

**Cultural Memory:  
Essays on European  
Literature and History**

*Edric Caldicott  
Anne Fuchs  
Editors*

**PETER LANG**

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*Edric Caldicott & Anne Fuchs (eds)*

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*Essays on European Literature and History*



PETER LANG

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EDRIC CALDICOTT AND ANNE FUCHS

## Introduction

'Memory' and 'culture' are terms which have reached a state of high fashion, if not over-use, but they need careful handling. This introduction attempts to track their use in contemporary critical discourse, and then to relate their significance to literary and historical output; every essay in this volume shares this preoccupation, but addresses it within the specific brief of a 'local' context. Our concern here is to map the surrounding theoretical terrain.

Over the past twenty years cultural memory has become the object of intense scientific, philosophical, social, and cultural enquiry. The proliferation of theories of cultural memory in particular has been fuelled by the perception that digital technology heralds the arrival of new storage systems; at the same time, and more significantly, the new technology has also created a shift of paradigm which affects the negotiation and articulation of our cultural identities. The recognition that memory should neither be conflated with storage systems of any kind nor with the neuro-physiological processes that allow us to recall past events is an insight that has guided nearly all debates in this area since the posthumous publication of Maurice Halbwachs's seminal studies under the title *On Collective Memory*.<sup>1</sup> Halbwachs decisively dismissed the biological theories of memory that had dominated research in this area around the turn of the last century in favour of a cultural framework of interpretation, arguing that our memories are socially constructed. While certain neuro-physiological pro-

1 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Lewis A. Coser (ed. and trans.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Page references are henceforth cited in brackets in the text.

cesses are undoubtedly the *sine qua non* for our capacity to conserve and retrieve information, analysis of these processes alone does not suffice to explain the formation of certain fields of knowledge and memory.

The importance of Halbwachs's work cannot be stressed sufficiently: by turning to the social frameworks that shape our memories, he showed that memory must not be understood as quintessentially an individual attribute. He writes, 'it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories' (Halbwachs: 38). This means that, although the individual's memories of his or her own past have a unique reference point in the self as a 'locative system',<sup>2</sup> these memories are always forged *vis-à-vis* available social and cultural frameworks. Or as Jeffrey Prager argues, although memories are 'embodied' in a particular person, they are at the same time socially 'embedded'.<sup>3</sup>

This dual aspect of memory, its embodiedness and embeddedness, points to another important characteristic: its present-mindedness. Since we always remember the past from the perspective of our contemporary world, our memories are located in the in-between of the present and the past. Memory as a relationship to a meaningful past can therefore change according to the emerging needs of an individual or a group. Its time-horizon spans the past, the present, and the future: the past is retrieved in the present with a view to providing some orientation for the future. This goes some way towards explaining why we forget, rediscover, and revise aspects of our personal and collective pasts. Thus memories are not static representations of past events but 'advancing stories' through which individuals and communities forge their sense of iden-

2 See Ciarán Benson, *The Cultural Psychology of the Self. Place, Morality and Art in Human Worlds* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001).

3 Jeffrey Prager, *Presenting the Past. Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Misremembering* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 70.

tity. Or, to put it differently: memories offer heavily edited versions of the self and its world.

That there is an intimate link between memory and narrative has been recognized by many disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and historiography which, over the past three decades, have increasingly studied the function of narrative for the formation of our symbolic worlds. To look for a fact independent of its symbolic mediation is therefore as naïve a quest as a Rousseauesque return to nature seen as outside culture. The consensus that narrative is at the very heart of all human deliberations on meaning is overwhelming, as a few illustrations will show.

The opening of L. P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between* (1953) begins with the now celebrated line 'The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.' With beguiling irony the author then proceeds to demonstrate that it is, in fact, the opposite which is true. Still haunted by the events of a distant but extraordinary childhood summer, the elderly narrator recalls the events which have continued to live so vibrantly within him. In thrall to those moments of the past which predicted (perhaps even defined) what he has become, he gives them expression in the story he tells. It is a useful illustration of the obvious: the way in which, even in fiction, the ultimate expression of memory and identity lies in narrative. Our understanding of the nexus between (auto)biographical detail and narrative has been transformed by Paul Ricœur in the three volumes of his *Temps et récit* (1983–85), and in *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990). More recently, in *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (2000), he focused further on History which, although it may appear more abstract, still defines itself by the use of narrative in the distinction sought between 'histoire-mémoire' and 'histoire-analyse'. Whose narrative? What history? The questions overlap.

History, memory, narrative and fiction are all fused in the collective or individual response to a prevailing climate of opinion, which we may choose to call a 'culture'. In *On Stories*, for example, Richard Kearney has shown how these elements

sometimes coagulate spontaneously to form a national narrative; his most striking examples come from the USA:

America, like all other nations, has defined itself by telling stories of itself and its 'others'. Today, in the aftermath of World Wars and Cold Wars, America has begun to discover hidden divisions *within* the national body politic and is responding by inventing new narratives of the alien 'other'. The more extra-terrestrial the better.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the secretion of a national narrative is not always so innocent. As a number of essays in this collection illustrate, the collective response is sometimes the result of nationalist manipulation at a higher political level, construed in an important collection of essays by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger as an 'invention of tradition'.<sup>5</sup> On the individual level the response may appear to be a fiction, but fiction in a wider cultural context has a way of appearing to be true.

Just as memory may be individual or collective, the concept of 'culture' may be objective or subjective. The social collectivity may impose and mould a pattern of responses in its members; this can take the form of conformity in legislated areas such as religion, language, and education, or the recognition of identifiable regional affiliations. In this way it can be said that objective cultural values shape memory and behaviour. Conversely, in the case of less traditional societies, or in a radically altered social order, close integration follows a process of immigration or assimilation in which a personal quest for identification with the new or adoptive community cohabits with an earlier set of values. This explains how *ci-devant* aristocrats were able to participate in the republican experiment of France, or why it was that emigrants from Poland, Sicily and Ireland proudly became Polish-American, Italian-American, or Irish-American: in both cases, the sense of social identification

4 Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 102.

5 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, coll. Canto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

with a new order stems from a sense of personal choice. This is subjective culture at work. It goes without saying that at times of great social upheaval, in times of war or mass emigration, there are processes of identification with the past, with the new present, or with the future, which are shared by large communities. Just as immigrants to a traditional conservative society may spark a reinforcement of objective cultural values, so the process of re-rooting can, depending upon the circumstances, create reactions as varied as hope, guilt, nostalgia, hate, or despair.

Sociologists will recognize here the classic conditions for the creation of endogamous or exogamous groups (in-groups or out-groups), but our concern in this collection of essays is to show how the life of the imagination shares in the processes of change, assimilation and redefinition. Emerging from circumstances like these, whether it celebrates or mourns the passing of an old order, the literary work of fiction has a quality of authenticity to match that of the historical record. It becomes a question of 'who we think we are'.<sup>6</sup>

If our symbolic worlds are discursively generated, then this must have serious consequences for the way in which we think about cultural memory: it can no longer be conceived in terms of 'heritage' or 'warmth of tradition'. Such pre-critical notions always suggest that our cultural horizons are genuine, unmediated and natural. 'Communities', writes Benedict Anderson, 'are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined'.<sup>7</sup> Memory as a retrospective imagining involves the story as a basic mnemonic act.<sup>8</sup>

6 See Philip Yale Nicholson, *Who Do We Think We Are? Race and Nation in the Modern World* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002).

7 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 7th edn (London, New York: Verso, 1996), p. 6.

8 See Jacques le Goff, 'Memory', in *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 52.



At this point, however, it is necessary to differentiate clearly between the notions of collective memory on the one hand and cultural memory on the other. Collective memory, as analysed by Halbwachs, has a lifetime of roughly three or four generations; it is characterized by its limited horizon and oral traditions; it is informal and based on everyday communication between members of a group. As analysed by the Egyptologist and cultural theorist Jan Assmann, however, cultural memory differs from collective memory in its distance from the world of the everyday:

Distance from the everyday (transcendence) marks its temporal horizon. Cultural memory has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time. These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance). We call these 'figures of memory'. The entire Jewish calendar is based on figures of memory. In the flow of everyday communications such as festivals, rites, epics, poems, images etc. form 'islands of time', islands of completely different temporality suspended from time. In cultural memory such islands of time expand into memory spaces of 'retrospective contemplativeness' [retrospektive Besonnenheit].<sup>9</sup>

Assmann does not imply, of course, that cultural memory is static and closed to change; on the contrary, he emphasizes that it 'always relates its knowledge to an actual and contemporary situation' (Assmann, 'Collective Memory...': 130). The texts, images, festivals, rites etc. that constitute the 'figures of memory' provide only a potential, not in themselves a stable horizon; the emergent meanings are negotiated through transmission from a contemporary perspective. As regards the history of cultural memory in the early advanced civilizations, Assmann shows that this emerges in the realm of the sacred where it is transmitted by special carriers such as shamans,

9 Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', in *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 125–33 (p. 129).

mandarins, priests, rabbis, or poets.<sup>10</sup> Unlike communicative memory, which is informal, cultural memory communicates institutionalized 'figures of memory'. In the early civilizations two of its primary forms are therefore the ritual and festival, both of which allow the group to participate in cultural memory (Assmann, *Das kulturelle...*: 57).

The advent of writing, however, leads to a transition from ritual towards textually constituted cultural coherence. (Assmann, *Das kulturelle...*: 88) This also means that cultural memory now becomes canonized, and new institutions of interpretations emerge such as the Jewish *sofer*, the Islamic *mullah*, or the Hellenistic *philologos* (Assmann, *Das kulturelle...*: 95). The canon as a highly formalized tradition gives expression to the normative self-image of the group by means of a quasi-contractual relationship between a corpus of texts and the group. Canonization therefore always implies the obligation to remember a particular tradition.

The prescriptive dimensions of cultural memory, its affinity with the sacred, and ceremonial function, have of course long been eroded in our post-canonical and post-colonial world. Cultural memory is more than ever fragmented in different minority groups who attempt to legitimize their cultural identities by claiming localized and competing traditions. The diversification and fragmentation of memory show that we cannot always forge our cultural identities with reference to a *grand récit* that is suspended from temporality. Cultural memory today rarely offers an island of timelessness, where meaning survives as a pure crystal that must be passed down to the next generation. Models of objective and subjective culture coexist in the world, exemplified by France and the USA respectively but, in an age of memory contests, memory has become diversified, destabilised and more vulnerable to drastic revisions. This is nowhere more keenly felt than in the former

10 Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, 3rd edn (Munich: Beck, 2000), p. 54.

United Kingdom of Great Britain which, it has been suggested, should be re-baptized the Atlantic Archipelago.

The relatively recent diversification of cultural memory does not, however, destroy its primary function of providing a group with an awareness of its unity and peculiarity. Cultural memory today involves a retrospective imagining that simultaneously articulates, questions and investigates the normative self-image of a group. It is a self-reflexive and increasingly ethno-critical practice: self-reflexive in that it reflects the group's preoccupation with its own social and cultural norms; ethno-critical in that it tends to question the group's normative assumptions about its sense of belonging. Or, to put it another way, cultural memory can be understood as a repertoire of symbolic forms and stories through which communities advance and edit competing identities.

Since the late 1980s European societies have been deeply immersed in debates on cultural memory. The recent proliferation of a museum culture combined with the public's enormous interest in memoirs, autobiographies and diaries is not coincidental. Its causes are legion, and can be rapidly summarized as follows: the deep-seated tensions between regional interests and local custom on the one hand and the increasing weight of central authority on the other (so passionately examined in the wake of the Revolution, by Michelet in his *Tableau de la France*, and carefully scrutinized in several essays in Pierre Nora's seven-volume *Les Lieux de mémoire*<sup>11</sup>); the generations which shared first-hand experience of the two World Wars and post-colonial conflict are now dying out;<sup>12</sup> the changed perceptions of

11 Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, seven volumes: t.1 *La République*; t.2 *La Nation* (3 vols); t.3 *Les France* (3 vols), coll. 'Bibliothèque illustrée des Histoires' (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–92). See in particular, several essays in the sections 'Partages de l'Espace – Temps', 'Traditions', and 'Enracinements' in *Les France*, 1; most rewarding is Marcel Roncayolo, 'Le département', *ibid.*: 884–929.

12 The loss of first-hand witnesses, acutely felt in Britain after the Second World War, created a fruitful style of reconstructive nostalgia in socio-

the geo-political landscape after the end of dictatorships, i.e. the Occupation and Collaboration in France and Italy, the Franco regime in Spain, and the Salazar regime in Portugal; the Fall of the Wall, accompanied by the rediscovery of those figures of memory that led a subcutaneous existence under communist rule, and most significantly the sharper critical focus which this has brought to the exponential growth in Holocaust studies.<sup>13</sup> The emergence of new cultural identities in Central Europe is undoubtedly fuelled by the reconstruction of certain aspects of the pre-war cultural landscape, in particular the notion of 'Mitteleuropa', that is a central European culture that is re-mapped with reference both to contemporary and to pre-war sensibilities.<sup>14</sup> In the case of Ireland, had he but studied it in his *Masse und Macht*, Elias Canetti might have suggested memory itself as the *Massensymbol* of a country which has never ceased to search for the identity of its Gaelic Golden Age prior to the arrival of the Normans and the English. The theme of memory in Irish literature is the haunting refrain of the dispossessed.<sup>15</sup> Himself a Breton, Ernest Renan (1823–1892) made frequent reference to the place of memory in the Celtic world.

logical research which was brilliantly captured by Peter Laslett in his *The World We Have Lost* (London: Methuen, 1965). The conjuncture in question may also have had its impact on prose fiction, as in L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* (1953).

- 13 For recent assessment of the proliferation of Holocaust studies, and its consequences, see *Times Literary Supplement*, special no., 'Jewish Studies', 1 March 2002; in particular, Saul Friedländer, 'True believers. Greed, ideology, power and lust as motives for the Holocaust', 4–6; and Robert S. Wistrich, 'Unpardonable', 6–7.
- 14 On the re-discovery of 'Mitteleuropa' see: Christoph Ransmayr (ed.), *Im blinden Winkel. Nachrichten aus Mitteleuropa* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1989).
- 15 See Seán Ó Tuama and Thomas Kinsella (eds), *An Duanaire 1600–1900: Poems of the Dispossessed*, Thomas Kinsella (trans.) (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1981, 1985).

The loss of first-hand witnesses marks a significant transition from communicative memory towards what Marianne Hirsch has aptly called ‘postmemory’:

postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.<sup>16</sup>

In the first instance, postmemory captures the after-life of Holocaust memories in our contemporary world: in the words of James E. Young, it refers to ‘history’s after images’, that is ‘the composite record of events and these events’ transmission to the next generation’.<sup>17</sup> Unlike memory, which establishes a direct connection to the remembered past, postmemory is thus extremely self-conscious, hyper-mediated and, as Young points out, even self-indulgent (Young: 3),<sup>18</sup> – a failing from which we hope to remain exempt.

These introductory reflections do not offer a new theoretical approach to the complex cross-stitching between the present and the past, memory and narrativity, memory and trauma, and memory and forgetting. However, by outlining the cultural horizon in which this volume is situated, they should provide

16 Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 22.

17 James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge. After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 2, 4.

18 It should also be specified that, although Hirsch developed the concept with reference to the experience of the children of Holocaust survivors, she is eager to emphasize that it may be employed to describe ‘other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences’ (Hirsch: 22). See also Norman G. Finkelstein’s controversial book, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, now in paperback ‘with explosive new postscript’ (London: Verso Books, 2001).

an intellectual map for the following collection of articles, which examine the construction of cultural memory in examples of European discourse from the seventeenth century to the present day. Since our approach is not primarily historical in nature, the various contributions are structured around the following five thematic lines of enquiry: Memory as Counter-History; Narrative and Remembering; Locating Memory; Remembering and Renewal; Remembering as Trauma.

Put another way, our volume illustrates that cultural memory is not always a national affair. Although it is true that, with the rise of the nation state, cultural memory tends to be negotiated *vis-à-vis* notions of national identity, the present volume brings to the fore the mutual interdependence of local, national and wider European concerns. All the essays in this book contribute to a dialogue about memory and identity in the context of European history and literature, but at the same time it should be emphasized that the five headings that guide our exploration of cultural memory do not provide entirely distinct categories that should be seen in isolation from one another. Nearly all contributions connect with themes and topoi that recur elsewhere. Ideally, the arrangement of the separate articles under the five headings should create a network of concerns whose nodes consist of concepts such as historiography, narrative, and identity.

The collection cannot lay claim to being exhaustive, but it does explore and illustrate the sense of cultural difference without which dialogue in Europe would be impossible. At a time when the fear of aliens steps out of the American subconscious to impinge upon, and shut out, real relations in the world, the diversity and sense of cultural difference in Europe are appreciated as a precious asset. They exist because history, memory, tradition, and the life of the imagination freely explore and assimilate contrasting perceptions of the past.<sup>19</sup> Offering an

19 This lends tangential support to the celebrated essay of the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description', published in *The*

alternative approach to European development, this may also be read as an active advocacy for the continuing place of modern languages and literatures in European institutions of higher learning.

## Memory as Counter-History

Dealing with the complex relationship between historiography and memory in examples ranging from the Enlightenment in France and Germany to contemporary post-Holocaust discourse, this section offers five essays.

Jeanne Riou's opening article examines how the notion of culture can be debated in a manner that avoids the pitfalls of a universalizing and monumentalizing epistemology *à la* Schiller on the one hand and the politically paralysing arguments of Nietzsche on the other. Analysing the merits and limitations of Schiller's Enlightenment historiography as well as Nietzsche's scathing critique of the monumental gaze, Riou – following Benjamin – advocates 'a phenomenology of historical awareness' that is both critical and ethical. Critical in that it resists a simple return to the archive, a post-deconstructionist form of historicism; ethical in that its resolve is to focus on the speechless victims of a history full, as it is, of catastrophes.

There are two *ancien régime* French models for consideration in this section: Carol Baxter's investigation of the virtual revolt against official ecclesiastical policy (rehearsed in their

*Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt explore the implications of this essay for literary criticism in a chapter suggestively entitled 'A Touch of the Real', in Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt (eds), *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); edition consulted, paperback (2001)

collective memory) by the religious community of Port-Royal, and Síofra Pierse's study of the nature of truth in Voltaire's historical writing. In both cases, recourse to memory is seen to be a revolt against the orthodoxy of the day: the first is a collective response, arising out of the shared perception that the values of a threatened, and persecuted, Jansenist community would best be protected by the composition and distribution by the nuns of their individual *mémoires*/memories. This, in the course of time, could only be seen as an alternative history of the crisis, if not a revolt against the powers-that-were. In the case of Voltaire, a century later, the focus could only be individual and openly provocative. In his unique blend of showmanship and adherence to transparent critical values, Voltaire questioned prevalent ideas of truth in historical writing; the champion of relativism attacked canonical interpretations of the past to propound a new concept of historical writing, one in which an open admission of the narrating self, including his or her personal, intellectual testimony, should be admitted.

Angela Reinicke's article deals with two contemporary examples of counter-history and postmemory, *Bruchstücke* by Benjamin Wilkormirski alias Bruno Doesseker and the late W. G. Sebald's renowned narrative *Die Ausgewanderten*. Analysing the scandal around the Wilkormirski/Doesseker 'autobiography' with reference to the debate on authenticity in Holocaust writing, Reinicke argues that historiography after the Holocaust has to position itself *vis-à-vis* the ethical need for truth on the one hand and the limits of representation on the other. Following Levinas and Edith Wyschogrod, she advocates a type of discourse which brings into relief the alterity of the other, without, however, forcing this other into speech. She concludes that W. G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten* is an example of an ethics of remembering that maintains a delicate balance between the need to bear witness to the abyss and the need to refrain from violating the other's sphere.

Sabine Eggers offers a contribution on counter-history in the poetry of two East German poets, Johannes Bobrowski and Sarah Kirsch. Challenging the commonly held view according



to which GDR literature only began to question official Marxist historiography in the late 1960s and 1970s, Eggers analyses Bobrowski's poetry as a relatively early example of a polysemic approach to personal and collective memory. While official GDR historiography claimed to have mastered National Socialism through a rational mode of analysis, it had effectively created a split between factual knowledge of fascist crimes on the one hand and personal memories on the other. In his poetry of the 1950s and 1960s, Bobrowski turns to the eastern Jewish culture, bringing into relief the lasting effects of National Socialist violence through a figurative language that makes room for private associations and memories. For Eggers, Sarah Kirsch's poetry continues Bobrowski's poetic mode in that she too favours a non-rational, metaphysical approach to history that is guided by deep scepticism towards the notion of historical progress. Through the use of archetypal imagery, myth and folklore, both poets thus offer an alternative, deeply personal mode of expression that mediates the suppressed memory of historical violence, in this case, the National Socialist past.

## Narrative and Remembering

The intimate link between cultural memory and narrative mentioned before is foregrounded in the second set of essays. David Rock opens this section with an article on Jurek Becker's 'Jewish' works, in particular in *Jakob der Lügner*, *Der Boxer* and *Bronsteins Kinder*. Becker's preoccupation with his Jewishness is, as Rock argues, directly related to his lack of personal memories of the formative experiences that shaped his life. In Becker's writings, memory is a creative act that fuses the self's imaginings with historical research and the sparse family anecdotes that had been passed down to him. Exploring 'conceivable versions of the past' in his Jewish fictions, Becker

thus engages in the search for identity via imaginative linguistic constructs.

Memory as an amalgamation of fantasy, fact and narrative is also the concern of Eamonn Jordan's reading of Brian Friel's play *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Concerned with Friel's metatheatrical techniques, such as story-telling, the play-within-a-play, masks, carnival and so forth, Jordan examines how in *Dancing at Lughnasa* Friel's transgressiveness is specifically reconfigured within the framework of memory. Here ownership of memory is disrupted by means of the narrator's contradictory account of the dancing which he never really witnessed. As an 'over-worked, manipulative performance', memory is distorted by such factors as time, desire, and repetition. Nevertheless, as a performance, writes Jordan, it 'functions as a redemptive act, a form of substitution fantasy, where defiance and belonging can emerge'.

Memory as an imaginary reconstruction is the focal point of Deirdre Byrnes's contribution on the dialectic of remembering and forgetting in Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe*, a family story that addresses the complex interplay between personal trauma and the politics of remembering in the GDR. Exposing her communist mother's repression of her Jewish heritage, the narrator of *Pawels Briefe* attempts to fill the gap by carefully reconstructing the submerged history of her grandparents. However, the available documentary evidence, including letters and photographs, argues Byrnes, results in an imaginary reconstruction that makes the fractures of memory visible.

The narrational memory, embedded in the cultural matrix of accumulated reading (the 'bibliothèques mémorieuses'), is investigated by Patrick Crowley in his study of Michon's *Vies minuscules*. In the reconstruction of the incidents of a family's past, material objects are shown to act as triggers for memories of ancestors' narratives; unlike the involuntary memory of Proust's madeleines, these are not first-person memories, they are the relayed memories of 'another' which are then further distilled by Michon in the pot-still of his acquired literary

culture, acquired, that is, since his first (and now distant) contact with ancestral memory and narrative.

## Locating Memory

The location of memory in both real and imaginary sites provides the point of departure for the following section. Douglas Smith explores the practical and political implications of André Malraux's concept of the 'musée imaginaire', a museum without walls, virtual reality before its time. The concept of the museum is taken beyond its original roots, the consecrated role of a shrine of national achievement, of national memory, to the global appreciation of art at a universal, almost metaphysical, level. Once again, analogies can be found with Proust; in this case, it is his perception of the museum as a railway station which is evoked, 'the transition between two different worlds (life and art)'. The issues raised by Malraux's concept are shown to have continuing repercussions in the contemporary political scene, in which the project of the Museum of Primordial (or Primitive) Art in Paris, with its apparently rootless CD-ROM catalogue, presenting works of art from other, often underdeveloped, societies, provokes reflection about the national memory and the national heritage, as well as political debate about national responsibility.

In a contribution that examines the intimate connection between landscape and memory (more specifically the memory of the 'year of the French' in Irish folklore), Guy Beiner shows how the memory of the revolutionary upheavals in Ireland in 1798 was mapped by popular memory onto the landscape, and then preserved through folklore sources. Place names of battle sites, sites of death and burial are discussed as specific examples of *loci memoriae* that form a cartography of a social memory that continues to feature in Irish folklore well into the twentieth century. Beiner argues that the study of this

‘vernacular landscape’ helps to ‘uncover vestiges of a primarily rural cultural memory’.

Christian Emden’s study returns to the quest for a cultural historiography that traces the ‘unconscious after-life of the past’. Comparing cultural memory in Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin, Emden shows that both thinkers engage in an interdisciplinary undertaking that highlights the complex interplay between the material conditions of culture and their symbolic after-life. At the heart of Benjamin’s understanding of historical transformation is the idea that the past survives in symbolic, often marginal forms, such as architectural details, ruins, inscriptions and so forth. Like Benjamin, Warburg favours an archaeological view of the past which analyses those hidden connections and forgotten details that subconsciously inform our cultural memory. Cultural memory is thus neither a *grand récit* nor simply a lived tradition. Instead it is a specific way of looking at the past that prioritizes the minutiae over the monumentalizing gaze of the historian proper.

In another illustration of the Irish sense of place, a specific mutation of what we call ‘cultural memory’, Samuel Beckett’s *Mercier et Camier* is shown by Phyllis Gaffney to have multiple echoes of the past and of the city from which the author exiled himself. Rooted in memory, like the beech trees of St Stephen’s Green, this work of Beckett reveals to patient enquiry a sense of loss and of irony: loss in space and time, masked by an irony which is both playful and vulnerable, hiding that which hurts and seeks expression. The act of relocating memory is thus seen to be sometimes a form of flight as well as a dogged affirmation of new directions.

The recycling of scraps of the past whose significance has been forgotten is one of the concerns of Gillian Pye’s contribution on Herbert Achternbusch’s early play *Ella*, which dramatizes the attempt of a mentally handicapped, institutionalized woman to reclaim her past and sense of self. Pye’s analysis of Ella’s obsessive monologue, of the ghosting of voices between Ella and her son Josef, of the repetitive movement of a narrative that fails to establish causality, highlights the traumatized

consciousness of the figure. The lack of clear spatial and temporal sequencing in Ella's rambling story thus points to the gaps in Ella's memories that are the result of institutionalized and familial cruelty. Her inability to locate herself in the world goes hand in hand with her inability to recall her past in a coherent story. However, Pye argues that Ella's narrative disorder also has to do with Achternbusch's aim to resist the censorship of the archive. His refusal to impose narrative order can be interpreted as an attempt to escape the notion of autobiography as a 'topological substitution' for the self. She concludes that Achternbusch can be viewed as type of junk artist who conjures up scraps 'with which to commit spontaneous acts of *art brut*'.

## Remembering and Renewal

If remembering is often associated with a sense of loss, it can also serve as inspiration for collective new beginnings and for the individual creative act. Exploring the process of remembering in the spheres of both collective and individual experience, the subjects embraced in this section show how commemoration becomes celebration: firstly, on a collective political level when it leads to assertion of new values; secondly, on an individual level when artistic innovation is inspired by the influence of cultural models acting beyond their original point of origin. Like a background fugue, however, the sense of renewal is frequently shown to entail a sense of loss.

Following the example given by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in their collection of essays on nineteenth-century nationalism, entitled *The Invention of Tradition*, Edric Caldicott investigates the manipulation of memory in the early years of the French Third Republic, still the longest-lived of the political constitutions inspired by the French Revolution. From official acts of commemoration to educational policy and the

emerging status of the writer as the seer of state, memory is shown to be a powerful instrument of persuasion in the political arena.

In a welcome inclusion of opera as a national art form, Deirdre O'Grady explores the impact of French literary innovation, particularly the work of Victor Hugo, upon the style and production of Giuseppe Verdi via his librettists Francesco Maria Piave (*Rigoletto*, 1851) and Arrigo Boito (*Otello*, 1887). Tracing the progression of Verdi's work, from his association with Piave to the work done with Boito, climaxing in his masterpiece *Otello*, her study offers not only a rewarding insight into the evolution of Verdi's work but also the gestation of new beginnings. Cross-cultural influences are shown to provoke changes beyond their immediate environment, even within traditions which are assumed to have their own national self-sufficiency.

The next two chapters of this section adopt a wider angle of vision to explore the conceptual issues of the *translatio studii*. Susan Bassnett investigates the strategies of the translator and, with that, the place reserved for original, residual, cultural values transplanted into another language. Caught between servitude and subversion, the translator is also trapped between the past and the present. How can the translator's function be defined? To preserve a literary time capsule (which is necessarily altered by the act of translation), or to interpret (remember) a work for his or her own time? A selection of specific translations, including those of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the Brazilian Haroldo de Campos, Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney, illustrate how dangerous, and yet how essential and rewarding, the craft of the translator is.

Patrick O'Donovan investigates the fundamental notions of memory and culture themselves in the work of the historian-philosopher Michel de Certeau. Using *La Culture au pluriel* and *Une Politique de la langue: la Révolution française et les patois* (both written in collaboration with Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel) as a means of access to the scrupulous detail of de Certeau's work, he underlines the importance of a central question which Paul Ricœur later took account of: whose memory? Can

memory be said to exist if not reproduced? And who is to reproduce the memory of the illiterate, or the memory of the non-literate participants in contingent actions, such as the student demonstrations of May '68? Is memory (meaning, more specifically, the reproduction of memory) not a prerogative of wealth and power? From this point of view, the reconstruction of the *patrimoine*, or popular culture, may be considered to be as much a loss as a renewal. Indeed, renewal is synonymous with loss, as we have been shown in the work of the translator, and also in the re-location of 'Primordial/Primitive Art' as traced by Douglas Smith.

The concept of official memory, with the ossification of approved models in the form of the Francoist legacy in Spain, is challenged by the contemporary Spanish writer-in-exile, Juan Goytisolo. The complex echoes of opposing identities, orthodox/official and homosexual/alternative, are traced in his autobiographical work by Alison Ribeiro de Menezes. Her study shows how a radically different perception of Spanishness is promoted in the writer's work, including 'a whole-hearted acceptance of all things Arab'. The subtle aesthetics of his narratorial strategy stimulates comparison with Cervantes himself, an emblem of Spain and yet an exemplary exponent of authorial hide-and-seek.

## Remembering as Trauma

If renewal entails loss, it is also built upon trauma. In this respect, memory studies hold a precarious balance between celebration and commemoration, between rejoicing and mourning. It would be futile to seek the point of preponderance between these extremes, and probably fatuous, if not a betrayal, to assert that the reproduction of memory, i.e. the act of writing itself, is a form of celebration. If the trauma of the past is to be a lesson for the future, it must be remembered as recorded by its

witnesses and victims. The thinly fictionalized account in Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* of the bloodiest trauma in French history offers no consolation, no redemption. Tom Quinn's study of the text shows how, in his flight from unforgettable horror, the author, Louis Destouches, took refuge in the nom-de-plume Céline, whose debasement is masked in turn by the nom-de-guerre Bardamu who, in his turn, seeks an *alter ego* under the name of Robinson. Revulsion for the past drives the writer not to a self-portrait of the hero, but to an anti-portrait full of self-loathing.

The reverberations of Shoah memories in family life are one of the concerns of Carmel Finnan's chapter on the autobiographies by four women writers of Jewish origin, namely Cordelia Edvardson, Ruth Klüger, Laura Waco and Helene Janeczek. Addressing the complexity of German-Jewish relations since the Shoah, the four writers occupy a 'nomadic position' in Deleuze and Guattari's sense that allows them to negotiate a fragmented sense of identity with reference to normative notions of Jewish identity on the one hand and the severed ties to their sites of origin on the other. Concerned with the ambivalence of the mother-daughter relationship, the emotional disorders of the parental generation, and the interplay of silence and rage that characterizes the transmission of the trauma to the second generation, the autobiographies articulate female Jewish identities that remain fragmented and heterogeneous. Finnan concludes that they succeed in challenging the continued recasting of German-Jewish relations in the binary dichotomy of self versus other.

Returning to a theme broached by Alison Ribeiro de Menezes in 'Remembering and Renewal', Catherine O'Leary explores the anti-Franco legacy in contemporary Spanish literature, but in the case of the theatrical work of Antonio Buero Vallejo, there is no renewal: the atrocities of the past are confronted squarely, as are the delusions of the *pacto de olvido*, but Vallejo is shown to stand for the view that in the wake of Franco power does 'not so much change hands as change appearance'. The need to remember is a moral imperative and, in



a distant echo of the dilemma perceived by Michel de Certeau, we are advised that 'history is amoral: events occurred'.

In the concluding chapter of the book, Silvia Ross explores the German occupation of Rome and, in particular, the unforgiving portrait of the unforgivable Celeste Di Porto, dubbed the *Pantera Nera*, whose infamous complicity is explored in the work of Elena Gianini Belotti and Giuseppe Pederiali. There is a documentary core to the preoccupations of these writers ('if there were some rotten apples among the Jews of Rome, why not say so'), but Silvia Ross also takes into account the feminist and authorial strategies of their respective works. The relationship of narrative to memory, 'the gap between knowledge and understanding', becomes itself a topic in their work. It is a subject which brings us back to the fundamental questions with which we began, and which have spread in ever-widening circles. Can there ever be an explanation of the Holocaust, so un-human that for many its uniqueness had to be signalled by use of the term 'Shoah'? What forms of narrative can ever offer an explanation of the past? How do the demands of the elusive reality of memory, collective or individual, isolate us from each other, and how do they find expression? These are questions which sometimes find answers and constantly provoke new insights, offering 'moments of reprieve' and artistic innovation in the shared narrative of memory. If Primo Levi's *If this is a Man* is a powerful reminder of the responsibility to remember, the contributions to this book will have shown that memory also serves as an instrument for celebration, play, and renewal.

# Part 1: Memory as Counter-History

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JEANNE RIOU

## Historiography and the Critique of Culture in Schiller, Nietzsche and Benjamin

Theories of memory, from psychoanalysis, deconstruction, to intertextuality, have had considerable implications for historiography and the question of how the past is reviewed. From Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality to Renate Lachmann's application of this in Slavonic studies, cultural practices of storage and retrieval of information came under critical review.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Michel Foucault's archaeology of knowledge questioned how the past is read and showed how systems of investigation did not so much observe as generate reality.<sup>2</sup> In the aftermath of the Egyptologist Jan Assmann's *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* (1992), the renewed investigation of cultural memory began to characterize Cultural Studies.<sup>3</sup> Much of the initial debate had stemmed from the conflicting ideas of Henri Bergson and Maurice Halbwachs in the early decades of the twentieth-century. Increasingly, during the 1990s there was a critical attempt to re-think memory across disciplinary boundaries.<sup>4</sup>

- 1 See Julia Kristeva, 'Probleme der Textstrukturierung', in J. Ihwe (ed.), *Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), II/2, pp. 485–507.
- 2 For a summary of the common ground shared by discourse analysis and intertextuality, see Anselm Haverkamp, Renate Lachmann, 'Text als Mnemotechnik: Panorama einer Diskussion', in Anselm Haverkamp and Renate Lachmann (eds), *Gedächtniskunst. Raum-Bild-Schrift. Studien zur Mnemotechnik* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), pp. 7–24.
- 3 Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in den frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Hanser, 1992).
- 4 On the shift towards cultural memory in cultural studies see Hartmut Böhme, Peter Matussek and Lothar Müller (eds), *Orientierung Kulturwissenschaft. Was sie kann, was sie will* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2000), pp. 147–63.

The return to the archive that is sometimes associated with cultural memory was not, however, a reaction against deconstruction. As Assmann stresses in *Moses der Ägypter*, it is important to differentiate between history and the history of memory.<sup>5</sup> Cultural memory does not have direct recourse to the past, but follows the inscriptions of memory in a discontinuous, intertextual network of interpretation. It is concerned with the process of reading culture as one which does not translate the past, but which ascribes particular meaning to history in the process of reading the past (Assmann: 28). Dietrich Harth comments that Cultural Studies as a discipline both contains and creates its fields of observation.<sup>6</sup> Harth, defining how Cultural Studies surveys its resources and investigates its scientific, scholarly, technological memory, uses the metaphor of a kaleidoscope. The defining feature of cultural memory, understood here as a practice, is that it should not be conflated with the pre-critical notion of tradition; it cannot mediate between past and present as the nineteenth-century hermeneutic model of understanding from Schleiermacher to Dilthey suggested, and it is not to be conflated with a canonical representation of history. The image of the kaleidoscope suggests the multiplicity of interpretative processes as well as the diversity of the material resources that themselves constitute cultural memory.

This study examines the relationship between cultural memory and aspects of historiography in the late Enlightenment. The notion of universal history in the Enlightenment and the accompanying interest in ethnography are always at least implicit points of departure for contemporary critiques of culture. It is likewise difficult to envisage any debate on cultural memory that is not somehow rooted in a critique of rationalism. Two historiographical essays by Friedrich Schiller

5 Jan Assmann, *Moses der Ägypter. Entzifferung einer Gedächtnisspur*, (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1998), p. 26.

6 Dietrich Harth, *Das Gedächtnis der Kulturwissenschaften* (Dresden: Dresden University Press, 1998), p. 9.

will be discussed: *Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man Universalgeschichte* (1789) and *Die Sendung Moses* (1790). Examining the paradigm of memory which is operative in these texts, the opening section of this chapter attempts to place this paradigm within the context of the critique of Enlightenment epistemology which began with Nietzsche.

Both of the Schiller essays exemplify the Idealist model of historiography, but at the same time Schiller clearly struggles with the expectation that a historiographer, in order to grasp any event, must be in possession of a totality of knowledge leading up to that event. His implicit question is: Where does the task of the historian begin and how may the parameters of historiography be defined? As he acknowledges in a letter to Caroline von Beulwitz in 1788, historical narrative is aesthetic in nature and the historiographer is deluded in thinking otherwise. There is therefore no knowledge of historical facts that is not somehow translated for narrative purposes: this is an important recognition in the eighteenth-century discourse on historical memory and will be discussed in more detail in relation to Schiller's deliberations on the emergence of European rationalism in his essay on the figure of Moses. While other thinkers of the late Enlightenment from Johann Gottlieb Herder to Wilhelm von Humboldt or, of course, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, are more readily associated with the philosophy of history than Schiller, Schiller nevertheless raises certain questions that are central to Enlightenment historiography and its epistemological premises.

The final section of this contribution returns to critiques of Enlightenment rationalism. Cultural theorists in the early twentieth century such as Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin took issue with Nietzsche's historiography *without* reverting to a universalist or Idealist model. Having discussed Schiller's politically engaged notion of universal history and Nietzsche's politically disengaged yet not insignificant critique, Benjamin, answering Nietzsche, makes a case for historiography that is based on 'historical materialism' but is not founded on Idealist dialecticism.

## Universal History and Epistemology

In the late nineteenth-century, Friedrich Nietzsche castigated the rationalism of the Enlightenment, rejecting the disciplinary specialization of humanist scholarship. His dismissal of historiography in *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* (1873) is relevant to the theme of cultural memory because it is his notion of the cultural need not only to remember, but also to forget, that pinpoints weaknesses of Enlightenment historiography. He rejects its belief in truth, understanding and progress, seeing this as based on an epistemology which, from Descartes to Kant and Hegel, rationalizes human existence into an arbitrary model of subject identity. For Nietzsche, the optimistic Enlightenment slant on history is crudely triumphalist, and based on an Idealist grand gesture of replicating the past.<sup>7</sup> At the same time as declaring that the past must be understood in order to comprehend the present, real historical existence, according to Nietzsche, is in this paradigm turned into an epistemological problem and purged of its experiential content. History, for Nietzsche, is opposed to life, at least as far as its philosophical definition is concerned: its very emergence as a discipline is symptomatic of a culture which uses the past in order to justify its own *modus operandi* (Nietzsche, II: 219).

Unless one upholds Hegel's view of the autonomous subject which transcends the historical moment in discerning the cyclical pattern of history, Nietzsche's critique of Idealism is not without foundation. In Hegel's dialectical model, it comes within the remit of the autonomous subject to formulate an ideal of culture. Considered in this way, the historiographer is invested with the knowledge of the errors of the past, which he reviews dialectically as embodied alternatives firstly to the

7 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke*, Karl Schlechta (ed.), 5 vols (Frankfurt a. M.: Ullstein, 1969, repr. 1979), II, pp. 209–87 (p. 223). Further references to this edition are given in the text.

present and secondly to its transcendental continuation in the future.

Along these lines it is possible for Hegel to consider reflection itself as grounded in the return of activity from the phenomenon to the consciousness. By extension, since the subject is thereby guaranteed at least the possibility of accurate knowledge outside selfhood, the historian can regard time in the past as knowable within the present. Instead of only gaining self-knowledge, the historiographer works from the identity of self in present time, and present time is clearly distinguishable from time that is past in the very terms of knowing. Therefore the historiographer, although bound in the present, can survey the past if he presents it to himself in the same manner as any object must become known to the transcendental subject in representation.<sup>8</sup>

Nietzsche has good grounds for taking issue with this model. *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* opens with a quotation from Goethe that is intended to show the disadvantages of overloading thought with the baggage of ideas that are disconnected from experience (Nietzsche, II: 209). Nietzsche compares this over-reliance on historical knowledge to a paralysing weight that decreases activity in the present. From the point of view of the present, if one immerses oneself wholly in the contemplated past, no course of action seems open for simply thinking in the present that is not somehow moulded by habit. From here he goes on to develop his notion of the importance of forgetting with the famous analogy of animals grazing: from one day to the next they are unencumbered by memory (Nietzsche, II: 212).

Justified though his criticisms are, their consequences, if brought to a logical conclusion, are that the historian must occasionally abdicate responsibility for the past. Granted,

8 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Werke 1832–1845*, Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (eds), 20 vols (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), III, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 138.



Nietzsche holds that what makes us human is our infiltration by past events that sift through somehow to the feeling core of ourselves. That notwithstanding, Nietzsche regards the a-historic origin of all historical thinking from within the aesthetics of antiquity: the great deed as an animating mythology (Nietzsche, II: 223). There is within this, a tendency towards a subjectivized and mythologically aestheticizing recourse to the past. Surely this is as problematic for the interpretation of history as the totalizing stance taken by Hegel. Furthermore the uncomfortable question arises as to whether any model of historiography that adopts a less assured stance than either of these opposite positions will somehow be caught in between, leaving the arguments of either Hegel on the one hand or Nietzsche on the other fundamentally unanswered. The challenge to cultural memory is surely to question how the notion of culture can be debated in a way that avoids monumentalizing and at the same time goes beyond the politically debilitating arguments of Nietzsche. Before venturing any answer to this, however tentatively, it is worth looking at an example of eighteenth-century historiography, in this case Schiller, to see if it is possible to read its critical intent less damningly than Nietzsche without 'turning a blind eye' to its teleological implications.

Between the convening of the Estates General and the storming of the Bastille in 1789, Friedrich Schiller, at this stage firmly a Republican sympathizer, held his inaugural address at the university of Jena on the subject of historiography. In his address entitled *Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man Universalgeschichte?* he attacks the 'career academic'.<sup>9</sup> Apart from being provocative, Schiller, who at this stage in his thinking is predominantly influenced by Rousseau, is painfully aware of the problem of writing history. His idea of a com-

9 Karl-Heinz Hahn (ed.), *Schillers Werke. Nationalausgabe*, 42 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1970), XXVII/1, pp. 359–76 (p. 360). Further references to this edition are given in the text.

parative, universal historiography calls for different levels of historical and philosophical analysis. The address is a partly contradictory piece of writing, seeming to divide into two lines of thought that are difficult to reconcile: one is based on Rousseau's critique of power in the *Discours sur l'Origine et les Fondements de l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes* (1755), and the other reflects an Idealist faith in the progress of history towards universal justice.

Schiller's 1789 address opens with a critique of modern disciplinary specialization and the self-aggrandizement of opportunistic academics who stand to gain from the compartmentalization of knowledge. From this he moves on to the problem of history itself: how does the historian arrive at more than simply an aggregation of historical objects ('Gedächtnißschätze')?<sup>10</sup> The uncommitted scholar, should he turn his attentions to history, is so conceptually weak that he can do nothing more than place facts on top of each other, one by one, as though they were building blocks:

Seine größte Angelegenheit ist jetzt, die zusammen gehäuften Gedächtnißschätze zur Schau zu tragen, und ja zu verhüten, daß sie in ihrem Werthe nicht sinken. Jede Erweiterung seiner Brodwissenschaft beunruhigt ihn, weil sie ihm neue Arbeit zusendet, oder die vergangne unnütz macht; jede wichtige Neuerung schreckt ihn auf, denn sie zerbricht die alte Schulform, die er sich so mühsam zu eigen machte, sie setzt ihn in Gefahr, die ganze Arbeit seines vorigen Lebens zu verlieren. (Hahn: 360)

[His main priority now is to arrange the treasures of memory which he has collected and to put them on display, in so doing to take care that they do not drop in value. Any expansion of his trade that might incur more work or render his achievements useless, any important discovery, frightens him, since it breaks with the old uniformity which he has so painstakingly mastered and it puts him in danger of forfeiting the entire fruit of his labour up to that point.]

10 Schiller's term is difficult to translate: the most accurate translation, 'treasures of memory' which I use later, would not make sense here, since it does not really convey the notion of an historical object.

Schiller's position is clear. The average scholar is not a man of genius, not a real thinker, and certainly not one who would welcome reform, be it in the sense of Martin Luther, or (since Schiller is writing on the verge of the collapse of the *ancien regime*) of revolution.<sup>11</sup> In the midst of this elegant onslaught, he slips in the metaphor 'Gedächtnißschätze', treasures of memory. The so-called facts, he claims, are known to us in the form of such treasures arranged in the opportunistic gaze of the historian. The historian is furthermore often someone who neither understands nor cares about his subject. This goes beyond the personality of the individual and has implications for the telos of the discipline. Schiller goes on to imply that this type of scholar is like a mercenary soldier. In other words, the disinterested mercenary academic pragmatist plays a considerable part in the machinery of power.

Bearing in mind these misgivings, Schiller is faced with the problem of how the recorded tellings of the past are to be used in such a way that they do not simply reinforce the self-promoting line of careerist intellectuals. Trying to resolve this problem, he firstly outlines the deficits of individual disciplines such as law, medicine, the empirical sciences and finally philosophy. All of these, he claims, are in danger of randomly inventing their own *raison d'être* unless there is a culture of mutual intervention, one that demands transdisciplinary understanding. What would enable this is the philosophical and comparative method of study. Without a historiography that is automatically a philosophy of history, historians would be at the mercy of uncorrected empirical classification on the one hand, and interpretations that are retrospective and support a given *status quo* on the other (Hahn: 370). Schiller points out that history not only explains with reference to the past, but

11 From Schiller, Hegel to Nietzsche, the historiographer is a masculinized identity. It has therefore seemed necessary to reflect this in the use of the English pronoun 'he', and to refer in this instance to the scholar as 'not a man of genius'.

that the thinkers who explain the past are themselves products of a political system.

His misgivings about historical objects, 'treasures of memory', anticipate a problem that later went overlooked in positivism. He is talking about the imaginative but also empirical reference point to something that has a particular place in the logic of cause and event. If the historian makes the mistake of simply gathering evidence along one line of analysis, there is nothing to guarantee that the evidence will not be selected to suit the hypothesis. It is not that Schiller is arguing against historiography, but that he is concerned with the critical methodology for interpreting the past. He is not alone in this. Herder, for instance, envisages a philosophy of history in which the history of any culture must be read in comparison with the development of other cultures. The same fundamental idea can be found in Rousseau, although Rousseau has major reservations about the legitimacy of European domination of the world and subsequently about Eurocentric readings of so-called primitive cultures. The point at issue is the problem of dealing with history as a chain of events linked in a causal relationship, which may be demonstrated by the historical object, 'treasure of memory'. The precise nature of this is not clearly defined in Schiller's essay. It could be a book, a method of interpretation or a geographically contained set of explanations for a historical conflict in a particular region. The essay believes in the capacity of reason to establish a legitimate basis for historiography. What Schiller wishes to avoid, however, is a naïve alignment of events or mini-interpretations that find their only justification in a retrospective, surveying position.

It is in the second part of Schiller's essay that a contradiction seems to emerge to the radical politics of the first part. The language becomes heroic when Schiller defines the role of the philosopher, who is henceforth to be entrusted with reuniting what has become divided by the politics of reason. Here Schiller reflects the idealizing, harmonizing vision of the late Enlightenment. He is essentially optimistic about the voice of reason being a critical one, capable of remembering the past and of

putting things right in the future. Schiller goes on to refer to Europe's colonial ill-doings, claiming, in a manner reminiscent of Rousseau, that the so-called primitive societies show Enlightened Europe in a shameful light. The European has lost what had made him human, his capacity to feel as well as to think. At the same time, in his barbarism, primitive man shows up the stage from which modern man has emerged in his journey towards reason. Asking what the travelogues of the colonial world revealed, Schiller lists off despotism, wildness, slavery, superstition, stupidity, and the naked defensiveness of a community always on the alert against attack:

Dort wirft sich die fromme Einfalt vor einen lächerlichen Fetisch, und hier vor einem grausenvollen Scheusal nieder; in seinen Göttern mahlt sich der Mensch. So tief ihn dort Slavery, Dummheit und Aberglauben niederbeugen, so elend ist er hier durch das andre Extrem gesetzloser Freyheit. (Hahn: 356)

[Here the devout simplicity throws itself at the feet of a ludicrous fetish and there it flings itself down before a hideous monster; man draws his own image in the gods he creates. As low as he sinks to slavery, stupidity and superstition, he can equally rise up to the nobility of the other extreme: of boundless, uncontrolled freedom.]

What does he mean in his derisory remarks about the fetish, the central role of ritual? On one level it is the obvious Enlightenment rejection of primitive ritual, since what is to be aimed towards in Enlightenment terms is a contractual society. This would be based on reason, but nevertheless be able to look back at what it had been before becoming reasoned. From this narratological perspective, 'primitive' societies are thought of as the infancy of modern society, Enlightenment is regarded as its metaphorical journey into adulthood. Schiller reiterates Rousseau's concern for what has been won and what has been lost in the process of civilization. The model of cultural memory is all-encompassing here and is confident of its ability to understand the past.

In order to understand any single moment, it would be necessary, Schiller continues, to understand all of history. To

understand any sequence of events, each event must be disentangled and understood as a frozen moment. This, Schiller knows, is impossible, since it would involve knowledge of irretrievably lost tracts of time that were not documented. There is an implicit link between what Schiller alludes to in saying that mythology is a history of human self-reflection and his poetic attempt, particularly in his classical period, to concentrate on antiquity as a frozen moment in time from which the current perspective may then be subjected to humanist reevaluation.

Schiller's idea of critical historiography is teleological. His prerogative was to establish a trans-disciplinary culture of historical examination. Therefore cultural history would also involve ethnographic comparison to other cultures. While this approach has undoubted shortcomings, as highlighted so effectively by Derrida's critique of anthropology, it is nonetheless essential that, before dismissing it, any current evaluation of how we use the past or get to know non-European cultures should consider precisely where they either concur with, or depart from, this type of ethnography and universal historicism.<sup>12</sup> Otherwise the likelihood is that cultural memory will come to mean everything and nothing, a fashionable pot-pourri of revisiting history without negotiating the difficult hurdles faced over two hundred years ago by such Enlightenment thinkers as Schiller.

Having examined Schiller's notion of history, it will now be useful to consider the later essay, *Die Sendung Moses*, which would subsequently be revisited by Freud in his examination of monotheistic religion. Schiller's essay on Moses is an attempt to theorize the relationship of mythology and rationality. It is this relationship and the emergence of Judaism which are treated in Schiller's essay as the historical precedent for European subjectivity. In the essay, the historical figure of Moses is regarded as

12 Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans.) (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

the founder of Enlightenment. Schiller's Moses is a Hebrew brought up among Egyptians who combined the learning of an intellectual élite in Egypt with the mythological stake to Hebrew identity in order to lead an oppressed people to freedom with the instrument of a rational idea. To this extent his essay sees what Schiller calls the Hebrew nation as an important universal-historical people which has been treated with great injustice. At one point he uses a metaphor which unwittingly conveys all the ambivalence of Enlightenment liberalism – the Hebrew people is described as the ultimate, if impure, container for cultural memory:

Als ein unreines und gemeines Gefäß, worinn aber etwas sehr kostbares aufbewahret worden, müssen wir sie schätzen; wir müssen in ihr den Canal verehren, den, so unrein er auch war, die Vorsicht erwählte, uns das edelste aller Güter, die Wahrheit zuzuführen; den sie aber auch zerbrach, sobald er geleistet hatte, was er sollte. (Hahn: 378)

[We must respect it as an impure and common vessel which, for all its impurity, harbours something of great value. We must honour in it the channel in which, impure though it may be, that most noble of all things, the truth, could be conveyed to us, the truth which, coming into its own, broke the vessel which had stored it for all that time.]

Hebrew identity is hereby defined as the forerunner of European rationalism. Without the transition from the mythological worship of many gods to a rationally structured religion in which one god has a paradigmatic hold on the entire identity of a culture, there would be no foundation for the religion Schiller is interested in, namely Reason. The ambivalence of this cannot be overstated here. Egypt is understood as a cultivated state – the Hebrews on the other hand are oppressed and uneducated, incapable of producing a revolutionary saviour. Moses takes on that role only because he is a product of Egyptian culture. As such, he is in a position to utilize Egyptian philosophy for the salvation of his oppressed people. He does this with the help of a founding ritual initiation – the ten commandments are the ritual instigation of monotheistic religion; the story of their origin is invented by Moses using the conventions of ritual that

he learned in the cult of Isis worship among the Egyptian learned élite. Had Moses failed in his attempt to rescue his people, he would have fallen victim to their blind fanaticism (Hahn: 384). Therefore he needed a regulating idea that would give them a cohesive identity, and for this he appropriated the cultural rites and practices he had learned among the Egyptians. The mysteries and legend of the temple of Isis are turned from a moment of secrecy into a metaphor for truth underpinning the foundation of a future culture. The goddess Isis says 'I am that which is there' and on a pyramid at the temple is the inscription 'I am every thing that is, that was and that will be, no mortal human may raise my veil.' Schiller sees the goddess of the Egyptian legend as becoming merged with the Hebrew Jehovah to instigate a new name for that which cannot be named and also cannot be shown in images, Jao. In this way, he concludes, mythical, superstitious beliefs are incorporated into the identity of a separate religion, and this is bound together by Moses's promise to deliver his people from slavery. The political helplessness of the Hebrews, lost in mythology and in the worship of many gods, can thereby be transformed into a normative cultural identity:

Aus seinen Mysterien, aus seiner Priesterschule zu Heliopolis, erinnert er sich jetzt des wirksamen Instruments, wodurch ein kleiner Priester-Orden Millionen roher Menschen nach seinem Gefallen lenkte. Dieses Instrument ist kein andres, als das Vertrauen auf überirdischen Schutz, Glaube an übernatürliche Kräfte. Da er aber in der sichtbaren Welt, im natürlichen Lauf der Dinge nichts entdeckt, wodurch er seine unterdrückten Nation Muth machen kann, so knüpft er es an den Himmel. (Hahn: 390)

[From his mysteries, novitiate in Heliopolis, he recalls the effective instrument which enabled a small order of monks to mould millions of uncultivated people according to its wishes. This instrument is none other than trust in a divine protection and the belief in supernatural powers. Since he finds nothing in the visible world, the natural order of things, which would provide encouragement for his oppressed nation, he turns to the heavens for this.]



This is Schiller's comment on the emergence of culture and, by association, its memory. What it shows quite clearly is the epistemological role attributed to memory by Schiller, and his presupposition of how a mythological notion acquires the status of a founding truth.

Jan Assmann illuminates Schiller's position (Assman: 186–205). Firstly he establishes that Schiller's reading of Moses is largely plagiarized from the Kantian Karl Leonhard Reinhold. Reinhold's own interpretation derives in essence from the English cultural historian John Spencer, who, writing in the seventeenth century, used the terms *accomodatio*, *translatio*, *mutatio* and *derivatio* to account for the approximation of Egyptian cultural sources by Hebrew and subsequently Judeo-Christian culture (Assman: 107–8). Assmann regards Spencer as a key figure in the emergence of historicism and the comparative history of religion. What characterizes this investigation of the traditions combined at the roots of culture is, as Assmann argues, the idea of an origin. It is this belief in an origin that leads Spencer to make overly radical assumptions about all Hebrew laws and institutions as having been initially Egyptian. Furthermore, as Assmann also establishes, Spencer's historical approach strengthens the earlier 'discovery' of Egypt made by Marsilio Ficino who published the *Corpus Hermeticum* at the end of the fifteenth century (Assman: 110–11). Egypt is now doubly established as a cultural origin of Judeo-Christian identity at critical points in modern self-consciousness, firstly in the Renaissance and secondly in the Enlightenment. A fuller discussion of how cultural memory is formed and used would involve at this stage a consideration of the aesthetics of revelation on the level of hermeneutics, and also the role of the image in Weimar Classicism and Romanticism, since these two manifestations of Enlightenment rationalism are intricately concerned with both the idea and the normative function of the image. However, before concluding, I wish to return briefly to the starting point and to Nietzsche's misgivings about the uses of history.

## Beyond Enlightenment Historiography: Benjamin's Answer to Nietzsche

According to Nietzsche, culture, like the individual, depends on its ability to forget, since without this the burden of consciousness would be overwhelming. Nietzsche seems to answer conclusively, and in the negative, the Enlightenment historicist paradigm. With regard to the frequent and pragmatic use made of the past in stabilizing a contemporary idea, Nietzsche's warning seems all the more relevant. Nevertheless, there is equally no pressing reason to agree that a particular culture or indeed an individual must forget for the sake of sanity. Without falling into Schiller's trap of rescuing an ideal of reason from an origin in the interpreted past, it is possible to produce an imperative of cultural remembering; the most convincing example is Walter Benjamin in *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (1940).

Instead of stressing the impossibility of universal knowledge, Benjamin insists on the attempt to do justice to unwritten history. While Nietzsche points to the tragic impossibility of historical memory, Benjamin, without sacrificing Nietzsche's insight into the futility of the monumental gaze, does not give up on those whose suffering is blanketed in the writing of the past. Historical materialism, the type of cultural memory Benjamin tries to identify, looks to the inherent danger within any image of the past. A brief instant fixed and held in the historian's gaze should be seen, according to Benjamin, from the fearful perspective of the oppressed and the tyrannized.<sup>13</sup> Any moment in monumental history is inherently affirmative of the culture it pretends to describe in objective terms. It does not speak for the subjects of history since they are necessarily objectified, and poverty, war and annihilation become taken for

13 Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (eds), 6 vols (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1974), I/2, pp. 691–706 (p. 695).

granted. Historians cannot take account of the real experience of the subjects of history since historiography emerged in the interests of passing on cultural heritage as a valuable, objective document. Benjamin is essentially demanding a phenomenology of historical awareness, an unyielding resolve to write history by recreating and confronting the substance of fear. Only in this way is it possible to write from beyond the victorious monumentalizing gaze of the victors. Essentially, this represents an intentionality of concentrating on the catastrophic circumstances as they dawn upon the speechless victims of history.

Is Benjamin asking the impossible? No, because to write at all with historical intent is to somehow construe the past. As I hope to have shown, Schiller's universalist approach is already aware of that. At the same time, in recording history, we are not dealing with a random narratological act or an instance of pure aesthetic liberty. It is therefore justified to argue with Benjamin and against Nietzsche that not only do we have no right to forget, but that historiography must be attempted from the perspective of preventing impending disaster, and therefore always with a subjective concession that suffering, unless we intervene, will be repeated. Therefore the historian's declaration of intent with regard to the phenomenon of suffering is of paramount importance. Critical historiography does not need Nietzsche's therapeutic forgetting, but Benjamin's relentless evocation of the facts that are not easy to find, the memory that no culture readily adorns itself with. Critical Cultural Studies as a discipline is often informed by Benjamin's catastrophic analysis of history.

The roots of cultural memory are in specific efforts of Cultural Studies, and its path has always been one of investigation into disciplinary boundaries. Since it is to some extent tied in with the disciplinary identity of Cultural Studies today, it is subject to the same pressures and must continue to insist on its critical stance. Should it cease to be identified with the problems of memory, it runs the risk of being usurped as a meaningless label, a fashionable answer to deconstruction, a

return to the archive, a well-intentioned but epistemologically redundant plea for accountability. That this should happen would not be attributable to models of cultural memory initiated by Benjamin or Simmel or, in contemporary terms, Assmann or Harth. In passing from specialized and innovative foundational studies, cultural memory should not, inadvertently as it is seen to 'replace' deconstruction, be divested of its more nuanced positions. Understanding culture means, as Ernst Cassirer pointed out, accounting for the predicative role of symbolic impression in the writing of culture of which historiography is necessarily a part. Therefore, in order to understand culture it is not enough to rely on an empirical distinction between 'facts' and 'theory': all facts are construed in a particular judgemental context.<sup>14</sup>

What I hope to have shown, is not simply the limitations of Schiller's Enlightenment historiography, but that a generalizing of the concept of cultural memory today would not only be making the same universalist mistakes as Schiller, it would also be choosing to forget, which in this sense would be wholly Nietzschean and without regard for what Benjamin terms, in an extraordinary metaphor, an 'angel of history'. Referring to a work by Paul Klee, Benjamin compares the historian to the depiction of an angel in mid-flight, half-facing the shocking sight which he is already leaving behind. Although he is moving away, the angel, or Benjamin's historian, does not avert his gaze. This metaphor allows for two perspectives, the angel's retrospective focus on the catastrophe and the impression of those as yet facing it: the same event, in other words, before and after (Benjamin: 697). Benjamin's attempt to capture both perspectives on history is not confined to the experience of fascism, it applies to any critical refusal to forget that anyone could find themselves on the wrong side of history: either nothing is written in stone, or everything is.

14 Ernst Cassirer, *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften: fünf Studien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994), p. 17.

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CAROL BAXTER

## Communal Memory as a Response to Crisis: The Community of Port-Royal, 1661–1711

It is often said that history is written by the victors. It might also be said that history is forgotten by the victors. They can afford to forget, while the losers are unable to accept what has happened and are condemned to brood over it, relive it, and reflect how different it might have been.

Peter Burke's statement in an essay on history and social memory helps to set the context for an exploration of the process by which communal memory was constructed within the Port-Royal community; it was a process which developed as a response to crisis.<sup>1</sup> This chapter argues that the circumstances of religious controversy (in which the nuns of Port-Royal<sup>2</sup> came to be regarded as heretics for their defence of Augustinianism and association with the Jansenist movement) fundamentally shaped the form in which communal memory was crafted by the community.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, as the creation of a tragic and

- 1 Peter Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 54.
- 2 Classic accounts of the history of Port-Royal are given, *inter alia*, in [Charles Augustin] Sainte-Beuve, *Port-Royal* Maxime Leroy (ed.), 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1955); Louis Cognet, *La réforme de Port-Royal 1591–1618* (Paris: Sulliver, 1950); F. Ellen Weaver, *The Evolution of the Reform of Port-Royal: from the Rule of Cîteaux to Jansenism* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1978), and Antoine Adam, *Du mysticisme à la révolte [:] les jansénistes du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1968).
- 3 General accounts of Jansenism which provide overviews of its history and theological development include Françoise Hildesheimer, *Le Jansénisme en France aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Publisud, 1991) or, from a more partisan perspective, Augustin Gazier, *Histoire générale du mouvement janséniste depuis ses origines jusqu'à nos jours*, 6th edn, 2 vols (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1924). Jean Delumeau and Monique Cottret eluci-

heroic mythology of communal resistance became a factor in increasing the community's refusal to countenance compromise, the discourse of memory which had developed to defend the nuns' reputations against allegations of heresy became itself, in turn, an active force in fostering their resistance. The term 'communal memory' is used in this context to convey the intensity of the collective memory developed by a community bound by a common life-purpose, and by a shared experience of what it viewed as persecution.

While the Port-Royal community had been returned to the rigour of full observance of the Rule of St. Benedict by its then-abbess, Angélique Arnauld, in 1609, the process of collecting the *mémoires*/memories of those involved in consolidating the Port-Royal reform began as late as 1652. Some devotional texts had been written in earlier decades, most notably *Le Chapelet Secret du Saint-Sacrement* – a mystical contemplation of the sacrament of the Eucharist by Mère Agnès Arnauld, a sister of Mère Angélique.<sup>4</sup> However, it is interesting that the preservation of historical artefacts was not initially accorded priority. There is evidence, for instance, to suggest that a prioress hostile to Angélique Arnauld, Mère Jeanne de Pourlan, actually destroyed letters to the former from St. François de Sales in 1630

date Jansenism's position within Catholicism in *Le Catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire*, 6th edn (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), 1996. Recent works on eighteenth-century Jansenism include Monique Cottret, *Jansénismes et Lumières [:] pour un autre XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998); Dale K. Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution [:] from Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560–1791* (New Haven, CT, London: Yale University Press, 1996); Catherine Maire, *De la cause de Dieu à la cause de la nation: le jansénisme au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), and Marie-José Michel, *Jansénisme et Paris 1640–1730* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2000).

- 4 Louis Cognet has dated the printing of this text to 1626. However, he does indicate that it was intended for limited circulation at that time. Louis Cognet, 'Le Chapelet Secret du Saint-Sacrement', in *Société des Amis de Port-Royal* (Paris: Bibliothèque Mazarine, 1951), pp. 3–14.

and 1631, believing them to be of no merit.<sup>5</sup> The few memoirs written in the late 1630s differed in character from those produced in the 1650s and were primarily concerned with defending Mère Angélique's actions in establishing, and later leaving, the short-lived *Institut du Saint-Sacrement* rather than with recording the community's history.<sup>6</sup>

It would seem that the catalyst for the community's codification of its communal memory from the 1650s onwards was provided by the Jansenist controversy itself. By the 1650s, the Port-Royal nuns, in common with other disciples of Augustinianism, were aware that opponents were actively soliciting the pope's condemnation of Cornelius Jansen's *Augustinus* – five contested propositions from this work were subsequently condemned in 1653.<sup>7</sup> It was apparent that the nexus of beliefs professed by the Port-Royal nuns was being pushed into a position of heterodoxy within the Roman Catholic Church. It was necessary, therefore, to produce a record which would defend Port-Royal's reputation by underlining the two aspects of its history on which supporters and opponents were in

5 Fabian Gastellier, *Angélique Arnauld* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), p. 160.

6 The three texts written to defend Mère Angélique's action were [Catherine Arnauld Le Maître] *Relation de ce qui a précédé l'établissement du monastère du Saint-Sacrement, et de ce qui est arrivé depuis jusqu'en 1636*; [Angélique Arnauld] *Relation concernant les raisons qui ont engagé la Mère Marie-Angélique Arnauld à faire sortir son monastère de la juridiction de l'ordre de Cîteaux, pour le soumettre à celle de l'ordinaire*; [Angélique Arnauld] *Relation de la conduite que M. Zamet évêque de Langres a tenu à l'égard du monastère de Port-Royal, de la Maison du Saint-Sacrement, de M. l'abbé de Saint-Cyran et de la Mère Angélique, pour servir d'éclaircissement et de réponse à un mémoire de ce prélat*.

7 Jacques Gres-Gayer, for instance, provides a detailed history of the process by which those with 'Jansenist' sympathies were gradually marginalized within, or expelled from, the Sorbonne's theological faculty as Jansenism came to be regarded as heterodox. See Jacques M. Gres-Gayer, *Le Jansénisme en Sorbonne 1643–1656* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1996).



agreement, namely the exemplary nature of its early reform and the saintliness of its reformer, Angélique Arnauld.<sup>8</sup>

In this initial phase, the focus of the process of remembering rested on the figure of Angélique Arnauld. While many nuns were engaged in the activity of assembling and recovering both oral and written testimony, the narrative structure developed at this stage recorded their lives only at their points of interaction with, and in relation to, that of Angélique. Geneviève Pineau's description of the circumstances of her entry into Port-Royal, for instance, was motivated by the objective of representing Angélique as an instrument of God. Pineau gave a striking account of how Angélique felt compelled by what she viewed as a divine force directing her actions to force Geneviève to enter the community – Geneviève included a dramatic image of clinging physically to the grille of the convent while Angélique tried to urge her into the cloister.<sup>9</sup>

In this narrative, as in most others, a theme was brought to the fore which would later form an important element in the communal memory constructed at Port-Royal, namely the role of divine grace in directing the actions of the community. Angélique Arnauld had expressed interest in writing 'un livre de la Providence de Dieu' [a book of God's Providence] which

- 8 Interestingly, Pascale Mengotti-Thouvenin argues that another early text, Catherine Arnauld's account of the life of her mother, Catherine de Sainte-Félicité Arnauld, which underlined the exemplary quality of the latter's life, was itself written to highlight the saintliness of the Port-Royal community at a time (1641) when Port-Royal's spiritual director, the abbé de Saint-Cyran, was in prison and the Port-Royal reform was being challenged. Pascale Mengotti-Thouvenin, 'Port-Royal, laboratoire de mémoires', in *Chroniques de Port-Royal* [:] *Port-Royal et les mémoires* [:] *actes du colloque organisé par la Société des Amis de Port-Royal à Port-Royal des Champs le 17 et 18 Septembre 1998*, No. 48, Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, 1999, p. 17.
- 9 Geneviève Pineau, *Relation de ma soeur Genevieve Pineau*, an undated manuscript contained in PR 44, a collection of miscellaneous manuscripts held at the Bibliothèque de Port-Royal, pp. 281–2 [note: pagination was added later].

would indicate ‘ce que Dieu avait fait pour nous’ [what God had done for us].<sup>10</sup> Antoine Le Maître accordingly persuaded her to write an autobiography, the *Relation écrite par la Mère Marie-Angélique Arnauld de ce qui est arrivé de plus considérable dans Port-Royal*, in 1654–55 which had the explicit aim of outlining the gifts of grace bestowed by God on her community. The presence within Port-Royal’s communal memory of the belief that the community enjoyed divine favour was already evident from the start of this process of remembering.

In 1661, two events took place that served to transform the process of codification of communal memory at Port-Royal. In common with other religious communities, the Port-Royal nuns were ordered to sign a Formulary condemning as heretical the contested propositions allegedly drawn from Jansen’s work.<sup>11</sup> They refused to do so for a series of reasons, including the fear that this might involve an implicit condemnation of Augustinianism.<sup>12</sup> They also believed that as they did not know whether

10 According to the *Avertissement* to the memoir, published in 1742, ‘elle [Mère Angélique] nous disait fort souvent [...] qu’elle aurait eu sujet de faire un Livre de la Providence de Dieu, tant elle en avait fait d’expériences [...] de crainte que nous ne vinssions à oublier ce que Dieu avait fait pour nous [She often told us that she had reason to write a book recording God’s providence since she had experienced it so often and feared that otherwise we would begin to forget what God had done for us], *Relation écrite par la Mère Marie-Angélique Arnauld de ce qui est arrivé de plus considérable dans Port-Royal*, in [Angélique de Saint-Jean Arnauld d’Andilly] *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire de Port-Royal et à la vie de la Révérende Mere Marie Angélique de Ste-Madeleine Arnauld*, 2 vols (Utrecht, 1742), vol. 1, pp. 262–3.

11 The most detailed account of the controversy over the signature of the Formulary is to be found in Sainte-Beuve, op. cit.

12 Angélique de Saint-Jean’s spiritual reflections confirm that the nuns perceived themselves to be persecuted because they were disciples of St. Augustine, ‘nous sommes en cette occasion les victimes qu’on a choisies pour immoler à la passion de ceux qui voudroient perdre tous les Disciples de S. Augustin, [...]’ [We are the victims who have been chosen to be sacrificed by those obsessed with destroying all of St. Augustine’s disciples], [Angélique de Saint-Jean Arnauld d’Andilly] *Reflexions de la*

or not the contested propositions were in the *Augustinus*, they might perjure themselves and risk eternal damnation, if they attested publicly to something of which they were in ignorance.<sup>13</sup> In response, Louis XIV ordered the removal of all students and postulants in April 1661. Furthermore, in August 1661, Mère Angélique died. Her death, depriving her community of a tangible link with the origin of its reform, appears to have generated an anxiety within Port-Royal that the relationship with its past would be broken if the nuns did not embark on a process of preserving the historical testimony crucial to the community's identity.<sup>14</sup> The fear that the communal memory of its 'reformer' would be lost, emerges strongly from the preface written by Mère Angélique de Saint-Jean to introduce her biography of her aunt, Mère Angélique, which provides confirmation that this was a primary motivational factor prompting the process of communal remembering:

*R. Mere Angelique de S. Jean Arnaud, Abbesse de P.R. des Champs, pour préparer ses Soeurs à la persecution, conformément aux Avis que la R. Mere Agnès avoit laissés sur cette matiere aux Religieuses de ce Monastere* (no place of publication, 1737), p. 7.

- 13 In their *acte* of 5 July 1664, the nuns pleaded ignorance regarding the issue of whether the contested propositions were in the *Augustinus*, 'ne sçachant point si les heresies condamnées sont dans le livre d'un Evesque Catholique que nous sommes incapables de lire; nous sommes incapables aussi de rendre témoignage par une signature publique de ce fait [...]' [not knowing if the condemned heresies are in a Catholic bishop's book which we are unable to read, we are unable as a consequence to attest by our public signature to the truth of this fact], *Divers actes des religieuses de Port-Royal du Saint Sacrement. Touchant l'Ordonnance de Monseigneur l'Archevesque de Paris, par laquelle il exige la foy humaine du fait de Jansenius. Et les étranges violences qui leur ont esté faites en consequence de ce commandement* (no place or date of publication cited [1664]), pp. 2–3.
- 14 Weaver confirms that the nuns were ordered by Mère Agnès Arnauld to record their memories of Mère Angélique following her death, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

après la mort de la Mere Angélique, (qui arriva en 1661.) [...] toutes les Sœurs desirant qu'on ne laissât pas effacer une memoire aussi precieuse [...] la Mere Agnès (sa sœur) ordonna que toutes les Sœurs écrivissent chacune à part ce qu'elles auroient pu savoir de particulier, afin que cela servît de Memoires.<sup>15</sup>

[Following Mother Angélique's death (which took place in 1661), as all of the nuns desired that such a precious memory should not be lost, Mother Agnès (her sister) ordered that every sister should each record her individual memories so that these might serve as a memoir.]

It could also be argued that this factor was coupled with a consciousness that Port-Royal's stance of public disobedience necessarily introduced an element of precariousness into the community's future existence, thus making it more imperative to secure its historical record and ultimate legacy. This interpretation has been confirmed by Constance Cagnat-Deboeuf who argues that a process of mythification developed which served both to justify the community's actions and to perform a compensatory function by substituting a positive, mythical image for the painful reality in which it was enmeshed.<sup>16</sup> Resistance facilitated the production of a discourse of communal memory at Port-Royal by providing the motive for the nuns to abandon the compulsory rule of silence. The decision to break the rule of silence was justified as an essential strategy in defending a divine cause and the community's reputation.

From 1661 onwards, Port-Royal's communal memory was built up through two separate but intertwining narrative processes: on the one hand, individual nuns were encouraged to prepare personal memoirs of key events in the evolution of the community<sup>17</sup> while, on the other hand, during the period of

15 *Avant-propos* by Mère Angélique de Saint-Jean Arnauld d'Andilly in *Memoires pour servir à l'histoire de Port-Royal*, op. cit., vol. I, p. 5.

16 'Port-Royal et l'autobiographie', p. 235 in *Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Études Françaises*, No. 49, Paris, May 1997, 223–42.

17 Even at the early stages of communal remembering, quite a few nuns were involved in the process of gathering information. Mère Angélique de Saint-Jean recalled how she had drawn on the memories of older

greatest crisis, in the 1660s, a key editorial group led by Mère Angélique de Saint-Jean was formed to craft the collective memory into a mythology of martyrdom.<sup>18</sup> The discourse of memory developed from 1661 onwards was fundamentally different in character to that of the 1650s in that what became pivotal at this stage was a reiteration of the collective nature of the process of remembering. Narratives no longer revolved exclusively around a single dominant figure, but now also emphasized shared participation in a common experience. The forms used to express the communal memory reflected the newly emerging emphasis on the collective rather than the individual. From 1661 until 1664, and again from 1665 until 1669, daily journals were collectively prepared,<sup>19</sup> focusing on the evolution of the nuns' resistance and on the adverse measures being taken against them by the ecclesiastical and secular authorities to force their submission.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Angélique de

nuns such as Sr. Catherine de S. Paul (Goulas), Sr. Anne de S. Augustin (Garnier) and Sr. Marie-Marcelle when she first started work on her biography of her aunt in 1652. She had previously consulted Mère Agnès, Sr. Marie-Claire Arnauld and Sr. Catherine de Saint-Jean Le Maître. Simultaneously, Antoine Le Maître asked Sr. Marie de l'Incarnation (le Conte) to get information from Mère Angélique and to record those reminiscences.

- 18 This is confirmed in Anne-Claire Josse: 'La politique editorial Port-Royaliste: le cas d'Antoine Singlin', *Mémoire de DEA d'histoire sociale, des cultures, des idées, des sciences, des religions*. Université de Paris-Nord (Paris XIII), 1999.
- 19 The journal of the period from 1665 until 1669, for instance, was subsequently printed as *Journaux de ce qui s'est passé a Port-Royal, depuis que la Communauté fut transférée à Port-Royal des Champs, jusques à la paix qui leur fut renduë en 1669*. The printed version of this text is to be found in *Divers actes*, op. cit.
- 20 The manuscript of Mère Angélique de Saint-Jean Arnauld d'Andilly's account of the history of the community between 1661 and 1662, *Relation de de qui s'est passé a Port-Royal depuis le commencement d'Avril 1661. jusques au 29. du même mois de l'année suivante 1662*, is still extant at the Bibliothèque de Port-Royal. This manuscript (PR 71) is considered to be

Saint-Jean initiated the practice of having most public documents of resistance (appeals to the Parlement de Paris, to the king and archbishop, accounts of their persecution, reiterations of the theological bases for their stance) collectively signed by the community as a whole.<sup>21</sup> While this strategy was probably intended to demonstrate publicly the united nature of the community's resistance, it helped to reinforce each nun's sense of shared participation in, and active engagement with, the campaign of resistance.

Furthermore, the physical process of producing a discourse of communal memory was itself highly collective in nature. Many nuns were involved either in writing biographies of fellow-sisters, collecting material about the Port-Royal reform from those unable to prepare their own narratives, or in providing testimony of aspects of the community's history. These accounts were then edited by Angélique de Saint-Jean, assisted by a series of nuns such as Elizabeth-Agnés Le Féron and Christine Briquet who performed key scribal functions and copied manuscripts for wider circulation.<sup>22</sup> Angélique de Saint-Jean's own captivity narrative, for instance, written in July 1665, was copied and circulated to a series of supporters, including the bishop of Alet by 1666.<sup>23</sup> One might suggest that the physical

in Mère Angélique de Saint-Jean's own handwriting and has corrections by Antoine Arnauld.

- 21 Examples of texts collectively signed include: *Declaration des Religieuses de Port-Royal, touchant leurs actes qui ont été imprimez, s.l., 1664*; *Requête présentée au Roy par les Religieuses du Port-Royal des Champs en mars 1707, s.l., 1707*; *Requête présentée à son Eminence Monseigneur le Cardinal de Noailles Archevêque de Paris, par les Religieuses du Port-Royal des Champs au mois d'octobre 1707* (no place of publication cited, 1707).
- 22 Other nuns involved in copying key manuscripts included Sr. Suzanne de Sainte-Catherine de Champagne, the daughter of the painter, Philippe de Champagne, who copied a version of the *Constitutions de Port-Royal* in 1662. Weaver, op. cit., p. 83.
- 23 Mère Angélique de Saint-Jean's unease at the decision to circulate a copy of her *relation* to the bishop of Alet was conveyed in a letter to Antoine Arnauld. See Angélique de Saint-Jean Arnauld d'Andilly,

process of crafting personal reminiscences into texts, by forcing the nuns to revisit key episodes in the community's history, served in itself to embed a process of collective memory. It might also be argued that the process of retrieving and disseminating the testimony of older nuns also facilitated the creation of a homogeneous communal identity as a common pool of memories was shared across generations.

It is possible to see the linkage between autobiography and identity in the *mémoires* written by the Port-Royal nuns: as autobiographical accounts served not only to probe the lives of their authors, but also to reinforce the collective identity of the community. When Mère Agnès ordered that each of the nuns who had been held in captivity should write an account of her experience, the 'relations de captivité' [accounts of captivity], the process was simultaneously individual and collective. Angélique de Saint-Jean's account could be described on one level as an intensely personal narrative, outlining how her resilience had been shaken by an experience of despair. In a letter to Antoine Arnauld, she explained how the account was intended as a confession of her sinfulness and of the divine grace bestowed on her during her period of captivity:

mon principal dessein, quand je l'ai écrite, n'a été que d'exposer au jugement de mes Confesseurs, quelle avoit été ma conduite [...] dans l'esperance que leur charité m'aideroit à reconnoître les graces que Dieu m'y a faites, & à remarquer les fautes que je puis y avoir commises.<sup>24</sup>

[my primary aim when I wrote it was to outline my conduct to my confessors in the hope that their support would help me to recognize the grace which God had bestowed on me and to identify the sins which I might have committed during that period.]

*Lettres de la Mere Angelique de S. Jean à Mr. Arnaud, écrites depuis que la Communauté fut transferée à Port-Royal des Champs jusqu'à la paix de l'Eglise*, p. 2 in *Divers actes*, op.cit.

24 *Lettres de la Mere Angélique*, op. cit., p. 2.

However, when the ultimate message of her text – that only with God’s grace could the individual receive the strength to persevere in her resistance – was echoed in each of the other captivity narratives, the personal experience was transformed into a defining element in the communal memory.<sup>25</sup> Resistance was equated with divine favour and, consequently, with virtue, while capitulation revealed the individual’s hidden unworthiness and sinfulness.<sup>26</sup> The accounts of those who had submitted and signed the Formulary served to reinforce this message. Their narratives, drawing heavily on the model of Augustine’s *Confessions*,<sup>27</sup> revolved around the confession of the sin of signature and emphasized how pride and sinfulness had trapped them into submission.<sup>28</sup>

- 25 Cagnat-Debœuf confirms the primary religious focus of the process of remembering at Port-Royal, ‘les autobiographes de Port-Royal se distinguent surtout des autres mémorialistes du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle par le dessein religieux qui les anime: c’est sur leur itinéraire spirituel que leur récit entend mettre l’accent, à la manière d’Augustin dans ses *Confessions*.’ [The Port-Royal autobiographies are characterized by the religious objective which infuses them – their narrative aims to emphasize their spiritual journey in the manner of Augustine in his *Confessions*.], Cagnat-Debœuf, op. cit., p. 227
- 26 When Sr. Angélique de Sainte-Thérèse Arnauld d’Andilly, a sister of Mère Angélique de Saint-Jean Arnauld d’Andilly, signed the Formulary (which she subsequently retracted), she experienced an overwhelming sense of her own sinfulness, *Relation de la Soeur Marie Angélique de Sainte Therese Arnauld d’Andilly, sur l’enlèvement & la captivité de la Mere Catherine Agnés de Saint Paul Arnauld sa tante, avec laquelle elle fut mise au Monastere de Sainte Marie du Faubourg Saint Jacques à Paris*, p. 45 in *Divers actes*, op. cit.
- 27 See Mengotti-Thouvenin, op. cit., who confirms that St. Augustine’s *Confessions* was a model for the nuns’ accounts, p. 38. Similarly, Cagnat-Debœuf shows how Mère Angélique de Saint-Jean viewed her *relation* as a confession in which she could enumerate the sins committed during her captivity and highlight the grace which she had received from God during the same period. Cagnat-Debœuf, op. cit., pp. 227–30.
- 28 See also the *relation de captivité* written by Sr. Candide Le Cerf, *Relation de ma Soeur Madeleine de Ste. Candide Le Cerf. Contenant les choses*



The uniformity of themes across individual captivity accounts highlights a distinctive characteristic of Port-Royal's discourse of communal memory, namely the stability of representations and priorities from 1661 until the community's dispersal in 1709.<sup>29</sup> The dominant messages conveyed in the nuns' narratives of memory emphasized the community's saintliness, the justice of their stance of resistance and the injustice of their persecution. Thus, what was emphasized in the account of the life of a key resistance figure, Sr. Eustoquie de Flécelles de Brégy, prepared after her death in 1684, for instance, was her courageous witness to the truth: 'Pendant le cours de la persecution de 1664, aucune des Religieuses de Port-Roial ne rendit à la verité un témoignage plus éclatant [During the course of

*principales qui se sont passées depuis son enlevement de Port-Royal de Paris*, p. 142 in *Divers Actes*, op. cit.

- 29 The consistency in the strategies and arguments used by the community throughout the period of resistance can be seen most markedly in two texts, written 43 years apart, in 1664 and 1707, and yet almost identical in the arguments justifying the use of public appeals defending their position. In both cases, the nuns justified their decision to break religious silence on the basis that they would be criminal before God if they remained silent in the face of efforts to destroy their monastery. Thus, in a letter to the king in March 1707, the nuns wrote, 'Cette conduite, Sire, nous met dans la triste nécessité de rompre le silence que nous voudrions garder toute nôtre vie, & qui jusqu'ici a fait notre plus douce consolation. Mais nous nous croirions tres-criminelles devant Dieu aussi bien que devant V. M. si dans une occasion où il s'agit de la destruction entiere de notre Maison, nous negligions de faire connoître à V. M. que tout ce qu'on lui allegue contre nous, ne sont que de vains pretextes qui n'ont aucun fondement.' *Requete présentée au Roy par les Religieuses du Port-Royal des Champs en mars 1707* (no place or date of publication cited [1707]), pp. 2–3. [This conduct, Sire, forces us sadly to break the silence which we would wish to observe throughout our lives and which has, up to now, been our sweetest consolation. However, we would believe ourselves sinful both towards God and Your Majesty if, on an occasion where the complete destruction of our monastery is at stake, we were to neglect to inform Your Majesty that the allegations made against us are without foundation].

the persecution in 1664, none of the Port-Royal nuns gave more striking witness to the Truth].<sup>30</sup>

This thematic uniformity was probably facilitated by the predominant use of the 'nécrologe' or necrology, a narrative type which was highly schematic in nature, as one of the most important narrative forms from the late 1660s onwards.<sup>31</sup> The 'nécrologes' consisted of hagiographical accounts of the lives and virtues of dead sisters and were intended to highlight the exemplary quality of these women's lives.<sup>32</sup> Pascale Mengotti-Thouvenin has compared them to medieval legends of saints' lives as they drew on a limited repertoire of topoi to represent the life in question.<sup>33</sup> The 'nécrologes', in particular, provided a useful mechanism for embedding key elements of the community's mythology into communal memory as each biography was re-read to the community annually on the anniversary of the

30 *Necrologe de l'abbaye de Nôtre-Dame de Port-Roïal des Champs, Ordre de Cîteaux, Institut du Saint Sacrement, qui contient les eloges historiques avec les epitaphes des fondateurs & bienfaiteurs de ce monastère, & des autres personnes de distinction, qui l'ont obligé par leurs services, honoré d'une affection particulière, illustré par la profession monastique, édifié par leur pénitence & leur piété, sanctifié par leur mort, ou par leur sépulture* (Amsterdam: Nicolas Potgieter, 1723), p. 510.

31 These were later printed in the *Necrologe* and in [Lefebvre de Saint-Marc], *Supplément au Nécrologe de l'Abbaye de Notre-Dame de Port-Roïal des Champs, Ordre de Cîteaux, Institut du S<sup>t</sup> Sacrement* (no place of publication provided, 1735).

32 The exemplary purpose of the *nécrologe* is made explicitly clear in the preface to the text: 'Comme leur principal, pour ne pas dire, leur unique but étoit de s'édifier elles-mêmes & d'édifier leur Sœurs, à qui l'on en faisoit la lecture en Chapitre au jour de l'anniversaire de chacun de ces illustres morts, elles se sont presque toujours bornées à n'y rapporter que les faits propres à nourrir leur piété, & à les instruire de leurs devoirs.' [As their principal, indeed only, objective was to edify themselves and their sisters to whom these biographies were read during Chapter on the anniversary of each of these illustrious deaths, they almost always limited themselves to recording only those facts which would nourish their piety and instruct them in their duties], *Necrologe*, op. cit., pp. IV-V.

33 Mengotti-Thouvenin, op. cit., pp. 33-4.

person's death. This process of ritual repetition of highly schematic texts seems to confirm Maurice Halbwachs' argument that collective memory is shaped by rituals of commemoration.<sup>34</sup>

The consistency of narrative and representational strategies used in the discourse of memory crafted at Port-Royal not only forged a communal identity which interpreted its resistance to authority as the defence of a divine cause. It also fostered a certain mental rigidity which prevented the nuns from being able to countenance the option of signing the Formulary. Thus, while the communal emphasis on remembering ensured that the community of 1709 had access to the resistance texts of the previous generation, it was effectively imprisoned within the framework of this cohesive communal identity and unable psychologically to develop a new perspective. Communal memory became simultaneously a psychological support and a strait-jacket for the later generation.

The Port-Royal nuns were highly successful in constructing a communal memory which contributed to their notion of themselves as a spiritual élite chosen by God to defend a saintly cause. If such a conscious effort was made by the Port-Royal community to construct a collective historical memory which would shape its subsequent historical legacy, why did its memory remain so contested within the Catholic Church? Why was the community not more effective in persuading future generations of Catholics of the orthodoxy of its cause? One explanation is provided by Halbwachs's conceptualization of collective memory. His idea that the collective frameworks of memory help to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of our society provides a useful analytical tool for understanding Port-Royal's failure to have its communal memory accepted within

34 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited, translated and with an introduction by Lewis A. Coser, *The Heritage of Sociology* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), originally published as *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952), pp. 38–40.

the wider societal collective memory.<sup>35</sup> It is apparent that the memory constructed by the Port-Royal nuns could only have been accepted if it had accorded with the predominant thoughts of its society. Furthermore, the space for a dissenting collective memory was even less available within the sphere of collective religious memory where, as Halbwachs argues, new dogma or collective traditions can be incorporated only if they are perceived to fortify the existing tradition.<sup>36</sup> It is possible to see the creation of Port-Royal's communal memory as an attempt to oppose the ecclesiastical establishment's sole authority to determine religious tradition and memory. However, the Port-Royal nuns finally had to accept that they would occupy what Henry Phillips has termed a space of opposition. Phillips has argued that bearing witness became more important than survival.<sup>37</sup> I would add, in conclusion, that the process of

35 As Halbwachs states, 'the collective frameworks of memory are not constructed after the fact by the combination of individual recollections; nor are they empty forms where recollections coming from elsewhere would insert themselves. Collective frameworks are, to the contrary, precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of our society.' *Idem.*, p. 40.

36 'The memory of religious groups claims to be fixed once and for all. It either obliges others to adapt themselves to its dominant representations, or it systematically ignores them [...]', *ibid.*, pp. 91–2. Confirmation of Halbwachs's description of the conservative process by which religious institutions change is provided by Hans Küng: 'At all times and in all places, traditional *theology* has been extremely suspicious of the category of the *novum*, [...] The attitude has maintained that *innovators* were heresiarchs, heretics, enemies of the church and also of the state; seduced by Satan and their own doubts; stubbornly persisting in their pride and rigid outlook.' Hans Küng: 'Paradigm change in theology: a proposal for discussion', pp. 3–4 in Hans Küng and David Tracy (eds), *Paradigm Change in Theology [:] a Symposium for the Future*, Margaret Köhl (trans.) (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), pp. 3–33.

37 Henry Phillips, *Church and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 205.

bearing witness by reinforcing a communal identity born out of resistance not only became of paramount importance but also ultimately prevented survival.

SÍOFRA PIERSE

## A Sceptic Witness: Voltaire's Vision of Historiography

There is no shortage of eighteenth-century commentary on questions of historiography and memory. Whilst Goldsmith sings to 'Memory! Thou fond deceiver', a record in *Walpoliana* notes that the Whig leader and prime minister Robert Walpole, first Earl of Oxford, remarked to his son Horatio that he could stomach 'anything but history, for history must be false'.<sup>1</sup> The implication in Walpole's statement is that the whole question of truth and fact in history, with the concomitant discussion of truth in eighteenth-century historiography, was a pivotal focus. It was, in fact, one which marked out the difference between Voltaire's theories of historiography and those of his contemporaries. Nor is the issue of truth and its articulation in works of history or memory one that has yet been resolved, as is clear from its modern-day depiction by Walter Benjamin: 'The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again.'<sup>2</sup> Amongst eighteenth-century historians, the entire historiographical approach and viewpoint of each could be said to be reflected in their actual interpretation of historical truth and in any consequent demonstrations, real or feigned, of authorial deference to a pre-extant *truth*.<sup>3</sup>

1 Horatio Walpole, *Walpoliana* (Dublin: Printed by B. Smith for the Proprietors, 1800), 1, p. 60.

2 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, H. Zohn (trans.) (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 255.

3 The following convention will be adopted throughout this paper: in order to convey a deference by contemporary historians to an alleged pre-extant historical truth, the term 'the one truth' will be used.

This chapter will consider the question of truth in eighteenth-century French history in order to explore further the hazy boundaries between history and memory, and between historiography and remembering. Firstly, three historians who were contemporaries of Voltaire will be examined for their treatment of the problem of historical truth. Secondly, focus will turn to the question of truth in contemporary historical novels, as a genre which closely mimicked history. Finally, a link will be drawn between, on the one hand, Voltaire's declared approach to the question of truth in history and, on the other hand, his unusual vision of a new type of historiography, taking into account the wider implications of this vision.

## Voltaire's Contemporaries' Approach to the Question of Truth in History

It could be said that the very linchpin of eighteenth-century French historiography was the declaration of adherence to the immutable principle of history as truth. In French historiographical circles in the period from the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century, this insistence on *vérité* was one of the primary tenets of history. On closer inspection, truth is actually established in a number of ways. Crucially, the status of the historian and the source of the information are held up as proof of the truth and veracity of a history.

As it happens, the history of Charles XII of Sweden was studied by several historians of the time, and thus offers a convenient common ground for the purposes of comparison. This particular interest in Charles XII can be attributed in large part to his youth and charisma, and to his sweeping military campaigns and successes – not unlike the appeal of Louis XIV. Among the many historians who, in addition to Voltaire, wrote histories of Charles XII, King of Sweden, are Jean-Léonor Grimarest, Willem Theyls and the abbé de Vertot. These last

three historians later served as historical sources for Voltaire's own history of Charles XII. Firstly, Grimarest, an historian of the rather long-winded and over-inventive school, typically establishes his authority at the outset by insisting upon his impeccable lineage as an historian and on his resultant entitlement to write the history of Charles XII, even if geographically situated very far from the action. His heavy stress is on the assertion that he has very close access to the real truth. He quotes his sources just to prove that he hears his history at first hand, out of the proverbial mouths of the protagonists, thus supporting his repeated and forceful claims to veracity and authenticity:

Je tiens tout ce que j'avance de la bouche même de plusieurs Officiers, qui ont été témoins des Actions de ce grand Roi: Et pour m'assurer davantage de leur certitude, je m'en suis informé à des Personnes du Parti opposé qui se sont fait honneur d'en avouer la vérité. Et le Public n'auroit rien à souhaiter davantage, si un Auteur plus entendu que moi la lui avoit renduë.<sup>4</sup>

[Everything I assert comes directly from the very mouth of several officers who witnessed the actions of this great King. And to further guarantee their reliability, I asked people from the opposing faction who, to their credit, acknowledged their truth. And the public could not wish for more if a more famous author than I had reported on this to them.]

So, whilst inadvertently revealing a certain inferiority complex, the historiographer insists that *vérité* may be ascertained by consultation with both warring factions and that the truth surely lies in the correspondence and coincidence of the factual details. Not only does this point towards the existence of one truth but, as Grimarest's text indicates, truth is depicted as being immutable, regardless of who the purveyor may be. This is, of course, deeply ironic, in that it is openly acknowledged in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century historiography that an

4 Jean-Léonor Le Gallois de Grimarest, *Les Campagnes de Charles XII, roi de Suède* (Paris: J. Le Febvre, 1705), Avertissement.



unverified story can come into common circulation as truth and in time be recorded as history, as La Mothe le Vayer expresses in such an artless fashion:

Il est mesmes du devoir d'un Historien d'écrire assez ordinairement des choses qu'il ne croit point, ne fust-ce que pour remarquer ce qui a esté tenu pour constant par le peuple.<sup>5</sup>

[It is even the duty of the Historian commonly to record things that he does not consider true, if only to set down those matters which have always been asserted by the people.]

Reality of this kind could be interpreted as an early articulation of Goebbels's dictum: 'a lie told over and over again becomes a truth.'<sup>6</sup> Voltaire's attitude is to be quite scathing about such practice when the rumour is completely unlikely or contradictory: 'ce qui n'est point vraisemblable ne doit point être cru' [that which is completely unlikely must simply not be believed],<sup>7</sup> but as a rule he tries to goad readers into logical consideration of the situation for themselves.

In this way, Voltaire portrays Grimarest's particular form of logic as being skewed and worthless. Yet, it was a logic employed by even the most thorough of contemporary historians. One such thorough historian is Theyls, who draws a direct connection between the historical material he produces and the original manuscript notes which he still possesses and which he holds up as allegedly infallible proof of the veracity of his published text. Theyls writes to assure his Ambassador of his extensive research, producing his sources as proof of truth:

5 François de La Mothe le Vayer, *Préface d'une histoire*, in *Jugements sur les Anciens et Principaux Historiens grecs et latins dont il nous reste quelques ouvrages* (Paris: A. Courbé, 1646), p. 350.

6 Goebbels's dictum quoted in J. Merriman, *A History of Modern Europe* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), II, p. 268.

7 Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, in R. Pomeau (ed.), *Ceuvres historiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 889.

J'espère que votre Excellence trouvera d'autant plus de satisfaction à les [ces Mémoires] parcourir que j'ai apporté une attention extraordinaire à n'y rien mêtre que de véritable, dont les originaux sont entre mes mains.<sup>8</sup>

[I hope Your Excellency will be more than satisfied with these [Memoirs], since I have been meticulous in including only the truth, directly gleaned from originals that I have in my possession.]

What Theyls neglects to address are questions of partiality, omission or misunderstanding in his 'originaux'. Nor does he consider issues such as misinterpretation, revisionism, or time and memory lapse. Theyls's work provides extensive details of the unimportant solutions, resolutions and re-negotiations which form the background to the diplomatic or historical decisions surrounding the fate of Charles XII, King of Sweden, while in exile. The result is that climactic events are somewhat smothered in the endless, albeit factually accurate and possibly literally *true* accounts of meetings and letters which led to the resolutions. Yet, even such apparently *true* historical *facts* are subject to misinterpretation, subjectivity and nuance.

Another contemporary historian, Vertot, declares that everything in his history is true, simply because he has painstakingly deciphered other histories which were, of course, full of untruths and thus were intentionally misleading. Having siphoned off the inaccuracies and elaboration of other authors whom he, naturally, accuses of partiality, Vertot promises to present the pure and unadulterated one truth. In the eighteenth-century, this stance is common although not quite universal amongst historians. Nor has this historiographical phenomenon disappeared fully, as the problem of 'new' historical perspectives has never been fully resolved. More recently, Michel de Certeau has again underlined the difficulty which historians face in attempting to evade both their identity and their current time-frame, in order to write with complete

8 Willem Theyls, 'Épître', *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de Charles XII, Roy de Suède* (Leyde: Jean du Vivier, 1722).

freedom, because in fact: 'ils sont toujours situés *dans* l'histoire'<sup>9</sup> [they are always themselves situated within history]. In the same way, Pierre Nora highlights how, in an attempt to evade the stances of their predecessors, past French historians have chosen to denigrate them in order to distinguish their 'new' viewpoint: 'tous les historiens ont prétendu dénoncer les mythologies mensongères de leurs prédécesseurs'<sup>10</sup> [all historians have claimed to expose the erroneous lies propagated by their predecessors]. In Vertot this certainly is the case, as is shown by the following passage of hollow rhetoric:

J'avoué que j'ay été blessé du peu d'exactitude ou du manque de bonne foi de plusieurs Historiens; qui ont parlé des affaires de la Suède; les uns ont déguisé la vérité & les autres n'ont pas eu assez de soin de nous instruire ni des événemens ni des motifs des entreprises; plus ces Auteurs m'ont paru se contredire, plus je me suis appliqué à les concilier, ou à démêler le vrai du faux.<sup>11</sup>

[I admit that I have been shocked by the lack of precision and the bad faith of many historians who have dealt with Swedish affairs: some disguise the truth and others have not taken enough care to instruct us regarding either the events or the purposes of the ventures. The more these authors seemed to contradict themselves, the more I applied myself to the contradictions, or to disentangle true from false.]

This method of persuading the reader of one's superior critical faculties and ability to distinguish 'le vrai du faux' [true from false history], is evidently self-promotional. It is achieved by freely admitting the existence of phoney, partial histories, and then by insisting on being able to disentangle the real from the false. In any era, it is tempting to believe that the most recent

9 Michel de Certeau, *L'Écriture de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 28.

10 Pierre Nora, 'Entre Mémoire et Histoire: la problématique des lieux', in P. Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), I, pp. xv-xlii (p. xxi).

11 Abbé de Vertot, *Histoire des Révolutions de Suède. Où l'on voit les changemens qui sont arrivés dans ce Royaume au sujet de la Religion et du Gouvernement* (Paris: F. Barois, 1722), 'Avertissement'.

assessment must surely be the most accurate. But in eighteenth century historical discourse, aside from constituting an attempt to gain the readers' confidence, it still presupposes the existence of the one truth waiting to be uncovered.

## Contemporary Historical Novels: An Imitation of History

With such blanket assertions by historians, that truth exists and must simply be uncovered, it is clear that the enunciated aspiration of each historian is to recount a factual history, and that history for them equates with truth. With this in mind, it is particularly interesting to examine an unusual case from the contemporary historical novel.

Bibliographical records and contemporary text classification inform us that wherever they successfully and fastidiously mimicked both the approach and enunciated historiographical principles of historians, eighteenth-century historical novels often sold as *real* histories. Such mimesis is often a key feature of the contemporary novel, as Jenny Mander has illustrated, but the historical novel must be considered as quite a separate genre.<sup>12</sup> Often mistaken for actual history, contemporary historical novels may be put to the litmus test for historical principles in the eighteenth century in order to measure their adoption of real historians' theoretical rhetoric, such as an adherence to the principle of truth in history.

In his *History of Charles XII*, a work long attributed to the alleged author of its title, or the 'Scots Gentleman in the Swedish Service', Daniel Defoe refers to the historical truth in such a way as to mimic the historians' insistence on presenting the

12 Jenny Mander, *Circles of Learning: Narratology and the Eighteenth-Century French Novel* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999), pp. 67–8.

events as they occurred. With the assertion that what he presents is common knowledge, Defoe evidently manipulates his readers.<sup>13</sup> He challenges them furthermore to expose their ignorance by refuting his factual assertions and showing alternative (or, by his definition, incorrect) knowledge:

As these Memories are meerly Historical, they need little Apology, they contain a relation of Things transacted within the View, and perhaps in the Memory of most that shall now read them, and need no better Appeal for their Authority and Truth, than the General Knowledge of Mankind; the Assent of which in this Age, must needs pass for Approbation in the next.<sup>14</sup>

With this clever manoeuvre, Defoe taps into the key historiographical preoccupations of the day, identified elsewhere as being: authority, subject, style, statement of aims, target audience and truth.<sup>15</sup>

This passage is among the deftest pieces of persuasion to be found in any historical preface. By using the words ‘meerly Historical’, the author follows in the footsteps of real historians on the question of style and choice of words to convey material. The assessment of truth is not openly insisted upon but, cunningly, passed on to the reader for judgement. By appealing to the readers’ general knowledge, the narrator forces acceptance of the work as true, since the converse would amount to renunciation of the ‘General Knowledge of Mankind’ and would merit the readers being judged ignorant, inadequate and wrong by posterity. By the same token, posterity, including the reader in 2003, is being advised to accept as truth that which contemporaries knew to be fact. Nor is this reference to posterity a device without foundation in real historiography, as is

13 See also Daniel Defoe, ‘Introduction’, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, A. Burgess (ed.) (London: Penguin Classics, 1966).

14 Daniel Defoe, ‘Preface’, *The History of the Wars of his Present Majesty Charles XII, King of Sweden [...] By a Scots Gentleman in the Swedish Service* (London: H.P., 1720).

15 Síofra Pierse, ‘Voltaire and Clío: from history to story’ (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1999), ch. I.

evident from La Mothe le Vayer who, while confidently referring to immutable 'veritez historiques',<sup>16</sup> had identified posterity as being the one great judge and leveller:

De mesme que les histoires ne doivent estre escrites principalement *que* pour elle [la postérité] [...] il n'y a qu'elle aussi, comme plus exempte de passion, qui les puisse mettre à leur juste prix [...] le tems seul, qui conserve la memoire de toutes choses pouvant donner à un chacun la reputation qui luy appartient.<sup>17</sup>

[Just as histories must never be written solely for posterity, it is only posterity, being entirely dispassionate, that can truly assess their actual merit. Time alone, which conserves memory of all things, is able to restore to each his due reputation.]

Clearly, Defoe's is a clever double manipulation of readers present and future. His technique helped to influence the reception of his history of Charles XII, and to ensure that for many years after its publication it was considered *real* or *true*, a *History* as opposed to a fiction.<sup>18</sup> Defoe's first-person narrative rendered it more attractive, persuasive and memorable than a traditional factual history might have been. This is a clear, early instance of a cultural moment being neatly marshalled, packaged, and then presented as an historical memory by a novelist posing as journalist-historian.

16 François de La Mothe le Vayer, 'Introduction', *Discours de l'histoire*, in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Augustin Courbé, 1662).

17 La Mothe le Vayer, *Préface* ...: 350.

18 It is worth noting that some critics today persist in classing this work as history. See Paula R. Backscheider, 'The Histories', *Daniel Defoe: Ambition and Innovation* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), ch. 4.

## Voltaire's Vision of History as Selective Memory

Amongst his contemporaries, Voltaire is an unusual historian in that his historical text is not concerned exclusively with the past, but deals with the problems of historiography as well as with a multitude of other issues; these include economics, social theory, propaganda for the cause of the 'philosophes', and a probing approach to religious systems.<sup>19</sup> There are two sides to Voltaire the historiographer. On the one hand, there is the serious historian who insists on solid historical research, good sources, and an indefatigable hunt for first-hand witness accounts and opinions on historical happenings. Such scrupulous research was not always common amongst contemporary historians. This side of Voltaire 'the serious historian' is evident in his own attentive approach to writing, even in his earliest history *Histoire de Charles XII*; this is a feature which is well documented elsewhere.<sup>20</sup>

The other facet of Voltaire emerging from his historiography is as an historian who manipulates the idea of truth for his own ends as he consciously devises his own new vision of historiography. Exactly how Voltaire marries these two approaches to historiography is rather ingenious. When Voltaire writes that no historian is omniscient, we encounter a basic premiss of his vision of history: 'Aucun historien, quel qu'il soit, n'a tout vu' [No historian, whoever he may be, has seen everything].<sup>21</sup> This stark affirmation of the physical impossibility of omniscience releases the historian from all sorts of restrictions and, above all, from the obligation to indulge in any

19 See Marc Serge Rivière, 'Voltaire, historien et "homme de passion": la part de la propagande philosophique dans *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*', *Travaux de Littérature*, XIII (2000), 161–76.

20 Voltaire, 'Introduction', *Histoire de Charles XII*, G. von Proschwitz (ed.) (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996) pp. 11–36.

21 Voltaire, *Supplément au siècle de Louis XIV*, R. Pomeau (ed.) (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), pp. 1223–74 (p. 1241).

of the various textual contortions ritually undertaken by some contemporaries in an effort to appear as omniscient and infallible purveyors of the one truth. Few other contemporary historians would have either the audacity or the vision to impose such an enlightened but yet self-serving qualification on history.

Furthermore, in his later works on the subject, Voltaire insisted on the pyrrhonism of history,<sup>22</sup> or the philosophical impossibility of ever knowing all the facts of an event. On the impossibility of omniscience, he wrote in a letter to the *Journal des savants*: 'Je crois qu'il faut désespérer de savoir jamais tous les détails au juste.' [I think that one must despair of ever knowing every precise detail].<sup>23</sup> So, although he engages in extensive historical research in search of facts, the simultaneous awareness of the probable inaccuracy of sources neither deters Voltaire from writing history nor does it inhibit him in the slightest, as he writes: 'Et moi [...] je n'ai consulté pendant vingt ans que des gens qui ont mal vu.'<sup>24</sup> [As for me, for twenty years I have consulted only people who didn't quite see clearly]. Unlike that of his contemporaries, Voltaire's historical discourse is not ridden with self-doubt; indeed, his method of systematic doubt renders him perversely assertive. The admission of both the practical impossibility of omniscience and of the philosophical pyrrhonism of history illustrates how cavalierly the historian Voltaire could dismiss the fears of contemporary historians about their own inadequacies in relation to the chosen historical subject matter; this included their reluctant admission of reliance on other sources, their allowance for a

22 See Voltaire, *Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire*, in *Histoire de Charles XII*, von Proschwitz (ed.), pp. 567–78; see also Voltaire, *Le Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire*, in L. Moland (ed.), *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire* (Paris: Garnier, 1879), vol. XXVII, pp. 235–99.

23 Voltaire, *Correspondance*, in Theodore Besterman (ed.), *Œuvres Complètes* (Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1968–71), Voltaire to the *Journal des savants*, circa 15 February 1742, ref. D2593.

24 Voltaire, *Supplément* ...: 1256.



margin of error, their insistence on the one truth, and their consequent posture of feigning omniscience or ignoring its difficulties.<sup>25</sup>

Reinforcing his assertion of the sceptical stance, Voltaire's treatment of facts in history, *les faits*, involves the introduction of the concept of different degrees of truth in the historical *récit*. This is yet another clear indicator of the historian's very unusual approach to truth in history: an approach that can be somewhat indulgent and quite pragmatic, but which has a logic based firmly in Renaissance thought, as Paul Ricœur clarifies: 'La Renaissance a été par excellence le moment de prise de conscience du caractère pluri-dimensionnel de la vérité.'<sup>26</sup> [The Renaissance marks the actual moment of realization of the multi-dimensional nature of truth]. While so many of his contemporaries claim absolutism in search of the one truth, Voltaire assesses each situation in turn for a degree of truth which is reasonable by his own careful research standards. Truth appears to come in all shapes and sizes within his texts, ranging from the *very true* to the *less true* and the *not so true*.<sup>27</sup>

Donning the cap of historiographer, Voltaire dares to provide a *modus operandi* for other historians, of which the cornerstone is his advocacy of scepticism in the treatment of truth or facts. His repeated use of the first person plural indicates that the historian wishes both to include his contemporaries and to set a precedent: 'Refusons notre créance à tout historien ancien et moderne, qui nous rapporte des choses contraires à la nature, et à la trempe du cœur humain.'<sup>28</sup> [Let us reject belief in every

25 Pyrrhonism is being used here in the sense of deriving from Pyrrhon, the Greek philosopher, who 'dismissed the search for truth as a vain endeavour'. *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 15th edn (Micropædia, 1995), *Pyrrhon*.

26 Paul Ricœur, *Histoire et Vérité* (Paris: Seuil, 1955), p. 165.

27 See Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*: 993; Voltaire's early pragmatism with regard to historical *vérité* is a prologue to his much later definition of history in his article *Histoire* in the *Encyclopédie* as 'le récit des faits donnés pour vrais'.

28 Voltaire, *Pyrrhonisme*, in *Histoire de Charles XII*: 573.

single historian, ancient and modern, who mentions things which are contrary to nature and to the very moral fibre of humanity]; 'Défions-nous aussi de tout ce qui paraît exagéré.'<sup>29</sup> [Let us be wary of anything that appears exaggerated].

This scepticism concerning sources is increased by Voltaire's awareness of the impossibility, even for first-hand witnesses, of ever being able to fully formulate events in words. His thoughts prefigure the telling moment in *Jacques le fataliste*, where Diderot would later articulate Voltaire's implication that truth is impossible to convey:

*Le Maître* – Ne sois ni fade panégyriste, ni censeur amer; dis la chose comme elle est.

*Jacques* – Cela n'est pas aisé. N'a-t'on pas son caractère, son intérêt, son goût, ses passions, d'après quoi l'on exagère ou l'on atténue?<sup>30</sup>

[*Master* – Be neither a wishy-washy panegyrist nor a bitter critic. Tell it like it is.

*Jacques* – That's not easy. Does not each one have his own nature, interests, tastes, passions, according to which one exaggerates or tones things down?]

Voltaire knew that each historian brought a great deal of baggage, prejudices and preconceptions with him when writing history. So, he decides that if history has to convey a 'truth' it would be precisely that: a truth, from his own chosen perspective. That apparent ambiguity would become the inspiration behind his later, entirely new vision of history in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, a vision of society which consciously brings history closer to constituting a record of collective cultural memory.

Voltaire's ability to dispense with the idea of *the* truth, or *the* history that was waiting to be conveyed, allows him to reject a concentration solely on facts, dates and battles which had

29 Ibid.: 572.

30 Diderot, *Jacques le fataliste*, in A. Billy (ed.), *Cœuvres de Diderot* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 517.

comprised the traditional focus of history. Thus he can devise an entirely new vision of history, one which J. H. Brumfitt has retrospectively termed the first 'social history'. Brumfitt defined this as 'the history not of an individual but of an age'.<sup>31</sup> In Voltaire's new, 'social history', the historian would place great emphasis on both artistry and entertainment within history, and would refuse to engage in the hagiographic portraits painted by his contemporaries. In drawing attention to the artifice of the historical composition, history would be exposed for what it is: an arbitrary, selective, individual and literary creation which would not be prescriptive, nor exhaustive in its coverage, nor perfect in its truth.

This portrayal of history as a selective snapshot had traditionally fostered a false sense of security for its purveyors and readers in the eighteenth century. However they viewed it, they resolutely avoided addressing the idea of truth as being as elusive as Benjamin's flash image depicts it. Instead, they seek the one truth in the past, presupposing that it can be seized by historians. Nora's problem with history lies in his implication that while there is something to recapture, it is the method which is problematic: 'L'histoire est la reconstruction toujours problématique et incomplète de ce qui n'est plus.'<sup>32</sup> [History is the ever-problematic and incomplete reconstruction of that which is no longer]. It is perhaps as an early precursor of this unhappiness with reconstruction that Voltaire, following the example of the sceptics Bayle and Fontenelle, at least recognized history as an artifice rather than an absolute, and exploited it in his own way, providing his unapologetic account of history as a memory for posterity. Where his contemporaries argued that memory must focus on dates, battles and facts, Voltaire exposes this as being only part of the picture. His innovation was in proposing a new part-picture, focusing (at

31 J. H. Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 46.

32 Nora: xix.

least in theory) less on battles, more on great men such as Charles XII, Louis XIV or Peter the Great and on their great social and economic achievements. Unusually, Voltaire establishes history as memory and swivels the focus away from battles to culture or society, and from exclusive events to individuals and minutiae. Thus Voltaire confirms that for himself, as for his predecessors, the memory which is available and constructed for posterity is indeed selective and incomplete, merely a memory among many, or selective snapshots of the past.

In this light, one might define the difference between Voltaire and his contemporaries further as being that Voltaire blatantly transfers the focus of history to the purpose of it, from prescriptive, archival, traditional history, to descriptive cultural memory. As he wrote, quite dismissively, of other practitioners: 'ce qui manque d'ordinaire à ceux qui compilent l'histoire, c'est l'esprit philosophique'<sup>33</sup> [what those who write history usually lack is a philosophical cast of mind]. He, Voltaire, would bring just such philosophical flair to history by moving it towards new possibilities, by exposing the framework as artifice and by expelling absolute truth from the equation. Voltaire's sharp perception was that the old history was dead, and long live the new.

33 Voltaire, *Remarques sur l'histoire*, in *Œuvres historiques*: 42.

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ANGELA REINICKE

Authenticity, Truth and the Other in  
B. Wilkormirski's *Bruchstücke*  
and W. G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten*

In his seminal book *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, James E. Young points out the explicit ontological differences between historical and fictional events, but he also emphasizes the arduousness of discriminating between 'facts' and 'fiction' in the linguistic representation of personal memories. Young demonstrates that historical treatises of the Holocaust are just as arbitrary, troped and interpretative as the fictions of the Holocaust. In his opinion, the disentanglement of the literary and the historical truth of the Holocaust is beyond the bounds of possibility. He concludes that the facts of the Holocaust exist ultimately only in their narrative and cultural reconstruction.<sup>1</sup> Young's argument is based on Hayden White's influential position that the historical truths of the Holocaust cannot be regarded as being identical with the facts as such but

with a combination of fact and the conceptual matrix within which the fact has been located in the discourse. The imagination no less than the reason ha[s] to be engaged in any adequate representation of the truth; and this means that the techniques of fictionmaking are as necessary to the composition of a historical discourse as erudition might be.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 6–11.
- 2 Hayden White, 'The Fictions of Factual Representation', in Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 123.

However, the by-now infamous case of Bruno Doesseker, alias Benjamin Wilkomirski, who in 1995 published a widely acclaimed book, entitled *Bruchstücke*, raises serious questions in this regard. Marketed as an autobiographical account of a childhood spent in various concentration camps, the book became an immediate bestseller. A few years later the authenticity of Wilkomirski's survival book was, however, challenged when the journalist Daniel Ganzfried brought to public attention the fact that Wilkomirski had lived as Bruno Doesseker in Switzerland for over 40 years.<sup>3</sup> When further historical research established that Doesseker's claims were false, the author attempted to justify his position by stating that his readers were free to consider his book either as *literature* or as a *personal document*.<sup>4</sup> However, the issue here is not the suggestive power of literature but the truthfulness of an author. I agree with Philippe Lejeune's view that

it is *not* a question of actual fact that separates autobiography from fiction [...] but a question of the *right* to claim experiences as one's own: the right to invoke the empirical bond that has indeed existed between a writer and the events in his narrative. (Young: 23–4; my emphasis)

The case in point is that Doesseker testified on behalf of the victims of the 'Final Solution' as the absent referent of history. In the end, fact-based historical research was needed to question the authenticity of *Bruchstücke* as an autobiographical text successfully. Does this mean that we depend implicitly on the factuality blueprint of a positivistic historiography to settle such disputes?

If we follow Young's argument that all Holocaust literature is troped, it is possible to argue that the factual errors in

3 Daniel Ganzfried, 'Die geliehene Holocaust-Biographie', *Die Weltwoche*, 27 September 1998, pp. 45–6.

4 Daniel Ganzfried, 'Fakten gegen Erinnerung: Der Fall Wilkomirski zieht weite Kreise: Eine zweite Klärung der Tatsachen', *Die Weltwoche*, 3 September 1998, p. 12.

Wilkomirski's childhood memoirs are merely a lapse in the comprehension of his material. Hayden White contends that

one must face the fact that when it comes to apprehending the historical record, there are no grounds to be found in the historical record itself for preferring one way of construing its meaning over another.<sup>5</sup>

In an effort to escape the most extreme implications of this relativism, White tries to differentiate between lie and error by putting forward the idea that a lie is the denial by an interpretation that an event considered by that interpretation is real. A lie therefore exhibits a *moral failure*. An error, on the other hand, merely evinces a drawing of false conclusions (White 1987: 78). However, this distinction fails to address the following issue: both modes of falsification are based on the presupposition that a referent *extrinsic* to the narrative could determine whether the failure is blameworthy (a lie) or an innocent mistake (an error).

Young also acknowledges this dilemma: he suggests that the question as to the appropriateness of a given interpretation can be resolved with reference to Nietzsche's view of a relative, pragmatic truth. This truth must be judged according to whether it is 'life-providing, life-preserving, and perhaps even species-cultivating'. Young's inference is that these

criteria with which to evaluate interpretations of the Holocaust [...] seem especially appropriate to our study of its narrative; for they allow both a plurality of meaning *and* a basis for evaluating these meanings. (Young: 191)

This conclusion appears to me to be highly problematic: firstly, the vocabulary employed by Nietzsche has chilly resonances that make such a relativist approach ethically untenable in relation to the real suffering by real people whose life was not deemed to be 'species-cultivating'. And secondly, the ability to

5 Hayden White, *The Content of the Form. Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 74.



make such judgements still requires authorization, a third party. The corollary of Young's and White's narrative theories is that artistic forgeries, which typically present themselves in the style of the one whose work they falsely claim to be, but whose history they did not actually pass through, would be impossible to expose if certain absolute perimeters set by the evidence were not exceeded.

It is no coincidence that the authenticity of Wilkomirski's *Bruchstücke* remained unquestioned for quite a long time. An analysis of the narrative strategies and the formal features of the text suggests that we are presented with a particularly sensitive, responsible Holocaust memoir which reflects on the pitfalls looming when traumatic memory enters the continuum of narrative representation. The author's speech-act in the preface announces his intention to convey his traumatic experiences somehow while trying to avoid any falsifications that are intrinsic to a closed, linear narrative:

Meine frühesten Erinnerungen gleichen einem Trümmerfeld einzelner Bilder und Abläufe. [...] Oft chaotisch Verstreutes, chronologisch nur selten zu gliedern, Brocken, die sich immer wieder beharrlich dem Ordnungswillen des erwachsen Gewordenen widersetzen und den Gesetzen der Logik entgleiten. *Will ich darüber schreiben, muss ich auf die ordnende Logik, die Perspektive des Erwachsenen verzichten. Sie würde das Geschehen nur verfälschen.*<sup>6</sup>

[My earliest memories are like an expanse of rubble of isolated pictures and courses of events, often chaotically scattered, hardly ever to order chronologically, lumps that persistently oppose the will to order of the grown up and slip away from laws of logic. *If I want to write about it I have to do without the ordering logic, the perspective of the adult. It would only falsify the events.*]

Ultimately, it was the egregious empirical inadequacy of the account that led to Wilkomirski's unmasking. However, the caution and unease that can be detected in nearly all of the

6 Benjamin Wilkomirski, *Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939–1948* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1995) pp. 7–8 (my italics).

publications concerned with the pursuit of the truth in this case are rooted in the unsettling awareness, 'that even the most precise historical renditions of the Shoah contain an opaqueness at the core which confronts traditional historical narrative'.<sup>7</sup> The agonizing indeterminateness we have to cope with in relation to the Holocaust is ingrained in the fact that the intended bureaucratized mass extermination of a whole people is an 'event at the limits' which 'escapes our usual categories of representation' (Friedlander: 3–4). The impasse in which historiography finds itself trapped can be formulated as follows: our need for truth is unavoidably linked to ethical, as well as epistemological, dimensions, both of which seem to become the more elusive to ontological analysis the closer we get to the epicentre of the catastrophe. David Carroll has pinpointed the aporia most precisely:

We are required to judge the philosophical, literary, political, historical and moral effects of the different ways of talking about 'that' [the Holocaust] and yet *we do not have the systems of belief or knowledge, the rules, the historical certainty or the philosophical or political concepts necessary to derive or determine judgment.*<sup>8</sup>

The question arises if, after the Holocaust, with this 'tumor in memory',<sup>9</sup> as Levinas puts it, it is still possible at all to engage in historiography.

This quandary has been addressed by the philosopher Edith Wyschogrod in her study *An Ethics of Remembering*.

7 Saul Friedlander, 'Introduction', in Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation. Nazism and the 'Final Solution'* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 5.

8 David Carroll, 'Foreword', in Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the jews'*, Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts (trans.) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 11 (my italics).

9 Quoted in Helmut Peukert, 'Unconditional Responsibility for the Other: The Holocaust and the Thinking of Emmanuel Levinas', in Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (eds), *Postmodernism and the Holocaust* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), p. 155.

*History, Heterology and the Nameless Others*. Realizing the philosophical impossibility of recovering 'what really happened', Wyschogrod advocates a radically new approach to historical discourse. Consequent upon Rancière's averment that history is concerned with a double absence, 'that of the 'thing itself' that is no longer there – that is in the past; and that never was – because it never was such as it was told',<sup>10</sup> Wyschogrod suggests a reconfiguration of historiography that takes account of the *res gestae* in terms of absence rather than presence. In accordance with Walter Benjamin's conception that it is the historian's task to give a voice to the anonymous victims of history, Wyschogrod creates what she calls the 'heterological historian', a figure which acknowledges the categorical imperative to speak in a responsible manner for the unknowable dead others. This historian is in search of what precedes history and is one whose

responsibility is mandated by another who is absent, cannot speak for herself, one whose face the historian may never see, yet to whom 'giving countenance' becomes a task.<sup>11</sup>

The heterological historian is driven by the urgency of ethics and by the promise to the dead to approximate their stories and to convey them to the living. The question as to whether and how this task can be accomplished will be explored in what follows.

Wyschogrod's argument is informed by Emmanuel Levinas's thought which is predominated by the notion that the ontological imperialism of Western philosophy has consistently practised a suppression of the other. Analysing the relationship

10 Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, Hassan Melehy (trans.) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 63.

11 Edith Wyschogrod, *An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology and the Nameless Others* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. xii, hereafter *ER*. Wyschogrod refers to the 'heterological historian' and 'the other' in the feminine gender throughout her book.

between the Same (le Même) and the Other (l'Autre), Levinas concludes that the Same has always been the privileged term, since it is in the nature of the relation to bring the Other into the Same's sphere of familiarity. The Same is envisaged as incorporating that which lies outside it by making it intelligible and thus reducing its true otherness. To preserve the Other as other, it must not become an object of knowledge or experience, indeed the failure of understanding is essential if the radical alterity of the Other is to be preserved. According to Levinas, 'the face of the other in proximity, which is more than representation, is an unrepresentable trace, the way to the infinite'.<sup>12</sup> Wyschogrod contends analogously, 'the Other can be neither the object of a thought, affect, or action, nor grasped in the manner of a content in that the other transcends the various modes in which content is apprehended' (*ER*: 10). But if the Other is an excess which transcends incorporation into thought, how can the heterological historian appropriate the dead others linguistically when she constructs a narrative about their suffering?

Wyschogrod explores the paradoxes the heterological historian generates:

If [...] I enter into the other's history, recount it, have I not created in his name a particular constellation of verbal or gestural instances having practical import, one that imposes a language of dominance and an alien historical identity? (*ER*: 5)

Wyschogrod is all too aware that the suppression of the alterity of the other is an act of violence and thus inadmissible on ethical grounds. And yet, she urges,

the weight of the cataclysm is a forcefield from which the historian from any place or period, any social, political, economic, or cultural conformation cannot escape for it purely and simply demands that she speak out of that non-place. (*ER*: 18)

12 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, A. Lingis (trans.) (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academi, 1991), p. 116.

The upshot of this argument is that if the heterological historian remained silent the other would be consigned to invisibility. Furthermore, the lapse into non-articulation would effect closure to the intended elimination from memory of the suffering that was inflicted upon the Jews of Europe. Wyschogrod contends that the cataclysm exercises a pressure to speak, to utter the promise to name the dead others who have been reduced to the merely numerable. She asserts that the proper name, insofar as it is severed from the living bearer, does not carry any meaning; it is empty. The primary function of the name of the dead other is that of 'an ethical placeholder', a plea to the historian to 'fulfill the promise of truthfulness' and to relate the story of the other's suffering (*ER*: 10). The accomplishment of that task requires the reconfiguration of the historical narrative in such a way that it encompasses the referent in terms of absence rather than presence. In consequence, the narrative about the *res gestae* has to express not only that which emerges but also to communicate that which cannot percolate to the surface. The heterological historian is in pursuit of what the other did or could have enunciated, of the 'indexical sign of the absent other within historical discourse' (*ER*: 22). By taking up the silences of the dead other into the body of her narrative, the heterological historian is in a position to 'continue [...] the speech-acts of the dead' (*ER*: 14), but not directly or in a representational mode. This endeavour constitutes a challenge that 'requires epistemic sophistication and historiographic inventiveness' (*ER*: 10). For Rancière, this can best be accomplished by taking advantage of the power historical writing derives from its inner kinship with literature in that

if the notion of fact reflects the effort to say what is, fiction attempts to imagine what is not, to bring absence into presence, to construct a world that does not exist. (*ER*: 27)

Wyschogrod suggests the transformation of fiction into *ficciones*, a term coined by Jorge Luis Borges. The emerging new genre compels the historical artefact to make visible the unbreachable difference between the present of the text, the

reconstructed past and the circumstances of its production. In an historical narrative thus fashioned, the alterity of the other can be a motif without actually emerging at the surface:

By bringing forth the silences of the other rather than by forcing silence into speech, by devising strategies of encounter that simultaneously attest and preserve that silence, silence itself becomes a speech-act. (ER: 32)

Against this philosophical background W. G. Sebald's book *Die Ausgewanderten* presents the perfect accomplishment of an ethics of remembering. Sebald expresses the main concern of his work as follows: 'das unmögliche Geschäft des Dichters ist die Wahrheitsfindung' [the impossible business of the writer is that of finding the truth].<sup>13</sup> In order to achieve this, he engages in the attempt at reconstructing those traces of the past that have been submerged or marginalized. The narrator of *Die Ausgewanderten* articulates a need to do so because 'gewisse Dinge (haben) so eine Art wiederzukehren, unverhofft und unvermutet, oft nach einer sehr langen Zeit der Abwesenheit' [Certain things have a way of returning unexpectedly, often after a lengthy absence].<sup>14</sup> While this statement in isolation might sound like an admonition to come to terms with the past, Sebald's artfully fashioned narrative relates the reappearance – in obituaries or in memories triggered by old photographs, stumbled across by chance – of the people he had once encountered but had since lost sight of on the other side of the line between life and death. The fact that all four protagonists of *Die Ausgewanderten* had to leave their home country in their youths and found themselves overwhelmed and crushed by the impact of this experience in old age, causes the narrator to embark on a highly personal journey into their pasts. This endeavour is

13 W. G. Sebald, *Die Beschreibung des Unglücks: Zur österreichischen Literatur von Stifter bis Handke* (Salzburg: Residenz, 1985), p. 11.

14 W. G. Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten* (Frankfurt a. M.: Eichborn, 1993), p. 36. The page references, given as DA, following subsequent quotations will refer to the above edition.

never easy, the narrator constantly aware that their absence is irreversible. No matter how carefully he tries to reconstruct their biographies from the shards of their shattered lives, the danger of distorting the picture, however slightly, remains:

Es war ein äußerst mühevolleres, oft stunden- und tagelang nicht vom Fleck kommendes und nicht selten sogar rückläufiges Unternehmen, bei dem ich fortwährend geplagt wurde von einem immer nachhaltiger sich bemerkbar machenden und mehr und mehr mich lähmenden Skrupulantismus. Dieser Skrupulantismus bezog sich sowohl auf den Gegenstand meiner Erzählung, dem ich, wie ich es auch anstellte, nicht gerecht zu werden glaubte, als auch auf die Fragwürdigkeit der Schriftstellerei überhaupt. (DA: 344–5)

[Often I could not get on for hours or days at a time, and not infrequently I unravelled what I had done, continuously tormented by scruples that were taking tighter hold and steadily paralysing me. These scruples concerned not only the subject of my narrative, which I felt I could not do justice to, no matter what approach I tried, but also the entire questionable business of writing.]

The flow of the text is interrupted time and again by reflections on the unreliability of memories such as: 'Wie ich mich erinnere oder wie ich mir vielleicht jetzt nur einbilde [...]' (DA: 36) [as I recall, or perhaps merely imagine]. The reader unfailingly notices that this beautifully crafted prose is a homage to the dead. However, the fractures in the body of the text indicate that it is hovering over the abyss which cannot be captured by language and, indeed, should not be. Thus the narrator confesses to the reader the temptation to imagine the moment when Paul Bereyter, his beloved former schoolteacher, took his own life. In the end he shys away from trespassing on that very personal, inconsolable space because he understands that it would be an intrusion from which he has to abstain:

Solche Versuche der Vergegenwärtigung brachten mich jedoch, wie ich mir eingestehen mußte, dem Paul nicht näher, höchstens augenblicksweise, in gewissen Ausuferungen des Gefühls, wie sie mir unzulässig erscheinen und zu deren Vermeidung ich jetzt aufgeschrieben habe, was ich von Paul Bereyter weiß und im Verlauf meiner Erkundungen über ihn in Erfahrung bringen konnte. (DA: 44–5)

[Such endeavours to imagine his life and death did not, as I had to admit, bring me any closer to Paul, except at best for brief emotional moments of the kind that seemed presumptuous to me. It is in order to avoid this sort of wrongful trespass that I have written down what I know of Paul Bereyter.]

This passage accomplishes two things: it bears witness to the rupture and, at the same time, it epitomizes the need to refrain from violating the other's sphere. Any attempt at visualizing or understanding the very act of crossing the borderline would be a transgression. *Die Ausgewanderten* is a plea for the necessary rectification of focus which encompasses the 'big historical events' as well as the 'lautlose [...] Katastrophe, die sich ohne ein Aufhebens vor dem Betrachter vollzieht' [silent catastrophe which quietly unfolds before the observer].<sup>15</sup> The knowledge of this necessity motivates the narrator's search for the vanished traces of the marginalized, in the course of which he becomes increasingly aware of the degree of 'Erinnerungslosigkeit [...], das Geschick, mit dem man alles bereinigt hatte' (DA: 338) [lack of memory and the efficiency with which everything had been cleaned up]. The meticulously precise piecing together of those lost lives and their relation through the medium of language restores their significance, yet, all the while, bears witness to an irreversible absence. Sebald describes his writing technique, in terms of Lévi-Strauss's *bricolage*, as a form of wild working and pre-rational thinking whereby he rummages around in accumulated pieces he has found by chance until they somehow begin to fit together (Löffler: 20). It could be imagined as a process, not unlike a chemical reaction, during which the vehicle of his prose, a kind of chronicle consisting of a conglomeration of data, documents, diary entries, photographs, interviews and memories, passes through his consciousness. Sebald maintains that the author cannot be seen as a 'wertfreie Instanz' [impartial authority] any more. He

15 Quoted in Sigrid Löffler, 'Kofreisen (sic) in die Ferne', in Franz Loquai (ed.), *Fußnoten zur Literatur* (Bamberg: Universität Bamberg, 1995), p. 19.



is required to put his cards on the table, albeit in a very discreet manner.<sup>16</sup> The implication of this view is that it is the signature of the author, which is inscribed in the body of the text, that vouches for the authenticity of the artefact:

Authentizität des Schreibens hat etwas damit zu tun, das man den Filter, durch den geschrieben wird, mit ins Bild bringt, daß man also etwas erfährt über den, durch dessen Kopf das alles vermittelt wird. Dieser Kopf ist natürlich möbliert mit allem möglichen Kulturkram.<sup>17</sup>

[Authenticity of writing is about bringing the filter through which a text has passed into the picture so that one finds out something about the person through whose head all of that is mediated. This head, of course, is furnished with all possible kinds of cultural stuff.]

The text is interwoven with literary reminiscences which are certainly closely linked with Sebald's professional background. Moreover, Sebald's prose allows the extrapolation of his personal disposition towards his topic. He evaluates the outcome of the difficult endeavour he has embarked on in the following way:

Hunderte von Seiten hatte ich bedeckt mit meinem Bleistift- und Kugelschreibergekritzel. Weitaus das meiste davon war durchgestrichen, verworfen oder bis zur Unleserlichkeit mit Zusätzen überschmiert. Selbst das, was ich schließlich für die 'endgültige' Fassung retten konnte, erschien mir als ein mißratenes Stückwerk. Ich zögerte also, Aurach meine verkürzte Version seines Lebens zu übersenden [...]. (DA: 345)

[I had covered hundreds of pages with my scribble, in pencil and ballpoint. By far the greater part had been crossed out, discarded, or obliterated by additions. Even what I ultimately salvaged as a 'final'

- 16 Quoted in Marco Poltronieri, 'Wie kriegen die Deutschen das auf die Reihe? Ein Gespräch mit W.G. Sebald', in *Fußnoten zur Literatur*, p. 40.
- 17 Quoted in Sigrid Korff, 'W.G. Sebald's Die Ausgewanderten', in Stephan Braese (ed.), *In der Sprache der Täter: Neue Lektüren deutschsprachiger Nachkriegs- und Gegenwartsliteratur* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), p. 171.

version seemed to me a thing of shreds and patches, utterly botched. So I hesitated to send Ferber my cut-down rendering of his life.]

It appears to me that the above depiction of the author's creative process is mirrored in the highly poetic and evocative description of Max Aurach's artistic work.<sup>18</sup> The narrator describes in great detail Aurach's particular method of painting which involves an endless process of erasure:

Es wunderte mich immer wieder, wie Aurach [...] ein Bildnis von großer Unmittelbarkeit zusammenbrachte [...] und wieder auslöschte, um [...] von neuem die für ihn, wie er sagte, letztlich unbegreiflichen Gesichtszüge seines [...] Gegenübers herauszugraben. Entschloß sich Aurach, [...] das Bild, weniger in der Überzeugung, es fertiggestellt zu haben, als aus einem Gefühl der Ermattung, endlich aus der Hand zu geben, so hatte es [...] den Anschein, als sei es hervorgegangen aus einer langen Ahnenreihe grauer, eingäscherter, in dem zerschundenen Papier nach wie vor herumgeisternder Gesichter. (DA: 239)

[I marvelled to see that Ferber had created a portrait of great vividness and erase(d) the portrait yet again, and once more set about excavating the features of his model. The facial features and eyes, said Ferber, remained ultimately unknowable to him. If he then decided that the portrait was done, not so much because he was convinced that it was finished as through sheer exhaustion, an onlooker might feel that it had evolved from a long lineage of grey, ancestral faces, rendered onto ash but still there, as ghostly presences, on the harried paper.]

The passage gives paradigmatic expression to the enormous effort to capture the other through the medium of art. It also suggests that the other can only be approximated. Sebald's book is an exceptional accomplishment in that it achieves the realization of what is at the heart of Levinas's ethics: it preserves the Other as other.

18 Max Aurach is the protagonist of the fourth story. In the English translation his name was changed to Max Ferber.

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SABINE EGGER

## Deconstructing Marxist-Leninist Historiography: Memories of National Socialism in East German Poetry

It is a widely held view that GDR literature began to explore National Socialism only in the late 1960s and 1970s in a subjective, polysemic (that is, textually ambiguous), way, thus challenging the official 'objective', 'monosemic' Marxist-Leninist historiography.<sup>1</sup> Through autobiographical literary accounts, such as Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* (1976), and the lyrical poetry of Günter Kunert, Sarah Kirsch, and other poets associated with the *Sächsische Dichterschule* [Saxon School of Poets], an increasingly complex view of a German past emerged that has continued to haunt East Germany. While it is true to say that the voice of much of the earlier GDR poetry was affirmative in that it celebrated the new society that had overcome the fascist past, there were also significant exceptions. The following study examines the counter-discourse to official historiography in poems by Johannes Bobrowski as well as its further development in East German literature, especially in the work of Sarah Kirsch.

- 1 David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 18–19. Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press; 1999), p. 159. Hermann Korte, *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik seit 1945* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1989), pp. 126–35. For a definition of 'monosemic discourse' see Peter Zima, 'Der Mythos der Monosemie. Parteilichkeit und künstlerischer Standpunkt', in Hans-Jürgen Schmitt (ed.), *Literaturwissenschaft und Sozialwissenschaften: Einführung in die Theorie, Geschichte und Funktion der DDR-Literatur* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1975), pp. 77–108.

Johannes Bobrowski's poems of the 1950s and 1960s anticipated the polysemic approach to personal and collective memory of the younger generation which followed.<sup>2</sup> His poetry recognizes individual experience as an historical fact in its own right. This provided an aesthetic model for younger writers who rediscovered the Shoah and Second World War as a self-experienced reality.

During the foundation years of the GDR, writers were encouraged to participate in the construction of socialism by celebrating the progress made in the new socialist Germany, rather than reflecting on the National Socialist past.<sup>3</sup> While the citizens of Adenauer's Federal Republic avoided confrontation with their recent past through individual and collective mechanisms of denial, Marxist historiography allowed East Germans to see themselves as victors of history by interpreting National Socialism as a product of capitalism. Since East Germany with its anti-fascist movement had supposedly purged itself of reactionary elements, it assumed that it was free from the burden of the Nazi-past.<sup>4</sup> Bärbel Bohley, one of the co-founders of the

- 2 My understanding of 'collective memory' is loosely based on Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Lewis Coser (ed.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 43. 'Collective discourses about the past' might be a more apposite term for the usage in this paper. These include discourses participating in the dominant 'official discourse' as well as subversive discourses, for example in the private sphere or in literature.
- 3 On the theme of individual and collective guilt in German literature immediately after the war, see Monika Melchert, 'Die Zeitgeschichtsprosa nach 1945 im Kontext der Schuldfrage', in Ursula Heukenkamp (ed.), *Deutsche Erinnerung: Berliner Beiträge zur Prosa der Nachkriegsjahre (1945–1960)* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1999), pp. 101–66 (p. 106).
- 4 Frank Trommler, 'The creation of history and the refusal of the past in the German Democratic Republic', in Kathy Harms, Lutz R. Reuter and Volker Dürr (eds), *Coping with the Past. Germany and Austria after 1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 79–93 (p. 80). Cf. Fulbrook: 48–59 and Martin Sabrow, 'Einleitung: Geschichtsdiskurs und Doktringesellschaft', in Martin Sabrow (ed.), *Geschichte als Herrschaftsdiskurs: Der Umgang mit der Vergangenheit in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), pp. 9–36.

opposition group *Neues Forum* in 1989, was born in 1945 and grew up in the new socialist Germany. She recalls her feelings about National Socialism and its significance for her generation in the 1960s:

Da kam man schon auf solche Themen: Wir sind das bessere Deutschland. Wir haben aufgeräumt. Die Nazis sind alle im Westen. Das war für mich glaubwürdig. Für mich war das hier schon das bessere Deutschland.<sup>5</sup>

[It was easy enough then to pick up the key themes: We are the better Germany. We have cleared up. The Nazis are all in the West. That was for me believable. For me it was the better Germany.]

The East German 'grand récit', outlined above, with its comfortingly progress-oriented teleology, provided a framework that helped individuals to avoid working through unpleasant or traumatic personal memories on a cognitive *and* affective level.<sup>6</sup>

The official GDR discourse was thus based on the rational and professional 'mastery' of the National Socialist period through Marxist-Leninist historiography.<sup>7</sup> It functioned as a

5 'Gespräch mit Bärbel Bohley', in Vera-Maria Baehr (ed.), *Wir denken erst seit Gorbatschow: Protokolle von Jugendlichen aus der DDR* (Recklinghausen: Georg Bitter, 1990), pp 129–42. Cf. Christa Wolf, 'Das haben wir nicht gelernt', in *Reden im Herbst* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1990), pp. 93–7 (p. 96).

6 These two different aspects of collective and individual memory are central to this chapter: 'Cognitive' memory means seeking to understand rationally and assign meaning to what happened in the past. 'Emotional' or 'affective' remembering refers to the process of 'working through' the emotions related to the memory of the events, according to Freudian psychoanalysis. See Fulbrook: 147. See also in this context Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (Munich: Piper, 1967).

7 'Official discourse' is here not quite co-terminous with 'cultural memory' which refers to all culturally institutionalized acts of collective memory, including literature. The 'official discourse', however, excludes literary discourse which subverts the official account. For a definition of 'cultural memory' see Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1992), pp. 48–56.

system of exclusion and prohibition, organized around a dualistic structure which coded cultural and societal norms as true or false. It was monosemic in the sense that it sought to prohibit any form of ambiguity.<sup>8</sup> Official socialist norms were enacted through a binary system that distinguished between enlightenment and anti-enlightenment values. Anti-enlightenment modes of thinking, such as subjective, non-rational, emotional modes, were coded as irrational, bourgeois-individualist, reactionary or even fascist (Bathrick: 15–16). The absence of individual memory of the Shoah in literary and non-literary discourse created an emotional void in collective memory, that means a psychological separation of factual knowledge of the ‘capitalist fascist crimes’ and personal memories – or those of one’s parents (Fulbrook: 53–5; 162).<sup>9</sup> Despite a rather thorough denazification in education, administration and industry, and a clear focus on ‘anti-fascist’ education in schools, a sense of emotional detachment from the crimes of the National Socialist past seems to have prevailed through different generations, due to the ‘objective’ mode and the content of the master discourse.

Bobrowski’s poems address this void through his subjective reflections of individual and collective experience. His writings subvert and reinscribe the official historiography through their polysemic and non-rational mode of discourse, as

- 8 Peter Zima, ‘Der Mythos der Monosemie’, p. 78. See also: Wolfgang Emmerich, ‘Status melancholicus. Zur Transformation der Utopie in der DDR-Literatur, *Text und Kritik*, special vol. *Literatur in der DDR. Rückblicke*, (1991) 232–45 (p. 236).
- 9 Fulbrook refers to oral history interviews in the late 1980s, which suggest a lack of any real feelings of guilt or shame among the generation who were young adults during the war. See Lutz Niethammer, Dorothee Wierling and Alexander von Plato, *Die volkseigene Erfahrung* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1991). Wilfried Schubarth’s survey of historical consciousness among 2000 young people in the GDR in 1988 also reveals a sense of emotional detachment from NS history. See Fulbrook: 164; for similar findings see Thomas C. Fox, *Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust* (Rochester: Camden House, 1999).

well as through their content. They deconstruct the myth of an 'anti-fascist' East Germany and question historical optimism.

Die Deutschen und der europäische Osten [...] Eine lange Geschichte aus Unglück und Verschuldung seit den Tagen des deutschen Ordens, die meinem Volk zu Buche steht. Wohl nicht zu tilgen und zu sühnen, aber eine Hoffnung wert und einen redlichen Versuch in deutschen Gedichten.<sup>10</sup>

[The Germans and Eastern Europe [...] a long history of calamity and guilt since the days of the Teutonic Order, which stands on my people's account. Not that it can ever be erased or atoned for, but it is worth hope and an honest attempt in German poetry.]

These words summarize the central theme of Bobrowski's work. His first two volumes of poetry, *Sarmatische Zeit* (1961) and *Schattenland Ströme* (1962) are particularly concerned with the mutual history of the Germans and their eastern European neighbours.<sup>11</sup>

Born in 1917 in Tilsit, in what was at the time eastern Germany, he grew up in an area inhabited by Germans, Poles, Lithuanians, Sinti and Roma, and Jews. In his poems Bobrowski juxtaposes memories of his childhood with the crimes committed against members of the other ethnic groups by Germans during National Socialism, crimes in which he participated as a German soldier during the Second World War. Bobrowski employs the name 'Sarmatia', a geographical term denoting eastern Europe, used by the Alexandrian geographer and astronomer Ptolemy in the second century AD, to embrace both the geographical and historical space with which he is concerned. He interprets history as a negative continuum, a pattern of repetition, which can be traced back to its mythic origins. His

10 Johannes Bobrowski, 'Mein Thema', in Gerhard Rostin, Eberhard Haufe and Bernd Leistner (eds) *Johannes Bobrowski. Selbstzeugnisse und Beiträge über sein Werk* (Berlin: Union, 1975), pp. 1–23 (p. 23).

11 Johannes Bobrowski, *Gesammelte Werke in 6 Bänden*, Eberhard Haufe (ed.) (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1998). Further references to this edition, cited as *GW*, are given after quotations in the text.



sceptical view of the historical process and the relationship between individual and collective responsibility for the German past are at the heart of his work.

In his poems he returns over and again to the eastern European Jewish culture annihilated by the German army. His poem 'Die Spur im Sand' (1954) illustrates this theme as well as his poetic approach to history and personal memory. 'Die Spur im Sand' is a recurrent image of the omnipresent traces of German inhumanity in his Sarmatia, but also representative of the difficulties inherent in the process of remembering, the evasive nature of 'true' memory.

Der blasse Alte  
im verschossenen Kaftan.  
Die Schläfenlocke wie voreinst. Aaron,  
da kannte ich dein Haus.  
Du trägst die Asche  
im Schuh davon.

Der Bruder trieb  
dich vor die Tür. Ich ging  
dir nach. Wie wehte um den Fuß  
der Rock! Es blieb mir eine Spur  
im Sand.

Dann sah ich  
manchmal abends  
von der Schneise  
dich kommen, flüsternd.  
Mit den weißen Händen  
warfst du die Schneesaat  
übers Scheunendach.

Weil deiner Väter Gott  
uns noch die Jahre  
wird heller färben, Aaron,  
liegt die Spur  
im Staub der Straßen,  
finde ich dich.  
Und gehe.  
Und deine Ferne

trag ich, dein Erwarten  
auf meiner Schulter. (GW I: 28)

[The pale old man/in the faded caftan./The old-time earlocks. Aaron,/I used to know your house./You bear its ashes away/in your shoes.//Your brother drove you from its door. I followed/you. How your caftan flapped about/your feet! All I was left with were traces/in the sand.//Then I sometimes/saw you of an evening/coming down the lane, whispering./With your white hands/you threw the snow-seed/over the barn roof.//Because your fathers' God/will continue to brighten/the years for us, Aaron,/traces remain in the dust of the streets,/I shall find you./And go./And I bear//your distance, your expectation/on my shoulders.]<sup>12</sup>

The poem recalls an event from the speaker's past: His neighbour, a Jew, is taken away. The use of 'ashes', connoting the ovens of the extermination camps, evokes both Paul Celan's famous Shoah poem 'Todesfuge' (1948) and, in the context of Bobrowski's work, the many pogroms in eastern European history, which are central events in his poetry, for example in 'Die Heimat des Malers Chagall' (1955) and 'Holunderblüte' (1960). The antiquated word, 'voreinst' [then] contributes to a general broadening of the historical dimensions. The ambiguous lines 'I followed/you' point to a sense of personal responsibility, referring to the speaker following his expelled neighbour, Aaron, but also to Bobrowski, the soldier sent East with his unit in the footsteps of the *Einsatzgruppen* [mobile killing units] to annihilate Jews during the invasion of Russia, and, finally, as chronicler of centuries of German oppression in eastern Europe.<sup>13</sup> The poem's conclusion refers to Bobrowski's poetic project at large: the promise to remember his individual share of guilt as part of a collective German past burdened with guilt. 'Das will ich: eine große, tragische Konstellation in der Geschichte auf meine Schultern nehmen, bescheiden, und das

12 Trans. by David Scrase in David Scrase, *Understanding Johannes Bobrowski* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), p. 21.

13 Compare Scrase's interpretation, op.cit., pp. 21–2.

daran gestalten, was ich schaffe.<sup>14</sup> [This is what I want: to take a great, tragic constellation in history on my shoulders, modestly, and work through it as well as I can].

The intrusion of National Socialist violence into the peaceful Jewish world of the eastern European *shtetl* is directly addressed in such poems as 'Kaunas 1941' (1957/58), 'Bericht' (1961) and 'An\*\*\*\*' (1958). Most of these poems contain only vague references to time, place and other particulars of the events depicted. A photograph entitled 'Kowno 28. June 1941' in a history book on the Shoah, known to Bobrowski, may have been one of the sources for his poem 'Kaunas 1941', as Dagmar Deskau suggests in *Der aufgelöste Widerspruch*.<sup>15</sup> The caption underneath the photograph reads: 'Bei dem Blutbad in Kowno (Litauen) ließ sie (scil. die Sicherheitspolizei) Hunderte von Juden durch freigelassene Zuchthäusler mit Eisenrohren totschlagen' (Schoenberner: 41) [During the bloodbath in Kowno (Lithuania) the security forces released convicts from prison and ordered them to beat to death hundreds of Jews with iron pipes]. In the poem the event is evoked in dark, enigmatic tropes:

Stadt,  
über dem Strom ein Gezweig,  
kupferfarben, wie Festgerät. Aus der Tiefe die Ufer  
rufen. Das hüftkranke Mädchen  
trat vor die Dämmerung damals,  
sein Rock aus dunkelstem Rot.

- 14 Bobrowski in a letter to Hans Ricke (9 October 1956), cited in Ursula Heukenkamp, "'Neues hat nie begonnen": Das Wandlungsthema im Gefangenschaftsbericht von Johannes Bobrowski', in Ursula Heukenkamp (ed.) *Unerwünschte Erfahrung: Kriegsliteratur und Zensur in der DDR* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1990), pp. 227–60 (p. 253).
- 15 Dagmar Deskau, *Der aufgelöste Widerspruch: 'Engagement' und 'Dunkelheit' in der Lyrik Johannes Bobrowskis* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1975), p. 34. According to Hubert Faensen, 'Bericht' is based on a photograph in Gerhard Schoenberner's, *Der gelbe Stern – Die Judenverfolgung in Europa 1933–1945* (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1960), p. 98. See Hubert Faensen, 'Gedenkzeichen und Warnzeichen', in Rostin *et al.*: 91–5 (95).

Und ich erkenne die Stufen,  
 den Hang, dieses Haus. Da ist kein  
 Feuer. Unter dem Dach  
 lebt die Jüdin, lebt in der Juden Verstummen,  
 flüsternd, ein weißes Wasser  
 der Tochter Gesicht. Am Tor  
 lärmten die Mörder vorüber. Weich  
 gehn wir, im Moderduft, in der Wölfe Spur [...]. (GW I: 60–1)

[City/over the river branches/the colour of copper, like festive decoration. From the/depth the banks/are calling. The girl with the sick hip/stepped before the dusk then, her skirt of deepest red.//And I recognize the steps, the slope, this house, there is no fire. Under the roof/lives the Jewish girl, lives in the Jews' silence,/whispering, a white water/the daughter's face. The murderers/are passing the gate noisily. Softly/we walk, in the musty odour, following the traces of the wolves [...].]<sup>16</sup>

The specific time, indicated in the title, is again changed to a vague 'damals' [then] in the fifth line. The identity of the girl in the red skirt in the first verse is not revealed. Only in the context of other of Bobrowski's poems, in which the girl with the red skirt is a recurrent image, can she be interpreted as an archetypal figure of persecuted innocence. All we learn about the other people depicted in the poem is their ethnic identity, their age, or family relations. Bobrowski is not interested in the stories of individuals. 'Kaunas' explores how fellow human beings are murdered because of their ethnic identity, as an example of fratricide. The speaker of the poem alternates between first person singular and plural. He speaks as the representative of those who have closed their eyes to the crimes committed, as the representative of all Germans who are guilty because of their active or passive support of the National Socialist 'wolves'. The change from description to reflection

16 Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

indicates that the poem is primarily about the individual's attitude to the event:<sup>17</sup>

Sah ich dich nicht mehr an,  
Bruder? An blutiger Wand  
schlug uns Schlaf. So sind wir  
weitergegangen, um alles  
blind. (GW I: 60)

[Did I not look at you,/brother? At the bloody wall/we were overcome  
by sleep. So we walked on, /to all/blind.]

In Bobrowski's poetry, the Jewish victims and their stories are stripped of their individuality; they inhabit archetypal spaces: earth, sky, human being, mountain, river, plain.<sup>18</sup> The poems are concerned with historical events primarily as a manifestation of timeless patterns and general rather than individual human behaviour. Historiography and mythology have the same status. In the unpublished poem 'An\*\*\*', for example, the reference to the Rasainan miller, a character from Slavic mythology, links the Shoah and the brutal conversion of the Slavic tribes to Christianity, and the destruction of their traditional culture by the Knights of the Teutonic Order in the Middle Ages (GW II: 312). Guilt in Bobrowski's interpretation of history as 'Schattenfabel von den Verschuldungen' [shadow fable of guilt] is defined in terms of humanist or Christian values (GW I: 161). During an interview in 1964 Bobrowski explained:

Ich bin als Soldat der Wehrmacht in der Sowjetunion gewesen. Ich habe dort das noch vor Augen geführt bekommen, was ich historisch von den

- 17 Bobrowski's poem 'Bericht' is formally and thematically built on the idea of people taking or failing to take a humane 'Haltung' [attitude/stance] in the face of injustice, which is central to Bobrowski's work (GW I: 133).
- 18 On Bobrowski's poetics of space see Oliver Schütze, *Natur und Geschichte im Blick des Wanderers: Zur lyrischen Situation bei Bobrowski und Hölderlin* (Würzburg: Königshausen, 1990), p. 21.

Auseinandersetzungen des Deutschen Ritterordens mit den Völkern im Osten und von der preußischen Ostpolitik aus der Geschichte wußte.<sup>19</sup>

[I was in the Soviet Union as a German soldier. I saw there at first hand what I knew about the conflict between the Knights of the Teutonic Order and the tribes in the East and also about the political relations between Prussia and Eastern Europe from history.]

Here, as in his poetry, he interprets the individual event as a recurring example of the same principle of inhumanity, its nadir being National Socialism. He puts forward a static or cyclical model of history that is diametrically opposed to any idea of progress. In his programmatic poem 'Absage' (1959) he states, 'Neues hat nie begonnen' [nothing new has ever begun], (GW I: 73). The individual's ability to act is reduced to the reflective and painful remembrance of the past through language. Remembrance through poetry paradoxically hopes to transcend the repetitive catastrophe of history.

Rather than looking at the personal and collective past from the safe distance of a rational analysis, Bobrowski attempts to re-live it by resurrecting it through his poetry as 'Zauberspruch' [magic spell] or 'Beschwörungsformel' [conjur-ation].<sup>20</sup> He wants to expose himself to the painful process of memory. In his own words, he wants to be 'angegriffen' [attacked] by his memory like metal by an acidic substance. Bobrowski employs the metaphor 'rust' in several poems for the act of remembrance. In 'Wiedererweckung' (1965) the poet-speaker and reader are urged:

beleb mit Worten  
das Blut in den Bäumen und  
den Lungen, den Rost  
schlag von den Wänden und Stufen,

19 Johannes Bobrowski, 'Ansichten und Absichten: Ein Interview des Berliner Rundfunks', in Rostin *et al.*: 51.

20 Bobrowski refers to this poetic principle in a letter to Peter Jokostra (4 March 1959. Quoted in Eberhard Haufe, 'Zu Leben und Werk Johannes Bobrowskis', in GW I: VII-LXXXVI (LXII).

an deinen Händen  
bleibt er, dort mag er sich nähren  
mit deinen Nägeln. (GW I: 203)

[revive with words/the blood in the trees and/the lungs, scrape the rust/from the walls and steps,/it shall remain on your hands,/there it may nourish itself/with your fingernails.]

The reader's emotional catharsis is achieved through the poem's figurative language, and not through a process of logical interpretation. The poem as 'conjunction' allows the reader, through its open syntactic structure and polysemantic imagery, to fill its free associative spaces with personal emotions, associations and memories. In a sense, the poem creates a 'prosthetic memory' to share the act of remembering even with a reader who has no personal experience of National Socialism.<sup>21</sup> The reduction of individuals and events to their symbolic function may, however, prevent the reader's emotional identification, and perhaps even empathy, with the real flesh-and-blood victims of the Nazi army.

Sarah Kirsch's poetry can be read as a continuation of Bobrowski's poetic mode with regard to its non-rational, metaphysical approach to history and its deeply sceptical view of progress. Kirsch's poetry is exemplary for the subjective and polysemic exploration of the National Socialist past by a number of younger GDR writers from the late 1960s onwards.<sup>22</sup> Their texts approach the past as a self-experienced reality. They

- 21 Alison Landsberg coins the term 'prosthetic memory' in her article on the Shoah in American popular media to describe 'strategies [...] within which an alternative living memory is produced in those who did not live through the event'. Alison Landsberg, 'America, the Holocaust and the Mass Culture of Memory: Toward a Radical Politics of Empathy', *New German Critique*, 71 (1997), 63–86 (p. 66).
- 22 Compare also Julia Hell's study of Christa Wolf's attempts at 'authentic subjectivity', in Julia Hell, *Psychoanalysis, History and the Literature of East Germany* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 200–21, and Jan-Gerrit Berendse, *Die 'Sächsische Dichterschule': Lyrik in der DDR der sechziger und siebziger Jahre* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1990).

explore questions of individual responsibility and the process of memory on a personal level or, by extension, through memories of their parents' generation of what they had or had failed to do in Nazi Germany. Kirsch's polysemantic elegies are concerned with 'the portrayal of the past from one's place in the present, to show its continuing influence on one's present' (Haufe, in *GW I*: LVI). Her work aims at capturing a deeply personal and sensual dimension of experience that was excluded from official, rationalist discourse. Like Bobrowski, she wants to conjure up and mediate moments of historic atrocities in the present, by using ambiguous and compelling 'imagines agentes'.<sup>23</sup> The title of her 1972 volume *Zaubersprüche* is programmatic with regard to her formal approach.<sup>24</sup> Elements of myth, folklore and fantasy are employed as an alternative, non-rational mode of expression that gains access to the Other through memory.

As Barbara Mabee points out, Kirsch explores the Nazi genocide of the Jews as part of a history of suppression and extermination of the Other.<sup>25</sup> This suppressed Other manifests itself in different forms in her poems: as Jewishness or as an original unity of humankind and nature, but also as femininity. 'Hirtenlied', in *Landaufenthalt* (1967), is a paradigm of her poetry. It reflects on her self-assigned role as chronicler of the history of domination over the Other in nature and human consciousness.

Ich sitz über Deutschlands weißem Schnee  
der Himmel ist aufgeschlitzt

23 Marcus Tullius Cicero, cited in Frances A. Yates, *Gedächtnis und Erinnern: Mnemotechnik von Aristoteles bis Shakespeare* (Weinheim: VCH, Acta Humaniora, 1991), p. 15.

24 Sarah Kirsch, *Zaubersprüche* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1972).

25 Barbara Mabee, "'I wash tears and sweat out of old moss': Remembrance of the Holocaust in the Poetry of Sarah Kirsch', in Elaine Martin (ed.), *Gender, Patriarchy and Fascism in the Third Reich: The Response of Women Writers* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), pp. 201–38 (pp. 209–11).



Wintersamen  
 kommt auf mich, wenn nicht Schlimmres  
 Haar wird zum Helm  
 die Flöte splittert am Mund.

[...]

Ich knote an Bäume mich lieg unter Steinen  
 streu Eis mir ins Hemd ich schneide  
 das Lid vom Aug da bleibe ich wach:  
 Meine tückische Herde  
 die sich vereinzelt die sich vermengt  
 meine dienstbare tückische Herde  
 wird Wolke sonst: winters noch  
 ist sie zerkracht.<sup>26</sup>

[I sit above Germany's white snow/the sky is slit open/Winter seeds/come to me if nothing worse/hair becomes helmet/the flute splinters in the mouth.//[...]/I tie myself to trees lie under stones/sprinkle ice in my shirt I cut/the lid off my eye then I stay awake:/My insidious flock/which separates and mingles/my serviceable insidious flock/becomes a cloud otherwise: still in the winter/it burst.]<sup>27</sup>

The remembering self finds traces of history in nature. The way in which Kirsch associates the suppressed memory of historical violence with the destruction of nature in this poem is reminiscent of Bobrowski's work. The snow-covered landscape in the first stanza symbolizes the situation of the poet-speaker in a post-war Germany, which refuses to remember its recent history. 'Schnee' [snow] and 'Wintersamen' [winter seed] can be read as intertextual references to poems of Bobrowski, Paul Celan or Nelly Sachs. In their work, as well as in other texts in Kirsch's *Landaufenthalt*, snow, cold, winter and ice serve as metaphors for historical violence, amnesia and spiritual paralysis with regard to National Socialism. The image of 'Schneesaat' [snow seed] in Bobrowski's poem 'Die Spur im Sand' is but one

26 Sarah Kirsch, *Landaufenthalt* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1972), p. 17.

27 Trans. by Mabee, pp. 228–9.

example of this. In the metaphor employed in Kirsch's poem, Germany has 'buried' its crimes against the Other underneath a layer of 'white snow', and is thus condemned to repeat them. The vicious cycle of violence against fellow human beings can only be broken through empathy. The painful memory of crimes against humanity and nature involve the difficult return to both inner and outer nature: 'I tie myself to trees [...].' The poem ends in an apocalyptic vision of a nuclear disaster. The self-destruction of her society, or 'insidious flock', due to the continuous destruction of the Other may only be averted through the continuing emphatic remembrance of the poet-speaker. This, however, seems not to be humanly possible. As in Bobrowski's work, remembrance appears as a painful, and probably hopeless endeavour. Nevertheless it must be attempted again and again, motivated by a paradoxical sense of hope.

Bobrowski's poetic approach to National Socialism and the Shoah can be criticized on a number of grounds. Aspects open to criticism are his depiction of historical process essentially as a force of fate and his somewhat stereotypical portrayal of the Jewish victims.<sup>28</sup> But he remains exceptional in East German literature of the 1950s and early 1960s in that he was *the* non-Jewish writer who most consistently evoked the theme of individual and collective guilt. The importance of his poetic approach to remembrance within East German literature cannot be underestimated.

It is more difficult to decide what effect the literary counter-discourse outlined above had on popular discourse in East Germany. Thomas C. Fox concludes in his book *Stated Memory. East Germany and the Holocaust* that most East German writers and film-makers participated in the official, affirmative discourse. But he also adds that from within this they 'not

28 Sabine Egger, 'Die Mythologisierung von ostjüdischem Leben und Geschichte in der Lyrik Johannes Bobrowskis 1952–1962', in Paul O'Doherty (ed.), *Jews in German Literature since 1945: Jewish-German Literature?* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 353–65.

infrequently interrogated, extended and even undermined that very discourse' (Fox: 98). Nevertheless, such subversive accounts remained marginal within GDR society. The official foundational narrative of the socialist victors of history was of vast importance for the formation of a collective identity in the GDR, and it continued to dominate political discourse, as well as film, school books and so on, and that means, cultural memory in general. (Bathrick: 17) The current rise of right-wing extremism in former East Germany would suggest that many eastern Germans still think that they had little to do with National Socialism. Mary Fulbrook explains that:

on the one hand, the narrative plots of the official tales, and the vocabulary in which they were phrased, do not in the main appear to have been so perfectly ingested and digested as to be generally reproduced as unquestionable truth; but on the other, the underlying moral of these tales, that one had little or nothing to be ashamed of, does appear to have achieved broad popular resonance. (Fulbrook: 155)

If one assumes that, at the same time, stories of fathers and grandfathers who had supported, or at least tolerated, the Nazi regime, were passed down, largely unquestioned, outside the official realm of discourse, one could imagine such stories – or worse, revisionist neo-Nazi tales – potentially filling an emotional void left by official Marxist-Leninist historiography (Fulbrook: 158).<sup>29</sup>

29 Fulbrook gives examples of informal discussions in workplaces and families of supposedly better times during National Socialism as a way of expressing dissatisfaction with aspects of life in the GDR.

## Part 2: Narrative and Remembering

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DAVID ROCK

## Creating Memories in the Search for Identity: The Holocaust Fiction of Jurek Becker

A central theme of this volume is the way in which cultural memory is mediated through literature. This chapter addresses the specific difficulties of remembering the Holocaust and of coming to terms with its repercussions, with the emphasis on very individual forms of memory and identity in three novels and two stories by the East German writer, Jurek Becker. This individual case will also be seen to reflect the widely shared proposition that the past haunts, but is itself re-shaped by, the present.

Two years before his death in 1997, Jurek Becker published a short essay in the German magazine *Der Spiegel* in which he sharply criticized the decline in standards of the state-owned radio stations in Germany during the 1990s, not least because radio was a medium close to his own heart for a very personal reason: after the war, it had become a substitute for the large Jewish family which he had lost in the Holocaust.<sup>1</sup> As he had no aunts and uncles to tell him stories, it was the radio given to him at the age of eleven by his father which supplied the tales which fired his imagination. And imagination was to become the crucial factor in his search for identity.

It was also a radio which was the idea behind Becker's most famous novel, *Jakob der Lügner* (1969).<sup>2</sup> His first work was, as the author explained in 1983, an improvisation on one of the few true stories from this time told to him by his father, about a

- 1 Jurek Becker, 'Die Worte verschwinden. Über den Niedergang des öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunks', *Der Spiegel*, 2/49 (1995), 155–61.
- 2 Jurek Becker, *Jakob der Lügner* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1969).

man in the Lodz ghetto who had been shot when the Gestapo discovered the clandestine radio with which he had provided his fellow-Jews with news from London and Moscow.<sup>3</sup> Becker composed his own unusual version of this story, improvising a humorous tale about a Jew in a Polish ghetto who pretends to have a radio in order to give a suicidally rash friend the hope to carry on by convincing him of the Russian advance. A true story thus became the inspiration for a fictional masterpiece which explores, amongst other themes, the lack of resistance by Jews to the horrors meted out to them by the Nazis.

Jurek Becker was born in Lodz in 1937; his father was the only other family survivor of the Lodz ghetto and concentration camps. Fearing a resurgence of anti-semitism in Poland, Becker senior took his son to East Berlin in 1945 and straight away encouraged him to learn German and forget his Polish, an experience which left the young boy literally speechless for a time.<sup>4</sup> When I interviewed Becker in 1991, he admitted that he had now totally forgotten his mother tongue. He also claimed to have almost no memories of his earliest childhood.<sup>5</sup> He believed that there was a linguistic reason for this: that these memories of his experiences in the ghetto and concentration camps had been stored away in the Polish language, and had thus been forgotten along with his Polish.<sup>6</sup> On another occasion, though, Becker also offered a slightly different explanation for his lack of memories: in an earlier essay, he expressed his belief that the unusually late start of his memories had something to do with repression, a mechanism separating and thus protecting him from dreadful experiences.<sup>7</sup> As Becker himself realized,

3 Jurek Becker, 'Resistance in *Jakob der Lügner*', *Seminar*, 19 (1983), 269–73.

4 See Jurek Becker, 'Antrittsrede', in Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (ed.), *Jurek Becker* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1992), pp. 13–14 (p. 13).

5 This was a claim that he maintained consistently until his death.

6 See also Karin Graf and Ulrich Konietzny, 'Werkstattgespräch mit Jurek Becker', in Karin Graf and Ulrich Konietzny (eds), *Jurek Becker* (Munich: Iudicium, 1991), pp. 56–74.

7 Jurek Becker, 'Mein Judentum', in Heidelberger-Leonard: 15–24 (16).

his continual preoccupation with his own Jewish origins in his fictional works was directly related to this lack of memories of experiences which largely determined the course of his life.<sup>8</sup>

His works set in this period are, then, not written from memory; they are largely the product of three things: his own imagination, his father's sparse anecdotes and historical research. In his very last interview, he even claimed that *Jakob der Lügner* was the attempt to trace some hint of his own autobiography through a combination of research and imagination.<sup>9</sup> His Jewish works, it seems, are a search for identity via imaginative linguistic constructs, an attempt, as it were, to open the locked doors of the past with the keys of imagination and language. Such works are not rediscovered memories or direct reflections of his own experiences but fictitious reconstructions.

*Jakob der Lügner* is a freely invented reconstruction of the lost world of Becker's childhood in a story about an unheroic hero in a Polish ghetto. In the narrative technique and style of his first novel, with its chatty, conversational tone, Becker recreates something of the Yiddish oral tradition of storytelling, articulating through the multiplicity of its characters the East European Jews of his childhood for his German readers, 'for the others' who had not witnessed the events in the ghettos, as he once explained, but also for himself.<sup>10</sup> In his final interview, he explained that one of his reasons for writing his first novel was the desire to know more precisely what the ghetto was like, which he claims he knew much better after the book than before it (Koelbl: 211). But above and beyond this, the form of *Jakob der Lügner* also employs techniques associated with Jewish culture, such as aspects of the traditional Yiddish narrative, Yiddish words, Old Testament phrases and imagery drawn

8 See Ingo Roland Stöhr, "'Die wahre Aufregung...'" Ein Gespräch mit Jurek Becker', *Dimension*, 17 (1988), 8–29.

9 Herlinde Koelbl, 'Das ist wie ein Gewitter', *Der Spiegel*, 13/51 (1997), 210–16 (p. 211).

10 Jurek Becker, 'Answering Questions about *Jakob der Lügner*', *Seminar*, 19 (1983), 288–92 (p. 288).



almost directly from Judaism, in order to affirm its survival of its attempted destruction by the Nazis.<sup>11</sup> By employing the type of narration, vocabulary and symbolism associated with that culture, key aspects of the everyday life, language and ideas of the Eastern European *shtetl*, familiar to the family which Becker never really knew, are recreated and preserved from oblivion in literary form.

When the novel first appeared, the young Becker was hailed by critics as the East German heir of the tradition of Jewish storytelling represented by writers such as Sholom Aleichem and Isaac Bashevi Singer, but Becker was quick to resist this label of 'Jewish writer', and in his essay 'Mein Judentum' (1978), he denied any attachment to Judaism (Becker, 'Mein Judentum': 15–24). His resistance to such labelling was, though, not synonymous with the denial of Jewish identity. Indeed, his other fictional works on Jewish themes, *Der Boxer* (1976) 'Die Mauer' (1980), 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte' (1980) and *Bronsteins Kinder* (1986), are partly a search for his lost Jewish identity;<sup>12</sup> for in them, as he suggested to me in 1991, he attempts to unlock his own suppressed memories or at least to revive the few very faint ones which he still has of Jewish family life, such as the sound of his mother's voice in the ghetto. In the story 'Die Mauer', for instance, an adult narrator pretends to become a child again and to re-experience events in a ghetto through the eyes of himself as a five-year-old; the child's mother, though, has 'kein Gesicht mehr [...] nur noch eine Stimme [no face any longer, just a

11 For detailed examples, see John P. Wieczorek, "'Irreführung durch Erzählperspektive?'" The East German Novels of Jurek Becker', *Modern Language Review*, 85 (1990), 640–52; and David Rock, *Jurek Becker: A Jew who became a German*, (Oxford: Berg, 2000), pp. 35–60 and pp. 69–70.

12 Jurek Becker, *Der Boxer* (Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1976); Jurek Becker, 'Die Mauer', in *Nach der ersten Zukunft* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1980), pp. 62–102.; Jurek Becker, 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte', in *Nach der ersten Zukunft*, pp. 40–61; Jurek Becker, *Bronsteins Kinder* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1986).

voice] (Becker, 'Die Mauer': 63).<sup>13</sup> And in the freely invented 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte', Becker creates a vivid story about the sort of storytelling tradition which probably existed within his own family. Again, Becker manages to revive an aspect of Jewish family culture so important to him, a custom which is part of his own heritage but which to his annoyance, as his narrator tells us, has disappeared before his time (Becker, 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte': 40). And again, Becker succeeds in skilfully employing techniques associated both with his own family heritage and with that of Central European Jewish culture – the oral tradition of storytelling, whose exponents in his own family have perished – in order to ensure its survival at least in written form.<sup>14</sup>

In these three works, Becker explores conceivable versions of the past, possible dimensions of his own forgotten experiences and of his Jewish origins through fiction, through the medium of his imagination. He viewed his writing about this time as an attempt to retrieve memories or even create them for himself, for he saw them as indispensable, comparing being without memories of childhood to being condemned to drag a big box around with him the whole time, whose contents he did not know; and the older he got, the more impatient he became to open it.<sup>15</sup> In an interview in 1988, Becker explained the way such stories came to him in terms of 'pseudo-memories', 'remembering things erroneously', adding that this was an important source of his creativity: memory was for him creat-

13 For an analysis of the story see: David Rock, *Jurek Becker: Five Stories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 12–25.

14 For a more detailed analysis of this story, see David Rock, 'Aesthetics and storytelling: some aspects of Jurek Becker's *Erzählungen*', in Arthur Williams, Stuart Parkes and Julian Preece (eds), *Contemporary German Writers. Their Aesthetics and their Language* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 55–69.

15 Jurek Becker, 'Die unsichtbare Stadt', in Hanno Loewy and Gerhard Schoenberger (eds), *'Unser einziger Weg ist Arbeit.' Das Ghetto in Lodz 1940–1944* (Vienna: Löcker, 1990), pp. 10–12 (p. 10).

ive, functioning as the filter through which imagined and therefore possibly real experience was transformed into literature (Stöhr: 8).

We know that Becker's only clear memories date from the time after his father had managed to find him with the help of an American relief organization after the Second World War. Unlike *Jakob der Lügner* which was purely fictitious, his second Holocaust novel *Der Boxer* does relate to these memories of his own experiences in the early post-war years. Indeed, the author described it as his 'most private book'.<sup>16</sup> Its plot has several autobiographical parallels, such as: the death of the mother in a concentration camp; father and son as the sole survivors of the entire family; the father's reunion with his son in a camp shortly after the end of the war through the help of an American relief agency; and the decision to resettle in East Berlin. Motivated above all by his desire to shield his son from painful memories of the past, the novel's main character, Aron Blank, like Becker's own father, refuses to speak about the Jews and the Holocaust. His desire to forget the past leads him to suppress his Jewishness: he tries to change his appearance by dying his hair and he changes his name to Arno. Yet his efforts to acquire a new identity fail, for the camps still exist in his head and he is continually haunted by the ghosts of the past. Moreover, his reticence as Holocaust-survivor leads to a complete breakdown of communication with his son, Mark, who becomes increasingly estranged from his father, and one day suddenly leaves home without any forewarning. From subsequent letters, it turns out that he has gone to Israel on the eve of the Six Day War. When the letters suddenly stop, Aron assumes that his son has been killed.

In the son, Becker gives us the reverse side of the coin to the father: by choosing a Jewish identity for himself in the Jewish state of Israel, Mark negates his father's attempts to

16 Richard A. Zipser, 'Interview with Jurek Becker', *Dimension*, 11 (1978), 407-16 (p. 411).

suppress his own Jewish identity and also to protect Mark from his own Jewishness. In this respect, Mark corresponds closely to the definition of a Jew given by Becker in his essay 'Mein Judentum', when he claimed that the question of belonging to a group of people such as the Jews involved an act of individual free will, an intellectual decision (Becker, 'Mein Judentum': 19).

The Jewish critic Chaim Shoham has argued that Becker's refusal to define his identity according to his biological origins and the religious faith of his parents represents, from a Jewish point of view, a typically assimilatory tendency.<sup>17</sup> For Shoham, Becker's writing was a denial of his Jewish identity and thus a form of psychological therapy: the act of writing was the attempt to find a new identity in place of the Jewish one which he wanted to extinguish. It is my view, though, that Becker's case was exactly the reverse: it was precisely through the act of writing, and indeed through the medium of the German language, that he sought to seek, explore and possibly rediscover that part of himself, namely the Polish-Jewish element, which as a child he had extinguished from his memory. Shoham also argues that Mark Blank is Jurek Becker's *Doppelgänger*, and he interprets Mark's later turning to Israel and to things Hebrew, what Shoham calls 'his return to a Jewish identity', as evidence of Becker's inability to deny, to suppress his own Jewishness. Yet Mark, the boxer of the title and an aggressive bully at school, is in many ways quite unlike his author; indeed, none of Becker's protagonists are identical with the author. One of his distinguishing marks as a writer was the obvious delight which he took in quite literally playing different parts, exploring different identities. It is no coincidence that one of Becker's favourite authors was Max Frisch: in the latter's novel *Mein Name sei Gantenbein* (1964), the formula according to which the narrator

17 Chaim Shoham, 'Jurek Becker ringt mit seinem Judentum. *Der Boxer* und Assimilation nach Auschwitz', in Albrecht Schöne (ed.), *Kontroversen, alte und neue* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986), V, pp. 225–36.

operates is: 'Ich probiere Geschichten an wie Kleider!'<sup>18</sup> [I try on stories like clothes!]. Jurek Becker's only real memories (the ones from the early post war years) inspire imaginative improvisation on the theme of possible identity; and not unlike Frisch's narrator, Becker quite literally tries on different identities in his stories and novels. Moreover, as Claudia Brecheisen has observed, Becker demonstrates through the multiplicity of his Jewish figures (particularly in *Jakob der Lügner*) (Rock, *Jurek Becker*: 55–60) and 'with bold and fine lines of differentiation', that there is no such thing as 'the Jew, the Jewish identity', but rather a plurality of Jewish identities.<sup>19</sup>

The narrator and main character of Becker's last Holocaust novel, *Bronsteins Kinder*, also appears to bear close autobiographical resemblance to Becker. Like his author himself, Hans Bronstein rejects his official GDR classification as a 'victim of fascism'. Like Becker, too, he is a citizen of the GDR, philosophy student and the son of Jewish parents. Another strong parallel to Becker's own life, and above all to his own difficult relationship with his father, is reflected in the novel's major theme: the repercussions of the Holocaust. Despite the semblance of normality in their everyday lives, the survivors remain life-long victims, unable to communicate with their children who therefore have difficulty comprehending them. One of the central themes in both this novel and *Der Boxer* is the reticence, the persistent lack of communication between the generations.

Yet as Hannes Krauss has rightly claimed, Becker's Jewish novels are not confessional autobiography but models with types.<sup>20</sup> The autobiographical dimension is not to be found at

18 Max Frisch, *Mein Name sei Gantenbein* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1967), p. 23.

19 Claudia Brecheisen, 'Literatur des Holocaust: Identität und Judentum bei Jakob Lind, Edgar Hilsenrath und Jurek Becker' (doctoral thesis, University of Augsburg, 1993), p. 87.

20 Hannes Krauss, 'Jurek Becker. Ein jüdischer Autor?', in Jost Hermand and Gert Mattenklott (eds), *Jüdische Intelligenz in Deutschland* (Hamburg: Argument, 1988), pp. 139–46.

the level of facts, rather the author gives shape to his fundamental experiences in free literary fiction. The stories of characters such as Hans (*Bronsteins Kinder*) and Mark (*Der Boxer*) represent just two of several possible situations, views of life and ways of coming to terms with repercussions of the past that Becker was able to envisage.

In many of Becker's texts, the idea of the past is integrally linked to the notion of the future; indeed, the past is often the precondition both for the future itself and for free self-determination, with memory frequently playing a vital role. His novels, though, deal not with the author's own case, namely the psychological problems associated with the repression of memories, but with the related yet distinct theme of memory as an essential factor in coming to terms with past experiences. A theme common to both *Der Boxer* and *Bronsteins Kinder* is the realization that the future is dependent on the past, and that those who wish to determine their own future have to fix their gaze on the past in order to be able to leave it behind and move on. At the start of *Bronsteins Kinder*, for instance, the narrator explains his paradoxical reason for telling his story: first of all he has to form as precise an impression as possible of events that are to be removed from his memory (Becker, *Bronsteins Kinder*: 15). The earlier novel, *Der Boxer*, offers a contrasting variation on this theme when his American lover points out to the Holocaust survivor, Aron, that whoever wishes to determine his own future must first face up to the past in order to be able to leave it behind (Becker, *Der Boxer*: 45).

Through Hans, the narrator of *Bronsteins Kinder* and son of the Jewish survivor, with his paradoxical need to remember in order to be able to forget, Becker reflects on the difficulties, even so long after the event, facing children of Jewish victims of the Holocaust in adjusting to life in Germany and trying to live as 'Germans'. As his name suggests, Hans sees himself as a German not a Jew, yet despite himself as it were, when he reaches adulthood and learns more details about his father's past, Hans develops a sense of Jewishness and increasingly feels an outsider in the country in which he is a citizen. And his

attempt at personal *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* [coming to terms with the past] ultimately fails, for his goal of remembering with precision in order to be able to remove the past from his memory proves impossible.

This failure is anticipated in two incidents which take place during the year after his father's death, both of which demonstrate that the past can never be eradicated. The first features an image employed elsewhere by Becker as a metaphor for memory (See Becker, 'Die unsichtbare Stadt': 10): when sorting out a box of family mementoes, Hans poses the question whether starting a new life will entail destroying the box and its contents, but has to answer in the negative, for he realizes that this form of denial would simply perpetuate his life as it was, and he wants to move on (Becker, *Bronsteins Kinder*: 255). The second incident involves an old school exercise-book into which Hans has copied details from a notebook belonging to a former Neuengamme concentration camp guard called Heppner. Hans's father, a survivor of Neuengamme, has taken revenge on Heppner by imprisoning him in his *dacha*, chaining him to the bed, interrogating him and subjecting him to physical abuse. Though Heppner is eventually discovered and later released by Hans after his father has died, Hans is unable to rid himself of the memory of the man. After some deliberation, Hans does destroy the notebook, tearing it into the tiniest shreds, but to no avail for he is unable to destroy the information in his own head. Though he wants only to be rid of this living symbol of the past and its repercussions, he realizes that he cannot obliterate the man simply by destroying the things with which he is associated (Becker, *Bronsteins Kinder*: 256–61).

Do these major themes, such as the inescapable repercussions of the past, Hans's denial of his Jewishness and his confusion about his identity, point to central characteristics of Becker's own complex psyche? Are characters such as Hans Bronstein and Mark Blank really Becker in disguise, as several

critics have suggested?<sup>21</sup> Here the answer must still be no, because despite several parallel autobiographical features, Becker is not identical with his characters Hans and Mark. As we have established above, such characters represent just two of various possible views of life, not the author's own. Becker is playing out certain possibilities, in the later novels in terms of different ways in which Jews come to terms with the past, the Holocaust, and in earlier works in terms of conceivable, yet imagined, memories in the search for the lost Jewish part of himself from his early childhood in Poland. Through their potentiality, Becker's novels and stories contain and express a memory much broader than the author's own, created from an amalgamation of autobiography, research, and imagination in his search for the sources of the Jewish cultural identity that he had lost.

21 For further details see Paul O'Doherty, 'Bibliography', in Colin Riordan (ed.), *Jurek Becker* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), pp. 118–52.



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EAMONN JORDAN

## The Meta-Theatricalization of Memory in Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*

Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) brings together memory and dancing, the sacred and the profane, ritual and transcendence in a brilliantly complicated fashion.<sup>1</sup> Michael, the play's narrator, is a memory maker, and the play is a dream-catcher of sorts. Dance serves as a manifestation of a defiant optimism: 'I want to dance' (*DL*: 24) Agnes states, and memory functions as an expression of buoyancy, even deliverance. Memory is simultaneously about remembering and forgetting, formulation and narration, structuring and phrasing, denial and embellishment, release and recovery. One might assume that such a successful play would result in many cheap imitations, but it did not. It might be even harder to believe that such a play would bring with it the demise of a particular writing practice, but it did. This is not to say that there are no residual traces of such a practice still in operation, but its dominance has collapsed decisively. Simply put, this old writing practice could be regarded as a post-colonial one, which was dependent on a series of binary oppositions that were utilized in order to confirm difference, dissent and resistance. Secondly, the principal ingredient of such dramas was the fact that the past, identity, place, home, landscape and exile were interrogated. More importantly, a fundamental sense of permissive meta-theatricality was relied upon to bring on board discord and opposition, whereby authority could be questioned, power

1 Brian Friel, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, in *Plays 2* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999). Further references are given as *DL* after quotations in the text.

inverted and an alternative set of values could be suggested, referred to or articulated.

What I mean by meta-theatricality is that these plays relied on storytelling, play-within-a-play, mask, artifice and carnival in order to consolidate serious critiques of Irish society, and of Ireland's broader relationships to the world elsewhere. A sense of transgressive play is found across a whole range of Friel's work, from *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964) to *Faith Healer* (1979), and is here re-formulated within the framework of memory. Friel's storytellers tend to be voyeurs, sometimes partaking in the action, but usually they are only at the fringes; seldom are they totally immersed in the situation. Michael is both narrator and intruder, and he plays with the memory, and at times, participates unnaturally in the resuscitated reminiscence as the child Michael.<sup>2</sup> To be too involved means often to be without the comfort and confidence that distance brings. How Friel achieves distance from his subject matter is his greatest skill as a playwright. In Friel's plays, the emotion is always blatantly painful, but it is never raging; it is expressive only in the determination of the characters to maintain a masked control over it.<sup>3</sup> Play complicates flow, expressivity, control and performativity. As Pine notes, play 'is both innocent and dangerous, both a revel and a risk'.<sup>4</sup>

In this writing tradition, play never had a singular presentness about it; the future was not the fundamental concern, instead it was the past that needed to be manipulated, before a

- 2 The male characters in *Lughnasa*, according to Anthony Roche, are 'moved to the margins and rendered deliberately unreal'. Anthony Roche, *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994), p. 285.
- 3 For Christopher Murray, 'it is as if masque, in the Jacobean sense, were overlaid by anti-masque, and a dissonance expressed'. Christopher Murray, "'Recording Tremors": Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* and the Uses of Tradition', in William Kerwin (ed.), *Brian Friel: A Casebook* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), pp. 23–41 (p. 31).
- 4 Richard Pine, *The Diviner: The Art of Brian Friel* (Dublin: Dublin University Press, 1999), p. 269.

less hesitant trajectory could be followed, and this is understandable, given that Ireland's past was beset by uncertainty, trauma, loss and victimization. Into that mix comes myth, legend and memories of all sorts. Memory was a strange type of inheritance; on the one hand there were shared memories that could be validated on a communal level. On the other there was a type of memory structure that was not so much based on fact as reliant upon a sense of sentiment or on an elaborate combination of fantasy, fact, narrative, defiance, possibility and reassurance. Friel captures this with the following lines:

And since there is no lake, my father and I never walked back from it in the rain with our rods across our shoulders. Have I imagined the scene, then? Or is it a composite of two or three different episodes? The point is – I don't think it matters. What matters is that for some reason [...] this vivid memory is there in the storehouse of the mind. For some reason the mind has shuffled the pieces of verifiable truth and composed a truth of its own. For to me it is a truth. And because I acknowledge its peculiar veracity, it becomes a layer in my subsoil; it becomes part of me; ultimately it becomes me.<sup>5</sup>

If the mind can 'shuffle the pieces', then the shuffling feet, through movement and dance, can trigger something altogether different. Friel can unsettle the verifiability of memory but, unlike Samuel Beckett, he cannot divorce memory from eloquence. Mask becomes memory, as mask activates a spirit of deeply harboured energy and a protracted memory of connection even when, as in *Lughnasa*, such memory is carnivalized and performative.

In *Lughnasa*, Friel emphasizes the memory processes of all the Mundy family, and of Michael, in particular. The family places obsessive weight on memory, as it bestows a level of subjectivity, unconfirmed by other activity in their lives; everything from Father Jack's difficulty in remembering his native tongue all the way to Maggie's memory of the dancing competition that her friend, Bernie O'Donnell and her partner,

5 Brian Friel, 'Self-Portrait', *Aquarius*, 5 (1972), 17–22 (p. 18).

Curley McDaid, unfairly lost, are mullied over. Moreover, the process of recollection within the play serves as a metaphor perhaps for the way in which the Irish nation itself records, dramatizes, negotiates with its past(s), and how it celebrates, passes on, accumulates and inherits the past. Adam Phillips argues that:

If memories are more like dreams than pieces of reliable documentary evidence, and are disguised representations of forbidden desire, it is as though desire can only be remembered by being successfully forgotten; which in this context means represented by a sufficiently censored dreamable dream, or an often banal replacement-memory. Forgetting, in its versions of disguise, makes desire accessible by making it tolerable.<sup>6</sup>

Michael deliberates on four key formative memories: the return of Father Jack from the missions, two close-together visits from his father, Gerry Evans, who is normally elsewhere, the presence of a new radio and the memory of his mother and his four aunts dancing. With these seed memories Michael introduces the play, but this stop-over by his father, whom he sees infrequently anyway, marks the slow demise of Gerry's visits, the return home of his uncle from the missions leads to his death within a year of his return home, and although the dance of the Mundy sisters is simultaneously celebratory and defiant, it also becomes the ominous indicator of impending separation.

The gaps between expectation and reality, longing and actualization, and substance and appearance are evident. The initial delight at Father Jack's return makes way for the utter shock provoked by his ill-health and unusual perspectives, the initial awe in the face of the magic of radio gives way to the sexual tensions and rivalry between the sisters over the partnering of Gerry in dance, the promises of a father to bestow gifts and to ensure his presence in the lives of mother (Chris) and child come to nothing. The heroic home-coming of Jack leads to ostracization and to Kate losing her job, thanks to the hostility

6 Adam Phillips, *On Flirtation* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p. 24.

of the local Parish Priest to Father Jack's religious practices, in addition the arrival of a new knitting factory leads to an altogether different regime within the household, with Rose and Agnes fleeing to London, only to fall into awful circumstances. Expectation and anticipation deliver nothing. The opposite of what is wished for occurs.

Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985) opens with a monologue delivered by Elder Pyper, who is haunted by the ghost of his younger self and by the ghosts of the dead soldiers that he fought with at the battle of the Somme. Pyper has been mis-representing the past: the version of it that he proffers at the start of the play, despite the unacknowledged inconsistencies of his speech, is challenged very strongly by the evidence that he is obliged to recollect and that an audience witnesses, during parts two, three, and four of the play. These units follow the soldiers from their first meeting together in the army barracks, through temporary homecomings from the war, and on to their final preparation for battle, readying themselves for death.

At the end of *Observe the Sons of Ulster* Elder Pyper and the ghost of his Younger Self embrace as if to bring an end to the haunting; Elder Pyper, for the first time, can acknowledge the events and their implications, in all their completeness. In this play there is a dramatic convention in operation. Units two to four are not simply Pyper's memories, instead they are a sort of agreed memory of what had occurred. Subjectivity is absent, and more importantly, incidents are staged which the Elder Pyper could not have witnessed, such as the home-comings of the three other pairs during part three.

In *Lughnasa*, a similar type of memory structure is in operation. There is of course the central memory that is both written and defined by Friel, of which Michael claims a type of tentative ownership. The play takes place in what O'Toole calls 'a collapse of past and present into the eternal suspension of

memory'.<sup>7</sup> On the surface, the dramatic convention of *Observe The Sons of Ulster* and of *Lughnasa* is that the central memory structure remains complete, only the response of Pyper in the former and Michael in the latter can vary. Likewise, in *Carthaginians* (1988), McGuinness deploys a play-within-a-play format so that the characters can begin to free themselves from the impact of the deaths on Bloody Sunday (1972), when the pain experienced by them could only be filtered through displacement, condensation, symbolization, self-harm and avoidance. The women in the play inhabit a graveyard, hoping to witness the dead rise. The memory of Bloody Sunday is so painful that nothing can be done with it until it begins to be freed up a little. Some movement on the path to freedom is achieved after the mock play-within-a-play, *The Burning Balaclava*, which provides an irreverent and unsettling response to the events of Bloody Sunday. Because history is over-rehearsed here in the burlesque play-within-a-play, and during the mock Battle of Scarva in *Observe The Sons of Ulster*, and because memory is an over-worked, manipulated performance in *Lughnasa*, then they mutate into something else. Just like Pyper, Michael in *Lughnasa* lays claim to a memory moment, the dance sequence, that he himself did not witness, something not many critics have noticed. When the sisters participate in the main dance, Michael is absent. He is playing down the lane. While both Pypers embrace in the McGuinness text, Michael fails in *Lughnasa* either to embrace his younger self or to acknowledge the contradictions of his narrative accounts as Pyper does. Friel does not call an end to Michael's fabrication or his disingenuity: involuntary memory is his Oileán Draíochta [Magic Island] of sorts.

The play states that Michael is a 'young man'. Let us say he is forty, at most fifty years old (and both are stretching things). In the first case, then, the memory activity, if we can isolate it as

7 Fintan O'Toole, 'Marking Time: From *Making History* to *Dancing at Lughnasa*', in Alan Peacock (ed.), *The Achievement of Brian Friel* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1993), pp. 202–14 (p. 203).

a single one, may take place in 1969, or with the second set of dates, it is 1979. So the memory moment most certainly is not 1990, the date of first performance. It becomes a supplementary frame of mediation. Additionally, Act One is set on a warm day, early in August, and Act Two in early September, yet Michael tells us that his father's return visit was a 'couple of weeks' later (*DL*: 65). So we move from early August to early September in just three weeks rather than the expected four, and either way, it contradicts Michael's reference to 'a couple of weeks', which normally suggests two. Time-scale, like memory, is unreliable. Details, like the fact that Gerry, the Welshman, speaks with an English accent (*DL*: 43), additionally and intentionally defamiliarize. There are substantially different linguistic, temporal and spatial frames evident, ensuring that space, time, language and dance overlap in a very complicated way. Temporally, there is real, memoried, imagined and ritualistic time in operation, while spatially, real, mythologized, internal, pagan, other-worldly and imagined spaces function simultaneously. In addition there are relationships between on-and-offstage (mimetic/diegetic), Donegal and Ryanga, and the imaginary Ballybeg and the Glenties, where the writer's own family on his mother's side, the MacLoones, were based.

Through narrative, Michael informs an audience not only what will occur, but, what to expect and what to look out for. He can tell us what is to happen to his family, and then it materializes. But, although we trust him with the facts, should we still trust him with his interpretation? Friel urges no. Michael must fail ultimately to determine meaning for the spectator, despite his best efforts. Michael seduces with his tone and his pleading, and through the way he narrates, deploying key words and seductive rhythms. In his final evocation Michael suggests that

everybody seems to be floating on those sweet sounds, moving rhythmically, languorously, in complete isolation; responding more to the mood of the music than to its beat, (*DL*: 107)



whereas in his opening monologue he remembers something somewhat different. He recalls his 'mother and her sisters suddenly catching hands and dancing a spontaneous step-dance and laughing – screaming – like excited school girls', and that 'Marconi's voodoo' deranged 'those kind, sensible women' and transformed 'them into shrieking strangers' (*DL*: 8). During the opening narrative he describes the dancing and atmosphere using words like 'spontaneous', 'laughing', 'screaming', 'excited' and 'deranged'; by the final monologue his depiction relies on words like 'floating', 'rhythmically', 'languorously', 'hushed rhythm' and 'silent hypnotic movement', two contradictory responses. In between, 'grotesque', 'aggressive', 'raucous', 'erratic', 'caricaturing' and 'parodic' are some of the words Friel employs to express the central dance in his stage directions.<sup>8</sup>

The brilliance of this play lies in the disturbing sense of incongruity established by Michael's contradictory accounts of the dancing, and by Friel's particular stage directions. The playwright is as consciously disruptive and manipulative as Michael attempts to be. Friel complicates his narrator's ownership of memory. Michael's response to the past is utterly unreliable and his summaries are deceptive. Furthermore, in performance, something altogether different is added by the performers, under the director's guidance, and by an audience's expectations of the dance sequence. The consistent problem has been that some directors have run close to Michael's dreamy account and downplayed the stage directions prompted by the writer when it comes to the dance. Even when the dancing is aggressive the audience becomes oblivious to Friel's attempts to introduce parody and caricature. Likewise, there is a subtle difference between the opening and closing tableaux. Characters take up different stage positions. Jack's uniform at the end

8 Claudia W. Harris, 'The Engendered Space: Performing Friel's Women from *Cass McGuire* to *Molly Sweeney*', in William Kerwin (ed.), *Brian Friel: A Casebook* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), pp. 43–74 (p. 48). Harris finds that 'these passionate women are demeaned by his description'.

is utterly different to the one that was seen at the start of the play. In effect, neither tableau can be regarded as a single authentic memory moment, instead both scenes are a collage of superimposed images or realities. The image of Jack in the first tableau has more to do with the photo that had fallen from Kate's prayer book than anything else. (Interestingly in the play, Kate is embarrassed by the picture of Jack in a British uniform; in the film version, scripted by Frank McGuinness, such a picture is displayed on the wall of the kitchen.)

So, what prompts Michael's actions? Remember that he was just seven years old around the time of the seminal incidents. Perhaps it is the traumatic nature of social circumstances and the horror of what was to befall his family? Harrowing details appear from the first narrative onward, often as casual qualifications, as Michael picks his way through the formative experience of the summer of 1936. The narrator attempts to romanticize, to champion and to idealize the energy and exuberance of the Mundy sisters. He finds solace in the past and everything else is filtered through this memory in order to consolidate meaning in his own life. I have suggested elsewhere that

in most of Friel's plays the battle cry is 'no surrender' to memory; here he plays a different game, as he assiduously invites surrender, tempts an audience in, but defiance is the truer obligation.<sup>9</sup>

Is it that the more brutal the memory the more throwaway it becomes, the more slight the incident the greater the eloquence required and the greater meaning given?

Maybe, Michael's incapacity to name that pain, prompts him instead to celebrate his inability to articulate the substance of the dance that 'owes nothing to fact' and everything to intensity and atmosphere (*DL*: 107). That he gets the atmosphere wrong owes much to his need to get the facts wrong. He

9 Eamonn Jordan, 'Introduction', in *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2000), pp. xi–xlvii (p. xlv).

can try to use language to give a reading of it, he can even suggest that language is unimportant, but all the time words fail, and more importantly the versions of events, which he provides, are riven with contradiction. In *Living Quarters* (1977), the ledger held by Sir, despite his insistence otherwise, cannot contain all the details. Truth cannot be known, it always remains incomplete; the political implications of this idea are made manifest in *Making History* (1988). Atmosphere becomes fantasy. There is nothing to be restored, nothing to be replayed if, as I have suggested already, the event was never witnessed by Michael in the first place.

The central dance, as stipulated by the stage directions, is aggressive, self-conscious, transgressive, an attack on a social order that inhibits and controls women and men. The dancing brings a kind of chaotic disorder that is energizing. By contrast, the dancing of the males is utterly different. Gerry's dance is elegant and formal; while Jack's stick dance is pathetic. The recollection is of movement and physicality, and as such memory has the free structure, rhythm and elusiveness of dance. Commemoration becomes dance and it becomes both a dance of memory and a ghost dance, as it does in *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, where Elder Pyper states: 'dance in the deserted temple of the Lord. Dance unto death before the Lord.'<sup>10</sup> Through the spirit of play or dance-play there is release. Likewise, the contradiction and uncertainty that Friel garners from the play's structure is not only consistent with the structure of memory, but its fluidity has all the hallmarks of play. We must keep in mind Heaney's comment that memory in Friel's work is a 'mythological resource rather than a deceptive compensation', therefore play serves as mythic enablement and as a template of possibility.<sup>11</sup>

10 Frank McGuinness, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme and Carthaginians*, in *Plays One* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), p. 100.

11 Seamus Heaney, 'For Liberation: Brian Friel and the Use of Memory', in Peacock: 229–40 (232).

Dance-play is the defiance against almost impossible odds. Dancing is the agency of expression for these sisters and memory is the agency of consolation for the young man, who had witnessed his known world almost disintegrate around him. The Festival of Lughnasa was celebrated in Ireland, while in Uganda, two harvest festivals were celebrated, 'the Festival of the New Yam' and 'the Festival of the Sweet Casava', both dedicated to the Great Goddess Obi, to whom sacrifices were offered in order to ensure that the crops would flourish and that the community might communicate with the dead.<sup>12</sup> By drawing on the Ryangan ritualism in the way that Father Jack does, Friel does not attempt to superimpose this ritualistic reality where the secular and the sacred meet, or the pagan world of the back hills at the time of the Lughnasa festivities onto the Mundy's. Neither the dancing nor the pagan can be pastoralized or simplified. Neither ceremonial nor post-colonial superimpositions are possible. As Anna McMullan notes, 'Jack's dance is an enfeebled version of his remembered African rituals, and the killed rooster at the end of the play is like a failed or aborted ritual, an act divorced from its significance.'<sup>13</sup> This sense of ruptured separation haunts the play. Not only do the pagan ceremonies on the back hills result in Sweeney's injuries, but the marital arrangements proposed by Father Jack, whereby the four sisters might be married to one male, could not be managed by the Mundy sisters, as the reality of the tensions between them and Gerry attests. Ultimately, it is their defiance with which Michael identifies, not the energy of the grotesque, of subversion and of caricature.

Richard Allen Cave notes that the dance and the crazed energy of the women at the moment of dancing

12 See Gerald Fitzgibbon, 'Interpreting Between Privacies: Brian Friel and the Boundaries of Language', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 5/1 (1999), 71–84.

13 Anna McMullan, 'Gender, Authority and the Body in *Dancing at Lughnasa*', *Irish University Review*, 29/1 (1999), 90–100 (p. 95).

call to mind the traditional image of the Maenad or Bacchante of classical lore, a woman totally given over to bodily impulse and the sensuality of movement in celebration of the power of the god, Dionysus.<sup>14</sup>

Pine argues that the dance 'belongs to the women, in the sense that a similar action among five men would be inconceivable' (Pine: 277). Many critics see the dancing as a positive feminine gesture and yet view the act of memory as a masculine negative one. I am not sure why that should be the case. Claudia Harris suggests that Friel attempts

to reconcile his childhood witness of the radio's voodoo, possessing those sensible women and transforming them into screeching strangers, with his current adult acceptance yet continued male incomprehension of the womanhood expressed in the event. (Harris: 44-5)

The association of woman with such disturbing energy, that is non-rational and bodily based, has been confronted by a number of women critics. Harris observes:

The actors need not only the freedom of an actual space on the stage, but also the imaginative license to exploit the brief removal of the unconscious patriarchal filter that normally colors their lives. Friel reproduces the distinctly male perception that society has of the women and that the women to a large extent have of themselves. (Harris: 45)

For me, Michael is not re-authorizing or re-working the memory, instead he is trying to place it. Michael is not attempting to deny the reality of the sisters, but the fact that he misreads it can be put down to a number of things. How this can be viewed as a form of totalitarian, repressive, patriarchal domination, and masculine omnipotence at the expense of women is difficult to concede. It is not so much a tribute as a statement, or acknowledgement of substantial loss, eased some-

14 Richard Allen Cave, 'Questing for Ritual and Ceremony in a Godforsaken World: *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *Wonderful Tennessee*', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 5/1 (1999), 109-27.

what from a blatant rage and despair. Soft focus productions of the play distort this and make it a tribute.

The characters can have little impact on their situation. Social, political, religious and economic forces have a momentum all of their own. Life did not grant the women a level of freedom or of subjectivity, nor did it grant most men much else. As a child, Michael has little control over his environment, as an adult he has little more. The one thing Michael has is some ownership over his memory, but it is not a vengeful, disturbing one. His distorting owes little to misogyny, and almost everything to trauma and his own sense of powerlessness. While an audience empathizes with Michael's pain and recognizes how he displaces his trauma, it still should be alert to the sleight-of-hand, to his clever appropriations of memory. Gar, in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, states that a recollection was 'just the memory; and even now, even so soon, it is being distilled of all its coarseness; and what's left is going to be precious, precious gold.'<sup>15</sup> It is as if Michael has been flouring, frosting and fostering the memory for too long. But it is misguided to expect survivors to be more mature, perceptive and knowing. Michael is a survivor of painful experiences, but suffering offers no guarantee of humanity.

Michael's efforts to romanticize or idealize the dance are not important. What is vital is the dependency and despondency he displays in latching on to it, and the desperation of an individual troubled by painful memories about a family where choices were severely limited, a family which did the best it could under harsh circumstances. Clearly, memory is linked with a sense of communal belonging that is at times nostalgic, yet the most considerable ingredient of the play is the sense of active community established by the sisters. They fought, disagreed, contained and sustained antagonisms, compromised, co-operated and cared. There is humanity in their judge-

15 Brian Friel, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, in *Selected Plays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), p. 77.

ments of one another, a leniency even in the most vicious putdown or accusation. The survival instinct is to play with memory. Hugh reminds us in *Translations* 'to remember everything is a form of madness'.<sup>16</sup> Seamus Heaney argues that

it is because of the authenticity of the transition from narrative presentation to reverie and narcotic dream-life at the end of *Dancing at Lughnasa* that we can respect Michael's entrancement as an adequate response to 'evidence', (Heaney: 235)

and he quotes Jung who states that 'in the end the only events in my life worth telling are those when the imperishable world irrupted into the transitory one'. (Heaney: 236) Fintan O'Toole suggests something akin to Jung, claiming that 'if nothing can really change, then nothing can really die'. (O'Toole: 204) Yet Friel's play dramatizes how the perishable world irrupts into an intransitory one, a perishable world that was narrated to Michael as part of the family memory, given that he did not witness the key moment of dance. The play is not as much about the preservation of the past and a denial of history's impetus, as a marking of the process of adjustment and realignment within the trauma of ritualized memory.

Thus, as narrator, Michael attempts to articulate a gap between 'what seemed to be and what was, of things changing too quickly before my eyes, of becoming what they ought not to be' (*DL*: 8). This is the gap into which the play falls, between what may have been, what was, what is, and what ought to be, between the real and the ideal, between the real and the imagined. Memory cannot be entirely truthful; it can only, at best, be warped by time, emotion, desire, repetition and by the frailty of fact. The memory literally is a false one, yet psychologically and culturally, a fabled truth. Thus the drama is about the impossibility of fully accessing, resuscitating, processing or purging memory. But through the intervention and impetus of play, an altogether different energy is let in. To disassociate, to

16 Friel, *Translations*, in *Selected Plays*, p. 445.

invert, to displace are the keys to what Friel does. After all, when Michael summarizes through narrative intervention much is glossed over, so much is pushed away and little penetrates the control he possesses. The distinction between pain and pleasure has been blurred by many contemporary writers; here Friel substitutes one for the other. The pain of loss is displaced by the pleasure of positive memory.

Meta-theatre implies a play-within-a-play format as I suggested at the start, and here Friel delivers a memory-within-a-memory or a memory collage. For Gilbert and Tompkins, within a post-colonial context: 'A play-within-a-play disperses the centre of visual focus to at least two locations so that the viewer's gaze is both split *and* multiplied', suggesting that 'plays-within-a-play demonstrate a split specularly that forms a location of difference; the two object sites of the gaze can never be identical.'<sup>17</sup> Likewise, the memory-within-a-memory, framed as *Lughnasa* is by two dissimilar tableaux, and peppered by contradictory narratives, confirms the activity of the dispersal variable and multiplicity of focus that Friel was after. The dialogical structure in *Lughnasa*, similar to that proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin, ensures not only a double-voiced consciousness or a double-take on reality, but a doubling of image as well. Somehow, life imitates memory and memory imitates life. For Adam Phillips, 'a child can only find his game (and the new self that plays it) by first acknowledging the mother's absence'.<sup>18</sup> Michael still fails to do so. The sisters' (mother proliferation, in a different way) absence is a realization of Michael's own fear of death and fear of not being remembered.

Meta-theatre often implies storytelling. Friel offers a revised and fabricated memory in the form of anecdotal narrative. Artifice and a carnivalized consciousness are delivered by the presence of the back hills and by the Ryangan narratives

17 Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 250.

18 Adam Phillips, *Darwin's Worms* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), p. 126.



expressed by Father Jack. In Friel's play, *The Gentle Island*, Manus delivers the following lines: 'There's ways and ways of telling every story. Every story has seven faces.'<sup>19</sup> If every story has seven faces, then in terms of meta-theatricality, every face or every mask has seven stories. Thus identity and memory are both performative. Memory functions as a redemptive act, a form of substitution fantasy, where defiance and belonging can emerge. In this way, Friel meta-theatricalizes the memory reflex by offering a desecrated ritual of re-enactment. Wild, wayward, errant, delicate and elaborate, memory is willed on by a repetition compulsion that is dangerous as well as consolatory. Memory is far from being a recreational activity. The Mundy sisters' collective dance becomes a primitive rite, an alternative, condensed and reductive Lughnasa, a temporary aberration from more dominant social realities. Into that mix we can add the sacredness of memory, the profane quality of re-enactment and the recreational voyeurism of non-participation and non-witnessing. Memory evolves, accumulates and erodes; it is organic and unfixed. Michael is nurtured and sustained by memory, but he cannot call the shots. Memory becomes spectacted image and it becomes the unstable, spectacular bearer of possible reactionary values. Michael's memory is the leap of fate, in the face of the decline of faith in formal or pagan belief systems. The narrator, as yet, unlike Jack's and Gerry's exchange of hats, which required both gestural and symbolic distancing from the possessions, can only bring 'perhaps' and 'maybe' as the significant distancing needed to move on from the prolongation of the memory of summer 1936. In terms of archetype and collective personifications, Steiner, quoting Jung, argues that faced with these figures, the mind 'remembers', it 'knows that it has been here before', for it 'is precisely this déjà vu within formula and executive originality which makes our experience of great art and poetry a homecoming to new

19 Cited by Elmer Andrews, 'The Fifth Province', in *Peacock*: 29–48 (31).

remembrance'.<sup>20</sup> This is what Friel is after. Memory shares the values of meta-theatricality; it shares the function and elaboration, impetus, substance and tenacity of play.

The dancing takes a variety of forms, becoming memory's mirror. Traditional reel, step-dance, graceful formal waltzing, and a series of grotesque, caricatured, disfigured and dishevelled shuffled movements, enacted by everyone from Rosie to Father Jack, act as apt descriptions of memory. Traditional rhythms, locked into defiance, abandonment and sad surrender, romanticized step-dancing of belonging and togetherness, and the swish and the swirl of the waltz materialize as strands and shards of memory, that then conspire further to co-exist as a carnivalized memory of excess, exaggeration, intoxication and gracelessness. Dance is a perverse exemplary moment of union, and yet it is the co-celebration of imminent collapse. Memory is an explosive miracle of continuity and the ripening, miraculous re-constitution of the impossible. For all his charm, Gerry is a fraud; despite its magnetism, memory proves to be a charismatic charade, yet its strengths are never dismissed for all of that.

20 George Steiner, *Antigones: The Antigone Myth in Western Literature, Art and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 126.

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DEIRDRE BYRNES

## Exposing the Gaps in Memory: Forgetting and Remembering in Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe*

Remembering the past emerges as a difficult, but essential task in Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe*, published in February 1999. As specified in the subtitle, the text is a 'Familiengeschichte' [family story] unfolding against the turbulent backdrop of twentieth-century German history. This family story encompasses three generations: the eponymous Pawel's persecution and death in a concentration camp; his daughter Hella's unwavering allegiance to communism; Maron's scathing attack on socialist practice in the GDR. It is already apparent that this family biography is fractured as a result of historical forces. In her essay 'Rollenwechsel' or 'Role Reversal', written in response to the contradictory reactions which the text had evoked in critical circles, Maron emphasizes that it is the continued fracturing of her family story which defines each generation:

Ich hätte den ersten ohne den zweiten Teil nie geschrieben, weil mich vor allem dieser Wandel interessierte, der biographische, der kulturelle, die fortgesetzten Brüche in den Lebensläufen aller beteiligten Generationen.<sup>1</sup>

[I would never have written the first part without the second because it was this change which interested me more than anything else: the biographical, the cultural change, the continued fracturing of the family biography down through all of the generations involved.]

Even more significant, however, are the emotional and psychological dimensions of this rupture: the dialectics of forgetting

1 Monika Maron, 'Rollenwechsel', in *Quer über die Gleise: Essays, Artikel, Zwischenrufe* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2000), pp. 95–116 (p. 107).

and remembering which informs her family story is the focus of this chapter.<sup>2</sup>

As Maron herself explains, *Pawels Briefe* is a reflection on the workings of memory:

Und mich interessierte, wie die Erinnerung auf uns kommt, durch welche Temperamente und Überlebenstechniken sie gefiltert wird und wie viel für immer dem Vergessen anheim gefallen ist. (Maron 2000: 107)

[And I was interested in how memory comes to us, through which channels it is filtered and how much is destined to sink into oblivion].

This paper seeks to demonstrate how the forgetting thematized in *Pawels Briefe* is caused by personal and political trauma, and by a subsequent strategic politics of remembering.

The story of Maron's maternal grandparents Pawel and Josefa Iglarz had lain dormant ever since her début novel *Flugasche*, written in 1976, and first published in 1981, but only in West Germany. Josefa is the name of the protagonist in *Flugasche*, her surname 'Nadler' the German translation of 'Iglarz', as the author explains at the beginning of *Pawels Briefe*. 'Erinnerungen haben ihre Zeit' [there is a time for memories], Maron announces on the very opening page of her family story, the opportune time for recording her grandparents' past being the arrival of a Dutch film crew in Berlin in the summer of 1994. During the search for relevant photographs Hella discovers a bundle of old letters dating from 1942: Pawel's final correspondence with his children, written during the weeks preceding his death in a concentration camp. Pawel Iglarz was born in the Polish town of Ostrow in 1879 to Jewish parents. At the turn of the century he arrived in Berlin, where he and his wife Josefa were to spend some thirty-four years. With the imminent outbreak of the Second World War he was sent first to a camp

2 I would like to acknowledge the support of the Irish Research Council for the Humanities from whom I received a Government of Ireland Scholarship for the academic year 2000/01.

on the German–Polish border, returning for two weeks in the summer of 1939, 'ein erschöpfter, ein verzweifelter Mann' [an exhausted, a despairing man].<sup>3</sup> Josefa immediately left Berlin with him for her native Kurow where they lived with her sister until Pawel's internment in 1942. Already seriously ill, Josefa died a few weeks before her husband's execution. The Jewish Pawel and Catholic Josefa had converted to the Baptist faith before leaving Poland, and this resulted in immediate disownment by their respective families.

Hella cannot remember her father ever talking about his family or birthplace. Even in his letters from the ghetto Pawel appears determined to deny his Jewish heritage:

Nur dieses eine Mal erwähnt er seine jüdische Familie, und nur als die unfreiwillige Herkunft, die ungewollten Eltern.  
[...] Sogar im Ghetto, zurückgeworfen in die jüdische Schicksalsgemeinschaft, verwünscht er noch einmal seine Abstammung, indem er sich noch einmal von den Eltern lossagt. (Maron 1999: 98–9)

[He mentions his Jewish family on only one occasion and merely in the context of unwanted parents and of origins which he had not chosen. Even in the ghetto, thrown back upon this shared common destiny, he cursed his origins once more by once again dissociating himself from his parents.]

Such complete renunciation of one's origins proves impossible. In his penultimate letter, which Maron terms his legacy (Maron 1999: 111), he emphasizes the importance of family solidarity. His granddaughter interprets Pawel's final request as an expression of personal regret:

Es ist das einzige Zeugnis für das Leid, das der Bruch mit seiner jüdischen Familie in Pawel hinterlassen haben muß, gegen das er die eigene Familie gegründet und eingeschworen hat: haltet zusammen. (Maron 1999: 149)

3 Monika Maron, *Pawels Briefe* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1999), p. 84. Page numbers from the text will appear in parentheses directly after quotations.

[It is the only evidence of the pain which the break with his Jewish family must have caused Pawel and in the light of which he formed his own family: the plea to stay together.]

The ensuing rift between his children, based on apparently irreconcilable political differences, reads as all the more futile in the light of Pawel's plea for tolerance.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of memory and its repression, Hella's reaction to the recovered correspondence is highly significant. She cannot remember ever having read her father's letters from the ghetto or indeed of having written to him during his final months in Belchatow. Bewildered by her inability to recall such momentous events, she continues to search through the documentary evidence: 'Meine Mutter nahm die Spur ihres Vergessens auf und suchte weiter in den alten Papieren, die offenbar zuverlässiger waren als ihre Erinnerung.' (Maron 1999: 11) [My mother took up the trail of those things she had forgotten and continued to search among the old documents which were obviously more reliable than her own memory].

The unearthed correspondence provides evidence of twenty-four year old Helene Iglarz's efforts to prevent her threatened deportation to Poland. Maron comments that Hella desperately attempts to remember at a time when forgetting has become synonymous with repression and lies. Significantly, what Maron terms her mother's 'Erinnerungslücken' (Maron 1999: 17) are directly linked to the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>5</sup> She probes the 'gaps in memory' which demand an explanation (Maron 1999: 17). These glaring omissions, which characterize Hella's attempts to remember from 1939 onwards, are an involuntary expression of the tendency to

4 Hella and Marta did not speak to their brother Paul for the final thirty years of his life because he rejected the communist doctrine. Reconciliation never took place (Maron 1999: 188).

5 Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* is an important point of reference here. Wolf writes of 'Gedächtnislücken' (Frankfurt a. M.: Luchterhand), p. 294; Maron, for her part, seeks to probe the 'Erinnerungslücken' or gaps in her mother's memory.

repress trauma. She has pushed an entire sequence of traumatic events with enormous personal import so deep into her unconscious that she is no longer able to recollect them: her father's deportation; her mother's ultimately fatal illness; Pawel's imprisonment and subsequent execution. In order to envisage her grandparents' life together, Maron has recourse to her mother's memories of a carefree, idyllic childhood. The interplay of remembering and forgetting once again emerges here. Repressing the brutal severing of her family biography caused by war is the prerequisite for envisaging the happiness of this family up to 1939: 'Um mir das alltägliche Leben meiner Großeltern vorstellen zu können, muß ich vergessen, wie sie gestorben sind.' (Maron 1999: 23) [In order for me to envisage my grandparents' daily life together, I have to forget the circumstances of their death].

In June 1942, Pawel sends his children Josefa's final letter to him, dictated on the day before she died. He asks that Monika be shown the letter as soon as she is old enough, but in fact more than fifty years elapse before she finally comes to read the poignant text. She reflects at length on the reasons for and implications of such sustained forgetting:

Vor diesem Vergessen stehe ich ratlos, so ratlos wie Hella selbst. Das Jahr 1945 sei für sie wie eine Wiedergeburt gewesen, hat Hella gesagt. Eine Wiedergeburt ohne Eltern, ein Neuanfang ohne die Vergangenheit? Mußten nicht nur die Täter, sondern auch die Opfer ihre Trauer verdrängen, um weiterzuleben? [...] Und später, als [...] die Zeitungen 'Neues Leben', 'Neuer Weg', 'Neue Zeit' und 'Neues Deutschland' hießen, als die Gegenwart der Zukunft weichen mußte und die Vergangenheit endgültig überwunden wurde, wurde auch die eigene Vergangenheit unwichtig? [...] Oder waren die Jahrzehnte davor so aufs Überleben gerichtet, daß zum Innehalten und Zurückblicken keine Zeit war? Wir haben immer so nach vorn gelebt, sagt Hella. (Maron 1999: 113-14)

[In the face of such sustained forgetting I am at a complete loss, as helpless as Hella herself. The year 1945 was like being born again, Hella said. A rebirth without parents, a new beginning without the past? Was it not necessary not only for the perpetrators, but also for the victims to repress their sorrow in order to continue living? [...] And later [...]



when the newspapers sported titles such as 'New Life', 'New Way', 'New Time' and 'New Germany', when the present had to give way to the future and the past was definitively overcome, did one's own past also become insignificant? Or were the years before so focused on survival that there was no time for reflection and looking back? We lived towards the future, Hella said.]

In the post-war years the emphasis was firmly on progress. Orientation towards the future, captured in Hella's refrain 'Wir haben immer so nach vorn gelebt' [we lived towards the future], necessarily entailed the repression of the pain and suffering which came before. Determined to embrace the future and imbued with an unwavering belief in communism as the only legitimate response to the devastating repercussions of fascism on her own family, Hella constructed a post-war life 'ohne die Vergangenheit' [without the past]. (Maron 2000: 108)

*Pawels Briefe* is not only a reflection on forgetting and remembering in terms of the Holocaust. As in previous texts, Maron once again problematizes the history of the GDR. A bundle of letters and photographs precipitates the imaginary reconstruction of her grandparents' life together. Hella's personal notes from 1945 onwards frame the shorter second part of the text. Hella experienced the end of the war as a 'Wiedergeburt', a rebirth, and her memoirs recall 'die wilde Nachkriegszeit, in der alles möglich schien', the wild post-war period when everything seemed possible (Maron 1999: 155). Immediately after the liberation of Berlin by the Soviet Army Hella became secretary to Karl Maron, Chief of the People's Police and later GDR Interior Minister. She embraced the spirit of the antifascist state enthusiastically; her daughter, on the other hand, offers a very different perspective: 'Ab jetzt bestreite ich ihr die alleinige Interpretationshoheit für ihr Leben' (Maron 1999: 154) [From this point on I dispute her right to a singular interpretation of events]. Maron counters her mother's tendency to forget problematic aspects of her socialist biography by launching a scathing attack on the GDR:

Nichts in ihrem Leben vor diesem Mai 1945 – weder ihre Herkunft noch ihre Erziehung, weder ihr Sinn für Gerechtigkeit noch ihre Freiheitsliebe – kann mir erklären, warum sie für die nächsten Jahrzehnte zu denen gehörten, die ihre politischen Gegner in Gefängnisse sperren, Christen drangsalierten, Bücher verboten, die ein ganzes Volk einmauern und durch einen kolossalen Geheimdienst bespitzeln ließen. Was hatten Pawels Töchter Hella und Marta unter solchen Leuten zu suchen? (Maron 1999: 154)

[Nothing in her life before May 1945 – neither her background nor her upbringing, neither her sense of justice nor her love of freedom – can explain to me why she belonged in the ensuing decades to those who incarcerated their political opponents, who oppressed Christians, banned books, who walled in an entire population and spied upon them with the aid of a colossal secret service. What were Pawel's daughters Hella and Martha doing among such people?]

This quotation is just one example of what amounts to a scathing indictment of socialist practice in the GDR. Mother and daughter remember a shared past very differently and provide two opposing interpretations of the same family history. In 'Rollenwechsel' Maron explains that she did not seek to conceal their polarized political views:

Den unlösbaren Zwiespalt unserer politischen Ansichten habe ich nicht verschwiegen, sie sind Teil unserer Geschichte und Gegenstand unseres Gesprächs und sogar ein Vehikel des gemeinsamen Erinnerens. (Maron 2000: 106)

[I have not hidden our irreconcilable political differences: they are part of our story, a topic of our discussions and even a vehicle of shared recollection.]

In *Pawels Briefe* Maron is intent upon exposing the gaps in Hella's memory which also open up *vis-à-vis* the post-war period. She experiences her mother's marriage to Karl Maron in 1955 as a caesura which brings the story of Pawel, Josefa and their children to an abrupt end. Maron emphasizes the conspicuous absence of contemporary political events from Hella's memoirs as of that date:

Über die vierzig Jahre bis 1995 finde ich, außer Privatem, in Hellas Notizen kaum etwas über die Zeit, in der wir lebten, als hätte sich Hellas Biographie, bis dahin auf fast natürliche Weise verwachsen mit der deutschen Geschichte, vom Zeitgeschehen gelöst. (Maron 1999: 190)

[On the forty years until 1995 there is hardly any reference in Hella's notes to the period in which we lived, as if Hella's biography, up to that point deeply rooted in German history, had detached itself from contemporary events.]

Maron lists the prominent political dates glaringly absent from her mother's notes: 'In ihren Aufzeichnungen erwähnt Hella weder das Jahr 1953 noch das Jahr 1956, kein Wort über den Mauerbau 1961.' (Maron 1999: 191) [In her notes Hella does not mention the year 1953 or the year 1956; there is not a word about the building of the Wall in 1961]. Of particular significance is Maron's description of her mother as someone who remembers naïvely. When asked to recall a particular year, she promptly offers 'ein naturbelassenes Stück Erinnerung voller Düfte, Temperaturen, Geräusche', a natural segment of memory, complete with the appropriate smells, temperatures and noises (Maron 1999: 166–7). Hella's 'naïve' memories are diametrically opposed to the politically significant dates conspicuously absent from her notes. A strategic politics of remembering was at work in the socialist state, which necessarily entailed a quite deliberate forgetting of highly problematic dates and events in GDR history. Maron counters her mother's tendency to forget controversial aspects of the new state which she had embraced with such enthusiasm by presenting a very different version of their shared family story.

Despite her mother's repression of family trauma, the text charts Maron's attempts to reconstruct her grandparents' past. From the outset she is determined to explore 'die Schicksale dieser gerade versunkenen Generation' (Maron 1999: 7), even if 'the fate of this submerged generation' has been consigned to the annals of history. The story of Pawel and Josefa lives on in their granddaughter's imagination as 'der kleine, vorstellbare Ausschnitt der unvorstellbar grausamen Geschichte', the small

imaginable part of the inconceivably dreadful history (Maron 1999: 8). Determined to access their submerged past, Maron travels to Ostrow, hoping to learn more about her unorthodox grandparents. However, she encounters much resistance. In the Polish community there is a pronounced reluctance to discuss the pre-war years. All traces of her grandfather's origins have been obliterated; indeed Maron's son Jonas, himself a professional photographer, wonders 'wie er das Nichts fotografieren sollte', how he is to photograph the nothingness (Maron 1999: 103). They travel to the former concentration camp at Kulmhof, now the commemorative site of Chelmno. Maron has no precise details of her grandfather's execution: Pawel may have been gassed in Kulmhof or shot in the woods surrounding the Belchatow ghetto. A museum houses 'die letzte Hinterlassenschaft der Toten', the legacy of the dead (Maron 1999: 184). The section concludes with a single chilling statistic: one hundred and fifty thousand Jews died in Kulmhof.

Despite this brutal eradication of her Jewish heritage, Maron is intent upon documenting her grandparents' life together prior to the suffering which characterized their final years. In the very opening sequence of her text she explains that remembering is in fact the incorrect term to describe the manner in which she charts her grandparents' past:

Erinnern ist für das, was ich mit meinen Großeltern vorhatte, eigentlich das falsche Wort, denn in meinem Innern gab es kein versunkenes Wissen über sie, das ich hätte zutage fördern können. (Maron 1999: 8)

[Remembering is the wrong verb because in my heart I did not possess any submerged knowledge about them which I could have brought to the surface.]

Maron was only one year old when her grandfather was executed: she can merely reconstruct Pawel's story from surviving documentary evidence in the form of letters and photographs: an imaginary reconstruction, as the critic Frank Schirrmacher

observes.<sup>6</sup> The montage form is a highly effective stylistic device which facilitates this reconstruction.

Maron attaches particular importance to her use of montage:

Das Buch ist eine ganz und gar kontrollierte Montage, die es mir ermöglicht hat, Vergangenes und Gegenwärtiges ständig in Bezug zu setzen, die mir Raum für die Reflexion über Erinnern und Vergessen geboten hat und die mindestens so viel Überlegung verlangt hat wie das Schreiben der Sätze. (Maron 2000: 108)

[The book is a tightly controlled montage which made it possible for me to place past and present in constant relation to one another, which offered me the necessary space to reflect on remembering and forgetting, which required just as much consideration as the composition of sentences.]

At this juncture it is appropriate to consider in greater detail the interplay between the documentary material and the imaginary act invested by Maron in reconstructing her family past. In order to recreate the atmosphere of the pre-war Berlin in which her grandparents lived, she introduces documentary material about Neukölln into her narrative: a newspaper extract from 1930; a medical report dated 1931; election results. A copy of Pawel's birth certificate is inserted towards the beginning of the text. Clearly, the extracts from her grandfather's correspondence occupy a central position within the montage format, and facilitate Maron's attempts to understand this influential figure better:

Seine Briefe klingen nach wie ein endloser weher Gesang [...] Unter meine Erinnerungen mischt sich die verspätete Sehnsucht nach meinem Großvater. Ich wünschte, es hätte ihn in meinem Leben gegeben. (Maron 1999: 180)

6 Frank Schirrmacher described the text in these terms when introducing Maron before her reading at the theatre of Schaubühne, Berlin on 21 February 1999.

[His letters linger on like an endless, aching song [...] My memories are mingled with a belated longing for my grandfather. I wish that he had been a part of my life.]

There is repeated reference to Monika in Pawel's correspondence and when she reads her name in this context, the gap between past and present is lessened, if only momentarily:

Wenn ich in Pawels Briefen meinen Namen finde, [...] wenn ich mir vorstelle, daß der Mann, der diese Briefe schrieb, an mich dachte, auf mich hoffte, verliert das Wort Vergangenheit für Minuten seinen Sinn. (Maron 1999: 141)

[When I read my name in Pawel's letters, [...] when I imagine that the man who wrote these letters was thinking of me, had invested hope in me, the word past loses its import for a few brief moments.]

Photographs, with their immediate visual impact, frequently serve as the point of departure for the imaginary reconstruction of her grandparents' life together. A single photograph of Pawel's father is the only concession to a childhood spent in Ostrow. Sibylle Cramer interprets the picture of the old man, his left hand resting on an open book, as follows: 'Mit Hilfe der einzigen erhaltenen Photographie des Urgroßvaters blättert Pawels Enkelin die Geschichte familiären Vergessens zurück'<sup>7</sup> [With the aid of the only surviving photograph of her great-grandfather, Pawel's daughter leafs back through the story of familial forgetting]. Inserting photographic images into her text, Maron attempts to counter this tendency to forget. Elegant portraits of Pawel and Josefa taken at the turn of the century are also reproduced in the text. A single family portrait dates from the early 1920s. Fascinated by what she terms the elegance of the familial pose, Maron is overcome by longing, inspired by the 'Glücksverheißung', the promise of happiness which the picture evokes (Maron 1999: 46). Other photographs

7 Sibylle Cramer, 'Der Sprung durch die Zeit und die gerettete Geschichte', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 20/21 February, Literatur-Beilage, 4.

testify to her grandparents' life in Berlin before the irreversible severing of their family story with the outbreak of war: Josefa in the kitchen; Pawel with members of his cycling club. A particularly poignant image is that of husband and wife sitting together outside her sister's house in Kurow shortly before their separation. Hella features prominently in the photographs from 1945 onwards. More explicitly than the images of Pawel and Josefa, the post-war photographs document the political context: liberation of Berlin in 1945; Hella attending the Party school two years later; Hella and Monika at a political demonstration in 1953.

Photographs are thus an integral aspect of Maron's narrative. Dotted throughout the text, they assume the status of socio-historical and cultural documents. On one level, the photographs reproduced in *Pawels Briefe* close the temporal and spatial distance between past and present. They probe at those 'Erinnerungslücken' which appeared to characterize an entire post-war generation. However, in terms of the interplay between image and text, photographs can also act as a substitute for memories. Roland Barthes writes: 'Not only is the photo never, in essence, a memory [...] it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory.'<sup>8</sup> According to Marianne Hirsch, photographs are 'perched at the edge [...] between memory and forgetting'. (Hirsch: 22) As such, their use in *Pawels Briefe* testifies to the fact that Maron is undertaking an act of imaginary reconstruction, rather than one of remembering.

*Pawels Briefe* explores the dialectics of forgetting and remembering across three generations of a single family. Pawel seemed determined to deny his Jewish origins. Hella has completely repressed the personal trauma caused by the devastating impact of fascism on her family structure. She is also selective in her recollection of life in the post-war period: Hella

8 Quoted in Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 20.

displays an almost brutal determination to recall only happy times and events:

Manchmal kommt es mir fast gewalttätig vor, wie sie den Tatsachen ihres Lebens das Glück abpreßt, als könnte sie einen anderen Befund nicht ertragen. (Maron 1999: 70)

[Sometimes she seems almost violent in her determination to squeeze happiness from the events of her life, as if she could not even contemplate a different outcome.]

In the third generation Maron embarks upon an imaginary reconstruction of her family history, but this is done in a way which makes the fractures visible:

Mir ist diese Dialektik familiärer Kontinuität vorenthalten geblieben. Nachträglich schaffe ich mir nun die Bilder, an die ich mich, wären meine Großeltern nicht ums Leben gekommen, erinnern könnte, statt sie zu erfinden. (Maron 1999: 51)

[I have been deprived of the dialectic of familial continuity. Retrospectively I create images which, had my grandparents lived, I would be able to remember, instead of having to invent them.]

She counters her mother's repression of personal trauma by reconstructing, with the aid of family photographs and letters, the final years of her grandparents' life together. In the second section she presents a version of GDR history which is very different to her mother's interpretation and she criticizes Hella's 'naïve' recollection of the GDR. The text charts Maron's ultimately successful efforts to expose the gaps in memory which characterize her family story. In conclusion, then, *Pawels Briefe* is an important recent contribution to the complex East-German perspective on memory and its repression.



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PATRICK CROWLEY

## Figuring the Past: Cultural Memory in Pierre Michon's *Vies minuscules*

Cultural memory can be understood as lying somewhere between the public space of History, with its marshalling and interpretation of what society takes to be objective facts, and the private, subjective space of local stories and personal memory. Cultural memory can be taken as an intermediary space constituted by the aesthetic forms of high culture and those everyday objects that are invested with family memories. Viewed as a discipline, cultural memory can be seen as an examination of the modalities involved in the transmission, mediation and negotiation of cultural forms over time. But what happens when cultural memory is thematized, what happens when it is brought into fiction as a space in which a writer interrogates the spectral figures of the past through the representations of memory and culture? What happens when a writer uses his cultural heritage, the literary canon, for example, in order to write about himself or another? Does cultural memory as the theme facilitate the articulation of identities or does it unsettle such formations? At stake here is the tension between the boundlessness of intertextuality and the presumption of an extratextual, punctual, identity.

In pursuit of these questions I want to look at Pierre Michon's first, and perhaps most significant text, *Vies minuscules*. Published by Gallimard in 1984, *Vies minuscules* sets out Michon's stall for the texts that were to follow. Eluding generic classification, *Vies minuscules* is composed of eight ostensibly biographical chapters each of which tells the story of someone

known or related to the author/narrator.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I make reference to three of the 'lives' or 'vitae': 'Vie d'André Dufourneau', which takes as its starting point a farm-hand's departure for French Colonial Africa, 'Vie d'Antoine Peluchet' which is a fictional biographic sketch of the narrator's distant uncle, and 'Vie de la petite morte', the final chapter that acts as a meditation on the narrator's dead sister and on his identification with the life and work of Arthur Rimbaud.

Clearly, the connecting thread between each 'life' is the identity of the narrator. Each biographical narrative is infused with an autobiographical dimension, or intentionality. Indeed, though the autobiographical pact is never signed, it is clear from the beginning that the narrator is not simply resurrecting marginal lives from the past but uses each life as a figure of the narrator's desire to write.<sup>2</sup> Though the text's recourse to fiction is acknowledged, the narrator eventually identifies himself as 'Pierrot' in 'Vie de Georges Bandy', and towards the end of the text Michon is given as the family name of his paternal grandparents. The effect of this broken signature is to create an oblique autobiography through eight fictionalized biographical sketches and to underwrite, however tentatively, the referential thrust of the text and its exploration of memory.

Indeed, Michon, in his interviews, is keen to counterbalance the pull of textuality with the verifiability of the referent. In an interview with the historian Arlette Farge, Michon talks about the interrelationship between referent (in this case the people he writes about) and rhetoric in *Vies*

- 1 Pierre Michon, *Vies minuscules* (Paris: Gallimard, Folio, 1984). Further references to this text will be indicated by the abbreviation VM followed by the relevant page numbers.
- 2 The term 'autobiographical pact' is taken from Philippe Lejeune's *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975). Lejeune's claim is that the relationship of identity between author, narrator and protagonist is based on the name and distinguishes autobiography from the novel.

*minuscules*.<sup>3</sup> Michon expresses the wish not to cheat on the referent of history. He claims that the names, the dates, the places and the contours of the lives he writes of in *Vies minuscules* are true and can be verified by the archives. But in the same breath he notes his recourse to rhetoric and its power of persuasion.

In many ways Michon's work seems to chime with the ideas of Paul Ricœur. For Paul Ricœur the trace is exterior and anterior to the text. It is a concrete fragment or mark, a material artefact linking the present to the past and as such is the material basis for the study of history.<sup>4</sup> In Ricœur's terms, the trace is a material *connecteur* with the past, linking the living to the dead of past generations, to their deeds, thoughts and sufferings (Ricœur: 335). He argues that the events of the past, embodied within the '*caractère chosique*' of the trace, can be represented by the historian within a linguistic structure. In writing history or a biography the historian repays, in part, a debt to the past by intertwining history and the tropes of fiction, within a text that provides the reader with an imaginary reconstruction of what was once real. Michon's work seems, in some ways, to validate the Ricœurian position, based on the distinction between what is outside the text and what is within the text. Ricœur argues, convincingly in many respects, that the trace invites the historian to work out the possible causes of its making, to reconstruct in language the event that left in its wake a physical trace or mark of its passage. In this way we move closer to '*le monde qui, aujourd'hui, manque, si on peut le dire, autour de la relique*' [the world, now gone, which surrounded the relic, so to speak] (Ricœur: 335). This position seems to be echoed in the final page of *Vies minuscules* which

3 Pierre Michon and Arlette Farge, 'Entretien', *Les Cahiers de la Villa Gillet*, no. 3 (1995), 151–64 (p. 153).

4 Paul Ricœur, *Temps et Récit*, III (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1985, coll. 'L'Ordre Philosophique'. Edition cited, 'Points Essais', 1991). See, in particular, sections entitled 'Archives, documents, trace', pp. 212–28, and 'L'entrecroisement de l'histoire et de la fiction', pp. 329–48.

refers back to the lives that make up the text and ends with the following sentence: 'Que dans le conclave ailé qui se tient aux Cards sur les ruines de ce qui aurait pu être, ils soient.' (VM: 249) [So that they might join the conclave of angels that is gathered at Les Cards over the ruins of what might have been].

Michon's narrator figures the past in a number of ways. Figuring himself as a biographer, as a keeper of the trace, as a witness, he constructs his stories around anecdotes related to him by his maternal grandmother, Élise. These stories, and their fictional arabesques, draw upon the narrative possibilities of physical objects left behind by his protagonists as concrete markers of an absent presence. In each case there is an ostensible link between the physical trace and the linguistic structures that transmit the past. Consider, for example, the second life, 'Vie d'Antoine Peluchet', the story of the narrator's far-removed uncle who refuses his father's authority and leaves the family farm in 1867. The story begins with the narrator recalling how when he fell ill as a child his grandmother would take out what were known as the 'treasures': two biscuit tins full of objects, each a primer for stories, each worthless as an object but invaluable in the transmission of the memories of ordinary people (VM: 33). Of the objects the narrator says that it was the stories they inspired, and the people they were associated with, which granted them the status of relics. These objects – such as a cracked amethyst or a jeweller's ring with a missing stone – carry stories that recover the past not through the facts of history but through inexhaustible myths that vary with the telling.

Each object is, then, inextricably linked to, and validated by, stories that are never constrained by a definitive version. Chief amongst these objects is 'la Relique des Peluchet', the talisman brought out to bring comfort to those of the Peluchet family who were either dying or in labour (VM: 36). Marianne Payot's interview with Pierre Michon in *Lire* includes a photograph of the white, unglazed, porcelain figure of Madon-

na and Child, the 'Relique des Peluchet'.<sup>5</sup> That the relic exists suggests that its inscription dovetails with an uncomplicated hermeneutic approach to the trace that sees it as a concrete repository of memory. However, the thematization of the trace pushes the hermeneutic position into an engagement with the text that, in many ways, undoes the distinction between trace as prior and external to the text. By transposing what is tangible into what is textual it could be argued that the physical trace loses its evidential status and blurs the neat distinction between what is outside the text and what is inside. Indeed, it is the manner in which the medium of narrative figures the referent of experience that haunts the text.

The first life, 'Vie d'André Dufourneau', illustrates the point. André Dufourneau was an orphan sent to work on Michon's great-grandparents' farm. Following the marriage of the narrator's grandmother Élise, Dufourneau emigrated to French Colonial Africa to make his fortune. The 'life' of André Dufourneau, however, centres less around the man than on the effect of his departure for Africa and the half-fictions that emerge to fill his absence. The story of his departure is told by a narrator, who recalls, interprets, and embellishes the stories he has heard of Dufourneau from his grandmother, Élise. His grandmother's memories are verified, in part at least, by the evidence of the trace. Physical objects – the letters and coffee beans, received from Dufourneau – remain in his absence acting as collateral against the erosions of time. The sack of coffee beans that Dufourneau brings back from Africa before returning there to die in obscurity, becomes the precious alibi of his grandmother's memory; it takes on an iconic value acting as both epitaph and a prompt reminder against the dissipations of memory into the streams of forgetfulness (*VM*: 28). This sack of coffee remains in the form of green beans trapped in the past. However, with the passing of time these objects come to act as

5 Marianne Payot, 'Pierre Michon: une vocation tardive', *Lire*, 255 (1995), pp. 26–7.

repositories for the emotions of the narrator's grandmother and a primer for her stories of Dufourneau. The coffee beans counter-balance the erosion of time yet in persisting over time they acquire the patina of myth as Dufourneau is transformed into a 'roi mage' [wise king]. Dufourneau's coffee beans install the referent into the representational structures of memory with the result that the referent, Dufourneau, is supplemented by a literary allusion. Once inscribed within narrative the trace of Dufourneau becomes as much the gift of one of the three wise men as a reminder of a farm hand who left for Africa. Concurrently, Michon's narrative transforms the effect of the physical trace into a metaphor for his own writing, for his return to his grandmother's stories as an epiphanic source of his own self-revelation as a writer.

Throughout *Vies minuscules* the character of the trace oscillates between being a mimetic object external to the text and being a metaphor for the act of writing. In this sense its ambiguous status reflects a text which points outwards yet is saturated with literary allusions and intertextual grafts. What Michon's narrator puts in play is how the absent referent which survives only in traces comes to be figured through the filter of books and images over time. Like Dufourneau's green beans, the past is only known through the filters of cultural representations. The memory of one is intertwined with the memory of the other. This point in particular is one which should be considered in order to arrive at a conclusion. Élise, the grandmother, is described as the narrator's 'romanesque grand-mère' ['novelizing' grand-mother] implying that her memory of Dufourneau has already been shaped by fiction before being passed on to the narrator. In turn, the narrator makes clear that his own intention is to continue this act of transmission by transposing, 'les données de sa mémoire' [the details of her memory] into a 'schème plus noble et bonnement dramatique qu'un réel pauvre' (VM: 20) [a more noble and more openly dramatic schema, rather than confine them within an impoverished representation of reality]. Here Michon's narrator is making the point that one's sense of the real is in many ways mediated by

memory which, in turn, can never be entirely trusted for its factual veracity. Michon's text works with and mirrors the schemas of Élise's memories. In Élise's mind Dufourneau's departure is crystallized in the declaration that, 'là-bas il deviendrait riche, ou mourrait' [there he would become rich, or die in the process]. This phrase is later repeated in the first person and it is the only direct citation attributed to Dufourneau:

'J'en reviendrai riche, ou y mourrai': cette phrase pourtant bien indigne de mémoire, j'ai dit que cent fois ma grand-mère l'avait exhumée des ruines du temps, avait de nouveau éployé dans l'air son bref étendard sonore, toujours neuf, toujours d'hier. (VM: 21)

[I'll come back rich, or I'll die there'. This sentence, however, quite unworthy of being remembered (I've said that my grandmother had, a hundred times, unearthed it from the ruins of time), had, once again, unfurled its ephemeral voice-borne standard, always new, yet forever from the past.]<sup>6</sup>

Michon's sentence draws upon the old image of time as a destroyer of memory whilst at the same time offering language as a shadower of time in that it too has the characteristics of succession and permanence. Moreover, these words 'J'en reviendrai riche, ou y mourrai' heard and remembered, we are told, by Élise, acquire a talismanic quality for the narrator as youth. With each act of transmission, with each telling of the story, something new is added and in the narrator's case the 'schème plus noble' is the interweaving of Rimbaud's life and work into the life and the story of Dufourneau.

Though Dufourneau departs for a real Africa in search of gold, Michon's narrator offers an Africa that doubles as a metaphor or trope of writing. As a traveller explores sands and forests, the writer must explore 'la mémoire et les bibliothèques mémorieuses' (VM: 22) [memory and the libraries of memory] and return with words or die in the attempt. However, in using

6 I would like to thank Larry Duffy of the University of Ulster for his comments and useful suggestions on an earlier draft of these translations.



Africa as a metaphor of writing, Michon also draws upon the biography of Arthur Rimbaud, his departure for Africa, and the work of Rimbaud, in ways that make it difficult to distinguish 'la mémoire' from 'les bibliothèques mémorieuses'. Michon links Dufourneau's 'J'en reviendrai riche, ou y mourrai' and his departure for Africa, to a remarkably similar line from Rimbaud's *Mauvais Sang*. The fragment from *Mauvais Sang* is brought to the surface immediately after the metaphor of Africa is introduced. Comparing the two texts in the examples below it can be seen how, once signalled by citational commas, the extract from *Mauvais Sang* is cleanly grafted onto the text:

**Text A:** 'Vie d'André Dufourneau'

Le voilà parti, André Dufourneau. 'Ma journée est faite; je quitte l'Europe.' L'air marin, déjà surprend les poumons de cet homme de l'intérieur. (VM: 22).

[There he goes, André Dufourneau, 'My day is done; I am leaving Europe'. The sea air has already surprised this man from the interior.]

**Text B:** *Mauvais Sang*

Ma journée est faite; je quitte l'Europe. L'air marin brûlera mes poumons [...] Je reviendrai, [...] J'aurai de l'or: je serai oisif et brutal. Les femmes soignent ces féroces infirmes retour des pays chauds.<sup>7</sup>

[My day is done; I am leaving Europe. The sea air will scorch my lungs [...] I shall come back [...] I shall have gold. I shall be idle and brutal. Women take care of these ferocious invalids on their return from torrid countries.]<sup>8</sup>

Here Michon's text signals the 'bibliothèques mémorieuses' by embedding a citation from *Mauvais Sang* which harmonizes with the imagined scene of Dufourneau's departure. Rimbaud's poem is returned to later in 'Vie d'André

7 Arthur Rimbaud, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Antoine Adam (ed.) (Paris: Gallimard [Collection de la Pléiade], 1972), 95–6 (henceforth OC).

8 English translation from Enid Rhodes Peschel (trans.) *A Season in Hell, Illuminations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Dufourneau' when the narrator imagines the day when Dufourneau made his first and only visit back to Les Cards. Michon was but an infant in his mother's arms and so, as a biographer, can have no memory of his hero. Instead, he observes that had Dufourneau returned at any given point later in his life his own memory of Dufourneau would have been contingent upon his literary interests. The narrator notes, for example, that were he to have met Dufourneau when he had been ten years old he might have remembered him as wearing the purple robes of one of the biblical wise kings with gifts of coffee and indigo. Had he been fifteen he would have seen Dufourneau as "le féroce infirme retour des pays chauds" qu'aiment les femmes et les poètes adolescents' (VM: 26) ['the ferocious invalid returned from torrid lands' that women and adolescent poets love]. Again, it is Rimbaud's poetry and his identification with Rimbaud that would have shaped his perceptions. Closer in time to the writing of the text he would have seen Dufourneau through the prism of Conrad's prose "la sauvagerie l'avait caressé sur la tête", comme le plus brutal des coloniaux de Conrad' (VM: 26) ['savagery had caressed his head', as with the most brutal of Conrad's colonials]. Finally, at the moment of enunciation he writes that he would have thought of that meeting with Dufourneau as he has just described him: 'j'en penserais ce que je dis ici, rien de plus, et tout reviendrait au même.' (VM: 26) [What I would think about it is what I say here, nothing more, and it would all amount to the same thing]. The narrator presents the past not as a simple memory but as a fabrication based on stories, or as a perception encoded within whatever representational schema is at hand to influence the structuring of memory.

Dufourneau, then, is not conveyed as a singular entity but as a composite of Élise's stories and a string of intertextual allusions that bring the reader into the texts and lives of Arthur Rimbaud and Pierre Michon. The triangular relationship between the work of Rimbaud, his biography and Michon's own auto/biography is continued and brought to the fore in 'Vie de la petite morte'. In this final chapter, Michon writes of his sister,

Madeleine, but also of his first encounter with the life and work of Arthur Rimbaud, which he read as a child in an *Almanach Vermot*. The narrator supplies the dates of his sister's birth as 1941 and her death as the 24 June 1942. She died before he was born, and he describes her as an angel. Later, he relates how the article in the *Almanach Vermot* refers to Rimbaud as an angel which he glosses thus: 'l'épithète entre toutes angélique, qui m'avait jusqu'alors paru réservée aux petits morts – aux petites mortes.' (VM, pp. 229–30) [the epithet 'angelic' above all others, which until then had seemed to me to be reserved for those children – for those girls – who had died]. In his child's mind his sister, Madeleine, and Rimbaud become part of the same semantic nexus. In the same *Vie* the narrator muses 'Allons, il faudrait bien faire l'ange, un jour, pour être aimé comme le sont les morts.' (VM: 230) [Right then, one has to pretend to be an angel, sooner or later, if one wants to be loved as the dead are loved], and goes on to reflect that his deceased grandparents, Félix and Élise, 'n'ont plus d'yeux pour me voir pousser des ailes' (VM: 230) [can no longer see me sprout wings]. Now that he has fulfilled his vocation to write, the narrator figures himself as an angel, thus adding a further semantic layer to the child's conflation of death and poetry.

In writing of his sister, grandparents, distant relations and so on, Michon enacts and encodes the work of mourning and commemoration. In the process, however, the referents of those dead and departed are, perhaps, effaced by metaphor. Towards the end of 'Vie de la petite morte', the narrator recalls his first attempt to write and draws together an image of his sister, Madeleine, and the poetry and life of Rimbaud. He recalls how in the summer of 1963 he was in the suburbs of Paris staying with relatives before flying out to England. In the neighbour's garden he sees a young girl:

C'était bien elle, 'la petite morte, derrière les rosiers'. Elle était là. [...] Je m'envolai pour Manchester; rien n'y fut considérable; j'y tins mon premier carnet, et cet événement est le premier que je rapporte. (VM: 246)

[It really was her, 'the dead girl, behind the rosebushes'. She was there [...] I flew out to Manchester where nothing much happened; I kept my first notebook, and this event is the first that I put to words.]

The central figure of this *événement* is a citation from one of Rimbaud's poems, 'Enfance'. The poem includes the line 'C'est elle, la petite morte, derrière les rosiers' (OC: 122) [It is her, the little dead girl, behind the rosebushes]. The Pléiade edition glosses the line, offering the hypothesis that the reference is to Rimbaud's sister Vitalie (1858–1875), but acknowledges that the argument is untenable. What is significant in this interplay of the extratextual and the intertextual, however, is not whether Rimbaud's poem refers to his dead sister but the manner in which the different discourses of cultural memory, both poetic and referential, are combined in Michon's texts. Sister, Rimbaud, and the narrating autobiographical subject are encoded as linguistic fragments caught up in the differential structure of the text. From this perspective, identity is best viewed as provisional, relational and open to the kaleidoscopic re-patterning of the intertext. Real lives are viewed through inescapable cultural frames and textual filters that are personally negotiated. In Michon's *Vies minuscules*, the intertext is not simply present as a rhetorical structure that evokes the past but is offered as an insight into how Michon as child, teenager and adult negotiates, remembers, and now retransmits the real. The text questions the extent to which we have access to the real of the present or the past beyond the screen of narrative.

Aesthetic objects and ordinary forms of culture are transmitted from generation to generation and can shape our memory of the past. To what extent they bring us closer to the 'real' of the past is another question. Michon's *Vies minuscules* puts in play the entanglements of cultural memory and personal memory to such an extent that they open up the polysemic possibilities of the text. The result appears to be the collapse of the distinction between memory as an imprint of a referential past and the randomness of intertextual connections. Cultural memory, as theme, is drawn into the uncertainties of

inscription: once separated from the witness, once unmoored from the physical trace, cultural memory becomes indistinguishable from a pure fiction. But Michon's text also suggests that an active engagement and marshalling of intertextual allusions allows for the trace of the other to be revived. Michon's reworking of Élise's stories into a textual interweave that borrows from Rimbaud, Conrad and others, allows him to leave his signature or mark within the text. By drawing the myriad signs of the intertext into an idiomatic pattern Michon conveys the sense of another's existence – Dufourneau's, Peluchet's, Madeleine's – and brings to the fore the tensions involved in drawing the cultural sign towards the ever receding horizon of real lives.

## Part 3: Locating Memory

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DOUGLAS SMITH

## Without Walls: 'World Art' and Malraux's Imaginary Museum

Malraux's post-war work on aesthetics turns on the development of the concept of the *musée imaginaire*, literally the imaginary museum, or less literally, in Stuart Gilbert's translation, the museum without walls, referring to the art book or text with reproductions whose destiny according to Malraux is to supersede the traditional Western museum.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this study is firstly to examine the notion of the imaginary museum in relation to the traditional museum, then to explore the approach of both institutions to non-Western cultures, before considering in conclusion some of the implications of Malraux's ideas for contemporary trends in French museum development.

### Museums Real and Imaginary

For Malraux, the imaginary museum differs from the traditional museum in four key respects. Firstly, and obviously, it is a museum of reproductions rather than originals. Secondly, by

1 See André Malraux, *The Museum Without Walls* in Stuart Gilbert (trans.) *The Voices of Silence*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1954), pp. 11–128. All English translations are from this edition and subsequent references are given in the text using the initials MWW. The French original is *Le Musée imaginaire*, Part One of *Les Voix du silence* (Paris: NRF/La Galerie de la Pléiade, 1951), pp. 9–125, hereafter cited in the text as *MI*. This is the second revised version of the text initially published independently as *Le Musée imaginaire* (Geneva: Skira, 1947), the first of the three-volume series entitled *La Psychologie de l'art* which formed the basis of the rewritten and expanded *Les Voix du silence*.



virtue of its range, it emphasizes the style of an individual or a period with reference to a number of works rather than an isolated masterpiece. Thirdly, it privileges non-illusionistic art, that is, modernist and non-Western production, over the traditional Western representational canon. Fourthly, through its juxtaposition of different cultures, it encourages an interrogation rather than an affirmation of existing aesthetic criteria. According to Malraux, these four innovative features of the imaginary museum are made possible by three historical factors: firstly, the invention of photography and sophisticated techniques of reproduction; secondly, the artistic revolution of Modernism which has challenged and broadened the taste of the Western public; and thirdly, the process of globalization which has brought the West into contact with a diversity of other cultures, both historical and contemporary. The combined result is for Malraux the first museum with truly comprehensive global reach – any object from any period anywhere in the world can be photographed and integrated into the collection of the imaginary museum:

Car un musée imaginaire s'est ouvert, qui va pousser à l'extrême l'incomplète transformation imposée par les vrais musées: répondant à l'appel de ceux-ci, les arts plastiques ont inventé leur imprimerie. (*MI*: 14)

[For a 'Museum without walls' is coming into being, and (now that the plastic arts have invented their own printing press) it will carry infinitely farther that revelation of the world of art, limited perforce, which the 'real' museums offer us within their walls.] (*MWW* 16)

In this context, then, the notion of a 'world art' or a 'world heritage' becomes possible:

Comme la lecture des drames en marge de leur représentation, comme l'audition des disques en marge du concert, s'offre en marge du musée le plus vaste domaine de connaissances artistiques que le monde ait connu. Ce domaine [...] c'est pour la première fois, l'héritage de toute l'histoire. (*MI*: 44)

[Alongside the museum a new field of art experience, vaster than any so far known (and standing in the same relation to the art museum as does

the reading of a play to its performance, or hearing a phonograph record to a concert audition) is now, thanks to reproduction, being opened up. And this new domain [...] is for the first time the common heritage of all mankind.] (MWW: 46)

Of course, the major traditional museums of the West also had global ambitions and the golden age of their foundation and expansion in the nineteenth century coincides with the most intense period of European imperialism.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, the collections of institutions such as the Louvre or the British Museum are monuments to colonialism and testaments to the educational and cultural alibis used to justify the imperial enterprise, both at home and abroad. But while the imaginary museum might be said to extend the global reach of its traditional precursor, creating a more exhaustive repository of world art than previously possible, it does so through photography rather than the physical appropriation of the artefact. In many respects, it is this different relation to the object which constitutes the fundamental distinction between the traditional and the imaginary museum.

Organized as it is around its collection of artefacts, the traditional museum is based on an aesthetics of presence, in other words the interest and fascination of the concrete object on display. Conversely, the imaginary museum depends for its range and impact on the absence of the specific object. For Malraux, the absence of the actual object paradoxically allows the intuition of a different kind of presence – through the juxtaposition of photographs of a series of different artefacts, the imaginary museum encourages on the part of the reader-visitor an activity of comparison and contrast which leads to the perception of a common style underlying the work of a par-

2 For an overview of this phase of the development of the European museum, see Germain Bazin, *The Museum Age* (Brussels: Desoer, 1973), pp. 193–238 and Roland Schaer, *L'Invention des musées* (Paris: Gallimard/Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993), pp. 75–97.

ticular individual or period or civilization.<sup>3</sup> As Malraux says of the contents of the *musée imaginaire* once subjected to photographic reproduction: 'Qu'y ont-ils perdu? Leur qualité d'objets. Qu'y ont-ils gagné? La plus grande signification de style qu'ils puissent assumer.' (*MI*: 44) [In the process, they have lost their properties as *objects*; but, by the same token, they have gained something: the ultimate significance as to *style* that they can possibly acquire] (*MWW*: 44). Furthermore, for Malraux, this perception is not just the beginning of a local kind of cultural or stylistic literacy but is actually the first step towards a much deeper realization – namely, that all objects of aesthetic value possess a common capacity to outlive the time and place of their initial fabrication and to address subsequent generations from different cultural backgrounds. In this perspective, art, for Malraux, comes to embody the human capacity to defy death through creation and to overcome the barriers of cultural difference through a common language of form:

Nous avons appris que si la mort ne contraint pas le génie au silence, ce n'est pas parce qu'il prévaut contre elle en perpétuant son langage initial, mais en imposant un langage sans cesse modifié, parfois oublié, comme un écho qui répercuterait aux siècles avec leurs voix successives. (*MI*: 67)

[We have learned that, if death cannot still the voice of genius, the reason is that genius triumphs over death not by reiterating its original language, but by constraining us to listen to a language constantly

- 3 For Rosalind Krauss, this emphasis on a differential network of relations makes Malraux's analysis of art fundamentally structuralist in character, while for Jean-François Lyotard, the presence-absence paradox makes Malraux a precursor rather of post-structuralism. See Rosalind Krauss, 'The Ministry of Fate', in Denis Hollier (ed.), *A New History of French Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 1000–6 and Jean-François Lyotard, 'Limbes', in *Signé Malraux* (Paris: Grasset, 1996), pp. 379–401. While providing illuminating perspectives, both approaches seem a little anachronistic in terms of Malraux's specific commitments.

modified, sometimes forgotten – as it were an echo answering each passing century with its own voice.] (*MWW*: 69)

In philosophical terms, then, the imaginary museum is an institution founded on a kind of existentialist humanism, where the aesthetic fulfills the double function of transcending death and of uniting the diverse cultures of world history in a common humanity:

Rien ne donne une vie plus corrosive à l'idée de destin que les grands styles, dont l'évolution et les métamorphoses semblent les longues cicatrices du passage de la fatalité sur la terre. (*MI*: 44)

[Nothing conveys more vividly and compellingly the notion of a destiny shaping human ends than do the great styles, whose evolutions and transformations seem like long scars that Fate has left, in passing, on the face of the earth.] (*MWWI*: 46)

As contemporary critics such as Georges Duthuit pointed out, such a project necessarily involves reducing artefacts to their purely formal qualities and eliminating all consideration of content and context, since these aspects of a work are too culturally specific to be easily translated from one civilization or period to another.<sup>4</sup> The result for Duthuit is a version of cultural history which is metaphorically as well as literally two-dimensional – context is flattened out just as the third dimension of the original work or artefact is lost through photographic reproduction (Duthuit I: 22–3). For Duthuit, Malraux's project is one of gross cultural imperialism, forcibly removing artefacts from the living cultures which sustain them and give them meaning in order to appropriate them for a Western set of values:

Les mots de *conquête*, d'*annexion*, de *possession* retentissent incessamment [...] arrachez les créatures de l'art à leur foyer, entraînez-les pour les forcer à illustrer votre triomphe.

4 See Georges Duthuit, *Le Musée inimaginable*, 3 vols (Paris: José Corti, 1956).

[The words *conquest, annexation, possession* ring out incessantly [...] tear the creatures of art from their homes, drag them off forcibly to bring fame to your triumph.] (Duthuit I: 24–5)

In fact, as E. H. Gombrich notes, the history of art which underpins the imaginary museum is actually not a history at all but a kind of formalist metaphysics, where form itself takes on an ontological significance which renders history irrelevant.<sup>5</sup> Commenting on Malraux's tendency to conflate non-Western art with the Modernist attitude to nature and death, Gombrich remarks: 'To look for the same kind of aggressive defiance in the non-naturalistic styles of the past is to do violence, not to nature, but to history' (Gombrich 1976: 178). Essentially, Malraux's account of the genesis of the imaginary museum is indifferent to history. The one significant exception is precisely the shift within the Western tradition from representational art to Modernism, for it is this transition which allows Malraux's a-historical recuperation of all past art, regardless of origin, in a formalist perspective. In other words, history is only of interest to Malraux in so far as it can be used to cancel itself out.

## Sites of Memory / Non-Sites

The Austrian modernist Robert Musil once joked that the paradox of monuments is that no-one can remember what they were intended to commemorate.<sup>6</sup> Louis Malle's 1960 film version of Raymond Queneau's *Zazie dans le métro* turned this

5 See E. H. Gombrich, 'André Malraux and the Crisis of Expressionism', in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art* (London: Phaidon, 1963), pp. 78–85 and 'Malraux's Philosophy of Art in Historical Perspective', in Martine de Courcel (ed.), *Malraux: Life and Work* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976), pp. 169–83.

6 See Robert Musil, 'Denkmale', in *Nachlaß zu Lebzeiten* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957), pp. 59–63.

insight into a running gag whereby the most celebrated tourist sites of Paris are consistently misidentified by native Parisians. In similarly counter-intuitive fashion, Malraux's formalism means that the imaginary museum becomes a place of forgetting rather than remembering, a place where every object is viewed in the exclusive terms of Western aesthetic and philosophical preoccupations rather than in terms of its own specific history. In this respect, the imaginary museum reproduces the logic of the traditional museum, which typically de-contextualizes the objects of its collection only to re-contextualize them, often forgetting their specific histories in order the better to integrate them into the collective memory of the culture which has appropriated them. So the museum functions as a site of memory (*lieu de mémoire*), in the sense given the term by the historian Pierre Nora – a place where the contemporary deficiencies of organic lived memory are supplemented by a prosthetic collective memory, where institutionalized remembering is produced and incited through a communal forgetting: 'Il y a des lieux de mémoire parce qu'il n'y a plus de milieux de mémoire.' [Sites of memory exist because communities of memory no longer exist].<sup>7</sup>

The museum, however, is not only a site of memory in this complex sense but also a kind of non-site (*non-lieu*), to use the term coined by the anthropologist Marc Augé. For Augé, contemporary society is increasingly characterized by the proliferation of anonymous, abstract and fundamentally interchangeable spaces such as airport lounges or motorway cafés:

7 See Pierre Nora, 'Entre mémoire et histoire: la problématique des lieux', in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard/Quarto, 1997), 7 vols, I, pp. 23–43 (p. 23).

Les non-lieux, ce sont aussi bien les installations nécessaires à la circulation accélérée des personnes et des biens (voies rapides, échangeurs, aéroports) que les moyens de transport eux-mêmes.<sup>8</sup>

[The parts of the infra-structure necessary to the accelerated circulation of people and goods (urban clearways, motorway junctions, airports) are as much non-sites as the means of transport themselves.]

Augé does not explicitly address the question of museums, but many of his remarks on the non-sites which punctuate the transport network could equally be applied to the familiar 'white cube' model of many modern display spaces. More explicitly, and much earlier, the novelist Marcel Proust compared the institution of the museum to a railway station in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (1919). For Proust, as for Malraux, the abstract, anonymous space of the museum functions as a repository for the eternal, universal values of art and serves to screen out the distracting and irrelevant contingencies of personal life and social context. The virtue of a museum gallery is, according to Proust, that it symbolizes 'par sa nudité et son dépouillement de toutes particularités, les espaces où l'artiste s'est abstrait pour créer' [by its spareness and its stripping away of all particularities, the spaces into which the artist abstracts himself in order to create].<sup>9</sup> Like the railway station, Proust's museum allows the transition between two different worlds (life and art) and the shedding of specific identities associated with particular places, at the same time as it enables the perception of deeper identities or essences:

8 Marc Augé, *Non-lieux: introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), p. 48. For Augé's views on Nora's concept of site of memory, see also 'Une histoire du présent', in *Magazine littéraire*, 307 (1993), 32-8 and 'Consensus et postmodernité: l'épreuve de la contemporanéité', in his *Pour une anthropologie des mondes contemporains* (Paris: Aubier, 1994), pp. 31-60.

9 See Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, Jean-Yves Tadié (ed.) (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 4 vols, II, p. 6.

Mais enfin le plaisir du voyage [...], c'est de rendre la différence entre le départ et l'arrivée non pas aussi insensible, mais aussi profonde qu'on peut, de la ressentir dans sa totalité, intacte, telle qu'elle était en nous quand notre imagination nous portait du lieu où nous vivions jusqu'au coeur d'un lieu désiré, en un bond qui nous semblait moins miraculeux parce qu'il franchissait une distance que parce qu'il unissait deux individualités distinctes de la terre, qu'il nous menait d'un nom à un autre nom, et que schématise [...] l'opération mystérieuse qui s'accomplissait dans ces lieux spéciaux, les gares, lesquels ne font presque pas partie de la ville, mais contiennent l'essence de sa personnalité de même que sur un écriteau signalétique elles portent son nom. (Proust II: 5)<sup>10</sup>

[But ultimately the pleasure of travelling [...] is that of making the difference between departure and arrival not as imperceptible but rather as profound as possible, to experience this difference in its full measure, intact, just as we did when our imagination transported us directly from our home into the heart of a desired location, in a leap which struck us as miraculous not so much because of the great distance covered but because of the way it united two geographically distinct and individual places and led us from one name to another, a movement schematized by the mysterious operation performed in those special places, stations, which scarcely belong to their town, but still contain the essence of its personality just as they carry its name on the sign which identifies them.]

In this context, it is not entirely coincidental that the major nineteenth-century art museum in Paris, the Musée d'Orsay, is housed in a former rail terminus.<sup>11</sup> As Proust notes, the museum

10 On Proust and the museum, see Theodor W. Adorno, 'Valéry Proust Museum', in *Prismen: Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1955), pp. 215–31. Essentially, the contrast which Adorno establishes between Proust and Valéry as respectively defender and critic of the museum applies equally to the opposition between Malraux and Georges Duthuit discussed earlier – for Proust/Malraux the museum is the institution which houses and protects the transcendent values of art, while for Valéry/Duthuit, the museum is rather the tomb which stifles living cultures by depriving them of their sustaining social and historical context. See also Paul Valéry, 'Le Problème des musées', in Jean Hytier (ed.), *Œuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 2 vols, II, 1290–3.

11 For a brief history of the Musée (formerly Gare) d'Orsay, see Caroline Mathieu, *Orsay: esprit du lieu* (Paris: Scala, 1999).



de-contextualizes as mass transport displaces, and both processes operate through the use of anonymous, non-specific space. If the traditional museum is characterized by such displacement and de-contextualization, then its imaginary successor takes these processes even further – thanks to its virtual character, the imaginary museum imposes a more radical logic of abstraction, removing the work from its site-specific context to re-locate it not within another site but within the absolute non-site of photographic reproduction.<sup>12</sup>

Malraux's privileging of form and disregard for context, illustrated by his use of photography to crop away the surroundings of a site-specific artefact, implicates him in a long-standing debate within museology, particularly with respect to the development of the ethnographic museum in the course of the twentieth century. This debate focuses essentially on the opposition between aesthetic and functional value. First collected as material for display in the *cabinet de curiosité* or *Wunderkammer* of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, objects produced by non-Western cultures were initially viewed as props in a kind of exotic spectacle. In reaction against this 'aesthetic' appropriation, twentieth-century anthropology sought to remove artefacts from the domain of art and the spectacle in order to re-locate them in their social and functional context. Within the modernized ethnographic museum, artefacts were re-contextualized by abundant documentation in the form of fieldwork photographs and explanatory text, in the hope of undoing their previously abusive appropriation.

The choice between aesthetic and functional criteria of display is not, however, an unambiguous one. While the aesthetic

12 The anonymous logic of abstraction which characterizes the non-site of the museum is one reason why much contemporary Western art is resolutely site-specific – it thereby challenges the capacity of the institution to house and accommodate it. On the relations between site-specific artworks and the museum, see Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), pp. 25–6 and Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 17.

approach denies the specific social and cultural context of a given artefact, it nevertheless confers a degree of recognition of cultural achievement, albeit in Western terms – objects are no longer simply viewed as instruments or tools but as products of a civilization with values beyond mere use. Conversely, the functional approach attempts to give full recognition to the specific social and cultural context of a given artefact, but runs the risk of denying its status as proof of cultural achievement in those same traditional Western terms – if an object is merely useful, it may be deemed to have no real cultural value and so fail to serve as proof of civilization.<sup>13</sup> This ambiguity is produced largely by two competing definitions of culture – the aesthetic notion of high culture versus the anthropological notion of culture as a whole way of life – a conceptual distinction embodied institutionally in the art museum on the one hand and the ethnographic museum on the other. This is of course a Western distinction which does not apply to more integrated non-Western cultures, where cultural life has not separated out into an autonomous field distinct from those of religion and everyday life and where the difference between use value and aesthetic value is consequently meaningless. None the less, the distinction is a real one in the context of Western culture, where historically (at least since Kant's *Critique of Judgement*) the functional and the aesthetic have frequently been opposed, and to that extent it is relevant to the current discussion. In other words, the opposition between functional and aesthetic value

13 On this ambiguity, see Denis Hollier, 'La Valeur d'usage de l'impossible', in *Les Dépossédés (Bataille, Caillois, Leiris, Malraux, Sartre)* (Paris: Minuit, 1993), pp. 153–78. More generally, on the relation between non-Western cultures and Western Modernism, see Hal Foster, 'The "Primitive" Unconscious of Modern Art or White Skin, Black Masks', in *Recodings*, pp. 181–208; James Clifford, 'On Collecting Art and Culture', in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 215–51; Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994).

may not tell us much about other cultures, but it tells us a great deal about our own (its lack of integration and its difficulty in comprehending more integrated societies, to give two examples). If the functional approach with its aesthetic blindness has dominated approaches to the museum display of non-Western artefacts for most of the twentieth century, a tendency to reverse this trend has emerged fairly recently. And it is to a specific example of this reversal that I now want to turn.

### Musée des arts premiers (Museum of Primordial Arts)

Unlike the Mitterrand era, the Chirac presidency has so far produced only one major metropolitan *grand projet*, scheduled for completion in 2004 – the Musée des arts premiers, an institution whose title poses a real problem for translation, but which I propose to call for the purposes of this article the Museum of Primordial Arts. Both the French title and my translation are essentially exercises in euphemism designed to avoid the term ‘primitive’, a telling evasion which points to some of the conceptual and political problems associated with the project.<sup>14</sup> The proposed name of the new museum, with its connotations of ethnocentric condescension, has in fact already caused considerable embarrassment and the project is now frequently referred to simply as the Musée du quai Branly, metonymically substituting the name of its site for that of its contents. The central idea of the new museum is to assemble and re-house a number of non-Western cultural artefacts currently held in other French museum collections in a new institution whose fundamental organizing principle is, as its name

14 For a brief history of the term ‘primitive’ and its connotations, see Rhodes 1994: 7–22.

suggests, primarily aesthetic. So the contents of the new museum will be chosen in the first instance for their exemplary aesthetic qualities (*arts premiers*), even if they are subsequently set in a broader ethnographic context.<sup>15</sup> Prior to the planned opening of the new museum, a sample of its future collection is currently on display in the Pavillon des Sessions of the Louvre, a choice of venue which is itself significant – rather than the ethnographic context of the Musée de l'Homme at Chaillot, the collection is showcased in the flagship French art museum. In the provisional exhibition at the Louvre, the curatorial emphasis is very much on the object itself, with supplementary ethnographic information supplied discreetly in a variety of accompanying formats which the visitor may or may not choose to consult. The inevitable first impression is aesthetic and formal.

It is difficult not to see in the background to Chirac's project the influence of Malraux's aesthetics and also to sense something of the post-war Gaullist politics which informed it (and Chirac's early career). In the cultural and political context of the 1940s and 1950s, the years during which the idea of the imaginary museum began to take shape, Malraux's existentialist formalism represented an attempt to reconstruct the foundations of a Western humanism which had been called into question by the barbarism of National Socialism, a movement founded ideologically on cultural exclusivism rather than cultural universalism. This is its positive context, but Malraux's humanism is ambiguous at best. For not only his writings but also his later political activities as Gaullist Minister for Culture in the 1960s formed part of an attempt to re-affirm on a cultural level the global position of France and Western Europe at a time when the political initiative had passed to the superpowers of

15 For an introduction to the new museum which places it in the historical context of the development of French anthropology, see the accompanying publication by Marine Degli and Marie Mauzé, *Arts premiers: le temps de la reconnaissance* (Paris: Gallimard/Réunion des musées nationaux, 2000). As its title suggests and its function requires, it is sympathetic to the museum's project.

the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> It is tempting to see in Chirac's project of a museum of primordial arts a similar attempt to re-affirm the cultural pre-eminence of France through a humanist aesthetics of form, at a time when the New World Order of the twenty-first century is dominated by the United States. In what appears a gesture of inclusiveness and generosity, artefacts produced in non-Western societies are accorded the honour of recognition as works of art, but their historical and cultural specificity is thereby occluded. In this respect, both Malraux's concept of 'world art' and Chirac's notion of '*arts premiers*' are examples of what might be called 'soft' imperialism with a humanist alibi.

## Conclusion: Another Brick in the Wall

A different kind of generosity and recognition would involve the return of artefacts to their home cultures, but nothing seems further from the minds of Western curators and politicians.<sup>17</sup> It might have been thought, however naïvely, that one consequence of the development of the imaginary museum and its extensions through technology beyond that of printing (that is, television, CD-ROMs and web sites) would be to render the traditional museum obsolete, and thus allow the dispersal of its contents. But far from superseding the traditional museum, the

16 On Malraux's tenure as Minister for Culture, see Jean Lacouture, *André Malraux: une vie dans le siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), pp. 355–95; Philippe Poirier, 'L'État esthétique (1958–1969)', in *L'État et la culture en France au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Livre de poche, 2000), pp. 67–115; and Augustin Girard and Geneviève Gentil (eds), *Les Affaires culturelles au temps d'André Malraux 1959–1969* (Paris: La Documentation française, 1996).

17 On the question of the return of artefacts housed in Western museums, see Jeanette Greenfield, *The Return of Cultural Treasures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

imaginary museum has if anything helped to consolidate its position. If the imaginary museum has become in a sense even more imaginary, even more virtual, through its technological extensions, the traditional museum has responded to the competition of the art book and its successors by re-emphasizing the concrete presence of the objects which it displays. For the major advantage which the traditional museum retains over its reproduction-based competitor remains its possession of the original object. To quote Germain Viatte, the museological director of the Musée des arts premiers, 'Un musée n'est pas un livre [...] Le musée doit apporter ce qu'il est le seul à pouvoir donner: l'accès à l'objet.' [A museum is not a book [...]. The museum should contribute what it alone can offer: access to the object] (Degli and Mauzé 2000: 146). In a sense, rather than superseding the traditional museum, the imaginary museum has functioned as the publicity and marketing arm of the older institution. Viewing reproductions seems, if anything, to increase the desire to see the original – contra Walter Benjamin, the auratic power of the original is not diminished but rather enhanced through reproduction.<sup>18</sup> Not only does the

18 For Benjamin's celebrated argument that photographic reproduction diminishes the 'aura' or aesthetic presence of a work of art, see 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit', in *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften I* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1955), pp. 136–69. Although Malraux does not discuss Benjamin explicitly in *The Museum Without Walls*, he does so in an earlier speech from 1936, 'Sur l'héritage culturel', in Janine Mossuz-Lavau (ed.), *La Politique, la Culture: discours, articles, entretiens (1925–1975)* (Paris: Gallimard/Folio, 1996), pp. 132–43. On occasion, of course, Benjamin also wrote of the auratic power of photography itself, as in 'Kleine Geschichte der Photographie', in *Angelus Novus: Ausgewählte Schriften II* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1966), pp. 229–47. Ironically, photography does not have a place in its own right within the imaginary museum – it remains for Malraux an instrument of reproduction rather than an autonomous medium. For an exploration of the implications for the museum of the recognition of photography as an independent art form, see Douglas Crimp, 'The Museum's Old, the Library's New Subject', in *On the Museum's Ruins*, pp. 66–83. On the relationship between Malraux and Benjamin, see

imaginary museum extend the project of the traditional museum but its invisible architecture underpins the continuing survival and success of the traditional museum structure, as the sale of 'imaginary museum' products such as catalogues and CD-ROMs constitutes an important contribution both to its merchandizing revenue and its public profile.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the many differences between the traditional and imaginary museums, the latter at a fundamental level extends and perpetuates the ambitions of the former. While much of the expansionist and ethnocentric ideology of the traditional museum persists in Malraux's project and finds itself revived once again in Chirac's new museum, the exhibition catalogue, the CD-ROM and the web site have become virtual extensions of the traditional museum rather than a substitute for it. To return in conclusion to Stuart Gilbert's phrase, the museum *without* walls has paradoxically allowed the museum *with* walls to reinforce those walls by moving beyond them.

Régis Debray, *Vie et mort de l'image en Occident: une histoire du regard en Occident* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), pp. 170–2.

19 See Rosalind Krauss, 'Postmodernism's Museum Without Walls', in Reesa Greenberg *et al.* (eds), *Thinking about Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 341–8.

GUY BEINER

## Mapping the 'Year of the French': The Vernacular Landscape of Folk Memory

The landscape, changed by man or not, often was a powerful mnemonic device.<sup>1</sup>

The history of Ireland must be based on a study of the relationship between the land and the people.<sup>2</sup>

In *The Personality of Ireland*, Emyr Estyn Evans advocated what he defined as 'an anthropological view' of Irish history, involving 'a trilogy of regional studies': *habitat* – cultural geography ('the total physical environment'), *history* – based on archival sources ('the written record of the past') and *heritage* – folklore, anthropology and archaeology ('the unwritten segment of human history').<sup>3</sup> Citing Estyn Evans as a noteworthy example, Kevin Whelan has commented on the influence of the *Annales* school of twentieth-century French historians on historical geography in Ireland, namely introducing an approach of *géographie humaine*, characterized by a dialectic between history and geography. In this light, Whelan described cultural landscapes as 'communal archives, palimpsests created by the sedimentation of cultural experiences through time'. He identified the subaltern-historical value of cultural landscape as

- 1 Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (London: James Currey and Heinemann Kenya, 1985), p. 45.
- 2 J. C. Becket, *The Study of Irish History* (Belfast: Queen's University, 1963), p. 17.
- 3 Emyr Estyn Evans, *The Personality of Ireland. Habitat, Heritage and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).



potentially a democratic document from which can be recuperated the history of the undocumented. In this approach, history is reconstructed by seeing the landscape through the eyes of those who made it.<sup>4</sup>

A useful term for this kind of investigation – ‘vernacular landscape’ – was coined by J. B. Jackson in reference to ‘territory of an impoverished and illiterate population with no written history, no written laws or records, and no documented title to the lands it occupies’ as opposed to ‘political landscape’, defined as belonging to the ruling classes (crown, aristocracy, clergy etc.).<sup>5</sup> Jackson’s use of the term, based on the English and German experience (referring specifically to Jacob Grimm’s 1828 collection of local law and customs relating to property, rank, social relationships and the administration of customary law in north-west Europe – *Deutsche Rechtsaltertümer*), is not quite applicable to the Irish case. Yet appropriating and modifying the term ‘vernacular landscape’ for Irish Studies does call attention to aspects of cultural memory that are embodied in the special relationship between the local-rural communities of Ireland and their surroundings, as expressed in particular through folklore sources.<sup>6</sup>

- 4 Kevin Whelan, ‘The Region and the Intellectuals’, in Liam O’Dowd (ed.), *On Intellectuals and Intellectual Life in Ireland: International, Comparative and Historical Contexts* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies of Queen’s University Belfast and the Royal Irish Academy, 1996), pp. 126–7.
- 5 John Brinckerhoff Jackson, ‘The Vernacular Landscape’, in E. C. Penning-Rosewell and D. Lowenthal (eds), *Landscape Meaning and Values* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), pp. 65–81. See also: John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 149–54.
- 6 An early attempt to facilitate such a study can be seen in the work of the Topographical Section of the nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey project. Under the direction of George Petrie, of the Royal Irish Academy, scholars such as John O’Donovan and Eugene O’Curry were employed to conduct fieldwork and document folklore under the headings of topography and local history. This study was terminated by the authorities in 1841. It is interesting to note that, in his speech to mark the establishment of the Irish Folklore Commission in 1935, Minister of

Focusing primarily on examples from North America, Kent Ryden argued convincingly that there is a distinct difference between the geographical concept of space, mapped in the reality of physical marks, and an anthropological-cultural notion of a sense of place, marking experiences in landscape which are meaningfully expressed through oral and written narratives. He observed that 'regional folklore encapsulates and transmits the intimate and otherwise unrecorded history of a place; it reveals the meaning of a place to be in large part a deeply known and felt awareness of things that happened there.'<sup>7</sup> Henry Glassie's study of the sense of history in an Ulster community reveals that it is intrinsically tied with places in the landscape, observing that 'in place the person is part of history.'<sup>8</sup>

Séamas Ó Catháin and Patrick O'Flanagan employed the term 'living landscape' in their study of the place-names and fairy lore of northwest Erris in Co. Mayo. Their research demonstrates the vivid and vital relationship members of a rural community maintained with their environment through a rich repository of traditional narratives and customs that helped demarcate and explain their world. For this reason, the folklore of landscape offers a window into a community's *mentalité*.<sup>9</sup> The multitudinous range of place-names in just one locality is overwhelming. The engagement with the vernacular landscape was intense and people attached names to practically every distinct site in their locality (a phenomenon to which Ó

Education Tomas Ó Deirg chose to describe the Commission as a continuation of 'work abandoned 100 years ago' by the Ordnance Survey. See: *The Irish Press*, 3 April 1935; *The Irish Times*, 3 April 1935.

- 7 Kent C. Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape. Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), p. 63.
- 8 Henry Glassie, *Passing the Time in Ballymenone. Culture and History of an Ulster Community*, 2nd edn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 201.
- 9 An attempt to explore this direction in more general terms is Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins, 1995).

Catháin and O'Flanagan applied the label: *homo nominus*, man the namer). Because this is by and large an unofficial geography, insofar as most of the place-names are anchored in local tradition, without external recognition, the *seanchaí* [storyteller] is invaluable in offering an interpretative insight into the vernacular landscape.<sup>10</sup>

Irish folklore relating to the landscape has an ancient pedigree. The term *dinnseanchas* is commonly used to denote the large corpus of medieval toponymic lore written in metrical verse and also in prose [known as *Dindshenchas Éirenn*].<sup>11</sup> The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature notes that:

The *dinnshenchas* reflects a mentality in which the land of Ireland is perceived as being completely translated into story: each place has a history which is continuously retold. The *dinnshenchas* is the storehouse of this knowledge, but the mentality which it expresses is to be found throughout all phases of Irish literature.<sup>12</sup>

Kevin Whelan has commented on the ability of place-names to mirror a society's value system, observing that 'placenames must represent communal values if they are to take root as an intrinsic part of the indigenous mind'. Demonstrating how

- 10 Séamas Ó Catháin and Patrick O'Flanagan, *The Living Landscape. Kilgalligan, Erris Co. Mayo* (Dublin: Folklore of Ireland Council, 1975). In this study, almost 800 place-names were documented for the area of Kilgalligan alone.
- 11 In modern Irish *dinnseanchas* is translated as topography. Other terms used for place-names in studies of Irish toponymy are: *logainm* and *áitainm*; the verbal noun *logainmníocht* is used for naming of places, toponymy [*ainmníocht* – nomenclature].
- 12 Robert Welch (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 150. Dáithí Ó hÓgáin claimed that 'neither the texts of the *Dindshenchas*, or the many other miscellaneous items of place-lore in the literature, had much influence on the oral tradition'. He argued for the particular character of folklore concerning places, which also displayed aspects absent from the literature. Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *Myth, Legend and Romance. An Encyclopaedia of the Irish Folk Tradition* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1991), p. 363.

place-names can serve as an index of changes in norms and attitudes in modern Irish history, Whelan concluded that

a placename can act as a very powerful summation of large aspects of one's own biography, the history of one's family, the history of one's community and the history of one's nation.<sup>13</sup>

In the typology of place-names applied by Ó Catháin and O'Flanagan, a category of commemorative names specifically relates to the relationship of a community in the ethnographic present with the historical past (Ó Catháin and O'Flanagan: 71). Place-names, together with the folk history narratives associated with them, may serve as a medium of commemoration by which past events of local significance are remembered in daily life. By examining historical folklore sources that relate to the landscape associated with a particular episode in late-eighteenth century Irish history, this article proposes to demonstrate how the study of vernacular landscape can help to uncover vestiges of subaltern, primarily rural, cultural memory.

## The Year of the French

In the summer of 1798, a series of uprisings organized by the secret society of The United Irishmen spread through Ireland. Following the suppression of the better-known 1798 Rebellion arenas in the province of Leinster (particularly Co. Wexford) and northeast Ulster (Counties Antrim and Down), French military aid sparked a further rebellion in the province of Connaught. On 22 August 1798, a small French expeditionary force of 1000 men under General Jean Joseph Amable Humbert arrived in Killala Bay in northwest county Mayo and landed in

13 Kevin Whelan, 'Placename Change: An Index of Value Systems in Transition', *Sinsear*, 1 (1979), 44-9.

the village of Kilcummin. They landed in an area where United Irish organization was particularly weak and underdeveloped. Nevertheless, the French troops proceeded to the small town of Killala and secured the neighbouring town of Ballina. Subsequently, they were joined by several thousand Irish recruits. The Franco-Irish army succeeded in defeating a much larger British force stationed in Castlebar, the principal town of Mayo, at a battle that was to be popularized as the celebrated 'Races of Castlebar'. Following the victory, the 'Republic of Connaught' was proclaimed in Castlebar, and Citizen John Moore of Moore Hall was appointed president.

With the failure of expected reinforcements to arrive from France, Humbert attempted to team up with additional United Irish forces, which were reported to be assembled in the Midlands, and from there he hoped perhaps to continue on to Dublin. The insurgent army embarked on a campaign through north County Mayo, into south County Sligo, headed eastwards through County Leitrim, only to be ultimately defeated on 8 September 1798 near the village of Ballinamuck in north County Longford. Shortly after, on 23 September, the remaining rebel contingency in Killala was defeated, thus putting an end to the attempted French invasion and the local uprising. Small-scale guerrilla resistance continued, mainly in the hills of Erris and Tyrawly (northwest County Mayo) and Connemara (northwest County Galway).

Local folklore accounts reveal that communities throughout the west of Ireland and the Midlands recalled and commemorated *Bliain na bhFrancach* (as it was remembered in Irish speaking communities), or 'The Year of the French', as a central episode in the region's historical identity and a major landmark event in the chronology of the relatively recent past. Fortunately, numerous folklore sources have been documented. The Irish Folklore Commission (1935–1970) sent field-workers throughout the island of Ireland to record and write down folklore. Approximately 100 folklore sources relating to this historical episode can be found in the Commission's Main Manuscript Collection. The Schools' Scheme project of 1937–8 (coordinated

by the Irish Folklore Commission, the Irish Department of Education [*An Roinn Oideachais*] and the Irish National Teachers' Organization (INTO)] facilitated the collection of folklore by pupils in primary schools in the twenty-six counties of the Irish Free State. The Schools' Manuscripts Collection hosts another 200 relevant accounts gathered in communities that had been involved in the Rebellion.

In 1937, historian Richard Hayes wrote the *Last Invasion of Ireland. When Connacht Rose*, which is to date the most comprehensive study of the events of 1798 in the west of Ireland. Untypical of the historians of his time, Hayes spent the summers of 1935 and 1936 travelling in the footsteps of the Franco-Irish army and interviewing people along the way. His book facilitated the publication of some 140 traditional accounts, and further folklore material can be found in his field notes.<sup>14</sup> In addition to these three major collections, which were mainly compiled in the mid-1930s, numerous references to relevant folklore traditions can also be found in miscellaneous sources dating from the late eighteenth-century through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as private collections, personal memoirs, publications of popular print, newspapers, commemoration booklets and local histories. Altogether, a rich inventory exists of several hundred folklore sources relating to the events of 1798 in Connacht.

14 Richard Hayes, *The Last Invasion of Ireland. When Connacht Rose*, 4th edn (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1979); National Library of Ireland, Richard Hayes Papers MSS 13799–13801. For a detailed examination of the work of Richard Hayes as a collector of historical folklore see: Guy Beiner, 'Richard Hayes, *Seanchas*-Collector Extraordinaire. First Steps Towards a Folk History of *Bliain na bhFrancach* – The Year of the French', *Béalóideas*, 68 (2000), 3–32.

## Mapping Commemorative Toponymy

Samuel Lewis's, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* reveals that by the early-nineteenth century the French invasion of 1798 was acknowledged as a significant historical episode in the official geographical identity of the area. However, this external recognition was largely restricted to the main towns and sites associated with the campaign: Killala, Ballina, Castlebar and Ballinamuck.<sup>15</sup> At the time of the extensive folklore collection projects of the 1930s, all along the route of the Franco-Irish insurgent army, from Kilcummin to Ballinamuck, there were people in the different localities who could point out the route the Rebel army was believed to have taken through their neighbourhood and the exact location of the battlefields. For the people of Connacht, the French invasion was not an abstract episode in a remote past, but a vivid and essential part of the heritage of their district.

The map of *Bliain na bhFrancach* in folk memory went beyond the footsteps of the Rebel army and also charted sites of popular agitation and local uprisings, routes Irish recruits took on their way to join the French, local skirmishes between smaller forces separated from the main body of the army, the flight of fugitives after the defeat at Ballinamuck, guerrilla warfare and outlaw activities after the French surrender, and the punitive activities of military and yeomen terror in repressing the local population. These geographical delineations may not always conform with studies of military historians yet, for the people of Connacht the French invasion and its aftermath, as it was remembered in social memory, was an integral part of their vernacular landscape. In fact, the a-historicity of traditions relating to commemorative landscape is of lesser relevance to

15 Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (New York: S. Lewis, 1837).

understanding the influence they maintained in popular imagination.

Memory of the French invasion was preserved through place-names that referred to sites associated with the French presence. The site of the French camp in Killala was known as *Baile an Champa* [Place of the Camp] (IFC S141: 304; Hayes: 217).<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the field at Cloone, County Leitrim, where the Rebel army camped on the eve of the Battle of Ballinamuck was known locally as 'Camp Field' (IFC S222: 248–50, 615–9; IFC Boxes S222a, S222b, S222d).<sup>17</sup> The hill of Slievenagark [*Sliabh na gCearc*], north of Castlebar, where the Rebel forces positioned themselves before attacking the town, for years afterwards was known as 'Mount Humbert' (Hayes: 43). A hill three miles to the south of Castlebar, where a skirmish took place, was called 'French Hill' [*Cnoc na bhFrancach*] (Hayes: 53; IFC 1649: 5).<sup>18</sup> The location of Humbert's headquarters in Castlebar was popularly recognized as 'Humbert's House' (IFC S89: 454). Place-names also marked the route of the Rebel army from Mayo to the Midlands, and several pathways were known by the name

- 16 IFC and IFC S = the Main Manuscript Collection and Schools' Manuscript Collection of the Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin. The numbers on either side of the colon represent the volume number and the page number(s) respectively (Schools' Manuscript Collection Boxes contain the original copybooks of the pupils and are not paginated). I would like to thank the Head of the Department of Irish Folklore at UCD for permission to use source material from the Irish Folklore Collection.
- 17 Commenting on field names as important elements in the rural sense of place, geographer Patrick J. Duffy noted that 'One distinctive mark of the local is the intimate baptism of the fields with individual familiar names.' See: Patrick J. Duffy, 'Heritage and history: exploring landscape and place in Co. Meath', *Ríocht na Midhe*, XI (2000), 206–8.
- 18 Local recognition of the place-name was enhanced as a result of a local initiative to build a commemoration monument in 1876. Wider public recognition was attained during the centenary commemorations when the place-name 'French Hill' was commonly used. See for example the reports of the ceremonies in Castlebar in the *Connaught Telegraph*, 28 August 1898.



'French Road'.<sup>19</sup> Memory of United Irish participation, alongside the French troops, was engraved in the vernacular landscape through the use of the familiar sobriquet 'croppy' in place-names such as 'Croppy's Gap' (a field on Kiltycreevagh Hill, near Ballinamuck) (IFC S758: 254–5, 438, 460) or 'Croppy's Bud' (a bush on the Ballinamuck battlefield) (IFC S758: 438).

Many place-names mark features of the landscape associated with outlaws on the run. For example, several caves in Connemara were identified as the hiding places of the legendary outlaws Fr. Myles Prendergast and his kinsman Johnny Gibbons Jr. ('Johnny the Outlaw'), among them '*Scailp an Athair Maoilre*' [the cave of Father Myles], '*Pluais an Athair Maoilre*' [the cave of Father Myles] and '*Scailp Johnny*' [Johnny's cave] (IFC 1318: 105–7, 111–15; Hayes, p. 303).<sup>20</sup> Lore relating to places associated with 1798 also reveals tales of terror and repression. For example, in the area of Ballinamuck it was remembered that locals had to hide in 'fairy forts' to escape persecution (IFC S214: 328; IFC S758: 50). By identifying places of refuge, where local inhabitants fled from the rampage of terror that accompanied the suppression of the Rising, communities commemorated the less valiant aspects of the Rising and the suffering involved. By far the most common of the commemorative place-names relate to places of death and burial.

19 For example: between Killala and Ballina, see Ken Lyons, 'The Races of Castlebar' in 1798. *A Commemorative Booklet* (Castlebar: Castlebar 1798 Commemoration Committee, 1998), p. 20; near Crossmolina, Co. Mayo, IFC S152: 73-4; near the village of Cloone in south Co. Leitrim, IFC Box S222a, Box S222d.

20 Seán Mac Giollarnáth, *Annála Beaga Ó Iorras Aithneach* (Dublin: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1941), pp. 78–9.

## The Weeping Landscape: Sites of Death and Burial

The high mortality of The Year of the French was commemorated ubiquitously in the vernacular landscape. The final battlefield at Ballinamuck was engraved in social memory as the death site of hundreds of Irish rebels, forsaken by their French allies and left to suffer merciless liquidation at the hands of the Crown forces. Similarly, the route by which the Mayo rebels retreated towards their last stand in Killala, where a militia-man's contemporary eyewitness account reported 'such terrible slaughter as took place is impossible for me to describe',<sup>21</sup> was later remembered as *casán an áir* [the pathway of slaughter] (Hayes: 173). The sites of the widespread executions throughout Connacht of apprehended insurgents were locally remembered. Several sites were subsequently named 'Gallows Hill', including one at Rathduff Castle, near Ballina (IFC S148: 117, 137), another at Belcarra, near Castlebar (IFC S94: 400), and the particularly infamous site at Carrick-on-Shannon, where prisoners taken at Ballinamuck were selected for execution by lottery.<sup>22</sup> 'Hangman's trees', on which rebels were executed, were still pointed out in the 1930s all along the 1798 Rebel

21 Letter by Joshua Kemmis, Ballina, 25 September 1798, National Library of Ireland, Frazer MSS. II/89.

22 T. M. Ó Flynn, *History of Leitrim* (Dublin: C. J. Fallon, 1937), pp. 72–3. Not only was the story of the lottery at 'Gallows Hill' remembered, but also the trees, on which the condemned rebels were hung, were pointed out (IFC 559: 237–8; IFC S209: 227). The lottery was directed by Major General George Hewitt; Hewitt papers, National Army Museum London, MSS 5910–198. It appears in an anonymous account of a field officer quoted in W. H. Maxwell, *History of the Irish Rebellion in 1798* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1845), pp 243–4. See also: W. E. H. Lecky, *History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, 5th edn (London: Longmans Green, 1913), V, p. 63; C. Litton Falkiner, *Studies in Irish History and Biography* (London: Longmans, 1902), pp. 317–18.

trail.<sup>23</sup> When the trees were cut down, they continued to survive in the imaginary landscape of social memory, as in a tradition about the executions of rebels in the townland of Cavan which remembered that ‘the trees on which they [Croppies] were hanged stood there up to a short time ago, the track of the rope being visible’ (IFC S766: 207).<sup>24</sup> This case exemplifies the key point that landscape of commemoration does not require tangible-physical features but may rely solely on remembered places, which have ceased to exist.

In addition to sites of death, the vernacular landscape of The Year of the French is littered with graves. Some of the places of burial are specifically associated with the memory of French troops and carry names such as ‘The French Bridge’ [*Droichead an Fhrancaigh*] (IFC S128: 236, 564) or numerous sites known as ‘the Frenchman’s Grave’ (IFC 104: 479–80; IFC S119: 518; IFC S123: 211; IFC S202: 131; Hayes: 222, 289–90; Lyons: 23).<sup>25</sup> Sites identified as ‘Croppies’ Graves’, denoting the burial spots of Irish insurgents in 1798, were widespread throughout the West. A concentration of these graves is to be found in the vicinity of Ballinamuck (IFC S222: 618; IFC S758: 254, 320–2, 434; IFC S759: 216; IFC S760: 127–33; IFC S765: 25; IFC S766: 306. See also: Devaney: 136). These were often sites of mass graves, such as ‘Bully’s Acre’ in Balinallee, Co. Longford, where the executed rebels captured at Ballinamuck were collectively buried (IFC S222: 616; S759: 216; IFC S766: 207, 307; IFC Box

23 For example in Leitrim alone several such trees were identified: Drumshanbo, IFC S207: 143–5; Lakefield Hill, Farnaught (IFC S214: 257), Breanros, Mohill (although cut down, the stump was still pointed out) (IFC S328); Roosky, on the border with Co. Roscommon (IFC 1480: 387).

24 Local historian Rev. Owen Devaney recalled meeting an old man in Cavan who claimed that he remembered seeing the irons on a particular tree from which in 1798 hanging ropes were suspended for the execution of prisoners. Rev. Owen Devaney, *Killoe. History of a Co. Longford Parish* (Cavan: Abbey Printers, 1981), p. 128.

25 Bernard O’Hara, *Killasser, A History* (Galway: O Hara, 1981), p. 33.

S759a).<sup>26</sup> Social taboo ensured that locals around Ballinamuck, and throughout Connacht, accorded respect to sites identified as graves of Rebels. Folk traditions ensured that the ground was neither tilled nor mown (IFC S760: 133; IFC 1858: 27–8).<sup>27</sup>

Many graves were unmarked mounds in the landscape and their identification relied solely on social memory. Others were marked with piles of stones (*carn, leacht, meascán, clochan*), placed as a token of respect and an act of spontaneous commemoration by the people of the locality.<sup>28</sup> For example, a stone heap was said to have been placed on the grave of a rebel called O'Farrell, who was shot dead when fleeing Ballinamuck battlefield and buried on top of 'Cairn Hill' in Lilloe, County Longford (IFC S759: 215–6; IFC Box S759a). Often different narratives facilitated competing traditions regarding the identity of the commemorated. According to an alternative tradition, the heap of stones popularly known as the 'Meascone' [*Meascán*] on top of Cairn Hill was believed to mark not just O'Farrell's burial place, but also a mass grave for thirty-six rebels (IFC S759: 211–10; IFC Box S759a). People of the locality paid homage to this site with a yearly visit on the first Sunday of June (IFC S759: 211–10; IFC Box S759a).<sup>29</sup> Some graves were

26 Pádraig Mac Gréine, 'Traditions of 1798, The Battle of Ballinamuck', *Béaloides*, 4 (1933–4), (p. 395).

27 Padraig Rehill, 'People and Places' in Padraig Rehill (ed.), *Ballinamuck Bi-Centenary 1798–1998* (Longford: Turner Print Group, 1998), p. 143.

28 Cairns were a recognized form of folk monuments, which were not particular to popular '98 heroes. For a discussion of the custom of marking a place of death with a heap of stones to which passers-by added stones (based on the 132 replies of the 1938/9 Irish Folklore Commission questionnaire on death-cairn customs and material, from both the Main and Schools Manuscript Collections of the IFC, with reference to a list of printed sources dating back to the seventeenth century) see: Máire MacNeill, 'Wayside Death Cairns in Ireland', *Béaloides*, 16 (1946), 49–63; Seán Ó Súilleabháin, *A Handbook of Irish Folklore* (Dublin: Educational Company of Ireland, 1942), pp. 20–2.

29 No explanation was offered as to why this ritual took place specifically in June.

marked in a distinct way, often with big standing stones. (IFC 1858: 27; IFC S148: 241; Devaney: 136) Croppies' Graves in County Leitrim were decorated and marked by planting flowers in the shape of a cross or a coffin (IFC S212: 334). In some cases a proper gravestone was erected, as in the case of the memorial for Roger 'Ratchie' Farrell along the roadside at Slatta, Co. Roscommon (near Rooskey) (Rehill: 144).

Narratives relating to graves of Irish rebels help to identify names of local people who joined the French. By preserving the memory of members of the community who took part in the Rising, local commemoration contributes to the democratic character of folk historiography, as opposed to official historiography, which neglects these forgotten rebels. The cultivation of graves offered each community local monuments to maintain the memory of their dead. This is a popular form of commemoration as opposed to the more canonical medium of official monuments that tended throughout the nineteenth century to call attention either to anonymous, abstract representations or to a limited pantheon of recognized heroes.<sup>30</sup>

## Burial

There are recurring stories of locals reclaiming the corpses of executed rebels and secretly giving them a proper burial. These narratives of clandestine burial recall the terror during the sup-

30 Official commemoration of individuals is a modern custom. The first monument to dead soldiers appeared following the French Revolution (the monument for the Swiss Guard in Lucerne), and the first large-scale cemetery for casualties of war was the Gettysburg National Cemetery (begun in 1863). The naming of dead individuals was only introduced as a universal practice in First World War commemoration. See: Thomas W. Laqueur, 'Memory and naming in the Great War', in John R. Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 150–67.

pression of the Rebellion and offer insight into how burial was a problematic act, which often implied sedition and resistance. The stealth of burying executed rebels is best exemplified in the vivid folk memories from around Ballinamuck of the burial of Irish rebel leader General George Blake of Garacloon. Local traditions recall that, following Blake's execution, his corpse was brought to a barn in the McKenna household to be waked, and then was buried in Tubberpatrick graveyard (IFC S758: 434–5, 455–6, 458–9; IFC S760: 133, 477; IFC S761: 244; IFC S766: 307; IFC 1858: 24–5, 96–7; Hayes: 227, 229, 230–1, 233, 237, 238). Blake's grave subsequently became a recognized memorial site and a designated focal point for commemoration of the Irish who participated and died in Ballinamuck (IFC Box S759a; Hayes: 227).<sup>31</sup> This is acknowledged in verse in the Ballinamuck ballad 'Blake's Grave', attributed to the local folk poet Patrick Higgins of Cloncoose (IFC S758: 455–6).<sup>32</sup>

The many haphazard and secret burials, that took place under conditions of threat in the aftermath of the defeat, were not necessarily ultimate interment. In following years, people of the localities where battles had taken place in 1798 discovered skeletons and bones.<sup>33</sup> As the anthropologist Jan Vansina observed, skulls and bones can function as mnemonic aids, serving as cues to recall memories (Vansina: 45). In this sense, corpses that resurfaced as skeletons ironically continued to feature in the 'living landscape' of 1798, calling attention to the

31 J. F. Quinn, *History of Mayo* (Ballina, 1993), I, p. 147.

32 The folk poem evidently emulates the well-known nationalist ballad 'Tone's Grave' by the celebrated Young Irelander Thomas Davis. See: Martin MacDermott, *Songs and Ballads of Young Ireland* (London, 1896), pp. 253–4.

33 The *Ballina Herald* of August 1892 reported the discovery in Knox Street, Ballina, of two skeletons believed to belong to rebels executed by the English on the eve of the French entry to the town (one of them was identified as Patrick Walsh); see: *Bliainiris*, II (1983/4), p. 24. Folklore collectors were told of bones being found at numerous 1798 battle sites: near Killala (IFC S144: 24–5); at Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim (IFC S207: 143–5); near Ballinamuck (IFC S758: 255, 460; Hayes: 229).

dead of the past and soliciting their commemoration. The re-burial of these skeletons by people of the locality was, in itself, an act of memorial, which continued to resonate as folklore.

## Memory and the Other World

Ó Catháin and O'Flanagan demonstrated in their study of Kilgalligan, Erris, that the 'living landscape' involves not only real places, but also includes a rich body of fairy lore relating to the supernatural. Fairy lore is central in Irish oral tradition, presenting a parallel universe, a mirror world, which may appear fantastic but nevertheless played a real and concrete role in the life of rural communities.<sup>34</sup> Angela Bourke has written about the 'virtual reality of Irish fairy legend' and has shown how fairy lore can provide essential insight towards deciphering the mental world of communities on the periphery of modernization.<sup>35</sup>

In this context it is important to acknowledge that the vernacular landscape of 'The Year of the French' also embraced, at times, the Other World. Stories of supernatural forces periodically re-enacting a battle demonstrate how, in folklore traditions, the fairies could provide an annual imaginary commemorative display (IFC 104: 479). Legends of fairies lamenting the dead can be interpreted as relating to remembrance of communal trauma (IFC 202: 145–9; IFC S969: 239). Just as in reality skeletons and bones resurfaced and served as concrete evidence

34 Ó Catháin and O'Flanagan, op. cit. It is interesting to note that, as a rule, the Irish Folklore Commission collectors did not profess to believe in 'superstitions' or ghosts. See Bríd Mahon, *While Green Grass Grows. Memoirs of a Folklorist* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1998), pp. 89–95.

35 Angela Bourke, 'The Virtual Reality of Irish Fairy Legend', *Éire-Ireland*, xxxi, 1–2 (1996), 7–25; Angela Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary* (Dublin: Pimlico, 1999).

of the past, folk narratives tell of dead rebels re-appearing as ghosts, impinging on the lives of people and rendering the memory of the dead inescapable. Like place-names, ghost narratives offered a medium for remembering injustice and grievances.<sup>36</sup> Through narratives of the supernatural, folk commemoration tapped into a readily available reservoir of fairy lore and folk tradition about the other world, enhanced through ritual traditions of blessings, charms and curses, thus enriching the social spheres where the historical past could be remembered.

## Conclusion

The sites of memory that feature in the Irish vernacular landscape are *loci memoriae* proper, places to which social memory is attached.<sup>37</sup> They do not conform to the *Lieux de mémoire*, as defined by Pierre Nora, which operate on three levels: material, symbolic and functional. The vernacular landscape maps places of memory that compose a 'living-landscape' that continues to feature in oral popular culture, at least well into the twentieth century, unlike Nora's concept of memory, which is 'dead' and deposited in specific sites.<sup>38</sup> In this sense, no understanding of popular cultural memory can be complete

36 For example: IFC S599: 159; IFC S765: 23–5.

37 *Loci memoriae* is a term from classical and medieval rhetoric referring to a tradition of mnemonic techniques described in Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1966). Here I use the term in its more nominal sense.

38 Pierre Nora, 'General Introduction: Between Memory And History', in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory. Rethinking the French Past*, Arthur Goldhammer (trans.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 14–20.



without mapping place-names and studying the folklore they entail.

Negotiations of memory took place in popular culture as hegemonic attempts to reshape collective memory exerted influence through official commemoration ceremonies,<sup>39</sup> National School education and popular print. Yet, the many aspects of 1798 folk memory associated with the vernacular landscape – the imagined map of the Rebellion, sites of death, stories of burial and traditions of the other world – reveal patterns of popular commemoration that were practised mostly without official recognition. The vernacular landscape is rarely reflected in the official geography of Ordnance Survey maps. Local familiarity with the vernacular landscape provided storytellers with a myriad of commemorative place-names that could be injected into narratives to add context and relevance. References to the vernacular landscape were often utilized to provide colour and narrative depth to a storytelling performance and at the same time, inadvertently, functioned as a subtle form of commemoration, evoking memories of events in the communal past.

39 See Guy Beiner, 'Negotiations of Memory: Rethinking 1798 Commemoration', *The Irish Review*, 26 (2000), 60–70.

CHRISTIAN J. EMDEN

## '*Nachleben*': Cultural Memory in Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin

Cultural memory is a highly theoretical idea which is difficult to grasp and virtually impossible to define. Since Maurice Halbwachs's *La mémoire collective* (1950) and Frances A. Yates's *The Art of Memory* (1966), the concept of memory itself, its historical development and shift of meaning, its cultural resonance and theoretical implications have received much attention. Over the last twenty years, we have witnessed an increased interest in the connection between history and memory, and the publication of the monumental *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (1984–1992) under the direction of Pierre Nora has led to an enormous interest in this topic. But why should we think about cultural memory if we already have serious difficulties in defining such common concepts as tradition, history, heritage, historical influence, and so forth? Is cultural memory not merely another and more fashionable formulation for what is generally termed historical tradition? In contrast, I wish to argue that the idea of cultural memory aims at a detailed description of underlying historical currents, of indirect and mediated influences, and of what we might initially term the 'unconscious after-life of the past'. In other words, cultural memory seeks to trace imaginary constellations of historical meaning, and we encounter such an understanding especially in the work of Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin.

Although we have to keep in mind that there are many obvious differences between Warburg and Benjamin, they also have much in common. First of all, their work is marked by an understanding of cultural historiography as an essentially interdisciplinary undertaking. In the case of Warburg, this interdisciplinary approach leads him to link traditional themes of art

history with astronomy, ethnology and evolutionary psychology, while his eclectic themes range from Botticelli and Ghirlandajo to images of submarines and airships in medieval culture, and the iconography of early twentieth-century postal stamps. In the case of Benjamin, this results in a combination of Jewish mysticism, hermeneutics, dialectical materialism, translation theory, classical scholarship and mythography. Secondly, both Warburg and Benjamin exhibit a penetrating attention for the minute details of cultural expression and representation from the fluttering movement of garments on *cinquecento* paintings to the design of Parisian subway entrances. Thirdly, both Warburg and Benjamin are essentially concerned with the workings of cultural and historical imagination, with the symbolic manifestations of cultural tradition and coherence. And fourthly, both Warburg and Benjamin employ highly metaphorical models in order to describe their own theoretical approaches: concepts such as allegory, melancholy, collection, excavation, archaeological layers, seismic waves and topographical mapping provide the framework for a highly complex interpretation of the European past, and in this respect, it would be a profound mistake to regard Warburg's writings merely as something of interest to art historians or to reduce Benjamin to a cultural critic of the modern condition.

In fact, it seems to be the case that they attempt to grasp the complicated and multi-faceted development, repetition and alteration of images, themes and symbols from Greek antiquity and Renaissance Italy to the German Baroque and the modern metropolitan landscape. But in order to do so, Warburg and Benjamin focus on a crucial problem of historiography, which was described accurately by the French historian Pierre Nora. Historical reality, he suggests, is twofold: on the one hand, we are faced with a tangible reality, which is more or less material and which is inscribed in space, time, language or tradition, but on the other, we are faced with a purely symbolic reality, which has a life of its own and which can survive without any need

for material manifestations.<sup>1</sup> Warburg's and Benjamin's enterprise focuses on exactly this interplay between the material conditions of culture and their symbolic after-life, which they both seek to describe in terms of cultural or social memory.

Let us first consider the after-life of the past, which plays a pivotal role for Benjamin's understanding of cultural memory. In his *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928), he discusses two examples for such an after-life, which bring him into close proximity with the Warburg School, for they represent what Warburg himself termed the 'after-life' (*Nachleben*) of antiquity. First of all, the themes of ancient lyric and epic poetry as well as the rules of Greek and Roman poetics are still present in the German baroque, although they lost their coherence and become a raw material for a new, more playful, more enigmatic and more allegorical literary imagination.<sup>2</sup> His second example for the intertwining of different historical layers, which we find towards the end of his study, is mainly concerned with the structure of baroque mythology, with the emblematic representations of Fortuna, Venus and others during the seventeenth century. In this context, he refers to Hermann Usener's seminal book *Götternamen* (1896), which seeks to understand myth as a form of symbolic consciousness, but he also takes his ideas from Warburg's *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten* (1920), which describes the survival of Greek demonic deities in Humanist theology, and to Franz von Bezold's *Das Fortleben der antiken Götter im mittelalterlichen Humanismus* (1922), which comes to similar conclusions. '[D]ie Götter', Benjamin writes, 'ragen in die fremde Welt hinein' [the gods project into the alien world], but they have lost their authenticity and become manifest mostly in the form of names, allegorical attributes and emblematic imagery, and as such they

1 See Pierre Nora, 'Comment écrire l'histoire de France?', in *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–1992), III/1, pp. 11–32 (p. 20).

2 See Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (eds), 7 vols (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), I, pp. 354–5.

form a considerable part of the cultural imagination (Benjamin I: 399).

This intertwining of different historical layers is particularly important for Benjamin's understanding of historical transformations, and in the context of his *Passagen-Werk*, we can realize that this survival of antiquity reappears in the urban landscape of nineteenth-century Paris which, for Benjamin, is a highly baroque city: he likens the palace of the world-exhibition to a Roman coliseum, the arcades with their shops, commodities, flaneurs and prostitutes turn into temples. Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* are marked by a correspondence between antiquity and modernity. A particularly bizarre example of the baroque after-life of antiquity in nineteenth-century Paris is a spectacular trip in an equally spectacular balloon:

Der Ballonfahrer Poitevin unternahm, von großer publicit  unterst tzt, eine ascension de l'Uranus mit M dchen, die als mythologische Figuren ausstaffiert waren, auf seiner Gondel

[The aeronaut Poitevin, sustained by great publicity, undertook an ascent to Uranus accompanied in the gondola of his balloon by young women dressed as mythological figures] (Benjamin V: 260)

The visual experience of Paris – which, for Benjamin, slowly but surely advances to the state of a phantasmagoric confusion – is largely characterized by an architectural topography which can almost be read like the different palimpsests of an ancient manuscript. Beneath the thin layer of contemporary, modern culture, we can quickly discern the images of a past which continue to fuel the symbolic imagination of the present.<sup>3</sup> The window displays of shops inevitably remind us of baroque chambers of curiosities, the arrangement of commodities in

3 See Richard Faber, 'Paris, das Rom des XIX. Jahrhunderts', in Norbert Bolz and Richard Faber (eds), *Antike und Moderne: Zu Walter Benjamins 'Passagen'* (W rzburg: K nigshausen & Neumann, 1986), pp. 53–96.

department stores follow natural history cabinets;<sup>4</sup> the deities of antiquity return in street names and the names of subway stations; shop signs and advertisements resemble the hieroglyphic inscriptions which have led to a formidable symbolic misinterpretation during the Renaissance, and which have triggered the emblematic iconography of the seventeenth century: 'Geschichtliches "Verstehen" ist grundsätzlich als ein Nachleben des Verstandnen zu fassen' [Historical 'understanding' is to be grasped, in principle, as an after-life of that which is understood] (Benjamin V: 574–5). And in much the same way as the German baroque can be described as a space of memory, which includes the deities of antiquity and the iconography of the Renaissance, nineteenth-century Paris seems to be another space of memory, which is – so to speak – of a higher order insofar as it is the crystallization of a long symbolical tradition. The past, Benjamin seems to suggest, does not survive in grand historiographical accounts, but in the symbolic margins of the historical imagination such as stage designs, industrial architecture, street lamps, novelties, ruins, inscriptions and so forth. Benjamin, it seems, is most interested in what he terms the 'Abfall der Geschichte' [refuse of history] (Benjamin V: 575).<sup>5</sup>

This attention to the minute details of cultural manifestations is shared by Warburg, although the latter approaches the problem from a different perspective. In Usener's seminal lecture *Philologie und Geschichtswissenschaft* (1882), he had already encountered the idea that any understanding of the history of thought is dependent on a philological attention to minute details, and several years later he found in Wolfgang von Oettingen's *Die Ziele und Wege der neueren Kunstwissenschaft* (1888) the

4 Susan Buck-Morss aptly described this as 'the dream world of mass culture'. See her *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 253–6.

5 On this point, see Irving Wohlfahrt, 'Et Cetera? De l'historien comme chiffonnier', in Heinz Wismann (ed.), *Walter Benjamin et Paris: Colloque international 27–29 juin 1983* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), pp. 559–609.

suggestion that the art historian should give particular consideration to the odd details and enigmatic curiosities which might help to shed light on a particular work of art.<sup>6</sup> The consequences of this approach are obvious. As early as his doctoral dissertation on Botticelli, he focuses less on the paintings at hand and more on the movement of the clothes and the folds in garments in order to grasp the iconographical presence of antiquity in Renaissance art and to explain Botticelli's paintings against the background of Angelo Poliziano's poetry and its literary representation of Greek themes; this finally leads him to reject Winckelmann's notion of a serene antiquity in favour of a darker image of ancient Greece.

Much like Benjamin, Warburg seems to assume that we are able to find a crystallization of the past in the small and symbolic details of cultural manifestations, and this idea is linked to Warburg's notion of an 'after-life' [Nachleben] of the past in the present. Throughout his writings, he seeks to understand the forms of this after-life: Dürer's representation of the death of Orpheus leads him back to ancient reliefs, in Renaissance medals he detects a union of pagan symbolism and theological humanism; on Flemish tapestries he discovers that medieval clothes *alla francese* are depicted in an ancient Greek style; Hellenistic astral mythology survives on frescoes in Ferrara; and he follows the influence of Greek and Neoplatonic astrology in the writings of Luther and Melanchthon. This historical transmission of images from the past to the present, from Antiquity to the Renaissance is, however, never a clear-cut development, but is dependent on manifold transformations, which alter the symbolic value of the original picture.

One of Warburg's prime examples of this phenomenon is that of the 'Nympha', the somewhat vague pictorial motif of a

6 See Hermann Usener, 'Philologie und Geschichtswissenschaft', in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1907), pp. 1–35 (p. 27). See also Wolfgang von Oettingen, *Die Ziele und Wege der neueren Kunstwissenschaft* (Marburg: N.G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1888), pp. 17–18.

young woman, which, in pagan art, appeared in mythological disguise as Venus, Fortuna, Flora, Victoria, Chloris and so forth, and which reappeared during the Italian Renaissance in a Christian context.<sup>7</sup> Inspired by a passage in Erwin Rohde's book *Psyche* (1894) which emphasizes the central position of the figure of the nymph in ancient Greek mythology,<sup>8</sup> Warburg turned to the iconography of this image in order to capture the dynamic tension between the representation of moving emotions in antiquity and their reapplication during the Renaissance and, surprisingly, in modern times. For example, on a Greek sarcophagus the motif of the nymph appears as a mænad killing Pentheus; on a wall-painting in Pompeii, the nymph is personified by Medea; on Botticelli's *Primavera*, she returns as a personification of spring; she is present on a wide range of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century paintings; in the twentieth century, the nymph is the central figure on a French postage stamp, a female golf-player on an advertisement for a local golf club in Hamburg, and she finally appears on a sheet of toilet-paper with the name 'Hausfee'. Against this background, we can see that the motif of the 'Nympha' is a metaphor for the continuous symbolic transformations which stand in the centre of Warburg's concept of cultural memory.

But Warburg's idea of cultural memory is also linked to particularly strong psychological emotions such as aggression, pursuit, violence, mutilation and so forth, which, over time, are substituted by different emotions and values such as grace, tranquillity, beauty, cleanliness, etc. For instance, the representation of a leg which is clearly torn-off from a body is, in pagan art, connected to the expression of violent mutilation, whereas the representation of the very same leg in a Christian context

7 See Aby Warburg, *Ausgewählte Schriften und Würdigungen*, Dieter Wuttke (ed.), 2nd edn (Baden-Baden: Köhner, 1980), pp. 56–7 and p. 84. For the following, see also Ernst H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Phaidon, 1986), pp. 105–27.

8 See Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1894), p. 374.



depicts a process of healing. Another example is the picture of a mother, who leads two children towards a saint, whereas on an ancient Greek sarcophagus, the very same mother is Medea leading her children into death. These two examples are not chosen at random: the first certainly refers to Donatello's relief of St. Antonius in Padua, and the second to Agostino di Duccio's representation of St. Bernardino. The successful transmission of images is dependent on a strong psychological emotion, and Warburg aptly coined the term 'Pathos-Formel' [emotive formula] in order to describe this process: a 'Pathos-Formel' is, so to speak, the antithetical use of an antique gesture in a more modern context, and, insofar as it is the basis for the historical mediation of images, the 'Pathos-Formel' thematizes the psychological background of what Warburg himself terms 'Bildgedächtnis' [pictorial memory] (Warburg: 267).<sup>9</sup>

It is not surprising that when Warburg introduced the idea of social or cultural memory he turned to the evolutionary psychology of his time. He had already read, as a student, a German translation of Tito Vignoli's *Mito e Scienza* (1879), which attempted to find a law for the workings of the human imagination by combining evolutionary theories, history, anthropology, ethnology, philosophy, etc., and in the National Library in Florence, he discovered Charles Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Men and Animals* (1872), which introduced him to the idea that our present facial expressions are merely symbolic residues of primitive emotions, which can be traced back along the evolutionary chain.<sup>10</sup> For Warburg, it was obvious that these ideas could be connected to the physiological and biological theories of memory, which were widely discussed in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Germany, and as a consequence he turned to Ewald Hering's lecture *Über*

9 See also Kurt W. Forster, 'Aby Warburg's History of Art: Collective Memory and the Social Mediation of Images', *Daedalus* 105 (1976), 169–76.

10 For a short outline of Warburg's interest in Vignoli and Darwin, see Gombrich: 68–72.

*das Gedächtnis als eine allgemeine Function der organisierten Materie* (1870) and Richard Semon's *Die Mneme als erhaltendes Prinzip im Wechsel des organischen Geschehens* (1904).

Whereas Hering simply regarded memory as an hereditary biological process, Semon regarded memory as the trace of a past event, which left a strong impression on our psychological apparatus. The association of such engrams constitutes, for Semon, reason,<sup>11</sup> and this was clearly compatible with Darwin's research into emotions, which suggested that the expression of psychological states progressed from a primitive to a more rational state. Against this background, Warburg now concludes that the engram, the trace of the past, becomes manifest as a symbol, especially as a visual or pictorial symbol. Thus, in much the same way as evolutionary theories construct memory as a transmission of traces and view tradition as marked by inherited psychological predispositions, Warburg regards cultural memory as a transmission or mediation of images. Thus, the task of the cultural historian is an 'Analyse des Erinnerungsvermögens' [an analysis of the mnemonic capacity], but such an analysis has to proceed, as we shall see, quite literally as an archaeology of the past (Warburg: 175).

Observing the historical signatures and their symbolic expressions, the cultural historian cannot but come to the conclusion that we are, in fact, surrounded by a symbolic after-life of the past, which continuously influences our own historical imagination. And furthermore, in order to untie these knotted historical layers, the cultural historian has to opt for a truly archaeological view of history. Walter Benjamin presents this perspective in more detail in a short fragment with the title *Ausgraben und Erinnern* (1932):

Wer sich der eigenen verschütteten Vergangenheit zu nähern trachtet, muß sich verhalten wie ein Mann, der gräbt. Vor allem darf er sich nicht scheuen, immer wieder auf einen und denselben Sachverhalt zurück-

11 See Richard Semon, *Die Mneme als erhaltendes Prinzip im Wechsel der organischen Geschehens* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1904), pp. 136–7.

zukommen – ihn auszustreuen wie man Erde ausstreut, ihn umzuwühlen, wie man Erdreich umwühlt. Denn ‘Sachverhalte’ sind nicht mehr als Schichten, die erst der sorgsamsten Durchforschung das ausliefern, um dessentwillen sich die Grabung lohnt. Die Bilder nämlich, welche, losgebrochen aus allen früheren Zusammenhängen, als Kostbarkeiten in den nüchternen Gemächern unserer späten Einsicht – wie Torsi in der Galerie des Sammlers – stehen. (Benjamin IV: 400–1)<sup>12</sup>

[He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. Above all, he must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the ‘matter itself’ is no more than the layers which yield their long-sought secrets only to the most meticulous investigation. That is to say, they yield those images that, severed from all earlier associations reside as treasures in the sober rooms of later insights – like torsos in a collector’s gallery.]

The archaeological process has to locate, excavate, record and order the finds, and in this respect, the archaeologist and cultural historian have to dig through the historical layers of cultural memory. Benjamin, it seems, develops a highly complex concept of historical knowledge, which is metaphorically based on the stratigraphic method widely used in contemporary archaeology.<sup>13</sup> This method allows us to arrange the artefacts in a sequential order, it enables us to establish relative chronologies, to associate different artefacts, and also to map the ruins of the past. In this respect, it should be clear that Benjamin’s use of archaeological metaphors is more than a flight of his imagination and that he does not wish to limit these metaphors to the realm of personal memories. It rather seems to be the case that he aims at an understanding of history by means of different interwoven layers. This principle resurfaces in the *Passagen-*

12 See also Josef Fürnkäs, *Surrealismus als Erkenntnis: Walter Benjamin – Weimarer Einbahnstraße und Pariser Passagen* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1988), pp. 117–32. See also Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), pp. 70–1.

13 See Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 196–7.

*Werk* in the form of historical strata: the streets of the metropolitan city consist of different architectural layers and are marked by temporal heterogeneity – the foundations of one building date from the sixteenth century, the neighbouring house was erected in a neoclassical style, the public place opposite these buildings is dominated by an Egyptian obelisk, and so forth.

The simultaneity of different historical layers in the context of the metropolitan landscape, is, however, not only an architectural phenomenon but for Benjamin also a form of social stratification. On his trips through the labyrinthine streets of Paris, the *flâneur* is able to read this stratification almost like the *liber naturae*: '[Alfred] Delvau will im Flanieren die sozialen Schichtungen der pariser Gesellschaft so mühelos erkannt haben wie ein Geologe die Erdschichten' [Delvau believes he can recognize the social strata of Parisian society in *flânerie* as easily as a geologist recognizes geological strata] (Benjamin V: 546). *Flânerie*, Benjamin seems to argue, is a practical process of remembering the historical layers and social stratification of the city. The *flâneur*, in other words, is always faced with the question of the past: 'Der Raum blinzelt den Flaneur an: Nun, was mag sich in mir wohl zugetragen haben?' [The space winks at the *flâneur*: What do you think may have gone on here?] (Benjamin V.: 527). In the last sentence, the grammatical structure is of some importance, for the *flâneur* is not faced with the question of what has happened in a particular place, but with the question of what might have happened: 'nichts von alledem was wir hier sagen, ist wirklich gewesen' [nothing at all of what we are saying here actually existed] (Benjamin V: 1000). In this respect, the *flâneur* resembles the cultural historian, who has to consider the different historical layers, their relations and their contents without ever being able to gain a complete picture.

Although Benjamin discusses some contemporary theories of memory – especially those of Freud, Reik and Bergson – in *Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire*, he is quite cautious and concludes that memory is unable to deliver a full reconstruction of the past. Memory – as he notes in *Ausgraben und Erinnern* – is

faced with images which are detached from their original contexts, and which are like torsos and broken statues in the gallery of a Renaissance collector. Already in *Zum Bilde Prousts* (1929), Benjamin stresses this particular dilemma of memory:

Man weiß, daß Proust nicht ein Leben wie es gewesen ist in seinem Werke beschrieben hat, sondern ein Leben, so wie der, der's erlebt hat, dieses Leben erinnert.

[We know that in his work Proust described not a life as it actually was but a life as it was remembered by the one who had lived it.] (Benjamin II: 311)<sup>14</sup>

Memory, Benjamin seems to suggest, does not provide an immediate or privileged access to the past, but it is first and foremost a creative process, which 'weaves' an image of the past that relies, above all, on the minute details triggering the *mémoire involontaire*. Such a very personal experience is, for Benjamin, however, always linked to an appropriation and interpretation of the historical past, or in other words, the imaginary life of personal memory partakes in the realm of what we might describe as cultural memory.

Like Benjamin, Warburg employs a concept of cultural memory, which is to a considerable extent based on archaeological models which enrich the references to evolutionary psychology and physiology we encountered above. We can find such an archaeologically inspired model in one of his most important studies, *Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoja zu Ferrara*, which Warburg presented in 1912 at the Tenth International Congress of Art History in Rome and which he revised in 1922. Under the influence of Franz Boll's book *Sphaera* (1903), which focuses on the history of astrological symbols in antiquity, Warburg attempted to decipher a mysterious fresco in the Palazzo Schifanoia, which was

14 On Benjamin's reference to Proust's conception of memory, see especially John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 253–79.

rediscovered in 1840.<sup>15</sup> The fresco consists of twelve horizontal units representing the months of the year, and each unit consists of three vertical parts. In the upper part of each unit we find images of the respective Olympian gods, in the lower part we can see depictions of the secular life at the court of Ferrara, and the middle is dominated by the constellations of fixed stars and astrological symbols. Warburg himself is particularly interested in these astrological symbols which hold the key to the fresco as a whole, but which also seem totally alien to the astrological consciousness of *cinquecento* Ferrara. As a consequence, he begins to trace the cultural mediation of these symbols, and in order to understand the archaeological model involved, we have to follow Warburg's complicated argument for a while.

The mathematical calculation of fixed stars and astral constellations in Greece in the fourth century BC is faced by a peculiar problem, for the number of fixed stars does not provide enough possibilities for astrological calculations. In order to compensate this decisive problem, the constellations are linked to mythological images, which give more room for interpretation. The most influential treatise on this subject is Teucros's so-called *Sphaera Barbarica*, which had an enormous influence on astrological imagery in antiquity. The symbols and the interpretations of the *Sphaera Barbarica* in fact travel through Asia Minor into Egypt, from there to India and back to Persia, where they are first translated into Arabic, probably in the ninth century AD, by Abû Ma'schar. In twelfth-century Spain, the *Sphaera Barbarica* was rediscovered and translated from Arabic into Hebrew and subsequently circulated at the court of Toledo, where it was furthermore enriched by the contemporary taste for Hellenistic occultism. In the thirteenth century, the Hebrew text was translated into French, and in 1293 it was

15 The most detailed interpretation of Warburg's decipherment of this fresco can be found in Marco Bertozzi, *La tirannia degli astri: Aby Warburg e l'astrologia di Palazzo Schifanoia* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1985).

then translated from French into Latin and its imagery entered the medieval European calendars, where it met a different iconological tradition inspired by Albericus's *De deorum imaginibus libellus*. These ancient Greek astrological images are linked with the poetic images of ancient deities in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Manilius's *Astronomica* in the course of the fourteenth century, and in 1488 they reappear in Pietro d'Abano's *Astrolabium Magnum*, which was one of the most influential texts of Renaissance astrology in Italy. Finally, Pellegrino Prisciani, librarian, astrologist and historiographer at the court in Ferrara, quotes Pietro d'Abano and Abû Ma'schar; in consequence Warburg concludes that Prisciani also inspired the iconography of the fresco in the Palazzo Schifanoia.

At first sight, Warburg's account of the history of astrological symbols seems to be a critical analysis of intertextual transmission of images over a period of almost 2000 years, and in this respect he speaks himself of a 'kritische Ikonologie' [critical iconology] (Warburg: 178).<sup>16</sup> But when he finally applies this historical account to the fresco in Ferrara, he characterizes his enterprise in quite different terms as 'ein fortwährendes Wegräumen unberechenbarer Schichten nicht verständlicher Zutaten' [stripping away layer upon layer of unintelligible accretions] (Warburg: 178), and he continues:

Damit lässt sich nun das ganze astrale System des mittleren Streifens eindeutig analysieren: Ueber die unterste Schicht des griechischen Fixsternhimmels hatte sich zunächst das ägyptisierende Schema des Dekankultes gelagert. Auf dieses setzte sich die Schicht indischer mythologischer Umformung ab, die sodann – wahrscheinlich durch persische Vermittlung – das arabische Milieu zu passieren hatte. Nachdem weiter durch die hebräische Uebersetzung eine abermalige trübende Ablagerung stattgefunden hatte, mündete [...] der griechische Fixsternhimmel schließlich in die monumentale Kosmologie der italienischen Frührenaissance ein, in der Gestalt eben jener 36 rätselhaften

16 On Warburg's concept of a 'kritische Ikonologie', see Eveline Pinto, 'Mécénat familial et histoire de l'art: Aby Warburg et "l'iconologie critique"', *Revue de Synthèse*, 108 (1987), 91–107.

Figuren des mittleren Streifens aus den Fresken von Ferrara. (Warburg: 179)

[The entire astral system of the middle register can now be analysed with certainty. The firmament as described by the Greeks was the base stratum on which the Egyptian cult system of decans was established; this, in turn, was overlaid by a layer of Indian mythological adaptation before finding its way, probably by way of Persia, into Arab culture. Clouded still further by translation into Hebrew and thence into French, the Grecian firmament found its way [...] into the monumental cosmology of the Italian early Renaissance, in the form of those thirty-six mysterious figures in the middle register of the frescoes in Ferrara.]

The spatial arrangement of the astrological images provides the framework for a much more complicated space of cultural memory, which is defined by the temporal transmission of these images. For Warburg, this understanding of the historical imagination as consisting of different layers is, in fact, an important aspect of his concept of cultural memory, and in a short account from 1929, he describes his collection of books as 'einen internationalen Seismographen für geistigen Erbgutsverkehr von Osten nach Westen, von Norden nach Süden' [an international seismograph for the transmission of cultural heritage from the East to the West, from the North to the South], which seeks to explain the mnemonic dimension of these transmissions (Warburg: 307).

On the one hand, this clearly suggests that, for Benjamin and Warburg, historical meaning is the product of a rather symbolic process. In the same way as the past does not survive in facts but only in symbols and within our own historical imagination, any interpretation of the past has to rely on symbolic forms. Our conceptions of tradition, heritage and history, they would argue, are above all symbolic constellations of meaning. But it should be clear that this unconscious presence of the past needs interpretation; it needs, in other words, an imaginary reconstruction.

Seen from the perspective of Benjamin and Warburg, cultural memory does not consist in the fairly obvious manifestations of historical traditions, which are, in one way or another,



ritualized or commemorated on certain social occasions – Remembrance Day, for instance – but rather it is a concept, which seeks to describe the unconscious traces, the hidden connections, forgotten details and symbolic representations of what is generally termed ‘historical tradition’. To be sure, cultural memory is not at all a form of tradition, but parts of historical tradition certainly belong to the realm of cultural memory. Against this background we might even come to the conclusion that an approach to the past in terms of cultural memory is a very specific way of looking at cultural history and the history of ideas: as I already mentioned above, cultural memory seeks to grasp the mediation of images, texts and ideas over a long period of time. Investigating the meandering evolution of cultural memory, we might understand how the present is haunted by the past and how the past is modelled, invented, reinvented and reconstructed by the present.

PHYLLIS GAFFNEY

## Aughrim, Flanders, Ladysmith and Other Sites of Memory in Beckett's *Mercier et Camier*

Works of history and works of fiction always intersect to some extent, insofar as they involve the narrative reconstruction of experience, lived or imagined. To illustrate or enhance their tale, historians frequently have recourse to legend, myth and imaginative accounts by contemporaries, while writers of imaginative prose, if they do not draw directly from historical reality, must at the very least locate their plot in some temporal setting – be it merely in lexical and stylistic choices that reflect a particular historical stage of the language which is their vehicle.

This interdependence of history and fiction is not always evident, and in the cryptic writing of Samuel Beckett, fictional gestures towards the real world can be tantalizingly obscure, inviting speculation. What follows is a brief consideration of the interrelation that seems to be at play in the novel *Mercier et Camier*, particularly in regard to some topographical allusions contained in the book, to see what their sources might be, and whether they form a pattern conveying something about the function of topographical and cultural allusions generally, in Beckett's work.<sup>1</sup>

*Mercier et Camier*, Beckett's first in 1970. Less well-known, perhaps, than the subsequent trilogy – *Molloy*, *Malone Meurt*, *L'Innommable* – and closer in many ways to the author's earlier works of fiction written in English – *More Pricks Than Kicks*,

1 All of the passages occur in both the original French text and in Beckett's English translation. Quotations cite the two original editions: Samuel Beckett, *Mercier et Camier* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1970), and *Mercier and Camier* (New York: Grove Press, 1974). In further references these will be abbreviated respectively to *MetC* and *MandC*.

*Murphy, Watt* – it bears comparison with the play that was to establish Beckett's name worldwide, *En attendant Godot*.<sup>2</sup> While *Godot* depicts two tramps endlessly waiting, and killing time with talk about the process of waiting, *Mercier et Camier* concerns two elderly vagabonds who wander without any ostensible purpose, and talk at length about travelling and planning their journey. Both processes – the waiting and the journeying – lead nowhere.

However, if the play is set in a kind of nowhere/everywhere, the novel's setting – a rain-soaked island – is less universal. As Vivian Mercier and Eoin O'Brien have shown, clues in the text suggest a specific Irish setting: the city of Dublin and the hills of County Wicklow.<sup>3</sup> The fictional world is punctuated by allusions to the real world. This happens in *Godot* too, but in the play the allusions seem haphazard (the Eiffel Tower, the Mâcon country), whereas in the novel they tend towards a semblance of coherence. *Mercier et Camier* is strewn with evocations of events from military history: sites of battle, in Ireland or abroad, in the distant past or in more recent memory.

The first site of memory is found in a passage (*MetC*: 10–12; *MandC*: 9–10) that describes at some length the travellers' initial rendezvous: a small and densely planted public garden, where the two men shelter from the rain in a pagoda-like structure. The garden is dominated by a gigantic copper beech nearing the end of its days, which was allegedly planted by a French Field Marshal, Saint-Ruth, shortly before this military man lost his life by being hit by a cannon-ball while fighting for a hopeless cause in a foreign land. When the tree finally succumbs, the garden will have more air and people will breathe more freely.

- 2 For a detailed comparison of the novel and the play, see Colin Duckworth's introduction to his edition of *En attendant Godot* (London: Harrap, 1966), pp. xlvi–lxxv.
- 3 Vivian Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 41–2; Eoin O'Brien, *The Beckett Country* (Dublin: The Black Cat Press, in association with London: Faber & Faber, 1986), pp. 62–6.

Now, as every Irish historian knows, a French Field Marshal named Saint-Ruth lost his life at the battle of Aughrim, on 12 July 1691, while leading the Jacobite cause against the claims of King William III. The initial meeting-point for Beckett's travellers is thus, curiously, placed under the shadow of the Williamite War, a watershed – in cultural, social and political terms – for the history of modern Ireland, with its date of 12 July still so charged with significance in Ulster today.<sup>4</sup>

But if some historical reality can be attached to the allusion to Saint-Ruth, does the passage have any geographical or botanical plausibility? The task of locating this 'garden mysteriously named' (*MandC*: 10) is not helped by the narrator: it is not a place, more a petit square, he declares in the French original (*MetC*: 11); it is 'not properly speaking a square, but rather a small public garden', he tells his English reader (*MandC*: 9). Whatever the semantic niceties involved in these distinctions, Dublin contains no monument to the memory of Saint-Ruth, and no square of that name exists. Yet one is tempted to dream up possible references to reality behind the fiction. St Stephen's Green, for example, which was first enclosed and planted during the late seventeenth century, is far too large to meet the author's description, but might be envisaged as a source for the author's green space, 'at the heart of a tangle of streets and lanes. It displayed the usual shrubberies, flower-beds, pools, fountains, statues, lawns and benches in strangulating profusion.' (*MandC*: 9). The Green contains two pagoda-type shelters and, up to the mid-twentieth century, a very large copper beech

4 The more famous Battle of the Boyne was fought on 1 July 1690 (old style calendar); its date was moved to 12 July by the new style calendar. But the actual date of the Aughrim confrontation was 12 July (old style). It may be significant, for what follows, that Saint-Ruth was inveterately opposed to Protestantism, and 'famous as a scourge of Huguenots': see R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600–1972* (London: Allen Lane, 1988), p. 150.

used to stand there, in the site now occupied by Henry Moore's Yeats memorial (unveiled in 1967).<sup>5</sup>

Another possibility may be Iveagh Gardens, where an elderly copper beech overhangs a miniature maze currently being restored – and the passage mentions the maze-like quality of the dense planting: 'il tenait du dédale' [it had something of the maze] (*MetC*: 11; *MandC*: 9); Iveagh Gardens, too, are laid out with statues, alleys and shrubs; but can hardly be said to lie at an intersection of streets. It is possible, then, that the square described in the novel is a fictional amalgam of more than one real square.<sup>6</sup>

As for the copper beech allegedly planted by Saint-Ruth, however, some facts belie the fiction. The life expectancy of a purple beech (of which the copper is a pale variant) is under two hundred years, so it is unlikely to last (as the passage says) several centuries. Moreover, since the *Fagus sylvatica purpurea* is not native to Ireland, having been introduced here in the late eighteenth century, it is impossible for a seventeenth-century Frenchman to have planted one.<sup>7</sup>

It seems therefore improbable that this fictional tree corresponds to an actual copper beech. All the more intriguing, then, as its latent metaphorical possibilities are considerable. (One is reminded of other trees in Beckett: the tree in *Godot*, the larches in *Company*.) Now, although no monument to Marshal Saint-Ruth exists in Dublin, another more concrete memorial of 1691 would have been familiar to the author: Grinling Gibbons's equestrian statue of King William, erected ten years after

5 Telephone conversation, August 2000, with the Park Superintendent's office. On the laying out of St Stephen's Green, see Maurice Craig, *Dublin 1660–1860* (Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1952; repr. 1980), pp. 18–21 and Samuel A. Ossory Fitzpatrick, *Dublin: A Historical and Topographical Account of the City* (London: Methuen, 1907; repr. Cork: Tower Books, 1977), p. 94.

6 As, indeed, Eoin O'Brien concludes, p. 353, n. 24.

7 E. Charles Nelson and Wendy Walsh, *Trees of Ireland: Native and Naturalized* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993), p. 111.

the battles of Aghrim and the Boyne. Standing opposite the front arch of Trinity College, in College Green, the statue was often vandalized before being finally blown up successfully in 1929, a year after Beckett graduated (Craig: 76–77).

In other words, the novel's copper beech may perhaps be interpreted as a naturalistic memorial, from the Jacobean side, dreamed up by the author. To convey what, though? A kind of symbol of Irish nationalist sentiment, sown in the late seventeenth century by a Frenchman and grown to full maturity by the twentieth? In fact, grown so mature that it is a source of suffocation: the novel's gigantic tree has reached the end of its useful life, and some much-needed air would be let in if it were chopped down. The dense planting in the square is perhaps a metaphorical undergrowth, of fossilized political attitudes and worn-out ideologies.

While this may seem a fanciful interpretation, it looks less farfetched when read beside a passage, rich in military references, found a few pages further on in the novel: the description of the park keeper – or 'ranger', in Beckett's translation (*MetC*: 17–19, 23; *MandC*: 13–14, 16). The text highlights the man's option to enlist in the First World War instead of taking part in the *escarmouches domestiques* back home (this 'domestic skirmish' presumably denoting the Irish War of Independence), a choice the man sometimes allowed himself to regret, because crawling in the mud of Flanders had earned him only a meagre pension. This internal conflict within the ranger echoes a key debate in Irish nationalist circles around the time of the Great War, a debate between the constitutional nationalists who responded to John Redmond's call to join up and fight the Kaiser, in the belief that Home Rule would follow their participation in the war, and the extreme republicans who preferred to instigate armed insurrection on the home ground instead – the key question being which path would lead more effectively to Irish independence. The *gardien's* patriotism is centred on a preoccupation with his own career, and with the frills of Irish nationalism (love of the Irish language, the Catholic faith and Gaelic folklore, *unique au monde*) and he is sus-

ceptible to bribery (the tramps later get rid of him by means of a shilling; he offers them an overnight stay in his square, for half a crown). 'Soyons un peu gentils avec lui, dit Mercier, c'est un héros de la grande guerre.' [Let us show him a little kindness, said Mercier, he's a hero of the Great War.] (*MetC*: 23; *MandC*: 16). But it is difficult to think kindly of this embittered, venal veteran in his 'sickly green' uniform.

If the Irish War of Independence and the Great War are associated with the park ranger, the Williamite War is also recalled in a curious reference to Sarsfield, in the third sentence describing the gardien:

Fort de l'exemple du grand Sarsfield, il avait failli crever dans la défense d'un territoire qui en lui-même devait certainement le laisser indifférent et qui considéré comme symbole ne l'excitait pas beaucoup non plus probablement. (*MetC*: 18)

[Inspired by the example of the great Sarsfield he had risked his life without success in defence of a territory which in itself must have left him cold and considered as a symbol cannot have greatly heated him either.] (*MandC*: 13–14)

Patrick Sarsfield, one of the leaders of the Jacobite side, left Ireland after the Treaty of Limerick in October 1691, with over 11,000 Irish soldiers, and was later to die at the battle of Landen in 1693, fighting for the French Crown.<sup>8</sup> The paradoxical sym-

8 Just as Redmond was to argue, over two hundred years later, that participation in a continental war would open the door to a form of independence, Sarsfield had urged his comrades at Limerick to fight with European armies as a means of gathering support for the Jacobite cause. On Sarsfield, see Edmund Curtis, *A History of Ireland* (London: Methuen, 1936), pp. 272–3; J. G. Simms, 'The War of the Two Kings, 1685–91', in T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne (eds), *A New History of Ireland, III: Early Modern Ireland 1534–1691* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 478–508; and J. G. Simms, 'The Irish on the Continent, 1691–1800', in T. W. Moody and W. E. Vaughan (eds), *A New History of Ireland, IV: Eighteenth-century Ireland 1691–1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 629–56.

metry about the fates of the two historical figures, Saint-Ruth and Sarsfield, was obviously not lost on Beckett: one a French soldier who died in battle in Ireland, the other an Irish soldier who died fighting for France. Like Beckett's park ranger who had fought in Flanders, both had risked their lives for a foreign cause. As one might expect with Beckett, the text brings out the futility rather than the glory of these men's military endeavours. It highlights the dislocation of expatriate soldiers, fighting in unfamiliar landscapes and not exactly wedded to their chosen cause. Rather than any pretensions to heroism, the narrator emphasizes the alienation of the returned veteran, the suffering of the soldier in battle – his diarrhoea rather than his medals – and the pathological consequences of surviving warfare.

In chapter VII of the novel (chapter V in the English translation), another war is evoked, when Camier utters a speech in reminiscent vein. Coming in the midst of a discussion about whether or not to open their dilapidated umbrella, in the pouring rain, this relatively extended recollection seems (at first) quite out of place:

Il a dû faire ses débuts vers 1900, dit Camier. C'était je crois l'année de Ladysmith, sur le Klip. T'en souviens-tu? Un temps splendide. Des garden-parties tous les jours. La vie s'ouvrait devant nous, radieuse. Tous les espoirs permis. On jouait aux assiégés. On mourait comme des mouches. De faim. De soif. Pan! Pan! les dernières cartouches. Rendez-vous! Jamais! On mangeait les cadavres. On buvait son pipi. Pan! Pan! encore deux qu'on avait égarées. Qu'entend-on? Un cri du mirador. Poussière à l'horizon! C'est la colonne! On a la langue noire. Hourra quand même! Ra! Ra! On dirait des corbeaux. Un maréchal des logis meurt de joie. Nous sommes sauvés. Le siècle avait deux mois. (*MetC*: 121)

[It must have come out about 1900, said Camier. The year I believe of Ladysmith, on the Klip. Remember? Cloudless skies, garden parties daily. Life lay smiling before us. No hope was too high. We played at holding fort. We died like flies. Of hunger. Of cold. Of thirst. Of heat. Pom! Pom! The last rounds. Surrender! Never! We eat our dead. Drink our pee. Pom! Pom! Two more we didn't know we had. But what is that we hear? A clamour from the watch-tower! Dust on the horizon! The



column at last! Our tongues are black. Hurrah none the less. Rah! Rah! A craking as of crows. A quartermaster dies of joy. We are saved. The century was two months old.] (*MandC*: 74–5)

Camier is referring to one of the most dramatic episodes of the Anglo–Boer war of 1899–1900, when the town of Ladysmith, on the river Klip, in the South African province of Natal, was besieged by Boer forces and finally relieved by imperial troops after four months, on 28 February 1900, as Camier most accurately recalls.

What on earth is an allusion to the Anglo–Boer war of 1899–1900 doing in the middle of this novel? Are we to believe that the elderly wanderers had participated in the Relief of Ladysmith? Or could the passage mean what it says, and is it to be interpreted as describing a game (*on jouait aux assiégés* [we played at holding fort]) played in their distant boyhood? Is Camier evoking an imagined participation in a historical event, if not a real-life experience?

Alternatively, given that General Sir George White, the commander defending Ladysmith's besieged garrison, was from Ballymena in Co. Antrim, is there a Northern Ireland connection? Could there be echoes of Beckett's own time at Portora Royal School? I am informed by the librarian at Portora of a memorial board outside the School Hall, to the memory of fifty-seven Old Portorans who had fought in the South African campaign, a campaign in which the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers had played a prominent part. Beckett would certainly have had the South African war imprinted on his memory, from his time at Portora from 1920 to 1923, even if (as I gather from the school librarian, who has looked at the records for me) he was not actually at school with the sons of any Ulstermen who had fought at Ladysmith. There would have been local knowledge and memories of the Ladysmith siege among the townspeople of Enniskillen, even twenty years later.<sup>9</sup> One wonders whether

9 Letter, 18 May 2000, from Gillian Mayes (Librarian, Portora Royal School).

there were schoolboy games, of the sort to which Camier alludes, played at Portora two decades after the event. Or was there some form of official commemoration, involving the ritual re-enactment of the Relief of Ladysmith, just as in our day the Apprentice Boys are wont to re-enact the Relief of Derry?

The tone of Camier's speech is unusually exclamatory, even triumphalist, for this man of few words. And, rather intriguingly, it echoes some first-hand accounts, which conjure up a surprisingly jolly, game-like atmosphere in the besieged town, where cricket, polo and tennis helped to pass the time on Sundays (when the Boers refrained from attacking), and where, on Christmas Day 1899, the Boers fired shells filled with Christmas pudding and labelled 'With the compliments of the season'.<sup>10</sup>

At face value, Camier's speech is hard to interpret. But perhaps its significance lies elsewhere. Like the Williamite War of the late seventeenth century, and like the nationalist debate over the Great War, the Anglo-Boer war, too, had divided the loyalties of Irish people. Nationalist circles had been very supportive of the Boer cause, seeing it as a blow for independence struck against the might of the British Empire; and leading nationalists, including Major Seán MacBride and Arthur Griffith, had fought on the Boer side. On the other hand, thousands of loyal Irishmen, from north and south, had fought with the imperial forces to put down the rebellion.

Perhaps, then, Camier's allusion is not so out of place after all. The South African War, too, had left its mark on recent Irish history and, like the Great War and the post-1916 'domestic skirmish', it had helped to shape the Irish political landscape of Beckett's youth. Moreover, if our hunch about St Stephen's Green is correct – that it may be a source for the Square Saint-Ruth – then the specific citing of Ladysmith also fits in. For if one stands at the north-west corner of the Green and looks up at the Fusiliers' Arch, erected in 1907 to the memory of the Irish

10 Byron Farwell, *The Great Boer War* (London: Allen Lane, 1977), pp. 216–34 (pp. 221, 226).

victims of the South African War, one will see (amongst other battle sites) the name LADYSMITH engraved on the side of the arch facing inwards away from Grafton Street.<sup>11</sup> Of course, all of this may be entirely coincidental. As with the copper beech, we may be barking up the wrong tree. Perhaps Beckett was merely tickled by the latent comedy in the phrase Relief of Lady Smith.

The novel's next military allusion occurs during the travellers' walk along an old military road, which must be the one in Co. Wicklow. They pass by a simple cross, planted in the bog, the purpose of which they have forgotten. The narrator, however, fills in the protagonists' memory gap:

C'était la tombe d'un patriote, amené par l'ennemi à cet endroit, la nuit, et exécuté. Ou peut-être n'y avaient-ils amené que son cadavre, pour l'y déposer. On l'enterra beaucoup plus tard, avec une certaine cérémonie. Il s'appelait Masse. On n'en faisait plus grand cas, dans les milieux nationalistes. Il avait plutôt mal travaillé, en effet. Mais il avait toujours ce monument. Tout cela, ils l'avaient su, Mercier et Camier, et sans doute bien d'autres choses encore, mais ils avaient tout oublié. (*MetC*: 167–8)

[It was the grave of a nationalist, brought here in the night by the enemy and executed, or perhaps only the corpse brought here, to be dumped. He was buried long after, with a minimum of formality. His name was Masse, perhaps Massey. No great store was set by him now, in patriotic circles. It was true he had done little for the cause. But he still had this monument. All that, and no doubt much more, Mercier and perhaps Camier had once known, and all forgotten.] (*MandC*: 98)

This rough memorial has been identified as the grave of Noel Lemass, a republican victim of the Irish Civil War (Mercier: 42; O'Brien: 65–6). As Vivian Mercier points out, the interesting thing about Lemass is the French Protestant origin of his name. Like Beckett's own surname, and the surnames

11 Other memorials in St Stephen's Green, perhaps lending support to my argument, include the busts of Tom Kettle and the Countess Markievicz, associated respectively with the First World War and the Irish War of Independence.

Camier and Mercier, Masse's real surname – Lemass – throws us back to the Huguenot emigration from France, after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. So, in terms of cultural memory, we have come round full circle, back to the late seventeenth century and the Williamite War, in the shadow of which the journey of Mercier and Camier began. And, possibly, again back to St Stephen's Green, whose French Walk owes its name to the French Huguenot refugees who settled in adjoining streets to the west, and had a cemetery nearby.<sup>12</sup>

The paradox of a fallen IRA patriot of French Protestant descent (Masse/Lemass) was doubtless not lost on Beckett. What the passage also brings out is the futility of the patriot's action; indeed, the cross marking the grave is more a site of oblivion than of commemoration. Oblivion and indifference: not only have the protagonists forgotten the exploits of this hero, but they apparently lack the curiosity to refresh their memory: they talk about going to peer more closely at the monument, but the narrative does not record whether they match their words with the deed. The roadside cross is an object of idle curiosity, no more.

Our final example is most open to challenge, and may not be a site of memory at all. However, it might just possibly be intended as a pun on a particular place name in Normandy familiar to Beckett when he was at Saint-Lô. In the novel's penultimate 'Résumé des deux chapitres précédents' [Summary of two preceding chapters] – the list of plot points which occurs after every two chapters – the narrator sums up a lively discussion engaging several people, overheard by Camier in a bar, concerning the Jesuits' ethical position on artificial insemination (*MetC*: 133; *MandC*: 79). To summarize the incident, the French résumé uses the phrase 'Mère l'Église et l'insémination artificielle' (*MetC*: 163). This could conceivably be read as a veiled allusion to the town of Sainte Mère l'Église. Lying just below one of the largest Normandy landing beaches in June 1944, that

12 Desmond Clarke, *Dublin* (London: Batsford, 1977), p. 73.

site of recent battle was well-known to the author, from his months at the Irish Red Cross Hospital in Saint-Lô. If this possible Second World War allusion is to be entertained, Beckett may be jibing at his countrymen's attitude to war: Irishmen will engage in heated arguments over abstract questions of moral theology, but remain neutral in cataclysmic international conflicts.

I have argued elsewhere that *Mercier et Camier* contains several echoes from Beckett's time at Saint-Lô. He left the Norman town in January 1946, and wrote the novel between July and October of that year.<sup>13</sup> But, Saint-Lô aside, this was an era when military phenomena were inescapable in daily life. Moreover, Beckett had grown to manhood in a time of universal commemoration: during the 1920s and 30s, war memorials were erected on an unprecedented scale, throughout Europe and the wider world, following the catastrophe of 1914–18.<sup>14</sup> The novel's military allusions could, therefore, at a banal level, be 'explained' by the author's biography.

Quite apart from such biographical pointers, however, I hope it will be clear that the particular military allusions in

- 13 Phyllis Gaffney, 'Neither Here Nor There: Ireland, Saint-Lô and Beckett's First Novel in French', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 9 (1999), 1–26. To return, once more, to St Stephens Green: that Saint-Lô and the Green were connected, in Beckett's mind, is seen in his poem 'Antipepsis', which is dated '1946 After Saint-Lô'. See Phyllis Gaffney, 'Dante, Manzoni, De Valera, Beckett...? Circumlocutions of a Storekeeper: Beckett and Saint-Lô', *Irish University Review*, 29 (1999), pp. 256–80, where it is argued that the poem's opening lines allude to the headquarters of the Irish Red Cross Society, at no. 21 St Stephens Green. The connection between St Stephens Green and Saint-Lô is further borne out by an anecdote told to me by a UCD colleague, Professor Christopher Murray. Murray once wrote to Beckett, asking him whether the Green had ever featured in his writings. Beckett replied with a brief, enigmatic note, enclosing his poem, 'Saint-Lô'.
- 14 As has been shown in the moving account by Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

*Mercier et Camier* seem to form a coherent pattern. It is perhaps significant, too, that all are retained in Beckett's translation: this does not apply to all his topographical allusions, some of which are omitted from the English.<sup>15</sup>

The military theme is also adumbrated by various uniformed characters who crop up on the protagonists' journey. Not just the park ranger, but a couple of police officers, provoke distrust and even violence: an altercation with one constable leads to his murder (*MetC*: 156–9; *MandC*: 92–4). Officialdom never gets a good press in Beckett, and in the passages we have been considering, military idealism is characteristically debunked, while war is presented as an alienating experience. Lastly, as we have seen, the conflicts we have mentioned show a very local concern with the Irish at war, and are significant in Irish nationalist rhetoric.

So much for the content of these allusions to sites of cultural memory. A final point concerns the manner of their expression: here, too, a pattern can be discerned. With the exception of the 'Mère l'Église' allusion (which may or may not be a site of memory), all of them have to do with forms of commemoration: a park and tree in memory of Saint-Ruth; fighting in Northern Europe in the footsteps of Sarsfield; re-enacting the Relief of Ladysmith; a graveside memorial to Lemass. Yet at the same time all point to the arbitrariness, incongruity and unreliability of what gets remembered.

The name of the park and its copper beech are known by a sign crudely nailed to the tree. How trustworthy is such a makeshift notice? How can the narrator know so much about the inner workings of the park ranger's mind – and body, the

15 Topographical references omitted in the English translation include Perpignan (*MetC*: 79) and La Scala (*MetC*: 178); Londres (*MetC*: 193) is changed to 'Dublin's fair city' (*MandC*: 111). The La Scala on p. 178 may not indicate Milan's opera house alone. It could also refer to yet another site of local Irish memory: Dublin's La Scala Theatre, beside the General Post Office, where de Valera launched the Fianna Fáil party in the spring of 1926.

description of which verges on a medical report? How reliable is Camier's evocation of Ladysmith? And, in the matter of the Lemass grave, the narrator (who seems to remember other details accurately) mis-remembers the patriot's name.

But who is the novel's narrator? To judge by the book's opening sentence, its narrator is at best highly subjective. Claiming vicarious knowledge of the protagonists' journey, he is ready to relate it if it pleases him to do so, if he wills: 'Le voyage de Mercier et Camier, je peux le raconter si je veux, car j'étais avec eux tout le temps' [The journey of Mercier and Camier is one I can tell, if I will, for I was with them all the time] (*MetC*: 7; *MandC*: 7). But we have no guarantee that the telling continues to please him, as he sometimes comments adversely on his own narrative. Indeed, two of our passages occur at moments when the narrator seems most self-consciously weary of fictional convention. The Square Saint-Ruth passage is preceded by the deprecating 'Que cela pue l'artifice' [What stink of artifice]; and the allusion to the Lemass memorial follows a description of the Wicklow bog cut short with the curt 'Fin du passage descriptif' [End of descriptive passage] (*MetC*: 10, 167; *MandC*: 9, 98).

Is this to imply that the subsequent passages, containing the historical allusions, are somehow more 'real', less 'artificial', less descriptive and more factual? As if the narrating voice was laying aside the fiction, and turning to fact? Yet it is hard to conclude anything so definite about the intrusions of the real into Beckett's surreal world. In this world, the fictional can be relayed in a most solidly factual way, as (for example) when the travellers' initial rendezvous is presented like a railway timetable (*MetC*: 10; *MandC*: 9). Yet this is precisely the moment that inspires the narrator's exclamation of disgust at his own artifice. Indeed, the boundary between fact and fiction is later so blurred that fiction is made to intrude upon fiction, in the final chapter of the work, by the introduction of Watt, the hero of Beckett's eponymous novel. Watt meets Camier on the road and recognizes Mercier behind him. In the course of their conversation the name of another Beckettian character, Murphy, is

mentioned. As if in counterpoint, further shards of cultural references occur in a cluster in the pages relating this fictional encounter: Dumas the Elder, the Evangelists, John the Baptist – to mention only those occurring in both the French and English texts (*MetC*: 191–97; *MandC*: 110–12).

The bizarre style of narration, cryptic yet strangely authoritative by its very neutrality, bathes the reader in a *chiaroscuro* of shifting perspective, 'now clear and now obscure' [tantôt clair, tantôt obscur] (*MandC*: 7; *MetC*: 8), as the narrative moves between the historically real and the obviously fictitious. Characters, like historical allusions, appear out of nowhere and vanish from the plane of the narrative. The protagonists themselves, as John Pilling observes, are eventually 'as superfluous to any significant narrative purpose as the belongings they have felt moved to leave behind'.<sup>16</sup> Finally, even the narrator seems to disappear.

Perhaps the safest conclusion to be drawn on the intersection of history and fiction in *Mercier et Camier* is that all records, fictional and historical, depend on the whim of the reporter. The relationship of narrative to reality remains cryptic. In *Mercier et Camier*, the reporter's voice eventually breaks up or fades away. As Hugh Kenner puts it, 'the book very artfully runs down. It is [...] a salute to entropy: a firmly stated dissolution.'<sup>17</sup>

Ultimately, then, the novel points to the unreliability of recorded memory. Just as Watt comments wisely on the limitations of his own future notoriety,<sup>18</sup> just as everyday objects –

16 John Pilling, *Beckett Before Godot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 207.

17 Hugh Kenner, *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1973), pp. 90–1.

18 'Watt? dit Camier. Ce nom ne me dit rien. Je suis peu connu, c'est exact, dit Watt, mais je le serai, un jour. Je ne dis pas universellement, il y a peu de chances par exemple que ma notoriété pénètre jusqu'aux habitants de Londres ou de Cuq-Toulza' (*MetC*: 193). [Watt? said Camier. The name means nothing to me. I am not widely known, said Watt, true,



bicycles, raincoats and umbrellas – eventually wear out and lose their usefulness; so do forms of commemoration peter out of significance. All memorials – be they parks, trees, re-enactments or gravestones – eventually give way to oblivion.

but I shall be, one day. Not universally perhaps, my notoriety is not likely ever to penetrate to the denizens of Dublin's fair city, or of Cuq-Toulza.] (*MandC*: 111)

GILLIAN PYE

## Haunting the Self: Herbert Achternbusch's *Ella*

### Introduction

Since the early seventies the Bavarian writer, dramatist and film-maker Herbert Achternbusch has intrigued and confused critics with his idiosyncratic body of work. In plays such as *Sintflut* (1983), which features Noah and 'Noahin' aboard the ark with an absurd collection of pairs: 'Auto' [car] and 'Autor' [author], 'Wasserhahn' [tap] and 'Wasserhuhn' [coot], or the surreal *Der Letzte Gast* (1995) in which the stage is peopled by the characters of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, Achternbusch has provoked audiences with what Jörg Drews has aptly called 'Gratwanderung des Autors zwischen dem trivialen Durcheinander, dem außerkünstlerischen und dem Kunstwerk als Ordnung'<sup>1</sup> [balancing act between trivial disorder, the world outside art, and the concept of art as order]. Whilst some have taken Achternbusch's surreal, nonsensical style as an indicator of his debt to Christian Grabbe, Alfred Jarry, Karl Valentin or Samuel Beckett, others have largely perceived the work as little more than 'trivial disorder' and have dismissed him as a 'bungler', a literary 'cowboy'.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, with the exception of the late W. G. Sebald's commentary and Drews' volume of collected criticisms, Achternbusch's work has rarely been explored in detail.

- 1 Jörg Drews, 'Alexanderschlachtbeschreibung', in Jörg Drews (ed.), *Herbert Achternbusch* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1982), pp. 15–41 (p. 23).
- 2 Cf. Reinhold Grimm, 'Der Verfasser heisst Herbert Achternbusch', in Drews: 61.

This study examines Achternbusch's first stage play *Ella* (1977) which dramatizes the story of an intellectually handicapped woman. In this piece, Achternbusch's repetitive, obsessive, and often absurd monologue provides a powerful theatrical metaphor for the complex interaction between memory, forgetting and personal identity. As this discussion will show, however, this drama also typifies Achternbusch's particular autobiographical anxieties and, as such, it sheds light on his apparent 'trivial disorder'. In the first instance, the deliberate blurring of the boundaries between distinct identities – the 'ghosting' of voices and images over one another – may be seen as a dramatization of the autobiographical process itself. Furthermore, Achternbusch's obsession with hoarding scraps of the past and his tendency to undermine the distinction between his personal history and that of his fictional figures, can be understood as strategies in an attempt to transcend the restrictions of autobiography.

### *Ella* as Memory Drama

*Ella* is a ninety-minute monologue in which the title figure looks back on her difficult life. 'Mein ganzes Leben war ein Leidensweg [...] ein Schlagen und ein Stoßen und ein Prügeln und lauter so Sachen'.<sup>3</sup> [My whole life was spent suffering [...] nothing but hitting and shoving, beating, and mocking and ridiculing and things like that]. *Ella*'s story is brutal, her humiliation and oppression relentless. In a rambling, repetitive narrative she recounts the abuse she has suffered at the hands of her father, her husband, and the staff of numerous psychiatric

3 Herbert Achternbusch, 'Ella', in *Die Einsicht der Einsicht. Theaterstücke* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1995), pp. 8–30 (p. 20). Further references to the text will be cited as *E* in the main body of the text.

institutions and detention centres in which she has spent her life. 'Wie ich auf die Welt gekommen bin, hat mein Vater mich schon verflucht' (E: 9) [my father cursed me the day I was born] she says, and as the litany of abuse unfolds, we are told that she was married off to a livestock dealer, an arrangement which her father brokered 'wie einen Kuhhandel' (E: 10) [like a cattle auction], that she has been beaten, she has lost two children, she has been forced to work in inhuman conditions and suffers imprisonment and hunger. Ella's experiences are a testimony to the cruelty meted out to the mentally weak and vulnerable.

When Ella escapes from a psychiatric unit her only hiding place is the chicken coop at her sister Luise's farm. As the opening stage directions indicate, it is this restricted space that forms the backdrop for Achternbusch's play:

Auf der Bühne ist ein Käfig. Ein Hühnerstall, den vorne ein Maschendraht abschließt. Im Hintergrund hocken auf Stangen weiße Hebriden. Auf der rechten Stange ist längs ein Bett. Im Mittelfeld ein Tisch, hinter dem Josef steht. Auf dem Tisch tickt blechern ein billiger großer Wecker. Kafeebüchsen, eine elektrische Kaffeemühle, eine Kanne und eine große Tasse. Ein Kocher mit einem Topf voll Wasser. Eine mit einem deutlichen Giftetikett versehene Büchse. Im Vordergrund sitzt eine Stufe tiefer und im Schatten Ella und schaut in einen Fernseher mit Tagesprogramm. [...] Außerhalb des Käfigs ist kein Licht. Josef ist der Sohn. Er trägt eine selbstgemachte Perücke aus Hühnerfedern und eine Kleiderschürze. Er läßt keine Zweifel, daß er die Mutter ist. Er hantiert andauernd mit dem Kaffeezubehör. Den fertigen Kaffee bietet er sich, Ella und dem Publikum an. Zum Schluß trinkt er einen Würfelzucker mit Zyankali und rührt, trinkt, fällt polternd um. Das scheucht Ella auf, die beim Anblick des Toten zusammensinkt, schreit und sich schreiend die Kleiderschürze zerreißt und nackt in dem Käfig herumrennt, bis das Licht ausgeht. (E: 9)

[On stage is a cage. A chicken coop closed off at the front with chicken wire. In the background white Hebridean hens sit on perches. Along the right-hand perch is a bed. In the middle, a table behind which Josef stands. On the table a large, cheap alarm clock ticks loudly. Coffee canisters, an electric coffee grinder, a pot and a big cup. A cooker with a full pan of water. A canister clearly labelled as poison. At the front, one step lower, sits Ella in the shadows, watching daytime TV. [...] There is no light outside the cage. Josef is the son. He is wearing a homemade

wig of chicken feathers and an overall. He leaves us in no doubt that he is the mother. He plays constantly with the coffee making equipment. He offers the coffee to himself, Ella and the audience. Finally, he soaks a sugar lump in cyanide and stirs it in, drinks and crashes to the ground. This startles Ella, who collapses on sight of the dead man, screams, tears off her overall and runs around naked in the cage until the light goes out.]

The most striking aspect of Achternbusch's drama is that Ella herself does not speak. Rather, it is her son Josef who dons a homemade wig and overall and speaks for her while she sits mutely in a corner. This dramatic device emphasizes the fact that the figure speaks the unspeakable, vocalizing the painful memories of a woman who has been brutalized all her life and does not have a voice of her own. As the stage directions make clear, however, 'Josef leaves us in no doubt that he *is* the mother' (my italics). This (gender) shift is central to Achternbusch's exploration of identity, and I will return to this question in a subsequent section. In the meantime however, it is important to note that the male figure takes on Ella's identity, and the account that spills from his lips seems to be spontaneous reminiscence. The narrative proceeds in a spiral pattern, constantly repeating previously mentioned episodes; the location is hazy; causality is not clearly established; and the translation of sensation to description is often so incomplete as to leave the audience in the dark.

In the following passage for example, Ella describes her feelings after the birth of her son Josef:

Und mir ist das Zeug kommen wie ich verheiratet gewesen bin, da habe ich, nein, das weiß ich noch, mh, da habe ich so viel geschrien, ich habe so viel Angst gehabt, ich habe gar nichts gekannt, als wie als Mama, aber ich habe Angst gehabt vor ihm, den Josef, weil er so, ich weiß es selber nicht, der war so rabiat, auch so zimperlich und ich habe Angst gehabt. (E: 11)

[And the stuff came when I was married, I, no, I remember, mm, I screamed so much, I was so scared, I knew nothing, than like than Mum but I was scared of him, Josef, because he was so, I don't know myself, he was so brutal and so timid and I was scared.]

Even this brief description is littered with repetition ('I was scared', 'than like than') and confusing non-sequitur ('than like than Mum'). This creates a stumbling narrative reflecting Ella's vulnerability and her struggle to translate her feelings and recollections into words. This has the effect of making her suffering tangible, and this is perhaps one of the most disturbing aspects of Achternbusch's text.

In this context, what is *forgotten* is as central to the re-enactment of suffering as what is remembered. Throughout the piece, Ella's memories are unclear and her account proceeds in a disorderly fashion, constantly returning to issues in an attempt to clarify them and to establish order, though in fact almost always undermining and disrupting meaning. Moreover, a clear account is often hindered by terminological imprecision. In the above example, the use of the term 'Zeug' [stuff] points to a gap in Ella's memory; a person, place or object that either cannot be recalled, or, alternatively, cannot be signified by means of language. Ella's poor command of language and her mental vulnerability – her weak concentration and nervous disposition – prevent her from providing a coherent account of her past. Her inability to testify coherently to her own suffering is a stark image of the dehumanizing effect of (institutionalized) cruelty, and underlines the centrality of memory to the dignity of the individual: the attempt to remember, record and voice experience is simultaneously an attempt to reclaim this experience as her own. At the same time, however, the obscurity of Ella's story, with its many omissions, is an effective dramatization of the terrifying power of the unknown. When the gaps in Ella's recollections are too wide for the audience to bridge by conjecture, we too are exposed to the nightmarish feeling of raw fear: a fear out of the control offered by linguistic articulation.

In contrast to the hazy memories of many of her own actions and thoughts however, Ella often recalls the voices of others with hallucinatory clarity. In the first instance, this mixture of confusion, punctuated by moments of clarity, obviously has the effect of highlighting the traumatized consciousness of the figure. Amongst undefined sensory impressions and indi-

stinct memories, the voices of those who treated Ella cruelly evoke key moments of her suffering. In terms of the drama, such key moments effectively re-enact a power relationship. For example, remembering the reactions of a neighbour to her desperate attempt to escape one of her father's beatings, she recalls: 'die Mutter und Ding die Frau hat gesagt: um Gotteswillen! was tust du denn was tust du denn wie hat dich der zusammengerichtet' (E: 14) [Mother and, thingy, the woman, said: for God's sake! what are you doing what are you doing what has he done to you?]. The relatively precise memory of the neighbour's words, combined with an indistinct memory of the location, time, and exact circumstances of the events, reinforces the authority of other speakers over Ella. In a confusing world it is the other who has control over language – who is able to articulate her thoughts – and the memory of this stands in stark contrast to Ella's own inner confusion.

Furthermore, in an institutionalized setting, the clear memory of another's words also underlines the role of language as an instrument of power and authority. In an account of her experiences at one of the homes for example, she recalls the nurse's words, 'Sind Sie nicht so frech, hat sie gesagt, sind Sie nicht so frech, sonst kommen Sie gleich in die Kammer.' (E: 22) ['Don't be so cheeky', she said, 'don't be so cheeky, otherwise you'll go straight to the room']. Notably, she remembers, too, that the nurse in question made indiscriminate use of the polite (Sie) and informal (du) forms of address when speaking to her, further highlighting the role of language as a tool of oppression. Ella is completely powerless against the caprices of her 'carers' who may speak to her in any way they see fit.<sup>4</sup>

The dramatic heart of the monologue can therefore be seen as Ella's struggle to define a sense of self through memory. In

4 Ella also recalls that the nurse said "'Du darfst nicht hinaus! Sie dürfen nicht hinaus!" Einmal du einmal Sie, wie es ihr eingefallen ist.' (E: 23) ["You [informal] are not allowed out! You [polite] are not allowed out!" Sometimes du, sometimes Sie, depending on whatever occurred to her.]

the combination of quoted speech – portraying the direct memory of cruelty – with hazy indications of time, space and plot, Achternbusch dramatizes the loss of self which is experienced by the title figure. At the same time, as the drama makes clear, the struggle to remember is nevertheless part of a vital attempt to reconstruct the self. Here Achternbusch makes explicit the link between memory and selfhood: only by remembering, by being remembered, and by being accorded a forum in which to articulate those memories, can those who have suffered in the past be returned to their rightful individuality. Ella's drama is an act of mourning in which she seeks to reconstruct her existence.

### Haunting the Self: Memory, Autobiography and Identity

Writing on the theme of memory, identity and the process of fiction, Renate Lachmann cites the act of mourning as an important means by which both individuals and cultures use memory to create and recreate identity. As a conscious ritual of remembrance, mourning aims to recall and represent what has been lost. This process is reflected in the legend of Simonides, who returns to the scene of the disaster of which he is the sole survivor; the house that has collapsed and obliterated its occupants. The art of *memoria*, which Simonides must employ in order to recall the scene before the disaster, 'gibt den Zerschmetterten ihre Gestalt zurück, macht sie kenntlich'<sup>5</sup> [will return form to the shattered and makes them recognizable]. Central to Lachmann's analysis is the notion that the attempt to 'return form to the shattered' by remembering implies a type of re-

5 Renate Lachmann, *Gedächtnis und Literatur: Intertextualität in der russischen Moderne* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990), p. 22.



ording which necessarily involves a process of fictionalization. Thus, as Italo Svevo notes, in our memory the past is always new 'it changes constantly, as life progresses [...] The present conducts the past like the members of an orchestra' (Lachmann: 17). In Achternbusch's memory-drama then, the uncertainties and non-sequiturs which characterize the title figure's recollections are not only indicators of the crisis of language, or of Ella's own vulnerability as a poor, intellectually-limited woman, but also point to the constructed nature of memory itself. For example, Ella recalls the time when a nurse in one of the psychiatric institutions allegedly suffocated a patient. She remembers that there was subsequently a court case, or perhaps, she claims, a hearing, or perhaps not at all: she does not actually know whether the doctor reported the nurse in question. In fact, it becomes clear that Ella does not really know what happened: she improvizes the story as she goes along (*E*: 24–5).

Ella's uncertain account seems to stem not only from her limited ability to recall, but also from the fictionalizing tendencies inherent in the remembering process itself. In other words, quite apart from the question of the exact nature of the original events that may have inspired this reminiscence, Ella is not merely repeating her story, but she is actually creating it. Here memory is shown to be as much a process of *construction* as of *reconstruction*: Ella's attempt to tell her own story is a creative act which requires the substitution of lived experience with a fictional phantasm.

At this point, it is important to return to the question of the substitution of identities with which *Ella* operates. As already observed, in *Ella* it is not the title figure who tells her story, but her son Josef who seems to act as a channel for his mother's memories. By having Josef speak what seem to be spontaneous personal memories – but which are in fact the spontaneous memories of *another* – Achternbusch has deliberately created a narrator figure. Particularly in the absurdly obvious gender shift, the effect of this narrator figure is to create a sense of distance. On the one hand, this again highlights the creative process that underlies both memory and narration: that the gap

between the narrating and the narrated self presupposes fictionalization. On the other hand however, this dramatic situation also highlights the particular operation of remembering as a process of doubling or ghosting. As Lachmann points out, memory implies the paradoxical process of representing *that which is not there*: in memory, the past is made *present* and yet is simultaneously acknowledged as *absent*. Memory involves the creation of a phantasm which, in Lachmann's words, 'creates a picture of the absent which aims to fix and to conserve it through similarity' (Lachmann: 28).

In *Ella*, Achternbusch dramatizes precisely this process in the creation of a figure that is, and yet is not, Ella. In his feather wig and apron Josef is clearly not identical to his mother, but is rather a parodic relative. In this haunting evocation of his mother's memory, the image of Ella appears, almost literally, as phantasm. By casting the son as channel for his mother's memories, Achternbusch once again highlights the centrality of memory to identity. By remembering or reconstructing his past, Josef attempts to develop a sense of his own identity. However, the double Ella-Josef figure also evokes the particular relationship of phantasm to remembered object in the process of remembering itself. Just as children usurp their parents – and here Josef 'usurps' his mother, taking her place – so too the phantasm, the conjured image of that which is absent, usurps the object to be remembered. In a constant process of reincarnation the phantasms conjured by memory take on the life of their original experiential inspiration.

This image of the remembering process as a fictionalizing conjuring trick – the evocation of phantasms which aim to 'fix' the absent in the present – also suggests one of the cornerstones of literature in general, and autobiography in particular. If literature is, as Lachmann terms it, 'Mnemotechnik par excellence' [mnemo-technique par excellence], if writing is the 'Gedächtnisstifter einer Kultur' (Lachmann: 35) [memory provider of a culture], then it is in autobiography – the attempt to (re)write one's own past – where memory and identity collide in the most fascinating and complex of ways. As Paul de Man

has argued, autobiography is based upon the impossible dynamic of an author declaring himself [*sic*] ‘the subject of his own understanding’<sup>6</sup> and as such, autobiography is constantly embroiled in the need to escape from the inescapable: ‘the tropology of the subject’ (de Man: 923). In other words, autobiography dramatizes the non-existence of a subject trying, by means of ghostly reincarnations, to catch a glimpse of herself, to catch herself ‘in the act’ and to be her ‘own voyeur’.<sup>7</sup> I would like to suggest that the play *Ella* is engaged in the dramatization of such voyeuristic endeavour and, by extension, is more generally symptomatic of Achternbusch’s complex, and often misunderstood, body of work.

### The Autobiographic Voyeur: Achternbusch and the Search for Self

On one level, *Ella*’s male narrator certainly generates a layer of absurdity which functions as an alienation effect, shielding the audience from some of the monologue’s barrage of suffering and abuse. The feather wig, the apron and the lame slapstick with the coffee making equipment, provide at least a small measure of relief from the litany of atrocities. However, the male narrator also raises several other questions about the nature of control and identity in this piece. Firstly, while the narration of *Ella*’s story by her son seems, as already suggested, to constitute an attempt to regain something of her identity, in fact it does not so much *restore* the voice of the figure as *appropriate* it. Secondly – and this is also related to the question of control –

6 Paul de Man, ‘Autobiography as Defacement’, in *Modern Language Notes* 94 (1979), 919–30 (p. 921).

7 See Marc Eli Blanchart, ‘The critique of autobiography’, in *Comparative Literature* 34/2 (1982), 97–115 (p. 105).

the relationship between narrator and narratee is complicated by an awareness of the particular treatment of fiction and autobiography which characterizes all of Achternbusch's work. As Drews expresses it, the material and structural basis of Achternbusch's books and films is 'die gleitenden Übergänge von autobiographischer Realität zur Fiktion' (Drews: 22) [the slippage between autobiographical reality and fiction]. In fact, Achternbusch is constantly engaged in attempts to conjure up phantasms of his own past: to fix what is absent by fictionalizing it, and then to 'catch himself in the act'.

In much of Achternbusch's work, the past is brought into the present of the texts and these then function, in the author's own words, as 'Konservierungsbüchsen' [preserving jars].<sup>8</sup> At the same time, however, this attempt is supported – or, one might even suggest, subverted – by the reverse dynamic. On the level of his work as a whole Achternbusch takes the here and now of the texts into the past: he creates a 'virtual' shared heritage by *playing at* intertextuality. In other words, he seeks to create an illusion of authenticity by making each of his texts a memory of the others.

In the context of *Ella*, this process operates in several ways. Achternbusch says that the figure of Ella is based upon a real life relative, his aunt Ella, who he claims did actually live in a chicken shed at one time. This is typical of Achternbusch's tendency to incorporate his own family past into his fictional work. At the same time, however, Ella herself has an implied past as a fictional figure, appearing in the earlier novel *Der Tag wird kommen* and in the film *Bierkampf*. Moreover, Ella's escape from the sanatorium and her stay with her sister Luise subsequently feature in the play *Mein Herbert* (whose title is clearly another of Herbert Achternbusch's autobiographical puns). Finally, in keeping with the author's tendency to repeatedly rewrite and

8 Michael Töteberg, 'Herbert Achternbusch', in *Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Munich: Edition Text & Kritik, 1995), pp. 1–14 (p. 9).

restructure his work, the anthology *Die Einsicht der Einsicht*, which features all of Achternbusch's plays written up until 1995, prefaces each text with an introduction. Each introduction serves to interconnect the dramas, integrating them into what could be described as a family saga.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, such introductions also constitute an attempt to locate the fictions in Achternbusch's own past, again muddying the boundaries between verifiable facts, bound to the physical reality of Achternbusch's life; the (fictionalizing) process of remembering and recording; and the creative work of producing fictional autobiography.

In the text that precedes *Ella*, for example, Achternbusch seems to be describing the circumstances in which he wrote the play:

Jedenfalls saß ich hinten in dem damals noch grünen VW Bus, dem ersten. Da packte mich die Idee vom Ella Stück. Das war ein grauer Tag im April, als in mir diese Knospe aufsprang. Damals, 1977, fuhren wir nach Salzburg. [...] Seltsamerweise kaufte ich in Salzburg einen Teppich aus Seidenstrümpfen geflochten. Wir waren auch im Naturkundemuseum, und ich sah die Mißgeburten, ihre wabbernde Hirne und die schwebenden Hirnflocken [...] Ein Jahr später zeigte ich diese träumende Geschöpfe in meinem Film *Der Junge Mönch*. Apropos anwesend oder abwesend, wo bin ich die ganze Zeit? [...]. Als hätte man mich als Kleinkind aus einem Spiel gerissen, das ich in den absurdesten Anklängen noch zu verstehen, noch fertig zu spielen vermeine. Eine Susn hätte da weiterhelfen, ergänzen können. Aber wo sollte ich sie finden, wieder finden? So penetrant wie Ella anwesend war, so durchsichtig war Susn weg. Oder hat man mich als Kleinkind in die Badewanne gestellt und nur vergessen? (E: 7)

[Anyway, I was sitting in the back of the green [VW bus, the first one. That was when I got the idea for the Ella play. It was a grey day in April

9 Achternbusch writes in the preface to the volume: 'Ich denke, ich habe mit den Vortexten das Romanhafte des ganzen deutlicher gemacht.' (E: 5) [I think, with the introductory texts I have highlighted the novel-like nature of the whole thing]. This is also typical of Achternbusch's constant attempts to undermine genre labels. Here, plays become a novel, elsewhere novels turn into dramatic monologues or screenplays.

when that bud burst open for me. At that time, 1977, we were going to Salzburg [...]. Strangely enough, in Salzburg I bought a carpet woven from silk stockings. We went to the natural history museum too and I saw the deformed, their rubbery brains, the floating blobs of brain, in, I assume, formaldehyde. A year later I showed these dreaming creations in my film *The Young Monk*. Apropos absent or present, where have I been all this time? [...] As if I had been torn away from a game as a small child which, in the most absurd echoes, I still think I am able to understand and to play to the end. A Susn could have helped there, could have completed it. But where could I find her, find her again? As clearly as Ella was there, Susn was transparently gone. Or was I put in the bathtub as a small child and just forgotten?]

Here, Achternbusch prefaces his play about remembering with what purports to be a memory itself. In stylistic terms, this text parallels the fiction which follows by presenting what appears to be a spontaneous reminiscence, full of private reference, forgetting, non-sequitur and so on. This alerts our attention not only to the connection between the writer as producer of fiction and the (fictional) individual as producer of memories, but also to some kind of interpersonal connection between the author and protagonist. This preface is typical of Achternbusch's attempts to fictionalize reality: to write his own past into the text. Here, the image of the preserving jars seems to be a salient one: Achternbusch is struck by the way in which deformation is preserved for future generations to see. The text is a jar of formaldehyde in which ghostly remains of the past may be preserved. At the same time, this preface is indicative of the process by which the author attempts to bring the present of the text into the past of his own existence. The phantasms created in fiction are conjured up as part of what purports to be a verifiable memory of the author's own experience. Here therefore, he states that at the time he was writing, Ella was very much present in his life and that he longed for Susn, a figure who appears throughout his work and seems to represent a long-lost love.

Ultimately, of course, such blurring of the boundaries between past and present and between fiction and autobiography, reveals Achternbusch's obvious concern with writing as a

means of preserving, or rather 'becoming', oneself. As Fritsch suggests, all of Achternbusch's writings appear to be fragments of a process of coming to consciousness in which the majority of the figures are 'vergangene Ich-Hüllen' [past shells of the self], the projections of a single I.<sup>10</sup> In other words, *Ella* dramatizes Achternbusch's particular preoccupation with the frustrating process of autobiography. In the double Ella-Josef figure, the drama frames the frantic autobiographic attempt to exploit memory in the vain hope of 'catching oneself in the act', of seeing even a glimpse of oneself. By having Josef adopt the form of Ella, Achternbusch reflects the process by which the narrator of memory, the autobiographic self, attempts to slip into other roles – to be possessed by the spirits of the past – in order to catch sight of himself.<sup>11</sup> By thematizing the possession of one figure by another, Achternbusch is therefore exploring the role of memory, identification and empathy in the creation of the autobiographic self. As W. G. Sebald observes, Achternbusch's work resembles a ritual attempt to conjure up a sense of belonging and origin, by achieving the 'magic return of the ancestors' through 'assimilation of their suffering in the person of a descendent'.<sup>12</sup> Sebald sees in Achternbusch's work an attempt to return to the primitive identificatory rite: the 'physical realization of remembrance on stage' which is enacted by reincarnating the 'extinct lives of the lost and wasted' (Sebald: 181).

In some senses, such an enactment is, however, doomed to failure and, arguably, betrays a rather exploitative power rela-

10 Werner Fritsch, 'Annäherungen an Herbert Achternbusch', in Drews: 100–20 (p. 100).

11 Notably, *Der Tag wird Kommen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 1973), the prose text which inspired the writing of the drama *Ella*, thematizes just such a quest. The protagonist decides to go back to his place of origin and on this journey he takes on the personae of his ancestors, including his mother, Ella.

12 W. G. Sebald, 'The art of transformation: Herbert Achternbusch's theatrical mission', in W. G. Sebald (ed.), *A Radical Stage* (Oxford: Berg, 1988), pp. 174–84 (p. 180).

tionship. This is not least due to the fact that Josef speaks for his mother. Behind the absurd disguise, Josef himself is not clearly visible at all. His empathetic adoption of his mother's story does nothing to define the contours of his own identity. At the same time, Ella is not clearly represented either. She is usurped by her son: her voice is *appropriated* by another. In fact, the interference between the two images, each 'ghosting' over the other, can be read as a metaphor for the failure of this dramatic narrative to generate any vision of selfhood. Even suicide brings no relief, for it is not Ella who puts an end to her own suffering, but Josef who merely seeks a way out of his imprisonment in the memory of the other. Moreover, there is something rather questionable about the image conjured up by Achternbusch as an autobiographic voyeur, watching – hoping to gain relief from – his narrator's intoxication by someone else's suffering. At worst, it seems that Achternbusch has been prepared to appropriate the suffering of another (even if fictional) for his own purposes.

## Resisting the System: Achternbusch and the Archive

Setting aside the questionable aspects of Achternbusch's many reincarnations, the double figure Ella-Josef is nevertheless the centrepiece of a powerful dramatization of memory and autobiography. The play is concerned with the importance of memory as both fictional resource and process and here both author and protagonist are memory artists. Like Achternbusch himself, the Ella-Josef figure attempts to piece together an identity from the shattered fragments of her (-his) memory.

In this context, what is important about Achternbusch's memory art is not so much the attempt at reconstruction or at imposing order, but rather the very act of collection and recollection itself. Ella's reminiscences are characterized by the in-



ability of the figure to order and to filter them effectively, to sort them into a structured narrative that successfully imposes rationality on her experience. As I have already suggested, Ella's narrative 'disorder' is also reflected in the style employed by Achternbusch in his preface to the play, as indeed in most of his other writings. This style seems to be defined by the attempt 'so viel wie möglich [...] so unmittelbar wie möglich aufs Blatt zu kriegen, mit allen Banalitäten, mit allem Schrott und Abfall' [to get down onto paper as much as possible, as immediately as possible, including all the banalities, all the junk and rubbish] (Drews: 24). For the fictional figure Ella, the inability to filter and order is a result of the trauma induced by a society obsessed with categorization and labelling. She is poor, female and has learning difficulties and has therefore been marginalized and institutionalized. For Achternbusch, on the other hand, the refusal to impose order by conforming to genre conventions or regulating his writing by imposing a system of aesthetic rigour – casting out the 'rubbish' – is part of an attempt to resist the system. Achternbusch refuses to conform to the demands of a literary establishment who have often seen his indiscriminate mixture of the banal and the poetic, the nonsensical and the obscure, as evidence of unrefined ability or even as 'aufgeblähtes Nichts' [trumped-up nothingness], as Grimm puts it.<sup>13</sup>

Certainly, memory plays a key role in the struggle against normative values. As Derrida has argued, the order imposed by the public house of memory – the archive – is an ideological one.<sup>14</sup> The separation of that which is to be remembered from that which is not worthy of preservation – which is to be rejected as junk – is a political process. A crucial aspect of Achternbusch's work, reflected here in the rambling narrative of the figure Ella, is his obsession with the need to need to recall, re-

13 Reinhold Grimm, 'Der Verfasser heisst Herbert Achternbusch', in Drews: 61–3 (p. 61).

14 Jacques Derrida, 'Archive fever: a Freudian impression', in *Diacritics* 25 (1995), 9–63 (p. 12).

claim and hoard every part of his past, and then to conjure it up in literature, without subjecting it to the censorship of the archive. A seemingly obscure fragment may evoke a moment of past poetically, it may connect with sensual experience for the briefest instant, generating an acute and much longed-for sense of self. Such an expression is of course public and yet it is also uniquely and intensely private in its refusal to conform to aesthetic standards or to be subject to conventions of narrative order.

This 'compulsion to reclaim and hoard everything he considers his own' (Sebald: 174), can equally be read as part of Achternbusch's poetic attempt to overcome the autobiographer's dilemma. In other words, his refusal to impose certain conventions of order on the narrative may be seen as a bid to escape the bind of the trope which, for de Man, is central to the paradox of autobiography. The conscious rejection of consistent narrative structure resists the idea of narrative as purposely designed *Doppelgänger*, as the 'tropological substitution' (de Man: 922) for the self as object. Although the avoidance of this linguistic trap is of course impossible, nevertheless, what is important is that in a text such as *Ella* the author admits and plays with both the possibility of communicative failure and the notion of narrative as *lack* of order. This potential for failure may, in its explicitness, contain a shred of potential authenticity. In Drew's view it is an example of 'authentic failure' which may claim to be a fragment of truth (Drews: 25). In other words, by creating something that is manifestly flawed, which is full of the rubbish collected throughout a lifetime, Achternbusch seems to want to suggest the existence of something real. By infusing fiction with the obscure remains of the past, and the past with the tatters of fiction, the author is engaging in an attempt to create an existence in which he may catch a glimpse of himself.

Like the junk artist Chomo, who has created a whole village full of strange figures and structures built from scraps

gleaned from rubbish dumps,<sup>15</sup> Achternbusch the *Bastler* [amateur craftsman] recycles objects whose significance has been forgotten and which have retained only their materiality, investing them with a new, and often excessive, symbolic meaning. According to Sebald, these fragments operate 'like totem pieces, testifying to his desire not to lose anything' (Sebald: 177). Moreover, like Chomo's junk figures, Achternbusch's reincarnations are a means of using the past to aspire to the future. Chomo's figures 'express a future world which will supersede our own' (Ferrier: 201) and suggest future civilizations in other universes. In this way the memory art implied by this indiscriminate hoarding process is not only about resurrecting random fragments of the past, but also about using them as a resource to reflect the future. I would like to suggest that Achternbusch's work, too, not only interrogates the significance of memory as a technique of data retrieval and retention, but also as a treasure trove of scraps, a 'künstlerischer Fundus' [artistic resource]<sup>16</sup> with which to commit spontaneous acts of *art brut*. In such acts, by poetic quirk, by means of an 'authentic failure' or even merely by means of their sheer material presence, Achternbusch might just 'catch himself in the act'.

15 The eccentric artist Roger Chomeaux (aka Chomo) has created a village of 'Preludial Art' located near Achères in the Fontainebleau forest. The village is built of 'scrap metal garnered from municipal garbage dumps' and, he claims, features around 30,000 works of art, including a church built from old cars and broken bottles and many strange figures or 'machâmes' ('clinkersouls'). See Jean-Louis Ferrier, *Outsider Art* (Paris: Terrail, 1997), pp. 190–202.

16 Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich: Beck, 1999), p. 22.

## Part 4: Remembering and Renewal

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EDRIC CALDICOTT

## Anniversaries: Republican Collectivization of Memory, from Molière to Dreyfus

With its exploitation of photographs and mass circulation of printed materials, a socio-cultural concept as recent as 'les lieux de mémoire' [sites of memory] may perhaps seem bound to have a republican slant (it would, after all, be difficult to include as much of this kind of material for the 'ancien régime'), but if one steps back from the seven volumes of Pierre Nora's edited work of that title<sup>1</sup> to find a broader view, a different construct of mass self-perception comes to mind as an overall shaping force, and that is the *Massensymbol* suggested by Elias Canetti in his *Masse und Macht* [translated as *Crowds and Power*]. The symbol he chose to exemplify the core self-perception of the French was the Revolution. This seems initially to be an odd-seeming choice when compared with the forest, sea, and mountains which he identified as the *massen-symbol* for Germany, England, and Switzerland respectively, but the preponderance of examples chosen by Nora's work do indeed illustrate the perpetuation by the Republic, particularly the early Third Republic, of the radical aspirations of the Revolution. This is necessarily true of the first volume entitled *La République*, but the same tensions and self-consciousness recur in the later volumes, entitled *La Nation* and *Les France*: these include the dynamic tension between the priorities of a centralized administration and the love of the physical diversity of the

1 Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, seven vols: t.1 *La République*; t.2 *La Nation* (three vols); t.3 *Les France* (three vols) (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Idées, 1984–92). The seven volumes have also been published by the same publisher in their paper-back 'Quarto' series; all references are to the earlier edition.

old provinces, with all the sacrifices that that entailed in the promotion of the revolutionary ideal of comprehensive and centralized unification (of territorial space and administration; the language; weights and measures; and of time itself with the creation of the republican calendar). The sense of self-conscious redefinition can also be found in the re-writing of history in justification of a republican *terminus ad quem* (Nora himself writes two separate chapters on the *Histoire(s) de France* of Ernest Lavisse), and in the celebration of the revolutionary calendar. Although this process reminds us of the invention of tradition so fruitfully explored by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger,<sup>2</sup> the republican commemoration of the Revolution gives a sharper doctrinal edge to nationalism.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the exploitation of memory in the collective process of republican nation-building in France; the means of investigation I have chosen is the testing of the connections between the agenda of a restored and enduring republican régime after 1870, with its opportunity to finish the work of 1789 and 1848, on the one hand, and the original revolutionary aspirations, on the other. The use of anniversaries was a systematic way of flagging those connections. To what extent this mirrors the processes of *Gelehrten-nationalismus* [nationalist scholarship] will have to be explored elsewhere, but we should appreciate that anniversaries and commemorations are an integral part of a programmed revolutionary agenda: this means setting them within a specific programme of development, not like the Easter Rising in Ireland, or Shakespeare's birthday in England, randomly observed and occasionally forgotten, but part of a systematic programme of self-perpetuation and national mobilization.

So, in what would have been the year 209 of the Republic, *une et indivisible*, it can be demonstrated how manipulative anniversaries are by pointing out that the year 2000 corresponded

2 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, coll. Canto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

to the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the metric system on 4 November 1800 (or, le 13 brumaire de l'An IX). Celebrated probably nowhere till now, this improbable anniversary does at least demonstrate that a metric system existed in France before November 1800, and that somebody was determined enough to reinstate it after that date (on 1 January 1840), when it became law. But why the metric system? The 'système métrique décimal' can be viewed as an archetypal reform of the French Revolution. Discussed, it is true, under the monarchy, it was not formally introduced until after the Revolution in a programmed series of measures.<sup>3</sup> In a specific sense, the metric system swept away the abusive proliferation of the old feudal measures (of which there were more than 2,000, including the 'pied du roi' [the King's foot], and the 'toise de Charlemagne' [Charlemagne's rood]). In a more symbolic way, it was devised and pursued with the aspiration to create a future new world for all: coherent in its overall concept, based on a meshing set of initiatives that 'font système', therefore universal in its application, and consequently self-perpetuating. Literally marked with the seal of the republic (le poinçon de la République) on the new platinum measures, it was a revolutionary French gift to humanity and science.

A full account of this 'coup d'état de la science' can be found in Denis Guedj's absorbing book *Le Mètre du monde* (there is a punning intent in his title, between 'mètre' and 'master'), but my main point can be illustrated by explaining the pun in the title. The concept of the metrical unit and the verification of its measurement came from the measurement of the earth, and more specifically of the meridian. The meridian is any imaginary line joining the two poles; everywhere is therefore on a meridian, which just remains a 'méridien', even when it passes through Greenwich; but when it passes through Paris it becomes 'la méridienne', the one true meridian. Throughout the

3 For a thorough investigation of the question, see Denis Guedj, *Le Mètre du monde* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2000).



1790s, the Commission des Poids et Mesures pursued the work of measurement of the *méridienne*, on a line running through Paris from Dunkirk to Barcelona across ten degrees of latitude, from approximately 41° to 51°. After a series of 115 careful triangulations, the precise measurement of the *méridienne* was confirmed, and with it that of the metre, originally defined as a ten millionth of a 'quart de méridien'. Hence the sense of a new system, rational and universal, with all parts integral to each other – and republican; thus, for Guedj's title, the metre was 'maître' [master], not only in the measurement of the earth, but in a reforming conquest of the world.<sup>4</sup> The climax to the process of adoption was reached with an International Scientific Congress in Paris, claimed to be the first in the world, convened in October 1798 and reporting on 22 June 1799 (le 4 messidor de l'An VII, the day of the summer solstice) to the two Chambers of the National Assembly through its Dutch chairman, van Swinden, who declared, 'Le champ qui fait subsister mes enfants est une telle portion du Globe. Je suis dans cette proportion co-proprétaire du Globe' [The field which feeds my children is a specific fraction of the Globe. I am, to this extent, a co-owner of the Globe] (Guedj: 250). His words captured the revolutionary ideal, and thrilled the assembled deputies – the metric system was perceived to be conquering a share in the world for all who followed the revolutionary citizens of France, with Patriotism and Universality simultaneously exalted in a series of reforms in unity of purpose. To celebrate this achievement, serving as an active reminder of reforms in permanent implementation, statues of/to the metre were erected in all the principal towns of France; one still remains visible under the colonnades at 36 rue Vaugirard in Paris.

4 The singularly purposeful universality of the French process is highlighted by the comparison with the earlier measurement of the Mason–Dixon line in the United States, conducted by Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon between 1765 and 1768 in order to define overlapping land rights in Pennsylvania and Maryland.

The next phase in this integrated adoption of a system, a system with the avowed aspiration to create a new, enduring and universal world order, was the formal deposit of the prototype metre measurements in the Archives Nationales. Like the Panthéon, the Archives Nationales were a creation of the Revolution (the Archives in 1789 and the Panthéon in 1791). These revolutionary institutions of memory and commemoration were designed to redefine memory, filtering out of collective awareness the feudal monarchic past, that flat completed past of one thousand years now dismissed in the administrative 'Out' tray under the term 'ancien régime', meaning not ancient but gone, finished, and disappeared. The titles, deeds, and charters which confirmed feudal, royal or monastic entitlement to property were originally inaccessible to the public, but they were put into the public domain by creation of the Archives Nationales, in the first movement of the Revolution to form part of a catalogue of past wrongs and new reforms (such as, for example, the conservation of the platinum prototype measures of the metre).

Similarly, the old church of Ste-Geneviève in Paris was converted to a new secular mission. Re-baptized as the Panthéon, its new purpose was to honour the 'grands hommes de la patrie', rejecting any criteria of rank or inherited status to recognize merit in a temple of revolutionary, and subsequently republican, achievement. Initially, no political figures of the past were admitted to it, only great orators and writers. It also gave rise to a new word in the French vocabulary, 'panthéonisation'. This is a strikingly republican expression of the systematic exploitation of signs and emblems in the mobilization of a collective memory. 'Panthéonisation' is a national funeral ceremony conducted at the Panthéon, with burial there for those who have served the revolutionary cause, subsequently the Republic, with distinction. It obviously meant less to the actual recipients of the honour (who, by a decree of 1795 had to be more than ten years dead) than to the celebrants, witnesses, and readers of news reports of the occasion. The first person to be buried in the Panthéon was Mirabeau, in 1791. He was

followed in the same year by Voltaire, and in 1794 by Jean-Jacques Rousseau – a clearly manipulative union which would have made them all cringe.

The most significant and symbolic ‘panthéonisations’ of recent times were those, in the bicentenary year of 1989, of l’abbé Gregoire (author in 1794 of the *Rapport sur la nécessité et les moyens d’anéantir les patois et d’universaliser l’usage de la langue française*, and of Condorcet (a member of the Commission des Poids et Mesures), who committed suicide in 1794, but not before completing his *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain*, and his *Mémoire sur la réduction des mesures*. None of these ‘panthéonisations’ were as stirring as the burial of Victor Hugo in 1885; not just a funeral but a triumphant affirmation of republican values in a resurgent Republic, for this was the first ‘panthéonisation’ since 1806, when the Empire and then the Restoration had abandoned the practice as incompatible with the status of Emperors and Kings. It also marks the consecration of the great writer, the ‘sacre de l’écrivain’ which Paul Bénichou traced back as far as 1830.<sup>5</sup> Already interred (and disinterred) in the Panthéon, Voltaire and Rousseau were again celebrated in 1878 with a national commemoration of the centenary of their deaths. This is perhaps not so much an undiluted homage to the writers as a nod in the direction of the Americans who had just celebrated the centenary of their own revolution, and for which Bartholdi had built an outsize commemorative ‘Liberté’, that is to say a statue celebrating the Republic (a Liberty statue) which was erected at the entrance to New York harbour. There were many thousands of these ‘Libertés’ erected in France in the year of the French centenary eleven years later, undoubtedly boosted by the earlier American ‘warm-up’.<sup>6</sup>

5 Paul Bénichou, *Le Sacre de l’écrivain: essai sur l’avènement d’un pouvoir spirituel laïque dans la France moderne* (Paris: Corti, 1973).

6 See Maurice Agulhon, ‘Esquisse pour une archéologie de la République’, *Annales*, 28 (1973), 5–34.

All these commemorations are entirely at one with the Jacobin programme of republican celebration, as inscribed by Lakanal in his *Projet d'éducation nationale* of June 1793, recommending the substitution of commemoration of the great achievements of the revolutionary years in the place of church festivals. This led to a lively controversy at the time about the desired nature of future commemorative celebrations. Danton agreed with him, but others objected to anything resembling the continuation of religious reverence. It was Robespierre who put an end to the quarrel with his vision of a new social religion in the *Rapport des idées religieuses et morales avec les principes républicains et sur les fêtes nationales* (1794).

From its inception, the Third Republic implemented a series of measures to give increasing weight to the place of French literature in the school curriculum (in 1880 Latin was replaced in the baccalauréat by French composition),<sup>7</sup> but there is reason to believe that the republican cult of the great writer was already in existence before being enshrined in the education system. It has been presented by Marc Fumaroli as a homage to the new secular religion of literature.<sup>8</sup> It extended beyond the champions of republican values to recuperate writers of the 'ancien régime' who, like Voltaire, would have

7 Martine Jey, *La Littérature au Lycée: Invention d'une discipline (1880–1925)* (Metz: Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, coll. Recherches Textuelles, no. 3, 1998).

8 Marc Fumaroli, 'Les Intentions du cardinal de Richelieu, fondateur de l'Académie française', in Roland Mousnier (ed.), *Richelieu et la Culture* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1987); Fumaroli's thesis is that throughout the shifting conditions imposed successively by the Consulate, Empire, Restoration and Republic, the Académie française miraculously survived because it was perceived as the custodian of French literature, 'c'est à l'exemple de ce corps d'Ancien Régime que la Littérature a pu devenir en France un pouvoir spirituel rival de la religion monarchique, puis du XIXe siècle à nos jours, une véritable religion nationale' [in the same way as this institution of the ancien régime, Literature assumed in France a spiritual power rivalling that of the monarchy, then from the nineteenth century to the present, a veritable state religion], p. 77.

balked at the creation of a republic. Martine Jey has shown how the most favoured period was the seventeenth century, and the most striking innovation of the period the invention of classicism, supreme in its respect for 'universality'.

The most outstanding beneficiary of this process was Molière, a court writer and favourite of Louis XIV. Cast by the nineteenth century as a victim in his own time of a tyrannical system, he was transformed into an incarnation of republican values, prescribed as mandatory in all school curricula, and referred to in one school inspector's report as a 'garant de la nation'.<sup>9</sup> The national homage to Molière had begun as early as 1822, after the discovery of his certificate of baptism had confirmed his birth as 15 January 1622. His bicentenary was therefore celebrated in 1822, and from that time dates the annual practice of the kissing of his bust on 15 January by the 'sociétaires' of the Comédie française. In 1873, the bicentenary of his death was honoured by the launch of the definitive new edition of his complete works in the prestigious *Grands Écrivains de la France* series, but the most outstanding example of his status in the republic occurred in 1880, anticipating by a few years the glorious apotheosis of Victor Hugo.

In 1880, the formal adoption of 14 July as a national day of celebration was confirmed; observed informally since the first anniversary in 1790 of the 'prise de la Bastille', then known as the 'fête de la Fédération', it only became official in 1880. And 1880 was also the bicentenary of the foundation of the Comédie française, founded seven years after the death of Molière by Louis XIV. How could a monarchical foundation celebrate its anniversary in the same year as the first national celebration of the 14 July? It was Molière who provided the answer. Without ever having known the Comédie française in his own lifetime, Molière was converted into the tutelary genius of the institution (as he had begun to be since 1822) and thus honoured in a

9 See Ralph Albanese, *Molière à l'école républicaine* (Stanford: Anma Libri, 1992).

surrogate way by the national celebration of the bicentenary of 'la maison de Molière'. This was Molière's third bicentenary in the space of just fifty-eight years. In this way, the cult of the great writer, unforeseen in 1789, was progressively incorporated into the developing system.

The system developing out of the Revolution sought to enshrine and perpetuate its ideals through coordinated reform and with the creation of new institutions, notably in education. The Third Republic was the first to last long enough to implement longer term goals of the Revolution such as the right to education for all, as expressed in article 22 of the revised and amplified *Droits de l'Homme* of 1793 and pursued by the *Comité d'Instruction Publique*:

L'instruction est le besoin de tous. La société doit favoriser de tout son pouvoir les progrès de la raison publique, et mettre l'instruction à la portée de tous les citoyens.<sup>10</sup>

[Everyone requires education. Society should wholeheartedly support progress of the public interest, and put education within the reach of everyone.]

The reforms of Jules Ferry were the most conspicuously successful in this regard (a success amplified by the phenomenal demographic growth following the years of Napoleonic butchery).<sup>11</sup> The combination of demographic growth and educational reform served in turn as a powerful stimulant to the publishing industry, and particularly to the businesses of Louis Hachette and Pierre Larousse which became, in a manner of speaking, great republican empires. As former teachers, they

10 See Bronislaw Baczko (ed.), *Une éducation pour la démocratie. Textes et projets de l'époque préévolutionnaire*, coll. *Titre Courant* (Geneva: Droz, 2000).

11 See details of population and school enrolment in Frédéric Barbier, 'The Publishing Industry and Printed Output in Nineteenth-Century France', in K. Carpenter (ed.), *Books and Society in History* (London, New York: Bowker, 1983).

both served the new system with doctrinal zeal, creating in the Hachette series of definitive editions, *Les Grands Ecrivains de la France*, and Larousse's *Le Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle* (now available on CD-ROM), powerful instruments for intellectual redefinition. Famous for their insistence on 'laïcité', Ferry's reforms replaced a system which in the intervening non-Republican years had combined education with ecclesiastical affairs in the same ministry (entitled *Ministère de l'instruction publique et des affaires ecclésiastiques*). The commitment to educational reform had been signalled very early in the life of the Third Republic; the loi Simon of December 1871 was predicated upon the assumption that after 1880 those who could not read or write would not be given the right to vote.

In his book *La Troisième République des Lettres*,<sup>12</sup> Antoine Compagnon suggests that it was as much the defeat of 1870 as the implementation of a revolutionary credo after years of neglect which triggered educational re-organization, and this because of fears of appropriation of the cultural heritage of France by the universities of Germany. It is to this also that he imputes the importance of the French school of history, exemplified by the life's work of Ernest Lavisse, and of the French historical school of criticism in literature, as exemplified by Gustave Lanson. The muses of History and Memory were given pride of place in the modest but omnipresent form of the 'petit Lavisse', alongside science, French literature, and grammar, but history was already in a process of a redefinition which incorporated the features of modern France in the new concept of 'histoire-géographie'. Both Michelet and Lavisse prefaced their monumental histories of France with geographical treatises, Michelet's by himself and Lavisse's by Vidal de la Blache. Michelet's commitment to a concept of history rooted in physical and political reality is clearly expressed in his *Tableau de la France*:

12 Antoine Compagnon, *La Troisième République des Lettres* (Editions du Seuil, 1983)

Le vrai point de départ de notre histoire doit être une division politique de la France, formée d'après sa division physique et naturelle. L'histoire est d'abord toute géographique.

[The true beginning of our history must be a political organization of France, shaped by its physical and natural boundaries. History is primarily a question of Geography.]

Michelet's conceptual 'point de départ' for 'notre histoire' reminds us that memory and commemoration were not passive but active concepts; they did not entail a lingering in the past, but stimulated active programming for the construction of the future. Following his essay 'Lavissee, institeur national' in *La République* (Nora t.1: 239–75), Pierre Nora wrote a second essay on the historian Lavissee for *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, '“Histoire de France” de Lavissee' (Nora t.2: 851–902) in which he uses the subtitle 'La républicanisation de la mémoire' (Nora t.2: 884). In a third essay, in fact the *original* one, written in 1962 for *La Revue historique*, he used the title 'Ernest Lavissee: son rôle dans la formation du sentiment national'.<sup>13</sup> This tendency towards institutional exploitation of memory is made abundantly clear in the celebration of the centenary of the Revolution in 1889. One of the initiatives taken by the commission charged with the organization of the celebration was the selection of revolutionary dates to be observed with the 14 July in the future as national holidays: these dates were 5 May (opening of the États Généraux); 20 June (the seizing of the Tuileries palace); 4 August (abolition of feudal rights), all in 1789, and 21 September (1792, Year 1 of the Republic and the abolition of the monarchy). And to the initial astonishment of every visiting anglophone schoolchild ever since, these dates were even given an extension in space by having streets named after them! The initial impact of this programme was diluted in time by the addition of other dates (and street names), such as 11

13 Pierre Nora, 'Ernest Lavissee: son rôle dans la formation du sentiment national', *La Revue historique* (1962), 73–106.



November, 1 May, 8 May, and also more enduring revolutionary dates such as 26 August (*Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme*, 1789), but there can be no doubting the zeal of the original programme.

As a more tangible reminder of the dynamic modernity of revolutionary reforms, the *Exposition Universelle* was also organized in 1889, itself following an initiative of the Revolution, *L'Exposition industrielle nationale* organized on the *Champ de Mars* in September 1798, followed by others in 1801, 1802 and 1803 (and yet more under the Empire). And the one most tangible reminder of the technological aspirations of the centenary *Exposition Universelle* is now the Eiffel Tower (the *Galerie des Machines* was destroyed in 1900), but it is as a revolutionary icon that the *Tour Eiffel* is mentioned here. Its construction aroused great controversy: there was a saccharine socio-aesthetic resistance campaign (among the signatories of which Maupassant dramatically changed his tune after construction was completed), but there was also a zealous interpretation of the tower as the symbol of revolutionary triumph. Gustave Eiffel himself is reported to have said, '*Le drapeau tricolore sera le seul au monde à flotter sur une hampe de trois cents mètres*'.<sup>14</sup> [The tricolour will be the only flag in the world to fly from a flagpole one thousand feet high]. There is also some confusion here of nationalist ardour with industrial and commercial interests.

Industrial and commercial influence on displays of Republican ardour has been documented by Maurice Agulhon in his study '*Esquisse pour une archéologie de la République*' (note 6 above). Gathering momentum since the centenary of the American revolution, the manufacture of Liberty statues (as '*déesse de la Liberté*', frequently in the form of Marianne) created industrial fortunes. Agulhon cites the archives of the Tusey factory which made a notable contribution to the spiral-

14 Paul Trouillas, *Le Complexe de Marianne* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1988), p. 105.

ling production of cast-iron and bronze statues as a civic amenity (a profitable civic trade maintained in the manufacture of 'vespasiennes', and in the present near-monopoly in the provision of public lavatories to the cities of western Europe). The 1889 strike organized by Jean Jaurès in the Eiffel tower construction yards also indicates the disaffection of the nascent labour movement in France. The mobilization of industry in the name of the Revolution, or indeed of the Republic, thus had limited possibilities: it could serve the cause only so far before other more material considerations came into play.

This much was clear in 1889. By the time of the next Exposition Universelle in 1900, political discord had been added to the pressures of industrial mobilization to brake the momentum of revolutionary emulation. The socialist movement was slowly assuming its own agenda, as is indicated by the first observance of 1 May as a national workers demonstration in 1890 (although not officially recognized as a public holiday until 1947). In terms of the unanimity of expression found in the anniversaries and institutional reform outlined here, any lingering illusions were ended by the Dreyfus affair. Zola's dramatic naming and denunciation of the military conspirators in his famous letter to President Félix Faure, 'J'accuse' (a headline phrased not by Zola, but by Georges Clemenceau) in *L'Aurore* on 13 January 1898, has too often been allowed to eclipse the sad postscript of his letter of 22 December 1900. In the same newspaper, almost two years after the first letter, Zola wrote to President Emile Loubet in response to the amnesty declared for all those implicated in the Dreyfus affair. Where the first letter is famously known as 'J'accuse', this one deserves to be known as 'J'accuse toujours', because Zola wrote it in direct symmetry with the first, doggedly re-iterating 'j'ai accusé' and re-naming, in the same order, all those whom he had originally denounced: Paty de Clam and the supporting military establishment of Generals Mercier, Billot, Boisdeffre, Gonse, Pellier, and commandant Ravary, with their flawed calligraphic experts Belhomme, Vari-nard, and Couard, 'les bureaux de la guerre', and 'le premier conseil de guerre'.

Zola's final letter could not have been more deliberately phrased, and he wrote it to communicate his protest at being confused in a general amnesty with the original perpetrators of the conspiracy. No legal judgement was made, the state had intervened with a political decision, therefore those whom Zola had also shown to be guilty of manipulation of military archives in an attempt to vilify his father's name escaped penalty. 'Si la loi d'amnistie a été votée par les Chambres', wrote Zola,

il est entendu que c'est pour assurer le salut du pays [...] Ce serait très bien, si pour sauver le pays du poison clérical et militariste, il ne fallait pas commencer par le laisser dans cet autre poison du mensonge et de l'iniquité, où nous le voyons agoniser depuis trois ans.<sup>15</sup>

[If the amnesty was approved by the two Chambers of the National Assembly, it was clearly in the interest of national security [...] It would be very good if, to save the country from the infection of militarism and clericalism, we did not have to sink into that other infection of deceit and iniquity which has tormented us for the past three years.]

The letter of December 1900, announcing the existence and the continuing threat of two omnipresent evils, clericalism and militarism with all their attendant sects, marks not only the end of republican unity of purpose but yet another anniversary, albeit one which has never been observed. The extremity of opposing views is highlighted by what appears to have been Zola's murder in 1902, and by the sorry circumstances of his own 'panthéonisation' in 1908, when the grateful Dreyfus, who was himself in attendance, was shot in the arm in an unsuccessful assassination attempt. The ceremony of 'panthéonisation' now served as a stage for discord rather than national solidarity.

The ignominious end of republican consensus only serves to underline just how systematically the cultural agenda of the Third Republic had been rooted in revolutionary aspirations.

15 Colette Becker (ed.), *La Vérité en marche* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1969), p. 201.

The radical all-inclusive nature of those aspirations, including the revolutionary collectivization of national memory, was eloquently analysed by the late François Furet in the opening lines of the essay he wrote for *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, 'L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution' (Nora t.3, *Les France*, 1: 107); his observations appear to stand true for the first thirty years of the Third Republic, for as long as its enemies lay without rather than within:

Si la Révolution française est à l'origine de la civilisation politique où nous vivons encore, deux cents ans après qu'elle a paru sur la scène de l'histoire, c'est d'abord qu'elle l'a voulu. A travers la voix de ses principaux acteurs, et le geste d'un peuple, elle s'est pensée elle-même comme un événement fondateur, mémorable par excellence: régénération de l'humanité par la liberté de l'individu enfin conquise sur les puissances séculaires de l'oppression. Avant elle, le passé n'est plus qu'un 'Ancien Régime', définition lapidaire qui efface de la mémoire nationale tout ce qui la précédée, féodalité et monarchie ensemble.

[If the French Revolution is still, two hundred years after its first appearance on the historical stage, the source of the political culture in which we live, it is primarily because that is what it sought to achieve. Through the voices of its principal actors, and the action of a whole people, it invented itself as a founding event which was, of its essence, memorable: a regeneration of humanity accomplished by freedom of the individual wrested from the ancient powers of oppression. The past, and all that preceded it, is now only an 'Ancien Régime' (an earlier epoch), a clear-cut definition which erases from the national memory everything which went before, both feudalism and the monarchy.]

It can be said that, in the early years of the Third Republic, the emblems and anniversaries of a powerful and persuasive 'imaginaire collectif' shaped a reforming nationalist culture out of 'memory'; a national narrative was created. Memory became a celebration, History its supporting narrative, and Literature itself became an instrument of national mobilization. In the work of Jey and Albanese (see notes 7 and 9 above), the history of the history of literature shows how the cultural constructs of an earlier court literature were transformed to suit republican values. This exposes the neglected other side of the question,

proposed here as an epilogue and a subject for further reflection. What happens to the private space of the individual imagination at times of such massive cultural mobilization? The question is undoubtedly naïve but, ... if the heat and clangour of a Barrès or a Déroulède (or even of a Jaurès or a Zola) do indeed capture the collective mood, it must have seemed to other, more private, writers like a long tunnel with a fearful sense of no exit. Were there no options? Was everyone necessarily mobilized? It is a supreme irony that, at a time when Literature itself was elevated to a new status in the modern state, the contemporary practitioner may have felt threatened in his or her freedom. Was Literature simply elevated as his-story? In what direction lay the channels of escape or delivery? In science fiction? Intimist introspection? Gender disguise? But this begins again the process of re-writing earlier cultural values. At this meeting point of memory and imagination, with all its social and psychological complexity, the literary historian finds an endless series of new questions, or old questions in new contexts, to consider.<sup>16</sup>

16 And an essential guide in these channels of enquiry, from the three volumes of *Temps et Récit* (1983–85) to *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (2000), is Paul Ricœur.

DEIRDRE O'GRADY

## Deformity and Dualism: Arrigo Boito and the Crisis of Italian Romanticism

Later Italian Romanticism had much in common with French realist writers such as Balzac and Zola, who depicted the darker side of life. The Italians, especially those associated with the movement known as 'Scapigliatura' [Dishevelment], also found inspiration in other French works, such as Victor Hugo's depiction of deformity and the grotesque in his tragedy *Le Roi s'amuse* (1832), in which the hunchbacked court jester Triboulet encapsulates the contrasting values of beauty and ugliness, laughter and tears, good and evil.<sup>1</sup> These contrasts, as well as the melodramatic psychology associated with the jester's curse, inspired the Italian adaptor of the tragedy, Francesco Maria Piave (1810–1876). Piave saw Hugo as breaking with nineteenth-century idealism and laying the foundations for a new artistic direction, based on the cultivation of the ugly and objectionable.<sup>2</sup> The related figure of Quasimodo in Hugo's novel

- 1 See Anne Ubersfeld (ed.), *Victor Hugo, Oeuvres Complètes, Théâtre, I* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1985), pp. 829–968. Of particular interest is the preface, pp. 829–36, which contains Hugo's defence of the piece; Anne Ubersfeld, *Le Roi et le Bouffon* (Paris: Librairie Jose Corti, 1974), pp. 95–156, pp. 609–44.
- 2 Francesco Maria Piave (1810–1876). In 1843 Count Alvise Mocenigo commissioned a libretto for the Fenice Theatre Venice drawn from the text of *Cromwell* by Victor Hugo. This was substituted by *Ernani* from Hugo's *Hernani* and marked the beginning of the Verdi–Piave collaboration. There followed *I due Foscari* (1844), *Macbeth* (1847), *Il Corsaro* (1848), *Stiffelio* (1850), *Rigoletto* (1851), *La traviata* (1853), *Simon Boccanegra* (1857) and *La forza del destino* (1862). See Antonio Santi, 'Per il centenario della morte di Francesco Maria Piave', *La Voce di Murano*, 18 May, 1910; Luigi

*Notre Dame de Paris* (1831) testifies to Hugo's continuing interest in the symbolic possibilities of deformity, which he used as the basis for the conflict between the opposing forces of light and darkness. When *Le Roi s'amuse* was adapted by Piave for the libretto *Rigoletto* for Giuseppe Verdi (1851), the associations and conflicts were carried a step further: Gilda, the daughter of Rigoletto, is portrayed as an angel, while being seen as the offspring of a devilish jester).<sup>3</sup>

This leads to the question: Can goodness spring from evil? Is darkness the source of light? Answered in the affirmative, it may be argued that the Verdi–Piave *Rigoletto* propagates unorthodox thought. This is one of the reasons for which both Hugo's *Le Roi s'amuse* and Verdi's *Rigoletto* encountered censorship difficulties. The former was banned after only one performance in 1832, and was denied a hearing for fifty years. In order to pass the various censors, Verdi's opera was performed under a variety of titles, including *Lionello*, *Clarra ke Perth* and *Viscardello*. The promotion of darkness and evil as active forces finds Hugo–Piave as important sources for the work of Arrigo Boito (1842–1918) and the Italian literary Scapigliatura movement of 1860–1870, which addressed the crisis of poetic expression at the end of the Romantic era.<sup>4</sup>

Baldacci, *La musica in Italiano: Libretti d'opera dell' Ottocento* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997), pp. 90–205.

- 3 See Deirdre O'Grady, *The Last Troubadours: Poetic Drama in Italian Opera* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 152–72.
- 4 For basic background reading on the Scapigliatura see: Pietro Nardi, *Scapigliatura da Giuseppe Rovani a Carlo Dossi* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1924); Arrigo Boito (Milan: Mondadori, 1942); Gaetano Mariani, *La Scapigliatura* (Caltanissetta/Roma, Sciascia, 1967), *Scapigliatura e Novecento* (Rome: Stadium, 1979); Adelaide Sozzi-Casanova, *La Scapigliatura* (Milan: Cooperativa Libreria, I.V.L.M., 1979); Dante Isella, 'Approccio alla Scapigliatura', in *I Lombardi in rivolta* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984), pp. 231–9; David Del Principe, *Rebellion, Death and Aesthetics in Italy. The Demons of Scapigliatura* (New York: Associated University Presses, 1996); Deirdre O'Grady, *Piave, Boito, Pirandello: From Romantic Realism to Modernism* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000) pp. 27–68. Of considerable interest are

The bohemian movement of Scapigliatura, attempting to relive the way of life presented in Henri Murger's *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* (1847–49), set about deconstructing the spectacle of pre-unified Italy. It promoted the annihilation of the beautiful by the ugly, and mused on the duality of human behaviour caught between conflicting opposites: 'Un sogno di peccato/E un sogno di virtù.' [A dream of sin/And a dream of virtue].

Deformity, parody and the grotesque became symbolic both of life and the conventional art form (O'Grady: 38–43). The deconstruction and reassembly of form are the subjects of Boito's *Libro dei versi* (1877). It consists of poems written during the 1860s, and contains images of decay, destruction and decomposition. The dramatization of the poet's perceptions are to be found in the operatic libretto *Otello*. Here reason and emotion are juxtaposed, and Art and Spontaneity are destroyed by Science.

While contemporary critical reactions failed to appreciate the implications of the Scapigliatura Milanese or to predict its far-reaching potential, it is now accepted that it represented the first modern school of Italian poetry. Scapigliatura was first adopted by Eugenio Camerini to describe a literature of social rebellion. With the passing of time it became identified with internal schizophrenia. It was incorporated in the title of Cletto Arrighi's novel *La Scapigliatura e il 5. febbraio* and finds its most elementary outlet in the expression of the service of Nature by Art and Science. Of the sixteen poems in Boito's *Libro dei versi*, four are particularly pertinent to this study. These are: 'A una mummia', 'Dualismo', 'Lezione d'anatomia', and 'Un torso'.

Since 'Dualismo' contains the basic opposing images which were developed and refined in Boito's later works, it provides a fitting introduction to the writer's intellectual progress. Never still, searching for an ideal state, the poet walks a tightrope



between light and shade, good and evil, permanently absorbed in active contemplation:

[...] Son luce ed ombra, angelica  
 Farfalla o verme immondo,  
 Sono un caduto cherubo  
 Dannato a errar sul mondo,  
 O un demone che sale  
 Affaticando l'ale  
 Verso un lontano ciel.<sup>5</sup>

[I am light and shade; an angelic butterfly/or a filthy worm. I am a fallen cherub,/damned to wander on earth,/or a devil rising, winging/wearily towards a far distant sky.]

The use of light and shade is not merely symbolic of being, it also provides a scientific undercurrent. Light is reason, intellect and Science. Shade is light in darkness. In the second stanza the poet passes from the medium of vision to that of sound, expressive of a thought within the mind: 'Ecco perché nell' intimo/Cogitazioni io sento/La bestemmia dell'angelo' (Quadrelli: 39). [This is why in my deep meditation/I hear the curse of the angel].

In a reversal of the Cartesian 'I think therefore I am', thoughts are *heard* from *within*. This is followed by an expression of the possibility that man's existence may have been pre-determined by chemical experimentation. Philosophy, physics and chemistry are embraced in an attempt to comprehend, determine and control the human lot: 'Forse noi siam l'homunculus/D'un chimico demente' (Quadrelli: 40). [Perhaps we are the scientific creation/Of a mad chemist].

Having introduced Science as his possible essence and origin, Boito utilizes Art in his search for an ideal, devoid of structure and form. But this, an 'arte eterea' [ethereal Art] is replaced by a real or rebellious form, an 'arte reprobata' [Rebellious Art] The real and ideal are thus seen in conflict.

5 Quoted in Rudolfo Quadrelli, *Arrigo Boito, poesie e racconti* (Milan: Mondadori, 1981) p. 39.

With regard to traditional morality the ideal may be considered good, the rebellious evil. Yet the good is seen to be without structure or form, rendering it revolutionary and rebellious. Boito has thus effectively created a poem of protest, in order to express his inner aspirations. This is his Scapigliatura 'manifesto'. It is an extension of the metaphysical and philosophical questions already raised in the dramas of Hugo and Piave. It does not, however, contrast the sources of inspiration – the Scientific and Artistic. It could be said that these co-exist and interact, in a poem full of both spontaneous enthusiasm and methodological expression.

In 'A una mummia' scientific and economic progress is parodied. As the result of a scientific process a human form has been preserved and has become a work of art. Paradoxically it lives a living death. Yet it serves the didactic function of illustrating a bygone civilization. It inspires both admiration and ridicule. On the day of judgement the mummy will break free from its glass case. It will liberate itself. Science will return to Nature: 'Mummia, quella mattina/Romperai la vetrina' (Quadrelli: 51). [Mummy, that morning/You will break the glass case].

In 'Un torso' Boito attempts to 'reassemble' a headless Venus decapitated by time, which no longer contains the physical receptacle of thought, the head.<sup>6</sup> The mind of the artist is transferred to the broken form; it is conferred on the torso in an attempt to reassemble form. The result is the incongruous combination of the abstract thoughts of the poet and the headless Venus. Mind and matter are thus joined. The process of transformation of Nature to Art is also tapped: tribute is paid to a piece of marble, which moulded into human form is a work of Art. Yet an even worse fate may await it – restoration. As an incomplete piece it remains the spontaneous expression of the

6 A further degree of complexity is achieved with regard to gender: the term *mummia* is feminine, and the form is considered female. 'Torso' on the other hand is masculine, but it belongs, in this case to Venus. Such fusions and confusions contribute to the duality expressed.

effect of Time on Art. Any possible restoration would merely disrupt and attempt to conceal the natural process of the disintegration of matter. In addition, the basic symbolism communicated by deformity, destruction and reconstruction provides the message that all art is the expression of its own time, and as such is permanently evolving in order to express and satisfy changing taste. Any attempt to preserve or prolong a movement beyond its 'sell-by date' results in the pathetic presence of a cultivated or even mummified form, symbolized by the subject of Boito's 'A una mummia'. Furthermore, the restoration of a work of art, in order that it conform to what is believed was its original appearance is nothing more than a grotesque reassembly of parts. Arrigo Boito cries out for artistic revolution, in an attempt to dissuade artists from a forced presentation of the Romantic ethos, in the wake of its natural demise.

In 'Lezione d'anatomia' Boito symbolically represents literary criticism. The lifeless corpse on the anatomy table is dissected and analysed in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. It is subjected to the same scrutiny as a poetic form, divided and taken apart by the literary critic. In this work the hand of Science is derided and a return to Art is advocated:

Scienza, vattene  
 Co' tuoi conforti!  
 Ridammi i mondi  
 Del sogno e l'anima!  
 Sia pace ai morti  
 E ai moribondi

Perdona, o pallida  
 Adolescente!  
 Fanciulla pia  
 Dolce, purissima  
 Fiore languente  
 Di poesia. (Quadrelli: 72)

[Begone Science with your consolations/Give me back the worlds/Of dreams and of the spirit./May peace be with the dead and the dying./Pardon, o pale adolescent,/Pious young girl,/Sweet most pure/Languid flower of poetry.]

Boito's aim, in common with that of other members of the Scapigliatura movement (including Ugo Tarchetti, Emilio Praga and Giovanni Camerana), was to identify literature with the figurative arts and music. His first major step in that direction was effected in the polymetric *Re Orso*, written in 1865 and dispatched to Victor Hugo who saw in it 'a combination of the poetry of philosophy and chemistry'.<sup>7</sup> Benedetto Croce described it as 'Evil as a manifestation of nature', and concluded: 'This is poetry that borders on music!'<sup>8</sup> Croce was thus the first to recognize the harmonic rhythmic qualities of the work, and to state its relationship to musical form publicly.

In *Re Orso* poetic innovation is achieved with the utilization of metric variety and contrasting effects. Sound is given priority over imagery, pointing to the fact that the work is intended for dramatic enunciation and that it contains qualities in common with the 'libretto' form. The basic 'duality' of the *Libro dei versi* is present, and the basic conflict is seen to be between brute force and beauty. The tale of *Re Orso* is as follows. The evil king of Crete, having decapitated his mistress, is offered in her place the Venetian Oliba, the personification of beauty and purity. Orso rapes and later beheads her, but her head becomes the moon. The king on his death is devoured by a worm that has made a symbolic journey towards his corpse. The King protagonist decapitates and thus deforms. Throughout the poem literary works are parodied. This is Boito's manner of rejecting the hitherto accepted masterpieces of Italian literature. He advocates their ridicule, rejection and, ultimately, reform. This may appear to contradict the poet's attitude in 'Lezione d'anatomia' where Science and Art are contrasted but ultimately reconciled in the poetic form. In *Re Orso* the contrasts are absolute. The figures which border on caricature are symbolic objects, mere puppets

7 Quoted by H. Busch (ed.), *Verdi's Otello and Simon Boccanegra* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 793.

8 Benedetto Croce, *La Letteratura della nuova Italia, saggi critici*, 2nd edn (Bari: Laterza, 1921), pp. 257-74.

controlled by a demented puppet master, who confronts the conscious and subconscious. In the next stage of his quest for innovation Boito turns to the music drama proper. Having deformed *both* the poetic symbol and his mode of expressing it in *Re Orso*, he now attempts to reconstruct form in an exercise in adaptation, collaboration and poetic dramatization.

In his adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello*, Boito carries the philosophical expositions of the *Libro dei versi* to a further degree of subtlety. By shifting the emphasis of the work, he turns the libretto into a theoretic expression of behavioural science. In effect, it is a dramatized exposition of the effect of the analytical on the spontaneous. In pursuit of destruction, he allows intellectual evil, in the form of Iago, to enter the mind of the essentially good Otello. Iago, the rational analyst, subjects the emotional expressionalism of Otello to a scientific experiment. A white devil manipulates a black angel, albeit a fallen one. In updating the enlightenment battle between Reason and Emotion, Boito brings the conflict to a new level of originality.<sup>9</sup> He carries it beyond the mere juxtaposition of Art and Science, and applies psychological reality to the laws of logic and objectivity. In this respect, he lays the foundation for the theatre of the absurd.

The drama develops as a conflict between good and evil, with the victory of the latter. Good is communicated by a series of prayers including, Otello's thanks to God for his victory over the infidel (Act I), and Desdemona's 'Ave Maria' (IV. 2.). The female protagonist is also placed in absolute opposition to Iago whose Creed or rather anti-Creed (Act II.2) is a parody of the cornerstone of Christian doctrine. In poetic terms, the two opposing forces are Iago and Desdemona. In the philosophical juxtaposition of Science and Art, Iago and Otello occupy centre stage. In a drama of doubt, uncertainty and suspicion, the

9 There is clear evidence of the influence of Vittorio Alfieri's *Agamennone* on Boito's *Otello*. Alfieri's villain Egisto owes much to Shakespeare's Iago, and in turn is an important source of the librettist's villain.

Science of evil utilizes the Art of insinuation. Otello is programmed to complete the physical destruction of Beauty and Innocence in the form of Desdemona. Unlike the subject of 'Lezione d'anatomia' Desdemona retains her beauty and purity. She is Art in its most sublime poetic form. Otello represents the spontaneity of Art, destroyed by scientific calculation. The white devil destroys the black angel, yet the twist of 'duality' is present. Science has destroyed both black and white, but a new poetic harmony is restored within the work. As Desdemona's beauty, pallor and purity are re-established in words, melodically the strains of the 'kiss motif' of Act I are repeated. In Verdi's opera this represents a final moment of tenderness in Act I, before Iago's poison begins to act. It forms the final section of the love duet. Its re-evocation illustrates the restoration of physical and thematic unity as the dying Otello embraces the dead Desdemona. Words and music combine to consolidate the structural unity of the work and the renewal of poetic harmony.<sup>10</sup>

Ideologically, therefore, it can be seen that, as a purveyor of original ideas and themes, Victor Hugo's drama of laughter and tears, together with its adaptation by Francesco Maria Piave, pave the way for Luigi Pirandello's psychological duality of reason/madness, truth/appearances, conscious and subconscious.<sup>11</sup> In the black comedy *Il berretto a sonagli* of 1920, the laughter of happiness is replaced by that of despair and insanity. The symbol which links Hugo and Piave to Pirandello is that of the Jester, wearer of the cap with bells.<sup>12</sup> Working for-

10 Boito is the first of the Italian intellectuals to dispense with ideology, warning that the moment of technique has arrived, and that all ideologies are good, provided that they allow for a laboratory experiment.

11 The Italian noun 'Coscienza' means both 'conscience' and 'consciousness'. This co-existence of moral discernment and awareness carries Boito's 'Dualismo' towards a realistic assessment of the subconscious.

12 It is also noteworthy that Hugo's drama *Cromwell* (1827) contains no less than four jesters. The concept of jest was in opposition to seriousness and truth.

ward from *Le Roi s'amuse*, one proceeds from a hunchback jester to his parodic opposite in *Re Orso*. The process of scientifically programmed manipulations in Boito's *Otello* points the way towards social manipulation in *Il berretto a sonagli*. In this work a female is forced to wear the jester's cap of feigned madness, in order that her accusation of infidelity against her husband be interpreted as an expression of that madness. The crisis of Romanticism, symbolized by physical deformity, is followed by a literature highlighting mental deformity,<sup>13</sup> while the concept of malformation and decapitation leads to a concept of separation of mind from body, conscious from subconscious and spontaneous from analytical.<sup>14</sup>

By way of conclusion, some reference to the musical climate of the time, and the stages in the development of the 'music drama', as a direct consequence of mid-nineteenth-century 'Dualism' is called for. With the collaboration of Verdi and Boito the crisis of Romanticism was redirected towards an entirely new form of operatic expression, which was unfortunately short-lived. On the death of Verdi in 1901, the combination of the 'grand manner' and the pursuit of psychological realism through continuity of musical emission gave way to another form of operatic Realism. Its exponents Mascagni, Catalani, Puccini, Giordano and Cilea restored the aria as a theatrical set piece, avoided psychological probings, and relied less and less frequently on the chorus as a source of social statement. Opera thus pursued an entirely new direction, which justifies the conclusion that a century after Verdi's death, his ultimate legacy has not been utilized as a way forward.

13 See Elio Gianola, *Pirandello e la follia* (Genoa: Il Melangelo 1983); Marco Manotta, *Luigi Pirandello* (Milan: Mondadori 1998); Mario Lavagetto, *Freud la letteratura e altro* (Turin: Einaudi, 1973). Physical deformity is also present in Hugo's *L'homme qui rit*, which depicts one whose expression is distorted to form a permanent smile.

14 The concept of the shattered self and the separation of intellect and matter is considered in G. Livio, *Il teatro in rivolta. Futurismo, grottesco. Pirandello e pirandellismo* (Milan: Mursia, 1976).

The foremost aim of the Scapigliati and Arrigo Boito had been a total break with tradition, and towards this end in the musical field, a total rejection of the Romantic Opera of Giuseppe Verdi. However, the cry for poetic revolution effected in the *Libro dei versi* did not take effect until 1877 – some fifteen years after the composition of some of the poems, which had appeared in newspapers and periodicals from 1862. It was the the polymetric *Re Orso* (1865) which represented the first attempt to individualize character and caricature by means of metre alone. As tradition is parodied, it may be argued that each figure emerges in the form of rhythmic expression projecting songs, airs and liturgical chant. Such departure from tradition, with exaggerated rhythmic presentations, demonstrates Boito's quest for poetic innovation allied to the musical form. This was finally realized in the monumental composition *Mefistofele*, for which he wrote both words and music.

In *Mefistofele* (1868), derived from from Goethe's *Faust*, Boito set himself an unbounded task. With Faust symbolizing Everyman, in a universe dissolving into intellectual abstractions, there emerges the dramatic exploration of philosophic progression, contained in musical form. In his youthful arrogance Boito departed from all previous musical forms. He dispensed with the aria as the centre of musical activity, indulged in over-use of the chorus, without the heroic trappings of Verdi's later works (*Don Carlos* and *Aida*). He introduced orchestral continuity and dominance in order to convey the conflict between body and mind, and between philosophical thought and the brain which contains it. What was, however, intended to inaugurate a new era in the history of musical expression, resulted in one of the most spectacular failures in the history of the theatre. The real problem was the length of the work. When Boito refashioned it he destroyed all traces of the original music, with the exception of two pieces which were published separately. When the opera was heard seven years later it met with resounding success. The entire libretto of the



original remains.<sup>15</sup> It has been incorporated into the final version of 1875 with little or no revision. Some of the most famous passages exist in the second scoring only: 'Lontano, lontano, lontano' [Far, far, far, away], 'Spunta l'aurora pallida' [The pale dawn emerges], and in the Fugue which concludes Act II. Luigi Baldacci calls *Mefistofele* a 'complete work, in which poetry, music and the arts converge to express a single purpose'.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of Boito's achievement with *Mefistofele*, he was aware of his own shortcomings as composer/librettist. This brought about his artistic renewal. Rather than attempt auto-identification with Art in its purest abstraction, he became drawn to the concept of collaboration, in which his revised and reformed poetic credo might identify with innovative techniques of composition and vocal emission. Ironically, the composer whose work he had ridiculed was to become his close associate and source of inspiration.<sup>17</sup> By this time Verdi, too, was searching for a new ethos which might carry his later compositions towards a form more readily identifiable with European taste in the final quarter of the century. In an interview with *Neue Freie Presse* in June 1875 he commented: 'Non sono in grado di scrivere da me i miei libretti come fa Wagner' [I am not capable, as is Wagner, of writing my own librettos].<sup>18</sup> Such a statement illustrates two points: (a) that his thoughts were turning towards 'music-drama' on a grand scale (he had attended a performance of Wagner's *Lohengrin* in December 1871); (b) he was seeking a new collaborator. Although it has never been clearly spelled out, I believe the appearance of Boito's *Libri dei versi* in 1877, with its concentrated emphasis on Art and Sci-

15 For an analysis of both versions of *Mefistofele*, and a synopsis of the difference between the two, see J. Nicolaisen, *Opera in Transition 1871–1893* (Michigan: UMI Press, 1980), pp.128–34.

16 Luigi Baldacci, *La Musica in Italiano: libretti d'opera dell'Ottocento* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997), p. 247.

17 Boito was present when Verdi died in the Grand Hotel Milan, Milan, in January 1901.

18 See Verdi, *Libretti* (Milan: Oscar Mondadori, 2000), p. xxiii.

ence, conscious and subconscious, and its fusion and contrast of the physical and spiritual, touched Verdi as the source of new musical cadences which would prove totally innovative.

A short review of Verdi's works from his middle period (1851–1853) reveals that the composer was constantly seeking to identify with changing taste, and in many cases attempted to look beyond the musical forms and poetic ideologies of his time. The dramatic originality of *Rigoletto* (1851) has already been attested. However, its musical strength lies in the fact that allied to skillful orchestration and clear delineation of the minor characters, there exists a melodic invention which allows for integral structure. In other words, the aria no longer exists in isolation. The musical creation focuses on the entire scene, and not on any one character or its musical expression. The dramatic recitative preceding the aria highlights the coexistence of the physical and the emotional, together with the musical ability of the composer to convey simultaneously both conscious and subconscious. Verdi's middle years continued to highlight operatic portraiture, allied to an ever increasing awareness of social realism, as seen in *La traviata* (1853) and *Un ballo in maschera* (1859). His utilization of French texts may also explain his shifting in style from his early political works, in which the grandiose served both religious and political statement, towards that of the French 'Grand Opera'. This allowed him reconstruct the spectacle of his early compositions (*Nabucco*, 1842; *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*, 1843; *Ernani*, 1844; *Giovanna d'Arco*, 1845; *Attila*, 1846; *La battaglia di Legnano*, 1849). These works, all in four Acts, and springing from an historical source, utilized the chorus as the voice of the people.

The French Grand Opera, in addition to the active use of the chorus also included a ballet. It consisted of multiple crowd scenes, and relied above all on spectacle in the achievement of effect. In 1855, with a libretto by Eugène Scribe, Verdi wrote *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* for the Paris Opera. It was a departure from the realistic style that Verdi had been cultivating, but it did demonstrate the composer's intention to conform to French musical taste. Ten years later he revised *Macbeth* (1847), for the

Théâtre Lyrique in Paris, adding an elaborate ballet for the witches. In 1867 *Don Carlos* was produced at the Paris Opera. Verdi, at this stage of his career, appeared merely to conform to a tradition based on display rather than on drama. It was not until the presentation of *Aïda* for the inauguration of the Suez Canal, in Cairo, that one became aware of an individual utilization of the composer's French experience. Here was exoticism allied to a new richness in scoring, unexpected modulations, and orchestral continuity. All of this exists alongside a ritualistic use of the chorus expressive of patriotic spectacle. Verdi had managed to refine and develop the combination of declamatory vigour and melodic beauty found in *Rigoletto*. The opera contains both spectacle and intimacy. Although it lacks the psychological penetration of *Otello*, musically, Verdi has absorbed the symbolic ambiguities of Hugo and the directness of his disciple Boito. With the latter he will succeed in providing Italy with its own 'sprechensong', drawing on French drama and operatic structures. Italian 'Dualism' is thus converted to harmonic statements and insinuations.

In the opening of *Otello* one is transported by violent cascades of sound, expressing the contrasting fortunes of Otello as he battles against the forces of nature. The dynamic levels alter with the changing fate of the protagonist. Here is a prediction of the internal war which rages within the mind of Otello in later scenes, and of the almighty war which shall be waged against him. This is 'Dualism' conveyed in physical, abstract and dramatic terms, conveyed musically in an *allegro agitato*, in which brass and organ pedal allow the tension be maintained for the duration of the first two hundred and twenty five bars. As the chorus acts as narrator in this symphonic spectacle of sound, the duality is maintained with titanism yielding to the scherzo styled 'fuoco di gioia'. This in turn gives way to wistfulness as storm, passion and light fades, and as the action proper begins.

Verdi's masterpiece, as already noted, projects the conflict between Art and Science. The master's score musically identifies artistic creativity and the science of technique, in a manner

hitherto unconceived. The sheer scale of expression is found in Iago's 'Credo' in which the subtle insinuation of evil ranges from a triumphant declaration of denial, accompanied by resounding brass, to a whisper followed by demonic laughter. Desdemona's final *scena* develops in two movements: the 'Willow Song' and 'Ave Maria', in which controlled terror and sustained serenity complement one another. Verdi's melodic expression is, in *Otello*, freed from all the harmonic restrictions which he had previously imposed on himself, in order to provide set pieces for dramatically conceived situations. He now allows recitatives, while declamations and arias merge as progressive expositions of melodic being.

*Otello* represents the climax of Verdi's career. It is the work which he was musically preparing for from the days of *Nabucco*. His appreciation of the psychological intricacies of the human mind came, however, with his introduction to Hugo and the Milanese Scapigliatura. As Boito came to recognize and appreciate Verdi's genius, so also Verdi, tirelessly pursuing innovation as an expression of social and artistic change, found the subtle separation and identification of the physical and psychological, wrought by Boito in *Il libro dei versi*, at the heart of his final vision of artistic expression.

Thus Deformity and 'Dualism', marking the crisis of Romanticism, prove to be essential stages in the deconstruction and reassembly of the poetic form. With the musical statements of these new directions the Italian 'music drama' is established, both as a prelude to Modernism and as the prose theatre of the absurd.

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SUSAN BASSNETT

## Translation as Re-Membering

Throughout the ages, translators have sought in a variety of ways to describe what it is that they actually do. They have sometimes done this defensively, seeking to argue the case for the importance of translation, sometimes assertively, sometimes in ways that reflect their own search for better understanding of what happens when there is more than one language in one's head. For translation is an activity that not everyone is able to grasp: monolinguals often assume it is an uncomplicated procedure that involves the substitution of elements of one language into another, whereas those who move between languages, understand that simple substitution is impossible.

At its most basic, translation involves the rendering of a text written in one language into another language, through a complex process of decoding and recoding, and is therefore a practice that involves both reading and rewriting. The idea that there is much more to translation than simple word for word substitution goes back a long way. St Jerome, in his famous letter to Pammachius (*circa* 405/410 AD), sought to distinguish between the idea of the translator who renders a text word for word and the one who opts for a more creative strategy, more 'sense for sense', that is a translation perceived in terms of broad brushstrokes, rather than detailed miniaturist copying. 'A literal translation', says St Jerome, 'obscures the sense in the same way as the thriving weeds smother the seeds'.<sup>1</sup> Organic metaphors such as St Jerome's have often been used by translators, who have variously described translation as a process of replanting, of transplanting seeds into new soil. Such trans-

1 St Jerome, cited in André Lefevere (ed.), *Translation/History/Culture. A Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 48.

plantation, as Percy Bysshe Shelley argued in *A Defence of Poesy* (1821), is fundamental: 'The plant must spring again from its seed or it will bear no flower.'<sup>2</sup> The text must be transplanted into new soil, so that it can grow afresh. Only the seed remains the same.

The translators of the Authorized Version of the Bible, published in 1611, describe translation in even more beautiful terms:

Translation it is that openeth the window to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most holy place, that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water [...]<sup>3</sup>

And translators who aid in this process of revelation that so nourishes the soul are worthy of the highest praise:

Therefore blessed be they, and most honoured be their name, that break the ice and giveth onset upon that which helpeth forward to the saving of souls.

What I propose to do in this chapter is to look at translation in terms not so much as those articulated by the translators of the Authorized Version, that is, as a divinely inspired mission, but rather as a literary activity that is uniquely balanced in time and in space. By this I mean that translation, which involves both reading and writing, operates as a bridge between cultures and between the past and the future. It is not accidental that so many translators should have used metaphors of bridging to describe what it is that they do, for translation provides a bridge between memories of texts written in time past and the desire for new texts in future time. Nor is it surprising that sometimes translation has been described as

2 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, in Roger Ingpen (ed.), *The Complete Works* (New York: Gordian Press, 1965), V, 109–40 (p. 114).

3 Anon., 'The Translators to the Reader', preface to the *Authorized Version of the Bible*, 1611.

a no-man's land, something that happens in the space in-between two opposing polarities. 'No-man's land' summons up images of desolate zones festooned with barbed wire, between two hostile armies, a zone so frightful that men dreaded stepping out into it. Yet translators step out from their trenches every day, braving attacks from both sides.

And attacks do come, frequently. Translators are accused of being unfaithful to the original author, of betraying the values or the meaning or the beauty of the source text; they are accused of denying the text its own autonomy, accused of manipulation, dishonesty, disloyalty, treachery, treason. Translators have been executed for their crimes: witness William Tyndale, burned in 1536, accused of heretical translation of the Scriptures, or Etienne Dolet, similarly burned ten years later in 1546, at the height of the Renaissance, accused of traducing not Christian texts but Plato. Closer to our own times, translators of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* have been shot by fanatics who saw the translator as the re-embodiment of the writer, and therefore a target of the *fatwa*.

The idea that the translator is indistinguishable from the original writer, that the translator has no independent existence and merely stands in for the writer physically is particularly ironic, for over the last decade or so the translator has come to be seen increasingly as a distinct presence in the text, as a (re)writer of the original. Many translator scholars, most notably André Lefevere and Lawrence Venuti, talk about the increased visibility of the translator. Once perceived as a mere vehicle through which the text passed on its way into a new language, the translator is today seen as a figure who operates actively on a text, adding his or her own elements to the reshaping in the second language.

A book of outstanding interest on the role of the translator is Suzanne Jill Levine's, *The Subversive Scribe*.<sup>4</sup> Levine is a distin-

4 Suzanne Jill Levine, *The Subversive Scribe. Translating Latin American Fiction* (Saint Paul: Greywolf Press, 1991).



guished translator of Latin American fiction, and her book manages to be autobiography, translation theory and a feminist statement all at the same time. She articulates the task of the translator in language that draws upon a whole range of contemporary metaphors: translation is a cross-gendering process, a bridge between the living and the dead, both a resurrection and a sacrilege, an enslavement and a liberation. In our post-modern age, Levine argues, we need to recognize what she calls the 'borderlessness or at least continuity between translation and original' (p. 183). Once this borderless state is accepted, then perceptions of the role of the translator will change, and translation will cease to be imagined as a betrayal or a servile task, always inferior to original writing.

The boundary between originals and translations is not an historical constant. It appears to have begun to be drawn with some precision in the seventeenth century, when the idea of an 'original' text began to acquire currency. Significantly, in the seventeenth century, the period of the consolidation of what had begun as voyages of discovery and had turned into the establishment of European colonialism, we find a writer like Dryden referring to the translator as the servant of the original. In the dedication to his translation of the *Æneid*, Dryden plays ironically with the image of the translator as slave of the original:

We are bound to our author's sense; [...] slaves we are, and labour in another man's plantation; we dress the vineyard but the wine is the owner's: if the soil be sometimes barren, then we are sure of being scourged: if it be fruitful, and our care succeeds, we are not thanked, for the proud reader will only say, the poor drudge has done his duty.<sup>5</sup>

In his translation practice, Dryden ignored this servitude completely, but the fact that he chose to articulate translation in

5 John Dryden, dedication of the *Æneid* (1697), quoted in Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (eds), *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), pp. 22–4.

these terms is significant, for he draws a parallel between what was happening in the Americas in actuality and what happened to the translator in relation to the source text. The original is presented as superior to the translation, which is nothing more than a copy of the original. 'The wretched translator', as Dryden puts it, is 'tied to the thoughts' of the original writer and cannot therefore have freedom of expression. Similarly, the colony is a reproduction, a copy of the original, the source that lay back in the Old World, doomed forever to be in a subservient relationship with that source.

It is therefore hardly to be wondered at if, three hundred years later, some of the most exciting thinking about translation is coming from former colonies. Suzanne Jill Levine writes about her role as a translator who bridges the Old World and the New, a translator who makes the Old World aware of the seismic shifts in consciousness that the New World has been undergoing. For some of the most radical metaphors describing the translation process have come from the Americas, from Canada, from Brazil and Latin America, metaphors that challenge directly the assumption that translation will always be inferior to the original, for in making such a challenge, they also deny the power once assumed by Europe to describe itself as the ultimate original. So we find the bilingual Canadian Sherry Simon referring to writing and translation as 'practices of creation' that meet in a contact zone. Simon sees the great migrations of peoples around the world as producing a new socio-demographic situations and increasingly mixed populations. In this new world context that redraws previous maps of power relations, translation has a vital role to play:

Because, then, cultures are bonded spaces characterized by a plurality of codes and languages, it is not surprising that translation has come to figure prominently in contemporary literature. Whether it is used as an implicit mode of literary creation in post-colonial writing or as an explicit source of inspiration in various modes of 'border writing', translation and plurilingualism inhabit many contemporary texts. As a consequence, the place of the translator is no longer an exclusive site. It

overlaps with that of the writer and, in fact, of the contemporary Western citizen.<sup>6</sup>

Equally large is the claim for translation made by the Mexican writer Octavio Paz. In his famous essay of 1971, Paz proposes a new paradigm for the relationship between original and translation. He challenges the assumption that poetry is untranslatable, arguing that translation and creation are twin processes. The task of the poet is to fix words in an unalterably perfect pattern whilst the task of the translator is to liberate those words, to free them from the constraints imposed upon them by the source author, and to give them new life in a new context. This is entirely possible since translation is, firstly, reading. And reading is 'translation within the same language'. In consequence, 'the two phases of translation', that is reading and writing, 'are an inverted parallel of poetic creation'.<sup>7</sup>

The idea of the translator as the (re)creator who liberates words fixed by another author is a long way away from Dryden's image of the translator slaving away on someone else's plantation. Liberation is the metaphor employed by the Brazilian translation scholar, Else Vieira, in an essay that examines the new, non-European poetics of translation devised by her fellow countryman, Haroldo de Campos, prolific translator, writer and literary critic. In a series of essays or prefaces to his translations, De Campos has invented new terminology to describe what he has actually done with the text, and Vieira summarizes a number of these neologisms as follows:

- 6 Sherry Simon, 'Translating and Interlingual Creation in the Contact Zone. Border writing in Quebec', in Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (eds), *Postcolonial Translation. Theory and Practice* (London, New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 58–9.
- 7 Octavio Paz, 'Translation: Literature and Letters', Irene del Corral (trans.), in Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (eds), *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 152–63.

Translation as 'verse-making', 'reinvention', 'a project of recreation' (in the 1960s), 'translumination and transparadization' (stemming from his translation of Dante), as 'transtextualization', as 'transcreation', as 'transluciferation' (stemming from his translation of Goethe's *Faust*), as 'trans-helenization' (as from his translation of the *Iliad* of Homer), as 'poetic re-orchestration' (from his rendering of the Hebrew Bible into Brazilian Portuguese), as 'reimagination' (from his trans-creation of classical Chinese poetry into Portuguese), are but some of the neologisms coined by Haraldo de Campos that offer a vanguardist poetics of translation as textual revitalization.<sup>8</sup>

De Campos is probably most renowned outside Brazil for his cannibalistic theory of translation. Following the modernist *Manifesto Antropofago* (1928) of Oswald de Andrade, de Campos proposed a model of translation based on cannibalization of the source. De Andrade and his colleagues had drawn upon the account of the death of a priest killed and eaten by Tupinamba tribesmen in 1554 to propose a new way forward for Brazilian culture. By symbolically devouring European culture, Brazil could be true to its history, simultaneously rejecting European codes and offering up an act of homage. De Campos's cannibalistic theory of translation follows the same path: translation involves taking the source text, devouring and digesting it. This process involves the symbolic death and dismemberment of the original, but just as cannibalism was perceived as an act of homage by the Tupinamba (after all, only the strongest, most prized victims would be devoured in order for their virtues to be transmitted to the devourer) so dismembering and devouring a text through translation should also be seen as respectful. De Campos's translation practice reflects the ideas he expresses: he turned William Blake's verse into concrete poetry, reduced Goethe's *Faust* to some forty pages. Texts, whether canonical or not, could be reshaped, cut down, transformed by the translation process.

8 Else Ribeiro Pires Vieira, 'Liberating Calibans: Readings of *Antropofagia* and Haraldo de Campos' Poetics of Transcreation', in Bassnett and Trivedi: 95–114.

De Campos has described translation as 'vampirization', as 'cannibalism', as 'patricidal dis-memory', the symbolic destruction of the father so that a new order may come into being. Alongside these more violent images, he has also spoken of translation as 'blood transfusion,' as the necessary act that gives life to texts which would otherwise cease to exist. Here, like so many other contemporary writers about translation, he draws upon the ideas proposed by Walter Benjamin in *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers* (1923). Benjamin posited the notion of translation as continuity, as the act which ensures the rebirth of the text in future time. Struggling to articulate his ideas about language, translation, truth and meaning in an essay that has been (and still is) extensively debated, Benjamin nevertheless offers the reader one of the most powerful and useful images of translation today: translation as survival.<sup>9</sup>

Let us now pause on this image of translation as survival, for this is intimately linked to memory. Whether the translator is seeking to 'dis-memorize' the text, as de Campos proposes, or to 'woman-handle' the text, as the Canadian translator Barbara Godard proposes, or to 'liberate' the text as Paz proposes, what takes place is the transfer of a work written in one language into another, thereby extending the readership, and reaching out to a new generation of readers.<sup>10</sup> Translation is therefore always future-oriented, the translator is always engaged in bringing something written in the past into a new present, that is, into the future.

In 1999, Seamus Heaney brought out his translation of *Beowulf*, and in his introduction he discusses how he came to translate it. He recalls how he encountered the poem when an

9 Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, Harry Zohn (trans.) (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 15–23.

10 See Haroldo de Campos, *Deus e o Diabo no Fausto de Goethe* (San Paolo: Perspectiva, 1981), discussed by Vieira, *op. cit.*; Barbara Godard, 'Theorizing Feminist Theory/Translation', in S. Bassnett and A. Lefevere (eds), *Translation, History and Culture*, pp. 87–97; Paz, *op. cit.*

undergraduate at Queen's University, Belfast, and how, as a translator, he found the key to his version through traces of the old in living language, traces that appeared most clearly in the language of his father's relatives. Asking himself how he wanted *Beowulf* to sound, he decided that he wanted it to be speakable by those relatives. Instinctively, Heaney found a way of relating an Anglo-Saxon poem to his own time, focusing not only on those elements of the text that he could decipher as a scholar, but on those elements that could be re-made in his version of the modern world. The final paragraph of his introduction sums up the way in which he has used translation as a bridge between past, present and future. He notes how at times he used local Ulster words, because they seemed to have a special power. Then he discusses his use of *bawn*, an Elizabethan word deriving from the Irish *bó-dhun*, a fort for cattle, that had come to be used specifically 'for the fortified dwellings that the English planters built in Ireland to keep the dispossessed natives at bay'. Heaney chose to use this word for Hrothgar's keep:

Indeed, every time I read the lovely interlude that tells of the minstrel singing in Heorot just before the first attacks of Grendel, I cannot help thinking of Edmund Spenser in Kilcolman Castle, reading the early cantos *The Faerie Queene* to Sir Walter Raleigh, just before the Irish would burn the castle and drive Spenser out of Munster back to the Elizabethan court. Putting a bawn into *Beowulf* seems one way for an Irish poet to come to terms with that complex history of conquest and colony, absorption and resistance, integrity and antagonism, a history that has to be clearly acknowledged by all concerned in order to render it ever more 'willable forward/again and again and again'.<sup>11</sup>

Heaney's *Beowulf* is dedicated to Ted Hughes, whose translation of Ovid won the Whitbread Prize in 1997. Hughes does not provide the reader with an account of his relationship with Ovid, nor does he explain how he came to translate parts

11 Seamus Heaney, Introduction to *Beowulf* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), p. xxx.

of the *Metamorphoses*, but he does provide us with a clue. The Roman Empire, the world that Ovid inhabited, was coming to the end of one stage in its history, and with the birth of Christianity moving into another. It was an age, Hughes, suggests, 'at sea in hysteria and despair': the tension between the two extremes of suffering, the horror of the arena and the search for a higher spirituality created a collision that echoes through the pages of Ovid's works. Hughes's brief introduction concludes with these two sentences:

They (the extremes) establish a rough register of what it feels like to live in the psychological gulf that opens at the end of an era. Among everything else that we see in them, we certainly recognize this.<sup>12</sup>

Ovid's time is our time: the end of an era in the Roman world and the clash between extremes of brutality and a longing for a higher alternative are presented by the poet as a reflection of our own times. This reflection is embodied in the actual translation, for just as Heaney drew upon words and speech patterns that resonate in ways that link a poem from the Dark Ages with the end of the twentieth century, so Hughes's version of Ovid is full of language that speaks of the modern world. Here, as an example, is the passage from Book I that speaks of the last age of men, the Age of Iron, characterized by cruelty, greed and corruption. The first version is from the standard prose of the Penguin edition:

Last of all arose the age of hard iron: immediately, in this period which took its name from a baser ore, all manner of crime broke out; modesty, truth, and loyalty fled. Treachery and trickery took their place, deceit and violence and criminal greed.<sup>13</sup>

Hughes's version of the same passage transforms this basic list of horrors into something more terrible:

12 Ted Hughes, Introduction to *Tales from Ovid* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), p. xi.

13 Mary M. Innes (trans.), *The Metamorphoses of Ovid* (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1955), p. 32.

Last comes the Age of Iron  
And the day of Evil dawns.  
Modesty,  
Loyalty,  
Truth,  
Go up like a mist – a morning sigh off a graveyard.

Snares, tricks, plots come hurrying  
Out of their dens in the atom.  
Violence is an extrapolation  
Of the cutting edge  
Into the orbit of the smile.  
Now comes the love of gain – a new god  
Made out of the shadow  
of all the others. A god who peers  
grinning from the roots of the eye-teeth. (Hughes: 11)

Note the words 'atom' and 'orbit' with their contemporary connotations, the phrase 'cutting edge' and the emphasis Hughes places on greed, the new god that overshadows the world. Hughes offers us an apocalyptic vision, a savage indictment of the modern world that goes far beyond Ovid's list of evils, a vision that translates Ovid not only into English but also into Hughes's own time.

Significantly, both Hughes's and Heaney's translations have not only won prizes but have figured in best-seller lists. Through their translations, both writers found a way of writing about the contemporary so that the act of translation is not only a re-membering, a bringing back to life of works that would otherwise be unreadable to anyone without expertise of Latin or Anglo-Saxon but also a means of speaking to readers about their own time.

This strategy of bridging times would have been recognizable to countless translators from across the centuries, but somehow in the disparaging of translation as some kind of lesser literary activity, it is easy to forget this other role. Innovation in literatures has frequently come through translations; new ideas, new forms, new genres are transmitted through translation. Conversely, old ideas, old forms are sometimes reinvented through translation, and it is tempting to speculate



on whether the success of Hughes's and Heaney's translations of ancient epic writers marks some kind of return to forms of verse narrative that were so disparaged by modernism.

Let us turn now to the opposite case, to a writer whose work has all but vanished from the literary map, the American poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Longfellow was one of those poets, along with Coleridge and Byron that I used to read in my teens, but as I grew older Longfellow seemed to slide out of official literary studies. I had a brief encounter with him about ten years ago when I taught a course on Comparative American Studies and was investigating with students the attempts by writers in North and South America to create an American epic to rival Homer or Virgil, but had no further dealings with him until I came across his house, now a museum, one summer afternoon in Boston. The guide who took us round the house was a Longfellow devotee who not only knew details of the poet's life, but could quote at length from his works. What interested me, as I walked through the book-lined rooms was the wealth of literature in dozens of different languages. Here, I reflected, was a highly cultured man whose knowledge of the literatures of ancient and modern worlds had filtered through his poetry.

Why suddenly digress to Longfellow in a paper on translation and memory? The answer is that it is intriguing to compare the Longfellow of today, a totally forgotten writer, with his reputation in his own lifetime, when he was the most popular living American author, feted all over the world, translated into dozens of languages, his poems adapted into plays, films, musicals and operas, ranked by Nathaniel Hawthorne as the greatest American poet, and who is still the only American poet whose bust stands in Westminster Abbey.

Russell Reising's book which traces the development of the study and theory of American literature is aptly entitled *The Unusable Past*. He discusses how a notion of American literature has evolved from the New England Puritans, through the Transcendentalists and on to twentieth century modernism, and how more recently an alternative line of enquiry has begun

to emerge which explores the history of an alternative canon of writers that challenges the narrowness of the earlier orthodoxy.<sup>14</sup> And he never mentions Longfellow at all. Indeed, so few critics mention Longfellow that one has to search thoroughly to find any recent scholar with any opinion about him whatsoever. It appears that the poems which established Longfellow's overwhelming popularity in the nineteenth century were those most utterly rejected by modernism. These four book-length poems are *Evangeline, a Tale of Arcadie* (1847), *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1858), *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863–1873). It could be said that from Whitman onwards the great American long poem has been an epic of self-discovery in which writers seek to explore their own identities and simultaneously explore national identity. Longfellow, in contrast, wrote long poems that are never autobiographical, but which are serious uplifting moral tales that draw upon pastoral and folk traditions. In short, Longfellow appealed to his own time only; his poetry failed the test of time and was swept away by a new high tide.

There is also another hypothesis that would fit alongside the version of events that sees Longfellow being erased by modernism. Even the most cursory reading of Longfellow's writing shows a man profoundly interested in translation. He was offered a Chair in Modern Languages at a ridiculously early age at Bowdoin, moving to Harvard in 1836. He translated prodigiously from eleven languages, sometimes well, sometimes prosaically and certainly without the flair that would later be shown by his great-nephew, Ezra Pound. But there is a way in which we can see translation as underpinning all his poetry, for in drawing so extensively on different European traditions, from Dante through to Icelandic sagas, Longfellow was endeavouring to create a poetry of plurality, one in which the life of King Olaf of Norway, the story of the Native Ameri-

14 Russell Reising, *The Unusable Past. Theory and the Study of American Literature* (London, New York: Routledge, 1986).

can Hiawatha or a story by Boccaccio could be repackaged for contemporary readers in accessible language and forms. And successful he certainly was, perhaps because in the twentieth century, the period of the great melting-pot theory when America was in the process of receiving polyglot peoples and transforming them into English-speaking Americans it was still good to look back to European traditions and employ those traditions to speak about newness.

The mistake Longfellow made (if we can term it a mistake) was to focus on building bridges between present and past, seeking ways of taking his readers back to their pre-American roots rather than constructing a bridge that would also move them forward into a future. That task was undertaken by Whitman, whose *Leaves of Grass* was to have such a massive impact on Latin American poets and start them on the road that would lead ultimately to the dis-membering of European models. When Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot employed translation, they did so from a modernist position, fearlessly encoding translated texts into their own poetry and looking not to the past, but to the future. Longfellow translated to demonstrate to his countrymen that American writing could be as great as that of the Old World. This was acceptable for a time, but then came to be seen as an embarrassment. As the United States came of age and American writers took up the modernist challenge, Longfellow's respectful homages to European writers of the past no longer appealed to a new generation of readers.

What is curious now is not that Longfellow was rejected by modernism, but that he has not been rediscovered by post-modernism, for if ever there was a writer whose works celebrate pluralism, surely he is one. He sought, particularly in *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, to let his readers hear a whole range of different voices, voices from diverse traditions all absorbed now into the American whole. Longfellow can be seen as a writer who sought to embody Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur*, a writer who transcended linguistic and cultural boundaries and endeavoured to transplant seeds in new soil, to bring older

generations of writers across the Atlantic and to articulate the American experience through popular forms of verse. *The Song of Hiawatha* is a New World version of the Finnish *Kalevala*; *Evangeline* and the *Courtship of Miles Standish* are heroic epics in the Virgilian mode; *Tales of a Wayside Inn* is a rewriting of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and Boccaccio's *Decameron*. All these texts are, in different ways, translations if we understand translation as rewriting. The problem with them is that they reflect a model of translation that belonged to an earlier time.

Unlike de Campos, Longfellow certainly had no perception of translation as a form of cannibalism. He had the greatest respect for the writers whose work he translated, and from whom he borrowed for his own poetry. He was a kind of literary voyager, someone who travelled through the literatures of Europe just as he travelled through the landscapes of Europe too, drawing inspiration from everything he encountered along his way. His links with Europe, his sense of belonging to a whole web of different literary traditions can be seen clearly in his letters and his journals. He delighted in other literatures, and drew upon them with the specific goal of both celebrating American-ness and extending the boundaries of American literature. Nathaniel Hawthorne, in his writing, paid similar homage to Walter Scott, though his subject matter makes this less immediately obvious. Poor Longfellow, with his idealistic notion of *Weltliteratur* through an American filter, came to be seen as too safe, too securely rooted in the Boston middle-class intelligentsia, taking too few risks and not even contemplating sacrilege, let alone devouring anyone. The result is that he has slipped from the apex of Mount Literature and disappeared somewhere below the foothills.

Does this mean that translators should always take risks, be willing to court danger, overtly challenge the *status quo*? This is not an easy question to answer, for there are dangers in straying too far from the source as well. In 1857, in the year that Longfellow was writing letters in praise of the wonders of Paris and French culture to his friend Charles Sumner, Edward Fitzgerald was putting the finishing touches to his translation of

the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, the most successful translation of all time in English literature. Fitzgerald had no qualms about cannibalizing his source. 'It is an amusement to me to take what liberties I like with these Persians', he wrote in 1851, adding that they were not good enough poets and needed 'a little art' (provided by the translator) to shape them into something worthwhile.<sup>15</sup> The problem with Fitzgerald, however, is that he paid so little respect to his source, and unashamedly ranked European literature much higher than Persian or any other non-European tradition. His concept of translation can justly be seen as reflecting the ideology of the imperial Britain of the nineteenth century, and today we would probably find Longfellow's respectful, if imitative, method more acceptable than Fitzgerald's. Here, of course, is the heart of the problem in the relationship between source text and translator: that relationship exists in terms of power dynamics, and when the balance of power tilts too far in one direction or the other, the resulting product will be unbalanced also.

Translation is not, and never has been a 'safe' activity. Translators themselves recognize this: translation involves breaking ice, lifting weights, according to the translators of the Authorized Version; it is both resurrection and sacrilege as we have seen exemplified in the recent translations by Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes. It is dangerous work in no-man's land, dodging bullets fired by both source and target readers. Sometimes a translator can bring a dead writer to life again and enhance both their fame; at other times, as happened with Longfellow, a writer is praised for his polyglottism at first but then derided for the same skills by a different generation. But translation is always of immense importance, for through translation the past is handed on to the future. Translation, like memory is always unfaithful, because no absolutely perfect

15 Edward Fitzgerald, *Poetical and Prose Writings*, Variorum and Definitive edition, vol. 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1902), letter to E. B. Cowell, 20 March, 1857.

memory or absolutely perfect translation can exist. But translation, like memory, writes the future, and it does so through re-writing the past.

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PATRICK O'DONOVAN

# Common Culture and Creativity: Forgetting and Remembering in the Cultural Theory of Michel de Certeau

## A Symbolic Revolution

For Michel de Certeau, May 68 represents both a point of crisis and the possibility of a new beginning. In both of these ways of construing May 68, culture is a central element in play. We shall see presently that these ideas have a bearing on how Certeau conceives of memory both as a social force and as a feature of individual cultural practice. But, to begin with, we shall consider more closely the form which this new beginning itself might be said to take.

In the text with which we shall mainly be concerned, *La Culture au pluriel*, Certeau presents May 68 as an all-encompassing symbolic revolution: symbolic in the sense that it calls into question the relationship between a society and its own system of representation; and all-encompassing, in that this symbolic crisis affects social relations in their entirety.<sup>1</sup> While he concedes in an earlier essay on the same subject that May 68 was *symbolic* also in the sense that it *signified* more than it achieved, the argument that May 68 *mattered* is a constant feature of Certeau's

1 Michel de Certeau, *La Culture au pluriel* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), p. 141. All future references to this work, first published in 1974, will be given in parentheses in the text (with the abbreviation *C.p.*). All renderings into English of this text are taken from the translation published by Tom Conley, *Culture in the Plural* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), abbreviated *CP*.



account of *les événements*.<sup>2</sup> Although May 68 may be presented as not having survived the return to order (with the re-election in June of the government of the right), Certeau insists that a previously tacit system of values is no more: the 'revolution', so to speak, destroys these values, even as it brings them to the surface.

What Certeau presents as the most original theoretical contribution of these events is precisely the central place that they give to the symbol (*P.p.*: 31, 36). The primary place of the symbol is discourse: 'la culture aujourd'hui, ça consiste à parler' [today, culture consists in speaking]. Speech is generally the domain of symbols (a 'lieu symbolique'), but, in the moment of revolution, its function as such is particularized: it comes to be defined more specifically as a space according to the gap between 'les membres d'une société et les modalités de leur association' [the members of a society and the modalities of their association] (*P.p.*: 37). This sudden manifestation of speech as an instrument of disruption is the unmistakable sign of a cultural crisis: 'le ressassement de l'anonyme crée l'analogue d'un "bruit" où la parole a d'abord la forme d'une rupture, d'un trou, d'un blasphème' (*C.p.*: 80) [the recurring emphasis on anonymity creates the analogy of an 'interference' in which speech initially takes the form of a rupture, a gap, or a blasphemy] (*CP*: 34). Speaking is an action in the sense that the primary means which 'fait connaître ce qui se cachait dans l'opacité de la vie sociale' (*C.p.*: 222) [is able to bring forth what had been hidden in the opacity of social life] (*CP*: 146).

The search for a new beginning originates, then, in the crisis. Indeed, it is a means by which the revolutionary impetus is maintained. We can see more clearly how Certeau theorizes the relationship between culture and society by drawing on a

2 Michel de Certeau, *La Prise de parole* (Paris: Seuil 1994), p. 32, cited as *P.p.* (first published in 1968 under the title *La Prise de parole: pour une nouvelle culture*).

number of essentially programmatic statements contained in the preface to *La Culture au pluriel*.<sup>3</sup> Certeau argues that culture may be defined in a traditional frame of reference according to a number of determinate reference-points: author, art-work, sphere of artistic production – in brief, what we might term the characteristic features of the system of ‘high’ culture as a kind of cultural memory. But a fuller understanding of culture as a determinate kind of *travail*, a process of *working through* undertaken within the social space requires what Certeau terms a disappropriation of culture, a break with proper nouns in favour of an engagement with culture as a set of signifying practices (C.p.: 11). Why is this so? Certeau deprecates the closure of the traditional reference-points and insists that determinate structures of this sort will always leave an element of indeterminacy: every place, or *lieu*, represents a form of differentiation which cannot be dissociated from ‘un travail de son autre’ (C.p.: 11) [a labour of its other] (CP: vii). This *travail* is the means by which we can identify culture as signifying practice. Culture is thus conditioned by places, rules, *données*, and represents the proliferation of inventions (those, say, of everyday life) in spaces that are socially constrained (C.p.: 11, 13).

In sum, his commitment to the reappraisal of the existing symbolic space will lead Certeau to adopt a quasi-ethnographic, or ‘culturalist’, perspective on culture as a comprehensive set of social representations:

plutôt qu’un ensemble de ‘valeurs’ à défendre ou d’idées à promouvoir, la culture connote aujourd’hui un travail à entreprendre sur toute l’étendue de la vie sociale. (C.p.: 166)

[today, rather than a sum of ‘values’ that need to be defended or of ideas to be promoted, culture connotes a labour to be undertaken over the entire expanse of social life.] (CP: 102)

3 The 1993 edition of this work, edited by Luce Giard, runs together the prefaces from the original edition of 1974 and the further edition which appeared in Certeau’s lifetime, that of 1980.

Certeau concludes that a crisis of authority emerges where institutions – social and political, as well as cultural – lose their credibility. This claim explains the urgency with which he writes:

les mois à venir exigeront des choix. [...] Cette exigence peut se mesurer au discrédit qui atteint nos 'cadres de référence' officiels et atteste une mutation du 'croyable'. (C.p.: 18)

[the months to come will require hard choices [...] This requirement can be measured by the discredit that infects our official 'frames of reference' and that attests to a mutation of the 'believable'.] (CP: 3)

A system of authority – at once latent and changeable – is the condition of any viable form of social organization. The prevailing set of authorities enables each person to articulate his or her relation both to others and to truth (C.p.: 19). A dual relation – to others and to truth – is the basis of Certeau's account of authority: thus, 'une vérité sans société n'est qu'un leurre. Une société sans vérité n'est qu'une tyrannie' (C.p.: 30) [a truth without a society is merely a lure. A society without a truth is merely a tyranny] (CP: 14). Culture is part of this system: it can be regarded as a 'langage social' and, as we have seen, a cultural crisis (or *schisme*) comes about where there is a dissociation 'entre un langage social et ceux qui renoncent à le parler' (C.p.: 23) [between a social language and those who refuse to speak it] (CP: 8). In a time of crisis, culture may be thought of as a social space of signification according to the possibilities for action that it contains, some of which may appear violent and may have a salutary impact on an existing tacit system of values. A 'violent' act of refusal is magnified precisely because of its singularity: it is an act which 'traverse d'une protestation un univers saturé' (C.p.: 80) [cries out in protest against a saturated universe] (CP: 34). The act of 'making' truth represents, then, a tentative form of agency: it corresponds to the attempt to discover 'les voies de la lucidité et

de l'action' (C.p.: 19) [the issues of lucidity and action] (CP: 4).<sup>4</sup> Symbolic violence is important in that it signals a necessary change. But Certeau insists that an act of this sort remains only a protest, unless it is assumed into a political project. A political project is the context in which this violence can be oriented as a 'travail' that defines its objectives according to the existing state of forces within society (C.p.: 81–2).

Now, if canonical reference-points are in doubt, memory is inevitably affected. Any attempt to preserve the values and institutions of the past runs the risk of sacrificing the commitment to truth – where these values and institutions have become diminished memories of the past – to their residual utility as means of keeping a social system in place (C.p.: 20). A further indication of the denial of a crisis is the ritualized perpetuation of memory:

nous avons trop d'anniversaires et pas assez de présent. Le pays fête des grandeurs et des célébrités qui étaient, hier, des signes de ralliement, mais qui ne le sont plus. (C.p.: 22)

[we have too many commemorations and not enough of the present. The country celebrates the grandeur and the celebrities that used to be rallying points, but that are no more.] (CP: 7)<sup>5</sup>

- 4 Following Husserl, Certeau goes on to argue – more strongly – that action consists in the attempt to 'fonder une société sur des raisons de vivre propres à tous et à chacun' (C.p.: 31) [[base] a society on reasons for living that belong both to *all* and to *each*] (CP: 14). He cites Paul Ricœur's translation of *La Crise de l'humanité européenne et la philosophie* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1977), which contains elements of Husserl's late unfinished work of the mid-1930s, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einteilung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*.
- 5 See Marc Augé, who extends this line of argument to the accumulation of artefacts of memory, stating that the contemporary interest in former ways of life derives from the sense that they convey something of a past that is in fact lost, in *Non-lieux: introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), p. 37.

The dynamics of memory will also have some bearing on how new forms of cultural activity come to emerge and be recognized. Firstly, memory can be closely linked to agency. Thus, the multiple *manières de faire*, or creative ruses practiced by individuals within the vast social space, are of decisive cultural significance, and occupy a particular place within any system of memory: they are presented by Certeau as passing manifestations of an enduring 'mémoire sans langage' [a memory without language].<sup>6</sup> Secondly, the observer can at best apprehend the innumerable mobile sets of tactics that exist in the present only by means of a kind of investigative fiction: the framework in which a given research mission is carried out is the effect of an imaginary projection (for it is impossible to grasp the social space in its entirety), within which any written analytical record captures only fragments of the phenomena under observation. Recorded memories, in any form, are no more than the manifestation of difference: 'de ce que chacun fait, qu'est-ce qui s'écrit? Entre les deux, l'image, fantôme du corps expert et muet, préserve la différence' [of all the things that everyone does, how much gets written down? Between the two, the image, the phantom of the expert but mute body, preserves the difference].<sup>7</sup> What matters most, then, is the

- 6 See Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien*, 1, *Arts de faire*, 2nd edn (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 65, henceforth *Iq* (English version: Steven F. Randall (trans.) *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 40, henceforth *PEL*). Compare the 'mémoire silencieuse et repliée' [silent and withdrawn memory] of the walkers, the *Wandersmänner*, in the city (1, 158; English version, p. 105).
- 7 See *Iq* 1: 67–68 (*PEL*: 42). Certeau draws an important and influential distinction between strategy and tactics, the former being based on the appraisal from a position of relative autonomy of the balance of forces, the latter being a feature of day-to-day social practice, based on the fortuitous exploitation of ephemeral opportunities within a space which remains that of the other (see *Iq* 1: xlvi–xlvii, and also 'Qu'est-ce qu'un séminaire?', *Esprit*, n.s. 11–12 (1978), 176–81 (pp. 179–80)). On the acute problem of how to capture and understand the actions of the individual agent (and, in particular, the difficulty of maintaining a distinction

constant negotiation of our access to culture, the endless process of working through culture that is a constant feature of everyday life; not, in other words, the forms in which culture may happen to be preserved, recorded or transmitted.<sup>8</sup> Memory, as a social force, becomes open to contestation, yet, considered as an element of individual cultural practice, it emerges as a space in which both traces of past events and possibilities of future action may be discerned.

### 'Popular Culture'

Preservation, recording and transmission are central features of any attempt to describe or to recover popular culture, and the longest chapter in *La Culture au pluriel* is devoted to an operation of this sort. Written in common with Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel, it was first published in 1970.<sup>9</sup> The essay is in some part polemical: thus, Certeau, Julia and Revel state in an initial note that what they have in view is the *concept* of popular culture (*C.p.*: 45). Their critique is framed accordingly: 'ce qui est donc en cause, ce ne sont pas des idéologies, ni des options, mais les relations qu'un objet et des méthodes scientifiques entretiennent avec la société qui les permet' (*C.p.*: 47) [the

between the actions of a number of agents and the composite behaviours ascribable to the average), see Augé: 52–3.

- 8 On this distinction, and on resourcefulness and creativity as features of our access to common life, see Michael Sheringham, 'Attending to the Everyday: Blanchot, Lefebvre, Certeau, Perec', *French Studies*, 54 (2000), 187–99 (pp. 191–2).
- 9 Julia and Revel also collaborated with Certeau on a further book: *Une politique de la langue: la Révolution française et les patois* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975). Conley's translation excludes this chapter, which is here quoted according to the translation by Brian Massumi published in Wlad Godzich (ed.), *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 119–36, abbreviated as *H*.

question, then, is not one of ideologies, or of options, but that of the relations of an object and its associated scientific methods to the society that sanctions them] (*H*: 121). Certeau himself does not explicitly establish a relationship between the notion of a symbolic revolution (the act, as we have seen, of bringing what remains unthought – the *impensé* – to the surface) and the act of stating what is at stake in establishing ‘popular culture’ as an object; but a relationship along these lines can clearly be established. For, as he and his co-authors argue at the outset, what the establishment of ‘popular culture’ as an object involves is a *tacit* act of censure: ‘la “culture populaire” suppose une opération qui ne s’avoue pas. Il a fallu qu’elle fût censurée pour être étudiée’ (*C.p.*: 45) [‘popular culture’ presupposes an unavowed operation. Before being studied, it had to be censored] (*H*: 119). Popular culture illustrates a disruption of memory that is the effect of relations of power.

There are four main points to be highlighted here: the identity of *patrimoine* as a kind of memory; the interaction of memory and forgetting; self-contradiction as a feature of the description of ‘popular’ culture, and its converse, namely the avowal of interest as an act of memory; and the bracketing of memory in the recovery of popular culture (or of the past, more generally).<sup>10</sup>

10 It is worth noting that these points all converge also on the problem of the relationship between a branch of knowledge and the *pouvoir* that brings it into being, a topic that connects this essay to Certeau’s own other works on historical method and epistemology. Thus, the critique feeds into the attempt by Certeau, Julia and Revel to characterize history as the discourse whose purpose is to reveal how an act of violence may effectively be at the base of any act of recovery or of memory: ‘l’histoire est en cela, même si elle n’est que cela, le lieu privilégié où le regard s’inquiète’ (*C.p.*: 71) [history is the privileged place where the gaze becomes unsettled, even if it is only that] (*H*: 136). See also *L’Écriture de l’histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), in particular chapters 1 and 2. For the historian, the forgotten is a remainder which can be used to disrupt prevailing representations of the past (see *L’Écriture ...*: 80–1 and 91–2).

Firstly, it is clear, in this context, that any claim of a scientific folklore to recover a cultural *patrimoine* will be controversial. Certeau, Julia and Revel also describe the important folklore movement of the mid-nineteenth century and beyond. The *souci folkloriste* represents an attempt to record and to preserve what is under threat from modernization: 'il veut situer, rattacher, garantir' [its intent was to situate, reconnect, guarantee]. Thus, for Certeau, Julia and Revel, it is inescapably subject to a wider social set of interests: 'son intérêt est comme l'envers d'une censure: une intégration raisonnée' (C.p.: 53) [what it was interested in was almost the opposite of censorship: reasoned integration] (H: 124). Because it is extensible into the present (and can thus represent a fabricated sort of memory), a *patrimoine* may amount in the end to a sanitized version of a distinctively national repertoire, defined historically (according to the establishment of a set of popular themes which contribute to the fabrication of a community within history) and geographically (the cohesion of a given physical space is attested by the dissemination of popular culture) (C.p.: 53). It may amount, in other words, to a kind of *mentalité*.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, the domain of popular culture is of interest to Certeau, Julia and Revel in part because it is inescapably subject to forgetting. In dealing with a number of works published in France during the 1960s devoted to aspects of historical popular culture of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, they conclude that any work of erudition will inevitably contain substantial omissions (the examples of childhood, sexuality and violence are cited).<sup>12</sup> In other words, the areas of life over which

11 See G. E. R. Lloyd, who comments extensively on the tendency of mentalities to confer a false impression of coherence with regard to systems of belief and modes of reasoning that coexist within a given culture, community or individual, in *Demystifying Mentalities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

12 The main contemporary works in question are: Robert Mandrou, *De la culture populaire en France aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Stock, 1964); Geneviève Bollème, *Les Almanachs populaires aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*



these works pass in silence represent a 'géographie de l'oublié' (C.p.: 63) [a geography of the *forgotten*] (H: 131), a ghostly residue of the culture which historical work can never fully recover. The knowledge and assumptions of the historian are distinct from the object on which he or she works. Thus, the historian cannot receive the popular in itself – or least, he/she must guard against concluding that popular culture manifests itself *other than* in a form that allows it to circulate on the margins of a social system which is primarily organized according to the demands of élite culture. Accordingly, 'la culture populaire ne se saisit que sur le mode de la disparition parce que notre savoir nous impose [...] de ne plus l'entendre et de ne plus savoir en parler' (C.p.: 63) [popular culture can only be grasped in the process of vanishing because [...] our knowledge requires us to cease hearing it, to no longer know how to discuss it] (H: 131). The presence of the observer effectively annihilates what is under observation, leading to the abstraction of determinate cultural practices from the historical circumstances of the agents who performed them.

Thirdly, Certeau, Julia and Revel go on to argue that scholarly descriptions of popular culture will tend to lapse into self-contradiction. These contradictions illustrate the tendency of the folklorist or the historian to occult, or to forget, their complicity with the drive to control or to eliminate popular culture. The search for the origins of popular culture exposes the methods of folklore or cultural history to this risk, if we allow the claim that folklore comes into being only because its objects are threatened by extinction. Thus, more recent studies of popular culture, which work within the framework provided by the cultural movement of the nineteenth century, are prone to circular arguments: they 'se donnent pour objet *leur propre origine*' [take as their object *their own* origin]; they 'poursuivent à la surface des textes [...] ce qui est en réalité leur propre

condition de possibilité: l'élimination d'une menace populaire' (C.p.: 59) [they pursue across the surface of texts [...] what is actually their own condition of possibility – the elimination of a popular menace] (H: 128). The same problem affects the explanation of the social functions of popular culture: 'est "populaire" ce qui reflète immédiatement la situation historique du peuple sous l'Ancien Régime' (C.p.: 62) [anything that directly 'reflects' the historical situation of the people under the *ancien régime* is 'popular'] (H: 130). In other words, the supposition of an origin *within* popular culture is taken to validate the descriptions of specific practices which are themselves taken to be popular: 'la culture populaire est supposée là à tous les instants de la démarche qu'elle vient cautionner' (C.p.: 62) [the presence, out there, of popular culture is presupposed at each stage of the process for which it stands as guarantor] (H: 130).

Fourthly, Certeau, Julia and Revel repeatedly argue that the description of popular culture is inevitably bound up with the act of 'violence', the annihilation of precisely this culture, that brings such an enquiry about: this is what is "'oublié" ou dénié' (C.p.: 59) ['forgotten' or denied] (H: 128). In fact, what must be kept in the memory is the act of violence, not the culture which it claims as its object, which remain unrecoverable: 'on ne saurait [...] reprocher à une littérature de s'articuler sur une violence (puisque c'est toujours le cas), mais de ne pas l'avouer' (C.p.: 68) [we cannot reproach a literature for grafting itself upon a prior violence (for that is always the case); but we can reproach it for not admitting it] (H: 134). Thus, how culture is documented and interpreted is a question of current political as well as intellectual interest. The case of 'popular' culture suggests that a claim to continuity with the past may be forged paradoxically by exclusion of the past and, further, that the problem of forgetting extends to the discourse of knowledge that makes this outcome possible.<sup>13</sup> What is at stake in the

13 As Jeremy Ahearne comments, what is at issue is a strategic operation, one 'which substitutes for the effective practices of the vast majority of

process is the perpetuation of cultural memory; but the process itself reveals how the elaboration of any such memory can itself be the effect of powerful forms of forgetting.

## Memory and Creativity

Popular culture can be taken to illustrate a feature of culture generally, namely the manifestation of remainders. Certeau writes, for instance, that 'la gestion d'une société laisse un énorme "reste"' [the management of a society leaves in its midst an enormous 'remainder'], and he goes on precisely to identify the remainder with the notion of culture: 'Sur nos cartes, ça s'appelle culture, flux et reflux de rumeurs sur les plages avancées de la planification' (*C.p.*: 206) [on our maps, *that* is what is called culture. It is the ebb and flow of muffled voices on the architects' blueprints in their advanced stages of drafting] (*CP*: 134). Popular culture is – at best – the remainder of an act of recovery that proceeds from within elite culture and that may well be blind to the circularity of its procedures. It is this concern with what lies beyond any or all grids, maps, schemas, that informs Certeau's account of creativity, within which he sketches an account of memory relative to the dynamics of time and of action, which we shall now go on to consider.

The loss of tradition as a local binding force accentuates the proliferation of heterogeneous signifying practices. At the same time, the social space comes to be more and more minutely mapped, such that there exists no space external to it: 'il n'y a plus d'ailleurs' [there is no longer an elsewhere] (*Iq* I: 65–6; *PEL*: 40). What risks being lost, or forgotten, is the sense that signifying practices allow the individual to situate him or her-

the population a stable set of representations', in *Michel de Certeau: Interpretation and its Other* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 136.

self with reference to a stable local frame of reference. The conviction that the social space is heavily constrained leads Certeau to theorize memory with reference to time. Thus, memory is defined as 'une présence à la pluralité des temps et [qui] ne se limite donc pas au passé' [designates a presence to the plurality of times and is thus not limited to the past] (*Iq* I: 320, n. 7; *PEL*: 218, n. 7). Memory becomes available as a sudden recapitulation which coincides, if only for a moment, with the infinity of lived experience. In mediating the invisible resources of time, memory allows us to transgress for a moment 'la loi du lieu' [the law of the place] (*Iq* I: 129; *PEL*: 85). This memory, in substituting for tradition, operates in a place which is not proper to it, and which it does not seek to possess. It is above all an unpredictable means of responding to the state of things at any given moment.

The predicament of the individual cultural agent flows in part from the existence of powerful agencies (for instance, the system of education, bureaucracies, the media) which fundamentally influence and constrain our cultural activity (even though these entities themselves will become exposed to crises of credibility and of authority if they no longer benefit from the *adhésion* of individual subjects) (*C.p.*: 23, 29). Certeau also claims that culture must be understood within the framework of an anthropology of what is taken to be believable (*une anthropologie de la crédibilité*), that is, the context within which beliefs assume a social significance, and, further, that cultural practices cannot be dissociated from a tactical science bearing on the innumerable range of individual, everyday *manières de faire* (*C.p.*: 12). What Certeau terms creativity thus presupposes a break with 'la culture au singulier': 'la culture au singulier est devenue une mystification politique. Bien plus, elle est mortifère' (*C.p.*: 122) [culture in the singular has become a political mystification. Furthermore, it is deadly] (*CP*: 67). Culture in the singular represents a denial of creativity. By contrast, culture as creative work tends to oscillate between what Certeau terms two 'formes': 'd'un côté, elle est ce qui "permane"; de l'autre, ce qui s'invente' (*C.p.*: 211) [on the one side is what 'permanates'; on

the other, what is invented] (*CP*: 137). The interplay of these forces is a matter of the social *conjoncture*. At a given moment, the pull of each forces is such that it leads us to forget the existence of the other – and further, past and future alike are contained in this cultural oscillation, themselves like half-forgotten rituals, or emergent manifestations that *will* themselves become the object of the characteristically fraught work which is that of memory.

Against the background of this theorization of cultural plurality, it is forgetting, rather than remembering, that may serve as a sign of incipient cultural activity. The manifestation of culture produces a momentary break in the prevailing system of culture. Culture is a kind of variant that introduces a disturbance, an element of play, into a system. It manifests itself a 'un oubli fugitif à l'intérieur des grandes orthodoxies de la mémoire' (*C.p.*: 216) [a fugacious oblivion within the great orthodoxies of memory] (*CP*: 141). Certeau mentions forgetting only in passing, as one of the forms which cultural variation might take. But the essential point is that fleeting forgetfulness is one means by which we can detect the tremor of culture as something unpredictable, disruptive, ephemeral. And forgetting *remains* part of the process, in that these cultural acts are not recuperated so as to become part of a regulated collective memory: 'la création est périssable. Elle passe, car elle est acte' (*C.p.*: 214) [creation is perishable: it passes because it is an act] (*CP*: 140).<sup>14</sup> Under conditions of cultural heteronomy, there may be no activity without forgetting: the *oubli* is only fleeting, but as such is the royal road not simply to provisionality, but to risk. The space of creativity owes its existence to the agent's self-abstraction from memory as a form of social constraint. It is this exclusion of memory that is the means by which Certeau

14 Cf. *Iq* I: 286–7, on recognition, as distinct from appropriation, as the characteristic mode of a desiring engagement with the *périssable* as a manifestation of otherness.

seeks to identify the secret rationale of the innovations of the individual agent:

l'analyse et la pratique de l'innovation dans nos espaces construits ne touchent pas à l'essentiel, qui est aussi le plus fragile: un désir de vivre en perdant les assurances que multiplie chaque société – une folie d'être. (C.p.: 222)

[the analysis and practice of innovation in our constructed spaces do not touch on the essential point, which is also the most fragile: a desire to live while losing the assurances that every society multiplies – a madness of being.] (CP: 147)<sup>15</sup>

If memory and forgetting are significant in Certeau's work, it is in part because they point to the ambiguity of what is common. Memory is inescapably subject to social pressures that have a bearing both on the control of meaning (for instance, those meanings ascribed to the past) and on the regulation of social 'spaces' (as one process among many in the naturalization of a given set of social relations). Forgetting is no less complex a phenomenon: it deprives memory of its lustre, but can also signify an unacknowledged complicity in processes of fabrication and repression. It is within common life that tensions of this sort are played out: *both* memory and forgetting can be a sign of the stultifying power of the culture of the singular, *or* of the emergence of plurality. The processes of tracking memory and forgetting alike enable us to glimpse something of the ambiguity of Certeau's theorization of culture – as a place of agency and creativity, on the one hand, and of contestation and conflict, on the other.

15 See Edgar Morin, who comments on the intensity of Certeau's focus on the existential dimension of culture, within which the activity of the agent comes to be grasped as 'la façon dont est vécu un problème global' [the way in which some all-encompassing problem is lived], in *Sociologie*, 2nd edn (Paris: Fayard, 1994), p. 158.

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ALISON RIBEIRO DE MENEZES

## Purloined Letters: Juan Goytisolo, José María Blanco White, and the Cultural Construction of Marginal Identity

In an interview with the *The Guardian*, the Spanish novelist Juan Goytisolo, well-known for his homosexuality, recently remarked, 'I never go to bed with men of Christian origin. It's almost impossible, because they've come to an open homosexuality out of a long sickness. I was sick for years, and didn't want to meet people who were also sick.'<sup>1</sup> This might be dismissed as an off-the-cuff remark to a journalist, yet, consciously or not, Goytisolo seems to reveal certain personal traits which afford commentators a critical insight into his writing. The books most relevant in this regard are the two volumes of his autobiography, *Coto vedado* (1985) and *En los Reinos de Taifa* (1986), in which Goytisolo recounts his 'cure' into homosexuality which he entwines, on the one hand, with a rejection of the Francoist Spain in which he grew up (and for him founded on an aggressively Christian identity) and, on the other, a consequent whole-hearted acceptance of all things Arab (but not Islam) as a personal religion.

The autobiographical project which Goytisolo undertook in the 1980s was, however, fraught with difficulties. Acutely aware of the pernicious nature of any discourse which claims for itself historical truth (much of Goytisolo's fiction exposes and subverts the foundational myths of Francoist Spain), his task was to develop a means of writing autobiography without resorting to standard orthodoxies (i.e. essentialist views of self,

1 Maya Jaggi, 'Juan Goytisolo: Scourge of the New Spain', *The Guardian*, 12 August 2000. I am grateful to Christopher Fitzpatrick for drawing this article to my attention.



teleological imperatives, or absolutist perspective on the events of his life). This methodological difficulty is reflected firstly in the basic structure of both volumes, consisting of long passages in roman type narrating the events of the author's life, interspersed with italicized sections reflecting on the process of writing autobiography and the problems of memory. It is also reflected in the appeal to a performative approach to identity, for Goytisolo posits the very act of writing the autobiography as a catharsis which will cure him of his 'unhealthy' negation of his homosexuality and, more generally, unhealthy 'Spanish' identity.

In the first italicized section of *Coto vedado*, Goytisolo signals his subversion of conventional autobiographical practice with an anti-teleological approach. His aim is not to explain who he is, but 'quien pudiste ser y no has sido' [who you could have been and are not].<sup>2</sup> Writing his autobiography is to be a 'reconocimiento, cura, desinfección' [recognition, cure, disinfection], which will allow him to 'luchar con uñas y dientes contra el olvido' [fight tooth and nail against oblivion] (*Cv*: 28). However, concealed behind this apparently blithe aim is a more telling one, for Goytisolo hints that his autobiography will bring about a rebirth:

Como la madre frustrada que después de un aborto involuntario busca con impaciencia, a fin de superar el trauma, la forma y ocasión apropiadas a lograr un nuevo embarazo, [siento] la violenta pulsión de la escritura tras largos meses de esterilidad. (*Cv*: 28–9)

[Like the frustrated mother, who, after a miscarriage, seeks impatiently the opportunity to be pregnant again in order to deal with the trauma [I feel] the furious drive of writing after long months of sterility.]

Writing as rebirth is a common theme with Goytisolo, whose fiction constantly seeks to create a marginal position with respect to orthodoxy. However, the presence of the reproduc-

2 *Coto vedado*, 8th edn (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1985), p. 29, hereafter *Cv*. All translations of Goytisolo's works are my own.

tive metaphor in his autobiography indicates that its apparently radical nature is attenuated by a standard conceptual approach, albeit inverted. Indeed, the italicized section from which the above quotations are taken is framed by two standard pieces of autobiographical writing: the details of Goytisoló's father's family which precede it and those of his mother's family which follow it.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, Goytisoló derides his Catholic and middle class origins, revealing that his grandfather's meanness was attenuated only in matters of religion by the purchase of a three-generation Papal indulgence (ironically extending to Goytisoló himself), and contrasting the existence of a family coat of arms with the illegitimate birth of his great-grandfather. Yet, this is not an effective anti-autobiographical tactic since it still attributes to family context the nature of the writer's future development. That he will reject his past is neither here nor there.

Goytisoló lines up his ancestors in either positive or negative camps, depending on their attitude to writing and homosexuality. That these are the two key markers of his future development, as gay and as a rebel writer, emerges only with hindsight, but here is a clear structuring principle. We read that the paternal line represents the bourgeois myth of family origins which is rejected as repressive, unimaginative, authoritarian, and ultimately linked to the political figure of Franco (whom Goytisoló's father supports), while the maternal line contains the seeds of the future 'true' Goytisoló: there is a great-

- 3 Paul Eakin, in *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), notes that negotiation of the line between fiction and factuality has become a topos of twentieth-century autobiography. Notwithstanding the clear self-consciousness of Goytisoló's autobiography, his practice is less nuanced than the work of Sartre and Mary McCarthy, which Eakin discusses, since Goytisoló's autobiography is oriented towards a pressing personal and political objective which entails not a balance between what Eakin terms the 'play of the autobiographical act' and 'the needs of the present consciousness' (p. 5), but the subordination of one to the other.

great-grandmother who wrote a lost novel in the style of Walter Scott; a bohemian uncle who is a nonconformist, a Catalan nationalist, who also has an Irish lover; and finally there is an open-minded, cultured mother whose library of French twentieth-century classics, including works by André Gide, would greatly influence her son.<sup>4</sup> But the most significant figure from the maternal line is arguably grandfather Ricardo, guilty of molesting Goytisolo as a child but treated with considerable sympathy, not because Goytisolo condones his actions but because he pities his situation, forced to conceal true feelings and live a lie.

Goytisolo clearly negotiates two positions here, based loosely on sexuality: on the one hand, we find the centre, representing an authoritarian, masculine position; and on the other, the periphery, a repressed, feminine position.<sup>5</sup> This is self-consciously developed in Freudian terms, with the autobiography enacting the assassination of the father and his values by virtue of the assassination not only of Goytisolo's natural father but also of Franco as a symbol of authoritarianism, to the triumph of the mother, and more generally through her the feminine principle in the form of writing, homosexuality, Arab culture, and, ultimately, marginality itself.<sup>6</sup> (Interestingly, Goytisolo attributes writing to his mother's family line, but in an earlier novel, *Juan sin Tierra*, he had characterized it as an exclu-

4 Goytisolo significantly makes reference to Gide's autobiography, a key homosexual text, in his 'Presentación crítica de José María Blanco White', discussed below. See *Obra inglesa de José María Blanco White* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1972), p. 13, hereafter *Oi*.

5 This recalls Toril Moi's definition of 'femininity' as marginal discourse, unmarked in biological terms. See her 'Feminist, Female, Feminine', in Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (eds), *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 104–16.

6 This view of the father figure is developed by Cristina Moreiras Menor, 'Juan Goytisolo, F.F.B. y la fundación fantasmal del proyecto autobiográfico contemporáneo español', *Modern Language Notes*, 111 (1996), 327–45 (p. 332).

sively male act: the phallic pen, the virgin page, and the seminal ink.) Nevertheless, there are several factors which reveal Goytisolo's lapse from effective subversion of the autobiographical form: first, his allusion to an 'authentic' self; second, the emergence of anagnorisis at the end of *Coto vedado*; third, and most significant of all, the general association of religion, sexuality, and a position of marginality evident in the opening quotation.<sup>7</sup> In relation to the first and second of these, we read of Goytisolo visiting Cuba and being introduced as a revolutionary thinker. He recounts how he felt this to be a false identity which left in him a 'un brusco e imperioso afán de autenticidad' [a brusque and imperious desire for authenticity] (*Cv*: 140). This authentic identity clearly emerges – in a teleological move which the autobiography claims to desist from, but in fact enacts – when, in a final act of recognition while touring impoverished southern Spain, he experiences the 'deslumbramiento epifánico' [epiphanic enlightenment] of his sense of empathy with the down-trodden peasants and their all-too prevalent Arab connections. The trip to this 'tierra casi africana' [almost African territory] acquires the 'aura iniciática' [initiatory aura] of a second birth (*Cv*: 275).

More troubling for the performative approach to identity, however, is Goytisolo's association of religion and sexuality. Goytisolo views his 'coming out' as a cure, that is to say, as the correction of an earlier deviant sexuality, and, consequently, falls into the trap of adopting the same oppositional thinking as those he would class as absolutist, illiberal, and repressive. This oppositional thinking extends to cultural perceptions of the Spanish imagination. In Spanish history, race, religion, and sexuality are inextricably linked at the supposed moment of the emergence of the nation's identity. According to Goytisolo's scheme, the expulsion of the Moors during the Reconquista

7 Space precludes discussion of *En los Reinos de Taifa*, where Goytisolo continues the autobiographical project established in *Coto vedado*; it is the initial formulation of that project which is of greatest interest here.

places heterosexual (or 'normal') *cristianos viejos* with *limpieza de sangre* (a pure Hispanic blood-line, free from Jewish or Moorish contamination) in a position superior to the Infidel, who is of tainted blood and indulges in 'deviant' homosexual practices. Goytisolo simply adopts the second identity offered by this cultural binary. He thus blunts his rebellion by retaining an oppositional politics without effectively adopting, or, in his most recent formulation of it in *Carajicomedia*, 'transmigrating' to a position of marginality.<sup>8</sup>

'Transmigrating' is a rather awkward term, but it does serve to emphasize the notion of autobiography and, by extension, literary criticism as a form of self-knowledge or, in the words of Paul de Man, an 'alternating process of mutual interpretation'.<sup>9</sup> It also throws light on Goytisolo's formulation of a marginal identity, arguably the central aim of all his work (whether fictional, autobiographical, or literary critical) from a new, and not exclusively autobiographical, angle. In other writings, and especially in *Reivindicación del Conde don Julián*, Goytisolo appeals to earlier 'heterodox' figures from Spanish literature and history; thus, the traitor Julián, supposedly responsible for the Moorish invasion of the peninsula, becomes Goytisolo's alter ego, and Cervantes, Góngora, Quevedo, and Luis de León are all turned into literary rebels.<sup>10</sup> None of this is concealed; certainly it is intertextuality at work, but not a case of Bloom's Freudian 'anxiety of influence'. Goytisolo's 'slipping into' the figures of famous (and at times not so famous) Spanish writers, seems endemic to his fiction; rather curiously, it also

8 In *Carajicomedia* Goytisolo acknowledges the source of this idea to be Antonio Enríquez Gómez's pseudo-picaresque work of 1644, *Vida de don Gregorio Guadaña*.

9 Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 9.

10 This aspect of Goytisolo's fiction is discussed in detail in my 'Dissidence and the Spanish Literary Tradition in the Later Novels of Juan Goytisolo, 1970–1988' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford, 1996).

occurs in his literary criticism, where he does not hide sources but uses them as camouflage to conceal something else. Again, Paul de Man seems relevant here, remarking that ‘the observation and interpretation of others is always also a means of leading to the observation of self’ (de Man: 9). This sense of duplicity, as we shall see, operates at the heart of Goytisolo’s literary criticism and reinforces the autobiographical project of *Coto vedado*.

In 1971 Goytisolo published a Spanish translation of selected works by the early nineteenth-century Spanish exile, José María Blanco White (1775–1841), who spent much time in England. Concluding his critical introduction to the volume, Goytisolo wrote:

Acabo ya y sólo ahora advierto que al hablar de Blanco White no he cesado de hablar de mí mismo. Si algún lector me lo echa en cara y me acusa de haber arrimado el ascua a mi sardina, no tendré más remedio que admitir que la he asado por completo. Pero añadiré en mi descargo que resulta difícil, a quien tan poco identificado se siente con los valores oficiales y patrios, calar en una obra virulenta e insólita como la que a continuación exponemos sin caer en la tentación de compenetrarse con ella y asumirla, por decirlo así, como resultado de su propia experiencia. (*Oi*: 98)

[Now, as I finish, I have just noticed that while talking of Blanco White I have not stopped talking about myself. If any reader wants to throw this back in my face and accuse me of having attended only to number one,<sup>11</sup> I can only admit that this is more than the case. But I will add in my defence that it is difficult for someone who identifies so little with the official values of the patria to soak up such a virulent and vicious body of works without falling into the temptation of completely absorbing it and taking it over, so to speak, as if it were the result of one’s own experience.]

11 This is the sense of this delightful Spanish idiom, but it loses much of the flavour (literally!) of ‘arrimar el ascua a mi sardina’, which verbatim means ‘to bring the hot coal closer to my sardine’.

Martin Murphy, Blanco White's biographer, calls this a 'brilliant case of iconoclastic special pleading'.<sup>12</sup> In opposition to any supposed distanced objectivity in his criticism, Goytisolo recognizes his own mental process of becoming Blanco, but in an aggressively unapologetic manner and at the end of his essay. This changes the light in which we go on to read Blanco. Goytisolo, in presenting selections from his works, is in fact presenting his own position, for editing is never a neutral form of interpretation. Goytisolo's 'editing', in this instance is, in fact, textual appropriation. The extracts from Blanco's works become, to borrow a phrase, 'purloined letters', quite literally indeed, since four of the selected passages are from Blanco's *Letters from Spain*.

It might seem as if Goytisolo's treatment of Blanco exemplifies de Man's argument since, to quote de Man,

both parties tend to fuse into a single subject as the original distance between them disappears. [It is] no longer clear who is analysing and who is being analysed.

The result, says de Man, is 'vertige, a dizziness of the mind caught in an infinite regression' (de Man: 10). To illustrate briefly: in translating his letters (and it is possible to speculate on the possible meanings of translation in the present context), Goytisolo becomes Blanco, but ... those very *Letters from Spain* were themselves written under an assumed identity. Signed 'Leucadio Doblado', Blanco explained that Leucadio derives from the Greek meaning 'white', and Doblado indicates the repetitive Blanco White of his surname. The doubling is also, of course, an indication of the use of a pseudonym. But Blanco was more of an impostor than that, for, in a preface worthy of Cervantes in the games it plays with the reader, he admits that the letters supposedly written from Spain were in fact composed in England. Goytisolo thus camouflages himself behind

12 Martin Murphy, *Blanco White: Self-Banished Spaniard* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 204.

someone who is already an impostor. This comparison could be pursued even further by considering the parallels between Blanco's satire of Spain in his letters and Goytisolo's satire of the Spain of his time in, for example, the novel *Juan sin Tierra*. Mocking the notion of *limpieza de sangre*, Blanco writes,

I verily believe, that were St. Peter a Spaniard, he would either deny admittance into heaven to people of tainted blood, or send them to a retired corner, where they might not offend the eyes of the old Christians.<sup>13</sup>

Then there is Blanco's cynical description of the execution of a nobleman and his 'posthumous' friends who paid for the conduct of the execution, assuring themselves that afterwards his certificate of noblesse would reflect on them. Lastly, the bullfight, according to Blanco, can only be enjoyed with 'feelings [...] greatly perverted' (Doblado: 158). Such preoccupations with purity of blood, the honour code, and national spectacles form the three main elements of the satirical 'auto da fé as tourist attraction' in part IV of *Juan sin Tierra*, a spectacle which apparently suffers under a lack of suitably 'qualified' victims since the censorship of the Regime has improved the moral health of Spain so significantly.

Goytisolo, in the construction of his marginal identity, adopts the position of a game-playing impostor. Yet, can one say that this does really constitute vertige, 'the endless oscillation of an intersubjective demystification [and] the disappearance of the self as constitutive subject'? (de Man: 11–12) Arguably, the marginal self which Goytisolo refracts through the mirror of earlier writers is not fragmented to the point of vertigo, but rather represents a self-conscious attempt by him to blind the reader (and possibly himself) to the existence of a rather more traditional autobiographical project in his writings taken as a whole: the creation of a unified, self-constituting marginal subject. Goytisolo superficially suggests that the self is

13 Doblado, *Letters from Spain* (London: Colburn, 1822), pp. 30–1.



a construct of language, the transitory and mutable product enacted and re-enacted during each and every writing process. In short, he apparently follows a structuralist/post-structuralist line, behind which he conceals an existentialist position and intention.<sup>14</sup> This is reflected in the contradictions in his autobiography noted at the beginning of this paper, and in the slippage between his roles as critic and 'subjective reader' in the essay on Blanco White. It is evident, too, in other contradictions which critics have highlighted in Goytisolo's fiction: his demythification of Francoist national identity based on an oppositional politics which, say his many detractors, simply reinforces the mythical paradigm he claims to subvert;<sup>15</sup> his appeal to a 'lenguaje sin historia' [language without history/story] in politically committed fiction;<sup>16</sup> and, we might add, his humanitarian concerns which reveal a personal sense of the suffering of his fellow man rather than pure textual play. But there is one final contradiction, namely Goytisolo's use of a particular metaphor for the writing process which, rather than excluding the figure of the author, in fact inscribes him at the centre of the text.

- 14 The prevailing critical trend has been to place Goytisolo's work within a structuralist and post-structuralist frame. See, for example, Stanley Black, *Juan Goytisolo and the Poetics of Contagion: The Evolution of a Radical Aesthetic in the Later Novels* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000); and Brad Epps, *Significant Violence: Oppression and Resistance in the Narratives of Juan Goytisolo, 1970–1990* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). One of the few critics to offer an existentialist view is Michael Ugarte in *Trilogy of Treason: An Intertextual Study of Juan Goytisolo* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982).
- 15 The bibliography in this regard is large, but the single best formulation of the argument is to be found in Jo Labanyi, *Myth and History in the Contemporary Spanish Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 196–214.
- 16 This is a fundamental problem. As de Man notes (p. 12), 'The task of structuralist literary critics [is] quite clear: in order to eliminate the constitutive subject, they have to show that the discrepancy between sign and meaning (*signifiant* and *signifié*) prevails in literature in the same manner as in everyday language.'

In bringing his essay on Blanco to a close, Goytisolo includes a passage which would later find its way into his fiction:

En el silencio denso, la mariposa nocturna ronda en torno a la lámpara: gira, planea, describe círculos obsesivos, se aleja si la espantamos, pero vuelve en seguida, una vez y otra y otra, hacia el fulgor que la fascina y atrae, absorbe en su alucinada tarea, hasta obligarnos a ceder por cansancio – así, desde el instante en que empuñamos la pluma, la idea fantasmal, reiterada, surge y nos acomete, se desvanece cuando la rechazamos, regresa tenaz y muda, con la certeza de su victoria paciente, sabedora de nuestro cansancio. Nos resignamos, pues: la acogemos. El paralelo entre los dos escritores se impone: ¿por qué nos resistiríamos a trazarlo? (*Oi*: 79)

[In the dense silence, the moth hovers around the lamp: it spins, flutters, traces out obsessive circles, flies away if we frighten it, but returns at once, again and again and again, towards the brightness which fascinates and attracts it, absorbed in its deluded task, until we have to give up with weariness – likewise, from the moment that we pick up the pen, the vague idea springs up repeatedly and takes hold of our minds, disappears when we reject it, yet returns silent and insistent, sure of its patient victory, fully aware of our weariness. So we resign ourselves, take up the idea. The parallel between the two writers imposes itself: why resist setting it out?]

The second writer with whom Blanco is here conflated is the poet Luis Cernuda. Merging Blanco and Cernuda as archetypal *déracinés*, Goytisolo passes for yet another Spaniard whose letters he also steals – Cernuda's use of the term *Sansueña*, for example, will appear frequently in Goytisolo's works.<sup>17</sup> And Cernuda himself adopts a form of doubling in his poetry which Goytisolo develops in *Señas de identidad* and *Don Julián*. But the link between Goytisolo's literary criticism and his fiction is closer yet, for the image of the moth circling the light in the

17 *Juan sin Tierra* is particularly relevant in this context, since in that novel Goytisolo adopts Cernuda's use of *Sansueña* as a derogatory name for Spain. For more on this, see my article, "'En el principio de la literatura está el mito": Reading Cervantes through Juan Goytisolo's *Reivindicación del Conde don Julián* and *Juan sin Tierra*', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 77 (2000), 587–603 (pp. 593–4).

above passage is echoed in *Juan sin Tierra*, the title of which recalls John Lackland or Jean Sans Terre, the legendary figure of exile who acts as a symbolic point of convergence – the light around which fly the dissident moths of Goytisolo's personalized canon of exiles.<sup>18</sup> In his most recent novel, *Carajicomedia*, about which much could be said on the subject of overlapping fiction, autobiography, and literary criticism, these dissidents, in a reversal of the mystical idiom, and in an echo of the opening quotation of this study, become the 'cured', 'healthy' saints of a homosexual literary tradition.

In *Carajicomedia* Goytisolo presents us with an enigmatic

personaje descrito en el capítulo V de *En los reinos de Taifa*, obra de mi amigo y discípulo barcelonés, padrastro y no padre de su autobiografía novelada.<sup>19</sup>

18 The lines from *Juan sin Tierra* (Barcelona: Mondadori, 1994) are as follows: 'en el silencio del escritorio-cocina la mariposa nocturna ronda en turno a la lámpara: gira, planea, describe círculos obsesivos, se aleja cuando la espantas pero vuelve en seguida, una vez y otra vez y otra, hacia el fulgor que la fascina y atrae, absorbe en su alucinada tarea, desdeñosa de tus manotadas: así, desde el instante en que regresas del baño, la idea fantasmal, reiterada surge y te acomete, se desvanece cuando la rechazas, porfía, tenaz y muda, con la certeza de su victoria paciente, sabedora de su inmediato cansancio : te resignas, pues, y la acoges: la soledad propicia su vuelo y el paralelo, a todas luces, se impone: por qué te resistirás aún a trazarlo?' (p. 203) [In the silence of the kitchen-study the moth circles the light: it spins, flutters, traces out obsessive circles, flies away when you frighten it but returns immediately afterwards, again and again and again, towards the brightness which fascinates and attracts it: absorbed in its deluded task, scornful of your hands waving it away: and so, from the moment when you return from the bathroom, the vague idea, springs up repeatedly and takes hold of your mind, disappears when you reject it, yet continues to insist silently again, sure of its victory, fully aware of your immediate weariness: so you resign yourself and take it up: the solitude is propitious for its flight, and the parallel imposes itself upon you mind: why resist setting it out?]

19 *Carajicomedia* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2000), p. 27.

[character described in chapter V of *En los reinos de Taifa*, a work of my Barcelonan friend and disciple, who is the step-father rather than father, of his own novelised autobiography.]

The friend is Goytisolo himself, and the literary echo is, of course, the prologue to part I of the *Quixote* – Cervantes as step-father, not father, of Don Quijote. Its presence signals a game of fiction and reality which is less an opposition between the two terms than an exploration of their ambiguous overlapping. Goytisolo both claims and refutes authority for the authorship of his autobiography, declared now to be novelized fifteen years after its original publication as authentic. Is this mere backtracking and gratuitous play? Apparently not, since Cervantes' original trick was really intended to have the paradoxical effect of reminding his reader just how good an author he was. Goytisolo, likewise, gives us a glimpse here of a more profound feature of his writing, and one which has rarely been brought to light: the project of creating a self which can withstand both the buffeting of the Franco regime (now gone, but still present in Goytisolo's vision of the Spanish cultural imagination), and the pull of contemporary literary theory.

These two forces pull in opposite directions, leading the author to embrace structuralism, psychoanalysis, and even post-structuralism, yet confronting him with the erasure of the individual subject which each of these discourses implies. For Goytisolo, the creation of a constellation of dissidents is no mere intertextual gimmick. It is a means to realize his own 'destiny' (a teleological initiative) in the wake of the attempts of others to do precisely the same. 'La nostalgia de lo que pudo ser y no ha sido,' he writes, 'ha conducido a algunos de los españoles más lúcidos a enfrentarse con la historia de su propio país y afirmar su propio destino en oposición a aquélla' (*Oi*: 97). [The nostalgia of what might have been has led some of the most enlightened Spaniards to confront the history of their own country and to affirm their own destiny in opposition to it]. Hence in his own autobiography he sets out to write the life of 'quien pudiste ser y no has sido' [those you could have been and are not].

Goytisoló's task is complicated by the search for a marginal personal identity which ultimately prevents him from deconstructing that marginal self. As with gender politics and feminism, each of which has confronted a dilemma between the usefulness of a post-structuralist attack on authoritative meta-narratives, weighed against the need to retain a unified self for the success of the project of identity politics, Goytisoló finds himself caught between post-structuralist writing techniques and existential aims.<sup>20</sup> The desire to resolve this leads to the activity of transmigration as a form of cover up. The adoption of the position of various marginal writers and other figures superficially suggests a fragmented identity, and thus disguises the fundamental core of marginality which, in Goytisoló's eyes, they all, embody. That core identity as archetypal *déraciné* is the light around which Goytisoló's heroic rebels hover in his canon of dissidence, developed throughout his entire work and disguised behind rampant and flagrant intertextuality at almost every turn.

20 The outline of existentialism given by Brian Morris in *Western Conceptions of the Individual* (Oxford: Berg, 1991) reflects Goytisoló's personal and humanistic/humanitarian concerns. Morris notes that for the existentialist thinker, 'the quest for authentic selfhood centres on the meaning of *personal being*' (p. 362), and that one finds predominant in existentialist writings 'such themes as freedom, choice and responsibility, [...] guilt, alienation, despair, boredom, death and loneliness' (p. 361).

## Part 5: Remembering as Trauma

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TOM QUINN

## Rewriting Memory: The Great War in Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit*

The memory of the Great War has been remarkably persistent, as is testified by the continuing observance of Armistice Day, 11 November, the day in 1918 on which it ended. Over the last twenty years, novels, history books, internet sites and TV series have all striven to represent a conflict which shaped the twentieth century and which lies at the root of modern consciousness and modern memory.<sup>1</sup> But it is still difficult to contemplate the Great War and to determine just what is its truth. There are so many truths on offer. Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1932) is one of those truths.<sup>2</sup>

*Voyage* is one of the most striking literary responses to the Great War. Written a decade after the war, Céline's novel revisits his own war past in a fictional, pseudo-autobiographical setting. His narrative of past and self, however, appears to owe little to the facts of his experience. Indeed, his fictional self-portrait as the coward, Bardamu, is astonishing from someone who was a decorated hero of the Great War. So, why does Céline rewrite his past the way he does? The answer lies in the nature of the war itself and in the trauma that flowed from it. This chapter will examine Céline's rewriting of self in *Voyage* by placing it within the context of a war that marked a transition from heroic to debased consciousness. It describes Céline's own

- 1 At present Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) is the most eloquent statement of the view that modern memory has emerged from the Great War.
- 2 Quotations from *Voyage au bout de la nuit* are from the folio edition (Paris: Gallimard, 1952). The title of the work has been abbreviated throughout to *Voyage* (V). All translations are my own.



war experience before going on to examine how remembered trauma contributed to a rewriting of self which would place Céline and *Voyage* at odds with his own war past and with the official commemoration of the Great War. It concludes that Céline's self-portrait as Bardamu draws on both remembering and forgetting in order to rewrite a traumatic past and to denounce the redemptive myth enshrined in commemoration.

## The Great War

In 1914 a generation of young men left for war on a wave of enthusiasm. Enthusiasm for what? For transcendence. For heroism. 'Parce qu'il est le seul à pouvoir regarder la mort dans les yeux, seul le soldat est un homme libre' [because only he can look death in the eyes, the soldier alone is a free man], wrote one soldier at the outset of war.<sup>3</sup> In the heat of battle, standing face to face with death, the soldier would become a death-conquering hero. 'Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with his hour', wrote the adored and doomed English poet Rupert Brooke, conjuring visions of purity, youth and athleticism out of his coming rendezvous with death.<sup>4</sup> Just a couple of years later, Wilfred Owen's poem 'Dulce et Decorum Est' would mark the ironic transition from Brooke's heroic anticipation to his own awful disillusionment, in its 'guttering, choking, drowning' description of a soldier dying from gas poisoning, and its final denunciation of the old lie: 'dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.'<sup>5</sup> This ironic divide also marked the individual

3 Letter of Richard Hoffman, soldier in the German army, in *Paroles de poilus: lettres et carnets du front 1914–1918* (Paris: Librio, 1998), p. 21.

4 Rupert Brooke, 'Peace', in Paul Fussell (ed.), *The Bloody Game: An Anthology of Modern Warfare* (London: Scribners, 1991), p. 37.

5 Wilfred Owen, 'Dulce et Decorum Est', *The Poets of the Great War*, 1997, CD NA 210912.

soldier. It is perfectly illustrated by the dual representation of self in German painter Otto Dix's self-portraiture, from his early resplendent and violent 'Mars', to his fatuous dupe 'Practice Target' shortly after he had gained some real knowledge of war.<sup>6</sup> Céline too was marked by this divide.

The consequences of the Great War were ironic. What began in enthusiasm ended in humiliation and death. If previous wars had been vertical, with the upright warrior-soldier nobly facing his enemy, the Great War was horizontal, debasing the soldier, forcing him down into the earth, burying him in trenches. The War, mechanized beyond belief, disposed of heroes with consummate ease. It was only weeks old when on one day in August 1914, 27,000 French soldiers were killed.<sup>7</sup> This set the tone for what was to follow. Over 500,000 soldiers, German and French, were killed during the year-long battle of Verdun in 1916.<sup>8</sup> 20,000 British soldiers were killed on the first day of the Somme, 1 July 1916.<sup>9</sup> 10,000 German soldiers were killed in a single explosion of mines on 7 June 1917 at Messines in Belgium (Gilbert: 336), a site now adorned by a Peace Tower commemorating the Irish dead of the Great War. These unimaginable, unprecedented figures were complemented by others, the hundreds of thousands of mutilated, without arms, without legs, without faces. In France alone, there were 15,000 unemployable *gueules cassées* [broken faces] who survived the war, often living in segregated housing in the countryside.<sup>10</sup> It

6 Both self-portraits by Otto Dix were painted in 1915, the first while he was still in training in Dresden and the second after he had arrived on the French front.

7 This figure is taken from Jean Jacques Becker and Serge Bernstein's *Victoire et frustrations 1914–1918* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), p. 34. The date was 22 August.

8 Jean-Jacques Becker, 'Mourir à Verdun', *L'Histoire*, 76 (March 1985), 18–29, p. 24.

9 The figure is from Martin Gilbert, *The First World War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994), p. 541.

10 Sophie Delaporte, '15,000 Gueules Cassées', *L'Histoire*, 225 (October 1998), p. 40.

was this horror of mangled heroic identity that Pat Barker caught in the climax of her *Regeneration* trilogy, when she described a soldier whose face has been blown away, repeating unintelligibly the words 'It's not worth it!'.<sup>11</sup> The Great War was the death knell of the hero. A generation of them had been sacrificed in a new, mechanized paradigm of warfare. Heroic identity lay ruined and disfigured. The belief that 'it was not worth it' was not an uncommon one.

## Céline at War

Céline's real name was Louis Destouches. Born in 1894, at twenty he was a regular soldier, having enlisted in 1912 in the twelfth Cuirassiers cavalry regiment. When war broke out Céline was among the first soldiers to head north to meet the Germans. Held in reserve, awaiting the crucial moment to intervene, the cavalry were the privileged spectators at the birth of the twentieth-century horror. 'On est puceau de l'Horreur, comme on l'est de la volupté.' [You are a virgin to horror, as you are to sex], Céline's narrator and double Bardamu says in *Voyage* (V: 22). Destouches's own loss of virginity to horror came at the Battle of the Marne in September 1914. It is impossible to say exactly what he saw, but he wrote the following to his family: 'Je n'ai jamais vu et je ne verrai jamais autant d'horreur [...] Les morts sont remplacés continuellement par les vivants.'<sup>12</sup> [I have never seen and never will see again so much horror [...] The dead are constantly joined by the living].

Céline saw three months of this horror. His war ended in the last week of October 1914, just before the descent into trenches would lead to a seemingly endless stalemate in battle-

11 Pat Barker, *The Ghost Road* (London: Viking, 1995), p. 274.

12 Cited in François Gibault, *Céline: Le temps des espérances* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986), p. 140.

conditions and create the Great War's most enduring image. For historian Jean-Jacques Becker, it is these first months of the war which most deserve the word 'carnage' (Becker: 24). By Christmas the French regular army had been all but wiped out.<sup>13</sup> The cavalry was defunct.<sup>14</sup> By October, Céline was a dismounted cavalryman crawling on the ground beneath enemy bombardments. On 27 October, he volunteered under dangerous conditions to deliver a message on foot to a fighting regiment. On his return a bullet caught him in the right arm smashing the bone.<sup>15</sup> He walked eight kilometres to the field ambulance before being transported to the field hospital at Hazebrouck. There he was operated on, refusing an anaesthetic for fear his arm would be amputated. A day later his father found him in a fever and clearly suffering from trauma:

Nous l'avons trouvé assez déprimé [...] La mort de plusieurs bons camarades l'a particulièrement affecté [...] La vision de toutes les horreurs dont il a été le témoin traverse constamment son cerveau. (Gibault: 147–8)

[He is quite depressed [...] The death of several good comrades has particularly upset him [...] The vision of all the horrors he has seen is constantly in his mind.]

The word horror, which we have seen repeatedly, is not without significance in any evocation of a Céline traumatized by his war experience. As Louis Crocq, a specialist on war trauma, writes:

L'horreur [...] désigne un sentiment complexe où l'on saisit que les limites de ce qui est tolérable à voir sont dépassées et où les valeurs

- 13 Gilbert: 122, gives figures of 300,000 dead and 600,000 wounded, captured or missing for the French army at the end of 1914.
- 14 See Marc Ferro, *La Grande Guerre: 1914–1918* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969) pp. 92–3, for an account of the cavalry's demise during the Great War.
- 15 Jean Bastier, *Le Cuirassier blessé* (Tusson: du Lérot, 1999) is the definitive account of Céline's experience in war. See pp. 289–315 for a detailed account of his wounding.

morales les plus sacrées sont bafouées [...] L'horreur apporte avec elle quelque chose d'incompréhensible, d'inexplicable et d'indicible. En ce sens, c'est elle qui nous paraît le mieux adhérer au vécu traumatique.<sup>16</sup>

[Horror [...] is a complex response where the person who experiences it feels that the limits of what is acceptable to see have been crossed and where the most sacred moral values are swept aside [...] Horror brings with it something of the incomprehensible, the inexplicable and the unspeakable. In this sense, it appears closest to the lived experience of trauma.]

Céline's war ended when he was wounded. After months of convalescence he was discharged from the army. He was cited for bravery in the regimental record and was awarded a military medal for heroism.<sup>17</sup> One of his superiors wrote of him: 'Le courage de votre fils a été admirable. Depuis le début de la guerre on le trouve d'ailleurs partout où il y a du danger, c'est son bonheur!' (Gibault: 151–2) [Your son's courage has been admirable. From the start of the war he was always to be found wherever there was danger. That's what made him happy!]

In war, Destouches had distinguished himself. His war was now over. During the next few years he travelled to London and Africa, far from the theatre of war. The war went on however, in all its horror. When it ended on 11 November 1918, 1,394,388 French soldiers had been killed, one in ten of France's able-bodied males, 20% of French soldiers who had taken part in combat. Of Céline's generation, born in 1894, one in three had been killed.<sup>18</sup>

16 Louis Crocq, *Les traumatismes psychiques de guerre* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1999), pp. 23236–7.

17 This citation is recorded in the *Journal des Marches et Opérations du 12<sup>e</sup> cuirassiers*, a hand-written day-to-day record of the regiment's movements and actions, held in the Military Archives at the Château de Vincennes near Paris. The citation is given in the entry for 29 October 1914. The entry dated 4 December 1914 notes that Destouches has been awarded a medal.

18 These figures are taken from Olivier Faron, 'Une catastrophe démographique', *L'Histoire*, 225 (October 1998), 46–8.

## The Trauma of Remembering

While the war continued, Céline watched it from afar. From Africa he wrote to his childhood friend, Simone Saintu. His tone is anything but heroic:

Presque tous ceux avec lesquels je suis parti en campagne, sont tués, les rares qui subsistent sont irrémédiablement infirmes, enfin, quelques autres comme moi, errent un peu partout, à la recherche d'un repos et d'un oubli.<sup>19</sup>

[Almost all of those who left with me for war have been killed, the few who remain are irremediably weakened, finally there are those like me who are always on the move, seeking respite and to forget.]

Céline's letters from Africa reveal the divide that has opened between the now twenty-two year old and his past heroic self. He openly detests the war. 'Je ne vous cache pas que la guerre me répugne' [I won't hide from you that I find the war repugnant], he writes (Letter of 22 August 1916, CC 4: 76–8 [78]). And in a style and language anticipating *Voyage* he attacks the notions of heroism and sacrifice:

Je prétends que la plupart des malheureux qui font acte de courage, accusent une pénurie tout au moins de représentation de l'idée de la mort. (Letter of 27 September 1916, CC 4: 104–5 [104])

[I claim that most of those unfortunates who perform courageous acts, lack the ability, at the very least, to form any representation of the idea of death.]

It is impossible not to hear in these pronouncements the voice of the future Bardamu when he asks: 'Étais-je donc le seul à avoir l'imagination de la mort dans ce régiment?' [Was I the only one in the regiment who could imagine death?] (V: 30). Or

19 Letter of 31 July 1916, Jean-Pierre Dauphin (ed.), *Cahiers Céline 4* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), pp. 60–7 (p. 61), hereafter CC 4.

when he tells us: ‘j’étais devenu devant tout héroïsme verbal ou réel, phobiquement rébarbatif.’ [I had developed a phobic repulsion from all heroism, verbal or real] (V: 69). It will be another sixteen years however, before Bardamu speaks on Céline’s behalf.

Céline’s wartime encounter with death led to the dissolution of his heroic identity. ‘La mort qu’on ne leurre pas a rompu ce pernicious charme.’ [Death, which cannot be cheated, broke that pernicious spell], he writes to Saintu (Letter of 31 July 1916, CC 4: 62). His vision of the war encompasses the futility of heroism. Courage, he realizes, has no place in a war dominated by machinery. In a letter to his father, he writes: ‘nous faisons la guerre selon le mode qui nous est imposé [...] nous avons le courage d’il y [a] deux siècles, et eux, font la guerre d’aujourd’hui’ (Letter of 30 August 1916, CC 4: 83–8 [86]). [We are fighting the war in a manner imposed on us [...] we have the courage of two centuries ago, while they, they fight today’s war]. The adversarial tone of this last letter, its opposition of ‘we’ and ‘they’, clearly accuses those who commanded the war, leaders and generals who sacrificed the courage of their soldiers. Céline’s self-portrait as the coward Bardamu in *Voyage*, when it appeared in 1932, will bear the mark, not just of his own lost heroic identity, but of this accusation, now directed towards the official war memory of the French Republic.

## The Myth of the War Experience

Céline tried to forget. For long years he was silent. ‘Read Barbusse’, he would say when asked about the war. Henri Barbusse’s *Le Feu* of 1916 had broken new ground in its efforts to tell the horrible truth about the war.<sup>20</sup> However, the trauma of

20 Henri Barbusse, *Le Feu* (Paris: Flammarion, 1916).

memory persisted. More than sixty years later, Céline's ex-wife, Edith Follet, insisted on his trauma, remembering his silence and unhappiness whenever the war was mentioned.<sup>21</sup> 'Louis ne savait pas être heureux' [Louis didn't know how to be happy], she said (Gibault: 237). Meanwhile, the wider collective memory of the war was taking shape in what George Mosse has called the myth of the war experience.<sup>22</sup> The myth, still recognizable today, structured the commemoration of the war. The myth exalted the values of heroism, patriotism, camaraderie, sacrifice and was made visible in the myriad of war monuments and memorials in which the dead were remembered as 'the glorious dead'. The myth provided a bereft generation with a pattern of meaning for an overwhelming experience of death. In doing so, however, it cleansed the horror and offered a form of reconciliation based on traditional values, the values, it can be argued, that had lured heroes to the slaughter in the first place. As Mosse wrote: 'Through the myth which came to surround it, the war experience was sanctified' (Mosse: 501).

In 1928 the tenth anniversary Armistice commemoration saw a resurgence in memory on a grand scale. Céline was working as a doctor in Paris and living with his American lover, the dancer Elizabeth Craig. Haunted by memory, and without doubt disturbed by the relentless exaltation of the official commemoration, he transgressed his silence and put war to paper. In March 1930, Céline confided in friend and fellow-veteran, Joseph Garcin: 'Vous le savez j'écris un roman, quelques expériences personnelles [...] D'abord la guerre, dont tout dépend, qu'il s'agit de exorciser' (Letter of 21 March 1930, Lainé: 617). [You know I am writing a novel, some of my personal experiences [...] The war, first of all, which must be exorcised].

21 Pierre Lainé, 'De la débacle à l'insurrection contre le monde moderne: L'itinéraire de Louis-Ferdinand Céline' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Paris IV, 1982), pp. 52–3.

22 See George Mosse, 'Two World Wars and the Myth of the War Experience', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 21 (1986), 491–513.



The extent to which the war haunted him, and to which he needed to exorcise it, is clear from another letter to Garcin:

J'ai en moi mille pages de cauchemar en réserve, celui de la guerre tient naturellement la tête. Des semaines de 14 sous les averses visqueuses, dans cette boue atroce et ce sang et cette merde et cette connerie des hommes, je ne me remettrai pas, c'est une vérité que je vous livre une fois encore, que nous sommes quelques-uns à partager. Tout est là. Le drame, notre malheur, c'est cette faculté d'oubli de la majorité de nos contemporains. (Undated letter of September 1930, Lainé: 621)

[I have in me a thousand pages of nightmare in reserve, the nightmare of the war naturally comes first. Weeks in '14 under those viscous showers, in that atrocious mud and that blood, that shit and that stupidity of men, I'll never get over it, it's a truth I offer you yet again, shared by just a few of us. It's all there. The drama, our unhappiness, is the faculty for forgetting of the majority of our contemporaries.]

This letter is of immense significance, expressing a profound sense of alienation and marginalization, 'notre malheur' [our unhappiness], in a society which has forgotten, which has cleansed itself of the truth of 'ce sang et cette merde et cette connerie des hommes' [that blood and that shit and that stupidity of men]. In this context, *Voyage* becomes an act of truthful remembrance, whose 'vérité' [truth] is clearly opposed to 'cette faculté d'oubli' [the faculty for forgetting] enshrined in the cleansing, redemptive myth of the war experience. As we shall see, it is the dissolution of his own heroic identity which will express the core of Céline's truth and which will oppose 'cette faculté d'oubli' of his contemporaries.

## The Anti-Self

Céline's pseudo-autobiographical portrait as Bardamu is not so much a self-portrait, as an anti-portrait. He is intent on destroying his own self-image as hero and replacing it with a debased

image, just as Otto Dix did. It is as if his past heroic self has been assimilated into the horror and has become part of 'the incomprehensible, the inexplicable and the unsayable'. It is the ghost of Céline's past heroic self which is being *exorcised*. The attack on self begins early in *Voyage*: 'moi crétin' [me, the cretin] is Bardamu's early self-judgement on the battlefield (V: 25). Later he says 'peut-être étais-je à plaindre, mais en tout cas sûrement, j'étais grotesque' (V: 54) [maybe I was to be pitied, but whatever the case, I was certainly grotesque]. Distinguished from the heroic self by what Bardamu calls 'l'imagination de la mort' (V: 30) [the imagination of death], his debased, unheroic self experiences death as a violation. 'Quand on a pas d'imagination', Bardamu says, 'mourir c'est peu de chose, quand on en a, mourir c'est trop' (V: 30) [If you have no imagination, death's no great thing, but if you have any imagination, death is too much]. Where the heroic self looks death in the eye, the debased self shuns it.

Bientôt on serait en plein orage, et ce qu'on cherchait à ne pas voir serait alors en plein devant soi et on ne pourrait plus voir qu'elle: sa propre mort. (V: 49)

[Soon we would be in the middle of the storm and the only thing we didn't want to see would be right in front of our eyes where we would see it and it alone: our very own death.]

The debased self confesses its inability to master death. 'Je n'ai jamais pu me tuer moi' (V: 256) [I never had what it takes to kill myself], Bardamu says. As such he can never be free.

Lacking death-mastery Bardamu is naturally a coward who represents in person an affront to the heroic character of the war itself. 'Dans une histoire pareille, il n'y a qu'à foutre le camp' (V: 22) [In a situation like this, the only thing to do is get the hell out of it], is Bardamu's view of the war, taken in true cowardly fashion from 'derrière un arbre' (V: 23) [behind a tree]. Later, he attempts unsuccessfully to desert. It was futile even to try. 'On a du mal à se débarrasser de soi-même en guerre' (V: 64) [It's not easy to get rid of oneself in wartime], his

alter-ego Robinson explains. The war was inescapable, and so too was the self trapped within it. That is, the self cut off from its heroic identity, caught in the circular entrapment of its own debasement. This self Bardamu drags around behind him through all of *Voyage's* episodes and exotic locations. There is no exit however, from debasement. 'J'avais beau essayer de me perdre pour ne plus me retrouver devant ma vie, je la retrouvais partout simplement', says Bardamu, unable to escape himself. 'Je revenais sur moi-même' (V: 626) [I had tried in vain to lose myself so as never to find myself again confronted by my life, but I found it everywhere. I always came back to myself]. Cut off from the death-mastering potential of his lost heroic identity, he follows his double, Robinson, in a new mode of death-mastery, based on disenchantment, cowardice, irony, the rubble of the heroic ideal. But if it works for Robinson, it does not work for Bardamu: 'c'était pas à envisager', he says, 'que je parvienne jamais moi, comme Robinson, à me remplir la tête avec une seule idée tout à fait plus fort que la mort' (V: 627) [I couldn't see that I would ever manage, like Robinson had, to fill my head with one idea altogether stronger than death]. Unable to achieve death-mastery, Bardamu, the debased hero, must remain beyond redemption, in a world beyond redemption. It is as if his past heroic self has been assimilated into the horror and has become part of 'the incomprehensible and the unsayable'. It is the ghost of Céline's past heroic self which is being exorcised. In this light, the transition from Destouches to Céline, from Céline to Bardamu, and indeed from Bardamu to his double, Robinson, can be seen as a protean flight from the imprisoning trauma of past self.

## The Anti-Myth

Céline's self-portrait as Bardamu does more than express the traumatic divide in his own being. It sends back an inverse

image of the heroic exaltation of the official war commemoration of the French Republic, and challenges the war's truths as represented by the myth of the war experience. As historian Jay Winter has observed of Céline: 'He railed [...] against the chorus of commemoration of the dead of the Great War, in art, in ceremony [...].'<sup>23</sup> In the process, *Voyage* becomes a strident accusation directed against commemoration in which the war becomes 'la monstrueuse entreprise' (V: 49) [that monstrous enterprise], 'cette foutue énorme rage qui poussait la moitié d'humains [...] à pousser l'autre moitié vers l'abattoir' (V: 69) [that damned enormous rage which impelled half of humanity [...] to push the other half into the abattoir]. Having endured 'la fricassée boueuse de héros' (V: 69) [the muddy fricassée of heroism], Bardamu's patriotism has become visceral. 'Moi, quand on me parlait de la France, je pensais irrésistiblement à mes tripes' (V: 72) [When anyone spoke to me about France, I couldn't help thinking of my insides], he says. Most striking of all however, in this demolition of 'imprimatured' memory, is that camaraderie is denied. This denial cancels out Céline's father's observation at Hazebrouck that Céline was particularly distressed by the death of several good comrades. 'C'est à cause d'eux que les guerres peuvent durer' (V: 53) [It's because of them that wars go on], Bardamu says of his comrades. Calling them 'des dégueulasses' [disgusting swine], 'des abrutis' (V: 32) [brutes]. At another point, wandering away from an explosion that has almost killed him, he wonders:

Ils sont peut-être tous morts à l'heure actuelle ? Puisqu'ils ne veulent rien comprendre à rien, c'est ça qui serait avantageux et pratique qu'ils soient tous tués très vite [...] Comme ça on en finirait tout de suite [...] On rentrerait chez soi [...]. (V: 29)

[Maybe they've all been killed by now? Since they don't want to understand anything about anything, it would be for the best if they

23 Jay Winter, 'Voyage to the End of a Mind: Céline, Psychiatry and War', draft copy of article kindly forwarded with permission to quote by Jay Winter.

were all killed quickly [...]. The war would be over and done with [...] I could go home [...].]

In attacking camaraderie, Céline breaks faith with those who fought and died alongside him and, in Christopher Coker's words 'fails to testify to the meaning of his own experience'.<sup>24</sup> But it is not experience that is ultimately in question. It is memory and the truths of memory.

One of *Voyage's* most memorable characters, the anti-democratic, anti-republican Princhard, a former history teacher, provides Bardamu with a key discourse of dissent. He is infuriated by his inability to have himself removed from the war by stealing tinned food. The military authorities have decided that for the 'honour of his family' he is to return to the front. Before he goes he leaves his own bitter testimony with Bardamu. Here is Princhard:

'L'honneur de ma famille'. Quelle mansuétude! Je vous le demande camarade, est-ce donc ma famille qui va s'en aller servir de passoire et de tri aux balles françaises et allemandes mélangées ? [...] Ce sera bien moi tout seul, n'est-ce-pas? Et quand je serai mort, est-ce l'honneur de ma famille qui me fera ressuciter? [...] Tenez, je la vois d'ici, ma famille, les choses de la guerre passées [...] Comme tout passe. Joyeusement alors gambadante ma famille sur les gazons de l'été revenu, je la vois d'ici par les beaux dimanches [...] Cependant qu'à trois pieds dessous, moi papa, ruisselant d'asticots et bien plus infect qu'un kilo d'étrons de 14 juillet, pourrira fantastiquement de toute sa viande déçue [...] Engraisser les sillons du laboureur anonyme c'est le véritable avenir du véritable soldat! Ah camarade! Ce monde n'est qu'une monstrueuse entreprise à se foutre du monde! (V: 91)

['The honour of my family' what marvellous indulgence! I ask you, is my family going to go and act as a sieve for French and German bullets? [...] It's me and me alone, isn't it? And when I'm dead will the honour of my family bring me back? Look, I can see it all from here, my family, when the war is ended [...] As everything must end [...] I see my family, joyously gambolling over summer lawns on sunny Sunday afternoons

24 Christopher Coker, *War and the Twentieth Century* (London: Brassey's, 1994), p. 154.

[...] While three feet below, I, papa, swarming with worms and stinking much worse than a mound of horse shit on the 14th of July, will lie in all my fabulously rotting, disgraced flesh [...] I tell you, the true future of the true soldier will be to fertilize the furrows of some nameless ploughman! Ah, Comrade! This entire world is nothing but a monstrous enterprise intended to make a damned mockery of the lot of us!]

Céline here makes the brutal physical reality of death the symbol of dissenting memory while at the same time denouncing commemoration and remembrance, even the remembrance of the bereaved family, as a mocking lie dependent on the illusion of immortalizing heroism. An illusion the war has broken in two, just as it has broken the heroic self in two. The adversarial divide between 'we' and 'they', between heroic past and debased present, between private memory and collective memory, symbolized in the striking evocation of 14 July, could not be clearer. And what divides them is the ultimate truth Céline has to offer: 'La vérité de ce monde c'est la mort' (V: 256) [This world's truth is death].

Céline's rewriting of self however, remains the key element in his dissent from myth. Here he goes to the heart of commemoration in a way which is still topical today. Identifying himself with the coward and deserter, Céline places himself in the ranks of those French soldiers who refusing the war died not for France but by her hand. The threat of being murdered by one's own troops hangs over the entire war episode in *Voyage*. While convalescing in Paris, for example, Bardamu, takes stock of his situation:

Pas bien loin de nous, à moins de cent kilomètres, des millions d'hommes, braves, bien armés, bien instruits, m'attendaient pour me faire mon affaire et des Français aussi qui m'attendaient pour en finir avec ma peau, si je voulais pas la faire mettre en lambeaux saignants par ceux d'en face. (V: 109)

[Not far from us, not sixty miles away, millions of brave, well-armed and well-trained men were waiting to close my account, the French too were waiting to tan my hide, just in case I wasn't ready to have it cut to bloody ribbons by the other side.]

Victims of military executions had no place in commemoration and they remain on the periphery of remembrance. In November 1999, for the first time, the British Government allowed relatives of victims of military executions during the Great War to lay wreaths at the Cenotaph, but on condition that this would be done a day before the official ceremony of remembrance. A year earlier in France, Prime Minister Lionel Jospin's acknowledgement, in an address at the symbolic site of Craonne, where the French Army mutinied in 1917, that those soldiers executed by their own army were also victims of the Great War, created one of the most heated controversies in recent French politics and a rift with President Chirac.<sup>25</sup> These recent controversies make Céline's rewriting of himself into the ranks of all those who refused the war, who were murdered by their own army, and who remained excluded from commemoration, not just an enduring testament to the loss of his own heroic condition, but a statement of dissent and accusation, as relevant today as it was seventy years ago.

## Conclusion

Writing from the deep trauma of his encounter with horror and his loss of heroic identity, Céline erases his own lived experience of the war. He exorcises the ghost of his own heroism and embraces a cowardice which will provide a symbol of debasement and dissent. In *Voyage*, Céline forgets his own heroic past to remember the débâcle of heroism. Thus, on either side of the trauma of memory that Céline seeks to resolve, we find remembering and forgetting. *Voyage* therefore embodies in one site of memory Paul Ricœur's notion that modern memory is

25 See Nicolas Offenstadt, *Les Fusillés de la Grande Guerre et la mémoire collective* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1999), pp. 177–200.

sick with 'le trop de mémoire ici, le trop d'oubli ailleurs'.<sup>26</sup> [too much remembering here, too much forgetting elsewhere]. As such, Céline's divided memory enacts a narrative of dissent which, while it expresses a profound alienation from self, indicts, and continues to do so, the myth of the war experience and the official war commemoration. Céline becomes Bardamu, anti-self, anti-myth and anti-memory. And *Voyage* becomes, as it shall remain, Céline's memory of war, beyond reconciliation, beyond redemption, beyond commemoration.

26 Paul Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2000), p. 1.



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CARMEL FINNAN

## Contested Memories: Autobiographical Challenges to the Collective Memory of the Shoah

In recent years the public perception of the Shoah has shifted from traditional historiography to individual memory.<sup>1</sup> The attendant surge in autobiographical narratives reflects this movement and highlights the desire on the part of many to fill the void created by the abstract treatment of factors such as ethnicity, age, class and gender in historical accounts of the Shoah. By prioritizing the personal experience of the Shoah, autobiography poses new challenges to the construction of cultural memory and to static concepts of the Shoah and the Shoah-survivor.

The four autobiographical narratives selected for analysis here are: Cordelia Edvardson, *Gebranntes Kind sucht das Feuer*; Ruth Klüger, *weiter leben. Eine Jugend*; Laura Waco, *Von Zuhause wird nichts erzählt. Eine jüdische Kindheit in Deutschland*; and Helene Janeczek, *Lektionen des Verborgenen*. They were written during the last twenty years and address the difficulties encountered by individual memory in the context of the phenomenal growth of a media-driven interest of this topic, ranging from films, web-sites and archives to oral and narrative testimonies. While the growth of popular discourse on the

1 Examples of recent studies on memory and the Shoah are Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Geoffrey Hartman, *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory* (Cambridge: Blackwell Press, 1994); James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and their Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); and Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

Shoah has certainly acquainted a wider audience with the horrors of the past, it has also, however, converted this event into a market-determined product, consumed for the sensationalist and sentimental effects it generates. The suffering of millions has ironically become a highly profitable Shoah-business, crudely exploiting events and individuals as marketing trends change. In the context of such blatant commercialization of historical events, autobiography has searched for more sensitive modes of contributing to the collective memory of the Shoah.

Despite the generational difference between the writers discussed here<sup>2</sup>, their texts were written and received in the context of renewed interest in the Shoah, and an increasing visibility and self-awareness of Jews in German culture.<sup>3</sup> The autobiographical project undertaken by many Jewish writers in this period expands the existing collective Jewish contribution to German-Jewish history. It also registers a turning point in the willingness of Jewish writers to articulate their experiences as Jews in Germany critically.<sup>4</sup> All four writers selected were born and socialized in a German-speaking country, but now live elsewhere. Their texts illustrate how complex socio-cultural conditions and familial relationships shape their identities as survivors and as children of survivors as well as the process of recall.

- 2 Cordelia Edvardson, *Gebranntes Kind sucht das Feuer* (Munich: dtv, 1986); Ruth Klüger, *weiter leben. Eine Jugend* (Munich: dtv, 1995); Laura Waco, *Von Zuhause wird nichts erzählt. Eine jüdische Kindheit in Deutschland* (Munich: P. Kirchheim, 1996); Helene Janeczek, *Lektionen des Verborgenen* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1999). Further reference to these texts will be given in brackets in the main text, using 'E' (Edvardson), 'K' (Klüger), 'W' (Waco) and 'J' (Janeczek), followed by the relevant page number.
- 3 See Sander L. Gilman and Karen Remmler (eds), *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany: Life and Literature since 1989* (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Elena Lappin (ed.), *Jewish Voices, German Words. Growing up Jewish in Postwar Germany and Austria* (North Haven: Catbird Press, 1994).
- 4 See Lea Fleischmann's autobiography, *Dies ist nicht mein Land. Eine Jüdin verläßt die Bundesrepublik* (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1980).

This analysis examines how the chosen autobiographies are textual products of the 'nomadic' positions occupied by each writer, as defined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari with their notion of minority literature.<sup>5</sup> These writers have all been severed from their cultural, familial, national, ethnic and linguistic origins by the Jewish catastrophe. Through the narrative process each traverses the various boundaries that echo this primal loss, writing across the chasms that have severed them from their sites of origin. This 'nomadism' allows them to challenge fixed concepts of Jewish identity since 1945 and, by implication, the reductive representations of the Shoah in theoretical and popular discourse.

Ruth Klüger and Cordelia Edvardson are first generation survivors who were deported as children and wrote their autobiographies over forty years after they were liberated. Edvardson, the illegitimate daughter of the half-Jewish writer Elisabeth Langgässer, was born in 1929 and grew up with her thoroughly assimilated mother and German-Catholic stepfamily in Berlin.<sup>6</sup> Similar to the other assimilated German-Jewish prisoners, Edvardson initially rejected the imposed Jewish identity after deportation, claiming that she was a German Catholic. She was taken to Sweden after liberation and lived there until moving to Israel in 1974. Klüger was born into a Jewish Viennese family in 1932. Her early childhood was increasingly overshadowed by the growing anti-Semitism in Austria. After the deportation of

5 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Dana Polan (trans.) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Also see Jacks Zipes, 'The Contemporary German Fascination for Things Jewish: Towards a Minor Jewish Culture', in Gilman and Remmler: 15–45

6 Edvardson's father was Jewish which, according to the Nürnberg Laws of 1935, categorized her as fully Jewish. After an attempt by her mother to circumvent these laws (adoption by a Spanish family) is foiled, Edvardson is forced to choose between either saving her mother or herself from deportation. She forgoes her newly acquired Spanish citizenship, thereby subjecting herself to the consequences of Nazi racial policies. See E: 66–8.

her step-brother and father, she and her mother were deported in 1942, first to Theresienstadt, later to Auschwitz, and finally to Christianstadt. After liberation Klüger spent two and a half years in a Displaced Persons' Camp in Bavaria, before emigrating to the USA with her mother at the age of sixteen. Klüger's academic career in German Studies currently allows her to divide her time between Germany and California.

Both Laura Waco and Helene Janeczek are the children of Polish Jews. Waco was born in 1947 and Janeczek in 1964. Their parents spent the immediate period after liberation in Displaced Persons' Camps in Bavaria.<sup>7</sup> Like most East European Jews who constituted the majority of post-war Jewish communities in Germany, their parents lived in a state of permanent transience, ready to leave Germany at the first opportunity. Definitive plans by Waco's parents to emigrate had to be abandoned on two occasions. Janeczek's parents actually returned to their native Poland in 1945, but returned to Germany after the Kielce pogrom there in 1947, and were forced to remain in Germany due to her father's weak physical health. Following the directives of her parents, Waco emigrated to Canada at the age of eighteen. She married shortly afterwards within extended Jewish circles and currently lives in California. Janeczek moved permanently to Italy in 1983 where she married an Italian non-Jew. She now writes in Italian.<sup>8</sup>

The narrative strategies chosen in each autobiography reflect the tensions structuring the reconstitution of their Jewish and German selves in textual form. The fractured narrative forms expose the cultural, generational, spatial and temporal gaps that must be traversed in each case, illustrating how their

7 Their parents belonged to the 30,000 Jews who remained in Germany after the closure of the DP-camps. For a detailed account of the Jewish life in post-war Germany, see Michael Brenner, *After the Holocaust. Rebuilding Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

8 Janeczek's first book, a volume of poetry, was published in German. Helene Janeczek, *Ins Freie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1989).

narratives, and by implication their identities are constructed along these fault lines. They also demonstrate how these writers must construct their narratives between different and often conflicting discourses on the recent past.

Klüger's *weiter leben*, written in the first-person narrative perspective, is structured as a dialogue between a chronological narrative of personal experiences and a reflection on theoretical and popular discourses on the Shoah.<sup>9</sup> This intertextual structuring device not only highlights the relationship between individual and collective memory but allows Klüger to challenge the silencing of the individual voice by existing master discourses. The dialogic nature of her narrative also enables her to draw her readers into the text, forcing them to reflect on various issues discussed. Klüger's intertextual strategy can also be interpreted as her answer to the debate about the possibility of literature after Auschwitz, in that she discounts such questions, claiming that the thematic and aesthetic heterogeneity of post-Shoah literature has long since provided an adequate response.

In *Gebranntes Kind sucht das Feuer*, Edvardson reflects on the difficulties of writing about the Shoah and responds by classifying her narrative as a novel. The use of this fictional genre allows her to highlight the productive process involved in the act of remembering and the implicit unreliability of memory at work.<sup>10</sup> While adopting the third-person narrative perspective, she nonetheless clearly identifies herself and family members as its main characters. She structures her text according to spatial and temporal associations, juxtaposing events from her early childhood in Berlin with later events in Auschwitz. Edvardson thus illustrates the tensions between different

9 On Klüger's narrative strategies, see Irmela von der Lühe, 'Das Gefängnis der Erinnerung. Erzählstrategien gegen den Konsum des Schreckens in Ruth Klügers *weiter leben*', in Manuel Köppen and Klaus R. Scherpe (eds), *Bilder des Holocaust. Literatur – Film – Bildende Kunst* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1997), pp. 29–45.

10 'Gebranntes Kind sucht Feuer. Interview mit Cordelia Edvardson', in *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, 2 April 1986, 24.

periods of her life, emphasizing how events in her early childhood are echoed in her experiences after her deportation as well as in the act of remembering them as an adult.

Waco's *Von Zuhause wird nichts erzählt* is constructed as a series of fragmented scenes that are arranged in a loose linear chronology. The naïve narrative perspective employed reproduces the maturing process of her first-person narrator. She weaves the different languages of her childhood – Polish, Yiddish and Bavarian dialect – into her narrative, creating a style that achieves both intimacy and detachment. It allows the reader to access her childhood in Munich during the 1950s and 1960s, thereby exposing the imposed isolation of this hermetic world. Furthermore, it also articulates the cultural disparities that defined her childhood, and the fact that the minority voices of East European Jews remained marginal in post-war Germany.

In contrast to Waco's episodic vignettes, Janeczek's *Lektionen des Verborgenen* is a tightly packed reflection on the relationship between past and present, showing how the changing public discourses on the Shoah influence her own understanding of the event and the intergenerational relationship in her family. Like Edvardson, Janeczek structures her narrative spatially. In her text, however, events from her own childhood in Munich are juxtaposed with those of her mother's earlier life. The parallels elicited by this device are structured by the depiction of a joint visit to Poland, including Auschwitz. Janeczek's use of this strategy illustrates the intergenerational dimension of memory, specifically in the way primary experiences of the Shoah are refracted through the first generation and passed on to subsequent generations. A consequence of this process is the development of a symbiotic relationship between the generations.<sup>11</sup> Janeczek articulates this blending of identities

11 See Aaron Haas, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust. The Second Generation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). For his examination of how this relationship is expressed in the texts of second generation writers, see Thomas Nolden, *Junge jüdische Literatur: Konzentrisches Schreiben in der Gegenwart* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1995).

between mother and daughter stylistically as a merging of narrative voices: her mother's voice is often superimposed on the daughter's (J: 80). On other occasions, however, she uses italic script to denote her mother's voice, intruding into her narrative (J: 16, 61, 65, 149–50).

The complex relationship to German culture forces each writer to address the issue of German-Jewish relations before, during, and after the Shoah, and its relevance for their identities as Jewish women today. Each writer must negotiate a position in relation to her Jewish and German origins, from which she can reconstruct the shards of self in narrative form. Remembering in this context must traverse the fissures that exist between Jewish and German consciousness. They must all revisit the temporal and spatial sites from which they reflect on earlier experiences and their consequences for their fragmented identities. German culture is, in this context, a primary and ambiguous site of self. It is a place of origin, signifying simultaneously the destruction of their Jewish origins. It is a fundamental constituent of identity and at the same time the negative other of their Jewish selves. Each text examines the problematic relationship to German culture, and German origins, by focusing on the reverberations of historical events within the family. This intersection is expressed most clearly in the ambiguous mother–daughter relationship. While this theme has dominated women's writing since the 1970s, and categorizes the four autobiographies examined here within this literary trend, the primal maternal bond has more profound relevance in the lives of Jewish women writers. Because Jewish ancestry is matrilineal, the mother-daughter relationship also establishes the ethnic context within which Jewish identity is explored.<sup>12</sup>

12 See Rachel M. Herweg, *Die jüdische Mutter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994); Eva Lezzi, 'Geschichtserinnerung und Weiblichkeitskonzeption bei Esther Dischereit und Anne Duden', *Askenas*, 6/1 (1996), 117–48; Helene Schruff, *Wechselwirkungen: Deutsch-Jüdische Identität in erzählender Prosa der 'Zweiten Generation'* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2000).



In Klüger's case, the decision to write her autobiography in German, like her earlier decision to study German, is guided by the dynamics of her relationship with her mother: her mother does not read German books. The recurring incidents of their dysfunctional relationship dismantle the idealized images of Jewish families constructed in popular, highly sentimentalized representations of the pre-Shoah Jewish culture. It also reflects the trend in Jewish literature, initially begun in America and apparent in texts published in Germany since the early 1980s, to criticize Jewish families and traditions openly.<sup>13</sup>

The earliest memories of maternal nurturing in Klüger's text are associated with a Gentile Austrian employee and not her Jewish relatives (K: 85). While on the run after her escape during a death march in 1945, it is once again a Gentile woman who acts as surrogate mother, covering her with a blanket during a long train journey through Germany (K: 274). In the complementary movement towards her German heritage and away from her Jewish origin, the historical axis of persecutor and victim shifts dramatically. Set against her recollections of acts of brutality endured at the hands of her biological Jewish mother are stories of compassion and nurturing in her encounters with benign German women. In her representations of the maternal function Klüger inverts the historical positions of persecutor and victim associated with German and Jewish relations, demonstrating that while personal experiences between 1933 and 1945 are defined by historical circumstances, they are not reducible to them.

This inversion of established historical positions also reveals the 'grey zones' in individual experiences of the Shoah, experiences that have been eclipsed by one-dimensional representations of the Shoah constructed in popular and historical

13 See Rafael Seligmann, *Rubinsteins Versteigerung* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988) and *Die jiddische Mamme* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990); Maxim Biller, *Wenn ich einmal reich und tot bin* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1990) and *Land der Väter und Verräter* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994).

discourses.<sup>14</sup> Klüger's narrative undermines the tendency to divide events into strict categories of either good or evil, thus challenging the over-simplification of human experience that has become fixed in the cultural memory of the Shoah. The irreducibility of individual experience to the dominant historical and cultural concepts of the Shoah is further illustrated in Klüger's depiction of her relationship to German culture. Her autobiography, a 'German book', is dedicated to her German friends and clearly addresses a German audience. In establishing her intended reader, Klüger attempts to restore her severed personal, cultural and linguistic links with German culture. She also, however, acknowledges the rupture that defines German-Jewish relations, not just in recent history, but by virtue of the persistent image of the Jew in German consciousness as a strange 'other'. Her autobiography, constructed as a personal dialogue with her German reader, seeks to challenge this perception of Jewish otherness in contemporary German culture:

Für wen schreibe ich das hier eigentlich? [...] Ich schreibe es für die, die finden, daß ich eine Fremdheit ausstrahle, die unüberwindlich ist. Anders gesagt, ich schreibe es für Deutsche. (K: 213)

[Who am I actually writing this for? [...] I am writing it for those who consider I emit an insurmountable strangeness. In other words, I am writing this for the Germans.]<sup>15</sup>

Edvardson, by contrast, frees herself from the literary legacy of her famous German mother by writing in Swedish, claiming that she has lost the necessary link with the German

14 In his accounts of Auschwitz Levi tries to capture the 'grey zones' of human behaviour, situations which are located outside the normative categories that apply to the world beyond Auschwitz. Primo Levi, *Moments of Reprieve* (New York: Summit Books, 1986). Also see Omer Bartow, 'The Gray Zone: Primo Levi', in Omar Bartow (ed.), *The Holocaust. Origins, Implementation, Aftermath* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 251–72.

15 All translations from German in this article are my own.

language.<sup>16</sup> Her deliberate movement towards her Jewish identity – her conversion to Judaism in Stockholm and her later emigration to Israel – can be interpreted as a final break with her assimilated, Catholic-German mother who refused to acknowledge Edvardson's Jewish identity.<sup>17</sup> Her conversion to Judaism is, as Edvardson asserts, an attempt to reclaim the Jewish identity she was denied as a child. This reclamation is achieved as a Shoah-survivor living in Israel and not through her matrilineal heritage. Despite Edvardson's appropriation of her Jewish origins she cannot fully abandon her connections with German culture. Even though her mother is associated both with the culture of her persecutors and the loss of her German origins as a Jew, Edvardson dedicates her autobiography to three 'mothers', one of whom is Langgässer, and to her children, one of whom grew up in and currently lives in Germany.<sup>18</sup> She acknowledges the historical, cultural personal boundaries she has traversed and the multiple sense of self this nomadism has produced:

Deutschland ist Bildungsheimat: Über meine katholische Erziehung habe ich Kultur und Kunst verstehen gelernt. Schweden [...] hat mir durch seinen Zustand der Unschuld und seine Natur viele Jahre lang Ruhe geschenkt. Israel ist geistige Heimat: hier habe ich meine Verbindung zum jüdischen Volk wiedergefunden.<sup>19</sup>

[Germany is my intellectual home, through my Catholic education I learned to appreciate art and culture. The innocence and tranquillity of Sweden gave me many years of peace. Israel is my spiritual home. I found my link to the Jewish people here.]

- 16 'Mein Deutsch ist ohne Gefühl', in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 Mai 1994, 17.
- 17 See Elisabeth Hoffmann, 'Jüdin – Deutsche – Katholikin. Fragen nach der Identität am Beispiel von Elisabeth Langgässer und Cordelia Edvardson', in Jutta Dick and Barbara Hahn (eds), *Von einer Welt in die andere. Jüdinnen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Christian Brandstätter, 1993), pp. 286–96.
- 18 Elisabeth Hoffmann, Edvardson's daughter, grew up with Edvardson's stepfather (Langgässer's husband) in Germany. She is the author of the article mentioned in the previous footnote.
- 19 'Mein Deutsch ist ohne Gefühl'.

The Shoah also plays a central role in the construction of Jewish identities for the second generation, conveyed to them in ways that both echo the catastrophe and seek to reinstate the continuity it destroyed. In each case their names are of immense historic and cultural importance, signifying the loss of their genealogical links and the attempt to re-establish them. Waco is given the name Laura, the closest German equivalent to the name of her murdered Polish grandmother (W: 5). Janeczek's absent Jewish lineage is inscribed in the name Helene after her maternal grandmother, Miriam after her paternal grandmother, and Regina after her aunt (J: 19). The Shoah is also transmitted to them through the incomplete memories of their parents, communicated through individual stories, but mainly through the silences and emotional disorders of their traumatized parents, such as depression, rage, paranoia and states of acute anxiety. The Shoah is consequently represented in the horrifying images unconsciously transmitted to them, in the beatings (Waco) and the eating disorders (Janeczek) that re-enact the brutality inflicted on their parents. As Jewish daughters, both their identities are framed around their dead Jewish female relatives and their duty to recreate this broken genealogy as future Jewish wives and mothers.<sup>20</sup> The lack of a young, vibrant Jewish culture in post-war Germany, with which the children can identify, also colours their perceptions of Jewish identity whilst growing up. Jewish culture in Munich during the 1960s and 1970s is defined almost exclusively by the experiences of their parents' generation and their attempts to re-establish the remnants of the destroyed pre-1933 East European Jewish culture. Janeczek, for her part, feels no allegiance towards the self-imposed alienation and élitism of her Jewish contemporaries (J: 109–11).

Waco's received sense of Jewishness embodies an array of contradictions, mediated primarily through her parents, who

20 See Karen Remmler, 'En-gendering Bodies of Memory: Tracing the Genealogy of Identity in the Works of Esther Dischereit, Barbara Honigmann, and Irene Dische', in Gilman and Remmler: 185–209.

are role models of enterprise and resourcefulness in creating a new life in post-war Germany. However, they also tyrannize their children through instilled feelings of guilt, frequent outbursts of uncontrollable rage, long periods of deep depression and an uncompromising, rigid disciplinary regime. Her sense of Jewishness is primarily defined by the emotional contradictions that bind her to her parents. As the helpless, ravaged victims of Nazi terror, her parents elicit pity from their daughter, but the overwhelming burden of grief and unhappiness they convey also provokes strong feelings of anger and resentment towards them, and a Jewish heritage defined by suffering (W: 133–4). Waco feels duty-bound to repair the fractured lives of her parents, yet is constantly reminded of her failure to fulfil this obligation.

The contradictions that define her childhood subsequently generate an underlying conflict between identification with her Jewish heritage and resistance to its attendant suffering. These tensions are expressed in the rift that develops between parents and children in the Waco household. Her successive attempts to extend her life beyond the hermetic world of her Jewish family into German society are restricted by the divisions between these two worlds. When a German neighbour rescues her from drowning she is severely beaten by her father for compromising her family and the collective Jewish identity through her carelessness (W: 75). Her parents curb her growing inclination to integrate with her German classmates by taking her to a Jewish commemoration ceremony of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. The event produces the intended response. The child claims afterwards that she hates all Germans and vows to return to the Jewish religion class she had recently begun to neglect. The success is, however, short term. When her parents sabotage her intentions of getting engaged to a Gentile years later, their intervention evokes quite a different response. Their eighteen year-old daughter declares that she hates being Jewish (W: 264).

A school trip to Dachau reinforces the contradictions between her Jewish and German worlds, and the discrepancies between German and Jewish memories of recent events. For

Waco, Dachau is a site of recent family history and individual memory: her father had spent the last months of the war in Dachau seventeen years previously. For her classmates, it is an historical site, devoid of personal or collective memory and far removed from their present reality. Despite her sense of estrangement from her German contemporaries during this trip, Waco nonetheless feels at ease in the home of one of these school friends afterwards, enjoying a few moments of reprieve from the screaming and the weeping and the unending punishment rituals in her Jewish family (W: 191).

The fractured form of Waco's narrative echoes both the disruptions and fissures in her life as well as the underlying sense of continuity her narrative seeks to reclaim. These disparities illuminate the 'grey zones' that defined her experiences of growing up the child of Jewish survivors in post-war Germany. Unlike Lea Fleishmann's autobiography, published sixteen years previously, Waco's text does not produce simplified images of a harmonious Jewish family, alienated from a hostile German environment. Similar to Jewish writing during the past two decades, her autobiography demonstrates how the Shoah is superimposed on the second generation in the tensions that define relations with their parents. Her autobiography is written in German and is dedicated to her German school friends. Like Klüger's text, it can also be read as an attempt to restore linguistic, cultural and personal ties with Germany, which, as Waco affirms, remains her place of birth and homeland (W: 271). For both Waco and Klüger, their sense of self is still closely bound up with the language and culture of their childhood. Their texts attempt to recreate this link with German culture as well as instigate a dialogue between their Jewish selves and their German readers, despite the historical and cultural disparities represented by these two positions.

Janeczek's autobiography highlights the inter-generational dynamic structurally, by juxtaposing scenes in which she accompanied her mother on her traumatic return visit to Poland with scenes from her childhood as the daughter of survivors. In these oscillating scenes, Janeczek depicts how her own neurotic

and paranoid behaviour re-enacts her mother's learned responses to traumatic events in the past. The hunger pangs her mother experienced in Auschwitz are remembered corporally by the daughter in her compulsive eating patterns. Janeczek traces her own interest in Italian culture to her mother's decision in post-war Germany to adopt an Italian persona. While this allows her to establish a thriving Italian shoe business, it also functions as a mask behind which her mother can hide her Polish-Jewish identity. Her mother's strategy of remaining invisible to official detection, learned while on the run from Nazis, are echoed in her daughter's disregard for official residency formalities (J: 30–9). This blurring of identities between mother and daughter is, however, countered by inverse behavioural patterns in the daughter who lacks her mother's survival strategies and will-power, as manifested in her structured and disciplined lifestyle.

The primary lesson Janeczek learns from her parents is that her identity is defined by a negative other. Even though Janeczek lives in Germany, holds a German passport, goes to a German school and speaks German, she is not and can never be German. Her mother's most cutting criticism of her behaviour is to consider it 'typically German' (J: 27–8). Despite her parents' insistence on maintaining their separateness from German society, Janeczek develops positive relationships with this culture through school friends, teachers and her German nanny, whose presence in the family for seventeen years introduced many German traditions into the Jewish household.

Unlike Waco who needs to restore her severed allegiance to German culture and recover the positive role it played in her childhood experiences, Janeczek acknowledges her connection with German culture, but emphasizes the differences that define her relationship to Germany. Even though she cannot speak Polish, the language she associates with her childhood is Polish, memorized in the childhood rhymes and songs she heard from her parents (J: 71).

The fact that her new homeland is Italy and her new identity Italian are further proof of the lessons Janeczek has learned

from her mother. She now is the Italian woman her mother pretended to be. Perhaps because Janeczek's lessons as the daughter of survivors did not expose her to the extremes and contradictions Waco experienced, her sense of self is less bound up with the tensions between her German and Jewish self. Furthermore, because she was born seventeen years after Waco, Janeczek grew up in a less conservative Germany and one in which Jewish presence was less invisible. As a result, Janeczek can locate her identity beyond this dualism. Similar to Lea Fleischmann twenty years previously, Janeczek also chooses to leave Germany. However, unlike Fleischmann, she does not embrace an Israeli Jewish identity as an alternative. As the wife of an Italian non-Jew, her choice of homeland is influenced more by personal issues than simply historic ones.

The four autobiographies examined highlight how the Shoah was experienced and remembered by gendered, historical and cultural subjects, and how these factors continue to play an important role in the lives of succeeding generations. These narratives clearly demonstrate how German-Jewish relations since 1945 are not reducible to any fixed definitions, such as a 'negative symbiosis', coined by the historian Dan Diner.<sup>21</sup> This relationship is for many Jews, particularly Jews with familial ties to German culture, more complex. Neither category is static, and it is precisely this instability that defines representations of self. These texts attest to how each individual writer attempts to redefine her problematic relationship to her German and Jewish origins, and to reconcile the tensions between conflicting selves, without opting for a simplistic synthesis between them.

Their autobiographies belong to the rich tradition of critical Jewish voices in German literature and, as such, are defining of their German selves and of their relationship with German culture. Their self-reflective voices on matters of personal and

21 Dan Diner, 'Negative Symbiose: Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz', *Babylon*, 1 (1986), 9–20.



historical significance demand the same questioning response from their German readers.<sup>22</sup> They challenge German readers to redefine their continued perception of them as an alien 'other'. In attempting to change the German perception of the Jews, a dynamic is set in motion, in which the Jewish self tries to occupy a double position, i.e. of both the Jew and the German who perceives the Jew as its 'other'. This splitting of perspectives is an intrinsic aspect of Jewish memory. While the difference between the self and other is emphasized in historical terms, at an individual level these two opposing positions are contained within the self, thus highlighting the divergence between individual memory and the historical and political positions represented in collective memory.

These autobiographies also attempt to redefine Jewish identity. All four narratives challenge the fixed notion of Jewishness, constructed by the male voice and represented primarily by the 'damaged' Jewish male body.<sup>23</sup> They question this reduction of Jewish identity by positing instead the fractured mother–daughter relationship and the female body as the site for reconstructing broken family genealogies, and as a means of constituting new Jewish identities in the future.<sup>24</sup> They are as such both acts of mourning and acts of renewal. Memory-work in all four narratives constitutes female Jewish identities that are fundamentally fragmented and hetero-geneous.

22 Even though two of these texts (Janeczek's and Edvardson's) were not written in German, they were nonetheless written very much within the cultural context of German-Jewish relations and address a German reader.

23 Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991) and 'Male Sexuality and Contemporary Jewish Literature in German: The Damaged Body as the Image of the Damaged Soul', in Gilman and Remmler: 210–49.

24 For the construction of female Jewish identity in fictional works by second generation daughters, see Karen Remmler, in Gilman and Remmler: 185–209.

CATHERINE O'LEARY

## History and Remembering in the Post-Franco Theatre of Antonio Buero Vallejo

History is amoral: events occurred. But memory is moral; what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers.<sup>1</sup>

Antonio Buero Vallejo (1916–2000) was, despite his Republican allegiances, the most commercially successful committed dramatist of the Franco era. In his theatrical explorations of myth and history, Buero challenged the Francoist ideal of an *España eterna* [Essential Spain] and later reclaimed the past from the *pacto de olvido* [agreement to ignore the past]. Cultural memory, distorted under Franco through censorship, was, according to Buero Vallejo, under threat once again in post-Franco Spain; a new process of mystification promised to deny the recent past in the name of the future. Buero's plays are at once an attempt to communicate this obscured cultural memory and an exploration of efforts to control and deny it in society. In order to demonstrate this, Buero's challenge to the use of history, myth and memory under Franco will be plotted briefly. This will be followed by an assessment of Buero's insistence, in the aftermath of Franco's death, on revisiting the past in order to remember and to progress.

Buero wrote a theatre of testimony. He was a persistent critic of Spanish society, both under Franco and after the dictator's death. In the plays written under Franco he attempted to say what could not be said directly, and in post-Franco Spain he insisted on expressing what few wished to hear. Nonetheless, as a dramatist, Buero was not overly provocative and his rebellion often appears to be more a moral rather than a political

1 Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), p. 138.

one. This moral concern can be seen particularly in his unvarying emphasis on history and remembering; in his plays he examined what people chose to remember, what they chose to forget, and what this revealed about them. His theatre asks the question: Who decides what is to be recorded in history?

It is useful at this point to look at the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, when attempts were made by the Franco regime to control history. The Nationalists transformed history into myth, revising and erasing facts for the purpose of gaining support for the dictatorship. History, thus falsified, became propaganda created to prove or support the regime's version of events and its political needs. It was no longer an accurate account of what had occurred in the past, but rather a telling testimonial to the regime's political views and fears. By adapting the past to fit the needs of the present, the regime sought to give the appearance of being both a natural link in a long chain of historical events and the key to overcoming barriers in the path of the destiny of the nation. Historians such as Tuñón de Lara and Preston have demonstrated how events that might have embarrassed the regime were simply written out of history.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that the Franco regime undertook to create a cultural identity based on a falsification of the past. This model was then protected by censorship, both official and environmental. The nationalism of the Francoists was a return to origins: a denial and a distortion of the historical past in favour of a mythical one. It was also a pillaging of a mythical cultural identity. Jo Labanyi shows how myth was employed to gloss over the years of racial dilution and supposed impurity to discover direct links to an earlier, though equally disputable, pure Spanish race.<sup>3</sup> It must be acknowledged, however, that the re-

2 Manuel Tuñón de Lara, 'Historia', in José María Castellet (ed.), *La cultura bajo el franquismo* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1977), pp. 23–46 (pp. 23, 30). Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 661.

3 Jo Labanyi, *Myth and History in the Contemporary Spanish Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 35–40, 67.

gime did not merely impose unwanted values by force; in fact it incorporated certain widely held values, such as those of Roman Catholicism, into a larger ruling ideology. In the process of assimilation, these values were often transformed or falsified to meet the political requirements of the regime. The regime's propagandists sought to convince the populace that they had a common destiny and that they belonged to a noble Catholic nation, which had been betrayed by the liberals and Republicans. This mythical, unified, Catholic Spanish race was defined against the Reds, the Republicans and the 'anti-Spanish' liberals who were identified as the other.

Unsurprisingly then, much of the use of myth and history in Spanish twentieth century literature was born of an abuse of the same by the state. The novelist Juan Goytisolo wrote: 'Cuando no hay libertad política, todo es política' [When there is no political freedom, everything is political].<sup>4</sup> This was certainly true in Francoist Spain where certain writers adopted a political and testimonial role normally performed by journalists. Historical fiction was employed to subvert the official version of history offered by the regime, and to acknowledge the existence of alternatives to it. Buero used his theatre to remember a different, unofficial history. The Nationalists glorified the Golden Age and created a link between it and Spain under Franco; Buero drew parallels between the decadence of both eras. The Nationalists dismissed the nineteenth century as an error; Buero reclaimed it, showing how it positively influenced and logically precipitated the events of the twentieth century. The Nationalists stressed the nobility of the populace; Buero did the same, while also exposing its contemptible racism and its manipulation by the ruling élite. Roman Catholic ideology and values influenced the Nationalists; Buero showed how both Church and government betrayed their virtues. The Nationalists emphasized a return to a common, mythical destiny, which

4 Juan Goytisolo, 'La literatura perseguida por la política', in *El furgón de cola* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1967), pp. 37-44 (p. 41).

had been betrayed by the Republicans and liberals; in *La tejedora de sueños* (1950) Buero parodies Homer's *The Odyssey* to analyse the 'return to origins' myth. In the play, he demonstrates the cruelty of the supposedly heroic leader who returns but does not save the Motherland, instead damning her to an unhappy dependence on his might.

In 1980, Buero wrote on the subject of historical drama: 'Escribir teatro histórico es reinventar la historia sin destruirla' [To write historical drama is to rewrite history without destroying it].<sup>5</sup> In the historical dramas that he wrote under Franco, the stress is on the possibility of change. Nothing is pre-ordained or naturally impossible, despite what the dominant ideology proposed. Buero undermined official history and endeavoured to demystify the regime's presentation of itself and what Raymond Williams termed, 'a sense of *predisposed continuity*', by challenging the notion of fate and construing history as progression instead.<sup>6</sup> He encouraged the spectator to realize that he was part of the evolutionary process of history. As Esquilache, in *Un soñador para un pueblo* (1958), declares: 'la Historia se mueve' [History moves] (O.C. I: 790). Yet Buero's use of history was more than merely thematic: it also helped him to evade censorship on occasion. These plays defiantly offer a modern perspective on repressive periods of history, similar in certain respects to the Franco era. As the character Martín in *Las Meninas* (1960) notes: 'Se cuentan las cosas como si ya hubieran pasado y así se soportan mejor' [Things are described as though they had already happened, and hence, they are more easily tolerated] (O.C. I: 847). However, his use of history was occasionally problematic, as his self-justifying and controversial

5 Antonio Buero Vallejo, *Obra Completa*, Luis Iglesias Feijoo and Mariano de Paco (eds), *Clásicos Castellanos Nueva Serie*, 2 vols (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1994), II, pp. 826–7. Further references to these volumes (abbreviated to O.C.) are given after quotations in the text.

6 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 116.

portraits of certain historical figures, such as Velázquez, Goya and Larra show.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly then, the choice of time period and setting in Buero's historical drama was not innocent. In *Un soñador para un pueblo*, *El concierto de San Ovidio* (1962), *Las Meninas*, *El sueño de la razón* (1969) and *La detonación* (1977), Buero Vallejo chose characters and eras which were not only interesting from a political perspective, but which also had a profound and lasting effect on the evolution of Spanish society. With the exception of *El concierto de San Ovidio*, all are based around times, characters or events familiar to the average Spanish spectator. Szanto writes of historical drama:

Such literary exploitations of the past are not accidental; history and its artefacts are always most valuable to any daily present when they serve contemporary needs, when they give plausible answers to contemporary quandaries.<sup>8</sup>

What is on offer in these plays is the dramatist's subjective interpretation, which challenges the official version of events, if only to submit another possible version of history:

Desmitificamos, pero para volver a mitificar. [...] No hay que destruir los mitos, sino estudiarlos. No hay que creer que esa palabra equivale a 'mentira'. Sólo es mentiroso el mito en el terreno de la ciencia y del

7 Buero was accused of appropriating historical characters in his fictional works in order to justify his own stance under Franco. Gonzalo Fernández de la Mora wrote: 'Y la reconstrucción que Buero nos brinda de don Diego, por ejemplo, es absolutamente inadmisibile a causa de su radical y palmaria inautenticidad, tanto que no hay palinodia prologal o epilogal que pueda remediarla' [Buero's reconstruction of Don Diego, for example, is totally inadmissible, due to its fundamental and glaring inauthenticity, to the extent that there is nothing that could be included in a prologue or epilogue that would remedy the situation], and went on to say that if the artist was alive he would be shocked to discover that he had been turned into 'un pequeño revolucionario de 1848' [a minor revolutionary of 1848], 'Demasiada Fantasía', *ABC*, 17 December 1960, 3.

8 George H. Szanto, *Theater and Propaganda* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), p. 8.

pensamiento racional; en el del arte, puede ser la expresión condensada de una gran verdad. (O.C. II: 434)

[We demystify, but only in order to re-mystify. [...] Myths do not have to be destroyed, but rather, they have to be studied. The word does not have to be taken to mean 'a lie'. Myth is only a lie in the arena of science and rational thought; in the arena of art, it may be the concise expression of a great truth.]

Buero also showed, particularly in his painterly dramas (those based on the lives of Velázquez and Goya), that, while politicians and kings may come and go, art remains as a testament to the times. Buero saw himself as continuing in the tradition of such artists, who, according to him, used their art to reveal certain truths that are distorted or falsified by others.

In his theatre of the Franco period Buero condemned what would later be termed the *pacto de olvido*. This determination to forget is linked to apathy, a shirking of responsibility, and to the likely repetition of past errors. Hence, in *El tragaluz* (1966) Buero suggests that the family's stagnation in the basement flat and its lack of progress is linked to its failure to deal with its past. Similarly, characters in plays such as *El terror inmóvil* (1949), *Irene, o el tesoro* (1954), *Hoy es fiesta* (1955), *Las cartas boca abajo* (1957), *Llegada de los dioses* (1971), and *La Fundación* (1973), like the protagonists of his post-Franco plays, resolve to forget certain pivotal past events and, as a result of their denial, suffer guilt and frustration in the present. Other characters representing the establishment, such as the Marquis in *Las Meninas*, like Franco himself, conclude that what displeases them does not exist and shall not be recorded: 'Aprended, don Diego, que tal descontento no puede existir en Palacio; luego no existe.' [Heed this, Don Diego: Such discontent must not exist in the Palace; therefore it does not exist] (O.C. I: 868).

Later, in his post-Franco theatre, Buero refused to oblige those who insisted that the literature of the new, free Spain should reflect a simplified revisionism or praise a societal revolution that, in fact, had never occurred. Hence, he anticipated the debate occurring among historians today. Referring

to the past twenty-two years of Spanish democracy in their recent book, *La memoria insumisa sobre la dictadura de Franco*, Nicolás Sartorius and Javier Alfaya write: 'Se ha confundido amnistía política con amnesia histórica, reconciliación con olvido.'<sup>9</sup> [Political amnesty has been confused with historical amnesia, reconciliation with forgetting]. This was Buero's pre-occupation also. Their point is the same as that of Buero's post-Franco plays: 'El pueblo español no ha arreglado sus cuentas con la dictadura y hasta que no lo haga no lo habrá superado del todo.' (Sartorius and Alfaya: 21) [The Spanish people have not yet dealt with the dictatorship and, until they do so, they will not have overcome it completely].

The type of drama that Buero Vallejo continued to write, and his enduring stress on the need to recognize and challenge the power structures of Spanish society, put him at odds with the mood of the new Spain. While others heralded the end of ideology with the end of Francoism, Buero continued to use the theatre to call for accountability and remembering. He understood the desire to progress, but refused to accept the accompanying determination to ignore an unresolved past. In his dramatic works he demonstrated the emergence of a new ideology that was reminiscent, in some respects, of the previous regime's ideology. He further implied that it was associated with, and of benefit to, many of the same people. In these plays Buero refuses to accept mutely the latest dominant ideology, or rather, the myth of its absence. His post-Franco plays remember a past based on falsification and denounce a future that is up for sale.

It was the so-called *pacto de olvido*, this collective resolve to forget the past, which allowed members of the Francoist administration to lead the democratization process and retain power and positions of privilege and influence. It is this same denial of the recent past and of responsibility for past crimes that Buero criticizes in his post-Franco plays. Characters in Buero's later

9 Nicolás Sartorius and Javier Alfaya, *La memoria insumisa sobre la dictadura de Franco* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 2000), p. 13.



plays are tormented by a past that they refuse to acknowledge or that they seek to deny or manipulate to suit present needs. Those suffering from voluntary amnesia, in their denial of memory and their assertion of their freedom from history, are engaged in mystification. Buero's post-Franco work is thus a criticism of falsification, myth and a certain type of revisionism, and an attempt to reassert the importance of history and remembering. Of course, Buero, too, is engaged in historical revisionism, reclaiming the past for the previously vanquished and denying the earlier dominant élite their exclusive version of events.

*Jueces en la noche* (1979), which deals with Spain's transition to democracy, proved unpopular with some critics who did not wish to be reminded of the problems, rooted in the recent past, which were still present in the newly democratized Spain. The protagonist, Juan Luis, is an opportunistic minister from the Franco era, who has reinvented himself as a 'life-long democrat' in order to maintain his position of privilege. The play also anticipates the return of the reactionary right, which four years later threatened Spain's nascent democracy.

The influence of the recent past on the present is thus a dominant feature of the post-Franco plays. Buero was obviously disillusioned with modern Spain and his plays are notably more pessimistic than before. An opportunity for accountability and remembering had been deliberately ignored in the name of progress. This new Spain, based on the contradictory *ruptura pactada* [negotiated break] with Francoism, is a myth that distorts the reality of a certain degree of *continuismo* [continuance]. *La detonación* demonstrates how a mask of liberalism can hide the same face that had ruled before; governments change, but certain people remain in office and censorship remains in place 'para no perjudicar las reformas' (O.C. I: 1547) [so as not to prejudice the reforms]. Hence this play anticipates the changes in legislation after 1975, which saw censorship modified rather than eliminated. Indeed, Buero's 1979 play, *Jueces en la noche*, was withdrawn after two months, despite commercial success,

because, according to Buero, 'el argumento molestó'<sup>10</sup> [the storyline annoyed certain people]. In that play Buero highlights the willingness of a large proportion of the population to accept the new social order because it is nominally a democracy. The notion that modern Spanish society is wholly democratic, given its origins and its denial of the past, is classed by Buero as yet another mystification. Yet the dramatist himself is again contradictory. One of the more troublesome facts about Buero's post-Franco theatre is that, while condemning the latest, more insidious forms of mystification that disguise new ideologies in society, he engages in his own form of mystification of the recent past, or more specifically of a certain spirit of opposition, now absent.

Buero's own dream of a socialist Spain, which for a while promised fulfillment, was another myth, and the dramatist's disillusionment with the socialism of the PSOE is evident from the dramas written during its period in office.<sup>11</sup> In his post-Franco theatre, socialism is dead. Solidarity is found only among the corrupt, who, by defending each other, protect themselves. Freedoms that many struggled and suffered for are no longer valued. The revolutionary spirit, embodied in the character of the Nicaraguan, René, in *Música Cercana* (1989), may live on in the youth of other countries, but it has expired in Spain. The few nonconformists in the modern Spanish society he depicts are old men such as Gaspar and Salustiano, who clearly belong to another era.<sup>12</sup> They are also the only characters

10 Gabriel de los Reyes, 'Comentarios de Buero Vallejo sobre su teatro', *Estreno*, 10 (No. 1, 1984), 21–4 (21). Phyllis Zatlín Boring commented: 'Buero's *Jueces en la noche* in the Fall of 1979 unleashed a violent reaction, mostly political. [...] Buero was attacked from Right and Left as an opportunist.' 'Theatre in Madrid: The difficult transition to democracy', *Theatre Journal*, 32 (No. 4, 1980), 459–74 (469).

11 The *Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, the Spanish Socialist Party, governed from 1982 to 1996.

12 The only young Spanish characters that could be described as idealistic are the female characters such as Amparo (*Lázaro en el laberinto*) and Patricia (*Las trampas del azar*). They may attempt to influence the men in

that learn from the past. The Spain that Buero depicts is superficially attractive, but it is rotten to the core. There has been no accountability for past misdeeds, and the Juan Luises, Alfredos and Gabriels prosper freely in the brave new world they have created.

In *Las trampas del azar*, Buero revisits the Francoist origins of some of the successful businessmen of the post-Franco period.<sup>13</sup> Power, he alleges, did not so much change hands as change appearance. Previously, in *Jueces en la noche*, he also examined the role of the Roman Catholic Church, which he had denounced for its collusion with the Franco regime in his earlier plays. He suggests that it abdicated its responsibility to offer moral guidance during the transition to democracy in its haste to distance itself from the past. The Church does not appear in the later post-Franco plays; the society portrayed here by Buero is a secular and amoral one where consumerism is the new religion. The mantra of the new Spain is spoken by Javier in *Música cercana*: 'Nadie es insobornable.' (O.C. I: 1976) [Nobody is incorruptible]. The dramatist suggests that this philosophy is the negative consequence of an unacknowledged past.

Lack of accountability in modern Spanish society is criticized by Buero's inclusion of memories of civil unrest in the plays. Direct references to student opposition to the Franco regime are found in *Jueces en la noche*, *Lázaro en el laberinto* (1986) and *Las trampas del azar*. By remembering in his plays the victims and vanquished of the Civil War, Buero condemns the regime that ensured they remained victims in post-war society and the democratic society that chose to deny them their historical voice. In *Jueces en la noche*, reference is made to the father of Fermín Soria who spent time in prison and who later finds it difficult to get employment because of his political record. His

their lives, but generally conform to the male protagonists' choices. Women in the theatre of Buero Vallejo are rarely protagonists.

13 Antonio Buero Vallejo, *Las trampas del azar*, intro. by Virtudes Serrano, Colección Austral No. 364 (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1995).

Civil War allegiances shaped his future and that of his son; Juan Luis, on the other hand, benefited from being the son of a Francoist General. Fermín himself is present only in the memory of certain characters, yet this memory of an absent figure torments the guilty conscience of Juan Luis. Again, Buero stresses that the present and the future are determined by the past, and that to ignore this fact is to falsify reality.

*Música cercana* comprises a criticism of revisionism, falsification and myth. Alfredo is obsessed by image, so much so that he wishes to alter his own history in order to fit in with the personal myth he has created. Fabio, too, revises his past in *Diálogo secreto* (1983), absolving himself of any responsibility for the lie he lives. These characters assert their freedom from history and justify their negative actions in the name of advancement. Buero uses his theatre to insist that real progress can only follow accountability. Nobody is free from history, and truth about the present can only follow from an acknowledgement of the truth about the past.

Linked to the idea of historical revisionism and the *pacto de olvido* is the leitmotif of repetition. Recurrence of past mistakes is reflected in the repetition of generations in the post-Franco plays, particularly in *Las trampas del azar*, but also to some extent in *Música cercana*. Buero reiterates themes and characters, and even actors, to highlight the repetition of errors that all are engaged in. In *Las trampas del azar* Buero shows history being repeated as radical youth rebels and then conforms and is rewarded for its compliance by the representatives of the establishment. The problem of the younger generation in *Las trampas del azar* is the problem of Larra in *La detonación*: impatience. In its haste to break from the past, it fails to learn the lessons of history. One function of the repetition device then is to highlight the repetition of choice, and not just errors.

Yet, there is a note of despondency in these plays that was absent from the plays written under Franco. Underlying Buero's argument is the notion that to advance in modern Spanish society is to accept the *pacto de olvido* and a new distortion of reality. The message of hope for Spain's future, that

earlier balanced his emphasis on history and remembering, is absent in all but the words of defeated old men. Learning from the past and avoiding historical errors seems less likely when history has been deliberately and selectively obscured and the collective memory is, like that of Buero's characters, a damaged one. Moreover, in *Las trampas del azar*, Buero experiments with the notion of karma, which sees the moral effect of, and final accountability for, past actions in the afterlife. Answerability has moved from this life to the next. This outcome, in a play by a professed atheist, signals Buero's belief that there is little hope for a defeat of the *pacto de olvido*.

For Antonio Buero Vallejo, a dramatist once described as the conscience of his country, the choice between the pact of forgetting and the need to remember was a moral one. Clearly, in these plays Buero is still seeking the ethical, socialist Spain that was once the dream of his dramatic heroes. For Buero, as for Milan Kundera, 'the struggle of man against power is the struggle of man against forgetting'.<sup>14</sup> His post-Franco theatre comprises a criticism of the absence of a debate about Spain's recent history. Yet he seemed to recognize that his language no longer spoke to those he wished to influence. In the later post-Franco plays, Buero's politicized and moral messages are no longer spoken by the protagonists, but by the old, the disappointed and the alienated, and the response from the audience was not protest or commitment, but silence.

'History is amoral: events occurred'. But memory is moral and Buero Vallejo's later plays form an attempt, albeit a largely unsuccessful one, to prick the collective conscience and to engage in a debate about the recent past. For Buero, 'la historia misma de nada nos serviría si no fuese un conocimiento por y para la actualidad.' (O.C. II: 827–8) [History itself would serve no purpose were it not for the knowledge it provides us about and for the present]. In what it says about what the Spanish

14 Milan Kundera, quoted in Harvey J. Kaye, 'Why do Ruling Classes Fear History?', *Index on Censorship*, 24 (no. 3, 1995), 85–98 (90).

people chose to remember and what they chose to forget, this theatre forms a testament to the times, just as his theatre under Franco did. Whether or not the plays themselves will be remembered or come to form part of a lasting cultural memory is probably dependent on the Spain in which Buero had so little faith. However, as Eagleton, drawing on Brecht, wrote:

*Survivability*, is in any case a profoundly suspect criterion of literary value: the history of the life, death and resurrection of literary texts is part of the history of ideologies.<sup>15</sup>

15 Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 178.

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SILVIA ROSS

## Remembering Betrayal: The Roman Ghetto's *Pantera Nera* in Elena Gianini Belotti and Giuseppe Pederiali

Elena Gianini Belotti and Giuseppe Pederiali are just two among a host of Italian writers whose works reflect the impact of the Shoah on Italian literary consciousness.<sup>1</sup> This Italian interest in the Shoah is particularly striking, considering that the number of victims in Italy is far lower than in, for example, Germany or Poland, due to the fact that the Italian Jewish population, although long established and relatively integrated, was much smaller. Of the roughly 45,200 Jews living in Italy under German occupation, approximately 85% of them witnessed liberation. Over 6,800 Jewish deportees, however, did not.<sup>2</sup>

Gianini Belotti and Pederiali have both produced intriguing and innovative texts which stem from actual events which took place in the Roman Ghetto, the oldest Jewish community

- 1 Italian contributions to literature of the Shoah range, to name just a few notable examples, from Primo Levi's influential *Se questo è un uomo* to Elsa Morante's later *La Storia*, to contemporary works such as Rosetta Loy's *La parola ebreo* which examines the reaction (or lack thereof) on the part of everyday Italian citizens to the persecution of the Jews, and Pope Pius XII's silence over the Shoah. More recently, Roberto Benigni's Oscar-winning film *La vita è bella* has sparked controversy and much critical debate because of its comic, fictionalized representation of life in a concentration camp: see for instance the various contributions to *Clio's Psyche* 6: 1 (June 1999), Millicent Marcus, 'Me lo dici babbo che gioco è? The Serious Humor of *La vita è bella*', *Italica*, 77: 2 (Summer 2000), pp. 153–70.
- 2 While estimates on precise figures vary, these are supplied by Susan Zuccotti. *The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue and Survival* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), pp. xxv–xxviii.



in Italy and also one of the communities to suffer most acutely during Nazi occupation. These tragic occurrences include the rounding up of over 1000 Jews from the area by SS men on 16 October 1943, and their subsequent deportation to Auschwitz. Only fifteen of them survived.<sup>3</sup> Another atrocity inflicted on Roman Jews (as well as on others) took place on 24 March 1944, the day of the massacre of the Fosse Ardeatine, in which 335 men (of whom seventy-five were Jewish), were murdered by German SS troops to avenge (at a ratio of over 10:1) the resistance fighters' bombing of via Rasella which killed thirty-two German soldiers (Coen: 124). This particular event has drawn further media attention in recent years because of the trial of Erich Priebke, one of the Nazi officers who directed it.

This chapter focuses on Gianini Belotti and Pederali's two literary depictions, written roughly half a century after the Shoah, of one particularly troubling case rooted precisely in Rome's Ghetto, that of Celeste Di Porto, a young Jewish woman born and raised there. During the German occupation of Rome, Celeste became involved with a Roman fascist and betrayed over fifty of her fellow Jews to the Nazis and their Fascist collaborators, presumably for financial reward (5,000 lire for every Jew captured) (Coen: 123–4). She would greet those she knew as she walked through the streets of her neighbourhood, trailed by Fascists or SS men who would then promptly arrest the person she had indicated. At the end of German occupation, once it was realized that she was in fact partly responsible for the deaths of

3 Historical accounts of the fate of Roman Jews on that night in October are related in various texts, among them Liliana Picciotto Fargion, *Il libro della memoria. Gli Ebrei deportati dall'Italia (1943–1945)* (Milan: Mursia, 1991), pp. 815–18 and Fausto Coen, *16 ottobre 1943. La grande razzia degli ebrei di Roma* (Florence: La Giuntina, 1993). The events of this same day are the subject of Giacomo Debenedetti's poignant literary account, *16 ottobre 1943* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1993) and are described also in Alexander Stille's *Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian Jewish Families Under Fascism* (New York: Summit Books, 1991), in the section on the Di Veroli family of Rome, pp. 167–222.

so many Jews, she was dubbed the *Pantera Nera*.<sup>4</sup> Tried in 1947 and sentenced to twelve years imprisonment, she was granted early release and was taken in by a convent but left soon after and presumably settled in a Roman suburb (Coen: 123).<sup>5</sup>

Celeste Di Porto's story is particularly painful to collective memory, for not only was she guilty of the betrayal of her fellow citizens (as many Italians were), but she was also guilty of an even greater betrayal, given that these fellow citizens were her co-religionists. In Pederali's novel *L'amica italiana* (1998), written after *Stella di Piazza Giudia* (1995), the text on which this analysis concentrates, the stand-in for the author himself (here named Vittorio) outlines his intentions behind writing about such a controversial figure:

- 4 A number of historians have mentioned the case of Celeste Di Porto, among them Renzo DeFelice in *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), Dan Kurzman in *The Race for Rome* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), Silvio Bertoldi in *I tedeschi in Italia* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1964), and Robert Katz in *Black Sabbath: A Journey Through a Crime Against Humanity* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969). For De Felice, the *Pantera Nera*'s case becomes symbolic of Jews betraying fellow-Jews, despite his being unable to explain her motivations (De Felice: 472–3). Different accounts exist in terms of specifying precisely where Celeste Di Porto would spot her fellow Jews and how she would behave when identifying them to the authorities. In Stille's book, Celeste is poised just outside the ghetto, lying in wait for potential victims: 'Standing on the bridge between the ghetto and Trastevere, she would finger people as they walked by' (Stelle: 214). Kurzman supplies a lengthier description of her tactics, without localizing the exact area in which she was active: 'All she had to do [...] was to walk down the street, flash her lovely smile, and greet every Jew she recognized with a few warm words, such as "So nice to see you, Mr. So-and-so." Then she would continue on, and several comrades following her would arrest the man who had been greeted and deliver him to Gestapo headquarters at Via Tasso. And in the case the victim denied he was a Jew, as he usually did, Celeste would come to testify and, to the laughter of her Fascist friends, personally pull down the victim's trousers to show that he was circumcised' (Kurzman: 156–7).
- 5 Kurzman instead says that she stood trial in 1945 and was sent to a convent, see Kurzman: 432.

Ne aveva discusso anche pubblicamente alla presentazione del suo libro a Roma, nel Campidoglio, e sui giornali, alcuni dei quali avevano criticato la sua aggressività nel penetrare il mondo e il personaggio di Celeste [...] 'Mi sembrava ingiusto nascondere i fatti. Se tra gli ebrei di Roma c'è stata qualche mela marcia perché non dirlo? Sarebbe razzista descriverli solo come eroi e vittime [...]' Nel parlare, Vittorio sentì la propria voce ripetere frasi che sono diventate il ritornello di ogni presentazione, di ogni intervista.<sup>6</sup>

[He had spoken about it even publicly at his book launch in Rome at the Campidoglio, and in newspapers, some of which had criticized his aggressiveness in penetrating Celeste's world and her character [...]. 'It seemed unfair to me to hide the facts. If there were some rotten apples among the Jews of Rome, why not say so? It would be racist to describe them only as heroes and victims [...].' As he was speaking, Vittorio heard his own voice repeat phrases which have become the refrain of every book launch, every interview.]

While the authorial persona ostensibly justifies his reasons for confronting such a problematic topic, his self-mockery at the same time would seem to belie the fact that interest in Celeste's case cannot be explained away easily through a series of stock sentences. Yet perhaps precisely because it is so difficult to understand, Celeste Di Porto's betrayal has inspired not only Pederiali but also Gianini Belotti, as both writers, through their fictional representations of an actual figure, endeavour to make some sense of her behaviour, in an attempt to bridge what Andrew Leak and George Paizis refer to as the 'gap between knowledge and understanding', a stance which they consider to be the goal of present-day analyses of the Shoah penned by those who never in fact witnessed it.<sup>7</sup>

Gianini Belotti is both a well-known feminist sociologist – her groundbreaking text on the education of girls, *Dalla parte delle bambine* (1973), greatly influenced Italy's Women's move-

6 Giuseppe Pederiali, *L'amica italiana* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998), pp. 21–2.

7 'Introduction', Andrew Leak and George Paizis (eds), *The Holocaust and the Text* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 1–16, (p. 3).

ment of the '70s – and an established writer of fiction.<sup>8</sup> Her novels and short stories focus on women's issues, in particular female experiences of childhood and ageing. 'Stenodattilo primo impiego', the central story, and most substantial in terms of length, in her 1993 collection *Adagio un poco mosso*, concerns Celeste Di Porto, where she is presented under the name Fiamma and is depicted in two separate moments long after her crime was committed: an office in 1950s Rome, and a bus and the suburbs of the same city in the present.

Pederali, author of many children's books, as well as science-fiction and historical novels, examines Celeste Di Porto's behaviour in his *Stella di Piazza Giudia*, using her actual name, along with her nickname, Stella [Star], given to her because of her striking good-looks. Pederali's account carefully outlines many historical details about the Roman Ghetto while at the same time attempting to portray daily life there during the fascist regime and at the time of the institution of the racial laws of 1938. It also focuses on specific events which took place in Rome during the years 1943–1944, in particular the Nazis' demand for 50 kg of gold from the Jewish community and the subsequent SS storming of the Ghetto on 16 October 1943, as well as the massacre of the Fosse Ardeatine.<sup>9</sup>

While the texts of Pederali and Gianini Belotti constitute fictional representations of the same historical referent, their treatments of the subject of the *Pantera Nera* have some parallels

- 8 *Dalla parte delle bambine* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1995). Gianini Belotti has published many works which cover areas as diverse as sociology, pedagogy, fiction and tourism but her literary texts have yet to receive the critical attention they deserve.
- 9 His 1998 follow-up novel, *L'amica italiana*, examines the fate of one of the incidental characters in the earlier *Stella di Piazza Giudia*, Fiorella Castelfranco, a twelve-year-old Roman girl deported to Auschwitz. Aside from interviews or reviews, little has been published on Pederali, apart from the critical anthology, Giovanni Negri (ed.), *Il fantastico mondo di Giuseppe Pederali* (Reggio Emilia: Edizioni Diabasis, 2000), which however contains little discussion of Pederali's novels concerning the Shoah.

but diverge in terms of assignment of blame. Both Pederali and Gianini Belotti's literary interpretations of actual events explicitly demonstrate concern for the issue of memory of the victims of the Shoah and both writers question either directly or indirectly how the young woman could commit such a despicable act as the betrayal of her own people. Yet, on the one hand, Pederali's novel approaches the issue from a number of viewpoints, thus investigating a variety of possible explanations for her behaviour, and on the other, Gianini Belotti's short story inculpates her outright, as well as those who, like her, profited from the suffering of others during the war.

Gianini Belotti's 'Stenodattilo primo impiego' examines the nature of corruption (financial, political, ethical, religious, sexual) through the story of Anita, related in a flashback which is sparked off by her seeing the aged Fiamma/Celeste on a Roman bus many years after her crimes. Anita, herself in her late fifties/early sixties, returns to her memory of her first job as a typist, at the age of sixteen. She thinks back to her boss, *commendatore* Arpino, his illicit dealings in post-war Italy (his actual business is not stated but clearly he is involved in black-market profiteering) and his corrupt associations: his ex-secretary Elsa (married but still his lover), his German wife Christine (now free after having served a sentence for war crimes), and Fiamma, the *Pantera Nera* (also recently released), as well as their entourage of religious women responsible for Christine and Fiamma's conversion. It takes young Anita quite some time before she finally understands just whom she is working for, and her witnessing a sexual encounter between the *commendatore* and Fiamma constitutes the shocking and definitive eye-opening experience which jolts her into the realization that she is working for war criminals:

Ognuno, in quella intricata partita, faceva il suo sporco gioco, ognuno era al tempo stesso corrotto e corruttore. Sull'immane massacro che era stata la guerra, il commendatore s'era arricchito – un pescecane, si diceva di quelli come lui, e molti erano stati processati e condannati – e ora usava il suo denaro per spadroneggiare sui corpi e sui destini. Ognuna di quelle donne ne traeva vantaggio, sì, ma ne pagava anche il

prezzo in modi che la sua ingenuità non avrebbe mai immaginato. In quelle transazioni, il loro corpo veniva usato, offerto o sottratto. La moglie si serviva del denaro del marito per riscattare i suoi delitti e lavarsi la coscienza, inducendolo a finanziare la setta religiosa che le offriva la redenzione e al tempo stesso costituiva una barricata contro gli esigenti appetiti di lui che ripugnavano al suo inedito ascetismo. Fiamma lo usava per salvarsi la vita, una turpe vita di delazione e tradimento prima, e ora di cinismo e opportunismo nella falsa conversione e nello sfruttamento delle voglie di un uomo che disprezzava e la disprezzava. Sorella Caterina se ne serviva per pagare i conti della sua congrega di invasati che la venerava come una santa e sulla quale esercitava un potere assoluto, sfruttando la furiosa attrazione di lui per i corpi giovani e il bisogno di redenzione della moglie. [...] Si rese conto che ormai non arretrava neppure di fronte all'ipotesi più ignobile, tutto le pareva possibile. La corruzione era penetrata in lei e di colpo aveva modificato ogni prospettiva. Un mondo adulto melmoso si era spalancato di fronte ai suoi attoniti occhi infantili. Non sarebbe più stata la stessa.<sup>10</sup>

[Everyone, in that intricate game, played his or her dirty part, each one was both corrupted and corrupter. The *commendatore* had become rich through the terrible massacre of the war – a shark, that is what those like him were called, and many of them had been tried and sentenced – and now he used his money to dominate bodies and destinies. Each one of those women profited from it, yes, but each one also paid the price in a manner that her inexperience would never have imagined. In those transactions, their bodies were used, offered or stolen. His wife used her husband's money to compensate for her crimes and to wash her conscience, inducing him to finance that religious sect which offered her redemption but at the same time constituted a barricade against those demanding appetites of his which repulsed her new asceticism. Fiamma used him to save her own life, a vile life of denunciation and betrayal before, and now of cynicism and opportunism in her false conversion and in her exploitation of the desires of a man whom she scorned and who scorned her. Sister Caterina used him to pay the bills of her congregation of lunatics, who revered her like a saint and on whom she exercised absolute power, taking advantage of his furious attraction to young bodies and of his wife's need for redemption. [...] [Anita] realized that at this point she would not shy away from even

10 Elena Gianini Belotti, *Adagio un poco mosso* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1995), pp. 86–7. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

the most ignoble hypothesis, everything seemed possible to her. Corruption had penetrated her and had suddenly modified every perspective. A slimy adult world had suddenly opened itself to her stunned childish eyes. She would never be the same again.]

The various fictional players, then, become representative of those who historically stood to gain from the consequences of the Shoah. The *commendatore* stands for Fascist Italians who, in their complicity with the Nazis' programme of genocide, took advantage of the suffering of Jews, as well as of others, during the war in order to improve their circumstances. Characterized as sexually predatory in his subjugation of women's bodies, the *commendatore* can be compared to the Duce himself, known for his self-representation as virile lady-killer. Arpino's wife, Christine, represents the Fascists' partners in crime, the German Nazis, while Sister Caterina can be seen as the corrupt Church which in its turn benefited from Nazism, rather than opposing it.

In a paradoxical role reversal, Fiamma, who once hunted down Jews in hiding, is now forced to live in hiding herself for fear of being recognized by her victims' relatives or friends. Symbolic of all those who handed over their fellow citizens to the Nazis and Fascists for money, Fiamma, in her Judas-like gesture of recognition of fellow-Jews

passeggiava per le viuzze del quartiere e quando li incontrava, li salutava con grande cordialità, in modo che coloro che la seguivano a debita distanza li riconoscessero. (Belotti: 82)

[would stroll along the little streets of the neighbourhood and when she met them, she would greet them with great cordiality, so that those who were following her a good way back would recognize them.]

This the ultimate betrayal. Literally sickened and overcome by feelings of nausea at her unsuspecting involvement, Anita, in her loss of innocence, feels somehow complicit in the corruption which surrounds her, in a role analogous, then, to that of the Italian people as bystanders or even unwitting accomplices to the atrocities of war.

The figure of Fiamma, therefore, becomes an emblem of the corruption of Italy both during and after the Second World

War. She is portrayed unsympathetically, both in terms of her behaviour (she is seen as self-centred, unrepentant and hypocritical) and her physical appearance (in the contemporary setting; she is depicted as a grossly obese, grotesque old woman). The figure of Fiamma/Celeste is in fact condemned explicitly, as Anita pins blame for the Shoah and the crimes of the Nazis and Fascists on her. At the end of the story (which returns to the setting in present-day Rome, like the opening sequence), Anita follows Fiamma home from the bus and then begins a campaign of silent assault, keeping vigil on Fiamma's house. Anita's gestures repeatedly underscore the importance of memory:

Il lunedì, appena prima di andarsene, quasi al tramonto, vergò un biglietto e lo infilò nella cassetta delle lettere [...] Millenovecentoquarantaquattro, aveva scritto, in lettere e in cifre, come su un assegno. Per tutto il tempo che era rimasta in attesa di fronte alla casa, la donna non aveva dato segni di vita. Solo nel momento in cui stava allontanandosi, con la coda dell'occhio aveva visto la tendina oscillare.

Il martedì tornò e sostò a lungo, leggendo un libro. Sul biglietto che lasciò scivolare nella cassetta prima di prendere la strada del ritorno, scrisse a stampatello, a grandi lettere: Auschwitz. La tendina della finestra non si era mossa.

[...] Tornò il venerdì. Sul biglietto, incolonnati in bellordine l'uno sull'altro, tracciò dei cognomi: Anticoli, Di Veroli, Spizzichino, Di Consiglio, Tagliacozzo, e più sotto una data: 24 marzo, 1944, Fosse Ardeatine.

Il sabato restò seduta sul muretto finché il sole non tramontò, ma non lasciò alcun biglietto. Ne lasciò uno, invece, il pomeriggio del lunedì: aveva scritto il nome e cognome del commendatore e, sotto, un grande punto interrogativo. (Belotti: 93-4)

[That Monday, just before leaving, almost at sunset, she wrote a note and slipped it in the letter box [...] In nineteen forty-four, she had written, in letters and in numbers, like on a cheque. The entire time she had been waiting in front of the house, the woman had given no sign of life. Only at the very moment when she was leaving, out of the corner of her eye, she had seen the curtain quiver.

That Tuesday she returned and stayed a long time, reading a book. On the note which she slid in the letterbox before starting off for home, she printed, in large letters: Auschwitz. The curtain in the window had not moved.



[...] She returned that Friday. On the note, in neat, ordered columns one above the other, she traced some family names: Anticoli, Di Veroli, Spizzichino, Di Consiglio, Tagliacozzo, and below, a date: 24 March 1944, Fosse Ardeatine.

That Saturday she stayed seated on the low wall until sunset, but she left no note. She left one, instead, on the Monday afternoon, after having written the first and last names of the *commendatore* and below, a large question mark.]

Gianini Belotti's protagonist, Anita, patiently waits to see what Fiamma's reaction will be, as she feels compelled to force the traitor (and, consequently, the readers) to remember her crimes, through the telegraphic messages which include not only a reference to the infamous Nazi death camp, but also the date of the massacre of the Fosse Ardeatine and the list of typical surnames of the Roman ghetto, that is, of some of Fiamma's victims. In these, the story's concluding lines, after Anita's prolonged and persistent watch, Fiamma finally emerges, yet the narrative ends before the two actually speak: the memory of the Shoah is thus consigned to the written word. The story's conclusion deliberately remains open-ended, with the reader left wondering just what Fiamma will have to say for herself when confronted in person with Anita.

Pederali's *Stella di Piazza Giudia* presents instead a multi-faceted Celeste, or Stella, who is not portrayed in quite such manichaeian terms as Gianini Belotti's. The text consists of twenty-six brief sections, each of which begins with a date, preceded by the verb 'essere' in the past imperfect (e.g. 'Era il 23 marzo del 1944, a Roma' [It was the 23 March of the year 1944, in Rome]). Not all of the entries are arranged strictly in chronological order, resulting in a fragmented narration of events which moves away from standard formats for the novel; this break in convention of genre is, as Berel Lang observes, characteristic of images of the Shoah since 'the pressures exerted by their common subject are such that the associations of the traditional forms – the developmental order of the novel, the predictability of prosody, the comforting representations of landscape or portrait in painting – are quite inadequate for the

images of a subject with the moral dimensions and impersonal will of the Holocaust.<sup>11</sup>

This non-distinctness of form is exemplified in *Stella di Piazza Giudia* where the various subdivisions could be considered chapters but at the same time a series of testimonies told in the first person by a number of presumed friends or acquaintances of Stella: the wife of Lazzaro Anticoli (one of the men Stella betrayed), Settimia (her childhood friend), Ignazio (the local cobbler), Lamberto (Celeste's second Jewish fiancé), Magda (the owner of the hotel where Stella meets her Fascist lover Vincenzo Antonelli), Antonio Nardi (his friend and colleague), Righetta (Celeste's cousin), Elio (the young Jewish man who recognizes Stella at the end of the war when she is in hiding), Marisa (lover of the fascist Pietro Koch and fellow inmate of Stella in prison), and so on. This arrangement of polyphonic narrators means that the reader is presented with a constellation of opinions and hypotheses regarding the possible motives for Stella's actions. The recurring theme throughout the text is a questioning of Stella's behaviour, as the various accounts together form a picture of Stella's transition from childhood to adulthood in the Ghetto.

Antonio Nardi, the fascist colleague of Celeste's lover, asks himself (and, implicitly, the reader) why Celeste committed such an act:

Non ho mai capito perché lo facesse. Voleva forse vendicarsi del Ghetto che l'aveva considerata una poco di buono. Oppure per i soldi e per le abbuffate alla Trattoria del Pantino. O per cercare di salvare i suoi parenti dalla deportazione (però denunciò anche suo cugino Armando, ucciso alle Fosse Ardeatine). O per amore di Vincenzo, l'uomo delle SS. O tutte queste cose insieme. O nessuna.<sup>12</sup>

11 Berel Lang, *Holocaust Representation: Art within the Limits of History and Ethics* (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 10.

12 Giuseppe Pederiali, *Stella di Piazza Giudia* (Florence: Giunti, 1995), p. 113. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

[I never understood why she did it. Perhaps she wanted revenge on the Ghetto who had considered her a good-for-nothing. Or perhaps for money and for the feasts at the Trattoria del Pantino. Or to try and save her relatives from deportation (but she denounced her cousin Armando, who was killed in the Fosse Ardeatine). Or for the love of Vincenzo, the SS man. Or all these things combined. Or none of them.]

Not surprisingly, Nardi is unable to reach a satisfactory answer to his questions regarding Stella's motives. Ignazio the cobbler, wise man or *chachàm*, confidant and spokesperson for the Ghetto, asks himself the same thing:

Perché lo fece?

Lo sa Dio. E non è soltanto un modo di dire, o una maniera per rispondere brevemente: lo sa soltanto Dio come una ragazza può commettere delitti tanto gravi per amore del denaro o di un uomo. O per paura. O soltanto per giovanile stupidità. (Pederali: 156-7)

[Why did she do it? God knows. And that's not just a turn of phrase, or a way of giving a short answer: only God knows how a girl can commit such serious crimes for love of money or for a man. Or out of fear. Or just through youthful stupidity.]

Ignazio, too, is incapable of finding a logical explanation for Stella's behaviour. He claims however that he wants to seek out the story behind Celeste so as to try and understand her, not judge her:

Io, Ignazio, con le parole che amo tanto, vorrei cercare la verità su Celeste. Ma ci sono occasioni in cui le parole sono tanto effimere da somigliare alle nuvolette di fiato che escono dalla bocca degli uomini d'inverno. Non voglio giudicare Celeste, solo tentare di capire. Racconterò ciò che ho visto o ascoltato dal centro del mondo, ovvero la mia bottega. Sugli episodi soltanto riferiti non posso mettere la mano sul fuoco: il giudizio di Dio brucia i testimoni portatori di mezze verità. (Pederali: 53)

[I, Ignazio, with the words that I love so much, would like to seek out the truth about Celeste. But there are occasions in which words are so ephemeral that they resemble cloudlets of breath which leave men's mouths in winter. I do not want to judge Celeste, I only want to attempt to understand. I will tell you what I saw or heard from the centre of the

world, that is, my shop. As far as the merely second-hand episodes are concerned, I would not swear to them: God's judgement burns those witnesses who bear half-truths.]

While we as readers are provided with a host of voices regarding Celeste's actions, we never hear Celeste's own words in the series of testimonies. Her motives remain mysterious to the reader, since, as Ignazio puts it, words seem inadequate, even useless, in such situations. And yet, rather than renounce expression of Celeste's actions and of their still more horrific counterpart, the Shoah itself, thus relegating them to the realm of the unspeakable or ineffable, that is, as something too extreme to be expressed or described in words, and thereby equating both with the sphere of the divine or mystical (as Giorgio Agamben has pointed out),<sup>13</sup> Pederali's text shows that one must at least attempt to understand, even if the act of witnessing is always destined to be inadequate since it is a witnessing for the absent, given the impossibility of consulting Celeste's victims (or Celeste herself, for all that matter). These testimonies must, however, have someone to whom they can be told, just as the testimonies of survivors must be related to someone; as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub have shown, a testimony must have a listener, and in this case, the reader has the responsibility of listening.<sup>14</sup>

Pederali's text in particular raises the question of how Italians (let alone Jews) could betray their compatriots, that is, Italian Jews; this question is of course a fundamental one in trying to understand human behaviour under Nazi-Fascist oppression, and it is complicated all the more by the issue of knowledge. Susan Zuccotti wonders if informers would in fact have as readily denounced Jews to the Nazi authorities had they realized what actually was occurring in the camps. How

13 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Daniel Heller-Roazen (trans.) (New York: Zone Books, 1999), p. 32.

14 Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London: Routledge, 1992).

much would the average citizen living under Nazi-Fascist rule have known about the fate of the deportees? There is mixed opinion among historians on the question of awareness, but Zuccotti suggests that many Jews, unwilling to believe the Allied reports on the atrocities of the Nazi death camps, dismissed them as propaganda aimed at furthering the cause against the German enemy, and thus in their scepticism ended up by endangering themselves (Zuccotti: 173–4). One might also ask, then, how much Celeste Di Porto truly knew and would she have behaved in the same manner had she been certain that she was sending her victims to an inevitable death? Pederiali goes as far as to allude to her having at least some suspicions regarding the treatment of Jews in Poland, for instance.

Indeed, Celeste's case clearly also brings to the fore the difficult and contentious issue of Jewish complicity in the Shoah, first raised polemically by Hannah Arendt and taken up again later by Zygmunt Bauman, who maintains that many Jews co-operated with the Nazi regime because they were presented with choices that seemed like the only rational option; he discusses, for example, the cases of heads of Jewish communities agreeing to hand over a limited number of names to the authorities in order to save, so they mistakenly believed, the majority. Bauman explains this mechanism precisely on which Nazism relied: 'While in full command of the means of coercion, the Nazis saw to it that *rationality meant co-operation*; that everything the Jews did to serve their own interest brought the Nazi objective somewhat nearer to full success.'<sup>15</sup> Yet Celeste's motives remain nonetheless unclear, and it is Pederiali's text which most effectively explores the variety of possibilities for her complicity with the Nazi regime, while at the same time reaching no definitive justification.

15 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 135.

One survivor presented in Pederiali's text, *Settimia* (based on the actual person of *Settimia Spizzichino*, sole woman survivor of the over 1000 Roman Jews deported to Auschwitz after that fatal night in October 1943) (Zuccotti: 125) through her witnessing performs an act of memory, something of which she is very conscious:

Forse neppure i miei ricordi aiutano a capire. E temo di non essere una testimone serena: tutte le storie vissute da me, l'intera mia vita, prima e dopo la deportazione, mi riconducono sempre al lager, quasi fosse un pozzo della memoria dove tutto affluisce e tutto annega nel gelo e nel dolore. (Pederiali: 33-4)

[Perhaps not even my memories help to understand. And I'm afraid I am not an objective witness: all the stories I have lived, my entire life, before and after my deportation, always bring me back to the camp, almost as if it were a well of memory where everything flows together and everything drowns in ice and pain.]

*Settimia*, in a desire to understand not only *Celeste's* crime but also the Shoah itself, is left with the sense that her own eyewitness testimony is insufficient. Her thoughts always return, as is the experience of so many survivors, to the death camp, yet she is not able to comprehend or communicate the events. At the end of the novel *Settimia* sees *Celeste* in the Ghetto, decades after her crimes were committed, but they hardly exchange any words; the result is a silence around *Celeste's* actions since we are given no answers, not even from the perpetrator herself.

*Gianini Belotti's* compelling story of an older woman's recollection of her youthful loss of innocence portrays ultimately an almost one-dimensional *Fiamma/Celeste*, a woman who is the emblem of the corruption and evil of Nazi fascism. In this way ensuring that readers will be compelled to remember the crimes of the Shoah, yet without supplying explanations, *Gianini Belotti's* text constitutes an indictment of *Celeste Di Porto's* actions. *Pederiali's* novel, on the other hand, in a fragmented narrative which attempts to reconstruct *Stella/Celeste* through the voices of many witnesses, while upholding the

memory of the Shoah, resists the temptation to represent an absolute 'truth' and does not pass judgement on the *Pantera Nera*, thus leaving the act of interpretation to the reader.

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## Legacies and Identity

East and West German Literary Responses to Unification

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This volume seeks to trace the robustly critical process of historical, political and personal self-examination to be found in German literature of the 1990s. Scholars from Australia, Britain, Germany, and the USA have contributed essays which deal with a broad range of East and West German writers (Biskupek, Grass, Hilbig, Königsdorf, Maron, Mensching, Walser, Wenzel, and Wolf) as well as with general topics such as literature and the *Stasi*, and the response to the aftermath of unification to be found in autobiographical writing, lyric poetry, satirical fiction and cabaret texts. For all their diversity, a common thread can be discerned in these writers and the literature they have produced: a concern for the particularity of the East German experience, past and present, and a desire to explore that discrete identity – in both its positive and negative aspects – which stubbornly persisted over a decade in which the citizens of the German Democratic Republic saw themselves, their institutions, and their culture, swept up and consigned to oblivion.

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Roland Walter

## Narrative Identities

(Inter)Cultural In-Betweenness in the Americas

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