghosting gender: *Nights at the Circus* and 'Le Numéro Barquette'

Such anomalous, free-falling, bodies do not easily fit into dominant narratives of gender, and I would argue that *Nights at the Circus* demonstrates Carter responding to the challenge that they represent by engaging in some metaphorical backwards somersaults of her own. Her method is clearly articulated in an essay published four years after *Nights at the Circus*, in 1988, which takes as its subject Edgar Allan Poe's most famous short story, 'The Fall of the House of Usher'. Entitled 'Through a Text Backwards: The Resurrection of the House of Usher', the piece is a neat conceit centred upon the retelling of Poe's tale from its end to its beginning. From the outset, Carter presents Poe as an inherently duplicitous

writer, whose tales 'are and . . . are not what they claim to be' (Carter *Shaking a Leg* 482–3); such an exercise in inversion, she claims, will reveal the true extent of that duplicity by uncovering the 'double' meaning interred beneath the surface of the narrative: 'I decided that I would invert "The Fall of the House of Usher" – play it backwards, in the same way as one can play a movie backwards, and see what face is showed to me, then, and what story that face told about the Ushers and their author' (Carter, *Shaking a Leg* 483).

In the course of following the resurrection and reassembly of the House of Usher from the tarn into which it has collapsed, Carter also resurrects the story's only female protagonist, Madeline Usher, whose death scene – that forms the climactic episode of the original story – is thrown into reverse. Her coffin is returned from the dungeon in which her brother has imprisoned it, to her bedchamber, from which she rises to stalk the corridors of the domestic space: 'She lies on her bed in her somnolent, half-sleeping state, neither fully dead nor fully alive, the life of a sentient plant, waiting, waiting until the men downstairs call up for her to come and frighten them' (Carter, *Shaking a Leg* 488). For Carter, the inversion of the story brings about a gender inversion, by moving the female figure from the background to the forefront of the text. In the process, Madeline – the woman for whom death is never final, whichever way one views her story – is revealed as the possessor of a vampiric energy, 'symbolising sex and femininity as compulsion and disease' (Carter, *Shaking a Leg* 489). Yet, as is so typical of Carter, this conclusion is revealed in the final paragraph as just another confidence trick when she confesses that the figure of the female vampire has actually no 'authentic' meaning to convey, but is just another one of the 'tacky theatrical device[s]' (Carter, *Shaking a Leg* 490) that form the Gothic narrative's stagy *mis en scene*.

'Through a Text Backwards' can be aligned with the Butlerian dynamic of 'doing/undoing', where the act of 'undoing' gender only constitutes a mirror-image of its 'doing'. Similarly, telling Poe's story backwards does not reveal any hidden 'truth' about that narrative, but only sheds more light on the extent of its artifice – as Carter concludes, 'The story is the story in a story' (Carter, *Shaking a Leg* 490). Viewed from the perspective of gender, Woman occupies no more privileged position within the Gothic narrative as Man, since both are equally constructed; '[mirror] images of gratified narcissism' (Carter, *Shaking a Leg* 490).

The overturning and retelling of familiar narratives is, however, a favoured tactic of Carter's, and 'Through a Text Backwards' is merely a tongue-in-cheek foregrounding of an already familiar trope within her fiction. And while such a practice may not – as 'Through a Text Backwards' indicates – provide the reader with a definitive interpretation of a narrative, it does offer them a different perspective on it. Moreover, it is a way of reading that is definitively Gothic because it engages in a 'ghosting' of the original text that exposes

its repressed, or latent, content, and thus frees what it has figured as most monstrous, and hence most unrepresentable.

I would propose that the first section of *Nights at the Circus* can be read as an example of inverted story-telling when aligned with another text to which it bears an uncanny – yet reversed – resemblance. The novel begins with Fevvers' performance being viewed by the sceptical journalist Walser, who then interviews her in her dressing room. During this encounter he hears Fevvers' life story whilst simultaneously viewing her gradual metamorphosis from her 'performing' to her 'everyday' self. This carries echoes of an essay published in 1926 by the French avant-garde novelist, poet, dramatist and film-maker Jean Cocteau, 'Le Numéro Barbette', which records his interview with the cross-dressing *ariéliste* Vander Clyde. Cocteau describes watching Vander Clyde transform into his on-stage feminine *alter ego*, Barbette, Cocteau then views Barbette/Clyde's performance, the culmination of which is Barbette's reinstatement of his male identity.

Nights at the Circus enacts a looking-glass version of Cocteau's scenario. Walser watches Fevvers' performance first, then her ritual disrobing, whereas Cocteau witnesses the construction of the Barbette image, then its public exhibition. Barbette begins as a man, becomes a self-created woman, then reverts back to masculinity, while Fevvers displays a hyperbolic femininity which in its dismantling threatens – from Walser's point of view, anyway – to reveal a hitherto hidden masculinity ('It flickered through his mind: Is she really a man?' [Carter, *Nights* 35]).

Where the two encounters particularly intersect is in their use of a male observer, whose voyeurism is tinged with a certain squeamishness concerning the metamorphoses they are witnessing so intimately. This is very evident in 'Le Numéro Barbette', which opens in an atmosphere of masculine conviviality: Cocteau feels 'at ease in that dressing-room . . . smoking, chatting to a fellow sportsman' (Cocteau). Yet this relaxed and harmonious mood begins to disintegrate as Barbette proceeds to construct his feminine stage persona. Cocteau pinpoints the moment of transition precisely:

It is not until he pulls on his blond wig held by a simple elastic band around his ears that he will take up – while putting a bunch of hairpins in his mouth – the slightest postures of a woman doing her hair. He then stands up, goes and puts his rings on. The transformation is complete. Jeekyll is Hyde. Yes, Hyde! Now, I am scared. I turn away . . . It is my turn to be intimidated. (Cocteau)

Mark Franko interprets Cocteau's reaction as 'the panic of being caught in a sexually indeterminate middle stage' (Franko 596), which constitutes a repulsion of the challenge to dualistic categories of gender that Barbette threatens to represent at the point at which his transformation from 'male' to 'female' is almost complete. Fascinated though he might be by the

spectacle of man becoming woman, Cocteau cannot and will not accept the intersection of these two identities, instead:

deal[ing] with a rigid sexual stereotype as a cultural absolute. Since there is no perception of a 'neither/nor' in an unselfconscious middle ground, no sensible paradox develops. One does not see the man in the woman or vice versa. One only sees the man in the man, even though he is got up in feminine gear. (Franko 597)

The female aspect of Barbette is perfectly acceptable to Cocteau, so long as he holds onto the knowledge that underneath the elaborate costume, wig and makeup, the man remains. Moreover, that fact of Barbette's foundational maleness is something on which the act itself depends, since it ends with an emphatic assertion of the performer's masculinity. So convincing is Barbette's masquerade of femininity, Cocteau observes, that the mere removal of his wig (to the audible astonishment, even 'embarrassment' of the audience) may not be adequate: 'It also requires the truth to be translated and to retain a certain appeal if it is convince us as forcibly as did the lie' (Cocteau). Consequently, Barbette performs a correspondingly exaggerated masquerade of masculinity, 'lets his shoulders play, spreads his hands, displays his muscles, exaggerates the sporty gait of a golf player' (Cocteau). Although the audience may be mortified at having been seduced by the duplicitous spectacle of the cross-dressed performer, gender norms are ultimately reinstated at the end of Barbette's performance, which closes down the potential it offers of proposing an alternative to dualism.

It is notable that throughout his essay Cocteau shies away from any conception of Barbette as a fully embodied ambiguously gendered subject; the only way in which he can accommodate such a notion is to resort to the discourse of the phantasmic. The allure of Barbette's transvestite display is licensed because it is manifested 'in the magic light of the stage, in a box of tricks where reality is no longer usual' (Cocteau), and the moments of suspension between masculine and feminine subject positions witnessed by Cocteau never coalesce into a fully apprehensible 'third space'. Instead, 'folded into the margins of the performance event' (Rothko 598), the possibility that Barbette represents is spectralised, flickering in and out of view at the very edge of Cocteau's narrative. Barbette's daring trapeze act itself becomes a metaphor for this 'rhetoric of evasion' (Franko 598). In its movement through space, Barbette's body displays both the perils of flight between one polarity and another, and also its necessary transitoriness. The body of the *arieliste* cannot remain suspended in the air or it will fall – it has to land on one side or the other of the trapeze's swing. As Rothko argues, in 'Le Numéro Barbette':

Gender identity is figured as a binary opposition in which male and female are mutually exclusive and gender liminality is, by implication, a

death-defying leap across those boundaries. Androgyny does not actually 'take place': the leap is always conceived as a plunge into the nonplace of oblivion, the '*chute d'ange* fall' described by Janet Flanner as the high point of Barbette's act. (Franko 598–9)

If Barbette is to remain a representable subject, it is vital that the gender-bending possibilities of his act remain unfixed. The alternative is to become a dangerous freak – Hyde rather than Jeckyll – or a disembodied being; a spectre. Barbette's act, seen through Cocteau's eyes, continually and compulsively flirts with the possibility of Gothic monstrosity: 'The danger of death is the challenge of performance that explores sexual ambiguity before a society (i.e., an audience) unwilling to recognize, let alone openly endorse, that ambiguity' (Rothko 600).

Flying into the gender void

Peta Tait argues that aerialism is intrinsically Gothic, since it constitutes a circus performance in which 'death is melodramatically proclaimed as ever-present' (Tait 140). The thrill of a performance such as Barbette's is literally as well as metaphorically death-defying, since his gender play is underpinned by genuine daring, and the ever-present risk of falling. For Fevvers, however, this is not – or should not be – a problem, since her wings allow her to negotiate a 'disconcerting pact with gravity' (Carter, *Nights* 17). Indeed, one of the most notable aspects of her act is the fact that it is performed much more slowly than is normal thus playing up the *lack* of physical risk inherent in her act, and potentially depriving it of the association with the macabre noted by Tait:

What made her remarkable as an *arieliste*, however, was the speed – or, rather the lack of it – with which she performed even the climactic triple somersault. When the hack *arieliste*, the everyday, wingless variety, performs the triple somersault, he or she travels through the air at a cool sixty miles an hour. Fevvers, however, contrived a contemplative and leisurely twenty-five, so that the packed theatre could enjoy the spectacle, as in slow motion, of every tense muscle straining in her Rubenesque form. The music went much faster than she did; she dawdled. Indeed, she did defy the laws of projectiles, because a projectile cannot *mooch* along its trajectory; it if slackens its speed in mid-air, down it falls. (Carter, *Nights* 17)

Yet, Fevvers' act remains an exemplification of risk on the terms outlined by Rothko in relation to Cocteau's analysis of Barbette – the risk entailed in the exhibition of sexual ambiguity in front of an audience unwilling to endorse it. In fact, Fevvers plays up this risk even more than Barbette by means of

the apparent laziness of her movement through the air. The very slowness of her passage between her trapezes allows more time for her audience in general (and Walser in particular) to view her body and contemplate its anomalousness.

Walser, like Cocteau, is shown to be struggling to accommodate his subject within dualistic gender assumptions. His self-avowed journalistic aim is 'ostensibly, to "puff" her; and, if it is humanly possible, to explode her, either as well as, or instead of' (Carter, *Nights* 11), an endeavour that depends on being able to explain away Fevvers' wings. For if we take the wings to symbolise the gender anomalousness intrinsic to the female *ariel-iste*, then what Walser is actually doing is trying to stabilise her as unproblematically female. This is evident in his reaction to her performance, during which his view of her is largely centred upon his assessment of her femininity. Viewed through his eyes, the more 'womanly' she is, the more easily he can discount the notion that her wings represent a genuinely inexplicable phenomenon.

The introductory preamble to Fevvers' act does nothing to dent his scepticism. Like Barquette, she makes her entrance clothed in plumage, her 'robe of red and purple feathers' (Carter, *Nights* 14) echoing Barquette's iconic ostrich feather costume. But whereas Barquette would 'daintily discard . . . the fifty pounds of ostrich feathers covering him one by one in "a sort of floating strip-tease"' (Senelick 506–7), Fevvers throws off her cloak with little ceremony, all the more quickly to reveal the feathers that she *cannot* remove:

LOOK AT ME!

She rose up on tiptoe and slowly twirled round, giving the spectators a comprehensive view of her back: seeing is believing. Then she spread out her superb, heavy arms in a backwards gesture of benediction and, as she did so, her wings spread, too, a polychromatic unfolding fully six feet across, spread of an eagle, a condor, an albatross fed to excess on the same diet that makes flamingos pink. (Carter, *Nights* 15)

However, the imperative to 'look' is not interpreted by Walser as an invitation to wonder, but an opportunity to engage in a voyeuristic contemplation of the female form, noting the brevity of her costume and the expansiveness of her bosom at the same time as he rationalises her wings out of existence. It is not until she bursts into action, 'jump[ing] up some thirty feet in a single heavy bound' (Carter, *Nights* 16), that he becomes flustered, barely managing 'to grab tight hold of his scepticism just as it was about to blow over the edge of the press box' (Carter, *Nights* 16). For a moment the wings genuinely threaten to disrupt Walser's casual misogyny by revealing themselves to be more than passive props, their apparent functionality enabling Fevvers' display of herself as an active and muscular agent rather

than an earthbound object of masculine scrutiny. Nevertheless, Walser's defensive reaction is to retreat back to a crudely reductive contemplation of Fevvers' as a sexual object, thus keeping her in her culturally sanctioned place: 'My, how her bodice strains! You'd think her tits were going to pop right out. What a sensation *that* would cause; wonder she hasn't thought of incorporating it in her act' (Carter, *Nights* 17).

But once he meets 'the marvellous giantess' (Carter 42) face-to-face in her dressing room afterwards, Walser finds his strenuously preserved scepticism steadily eroding. The life-story Fevvers relates to him does nothing to anchor her within the realm of possibility, and neither her behaviour nor her person conform to any mainstream standard of femininity. Fevvers may possess a 'startling head of hair, yellow and inexhaustible as sand, thick as cream' (Carter, *Nights* 19) and 'the face of an angel in a Sunday school picture-book' (Carter, *Nights* 42), but this classic beauty is intermixed with physical attributes Walser can only categorise as masculine. He feels overpowered by her extravagant muscularity, fearing 'she could easily crush him to death in her huge arms, although he was a big man with the strength of Californian sunshine distilled in his limbs' (Carter, *Nights* 52), and her ungloved handshake demonstrates a 'strong, firm masculine grip' (Carter, *Nights* 89). In addition, she reveals herself – much to his alarm – to be the possessor of a phallic sword kept hidden in 'the bosom of her dressing gown', which 'flashed and glittered in the exhausted light so sharply that Walser jumped' (Carter, *Nights* 48).

Walser thus differs from Cocteau in that he is never permitted even a moment of easy camaraderie with his subject. Instead, Fevvers exists in state of permanent estrangement from him, neither a woman whom he can unproblematically desire, nor a fellow man with whom he can feel a comfortable companionship. And while the wings, the markers of her freakishness and gender displacement, are 'stowed away for the night under the soiled quilting of her baby-blue dressing gown', they are nevertheless ever-present: 'an uncomfortable-looking pair of bulges, shuddering the surface of the taut fabric from time to time as if desirous of breaking free' (Carter, *Nights* 7–8). Here, the wings that threaten to explode into being at any moment belong as much to Walser as to Fevvers, their intermittent quivering indicating the presence of a barely-repressed 'erotic disturbance' (Carter, *Nights* 52) that has been aroused in Walser; an attraction that is very specifically attached to the possibility of new configurations of gender and desire that Fevvers risks bringing into being:

Walser felt the strangest sensation, as if these eyes of the *arieliste* were a pair of sets of Chinese boxes, as if each one opened into a world into a world into a world, an infinite plurality of worlds, and these unguessable depths exercised the strongest possible attraction, so that he felt himself trembling as if he, too, stood on an unknown threshold. (Carter, *Nights* 30)

I would propose that Walser is on the verge here of fully recognising Fevvers as a sexually indeterminate subject, but if he does so, he will have to face the vertiginous possibility of the contingency of *all* gender configurations; thus, in Judith Butler's terms, 'reveal[ing] the temporal and contingent groundlessness' of identity itself (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 141). A further dimension to Walser's profound discomfiture is added by the presence of his own desire for this anomalously gendered being, the result of which is to only further emphasise the shifting sands on which his own sense of gender identity has been built. The cavernous unfolding of Fevvers' eyes 'into a world into a world into a world' recalls Carter's concluding comment in 'Through A Text Backwards', that 'The story is the story in a story' (Carter, *Shaking a Leg* 490), making the point that the reversal of the Poesque narrative reveals no 'truth' external to the text, but only further levels of fictionality: Madeline and Roderick Usher as 'mirror image' twins 'entirely sufficient to themselves' (Carter, *Shaking a Leg* 490). The synthesis of Madeline and her identical twin Roderick into a single gender-b(l)ending figure is itself mirrored in the moment in which Walser gazes at Fevvers. In an exemplification of Butler's argument that 'the sense of possibility pertaining to me must first be imagined from somewhere else before I can begin to imagine myself' (Butler, *Undoing* 32), he glimpses a new way of viewing not only her gender, but also his own.

His encounter with Fevvers has made an *aerieliste* of Walser too: in his contemplation of her all-consuming gaze, the stable ground of gender falls away beneath his feet, and he is compelled to follow her into the void of 'the not yet actualized or the not actualizable' (Butler, *Undoing* 28). For Butler, it is the transformative power of fantasy, which permits 'us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise' (Butler, *Undoing* 29), that is the first step towards the embodiment of difference. Gothic monster Fevvers might be, but as Judith Halberstam says, 'The monster always represents the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries . . . and so we need monsters and we need to recognize and celebrate our own monstrosities' (Halberstam 27). This is precisely what Walser discovers. Surrendering his privileged role as spectator and following Fevvers to the circus, where he finds employment as an apprentice clown, he becomes as monstrous as she. Putting on his stage makeup for the first time, he is not only 'cross-dressing' in the sense that he is occupying a traditionally feminine position before the mirror, but also glimpsing the possibility of moving beyond the confines of dualism:

[H]e looked in the mirror and did not recognise himself. As he contemplated the stranger peering interrogatively back at him out of the glass, he felt the beginnings of a vertiginous sense of freedom . . . the freedom that lies behind the mask, within dissimulation, the freedom to juggle with being . . . that lies at the heart of burlesque. (Carter, *Nights* 103)

The novel upholds this performative space as its ideal, although it is always constructed as a precarious position. When the circus train subsequently crashes in the frozen wastes of Siberia, Walser suffers amnesia and is left with no identity at all. Taken in by a remote tribe, he adopts their world view, in which everything is taken at absolute face value, leaving no room for performative practices: 'They knew the space they saw. They believed in a space they apprehended. Between knowledge and belief, there was no room for surmise or doubt' (Carter, *Nights* 253). Although this might superficially appear to represent the ultimate freedom for the gendered subject, in a place where 'there existed no difference between fact and fiction' (Carter, *Nights* 260) a being such as Fevvers loses her capacity to instigate wonder, becoming instead a simple freak: 'perfectly natural – natural, *but abominable*' (Carter, *Nights* 289 [italics mine]). It is not until she spreads her wings in front of Walser that she is restored, seeing 'the eyes fixed upon her with astonishment, with awe, the eyes that told her who she was' (Carter, *Nights* 290). Fevvers' wings also function as the means whereby Walser is brought back to himself; but although he has been 'reconstructed', Fevvers perceives that he is 'not the man he had been or ever would be again' (Carter 291). During the course of the novel he has swung from stringent scepticism to absolute belief, but ends having found a place between, in which he can acknowledge his own desire for an anomalous being such as Fevvers, and accept its implications for his own sense of gender identity. In the erotic resolution of the novel, both Walser and Fevvers are established as queer subjects existing betwixt and between gender dualisms.

Conclusion

Fevvers, with her 'foot-high' slogan 'Is she fact or is she fiction?' resembles Barquette, '[d]escribed in publicity as a "man-woman", and billed as an enigma' (Tait 70), to an uncanny degree. Fevvers can be viewed as an ironic literalisation of Barquette, the feather costume and *chute d'ange* that were the hallmarks of the Barquette act becoming authentic feathers and real flight. Both construct their performances around an open secret, and both arouse hesitant fascination in the male witnesses and recorders of their act, since both Walser and Cocteau see, but are reluctant to endorse, the vertiginous gender-bending possibilities posed by the soaring queer bodies of their subjects. Yet, in her act of reversed story-telling, Carter picks up the unresolved tensions of Cocteau's narrative and pushes it as far as it can possibly go, until it reaches the conclusion that Cocteau himself evades.

As I have argued, Fevvers' wings are the key to this, since they seal her in her anomalous position; unlike Barquette, Fevvers, is unable (it appears) to remove her wings in the same way that Barquette removes his wig, therefore, she cannot end her performance with a restoration of normality. *Nights*

at the Circus does, it is true, concludes with a revelation that a confidence trick has taken place, and Fevvers' final exclamation, 'Gawd, I fooled you!' (Carter, *Nights* 294) can be viewed as analogous to the cheeky charade put on by the be-wigged 'ex-Barbette', who 'winks at us, hops from one foot onto the other, hints a gesture of apology' (Cocteau) once he has revealed the extent of his deception. But where Carter's resolution differs from Cocteau's is that her *arieliste's* revelation actually reveals nothing, since the nature of Fevvers' deception is never made clear. The consequence of this is that she never coalesces into a fully knowable and comprehensible subject capable of being unproblematically classified as 'woman' – or, indeed, properly 'human'. In 'Le Numéro Barbette', the masculine observer stabilises the queer subject through the act of narration, laying stress upon Barbette's foundational masculinity, and spectralising those moments in which he resists gender categorisation. But in *Nights at the Circus*, the male reporter is himself drawn into the scenario he is describing; rather than stabilising Fevvers, Fevvers destabilises him, drawing him into the performative 'third space' she occupies.

Judith Halberstam defines the Gothic monster of the twentieth century as incapable of being reduced to a simplistic oppositional relationship with the human, and thus always imagined as 'partial, compromised, messy and queer' (Halberstam 188). Fevvers, and by extension Walser, can be read in the context of such debates, resisting clear-cut dualisms in order to situate themselves within the messiness of evolving intelligibility; in the words of Judith Butler, 'contingent, frail, open to fundamental transformation in the gendered order of things' (Butler, *Undoing* 35). This tale told backwards ends with the transition into a new century, and a leap into the unknown, which will, optimistically opines Fevvers, hear 'the dawn chorus of the new, the transformed –' (Carter, *Nights* 285).

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16

Whole Families Paranoid at Night: Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

Martyn Colebrook

In recognition of its significance as a perceptive and prescient assessment of the postmodern condition, there exists a substantial corpus of critical writing about Don DeLillo and *White Noise* (1985). Notably there is Tom LeClair's *In The Loop: The Systems Novel* (1987) and Frank Lentricchia's two collections of essays, *Introducing Don DeLillo* (1991) and *New Essays on White Noise* (1991). Steffen Hantke has contributed *Conspiracy and Paranoia in Contemporary American Fiction: The Novels of Don DeLillo and Joseph McElroy* (1994) to the field of DeLillo studies, whilst David Cowart, Mark Osteen, Peter Boxall, Jesse Kavadlo and Joseph Dewey, to name but five, have written monographs examining the 'core' DeLillo novels and plays. Further to this, Tim Engles and John N. Duvall have edited *Approaches to teaching Don DeLillo's White Noise* and Leonard Orr has contributed a comprehensive study of *White Noise* as part of the Continuum Contemporaries series.

In the case of Lentricchia's and LeClair's studies, these critics pay tribute to *White Noise* mainly because the text appears to emphasise and correlate with a number of the defining theories of cultural post-modernism, as though the novel can be considered as a template for the ideas that Frederic Jameson, François Lyotard, or Jean Baudrillard have been postulating about the media, mediation and contemporary culture as a whole. As Cornel Bonca expounds in his essay *Don DeLillo's White Noise: The Natural Language of the Species*, this shanking of text to theory may well be a consequence of timing and not just the preferred critical approach:

This tendency may have something to do with the fact that *White Noise* was published in 1985, seemingly in the wake of a number of exciting, much-Xeroxed and much-discussed theoretical essays, among them Baudrillard's 'The Ecstasy of Communication,' Jameson's 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,' and Lyotard's 'Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?' (1)

As a figure whose corpus of work attempts to encapsulate the American cultural, paranoid experience but who feels that he must remain 'independent of influence' and 'outside of society', Don DeLillo's biography is as intriguing as it is responsive to the times he is writing about. DeLillo was born of Italian immigrant parents in the New York Bronx and lived a block away from Lee Harvey Oswald. He was raised a Catholic and claims the cinema of Jean Luc-Godard and the works of James Joyce as influences from his mid-twenties. The ritualised religious aspects of his upbringing can be identified in his most paranoid fiction, with the recurrence of rigid, hidden structures, coincidence and chance. His formative years were spent working as a copywriter for an advertising firm and he lived through the testing of atomic arms, the Kennedy assassination and the uncertainty of the Cold War. The feelings of unease and apocalypse are contextualised by an interview from *The Daily Princetonian* in which DeLillo offers a significant perspective on the shift in American consciousness:

In the years of the Cold War there was danger, there was the danger that an enormous cataclysm might take place, affecting virtually everyone on the planet, [. . .] The danger is different now. The danger is much more specific. The world isn't going to be destroyed, but you don't feel safe anymore in your plane, or train or office or auditorium. (Pell 2002: n.p)

This is the transition from danger on a larger, more comprehensive scale to a localised, more direct form of terror which heightens individual paranoia and instils a feeling of personal persecution. The potential to be able to interfere with and invade a private, personal space has come to pervade our contemporary daily existence with the imperious mass data-monitoring, close-circuit television and access to personal internet logs, through to the banalities and minutiae of recorded consumer activity which directs individuals to their perfect 'purchase'. Peter Baker discusses this relationship between terror and spectacle in his essay 'The Terrorist as Interpreter: *Mao II* in Postmodern Context,' and Margaret Scanlan discusses the relationship between novelists and terrorists in her ranging survey *Plotting Terror: Novelists and Terrorists in Contemporary Fiction* (2001).

Much is made of the different theoretical approaches that DeLillo's work lends itself to but I wish to concentrate on a reading of *White Noise* which moves away from these techniques and discusses the different representations of paranoia within the text. Whilst the fear of dying and concerns about the impact of consumerism and its erosion of the family unit have dominated studies of DeLillo, the understanding of paranoia as a general dominant theme has not been extensively analysed. Indeed, the paranoid sensibility which accompanies and impacts upon DeLillean characters has been put down to his ironic outlook on the uncertainties and fears which pervade the individual experience of contemporary life. As he told Gabe Pell

of *The Daily Princetonian*, commenting about American culture, 'I live in it, and I try to understand it [...] in the 21st Century [...] being an American has a new meaning. It means to be worried, perhaps as never before' (Pell 2002: 1). The reasons for this feeling of worry have been noted by Tony Tanner who, in *City of Words* (1971), reveals that American fiction has been characterised by a dialogue between those who seek a freedom from the ubiquitous 'systems' of control and those who are content with having their daily existences regulated and predicted:

There is an abiding dream in American Literature that an unpatterned, unconditioned life is possible in which your movements and stillnesses, choices and repudiations are all of your own; and there is also an abiding American dream that someone else is patterning your life, that there are all sorts of invisible plots afoot to rob you of your autonomy of thought and action, that conditioning is ubiquitous. (Tanner 1971: 15)

The obsessive patterning and 'invisible plots' are significant themes of DeLillo's work, which reflects a fear of the unseen, the unknown and the uncontrolled. The idea that omniscient agencies are influencing decisions and conditioning people to operate within regulated, predetermined patterns ultimately suggests that those who regulated in this way are consigned to a willing access to consumer-oriented paradise. The significance of figures such as Jack Gladney in *White Noise* who seek to escape this can be read in similar terms to that of the artist who is seeking to remain autonomous.

DeLillo views the writer as a figure who is struggling for the opportunity to communicate with clarity and independence, an artist who must preserve their own individuality to avoid the dangers of being rendered neutral and ineffective. The writer's continuous resistance to being consumed by the system suggests that the relationship between literature and culture is one of continuous interrogation, with the art reflecting and offering a commentary on the conditions from which it has emerged.

There remains no consensus for a comprehensive definition of 'paranoia' but my own interpretation derives from the etymological values of the word. The literal understanding of 'paranoia' is 'external mind' from 'para' (external) and 'nooi' (of the mind). By comparison, the clinical definition offered by *The Oxford Companion to the Mind* identifies one of the paranoiac's characteristics as 'coming into active collision with a world that does not subscribe to his own exalted view of himself and to others by attacking those who he conceives as persecuting him' (Gregory 1987: 576). The writer who seeks to pose a threat or act as an agent of change will use language as a weapon and not just an artistic medium and DeLillo has already commented (in an interview with Tom LeClair) that 'language was a subject as well as an instrument in my work' (Le Clair interview 21).

Steffen Hantke suggests that 'language is no longer exclusively part of the human nature, instead it is seen as a physically manipulable object with the ability to manipulate human nature and nature in general. Language ceases to be neutral, it becomes a piece of technology' (Hantke 1994: 123). It is necessary to understand that the language in DeLillo's work does not just constitute written and verbal forms; it becomes complicit with the technology that is also present. In an interview with Adam Begley, Don DeLillo summarises the relationship between the writer and the culture surrounding them: 'Words on a page, that's all it takes to help him separate himself from the forces around him' (Interview with Begley 277). Nevertheless, this detectable distance or difference does not necessary privilege the role of the author, whose task remains that of assimilation and not exclusion. DeLillo continues in this same interview to compromise the so-called ideal segregation of the novelist:

You want to exercise your will, bend the language your way, bend the world your way. You want to control the flow of impulses, images, words, faces, ideas. But there's a higher place, a secret aspiration. You want to let go. You want to lose yourself in language, become a carrier or messenger. The best moments involve a loss of control. It's a kind of rapture, and it can happen with words and phrases fairly often-completely surprising combinations that make a higher kind of sense, that come to you out of nowhere. (Interview with Begley 282) (Saltzman)

For the writer and the individual who are attempting to break free from boundaries and patterns, this means working against the cultural and consumerist hegemony. The relationship between hegemony and paranoia is suggested by Stuart Hall in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997): 'Gramsci's notion was that particular social groups struggle in different ways, including ideologically, to win the consent of other groups and achieve a kind of ascendancy in both thought and practice over them' (Hall 1997: 48). Paranoia is a sequence of attempts by different groups to subvert what is perceived as the cultural verisimilitude, a set of representative conditions, often stereotyped or idealistic, which are in constant flux and shift, continually responding to different discourses. In this respect, different languages of cultural representation evolve when discourses are subjected to endless streams of information: the 'white noise' that DeLillo appropriates for his novel, which manifest themselves in 'such vulgarized forms are advertisements, tabloid headlines and bureaucratic euphemisms' (Saltzman 1994).

White Noise was published in 1985 and has as its backdrop the omniscient threat of biological and nuclear warfare, as well as the burgeoning markets for cosmetic and life-prolonging medicines. Such a bleak vision is embellished by precise, perceptive observations and these convey the grim,

trenchant portrayals of mistrust and suspicion that pervade DeLillo's work. Don DeLillo explores the social paranoia that is induced by the acknowledgement of mortality and loneliness, as well as the foreboding threat of death that Jack Gladney and his wife, Babette, appear to encounter in different forms. DeLillo's jarring, digressive narrative technique cultivates an air of the blackly comic, drawing together a series of riffs on the themes of modern alienation, death and the gradual disintegration of a family as it collapses under the strain of contemporary cultural forces. *White Noise* is an acerbic and darkly comic satire about the processes by which a family are brought together and torn apart by the forces of consumerism. The central character Jack Gladney is forced to confront his own death following an incident known only as the Airborne Toxic Event, his wife Babette attempts to avert her own death using the designer drug Dylar and his children, most notably Heinrich, regurgitate the language of advertising as part of their daily speech.

'All plots tend to move deathward. This is the nature of plots. Political plots, terrorist plots, lovers' plots, narrative plots, plots that are parts of children's games. We edge nearer death every time we plot' (DeLillo 2002: 26). By edging towards death, the main reason why the characters appear to be hurtling towards a fatal conclusion in the novel is identified, the concept of planning being destabilised by unseen forces that remove control from the individual and erode the social, cultural and familial bonds that join them to others. To this effect, the portrayal of Jack Gladney, the main protagonist of *White Noise*, is distinct because it conveys the emotions and difficulties encountered by a man who has begun the slow progression towards death whilst his wife explores every medical option available to prevent this happening to her. In an interview with Caryn James of the *New York Times*, Don DeLillo explains that:

I never set out to write an apocalyptic novel. It's about death on the individual level. Only Hitler is large enough and terrible enough to absorb and neutralize (*sic*) Jack Gladney's obsessive fear of dying – a very common fear, but one that's rarely talked about. Jack uses Hitler as a protective device; he wants to grasp anything he can. (James 1985)

This statement addresses a number of important themes in *White Noise* and within the remit of paranoia as a whole. Although the postmodern paranoid experience is dependent upon the culture of the masses, essentially it remains oriented around the individual. Just as *Mao II* posed the question about the prognosis for when the 'old God leaves the world, what happens to all the unexpended faith?' (DeLillo 2002: 7) *White Noise* offers a response that demonstrates how the medium of television and adverts provide the consumer with a packaged spiritual experience. The idea of a 'packaged spiritual experience' relates to the 'televisual packaging' which is served

up to consumers through their fervent devotion to the mass media and its cultivation of a personal faith and the, following each show, serial, advertisement and infomercial generates. Murray Jay Siskind, an academic colleague of the protagonist, Jack Gladney, suggests the following about the effects of the contemporary media infused landscape:

I've come to understand that the medium is a primal force in the American home. Sealed-off, timeless, self-contained, self-referring. It's like a myth being born right there in our living room, like something we know in a dream-like and preconscious way [. . .] TV offers incredible amounts of psychic data. It opens ancient memories of world birth, it welcomes us into the grid, the network of little buzzing dots that make up the picture pattern. There is light, there is sound. I ask my students, 'What more do you want?' Look at the wealth of data concealed in the grid, in the bright packaging, the jingles, the slice-of-life commercials, the products hurtling out of darkness, the coded messages and endless repetitions, like chants, like mantras [. . .] The medium practically overflows with sacred formulas. (DeLillo 2002: 51)

The desire to be 'welcomed' into 'the grid' is suggestive of a network or matrix that offers a hospitable community or refuge, a society that will accept those on the outside whilst the lights and sound give this an almost religious aura. By referring to 'psychic data', this is the material of fantasy and desire that is being sold back to the consumer, the inner desires which have been converted to an attainable sequence of goods. Television's 'little buzzing dots' are the same individual signals that the visual language is composed of. The data that they contain is arranged artificially within the most effective structure for communication and as the consumer listens to the 'coded messages', 'chants', 'mantras' it becomes apparent that this is the information that has been made holy, highly ritualised and calculated; the 'unexpended faith' that is being manipulated to seduce the shopper. Interestingly Siskind identifies the television as 'sealed-off, timeless, self-contained' and this is highly resonant of the individual cells and rooms that different DeLillo characters have already occupied. *White Noise* is littered with such packages that will offer a structure for those who seek an ordered, systematic presentation; the condensing of Jack Gladney's course to 'three credits, written reports' (DeLillo 2002: 25) and Dylar itself, the pill that responds to the user's chemical needs. However, there is a paradox here because those people who remain outside of the mass, those who are resistant to these rituals are considered dangerous because of their independence but the influence of television and the mass media actually works by juxtaposing each person's unique experience with those of individuals who metamorphose into a group. The title, *White Noise*, indicates a saturation of media within the novel.

As Jack Gladney is looking through a collection of photographs, he chances upon a series of images that depict the times which have passed. The non-specific events, arguably, are in keeping with the deliberately anonymising and jarring stylistic effects of DeLillo's writing. I would locate this scene as falling in the early or mid-twentieth-century, but on the cusp of an influential event such as World War II or the Kennedy assassination:

Children wincing in the sun, women in sun hats, men shading their eyes from the glare as if the past possessed some quality of light we no longer experience, a Sunday dazzle that caused people in their church-going clothes to tighten their faces and stand at an angle to the future, somewhat averted it seemed, wearing fixed and fine-drawn smiles, sceptical of something in the nature of the box camera.

Who will die first? (DeLillo 2002: 30)

The nature of the box camera is important because it is this object that will evolve into a tool for capturing the defining moments of contemporary life (and could just as feasibly represent television), but this is a traditional scene from an idealised middle America that evokes feelings of nostalgia and conveys a sense of simplicity and relaxation. The 'quality of light' is natural and pure, different from the aura that is created when an image is mediated and the figures' positioning 'at an angle to the future' is suggestive of scepticism of change, a desire to avoid the head-on confrontation with the next era. 'Tightened faces' and 'fixed smiles' provoke feelings of indignant sufferance or resilience in times of difficulty but the children in this image are certainly of another time, an era of innocence and naivety that is to be shattered by the impending events of the novel. By placing the question 'who will die first?' at the end of the paragraph, this is an unnerving jolt for the reader who has just been lulled into Jack's moment of nostalgia. Initially, there is an almost elegiac quality to the language and having encountered such a natural image, one can conclude that Jack's awareness of how this sense of contentedness has declined inspires his conscious realisation that he too will eventually degenerate.

In his analysis of DeLillo and other chroniclers of consumerism, media and technology, one of Kenneth Millward's more penetrating questions concerns the authorial intention behind DeLillo's offering *White Noise* as a scathing satire of postmodernism:

Does *White Noise* lament the passing of an earlier historical moment when Americans were in touch with something that could credibly be called 'authentic', or does the novel relish the freedoms that the new technologically determined image culture seems to offer? Is DeLillo's novel nostalgic for the historical moment that *Ragtime* appears to celebrate? (Millward 2000)

I would argue that like DeLillo's other novels, *White Noise* interrogates the subject of consumerism and paranoia by offering a critique through imitation. Each character embraces consumerism and Jack Gladney's wife, Babette, embodies the commodification of the individual through her use of Dylar, a drug that progressively releases medicine into the brain and stimulates chemical reactions to remove the emotions associated with death. In many respects this is the ultimate consumer anodyne that is tailored to account for the individual needs.

Jack Gladney is an academic working at the College-on-the-Hill who has founded his reputation in the discipline of Hitler Studies, taking the sobriquet J. A. K. Gladney and developing a physical frame that imitates Hitler's own. By adopting this structure for his own personal and academic gain, Gladney is reinventing himself as a package for the consumers, his students. His initials have an imposing, secretive yet strangely artificial feeling, masking the true name that J. A. K. represents but also imitating a corporate advertising logo. Jack suggests that:

So Hitler gave me something to grow into and develop toward, tentative as I have sometimes been in the effort. The glasses with thick black heavy frames and dark lenses were my own idea, an alternative to the bushy beard that my wife of the period didn't want me to grow. Babette said she liked the series J. A. K. and didn't think it was attention-getting in a cheap sense. To her it intimated dignity, significance and prestige.

I am the false character that follows the name around. (DeLillo 2002: 17)

Essentially, Hitler offers Jack a secure refuge for his identity. This existence as Hitler is essentially performative but in his role as an educator and academic, Jack has become a mediator, adopting the persona of a figure who features in a course about celebrities and who Murray Jay Siskind places in the same category as Elvis Presley. Mark Osteen makes the astute observation that in *White Noise* 'Hitler is perhaps the pre-eminent author of spectacles in our century [. . .] Once again Hitler is figured more as a pop star than as a mass murderer; because the proliferation of images makes all form of fame equivalent' (Osteen 2000: 168). Jack's performance of his lectures in a highly theatrical fashion is imitative of different theatrical media techniques. This is not a case of a character who desires gratification. Instead, Jack is an individual who is bewildered by the complexity of choice offered in the intensity of Late Capitalism and is conscious of the feelings of estrangement that he experiences when trying to interact with members of his family.

With this in mind, Osteen also makes the pertinent point that:

Jack is a Professor of Hitler Studies but it is important to note that what he teaches is not Hitler but representations of Hitler and the creative constructions of the media that made Hitler into an image. The Hitler

of Jack Gladney has nothing to do with the morality, ideology, politics, or the industrialized forms of death associated with the Nazis. (Osteen 2001: 127)

It is apparent that the relationship between those who teach 'history' and those who receive it has reached the point where the different images, constructions and mythologies are being taught, rather than there being any engagement with the terrors of actual historical documentation or any attempt to experience the real. This is the spirit of Baudrillard's theorising, amongst the debris and detritus of the contemporary consumer's waste is the simulacra of a deceased dictator whose significance in the post-historical landscape of American culture has been neatly processed and produced for academic consumers and customers.

Osteen identifies one of the most significant themes of *White Noise* as being the 'mass', which is also a recurrent characteristic of narratives of paranoia:

As in *Running Dog*, in *White Noise* history is also packaged for ready consumption in Jack's courses about the 'continuing mass appeals of fascist tyranny' (WN 25). 'Mass,' a word that appears in almost every key scene of *White Noise*, signifies how Hitler's stature depended upon large crowds and the religious nature of his allure; as the word recurs in the novel, its meaning expands to encompass the complex relationship between consumption and death. (Osteen 2001: 168)

The importance of identifying the recurrent images of the 'mass' through DeLillo's novels is that the different media functioning within *White Noise* exist for the purpose of neutralising the individual's fear of death. Each person is seeking authenticity, they desire to feel validated and have their anxieties pacified. There is a lack of safety in existing as an individual in the novel but to be incorporated into the collective offers sanctuary, a security against loneliness:

Crowds came to form a shield against their own dying. To become a crowd is to keep out death. To break off from the crowd is to risk death as an individual, to face dying alone. Crowds came for this reason above all others. (DeLillo 2002: 73)

Jack's difficulty with establishing himself as a significant figure in his son and wife's lives is compounded by the sense of dislocation he suffers. Even when copulating with his wife, their desires are inspired by pornography from a range of different cultures and time periods and there is a distinct detachment during the act itself. Jack's narrative is self-conscious, mechanical and forced, 'I entered her.' 'He entered me.' 'We're not lobbies or elevators' (DeLillo

2002: 28) and it becomes apparent that their sexual desires have been reduced to a simple set of instructions. The reduction of humans to this level of simple programming is significant because it offers a remarkably paranoid view that actions and desires are simply a set of chemical impulses. As Jack's son argues, 'Who knows what I want to do? Who knows what anyone wants to do? How can you be sure about something like that? Isn't it all a question of brain chemistry, signals going back and forth, electrical energy in the cortex?' (DeLillo 2002: 45). Jack's response to this is intriguing in that when he goes to the ATM the next morning and withdraws cash his anxiety is, to a point, calmed because he is engaging with the unseen matrix again: 'The system was invisible, which made it all the more impressive, all the more disquieting to deal with. But we were in accord, at least for now. The networks, the circuits, the streams, the harmonies' (DeLillo 2002: 46). On an intertextual level, *Mao II* portrays a scene where the poet imagines his image being broadcast through these channels, across the airwaves and his body is reduced to a mass of signals and disparate images. Although the scene is one of a body being decomposed and reformed again, the feeling is that this offers a temporary freedom from the enclosed cell in which he has been imprisoned. Comparatively, Jack and his family witness Babette teaching an academic class on the television and the depiction is strikingly similar to that of *Mao II*:

The face on the screen was Babette's. Out of our mouths came a silence as wary and deep as an animal growl. Confusion, fear, astonishment spilled from our faces. What did it mean? What was she doing there, in black and white, framed in formal borders? Was she dead, missing, disembodied? Was her spirit, her secret self, some two-dimensional facsimile released by the power of technology, set free to glide through wavebands, through energy levels, pausing to say good-bye to us from the fluorescent screen. (DeLillo 2002: 104)

The immediate thought is that Babette is dead but because this event is being witnessed on television, Jack and his family find themselves disengaged from the prospect of a fatality and instead hypnotised by Babette's appearance as a 'secret self' or a 'spirit'. It is here that the significance of mediation becomes apparent because Babette is temporarily freed from her packaged life and by engaging fully with the camera, she is consumed both by the watching audience and by the camera itself, which decomposes her body and distils it into a series of pixels; repossessing her and defining her within a framework. DeLillo makes the connection between the power of technology and Babette's death representing a form of freedom, as though suggesting that the real can only be experienced through death.

The hidden networks which supply necessary economic support seem to reaffirm Jack's confidence but one of the most satirical scenes in *White Noise* occurs when the Gladney family go shopping and through the medium

of consumption, his relatives finally accept him as 'one of them' (DeLillo 2002: 83): 'My family gloried in the event. I was one of them, shopping at last [. . .] I kept seeing myself unexpectedly in some reflecting surface' (DeLillo 2002: 83). There is an almost narcissistic element to this scene, as Jack repeatedly acknowledges his image in the surfaces but he regains his sense of self and validates this by exercising control over clerks who satiate his desires with the merchandise he demands. This echoes an earlier scene in a shopping mall, where Jack notices that:

I realised the place was awash in noise. The toneless systems, the jangle and skid of carts, the loudspeaker and coffee-making machines, the cries of children. And over it all, or under it all, a dull and unlocatable roar, as of some form of swarming life just outside of the range of human apprehension. (DeLillo 2002: 36).

This is the collision between the soothing elevator muzak that placates the consumer and the 'real', the authenticity that lies just beyond the boundaries of human awareness. DeLillo's work is fixated on the presence of individuals who strive to achieve this temporary freedom from their packaged life but as *White Noise* develops, it is apparent that the determination to achieve the 'real' and the progression towards a decisive, fatal narrative are unavoidably intertwined.

At this point, the 'mass' develops to a more sinister entity than simple consumer happiness. Jack Gladney is subjected to an ATE (airborne toxic event), an occurrence that I would equate with the threat of biological warfare. DeLillo conveys the image of a sprawling nebulous cloud that infuses the body of those who inhale it or are consumed within its mass: 'Beneath the cloud of vaporized chemicals, the scene was one of urgency and operatic chaos [. . .] This thick mist arched through the air like some grand confection at a concert of patriotic music, (DeLillo 2002: 115–16). Babette's apparent 'death' has already been portrayed by this point in the novel and I feel it is important to recognise that the movement from mass-produced waste to a mass of chemicals is linked by the implication that the latter is a consequence of the former. The effects of his own consumption are slowly killing Jack and yet again the consumer and the product begin to physically merge. There is a remarkable similarity between the scene of Babette's television 'death' and the prospective degeneration of Jack's body through chemical breakdown, with his slow movement from a state of physical health to the unseen invasion of his internal mechanisms. As a state of emergency is declared, the scene, which initially took on operatic qualities, is now imbued with a sense of theatrical farce:

The voice grew louder, faded, grew loud again as the vehicle moved in and out of local streets. Toxic event, chemical cloud. When the words

became faint, the cadence itself was still discernible, a recurring sequence in the distance. It seems that danger assigns to public voices the responsibility of a rhythm, as if in metrical units there is a coherence we can use to balance whatever senseless and furious event is about to come rushing around our heads. (DeLillo 2002: 120)

The words 'toxic event' and 'chemical cloud' divorce the event from its true significance and are the same bureaucratic euphemisms that Arthur Saltzman identified in the introduction. The rhythms and cadences of the instructions bring a Foucauldian sensibility to this sequence, but these are the same pacifying rhythms as found in the consumer paradise of the mall. Saltzman referred to 'white noise' as such 'vulgarized forms as advertisements, tabloid headlines and bureaucratic euphemisms' (Saltzman 1994: p. 807) and it is noticeable that the name of the ATE changes from an ominous sounding 'heavy black mass' (DeLillo 2002: 110) to the light and ephemeral 'feathery plume' (DeLillo 2002: 111). This is the sanitised, non-threatening language that detaches the victims from the danger and prevents death becoming 'real'.

When Jack visits the doctor for a medical examination, he finally realises the extent to which his life and his body has become complicit with the technological advancement which has become inherent in contemporary Western society. Similarly, this is the point at which the information that is available has been obtained by methods which are invasive:

The whole system says it. It's what we call a massive data-base tally. Gladney, J. A. K. I punch in the name, the substance, the exposure time and then I tap into your computer history. Your genetics, your personals, your medicals, your psychologicals, your police-and-hospitals. It comes back pulsing stars. This doesn't mean anything is going to happen to you as such, at least not today or tomorrow. It just means you are the sum total of your data. No man escapes that. (DeLillo 2002: 141)

The idea of an individual representing the 'sum total of your data' compares with Heinrich's (Jack Gladney's son's) analysis of human instinct and composition being reduced to a series of data but this is also another example of human history becoming a commodity or a package which is available for private consumption. To a point, it is possible to suggest that DeLillo has moved into a genre that traverses the conditions of speculative science-fiction, with the complicity and convergence between humanity and technology. Speculative fiction is also characterised by remarkably paranoid images and the 'genetics', 'personals', 'medicals' effectively render Jack helpless as the electronic presentation displays his history with a far more calculated conviction than any human. It is as though his persona has been

translated into sequences of code and the similarities between 'pulsing stars' and 'chemical impulses' demonstrate this.

Jack is not the only character in *White Noise* to surrender his body to the commodifying forces in operation in the novel. When Babette recounts the transactions which led to her obtaining her Dylar, it becomes apparent that she engaged in brief sexual encounters in a motel with Willie Mink, the extreme scientist who dispenses the drug. Thomas Hine suggests that 'motels fit perfectly into post-modern capitalism because they are simple packages for people' (Hine 1995: 170) and it is appropriate that the motel room itself is a self-contained unit, perfect for the transaction between two bodies. Actions of violence in DeLillo's work are frequently portrayed through the conventions of cinema and when Jack determines to murder the man who has persuaded Babette to exchange sexual favours for Dylar, he attempts to break free of his mediation by finding a 'reality he can dominate' (DeLillo 2002: 297), a scene where he is in control and dictating the events. He becomes a conscious player in his own television film, sensing that he is 'part of a network of structures and channels. I knew the precise nature of events. I was moving closer to things in their natural state as I approached a violence, a smashing intensity. Water fell in drops, surfaces gleamed' (DeLillo 2002: 305). This is the self-realisation that occurs when an individual verges on the edge of the real, when they commit an act of violence that imbues them with a sense of power and the feeling of being in control, rather than at the mercy of impulses and restraint. In the moments after the murder, this breakthrough is complete:

I continued to advance in consciousness. Things glowed, a secret life rising out of them. Water struck the roof in elongated orbs, splashing drams. I knew for the first time what rain really was. I knew what wet was. I understood the neurochemistry of my brain, the meaning of dreams (the waste material of premonitions). Great stuff everywhere, racing through the room, racing slowly. A richness, a density. (DeLillo 2002: 310)

DeLillo's analysis that dreams are 'the waste material of premonitions' concurs with his theories of the connection between the mind and conspiracy in *Libra* (1988) but the language of the scene where Jack kills Minks is filled with far more experiential senses, the use of 'wet', 'richness', 'density' are important because they possess a greater impact than the depthless, lifeless, condensed language that characterised the earlier shopping mall scenes. The 'secret life' of objects is catalysed by Gladney's breaking free from the self-sealed spaces in which he has been contained.

However, in keeping with the themes of DeLillo's work, the state of realisation is only temporary. Each experience of the 'real' usually leads to death and it is at the end of *White Noise* that the relationship which

Osteen identifies between paranoia, consumption and death is finally made apparent:

But in the end it doesn't matter what they see or think they see. The terminals are equipped with holographic scanners, which decode the binary secret of every item, infallibly. This is the language of waves and radiation, or how the dead speak to the living. And this is where we wait together, regardless of age, our carts stocked with brightly coloured goods. (DeLillo 2002: 326)

The implicit trust and, to a certain extent, dependency on technology has returned and each consumer is sealed within the easily identifiable site of micro-Capitalism – the mall. This 'language of waves and radiation' is the American 'dread' of *Libra* and *White Noise's* hidden anxiety, the unseen communications which pattern, pacify and channel the consumer's contentment. 'Brightly coloured goods' is a distinctly non-descript phrase when compared to the enriched language of momentary freedom that Jack experiences whilst the queues and lists represent a repetitive repackaging of the same internal desires simply mediated through a different form. The repackaging of internal wishes and dreams characterises DeLillo's fiction as a whole, whilst novels culminate in the cathartic moment when these dreams are released through actions or words, the consequences for the protagonist all too often remain unresolved.

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17

Hooked on Classics: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* 25 Years On

Sonya Andermahr

Introduction

Given that *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is one of the more recently published texts discussed in this volume and having just published a book on Winterson's works myself, it felt slightly odd being asked by the editors to 'revisit' it as a 'classic' text. Still, it was 29 years ago that Winterson's debut novel was published, which is older than the average undergraduate student. Moreover, the literary scene was a very different place in 1985, so there must be a good case for reassessment of the text in 2014. The editors' aim in this volume is to provide 'new and original interpretations of texts which have established themselves as twentieth century classics'. The main problem this poses the contemporary critic is that the novel has always been seen by commentators as ineluctably 'new': novel, innovative, experimental, post-modern, as hybridizing forms, challenging boundaries and deconstructing discourses. Its publication coincided with the consolidation of critical theory in academic departments of English and so critical readings of it have always seen it in terms of – and in many ways as an exemplar of – the new (post-structuralist) theories. As a newly minted 'classic' text, one which entered the canon almost immediately upon publication, *Oranges* was hailed as a postmodern text, and Winterson as an exemplary feminist and queer literary practitioner (Morrison) from the very beginning. The novel has been analysed variously as a female and lesbian *Bildungsroman* (Onega, Andermahr), as a feminist appropriation of the fantastic (Armitt), as an example of the lesbian postmodern (Doan), as biblical reworking (Cosslett), as quest narrative (Onega, Pykett), and as working class text (O'Rourke). Numerous critics have drawn attention to the novel's intertextual relationship with other canonical texts including D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (Onega), James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Pykett), and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (Cosslett and Pyrhönen). Winterson, of course, has always resisted critical appropriation (in any terms) while not necessarily being unsympathetic to theory's ideological aims (she *is* a feminist; she *does* seek

to dismantle binaries, etc). She has stressed the general and universal reach of her work, quite antithetically to its construction in the academy. And she has a point: her readers are many and various; not everyone reads as a post-structuralist literary critic. Now that the postmodern moment seems to have waned somewhat in academic thought¹ – it may be that the time has come to reassess the critical reception of Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*.

Oranges was immediately popular on its publication in 1985, garnering admiring reviews from the print media and winning the Whitbread prize for First Novel.² It has remained in print and has sustained high sales figures over 29 years. It has been a recommended text by both AQA and OCR exam boards and has been widely taught since the 1990s as part of a module on 'The struggle for identity in modern literature'. The 1989 TV film version increased its marketability and its lifespan considerably; indeed it was rescreened on BBC TV in 2010. So, what makes *Oranges* a 'classic'? Firstly, it is a classic quest narrative in the form of a *Bildungsroman* or novel of development, charting the growth of a young person to maturity, which gives it a 'universal' appeal. Secondly, it takes the form of a fictional autobiography, appealing to the reader's fascination for the personal details of an individual's life. The novel begins with an emphatically autobiographical opening: 'Like most people I lived for a long time with my mother and father' (*Oranges* 3). This grounds the text in a personal history, which sets up readerly identification from the start. When discussing the appeal of the text readers frequently emphasize the authenticity of its description of a working class childhood, the humour and warmth of the narrative, and their identification with the young protagonist.³ Audience members of a recent *Bookclub* interview claimed to recognise and identify with Winterson's depiction of Accrington in the 1960s and 70s, right down to particular streets and shops. The novel's enduring success and popularity therefore owes much to its autobiographical framing. As Zekiye Antakyalioglu argues, '*Oranges* has proved to be her longest lasting success not only because it has been seen to radiate lesbian viewpoints, postmodern issues of intertextuality, metafiction, and new historicist understandings of the past and the present, but also because it is written in an autobiographical manner' (Antakyalioglu 5). It is at once specific – based on Winterson's own experience of growing up as a working class lesbian in a fanatically religious community in the North of England – and general, treating universal concepts such as first love, loss, grief, rage, and courage (*Winterson Oranges* xiv). Writing on the occasion of the twenty-fifth-anniversary of the novel's publication, Winterson stated:

Oranges would not be in print across the world, much less read and taught, 25 years later if it were just about me. I never wanted it to be just about me, and maybe that's the point. I wanted, through language and through storytelling, to reach something wider than my own circumstances. The opening words, 'Like most people . . . ' are the clue. Most

people have not grown up the way I did, but the struggle to become who you are is for everyone. (*Times* 4)

The story that she tells, a classic *Bildung* narrative, involves the struggle of a young lesbian to assert her sense of difference against the morally oppressive guardians of her community. In revising the 'narrative of damnation' associated with lesbian and gay texts for much of the twentieth century, incorporating a narrative of flight and 'enabling escape' (Stimpson),⁴ the novel represents a ground-breaking treatment of lesbian existence, placing the marginal subject at the narrative centre and inverting the usual privileging of heterosexuality. According to Hilary Hinds, the text's success can be ascribed to its ability to transcend genre categories, which she sees as a function of its lesbian aesthetic. Winterson herself compares the novel to Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* in terms of its experimentalism, its blurring of genres, and its radical treatment of sexuality (Winterson *Art* 53). The novel has been an important book for several generations of teenage readers, especially those experiencing similar conflicts around their sexuality. But it speaks more widely to teenagers' sense of marginalization and 'being different', which is a striking feature of post-war society. 'You'll have a different, difficult time' (Winterson *Oranges* 109), Jeanette is told by her orange demon.⁵ No doubt its endurance as a text that continues to circulate in culture may, in part, be ascribed to this factor. According to John Mullan, writing in *The Guardian* on the popularity of contemporary fiction on A-Level syllabuses, 'tales of oppression, valiantly overcome, are always favourites with A-Level setters' (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2006/oct/23/schools.alevels>).

As a text, it therefore operates – and has been read – on many levels. Commenting on initial reactions to the novel which read it in terms of autobiographical realism or as postmodern experiment, Susana Onega argues that '*Oranges* is both linear and realistic *and* anti-linear and experimental' (Onega 19). This is because it interrupts an autobiographical narrative set in the 1960s and 70s with a series of mythical tales and philosophical interludes. Nevertheless, despite its 'complicated' spiral structure and the diversity of styles and discourses utilized, the novel has a simplicity of address, which appeals to the majority of readers. In a recent *Bookclub* interview for Radio 4, Winterson emphasized the way in which she set out, not to write an autobiographical account of her life, but to use herself as a fictional character.⁶ In this way, she could escape the limitations of her origins and begin to write her own story and therefore gain power and freedom. In fact the novel enacts this 'battle of the stories'; between the version promulgated by her mother and the Church and her own growing disillusion with religious fundamentalism and need to individuate herself. The two aspects of classical quest and autobiography are united in Winterson's desire to use herself to write both fact and fiction. The text therefore circulates as a much loved comic novel of growing up, as teaching material, as an aspect of popular/

literary culture, and as part of Winterson's own mythobiography. Its success may be attributed to the ways in which the narrative 'hooks' itself onto classic texts, which circulate in the culture's collective unconscious. This chapter will combine these emphases and consider the novel as a literary classic that both subverts the canon and inscribes the tradition in the process of reworking autobiography as art. It will draw on recent interviews with Winterson to suggest that the novel represents a 'cover story' that conceals the sense of loss intrinsic to Winterson's origin story.

'I can change the story. I am the story'

Unsurprisingly, Winterson herself ascribes the novel's staying power to its art; its transformation of the raw materials of experience into an aesthetic form. In *Art Objects* and elsewhere Winterson argues strongly against autobiographical readings of her work, claiming that *Oranges's* importance lies not in its 'wit or warmth' but in its 'new way with words' (*Art* 53). However, her argument in *Art Objects* that 'the intersection between a writer's life and a writer's work is irrelevant to the reader' (27) is not always borne out in readers' accounts as revealed in the *Bookclub* interview, where the biggest laughs came when Winterson mimicked her mother pronouncing, 'Why be happy if you could be normal?' There is clearly an ongoing dialogue between fact and fiction in reception of the text, and readers' appetite for the 'real facts' remains undimmed. Another admiring audience member began her question by praising the humour of her depiction of childhood experience, before going on to ask Winterson to confirm whether the sampler episode 'really happened'. Winterson laughed it off but refused to enter into debate about the veracity of particular episodes, saying she could no longer remember which was which. In her *Times* article she takes a stronger line, despairing of approaches to her work which seek to narrow and fix versions of her life: 'I have even had questionnaires asking me to tick which bits of the story are true and which are the bits I made up' (Winterson *Times* 4). Despite Winterson's resistance to readerly attempts to identify the episodes in the text with aspects of her own life, readers undoubtedly do read *Oranges* in this way; they are interested in the minutiae and specificities of Winterson's life experience as well as the 'universal' themes the novel treats; together these aspects constitute the novel's appeal.

Oranges is an exemplary escape narrative. At once rooted in Northern English working class experience, the text also represents an escape from origins. Repeatedly, Winterson represents life as series of narratives, which frame and construct the self and the self's possibilities. Winterson describes her foster mother, whom she always refers to as Mrs Winterson, as a 'flamboyant depressive; a woman who needed an audience, a plot and some very good lines' (*Times* 4). Winterson ascribes to her an innate theatricality which she herself then adopts as a mode of representation and self-representation.

Her mother's stories were so powerful that Winterson risked becoming enmeshed in them, just as in *Oranges* the characters Jeanette, the princess and Winnet risk being caught up in more powerful narratives. As she wrote recently in *The Times*: 'To avoid the narrow mesh of her story about me, I needed a story of my own, and that is how and why I am a writer' (*Times* 4). Authorship becomes part of a struggle to control her own naming. Winterson relates how she finally achieved this on publication of the novel when her mother called her to say that such was her embarrassment, she had to order the book under a pseudonym. 'I knew then that I had won', she states in the *Bookclub* interview. When Mrs Winterson finally read the novel she complained that it wasn't 'true' but, as Winterson points out, truth is a relative concept: 'She had invented me – got a baby, given it a name, told it a story, made it a story, and the baby had invented herself in return' (*Times* 4). All these ideas – of the mother's creative power, the power of naming, and self-invention through storytelling – are present in *Oranges*.

Winterson rightly resists the novel's categorization as autobiography; it belongs to the recognised genre of fictional autobiography, in which a constructed narrative persona relates her own history, frequently from a position of hindsight. As Winterson remarks, while the 'facts' may be 'threadbare' or constraining, the 'story' permits endless possibilities for constructing the self (*Times* 4). In the preface to her novella *Weight*, Winterson insists that authenticity not autobiography is important, by which she means the achieved vision rather than the original 'facts' (xix). Winterson first expressed this aesthetic credo in the 'Deuteronomy' chapter of *Oranges*, which has since been much quoted by critics in order to establish Winterson as a postmodern practitioner of historiographic metafiction. What stands out now about Winterson's challenging of binary oppositions, especially the distinction between history and storytelling, is her insistence on the aesthetic transformation of life. The word is the thing; naming is power; language creates reality. Winterson uses the concept of 'fiction masquerading as memoir' (*Art* 53) to describe her use of autobiography; she does not 'clothe herself in a thin veil of fiction but make[s] herself the fiction' (Antakyalioglu 15). Life writing is a means of both theorizing and fictionalizing the subject as Lucie Armitt has demonstrated in her reading of *Oranges* alongside Caroline Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman*, which is itself a classic of feminist historiography. Winterson therefore 'intentionally position[s] herself in history, culture, and literature with the permanence of art, which enables her to transform her diaries into timeless orations' (Antakyalioglu 15).

Inscribing the tradition

Oranges has the literary tradition written into it in its ongoing engagement with classical and classic texts. Its allusions encompass Greek myth and Athena's birth from Zeus's head, Homer's *Odyssey*, Dante's *Inferno*, nineteenth-century

novels, and the modernists Eliot, Joyce and Woolf. Susana Onega points out that *Oranges* adopts a spiral structure, rather than either a linear or a cyclical structure, and that this feature is used by the Western canonical poets from Dante, Milton, Blake and Goethe to Yeats, Graves, and Eliot in order to express the ongoing cycle of human life. In his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', T. S. Eliot, who is one of Winterson's most admired writers, argues that a sense of the tradition is integral to canonical works of literature, which involves a historical awareness 'not only of the pastness of the past; but of its presence'. The writer should write

with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his [*sic*] own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity. (Eliot 'Tradition', 38)

Winterson's fusion of autobiographical narrative, allegory, fairy tale and philosophical reflection represents just such a bringing together of the timeless and the temporary. She transforms these diverse forms into an artistic whole, 'which is both something plural in the sense of fragmentation and unique in the sense of authenticity and originality' (Antakyalioglu 11). The novel contains literary allusions to a range of other texts which all have a 'simultaneous existence'. The text operates a structural intertextuality in which the realistic linear narrative is interspersed with biblical, fantastic and mythical tales. Winterson has commented that as a child her house contained only six books: two Bibles, a concordance, two books for children, and Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* (Winterson *Art* 153). She has also revealed that *Jane Eyre* was a favourite book of her mother's. Excepting the concordance, Winterson draws extensively on these works to provide the novel's mythical and narrative framework. In fact Winterson adopts what T. S. Eliot, in another essay, calls the 'mythical method' whereby the writer draws 'a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity (Eliot 'Ulysses' 483)' in order to give universal meaning and pattern to contemporary, contingent experience.

She does this, most obviously, with her use of biblical allusion. Structurally, the novel is divided into eight chapters which accord to the first eight books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges and Ruth. Winterson subverts the books of the Old Testament by inserting them into a lesbian coming-out story. She undertakes a parodic rescripting of the Bible giving her life story a biblical status and resonance. Jeanette's journey represents nothing less than a version of the Creation and Fall, Christ's passion, crucifixion, and redemption through love. In

'Genesis', for example, Jeanette's adoption by Louie is compared to God's creation of the universe and to Christ's birth; Louie chooses Jeanette just as God chooses his subjects as prophets and ultimately his Son as Saviour: 'My mother . . . dreamed a dream and sustained it in daylight. She would get a child, train it, build it, dedicate it to the Lord' (*Oranges* 10). Louie appropriates masculine powers of creation, using baptism, naming and storytelling. She gives birth not literally but metaphorically to a 'holy child'. Importantly, Louie inspires Jeanette with the belief that 'you can change the world' (10); indeed, it is from her mother and the Bible that Jeanette learns the power of allegorical thinking.⁷

In the second chapter, Winterson draws a parallel between Jeanette's removal from home to the dangerous 'Breeding Ground' of school and the expulsion of the Israelites from Egypt in 'Exodus' (21). In these early sections of the novel, Winterson's use of the mythical method works to emphasize the comic aspects. The use of an adult narrator to focalize the child's viewpoint provides the distance necessary for the humour to emerge. In the hyacinth episode, for example, when Jeanette enters a floral exhibit called 'The Annunciation', the narrator comments: 'I thought it was a very clever marriage of horticulture and theology' (45). The juxtaposition of childish project and high literary culture provides the humour. When her biblically themed work fails to impress, Jeanette switches to popular culture as inspiration, drawing on equally inappropriate Hollywood melodramas such as *Now Voyager*. She proves adept at hybridizing genres just as Winterson as writer draws on diverse discourses to transform autobiography into art. While the biblical book of 'Leviticus' concerns the rules governing religious observance, Winterson's version witnesses Jeanette's growing awareness of sexuality (52) and her first theological disagreement with the Church (58). In 'Numbers' Jeanette falls in love with Melanie and worries if this constitutes 'unnatural passions' (86). 'Deuteronomy' represents a self-reflexive philosophical meditation on the nature of history and storytelling, arguing that the latter represents a 'way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained' (91). In 'Joshua' Jeanette is subjected to an exorcism in an effort to rid her of her 'demons' (105); in 'Judges' she is accused by the Church fathers of 'aping men' and her mother orders her to leave home (125). The final chapter, 'Ruth' is the only female book alluded to. Significantly, it is the chapter in which Jeanette returns home after her forced exile to broker an uneasy truce with her mother. The biblical Book of Ruth represents a plea for tolerance of mixed marriages and foregrounds Ruth's loyalty to another woman, Naomi. However, Jeanette 'chooses the prophetic role of a writer for whom fiction, not the Bible, functions as scripture' (Pyrhönen 58), allowing her to challenge cultural myths of origins.

The archetypal narrative form, which has its Western origins in Greek epic, is the quest. Homer's *Odyssey* narrates the story of Odysseus's ten year quest to get home after the end of the Trojan wars. The central mythical quest

narrative explicitly alluded to in the inset tales is the Quest for the Grail, part of the Arthurian legend, recounted by Sir Thomas Malory in *Morte D'Arthur*, one of the few books in Winterson's childhood home. In Malory's version, Sir Perceval, son of King Pellinore, leaves King Arthur's court where he was a favourite knight to embark on an ultimately successful quest with Galahad and Bors. In the course of his adventures he is attacked by a gang of men and rescued by a red knight; he then saves a lion from being strangled by a serpent. The lion leads him safely to a ship, which enables him to continue his quest for the Grail. The themes of mortal danger, personal courage, and the pursuit of one's vision are all foregrounded in the narrative. Perceval represents an alter ego for Jeanette, a legendary counterpart whose knightly quest is no more or less significant and hazardous than Jeanette's own. In her treatment of the tale, Winterson develops the motifs of disintegration of community (of the Round Table) and Perceval's resulting sense of disillusion; the theme of lost love (between Arthur and Perceval); and Perceval's pursuit of his personal vision. Winterson uses Perceval repeatedly in her novels (see *The Power Book*) in order to symbolize the restless quest for love and happiness, and to evoke a certain homoeroticism. While Perceval experiences the loneliness of being cast out of the circle of love, the quest pushes him onwards. Jeanette's quest is also a quest for love and personal meaning – for something or someone to replace the figures of Arthur/mother and God.

The text also rewrites the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman*, especially Dickens's *Great Expectations* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, adopting aspects of the plot, characterization and narrative technique of the form. The plot of the orphan child cast adrift in the world, betrayed by some adults, and nurtured by others, is adopted by Winterson; Jeanette is in a long line of founding children, Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and Brontë's *Jane*, among them. As in these classic texts, Winterson presents a child's view of the world, mediated by an older, mature narrative consciousness. This creates an ironic distance which both makes possible the humour and renders the adult world strange and grotesque. The novel is peopled with comic grotesques from Jeanette's mother and the squeaky-voiced Pastor Finch to grumpy Betty in Tricketts and Mrs Arkwright of Arkwright's for Vermin. Louie in *Oranges* bears comparison to the maternal grotesques such as Mrs Joe and Mrs Reed found in Dickens and Brontë. The ineffectual but kindly men like Louie's husband also have their counterpart in Dickens's portraits of weak masculine figures. The novel contains a number of male grotesques, notably Pastors Finch and Spratt, who are akin to Dickens's perverted authority figures such as Mr Bumble and Squeers. In Jeanette's dream about marriage, men appear as beasts. Reading fairy tales such as 'Beauty and the Beast' only confirms Jeanette's theory. On one occasion, Jeanette overhears one of the neighbours saying, 'She married a pig' (*Oranges* 69). Winterson now disavows this portrayal but it remains a significant feminist aspect of the text, distinguishing it from mainstream discourse which posits male as norm.⁸

If the Bible is the novel's primary sacred source, *Jane Eyre* is the foremost secular intertext. As Pyrhönen comments of the novel's two central sources: 'They seduce Winterson, kindling her desire to write. What are they, if not her literary father and mother?' (Pyrhönen 66). The novel functions as a consolatory text for both Jeanette and her mother. Feeling depressed when abandoned in hospital, Jeanette thinks, 'so I was alone. I thought of Jane Eyre, who faced many trials and was always brave' (*Oranges* 28). Both Jeanette and the reader identify with the orphan Jane's struggle for survival. For her mother it is a founding text, one which she has completely rewritten to suit her own worldview. Instead of Jane returning to Thornfield to marry Rochester, Louie has Jane marry the missionary St John Rivers to embark upon 'the Lord's work' together in India. In fact, *Oranges* adopts the plot structure of *Jane Eyre* which enacts a struggle between religious and social duty and self-abnegation and Jane's passionate desire for selfhood. As in *Jane Eyre*, Jeanette is aided in her struggle for selfhood by a series of female figures; Elsie, Miss Jewsbury and the florist are counterparts of Helen Burns, Miss Temple and the Rivers sisters. While both texts emphasize 'the religious and spiritual dimensions of love' (Pyrhönen 50), Winterson's reworking substitutes a lesbian romance for the heterosexual romance of *Jane Eyre*.

While her mother gives her a thorough grounding in the Bible and her revised version of *Jane Eyre*, it is one of Jeanette's surrogate mothers, Elsie Norris, who introduces her to a wide range of English literature including Swinburne, Blake, Christina Rossetti and W. B. Yeats. Elsie also provides her with two of the novel's central insights: 'She said that stories helped you to understand the world' (29) and that 'What looks like one thing . . . may well be another' (30), which relate to Winterson's twin concerns with storytelling and epistemological relativism. As this suggests, metaphoric substitution is the principle of both the novel's structure and its philosophical vision. The text transforms everything into something else using repetition and parallelism: character, motif, and story all morph into another version of themselves. Visions are another form of allegorical 'seeing' and Jeanette repeatedly invokes the visionary poet-prophet William Blake to describe her childhood experience. Even the orange demon represents a Blakean vision. As she admits: 'This tendency towards the exotic has brought me many problems, just as it did for William Blake' (42). By adding the reference to Blake Winterson transforms Jeanette's experience of difference from the particular and ordinary to the literary and visionary.

Oranges adopts a particular form of the *Bildung* genre; it is a *Künstlerroman*, a novel of artistic development. As Lyn Pykett has shown, the novel has strong links with James Joyce's classic modernist *Künstlerroman*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Like Stephen Daedalus, Jeanette battles a series of oppressive authorities including the mother, school, Church and society. The novel's ending recapitulates that of *Portrait*; like Stephen, Jeanette chooses exile and independence on 'the other side' of the sea. In the final

chapter, a fellow Oxford student asks Jeanette, ‘when did you last see your mother?’ (156), which echoes Stephen’s conversation about his mother with his fellow student Cranly. Jeanette reflects that ‘I could have been a priest instead of a prophet’ (156), which provides a parallel with Stephen’s rejection of his vocation for the Catholic Church. Jeanette, like Stephen, rejects all the authoritative discourses – family, Church, nation in order to forge her own artistic identity. The narrator of *Oranges* encapsulates their shared visionary role: ‘The priest has a book with words set out . . . the prophet has no book’ (156). As Antakyalioglu comments, Winterson wishes to maintain that ‘art not only springs from experience, it also springs from other art’ (Antakyalioglu 7). As many critics have noted, the use of inset stories and fantasy elements are distancing devices to detach the narrative from the authorial persona. It represents a double strategy as Winterson mythicizes the ‘real’ facts of her/Jeanette’s life, and narrates classic tales which serve to eternalize the narrative subject. The multiple discourses add up to more than the sum of their parts, transcending mere autobiography and converting life into art.

Fairy tales are a type of quest narrative in which an innocent hero or heroine is subjected to the power of a betraying adult and has only their imagination and resourcefulness to aid them. Louie conforms to the role of the wicked step-mother and witch, purporting to give life to the heroine but ultimately betraying her, firstly by sending Jeanette’s birth mother away and then by siding with the Church fathers against Jeanette. Elsie Norris fulfils the role of fairy godmother and donor who helps the heroine in her quest by offering her guidance and a safe space to be herself. In the parable of the beautiful wise woman, the weight of patriarchal tradition leads the prince to ignore women’s wisdom. The Princess, who is certainly not a Sleeping Beauty figure, but a wise and resourceful young woman who saves a village by bringing knowledge and healing, is ultimately killed by the Prince who cannot possess her. Winterson’s retelling represents an anti-patriarchal morality tale. In this way, Winterson appropriates the form of the traditional fairy tale and the female archetype of good witch/spinster in order to subvert the canon. The relationship between the main narrative and the inset tales is that of allegory or parable. Winterson speaks about parables as an economic way of telling a story (*Bookclub* interview). The most succinct of the parables used by Winterson is that of the emperor Tetrahedron whose grace is contrasted to the foul Isoceles. Through personification, Winterson converts geometry into story and art. The novel’s central parable and most important of the inset tales is the story of Winnet Stonejar, which adopts all the novel’s key motifs: a parental sorcerer figure, a protective chalk circle, a talismanic pebble, exile from a community, and a connecting thread back home. In the tale, which is itself a version of Rumpelstiltskin, the sorcerer sets out to guess Winnet’s name and thereby have power over her. This episode points to the magical power of naming, just as Louie names Jeanette and creates her as a special child with a magical destiny as a missionary.

The sorcerer, disguised as a mouse, subsequently 'ties a thread around her button' (148), which mirrors the thread Louie has tied around Jeanette. The experience of the characters Jeanette, Winnet, and Perceval is therefore both personal and archetypal, specific and general. Together the characters represent the necessity of exile in the service of their vision. Their 'simultaneous existence' in parallel narratives constitutes the act of writing oneself a story, into the story, even when there seems to be no alternative to the present. It enacts the idea that the narrative of one's life may be changed even as it draws on numerous established narratives. What unites the heterogeneous discourses and multiple tales and 'ties' them together are the motifs of thread and the stone/heart. Perceval feels himself 'being pulled like a bobbin of cotton, so that he was dizzy and wanted to give in to the pull and wake up round familiar things' (168). He dreams he is a spider and a raven 'came and flew through his thread', similar to the raven who flies through Winnet's tale and leaves her its stony heart as a souvenir. The raven is a stand-in for the orange demon who throws Jeanette a pebble (111) and advises Winnet/Jeanette to 'find a new place' (143). When Jeanette returns home for Christmas after her first term at Oxford, she comments that her mother 'had tied a thread around my button, to tug as she pleased' (171). As Lucie Armitt has argued, these motifs represent emotional attachments, which cannot be simply severed by the quest for autonomous identity. They also, I would argue, represent the incorporation of lost objects in a Freudian sense.⁹ And it is the theme of loss in relation to primary attachments that I lastly want to consider as a significant aspect of the text.

A dark story – and an unhappy one . . .

If Jeanette is the novel's narrator-protagonist, Louie is its other main character. She occupies variously the role of God-like Creator, matriarch, villain, wicked step-mother, Blakean visionary, and failed prophet. It is from her mother and the Bible that Jeanette learns allegorical thinking. She represents maternal omnipotence in an archetypal form and the daughter's eventual disillusion with that power leads to a profound sense of loss as theorized by the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein. The mother's failure as a prophet when she sides with the bigoted Church fathers is the second major loss in Jeanette's life following the 'loss' of her birth mother. As a character Louie is both reprehensible and immensely enjoyable.¹⁰ Her larger than life persona contributes a huge amount to the novel's success. Winterson gives Louie the best lines including the one that gives the novel its title: 'oranges are not the only fruit' (167). It is not the case, either, that Winterson constructs the mother in wholly negative terms. As one audience member of the *Bookclub* interview commented on re-reading the novel 25 years on, Winterson accords Louie a large amount of sympathy and understanding. The novel shows an awareness of Jeanette's mother's own 'losses' – her lost

selves, the possibilities that never materialized, as Percy or Pierre's wife, as the special 'friend' of Eddy's sister. Winterson's own mother, a bright, educated and ambitious woman, was cut off by her family for 'marrying down' much like Mrs Morel in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. Winterson describes her as a theatrical woman who created a personal bio-mythology in order to escape the mundanity and ordinariness of life, and whose hyperactivity may be read as a symptom of her depression. Perhaps Winterson's prolific literary output over 29 years may also cover over her losses?

If *Oranges* tells a 'dark story' (Winterson *Times* 4), its comedy serves to cover over some of the more destructive aspects of the mother – daughter relationship, most notably maternal neglect. An early example of maternal neglect comes when Jeanette goes deaf for three months without any of the adults recognizing that she has a physical illness; rather, they believe she is in a state of holy rapture. The comedy masks the abuse of the child's right to health and well-being. Even when she is finally admitted to hospital she is left largely alone to build igloos out of orange peel. The novel is also full of images of violence towards the child. When her birth mother comes back for her, a scene that is not narrated until page 99, Louie refuses to let her see her. When Jeanette protests, Louie hits her. The narrator tells us that this was the first time in her life that she experienced uncertainty. This episode is followed by the terrifying scene in which Jeanette and Melanie are accused of demonic possession. Many readers and critics have commented on the violence that attends the exorcism scene; in a protracted episode that is tantamount to torture, Jeanette is physically restrained, and subjected to 36 hours of starvation and light deprivation which is meant to drive the demon out. When Jeanette refuses the Church's second attempt at exorcism, she is disowned by her mother: 'She's no daughter of mine' (153). The daughter who brings shame to the family and community is a feature of culture throughout history, not least contemporary British society where daughters who dare to choose their own relationship risk 'dishonouring' the family. The motif connects Jeanette to millions of young women who are made to carry the burden of their cultural tradition and are punished with exile or death. No wonder then that Winterson felt the need to write herself another story.

Oranges is a first novel about origins but what is striking revisiting the novel 29 years on is its preoccupation with death and loss. Winterson has used the phrase 'cover story' to describe the construction of narrative layers and versions in her work. Going back to *The Power Book*, she talks about 'changing the story' and providing alternatives or 'covers' to the story. In this context, it takes on a less postmodern meaning about surface play – multiple versions irreducible to a single truth – and a more deep-seated psychoanalytic resonance: the manifest content of fiction overlaying the latent content of life and its losses. Given the author's adopted status, the idea of a name as 'disguise' takes on added resonance and poignancy, suggesting that

her name is not her own. In fact, Winterson recently revealed that she had been given another name before being adopted until she was six months old: 'I was and was not "Jeanette" (*Times* 4). In this formulation the assumed name or pseudonym is both an artistic disguise and an ontological consequence of adoption, which becomes an intrinsic part of Winterson's origin story. Writing on the 25th anniversary of *Oranges*' publication, Winterson observed:

But it always comes back to the beginning. I realised recently that *Oranges* itself, while a narrative of escape, is also a cover story. It covers the story I haven't wanted to hear, and haven't wanted to tell. *Oranges* is a funny novel as well as a painful one, and there are crucial inventions in it that cover with planks the deep drops I needed to pass off as solid ground. (*Times* 5)

We may speculate about the precise nature of the crucial inventions and deep drops Winterson refers to here. No doubt they concern her insecurity about her origins, her sense of the loss of her birth mother, and the relative privation she experienced as a working class child deprived of cultural stimulation other than religious texts. The novel's humour covers over Jeanette's melancholy and represents a mechanism to defend against sadness.

The novel attests to the gradual process of disillusion with the mother's version of the world. It depicts a state of original plenitude when she was one with the mother, and there was no division. But this is interrupted firstly by the 'exile' imposed by school and then by the 'Fall' from grace when she sexually transgresses. It records her unhappiness at school where she spends hours sitting alone in the cloakroom with liver and gravy down her gymslip. She becomes a pariah at school, is routinely bullied by the other children and then victimized by teachers who accuse her of 'terrorizing' other children. She is forced by the school no less than by her mother to inhabit an 'outsider' status, which leaves her feeling isolated: 'If it had not been for the conviction that I was right, I might have been very sad' (43). Elsewhere, Jeanette identifies with Keats's misery (80). In the course of the novel, Jeanette suffers the loss of all of her primary love objects: first her birth mother, then her adopted mother, and the sense of belonging to a community. The loss of God is perhaps the hardest to bear: 'I miss God. I miss the company of someone utterly loyal. [. . .] I miss God who was my friend. I don't even know if God exists, but I do know that if God is your emotional role model, very few human relationships will match up to it' (164–5). Exile brings apostacy, uncertainty and isolation. The text incorporates these losses through the inset fairy tales. Perceval loses Arthur and the company of the knights of the Round Table. Winnet loses her place as the sorcerer's daughter and her budding love for the young stranger. These tales encompass three forms of human desire: man for man, woman for man, and

woman for woman in Jeanette's own case; loss therefore affects all subjects regardless of sexuality.

The novel's epistemological relativism may be seen as a consequence of Winterson's sense of a lack of identity and loss of primary attachments. Lacking the 'truth' about her origins, and experiencing a series of traumatic losses, the author-narrator foregrounds her own act of artistic creation. What Winterson edits out, by her own admission, are the despairing emotions that appear to have characterised periods of her life. The text therefore serves to cover over her loss. While Winterson admits that she is 'not a Freudian' (*Weight* 139), she recognises how manifest content may conceal a latent meaning. The novel may therefore be seen in terms of Freud's concept of mourning as a response to melancholia, marked as it is by a profound sense of loss and sadness. Concluding his journey, Perceval admits that it 'seemed fruitless' (168). Wryness emerges with her mother's latest exploits but this does not dissipate the uncertainty. Returning home after her exile to Oxford, walking down the hill to the house, Jeanette is overcome with sadness: 'I thought about the dog and was suddenly very sad; sad for her death, for my death, for all the inevitable dying that comes with change. There's no choice that doesn't mean a loss' (169). *Oranges* tells an unfinished story; as Winterson comments, there is not a happy ending and Jeanette's future remains uncertain. That story continues in Winterson's subsequent works as older characters take on the conflict of personal freedom versus worldly engagement and responsibility.

All Winterson's novels tell a single story: the story of children who are abandoned by their real parents and brought up by adopted ones, of how they are marked by that experience, and how they strive to create their own identity. The thread that connects them is Winterson's reinvention of classic narratives to tell her own story. *Oranges* inaugurated her writing career and with it she wrote herself into existence as a writer of fiction. It represents a classic 'creation' story in every sense, a creation of the self through storytelling, and recognition that this self is inevitably constituted by its losses.

Notes

1. In *After Postmodernism* (2001), Jose López and Garry Potter argue that '[theoretical] postmodernism has "gone out of fashion"' (4). Gavin Keulks has analysed the work of both Jeanette Winterson and Martin Amis in terms of a move towards a 'post-postmodern voice,' stating: 'My suggestion of a second, or late-phase postmodernism seeks to mollify the extremism of its radical "first-phase" configuration' (*Martin Amis* 2006: 161).
2. For example, Gore Vidal called Winterson 'the most interesting young writer I have read in twenty years' and Muriel Spark described her as a 'fresh voice with a mind behind it' (Interview with Maya Jaggi, 'Redemption songs'. *The Guardian*, 29 May 2004).

3. See, for example, the responses given by audience members of the Radio 4 *Bookclub* interview broadcast on 4 April 2010.
4. Catharine Stimpson instances Radcliffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* as the 'narrative of damnation' that has dominated twentieth-century lesbian fiction.
5. Winterson rejects the 'gay' label while acknowledging the book's significance in terms of sexual representation. She wrote recently in *The Times*: 'Yes, the book has been vital for a lot of gay people struggling with social prejudice and self-hatred, but *Oranges* is a book about becoming who you are by means of a story' (13 March 2010: 4).
6. Early reviewers as well as readers (mis)read the novel as autobiography in large part because the protagonist shares a name with the author. On this point, Winterson reveals: 'I felt that "Jeanette" was as good a disguise as any, partly because I did not relate to my name. I don't mean that I wish I was called Esmerelda, but from the first, my close friends have all called me something else, usually JW, or some variant of their own' (*Times* 4).
7. Another major source of Winterson's canonical rescripting is Greek myth. Louie takes on the role of a Greek god, creating divine beings and orchestrating human affairs. Louie dreams a dream of creating a child of destiny; Jeanette is a product not of Louie's womb but of her 'head' just as Athena springs fully-formed from Zeus's head in the Greek creation myth. In the Greek pantheon, Athena, Goddess of wisdom and purity is a favourite daughter who represents a threat to the paternal phallus just as Jeanette challenges maternal power.
8. The most awkward moment of the *Bookclub* interview came when a male audience member asked about the negative representation of men. Keen to be conciliatory, Winterson laughingly dismissed the portrayal, saying that she had mellowed since she had written it. Apart from Jim Naughtie's introduction which described the novel as among other things a lesbian coming out story, neither feminism nor lesbian experience were mentioned in the half hour interview. This disavowal is disappointing because it represents a normalization of available reading positions.
9. 'In 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), Freud theorizes melancholy as a state of mourning in which the mourner has made a strong unconscious attachment to an internalized object: 'The object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love' (Freud 245).
10. Winterson's portrayal of Louie is fascinating to consider in the context of the two female figures who dominated the 1980s: Princess Diana and Margaret Thatcher. If the novel contains princess archetypes for whom Diana could be the model, Thatcher appears to spring from the same soil as Louie and shares similar features of indomitable strength, being hard-working and evangelical about her beliefs and convictions – and famously not going to bed until the small hours. In the *Bookclub* interview, Winterson talked about her mother wallpapering the ceiling through the night, an account which resonates with a story of Carol Thatcher's about her mother doing the wallpapering in between parliamentary work.

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18

Remembering and Disremembering *Beloved*: Lacunae and Hauntings

Gina Wisker

On first reading *Beloved* when it came out in 1987, I felt I was in the presence of a book that had so many layers of meaning I would not be able to unravel them there and then to explore it, write about it, and teach it. The sudden shock of its intertwining of the historically 'real' and the Gothic destabilised me. The story is based on a newspaper cutting of an infanticide, Margaret Garner's (Sethe in the novel) murder of her baby in 1855, while the moment and location in which it is set, Cincinnati Ohio, was the first step to freedom into the American North for slaves from the South. These details are historical. Then the Gothic suddenly intervenes with a baby ghost and a haunting presence; '124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom' (1987, 3) challenging neat categories of modes of fictional expression and modes of reading. Morrison exposes painful history, confronts readers with the lived presence of slavery embodied in the baby ghost, then the fully grown presence of *Beloved*, and through this engages with the lived imaginary; ways in which people imagine and internalise versions of their lives, as real as felt experience. *Beloved* engages readers with the ways in which literature works to enlighten history and our own lives. This is where the ghosting appears. The novel now is haunted by its own success, by those postcolonial Gothic novels which have followed it, and by the effect it has had on our ability to speak of the terrible legacy of transatlantic slavery.

Story

Beloved uses storytelling forms derived from a Black folk aesthetic and focuses on the lives of women in the newly emancipated Northern states of America. Sethe's tale emphasises the brutality of slavery and we come to empathise with her on an individual basis, while being made aware of the beatings, lynchings, rape and ways in which slaves were dehumanised and treated as goods, worth less than animals. We are told that in 1874 violence still dominated:

Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes; eighty-seven lynchings in one year alone in Kentucky; four colored schools burned to the ground; grown

men whipped like children; children whipped like adults; black women raped by the crew; property taken, necks broken. (180)

Morrison's novel tells the story of this violence and its effects on successive generations of African-Americans including Sethe and her daughter Beloved. Sethe's mother chose to keep her as she was born from love, though she discarded her other babies born of rape on the transatlantic 'middle passage' and afterwards on the plantation. Sethe and other slaves lived on 'Sweet Home' plantation where the owner, Mr Garner felt confident and humanitarian enough not to castrate his male slaves, most of whom were named after himself. When Sethe fell in love with Halle, another slave, Mrs Garner gave her a pair of earrings, and she sewed herself a wedding dress but theirs was not a conventional marriage since slaves were neither allowed to marry nor to keep the children they bore, who would be sold into slavery. Garner died, and Schoolteacher arrived. He was aptly named since his brutal behaviour towards the slaves (most of the men burned, beaten and murdered) was matched by his misuse of education to teach his boys that Black slaves were non human. He taught them to identify and prioritise Sethe's animal characteristics over her human ones. She was beaten and her breast milk stolen. Although Sethe sent her sons and young daughter ahead of her on the 'Underground Railway' an unofficial linkage of radical supportive people, led by Harriet Tubman who helped slaves escape to the North, she had to follow later as she was pregnant. Beaten and weary, Sethe gave birth in a swamp with the aid of a young working class white girl, Amy Denver, after whom she named her daughter, Denver. When she arrived in Cincinnati at Halle's mother's house, Baby Suggs, a natural healer and lay preacher with community standing made her family welcome but the celebrations irritated others who became jealous at Sethe's good fortune. A month after her arrival the slavecatcher came with Schoolteacher looking for his goods and at that point Sethe knew she must kill her children to rescue them from the brutality they would undergo if recaptured. She killed only the two year old, Beloved (after 'Dearly beloved . . . ' the beginning of a birth, marriages and deaths sermon and the name cut on the child's headstone). It is this dead child who haunts 124 as a poltergeist. Its actions drive out the boys Howard and Buglar and keep away the community. Paul D, one of the Sweet Home men visits Sethe, casts out the violent ghost, and they begin a relationship which gives Sethe back some sense of her own self worth. Suddenly the fully grown Beloved reappears, weary, intrusive, and both befriends her sister Denver and takes over her mother's life. Their relationship of intense love drains Sethe who experiences overwhelming guilt. When Paul D discovers Sethe's crime of infanticide, he leaves. The house becomes dominated by Beloved's hold on her mother until Denver gets a job, the spell breaks and the community women return, humming, and exorcise Beloved from Sethe's life.

Some readers initially have mixed feelings when they discover Sethe is a murderer. This confusion is tempered once we hear the slavecatcher and Schoolteacher teaching that slaves are 'It' not people. Sethe acts to protect her children in the face of a much worse crime: the brutalisation and dehumanisation of slavery. The other main 'difficulty' in the novel is that the main character other than Sethe is Beloved, a ghost, or succubus, who functions as an invading, draining presence. It is on the purpose and presence of the ghost, the hauntology of people and place and the theorising enabled by the postcolonial Gothic that this piece will focus in the main, since this is the route my own response to *Beloved* has taken, and a response increasingly popular among other critics.

Personal lacunae

It is now well over 23 years since *Beloved* was published. In 1987 I had my own sons – one a baby – and was leaving one house and settling into another, returning to a 'haunted' space to make something new. My early work in 1988 filled me with a sense of guilt which almost silenced my ability to be critical. An initial workshop on teaching *Beloved* at the British Association of American Studies conference in York (1988) led to a contract and my first book *Insights into Black Women's Writing* (1993). Several essays later and *Toni Morrison* (2002) has been followed by *Teaching African American Women's Writing* (2011). *Beloved* has 'ghosted' my professional development, and the births, deaths, resettlements, recuperations and voicings of my family and professional life ever since. It has had similar strange ghosting effects on my undergraduate and postgraduate students including Dr Marion Treby whose work we explore (2011). The phrase 'a little old baby ghost' spoken by Paul D as he enters Sethe's haunted house, (5) sums up its contradictions. *Beloved* is haunting as a novel. It and the criticism which has engaged with the postcolonial Gothic have filled and enabled others to fill a lacuna, offering the right to speak about the poisoned legacy of colonialism and imperialism. This it does through its ability to connect us with the historical real, the events of slavery, which many readers resist, have forgotten, or find incredible. This process serves to re-enact the central tenet of the novel: 'it was not a story to pass on' (275). 'Beloved' (275) is, however, the last word. You cannot actually 'pass' on the story, i.e. remain unaffected and move on. You must in fact 'pass it on' while, as Morrison indicates throughout the novel, you also need to move on and live with what it exposes: first the years of internalised trauma and disempowerment, then expression and the realisation of new self-affirmation, moving on from our own versions of guilt or rage. *Beloved* is an essential text for study because it can provoke empathy, it informs, shocks and nudges the imagination into engagement.

Early criticism

Early critical work reflects the impact of the novel and the confusion critics and readers felt when deciding how to place *Beloved* and Morrison in the canon, and in their own lives.

The novel's publication in 1987 further established Morrison's reputation, moving critics on from their comments about her anomalous position as a Black woman writer who engaged with exploring more than just the horrifying realities of everyday life. She became a literary model, leading the way for other African American women writers, a challenge to the assumption that Black women writers only concentrated on 'a little black pain undressed' (Burford, 1988, 10), on life writing and testimony. When Morrison won the Nobel Prize the *Guardian* review was unable to cope with her blend of the real and the fantastic, and criticised her for Pilate in *Song of Solomon* (Morrison, 1977), because Pilate had no navel. People have navels. People in novels who are both realistic but also there to make a statement about constructing yourself rather than being tied to the past, might be represented as deliberately lacking a navel. The reviewer could not see Morrison moving beyond charting history, and missed both the symbolic and the beginnings of the Gothic in Morrison's work. Another limited view was that of Sarah Blackburn. Reviewing Morrison's earlier works, she equated Black history, and particularly examples with women as subject matter, with a limitation:

Toni Morrison is far too talented to remain only a marvellous recorder of the Black side of provincial life, and might easily transcend that early and intentionally limiting classification 'Black woman writer' and take her place among the serious, important and talented American novelists. (Sara Blackburn 1973, 3)

In interview, Morrison dealt with this kind of convoluted non reasoning which sets feminist testimony and Black history in opposition to greatness:

I refuse to let them off the hook about whether I'm a Black woman writer or not. I'm under a lot of pressure to become something else. That is why there is so much discussion of how my work is influenced by other 'real' writers for example white Southern writers whom I'm constantly compared to. (Morrison, interview with Stuart, 1988, 15)

There seem to be two emerging critical problems for conservative critics: how Gothic/fabulist/fantastic/sci-fi/speculative fictional forms rather than testimony engage with serious issues, and the right and skill of Black women writers to speak at all about their experience and to use these more popular forms of speculative fiction.

Morrison upset that dichotomy. Her intention: 'to bear witness to a history that is unrecorded, untaught in mainstream education and to enlighten our people' (Morrison, qtd in Tate, 1984, 185) leads her to re-imagine different periods of African American women's history mixing the realistic – details about Cincinnati, slavery, slave catching, the real infanticide – with the development of a more troublesome Gothic mode that includes the concept of cultural haunting and the use of the cultural imaginary. In this way Morrison's novels after *Beloved*, *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1999), *Love* (2003), *A Mercy* (2008), are ghosted by this prior novel which drew together the Gothic, the haunting, the imaginary with the historically real, filling the lacunae of hidden histories and silenced stories.

In this manner the novel echoes *Beloved's* own return from the dead as a full grown spirit woman, coming out of a swamp near her birth place, remembering her mother's earrings, entering the house which has been newly settled, newly exorcised by Paul D's slightly earlier entrance. *Beloved* is simultaneously a baby ghost with demands on her mother, who suffers intense guilt at the necessary sacrifice, a girl companion for her lonely sister Denver and a woman who seduces Paul D. She seems contained in the family home except that Stamp Paid, who initially rowed Sethe and her newborn to freedom, also sees her when he looks through the window, as do the community of women who re-convene at the novel's close to help exorcise the now seemingly pregnant succubus from Sethe's house. *Beloved* has filled herself up with her mother's energies, drained her of her mix of love and guilt, and prevented her from realising her own self worth.

Critical range

Criticism of the novel since its publication has variously engaged with it as a work of African American women's writing exemplifying the depiction of women's lives, roles, pains and solidarity and as a work of the Gothic imagination which suddenly introduces the legitimacy of the supernatural into a historical politicised text; focusing on gender or ethnicity. We are used to the Gothic now in the twenty-first century but it is important to remember that Morrison's novel is over twenty years old and in the 1980s Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) had been written but had only a cult following; Nalo Hopkinson was only work-shopping her early short stories; *Lord of the Rings* (1954–5, film 2001) had not yet been revived and those TV pioneers of intermixing the sci-fi supernatural magical Gothic with the historical such as *the X Files* (1993), were still considered as cult works. The use of the supernatural, fantasy and the Gothic to political effect was a historical phenomenon largely ignored by contemporary scholars, except by select individuals such as Martin Barker (1992). A radical philosopher, Barker exposed the links between the simultaneous clamping down on horror in the 1950s, and terror at communism and other radical politics.

Feminist critics have tended to focus on the treatment of self worth and on the development of Sethe, some using *Beloved* to argue against a homogenising of feminist critical voices, asserting the different experiences of Black and Asian women from those of the white middle classes in America and the UK. The work of Barbara Christian (1980, 1985) and Barbara Smith (1982) whose initial writing predates this novel, developed Black feminist critical approaches which tend to focus on Morrison's portrayal of strong women whether meanly individualistic (*Sula*, 1973) or strongly in support of family history (Pilate in *Song of Solomon* 1977). In *Beloved* we have Sethe as an example of a strong woman brought to breaking point. Her own internalised guilt is embodied in the figure of the succubus, her dead baby ghost. Here Boy the dog leaves as she enters, and later two chapters, one from Sethe's perspective, one from Beloved herself, start 'Beloved she my daughter. She mine' (200) and 'I am Beloved and she is mine' (212) emphasising the character's interchangeability and dependence, a shared, enriching and draining memory brought into a presence. 'A fully dressed woman walked out of the water' (50) is the first time we see the adult returned Beloved who enters Sethe's house, drinks, sleeps, eats, then dominates her.

Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes. Like a familiar, she hovered, never leaving the room Sethe was in unless required and told to. She rose early in the dark to be there, waiting in the kitchen, when Sethe came down to make fast bread before she left for work. In lamplight, and over the flames of the cooking stove, their two shadows clashes and crossed on the ceiling like black swords. (57)

Sethe is being eaten up, and Beloved is a ghostly, magical presence, like a witch's familiar. The crossing black shadows suggests their intertwining and the destruction Beloved brings even while she seems to be joyfully reuniting with her mother whose neck she massages then semi strangles.

Some critics identified the Gothic in *Beloved* at the outset. Upon the novel's publication, the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood (1987, 1) began the trend to recognise the Gothic in Morrison and saw *Beloved* as a ghost story which focuses on a fractured family under slavery. Atwood finds the book critical of white characters and talks about folklore concerning the dead. Arguing that the novel urges acceptance in the end, Ann Snotow (1987) places the text within the field of Holocaust literature and identifies the need to talk through the events and memories, and then move on. Snotow has no problem with the use of the supernatural to handle the issues of lived responses to the haunting past. In 1993 *Insights into Black Women's Writing* contained two essays on *Beloved*, one by Elaine Jordan and my own. My essay began the discussion continued here, and looked at the difficulty of reading a text which mixes realism and the Gothic, and the importance of overcoming the 'disremembering' of hidden slave histories, recuperating, understanding the

past, while the later book *Toni Morrison* (2002) mentioned this idea among a more general introduction on the text.

Taking up the issue of hidden histories in her critical work dealing with differences between writing by Black and white writers, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1989), Morrison discusses ways in which what is defined as history is never the full story and how important it is to tap into the imagination of people. While Jill Matus (1998) looked at cultural contextualisation of identity and racism, she also saw Morrison dealing with slavery as a kind of 'ghosting'. Linden Peach (1995) defines the intersection of the historical and the imaginative as magic realism. These themes have continued, as they do in this essay. A range of more recent criticism on *Beloved* has taken several directions but by far the most popular is that of looking at the novel as a ghost story, a haunting. What do ghosts do? They refuse to let the past lie down and hide, remain silent, they remind us through the wandering individuals of the spaces and places of the history and events which are layered into places. Ghosts are traditionally more often likely to be traumatic and problematic rather than friendly and everyday as they might be in Chinese culture where family ghosts live alongside the contemporary family and have their place in the household dynamics. In the western tradition a ghost's presence usually suggests something which has been repressed and now reminds us it needs to be heard and seen, embodied and preferably engaged with and worked through, not overlooked.

Following this approach, *Beloved* can be seen as a story of repressed histories brought into the open, acknowledged in the everyday. On this theme Deborah Madsen (2010/11) considers the unspeakable when dealing with *Beloved* among a selection of works which engage students with the experiences and expressions of trauma. She focuses on transatlantic slavery and its repercussions in teaching the slave narrative tradition, from Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs' autobiographical narratives to twentieth-century neo-slave narratives including Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* (1979). Madsen suggests that a historical juxtaposition of the autobiographical with the fictional leads to a 'normalising' of traumatic experience, i.e:

the scripting of trauma and its assimilation to cultural narratives of normality. The untranslatability of trauma makes survivor discourse especially reliant upon cultural scripting for the conditions of its own meaning, even when it may resist these cultural ideologies. (2010/11, 61)

Here Madsen reads the ghosting as an example of loss which is both physical and emotional – a displacement of historical loss. Literary texts enable and act as mourning processes, so they are 'the literary archive of slave narratives, which are seen to be included in this work of memorialisation' (65). Using the idea of the 'recovery moment' popular in American psychology, Madsen suggests that the particular poetic qualities of a literary text can

recover the trauma of the event in a moment of identity formation, bringing together absence and loss.

Morrison's essay (1987) on slave narratives is important here because cruelty and evil were unnamed and underplayed in the past. Morrison rips the 'veil' that previously lay over traumatic past experiences of slavery: 'I'm looking to find and expose a truth about the interior life of people who didn't write it (which doesn't mean they didn't have it)' (1987, 113). Madsen uses the work of Dominick La Capra in the introduction to his book *Representing the Holocaust* (1994) which helps theorise the engagement with the re-remembered truths of the trauma of the past – in this case of slavery – because the positions offered allow students to step outside 'victim' or 'perpetrator' and see more subtleties and so avoid the rejection, guilt and silencing which are common responses to the revelations of the repressed. In terms of LaCapra's reading Sethe is a traumatised silenced victim who can move beyond the trauma of the murder when she contextualises it in her life and is helped by Paul D to see that the death of the baby did not remove the best part of herself. Instead as he says, and she realises, 'you your own best thing' (273). Sethe relives the arrival of the slave catcher when Beloved is exorcised from her.

Madsen uses the concept of 'ghosting' to explore way in which Morrison enacts lived memory and history – which through the text causes students to move beyond disempowerment and silence to engage – and move on. Linda Holland-Toll and Angela Mullis (2010/11) see *Beloved* as an example of American Gothic. Morrison was after all not merely influenced by Faulkner but wrote a Masters thesis on his work. Ghosting in the tale enables a facing up to events and escape: Morrison uses common Gothic elements to explore themes of repression and oppression, and the act of storytelling in the novel then functions as a means of laying the ghost, and with it the past, to rest. In addition, Morrison uses storytelling to deal with both the Gothic elements and the possibilities of escape from the dark vision of the Gothic and subsequent redemption.

Holland-Toll and Mullis return to the haunting of place and cite Chris Baldick's *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, 'obsessed with old buildings as sites of human decay' (1992, xix–xx). Sethe is in an enclosed space in the house as she was in the shed in which she killed her baby. Paul D notices when crossing the threshold of her house there is a red aura and he mistakenly thinks it is the ghost of Baby Suggs.

There is hope 'Despite the enthrallment in the past, and the sense of unbreakable entrapment, *Beloved* also functions as a novel of redemption as well as Gothic horror' (2010/11, 108). For Holland-Toll and Mullis, *Beloved* is a novel which can take the reader through to imagining a redemptive future. And the form of oral storytelling has much to offer in this filling of the silence. Morrison's own comment in her introductory essay to the novel is 'to render enslavement as a personal experience, language must get out

of the way' (Morrison 1987, xix). Duly Holland-Toll and Mullis note that: slavery is so horrific that it is outside of language as a 'personal experience'. We can only get at the experience of this 'peculiar institution' by way of a collective telling, recognition of a community's experience (2010/11, 115).

In exploring the role of the storyteller who gives voice to the silences, Holland-Toll and Mullis use Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Storyteller' (1963). Paul D is the first storyteller to enter Sethe's life after the brutal events of the early part of the novel. Denver, who was silenced for two years, also develops a hunger for storytelling. Storytelling reduces the isolation of individual narrative and revives the voice of the community which left Sethe and Baby Suggs alone early in the novel and returns at the end, because her suffering is seen now as a community experience. Jean Wyatt (1993) also focuses on storytelling. The presence of the baby ghost returned as a full grown woman, Beloved, forces Sethe's story from her and enables her eventually to confront what she did, and to move out of the entrapped place she is in physically, mentally, psychologically, emotionally. 'She was my best thing' (272) says Sethe but Paul D points out now 'You your own best thing, Sethe. His holding fingers are holding hers. "Me?Me?"' (273).

Morrison asserts the importance of recognising the spectral in the everyday, but also the dangers of reading and critical practices which might deny its validity. She seeks:

the tone in which I could blend acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real time at the same time with neither taking precedence over the other. It is indicative of the cosmology, the way in which Black people looked at the world, we are a very practical people, very down to earth, even shrewd people. But within that practicality we also accepted what I suppose could be called superstition and magic, which is another way of knowing things. But to blend these two works together at the same time was enhancing not limiting. And some of those things were 'discredited' only because Black people were 'discredited' therefore what they knew was 'discredited'. And also because the press upward towards social mobility would mean to get as far away from that kind of knowledge as possible. That kind of knowledge has a very strong place in my world. (Morrison in Evans [ed.], 1985, 342)

Morrison's work opened up the possibilities for other African American and postcolonial writers to meld traditional ways of seeing – the mythic, the fabular, the cultural hauntings, the postcolonial Gothic, with the historical, the realist and the officially named. But Morrison and others have been aware of the dangers of negative critical reception, of not being taken seriously if they articulated their tales, their arguments through popular fictional forms, and the forms of folk culture. Horror, tales of spectres and hauntings and the Gothic more broadly have tended to be seen as popular

fictional expressions and therefore as more trivial, less serious than realist fiction. Tananarive Due, Miami journalist, daughter of Civil Rights activists, and author of several politically and culturally engaged African and US set vampire tales (such as *The Living Blood* 2002) articulates similar qualms over a decade later: 'I needed to address my fear that I would not be respected if I wrote about the supernatural' (Tananarive Due, 2002).

Realism and testimony are a necessary response to centuries of silencing and a social habit of ignoring and denying experience. However, feelings, hopes, desires and fears are a part of lived experience. As I discussed in an earlier essay:

the fantastic, imaginative lives of people explored, voiced, are dramatised in the speculative, the mythic, the Gothic. Misunderstanding, silencing, downgrading and denying this poetic, metaphoric form of expression is every bit as much an oppressive critical constraint as is refusing alternative versions of history. Fantasy and the Gothic are seen in this situation to be treated as gendered, second class, literary citizens. (Wisker, 2006)

The intersection of versions of the Gothic and the historical, of realistic detail, the imagination, and hauntology, have become important critical and creative territory in the work of contemporary writers as diverse as David Peace and Morrison.

Beloved is filled with the unspeakable, with gaps or lacunae, and with hauntings. It continues to haunt me, each reading revealing new meanings, filling in some of the gaps. Daniel Goleman defines a lacuna as: 'from the Latin for gap or hole, to refer to the sort of mental apparatus that diversionary schemas represent. A lacuna is, then, the attentional mechanism that creates a defensive gap in awareness. Lacunas, in short, create blind spots' (1997).

There is another term, 'lacunar amnesia', referring to blind spots in memory, which acts as an enlightening entrance into *Beloved*, in which individual and cultural amnesia over the misery and horror of the everyday lived experiences of slavery is troubled and challenged. Gaps are filled in, lives, homes and histories are inhabited and stories told. This coupled with the notion of cultural haunting (Kathleen Brogan 1998) and the postcolonial Gothic (David Punter 2000) can help explain how the disruptive presence of the returned baby ghost eventually leads to breaking silence over hidden memories, and how in discussion the novel can enable us to engage with that which might otherwise remain a legacy of victimhood on the one hand, and guilt on the other: each paralysing. As readers reading *Beloved*, we go through versions of shock, absence, filling the void, retelling the story, and coming to terms with ways of moving on which are similar to those experienced by Sethe.

History surrounds us, a tangible, visible existent experienced, bumped into by individuals and communities. In *Beloved*, the monstrous experience

of slavery on which the wealth and comfort of others, of many of our ancestors, is founded, translates into a lived madness, the haunting of the recent past in the body of the house, 124, Bluestone, and the lives of its occupants, Baby Suggs, the grandmother, Sethe, Denver, her daughter, and sons Howard and Buglar (who leave rapidly when the poltergeist cracks mirrors and leaves handprints in the flour). They try briefly to live a normal existence in the constant presence of the ghost of their baby sister Beloved, one of slavery's sacrificial victims, and a violent, disruptive, haunting presence. It is over the issue of this tangible history that readers and students face a problem. This historically situated, politically focused novel also validates the supernatural: it uses the forms of politicised, postcolonial Gothic. We must suspend our disbelief, and engage with the hybrid form as we also must empathise with Sethe, the protagonist who kills her own baby to rescue her from the worse, hitherto unspeakable horrors of slavery. The murder silenced the community, ostracised the family and it is not until Sethe can understand and tell her own story her own way and move on beyond the imprisoning memories of slavery and necessary infanticide that she can recognise her own self-worth. The novel has time slippages and lacunae of hitherto untold tales including the transatlantic crossing in race memory; the taking of Sethe's milk by the plantation owner, Schoolteacher's brutal sons and her whipping near death. These and the necessary infanticide gradually re-enter the tale and the haunted space, as does Beloved herself, so that the lacunae of silenced stories are newly refilled and reclaimed.

The process of mutual postcolonial abjection is, I suppose, one that confronts us everyday in the ambiguous form of a series of uncanny returns. (David Punter, 2000 p. vi)

Punter's work on the postcolonial Gothic offers ways into interpretations of *Beloved*, since it provides a theorised lens through which to recognise and discuss ways of expressing cultural hauntings, in which 'rememories' bump you into the past, the lived, inherited or felt memories and tangible presences of events in the lives of individuals, whole communities. The postcolonial imagination, Punter tells us (2000), unavoidably reads voids, ghosts and haunting in locations; silencing, dispossession and disempowerment in lives which suffered colonial and imperial rule. The disremembering, the covering up of the horrors of rape, murder, dispossession of indigenous peoples and of slavery are lacunae in the memories, stories and histories of people and places. The colonisers are also silenced and haunted. Implicated directly or not, they carry the secrets, ghostly whisperings of ghosts, and are part of that great oppressive history of transportation, uprooting from home, and abuse.

Colonisers were capitalist vampires, taking the ownership of their own bodies from the people they enslaved and from those whose lands they

stole, emptied or developed. Colonisers were also psychic vampires, removing history from people, taking away their own sense of ontological identity and security, so the tales of the dispossessed were not written down. However, their tales *were* passed on in folk tale, oral storytelling from mother to child and throughout communities. (Wisker, 2004, 25)

Sometimes the rememories are those of others, 'it's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to someone else' (p. 36), such as that of the transatlantic slave crossing. Memories and losses have been repressed and hidden. They act as lacunae in the stories and lives of the living. The hauntology of place and time emerges as a way of interpreting the inhabiting of the bodies and places of the present by those of the past. Derrida, in *Spectres of Marx* (1993, 1994) differentiates between spirits and spectres. I first came across the use of hauntology as a term which helps interpret the versions of haunting found in *Beloved*, in Katy Shaw's work on David Peace's Red Riding trilogy as a hauntology of the North (Shaw, 2010). Shaw uses Derrida and clarifies how 'Derrida takes pains to distinguish the spirit and the spectres as two different forms of the haunt. The spirit assumes body, incarnates itself in the spectre. What defines the spectre is its familiarity and difference, it is recognisable and felt yet at the same time "altogether other" (p. 10, *Spectres of Marx*). Derrida describes this paradox as, 'the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible' (p. 7, *Spectres of Marx*), a presence from the past which causes confusion, doubt and re-thinking since 'there is something disappeared, departed in the apparition itself as reapparition of the departed' (p. 6, *Spectres of Marx*) (Shaw, 2010, 110). *Beloved's* return as an adult casts her as other than the baby who was murdered, and yet the same; one who causes confusion, a mixture of love, guilt, recovery – a kind of plenitude, the filling of a loss, and form of draining of harmony and selfhood for Sethe, and for the household.

Morrison's use of the historically realistic and the postcolonial Gothic, the cultural haunting, manages to encapsulate both the vitality of the everyday real and the sense of how it must have felt imaginatively. She evokes the horrors of slavery which would mean that it was better to sacrifice your children than to let them be reclaimed, re enslaved, and how the guilt would haunt an individual, and both the culture of the victims and the victimiser, that latter which approved or turned a blind eye to the dehumanising of people as chattels 'not worth his own dead weight in coin' (148).

Haunted by its futures

Beloved now is also haunted by the future which it informed. We read back from several different novels which it has influenced as the first real ground breaking cultural haunting text and one which painfully dragged itself out of some swamp to present itself in front of us in its terrifying presence. The

re-memory caused us to face a Gothic moment. The ghosting, the haunting, what the book had to say and who it had to speak to were most unusual in the 1980s but perhaps less so now. In *Beloved* as in the later *A Mercy* (2008) a novel set in the days before the major period of slavery, the sense of slavery or servitude is internalised and undermines that of self worth. In Morrison's latest novel *A Mercy*, Florens, a young woman who has internalised her own servitude and obsessional, selfish hunger for another is seen as a black demon, and hunted by villagers. 'They want to see if my tongue is split like a snake's or if my teeth are filing to points to chew them up. To know if I can spring out of the darkness and bite' (2008, 115). Florens then shows she lacks a sense of responsibility for her actions in refusing to nurture the child rescued by the free Black man, the blacksmith and object of that obsessional love. Florens, like Pecola Breedlove in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Sethe in *Beloved* has internalised negative racist stereotypes, and must move beyond this. Florens does not own herself; she sees only her own obsessional love, a sign of her enslaved mind.

The sense of disempowerment and the dominance of memory lead back to our reading of newer texts such as Nalo Hopkinson's short stories *Skin Folk* (1997) and *The New Moon's Arms* (2007) with its episode of the slaves' escape from the horrors of transatlantic slavery by jumping overboard and swimming free, metamorphosed into fantastic 'mer-people' whose presence through the years is a lacuna for the local people – a silent secret. Their middle passage in the slave ship led to transformation and new freedoms rather than slavery, and magical reappearances liberate Calamity the protagonist into a new sense of her own self worth, in a similar fashion to the way in which exorcising the guilt attached to the baby ghost liberates Sethe.

Conclusion

Beloved is an intensely social and psychologically political book. It engages the reader with the everyday lived horrors of slavery and the race memory of the slave crossing, each equally felt as real, and it also engages the individual, black or white, with the complex consuming pain and guilt of the everyday lived memory of slavery. *Beloved* introduced me to the notion of 'cultural haunting' as a way of understanding the psychology of places which are imbrued with the experiences of imperialism and colonialism's dark sides: dehumanisation, displacement, destruction of memory and identity, language and human worth. These are the grim corollary to its ostensible success as it crosses to and owns the new world, changing cultures and bringing financial gains not just to the front line settlers and plantation owners, but to the comfortable landowners and capitalists back home. As Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1729) uses satire to ironically highlight the horrors of the Irish potato famine and the failure of humanity in a clinical imperial relationship on Britain's doorstep, so Morrison several centuries later uses

the Gothic, equally ironic, and cultural haunting to fill the hidden silences, the gaps, the lacunae of this moment in history. *Beloved* uses ghosting alongside historical realism, reimagining memory. Sethe and the community re-engage with the unspeakable and the hidden, as do the novel's readers, and then both find ways to move on so that the legacy of horror does not leave a paralysing guilt for black and white alike. It is first this engagement with history and the imagination, the lingering cultural memory, and then the development of ways of managing through fictionalising, through memory, through expression and working through the narratives of individuals that Morrison troubles the way we might be used to reading, and enables a profound new vision.

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19

Embracing Uncertainty: Hanif Kureishi's *Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*

Susan Alice Fischer

As Sukhdev Sandhu writes, 'If there is one figure who is responsible for dragging Asians in England into the spotlight it is Hanif Kureishi' (230). His novels *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and *The Black Album* (1995) trace a trajectory for young Asian English men and together give a picture of some of the ways their experiences – and England – have changed from the 1970s to the end of the millennium. Kureishi has the knack of capturing the *Zeitgeist* in each of these novels. *The Buddha of Suburbia* focuses on the 1970s during a heady time of experimentation with drugs, sexuality, Eastern philosophy, progressive struggles and counter-cultural youth movements, and when moving from the suburbs into London seemed to give access to all that one could possibly desire. Overall, *The Buddha of Suburbia* is an optimistic book that captures the wide-eyed enthusiasm of the period, while not shying away from addressing racism and the damage it causes. Kureishi shows the 1970s as a time when the assumption that white people were better than everyone else was still a firmly established norm in mainstream culture and when racism was more overt, something he has challenged not only with this novel, but his screenplays, such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985). Equally representative of its time, *The Black Album* is a bleaker novel that updates the marginalisation young Asian Britons experience. It takes place during 1989 when the Ayatollah Khomeini issued the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie for blasphemy in his novel *The Satanic Verses* against the Muslim religion. Although *The Black Album* never directly names either Rushdie or his novel, it explores a range of reactions the case stirred up in England.

While the essays in this collection have tended to focus on single iconic works, doing so in Kureishi's case would minimise the role he has played in describing contemporary British culture, particularly from the point of view of Asian Britons, and in contributing to a changing notion of what it means to be British or English. Kureishi has said that his writing career began 'at the end of something – the psychological loosening of the idea of Empire – and the start of something else, which involved violence, the contamination of racism and years of crisis' (Stein 114). Together *The Buddha of*

Suburbia and *The Black Album* highlight shifts in national identity, including the way that discourses about inclusion and exclusion have recently shifted their emphasis from notions of 'race' to religion and culture. In an interview with Susie Thomas, Kureishi notes the change in the ways that Asians have been seen in a British context. Comparing the times when he was growing up in the 1970s to the period of *The Black Album* and today, he notes, 'the use of the word Muslim is a completely new thing. We were Pakis, we were blacks, we were Asians' (Thomas 2007, 13). On the one hand, limiting the discussion to *The Buddha of Suburbia* ignores developments in recent British history and newer challenges to concepts of national identity, while focusing only on *The Black Album* obscures the deep roots of exclusion and racism that affect the more recent situation of both fundamentalism and Islamophobia. Kureishi did considerable research for *The Black Album* by speaking to young people about their attraction to Muslim fundamentalism. In his introduction to the script of *The Black Album* – the play debuted at the National Theatre's Cottesloe auditorium on 14 July 2009 – Kureishi writes:

Some of the attitudes among the kids I talked to for *The Black Album* reminded me of Nietzsche's analysis of the origins of religion, in particular his idea that religion – and Nietzsche was referring to Christianity – was the aggression of the weak, of the victim or oppressed. These attacks on the West, and the religion they were supposed to protect, were in fact a form of highly organised resentment or bitterness, developed out of colonialism, racism and covetousness. (Kureishi 2009, xii)

Throughout his exploration of Asian Britons, Kureishi has stood firm as one of the major voices affirming positive aspects of both Asian and British cultural backgrounds while critiquing both. What remains constant is Kureishi's abhorrence of orthodoxies, whether they manifest themselves as racism, fundamentalist religion, or entrenched political doctrines.

In these novels, Kureishi deals with two key moments in the continuum that is the struggle against marginalisation of Asian people in Britain, and specifically in London. *The Buddha of Suburbia* takes place during the 1970s, an era that follows on the heels of the heated anti-immigration rhetoric of the post-war period and is still reverberating from Enoch Powell's 1968 'rivers of blood' speech, in which he imagined that Black and Asian migrants from the former Empire would destroy the country. The 1970s also sees the rise of the National Front, which engages in harassment of and violent attacks on Asian and Black people. While it is also an intense period of hopeful experimentation, Kureishi blows the lid off this as well, looking at the phoniness of apparently well-intentioned members of the white liberal middle-classes and their demeaning interaction with Asian and Black people.

Published in 1990, *The Buddha of Suburbia* comes into a context which had just seen intense struggles of Black and Asian Britons, as Thatcherism

did much to squelch the emergence of progressive culture in the UK, aimed at its epicentre in London, partly with the collusion of the tabloid press which labelled anyone or any project engaged in feminist, gay, anti-racist or working-class politics the 'loony left'. Censorship also came from the Conservative government which passed Section 28 which forbade the so-called 'promotion of homosexuality' in any project receiving public funding, such as libraries and schools. This followed the Tories' abolition of the Greater London Council (GLC) in 1986, which had supported a range of progressive cultural projects, and their disbanding of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) which had also tried to institute educational projects which embraced multiculturalism and diversity. At the end of the 1980s, the Rushdie affair presented another sort of censorship and resulted in increased tensions in both Asian and white communities.

By the time Kureishi writes *The Black Album*, the draconian tactics of the Conservative government had decimated progressive movements, and a backlash was in full swing that dismissed progressive politics as political correctness – something we are still living through today (see Thomas 2009). Communism collapsed in Eastern Europe, creating a void for some on the left. In 1988, Penguin published Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, resulting in Ayatollah Khomeini's call to kill the author. While Rushdie managed to remain alive by hiding for the ten years that the *fatwa* was in effect, other violence related to the novel occurred. In addition to book-burnings and bookshop bombings, other individuals associated with the novel, such as translators or publishers, were attacked or killed (see Anthony). While some notable members of the progressive intelligentsia withheld their support of Rushdie, including John Berger, Germaine Greer and John Le Carré, most, including Kureishi, condemned the *fatwa* (Anthony). Stein writes the publication of *The Satanic Verses* was significant:

not only for black British literature but also in the context of British politics. The publication of Rushdie's novel antagonized British Muslims, and indeed many Muslims worldwide, who considered the text blasphemous [. . .]. At the same time the heterogeneity among Asians in Britain, and Asian Muslims in Britain, became all too obvious, with some defending the right to freedom of expression while others felt personally and spiritually antagonized. (124)

Among the long-term effects of the *fatwa*, according to Anthony, has been the curbing of literary and other cultural representations of Islam and Muslims. However, Susie Thomas argues that things are more complex, as the *fatwa* also sparked intense anti-Muslim reaction. Twenty years later, she argues, many seem to have abandoned the 'left-liberal ideal of respect for difference, articulated by Tariq Modood: "If people are to occupy the same political space without conflict, they mutually have to limit the extent to

which they subject each others' fundamental beliefs to criticism'" (Thomas 2009, 366). Instead, many have opted for entrenched positions which throw out multiculturalism wholesale with the dangerously wrong-headed view that it is incompatible with freedom of expression.

Kureishi has addressed some of these issues head on. While clearly coming down on the side of freedom of expression in *The Black Album* – as well as in his film *My Son the Fanatic* (1997), also about the attractions of fundamentalism for some second-generation Asian youth – Kureishi explores the relation between marginalisation and extreme positions. In an interview with Colin MacCabe, Kureishi defines fundamentalism as:

an attempt to create purity. It's to say we're not really living in England at all. We're going to keep everything that's English, everything that's capitalist, everything that's white, everything that's corrupt, it's going to be outside. And everything that's good and pure and Islamic, it's going to be in here, with these people. And you can see that mixing, you know, was terrifying, just as racists find mixing terrifying. But of course it's inevitable. (50)

Kureishi explores the totalising visions of religious fundamentalism, as well as of racism and other political orthodoxies, in both *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*. His work speaks out against ideologies which 'slot individuals into neat, discrete categories. [Protagonists] Karim and Shahid [. . .] are hungry for contingency, culture-clash, unpredictability' (253). In both novels, Kureishi intertwines the comic, the crude and the carnivalesque to thumb his nose at, and to subvert, the grand narratives of late capitalism and religious orthodoxies. As Kureishi says, 'There is nothing like a useful provocation to start a good conversation' (2009, xiii). Kureishi's focus on sex, drugs and youth culture, especially music, is deliberately provocative, aimed at overturning established notions of power.

Each novel presents its story through the eyes of a young man who experiences growth through an unorthodox education, particularly once he moves away from home and into London. Karim Amir in *The Buddha of Suburbia* tells his own tale in first person while Shahid Hasan's story in *The Black Album* is narrated through a limited third person point of view. Both Karim and Shahid come from middle-class suburban families, though there are some differences. Karim is the son of a lower middle-class white English mother and an Indian father from a well-to-do family in Bombay – and in this resembles the author's dual ethnicity – while both sides of Shahid's family are Asian and well-connected in Pakistan. Tellingly, one of Shahid's uncles in Pakistan was 'imprisoned by Zia for writing against his Islamization policies' (6), though Shahid will not understand what this means until much later. While Karim's father works in London as a civil servant and his mother in a shoe store, Shahid's family have developed a family-run travel agency with two shops in Sevenoaks, Kent, a business which alludes to the distances travelled by the

migrant generation, as well as to Shahid's move from suburbia to London as he embarks upon higher education. Both families are in disarray: Karim's is on the brink of divorce at the opening of the novel, while Shahid's father has recently died, and his tragically thuggish brother Chili also comes to London, leaving his mother and his posh wife, Zulma, to run the family business, until the latter decides to return to Pakistan without him.

In some respects the two protagonists, Karim and Shahid, are similar. Each embodies a youthful self-absorption in his search for identity and belonging. Each moves from the suburbs into London – the first in the 1970s, the second in the late 1980s – and yearns for a creative life outside the confines of his previous experience in the suburbs and of society's expectations for him, particularly with reference to his ethnicity. While Karim becomes an actor, Shahid wants to write. Kureishi has explained what suburbs and city represented for him: 'I was born, actually, in the suburbs, in a place called Bromley. And for us, the important place, really, was the river. And when you got on the train and you crossed the river, at that moment there was an incredible sense that you were entering another kind of world' (MacCabe 37). His protagonists feel the same way. The need for escape and belonging resonates with the protagonists' attempt to make sense of their hybrid identity. John Clement Ball writes, '[The] move from the suburbs to "London proper" becomes a local, miniaturized version of postcolonial migrancy and culture shock – the move from ex-colony to metropolis. This London not only includes "the world" in the sense of peoples, it also replicates within its borders the world's spatial patterning' (quoted in Ilona 100). Stultified by life in the suburbs, both characters want 'to lap up the disorderly and heterotopian possibilities of metropolitan life' (Sandhu 240).

Bruce King points out that *The Buddha of Suburbia* [. . .] begins a new era when the children of immigrants write as English' (187), a point he supports with the oft-quoted opening to the novel: 'My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories' (3). At the beginning of the book Karim is 17, and the novel spans three years, as well as suburb and city, London and New York. Kureishi is writing this at a time when Black and Asian people were still struggling to make themselves seen as English. Thus from the beginning Karim presents his sense of duality growing up in a society that does not fully accept him. Pilar Cuder-Domínguez, writes, 'Karim's story can be best described in terms of movement from periphery to centre' (175). The geographical movement represents the attempt for this 'funny kind of Englishman' to find a place for himself at the centre of English life, without having to conform to others' notions of who he should be based on his ethnic background. Karim's bisexuality adds another dimension to his experience of duality.

While *The Buddha of Suburbia* traces the movement from suburb to city, when we meet Shahid in *The Black Album*, he has already left the Kent

countryside to come to his college in north London, though his trajectory is sketched in as the novel progresses. Upon arrival in the city, Shahid is torn between opposing cultural discourses as he tries to find himself and a sense of belonging amongst his peers. Like Karim, he has embarked upon his education, only part of which has to do with his academic programme. When he meets Riaz, the leader of the Muslim group he falls in with, Riaz notes, 'you are searching for something' (5). And Shahid recognises that he 'wanted a new start with new people in a new place. The city would feel like his; he wouldn't be excluded; there had to be ways in which he could belong' (16). Although Shahid wonders if he is 'being slightly coerced by Riaz, as if he were trying to find out about him for some ulterior purpose', he is so eagerly 'waiting for college life to really start' (5) that he is drawn into the group. Religion seems one possible answer; and the group is friendly towards him, providing a ready-made brotherhood that taps into his sense of alienation, partly because the initial 'action' that he is involved in with them is protecting a family from violent racist attack. In addition to offering Shahid 'a sense that his identity is coherent and unified' (Holmes 300), the religious group acts as an antidote to the racism that Shahid has internalised. He confides to Chad, one of the group, that he 'wanted to be a racist [. . .] abusing Pakis, niggers, Chinks, Irish, any foreign scum' and 'to join the British National Party' (10–11). When Riaz gives Shahid the dubious honour of helping him with a manuscript, Shahid gets carried away with the revision and sexualises what is meant to be a devout work, thus recalling the Rushdie affair. But later, as tensions in the novel rise around the Rushdie affair, Shahid has to choose between dualistic thinking and a tolerance for ambiguity.

Shahid encounters other possibilities, such as parties with plenty of opportunities for sex and drugs. Observing his drug-dealer, 'Shahid wanted Strapper's life of no responsibilities, no tomorrow's [sic], taking pleasure and money as they came and went moving on' (197), a life in which his brother Chili becomes enmeshed. Shahid is also drawn to popular music, in particular that of Prince, whose *Black Album* gives the novel its title. What appeals to Shahid about Prince is his duality or hybridity, which counters Shahid's simultaneous longing for certainty. His lecturer Deedee Osgood, to whom Shahid is attracted both intellectually and physically, and with whom he has an affair, makes him see that Prince's attraction is that he cannot be pinned down: 'He's half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine but macho too' (25). Deedee represents the attraction of literature, intellectual life at the college, as well as love and sex. In class, she also turns him on to the 'history of struggle' through a discussion of racism and the US Civil Rights Movement (27). At the height of the conflict around *The Satanic Verses*, Deedee brings the book to class to discuss, while Shahid's fundamentalist friends burn it. At the end of the novel, Shahid will have to make a choice between the group and Deedee and what they each stand for. He will opt for the possibility of discussion that Deedee offers.

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim is similarly torn in different directions. When his father Haroon decides to leave Karim's mother, Margaret, for Eva with whom he has embarked upon another career as the eponymous 'Buddha' of the title, guiding other suburbanites in yoga and meditation, Karim opts for an adventurous and socially mobile life with his father and Eva. He is angry about the marginalisation and abuse that comes with being one of the few Asian students in his school, and he gradually drifts away to embark upon an education of a different sort. He is sexually attracted to both boys and girls, and while still in the suburbs has sexual relations with Eva's son Charlie, with whom he is besotted, with Jamila, the daughter of his father's oldest friend, and briefly with a white girl, Helen, whose father is a racist. These characters represent the different directions in which Karim feels pulled. He wants to be like Eva's son Charlie, who is revered by his peers; he feels comfortable with Jamila, partly because they share a long history and background, but also because she has great self-possession, which he lacks; and although he genuinely likes Helen, he also finds it gratifying to have sex with someone whose father is an Enoch Powell supporter.

Once he gets to the city, Karim is tugged in other directions, and it becomes apparent that most of the people he encounters see nothing beyond his ethnicity. Both theatrical groups with which Karim works 'cast him for authenticity' to exploit his 'exotic' appearance (147). In the first, not only is he forced to play Mowgli in Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* (1894), but his Otherness is exaggerated, as he has to wear make-up to darken his skin, cavort in a testicle-strangling loin cloth and put on a clichéd Indian accent. Clearly this production represents some of the worst excesses of stereotyping. Yet, Karim also 'subverts the stereotype by switching between a Peter Sellers Indian accent and deliberating "relapsing into Cockney"' (Thomas 2005, 70). He also begins 'to make little demands' of the director, Shadwell, whom he refers to as Shagbadly (150). Karim's ethnicity also determines his role in the second production, where he initially seems to have more freedom to develop his own character. But when he attempts to bring to the stage a character based on Jamila's father, Anwar, he is told that the character is too stereotypical, even though it is based on reality. While he sees the character as 'One old Indian man', Tracey, the sole Black member of the cast, feels that this 'picture is what white people already think of us', and she asks him why he 'hate[s] [him]self and all black people so much' (180). Both have a point: the character is individual, but the social context is hostile and alters meaning. Instead Karim settles on a portrayal of Changez, Jamila's Indian husband, even though Changez has asked him not to do so. (That Changez does not recognise the portrayal suggests a disconnect between how the English see migrants and how migrants see themselves.) In neither theatre company is Karim in control of portraying himself or the people he knows, a metaphor for Karim's difficulty in finding an identity in Britain. By juxtaposing these two situations, Kureishi criticises both the

ugly stereotypes of Asians and also the potentially falsifying notion of 'positive images', promoted by progressives in those years as an antidote to false or absent images, but which sometimes distorted the truth. Thus Kureishi pushes Karim and the reader away from accepted orthodoxies, whether of racists or of well-meaning progressives.

Both Karim and Shahid thus find themselves the prey of others who try to press them into pre-established roles as young Asian men and are pulled in competing directions by family and friends, by Asians and whites. Kureishi depicts Karim's and Shahid's lack of a strong centre, not only because they are young, but because they have been destabilised by the marginalisation they have experienced as Asians in contemporary Britain. In addition, family and society have incompatible expectations of them, and it is difficult for them to figure out what they actually want and how to achieve it. While Karim's father initially wants him to become a doctor, rather than an actor, Shahid's sister-in-law Zulma mocks his interest in religion by saying 'it is for the benefit of the masses, not for the brain-box types' (186). She urges Shahid to return home to help his mother 'and the family business [. . .]. From now you head the business your father and mother created, if you want it to survive' (189–90). But Shahid feels that '[t]he freedom he had come to London for was being snatched from him. He was gradually being dragged back into an earlier self and life, one he had gratefully sloughed off' (190). These tensions are bigger than the individual coming of age story, and both novels explore the ways that identity is differently constructed by Asian and British culture, with neither leaving enough room for the individual living between cultures to flourish. Stein has said that *The Buddha of Suburbia* is 'a novel about individualism' and that 'Karim Amir insists on forging his own affiliations and reserves the right to reject those parties who have all too fixed expectations of him' (122). The same could be said about Shahid Hasan in *The Black Album*.

As each protagonist attempts to locate himself, he comes across many people that set themselves up as 'guides' that show him possible ways of being. Karim's father, Haroon, comes to reject some of the constraints of suburban English conformism and returns to some of the Indian values he had discarded upon arrival in England. Karim sarcastically refers to his father as 'God', but he can only follow him so far, as he has to find his own way. Many of the other male characters that Karim encounters attempt to impose a definition upon him based on their own needs. The nefarious theatre directors mentioned above have preconceived notions about who Karim can become and control him. His friend Terry, who sees only through the lens of Marxism, asks Karim to join the Party. Karim finds that Terry's view of the working class 'which he referred to as if it were a single-willed person' fails to reflect the reality of the people from 'the housing estates near Mum's house, where the "working class" would have laughed in Terry's face [or] smacked him around the ear for calling them working class in the first place' (149). Moreover, Karim's

experience of 'the proletariat of the suburbs' is that of being on the receiving end of their 'hate-filled "virulen[ce]"' (149). Terry's insistence on class politics means that he can see only parts of Karim, but not his bisexuality. While Karim hates inequality as much as Terry, he realises: 'that what I liked in Dad and Charlie was their insistence on standing apart' (149).

The two women closest to Karim, his lover Jamila, and his father's lover (and later fiancée), Eva, both show Karim a kind of strength and determination. He perceives his mother, Margaret, as frustratingly weak for much of the novel, and her sense of victimhood at the break-up of her family parallels Karim's feelings of being lost in society at large: 'Why couldn't she be stronger? Why wouldn't she fight back? I would be strong myself, I determined' (19). Both mother and son begin to come into their own at the end of the novel. In the meantime, as her name suggests, Eva becomes a surrogate mother for Karim and is 'the only person over thirty [he] could talk to' (10). Her strength is underlined by her one-breasted Amazonian appearance. She not only opens up the world of literature and culture to him, but also gets him into London. Like him, she wants to be at the centre of things. Karim's contemporary, Jamila, also represents a strong female presence, and she is a smart, politically committed and determined young woman. Jamila does karate, reads feminist works by Simone de Beauvoir, Angela Davis and Kate Millet and is determined to be in control of her own sexuality. Forced by her father's hunger strike to accept an arranged marriage, she does so on her own terms, and while ultimately developing an amicable relationship with Changez, the man chosen as her husband, she refuses to engage in sexual relations with him as she did not select him. The bewildered Changez thus finds himself in situations beyond his furthest imaginings, which parallels Karim's own identity confusion. The two white women with whom Karim has affairs – Helen in the suburbs and Eleanor in London – bring him to a similar place with regard to ethnicity. Karim gets involved with Helen mostly because she is available, and he wants to get back at her bigoted father whom he dubs Hairy Back. Hairy Back's dog humps Karim and ejaculates on his back, thus initiating a number of scenes in which he will be literally and figuratively fucked by white society. Indeed, Dominic Head rightly sees a parallel between this scene and the relationship with Eleanor in London. Karim meets her in Pyke's troupe, and behind the scenes, the controlling and sadistic Pyke steers them into a relationship. When Karim learns that Eleanor's former lover Gene, a Black actor, has been driven to suicide by racism, he recognises the power of racism at yet another level. This is reinforced when Pyke and his wife Marlene fuck Karim: this is no lovemaking, but exploitative, objectifying sex in which power is exerted over Karim as an 'exotic' Other. After, he realises that 'the fucker was fucking [him] in other ways' (219): Karim's lover Eleanor becomes Pyke's masochistic and sycophantic lover, even though Pyke's ideas are precisely the sort that caused Gene's death.

In *The Black Album*, Shahid also encounters different ways of being. Riaz's group see religion as the only answer, while duty to family threatens to pull Shahid back to the suburbs. Shahid's experience is heightened because he is mourning his father's death and is thus flailing; unlike Karim, he has no father to rebel against. The world of drugs and parties also exerts its influence, but he sees the way that his brother Chili is being sucked into an underworld, and the drug-dealing Strapper represents a white underclass with no place to go. Like Karim, Shahid meets a Marxist, Professor Brownlow, Deedee's soon to be ex-husband, who has developed a stutter since the collapse of communism and who makes an unlikely alliance with the Muslim group against the Rushdie book. Brownlow sees the liberals 'working themselves up into a pompous lather' not as 'fighting for literary freedom', but 'just standing by their miserable class', without caring for 'the Asian working class' (215). Kureishi has commented on his argument with John Berger who supported the outrage against *The Satanic Verses* on the grounds that it 'came from the downtrodden proletariat' and that the novel 'humiliated [the] Muslim working class' (2009, ix). Just as Kureishi thought Berger's 'an eccentric and perverse point of view' (2009, ix), Brownlow's worldview fails to attract Shahid, and it is presented in the novel as a spent secular faith. While 'Islam attracts Shahid because it seems to constitute a solid, authoritative foundation for living in a postmodern world lacking in moral substance and spiritual direction' (Holmes 299), Shahid has difficulty latching on to any orthodoxy for any time: 'The problem was, when he was with his friends their story compelled him. But when he walked out, like someone leaving a cinema, he found the world to be more subtle and inexplicable' (133). Shahid eventually comes to his own conclusions about Rushdie. As he says to Chad, 'He hasn't spat on us or refused us a job. He never called you Paki scum, did he?' (218). Deedee represents the pleasure of intellectual ambiguity and possibility for Shahid, and he is attracted to the fact that she 'always stimulated him to think' (135). Even so, Deedee's liberalism is also challenged in the novel: as she calls the police to campus when Rushdie's book is 'flambéed' (226). As Kureishi says, liberals at the time found themselves in a 'tricky position': 'Criticism was essential in any society. This could be said, but not *that*. But how would this be decided, and by whom?' (2009, ix). Or as Shahid says about 'clever white people' like Deedee, 'Why would you want to change anything when you already have everything your way?' (110).

Sexuality and love are important parts of each young protagonist's education. King writes that Kureishi 'was the first black or Asian writer to move beyond the immigrant self and racial experience to an intense body of work about the Self and the life it leads in relationship to desire, the body, love, sex, age, and work' (186). Indeed, sexual relations constitute an arena in which many of the larger issues of the novel play out: 'the desire for change and renewal is expressed through sexual relationships' (King 187). It is not only that 'eventually themes of race, social justice, and personal social

advancement disappear to be replaced by stories on couples uncoupling and the costs' (King 187), but rather that these social issues often find expression through sexual encounters. For instance, in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim's desire to become someone else is expressed through his relation with Eva's son Charlie, whom he desires not for himself, but because 'I preferred him to me and wanted to be him' (15). As Thomas points out, this 'is part of Karim's unacknowledged loathing of his Pakistani self' and he will see Charlie differently '[o]nce [he] stops hating himself' (79). Towards the end of the novel, when Karim visits the now famous Charlie in New York, Karim is turned off by Charlie's sado-masochism when the latter steps on a reporter's hand and later enacts a sado-masochistic sex scene that Karim witnesses. Ultimately, Karim realises that the tables have turned and that Charlie wants him around only to witness his greatness: 'I realized that I didn't love Charlie any more. I didn't care either for or about him. He didn't interest me at all. I'd moved beyond him, discovering myself through what I rejected' (255). By this point in his education, Karim has seen the ways that others use him for their own sense of self, and he refuses to be locked in their sado-masochistic paradigm.

The Buddha of Suburbia ends with a moment in which Karim can gauge how far he has come and look forward to more growth: 'I could think about the past and what I'd been through as I'd struggled to locate myself and learn what the heart is. Perhaps in the future I would live more deeply. [. . .] I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn't always be that way' (283–4). Similarly, in *The Black Album*, Shahid finds himself by accepting ambiguity and continuing his relationship with Deedee. At the end, he wonders, 'How could anyone confine themselves to one system or creed? Why should they feel they had to? There was no fixed self; surely our several selves melted and mutated daily. There had to be innumerable ways of being in the world. He would spread himself out, in his work and in love, following his curiosity' (274). His decision to stay with Deedee '[u]ntil it stops being fun' is more profound than it seems at first sight (276). It is about 'embrac[ing] uncertainty' (227).

In his stance against orthodoxy and for uncertainty, Kureishi draws upon the carnivalesque, particularly as regards his protagonists' experimentation with sex and drugs as they wander through different spaces of the urban landscape. In his study of Rabelais, Mikhail Bakhtin focuses on the relation between social power and cultural forms, in particular the meaning of the medieval feast of Carnival, which he sees as a momentary liberation from the social order of everyday life as it inverts and subverts normative relations of power. The oppositional feast of the people, Carnival 'celebrated the temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal', in which the 'bodily element is deeply positive'

(686–7). As Karim and Shahid revel in this ‘bodily element’ through sexual experimentation, they resist the established order and become themselves.

Through the carnivalesque, Kureishi’s work undermines overarching narratives of politics and religion which ultimately oppress and limit. The subversive use of the carnivalesque can also be seen in the farcical elements of Kureishi’s fiction. For instance, in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim describes the incongruity of his clashing worlds when he presents his Aunt Jean and Uncle Ted as ‘characters from an Ealing Comedy walking into an Antonioni film’ when they arrive at Eva’s house just as his father is starting a meditation session (33). In *The Black Album*, the religious claim to see a divinely planted arrow pointing to the truth in an aubergine, while the Labour council leader Mr Rudder, known as the Rubber Messiah, latches on to the vegetable for his own political gain. His cynicism – and Kureishi’s humour – is apparent when he later says, ‘Let’s hope they curry this, blue fruit. Brinjal, I believe it’s called. I could murder an Indian, couldn’t you, lads?’ (179–80). Meanwhile, Shahid is left in a quandary about what to tell Deedee he’s been doing: ‘How could he say he’d been overseeing an aubergine?’ (180).

Through the incongruous, the ridiculous and the irreverent, Kureishi questions established truths and hierarchies of knowledge. He urges letting go of those aspects of religion that are incompatible with living in a ‘liberal’ society: ‘a religion isn’t something that you just swallow whole. It is a pick and choose thing too’ (MacCabe 51). The same could be said about his approach to politics. Shahid comes to recognise that the problem is that ‘Like pornography, religion couldn’t admit the comic’ (150). Holmes argues that ‘Shahid’s insistence on the freedom of the imagination [. . .] finally causes the split between him and Riaz’s group’ (304). Kureishi’s work encourages us to recapture laughter, reclaim imagination and embrace uncertainty.

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20

Samad, Hancock, the Suburbs, and Englishness: Re-reading Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

Philip Tew

In 'Speaking in Tongues' a recent address given by Zadie Smith in New York, in part concerned with the election of Barack Obama as President, Smith identifies and locates herself in terms of accent and class, thereby exhibiting, as she admits in this essay, a characteristically English obsession. Smith notes that she left university with a changed 'posher' accent adopted so that she might feel confident about being regarded by others as intellectually credible. Although initially she sustained two voice registers, she admits that her re-voiced accent has subsumed her earlier more working class one. 'Recently my double voice has deserted me for a single one, reflecting the smaller world into which my work has led me. Willesden was a big, colorful, working-class sea; Cambridge was a smaller, posher pond, and almost univocal; the literary world is a puddle.' Clearly there is suggested here a transitional set of affiliations, even a shift of identity perhaps, both of a particularly English kind. In revisiting Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), I want to reconsider and develop a broad theme I touched on and certain material that I used in preparing the first full-length study of her fiction, published as *Zadie Smith* (2010). In so doing, part of my focus will be Smith's evocations of Englishness, both cultural and literary aspects, as expressed in her writing generally and in certain specific ruminations about her life. It may be deceptive to be guided by initial critical responses to her first novel, for as I explain in *Zadie Smith* it appeared at a particular time and place just after the millennium (a short phase pre-9/11 that a decade on feels very distant and hard to recuperate). Moreover, as I explore in that earlier study Smith's first book was much hyped well in advance of publication in terms of a specifically 'hybrid' identity that was marketed very hard. This process had consequences: as well as the book's immense success, it was subjected to a veritable critical avalanche and its reception was shaped very much by certain essentialisms concerning ethnic identity and hybridity that permeate so much postcolonial criticism. I will suggest below that it is through this distorting prism that the book is still misunderstood, with its actual mood, its nuanced perspective and its range of contents and characters being either neglected or completely ignored.

In contrast, I hope, as well as suggesting that the overriding register of the narrative voice of the novel which is variously arch, complex, ironic and comic in terms of various English traditions explored below, I am also especially interested in Smith's other cultural interests and observations that seem either to be influenced by her father *or* to represent affinities acquired when Smith studied for a degree in English at King's College, Cambridge. Of course the latter is the environment in which, as described in 'Speaking in Tongues', she underwent her 'Voice adaptation [which] is still the original British sin.' It is worth noting that Smith repeatedly in interviews and journalism returns to Englishness, class, and paternal affinities, which observation is not to suggest that these contexts represent the sum total of her parts either personally or aesthetically. However, I feel these do represent strong currents in Smith's sense of identity and creativity, ones either critically neglected or even rejected by many to date. Setting both these possibilities and others expressed in the text of her novel against some may prove both intriguing and instructive.

First consider some specific responses to *White Teeth*, which as critical evaluations might superficially appear positive, but are in effect reductive in terms of narrowing the range of the novel *and* particularly its potential influences. Certainly, as we shall see, such responses ignore the author's own views of her creative coordinates. For Phyllis Lassner in *Colonial Strangers: Women Writing the End of the British Empire* Smith's novel is rooted in World War Two and the product of:

Britain's most celebrated postcolonial prodigy. [. . .] *White Teeth* proclaims a declaration of independence not only from haunting and constraining memory of the war's catastrophes and racist oppression, but from the very idea of belonging. After centuries of colonial oppression and decades of postcolonial depression and anger, *White Teeth* imagines the grand finale of Empire as the construction of a multicultural, multiclass British bazaar. (193)

The novel, for Lassner, is all about marginalized victimhood and rebellion against 'an ongoing history of oppression' (193) and the text explicitly acknowledges 'its colonial history and debt to postcolonial studies [. . .]' (193). Interestingly Smith balks at such sweeping judgments. In an interview with Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, Smith not only explicitly rejects the interviewer's comparison of her work with that of Salman Rushdie's, but Smith explains of her first novel responding to, it would appear with a certain irritation, the assumptions of hybridity on the part of her interviewer: 'Its not really one thing, it's lots of different things. [. . .] But I did want to write about England post-war . . . and so that's really what I did' (267). The interview is throughout subtended by a certain irritation on Smith's part with the interviewer's presumptions. Smith's sense of a certain hybridity at the nodal

point for the critic's understanding of both author and work appear to irritate Smith. Smith stresses the limited research involved in preparing and writing *White Teeth*, insisting more generally 'Novels are a huge con job, because it's not like academic work; you don't have to prove anything' (269).

In his essay 'Colonization in Reverse: White Teeth as Caribbean Novel' (2008) Raphael Dalleo rejects the literary establishment's ascription of the book as 'British' using a collocation of writers and theorists listed 'to show how the novel engages with the same problematic of British multiculturalism and self-definition' (91). Such criticism fails palpably to address the true complexity of Smith's novel and her sense of the equivocations of all notions of identity, largely defined in *White Teeth* by families and environments, rather Dalleo comprehending simply a hybrid or 'Caribbeanized' (93) London. This certainly is neither the register of the novel nor its view of the Caribbean. First, Dalleo ignores the oddly stereotypical (or archetypal) aspects of all of the characters, including those with Caribbean origins, evidenced in the craziness of Mad Mary, the comic sedentary cameo of Darcus Bowden with his 'lifelong affection for the dole, the armchair and British television' (31), and the reductive verbal double act represented by Clarence and Denzel. Second, Dalleo misses a significant point, that for Irie Jamaica as a 'homeland' (402) that she has never known offers an imaginary space that appears unsullied by the coordinates of current relationships. It can be, and therefore is, idealized by her. The narrator interrupts the flow of Irie's impressions with an ironic comment in parenthesis concerning Irie's romanticized view: '(For Jamaica appeared to Irie as if it were newly made. Like Columbus himself, just by discovering it she had brought it into existence). [. . .] And the particular magic of *homeland*, its particular spell was that it sounded like a beginning. The beginningnest of beginnings. Like the first morning of Eden and the day after apocalypse. A blank page' (402). Smith is being, in part, both knowing and ironic about the almost mystical longing of the young, the sense of being between that seeks to be effaced or validated, and that rarely satisfies the coordinates of the present. And riven identities suggest class dynamics as well as colonial migrations. Smith comments in 'Talking in Tongues' while discussing the model of not belonging that is larger than the legacy of colonialism – either to where one aspires to belong or from where one has emerged – suggested by George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. Smith senses at least implicitly a general longing concerning abandoned origins that is part of a bourgeois aspiration that has remodelled modernity,

Whoever changes their voice takes on, in Britain, a queerly tragic dimension.

[. . .]

How persistent this horror of the middling spot is, this dread of the interim place! It extends through the specter of the tragic mulatto, to the plight of the transsexual, to our present anxiety – disguised as

genteel concern – for the contemporary immigrant, tragically split, we are sure, between worlds, ideas, cultures, voices – whatever will become of them? Something's got to give – one voice must be sacrificed for the other. What is double must be made singular. (Smith 'Speaking in Tongues')

It might superficially appear that the critical inflections of Lassner, Dalleo and others similarly convinced of the innate postcoloniality of Smith's text are mirrored here, with Samad emerging as the archetypal figure in many ways. And yet this appears not finally to represent Smith's view, for she manages precisely to see beyond this particular dichotomy or form of entrapment; and the coordinates of being in-between are evoked as follows in intensely personal terms:

In Dream City everything is doubled, everything is various. You have no choice but to cross borders and speak in tongues. That's how you get from your mother to your father, from talking to one set of folks who think you're not black enough to another who figure you insufficiently white. (Smith 'Speaking in Tongues')

Samad's dream is also one of return, hence his kidnap of his son, Magid. The outcome serves to ridicule Samad's aspirations, shatter his hopes. For Smith it is the possibility of transcendence and its defining conditions undertaken in 'Speaking in Tongues' that suggest its importance in comprehending Smith's positioning of aspects of transcendent identity in her work. Smith locates a point of overcoming, in terms of both Cary Grant (formerly Americanized Englishman Archibald Leach from Bristol, a city for Smith with paternal connections) and Obama as changing that which defines them, in order to inhabit a further possibility that seems almost to be arrived at magically rather than by the act of migration alone (rendered mundane in *White Teeth* beyond Samad's histrionics). For Grant it is through a suavity that is almost impossibly elusive; for Obama it derives from the ability to articulate empathically many subject positions and constituencies through his subtle voicing of multiplicity as 'this invocation of our collective human messiness' (Smith 'Speaking in Tongues.'). This of course is articulated by Smith in Forsterian fashion. Obama and Cary Grant, for Smith, share something transcendent in that they both manage 'To *occupy* a dream, to exist in a dreamed space (conjured by both father and mother), [which] is surely a quite different thing from simply *inheriting* a dream. It's more interesting' (Smith 'Speaking in Tongues' Npag.).

And hence given the above, one might suggest that Smith actively resists the narrowing of her imagination and identity, the exclusion of certain parts of her by others including academic critics, leading for instance to acts of interpretation wilfully displacing the kinds of contextual reality explored in this essay, focusing too insistently instead on other possibilities, creating

thereby a different ideological emphasis than the ones Smith appears to foreground. This helps explain Smith's objection to Gerzina's assumptions in her interview, as when Smith comments, 'My family doesn't appear anywhere in the book, and I know – in terms of the Jamaican stuff in the book – people have assumed that because I have a Jamaican mother, but I don't have any contact with the rest of my Jamaican family, so it's as alien to me as anything else in the book' (268).

In fact in an even more assumptive fashion, Dalleo conflates hybridity as a general concept with Caribbean identity, despite hybridity clearly not being a process exclusive to that region. Dalleo's other evidence is slim at best, hardly sufficient to reach the conclusion that somehow Millat's Raggistani gang represent the whole city in that 'This indiscriminate borrowing suggests the kind of syncretic fusion seen in contact zones like the global Caribbean' (95). In fact this group's coordinates of influence once radicalized are in transition, away from the American mainstream entertainment industry to other more counter-cultural strains, largely constituted by the civil rights movement, Garveyism and Elijah Mohamed blended to remain 'within the letter of the Qu-rān' (470). And despite the latter caveat, on the day of the final denouement and KEVIN's planned protest against Marcus Chalfen FutureMouse©, Millat is 'stoned ' (498), hardly a desired condition for a radicalized Islamicist. Moreover, one wonders whether despite all of the confluations Dalleo foregrounds, whether he can seriously think that the Caribbeanizing aspect he posits subsumes the presence of all those other characters such as Archie, Ryan Topps, Alsana and Samad, the Cocknified Abdul-Mickey, the bourgeois Chalfens and the intellectualized Magid, all of whom he fails to factor into his globalizing account. Dalleo's critical strategy seems simply a matter of either knowingly or negligently exaggerating the importance of the hybrid argot of London youth and their sampling or mixing of cultural symbols both of which Smith deploys to comic effect, as in the first case with the various subtle verbal inflections of Irie, such as in her argument with Millat about the attraction of Garibaldi biscuits for the elderly prior to visiting J. P. Hamilton as part of the contentious Harvest Festival:

Millat from under the cocoon of his *Tomytronic*, sniffed, 'Nobody likes raisins. Dead grapes – *bleurgh*. Who wants to eat *them*?'

'*Old people do*,' Irie insisted, stuffing the biscuits back into her bag. 'And they're not dead, *akchully*, they're *dried*'. (162)

Another critic who might be regarded as representative of an apparently wilful disregard of the actual dynamics and balance of effects of Smith's novel is Pilar Cuder-Dominguez, who states confidently:

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) is another polyvocal novel about a large cast of characters who fail to pass the test of traditional, Anglo-Saxon

England. Two generations of Iqbals (of Bangladeshi origins), Joneses (a mixed-race couple, white English and black Jamaican), and Chalfens (Jews) make up a multicultural mosaic where white Englishness is dislocated and even *close to complete erasure*. Depending on their relative age, they tend to meet in either the pub or the school, both of them depicted as *temples of hybridity and complexity* [my italics]. (183)

Again a certain narrowing of focus and hyperbole are self-evident. Cuder-Dominguez's reading also ignores the reality that these family groups all exist implicitly in a wider culture, and neglects the literary influences to which Smith alludes explicitly. Her novel is not simply an ideologically-driven polemic, which is surely how Cuder-Dominguez regards it, concluding of Smith that 'she targets white Englishness and exposes its myths and prejudices' (185) and in Cuder-Dominguez's desire to be radically postcolonial she either misses or effaces Smith's satirical engagement with multiculturalism, and confidently erases Smith's nuanced Forsterian and Dickensian humanism. In 'Mediating multi-cultural muddle: E. M. Forster meets Zadie Smith' Catherine Lanone points out concerning Smith:

She chose an extract from *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Forster's first novel, as the epigraph for the opening chapter of her own first novel, *White Teeth*, adding echoes such as Forster's statement that one should betray one's country rather than one's friend, a sentence which is loosely and anonymously picked up by one of her characters. (186)

As Lanone adds later the novel also 'used the motif of teeth to question the notion of roots and debunked myths of historical belonging (like the dubious family appropriation of the Great Mutiny) [. . .]' (192).

Matthew Paproth in 'The Flipping Coin: the Modernist and Postmodernist Zadie Smith' misses the irony both in Smith's tone *and* in her approach to characterization. Fundamentally Paproth positions Samad with regard to his obsession with ancestor Mangel Pande as sustaining a virtuous tradition, moving to putative transcendence, where 'Although your history may be helplessly entangled with your present-day existence, it alone does not have to constitute that existence' (17). In fact in the Holbrook Gerzina interview Smith is far more dialectical, going as far as to claim, 'Colonialism is like a love affair between countries; it's not just one country going to subdue another; it's two countries becoming fixated on each other' (274–5), a suggestive observation. Samad hankers after his past experience of Muslim tradition in Bangladesh, disquieted by the present in London (and his own failings), and thereby seeking an impossible vista (the imagined point of origin as unchanged and static) he misses the ability to transcend both locations of past and present.

Given all of the above, interestingly Smith herself also volubly rejects Gerzina's notion that Smith's novel is underpinned by 'an astonishing

knowledge of histories that are not your own' (268) having already reacted when asked about her 'multi-racial background,' interceding 'It's not so "multi-", it's just one black parent and one white!' (267). Smith also appears vexed when Holbrook Gerzina assumes a panorama of London dialects, 'I'm interested in making characters' (269) reminding her interlocutor that Archie's way of talking was 'a product of watching a whole load of British television, because I don't think many people actually talk like Archie' (269). This is a context and influence Smith explores alongside her relationship with her father in 'Dead Man Laughing,' a poignant recollection of certain significant paternal affinities. Archie Jones in terms of his second marriage, his capacity for practicalities and his menial profession appears to have been drawn fundamentally from her father, Harvey, whose obsession with Tony Hancock Smith outlines and confesses to sharing:

The sadder and more desolate the comedy, the better Harvey liked it.

[. . .]

Harvey had him on vinyl: a pristine, twenty-year-old set of LPs. The series was 'Hancock's Half Hour,' a situation comedy in which Hancock plays a broad version of himself and, to my mind, of my father. A quintessentially English, poorly educated, working-class war veteran with social and intellectual aspirations, whose fictional address – 23 Railway Cuttings, East Cheam – perfectly conjures the aspirant bleakness of London's suburbs (as if Cheam were significant enough a spot to have an East.) Harvey, meanwhile, could be found in 24 Athelstan Gardens, Willesden Green (a poky housing estate named after the ancient king of England), also by a railway. Hancock's heartbreaking inability to pass as a middle-class beatnik or otherwise pull himself out of the hole he was born in was a source of great mirth to Harvey, despite the fact that this was precisely his own situation.

[. . .]

Occasionally, I'd lure friends to my room and make them listen to "The Blood Donor" or "The Radio Ham." This never went well. I demanded complete silence, was in the habit of lifting the stylus and replaying a section if any incidental noise should muffle a line, and generally leached all potential pleasure from the exercise with laborious explanations of the humor. (Smith 'Dead Man Laughing' Npag.)

Hancock and his peculiarities feature among the coordinates of post-war Englishness, particularly its suburban contradictions. Smith's affinity for Hancock may, as I suggest below, serve as a key to radically re-reading the inflection of Samad's characterization. Later in the same essay Smith reports her father having listened to her novel:

Listening to my first novel, *White Teeth*, on tape, and hearing the *rough* arc of his life in the character Archie Jones, he took it well, seeing the

parallels but also the difference: 'He had better luck than me!' The novel was billed as comic fiction. To Harvey, it sat firmly in the laugh-or-you'll-cry genre. [my italics] (Smith 'Dead Man Laughing' Npag.)

However, it is misleading to conflate Archie and Harvey in simplistic fashion. Archie is never entirely either Hancock or Harvey, the fit as Smith insists always remains 'rough.' And yet Hancock and Smith's father's fatalistic obsession with the comic's humour, discussed by Smith in 'Dead Man Laughing,' is still suggestive specifically in terms of *White Teeth*. Surely Hancock's 'social and intellectual aspirations' and Harvey's bad luck, as well as his melancholy expressed in his affinity for Hancock's 'comic bleakness [. . .] wedded to despair, in his life as much as in his work' are all found in Samad, exhibiting these very characteristics, expressed in large part in his own tortured scepticism and pessimism. Peter Goddard in 'Hancock's Half-Hour': A Watershed in British Television Comedy' describes the comic as 'the seedy misfit with intellectual pretensions, sure he was missing out while those around him had never had it so good [. . .]' (78). In precisely terms that might equally be applied to Samad, Eric Midwinter in *Make 'Em Laugh: Famous Comedians and Their Worlds* (1979) describes the comic and 'his pseudo-intellectual ramblings' (135) thus:

Tony Hancock was both introspective and melancholy. He was perpetually soul-searching and as frequently soul-seared, yet his self-deception knew no bounds as he created flimsy, brash veneers of cocksureness. [. . .] That odd compound of self-delusion and insecurity shone frighteningly through all the time. (128)

A similar paradoxical penchant is exhibited when Samad encounters 'Mad Mary', one of the eccentrics that haunt the streets of the suburban city, apparently harmless, but impelled and still deranged. Samad responds in kind, again in a decidedly Hancockian fashion:

He grew confident. There had always been a manqué preacher in Samad. A know-it-all, a walker and a talker. With a small audience and a lot of fresh air he had always been able to convince himself that all the knowledge in the universe, all the knowledge on walls, was his. [. . .] 'Believe me, I understand your concerns,' said Samad, taking inspiration from that other great North London street-preacher, Ken Livingstone. 'I am having difficulties myself – we are all having difficulties in this country, this country which is new to us and old to us at the same time. We are divided people, aren't we.' (178–9)

Archie may represent the biographical element (and ethnic identity) of Smith's father, Harvey, but surely and somewhat ironically it is Samad who

incorporates much of Smith's father's unfulfilled ambitions, his thwarted desire to improve himself, whereas Archie is satisfied with his lot. As Andy Medhurst says in 'Negotiating the Gnome Zone: Visions of Suburbia in British Popular Culture' 'Hancock lurks on the fringes of suburbia, close enough to see the lifestyle he aspires to, but always outside, always excluded, not really "one of us"' (253). Here lies some of the provenance for Samad. Also significantly in 'Dead Man Laughing' Smith describes: 'Harvey's seemingly infinite pessimism. *No good can come of this.*' Of course one might trace a certain amount of this kind of reticence in Archie, but it is far more comprehensively evident in Samad, whose pomposity, wry humourlessness and the ersatz philosophizing that subtend his character and experience of life all represent a convincingly Hancockian combination, again far more so than for Archie who exhibits no real goals or ambitions in terms of career, class or intellect.

Just like Hancock Samad is mocked and parodied by those closest to him, his wife Alsana deriding his attitudes and his manner of speech, and Shiva, a colleague at the restaurant where Samad works, mimicking the older man pitilessly after Samad responds to Shiva's complaints about sharing tips. Shiva parodies the older man's words, his movements and the inappropriateness of his responses:

Round and round the kitchen he went, bending his head and rubbing his hands over and over like Uriah Heep, bowing and genuflecting to the head cook, to the old man arranging great hunks of meat in the walk-in freezer, to the young boy scrubbing the underside of the oven. 'Samad, Samad . . .' he said with what seemed infinite pity, then stopped abruptly, pulled the apron off and wrapped it round his waist. 'You are such a sad little man.' (57)

Smith similarly orchestrates the details with great skill to achieve the kind of baffled, wounded pathos Hancock achieves, the humour expressed most potently in his very ordinariness and inanity. Hancock too is prone to a certain mockery, his pathos differently inflected to that of Archie whose position in life is more uncomplaining, hence evoking a more dignified pathos of a kind Hancock and Samad lack. As for the latter pair they are subject to a comedy of utter banality precisely where, quite unlike Archie, the victim imagines himself tragic. Samad is always such a person, in part swept along partly by the forces of history, but more dynamically by his own refusal to imagine a space beyond his sense of contestation, his sense of victimhood, his inner melancholy. Radically misunderstood by others – at least as far as he regards matters – Samad rails constantly at the world. All of the above confer upon his Dickensian roots as a character the passage highlights a decidedly Hancockian quality, although unlike the apparently frustrated and celibate Hancock, Samad manages at least to inveigle two women into his intimate life.

There are other, perhaps unexpected, possibilities in the very suburban nature of Samad's life that I will proceed to examine below. John Archer describes of the earliest origins of the suburbs in 'Colonial Suburbs in South Asia, 1700–1850, and the Spaces of Modernity' (26–54), noting that 'Colonies and suburbs (in the sense of a locale outside the settlement proper) have existed almost since the beginning of organized settlement. Colonies and suburbs were sites of exile and alienation. Both were politically and economically dependent on the metropole' (27). However as Archer comments on the English dimension in an early development at Kew that would permeate even the Empire:

The genesis of this and subsequent clusters of comparable dwellings cannot be explained simply as a matter of changing 'taste' or of geographic dispersion based on factors such as economics and transportation. Rather, it also is a matter of critical changes in English modes of consciousness at the beginning of the eighteenth century: consciousness that began to anchor identity primarily in the autonomous *self* rather than in social hierarchy or collective. The suburban villa was instrumental in the construction of this consciousness: it did so, in part, by spatially differentiating private from public, by establishing the suburban plot as a site for cultivation of the self (e.g. through leisure pursuits) instead of commerce and politics. (40–1)

Hence the suburbs might be considered as variously an evolving, but contradictory and ambivalent environment *per se*, a space of abutment and transition, a shifting spatial vocabulary. This might be read in a postcolonial fashion, but although Samad is certainly a migrant, in many ways he is rendered by Smith as a suburbanite *extraordinaire*, almost as a postcolonial Pooter, with his pomposity, with his regular commute to work to an Indian restaurant at the heart of 'London's Theatreland' (56), the conflicts in the community and with his wife, his attempts at intellectualism, and added is that suburban staple of post-war America and late-capitalist Britain, his extra-marital affair.

Curiously there may even be a further irony in Samad ending up as a typical suburbanite in many ways, a curious appropriateness that might explain both the suburb's attraction for him and a subliminal familiarity, ignored by critics. As Archer indicates despite the exilic and alienated origins of the suburbs, in the sub-continent they acquired a fashionability and Archer points to 'the early appearance of suburban enclaves in the vicinity of Madras' (41) from 1710 onward. Suburbs of 'garden houses' (42) were developed and by 1811 a garden setting was 'paradigmatic' of Madras (45). Archer adds 'Not only was it unfashionable to live in the town itself, but the garden house was a necessary instrument for the *contrapositional* constitution of self and family as domestic counterparts to the toil and commerce

of the city' (45). The system or model spread throughout Imperial India. Samad inhabits a more *déclassé* form that epitomized the economic decline of the interwar years with the Great Depression and the demise of the servant class. The comparison with Hancock – a figure who inhabits mostly a world of men – situates the masculine bastion of O'Connells, a tragic-comic zone of nostalgia. As David Wall clarifies in 'Tony Hancock and the Cultural Landscapes of Post-War Britain' Hancock's East Cheam may represent Britain's post-imperial decline with its painful era of loss, the change and disruption that undermine the topographically idealized view (235–6), but specifically the suburban setting becomes a site for contesting meaning, a tradition essentially continued in Smith:

Suburbia situated as it is on the boundaries between a variety of spaces, discourses, systems and economies, is inevitably shaped by transgressions of those boundaries. Between public and private, street and garden, country and city, polite and impolite, domestic and foreign, included and excluded, or that most powerful of boundaries, between centre and margin, suburbia exists as both place and no-place, defined always in liminal relation to the social, geographical and ideological place it is not. This volatile tension between presence and absence has meant that, notwithstanding a traditionally scornful attitude towards suburbia which characterises it as 'offering nothing but drab conformism and frigid respectability' (Medhurst 1997: 241), suburbia has emerged as what Michael Bracewell (1998: 114) calls 'the primary incubator of English outsiders and artists'. (236–7)

Smith is also aware of the genealogy of British comedy, and the immense influence of television sitcom, something she alludes to in 'Dead Man Laughing' after describing her own delight with Hancock resisted by her teenage friends more influenced by a new age dominated by American comedy:

Hancock wasn't such an anachronism, as it turns out. Genealogically speaking, Harvey had his finger on the pulse of British comedy, for Hancock begot Basil Fawlty, and Fawlty begot Alan Partridge, and Partridge begot the immortal David Brent. And Hancock and his descendants served as a constant source of conversation between my father and me, a vital link between us when, class-wise, and in every other wise, each year placed us farther apart. (Smith 'Dead Man Laughing' Npag.)

Moreover, like so many televisual representations in sitcom of men in the suburbs unable to respond to womanly criticism, and like neighbour Marcus Chalfen, Samad withdraws, using the very medium of television so often associated with archetypal Anglo-American and Australian suburban

lives. 'Samad shrugged, went into the kitchen drawer and fished out the earphones that could be plugged into the television and thus short-circuit the outside world. He, like Marcus, had disengaged. Leave them, was his feeling. Leave them to their battles' (438). His conflict with Alsana, with her acerbic asides, draws on the tradition of sitcom and its implicitly suburban conflicts and values. And despite criticizing Britain and its weather (in a sense in so doing exuding two very British suburban characteristics) Samad ends up 'betraying the English inflections of twenty years in the country [. . .]' ((407).

Samad describes his impulse for quietude, a suburban desire that he can continue 'letting the things that are beyond my control wash over me' (179), but the impulse to reaffirm his Islamic identity militates against that desire to remain placid in such a decidedly suburban fashion. Hence his identity is in flux, but the suburbanite in him persists. At least for a while, he continues to have an affair with Poppy Burt-Jones. Having decided to do so he is faced with an image 'clearly by the bandstand his two sons, their white teeth biting into two waxy apples, waving, smiling' (182). The juxtaposition, the uncanny revelation of one's guilt is less a matter of tragedy and morality, more an aspect drawn from television sitcom, a genre ineluctably tied to the mores of suburban life upon which it reflects. Such are the proximities of the suburbs, its synchronicity, the reminder of human failings in its practices. As Goddard says, the Hancockian exists in a world 'where comedy could be found in personal relations, in the thwarting of aspirations and in the mundanity of everyday life' (87). This is exactly how Smith situates Samad. Smith comments in 'Dead Man Laughing':

When meditating on the sitcom, you extrapolate from the details, which in Britain are almost always signifiers of social class: Hancock's battered homburg, Fawlty's cravat, Partridge's driving gloves, Brent's fake Italian suits. It's a relief to be able to laugh at these things. In British comedy, the painful class dividers of real life are neutralized and exposed. In my family, at least, it was a way of talking about things we didn't want to talk about. (Smith 'Dead Man Laughing' Npag.).

And yet, perhaps it is among the paradoxes and contradictions of the suburban mind, despite the myths and archetypes of liminal space, that transcendence might still be a possibility even there in the suburbs, within the quotidian, for as Roy Bhaskar says in *Reflections on Meta-Reality: A Philosophy for the Present* (2002) of apparently banal and normative cultural practices, 'Transcendental identification is common in everyday life. It is not something to be opposed to ordinary life; it is something which is necessary to keep ordinary life going. This all really begins to break down the subject-object duality which is so characteristic of our contemporary world – our world of duality, alienation, contradiction and crisis.' (43–4)

I might ask whether I am as guilty in emphasizing one aspect of Smith just as some of the critics I excoriate above do in a different manner, in my view co-opting or dragooning Smith into the ideological constraints that animate so much postcolonial criticism. Well clearly I think it is a necessary critical rebalancing, and importantly it is similar to the process undertaken by Smith herself, as when she considers issues of identity in 'Speaking in Tongues.' Although Smith admits that she signs herself as black on questionnaires ignoring the option of 'biracial' she adds:

I also know in my heart that it's an equivocation; I know that Obama has a double consciousness, is black and, at the same time, white, as I am, unless we are suggesting that one side of a person's genetics and cultural heritage cancels out or trumps the other.

[. . .]

I suppose it's possible that subconsciously I am also a tragic mulatto, torn between pride and shame. In my conscious life, though, I cannot honestly say I feel proud to be white and ashamed to be black or proud to be black and ashamed to be white. I find it impossible to experience either pride or shame over accidents of genetics in which I had no active part. I understand how those words got into the racial discourse, but I can't sign up to them. I'm not proud to be female either. I am not even proud to be human – I only love to be so. As I love to be female and I love to be black, and I love that I had a white father. (Smith 'Speaking in Tongues' Npag.)

In 'Love, actually' in writing about herself aged around eleven Smith confirms the larger possibilities she regards as inherent in effective fiction, stating. 'EM Forster's *A Room With A View* was my first intimation of the possibilities of fiction: how wholly one might feel for it and through it, how much it could do to you.' Although she also recollects a later response as a student, with her academically-influenced intellectualization of interpretation, a rejection of a 'love' of a text as insufficient, abjuring the pleasurable, subsequently in retrospect she finally resolves that:

The conflation of the simple in style with the morally prescriptive in character, and the complex in style with the amoral or anarchic in character seems to me one of the most persistently fallacious beliefs held by English students. The truth is, surely, that every variety of literary style attempts to enact in us a way of seeing, of reading, and this is never less than an ethical strategy [. . .]. (Smith 'Love Actually' Npag.)

Smith's work is founded on an awareness of the wider ethical function of fiction, on a certain level always about tentative possibilities, never just a social critique of human possibilities, but a celebration of human failings.

This is instructive in terms of *White Teeth*, since it seems that an ethical view for Smith is not a complex, socialized one necessarily, but might be found even in the less explicitly ethical (such as Jane Austen) and rather more in Forster, concerning whom she finds:

His protagonists are not good readers or successful moral agents, but chaotic, irrational human beings. [. . .] Forster's folk are famously always in a muddle: they don't know what they want or how to get it. It has been noted before that this might be a deliberate ethical strategy, an expression of the belief that the true motivations of human agents are far from rational in character. [. . .] His was a study of the emotional, erratic and unreasonable in human life. But what interests me is that his narrative structure is muddled also; impulsive, meandering, irrational, which seeming faults lead him on to two further problematics: mawkishness and melodrama. (Smith 'Love Actually' Npag.)

Influence is important in Smith's aesthetic shaping of elements, and the above passage although it relates explicitly to Forster, offers a cartographic abstraction or pretty much a guide to the very human qualities that permeate *White Teeth*, which is distinctly comic and anti-heroic, just like Forster. Admittedly Smith satirizes less gently than Forster, and as I state in my earlier study 'Interpretatively, one can exaggerate the positive qualities of cultural identity and heritage in Smith, over-determining such themes' (15). Why might this be important? Well, firstly it is close to the Forsterian vision of the novel that animates Smith and which perspective she maintains. Smith makes evident in 'What Makes A Good Writer?':

To me, writing is always the attempted revelation of this elusive, multi-faceted self, and yet its total revelation [. . .] is a chimerical impossibility. It is impossible to convey all of the truth of all our experience. Actually, it's impossible to even know what that would mean, although we stubbornly continue to have an idea of it, just as Plato had an idea of the forms. When we write, similarly, we have the idea of a total revelation of truth, but cannot realise it. And so, instead, each writer asks himself which serviceable truths he can live with, which alliances are strong enough to hold. (Smith 'What Makes A Good Writer?' NPag.)

And in this same essay, it is in this context of an imperfect form, imperfectly rendering an attempt at a certain ontological truthfulness, that Smith also states precisely in Forsterian tones her aesthetic credo:

Writers have only one duty, as I see it: the duty to express accurately their way of being in the world. If that sounds woolly and imprecise, I apologise. [. . .]

When I write I am trying to express my way of being in the world. This is primarily a process of elimination: once you have removed all the dead language, the second-hand dogma, the truths that are not your own but other people's, the mottos, the slogans, the out-and-out lies of your nation, the myths of your historical moment – once you have removed all that warped experience into a shape you do not recognise and do not believe in – what you are left with is something approximating the truth of your own conception. That is what I am looking for when I read a novel: one person's truth as far as it can be rendered through language. This single duty, properly pursued, produces complicated, various results. (Smith 'What Makes A Good Writer?' NPag.)

For critics, at least in terms of Smith's work, a postcolonial tendency mostly represents a reinterpretation of the core values underpinning *White Teeth*, away from the muddle that Smith celebrates, rejecting the paradoxes of human beliefs and opinions, steering the reader toward the critic's own certain and essentialist ideological principles, exemplified for instance in the ability to situate Samad as some sort of archetypal hero. In fact, in Forsterian fashion, Smith's characters and her text precisely represent the kind of 'muddle' that Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) identified in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759 (vol. 1, 2)–1767 (vol. 9)), which is Smith's sub-textual allusion in her choice of the term above used to describe Forster himself. This quality in Sterne Forster calls 'the universe as a hot chestnut' (106) and Forster noted in his *Commonplace Book* that Sterne is about 'Supremacy of indecision in human life' (156). These are the central qualities of Smith's work, and are primary aspects in understanding her characterization of Samad, defined largely by his various equivocations, and only ever partially resolved by Archie in the aleatory fashion of spinning a coin. Even in Samad there is a subtle inflection of various English traditions, ones that the novel incorporates both in an interrogation and celebration. Smith's complex fiction has multiple coordinates, its energy deriving from its ironic *jouissance*.

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