

*Anglistica* is published twice a year by the Dipartimento di Studi Letterari e Linguistici dell'Occidente, Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli

**Subscriptions**

Yearly subscription rates  
Lire 60.000

Single issues  
Lire 30.000

*Orders:*

Herder Editrice e Libreria  
Piazza Montecitorio, 120  
I-00186 Roma  
Tel. +39-06-679 46 28  
Fax +39-06-678 47 51  
(Payment by credit card accepted)

*Exchange proposals for periodicals are welcome; please send to Editorial address*

ISSN 0391-5956

*Cover design:*  
Jocelyne Vincent

**Editor**

Lidia Curti

**Editorial board**

Patrizia Fusella  
Donatella Izzo  
Marie-Hélène Laforest  
Jocelyne Vincent  
Marina Vitale  
Jane Wilkinson

Iain Chambers, Sara Marinelli, Mena Mitrano (guest editors)

**Editorial assistant**

Anna Maria Cimitile

**Editorial address**

Istituto Universitario Orientale  
Dipartimento di Studi Letterari e Linguistici dell'Occidente  
Via Duomo, 219  
80138 Napoli  
Fax 081- 204639  
E-mail: [anglistica@iuo.it](mailto:anglistica@iuo.it)  
Website: [www.iuo.it/diplotto/pubblicazioni/r\\_a/anglistica/Home.htm](http://www.iuo.it/diplotto/pubblicazioni/r_a/anglistica/Home.htm)

PER  
65

# anglistica

**vol. 4 (2000), n. 2**

**A  
I  
O  
N**  
Annali  
Istituto  
Orientale  
Napoli

The radical reconfiguration over the last three decades of critical studies and what constitutes 'knowledge', whereby 'theory' and writing, literature and the 'social', poetics and politics have crossed each other's path, has led to an irreversible interrogation of previous autonomies. It would be simple to reduce this trajectory to a superficial social history that commences around 1968 and develops, above all, through the writings, both theoretical and literary, of new historical subjects distinguished by gender, ethnicity and minority status. However, these are also symptoms of an altogether deeper current that, to use the unfashionable concept of egemonia, draws our attention to the limits and crisis, both intellectual and institutional, of a particular historical-cultural formation and its subsequent arrangement of disciplines in the western academy. The confident nineteenth-century positivism and/or idealism that cultivated and established the present day divisions and distinctions of the social sciences and humanities (and the critical and historical sense of such terms are themselves to be investigated) is exhausted. Confronted by nervous retrenchment into orthodox backwaters or else the continual adjustment of the inherited discipline in order to continue to converse with change, the initial dispositif is now clearly in crisis.

Yet crisis is, of course, the very basis of criticism. This is to suggest a theoretical modality that is neither conservative nor merely accommodating. But if positivism and idealism are no longer able to mirror the world in their languages, if the confidence of a subjective objectivity orbiting around the universal I/eye (humanism) is justly afflicted by doubt, then critical work, whether in literature or anthropology, becomes an altogether more exposed, more vulnerable, undertaking. Whatever the response to such a situation, which, of course, requires recognition as a critical situation and not something to be brushed under the carpet, it becomes clear that a local response, for example restricted to the field of 'English literature', cannot be divorced from a wider comprehension of the crisis-criticism of the humanities and its particular tutelage of 'knowledge'. It is in this direction that the new series of *Anglistica* proposes to travel, drawing critical strength, above all, from an interdisciplinary approach that has historically developed within the vicinity of English literary studies, that of cultural studies. But, precisely because it is interdisciplinary, existing between and beyond existing disciplines, neither cultural studies nor the critical perspective proposed for this journal can claim the authority of an intellectual orthodoxy nor the institutional recognition of a disciplinary regime. Being vulnerable is an uncomfortable, but necessary, position to occupy; the only comfort it provides is the perpetual aperture, the opening, through which an intellectual challenge can continue on its way.

## CONTENTS

Vol. 4 (2000), n. 2, *Englishness and Its Discontents*  
(editors for this issue: Iain Chambers, Sara Marinelli, Mena Mitrano)

---

Sara Marinelli, Mena Mitrano	Editorial	5
------------------------------	-----------	---

---

### ARTICLES

#### BELONGING?

- |                            |  |    |
|----------------------------|--|----|
| <b>Anna Maria Cimitile</b> | Nation, Belonging and <i>Méconnaissance</i> :<br>Pauline Melville's <i>The Migration of Ghosts</i> | 13 |
| <b>Sara Marinelli</b>      | Impossible Origins and Adopted Selves:<br>Traces of Identity in Jackie Kay's Writing               | 29 |
| <b>Mena Mitrano</b>        | Che cos'è la teoria  | 51 |
- 

#### THE DISEASE OF NATIONHOOD

- |                           |   |     |
|---------------------------|---|-----|
| <b>Silvana Carotenuto</b> | <i>Here and Now</i> : The 'Leprosy of Nationhood'<br>in Sonia Sanchez's Poetics | 81  |
| <b>Jane Wilkinson</b>     | The Sickly Weal: Anglo-Scottish<br>DissemiNations in <i>Macbeth</i>             | 103 |
- 

#### A TROUBLED ENGLISHNESS

- |                          |  |     |
|--------------------------|--|-----|
| <b>Mario Faraone</b>     | "England, Their England": Ideas of<br>Englishness in Some Political Writings of<br>the 1930s | 133 |
| <b>Floriana Perna</b>    | Englishness in Australia: The Idea of<br>National Identity in Peter Carey's Novels           | 151 |
| <b>Demetrio S. Yocum</b> | In(ter)dependence: The Poetic Revolution<br>of Seamus Heaney's Troubled Poetry               | 167 |
- 

#### DIALOGUE/DEBATE/DISSENT

- |                     |  |     |
|---------------------|--|-----|
| <b>Mena Mitrano</b> | On Diaspora, Coerced Mimeticism, and<br>Surfaces: An Interview with Rey Chow | 187 |
|---------------------|--|-----|
-

CONTENTS

Summaries	211
Notes on Contributors	214
Stylesheet	215



---

Finito di stampare nel mese di settembre 2001  
nelle officine grafiche napoletane Francesco Giannini & Figli s.p.a.

EDITORIAL

In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (*Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, 1930) Freud seriously questions the idea of community. In 1915 he had established the existence of a destructiveness “in the background” of the binding power of libido. At that time, however, it had seemed to him that destructiveness was “strongly alloyed with erotism”. Progressively, the existence of “a non-erotic aggressivity and destructiveness”, though it could not be fully demonstrated, gained a powerful hold on him. If people in general tend to reject this destructiveness, Freud realized that his thought had also followed the crowd and been no stranger to a similar “defensive attitude”. But the 1930 essay finally pays its debt to the “inborn human inclination to badness, to aggressiveness and destructiveness, and so to cruelty as well”. How might this foundational cruelty hold the notion of community accountable? Families, races, people, nations, Freud notes, no longer present themselves to the mind as cohesive wholes, merging in turn into the greater unity of mankind. The community-making process of civilization is undermined from within by the vicissitudes of cruelty. We do not know, Freud concludes, why community has to happen.

This issue of *Anglistica* might be read as a long gloss on Freud’s impasse. “Englishness and Its Discontents” was originally the title of the doctoral seminar held in the academic year 1999-2000 at the Istituto Universitario Orientale in Naples. Most of the essays included here have evolved from presentations given at the seminar. In substituting Englishness for “Civilization” the participants had a double intent: first to affirm the contemporary relevance of Freud’s question (Why community?), secondly to inflect the term “community” historically with particular reference to nation and the sense of national belonging. As a productive area of critical investigation, the national tie here emerges through the interrogation and deconstruction of Englishness. The recent redrawing of the cultural boundaries that once separated England from its former colonies has dealt a blow to assumptions of Englishness. Once one of the most powerful and extensive of empires, a historical, cultural, and linguistic dominium now has to come to terms with internal corrosion and multiplicity. Englishness itself is

transformed into an allegory of that "incomplete inclusiveness", constantly reminded of, and threatened by, its own incompleteness.

Having established its own identity through borrowing and plundering, Englishness today encounters those exceeding identities that have suffered from the discontent and dis-ease of being under its hegemony. From the nostalgic object of desire of past generations who could identify Englishness in an "imagined community", secured in a set of shared values and fantasies carrying specific political, linguistic, and cultural connotations, Englishness now arrives at the shore of an altogether more extensive surface: a trans- and extra-national space lying beyond existing national boundaries. Here we are invited to read the term as a pre-text, previous to the writing of another text and as a subtext informing the text of the other. The concept can no longer be understood to refer either to a transhistorical and autonomous force beyond colonial violence or to an ineffable state of mind beyond the scrutiny of thought. Rather than presuming a homogeneous linguistic, national, and cultural whole, Englishness has been transformed into the signifier of a porous, plural and fragmented space. It now signals the imperative of inhabiting this space as the necessary precondition for producing credible discourse; that is a discourse seriously intent on bridging distinctions between culture and society.

Here one might invoke Samuel Beckett's renowned struggle with his mother tongue. In Beckett's case, to tear the veil of English meant to open spaces for new ideas. Similarly, in times of ongoing cultural configurations, migrations, and globalization, to ruin the reputation of Englishness means precisely to imagine and inhabit the space of the nation in a singular and multiple way and let an internal multiplicity come to thought and writing. To assert one's belonging to a community, is often to inflect that assertion with discontent. Our critical journey, specific to the seminar that instigated the writings, moves from a postcolonial awareness of a troubling, discontented Englishness to the (humanist) subject's "fall" into incomplete identifications. To negotiate a "realer" subject becomes the pressing demand of Eve Sedgwick's intellectual autobiography *A Dialogue on Love*. Here psychoanalysis is deployed to protect the differences internal to the national American body from a unifying reductiveness (Mitrano). When understood as a critical disposition, Englishness encapsulates the incompleteness of the act of recognition, which must always reckon with a simultaneous

moment of *méconnaissance*. The essays in the first section chart a trajectory of slippery identifications in which differences – especially sexual, gender, ethnic, and racial differences – displace each other and come to exist as an incessant process of mutual translation. For the Macusi Indian woman, protagonist of Pauline Melville's story *The Migration of Ghosts*, the search for community evokes the link of *méconnaissance*. Her "sense of belongingness comes out of unexpected, imaginary encounters with... ghostliness" (Cimitile). In Jackie Kay's work, adoption becomes the main figure for identity, synonymous with the experience of being misplaced. The writer in the collection of poems *The Adoption Papers* is both inside and outside communities, being black and Scottish in white British society, while in the novel *Trumpet* the *méconnaissance* effect of identity is amplified by Colman's and Joss Moody's incomplete identifications: the first (the son) being a black man from ethnically mixed and "homosexual" parents, the second (his father) being a black artist who had lived his/her life as a man and is discovered to be a woman after death (Marinelli).

In the second section, what Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* had termed cruelty passes into the pervasive metaphor of illness. Illness here intercepts and interrupts the dream of a whole and healthy national body. In post-colonial imagery, the colonised territory often appears as a wounded, raped, massacred female body, whose scars and wounds need to be cured through the 'treatment' of narration and through the healing voice of poetry that can bring them into language. Paradoxically, the vicissitudes of illness ensure the value not only of the voices that the nation represses but also of the differences that the discourse on nation cannot include, explicate, nurture or heal. In a historical frame, it is certainly possible to speak of an internal 'Englishing' of other communities. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* makes the case for Scotland. By many defined as a 'Royal play', *Macbeth* remains a prime example of a textuality that both constructs and interrupts national loyalty. Far from being an untroubled homage to the new King James I, the play "is marked and constructed by the heterogeneous and antagonistic histories... temporalities and representations it traverses and rehearses" (Wilkinson).

But as a signifier of internal rewriting and fragmentation, Englishness can also function allegorically. In other words, it can suggest a set of critical tools with which to query the national tie. To

speak of Englishness, therefore, can also mean to tap a conceptual reservoir in the hope of generating new analyses of other, similarly imaginary, communities. The African American poetry of Sonia Sanchez is an example. Here race traverses State and family ties as these come to be through Aids and illness. In Sanchez's poetry, the interference of the infected blood of Aids renders inoperative the metaphor of a national bond as though it were composed of common transhistorical blood. Here the poetry is invested with an almost visionary force, "its healing power directed to seemingly indestructable and punishing metaphors" (Carotenuto).

The last set of essays illustrate the critique of Englishness as an "imagined community". For the writers of the 1930s it is a set of shared values and fantasies that afford a sense of moral superiority to all those who identify (Faraone). The discontented, all those identities repressed under English hegemony, are quick to unveil the fictional nature of the community-making force of Englishness. In the case of Australian novelist Peter Carey, discovering the fiction of Englishness leads to questioning "the equation of Australian identity with the Anglo-Celtic ethnicity" and consequently to a revision of Australia's internal historical myths (Perna). For the Irish poet Seamus Heaney English is a home haunted by repressed voices. He thus sees in the openness to "the sounds and articulations of conflictual national histories" the redemptive dimension of writing in English (Yocum).

Finally, the interview with Chinese American scholar Rey Chow on the relation between postcoloniality and what she calls "high theory" explicitly thematizes a *leit motif* of the seminar "Englishness and Its Discontents". It remains to be seen how productive the encounter between the postcolonial and these emerging theoretical sensibilities will be for the future of literary and cultural criticism.

The voices in the following essays might strike the reader as widely varied and dissonant; they are not intended to be woven into a final story. Their uneven nature, scattered in time and geographical space, invites us to consider the precariousness of stable identifications and categories. Beginnings and endings remain as fantasies, ultimately consigned to the textuality of an unfinished and incomplete narration.

Sara Marinelli

Mena Mitrano

## ARTICLES

quest of a "homeland" that, like the man to tap a conceptual  
rest of the world. The analysis of other, similarly  
American poetry of Scott  
State and family ties as  
In Sanchez's poetry, the  
of AIDS renders inoperative the  
of cultural  
with an almost  
the industrial

as an  
a set of shared  
to all these  
repressed  
The nature of the  
of Australian  
of Englishness leads to  
with the Anglo-Celtic  
of Australia's internal  
Stamus Heaney English is a  
in the openness to "the  
national histories" the  
Yocum).

American scholar Rey Chow on  
and what she calls "high theory"  
"Englishness and its  
low productive the encounter  
emerging theoretical sensibilities

might strike the reader as widely  
to be woven into a bond  
in time and geographical space  
of stable identifications and  
remain as fantasies, ultimately

Sara Marinelli  
Mena Mirano

Nation, Belonging and Transience:  
Pauline Miller's *The Black Eye* and *Ghost*

Belonging?

Belongingness as its very essence. *The Black Eye* is the  
reordering of a sense of belonging.

Each member of the family... each  
making his own patchwork quilt of reality... missing fragments of  
experience here, pieces of information there... From the very impressions  
gleaned from one another, they created a sense of belonging and tried to  
make do with the way they found each other.

The feeling of being part of, of belonging in a group with shared  
memories and desires, is not given, not even when the group is a family.  
What is there is the need for it, and it is so strong it sets in motion a  
process whereby belongingness is constructed. The created sense of  
belonging helps to "make do" with the available, with whatever aspects  
of each other were there to "use." It is a way of making sense, a unifying  
sense, of what is presumably felt to have not one. This is achieved by  
collecting "fragments" and "pieces," but that is not the only possibility  
of belonging-as-sense: for the result of all the glomping is, for each  
member of the family, *this* one patchwork quilt of reality.

Here is an astonishing if revealing statement about belongingness:  
to feel a member of a group is fundamentally a private, personal and  
original threading of elements at one's disposal: an individual's  
assembling of loose fragments and pieces. The sense of belonging is

*The Black Eye* (London: Virago, 1977, 1974), 25.

Anna Maria Cimitile

**Nation, Belonging and *Méconnaissance*:  
Pauline Melville's *The Migration of Ghosts***

Belongingness has its ways. In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is this rendering of the sense of belonging:

Each member of the family in his own cell of consciousness, each making his own patchwork quilt of reality – collecting fragments of experience here, pieces of information there. From the tiny impressions gleaned from one another, they created a sense of belonging and tried to make do with the way they found each other.<sup>1</sup>

The feeling of being part of, of belonging in a group with shared memories and desires, is not given, not even when the group is a family. What is there is the need for it, and it is so strong it sets in motion a process whereby belongingness is constructed. The created sense of belonging helps to “make do” with the available, with whatever aspects of each other were there to ‘use’. It is a way of making sense, a unifying sense, of what is presumably felt to have not one. This is achieved by collecting “fragments” and “pieces”, but that is not the only peculiarity of belonging-as-sense: for the result of all the gleaning is, for each member of the family, “his own patchwork quilt of reality”.

Here is an astonishing if revealing statement about belongingness: to feel a member of a group is fundamentally a private, personal and original threading of elements at one's disposal, an individual's assembling of loose fragments and pieces. The sense of belonging in

<sup>1</sup> Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (London: Vintage, 1970, 1994), 25.

the very same group is made of as many different patchworks as are the people in it.

A discussion of the sense of belonging entails engaging with other concepts, such as home and nation, but also diaspora, migrancy, exile. The meanings of these terms have been reconfigured in the last decades and the process of their redefinition is still on. The contemporary transnational space more and more forces us to rethink those terms in their articulations. Postmodernity is also in the encounters between those conditions.

Migrancy is the metaphor for revised notions of identity in postcoloniality.<sup>2</sup> From a historical event diaspora has turned into the home of the subject, an apt figure of the contemporary condition, as we acknowledge the constitutive breaches and gaps of the self, the constructed character of an integrity of 'identity' – the latter being a process or constant becoming. At the same time, however, nation and the national character, that is, a sense of definiteness and unity, are important stakes for postcolonial societies; the need for a reconstituted national identity and for its recognition as a political entity, with definite state frontiers, is at the heart of such contemporary struggles as the *intifada* and the related long 'peace process' that should eventually lead to the constitution of the Palestinian state in the Middle East, or the outcome of ethnic struggles in the Balkans. The way we negotiate between the need for a nation and the experienced sense of non-belongingness opens up new figurations of the two, where the contingency of nation-states is interspersed with the undecidability of identity.

The definition of 'home' has been central to human thought and even the 'will to knowledge' is one instance of a desire to inhabit or belong in a mastered and familiar space, to the point that philosophy itself could be envisioned as a way of constructing/being at home. This space, however, is never fully the homely it is willed to be. Migration unsettles the notion of home as a stable and secure place; the 'home' is fraught with the unknown, the uncanny, as Freud

<sup>2</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1994) is one instance of the metaphoricality of migrancy in contemporary theory.

explained; it is also equally inhabited by those cast as the defining foreigners to that very space; its domesticity is grounded in the violence exerted to keep the 'strangers' at a distance and in the proximity and entanglements with them that such violence paradoxically entails.<sup>3</sup> Yet we are still 'after' a home, so much so that today this unsettling is often read not as a destruction, but rather as a redefinition of the sense of home: thus, for instance, migration is interpreted as a new "ground-marking", as another "form of emplacement".<sup>4</sup> No matter how much we acknowledge the displacement and fragmentariness of our identity, we still build a sense of belonging out of it.

If we cannot live without belonging, if we cannot think but forms of belongingness for us, this does not mean that the latter retains the same valency through time. Changing figurations of belongingness become the new space we live and enable new ways of living that space. Pauline Melville's short story *The Migration of Ghosts* gives an interesting form to the already complex articulation of home, sense of belonging, nationhood and migrancy, as it reshapes the sense of belonging as coming out of unexpected, imaginary encounters with... *ghostliness*.

In the text the spectre adds an original valency to the notions of belongingness and nation, one that, in my opinion, has resonances with "[one's] own cell of consciousness" as the privileged site of the sense of belonging.

Loretta is a Macusi Indian woman on holiday in Europe with her English husband Vincent. The wedding of a niece is the occasion that brings Vincent back to London after ten years in Brazil, where he has settled down as the owner of a smallholding. Vincent is enthusiastic about their journey to Europe and wants his wife to see and appreciate the Old Continent the way he does, whereas Loretta does not like Europe and longs for a quick return to America. Loretta feels very uneasy during their holiday and often thinks of their life in Brazil: the comforts of the English life-style remind her, by contrast,

<sup>3</sup> Iain Chambers, "A Stranger in the House", *Communal/Plural* 6.1 (1998), 33-49.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Carter quoted in Chambers, "A Stranger in the House", 35.



of the poor conditions of her country (she has dreams where her house is at last supplied with taps with endlessly running water).<sup>5</sup>

Loretta's feeling of uneasiness is accompanied by an uncanny experience of cultural difference that she has while in Europe; a reiterated disturbing perception of the colour white is the form it takes. For Loretta skin colour is the sign for racial difference: the Macusi woman is immediately aware of her own difference in England as at the wedding she notices that hers is "the darkest complexion in the congregation" (180). Interestingly, however, her point of view retains a subversive capsizing of European constructions of whiteness when it comes to describe the colour of the English: whiteness finds the most uncanny associations in her mind, and even the sacred rituals of Western Christian tradition where white is a symbolically charged colour get desecrated. The white dress of the bride is described as a "white silk sheath" (180). White is the colour of Europe but a deadly hue for Loretta: the sheets of the bed in the London hotel room are "white tombstone" (181). The white tablecloths and plain white dishes of the restaurant in Prague, where they will go later to visit Vincent's friend Iveta, have "something disheartening" about them (184). Loretta does not enjoy staying in Europe, and most things she sees are saddening for her; a ghostly white becomes the catalyst of her uneasiness in the old continent.

Western whiteness has its 'discontents'. In London the bride reminds Loretta of "the white grub that inhabits the kokerite seed in her native savannah", and she is imagined running out of the church like a "white capuchin monkey" (180). In Prague, there is as it were the realisation of that disturbing image; Loretta and Vincent see a mock wedding with a transvestite bride in the streets and Loretta is reminded of the wedding in London. 'White' is by no means exclusive to Europe, although its cultural status as symbol of purity is. The reiterated associations of the colour white with elements from Loretta's native country produce an uncanniness in the 'European' colour; from the savannah, grubs and monkeys refigure the cultural status of white. Loretta's is the outsider's point of view that uncovers

<sup>5</sup> See Pauline Melville, *The Migration of Ghosts* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 179-196. All references to the text are from this edition.

the deadly and beastly in the Western tradition, the supplement that makes visible its discontents. Loretta cannot feel at home in what is instead homely for Vincent. The English sense of cosiness is disrupted by the image of a white grub inhabiting an exotic seed. Ghostly images from elsewhere reveal the *unheimlich* in the homely.

In this space of uncanny whiteness, how is Loretta to survive? It is during their stay in Prague that a ghostly reality shapes itself for her to dwell in. While walking through the city's magical streets, she and Vincent see a wooden door in the wall with the words "Lantern Magica" written on it. They go through and find an altogether different space within, a small courtyard with paintings on the walls:

Rotund, naked women rolled in and under the blue waves, an aqueous erotica in pale blues and yellows, gentle and playful. The sight was entirely unexpected. Its mood belonged to a warmer climate.... The heart of Prague, despite the Czech Republic being a land-locked country, seemed to belong to water spirits. (190)

Loretta feels a strange sense of familiarity at this sight; the murals make her think of Brazilian water spirits and she recounts one story about them to Vincent. From this moment on, her sense of uneasiness at being in a foreign place disappears: "she felt cheerful, as if she had been sent a message by someone from home" (190).

Loretta feels at home in Prague at last. What makes this possible is not some encounter with another Brazilian 'in the flesh' but an encounter with... *ghosts*. The ghosts are very much a creation of Loretta's imagination, they are conjured up in the associations triggered by the murals, which remind her of home insofar as they remind her of some legends of her country. *The Migration of Ghosts* creates the sense of the homely through the inconsistent presence of spectres. The ghostly familiarity Loretta experiences in the Prague courtyard has three important features: it comes as a *surprise*, the sight being "entirely unexpected"; it arises as an actualisation of her nation's legendary being – that is, it is produced as/by a *story*; and, above all, it is characterised by *displacement*: surrounded by the marine scenes, Loretta asks Vincent: "Do you think spirits can migrate?" (190).

Only a moment before another spectral, yet enabling, encounter

had taken place. The couple see a band playing in the streets and Loretta thinks she recognises someone from her own continent; the effect is, as in the courtyard, a restated sense of belonging for her. Here as later, however, the feeling comes from misconstruction. The passage quoted at length will reveal the interesting turns that belongingness takes in this story:

The drummer, banging his hand-drum, turned in their direction and Loretta caught her breath in astonishment. He was unmistakably a native Indian like her: the same jet-black straight hair, the same brown face and flat features and fat brown eyelids over black pebble eyes. She pulled urgently on Vincent's sleeve.

'Look,' she said, astounded, 'an Amerindian boy.'

Vincent looked.

'You're right,' he said. 'Let me go and ask.' And in one of the gaps between songs he went up to the band.... Eventually, he returned, laughing and shrugging his shoulders.

'No, apparently he's not Amerindian. He's from Mongolia in what used to be the USSR. His parents found their way here some years ago. He only speaks Czech. But your people are supposed to have come over from Mongolia originally, across the Bering Straits, aren't they? Maybe that's why you look alike.'

'I never heard that,' she said, frowning a little.

The boy with the drum slung over his shoulder looked towards Loretta with curiosity. He nodded acknowledgement and gave a little bow. They faced each other across tens of thousands of years. She smiled back at him. Feeling unexpectedly liberated, Loretta forgot the sulk that had threatened to spoil the morning and walked happily, arm in arm with Vincent, towards Wenceslas Square. (186-187)

The sense of belonging is an *affect*, an emotion associated with an idea. The latter is a misrepresentation, grounded in a different temporality, fantasy and desire. Belongingness turns out to be an imaginary state and the three 'grounds' here detected configure it for postmodern temporalities.

First, which time? The modern nation – and the sense of belonging that goes with it – is deeply embedded in the perception of

time. In his ground-breaking *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson has presented the nation as the *imagining* of a community that is made possible by a new perception of simultaneity, one that is closely linked with the modern apprehension of time as linear and consequential, as a Benjaminian "empty homogeneous time". Individuals "may be largely unaware of one another", but a "complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity" is what makes possible the conceiving of themselves as "a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history".<sup>6</sup> In *The Migration of Ghosts*, however, there is an overturning of the modern notion of simultaneity, which here enables the imagining of the separatedness rather than the community; such simultaneity, "marked ... by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar",<sup>7</sup> promotes other thoughts in Loretta's mind. In Prague again:

The afternoon drew on. They walked through flaking, decrepit stone buildings which still retained some warmth from the sun. Ordinary people went about their business. This is what it will be like when we are gone, thought Loretta, and Prague closes over behind us as if we had never existed. She would be grateful when they left. (189)

A community is still imagined, but the subject feels herself separated from it. If the modern understanding of time and simultaneity only serves division here, then another temporality allows the imagining of a community for oneself.

In the text modern calendrical time has a spectral hue, which redefines the idea of nation for postmodernity. The sense of belonging felt by Loretta is constituted in an uncanny *vicinity* spanning not only across space but also bringing together ages far apart. *The Migration of Ghosts* seems to stage an ancient, anachronistic apprehension of time, one which has little to do with the modern progressive time and which haunts it. This is similar to what Anderson identifies as the medieval perception of time, which,

<sup>6</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

neglecting linearity and consequentiality, privileged "a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present".<sup>8</sup> When Loretta looks at the Mongolian boy looking back at her, they bring into being an encounter across "tens of thousands of years". The 'nation' their reciprocal gaze stages is embedded in another temporality, one which, as the ghost in the machine, inhabits the actual calendrical time and is the enabler of the community they briefly create.

But what makes a community feel as one? Something that, individually perceived as a trait shared with others by each member of a society, brings that society into being. And what helps produce the perception? Jacqueline Rose has argued that fantasy has a great part in the constitution of states; she takes her cue from Freud, in whom she reads a tentative connection between fantasy and "the question of how subjects tie themselves ethically to each other and enter a socially viable world".<sup>9</sup> In her discussion Rose takes up the definition of fantasy as the "psychic glue" of social reality.<sup>10</sup> With fantasy the inner and psychic world, the indeterminate enter the public, social space; this is also the case in *The Migration of Ghosts*, where the fantasised migration of spirits and the equally fantasised Amerindian restate a sense of belonging for Loretta. The presence of fantasy is here beneficial, constructive: after her 'encounters' Loretta is at last serene, as if she were at home again; the events show not only "the force in the real world of the unconscious dreams of nations",<sup>11</sup> but also the positive power of such intervention. To accept the asocial element of fantasy as constitutive of, rather than disturbing, the sense of belonging means a revision of the opposition between contingency and the aleatory, a spectralisation of the concreteness of nation.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Here Anderson paraphrases Walter Benjamin on what he calls, in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1939), Messianic time; thus postmodernity could be said to be the time when what was only auspicated by Benjamin finds its realisation. See also Homi K. Bhabha, "A Question of Survival: Nations and Psychic States", in James Donald, ed., *Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory: Thresholds* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 89-103, for a reading of Anderson's essay that deconstructs the homogeneity of time of national discourse as presented in that text.

<sup>9</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

The route by which the sense of belonging is attained in *The Migration of Ghosts* is a tortuous one. In Prague, Loretta recognises as an Amerindian boy someone who is in fact from Mongolia, speaks Czech only and is a drummer in a band playing traditional Slovakian songs. Loretta strongly wants to find a recognisable face, a mirror that there, in a foreign, and to her unfriendly, country, restates her identity through its reflecting of her self. Racial and national identity become a matter of desire; belonging comes out of longing. And when desire gets into the picture, things are likely to go awry.

The spectral character of nationhood is one aspect of the 'devious' belongingness proposed in Melville's story. The Greek meaning of fantasy as "spectral apparition" appropriately renders the 'consistence' of nation in the text, where a phantom sneaks in to 'make' the sense of belonging: a 'conjured up' ghost of race, the Mongolian as Amerindian, is the fantasy of nation, posits nation as fantasy. What does it mean that a spectre is at the heart of nation and the sense of belonging? A ghost is a liminal entity. Between past and present, material and immaterial, in its most banal definitions, always uncanny in its appearances, it can also be read as a trope of the emergence of the unexpected that allows recognition and identification.

Recognition is always a matter of misrecognition. Jacques Lacan has theorised this point when presenting the "mirror stage" as constitutive of the formation of the 'I'. The Lacanian version of identity formation is well known: seeing for the first time its image reflected in the mirror the child perceives itself as *one*, as the subject of the movements assumed in the image.<sup>12</sup> The implications of this are revolutionary; it is only when the 'I' is doubled in an exteriority that such an 'I' is constituted; it is only when seeing itself *outside* itself, alienated in the mirror image, that the "I" is formed. The child mistakes the image in the mirror for its own self; *méconnaissance* is what allows identification. In mistaking the Mongolian for an Amerindian, Loretta enacts the mirror stage that gives her back her identity. The element of racial (in)difference that is involved in her

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience", *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), 1-7.

misrecognition adds a new valency to it. Out of Loretta's mirror stage there emerges the knowledge that racial identification is also a matter of *méconnaissance*.

*Méconnaissance* is a form of knowing. Loretta's spectral racial identification arises from her desire to feel at home. Desire *knows*. It knows what the subject does not know it knows. The Lacanian theorisation of *méconnaissance* acknowledges fantasies as its constitutive material. Rose reads fantasies not only in the Freudian terms of "protective fictions" that bar the way to memories, but also as a recognition of memories, "a way of re-elaborating and therefore of partly recognising the memory which is struggling, against the psychic odds, to be heard".<sup>13</sup> In *The Migration of Ghosts* the memories recognised in the fantasised Amerindian would be unconscious ones, an ancient knowledge that is unaware of itself, so to speak (it is Vincent who tells Loretta that her people are supposed to have originally come from Mongolia to America). In knowing desire creates. In *The Migration of Ghosts* the recollecting, remembering of unconscious memories is an event, something that happens as creation, here and now. The desire that lets Loretta mistake the Mongolian for Amerindian is this subversive, new form of knowing, whereby the recognition of unknown memories coincides with the event. The truthfulness of those memories is not at stake here; what is *different* in *méconnaissance*-as-knowledge is that with it memories converge in a present that is in fact their purveyor. The spectral character of this knowledge would also lie in the ulterior liminality between fantasy as recognition of repressed memories and fantasy as misrecognition happening here and now, in actuality.

The play of memory and desire is a constant feature in the story. It participates in the constitution of an actuality that is the 'present' only insofar as the latter is a merging of times and insofar as reality (always legendary, textual in character) is a combination of remembered tales and anticipations. Seeing the mock wedding in Prague Loretta finds herself fully immersed in such a 'present':

Loretta had a disturbing sense of *déjà vu*. She seemed to know every detail of what was about to happen. For a few moments, as she walked

<sup>13</sup> Rose, *States of Fantasy*, 5.

along, the future merged vividly with the present. As the experience abated, she remembered the wedding in England and how she had imagined the bride turning into a man. It seemed to be coming true. Sometimes she felt she could make the world like that, dreaming it into existence. She frowned with concentration as she walked along. It all reminded her of something else too, a tale told by her mother who, in turn, had been told the story by a visiting Mayonkong trader from Venezuela. (188)

"[A]ny present moment may become a point of attachment for an ever-recrudescent cultural past."<sup>14</sup> In *The Migration of Ghosts* that past always comes as a surprise, totally unexpected. Its emergence in the present is truly an "arrival", "absolutely different: the other that I expect to be unexpected, that I do not await".<sup>15</sup> It is the *invention* of the present, of desire, that constitutes the sense of belonging.

The sense of belonging is phantasmatic in *The Migration of Ghosts*. Fantasy takes part in the constitution of the nation-as-home. The latter is also an object of desire; as such, it is constituted *in* that very desire. *Méconnaissance* enables its coming into being. With fantasy, desire, *méconnaissance*, the aleatory becomes constitutive of belonging. Melville's story proposes *méconnaissance* as the *heimlich*, the familiar produced in misrecognition. The ghost, setting time "out of joint", is the privileged trope of this different, displaced and eventful character of belongingness.

\*\*\*

Ghosts accumulate on ghosts. Loretta's phantasms set themselves against a background with a strong sense of ending and fading away. In the story the redefinition of the sense of belonging is accompanied by a presentation of the end of Communism in the era of globalisation. While in London Loretta remembers a young couple

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm Bowie, "Memory and Desire in Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*", *New Formations* 26 (Autumn 1995), 3. Bowie comments on the play of resonances between memories and desires in Freud's text.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Derrida, "The Deconstruction of Actuality", *Radical Philosophy* 68 (Autumn 1994), 33.

that she helped some time earlier in Brazil. They were communists, involved in a fight between the police and the Sem Terra, the people fighting for their rights to own the land they had been usurped of. Loretta remembers the two:

In his hand he grasped a cheaply printed copy of the Communist Manifesto and some other tattered texts with pictures of Lenin on the front. Even in these circumstances, immediately after witnessing a massacre, his description and analysis of the events were illuminated by ideas and sayings gleaned from these books which he studied every night.... His girlfriend was to return to São Paulo where she would have the baby and then immediately give it up for adoption so that she could return and fight with the Sem Terra. Nothing, she said ... we have nothing. *Nada. Nada.* (183)

The picture here presented of an almost anachronistic Communism, tattered like the boy's own copy of the Manifesto, is enhanced by Loretta's silent considerations: "Loretta did not speak. The Sem Terra were not liked by her own Macusi people. They burned the forest and squatted on the land. The Macusi claimed that the land was Indian territory" (183). What does this remembering mean? The dispossessedness of the Sem Terra is felt in an ambivalent way by Loretta, a woman who also feels very uneasy (dispossessed?), far from her country and who creates her imaginary 'home' to avoid such unease. The end of Communism, the loss of all shared property, the "*nada*" pronounced by the girl, is the kernel of a story about imagined belonging and ghostly, atemporal nations.

Communism is the ghost of itself in *The Migration of Ghosts*. Globalisation apparently allows no place for it, above all in the ex-Eastern bloc. Vincent and Loretta go to Prague to see Vincent's long-time friend Iveta and her husband Paul. Vincent imagines that with them he will resume political discussions and is highly expectant of their conversations: coming from a communist family himself, he wants to "talk politics" with Iveta and is curious about "what she makes of the new regime" and the end of Communism (182). When they eventually meet, however, Vincent

has to face an altogether different situation, totally unexpected by him: in a Prague that, like the waitresses in the hotel where they stay, "thrusting capitalism had taken by surprise" (184), Iveta is having an affair with a young man and, having invited him to dinner together with Vincent and Loretta, the last thing she wants to do is to discuss politics with her English friend. Being asked whether things are better after the end of Communism, all Iveta says is: "Children don't have to learn Russian in schools any more. And we have McDonald's and Benetton" (192). She replies "in a noncommittal way" and is just not interested in the topic. Apparently a sad private life has taken over any interest and belief in the shared public sphere and in the community.<sup>16</sup>

The ghostly Communism is countered by a cultural landscape that is highly contrasting with the former's fading away by way of its accumulations. For the cultural space presented in *The Migration of Ghosts* is also a packed one. The end of Communism goes hand in hand with the presentation of a global, crammed space of cultural consumption, a European landscape after the great East-West divide that is fraught with incongruent products and artifacts, a space of confusion of the new, transnational economy and degraded one-time ideologies. The great symbols of old Communism are now but cheap souvenirs:

A street vendor had set up a stall. On one side he was selling old Russian army hats. On the other he was selling empty tin cans garlanded with labels that said, in bold red capital letters on a white background: 'THE LAST BREATH OF COMMUNISM'. Loretta picked up one of the tins and looked puzzled.

'It's a joke,' said Vincent. 'It's empty. Just air inside.' (187)

Then there is what is described by Paul as a "flooding in" of outsiders "to set up new businesses" (192). "[S]harp-suited German businessmen" discussing in English with Prague officials about their enterprises in that land, bribing them with U.S. dollars (184-185),

<sup>16</sup> Iveta's flirtatious attitude towards her lover during the dinner is represented as a cruelty towards her husband, with whom Vincent silently takes sides, seeing in his friends' situation more the sense of Paul's misery than that of Iveta's happiness.

and McDonald's and Benetton in Prague become the landmark features of this new scenario.

Vincent prefers not to see this reality and sticks to his own ghosts to deter it. He insists on seeing another Prague, and makes efforts to establish a continuity between the present and the literary past of the city by visiting Prague Castle and Kafka's house, remembering that *The Castle* must have been written there (185). This is what corroborates Prague's beauty for him. Vincent does not believe in the migration of ghosts, but rather thinks that they are "quite conservative" and "stick around the same place" (190). He thinks of ghosts, if he thinks of them at all, as positive entities, guarantors of a presence of the past that is origin, foundation and force in/for the present. His commonsensical phantasms have little strength though, and that continuity refuses to be easily established: Vincent cannot remember whether it was *The Castle* or *The Trial* the book in question, and his assertive statement of a tradition ends up in uncertainty.

The cultural space so forcefully characterised by an 'end', the end of Communism, paradoxically configures a temporality other than linear, and brings about a spatialisation with ghostly features. Jacques Derrida has discussed the end of Communism in terms of the global space as always already *haunted* by the spectre of Communism.<sup>17</sup> In Melville's story the tin of air Vincent sees is the presence of Communism as also a form of haunting. Reduced to air and, even worse, to emptiness in the souvenir, Communism is present as its own ghost, a spectre haunting itself as well as the cultural space of its haunts. Its ghostliness is a mark of its own consumption and usury. The setting of culture in *The Migration of Ghosts* configures a space that is at once of accumulation, consumption, and ghostliness.

Communism's translations continue. Globalisation is criticised in the hoarded cultural space where objects and goods once with a value are now heaped one upon the other, amassed simulacra of themselves, reduced to valueless souvenirs. Communism melts into thin air and becomes a tin of "the last breath of Communism". Given to Loretta as

<sup>17</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, with an Introduction by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).

a joking gift by her husband, the useless tin will soon find its utility: she thinks of giving it to the young communist or to her father once back home, as "[c]ontainers of any sort always proved to be useful out there" (196). In the long journey of the tin of air from Europe to Latin America is the transformation that spatial as well as temporal translations operate on ideologies, cultures, and artifacts. These exist as those translations and are always the ghosts of themselves.

The evanescent ghostliness of the sense of belonging exists amidst that other ghostliness, the amassed yet usured materiality of consumering global societies in *The Migration of Ghosts*.

In conclusion, there is a vicinity of ghost and consciousness that I should also like to consider. "Consciousness" has the same root as "conscience"; and conscience is the ghost or 'spirit' of human agency for most of western philosophy. In *The Migration of Ghosts* consciousness is itself ghostly. For, if consciousness is also formed in the sense of belonging, the ghostly character of the latter can only unfix, destabilise the former, reduce it to a spectre. The quotation from Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* with which I opened this article would seem to corroborate this spectral figuration. The ghostly character of belonging in Melville's story and the "cell of consciousness" in Morrison's novel stand for the same thing, the fantasised and the intimate share in the same space; out of this alone there emerges the sense of belonging.

The spectral reinvents the nation. It is a patchwork made of other patchworks, a phantasm oscillating between the outside of the nation and the inside of each one's "own patchwork quilt of reality". The nation is a *detour in méconnaissance*.

Sara Marinelli

### Impossible Origins and Adopted Selves: Traces of Identity in Jackie Kay's Writing

She never pretended I was her natural child. When she parceled out chores or favors she'd say, 'You are just like my own'. That 'like' I guess it was made me ask her ... where my real parents were.... O, honey, they disappeared without a trace. The way I heard it I understood her to mean the 'trace' they disappeared without was me.... I'm Trace, what they went off without.

Toni Morrison, *Jazz*

#### ...from where to begin a story

I say to the man at the desk  
I'd like my original birth certificate  
Do you have any idea what your name was?  
Close, close he laughs. *Well what was it?*

So slow as a torture he discloses bit by bit  
my mother's name, my original name...<sup>1</sup>

There is often a search for origins in Jackie Kay's writing, for the exact suture where life-lines join after having been naturally separated or forcedly severed, and from where different stories can begin. These are the stories of two white mothers and a black daughter, whose voices fluctuate in the collection of poems *The Adoption Papers* (1991), and of a black son and his adoptive 'mixed'

<sup>1</sup> Jackie Kay, *The Adoption Papers* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Publications, 1991). Hereafter cited in the text as AP.

parents in the novel *Trumpet* (1998).<sup>2</sup> From the very pattern of these narratives, where dissonant accents are meshed to articulate their speech and their lives, the quest for roots is indeed constantly deferred and dispersed in the unfolding of their intricate relationships. Paradoxically, the obstinate desire with(in) which the search for 'real' parents is undertaken by the daughter in *The Adoption Papers* and the son, Colman Moody, in *Trumpet*, is marked by resistances and surrenders that cast doubts on the significance of the search itself:

...a few genes, blood, a birth.

All this bother, certificates, papers.

It is all so long ago. Does it matter? (AP, 20)

The longing for 'origins' indeed coincides with the struggle to begin a story, as any singular sense of belonging is refracted and dissolved in a state of hybridity that emerges from dwelling in the interstices of a homogeneous national space and straight sexuality. The writer represents one of those border voices in the territory of nation, gender, sexuality, that, being initially perceived as an anomaly inside the nation, has indeed translated this anomaly into an inclusive fragment of what resides at its core; as one of those stories that, being negated and excluded, uncannily return.

The daughter in *The Adoption Papers* (and the writer herself) inhabits a borderline territory, the insides and outsides of being black and Scottish in white British society, while Colman, in *Trumpet*, is black and has been raised by 'homosexual' and ethnically mixed parents.<sup>3</sup> Besides being the connective link between the two stories, adoption signifies the experience of a divided and split subject, whose sense of misplacement is amplified in *Trumpet* where identity boundaries are crossed and uncommensurably extended. It is indeed not simply the story of an adoption of children, but the *mise-en-scène*

<sup>2</sup> Jackie Kay, *Trumpet* (London: Picador, 1998). Hereafter cited in the text as T.

<sup>3</sup> I am here using the word 'homosexual' to introduce the argument. Later on it will be discussed how the names 'homosexual' and 'lesbian' are put in question in the novel as they are unable to define the borderline sexual identity of the woman who chooses to live all her/his life as a man.

of an adoption of gender performed by the black trumpet player Joss Moody, who lived his/her life as a man and is discovered to be a woman after death.<sup>4</sup> The unexpected, shocking disclosure of this secret by the corpse of the woman who was believed a man by everyone, except his wife, throws his son Colman into a furious and painful search for truth. It drives him to redraw all his parents' intimate life and his own relationship with the person he used to call father. Whereas the novel displays mostly a male bond between father and son, in the collection of poems it is a female world that is represented and imagined. Here the writer enters a state of fantasy and remembrance from where she reworks her memory and puts her own story of adoption into language.

Being born in Scotland from a Nigerian father and a Scottish mother and brought up in Glasgow by a Scottish couple, Jackie Kay has always been confronted with the ambiguous condition of residing in the liminal space between Scottish and Black culture; a condition that, after the initial suffering for being perceived as different, as not Scottish, she has embraced as a plural cultural position where to speak from. This plurality of vision is also evoked across a polyphony of voices that speak to each other and within each other especially in *The Adoption Papers*, where the daughter's voice is intersected with those of her two (white) mothers. Here, the girl's ambivalent desire for reunion with the birth mother and separation from her, constitutes the primary drive that urges her to narrate her story from the revelatory moment she recognises she possesses "no nose or mouth or eyes to match" (AP, 29). A revelation that casts the shadow of a supplementary history, whose spools are disseminated in the layers of her black skin. "Mammy why aren't you and me the same colour" (AP, 21) – she asks as she discloses an impossible and incomplete identification with the white features that frame her own familiar and social surrounding. Furthermore, in

<sup>4</sup> The story narrated in *Trumpet* takes inspiration from the 'freaky' life of Billy Tipton, a famous jazz piano player who had two wives and three sons and was discovered to be a woman after his death. See Marjorie Garber's analysis in *Vested Interests* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992). Gender as performance is extensively analysed in the work of Judith Butler. See especially her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London & New York: Routledge, 1990).



*Trumpet*, although Colman can state "I am the same kind of colour as my father" (T, 50), he also discovers how deceitful and risky the resemblance with his father is once he realises he cannot identify with a man that has turned to be a woman.

### Adopting identities

The need for identification with the mother for a daughter, with the father for a son, the need to return to the 'matrix' as the site of memory and authenticity, can be considered as the first stage towards the achievement of a distinct identity and subsequent separation:<sup>5</sup>

It is the well, the womb, the fucking seed.  
Here, I am far enough away to wonder –  
what were their faces like  
who were my grandmothers  
what were these days like  
passed in Scotland  
the land I come from  
the soil in my blood. (AP, 29)

The transit into the mother's body and the desire to go back to her womb, are here conjoined with the return to her Home as well, to home as Maternal soil. It is then a return to Homeland – to the Mother's land – to Motherland. To long for reunion, to claim for authenticity after having experienced loss and estrangement, to envisage Mother/Land, Mother/Tongue as the site of 'foundations', are some of the predicaments exposed in the literature, the language

<sup>5</sup> As Marianne Hirsch argues in her book, *The Mother/Daughter Plot* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), the narrative of a mother-daughter bond is almost a compulsory step in women's writing. It is interesting to notice that the bond mother-son is less investigated than female relationships. For an analysis of mother-son connection, see Lidia Curti, *Female Stories, Female Bodies* (London: Macmillan, 1998), in particular chapter 7, and Marie Hélène Laforest, "Masculinity in the Margins: Women Writing the Caribbean", *Anglistica* 2.2 (1998).

and the discourse on national identity of many post-colonial writers. The adopted child's demand to get in touch with his/her 'authentic' origins is affiliated with the urgency of a community to pursue a common past, a common tradition, a common language, and claim for the autonomous identity of 'Nation'. "Motherhood, in which the seeds of disseminations are sown, grounds the narrative of the nation".<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, nationalist discourses often appeal to the Nation as maternal, as the ideal 'umbilical cord' that keeps a community bound together.<sup>7</sup>

The inner fracture that scars the adopted child's self and the sense of division between two mother(s)/countries, two cultures, two languages, unfolded in Jackie Kay's writing, are the common inheritance shared by different stories of colonization across the world. The bond between the daughter and two mothers parallels the ambiguous relationship of a colonized country towards the 'adoptive' Motherland, whose culture and language are part of its own culture, and towards the birth Homeland, whose features and language, like that of Jackie's birth-mother, can only be imagined and imaginary.<sup>8</sup> It becomes indeed difficult to answer the question "Who is the real mother?". A clear distinction between them fades away and marks the passage to another space of enunciation, a 'third space', where the three voices, though typographically distinguished, are easily overlapped and blurred, thus turning into a hybrid language of love and grief within the voice of the daughter.

The metaphor of adoption can be useful to describe the peculiar type of bond between the coloniser country and the colonized one. It is particularly effective in the way it alludes to the ambiguous relationship between Scotland and England. They have, in many respects, been perceived as one single country under the name of

<sup>6</sup> Celeste Fraser Delgado, "MotherTongues and Childless Women", in Obioma Nnaemeka, ed., *The Politics of (M)Othering* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 132.

<sup>7</sup> See Susheila Nasta, ed., *Motherlands* (London: The Women's Press, 1991) and also Nnaemeka cited above.

<sup>8</sup> 'Imagined' and 'Imaginary' appear in the titles of two important books on the question of national identity and the post-colonial one. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983) and Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Granta Books, 1991).

Great Britain, or sometimes even more confusingly, under the name of England. Actually, across her long-lasting imperial dominion, England has often been identified as the Motherland of innumerable and often unknown colonies/‘children’, living at the opposite side of the globe, having another culture, and speaking other languages. The proximity of a country like Scotland has allowed England the ‘natural’ incorporation of its own neighbour – like a mother towards her child.

Scotland as an ‘adoptive child’ in the bosom of England, has suffered from the legacy of being, culturally and linguistically, a divided nation. In fact, the supplanting of Scots by English after the Union of 1707 and Scotland’s participation in the construction of the British national state has undermined the very ground upon which the holistic idea of nation as a single and unified totality is produced.<sup>9</sup> As a result to its cession to British Parliament, Scotland had failed to be a distinct nation and, consequently, has become the place of failed imagination, thus turning this restraining label as the predicament of its culture and the common trope of its literature. Through the years, several generations of writers, sociologists, artists and intellectuals have lamented the absence of a Scottish modern consciousness.<sup>10</sup> The country has in diverse occasions expressed its aspiration for independence from the British government and has often conceived this political act as an essential passageway for the assertion of a specific cultural identity, whose authenticity has to be regained from past origins. It is like an adopted child who, after the union with the

<sup>9</sup> For a stimulating approach to the question of Anglo-Scottish ‘contaminations’ within the formation of Scottish (and English) national identity, see Jane Wilkinson’s essay in this volume.

<sup>10</sup> The relationship between nation and imagination, and the idea of Scotland “as a place of failed imagination justified by the failure of the nation” has been a recurrent topic in Scottish culture. For an outline on the relationship between nation, narration and imagination in Scotland, see Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), in particular his “Introduction: Novel, Nation, Tradition”. See also the debate set up by the critic Tom Nairn who in *The Break-up of Britain* (London: Verso, 1981) has described Scotland’s inferiority complex under the hegemony of English culture and has defined Scotland’s relationship to England as self-colonization. See also Tom Nairn, “Scottish Identity: A Cause Unwon”, *Etudes Ecossaises* (1992) and Michael Hechter, “Internal Colonialism Revisited”, *Cencrastus* 10 (Autumn 1982).

foster mother, seeks for separation from her in order to gain an adult life, and wants to know his/her genealogy, his/her blood:

I have my parents who are not of the same tree  
and you keep trying to make it matter,  
the blood, the tie, the passing down,  
generations.  
We all have our contradictions,  
the ones with the mother’s nose and father’s eyes  
have them;  
the blood does not bind confusion,  
yet I confess to my contradiction  
I want to know my blood. (AP, 29)

To appeal to bloodlines and to pure ‘authentic’ roots has in many respects constituted the first step towards the ideal construction of Scottish nationhood in opposition to the English one.<sup>11</sup> It is from the menace of becoming a vanishing culture under the threat of English cultural hegemony, that the myth of Scottishness had begun to take form. The narrativisation of Scottishness as the essence and incarnation of Scottish national identity is not distinguished from any discourse on the way nations ‘come into being’. It is coextensive of reflecting upon Englishness or any *Other-ness*<sup>12</sup> as long as any of

<sup>11</sup> I am here referring to the specific cultural movement of the early 1930s – the so called ‘Scottish Renaissance’ – according to which the appeal to past origins and to ‘pure Scots’ were conceived as the basic steps towards the achievement of a modern Scottish cultural awareness. Although some backward tendencies are still evident today in some trends of Scottish nationalism, the hybrid nature of Scottish culture has instead recently become one of the innovative achievements reached by several critics and intellectuals within the present Scottish cultural debate, and also by a new cultural strategy pursued by the Scottish Ministry of Culture in the new Scottish Parliament. See Christopher Whyte, ed., *Gendering the Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), Craig cited above, and Marco Fazzini, *Crossing: Essays on Contemporary Scottish Poetry and Hybridity* (Venezia: Supernova, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> With this linguistic game I would like to suggest that the kind of cultural construction that produces a discourse about Englishness or Scottishness, or Nation-ess, is the same one that informs the discourse about *Other-ness* as the multi-faced and multi-named alterity menacing a national order. At the time of its birth a nation gives also birth to its possible external and internal others.

these signifiers are considered as imaginary and invented discourses, as 'cultural artefacts'. Despite its fictional character, the nation is not a trans-historical and a-temporal entity, as Benedict Anderson also pointed out in *Imagined Communities*, but it comes into being through a set of cultural, social, political and daily practices that constitute the specific "style in which [it is] imagined".<sup>13</sup> It is a style that finds its 'correlative objective' in products, habits, costumes, national anthems, in all the "scraps, patches and rags of daily life" that constitute the contingency of the 'nation-body' and its public 'corpus'.<sup>14</sup>

The authentic origins the daughter is 'contradictorily' seeking out do not get her in contact with her parents' blood, but with the contingency of her own body and with her own blood. The progenitors' unknown blood flowing in her veins is also the blood that leaks from her female body:

I know my blood.

It is dark ruby red and comes

regular and I use Lillies. (AP, 29)

"The soil in [her] blood" is concurrently evoked and denied between the lines in the name of identity. Blood is no longer, and not only, the chain to family bonds, but the fluid passage to the avowal of her female self. The profound "intersection between female and sexual subjectivity, family structures and the narrative of the nation" is here displayed.<sup>15</sup> Questions of gender, sexuality, nationality, continuously overlap thus disrupting any holistic account of homogeneous identity, according to which the writer has often been perceived as an 'anomaly'.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> See Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation", in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 145.

<sup>15</sup> See Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, 3.

### The anomaly/un-homely within the nation

Scotland is having a heart attack.

Scotland is having a heart attack.

Scotland is having a heart attack.

The Broon's Bairn's Black.<sup>16</sup>

Being black, gay and Scottish, as Jackie Kay identifies herself, has been considered anomalous. The peculiarity of her broad Glasgow accent uttered by her black body causes an estrangement-effect to Scottish people that the writer has acknowledged as part of her own living on the rim between two cultures. Anomaly is the word the writer uses for herself to describe the way she is perceived, as it emerges in some of her poems, such as "So you think I am a Mule" and "In my Country". The allusion to anomaly is figured by a mule that stands not only for *mulatto*, but also for the 'bastard' entity it embodies:

'Where do you come from?'

'I'm from Glasgow'

'Glasgow'?...

'Ah, but you're not pure.'

'Pure? Pure what?'.<sup>17</sup>

In an interview conducted by Rebecca Wilson, Jackie Kay commenting on this poem, alludes to anomaly once again:

That poem came about because the question 'Where do you come from?' is probably one that every Black person in this country is asked

<sup>16</sup> Jackie Kay, "The Broon's Bairn's Black", *Off Colour* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Publications, 1998). 'Broons' is the name of the ideal 'kailyard' family, symbol of Scottish 'authenticity'. The word 'Bairn' means 'baby' in Scots.

<sup>17</sup> Jackie Kay, "So You Think I'm a Mule", quoted in Dorothy McMillan, "Twentieth-century Poetry II: The Last Twenty-five Years", in Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan, eds., *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 570. Actually "In my Country" can be read as a rewriting of "So you think I am a Mule". See also Susanne Hagemann, "Women and Nation", in the same volume.

too many times. And the question always implies 'You don't belong here'.... This irritates me a lot that people can't contain both things, being Black and being Scottish.... And so being Black and Scottish is always treated as a kind of anomaly, which I suppose it is.<sup>18</sup>

It is in fact only through the gaze of white people that she becomes aware of her blackness and her diversity, when children at school address her with funny names:

What did you call me?....  
*Sambo, sambo*, he's crying now....  
 He turns and shouts *Dirty Darkie*... (AP, 24)

Also in the novel the trumpet player's family is described as 'scandalous': "Where were her parents from?" "Well, that was a bit of a scandal. Her mother was from Glasgow, but her father was a black man" (T, 250).

The presence of the black body within the nation cuts through its presumed homogeneous tissue; it cannot be contained within the linear frame of a national identity, as it introduces the anomaly/unhomely inside the home. Using Homi Bhabha's words, it can be said that within the discourse of Scottish identity Jackie Kay represents "another dimension of 'dwelling' ... as a coloured [Scottish] woman, defines a boundary that is at once inside and outside, the insider's outsideness".<sup>19</sup> As the writer herself states in an interview: "So, although I was steeped into Scottish culture, of which I am very appreciative, I never had any sense of Black culture at all, until I went about finding and creating that for myself".<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Gillean Somerville-Arjat and Rebecca Wilson, eds., *Sleeping with Monsters: Conversations with Scottish and Irish Women Poets* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990), 121-122.

<sup>19</sup> Bhabha, *The Location*, 14.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Somerville-Arjat and Wilson, *Sleeping*, 122. In the poem "Pride", *Off Colour*, the poet finds traces of herself in African Ibo culture whose features she tracks in her own face, nose, and teeth: "My whole face changed into a map / and the stranger on the train / located even the name / of my village in Nigeria / in the lower part of my jaw. / I smiled my newly acquired Ibo smile, / flashed my gleaming Ibo teeth".

It is paradigmatic that the fact of adoption provides insights into the invention of identity. It is not always axiomatic that being born in a place, one is entitled to *that* national identity. Besides signifying separation and cultural division, adoption can also be embraced as a metaphor of freedom and choice in the problematic construction of identity. It leaves the margins of personal imagination wide open and hides the tread of an un-lived, possible life, of many possible lives. It is then across imagination that life-lines meet, in the 'state of fantasy' where personal and political are conflated in the process of reshaping identities, and in the compulsion to tell stories.

Invention breaks through the construction of the self. Black female figures like Angela Davis and Bessie Smith, for instance, have been for the writer some of the first black persons with whom she could identify:

Angela Davis is the only female person  
 I've seen who looks like me. She had big hair like mine  
 that grows out instead of down.  
 My mum says it's called an *Afro*....  
 I can see my skin is that colour  
 but most of the time I forget,  
 so sometimes when I look in the mirror  
 I give myself a bit of a shock  
 and say to myself *Do you really look like this?*  
 as if I'm somebody else. (AP, 27)

Several poems in the collection *Other Lovers* and a fictional biography, *Bessie Smith*, are dedicated to the black blues singer Bessie Smith, who has represented for the poet much more than an idol to love: above all an imagined/imaginary black mother:

Why do I remember the blues?....  
 Why do I remember her voice and not my own mother's? <sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Jackie Kay, "The Red Graveyard", *Other Lovers* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Publications, 1993), 13.

Also in *Trumpet*, all characters are involved in a process of imagination. Joss Moody, for instance, is dreaming of Africa as a phantomatic place:

'Fantasy Africa'. That was Joss's first big hit. We never actually got to go to Africa. Joss had built such a strong imaginary landscape within himself that he said it would affect his music to go to the real Africa. Every black person has a fantasy Africa, he'd say. Black British people, black Americans, Black Caribbeans, they all have a fantasy Africa. It is all in their head. (T, 34)

Likewise his son Colman conjectures hypotheses on his parents' provenance:

If I'd got the chance I'd have probably liked to see a photograph of my mother and one of my father. I don't even know which one was black or where the black one came from. Haven't got a clue. People are always ... asking if I'm from Morocco, Trinidad, Tobago, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Jamaica ... I dunno, I says. Then I thought the next fucker that asks me where I come from, I'm going to say, yes, I come from Hawaii, Morocco, Trinidad, or any place they ask. (T, 58)

Where history fails, imagination begins. In imagination the narration of the nation and of the self commence. Imagination seems to be the ideal tie that binds personal and collective stories together. Jaqueline Rose in her book *States of Fantasy* suggests how the shape of a nation is affected by the interaction between individual and collective fantasy. As she puts it: "fantasy ceases to be a private matter if it plays its part in the forging of the collective will".<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, it is in the space of fantasy that the fracture between private and public is overcome. Collective imagination and the narration it produces can be a powerful force able to alter, or even to discipline, subjective and national identity, intimacy and institutions.

This is also true if we consider adoption as both a private matter and a social and political issue. Furthermore it raises problematic issues regarding the representation of maternity:

<sup>22</sup> Jaqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 3.

I always wanted to give birth  
do that incredible natural thing  
that women do ...  
even in the early sixties there was  
something scandalous about adopting,  
telling the world your secret failure. (AP, 10)

The split between the figure of the birth mother and the adoptive mother also introduces the theme of motherhood as both a biological experience and as an institutional role.<sup>23</sup> When the adoptive mother is looking for a child to adopt, first of all she registers her social failure of being a childless woman, as she is denied the first natural act that makes her a woman in a patriarchal society: "I'm not a mother until I've signed that piece of paper" (AP, 16). Motherhood is here disjointed into two founding acts: the planting of the seed in the mother's womb, and the signing of the adoption papers. Life is split between a private, intimate, biological act and a legal, institutional one. The experience of mothering thus passes through a public, official, political sign. In particular adoption is an undertaking that is not confined within the *domus*, but which has its social counterpart. Among other things, it means bringing an internal other, 'an alien', a domesticable alterity within the space of the nation:

bringing up an *alien* child,  
who knew what it would turn out to be. (AP, 10)<sup>24</sup>

To be *adoptive* is, in fact, not to be *native*. If we think of the etymology of 'nation' from the word *natio*, which means to be born in a certain place, to be adoptive implies to be disowned by *that* specific national identity. In order to come into being, into existence,

<sup>23</sup> In her famous book *Of Woman Born* (London: Virago, 1979) Adrienne Rich makes a distinction between motherhood as a biological experience and as an institution, insisting on the prescriptive role of the latter. On the contrary, in some fictions from African writers adoption is interpreted by women as a way to be mothers without subjecting their bodies to a potential abuse. See Nnaemeka, *The Politics*.

<sup>24</sup> My emphasis.

the adoptive has to *go native*, has to acquire a nationality and a home in the world. Above all, it has to have a proper name, to step into the realm of the symbolic and enter the Law of the Father. To be native is a matter of blood, to be adoptive is a matter of signing papers, of achieving a legal status. The very title of the collection of poems, *The Adoption Papers*, attests to the uncompromising act of *writing* one's own identity in order to legitimate it and the necessity of entering the space of a 'primal' institution: the family.

It is indeed in the intimate domain of the family that the narration of the nation happens to intervene, where "hidden secrets hover in the space between social and psychic history".<sup>25</sup> As Homi Bhabha observes: "the recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and the world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other".<sup>26</sup> They become obscure and ambiguous. This is rendered evident within the kind of 'deviant' family depicted in the novel, where the inner, secret self is trans-vested in legal, official and 'straight' dresses. When the son discovers to having a woman as father, he desperately looks for a community norm in which to identify and not to feel different and perverted:

How many people had fathers like mine?... I could ring round the whole country and never find anybody that's gone through what I'm going through....

No man wants a fucking lesbian for his father! For his mother, maybe, but not for his father! (T, 61, 66)

Whereas in *The Adoption Papers* home is the place where the mother is, thus signifying comfort and belonging, here home is the place where the 'paternal abject' resides. In the attempt to find a home in the world, the story narrated in *Trumpet* displays the total invasion of the world into the home, thus erasing any separation between private and public. The unhomey has utterly invaded the home, and home, as demonstrated by Freud in his essay *The Uncanny*, is exactly the

<sup>25</sup> Rose, *States of Fantasy*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Bhabha, *The Location*, 9.

territory in which the monstrous dwells. The uncanny is read by Freud as "something which should have been secret and that has come to surface".<sup>27</sup> When the secret is unveiled by the dead body of a black woman who was believed a man, it displays the symptoms of a terrifying subjective and collective fear of displacement. The unmasked corpse of the woman exhibits excess that cannot find easy "accommodation in the familiar division of social life into private and public spheres". It "represents a hybridity, a difference 'within', a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality".<sup>28</sup> The transvested body of the trumpet player is too disturbing to be named; it incarnates the anomaly in the house of the nation, somebody without *nomos* – without law – without name.

When the funeral director receives the body and has to inform the deceased's son that the corpse is not a man's one, he can't articulate his speech, he cannot utter the unspeakable:

Underneath the pyjama shirt were several bandages wrapped firmly round the chest.... He began to unravel the bandages.... There they were, staring up at him in all innocence – the breasts.... It was as if they knew they were secrets.... It had never happened to him before. He had never had a man turn into a woman before his very eyes.... He wondered *who* knew about this woman lying on the table. Who knew what ... He could never think of the right words to say.... (T, 109-112)

It is in the rituality of daily life that "the un-homey stirs", that the disciplining power of a national, heterosexual identity "falls most enduringly on the details of life: how you can live or not, who you can love or not", who you can mourn or not.<sup>29</sup> The uncanny sneaks through the bandages that Joss's wife ritually used to wrap around his/her chest to conceal her husband's female body:

<sup>27</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", in *Art and Literature* (London: Penguin, 1985).

<sup>28</sup> Bhabha, *The Location*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> I am quoting and paraphrasing Bhabha, *The Location*, 15. The last sentence refers to the question of impossible mourning in homosexual couples, which is an important theme in the novel. For a problematic analysis of this question, see Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). See especially chapter 5.

I wrapped the bandages around his chest for the last time. The bandages that were part of our life together. I wrapped them round and round tightly till his small breasts flattened underneath the cream coloured bandages. (T, 203)

They become the threshold between domestic and public sphere, and grotesquely the bridge between the intimacy of the closet and the spectacularity of the world. The movement they signify – from the inside of the household to the outside of the world – is that of ‘horror’ itself: what emerges “from the intimate and profoundly familiar to the strange and wonderful, from the depth to the surface, from the self to the other”.<sup>30</sup> They also come to symbolise the couple’s ‘interstitial intimacy’ which is in danger of being detected by the overseeing, ‘panoptic’ eye (from that of its son to that of the neighbours) of institutions and social behaviour, and is simultaneously produced as a form of resistance to the threat of norms. The bandages ceremony recites the “reiterative and citational practice” that Judith Butler calls performativity, and through which gender roles are here indeed repeated. The body is (in)vested with categories of sex that are a reproduction of a gender norm. Butler has extensively discussed in her work the ambivalence of power inherent in the ‘citational practice’ acted by transvestites and drag subjects: while it unmasks “the constructed nature of heterosexuality”, it also produces a sexuality that restates a norm and that cannot exceed the dynamics of *surveillance*.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, “whatever gender [Joss Moody] is assigned” his cross-dressing becomes indecipherable to the public eye until it is normalised and “narrativized by a story that recuperates social and sexual norms, not only reinstating the binary (male/female) but also retaining, and encoding, a progress narrative: s/he did it in order to get a job, find a place in a man’s world ... become a jazz musician”.<sup>32</sup>

What is not said is that the gender Joss Moody had been performing since he was only an eleven-year old girl “wearing a

<sup>30</sup> Curti, *Female Bodies*, 167.

<sup>31</sup> See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>32</sup> Garber, *Vested Interests*, 68-69.

man’s suit” (T, 219), and his decision to be a jazz musician and love another woman, means to bring an erotic, sexual desire into existence. This transgressive pleasure made her sever family ties, in order to follow “the impulse to break the hold of tradition, to break from the heterosexuality of discourse which the mother represents”.<sup>33</sup> Joss Moody’s liminal body and sexuality betoken the excessiveness of a story that cannot be told, that cannot be uttered in words when he is still alive, and that cannot be explained after his death. It is a story in which any name is “that of the displaced subject, of what was not supposed to be there”.<sup>34</sup> “No doubt they will call me a lesbian. They will find words to put on to me. Words that don’t fit me. Words that don’t fit Joss. They will call him names. Terrible vertigo names” (T, 154).

In a kind of epistemological rupture, words are ‘out of joint’ and loose their proper function and power to describe things, as they are confronted with a freaky, edging love that “dare not to speak its name, it did not even have a name”.<sup>35</sup> Joss’s transvested body becomes more than ‘male’, more than ‘female’, more than ‘Scottish’, more than ‘Black’. This supplement, this being ‘more’, cannot find easy accommodation, easy definition in the homogeneous narrative of [Scottish] nationalism.<sup>36</sup> It incarnates the terrible discontent of certain sexual identities and practices that are underrepresented in the national space. It becomes synecdochal of an unrepresentable minority, of those figures of abjection who, previously dwelling on the margins, now come to inhabit the insides of the nation space. They uncannily return as counter-narratives, interceding and interrogating the national narration: what sort of hospitality to offer to the dissonant identities emerging at the national borders? What name to give to Joss Moody’s sexual, excessive black body? Or, together with Judith Butler, we might ask “which bodies come to matter?”.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, 138.

<sup>34</sup> Curti, *Female Stories*, 175-76.

<sup>35</sup> George Mosse quoted in Andrew Parker et al., eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (London & New York: Routledge), 7.

<sup>36</sup> I am quoting and paraphrasing Iain Chambers, “Signs of Silence, Lines of Listening”, in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, eds., *The Post-Colonial Question* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), 53, 60.

<sup>37</sup> Butler, *Bodies*, xii.

The figure of the transvestite draws upon a sexuality and an eroticism that do indeed subvert precisely because they let *those* abject, uncanny bodies come to matter. They come to take significance although they assume the shape of cultural fears, anxieties and collective fears.<sup>38</sup> They come to matter within the process of displacement they onset. For it is precisely in the spark of a cultural shift that the horizon of the categories (national, sexual, racial) is expanded to become vague and porous.<sup>39</sup>

### Beyond the origin: an unfinished genealogy

There is no place of pure beginning, not historically, politically, or culturally in the world.

Jaqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy*

When he gets down ... he loses his sex, his race, his memory.... Back, from way. When he was something else. Somebody else. Her. That girl. The trumpet screams. He's hot. She's hot. He's hot.... It is liberating. To be a girl. To be a man....

So when he takes off, he is the whole century galloping to its close. The wide moors. Scotland. Africa. Slavery. Freedom. He is a girl. A man. Everything, nothing. The sun, the moon. Black, white....

He just keeps blowing. He is blowing his story.... (T, 131, 135-6)

Birth mother, adoptive mother. Male, female. Angela Davis, Bessie Smith. Fantasy Africa. The Scottish border. To which of these 'origins' to turn?

The initial search for the 'genesis' has revealed the failure of a

<sup>38</sup> Social anxieties and fears are brought to a brutal and tragic epilogue in one of the several stories of cross-dressing: that of an American girl, Teena Braydon, who is sexually abused and murdered after her 'real' identity had been discovered. The rage and violence consumed on her body by two young men is the sign of social discontent and the fear of alterity that says something about the (psychic) state of a restless and disturbed America. The story has recently been narrated on the screen by Kimberley Peirce in her movie *Boys Don't Cry* (1999).

<sup>39</sup> These observations require further investigation. In particular I refer/defer to the question of political agency analysed in Judith Butler's work.

discourse on authenticity. "Narratives of identity and belonging are compounded and rendered composite, complex. Identities are articulated across the transition, the bridge or passage between, rather than firmly located in any one culture, place or position".<sup>40</sup> Stories are enmeshed, intersected, like the three speaking voices in *The Adoption Papers*. By retracing back her way towards the womb, Jackie can only assume her birth-mother's aspect, but what she gains is an empty image and the disavowal of her own fantasy:

She is faceless

She has no nose....

She is faceless, she never

weeps. She has neither eyes nor

fine boned cheeks....

We are not as we imagined....

she is faceless and

she is too many imaginings to be flesh and blood. (30, 32-33)

In turning back to roots, to the point where life-lines join and narratives begin from, the "realm of the 'beyond'" is disclosed. The 'beyond' requires us "to move away from the singularities" of race, gender, nation, sexuality. As Homi Bhabha puts it:

What is ... crucial is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences.... It is in the emergence of these interstices ... that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness* ... are negotiated.<sup>41</sup>

While 'going back home' through her writing, Jackie Kay's search has indeed come across the zone of the 'beyond', where hybridity lies. Similarly, Colman Moody, while hunting his father, had to come to terms with his alterity and his cross-sexuality: "I'm going to track him down. I'm going to trace him back to when he was a girl in Greenock, to when he lived under the name of Josephine Moore" (T,

<sup>40</sup> Chambers, "Signs of Silence", 53.

<sup>41</sup> Bhabha, *The Location*, 1-2.



61). But, in response to Colman's quest for his dad's story, the father's answer is a ceaseless deferral, as "any story might be true":

Tell me *really*, tell me where your father was *really* from.  
 Look, Colman, he said. Look, I could tell you a story about my father...  
 I could say my father was a black American who left America because  
 of segregation and managed to find his way in Scotland where he met  
 my mother. Or I could say my father was a soldier or a sailor who was  
 sent here by his army or his navy. Or I could say my father was from an  
 island in the Caribbean whose name I don't know because my mother  
 couldn't remember it. Or never bothered to ask. And any of these stories  
 might be true. (T, 58-59)

Doubts and interrogations arise regarding the pursuit of an identifiable origin which is always deferred; it is an absence-presence, a trace that delays and defers to an unfinished genealogy. After having postponed it many times, finally Colman opens the letter his father had written to him before dying and, disappointed, does not grasp any word about his father's secret, about 'the primal scene', or about his father's childhood "when he was a girl in Greenock". Joss knows he cannot explain his/her personal story – which remains unspeakable in words – and chooses to go beyond, narrating *his own* father's story, Colman's grandfather.

Starting from the stories that are marginal to dominant culture, from those of mothers in *The Adoption Papers* and of fathers in *Trumpet*, and from her-story, Jackie Kay takes us into a much wider history, where "all the stories told aren't stories alone". To use Carolyn Steedman's words: "they [stories] exist in tension with other more central ones... [A] mother's story, a hundred thousand others, cannot be absorbed into the central one: it is both its disruption and its essential counterpoint".<sup>42</sup>

The tales narrated by the writer draw a line from Africa to Scotland – a disturbing, unexpected line that invokes the re-mapping of a culture that only recently has been coming to terms with "the fact that black people have been in Scotland for over four hundred

<sup>42</sup> I am quoting and paraphrasing Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986), 21-22.

years".<sup>43</sup> Both stories manage to attain a temporary, fictional reconciliation with their possible inceptions, although they disclose something which is not told, but that can be imagined. There is always a story of migration and diaspora behind a black body transplanted in white society, even if it is only caught as a fragment of longer tales and memories recounted by mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers. Even if it is only a gaze, a sentence pronounced by a white voice *simply* saying: "Look, a Negro!"<sup>44</sup>

The life-lines the son was looking for bitterly meet elsewhere, in a distant but 'familiar' horizon: through the passage from Africa to Scotland's shores. It is effectively always on a ship, or locked inside a hold, that the unaccountable journeys of old and modern diaspora have begun and/or have been dramatically interrupted. Here it is a ship touching the coast near Greenock at the dawn of the twentieth century, in those turning 'moments of cultural articulation':

You wanted the story of my father, remember? I told you his story could be the story of any black man who came from Africa to Scotland. His story was the diaspora.... This was at the turn of the century.... The big ship moored and gigantic. My father looked back at it. Strange how newly arrived ships static on the sea look so unreal.... It looked like an enormous fiction, the letters written in italic at its side like the title of its epic narrative, *HMS Spiteful*.... My father came off a boat right enough". (T, 271-272)

The son was probing the 'sources' and gets the story of a ship landing in Scotland from Africa in return. The ship was called *HMS Spiteful*. The name of the spectral, "unreal" ship crossing the century and crossing the ocean is obscure in its initials, but the disquieting adjective that completes and signifies them offers no comforting reading: "spiteful". Spiteful, like the possessed house in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Spiteful, like the memory of slavery that haunts entire generations of black people. Through a literary and historical rooting/routing, the hideous, un-homely name of the vessel speaks of

<sup>43</sup> Maud Sulter interviewed by Rebecca Wilson, in Somerville-Arjat and Wilson, *Sleeping*, 29.

<sup>44</sup> See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto, 1986), 109.

what Derek Walcott calls “the bitter memory of migration”, of the emigrant black workers who, “in their cultural passage, hither and thither, become part of the massive economic and political modern diaspora”.<sup>45</sup> It is as if the ship, to paraphrase Homi Bhabha once again, “bridges the ‘in-between’ diasporic origins of the coloured [Scottish] and turns it into the symbol for the disjunctive, displaced everyday life”.<sup>46</sup>

Like the ghost of the little girl named Beloved, Colman’s father claims a narration and ‘wants to join’ the scars of a disjuncted memory. But, contrary to *Beloved*’s, this is “a story ... to pass on”, from father to son.<sup>47</sup> The father’s story goes further back in the past, to a space in time that has filtered through the sutures of family and community ties, presuming a history which is not directly told. It is the pale trace of a longer and more painful history, whose origins and whose bastard, impure fruits are scattered across the world:

Maybe you will understand me, maybe you won’t. I knew you’d come here. I knew you would come looking for stuff. I’ve left it all for you, my letters, photographs, records, documents, certificates. It is all here. Mine and your own. I sat down here this morning to destroy all of this. Burn the lot. But I stopped myself.... I thought to myself, who could make sense of all this? Then I thought of you. I am leaving myself to you.... You will be my father telling or not telling my story. (T, 277)

<sup>45</sup> Bhabha, *The Location*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Picador, 1988), 274. The exact quotation says: “it was not a story to pass on”.

Mena Mitrano

### Che cos’è la teoria

#### Goya’s bow



Under the low lights of the museum room, the girl in this family portrait seems to wear her hair in a long, lush ponytail tied way up on her head so that the black bow grazes her forehead. From her forehead, the lush mass falls on the right hand side of her body,

which arches to the right as well. The bizarre hairdo gives the girl the air of being ready for a portrait. Her features, still as a porcelain doll's, lure the painter emphatically, but the painter averts his gaze. To the far left, a maid, carrying on a tray what is necessary to the Princess' toilette, stares above the shoulders of the painter to the posthumous spectators beyond the canvas. She catches them beguiled by the girl-doll as if to her this were no surprise. Her gaze yields no sympathy; its immotion verges on coldness. As she holds the tray up to view, the bundle of lace softens her cold stare. The second maid, who avoids direct speech with posterity, doubles the softening effect with more gauzy transparent textures. Now there are two kerchiefs on both maids' frocks and the two headdresses. It becomes apparent that the transparency is meant to both contain and reveal – enunciate and muffle – some sort of intractable coldness, which itself controls, while translating it, some sort of intractable non-human knowing. As it faces the spectator, the initial coldness enters a narrative. It passes into an almost insolent request, as if it were imperative that the spectators' looking be a decisive, consequence-bearing action. Together, the maids' gazes summon one to action: one can't be here just to look; something must be done.

Once narration has begun, it weakens the initial coldness in the first maid's gaze. But the coldness is picked up again at its beginning by one of the male servants at the opposite end of the group. In imitation of the maid, he is slightly bowed while the query in his gaze reaches beyond the canvas. This servant takes up the coldness, formerly muffled by the transparency of gauze and lace, and decidedly steers it into a further abstract direction indicated nowhere else than on his thin pale features. The servant wears his features in a manifest reciprocity with the face of his master Don Luis, seated at the table playing a solitaire.

With a sweeping movement the master has been deprived of his masterly attributes. The most master-looking person in the painting is not Don Luis, Prince of Bourbon, but the figure in red in the foreground, by some identified with Alejandro de la Cruz, private painter to the Prince, by others as Luigi Boccherini, at that time at the service of the Prince. Like most of the others, he follows the Prince' action, a game of cards. Unlike the others he looks less like a



harsh firmness of his stare bestows on him the natural authority that has fled the older man.

At the centre of the portrait, Princess Maria Teresa de Vallabriga e Rozas, donning the white layering of her negligee, picks up again the motif of transparency, echoed by the headdress of Donna Isidra Fuentes at her back. Once again, it is a question of a transparency that does not reveal, as the small candle, the only source of light in this interior, confirms. Condensed on the Princess and reflecting back on the onlookers around, the candlelight does not really illuminate. Despite the long hair and the detail of the slipper, the gender of the lit figure at the centre is not immediately clear. She meets the eye as the centre of an ineffable clarity in a family portrait in which very little is clear, in which, in fact, blood ties pass as surface kinship with the servants. (The young man with the headband, identified with Francisco del Campo, responsible for introducing Goya to the royal family, smiles half amused at being part of this family, half

embarrassed.) In this context, one wonders what kind of sense is required to judge a master who does not look like one.

The painting is divided into two scenes, at once separate and joined by the work of a black bow. Importantly, the bow is on the same trajectory as the painter's brush. But where the brush is halted, the bow does its work. Leaning against her older brother, the future archbishop of Toledo, also following his father's game with the rest of the group, the girl crashes against the scene next to her. As she bows to the bow, a "dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" takes place.<sup>1</sup> Her hairdo traces the legendary shape of the unicorn, the magic and curative thing from the remote past, evoking healing and transformative possibilities where they do not seem to belong. The performative work of the bow goes on. As its loops trace the legendary unicorn-like arch, stirring memories of magic and healing, they spread their action to the objects in the maids' hands. Now the two women re-enter as two gift-bearing Mary's. Mary of Magdala the first, with her demanding gaze, Mary of Bethany the second, with more modestly averted eyes, carrying a silver box that alludes to an unguent or balm jar. For a fraction of a second the spectator is released from the call rising from both sides of the group and left to the playful guessing of whose hair this is. The bow really ties two figures: the girl, Maria Teresa and future countess of Chinchon, and her brother. It is plain now that the long, lush hair belongs to the boy and nothing else can be done with this bow that ties his hair regularly, at the nape of his neck. It is clear that the bow could not have been the girl's. Had it been hers, its loops would have been turned to the right, unless it were either carelessly tied or purposely twisted, precisely to give more protuberance to the ponytail so that it would look unicorn-like. This imaginative flight on the wings of an object is soon checked and, saved from a chain of blatant mistakes, the spectator has to deal with the demanding tension of the scene to the right.

Goya's *La Familia del Infante Don Luis* (1783) is often compared to Velazquez's *Las Meninas*. There, the painter is staring at the invisible point where we, the spectators, are. In Foucault's reading, the painter of *Las Meninas* is staring at a doubly invisible

<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990), 97.

spectacle: "first, because it is not represented within the space of the painting, and, second, because it is situated precisely in that blind point, in that essential hiding-place into which our gaze disappears from ourselves at the moment of our actual looking."<sup>2</sup> Goya's painter, on the contrary, is staring at a visible spectacle, visible to the spectator, that has not yet been transposed on the canvas. This is blank, except for shadows, maybe the painter's own. Goya inverts Velazquez's positions: the painter represents himself as staring at a visible 'them', turning his back to the viewers. What in Velazquez had been the studious gaze of the painter on the viewers, the invisible model is here delegated to the maid on the left, who is peering from behind the canvas. It is the delegation of this role that had created the impression of coldness. No longer the model – and thus no longer left to the shock of our invisibility – the spectator is now drawn in with the forcefulness of a coldness. Her gaze is not allowed to close in its self-sufficiency but must trace the vitality of a search that cannot concern her since she is not in the family. If in Velazquez the spectator coincided with the model, here the point of the spectator coincides with Goya, the painter outside the painting.

With Goya, one is staring at a painter absorbed by the scene of judgment to the right, oblivious to the seduction of the imaginative work of the hairdo and bow. His own models are looking at the painter objectifying himself as concentrated on how to deafen on the canvas the clamour of the central master/servant combat. He is not there to do something; the tension passes him by; so does the contingent and dramatic construction of meaning in which the spectator for a while loses herself. Devotion to the royal family, testified by his inclusion in the intimate scene, compels a devoted representation of this family scene, which nevertheless appears as a tantalizing intellectual theatre. Representation has effects beyond itself, in the realm of ideas. Subject to this fierce intellectual energy, the spectator is called posthumously by the delegates – coldly, from beyond the grave. Here, an ineffable clarity is still waiting to be dressed, a judgment is still awaiting a cure. Caring and curing are encrypted in each other as the objects for the care of the body are directed, like a balm, toward the scene of judgment.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 4.

### The judgment of Don Luis

But what does it mean that judgment needs a balm or a cure? What has Don Luis done? He is playing cards, killing time; he has retreated to the most private time of his wife's day – her toilette – in one of the most private corners of the home, which he is allowing to be exposed to view, showing there his servants, including the painter, if he wants to paint. What appears as comfort, turns to weakness under the gaze of his accuser. The man is in his dressing gown, relinquishing himself with no composure (no shame) to luck and chance (the cards). His look between exhaustion and resignation is far from courtly dignity; in his eyes and on his lips a half-formed expression directed to the figure in red (a justification perhaps).

Goya's intellectual theatre unsettles the idea of consciousness by engaging its philosophical scene.<sup>3</sup> This is the extent to which the subject is imbricated in power and, by extension, the extent to which the recognition of selfhood must coexist with the combat of self/other, master/slave, in brief, to what extent the recognition must pass through the submission of something/someone as inferior. The paradigm here is, of course, Hegel. It can be recalled that in Hegel's narrative subjectivity evolves in successive stages: from *Begirde* (the concrete division and battle between master and slave) one moves to the stoic consciousness (the exaltation of internal self-sufficiency), then to the sceptical consciousness (recognition of concrete differences and things), to arrive to the unhappy consciousness (interiorization of the master/slave positions within the self) and to the final reconciliation of the finite being with the universal (with the objectification of the I as if it did not belong to the self). Goya's narrative begins along similar lines but fixes itself at the point when *Begirde* is about to be broken by the realization of the selfhood of another. As I recognize the selfhood of another, I break the initial self-consciousness as a form of desire – whose characteristic attitude is that the self subordinates the object to itself – and gain awareness of sharing in a greater underlying reality. The realization of the selfhood of the other – and thus of the binding of finites in difference

<sup>3</sup> I am using 'philosophical scene' in a reified sense here, to suggest a problematic that seems more akin to philosophy than any other discipline.

without annulling identities – is then a moment that emerges from the withdrawal of desire. Goya magnifies the earlier stages of Hegelian subjectivity to 'argue' that this realization is not an overcoming of the stage of master/ slave but a temporary deactivation of its force, its being put beside the point. In Goya's *Familia*, the desire to subject another thrives, confusing itself with judgment. Goya shows judgment to be hopelessly and fantasmatically traversed by subjection, just as the master and the servant are fantasmatically attached by ineffable family ties.

In Goya's version of subjectivity, Don Luis has acquired the exhaustion of the servant. Sitting at his game of cards, killing time, abandoned to chance, withdrawn in a private corner next to his wife, his figure focuses that stage of consciousness at which, through his work, the subject (the servant in Hegel's scenario) tries to erode concrete divisions. But the attempt to free himself from his finite limitations is vain. This use of work against the limits that fix one in one's name, one's position, can be thought of as the contact or pressure of two surfaces, one against the other. Goya portrays a moment of repose from the incessant labour of this pressure, not necessarily destined for the public gaze. In so doing, he takes the philosophical account of consciousness in a different direction. In this moment of exhaustion from the incessant labour of the construction of the forgetfulness of concrete divisions and limitations, the recognition of the selfhood of the other is staged. Thus staged, though, the recognition is confused with a demand issuing from the exhausted, declining being of Don Luis. Though unspoken, the demand has to be met. The judge is, therefore, both a judge and the demand's addressee. It is up to the judge to 'hear' it; it is up to the judge to recognize the sign. Yet, would his judgment change? If a sinister quality and tension envelops the circle of people occupying the two-thirds of the image from the right, it is because here the recognition of the selfhood of the other is fiercely knotted into the exertion of judgment.

For Goya the recognition of the selfhood of the other is a moral encounter with knowledge (hearing the demand). This encounter, in turn, demands the withdrawal of knowledge's inevitable, aggressive, and lasting capacity for thriving within judgement, as judgment. The question arises: can the moral moment be only an intermittent

interruption of desire or subjection? Aware of the other's judgment, Don Luis needs to send a signal that might prompt his judge to recognize his selfhood but that might not placate the anguish of the man for being judged in his private exhaustion. (In his dressing gown, he is primarily a father and husband in this portrait.) The point is that work (what in Hegel is the labour of disavowing material distinctions) disavows the moral moment as a moment of recognition. It safely declares it a parenthetical balm stolen from chance in the ongoing, unrelentless drama of a subjectivity inflected by submission, and somehow always destined to the mimesis of material, historical divisions. If it arises at all, the moral moment is a stroke of luck. Goya makes a spectacle of the baffling clarity of this mimesis.

Foucault has given a name to the unheard demand rising from Don Luis: critique. By this he means a moral experience with knowledge foreign to one's own, an encounter that is not a command but must issue from a 'virtuous' act of the subject: the act of overseeing a domain one would not want to police.<sup>4</sup> An act of voluntary insubordination to sure ways of knowing, critique is the refusal to be governed by the paroxysms of the will, and thus may exceed philosophy. Similarly, Goya's family portrait is not so much usurping the philosophy of something it cannot control. The vitality with which the two parts of the painting are joined gestures toward an intellectual object that has no speaking subject.

As noted Goya's portrait is divided into two scenes. They can be given a name now: to the left, the scene of a cosmetic art; to the right, the scene of the hard stuff of consciousness. The two are at a standstill, almost completely unchanged one by the other. The painter objectifies himself as uninvolved in the scene of the magic *cosmesis*, of the artful object (girl-doll). He appears to be completely, almost passively, given to the translation of the 'family scene' to the right onto the canvas, without having succeeded yet. From his place beyond the grave, which he now makes his spectator occupy, Goya unleashes the fierce intellectual energy of a brush (the one that has finished the painting, outside the canvas, and that finds its kin in the hidden brush of the hairdresser) that reaches beyond its field to

<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler, "The Virtues of Michel Foucault" (lecture), The School of Theory and Criticism and Theory, Cornell University, summer 2000.

unsettle the world of ideas. This is not only an ambition, but also an impatience, an impetuosity that matches the strange mixture of hardness and gruelling ethereality of the idea at hand. It is this impatience to unsettle the world of ideas – particularly the tale of consciousness – with no respect for disciplinary boundaries, borrowing ideas left and right, and making them work in the reading of text that the phenomenon of 'theory' might best be explained.

In his definition of theory, Jonathan Culler argues that it is a miscellaneous genre that has effects beyond its field.<sup>5</sup> This is the ambition at work in Goya. However, the miscellaneous quality is put into effect by a quintessentially dissatisfying encounter with the philosophical scene, intended here in an abstract, reified way as the privileged site of subjectivity. What I have called 'the judgment of Don Luis' is really a short hand to indicate the space circumscribed by the problematic of subjectivity, which is the primary concern of theory. In a way, so far drawing on Goya's Don Luis, I have been saying what Culler has lucidly put:

The English word subject already encapsulates this key theoretical problem: the subject is an actor or agent, a free subjectivity that does things, as in the 'subject of a sentence'. But a subject is also subjected, determined, 'her Majesty the Queen's loyal subject', or the 'subject of an experiment'. Theory is inclined to argue that to be a subject at all is to be subjected to various regimes (psycho-social, sexual, linguistic).<sup>6</sup>

Theory arises from a consummate awareness of power, witness its Foucaultian version – critique. One of the uses to which this awareness has been put is to affirm the productivity and renewability of norms. Drawing on the psychoanalytic notion of repression, Judith Butler's work poses a performative repression that is productive in spite of itself. It both forbids and generates desire. In this model, freedom is the subjective appropriation of repression. On the other hand, however, productive power is also an extended apparatus that

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998). See especially chapter 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

ushers in what cannot be said. It is, to borrow from Ferenczi, the regime of a confusion of tongues, a seductive adult that robs possible utterances of the freedom of their childhood. This is the case with Foucault's 'originary freedom', the almost unspoken and unsayable, what one wants to say but cannot because of the awareness of power.<sup>7</sup> Even though it is not predicated on silence or censorship, the popular Foucauldian paradigm of transitive power might be seen to indicate a lack of faith in a scene of subjectivity wholly governed by philosophy. In taking on the question of the subject, 'theory' has invaded the philosophical scene dragging into the open a sort of despair because it does not seem possible to move beyond judgment, that is, power. How can what here I have called the moral moment not be only an intermittent flicker swallowed in the theatre of the master/slave positions?

For Culler theory is marked by its inclusiveness. It borrows freely from other fields without respect for disciplinary authority, and this is the reason why it creates no specialized knowledge. However, as Culler also knows, this inclusiveness is destined to remain incomplete. It could be argued that theory's incomplete inclusiveness is the sign of a claim. Theory assumes that there is always left over an intellectual object that does not have a speaking subject and that claims one. Goya's painting is so useful because it parallels the contemporary ambition of theory. The seemingly inappropriate yet pressing question it poses – 'What do we do?' – together with the fierce intellectual energy posthumously unleashed from beyond the grave, speak of an intellectual object that cannot rest. Goya's *Familia* puts this restlessness on display.

As cosmetic art and philosophy join at the bow, the question that forms before our eyes can be rephrased through the mechanism that Abraham and Torok call 'endocryptic identification'. It refers to a memory "buried without legal burial place. The memory is of an idyll, experienced with a valued object and yet for some reason unspeakable."<sup>8</sup> The two scenes stilled in their separation speak of an

<sup>7</sup> Butler, "The Virtues of Michel Foucault".

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, "The Lost Object-Me': Notes on Endocryptic Identification", in *The Shell and the Kernel* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 141.

idyll frozen at the moment of its happening. Goya creates the effect of a memory of an idyll between the moral moment swallowed in power and the art of *cosmesis*, the care of the body. Abraham and Torok write: "The fact that the idyll was real and that it was later denied must be disguised and denied."<sup>9</sup> The separation of disciplines (art and philosophy) disguises and denies the idyll of the philosophical object and *cosmesis*. Here the suggestion is that this division is the burial of the object. Remarking precisely on this division, Goya's portrait questions the legitimacy of the burial. In other words, when theory goes to the scene of philosophy the effect of a real but denied idyll is created. According to Abraham and Torok, lost and denied, the idyll is removed to a place in the ego, a place of inclusion where the "assimilation of both the illegitimate idyll and its loss is precluded."<sup>10</sup> This inclusion is the inversion of the invasive procedure of melancholia in Freud, as here the object "carries the ego as its mask."<sup>11</sup> This is the object that painfully misses the subject. And it is this missing that we uncannily hear in the illegitimate question issued first from the cold stare of the tray bearer to the far left and then put on by the servant to the far right who, bearing the resemblance of the master in his emaciated shroud, finally fixes it on Don Luis: 'What do we do?'

Goya's painting essentially permits us to outline a story otherwise difficult to tell. In motioning outside itself, in the direction of other fields, gathering itself around the word subject, theory directs itself to the philosophical scene and points to an object abandoned by that scene, abandoned every time to a posthumous speaking subject. Theory is the ego that wears the mask of that abandoned object. Certainly the most striking feature of this harlequin discipline, made of bits and pieces of other critical thoughts, is that it builds a subjectivity that is a shadow counterpart of the strictly philosophical one. It declares that what should be the quintessential philosophical thing, i.e. the subject (What is Man? What is Being?) is precisely the object that philosophy has passed by.

The inclusive mechanism that I see at the heart of theory, its

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

offering itself as a harlequin subject, a mask for an otherwise abandoned intellectual object, is illustrated – I should say incarnated – by Eve Sedgwick's recent personal account *A Dialogue on Love*.<sup>12</sup> The striking feature of this narrative by one of the most acclaimed American theorists, in terms of my discussion here, is that it makes the passage to theory into a trope of contemporary American autobiography. Rather than simplify the story of the self, it retranslates this American object in ever multiplying, uncannily concatenated layerings.

Inside the United States, theory is assumed to be a foreign, European, intellectual invasion (mostly French, to the point that one has the feeling that theorists are a post-modernist lost generation still going to Paris to find the revitalized I of Henry Miller). Outside the United States, it is disparaged as yet another American product, a contemporary form of 'Americanism': excessive, spectacular, conquering, exactly like the extravagant cars and fridges of the 1950s, too American for European taste. In Sedgwick's account theory is an intellectual path within nationally specific constraints. It displays a passion for geographical location that is simultaneous to an impatience with its constraints, a combination that goes back to an illustrious American tradition uniting Emily Dickinson, Charles S. Peirce, and Gertrude Stein.

### The anxiety of theory

The central knot of Sedgwick's autobiography is the abandonment of poetry for theory and its subsequent return. As her body is undermined by cancer, and through the help of psychoanalysis, she reviews her past. In the process, poetry resurfaces. The narrative fabric of the analytic dialogue yields new words, or words put in a new perspective. Over these poetry extends, taking into itself the word-objects from Eve's past before they are lost to the more fitting art of criticism. In her book of verse *Fat Art, Thin Art*, Sedgwick had explained the loss of poetry as a historical event defining her generation:

<sup>12</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *A Dialogue on Love* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), henceforth referred to in the text as DL.

Later, after she'd run away from me  
all those times I would wonder  
sometimes how much her grueling aptitude  
for silence and aversion  
owed, maybe, to the domestic politics  
of postwar – when the thing you asked your courage  
would be, How to refuse?  
How to go limp when you are hailed by the Law  
in the shape of a state trooper with a dog,  
to leave, like the Unfriendly Ten,  
the names unnamed to the Committee.  
A song my muse would like to sing  
was, We shall not, we shall not be moved.  
Except – another thing – she couldn't sing.<sup>13</sup>

Far from a station in a solitary path, an incident in the *building* of an intellectual, being abandoned by the muse of poetry is an event of national dimensions shaping the identity of a postwar generation, marked by the Vietnam protest and the experience of anti-communist fury. In such a climate, the muse must oppose her 'No' to the invasive power of institutions, which events make increasingly palpable. The antagonistic song poetry "couldn't sing", whether because poetry was not prepared or whether because Eve could not make her muse sing while also saying 'no', at that point the song had seemed better sung by criticism, a sort of 'poetry' fit for a time when it is clear that institutions shape individual acts, while national history puts the muse out of work as if it were an invention of childhood.

In the analytic dialogue with Shannon, once again Eve recounts the loss of poetry:

It was my first vocation, first identity – from early childhood on into my thirties. (When my grandmother lost her memory and didn't know our names or relationships. She still mouthed, pointing at me, 'The poet?') Poetry both my first love, I guess, and first self – always with

<sup>13</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Who Fed This Muse?", in *Fat Art/Thin Art* (Durham: Duke U.P., 1994), 6.



the most excruciating blockages – gone now for years. Really gone for a decade. I can't think about it; I don't; when I used to, it would make me crazy. I don't know if it was depression that drove this muse away or if it was the long rocky strand of her loss that made depression (DL 65).

And she adds, "I do know I'm being incredibly fortunate in my second love. Never expected to be able to pour my self and energies into critical writing, have them so answered..." The analytic situation does not unburden Eve from her historicizing impulse. The loss of poetry remains a sort of generational rite of passage in national intellectual autobiography. The analytic dialogue, however, does reinforce the powerful mutual incarnation of national history and autobiography, as it allows for a reconnection of the personal and the public realms by clearing a space for a personal truth that the language of 'No' could not speak. As we shall see, Eve's transference on her analyst Shannon is a Ferenczian event: her transference love for him consists in her telling him a truth that cannot be told otherwise or to no one else.

The narration of the passage from first to second love parallels the confusion of public and private, the intrusion of an institutional setting in the Jewish family hearth. The sign of this confusion is the mother's voice. Taken out of the home and into the schools where she teaches, the mother's voice returns home as a hateful teacherly voice. The Foucauldian setting of instruction (school systems) is one of the best illustrations of how power is produced not by any external repression but through the individual.<sup>14</sup> Taking on the voice with which the other party (the students) expect to be addressed if they must comply with the system of instruction (normalization and *surveillance* in Foucauldian terms), the mother takes back home a voice (with all the connotations of inside, interiority, intimacy attached to the voice) perfectly immersed in power relations. As a result, she substitutes the home family with the extended family of power, blowing up the possibility to which any child is entitled of a mother-child idyll of sheltered love:

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 119.

– some estranging sense,  
radiating discomfort,  
of 'mother' with 'child'.

Hating that: my first  
memory of real hatred.

A blade. A glass wall. (DL 33)

Two things are accomplished here. The first is that the teacherly voice indicates an early transaction with power. And thus Foucault allows Eve to transfer further back in autobiographical time what in her poem quoted earlier, "Who Fed This Muse", was a event in historical-national time. Hence, the song of the 'No' that in that poem rose as a response to the palpable individualizing force of institutions, here in the narrative of the analytic situation acquires a more complex genealogy due to the early denial of the mother-child idyll. Home is already the site of history, Eve finds out. The second accomplishment is that this realization coincides with the resurfacing of poetry, a poetry that now can extend over the 'No', estrangement of mother-child (significantly placed in quotation marks), and take it in comfortably. It is as if now the muse could sing (legitimacy) as history takes up lodging in the home, a place without doors where public and private can no longer be told apart. This confusion no longer needs criticism to be spoken.

But Eve's mother, it turns out, is not the origin of this power/home confusion. The beginning goes even further back. The mother's teacherly voice, with her irreversible intimacy with power, is itself a 'No', the refusal of her own mother's fishwife's voice. Eve's mother is a woman with a contagious, uncommon devotion to culture. Yet, in her struggle up the educational ladder, and for assimilation in America, she was able to move only from nursery school to high school in the prime of her life. Only in advanced age did the teaching for adults or in the elder hostels come along with the independent study groups, a surrogate for more official and recognized academic circles of learning. As a woman in love with culture, Eve's mother comes less from her own mother (Nanny) and more from the anxiety of having one.

Nanny, in fact, is loud, rough, uneducated. An ungracious presence

with an extremely “raucous” voice and “startling and abrupt movements” (DL 150), she has wielded her power by the terrible force of her historically determined scarcity: “she always knew she was right. She had a hasty temper and she would let you feel her anger irony and aggression were her only modes of affection” (DL 149). Eve’s mother’s early (from the child’s perspective) turn to power is a turn away from the terror of any intimate link to the non-intellectual body of Nanny. Nanny is like a mother’s milk that promises to rob the child of the legitimate initiation into language and culture emblematised by English (for the mother/daughter) and critical brilliance (for the daughter/granddaughter). If acknowledged, Nanny would be the point of departure of a subjectivity inseparable from the aggression of a devastating poverty, a subjectivity in which the traumatic loss of intellect risks at every second to precipitate into an ontological abyss and disappear there.

In the shadow of this tale, the historical passage from poetry to criticism would appear as a symptom managing an undefeatable anxiety. And if theory arises in the nuances of this passage (the passage to criticism launched Eve as a queer theorist), then the question of theory becomes precisely its filiation to an aggressive origin threatening poverty. The possibilities of the analytic dialogue suggest this much as it allows Eve – and her readers – to make an otherwise unlikely connection between her own theoretical prowess and this double refusal buried in family history. At the centre of the narrative, then, Nanny is a site of anxiety, a shameful origin threatening the legitimate possession of cultural mastery:

There’s a pair of us?

She refined to her quiet

by the long labor

of refusing her

mother’s noisy and pointed

wit of the fishwife –

and her own relish

in it – I, the refusal

of a refusal – (DL 50)

Eve comes from the labour of the negative. Only now, through the mediation of the analyst, can poetry sing the ‘No’. This mediation is also a mitigation, a balm analysis carries to the subject scene, making it into an extra-philosophical scene in which judgment is now agitated by a fierce anxiety. As Goya teaches, only a fierce intellect can stand up to the abandoned object that philosophy passes by. All this is said in the word Eve borrows from Shannon – labour, which gives her a version of herself so different from the public image. Against the demonic icon, her self now is a fragile object refined in the labour of the negative. Earlier on in the sequence, the narrative of her mother’s schoolteacher voice is prompted by Shannon’s remark:

It’s that the you I see when I look at you, sitting there on the couch so nicely, is the product of an arduous and almost endless labor. You really were very, very different from the way you are now – the person I know is someone who’s been torturously polished, rubbed (DL 32).

This exchange is immediately followed by a poetry fragment:

shaped, repainted, pinked,

molded . . . You’ve done so much!

You’re

really different. (DL 32)

Again, the borrowing from Shannon’s speech enables the muse to speak a song that does not shun self-irony and criticism. Plainly, the recovery of poetry is in step with Eve’s transference love for Shannon. But to follow the transference also means to arrive at Shannon’s consonance with the hateful (because) non-intellectual being of Nanny, as well as his embodiment of a national object of spectacle and hence judgment (Shannon as a Thanksgiving parade float at narrative’s close). It means to get to the mutual encrypting of class and national discourses.

For the first part of the dialogue Shannon is an intellectually disappointing interlocutor, not bright enough, not challenging enough. “Stupid”, “dumb”, “mild” typically qualify him: “these hours when I’ve splashed around so happily in his mild, hired companionship. Too dumb or too nice – like, with no teeth, or at least

no tooth for me" (DL 51). Eve notes: "Tonight, though, when I am practically jumping out of my skin with 'feelings about' my therapist, it's obvious that I can never utter them. What would I say? I could adore you, but you won't think enough? Don't you even care what garbage comes out of your mouth?" (DL 52). Importantly, Shannon is not gay enough; in fact, not at all. This is crucial as one of the primary meanings of love in this account is love for gay men. In connection with this love Eve uses the adjective 'true'. Her declaration, "My love is with gay men" (DL 23) knots her work as a critic and her life via one of the distinguishing traits of theory – that brand of criticism that has invaded the scene of philosophy through the aid of other disciplines, especially psychoanalysis – that of a subjectivity conjugated on identificatory possibilities rather than understood as an organic identity. Not being a man, not even being gay, Eve has nevertheless built (mothered?) a theoretical edifice (Queer Studies). Significantly, *Dialogue* opens with the publication of *Epistemology of the Closet*, the book that gave an intellect back to gay subjectivity thanks to the notion of lateral identification literally incarnated by Eve in that *teoria attiva* that her life is. This love through and of theory, and her own mothering role in it, Shannon finds as pallid as Eve's S/M fantasies. Occurring in "institutional settings" (54), the fantasies are a literalized submission to power, whose violence is completely disjoined from Eve's work. The possibility of a shameful disjunction between her violent "sex-acts" (44), on the one hand, and the solidarity of her 'theoretical' love-work with gay men all the more emphasizes Eve's exhausting labour against the attacks of anxiety and shame. Perhaps this is why Shannon finds them "abstract" (54), provoking an escalation in Eve's rage. The text reaches a crisis as the circle of 'theoretical' love bursts into that of transference love.

Violent S/M fantasies might be the inevitable accessory of any consciousness sharpened by the pervasive workings of power. And we know that Eve has developed her second art against the Law and its impositions, turning refusal and withdrawal into the power of critical speech. Yet, Eve's awareness of the pervasiveness of power dates back to her childhood. She has earned it through the voice her own mother brought back from the public realm into the intimacy of the mother-child dyad. That teacherly voice, first object of the child's hatred, was not simply an object changed by power, it was also her

mother's consent to the work of power in her attempt to distance herself from Nanny's aggressive roughness, and thus from the anxiety of permanent intellectual robbery radiating from Nanny's fishwife manners and voice.

As a child Eve had mothered her mother. Her poetry, a muse whose locks and harmonious song (significantly opposite the 'No') are irrefutable marks of difference from roughness, imperfect English, or ugly noises, had sheltered her mother from any kinship with Nanny. Now, as an adult, critical writing performs a similar theoretical distancing from the ripples of anxiety reaching from the past, of refining the object in the background of this anxiety. Theory is the great labour of the negative, the transformation of violent institutional individualization into identification-love, of an anti-poetic 'No' into a new song, a new equally seductive muse. It is, in brief, the patient making of a fragile artefact. But Eve's body, under the merciless attack of cancer, has become equally fragile.

Shannon and Eve's disagreement on the S/M fantasies is a turning point in the account. Eve comes into the analysis wanting to make her analyst "smarter" (165). The pre-analytical work of theory had built a shelter around the anxiety-emanating object. As her project fails, "a circuit of reciprocity" (165) is established with the mutual avowal of the analyst and the theorist "as something of a transformational object" for each other (167).

'Transformational object' is Christopher Bollas' term. It refers in the adult to an object that "promises to transform the self".<sup>15</sup> In the child this is an object that prevents the collapse of the I in light of the mother's inability to provide a facilitating environment, due to her absence or, in Nanny's case, to her aggressiveness. In the life of the adult, writes Bollas, the search for a transformative object "is not oriented toward the possession of the object: this is sought so that one can surrender to it as if to a medium that alters the self, in which the subject-suppliant feels now the addressee of environmental-somatic cure, identified with the metamorphosis of the self".<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Bollas, "The Transformational Object", *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 60 (1979), 97-108. I am working with the Italian translation of this essay, "L'Oggetto Trasformativo", in *L'Ombra dell'Oggetto* (Roma: Borla, 1989), 23.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

At the turning point of the dialogue there is a mutual surrender of Eve and Shannon as that medium. What triggers it is the story of a bridge, significantly a connector and facilitator of transit: "He's been in New Orleans, and he tells me about driving across a bridge there, some kind of marvel of unlikely and spectacular engineering" (DL 162). Then, reporting Shannon's words:

I was looking forward to making it so you would be interested in the bridge. Thinking about it later, I saw that all this signified some real shift in my relationship to you. I'm feeling something I rarely do about patients: that being really seen by you is something that matters to me. Not that I just get narcissistically recirculated back to myself through your eyes, which happens all the time – but that I'm changed to myself in some way as I see that you see me (DL 162-3).

At the moment of counter-transference Shannon is a reversed Nanny, a facilitator ("so you would be interested in the bridge"). In Shannon, Nanny shows herself in search of a transformative object. "[B]eing seen by you is something that matters to me", says Shannon. And Nanny was/is 'matter', anxiety-laden matter for Eve and her mother's intellect. Shannon himself has been stupid, dumb matter to bright Eve.

Thus, through the counter-transference Shannon reveals the relation of inclusion (in Torok's sense) that Nanny's voice has to Eve's theory. Hers is a voice that one cannot have loved and thus cannot have lost. It embodies the anti-English, anti-culture position of a servant one cannot 'love', a position of crude regression to the first primordial combat of the Hegelian scene of subjectivity. As such, it is unable to advance the scene to its standstill on the question of the moral moment. Incidentally, this 'never-never' is symmetrical to Butler's construction of homosexual attachment.<sup>17</sup> The voice is an illegitimate idyll encrypted in Eve's theoretical edifice. As Torok points out, the mechanism of inclusion prevents the idyll from being spoken: it comes through the parallel motion of the subject subtly responding to an object that misses (mourns) it. It is not a

<sup>17</sup> Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification", in *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford U.P., 1997), 132-50.

coincidence that as Eve relinquishes the "making smarter project" she has for Shannon, a particular strain of psychoanalysis begins to tie the narrative together, the axis connecting Ferenczi, his heir Balint, and Christopher Bollas.<sup>18</sup> The references to Ferenczi are substantial. The make up of the narrative itself is a homage to Ferenczi's mutual analysis. The writing pairs Sedgwick's mix of prose-poetry and her analyst's notes, offered to the reader as part of the text. Shannon's analysis of his countertransference to Eve is another Ferenczian homage. Shannon himself embodies a type of Ferenczian analyst: his mild maternal care and tenderness initially antagonized by Eve's Oedipal smartness. But the most powerful reference to a Ferenczian tradition is in the environment occupied by the caring analyst.

The narrative opens in the analyst's room depicted as if it were the site of an intellectual *tabula rasa* – it is "metaphysically 'lite'". Shannon's light metaphysics is located inside an old building: "Space not only light with sun and canister lighting but, if there's an appreciative way to use the word, 'lite', metaphysically lite" (DL 3). The opposition old/new parallels the other heavy/lite. Inside an old house that looks as new is Shannon's illuminated space. It is a room made for a 'lite' thought, with all the associations it encourages: slender like the slender poetic fragments that spring up everywhere in the dialogue, for example, or weightless as the weight that Nanny no longer has, as well as the allusion to diet products indicating abstinence from certain foods and the selection of others.

The theme of the warm environment created by the sympathetic Ferenczian analyst rather than the uninvolved Freudian one is taken up by Eve's poetry, in a sort of strophe/antistrophe melody:

– Not in love with a  
person – but with the place the  
person inhabits

<sup>18</sup> The emergence of this strain is acknowledged in Shannon's note: "Quiet week-end. Went to bookstore in NY and found copy of Michael Balint, *Basic Fault*. Talking about warm and quiet environment as part of therapeutic transference instead of the anger, suspicion, mortifying self-loss she had imagined-reassured that what we are doing is on the right track" (DL 83).

and with the space of  
my friendly distance from him.  
Nor insatiable

but, in fact, content.  
Nor demanding. Nor always  
be frustrated –

rather, to be pleased.  
Grateful, trusting, yes, tender.  
Happy, therefore good. (DL 83-84)

Trusting and tender are explicit references to Ferenczi. In proposing a return to Freud's seduction theory, Ferenczi intended to put forth a theory of intellect that vied with Freud's *Verneigung* (Negation). If in Freud it is the distance from the object that produces the concept, in Ferenczi conceptual mastery has to be recovered. Through the caring guidance of the analyst the patient must be taken back to the trauma scene where conceptualization has been substituted by the victim-aggressor mutual identification, usually because of an aggression against the child in the family environment.<sup>19</sup> Ferenczi's trauma theory, with its strong ambition to be a theory of the subject (the patients' trauma memories were not always 'proved', a fact that had led Freud, a generation before Ferenczi, to abandon his own seduction theory), inflects Eve's narrative. It helps shape the autobiographical as the search for something beyond the frontal combat with institutions that at first glance it might appear to be. As the narrative progresses, the initial combat Eve/Shannon is removed in a space where the analyst/analysand dialogue is taken to the inside of an old intellect, where it makes room for metaphysical 'liteness', a sort of metaphysics of relief. But relief from what?

Nanny is the centre of a ravished intellect and the intimation of an intellect always potentially beset by the anxiety of spoliation. As Eve 'discovers' this other analytic tradition, even takes it in her

<sup>19</sup> I have discussed Ferenczi's trauma theory and its relevance to contemporary discussions of subjectivity in an unpublished essay, "The First Kiss of Philosophy: Sandor Ferenczi".

poetry fragments, she is reversing Nanny's attributes. With Shannon, she is going back to that old intellect in a way that drains it of anxiety. She can then be less the mask for the abandoned object that mourns her and more the subject of speech. If so, her autobiography is suggestive of an endocryptic inclusion of class (Nanny) and theory (her work on gay subjectivity), where class stands for an interpretive configuration fixed on the authority of family and group genealogy (class here means Jewishness and race, whiteness). This endocryptic relation projects the personal account in the arena of national biography as it describes a pervasive change in national cultural models. Theory names this change. It endocryptically includes class because in this way the spectre of segregated genealogies that accompanies this notion can be denied. In the abandonment of the old intellectual configuration of class and race differences, theory means a relief from the reductiveness of that critically-enabling paradigm. In a sense, then, Sedgwick's story incarnates a generalized critical journey.

The stylistic choice of the analytic situation is ingenious not only because it juxtaposes critical journey to family memories but also because it sustains the allegorical link between the old national intellect of class and race and Nanny, that anxiety-emanating object that propels her daughter's complicity with power (the teacherly voice) and her granddaughter's dive into subjectivity. In both cases they can be construed as escapes from attacks on the very source of intellectual fluency, attacks from which both Eve the woman and Sedgwick the national intellectual come. That this is an analytic dialogue it means that what is being told can reach the reader only through the filter of the sympathetic analyst. In a way, to be fully the recipient of Eve's story, the reader is invited to identify with the caring analyst. Critical fluency will be decided by this positioning. I would say that this is true for all readers, but particularly those outside the United States.

In the present reading, Sedgwick's narrative pairs intellectual power with the reworking of the anxiety emanating from an origin. Without wanting to push this point too far (with American history in mind, for example, one could argue that shameful beginnings, that must therefore be reversed, are an American theme, but this generalization would be immediately superseded by the other equally

true statement that origin-hatred is also an eminent post-structuralist theme), one could limit oneself to saying that in terms of the question 'Che cos'è la teoria' what matters is the transition from the 'anxiety-emanating object' to the discourse of subjectivity. In this transition criticism exhibits a philosophical ambition and freely borrows to become a new, unrecognizable speech, never finished, always open, as Culler says. At the same time, the most academically fashionable and yet the least academically qualifying, one could add. What matters in Sedgwick, in relation to that question, is the freedom to examine – to take up and narrativize – a meaningful internal difference that exceeds the scene of judgment. What is important is to narrate the internal difference beyond the reductiveness of that scene.

The narrative ends with a condensation – Shannon the transformative object as national body. As she is walking back from a gas station to go to her therapy session, Eve spots her analyst rounding the corner toward "the gray building": "I notice more the calm buoyancy with which he is able to steer his round, large, light body, like a float in a Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade" (DL 219). Shannon's round, mild, and maternal body is consigned to the reader as the compendium of a national image, a national allegory. With the plump, mild, non-intellectual Shannon, Sedgwick gives to the viewers what might be catachrestically termed a self-Orientalizing image of 'America'. Here is a performative 'America' that responds to the interpellation of strangers in a sort of 'as you like it' style. Shannon is uncontrollably consigned to the judgment of the viewer while, just like the artist in Goya, Sedgwick the theorist, outside the narrative, looks on: What do we do?

What does one do with this round American body? Does one conclude: It is so American, just like cars and fridges in the 1950s, capitalism in the 1930s, and even now?<sup>20</sup> Even its metaphysics is diet-related – 'lite'. Sedgwick cautions against this kind of response. If you think twice about it, it is a way of playing anxiety-emanating Nanny, only this time from outside rather than inside the family. What the autobiography of Sedgwick the Queer theorist shows, then, is, among

<sup>20</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (London: Routledge, 1988). See particularly chapter 3, "Towards a Cartography of Taste 1935-1962".

other things, a discontent with Americaness, a term too easily heard as 'Americanism', twisted, that is, into an attack and, from a Ferenczian perspective, into an anxiety of spoliation: it threatens to reduce the intellect of internal meanings to a flat land of cultural-emotional vacuum, a "desert-like state of ontological impoverishment", as Tim Gould puts it in a wonderful e-mail (DL 168).

Sedgwick's narrative presents a subject laden with this ever-productive anxiety of impoverishment. 'Ontological impoverishment' aptly indicates that, as in Goya's painting, philosophical subjectivity passes something important by.

### The mind's laden brush

In "Che cos'è la poesia" Jacques Derrida answers the question with the figure of the humble *istrice*, *herisson* in French, the hedgehog in English.<sup>21</sup> The *istrice* is at once retreated and exposed, rolled-up and prickly, vulnerable and dangerous: "It blinds itself. Rolled up in a ball, prickly with spines, vulnerable and dangerous, calculating and ill-adapted (because it makes itself into a ball, sensing the danger on the autoroute, it exposes itself to no accident)".<sup>22</sup>

Sedgwick's autobiography incarnates the simultaneity of such movement. Drawing again on Goya, it could also be described as the movement from the scene of judgement, whose memory ("by heart") she tries to disable or unlearn, to the other side where the painter's brush is suspended, as if hesitant, in the same space of the flicker of the unicorn-like hairdo, the gift-carrying hands – the cosmetology of the cure. In her biography, the movement back and forth from the suspended brush to the scene of judgement is an inevitable one, an act of critique, a crafting of the self at the junction of overseeing a domain it would not want to police ("My love is with gay men").

In her volume of poetry, art can be called by its name only when it is divided, two arts: the thin art of poetry and the fat art of critical writing. On the one hand, art's art: the suspended brush in Goya

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Che cos'è la poesia", in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1991), 233.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

indicating the anticipation of creation, the stirring fullness of this moment, caught in the painter's self absorption. On the other hand, the larger – fat – philosophical scene, the battle for the recognition of one's being. In her youth poetry started to withdraw: reticence, refusal, aversion of the Law. It withdrew precisely by offering another muse, that of critical writing. Less like song-enamoured Orpheus, more like Alcestis, this second muse chooses silence so that her next of kin may go on.

Rolling up, sensing the danger on the freeway of history, one art 'blinds itself' and forgets itself in its capacity to host another, which in turn transforms into a capacity for being hosted, as the fragments of poetry are carried inside Eve's narrative on love. 'Che cos'è la teoria?' We learn from Sedgwick: this historically determined North American mutual hospitality of two arts. And, at the same time, as this mutual hospitality is very literally Sedgwick's fragile life, her mortal self visibly attacked by cancer, something we learn 'by heart', an emblematic story a 'you' desires to learn: "A fable that you could recount as the gift of the poem, it is an emblematic story: someone writes you, to you, of you, on you".<sup>23</sup>

The labour of this mutual hospitality is one of translation. The other side of Eve's loss of poetry is her brilliant translation of the forbidden idyll with a non-intellectual, anxiety-emanating centre (Nanny) into her love for her gay male friends. The ontological desert that Nanny's ungraceful roughness threatened the mind with, robbing it of conceptuality, translates into Eve's conceptualization of gay subjectivity, to which her popularity and iconic status as a national intellectual is due. But, as I've hinted in the introduction, this is not just a family story. Or, if it is, it is only in the sense that Goya assigns to family in his *La Familia del Infante Don Luis*, as a court (an emblematic arrangement of relations) that must put itself on public display at all times, and that does so with the impudence of those who suddenly turn rightful onlookers into illegitimate intruders.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>24</sup> Excerpts from *A Dialogue on Love* first appeared in a *Critical Inquiry* issue on intimacy. It would be interesting to pursue further the notion of a 'national' intimacy. In a sense, I am already implying in my discussion here that Sedgwick is lovingly shielding, in the body of Shannon, the fragile image of an 'America' misunderstood outside its border.

As noted earlier, the body of the Ferenczian mild, maternal, sympathetic analyst – transformative object who has given a family history to Eve Sedgwick's national iconic status as Queer theorist – becomes a national allegory, albeit the allegory of a 'lite' nation, one that accepts to be interpellated as a spectacle. At this point, the non-intellectual centre of anxiety, the Ferenczian threat of intellectual robbery to which psychoanalysis had carried its balm, retranslating it back from Eve's theoretical identification with gay subjectivity, disperses from the family sphere (Nanny) to the wider sphere of national image-making under the eyes of a third. Shannon exits as a too familiar image of 'America' but one about which all those who read the story from the 'outside' (in a non-Ferenczian way), having learned their Americanism by heart, can say very little. For Eve has taken in her dialogue this body that looks like a Thanksgiving parade float. She has shielded it, protecting its 'lite' metaphysics in thin poetry jotted down as if with the calligrapher's brush.

It is the haiku that occurs to her as "a possible form for writing of Shannon and me" (DL 195). Indeed, the last part of the narrative reads like a palinode to the haiku as she realizes the extent to which American writers have drawn from it. James Merrill's prose, she muses, is interspersed with haiku; sentences "fraying into a prose that's never quite not the poetry". Once 'insipid', the haiku lines now transform into "condensations and inky dribbles of the mind's laden brush" (DL 195). She might be accused of orientalism, of course. But Sedgwick's use of the haiku, as she herself indicates, must be seen within an American tradition that has had recourse to it, a tradition which goes from Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound, Gary Snyder, Sonia Sanchez, and James Merrill to whom Eve explicitly refers.<sup>25</sup> The haiku's thinness, its immediacy, away from longer breaths, indeed its metaphysical liteness, if they issue from an 'orientalist' point of view, all describe the retreat of this text, as if invoking an American literary body rolled up, withdrawn in the humble *istrice's* characteristic gesture. One cannot fail, in fact, to hear in Sedgwick's 'orientalism' a reference to Dickinson's 'American' haikus, those emblematic stories of extraordinary scarcity and retreats. The 'lite' metaphysics of the

<sup>25</sup> Jay Parini, ed., *The Columbia History of American Poetry* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), 600-698.

thin art of the haiku, like Shannon's Ferenczian tenderness, might protect an internal (national) difference as legendary as the unicorn-shape suggested by the work of the bow in Goya's image.

The mutual hospitality of the first love of poetry and the second love of criticism renders criticism an incomplete word. But one senses that the appearance of the supplementary word 'theory', precisely as it embodies Sedgwick's intellectual autobiography, announces an incessant self-translation. Though this is a book about mortality, there is something exquisitely defiant about it. "I want to be realer", is Eve's motto. While at first it may sound like a recant of theoretical, abstract scenarios, it implies the necessity of theory – of her abandoned first love of poetry – to attain to this enhanced realness. Sedgwick's biography of Eve indicates that this might be not only an internal necessity, simply the direct offspring of post-War America. In this discussion I have merely begun to suggest that it might also be an out-ward directed rhetorical necessity to protect the labour of incessant self-translation from the anxiety of de-intellectualization – an anxiety coming from within as well as from without – to which anything 'American' is inevitably exposed.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Particularly interesting in this regard, though it cannot be discussed here, is the current debate between High Theory and Cultural Studies. The former often tends to construct the latter as its working class relative. See Rey Chow, "On Chineseness", *Critical Inquiry*, forthcoming.

Finally, I thank Spanish artist Gonzalo Tena for his invitation to join members of the Academy of Spain in Rome for a visit to the Goya exhibition at Palazzo Barberini in the spring of 2000, and for his warm response to my work.

## The Disease of Nationhood

...the place where poetry can meet imagination and  
...the place where poetry can meet imagination and  
...the place where poetry can meet imagination and  
...the place where poetry can meet imagination and  
...the place where poetry can meet imagination and  
...the place where poetry can meet imagination and  
...the place where poetry can meet imagination and  
...the place where poetry can meet imagination and  
...the place where poetry can meet imagination and  
...the place where poetry can meet imagination and

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Who Comes After the Subject?* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 10.  
<sup>2</sup> See Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 11. I quote it here as it appears in the 1990 edition.  
<sup>3</sup> See Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 11.





called 'democratic' *abstraction* of the 'rights', and perform the poetic literalisation of soil and blood.

These are the elements that inscribe on/in themselves the trace of 'belonging' and the 'circuit' of subjectivity. That is to say, soil and blood provide the space-time for the fundamental axes of contemporary dialectics and metaphysics. Centred in centrism – because, as somebody has remarked, "we are geocentric"<sup>3</sup> – the earth, seen from the inside, is what is opposed to the sky, the sea, the ocean; it is itself the inside opposed to the outside; it is exteriority as essential to interiority (subject, Me, truth), registering the 'limit' between the private and the social, the separation of the lively body from the corpse, the local from the global. Within the dialectical horizon of this earth, belonging turns into separation, affecting the metaphysics of the immanent 'totality' of blood which only circulates the most striking practices of 'exclusion'. This is especially the case for the African-American community and its experience of the long fatal history of the anthro-medical conception of being labelled and catalogued as 'black'. Sanchez reads this racist configuration by focusing on the structural discourse of the 'epidemic', the social construction of the viral Phobia: "our ever more highly developed machine ... in its preference of the foreigner, preferably the foreign rival".<sup>4</sup> This accounts for the policing and punishing of contemporary migration, itself the symptom of the circulation of diseases, infestations and infections. For Sanchez, differently, it offers the deconstructive occasion to understand the poetic force of the virus as something which 'strikes back' from the side of marginalisation – from Africa, Soweto and Congo, from Chile and subaltern America, blood beats back with a response and a resistance.

The progressive time-line from leperdom to ethnic disease is, however, still too abstract for Sanchez: blood is what exposes her to the experience of her brother's death by Aids, the most complex and concrete politics of death in our times. I will tell you of the affects circulating in the poems devoted to the young brother – what can be

<sup>3</sup> Hélène Cixous - Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Hélène Cixous. Rootprints. Memory and Life Writing* (London: Routledge, 1997), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Hélène Cixous, "We Who Are Free", *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 1993), 212.

here anticipated is that, at the same time and simultaneously, the most painful, communal and annihilating event empowers Sanchez's reading of the mechanics of death as *perire*, *transire*, trespass... on the 'side of life'. On the 'side of life', blood makes the names of the dead and the living resound, poetically practising the flux of unappropriable 'mixings'. In its absolute unappropriability, the evocative, fluid and impure blood circulates around the whole globe, sowing the sky, the sea, the ocean, with seeds of pride. It is a disturbance on the surface of the earth inscribing a 'common zone', a 'zone of contact' where affects encounter racist and nationalistic *phobia*. Here the local is not opposed to the global, the two do not even fuse and produce a 'third space': they are and have been, already and always, continuously trans-fusing (transubstantiating) into the other, par/taking (common sharing) one of the other. *Here and now*, amongst the cells of our Body, through the fissures of the Cosmo, an "uninterrupted, a transnational, translinguistic music is heard"<sup>5</sup> – it is Sanchez's poetic hymn to singular multiplicity, "singularly plural and plurally singular".

We are *here*...

*Now* we carry the signature of women in our veins

*Now* we build our reconciliation canes in morning fields

*Now* the days no longer betray us

and we ascend into wave after wave of our blood milk.

What can we say without blood?<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>6</sup> "Aaaayeee Babo (Praise God)", in Sonia Sanchez, *Shake Loose My Skin. New and Selected Poems* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999). Our italics. I have started reading *Being Singular Plural* by Jean-Luc Nancy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) too late to give it the appropriate relevance to my analysis: it shares the same question, the same urgency of the question, on the meaning of the earth and of its inhabitation: "let us know that we have not even begun to discover what it is to be many, even though 'la terre des hommes' is exactly this", xiv. Here and now, I would like to devote my reading to Giorgio Agamben, *Il tempo che resta. Un commento alla "Lettera ai Romani"* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000).

### The insights of poetry

The Algerian-French Jewoman critic, university teacher, philosopher and poet-playwright Hélène Cixous, in an essay entitled "We Who Are Free", delineates a provisional dialectical-psychoanalytic framing of our contemporary life. She senses that, nowadays,

...a phobia of nonidentity has spread, and individuals, and nations like individuals, are infected with this neurosis, this pain, this fear of nonrecognition, where each constructs, erects his auto-identification, less out of intimate reflection than out of a system of rejection and hatred.<sup>7</sup>

"Does the individual self, such as it was defined in the eighteenth century by the ideology of human rights, still exist?"<sup>8</sup> – politically engaged in the post-modern question, supported by her critique of phallogocentric and colonial patterns, Cixous knows that "ours is the era of a double temporality", a broken-backed century, the bitter dawn of liberty, the Western world in the throes of dissociation and reorganisation among civil wars and nationalist fervour. These are the conditions of modernity: the affirmation of him/herself as distinct as unique and non-other; the double and otherness forbidden; the fear of nonidentity and nonrecognition. In such a time of silence, in so severe a climate, Cixous urges for the passion – kinship, common orientation – of poets in their 'mission', that is, the essential and dynamic expression of the affect of 'suffering':

...how is life interned and abased to be blessed nonetheless, how is the most tender to contrive to say something about what is most cruel, how to contrive that the cruel and the destructive do not stifle all celebration, how to ensure that unhappiness does not eliminate the memory of happiness. The celebration of exile, drawing music from the stone, such is the mission...

*What have these poets taught us, what sublime lessons?*

First and foremost, the mystery of pain and compassion: in times of

<sup>7</sup> Cixous, "We Who Are Free", 202-3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

injustice, the 'subject' of pain is not me, but you. Your pain makes my own more bitter and more generous. Your pain restores my pain to me. For my pain, when it is too great, exceeds, escapes me, grows alien to me, I can only undergo it fully, far inside me, where I am stranger within me. It is only in your pain that I can suffer and weep. I need you to suffer my suffering.<sup>9</sup>

This 'other' dialectics is central to the 'clandestine strength', the 'unremitting combat' of the poetry of Sonia Sanchez (b. Birmingham, Alabama, 1935), determined as it is to convey, in its core of attention for a total universe of pain, blood and death, the revolutionary transmission of instances of cure, healing and renaissance.<sup>10</sup> This ethical dimension of Sanchez's re-inscribing can be followed in all the different forms of her lyrical engagement, the variety of her approaches to different poetic genres, her radical experimentations with 'form' and 'style', which is to say, with 'address'. Sanchez is considered the master of Sonku, Tanka and (Blues) Haiku – the text still relevant to the understanding of this form is the inspiring *The Empire of Signs* by Roland Barthes – of villanelle and rhyme royal. Her language normally uses Black speech, dialects and street speech incorporated into a sophisticated formal repertoire, shifting from blues-inspired love poems to political calls to arms. One might want to investigate her practice of teaching, for example seeing how her communion with students, who love "raps and dictionaries to find some different rhymes", produced the anthology *Three Hundred and Sixty Degree of Blackness Comin' at You* (1972). Or one might want to watch her video *Ologapo Rose* (1989), a realistic documentary where "Sanchez's candid interviews with US servicemen and Filipino bar girls exposed the gendered power relations that resulted from a military-base economy".<sup>11</sup> Finally, one might want to read Sanchez's poetry through the range of her privileged themes: racism, imperialism, rapism, sexism, homophobia, the problems of race,

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>10</sup> On the value of the 'trans', see my "A 'will-to-poetry' in the crossing of space and time: *An Atlas of the Difficult World* by Adrienne Rich", *Anglistica* 2.2 (1998), 19-21 (the section entitled "The trans-location of Poetry").

<sup>11</sup> In Camilla Benolirao Griggers, "Goodbye America (*The Bride is Walking...*)", in Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook, eds., *Deleuze and Feminist Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 178.

ethnicity and black consciousness; what she calls the 'neoslavery' of blacks in their generational and class conflicts.<sup>12</sup>

Here and now, what can be done is to follow some circulations-inscriptions of her work, focusing on the intense and localised relationship between nationalism and race founded on 'birthright citizenship'. It is this, according to Kaplan, Alarcon and Moallem in their recent "Multicultural Nationalism", which constitutes "citizenship through blood and soil, in a conflation of *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*".<sup>13</sup> This double construction attracts Sanchez's poetic deconstruction: "Two things at once: to emphasise both the permanent value of the philosophy of rights and, simultaneously, the inadequacy, the limits of the breakthrough it represented: to both construct and deconstruct, to praise and criticise, at one and the same time".<sup>14</sup>

Strategically, what Sanchez does is to turn the two rights into their most literal sense. 'Blood' is concretely what inscribes the political history of American anthropological medicine which has continuously foretold the eventual (and desired) extinction of black people, through (an) infinite (complicity of) discourses on their organic inability to cope with civilisation.<sup>15</sup> Such material heritage is written by Sanchez upside down, in a single gesture that allows the 'impure' discourse of blood to be trans-ported from the medical to the social, in the singularity of the individual (in a wonderful elegy

<sup>12</sup> See Philip Brian Harper, "Nationalism and Social Division in Black Arts Poetry in the 1960s", *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Winter 1993).

<sup>13</sup> Norma Alarcon, Caren Kaplan, Minoo Moallem, "Multicultural Nationalism", in Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, Minoo Moallem, eds., *Between Women and Nation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 254.

<sup>14</sup> Cixous, "We Who Are Free", 202.

<sup>15</sup> See John S. Haller, Jr., *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority - 1859-2000* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971); Sanders L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Melbourne Tapper, *In the Blood: Sickle Cell Anaemia and the Politics of Race* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Nicolas Rose, "Medicine, History and the Present", in Colin Jones and Roy Porter, eds., *Reassessing Foucault: Power, Medicine and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1994). My reference to what counteracts the 'abstraction' of the right echoes Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 24-25, when he states that "concrete here primarily signifies the real object of a thinking of being-in-common, and this real object is, in return, the singular plural of the origin, the singular plural of the origin

written for the death from Aids of her brother *Does your house have lions*) and in the internal dynamics of the familiar (the young boy is described in the relationship with his father, as an instance of the patriarchal family within the black community), through the memento of the global and the international – this is, as we will see, Sanchez's refrained destination. From the dis-ease trait, through the mobilisation of the 'plague', to the channels-veins of a communal body, blood fluidity writes Sanchez's route to difference – the word is not accidental, in that it refers to what Derrida emphasises in deconstruction: "I say the route and trace of a return, what distinguishes a route from a path or from a *via rupta* (its *etymon*), as well as *methodos* from *odos*, is repetition, return, reversibility, iterability, the possible reiteration of the itinerary".<sup>16</sup>

This route is inscribed on the 'soil'. In a dynamics which gradually becomes confident in its own strength, Sanchez's politic of location suspends all idealism attached to the earth, revealing it as the locus for dialectics: configurations of myths, 'babylons', 'wounds running on the city' frame a scenario of imprisonment, exile, riots, violence. This earth is the ultimate place of submission, annihilation and (self)destruction; on the other side, this earth is what reveals to us, most precious, most vividly, the scars, the wounds, the traumas of racism, colonisation and imperialism, the worldly predominance of death, pain and suffering. Injuries, offences, lesions; in Sanchez's poetry, the experience of terror is reality itself – "the cope of any *férence*, of any reference as *différance*".<sup>17</sup> Extraordinarily, by facing what nonetheless leaves a trace, the wound as an alteration, the world in its most strikingly exorbitance, the poet feels that things can take place. Urged by the death of her mother, the most intimate pain, Sanchez starts addressing the problematic of *motherland* and *mothertongue* (these are very delicate questions, and Sanchez does not speak about them without a trembling, the discreet tremor of a

of 'community' itself (if one wants to call this 'community'). All of this is undoubtedly what is indicated by the word that follows 'equality' in the French republican slogan: 'fraternity' is supposed to be the solution to equality (or to 'equilibrium') by evoking or invoking a 'generic identity'. What is lacking there is exactly the common origin of the common".

<sup>16</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism*, 58.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

language that underscores the poetic resonance of her work).<sup>18</sup> The call of “rough mamas” – as the poem “style no.1” remembers them – links necessarily with the urgent stance of/for the ‘poetic’: “Keep on turning out poets girl. We need them. The world needs them”.

Following the blood’s route to difference, on an earth still glimpsing with prodigality, the gift of the poem comes and, through a process I would like to expose here, desires and promises the circulation-inscription of racial awareness: the globalisation of a community of appeal and address, the unspeakable birth of a language that does not signify so much property as provenance: “language is for the other, coming from the other, *the coming of the other*”.<sup>19</sup>

### The segregated ‘inside’

Let us be one with  
The earth expelling anger  
Spirit unbroken  
(“Poem”, *Like the singing off the drums*)

At the beginning of *Under a Soprano Sky*, a collection published in 1987, a sickly dialectics affects poetry in its ossified, almost necrotized value – a whole universe of birds (the Black generation of the sixties) displays orthopaedic wings.<sup>20</sup> The sky is now occupied by acrobatic preachers (“under a soprano sky”) and purple acrobats (“Poet”) who speak the language of macdonalds, the pope, the father, holidays and genocide, parades, infanticide and imperialism, blinding the slow eyes and turning them “ecstatic toward their/packaged excrement”. The space *in-between* exclusion and power is dialectically inhabited by a melancholic ‘subject’:

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 36: “the one who speaks in the first person raises his voice from the language of his mother”.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>20</sup> Sonia Sanchez, *Under a Soprano Sky* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1987). All quotations are from this edition, with reference to the poems’ titles.

i cannot smell the nerves.  
... i cannot taste my birth.  
... i cannot waltz my tongue.<sup>21</sup>

The negative experience of such a (dis)positioning is a painful dragging within an ‘inside’ which is as necessary as it is petrifying: “the pulse/shrinks into itself/and carve myself in white” (“Philadelphia”). It is the feeling of Philadelphia: in “Elegy”, this town is said to be chloroformed by the media and the police: “they came eating their/own mouths orgiastic teeth/smiling crucifixions”; a varicose town lit by a single fire, a spiderless city, a colony of domestic scars, where “modern gladiators/erasing the delirium of death from their shields” and “dreadlocks and blk/skins roast in fire”. In this *mi-lieu*, the poem can only sadly comment:

... and the blood is not yet dry.

It can only helplessly pose the refrained question:

How does one scream in thunder?  
... how does one city scream in thunder?  
... who anointeth this city with napalm?  
Who giveth this city in holy infanticide?

It could be a question of ‘detonating’ all nationalistic lobotomies. The poem chooses, instead, to appeal to the nationalist rhetoric; among the Rights of Man, citizenship exposes the soil and the country to a universal appeal of earthly belonging:

there is this earth. this country. this city./this people./collecting  
skeletons from waiting rooms.

On this earth, life is still missing – to its very opposite, death arrives from Africa – “South African/children braided/in a colony /of charred

<sup>21</sup> In the poem “Notes from a Journal”, from the same collection, Sanchez states that “these are not good times for a black/woman/poet... All due respect to legionnaire’s disease and aids, racism is still the No. 1 killer in America. in the world. these are days that leave you hanging inside yourself”.

scarecrows" ("Poem"); from Attica or Chile – "redwhiteandblue american kids/... calling all yall bloods ("Roberto Malta: Chile/Sin Titulo"); from America itself – a Vietnam veteran dies of an epileptic fit, due to LSD and compulsive gene splicing ("Morning raga"). On this earth, death is organised in nuclear destruction – "open flesh replaced by commemorative crusts ... fed residual death in a bottle" ("a hiroshima maiden speaks") – and in concentration camps: "while bone-filled drifts that scattered blood/yield other births – death is not here ... life is not here" ("There is no news from Auschwitz"). The *in-between* of life-death echoes Martin Heidegger in *Poetry, Language, Thought*: "Pain is the joining agent in the rendering that divides and gathes.... Pain joins the rift of the difference. Pain is the difference itself".<sup>22</sup> In pain Sanchez resolves to drink 'the blood of whales' from the ocean she comes from, to be able to recuperate strength and evoke a potential community of addresses: young girls, sisters, johnnies, man, world, papa joe.<sup>23</sup> With them, by facing death, she goes back-forward to the memory of her mother, who died when she was only one:

i slid inside your veins and sailed your blood to an uncrucified shore.  
("Dear Mama")

It is the recovered gift of a (mother)land and the (sub)emergence of a (mother)tongue:

And history began once again. I received it and let it circulate in my blood.... And the poems erased the stutters and pain. And the words loved me and I loved them in return.  
("Dear Mama")

These instances of a precarious 'identificatory status' – no belonging, property, power of master or pure *ipseity* (hospitality or hostility), only re-birth, reception, circulation, healing, the gift of love, that is,

<sup>22</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 134.

<sup>23</sup> For the 'aquatic' origin, see Luciana Parisi, "Essence and Virtuality: The Incorporal Desire of Lilith", *Anglistica* 4.1 (2000).

"everything that weaves life as experience" – write their own self-validating difference. "Fragment 1" inscribes:

i am a reluctant ache  
authenticating my bones.  
i shall spread out my veins  
and beat the dust into noise.

As if echoing Osip Mandelstam's prose texts *The Noise of Time*, or the practice of twentieth century poets who "have often come forward as witness of the noises of history",<sup>24</sup> Sanchez's deconstructive ache beats the dust into noise by empowering the process of answering back the medical-anthropological Phobia of black infection: "we will string our seeds/like viruses" ("Africa Poem no.4"). Viruses return from the Congo – "contagious as shrines" ("haiku") – or from Kenya: "We are coming. Eating a little hearth. We are coming to stop the imperialist incessant dawns.... This earth. Which will seep from the corners of our mouths and make us whole" ("Introduction"). They strike back from America itself, for example in "For Mildred Scott Olmstead" dedicated to the woman "who has seen the impending death of imperialism". Along a feminine hereditary line – 'the mitochondrial Eve'<sup>25</sup> – as a re-inscription of black history and the myth of black inferiority, by means of a direct confrontation with racism and imperialism, the desire and promise will be that "a new earth will rise. For we have endured and we are in spite of our wounds" ("for Black history month"). The promise has the solemnity of a chant or a prayer, with Sanchez behaving as the 'inventor of a furious liturgy':

and the poem came  
...resurrected myself ...  
i said bleed and i will catch drippings in this morning cup.  
("Notes from a Journal")<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Cixous, "We Who Are Free", 205.

<sup>25</sup> Luciana Parisi, "The Microbial Circuit of a Body", *Tekhnema: Journal of Philosophy and Technology* 6, (2000).

<sup>26</sup> The healing truth of survival in language echoes Paul Celan, *Collected Prose* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1986), 34: "Only one thing remained reachable, close and

The 'ad-vent' or 'event' is evoked by Derrida as what "at the horizon, visible and miraculous, spectral but infinitely desirable, allows... the mirage of another language to tremble".<sup>27</sup> Sanchez's poetry watches its own mirage. In an apothropaic act, hoping that salvation lies in the writing of poems, on the threshold, the 'Soprano sky' imagines its communal reply to the annihilating interrogation: "How does one scream in thunder?/... how does one city scream in thunder?" by invoking "A ceremony of thunder waking up the earth to human monuments" ("Graduation Notes").

### The quarantined 'crossing' of death<sup>28</sup>

Death itself is a technology, a mnemonic and social construction.

(D. Vance Smith, "Plague, Panic Space...")

The 'ceremony to human monuments' takes place years later, in the elegy devoted to Sanchez's brother, *Does your house have lions?*<sup>29</sup> This title comes from the *Rahsaan Roland Kirk Anthology*:

One day in the late sixties, I was on the phone with Rahsaan and mentioned to him that just that day I had bought a house. He responded by asking, 'Does your house have lions?' I said, 'What?' He said, 'Lions. You know, like in front of a museum or the post office. You know, concrete lions. My house has lions. Get a house with lions'.<sup>30</sup>

secure amid all losses: language. Yes, language. In spite of everything, it remained secure against loss. But it had to go through its own lack of answers, through terrifying silence, through the thousand darkness of murderous speech. It went through. It gave me no words for what was happening, but went through it. Went through and could surface, 'enriched' by it all".

<sup>27</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism*, 22.

<sup>28</sup> The use of the word 'quarantined' comes from Sanchez's 'chant for young / brothas & sistuhs': "i've seen yo/self/imposed/quarantined/hipness", quoted in Dudley Randall, ed., *The Black Poets* (New York: 1971), 240-242.

<sup>29</sup> Sonia Sanchez, *Does your house have lions?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997). All quotations are from this edition, with reference to the poems' titles.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted at the beginning of the collection, with the 'signature': Joel Dorn, May 1993. For the importance of the 'name' and the problematic of the 'date', see

Lions are meant to ward off danger, pain and death. Outside the house of the poet, their construction will be realised by means of deconstruction: in order to celebrate the human traces of survival and resistance, one must suffer the same history of destruction these lions are meant to protect us from.<sup>31</sup> This can be done by positioning poetry in the vast and long heritage of Plague literature – the urban disease par excellence that covers the whole of the earth, from the 'streets' to the 'private chamber' to the 'body'.<sup>32</sup> From the streets of Harlem, where the brother arrives in the sixties at the age of seventeen, to the *oikos* – "the place where the economic principles that inform the nation begin ... where its economics and erotics unfold"<sup>33</sup> – along a quarantined path, the text writes the relationship between the young boy and his father who, in his guilt of abandonment, is now able to understand the need for "begging pardon, secreting old" through the affective appeal of blood:

blood the sound of blood paddling down the road  
blood the taste of blood choking their eyes  
and my son's body blood-stained red  
with country-lies, city-lies, father-lies, mother-lies...<sup>34</sup>

can you hear his blood tissue ready to pray  
he who wore death discourages any plague  
he who was an orphan now recollects his legs

("father's voice")<sup>35</sup>

Jacques Derrida, "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan", in Derek Attridge, ed., *Jacques Derrida: Acts of Literature* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>31</sup> Sonia Sanchez herself has been described as "a lion in literature's forest" by Maya Angelou.

<sup>32</sup> See Ian Munro, "The City and Its Double: Plague Time in Early Modern London", *English Literary Renaissance*, 30.2 (Spring 2000); D. Vance Smith, "Plague, Panic Space, and the Tragic Medieval Household", *SAQ*, 98.3 (Summer 1999).

<sup>33</sup> Vance Smith, "Plague, Panic Space", 374.

<sup>34</sup> Cixous, "We Who Are Free", 211, asks: "But where is the line drawn between the big and the little liar? The big killer and the little killer? Of course, it is blood that makes the difference".

<sup>35</sup> The fantasmatical social and familiar relevance of the problematic of blood has been recently stressed by Amal Treacher, "Welcome Home: Between Two Cultures and Two Colours", in Avtar Brah and Annie E. Coombes, eds., *Hybridity*

The final trait of the plague affects the body. After a journey to India, the brother's face is full of promises, but his lungs are already affected by the disease:

sister tell me about this cough i cough  
 all of my skin cradled in this cough  
 my body ancient as this white cough, i cough  
 all day and night i'm haunted by this cough,  
 a snake rattles in my throat this cough, i cough  
 a scream embalms my chest with cough  
 sister an echo surrounds my lungs with this cough, i cough.

("brother's voice")

His body is "bleeding faeces"; his body in "constant betrayal". Still, the "corpuscles that refuse to abstain" echo in the text allowing for what has been called "the resonance of a bi-language". The young boy dies; we would prefer to say that "he perishes" – the *per* indicating the crossing of the limit: *transire*. Once more, communal *grievance* literalises the spiritual physiognomy of the plague (mixing the bodily and the spiritual, the profane and the sacred) by ending the ceremony with the ancestors' language which hybridises identities and words, beyond all (re)assurance of filiations, names, nations, families and genealogies. Language allows the encounter, what can only be heard, what is still unpronounceable, what resists translation:

Female *jamma ga fanan*

Male look at his eyes. is he Asian?

and *Its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 100: "Social myths operate powerfully against mixed-race relationships and these tend to centre on the mixing of blood. What we all know is that for a mix of blood to occur there has to be a mix of other fluids as well. The socially grounded myths are pervasive, they may be false but they operate in such a way that these myths structure our relationships with one another, and our relationships to ourselves. These myths have a social message and the strong injunction here is not to mix up categories, that 'pure' blood should not be mixed with the 'tainted' blood of the Other. It would be easy to dismiss these myths, toss them aside, if we did not, unfortunately, internalise them. These myths...remain painfully operative at the level of psychic life".

Female *jamma ga fanan*

Male look at his hair. is he Indian?

Female *jamma ga fanan*

Male look at his cheekbones. is he native American?

Female *jamma ga fanan*

Male look at his hands. is he African American?

("Ancestor's voice")

### *ancestor's voice* (family)

TO BE SUNG

Male *sala maleikum* hello

Female *nanga def* how are you'

Male *sala maleikum* hello

Brother *magni fi rek* i am well

Brother *dama buga lek* i want to eat

Brother *dama buga naan* i want to drink

Male/ female *kai fi African* come here African

Male/ female *kai fi African* come here African

Brother *mangi nyo* i am coming

Bother *mangi nyo* i am coming

Brother *mangi nyo* i am coming...

### On the 'side of life'

the old ones  
 say we don't  
 die we are  
 just passing  
 through into  
 another space  
 ("Love poem (for Tupac)")

The Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector said "Living *life* instead of living one's own life is prohibited".<sup>36</sup> Beyond death, through the

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Cixous, "We Who Are Free", 213.



passage sustained by the strength of a bi-language echoing unpronounceable mixings and encounters, following lines of continuity and waves of 'arrivals' – where desire springs forth, even before the ipseity of an *I-me* – Sanchez halts the interdict. The collection *Like the singing coming off the drums*, published in 1998, together with some recent poems, wishes to compose and identify – in the double sense of 'identifying oneself' and 'identify with' – the 'side of life' that can be reached only by crossing the limits of possession, the dynamics of individuality, identification and solipsism.<sup>37</sup> *Here and now*, on 'the side of life', beyond the inversion of dialectics and the confrontation with death,<sup>38</sup> the pulsations of soil and blood return, provisionally as they have always existed but nonetheless constructing and circulating their own deformed, reformed, transformed 'rights': a fluid gathering of forms, a political earthly justice, the negotiation of a different language.

The first haikus of the collection are situated within an identity that only inscribes singularity: "i come from the same/place i am going to" ("haiku"); "i who have never moved/from where I was born" ("sonku"); "i am who i am" ("haiku"). Within this unique 'horizon', the affect of love traces its movement of fluidity and change: a 'holding of pulses', a crossing of rivers, tongues dancing hello inside the other's mouth, cruising in bones. Without mediation or economical exchange, it is the fluidity of blood which is identified with the poem and marks its life:

i come windless invader  
i am a carnival of  
stars a poem of blood.

("haiku")

<sup>37</sup> Sonia Sanchez, *Like the singing coming off the drums* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); *Shake Loose My Skin. New and Selected Poems* (see note n. 6). All quotations are from these editions, with reference to the poems' titles.

<sup>38</sup> In *Like the singing coming off the drums*, Sanchez uses references to leprosy as a sort of poetic refrain: "...the leper comes the/leper comes who will feed her/she without friend of lover" ("Tanka"); "i am a small piece/of yellow flesh taking shelter/like a leper" ("Haiku"). See note 45.

"now i move in the/blood of women who polish/pores a cappella"  
("haiku – for Bernice"); "hear me turn in blood" ("haiku"):

i listen to this blood  
breathing roses in my veins.  
i grow with laughter.

("haiku - for Nneka and Quincy")

The 'laughter of blood' is epidemic, giving hospitality to "a sublime tribe of guides across the forbidden frontiers". Its acoustics articulates a multiplicity of utterances, from the literal music of "A poem for Ella Fitzgerald" – the woman "cruising our veins ... carrying our sighs into/her bloodstream", the black community of listeners held in "a single drop of blood" – to the graphic voice of Tupac Amaru Shakur, a warriorlike genius who finds expression in the immediately effective form of a style practising resistance against all 're-colonisation of the mind':

resist  
resist  
resist for Tupac  
resist for you & me  
reSist RESIST RESIST.

("For Tupac Amaru Shakur")

The 'laughter of resistance' becomes life itself. In praise, Sanchez invokes the name of Toni Cade Bambara as the "Spear of the Nation", determined to store her strength "in my blood":

i have become life  
and oppose all killings, murderings,  
rapings, invasions, executions,  
imperialist actions.  
i have become life  
and i burn silver, red,  
black with life for our children

for the universe for the sake  
of being human

What we know today is that this  
earth cannot support murderers,  
imperialists, rapists, racists, sexists,  
homophobes. This earth cannot  
support those who would invent  
just for the sake of inventing  
and become death.

(“Remembering and Honouring Toni Cade Bambara”)<sup>39</sup>

Such knowledge could link continents, leading to a new cosmogony: “necessary plural, diffracted, discreet, a touch of color or tone, an agile turn of phrase or folded mass, a radiance, a scent, a song, or a suspended movement, exactly because it is the birth of a *world* (and not a construction of a system)”.<sup>40</sup> The earth now inscribes a maze of names and identities coiling up, a multiplicity of voices whose poetic function is to hint at a ‘suspended’ belonging. Cixous would say “...in times of strangeness, by sharing unhappiness, by being strangers together, people and poet reconstitute an internal homeland.... In a state of insubordination, trance and genesis, the other voices, the voices of the other meet, dream, interrogate, and shake the earth”.<sup>41</sup> Homeland and earth – a spiralling vortex which reveals that, as with the poet Akhmatova, Sanchez’s final poems are written in ‘other’ people’s words:

‘I wove a shroud for them – With the meagre words I heard from them’,  
from all the mothers who queued in front of the prisons. In front of the  
prisons, the miracle of compassion is accomplished: if Akhmatova,  
mother among mothers, writes with the mothers’ meager words, then

<sup>39</sup> See Gloria T. Hull, “‘What It Is I Think She’s Doing Anyhow’. A Reading of Toni Cade Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters*”, in Marjorie Pryse - Hortense J. Spillers, eds., *Conjuring Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>40</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 14-15.

<sup>41</sup> Cixous, “We Who Are Free”, 207, 216.

the mothers are also poets among poets. And anyone, man or woman, who contemplates the crucifixion becomes a mother.<sup>42</sup>

What the phantasms echo, what poetry becomes, what com-passion – contagion, contact – knows, is that life belongs to ‘us all’: “this paradoxical ‘first-person plural’ which makes sense of the world as the spacing and the intertwining of so many worlds (earth, skies, histories)”.<sup>43</sup> The intertwining is a force which can productively question the rigorous, and pervasive establishment of disciplinary order in ‘separation’, typical of all policies of leperdom as narrated by Foucault: “for each individual his place, his body, his disease and his death ... by means of an omnipresent and omniscient power that subdivides itself in a regular, uninterrupted way even to the ultimate determination of the individual, of what characterises him, of what belongs to him, of what happens to him”.<sup>44</sup> Sanchez’s genealogical voice belongs to Cornel West’s intellectual critique of contemporary ‘leprosy’ policy as what constitutes separation and exclusion:

...the ‘morality’ of the country/state/world  
that has enslaved and continues to enslave all of its  
citizens racially, and culturally, always questioning a  
country that remains silent while people stain the earth  
with their separate poverty, death, homelessness. Always  
questioning a country that denies the sanctity, the  
holiness of children, people, rivers, sky, trees, earth?

In the understanding of this (a)morality, by means of its interrogation and alteration, refashioning and opening, there is the acknowledgement of ‘us all’:

The poors. Blacks and whites. Asians and Native  
Americans. Jews and Muslims. Latinos and Africans

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>43</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Allen Lane, 1977), 197.

Gays and Lesbians...<sup>45</sup>

The evocation echoes in Sanchez's "New Works":

... to breathe in Latinos Asians Americans  
Whites Blacks Gays Lesbians Muslims and Jews, to gather  
Up our rainbow-colored skins in peace and racial justice.  
("Morning Song and Evening Walk")<sup>46</sup>

This 'us all' is rarefied, unexplored; still, "in the paradoxical simultaneity of togetherness (anonymous, confused, and indeed massive) and disseminated singularity",<sup>47</sup> it constitutes a common zone. Here identification means the interaction with the nation through performative events (singularity as the impossible neutralisation of difference), always and already in symbiosis and inter-lacing with globally and inter-nationally generating gendered trans-national practices. Now insistence and profundity become even more urgent and necessary, as Derrida would say:

...it becomes more necessary than ever to identify, in order to combat them, impulses, phantasms, 'ideologies', 'fetishizations', and symbolics of appropriation. Such a reminder permits one at once to analyze the historical phenomena of appropriation and to treat them *politically* by avoiding, above all, the reconstitution of what these phantasms managed to motivate: 'nationalist' aggressions (which are always more or less 'naturalist') or monocultural homo-hegemony.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> The praise of Cornel West recognises the experience of leprosy as 'constitutional' of its own deconstructive strength: "For he has seen the leper in himself. In all of us. And he cries out against a policy of leperdom. No longer the yells from the cities./The leper comes. The leper comes./The leper comes. Who will feed/ her or him?" ("Poem for Cornel West"). See note 38.

<sup>46</sup> Sanchez, *Shake Loose My Skin. New and Selected Poems*, Section VII.

<sup>47</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism*, 64. In "Morning Song and Evening Walk", in *Shake Loose My Skin*, Sanchez's fluid re-(dis)composition of a vast, trans-identitarian writing plays joyfully with 'gender': "Amen men men men Awoman woman woman woman/Men men men Woman woman woman/Men men Woman woman/Men woman/Womanmen". Echoing Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 3, in his

The renovated urge for a politics initiates the relationship between the 'subject' and the 'world' as what is constituted by the worlding of subjects and circulated by the processes of production of (new) subjects of history as they enter – have always and already entered – the contact zones of conquest, enslavement, and colonisation in modern(ist) nation making: "All culture is originally colonial.... Every culture institutes itself through the unilateral imposition of some 'politics' of language. Mastery begins, as we know, through the power of naming, of imposing and legitimating appellations".<sup>49</sup> The inaugurative co-appearance of this final construction, in its co-original circulation, marks a time change, the fluid passage to other planes, to new (dis)positions and bodily con-figurations, to a 'new geography' which is not terrestrial but of the soul, where no one will imprison the air of the sky, the sea, the ocean, any *férance* of language:

*it is time to move us all into another century ...  
and the spaces between us smiled  
... moving to a higher ground  
... come. i say come, you sitting still in domestic bacteria  
... you brown ones  
you yellow ones  
you gay ones  
you white ones  
you lesbian ones.*

("For Sweet Honey in the Rock")

Poetic language is the only native land that remains for us, an earth moving with us, a blood which is its own salvation, the *here and now*

appeal to "all things, all beings, all entities, everything past and future, alive, dead, inanimate, stones, plants, nails, and gods – and 'humans', that is, those who expose sharing and circulation as such by saying 'we'", Sanchez closes her last collection of poems by evoking all possible gendered species: "Say hello to the mangoes/theuniformed men/the nuns/the prostitutes/the rainmothers/the squirrels/the clouds/the homeless" ("Aaayeee Babo (Praise God)").

<sup>49</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism*, 39.

– Sonia Sanchez says that “The time is now”<sup>50</sup> – of the chance to process, sign, construct, express all super/human matters:

... reshape This wind, This sea,  
 This sky, This dungeon of syllables  
 .....  
 We are *here* ...  
 Knowing once that our places divided us  
 Knowing once that our color divided us  
 Knowing once that our class divided us  
 Knowing once that our sex divided us  
 Knowing once that our country divided us  
 Now we carry the signature of women in our veins  
 Now we build our reconciliation canes in morning fields  
 Now the days no longer betray us  
 and we ascend into wave after wave of our blood milk.  
 What can we say without blood?

(“Aaayeee Babo (Praise God)”)<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Sonia Sanchez, “The Bronx Is Next”, *The Drama Review* 12.4 (Summer 1968).

<sup>51</sup> See note 6. Our italics.

Jane Wilkinson  
**The Sickly Weal:  
 Anglo-Scottish DissemiNations in *Macbeth***

*Malcolm:* My countryman; but yet I know him not.

*Macduff:* My ever gentle cousin, welcome hither.

*Malcolm:* I know him now. Good God, betimes remove  
 The means that makes us strangers!...

*Rosse:* ...Alas, poor country!

Almost afraid to know itself. It cannot

Be called our mother, but our grave.

(*Macbeth*, IV.iii.160-166)

In *Macbeth*, the sense of belonging to a shared or imaginable community is falling apart. “The members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” writes Benedict Anderson.<sup>1</sup> “My countryman, *but yet I know him not*”: Malcolm’s inability to recognize his known kinsman and follower Rosse is part of a web of allusions to a diffused and expanding crisis of knowledge. The inability to know or even recognize a fellow countryman is seen as the symptom of a more general estrangement: if the many are unable to know one another, the knowledge and imagining of the one in which they are ideally included is also impeded. In the disjunctive present of 11<sup>th</sup> century Scotland, the traditional definitions and genealogies of national selfhood and communion are no longer adequate. Identifications are fluid, ambivalent and oblique, vacillating between images of

<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 6.

maternity and death, wholeness or fixity and fragmentation, contamination and dispersal.

*Macbeth* was first performed in 1606 at a time when English and Scottish parliamentarians and historians were debating the consequences of a possible extension of dynastic union and thus, implicitly, the fashioning of what might become a British national identity. A long tradition of reciprocal othering lay behind their heated and ultimately inconclusive discussions. The time *Macbeth* restages, compresses and intensifies – 1040-1057 – was seen as a focal moment in the history of this tradition, crucial both to the institutional development of Scotland and to the development of Anglo-Scots relations. The play itself rehearses and negotiates recent historiographical reconstructions of imaginings and questionings of the collective self in Scotland during the times not only of Macbeth but of his immediate ancestors and successors, construing them in a future preterite or anterior temporality as a medieval pre-text to contemporary issues. A text moreover, as *Macbeth* demonstrates, that like other narrations of nations presents what Homi Bhabha calls a “double-time”, producing a “double-writing or dissemi-nation” through which the national narrative is hybridized, the historical present displaced.<sup>2</sup>

On the one hand, that of Bhabha’s “national discourse of the teleology of progress”, the history of Macbeth’s reign can be taken as the beginning of the ‘progression’ of the Stuart dynasty, or as the seed from which the power of a united Britain could eventually flower.<sup>3</sup> On the other, it could be seen as the archaic, apparently surmounted past that threatens to re-emerge, *within* the civilized British present, in an endless repetition of a barbarous, unruly, self-devouring but also subversively self-proliferating Same. As in the witches’ presentation of the show of kings, simultaneously constructing and contesting a shadowy genealogy of origin for the Stuart dynasty, the merest shift in position and perspective is sufficient to transform accumulative linear progress into endlessly,

<sup>2</sup> Homi Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation”, in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 145, 147, see also 167.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

uncannily reiterative circularity. To the Jacobean audience, the procession of Banquo’s successors should presumably be identified as prefigurations of the unending peace and prosperity inaugurated in Britain by the Stuart lineage – yet another promotion of James I as the bringer of unity and peace. The glass born by the mysterious eighth king to multiply the show into “many more” supplements the ghostly figures with images of spheres and sceptres: mirrored attributes of the sovereign’s imperial power. But the apparitions – produced by the ambiguously in-between beings Banquo had himself identified as “instruments of darkness” – could surely also be seen as ghostly reminiscences and potential resuscitations of the far lengthier line of the unstable, tyrannical, murdered – and murdering – monarchs of the Scottish past. And the icons of British *imperium*, reflected in the mirror’s illusory, impermanent glimpse of wholeness, could prove to be yet another mockingly “imperfect” or “knotted” promise that may or may not be fulfilled in the extratextual or extrascenic future they explicitly interpellate.<sup>4</sup>

### Floating identities

The condition of not knowing had already been described by Rosse himself in more general terms in the previous scene:

But cruel are the times, when we are traitors,  
And do not know ourselves; when we hold rumour  
From what we fear, yet know not what we fear,  
But float upon a wild and violent sea  
Each way, and move – (IV.ii.18-22)<sup>5</sup>

The suspended condition of the floaters recalls the undifferentiated and indistinguishable state of the “two spent swimmers, that do cling together / And choke their art”, the image used in I.ii.8-9 to represent

<sup>4</sup> The expression ‘knotted’ is adapted from Alessandro Serpieri’s description of the witches’ imperfect but also chiasmic speech as ‘annodato’, “*Macbeth: il tempo della paura*”, in *Retorica e immaginario* (Parma: Pratiche, 1986), 203.

<sup>5</sup> Quotations are from the 1984 Arden edition of *Macbeth*.

the contention between the King's armies led by Macbeth and the rebel forces under MacDonwald. Friends and foes, loyalists and traitors, led by traitor-to-be and former friend, the armies are locked together in a fight for life and death on the blood-strewn field of battle. And the bloody, undifferentiating ocean of the battlefield is a prefiguration of the other "multitudinous seas" incarnadined by Macbeth's elimination of Duncan: a regicide that is also a murder of cousin by cousin and guest by host. According to Holinshed, Macbeth and Duncan were viewed by the people as a dyad of polar, specular opposites, whose qualities, instead of being divided, should rather have been united:

[T]he people wished the inclinations and maners of these two cousins to haue beene so tempered and interchangeablie bestowed betwixt them, that where the one had too much of clemencie, and the other of crueltie, the meane vertue betwixt these two extremities might haue reigned by indifferent partition in them both, so should Duncane haue prooued a woorthie king, and Makbeth an excellent capteine.<sup>6</sup>

The swimmers' involvement in a simultaneously life-preserving and suffocatingly deathly embrace in I.ii. suggests the position of twins floating in the amniotic liquid of their mother's womb and contending for a greater share of sustenance and protection. Potential Cains and Abels or Jacobs and Esaus, they are linked not only by their physical similarity but by the fluid, sheltering and endangering environment they have in common. "The ambivalent identifications of love and hate occupy the same psychic space", Bhabha points out in a comment on a passage in *Civilization and Its Discontents* in which Freud illustrates "the ambivalent identification of love and hate that binds a community together" through the example of "feuds between communities with adjoining territories". Although aggressiveness against the other may act as a kind of safety-valve for the domestic community, "paranoid projections 'outwards' return to haunt and split the place from which they are made".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Holinshed's Chronicles: England, Scotland and Ireland* (New York: AMS Press Inc, 1965), vol. V, 265. In future I shall use Holinshed's spelling for characters appearing in the Chronicle in order to differentiate them from Shakespeare's characters in *Macbeth*.

<sup>7</sup> Bhabha, "DissemiNation", 149.

The floaters of IV.ii.18-22 are no longer – or not yet – involved in either a civil or a foreign war, but their condition is already deeply and irremediably fissured. The position of the Scottish thanes who "do not know [them]selves", "fear", but "know not what [they] fear", could be a projection of the hovering in "fog and filthy air" of the weird sisters at the threshold of the play in I.i. Subjected to the cruelty of the times, the thanes unwittingly rehearse the chiasmic movement back and forth between fair and foul with which the sisters spell out and bring to the surface the confusion and uncertainty already present in Duncan's Scotland. Where all is constantly reversible, as in the witches' programmatic affirmation of fair/foul equivalence, there is no possibility for the community to find its bearings or a sense of direction. But in V.iii.164-166, the process has gone still further. In his response to Malcolm, Rosse attributes the 'not knowing' no longer to the members of the community but to their metaphorical mother, lamenting not only her physical wounds and deaths but her fear of confronting her own self-image. Instead of providing reassurance, her traditional casting or defining as motherland becomes a source of anxiety. Scotland now appears as a mother whose womb can only bring forth suffering, lack, fragmentation and death unless an external deliverer is able to intervene, removing the infant from the maternal womb-cum-tomb. It is thus appropriate that it should be Macduff – the "bloody child" who "was from his mother's womb/Untimely ripp'd" (IV.i.76; V.viii.15-16) and who will eventually eliminate the instrument of the community's self-estrangement – who breaks the atmosphere of uncertainty and recognizes Rosse as a member of his family and therefore of the community.

### Reflective anatomies

According to Anderson, "[c]ommunities are to be distinguished ... by the style in which they are imagined".<sup>8</sup> In *Macbeth*, the style of national imagining is provided by a metaphoric of sickness and health or "wholesomeness", division and unity and by a self-reflexive

<sup>8</sup> Anderson, *Imagined*, 6.

insistence on the power and dangers of spectacle. The protagonist's questions about the malady of his wife and country in V.iii. are part of a confrontation with a loss of corporate or corporal cohesion that had begun much earlier. Not only are the many no longer one, but the one has already begun to see itself as many. The Witches' declaration of contradictory equivalence and reversibility affects the possibility of representing and knowing both individual and collective bodies. The "unseating" of his heart or "unfixing" of his hair Macbeth sees and describes earlier in the play as he anatomizes his self shake "so [his] single state of man, / That function is smother'd in surmise, / And nothing is, but what is not" (I.iii.140-142). The dissociation of his physical and mental functions is a symptom of other, deeper, more troubling and elusive disorders of mind and state that must be discovered and exposed in order to break out of the endless mirroring and proliferation of nothing in non being. "Cast[ing] the waters of the land", "find[ing] her disease", and "purg[ing] it to a sound and pristine health", are achievements he as King would "applaud ... to the very echo, / That should applaud again" (V.iii.50-54), like, presumably, his Stuart counterpart, James I, self-styled King of Great Britain, seated in the 'real' theatre to watch Macbeth's defence of Scottish diversity and Malcolm's assertion of the virtues of Anglo-Scottish alliance, while Parliament was discussing whether or not to ratify the return to wholeness of the British national body.

Theatres were not only playhouses in Jacobean times. The multiple meanings of 'theatre' make it possible to see within or behind the playhouses traces of both anatomical theatres, or 'temples of mortality', and the chorographic theatres that mapped the body of the land. The term appears in works such as the *Theater of the Empire of Great Britain* (1611), compiled by John Speed. (Speed was also the author of a *History of Great Britaine*, 1614, which, according to its subtitle, paradoxically contains the "successions, lives, acts & issues" only of the "English monarchs from Iulius Cæsar, to our most gracious soueraigne King James").<sup>9</sup> But it had already appeared in

<sup>9</sup> The full title reads *The history of Great Britaine under the conquests of ye Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans. Their originals, manners, warres, coines & seales: with ye successions, lives, acts & issues of the English monarchs from Iulius Cæsar, to our most gracious soueraigne King James.*

visual form in the title-page to Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543). In his study of the Renaissance 'culture of dissection' and of the "contradictory emotions of desire and horror which anatomization seems to have engendered within early-modern culture", Jonathan Sawday notes that the universe of Vesalius's anatomical theatre "revolves around the conjunction of the womb and the tomb.... The womb is our point of origin, hence its central placement in the image. But, ironically, rising pictorially out of the womb appears the skeleton". Other representations of theatres of anatomy show either spectators or the representation of *Anatomia* herself with mirrors in their hands. They are images of *vanitas* like, for Macbeth, the "horrible sight" of – or reflected in – the eighth king's glass in the spirits' show of kings (IV.i.122), but also, Sawday concludes, "a reminder of the self-knowledge gained through the reflective discipline of anatomy".<sup>10</sup> Theatres, in early modern Europe, are sites in which the body, individual or collective, physical or political, may be dissected, mapped and exposed to public view. But the visions that they offer are partial and ambivalent, sliding between one sign and meaning and another, depending for their interpretation on the constantly varying positioning and perspective of their spectators.

### English health and Scottish sickness

Due first to the Elizabethan succession crisis and then to the debate on Union, pro- and anti-Scottish discourses proliferated between the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Both English and Scottish historiographical traditions depicted Scotland as a wild, unruly country, unvanquished by foreign forces but constantly threatened by domestic upheaval: an independent but precarious 'whole', taking

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), vii-ix, 66-73, figures 2, 5, 6 and 7. For a discussion of the ideological effects of cartography in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, see Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), particularly Chapter 3, "The Land Speaks", 105-147.

pride in its diversity. Both the *Description of Scotland* and most of the chronicles Raphael Holinshed had “gathered and written in English” in his *Historie of Scotland, conteining the beginning, increase, proceeding, continuance, acts and government of the Scottish Nation from the originall thereof unto the yeare 1571* consisted in an English translation of the Scots version of Hector Boece’s *Scotorum historiae* (1527).<sup>11</sup> Their passage from Boece’s Latin to John Bellenden’s Scots (in a version commissioned by James V) and Richard Harrison’s English was not only linguistic but also geographical, temporal and political. Yet the transculturation to which they were subjected through their reframing and relocating within an English editing of the nation is surprisingly limited.<sup>12</sup> The ‘Englishing’ of Scottish history is far more evident in *Macbeth*, where Shakespeare rearticulates Boece/Bellenden/Harrison/Holinshed’s material – together with additions by Francis Thynne and others in the 1587 edition – within a different temporal, political and cultural context. Thus his own rewriting or restaging of the chronicles is interwoven with icons, practices and discourses circulating in the early years of James’s reign. The interrelations between 11<sup>th</sup> century Scotland and England represented within the play prefigure not only James’s project to bring the two countries together in the union of Great Britain, but also the widespread resistance it encountered. In all three centuries –

<sup>11</sup> Holinshed’s chronicles first appeared in an illustrated edition in 1577. The implications of the translation and circulation of histories of Scotland in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries are discussed by Michael Lynch, “A Nation Born Again? Scottish Identity in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries”, in Davit Broun, R. J. Finlay and Michael Lynch, eds., *Image and Identity: The Making and Re-Making of Scotland through the Ages* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1998), 82-104, see particularly 89.

<sup>12</sup> David Norbrook maintains that Holinshed’s version of Boece’s history was “constantly disrupt[ed] ... with corrections of factual details by reference to other chronicles, or attacks on his anti-English bias”. He also points out how in the 1587 edition “the discourses of Boece and Buchanan, themselves slightly differing in emphasis, are in continual tension with editorial controls”. See “Macbeth and the Politics of Historiography”, in Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker, eds., *Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1987), 80-82. Editorial intervention is seldom so explicit as Norbrook suggests, however. It usually appears in unexplained shifts of viewpoint or vocabulary, as in some of the cases discussed below.

11<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> – ‘Scotland’, ‘England’ and ‘Britain’ are discursive constructs, imagined communities whose instability, incommensurability and ambivalence are further complicated by the re-imaginings and restagings through which the play projects its images of collective selves and others.<sup>13</sup>

In Shakespeare’s play, England is presented – by all except Macbeth – not only as a place that offers refuge and aid to the Scottish exiles but as the source of order and health. The Scottish motherland, conversely, is from the very beginning in a state of disorder, disrupted by both internal rebellion and invasion by the rebels’ foreign allies or mercenary forces. Later, it is portrayed, like Lady Macbeth, as suffering from an apparently incurable disease. Its illness, however, is one whose aetiology (malignant internal growth or foreign agent) and treatment (surgery, purgative herbs or drugs, or royal touch) vary according to the viewpoint of the observer.<sup>14</sup>

If Scotland was a mother to its inhabitants, whether life-bearing or death-bearing, the king was both father to his people (Scottish kings were explicitly Kings of the Scots, not of Scotland) and husband to his realm. Macbeth’s association of wife and country is therefore understandable, recalling conventional images of kingship that were widely used by James I, simultaneously head, father and husband to the body of his realm.<sup>15</sup> Aware that his wife’s well-being can only be restored by a mixture of surgery and medicine, Macbeth wishes the doctor first to “pluck” and “raze” the very roots of her infection from her mind and then to “cleanse” her breast of the

<sup>13</sup> Discussions of Anderson’s formulation of the “imagined community” by writers such as Bhabha, Žižek and Easthope are useful in broaching early modern British ‘imaginings’ of the national self. See Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993) and Anthony Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> References to illness, health and, generally, the body in *Macbeth* engage with a variety of contemporary beliefs and practices. For an extremely useful discussion of mental disturbance in the play, in relation to 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century medical treatises, see Claudia Corti, “Macbeth medico pazzo”, *Memoria di Shakespeare*, ed. Agostino Lombardo, 1 (2000), 101-123.

<sup>15</sup> See Kevin Sharpe, *Politics and Ideas in Early Stuart England: Essays and Sketches* (London and New York: Pinter Publications, 1989), 39, but also James’s 1610 speech to Parliament quoted below.



“perilous stuff” with which it is oppressed by applying “some sweet oblivious antidote” (V.iii.41-44). What he is asking him to do is to restore fluidity and fluency to her body, reversing or undoing both the blockage to the “compunctious visitings of Nature” and the substitution of gall for milk made by the murdering ministers she had herself invoked in I.v. 40-50.

Although the shifting of Macbeth’s concern from the mind and body of his wife to the body of his country recalls James I’s images of the national family and body, the development of the analogy takes a different direction. For James, the treatment of his wife’s malady should consist in reducing her divided body to a single form; for Macbeth, in a form of xenophobic purging and scouring: not a uniting but a separating and expelling. (“If thou couldst, Doctor, cast / The water of my land, find her disease, / And purge it to a sound and pristine health, / I would applaud thee to the very echo, / That should applaud again.... / What rhubarb, cyme or what purgative drug, / Would scour these English hence?”, V.iii.50-56.) Within the medical, corporeal context, water, hitherto an agent of undifferentiation and confusion, provides both the instrument – or ‘ground’ – for acquiring certain, founded, verifiable information and the means with which to expel the alien, and thus all forms of foreign infection and pollution.<sup>16</sup>

Nowhere, however, does Macbeth personally assume the function of healer. As head of his kingdom’s body it is the King who should provide for its health, as James himself maintains in his discussion of the monarch as “father of children” and “head of a body composed of divers members” in *The True Law of Free Monarchies*:

As the judgment coming from the head may not only employ the members, every one in their own office, as long as they are able for it; but likewise in case any of them be affected with any infirmity must care and provide for their remedy, in case it be curable, and if otherwise, gar cut them off for fear of infecting the rest.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See also note 19 below.

<sup>17</sup> James I, *The True Law of Free Monarchies: Or the Reciprocal and Mutual Duty Betwixt a Free King, and His Natural Subjects* (Edinburgh, 1598, reprinted London 1603), in *Works*, 1616, 204, quoted in William C. Carroll, ed., *Macbeth Texts and Contexts* (Boston and New York: Bedford / St. Martin’s, 1999), 216-217. See also the 1610 speech to Parliament quoted below.

The kingly, i.e. doctoral, role Macbeth is unable to play will eventually be assumed by Malcolm, but what Macbeth sees as the cause of the land’s disease becomes its cure in Malcolm’s hands.

For Macbeth’s adversaries, the only possibility for Scotland to recover from her wounds and return to “wholesome[ness]” (IV.iii.105) appears to be associated not with indigenous medicine but with the healing touch of the saintly English king. The treatment applied by Malcolm and Macduff is made possible thanks to the support of Edward the Confessor and the joint effort of Scottish and English forces. It is not the foreigner who must be flushed out or expelled as the invasive source of infection, but a tumorous growth that has developed *within* the Scottish body politic, making the home unhomely. The origin of the malady is unfamiliar, unrecognizable, but also disturbingly recognizable as a long-established and therefore ultimately familiar presence that can no longer be ignored or projected onto an alien ‘other’. The avenging army is led by Malcolm, “the med’cine of the sickly weal” (V.ii.27), made such not only by his position as legitimate heir, but through the process of purification and fortification he has undergone during his lengthy sojourn at the English (foreign) court. Beside him is Macduff, who had also fled to England where, only apparently incidentally, he had learnt from Malcolm of the English King’s miraculous cures. But Macduff’s connection with medicine is more complex and ambivalent than that of Malcolm, *medicus patriae* and future *rex*.<sup>18</sup> He is himself the product of an act of surgery that by removing him prematurely from his mother’s womb had prepared him for his future role. It is as one who is “not of woman born” that he is able to perform the final act of surgery. By unseaming the head of the homegrown tyrant, he makes way for a new king, a “sovereign flower” (V.ii.30) who is dewed by the loyalty of Scottish nobles, but who is also and primarily enforced by his powerful foreign allies. The country’s healing takes place both through excision or surgical removal and flushing out or scouring, and through the application of

<sup>18</sup> *Rex medicus patriae* is a motto that appears among the emblems “either dedicated to James or alluding to him” in Henry Peacham’s *Minerva Britannia* (1612); see Graham Parry, *The Golden Age Restor’d: The Culture of the Stuart Court, 1603-42* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), 24.

an external antidote or tonic. Its strength is augmented or restored through a process of implanting, transfusion or incorporation of energy from without.<sup>19</sup>

### *Rex medicus patriae: the discontents of healing*

Whether the cure will be permanent is of course another matter. *Macbeth* was written at a time when the royal physician metaphor was still literalized – or, to be more precise, enacted or embodied – in the ceremony of the Royal Touch (introduced by Edward the Confessor, the practice was to continue until the 18<sup>th</sup> century). James, however, regarded it with diffidence. Although kingly healing, whether of individual bodies or of the body politic, was considered an essential part of the rhetoric of power, it required constant adjustment to keep it in line with changing knowledge, beliefs and practices. In *Basilicon Doron*, James encourages his son to act as “a good Physician, who must first knowe what peccant humours his patient naturally is most subject vnto, before he can begin his cure”. In his introduction to the 1603 edition, he explains that his “kingly gift” of instruction was “not so much ordayned for the institution of a Prince in generall”, but “as contayning particular præcepts to my Sonne in speciall”. It thus necessarily includes the “particular diseases of this kingdome, with the best remedies for the same”, which he, “as a King” who has “learned both the theorick and practick thereof”, is best fitted “plainlie to expresse”. (Similarly, in the case of England whose “sickness” he expressly avoids discussing, it is Elizabeth, should there be “any corruption stollen in in her state”, who must “see the same purged, and restored to the auncient integritie”).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Lenox’s proposal of a moderate sacrifice in order to “dew the sovereign flower and drown the weed” is particularly interesting in this context, since, as the Clarendon edition of *Macbeth* points out, the flower metaphor has possible “remedial” connotations and both “dewing” and “drowning” imply external additive or accretive applications as opposed to extirpation and surgical removal. “Dewing” and “drowning” could also be compared to Macbeth’s proposal to “scour these English hence”, a particularly drastic form of purging or “flushing out” and another example of the ambivalent power of liquid.

<sup>20</sup> James Craigie, ed., *The Basilicon Doron of King James VI* (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Text Society, 1944), 73, 20, 21-22. Italics mine.

The risks of kingly healing are foregrounded in some of James’s speeches to Parliament, in which rhetoric and medical knowledge commingle. Gabriel Harvey’s *De motu cordis* was only published in 1628 and the effects of his theory of the circulation of blood on contemporary medical practice and particularly on bloodletting or phlebotomy and purging, still largely dominated by Galenical doctrine, took some time to appear. But in his reflections on the destructive or contaminating power of the cure, James anticipates later scientific demonstrations of the adverse effects of excessive recourse to phlebotomy and purging. “[The head] may apply sharp cures, or cut off corrupt members, let blood in what proportion it thinks fit, and as the body must spare, but yet is all this power ordained by God *Ad aedificationem, non ad destructionem*”, he declares in an address delivered on March 21, 1610. “[I]t were an idle head that would in place of physic so poison or phlebotomize the body as might breed a dangerous distemper or destruction thereof”.<sup>21</sup>

The magic power of the Royal Touch was uncomfortably reminiscent of the healing techniques of wizardry and witchcraft that the Jacobean court and clergy were seeking to eradicate, but that were also the object of increasing contention. Recalling Keith Thomas’s considerations on the temporal coincidence between the development of the royal ceremony and the banishment of similar activities by cunning women and rural magicians, William C. Carroll concludes that “all forms of charismatic healing power were centralized and reserved as attributes of sovereign power”.<sup>22</sup> James, however, was notoriously sceptical about the “healing benediction” (IV.iii.156) he was supposed to have inherited from Elizabeth

<sup>21</sup> For James’s speech, see J. R. Tanner, *Constitutional Documents of the Reign of James I A.D. 1603-1625* (Cambridge: CUP, 1961), 15-16. For the implications of Harvey’s *De motu cordis* for the theory and practice of bloodletting, see L. J. Rather, “Pathology at Mid-Century: A Reassessment of Thomas Willis and Thomas Sydenham”, in Allen G. Debus, ed., *Medicine in Seventeenth Century England* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1974), 71-112, especially 73-75, and for 17<sup>th</sup> century views of bloodletting and purging, see Allen G. Debus, “Paracelsian Medicine: Noah Biggs and the Problem of Medical Reform”, in *ibid.*, 33-48, especially 38.

<sup>22</sup> Carroll, *Macbeth*, 224. Carroll’s reference is to Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner’s, 1971), 197-211.

together with the English throne.<sup>23</sup> According to Arthur Wilson, writing in 1653 in his *Life and Reign of James I* (part of a "Complete History of England with the Lives of all the Kings and Queens Hereof"), he saw the ceremony of the Royal Touch as "a device, to aggrandize the virtue of kings, when miracles were in fashion; but he let the world believe it, though he smiled at it in his own reason". Moreover, he was diffident not only about the miraculous quality of the cure, which he saw rather as an effect of the imagination, but about the skill of his physicians. Wilson describes him "finding the strength of the imagination a more powerful agent in the cure, than the plasters his chirurgions prescribed for the sore".<sup>24</sup>

In *Macbeth*, the examples of sovereign healing and prophecy are undermined by the alternative models offered by the skills of the weird and wayward sisters.<sup>25</sup> Edward's miraculous power of prophecy cannot entirely displace the diabolical resonances of the forecasting of the witches and their masters. It is they who provide the first indication both of Macduff's future role as righteous tyrannicide, liberator of time and restorer of a hypothetical wholesomeness and, however enigmatically, of the power of those who are not "of woman born". But even without the witches' prophecy, the special circumstances of his birth mark Macduff with an ambiguous, fair-foul, witchcraftly origin. A twofold tradition, saintly and satanical, surrounded legends and visual representations of Caesarean birth in medieval and renaissance Europe. The *nonnatus* or *ingenitus* who survived delivery could be identified alternately with Caesar or with the anti-Christ, delivered not by human midwives alone but by devils. Increasingly, in fifteenth- and

<sup>23</sup> James's scepticism is documented in a number of contemporary records, including the Venetian ambassador's dispatch of June 4, 1603 (*CSP Ven.* 10: 44) and a report by the Duke of Saxe-Weimar on his visit of September 19, 1613 (in W. B. Rye, ed., *England as Seen by Foreigners in the Days of Elizabeth and James the First* (1865), (New York: Bloom, 1967, 151), quoted in Carroll, *Macbeth*, 224-225.

<sup>24</sup> Arthur Wilson, *The Life and Reign of James the First, King of Great Britain: A Complete History of England with the Lives of all the Kings and Queens Hereof* (London: 1719), 289, quoted in Carroll, *Macbeth*, 225.

<sup>25</sup> Malcolm's description of Edward's healing is significantly anachronistic: Shakespeare supplements Holinshed's account with practices introduced by Elizabeth.

sixteenth-century Caesarean operations, female midwives tended to be substituted by male surgeons, due to a more general marginalization of women in medicine, including limitations to their use of surgical instruments, in the attempt to distance and repress their knowledge and control of processes of reproduction. Midwives were accused not only of practices of abortion, contraception and infanticide, but also of association with witchcraft.<sup>26</sup>

That the cure of Scotland was unlikely to be definitive is also suggested by the circularity of the play. The dispersed fragments of the nation reassemble around their "med'cine", Malcolm, in the final scene, displaying the new bearer of the Scottish crown encircled or "compassed with [his] kingdom's pearl" (V.ix.22) in a carefully constructed representation of completion and closure. But although their hitherto divided voices are finally able to speak together in the royal salute, their performance of wholeness is unsettled by the echoes resounding both in their "hailing" and in Malcolm's closing address. The new power-bearers' unconscious rehearsing of their predecessors' gestures and words suggests continuity rather than change. After three hours' exposure to reiterated patterns of repetition and doubling, the spectator has little difficulty in imagining a sequel of further meetings between a new ambitious warrior and the same or more weird sisters, disrupting the re-established order and well-being of the realm with renewed infection.

Should the cure, and the establishment of peace, be seen then as something merely wished for or imagined? Both the "sound and pristine health" (V.iii.52) Macbeth speaks of and the "wholesome days" Macduff recalls and wishes to return to belong to the rhetoric of nationalism, the 'pedagogy' Bhabha sees as constantly disrupted by the everyday 'performance' of the nation. Within the context of the play, they suggest a particularly anxious endeavour to invent and fix a harmonious, uncontaminated origin for the nation, a beginning on which to found its future. The 'reality' the play depicts is on the contrary a sequence of rebellion, usurpation and regicide, characteristics, moreover, of both Scottish and English accounts of

<sup>26</sup> See Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Not of Woman Born: Representations of Caesarean Birth in Medieval and Renaissance Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990).

the origins of the nation. Not even the saintliness of Duncan and his queen have been able to protect the kingdom from warfare, either internal or external. Despite their attempts in IV.iii to cast Macbeth not simply as “the Tyrant” but as Tyranny itself, Malcolm and Macduff’s words and actions continue to undermine their reforming intentions with echoes of past ills. The elimination of the scapegoat is unlikely to free the community of its historic burden of usurpation and tyranny. What Stephen Mullaney sees as the “genealogy of treason and equivocation” complicating the genealogy of kingship in the show of Stuart kings threatens other performances too with its amphibological “interplay of likeness and difference”.<sup>27</sup>

Ignoring or reversing Holinshed’s account of the troubles that were to disrupt the reign of Malcolm and his successors, Shakespeare superimposes his own time and its anxieties and desires onto those of Duncan, Malcolm and Macbeth. James saw his accession as the healing of a rift, a return to another form of wholeness through his reuniting of the kingdoms that Brut, the mythic founder of Britain, had divided amongst his sons. Francis Bacon has described the widespread fear that Elizabeth’s death would be followed “in England [by] nothing but confusions, interreigns, and perturbations of estate; likely far to exceed the ancient calamities of the civil wars between the Houses of Lancaster and York”. But the fear was allayed by James’s unopposed succession. Bacon’s report recalls both the night and day imagery Malcolm uses in his attempt to cheer Macduff at the end of IV.iii and the “terrible dream” Banquo fears and Macbeth is shaken by: “[I]t rejoiced all men to see so fair a morning of a Kingdom, and to be thoroughly secured of former apprehensions; as a man that awaketh out of a fearful dream”.<sup>28</sup> James was represented as a *rex pacificus*, the inaugurator of a new era of peace, both in his own speeches and writings and in the masques and pageants presented in his honour. He cast himself as the reincarnation of Solomon, Arthur and Augustus, but also as the successor to Henry VII, the healer of the wounds created by the

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Mullaney, “Lying like Truth: Riddle, Representation, and Treason in Renaissance England”, in Alan Sinfield, ed., *New Casebooks: Macbeth* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 115 and 117.

<sup>28</sup> Francis Bacon, “The Beginning of the History of Great Britain”, quoted in Tanner, *Documents*, 4.

division between the houses of York and Lancaster. His project was thus located within a history of England that needed now to be rewritten as the history of Britain – the wounded island whose monstrously divided or double body could at last be brought together in a single, undivided whole.<sup>29</sup>

### The English infection

But to what extent could the conjunction of Scottish and English forces and the English monarch’s benediction of the new King of Scotland in *Macbeth* be taken as a model for the contemporary, burning issue of the unification of Scotland and England?<sup>30</sup> The opposition between Malcolm’s readiness to seek alliance with England and Macbeth’s contempt for the “English epicures” (V.iii.8) and his desire to cleanse his country of the English infection is the result of another manipulation of Holinshed’s narrative. In Holinshed it is not Makbeth but Makduffe who accuses Malcolme of being “so replet with the inconstant behauiour and manifest vices of Englishmen, that he is nothing woorthie to inioy [the crown]”.<sup>31</sup> It is not Makbeth, but – years after the former’s death – Malcolme’s brother Donald Bane (Shakespeare’s Donalbain), who appears as the defender of ancient Scottish virtue against English contamination. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare condenses and anticipates Holinshed’s more

<sup>29</sup> The need to rewrite British history was insisted on by several authors including Bacon. A Scottish expression of this need is to be found in Sir Thomas Craig of Riccarton’s proposal for a thorough revisioning of “the public annals of the two countries.... Errors and irritating expressions must be expunged ... and a new history of Britain should be written with the utmost regard to accuracy”. *De Unione Regnorum Britanniae Tractatus*, 1605, 468, quoted in Roger A. Mason, “Scotching the Brut: Politics, History and National Myth in Sixteenth-Century Britain”, in Roger A. Mason, ed., *Scotland and England 1286-1815* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1987), 76.

<sup>30</sup> As, it seems, had already been the case a year earlier in Sir George Buc’s 1605 panegyric in which he “presented the alliance between Malcolm and Edward as prefiguring the Union and traced James’s ancestry on the English side back to Edward”, see Norbrook, *Macbeth*, 96. Buc’s vision was modelled on Buchanan, according to Norbrook, *Macbeth*, 318.

<sup>31</sup> Holinshed, 276.

temporally dispersed allusions to Malcolme's favouring of Englishness, while he shifts the anti-English attitudes it identifies in other characters onto Macbeth alone. Thus the contrast between Malcolm and Macbeth and their respective visions of the body politic is made into a contrast between pro- and anti-Englishness. Macbeth's imagining of the "sound and pristine health" of the Scottish nation requires its absolute diversity or otherness from England; for Malcolm, on the contrary, "wholesomeness" can only be restored through the accommodation of English values. The "mix[ing] through alliance & daylie conversation" of the qualities of the two nations that James proposes in the *Basilicon Doron* in order to make their inhabitants "growe and weld all in one", is what Macbeth most fears.<sup>32</sup> His invitation to his alienated followers to "fly, false Thanes, / And mingle with the English epicures" (V.iii.7-8) opposes a centrifugal, dismembering movement to the exclusively Scottish stability, unity and wholesomeness he wishes the nation to be restored to. Against the purity and integrity of what remains firmly in the centre is the contaminated "mingling", hybridity, dispersal and falsehood associated with the loss of distinctiveness and singleness.

Conversely, in the Chronicle, the "venemous infection" of Scotland by English language, manners and "outrageous riot" is not lamented by Makbeth, who seems not to attribute any particular significance to the English aid afforded to his enemy. The protest comes, instead, from a group of nobles not long after Makbeth's defeat and death and Malcolme's recovery of the Scottish throne:

It is said, that such outragious riot entered at this time, and began to grow in use among the Scottishmen, together with the language and maners of the English nation (by reason that such a multitude of the same, flieng out of their countrie, were dailie receiued as then into Scotland to inhabit there, as before is shewed) that diuerse of the nobles perceiuing what discommoditie and decaie to the whole realme would insue of this intemperance, came to the king, lamenting greeuouslie the case, for that this venemous infection spred so fast ouer the whole realme, to the peruerting and vtter remoouing of the ancient sobrietie of

<sup>32</sup> Craigie, *Basilicon*, 201.

diet vsed in the same. Wherefore they besought him to prouide some remedie in time, before hope of redresse were past...<sup>33</sup>

Although he attempts to correct his errors, seeking to "haue redressed this infectiue poison, and vtterlie to haue expelled it foorth of his realme", Holinshed's Malcolme proves unable to perform the role of "med'cine of the sickly weal" in which Shakespeare was to cast him. The infection will resist all kinds of treatment, becoming a permanent feature of the nation's body. In one of the many asides in which the chronicler compares the past he is recounting to the Scotland of the present, it is seen to have "so entered into the inner parts of the intrails, that neither with purging, cutting, nor searing, it may be holpen. Sooner shall you destroie the whole nation, than remooue this vice".<sup>34</sup>

A more serious, but equally ineffective, attempt to cleanse the community's body and purge it of the vice would shortly be made, according to Holinshed, by Donald Bane. Shakespeare's Donalbain disappears from *Macbeth* after his decision to flee to Ireland. (Surely a significant choice: while Malcolm goes to England, Donalbain is returning to the source, retracing – in the opposite direction – the trajectory of his ancestors. The founders of the Scottish nation arrived by way of Ireland, according to the version that traced their origin, many centuries earlier, to the union, in 1500 B.C., between the Greek prince, Gathelus, and Scota, daughter of Pharaoh. After the destruction of Pharaoh in the Red Sea, their flight from Egypt led them and their descendants first to Spain, then Ireland and finally, after several centuries, to Scotland.) In the play, the only mention of Donalbain after his flight is a passing reference to his continued absence – made in a conversation between Cathness and Lenox in V.ii.7-8. In the Chronicle, on the contrary, Donald plays an active part in Scottish history, appearing, in opposition to his brother, as a champion of the ancient Scottish values and customs. After Malcolme's death, he returns to Scotland with the support of the King of Norway and is welcomed by his people:

<sup>33</sup> Holinshed, 281.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

For manie of the people abhorring the riotous maners and superfluous gormandizing brought in among them by the Englishmen, were willing enough to receiue this Donald for their king, trusting, (bicause he had been brought up in the Iles with the old customes and maners of their ancient nation, without taste of the English likerous delicats) they would by his severe order in government recover againe the former temperance of their old progenitors.<sup>35</sup>

The apparently gratuitous exchange between Cathness and Lenox in V.ii.7-8 can perhaps be read as a trace of Donalbain's extratextual, historical presence, a reminder of the gap that has been produced in Shakespeare's play. Donalbain is placed under erasure; neither physically present, nor entirely forgotten, he is the missing and therefore all-the-more disturbing member of Holinshed's Malcolm/Donald dyad, suggesting a potential re-enactment of the conflictual twinning of Duncane/Makbeth. In his absence, Shakespeare projects the *anti-Englishness* Holinshed associates with him – as, also, with Makduffe – onto Macbeth, whose patriotic concern for Scotland's well-being in the play is founded on a rejection of any form of alien infection or contamination. Whereas Shakespeare's Macbeth is isolated in his anti-Englishness, Donald's diffidence towards foreign novelties is initially shared in the Chronicle by a sufficient number of his subjects for him to be able to "receive the crowne" (emphasis mine) according to the ancient Celtic system of tanistry. Succession, under tanistry, was not by lineal inheritance or primogeniture but by election: the new king being named not by his predecessor but by the thanes. But the Chronicle is a composite account, engrafting a variety of linguistic, national and cultural mediations and bringing together different and often conflictual viewpoints and voices.<sup>36</sup> Thus, only a few lines later, we

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>36</sup> At times the composite nature of the Chronicle takes the form of explicit editorial intervention. Thus in describing the laws Macbeth had promulgated in the early, positive, untyrannical years of his reign (omitted by Shakespeare), the editor distances himself from his narrative, assigning the authorship of the passage explicitly to Boece, separating it from the rest of the Chronicle and placing it in inverted commas.

read how Edgar Etheling, the rightful heir to the throne according to the system of lineal inheritance, "was aduertised that Donald Bane had thus *vsurped* the crowne of Scotland".<sup>37</sup> By replacing "receiving" with "usurping", the chronicler is moving from one theory of kingly legitimacy to another, changing both his political lexicon and his vision of the nation. And the change in perspective would shortly involve even Donald's Scottish supporters. The story may thus be read as a narrative of shifts in the people's allegiance, on which, ultimately, the legitimacy of power and thus the vocabulary of the chronicler are based.<sup>38</sup> "Our kings received from our ancestors an authority which was not absolute, but which was limited within definite bounds", as George Buchanan puts it. "Confirmation, moreover, is supplied by *immemorial usage and by the people's assumption, without objection being made, of certain rights*".<sup>39</sup>

Here however it is not the traditional custom but the recently instituted law of primogeniture that prevails – the law Buchanan condemned for its irrationality. Beyond the occasional interruption of Holinshed's account by ideas and expressions either drawn directly from Buchanan's writings or revealing a similar stance on single issues, a deeper and more pervasive textual division is to be found. Within the chronicle, two contrasting views of history uneasily coexist. The framing story tells not of the "increase" indicated in

<sup>37</sup> Holinshed, 284, italics mine. For a similar version of Anglo-Scottish relations during and after the reign of Malcolm III, and especially in relation to Donald, based on *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. Garmonsway, see Bruce Webster, *Medieval Scotland: The Making of an Identity* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1997), 26-30. Webster concludes: "It was with English help that the Canmore dynasty was established, and it was to rule Scotland till 1286", 28.

<sup>38</sup> According to Henry N. Paul, *The Royal Play of "Macbeth": When, Why, and How It Was Written by Shakespeare* (New York: Macmillan 1950), 158, the purpose of Lenox's information about Donalbain "seems to be to remind the audience of the differing attitudes of the two brothers toward the English. Malcolm is to be admired because he is helping to unite the two kingdoms; while Donalbain is to be discredited as an opponent of this unifying process". I agree with the author about the importance of this exchange and its implicit invocation of the Donald Bane passages in Holinshed, but see it as much less univocal in its meaning.

<sup>39</sup> George Buchanan, *De jure regni apud Scotos* (Edinburgh, 1579), English translation by Charles F. Arrowood, *The Power of the Crown in Scotland* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1949), 56-58. Italics mine.

Holinshed's subtitle but of the degeneration of the Scottish people which has brought them to a state of unmanliness, luxuriousness and idleness: the fatal debilitation provoked by English infection. Briefly interrupting this account is what appears on the contrary to be an embryonic history of progress: the genealogy of the house of Stuart, moving from the founder, Banquo, through by means of continuous lineal descent to James VI. If it is the latter – the history of progress and union under the Stuarts – that is most obviously foregrounded in *Macbeth*, the former too is present, anamorphically undermining appearances of homage with the uncertainty of their sources and the possibility of new positionings of their audience.

The defeat of Donald's essentialist Scottishness by the arrival of Edgar Etheling is paralleled in *Macbeth* by the return of Malcolm, interrupting and disrupting Macbeth's oppositional vision of national self and foreign, invasive and infecting other. But the physical elimination of Macbeth does not entail the elimination of his story or his vision, or of the earlier and alternative stories and visions they engraft. Their haunting, unsettling presence remains to undermine the triumphantly continuist narrative of Stuart supremacy and Anglo-Scottish union with traces of a counter-narrative, dislocating the return to British whole(some)ness with their disseminatory, contaminating power.

### Blessed states and monstrous bodies

Negotiating Holinshed's versions of the Scottish (and English) past<sup>40</sup> and providing a testing ground for early seventeenth-century political ideas and issues, *Macbeth* plays a particularly complex role in the "emotional engineering" at work both in and outside Parliament at the time the play was written and performed.<sup>41</sup> What was under

<sup>40</sup> For a general consideration of the "dispersal of origins" between *Macbeth* and source/s, see Jonathan Goldberg, "Speculations: *Macbeth* and Source", in Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor, eds., *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology* (London: Methuen, 1987), 242-264.

<sup>41</sup> The expression "emotional engineering" is used by Bruce Galloway, *The Union of England and Scotland, 1603-1608* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1986), 50, in relation to James's attempt to "promote [a] coming together of hearts and minds" in favour of unity. It can however apply equally to the writing, speeches

debate was whether the "union of the crowns" under James I/VI should be extended to other areas through formal, institutional recognition. Whether the "blessed", divinely inspired condition of common health and wealth – the state of inner and outer peace and prosperity – that unification was expected to inaugurate could finally be fulfilled.<sup>42</sup> Viewed in this context, the innovations introduced by Duncan and later Malcolm – the setting aside of the tradition of tanistry or elective monarchy for lineal, primogeniture succession, and the institution of earldoms – could be taken as prefiguring the institutional and legal changes Union was expected to bring about. For both Boece and Buchanan, tanistry is preferable to primogeniture. For Buchanan, the system of primogeniture risks "committ[ing] the power over the whole people, to such as have no power over themselves". Boece describes the new titles of honour as "vain puffes", reflecting the decline of the Scottish people "into decadent and luxurious ways", while Buchanan not only defines them as "barbarous", but connects them specifically with the Stuart dynasty.<sup>43</sup>

In his address to his first English Parliament, 19 March, 1604, James enumerates the "blessings which God hath in my person bestowed upon you all". The first is "outward peace" or "peace abroad"; "no small blessing to a Christian commonwealth". Yet it is "far inferior" to the second, that of "peace within", sent by God in a double but unequal form which James elsewhere synthesizes in the

and, generally, practices of the adversaries of unification. *Macbeth's* position in relation to the debate is characteristically ambivalent, more an exploration and interrogation of the issues involved – attentively avoiding areas that might invoke official censorship – than the assumption of a clearly defined or definable position.

<sup>42</sup> According to Galloway, a "divine providence theme" was widespread among the supporters of Union, appearing in most of the tracts, as well as in James's speech at the opening of the English Parliament on March 19, 1604: "Christian theology and classical philosophy were used to show unity as a divine principle, the work of the gods ... the relationship between unity and prosperity reflected not the operation of earthly laws, but divine decree.... Idolatry and resistance to divine commandment are punished by disunity and misery. The logical consequence of this was to regard the union of the crowns as the work of God, a reward for the reformation of religion in England and Scotland". Galloway, *Union*, 33.

<sup>43</sup> Norbrook, *Macbeth*, 88, 86, 89.

Latin motto *rosas enricus, regna jacobus*. The new king was descended “lineally out of the loins of Henry the Seventh”, both the “first uniter” of the Houses of Lancaster and York and “the first ground-layer of the other peace”, the reconciliation and union of Scotland and England, “the ... inward peace annexed to my person”.<sup>44</sup> The reconciliation or “union” of Yorkists and Lancastrians under Henry VII appears therefore as a prefiguring of the union of England and Scotland under James, the true heir and “fulfiller” of his English (and Welsh) forefather.

James’s proclamation of the Union of Great Britain and his proposal for the naturalization of *post nati* Scotsmen as English subjects were discussed in Commons between 1604 to 1608. The King’s repeated interventions were only part of a massive campaign in favour of unification. Images of union were displayed in such “outward marks of government” as the kingdom’s name, flag, seals and coinage, but also the pageants and ceremonies held to celebrate James’s accession to both the English throne and the “Empire of Great Britain”.<sup>45</sup> But neither these, nor the voluminous tract literature published on the subject, produced the desired result. In 1608 ratification of union was in fact denied.<sup>46</sup> The English parliament feared the contagion or contamination that might ensue from the arrival of a polluting “swarm” of rapacious and barbarous Scotsmen, recalling the “multiplying villainies of nature” that “swarm[ed]” around MacDonwald, the prefiguration of Macbeth (I.ii.11-12).<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> “James I on a Union with Scotland, 1604”, in Tanner, *Documents*, 25.

<sup>45</sup> A particularly interesting image of union is offered by the Great Seal in which the arms of Cadwallader and of Edward the Confessor were appropriated by James – another motive, probably, together with the topicality of the Royal Touch, for Shakespeare’s development of Holinshed’s references to the English king. See Galloway, *Union*, 16, 49.

<sup>46</sup> Galloway speaks of “several hundred thousand words of text on the union, [which] contain a wealth of material of great interest to political, religious, economic and legal historians”. For these and other “outward marks or symbols of government”, *Union*, 46, 49, 166.

<sup>47</sup> James himself speaks of the widely entertained “conceit” and “double jealousy” that England would “be overwhelmed by the *swarming* of the Scots, who if the union were effected would reign and rule all”. Quoted in Galloway, *Union*, 36, italics mine.

Even Bacon’s appeal for a history of Britain is fraught with ambivalence. On the one hand he pointed to the need for “this island of Great Britain, as it is now joined in monarchy for ages to come”, to be “so joined in history for times past, and that one just and complete History [be] compiled of both nations”. On the other, and in the same context, he recalled the “worthiness of the history of Britain ... and the *partiality and obliquity* of that of Scotland”. And a contemporary comment on Bacon’s proposal unwittingly translates the title of the history he planned to write into “the story of *England*”. As Jennie Wormald comments, the episode provides an example of “deeply engrained Englishness wrestling with the British vision demanded by the new king of England”.<sup>48</sup>

Within the Empire of Britain, differences would blur and England’s carefully constructed distinctiveness could well give way before the barbarous energy of the invaders. The more the King insisted on the “likeness” between the two nations – their language, institutions and religion – the more diffident Parliament became. Its final decision, in 1608, forced him to remain “a polygamist and husband to two wives”, the head of “a divided and monstrous body”, to use the images he himself was wont to employ in addressing Parliament.<sup>49</sup> Polygamy and monstrosity are perturbances of nature and society or “estate”, examples of disorder, of the crossing of prohibited borders. For James, they are models of negativity, but they are also uncannily familiar, at least partly reminiscent of a family past he was anxious his heir should avoid repeating. The licentiousness of his grandfather, James V, on the one hand, to which he explicitly draws attention in *Basilicon Doron*, and, on the other, the monstrously divided – or united – bodies that fascinated his

<sup>48</sup> Bacon’s proposal was contained in a letter to Lord Ellesmere, who commented on it in a letter to the King. See Jennie Wormald, “The Creation of Britain: Multiple Kingdoms or Core and Colonies?”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> Series, 2 (1992), 179-181. Italics mine.

<sup>49</sup> On March 19, 1604, in Tanner, *Documents*, 25; but see also his speech to Parliament of 31 March, 1607, in *Documents*, 35: “For no more possible is it for one King to govern two countries contiguous, the one a great and the other a less, a richer and a poorer, the greater drawing like an adamant the lesser to the commodities thereof, than for one had to govern two bodies or one man to be husband of two wives, whereof Christ himself said, *ab initio non fuit sic*”.



great-grandfather James IV. The case James may have had in mind in his references to his kingdom as a "divided and monstrous body" was not of a head with two bodies but a body with two heads: the siamese twins, joined from the waist downwards, James IV is reported to have brought to live at court so that he "could study the phenomenon more closely".<sup>50</sup>

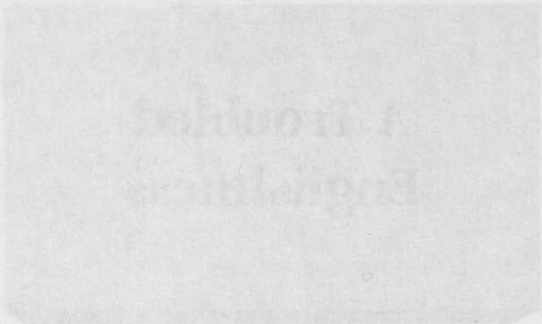
Engaging ambiguously with the debate on union through its restaging and translating of Scottish chronicles and their Englished re-editions, *Macbeth* is a narration of nations, a liminal text or site of passage in which previous and contemporary narrations intersect and overlap. Henry N. Paul's definition of it as "the Royal Play" suggests an untroubled, ultimately reductive fixity.<sup>51</sup> Rather than simply offering itself as homage to the new king and his imaginings of a British nation, *Macbeth* is marked and constructed by the heterogeneous and antagonistic histories, temporalities and representations it traverses and rehearses. Interrogating the site and scope of James's project of union, Shakespeare unseams Scottish and English histories, relocating their dismembered parts within the unstable, shifting context of contemporary events, practices and discourses. The text that is delivered is a reversible and revisable basis for performance, ready for the cuts, inclusions and alterations called for by new events and practices and audiences. The post-text that remains today is the Folio *Macbeth*, a hybrid, self-reflexively monstrous English body, scarred by traces of erasure and by its own imperfect stitching together and implanting of different versions and enactments. What it offers is a magnificently anamorphic spectacle or

<sup>50</sup> A. I. Short and T.W.J. Lennard, *James IV of Scotland, Sovereign and Surgeon*, The Durham Thomas Harriot Seminar Occasional Paper No. 7, 1992, 34. Short and Lennard's information is taken from the work of a 16<sup>th</sup> century Scottish historian, Robert Lindesay of Pittscottie, *The history of Scotland, from February 21. 1436, to March 1565; in which are contained, accounts of many remarkable passages, altogether differing from our other historians*, 1778; see A. J. G. Mackay, ed., *The Historie and Chronicles of Scotland* Vol. I (Edinburgh, 1899), 233.

<sup>51</sup> For criticisms of Paul's vision, see Michael Hawkins, "History, Politics and *Macbeth*", in John Russell Brown, ed., *Focus on Macbeth* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 155-188, especially Appendix, 185-188; also Alan Sinfield, "*Macbeth*: History, Ideology and Intellectuals", *Critical Quarterly* 28, 1-2 (1986), 63-77.

anatomy of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century imaginings of both medieval Scotland and the Jacobean weal, a dissection rather than a recomposition of the double body, topographical and temporal, debated in the political, theatrical and chorographic productions of Shakespeare's time. A re-enactment, as necessarily "partial and oblique" as the Scottish histories recalled by Bacon or the thoroughly English *History of Great Britaine* shortly to be published by John Speed.





Mario Faraone

**“England, Their England”:  
Ideas of Englishness in  
Some Political Writings of the 1930s**

Throughout the years I had spent in Hollywood, I had never tired of protesting against the American presentation of English life. What caricature! What gross exaggeration! But now – and increasingly during the weeks that followed – I began to reverse my judgement. *Is it possible to exaggerate the Englishness of England? Even the bus which took us from the airport into London seemed grotesquely ‘in character’; one almost suspected that it had been expressly designed to amaze foreign visitors.... And as for the accent that I now began to hear around me – I could scarcely trust my ears. Surely they were playing it very broad? Half the population appeared to be talking like Richard Haydn as a Cockney bank clerk, the other half like Basil Rathbone as Sherlock Holmes.*<sup>1</sup>

In the whole of Europe, but above all in England, the 1930s constitute a key decade for a better understanding of some of the main themes of modernity. Of these, the concept of nationality, and specifically the idea of ‘Englishness’, plays a major role in the cultural debate, which in various forms flourished in the panorama of literary criticism at the end of the century. ‘Englishness’, as it had been conceived at the end of the nineteenth century, definitely undergoes a major rethinking in the twentieth, and this is particularly true after the end of the Second World War, when the Empire had been dismantled and the British social, political and economic

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Isherwood, “Coming to London”, *London Magazine*, 1957, in John Lehmann, *Christopher Isherwood: A Personal Memoir* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987), 69-70.

situation suddenly and abruptly meets the 'other', represented by a conspicuous increase in colonial immigration. Nevertheless, already in the literature and political writings of the 1930s it is possible to trace several paths which allude to the necessity and, indeed, ineluctability of a general and progressive rearrangement of the social, economic, political and cultural nature of 'Englishness'.

Before looking at some of the essential dynamics of this theme, which recur in several writings of intellectuals in the decade, it is necessary to outline the terms of the cultural debate in the 1930s, a period in which not only the discipline and terminology of cultural analysis, but also the protagonists and categories involved, are very different from those of today.

\* \* \*

Chris Pawling, compares the size and significance of the 'Popular Front' in the so called 'Red Decade' with the anti-Thatcher political and intellectual movement of the Nineties.<sup>2</sup> In tracing a parallel between the situations during the Thirties and the Nineties, Pawling identifies "a central notion of solidarity, based on the assumption that the struggle for equality can only be pursued on the broadest possible front".<sup>3</sup> This "broadest possible front" is seen as representing in the Nineties what could have been, and was not, the *Popular Front* in the 1930s: an attempt to enlarge the basis of consent, so as to involve as many social classes as possible (to refer to the political paradigm of the Thirties), or the majority of ethnical, cultural and linguistic identities (to refer to the context of the Nineties). The aim should have been in the one case a more efficient and unified front to resist Fascist rise to power; in the other, an enlarged and heterogeneous popular platform to contrast the recrudescence of free market capitalism and the progressive enfeeblement and disappearance of the social and economic rights of the weaker classes under authoritarian rule.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Pawling, *Some Reflections on the 'National Popular': The Thirties and Nineties* (Sheffield: Hallam University, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

Pawling not only sifts the common ground, but also carefully analyses the deep differences. He warns us against too strict a parallel, because any reference to the 'Popular Front' "tends to evoke a white British Identity".<sup>4</sup> In other words, in dealing with the 1930s, the situation must be examined with the knowledge that the main point of reference is the British Anglo-Saxon population, with very few allusions to the 'other', the colonial subject.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, this political and cultural discourse exclusively concerns the middle class. References to the working class by British intellectuals either tend to deny its importance (as in the case of the more right-wing writers, such as Roy Campbell and, up to a point, Evelyn Waugh), or to transform it into a banner of progressivism and of the reorganisation of the welfare State (as in the case of the left-wing writers, the majority of intellectuals in the Thirties). Such ideas in most cases remained too general to be achieved in so critical a decade. Therefore, the reference target is the 'white cultured middle class'

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. Up to a point, it is here possible to consider this situation in the light of the distinction made by Iain Chambers in dealing with the nature of contemporary British society. Chambers examines "two perspectives and two versions of 'Britishness'. One is anglo-centric, frequently conservative, backward-looking, and increasingly located in a frozen and largely stereotyped idea of the national, that is English, culture. The other is ex-centric, open ended and multi-ethnic. The first is based on a homogeneous 'unity' in which history, tradition and individual biographies and roles ... are fundamentally fixed and embalmed in the national epic, in the mere fact of being 'English' ". See Iain Chambers, *Border Dialogues: Journeys in Postmodernity* (London: Comedia, 1990), 27. However, this parallel must not be pushed too far, due to the almost complete lack of an ex-centric component in the 1930s British society, and to the fact that, several elements of the British intelligentsia are not "located in a frozen and largely stereotyped idea of the national" but are open to ideas and traditions coming, if not from the Empire, at least from abroad.

<sup>5</sup> Orwell's 'six points proposal' at the end of *The Lion and the Unicorn*, constitutes a true exception, even if not the only one, to the general rule of this specific focus. Another fine example is represented by E.M. Forster's position, above all concerning the issue of 'freedom' in the middle of the 1930s. See E.M. Forster, *Abinger Harvest*, (London: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1964; or. pub. 1936), 64: "Last year, General Smuts made a magnificent speech about freedom to the students of the University of St. Andrews. With every word that he said, I agreed. But there was one thing he didn't say. He never suggested that the blessings he praised so eloquently might be applicable to the coloured peoples of South Africa. He was not even thinking about them. And this omission made his eulogy a mockery".

which owns the rights and privileges to accede to the highest level of education and to the practice of political power. A fairly good "exception" to this general rule is represented by George Orwell who keeps his distance both from the capitalistic and imperialistic right-wing politics of the Tories and from the incompetent and rhetorical left-wing, which parades the class struggle, one of the recurrent platitudes of British Marxism-Leninism in the 1930s, hardly applicable in a bourgeois capitalist cultural context like that of England.

A common element in the majority of the political writings of the 1930s is that of 'patriotism', which becomes more and more frequent towards the end of the decade. It could be regarded as one of the fundamental parameters of 'Englishness' itself, and it is essential to consider it in its entirety, because its recurrence in the writings of the period provides us with a better understanding of the quality of being English in a time of political and social turmoil. George Orwell, as usual, is direct and explicit on the topic: "Patriotism has nothing to do with Conservatism. It is actually the opposite of Conservatism, since it is a devotion to something that is always changing and yet is felt to be mystically the same".<sup>6</sup> By denying that patriotism is a privilege or a prerogative of conservative politics, Orwell underlines its contingent aspect and stresses its capacity to unite different social classes under the same banner: that of resisting and struggling against the Nazi menace.<sup>7</sup> Orwell's call to bring as many social classes as

<sup>6</sup> George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1940), in *The Penguin Essays of George Orwell* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 189. The relevance of this statement is proved by the fact that it appears, more or less with the same words, in another essay by Orwell, "My Country Right or Left", *Folios of New Writing* (Autumn 1940). See *The Penguin Essays of George Orwell*, 143.

<sup>7</sup> The theme of patriotism, frequently compared with the issue of 'otherness', contributes to outline and strengthen the sense of national identity. See Alessandra Marzola, *Englishness: Percorsi nella Cultura Britannica del Novecento* (Roma: Carocci, 1999), 179: "La difesa del patriottismo emerge infatti nel discorso come una constatazione necessaria e realistica, universalmente riconoscibile ... una riflessione che, dopo avere preso atto della forza sopraffacente della *national loyalty* e della sua strumentalizzazione nel contesto della guerra, legittima, a ritroso, come in un processo reso necessario da questa constatazione, le differenze tra le identità nazionali, premessa per la ricostruzione di un senso patriottico".

possible together in the struggle against Nazism is, of course, relevant to the issue of Englishness. Attempting to enlarge the social basis of the consensus means specifically admitting the working class – previously excluded from political discourse – to the administration of politics.

In the last part of *The Lion and the Unicorn*, Orwell indicates how opening up to other classes would mean granting the productive forces of England (i.e. the working-class) access to a higher level of education, hitherto the privilege of the upper-middle class; a well guarded privilege, which had produced a stratified and rigidly closed society, lacking permeability and cultural exchange. Moreover, it would mean altering the economic texture, reorganising the wealth of the nation, making tax exemptions and rebates possible. Orwell seems to have clear ideas and shows a precise and detailed economic and political understanding. This widening of political assent and economic fruition would mean the alteration of the web of national identity and of Englishness itself.

Far from being Orwell's main interest, patriotism nonetheless is regarded as the only obvious, if unpopular, choice. Orwell seems to state the impracticability of 'pacifism'. Even if at first sight siding with the government could be regarded as a major betrayal of the working-class cause, he underlines that the most urgent action to be undertaken is to contrast and defeat Nazism, seen as a danger for both culture and democracy in Europe.<sup>8</sup> Orwell considers England the most representative of these democratic forces. Not only was it the last free country to resist dictatorships, but its political system warranted a possibility of intellectual debate and opposition towards the ruling class. Nonetheless, Orwell is perfectly aware of the limitations of English democracy: "Do I mean by all this that England is a genuine democracy? No ... England is the most class-

<sup>8</sup> 'Pacifism' as a reaction to the use of strength by Nazism is a major aspect of the political debate of the last part of the 1930s. A compendium of opinions 'for' and 'against', is represented by the two pamphlets issued in 1936, the latter being an answer to the questions raised by the former: Aldous Huxley, *What Are You Going to Do About It? The Case for Constructive Peace* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936); Cecil Day Lewis, *We're Not Going to Do Nothing: A Reply to Mr. Aldous Huxley's 'What Are You Going to Do About It?'* (London: A Pamphlet published by *Left Review*, 1936).

ridden country under the sun. It is a land of snobbery and privilege, ruled largely by the old and the silly".<sup>9</sup> But he also knows that the positive elements existing in English culture will prevail, finally thrusting the various social components together by uniting them in the struggle against Nazism: "But in any calculation about it one has got to take into account its emotional unity, the tendency of nearly all its inhabitants to feel alike and act together in moments of supreme crisis".<sup>10</sup>

Seen as a bulwark against totalitarianism mainly due to its capacity to challenge and object to the decisions of the ruling power via parliamentary means – via the 'English liberties' often referred to by liberal and moderate writings of the 1930s – English democracy is also singled out as an outstanding aspect of 'Englishness' by E.M. Forster. Mainly interested in exploring individualism and its virtues, in examining human beings and human relationships,<sup>11</sup> Forster cannot help underlying the positive qualities of democracy, precisely because it consists of the individualism of each single voice: "I value [Democracy] because it criticises and talks, and because its chatter gets widely reported. So two cheers for Democracy: one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism. Two cheers are quite enough: there is no occasion to give three".<sup>12</sup> This statement has been much quoted, itself becoming a bulwark of the democratic and individual approach to the world of political debate in the 1930s. By implying that the parliamentary system, no matter how good it may be, ultimately represents a limited form of government, Forster

<sup>9</sup> George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 155.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. It is important to note that 'patriotism' can be regarded as one of the most important qualities of what we would nowadays call 'Englishness', in the sense that by unifying people against a common enemy it helps to construct the nation's sense of identity. In fact, Orwell indicates that in moments of great hardship and danger in British history, the people, the middle-class and the aristocracy have responded together, without hesitation, to calls for intervention.

<sup>11</sup> Loyalty to the concept of nation is regarded by Forster as a blind goal which makes one lose the loyalty to the individual: "I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend I hope I should have the guts to betray my country." See E.M. Forster, "What I Believe", *Nation* (16 July 1938); and "Credo", *London Mercury* (September 1938), reprinted in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), 66.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 67.

appreciates the possibility of self-criticism which constitutes the nature of the system itself. This almost Voltairean principle of 'Enlightenment' as an aspect of the British political system is noted by several of the 1930s intellectuals. The acknowledgement of the limits of the democratic system can easily be considered as an element of 'Englishness', since it is a common element, present in speeches and writings as different as possible in English political life: a sort of unifying parameter, even though a strong ideological contrast between individuals is also widespread.

Patriotism, understood as an exacerbated national feeling, as an ultranationalism which all others, and which therefore tries to undermine the ground of common work represented by the 'Popular Front', is what emerges from some of the writings of Sir Oswald Mosley. These writings conceive of the necessity both for a strong sense of tradition and continuity with the already existing social structure and for lining up with the newly emerging image of nationality and citizenship emanating from fascism and European dictatorships. Democracy, as we have seen in Orwell's and Forster's words, allows the individual to express his own opinions and to contradict those of other people. Hence, in the founding document of the British Union of Fascists, Oswald Mosley too can express his opinion, and he is able to stress and exalt this democratic value:

The movement is Fascist, (i) because it is a high conception of citizenship ... (ii), because it recognises the necessity for an authoritative state, above party and sectional interests.... We seek to organise the Modern Movement in this country by British methods in a form which is suitable to and characteristic of Great Britain.<sup>13</sup>

Mosley constantly stresses the importance of a specific English character both for the methods and the purposes of the British Union of Fascists programme. The pride of being British is often corroborated by the slogan 'Britain First'. The general impression given by Mosley's pamphlet is his intention to persuade his readers that Fascism is not at all alien to British culture. Joining the B.U.F.

<sup>13</sup> Oswald Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (London: B.U.F. Publications, 1932), 13.

does not necessarily mean importing some odd political theory from abroad, because this element is already present in England as it is in any other country, chiefly embodied in the struggle to safeguard one's own economy, traditions and culture. It is an element more or less characterising any national identity:

Our task is not to invent Fascism, but to find for it in Britain its highest expression and development. Fascism does not differ from the older political movements in being a world-wide creed. Each of the great political faiths in its turn has been a universal movement: Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism are common to nearly every country. An Englishman who calls himself a Conservative or a Liberal is not thereby adopting a foreign creed merely because foreign political parties bear the same name. He is seeking to advance, by English method and in English form, a political philosophy which can be found in an organised form in all nations.<sup>14</sup>

The universal condition of Fascist ideology is a compulsory stage in order to give confidence to the 'Englishness' of Mosley's supporters. And it is precisely in this sense that Mosley emphasises the necessity for England to single out "a very national character" so as not to distort the sense of national identity. Throughout his pamphlet Mosley appeals to the love for one's country which should be directed by "the grip of an organised and disciplined movement": "A whole people may be raised for a time to the enthusiasm of a great and decisive effort.... That enthusiasm and effort may be sustained for a long period.... History, however, provides few cases in which the enthusiasm and unity of a whole people have been so sustained through a long struggle to emerge from disintegration and collapse."<sup>15</sup> This sense of the unity of the people, in Mosley's prediction, will determine a historical decision and bring to power his Modern Movement. It is also a major issue in Orwell's essay, where it provides a good opportunity to bring a revitalising new force, this time Socialist-inspired, to power:

An intelligent Socialist movement will *use* ... patriotism, instead of merely insulting it.... We shall have to fight against bribery, ignorance

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 25.

and snobbery. The bankers and the larger businessmen, the landowners and dividend-drawers, the officials with their prehensile bottoms, will obstruct for all they are worth. Even the middle classes will writhe when their accustomed way of life is menaced. But just because the English sense of national unity has never disintegrated, because patriotism is finally stronger than class-hatred, the chances are that the will of the majority will prevail.<sup>16</sup>

Once again, patriotism is singled out as pivotal in the solidity of English national identity. The unity of the nation exists by virtue of the fact that each time Britain appeals to the patriotic sense of any social class the answer is generally generous and positive. Curiously the very elements considered by progressive intellectuals as the most fertile to change the social, economic and cultural texture of the nation, are precisely those the conservative right would also preserve, so as not to alter a perfectly tested and working mechanism. A confirmation of the ambiguous and problematic nature of patriotism in the panorama of the thirties.

Ralph Fox, probably one of the most representative left-wing intellectuals of the period, the author of several works on the relationship between politics and literature, thinks that an intellectual debate about the meaning and issues of 'nationalism' is of the uttermost importance in the 1930s, a period in which blind nationalism is offering proofs of its destructive power. Despite the obvious differences, in 1937 Fox, a declared Marxist and member of the CPGB, sees in 'nationalism' the same positive and negative elements that in 1940 Orwell was to emphasise in 'patriotism', and he underlines its risks:

In a world where nationalism has run mad in its most egoistic and destructive forms, the attitude of a serious and important writer towards nationalism is an important one.... Clearly, the writer of to-day has to distinguish very sharply between what is truly national and what is merely nationalistic or anti-national.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 181.

<sup>17</sup> Ralph Fox, *The Novel and the People* (1937; New York: International Publishers, 1945), 19.

Fox gives evidence of this subtle, yet important distinction, by referring to the concept of tradition in the English novel:

The past matters as much as the present. We must carry it with us on our march and therefore we are concerned that the burden should not weigh us down too heavily, that we should be able to choose from the past what is real enough to be of help, and abandon, for the time, what can only be of hindrance.<sup>18</sup>

But he also refers to what he calls 'the social question' and singles out two contrasting points of view in the debate:

One view believes that civilisation will continue to develop on the basis of private property, war and insane egotism expressed in the dictatorial nationalist state. The other view believes that humanity is fighting for a new series of values based on social property, which shall banish war, destroy nationalism, and replace it by the free growth of healthy nations co-operating with one another in a world civilisation.<sup>19</sup>

According to Fox, the former position leads people directly to the danger of totalitarianism, a state controlled by an imperialistic and capitalistic political economy, lacking a democratic relationship between the establishment and the people. The limits imposed by strict nationalism can only be removed by the latter position, which furthermore permits nations to co-operate with one another. In other words, this statement reveals Fox's perfect identity of thought with the basic ideology of the 'Popular Front', namely; to supersede various nationalistic divisions; to identify what is good in the concept of 'nation' itself; to create what would today be called a 'European pan-national movement' capable of substituting the various individual policies with the common interest; and to produce a

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 19-20. To overcome what many of the left-wing intellectuals evidently consider the 'limitations' of English literature, and in order to widen the front of literary voices in the anti-Nazi fight, in the 1930s England sees the blooming of several authoritative literary magazines, such as *New Writing* and *Left Review*, which publish works of some of the major European contemporary authors, like Silone, Lorca, Machado, Pasternak and many others.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

political and cultural conscience able to transcend national boundaries.<sup>20</sup>

A similar interest in the concept of 'nationality', even if conceived in terms proper to the opposite political and intellectual line-up, appears also in Waugh's political pamphlet *Robbery under Law: The Mexican Object-Lesson*. Here Waugh denounces nationalist appropriation, referring to the case of republican Mexico, when the National Revolutionary Government had seized the property of several capitalist British companies in 1938 in the name of the class struggle "for public and social welfare".<sup>21</sup> Waugh stresses that public opinion, which in the past had protested vehemently over an attack of Franco's navy against an international aid ship to the Spanish Republic, is now not even at all upset by this, because "the intellectual communists of today have personal, irrelevant grounds for they are antagonistic to society, which they are trying to

<sup>20</sup> Margot Heinemann, one of the most brilliant intellectuals of the period, describes the 'Popular Front' as a sort of pan-national and pan-ideological party, based on the supreme idea of overcoming any class or census divisions, in order to contrast and defy Nazi-Fascism in Europe. Once more, the idea of a common ground, of some characteristics shared by an otherwise heterogeneous bunch of 'fellow-travellers', seems the drawing force: "Fascist ideology, irrational though it might be, successfully appealed not only to the *petit-bourgeois* and the totally dispossessed, but to many intellectuals and workers.... A broad alliance of all groups and individuals who were prepared to oppose Fascism and defend existing liberties, whatever their other differences...". See Margot Heinemann, "Left Review, New Writing and the Broad Alliance against Fascism", in Edward Timms and Peter Collier, eds., *Visions and Blueprints: Avant-Garde Culture and the Radical Politics in Earlier 20<sup>th</sup> Century Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 115. In the writings of British intellectuals dealing with the concept of the *Popular Front* all along the decade, it is of course possible to detect a sense of 'sublime community', of belonging to a sort of elite in the effort to defend one's own values of culture, civilization and democracy against the danger of the 'barbarians'. An implication of the Shakespearean 'happy few', for instance, is evident both in the title and text by Leonard Woolf, *Barbarians at the Gate* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939).

<sup>21</sup> Nowhere in the book does Waugh mention that the work had been commissioned by the wealthy Pearsons, one of the damaged families. But, already in the introduction, he starts to polemize with the feeling of indignation expressed by international popular and intellectual opinions in a similar, if opposite, 'political incident' that happened in the course of the Spanish War: "This is a political book ... its aim roughly, is to examine a single problem; why it is that last summer a small and almost friendless republic [the Mexican one] jubilantly recalled its Minister



exploit".<sup>22</sup> Waugh follows on by overtly stating "I believe in government" – a belief that is also expressed in the writings of Orwell and Forster, even though with differences among the three. Another of Waugh's firm statements directly concerns our issue: "I believe in nationality; not in terms of race or of divine commissions for world conquest, but simply this: mankind inevitably organises itself into communities according to its geographical distribution".<sup>23</sup>

By applying the rules of the theory of sets, Waugh remarks that a huge superior set exists that contains several smaller inferior sets which in turn contain even smaller ones, which are families. Each of these sets has its own role: a superior form of government exists, is decided by a limited elite. The decisive aspect in this peculiar element of "Englishness" examined by Waugh is represented by his absolute conviction that in this sets-based structure nothing is going to change:

I believe that inequalities of wealth and position are inevitable and that it is therefore meaningless to discuss the advantages of their elimination... I want Britain to prosper and not her rivals. I believe that war and conquest are inevitable; that is how history has been made and that it is how it will develop.<sup>24</sup>

The pyramid system in which English society is organised and which Waugh appreciates so much is, of course, the very same hated class-system, refused and condemned by several of the left-wing writers of the 1930s. Many of them belong to the upper-middle class and, at least in their intentions, try to reject the advantages and privileges they are guaranteed by belonging to their class of origin.<sup>25</sup> What is more or

from London, and more important, why people in England thought about this event as they did; why for instance patriotic feeling burst into indignation whenever a freight ship – British only in name, trading in defiance of official advice – was sunk in Spanish waters and remained indifferent when a rich and essential British industry was openly stolen in time of peace". See Evelyn Waugh, *Robbery under Law: The Mexican Object-Lesson* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1939), Introduction.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> A thorough analysis of this system is, of course, impossible in this essay. Its condition as an element of the nature of 'Englishness' is evident in the writings of

less certain is that the notion itself of 'Englishness' for the majority of cultured upper-middle class writers of the 1930s corresponds to a definite idea of belonging to an above average privileged elite, in a class-conscious Edwardian society, based on going to public school, joining the Officer Training Corps and receiving one's education at 'Oxbridge'. This was a society planned on the heritage of privileges, obligations, rights and duties, created by wealth and rigidly stratified, carefully preserved by economic free-trade and a capitalistic market. Contacts with Marxism-Leninism and the feeling of loyalty towards the working-class cause make British intellectuals become more and more aware of the injustice of these elements of 'Englishness'. Such elements represented a fertile ground on which a Fascist culture, and eventually a dictatorship, could grow.

This, at least, is what frightens Edward Upward, a Marxist writer and intellectual, a powerful and influential voice in the thirties. In his novel *Journey to a Border*, Upward makes his protagonist experience a series of allegorical visions, one of which is precisely a Fascist meeting where hallucinated leader violently addresses a crowd, attacking the Communists as dangerous conspirators and as a menace to the values and beliefs that, in his opinion, constitute the heritage of a sane English nation:

This plot is a signal we have long been waiting for. At last the criminal forces have come into the open. They have thrown off the humanitarian, peace-loving, progressive disguises with which they hoped to fool the more sentimental and woolly-minded of our fellow-countrymen ... It is

almost all the intellectuals and artists of the period. In some of them, there is even a transparent sense of frustration in their efforts to overcome the class division, and to create a society which builds its set of values from the various 'Englishnesses' of its classes. Thomas Hodgkin considers the problem of the middle-class writer who tries, unsuccessfully, to artistically penetrate the themes of the working-class: "The position of a novelist whose origin is middle-class and who has been brought by his convictions to support the working-class struggle is not an easy one. His hopes, sympathies, and interests tend to lead him in one direction. The social background with which he is familiar, the literary tradition in which he had been brought up, move him in another. How can he reconcile that opposition by writing a novel which will be at the same time revolutionary and the fruit of his own experience?". See Thomas Hodgkin's review of Randall Swingler's *No Escape* (Chatto & Windus, 1937) in *Left Review* 3.2 (March 1937), 109.

our privilege today to strike a blow for all that is best in the national heritage. For honour, for romance, for the spirit, for idealism, for everything that makes life worth while. Against the cowardly hypocrisy of politicians, against disloyalty, against money-grubbing materialism, against the selfishness of the profiteering employer, against the whining discontent of the socialistic trade unionist ... To restore the moral fibre of our nation ... We shall not falter ...<sup>26</sup>

Upward indicates the elements characteristic of the typical worker, the representative of the nation's hope to find a new force to break with the imperialistic and capitalist past. And the elements of this other 'Englishness' are very similar to that of the middle-class because the worker is not a 'monster' alien to the British culture, but its sanest part, in a sense a sort of 'romanticised other':

The young man was hatless, wore baggy plus-four breeches and a dark suède-type jacket with a zip fastener at the neck. There were diamond-shaped canary-coloured checks on his stockings. However, his style of dress did not give an impression of showiness or of bad taste. The loud colours and the assertive bagginess were mellowed by wear and weather, though not to the point of dinginess or shabbiness. Fashions which in the places of their origin – Oxford and Cambridge and the golf-club – would have appeared cranky and pretentious, had now become sober and mild. They had been democratized.<sup>27</sup>

\*\*\*

The progressive wreckage of the political situation in Europe suggests travelling and going abroad as a possible answer with which the young writers of the period react to a situation which is rapidly escaping from their hands. And travel they do, at least most of them. At the beginning of 1939, Auden and Isherwood expatriate to the United States, quitting the political struggle for good, therefore practically bringing to a close the 'dishonest decade', as Auden unfairly judges the 1930s. Several others travel and frequently go

<sup>26</sup> Edward Upward, *Journey to a Border* (1938; London: Heinemann, 1969), 151.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

abroad in the 1930s. But they travel with luggage: the luggage of their 'Englishness', the nature of their education and behaviour, the heritage of their class of birth, no matter how hard they try to get rid of it. Some of them do not even try to get rid of the atmosphere of the 'moral superiority' of being English. Robert Byron and Peter Fleming travelling to the desert and to the Far East, for instance, more or less always succeed in creating an English 'atmosphere' wherever they happen to be, as Paul Fussell brilliantly describes it:

Byron was monomaniacal and doubtless slightly mad, carrying in him ... 'something of the genuine 19<sup>th</sup> century Englishman ... the eccentricity, curiosity, ill temper, determination to stop at absolutely nothing'. Fleming was different: the best-selling character he would learn to project in his works is that of the cheerful British amateur confronting the anomalies of abroad with unfailing pluck, intelligence, good-humour and modesty... One thing happening in [their] travel books is a re-definition of the character of the British 'young person'.... Conscious of the Britishness of the characters they display, both Fleming and Byron are careful in their travel books to remind the reader of their origin in a particular British intellectual and emotional tradition.<sup>28</sup>

Both the importance of democracy as an instrument of political aggregation capable of ensuring the plurality of opinions and the existence of elements which are not at all alien to the condition of 'Englishness' in 1930s culture, are recurrent themes in the voices of these intellectuals, speaking from such different political and cultural perspectives. On the other hand, specific elements of an 'Englishness' not yet defined as such, but nonetheless deeply felt, are also present in several works of the novels of the decade. For instance, the quality of 'being English' and the general difficulty of defining it, is what concerns Christopher Isherwood, right at the beginning of "Waldemar", the third episode of his *Down There on a Visit*.<sup>29</sup> Not being a jingoist at

<sup>28</sup> Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 77. Fussell is referring to Powell's memoirs *Infants of the Spring* (1976) and *Messengers of Day* (1978).

<sup>29</sup> The novel is actually published in 1962, but three out of its four episodes are set between the end of the 1920s and the end of the 1930s. Moreover, Isherwood mainly bases this episode on diaries and journals written in the 1930s.

all, the author nonetheless emphasises the irreducibility of the British population towards the 'other' and to any challenge coming from foreign elements, alien to British culture itself. The protagonist is on the ferry, coming into Dover harbour in August 1938:

How compactly the English sit, confronting their visitors: here we are, take us or leave us – this is where you'll do things *our* way, not yours. Byron saw the last of them here. So did Wilde. You say goodbye to them forever and go away to fame and death among the dagoes, and they couldn't care less. Oh, yes, when your name has been a household word everywhere else for the past two generations they'll concede that they used to know you – slightly. But they'll never really admit that they were wrong about you or about anything. They are indomitable, incorrigible, and so utterly self-satisfied that they no longer have to raise their voices or wave their arms when they address the lesser breeds. If you have any criticisms, they have one unanswerable answer: you can stay off our island.<sup>30</sup>

In a sense, this image of Englishness represented by Isherwood could be connected to the evident, yet unutterable and uncodifiable, quality of the English landscape and environment described by George Orwell as physically and culturally pertinent to the Englishness of the English population. A *je ne sais quoi* which anybody arriving in England perceives as an element of national identity, extremely individual yet characteristic of the whole:

When you come back to England from any foreign country, you have immediately the sensation of breathing a different air.... Then the vastness of England swallows you up, and you lose for a while your feeling that the whole nation has a single identifiable character. Are there really such things as nations? Are we not forty-six million individuals, all different? And the diversity of it, the chaos! The clatter of clogs in the Lancashire mill towns, the to-and-fro of the lorries on the Great North Road, the queues outside the Labour Exchanges, the rattle of pintables in the Soho pubs, the old maids biking to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn morning – all this are not only fragments, but

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *Down There on a Visit* (London: Minerva, 1997), 114-115.

*characteristic* fragments, of the English scene. How can one make a pattern out of this muddle?<sup>31</sup>

\*\*\*

The most sensible answer to Orwell's question should be that 'one can't', that there are as many distinct types of 'Englishness' in the 1930s as there are opinions expressing it. Writers and intellectuals as different as Evelyn Waugh and Ralph Fox, Robert Byron and Christopher Isherwood, George Orwell and E.M. Forster, Oswald Mosley and Edward Upward are hardly referable to a single common pattern. Yet, in their writings, common elements of the concept of 'Englishness' do exist, or at least multiple heterogeneous opinions on similar instances. Beyond the obvious political and cultural divergences, there is a common working ground and several meeting points for the intellectuals of the 1930s. One is surely represented by what we could call 'a state of grace', an awareness of sharing the quality of being English. Almost all of their essays and novels refer to it. Even patriotism is a sort of loyalty to this state of grace, because the nation represents its most suitable container. But this state of grace represents more than just the concept of nation itself: it is the sense of the moral superiority of being English, of exposing and exporting something peculiarly English, something which takes root in the world, for instance in countries such as Canada, New Zealand and Australia, the home of the RAF pilots who fight German planes at the beginning of Orwell's essay.

The moral superiority of belonging to English culture emerges from almost all the writings examined and from many others as well. In Orwell's *The Lion and the Unicorn*, there is also a feeling of responsibility towards that 'other', that colonial subject which after the war will represent something to be directly confronted, especially at home. In some of the six points he proposes in order to transform the economic arrangement of British society and to dispose of the empire with dignity, Orwell expresses the need to transform the empire into a federation of independent countries but also underlines the practical impossibility of implementing this plan before the end

<sup>31</sup> George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 145.

of the war and the defeat of Nazism. India and the other colonies cannot be abandoned to independence, because they couldn't possibly survive without the moral and military aid of the English 'motherland'. The proposal reads:

...4. Immediate Dominion status for India, with power to secede when the war is over; 5. Formation of an Imperial General Council, in which the coloured peoples are to be represented; 6. Declaration of formal alliance with China, Abyssinia and all other victims of the Fascist powers.<sup>32</sup>

In Orwell's words, England looks at and regards herself as morally responsible not only for Europe's salvation but also as the only chance left for the entire world to escape from the abyss of destruction. From this and other similar statements, 'Englishness' comes out as a sort of metonymy of 'Europeanness'. Though never asserting it directly, Orwell regards patriotism and 'Englishness' as 'necessary evils' needed to escape from the risk of dictatorship and to safeguard European civilization. Standing in this redoubt, England and its 'Englishness' represent the extreme rampart, waiting to face the barbarians.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 182. Orwell's opinion of the necessity to grant independence to the colonies, or at least to transform the empire to a federal system only after achieving the definitive defeat of Nazi-Fascism, is far from being an isolated voice in the 1930s. For instance, see what the CPGB states about this issue already in 1939, before the outbreak of war: "While upholding the rights of colonial peoples to self determination.... Communists follow the teachings of Lenin and Stalin in subordinating the actual realisation of the right of secession ... to the interests of defeating fascism." See "Editorial", *World News and Views* (6 April 1939). Also E. M. Forster, "Liberty in England" an address delivered at the *Congrès International des Ecrivains* at Paris on June 21, 1935, emphasises how the concept of freedom in the 1930s is "strictly race-bound and class-bound" (Heinemann, 117): "It means freedom for the Englishman, but not for the subject races of his empire. If you invite the average Englishman to share his liberties with the inhabitants of India or Kenya, he will reply 'Never,' if he is a Tory, and 'Not until I consider them worthy' if he is a liberal." See E. M. Forster, *Abinger Harvest*, 63-64.

Floriana Perna

### Englishness in Australia: The Idea of National Identity in Peter Carey's Novels

This paper addresses the idea of national identity in postcolonial Australia through the analysis of three historical novels (*Illywhacker*, 1985; *Oscar and Lucinda*, 1988; *Jack Maggs*, 1997) by the Australian writer Peter Carey. The plots of these novels unravel in a temporal space of approximately two hundred years (from the foundation of Australia to the present day), thus embracing the ideological construction and deconstruction of two nations formerly involved in a colonial relationship, England and Australia. England is firstly seen through the eyes of the earliest settlers and convicts (Oscar in *Oscar and Lucinda*; the title character in *Jack Maggs*); it is the mother country nostalgically invoked and cherished, the model to be imitated, the ideal land to be reconstructed. Australian national identity develops, subsequently (*Illywhacker*, Books 1-2, set in the 1920s), as an oppositional force to contrast English domination, now perceived as an oppressive, exploiting power which hinders the emancipation of the nation. Australia claims its own identity, in this momentous historical time, forcefully differentiating itself from that of the mother country. Nevertheless, once it has performed its function as a powerful ideological tool to unite the nation, this image of Australia shows its limits and reveals its fictional nature (*Illywhacker*, Book 3, present day). It becomes clear how, in opposing English domination, Australia has in its turn become an imperialistic, colonial nation. The concept of Australianness is therefore deconstructed and the idea of a unique, onefold Australian nation is abandoned in favour of an open, multicultural, shifting meaning of national identity.

The search for Australianness and the deconstruction of

nationhood in Carey's novels is, nevertheless, problematic. A search for a stronger, rather than a weaker, sense of 'nation' for present-day Australia is, for instance, invoked at the end of *Illywhacker*, to contrast neo-colonial powers such as the United States. The identification of the subaltern identity with the dominating culture, although a part of colonial ideology, is ambiguous, simultaneously a source of oppression and a practice to exert power. The deconstruction of the traditional images of Australia and Australianness overlaps, finally, with the search for a new, more self-conscious sense of nation. Carey's ideological narrative opens therefore a problematical gap, in which Englishness and Australianness, postmodern identity and postcolonialism give birth to new issues to be debated.

### Englishness

*Oscar and Lucinda*, *Illywhacker* and *Jack Maggs* all feature Englishness as a major topic of their narrative structure. *Oscar and Lucinda*, for the most part, grieves over the loss of England as mother country, presenting it mainly through the memories of its protagonist, Oscar, a clergyman from Devon who migrates to Australia in the mid-1800s. *Illywhacker*, Carey's first distinctly 'Australian' novel displays, on the contrary, a generally sarcastic and controversial attitude towards the idealisation of England and Europe in general on the part of its main character, Herbert Badgery, whose life spans almost the whole of the twentieth century. Englishness in *Jack Maggs*, a re-writing of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (the Dickensian Magwitch becomes Jack Maggs), is present both in an actual and a metaphorical way; the novel entwines Englishness and English literature, demonstrating their dependence on their repressed others, i.e. the colonies, especially Australia.

Let us start with a passage from *Oscar and Lucinda*, following Oscar's thoughts soon after his migration to Australia:

I am homesick for hedges and birds with *pretty* melody, for the *lovely* chalky blue sky of England. This colony seems so *hard* and new, all newly broken ground, much clay and sandstone, but *nothing* yet to

make the soil friable. The birds are bright but *raucous*. Everything is *lacking* in gentility and care, and society as a whole (although better dressed than anyone in England could imagine) seems *little* concerned with the common good, only individual benefit.<sup>1</sup>

England is, in this passage, the object of a deferential and unconditional love. Negative terms (*hard*, *nothing*, *raucous*, *lacking*, *little*) abound in the description of the 'new' world, whereas England is portrayed in positive, idealised, nostalgic terms (*pretty*, *lovely*). England, its landscape, its sounds, its sky are represented as 'the norm' of which Australia is a distortion, the mythical locus of order and normality, the lost, unattainable object of desire. The memory of England is cherished through the form of love described by Freud as 'idealisation': the loving subject, consumed by the attachment, impoverishes its character traits and assumes the loved object as its Ego-ideal.<sup>2</sup> As Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha have pointed out, this is a typical trait of colonial ideology, which constructs the dominant culture as the model to be imitated, producing in the subaltern subject feelings of inadequacy and self-contempt. The colonial subject shows feelings of envy towards the coloniser and longs to identify with him: "The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses its dreams of possession – all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible".<sup>3</sup> Colonial ideology encourages, moreover, the creation of a subject "*that is almost the same, but not quite*" as the coloniser.<sup>4</sup>

Identification with England and Englishness is, however, often problematic. If, on the one hand, the pressure to conform to the coloniser's rule reproduces colonial ideology, on the other hand it

<sup>1</sup> Peter Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988), 328. My emphasis.

<sup>2</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Group Psychology" in S. Freud, *Civilisation, Society and Religion: Group Psychology, Civilisation and Its Discontents and Other Works* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 141-147.

<sup>3</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 1963), 30.

<sup>4</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 86.

undermines its very foundations. There is always an 'incommensurable' gap, as Homi Bhabha maintains, between the model (England/Englishness) and the copy (Australia/Australianness) which, in the end, erodes the model's authority. Identification with the ruler can, moreover, defy the very partition between mother country and penal colony. A problematical identification with the mother country is, for instance, found in *Jack Maggs*. Here the recognition of English superiority leads to the refusal of the convict's Australian identity altogether. Thinking of himself as 'English' offers Maggs the only escape from the understanding of himself as a criminal. Talking to Mercy Larkin, his future wife, Jack declares:

'My son is an Englishman.'  
 'I meant your real children.'  
 'I am not of that race.'  
 'What race?'  
 'The Australian race,' he said, "The race of Australians.'  
 'But what of your babes?'  
 'Damn you, don't look at me like that. I am an Englishman.'<sup>5</sup>

However, Jack *is* a convict; he represents, in this respect, England's other, that is the repository of the negative traits the mother country denies. England has for centuries constructed its own identity by opposing itself to the colonies: these *have been* what England *has been not*, an inverted mirror in which Englishness could still see its unconscious reflected. Australia has embodied, in this play of fictional representations, England's criminal and working-class component, uneducated and uncivilised, geographically displaced and kept at a distance. England has been able to represent itself as a high-class, refined society as long as it was possible to project onto Australia its own denied traits. Being a criminal, and at the same time continuing to perceive himself as English, Jack defies this very partition; he challenges the binomial opposition Englishness/Australianness and implicitly rejects it.

If England and Englishness are associated with a higher degree of civilisation, it comes as no surprise that an idealising attitude

<sup>5</sup> Peter Carey, *Jack Maggs* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1997), 342.

towards England is also frequent, in Carey's novels, when cultural matters are dealt with. Miriam Chadwick, Oscar's wife in *Oscar and Lucinda*, for example, emigrated to Australia with her mother and was forced to work as a house-maid after her mother's death. She writes to a governess agency in London begging to be sent to England, "a place where learning might be appreciated".<sup>6</sup>

A further aspect of the perception of English society as learned and inherently superior is the understanding of the British variant of the English language as high-class, elegant and cultivated, whereas the Australian variant is scorned and disdained. Speaking English with a British accent immediately associates the speaker with the dominator, giving him/her importance and social value. Once again, the identification with England is ambiguous and double-edged. On the one hand, it states the superiority of the imperialistic culture; on the other, it offers the colonised the pleasure of acquiring power and prestige. Carey depicts this approach to the language in *Illywhacker* through the character of Cocky Abbot, described by Herbert Badgery as "an imaginary Englishman":

It was what happened in this country. The minute they began to make a quid they started to turn into Englishmen. Cocky Abbot was probably descended from some old cockney lag, who had arrived here talking flash language, a pickpocket, a bread-stealer, and now, a hundred years later his descendants were dressing like his gaolers and torturers, disowning the language, softening their vowels, greasing their way into the plummy speech of the men who had ordered their ancestors lashed until the flesh had been dragged in bleeding strips from their naked backs.<sup>7</sup>

*Illywhacker* marks an important shift in the representation of Englishness. Identification with the mother country starts here to be firmly refused. Herbert Badgery openly condemns Cocky Abbot's imitation of Englishness, ridiculing it. Book 1 of the novel, in which the character of Cocky Abbot appears, is set in the first decades of the twentieth century, a crucial historical time for Australia, in which

<sup>6</sup> Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, 398.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Carey, *Illywhacker* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1985), 126.

nationalism emerges as a powerful social force. The need to assert Australia's own identity leads to the critical revision of Englishness, now regarded as an oppressive model and made vulnerable to criticism.

Another image through which Englishness and English rule are attacked in *Illywhacker* is the family metaphor. This becomes, in the novel, a frequently used rhetorical figure Herbert utilises in order to encourage Australia to proudly claim its political and cultural independence. Australia's position with regard to the mother country is ironically compared to that of a dependent infant:

'Does it make you happy', I [Herbert] asked him [Cocky Abbot junior], 'to be a child all your life? That's what an agent is, a child serving a parent. If you want to serve the interests of the English, you go and be an agent ... [selling] their aircraft, and you'll stay a damn child all your life'.<sup>8</sup>

The family metaphor, as Benedict Anderson underlines, has been one of the most powerful ideological means of colonisation.<sup>9</sup> Imperialistic ideology has equated colonies with children in order to justify and perpetuate its power and right to rule over them. The family is a 'natural' institution, and parents belong to the elements in one's life which cannot be changed. Thus, through the correspondence established between the family and colonial reality, the impossibility of modifying the latter is legitimised. As long as it is considered as a 'child', the colonial subject is deprived of the possibility of emancipation: during the colony's 'infancy', the mother country is legally authorised to exert its authority upon it.

If it is possible to establish a correspondence between the colonial relationship and the family structure, interesting elements may be drawn from the reversal of this metaphor, reading the family as a symbolic image of the coloniser/colonised dynamic in all of Carey's historical novels. Orphanhood and adoption are, on the whole, the most common family structures in *Illywhacker*, *Oscar and*

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>9</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983).

*Lucinda and Jack Maggs*. Oscar, for example, loses his mother when he is still a child and rejects his father's authority by virtue of a religious call to priesthood; Lucinda, the woman loved by Oscar, suffers the loss of her father in childhood and her mother dies just before her coming of age; Miriam Chadwick loses both her parents at a very early age. In *Illywhacker*, Herbert chooses the condition of "self-appointed orphan", pretending his violent father is dead. As for adoption, in *Jack Maggs*, Jack is an orphan abandoned on the banks of the river Thames and adopted by a burglar, Silas Smith, who pays for Jack to be raised by Ma Britten (literary transposition of Mother Britain), who already has a child, Tom.

Through these images of orphanhood and adoption, Englishness is, once more, called into question and problematised. Rage and hate characterise here, metaphorically, Australia's emancipation from the mother country's overwhelming influence. It is possible to conjecture that orphanhood symbolises at the same time the unconscious desire of 'killing the father', that is to refuse the mother country's authority, and a condemnation of the 'creation' of Australia as a penal colony altogether. The refusal of filiation repudiates Englishness itself, disowning the English legacy in order to permit Australianness to emerge. Through the metaphor of adoption, another criticism is expressed. The family created by Tom, Ma Britten and Jack may in fact be interpreted as a symbolic image of the position of the colonised (Jack), raised for its own purposes by the mother country (specifically, Silas Smith wants to use the child for his crimes). Ma Britten never behaves like a mother, and does not call Jack 'son'. The adoptive child is given the illusion of belonging to the family of the coloniser, but is in fact rejected as spurious, hybrid, illegitimate.

An implicit criticism of English imperialism is also expressed through the structure of *Jack Maggs*. In *Great Expectations* the Australian convict is a marginal character, although he provides the financial resources for the English hero to be raised as a gentleman. The Australian's appearance in the novel is constantly marked by a sense of uneasiness, fear and anxiety: Magwitch is the repressed, whose disclosure causes uncanny feelings. Through the pages of *Jack Maggs*, Carey inverts the narrative structure, transforming Jack into the hero of this postcolonial rewriting.

On the whole, the representation of Englishness in *Oscar and*

*Lucinda*, *Illywhacker* and *Jack Maggs* is contradictory, complex and manifold. Nostalgic and idealised images of England are associated in these novels with a specific historical period, that of the foundation of the penal colony: it is mainly through the settlers' and convicts' eyes that Carey presents such a view of England. A problematical mimicry of Englishness is, moreover, correlated with the portrayal of this specific time. In *Illywhacker*, characters hold a more controversial attitude towards England, criticising its economical and political rule and claiming independence. A reading of the novels through the family metaphor also unmasks a deep dissatisfaction with the colonial reality and a criticism of Englishness.

It is precisely the deconstruction of Englishness as a myth that permits Australianness to emerge.

#### **Australianness**

The historical construction of the Australian nation requires, in the first place, the reversal of the binomial mother country/colony. If England had represented itself as a complex, positive culture reducing Australia to a few negative stereotypes, the process of emancipation of the former penal colony demands an appreciation of Australian difference, reducing, in its turn, English national identity to a few negative stereotypes. Australianness, that is to say the specific identity of the 'new' country, is, therefore, mainly shaped in contrast with Englishness. All the national myths of the new country invert and reinterpret positively the negative images associated with the penal colony. If England was the home of culture and refinement, Australia becomes the 'natural' land untouched by the evils of civilisation; if Englishmen represented themselves as rational and civilised, Australians emphasise their spontaneity and independence; England is a monarchy, whereas Australia claims equality and democracy; Englishness celebrated the bourgeois, individualistic ethos, while Australia bases its national identity on the concept of *mateship*, i.e. the strong bond of loyalty and companionship between mates. The whole of Australian mythology seems, finally, to converge in the popular image of the *bushman*, or the inhabitant of the country:

...a practical man, rough and ready in his manners, and quick to decry affectation.... He is a great improviser ... willing to 'have a go' at anything, but ... content with a task done in a way which is 'near enough'. Though capable of a great exertion in emergency, he normally feels no impulse to work hard.... He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion.... He is usually taciturn ... stoical ... and sceptical about the value of religion, and of intellectual and cultural pursuits generally.... He is a fiercely independent person who hates officiousness and authority – especially when ... embodied in military officers and policemen. Yet he is very hospitable, and, above all, will stick to his mates through thick and thin...<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding its distancing from Englishness, Australianness has, however, merely reproduced the mother country's dominating identity in many respects. Inverting the dominator/dominated opposition, the birth of Australia as a nation has also caused the marginalisation of subaltern groups such as Aborigines, non Anglo-Celtic immigrants and Asians. Once it has rejected its positioning as England's other, Australia creates its own others. A specific identity, the Anglo-Celtic, is assumed to represent the nation. This national synecdoche erases the complexity and cultural diversity of Australian social reality from the space of representation.

Peter Carey's work shows an outstanding awareness of the dynamics of national identity formation and of the reproduction of the power relations formerly implied in the colonial relationship. His novels question the equation of Australian identity with Anglo-Celtic ethnicity, unmasking, moreover, the masculinist and racist implications of the national images that have embodied the 'spirit of Australianness', such as explorers, shearers, soldiers, lifesavers etc. In contrast with the white, Anglo-Celtic image of Australia, Carey offers, for example, in *Illywhacker*, a celebration of Australian hybridity: Herbert chooses a Chinese adoptive father, Goon Tse Ying, and the book emphasises the presence of Russians, Jews, Chinese and other immigrants.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in John Carrol, ed., *Intruders in the Bush: The Australian Quest for Identity* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982), 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> Another novel by Peter Carey, *The Tax Inspector*, features a Greek woman as protagonist and portrays several characters of non Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, denouncing, moreover, the exploitation of immigrants in Australia.



As for the questioning of national mythology, *Oscar and Lucinda* provides an example of a historical revision of the myth of the Western explorer. Oscar is here, in fact, ironically depicted as an explorer in a voyage to the Bellinger river, which he undertakes as a proof of his virility and his commitment to Lucinda. During the journey, his expedition meets with a tribe of Aborigines, the Kumbaingiri. The episode is significantly recounted by a member of the tribe, Kumbaingiri Billy:

But on the last night, when they were almost there, the Kumbaingiri knew there were strangers in their country. The Kumbaingiri came with torches at night. They walked through the bush to talk to the strangers. But the strangers got frightened. Odalberee got frightened too. The Kumbaingiri men did not understand him. Then there was a lot of shooting.

The Reverend Mr Hopkins made a big fuss. He shouted. He ran about. The leader of the white men said: 'Tie that fellow up.'

They tied him up to a tree down in a gully. There were two men with him to keep him safe. Then they went back and fired more rifles at the Kumbaingiri. You could hear the red-haired man wailing. He was like a ghost in the night.<sup>12</sup>

The expedition is nevertheless celebrated as a great success and the diary of the leader of the group, Mr. Jeffris, is reported to have given the following version of the encounter with the natives:

His journals recorded that he had 'given better than we took' from the 'Spitting Tribe'. Also: '6 treacherous knaves' from the Yarra-Happini had been 'dispatched' by their guns. He had also successfully defended the party from 'the murderous Kumbaingiri'.<sup>13</sup>

The discrepancy between the two versions lays bare what has been repressed and cancelled in Jeffris's and, symbolically, in all Western explorers' accounts, that is the presence of the first Australians and their massacre. The diaries have historically become, as Paul Carter

<sup>12</sup> Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, 478.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 480.

remarks, an epic of colonisation.<sup>14</sup> Through the celebration of the explorers' deeds of heroism, European imperialism has glorified its martyrs and reduced the Australian landscape, already populated and inscribed, to a blank page awaiting its 'discovery' at the hands of the white cartographers.

A revision of Australia's historical myths is also present in *Illywhacker*. The book ends with a grotesque and sarcastic image: an Australian pet shop is transformed into an exhibition financed by the Japanese, in which 'typical' Australian characters are shown off to rich tourists. Bushmen, shearers, lifesavers: the myths and images that have symbolised Australia through the centuries are exhibited in order to be, in the final analysis, falsified and ridiculed. They do not have the same social meaning anymore; on the contrary, they have become stereotypes, utilised by the neo-colonial powers to subjugate postcolonial Australia:

There is a spirit in this place. It is this that excites the visitors. The shearers, for instance, exhibit that dry, laconic anti-authoritarian wit that is the very basis of the Australian sense of humour. They are proud people, these lifesavers, inventors, manufacturers, bushmen, aboriginals. They do not act like caged people. The very success of the exhibit is in their ability to move and talk naturally within the confines of space .... the exhibition is based on lies....<sup>15</sup>

The critical revision of national history and myths leads Carey to the conclusion that every image of Australia is a play of lights and shadows, of representation and repression; it is therefore impossible to trust any clear-cut definition of the nation. According to Carey, after having unveiled the power relationships implied in the traditional concept of 'Australianness', one cannot fix Australian identity around a single concept or idea any longer. Therefore new, secure foundations for national identity cannot be established; Australians cannot set boundaries and metaphorically reside just in one place. They are condemned, symbolically, to take precarious

<sup>14</sup> Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987).

<sup>15</sup> Carey, *Illywhacker*, 599.

dwellings in their own country. This is why, in *Illywhacker*, Australia is represented through the image of the tent, the symbol of nomadism. White Australians, in particular, cannot establish a sedentary abode on the soil of Australia, as it is clearly expressed in the following dialogue between Herbert and Leah, his lover:

'And what sustains you, Mrs Kaletsky?'

'Movement,' she said, displaying her white feet. 'I admit it. I am really the one dancing on hot macadam, not you: town to town, dancing, writing letters. I cannot stay still anywhere. It is not a country where you can rest. It is a black man's country: sharp stones, rocks, sticks, bull ants, flies. We can only move around it like tourists. The blackfeller can rest but we must keep moving'.<sup>16</sup>

Even this nomadic, postmodern identity is however, in the end, rejected. Conversing with the protagonist's grandson, Hissao, Leah contradicts herself and abandons every attempt to make sense of the word 'Australian', coming to the conclusion 'Australia' as such does not exist, and if it does, it is nothing but a fading photograph:

...she, for her part, was sick to death of trying to decide what it meant to be Australian. She then began to contradict herself, to say that there could never be an Australian architecture and he was a fool for trying because there was no such thing as Australia or if there was it was like an improperly fixed photograph that was already fading.<sup>17</sup>

Australianness is conceived of, on the whole, as a shifting, slippery and deceitful concept which it is not possible to fix; any definition of it ends up being a lie.

The notion of national identity, nevertheless, is not entirely done away with in Peter Carey's novels. An urge to define what Australia really is, and what renders it different from other countries, can still be perceived in all of Carey's writing. Moreover, the writer encourages the formation of a strong national character in order to contrast neo-colonial powers. In this respect, the most significant

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 586.

novel among those examined is *Illywhacker*. One of the working titles of the book was *Pets*, since "the title ... suggests the relationships between Australians and their economic and cultural relationship to the world".<sup>18</sup> Rather than developing an autonomous national character, Australians have always satisfied other countries' needs, in Carey's opinion, behaving like pets. Carey repeatedly attacks the dependence of Australians – "a timid people" – on other nations, their understanding of themselves as dependent children, their passivity and gullibility.

The urge to assert Australian national identity is especially manifested when the relationship between the United States and Australia is dealt with.<sup>19</sup> In *Illywhacker* the Ford car is the symbol of America and of American commercial imperialism. Herbert works as a Ford salesman for most of his life, yet he is aware of the fact that in selling American cars he is hindering his country's development and economic independence. At the beginning of the book he confesses to the reader: "... I loathed Fords on principle ... I was eaten up with selling them ... I did it from laziness because the Ford had the name, because it was American and people were more easily persuaded to buy a foreign product than a local one".<sup>20</sup>

Another meaningful passage in the book recounts Herbert's attempt to sell a Ford to the O'Hagen family. After trying to convince the O'Hagens of the car's qualities and reliability, Herbert suddenly feels guilty, and tries to persuade them to purchase an Australian car instead:

'Not the Dodge. The Summit. It's the Summit you should have'.

'What in the name of God is a Summit?' Stu [O'Hagen] shouted.

'A vehicle, made in Australia. An Australian car.'

'An Australian car,' O'Hagen said. 'What a presumption.'

'A what?'

'A presumption. You are sitting there and telling me we can make a

<sup>18</sup> Valerie Lawson, "Peter Carey: Advertising Doesn't Hurt Him a Scrap", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 September 1981, 47.

<sup>19</sup> The theme of America as a neocolonial power is extensively dealt with in other novels and short stories such as *Bliss*, *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* and *American Dreams*.

<sup>20</sup> Carey, *Illywhacker*, 61.

better car than the Yanks?....

'It's not the point about better,' I said, 'it's a question of where the money goes. You'd be better off with a worse car if the money stayed here'.<sup>21</sup>

Australian national independence is also fostered in the book through the extensive use of Australian English; the title of the book itself is derived from G.A. Wilkes's *Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms*. The use of the Australian variant instead of the British and American ones is in itself a way of asserting Australian identity and symbolically claiming the emancipation of the country.

To sum up, the representation of Australia and Australianness in Peter Carey's historical novels is twofold. Although the Australian writer is aware of the limits of any representation of the nation and of the impossibility of fixing Australian identity around a single concept or ethnicity, he still searches for a definition of his country's national character and encourages Australia to assert itself against neoimperialism. His writing thus embodies a double movement: a deconstruction of the traditional image of Australia and an urge to reconstruct it for a different purpose.

### Deconstructing national identity?

Postmodernity considers the concept of national identity as a fictional construct, as a structure of cultural power, as an 'imaginary community' which exists only by virtue of epistemic violence. Carey's invitation to strengthen his country's collective identity and his pursuit of a national character may at first seem to contradict his own postmodern conception of Australian identity and his need to deconstruct the idea of nation.

I would question this apparent paradox, arguing that the concurrent presence of the need for a national identity and of the awareness of the necessity of its deconstruction is not necessarily a contradiction in terms. The deconstruction of the idea of nation has an unquestionable validity when applied to dominant nations such as

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 72-73.

England and the United States; the uncritical application of the same model to a non-dominant postcolonial context may prove myopic. The idea of the nation has been an invaluable element in the process of the emancipation of the Australian colony from the English domination. A sense of national identity has been indispensable in contrasting a dominant country and may be used once more against neo-colonial powers. A contingent historical truth, i.e. the necessary deconstruction of European empires, cannot easily be transferred to other contexts and other nations. The relationship between England and Australia has been characterised by a marked disparity in power; the coloniser has denied the colonised its national identity. It is not possible to apply the idea of deconstruction to both realities assuming it will bring forth the same effects. The risk is to render the idea of the deconstruction of national identity another implicit form of imperialism, to perpetuate colonialism once again through the mandatory deconstruction of a national identity that has never really existed. As Rosi Braidotti asserts, referring to female subjectivity:

...one cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted.... In order to announce the death of the subject one must first have gained the right to speak as one; in order to demystify the metadiscourse one must first gain access to a place of enunciation.<sup>22</sup>

Rather than condemning the idea of nation as such, this should therefore be used strategically. Carey's narrative seems to move on this tricky ground, occasionally advocating the necessity of defining a national character and opposing new forms of colonialism. The tension between the nation and its deconstruction in Carey is not resolved, and cannot be resolved. His work is both a continuous search for Australia and a constant negation of its existence.

It is perhaps possible to conclude that, like all identities, national characters are fictions; yet without fictions, as Gayatri Spivak says, it is not possible to exist.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 141.

<sup>23</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

England and the United States; the ancient... The... of the nation has been an... A... of national identity has been... A... of national identity has been... A... of national identity has been...

Factor than condemning the idea of nation as such... It is perhaps possible to conclude that... It is perhaps possible to conclude that... It is perhaps possible to conclude that...

Demetrio S. Yocum

In(ter)dependence: The Poetic Revolution of Seamus Heaney's Troubled Poetry

By the rivers of Babylon  
We set and wept  
At the memory of Zion.  
On the poplars there  
We had hung up our harps.  
For there our gaolers had asked us  
To sing them a song...  
If I forget you, Jerusalem,  
may my right hand wither!  
(Psalm 137, 1-5)

It is sometimes asserted that the problem in Northern Ireland is one of national identity, and that the religious habit it assumes is a disguise for this underlying reality. Yet, violence in Ireland did stem from reactions to real (or perceived) discrimination between Catholics and Protestants. This discrimination has a long historical record, dating to the fifteenth century when it was sanctioned as a tool to pacify an occupied land and settle a Protestant populace who would prove more loyal to the Crown than its Catholic inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> What is true is that the two elements have become so entwined that it is extremely difficult to ascribe priority to either of them. However, as it was for the Gileadites who were able to identify the Ephraimites through their inability to pronounce the sibilant, religion and church adherence,

<sup>1</sup> For further historical details see Adrian Kerr, ed., *Perceptions* (Derry: Guildhall Press, 1992), and Maurice Irvine, *Northern Ireland, Faith and Faction* (London: Routledge, 1991).

though nominal, has clearly been in Ulster the *shibboleth* by which the hostile identity is recognized.<sup>2</sup>

In Ireland, and specifically in the Northern province of Ulster, as in any other colonised or newly independent country, narratives about the past defy closure, and history can never be safely at a distance as Michael Parker has put it.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, a post-colonial approach to any account of historical 'troubles', within and among nations, can have, as Catherine Hall suggests, "emancipatory potential" in so far as it is "...a history which involves recognition and the reworking of memory. A history which shows how fantasized constructions of homogeneous nations are constructed and the other possibilities which are always there. A history which is about difference, not homogeneity".<sup>4</sup>

The polarisation in politics in Northern Ireland over the past 30 years has placed such enormous pressure on individuals within communities to keep faith with the collective historical experience, and on writers to bear witness, that at times the fact has been obscured that they possess not a single homogeneous cultural and religious tradition, but rather a much more complex, multiple heritage. A dramatic "broken history", in the words of Seamus Deane, may have left artists "caught between identities", but has also established opportunities to scrutinise the ambivalence within origins and in the process to employ a diverse range of cultural, religious and historical perspectives, as well as aesthetic strategies.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, both Edward Said's discourse of advocating, after Frantz Fanon, a post-nationalist "transformation of social consciousness beyond national consciousness", and Homi Bhabha's statement that "being obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation ... peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification", seem to become particularly insightful when applied to the bloodied territory of

<sup>2</sup> The territorial war between Gilead and Ephraim is narrated in "The Book of Judges", *Old Testament*, chapter 12, vv. 1-7.

<sup>3</sup> See Michael Parker, *The Hurt World* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1995), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Hall, "Histories, Empires and the Post-colonial Moment", in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, eds., *The Post-Colonial Question* (London: Routledge, 1996), 76.

<sup>5</sup> See Kerr, *Perceptions*.

Northern Ireland. Both positions have the merit of indicating a 'way out' of the religious as well as socio-political *impasse* that has been strangling for so long this small corner of Europe.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, a new and refreshing view, which questions historical and ideological myths and heroes by distancing itself from them mainly through an act of recognition of the possible spaces, better still, territories of dialogue beyond barriers of whatsoever kind, has widened the Irish literary horizon particularly in the last years. After the explosion of creative writing in Northern Ireland at the time of the most dramatic phases of the conflict between Ulster and Great Britain, literary production is now going through a phase of fervent evolution, and this evolution clearly speaks the language of postmodernity and post-nationalism with its often dramatically ironic multi-voiced perceptions and its tragic representations. The terror and dislocation of the Northern Ireland Troubles have left a legacy of anger, bewilderment and hurt. But they have also stimulated writing of the highest order: powerful, searching and painfully candid. For the first time the writers – Catholic and Protestant, women and men, exiles and natives – explore the stifling pressures of identity and tradition and the brutal impact of violence by means of intertextual strategies and the subversion of traditional narrative methods. Young talents offer the reader an unexpectedly different Northern Ireland, and in particular a clear picture of everyday life in its once tormented urban centres, where the hybridity of Irish identity, its interactive and porous nature, its cultural and religious diversity, and its multiple traditions are represented in all their complexities. The poetry of the Troubles is now widely recognised as among the most vibrant contemporary writing in the English language. This creative perspective envisages the North as a multi-cultural, multivoiced, multi-ethnic reality which for all its uniqueness has much in common with the rest of the modern world – with the United States but even more so with Western Europe. The fact that this creative explosion somewhat anticipated the 1998 'Good Friday' peace agreement

<sup>6</sup> Edward Said, Terry Eagleton, Frederick Jameson, *Nationalism, Colonialism & Literature* (Chicago: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 66. Homi K. Bhabha, "The Third Space. Interview with Homi K. Bhabha", in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990).

between Northern Ireland's main political parties, seems to support this position.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, such an optimistic and liberating explosion could not have been conceived of without the almost secret creative season of the first generation of Northern Irish artists who kept working during the phase of the Troubles which began in 1968. The poetry revival in Northern Ireland had its immediate origins some years before that date, in the early and mid 60s. Many of the emerging poets were 'scholarship' children, beneficiaries of the Education Act of 1947.<sup>8</sup> Soon they began to find their voices at Queen's University in Belfast, Trinity College in Dublin and elsewhere at a time of intense cultural activity in the North. When the Troubles erupted in 1968-69, it was inevitable that an already vigorous poetic production should resonate with the crisis. Initially the response was cautious. Although there was some journalistic pressure to produce a kind of war poetry, and although a number of poets engaged in the poetry of the latest atrocity (to adapt Conor Cruise O'Brien's phrase about instant politics), the majority, while recognising the need for response, were more circumspect.

Seamus Heaney writes that for Northern Irish poets at that time the problems of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to their predicament. He describes the urgent necessity to find a poetic sound as a way "...to discover a field of force in which, without abandoning fidelity to the processes and experience of poetry ... it would be possible to encompass the perspectives of a human reason and at the same time to grant the religious intensity of the violence, its deplorable authenticity and complexity".<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For further analysis of contemporary writing in Northern Ireland see Laura Pelaschiar, *Writing the North* (Trieste: Edizioni Parnaso, 1998), to whom I am greatly indebted.

<sup>8</sup> This act, by making further education more widely available to the Catholic minority, paved the way for the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, the People's Democracy movement and the Social Democratic and Labour Party. See Parker, *The Hurt World*, 146.

<sup>9</sup> Seamus Heaney, "Feeling Into Words", in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978, 1980* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980), 34.

Without the benefit of a bower or retreat to a 'place out of time' – for even those who physically left the North did not, could not leave in another sense – these artists have endeavoured to address what Edna Longley has termed the "cultural dynamic underlying the conflict, and to fashion in their fictions, with as much integrity and compassion as they could muster, objective correlatives for the brutal experiences endured by ordinary people repeatedly hurt in an uncivil war".<sup>10</sup> Unlike those people on both sides of the Irish Sea who have implied that there is a single version of 'truth' and 'history', and merely recycled myths about "the other side" in order to maintain a solidarity bred on fear and ignorance, the most representative artists of those years have in the main avoided the temptation "to massage collective feelings", to use another phrase of Seamus Heaney's.

The experience of the Troubles has often produced texts in which the writer's own communities and their value systems have been subjected to a rigorous scrutiny. They have continued, in reviews and criticism as well as poetry, to weigh and evaluate the relationship between art and politics and the nature of artistic responsibility. Far from being cripplingly self-conscious – Seamus Deane has noted that artists: "can often be more troubled by the idea that they should be troubled by a crisis than they are by the crisis itself" – this preoccupation has proved enabling by underpinning and balancing the rich body of Troubles poetry of the last thirty years.<sup>11</sup> It has neither stifled the cry of protest nor frozen the springs of compassion and in itself constitutes a valuable, challenging examination of the whole nature of response. It is thanks to these poets if the values of art in times of violence were never dismissed or underestimated.

The main aim of this article is to dig into the writing of the Northern Irish poet Seamus Heaney in order to bring to light the corpses left behind on the battlefield of his deeply felt Christian – and Catholic – spirit, which could have found expression only in the political act of holding, as he has put it, "between my finger and my thumb the squat pen ... snug as a gun", where language itself is often a dangerous, sometimes a fatal weapon, give it its own powerful

<sup>10</sup> Quotation in Parker, *The Hurt World*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Seamus Deane, "The Artist and the Troubles", in *Ireland and the Arts* (London: Polity Press, 1983), 24.

“field of force.”<sup>12</sup> What follows is an attempt at exploring in particular the poem “Act of Union” which is in *North*, the collection written in 1975, and “Station Island”, which gives the title to the highly acclaimed work published in 1984. The tool used, in the first poem, to unearth the conflictual family relationships between Ireland and England, is that ‘auditory’ imagination first defined by T.S. Eliot.<sup>13</sup> While in the second it will be the mystical-historical poetics of Dante that guides us along Heaney’s spiritual pilgrimage through the casualties of the poet’s past. It is in this dialogic interplay respectively between Heaney and Eliot and then between Heaney and Dante, that there clearly emerges the assumption of art as a religious force, especially in times of war, and of language – handed down from father to son – as the artist’s unique faith.

### Act of Union

I think of the personal and Irish  
 pieties as vowels, and the literary  
 awareness nourished on English  
 as consonants.

(Seamus Heaney)

In 1798 a revolution in Ireland was attempted. The leaders were members of a secret society called the United Irishmen. The society originated amongst Ulster Presbyterians, whose faith is a non-conformist form of protestantism, and who, like Catholics, did not enjoy full civil rights. Inspired by the ideas of liberty and brotherhood seen in the French Revolution nine years prior, and bound together by their subjugation, they strove to achieve freedom from the British and the Protestants, armed with muskets and pikes. The rebellion failed. Thousands were massacred. Consequently, an act was passed in 1800 where the semi-independent Irish Parliament

<sup>12</sup> Seamus Heaney, “Digging”, in *Death of a Naturalist* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960), 13.

<sup>13</sup> See T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

was abolished and Ireland became part of the ‘United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland’. This law was called the ‘Act of Union’. This is also the title of Seamus Heaney’s poem:

Tonight a first movement, a pulse,  
 As if the rain in bogland gathered heard  
 To slip and flood: a bog-burst,  
 A gash breaking open the ferny bed.  
 Your back is a firm line of eastern coast  
 And arms and legs are thrown  
 Beyond your gradual hills. I caress  
 The heaving province where our past has grown.  
 I am the tall kingdom over your shoulder  
 That you would neither cajole nor ignore.  
 Conquest is a lie. I grow older  
 Conceding your half-independent shore  
 Within whom borders now my legacy  
 Culminates inexorably.

And I’m still imperially  
 Male, leaving you with the pain,  
 The rending process in the colony,  
 The battering ram, the boom burst from within.  
 The act sprouted an obstinate fifth column  
 Whose stance is growing uni-lateral.  
 This heart beneath your heart is a wardrum  
 Mustering force  
 His parasitical and ignorant little fists already  
 Beat at your border and I know they are cocked  
 At me across the water. No treaty  
 I foresee will salve completely your tracked  
 And stretchmarked body, the big pain  
 That leaves you raw like opened ground again.<sup>14</sup>

“Act of Union” is from the collection *North*, in which the search for

<sup>14</sup> Seamus Heaney, “Act of Union”, in *North* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 34.

self and historical identity powerfully emerges. It is a free verse poem that explores the relationship between, and the history of, Ireland and Northern Ireland. In this poem Heaney has achieved a balance between the past of Ireland and its present, its colonisation presented as its rape and its current violence brought about by sectarian beliefs as a result of its past.<sup>15</sup>

The poem is divided into two sections with the clear intention to show the invisible barrier between the past and the present. The second section begins with the conjunction "And" as if to stress the continuance of the conflict in Northern Ireland. The first section talks of Ireland, and the second of a child and her future. Marriage and sex can also be considered acts of union and this is what is referred to in the poem. The extended metaphor involves England, the male, addressing his Ireland, female and pregnant with a bastard child, the "obstinate fifth column", which will be alike to both its parents – the child who has now grown up and is causing the dissent that its father feared. This refers to one of the five provinces of Ireland, Ulster: Northern Ireland is normally referred to as Ulster because it is made up of six of Ulster's nine counties.

The poem is set in 1800 when the mother is pregnant. It starts with a burst of energy, which can be seen as Ireland in the first throgs of labour. The word "bogland" is used, and this is inherently tied up with Ireland's history. The English may have seen it as derogatory association but Heaney sees it as the essence of his country. It is a symbol of abundant material from the land and mind. The "bog-burst" presents the image of the bog separating to bring forth something, in this case the child, Northern Ireland, the 'fifth column'. The male, or England, provides a description of Ireland's geography, her back, arms, legs and her "heaving province", which can be seen as her womb. Heaney perceives Ireland to be female, as in other poems, as Mother Ireland, passive and ineffectual. This is

<sup>15</sup> *North* also contains the "bog poems" collection which is again about the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland and history, though of a different form. "Requiem for the Croppies" also confronts the rebellion of 1798 and specifically the final battle at Vinegar Hill and the massacre that occurred on it. "Ocean's Love to Ireland" is also a political poem that produces a historical perspective of England's conquest of Ireland and employs gender to further its message. *Ibid.*

highlighted in the lines: "that you would neither cajole nor ignore". She is uncommitted and her mutuality is said by the male speaker to have justified her implied rape. The male regrets the pain of his partner's imminent childbirth but also reads it as the promise of a forthcoming titanic struggle. This creates a pitying and wistful mood and a slow irregular rhythm. The child is already violent, his fists: "Beat at your borders and I know they're cocked / At me across the water". This correlates with the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland that is still continuing. As the theme of this poem is clearly political, it takes into account the creation of Northern Ireland and its relationship with England and Ireland. It portrays the persona's, and in all likelihood Heaney's, belief that Ireland will never recover from her 'rape' by England. Ireland may perpetually suffer from the legacy of Northern Ireland's metaphorical 'birth': "No treaty / I foresee will save completely your tracked / And stretchmarked body". The use of the word "save" has a double meaning. Not only does it mean to soothe wounds, particularly the wounds caused by "[t]he rending process in the colony", i.e. Northern Ireland being ripped apart, but it is also used in a Roman Catholic antiphon. This is indicative of the Catholics in Northern Ireland and their attempt to heal the situation with prayer, yet it is also religion itself that is a basis for brutality. The poem also communicates Heaney's concern about the 'Troubles', though to a lesser degree.

In the first section a regular rhyming scheme of *abcb* is employed, save the last two lines, and in the second section there is no rhyme, except in the last two lines again. The rhythm in these last lines symbolises the culmination of England's legacy. This end rhyming wraps up the stanzas and the poem effectively, unlike the situation in Northern Ireland, which will possibly never be completely resolved. If the epigraph to this section is taken into account, this poem consists predominantly of consonants and this connects with the point of view which is that of England. Heaney uses many different techniques in his poems, and "Act of Union" is no different. Vivid imagery is used in the first stanza to represent Ireland as England sees her. Alliteration is also present, in lines such as: "The battering ram, the boom burst from within". This helps convey the rhythm and feel of the sentence, the battering and the bursting. It also appeals to the senses - tactile, auditory and visual imagery is present in both sections, in phrases like



"wardrum / Mustering force, caress / The heaving province, fists already / Beat at your borders", and the geographical description of Ireland. The words "gash", "booms" or "pulse" are examples of onomatopoeia. England and Ireland are obviously personified as a male and female respectively. Although England thought that it had conquered Ireland, Ireland, despite its debilitated state, fought back and has now achieved freedom. England is suffering its "act sprouted an obstinate fifth column", which is now causing its distress: its violence has reached England in a spate of revenge, and raging war and when united with the rest of Ireland is even more powerful: "His heart beneath your heart is a wardrum / Mustering force". Therefore, "Conquest is a lie", or at least it is over.

One of the greatest influence on Seamus Heaney's aesthetic vision has been the so-called 'auditory imagination' first defined by T. S. Eliot as: "the sense of the syllable and of the rhythm, which penetrates at a much lower level than conscious thought and emotion, making each word resonate".<sup>16</sup> Far from being hasty, it could be argued that such 'imagination' took up its dwelling, and still resonates most clearly, in contemporary English: no other language has offered itself – and still does – as an open cave to the sounds and articulations of conflictual national histories through the troubled minds of its often silenced and once forced-to-listen people.

The break-up of the British colonial empire, in relation to the artistic production of several former colonized countries, has led to the articulation of the internal lacerations of the self, the recovering of the historical scars of the past and the difficulties in facing the future; in finding oneself "divided up to the veins" between past and present, language and history, culture and motherland.<sup>17</sup> Nowhere else has the aesthetics of the divided self been deeper analyzed than by the artists who, no matter from where, have taken a language – English – and turned it into Babylon, the land of exile from where they continue to sing their impossible journey back home.

English as a language of the former colonizers has become the fundamental in-between space for the re-remembering of the poetic

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Heaney, *Preoccupations*, 198.

<sup>17</sup> Derek Walcott, "A Far Cry from Africa", in *Collected Poems 1948-84* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), 34.

self: the only home left for all the culturally and linguistically displaced artists who continue to dwell in what was the former "house of horrors", learning how to make of it a new place to heal the wounds inflicted by colonial history. Far from representing only an aesthetic *escamotage* for the survival of one's own individual history, writing in English, as in the case of Seamus Heaney, conjures up a redemptive dimension for the healing self whose horizon has been widened to the point of learning how to cure the enemies' soul by writing in their very own language, opening spaces of relief for all. *Act of Union* is a conspicuous example of the tragedy of history based on a legacy which "culminates inexorably", but at the same time, like "opened ground again", it provides the vital sustaining force of an available poetic tradition common to Irish and English alike.

By personifying England and Ireland in *Act of Union*, Heaney presents a powerful yet simple representation of the turmoil and the events from which it stems. It is difficult to reach a complete resolution of the situation, but as Heaney himself has said:

In spite of devastating and repeated acts of massacre, assassination and extirpation, the huge acts of faith which have marked the new relations between Africans and Afrikaners, and the way in which walls have come down in Europe and iron curtains have opened, all this inspires a hope that new possibility can still open up in Ireland as well.<sup>18</sup>

### Station Island

*Trasumanar significar per verba  
Non si poria  
(Dante Alighieri)*

The colonialist aggression, beautifully articulated by means of the sexual metaphor in *Act of Union*, comes to the redemptive port of *Station Island* where Heaney's poetry most clearly reverberates,

<sup>18</sup> Seamus Heaney, "Remarks, Commencement Ceremony of North Carolina at Chapel Hill". Address: @ UNC-Chapel Hill, May 12, 1996.

soothing the brutal violence which has marked the turbulent history between the two shores of Ireland and England. It is in this poem that the poet defines the political mission of Eliot's 'auditory imagination' by charting the journey back to the "primitive and forgotten, returning back to origins and taking something of it".<sup>19</sup> It is here, on this tiny island, among the ghostly ruins of an old monastery built before Reformation, at the time of Christian unity, that Heaney's English plunges into its unconscious past to assemble "the most ancient to the most civil", bearing witness to its re-gained in(ter)dependence of English consonants with Irish vocalic sounds.

Station Island, in the middle of Lough Derg, County Donegal, northwest Ireland, is a small rocky isle. It has been a site of pilgrimage for Irish Catholics for over a thousand years. The island is also known as St. Patrick's Purgatory because St. Patrick was supposed to be the founder of the penitential vigil of fasting and praying which still constitutes the basis of the three-day pilgrimage. Each unit of the pilgrim's exercises is called a 'station' and involves walking barefoot and praying round the 'beds', stone circles which are said to be the remains of early medieval monastic beehive cells.<sup>20</sup> From the very earliest times, it has been described in literatures as well as popular legends, and in some medieval stories of visions and miracles. It is still the name for Irish Catholic religious, historical and cultural affiliations.<sup>21</sup> Beginning from the eighteenth century, it has inspired more specifically literary accounts: William Carleton's *The Lough Derg Pilgrim* (1828); Patrick Kavanagh's *Lough Derg: A Poem* (written in 1942, but published in 1978); Denis Devlin's *Lough Derg* (1946); and Sean O'Faolain's popular story *The Lovers of the Lake* (1958). According to the same poet, the idea of turning to Dante's *Purgatory* as a model to dramatize his own crisis of

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Heaney, *Preoccupations*, 198.

<sup>20</sup> According to the tradition, pilgrims to Station Island's cave, called St. Patrick's Purgatory, were customarily shut up in it for hours in order to suffer some of the torments of Purgatory. This cave, considered the entrance to the Underworld, was later closed and the purgatory housed in a chapel. See Carolyn Meyer, "Orthodoxy, Independence, and Influence in Seamus Heaney's *Station Island*", in Robert F. Garratt, ed., *Critical Essays on Seamus Heaney* (New York: MacMillan, 1995), 211.

<sup>21</sup> See Neil Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986).

conscience in the poem originated from these numerous earlier literary treatments of the pilgrimage. At the same time, by locating his personal purgatory in Lough Derg's island, Heaney comments implicitly on the way in which a specific site, as well as a literary masterpiece, is subjected to revision by successive generations.

Heaney himself made the three-day pilgrimage three times in his youth. "Station Island", he says, is "a purgatorio in itself ... involving a dark night and a bright morning, a departure from the world and a return to it".<sup>22</sup> In the poem, the poet walking round the obligatory stations is not only performing an act of penitence, a movement to his spiritual centre, but more significantly, a movement backwards in time to the many "stations" in his own uprooted and dislocated life.

In the somewhat prose verses of the twelve 'cantos' in the title poem, placed at the centre of the book, Heaney begins his travel diary: dreamlike sequences of a journey through a cloud of familial, sexual, and professional ghosts whose polyphonic voices are orchestrated according to T.S. Eliot's three poetical voices: fictional, lyrical, and dramatic. As a result of the communal religious atmosphere – attending services at the basilica, fasting, lack of sleep, repetitions of prayers, confessions, renunciations – the pilgrim-Heaney enters a strange usually unexplored zone of awareness where hallucination is undistinguishable from actuality. It allows him to reach beyond his own personal history and have imaginary conversations, in the poem, with his personal dead whom appear and disappear in the manner of Dante's shadows: Simon Sweeney, an old "Sabbath-breaker" from Heaney's childhood, whose first words are "Damn all you know"; the two Irish poets, the convert from Catholicism William Carleton, and Patrick Kavanagh; an invalid relative who died young; the young priest, dead after a few years in the foreign missions; two schoolmasters; the little girl Heaney first felt love for; a college friend shot in his shop by terrorists; an archeologist friend who died young; a cousin murdered by protestants; an executed Catholic terrorist; a monk who prescribed as penance a translation from St. John of the Cross; James Joyce. All these characters (with the exception of the young invalid relative)

<sup>22</sup> Seamus Heaney, "Envy and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet", *Irish University Review* 15.1 (Spring 1985), 18.

speak to the poet about their stories in the most recognizable way, in order to give dignity and meaning to their tragic death and remind the poet of his responsibilities as a committed artist. Some are admonitory, some reproachful, some encouraging. All seem to add to the irremediable sense of failure which permeates the whole poem, a condition which seems to involve both the poet, as artist and individual, as well as his own country.

But more interesting than the polyphony of the phantasmatic voices is Heaney's own self-portrait. As the pilgrim, he is able to articulate his own personal struggle, as a poet, to find his own independent voice and artistic integrity. This is highlighted by the poet's movements in the poem: whenever we encounter him, he is going in the opposite direction, against the crowd, clearing the way for other pilgrims (section IV), facing the wrong way (section V), or descending while the other pilgrims ascend the set of steps (section VI). Consequently, the poetry in *Station Island* conjures up a rite of passage; the passing of a threshold always to be trespassed reaching beyond the horrendously mutilated historical past. In this task, the poet avoids direct reference to political commitment; it is the private dimension which bears witness to the violence of the past as well as of the present:

My brain dried like spread turf, my stomach  
Shrank to a cinder and tightened and cracked.  
Often I was dogs on my own track  
Of blood on wet grass that I could have licked.  
Under the prison blanket, an ambush  
Stillness I felt safe in settled round me.  
Street lights came on in small towns, the bomb flash  
Came before the sound, I saw country  
I knew from Glenshane down to Toome  
And heard a car I could make out years away  
With me in the back of it like a white-faced groom,  
A hit-man on the brink, emptied and deadly.  
When the police yielded my coffin, I was light  
As my head when I took aim.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Seamus Heaney, *Station Island* (Milan: Mondadori, 1997), 95. Hereafter cited as SI.

Although the narrative armature of *Station Island* is almost totally taken from Dante, especially in the descriptions of the appearance and vanishing of ghosts, the verses, as in the fragment quoted above, seem to touch the limits of description. The poetic composition itself, by reworking Dante's structure according to the Irish context of violence, involves not so much an active participation of political commitment, but an inner, more sensitive and tragic depth.

Dante has left us with a vivid sense of the limits of the language which torments the poet. Like Dante, Heaney works on language almost against its own nature. Since his very literary beginning he has showed a great ability and command in exploiting the 'metamorphic' potentialities of the English language. Therefore, there is no big gap to fill between the Italian poet who gave birth to Italian language and the Irish craftsman Heaney, working on the latest changes of the English language: for both the physical object is always the most suitable symbol which becomes verb and action.

Irish writers had to learn a foreign language through which they could again create the ties with their readers who were at the same time struggling with phonemes and graphemes 'alien' to the representation of their own physical and psychic world. In order to achieve this task the poets eagerly strengthened the gnoseologic power of language. As such, the literary production in Northern Ireland is a wonderful creation of cultural pruning, always bearing the wound from which it originally germinated on its own bark.

As Alasdair Macrae has suggested, *Station Island*, though founded on a religious ground and ritual, is not primarily religious.<sup>24</sup> The major theme which emerges from the poem is common to most of Heaney's works, all significantly directed towards his own 'spiritual liberation', and that of his country, from the pressures of assimilated traditional structures and complacent devotional expressions of religious life. In the fourth section of the poem a young priest, who died young and forgotten in a distant mission, confesses how faith without conviction constitutes a rather meagre aid in facing the adversities in life:

<sup>24</sup> See Alasdair Macrae, "Seamus Heaney's New Voice in *Station Island*", in Garratt, ed., *Critical Essays*, 66.

His breath came short and shorter. In long houses  
 I raised the chalice above headdresses.  
 In hoc signo ... on that abandoned  
 Mission compound, my vocation  
 Is a steam off drenched creepers.

(SI, 66)

Implicit is the aim of the poet to make the poem a palinode of a way in which catholic doctrine and its ethics were imposed: the critique of hypocrisy, which was part of the poet's own education, is there to prevent any kind of religious fundamentalism.

Yet, poetry can be considered as one with a religious sense as it is implicitly stated in the monk's instruction, in section XI, to "read poems as prayers" as well as in the collection's final poem where all roads, whether leading to spiritual salvation or to artistic achievement, ultimately join. The translation of something by St. John of the Cross, urged on the poet as a penance, becomes the moment of renewed faith in the validity of his life and art. In this sense, Heaney, who is still facing the political violence of his country, by means of the 'unappropriate' signs of English language, is inevitably compared with the great Christian mystic. Both have despaired over the inability to express in a proper language the culmination of their experiences "of the night"; for both poets the lamentation over the inability of language to catch the essence of their illuminations is constant. Yet, as in the case of Heaney, it is essential to keep writing to open unknown paths and enrich the sphere of the word, by means of brave and audacious formulations, at the same moment in which the poet is obliged to admit and declare its limits. Thus, writing takes the shape of an authentic sacrificial rite.

As it was in Italy at the beginning of the first millennium, writing poetry in Northern Ireland is inevitably read as a political act. Like Dante, Heaney puts himself beyond any direct involvement and outside the fight which is killing his country. He condemns ideologies because they forced on people, considered merely as ethnic groups or social classes, the preconstituted roles which nullify individual responsibility. Heaney's political commitment is a 'service' to the transformed language of his people. Yet, to be effective, such a mission must abandon political militancy and

religious superficial conformism to embrace the most secret and hidden space of the poet's private, inner self, as Joyce reminds him in their encounter at the end of his journey, as Heaney returns to the mainland:

Your obligation  
 is not discharged by any common rite.  
 What you must do must be done on your own  
 So get back in harness. The main thing is to write  
 For the joy of it. Cultivate a work-lust  
 That imagines its haven like your hands at night  
 Dreaming the sun in the sunspot of a breath.  
 You are fasted now, light-headed, dangerous.  
 Take off from here. And don't be so earnest,  
 let others wear the sackcloth and the ashes.  
 Let go, let fly, forget.  
 You've listened long enough. Now strike your note ...  
 Who cares ... The English language belongs to us.  
 You are raking at deadfires, a waste of time for somebody your age.  
 That subject people stuff is a cod's game, infantile, like your peasant  
 pilgrimage.  
 Keep at a tangent.  
 When they make the circle wide, it's time to swim  
 Out on your own and fill the element  
 With signatures on your own frequency,  
 echo soundings, searches, probes, allurements,  
 elver-gleams in the dark of the whole sea.

(SI, 197)

Joyce's instruction contains a promise of renewal, and Heaney, in the face of a hostile world, offers us a future as he writes of language being "echo soundings", "searches", "probes". This movement can lead to the first step beyond the fortifications: no more rushing to the barricades, but urging the sides to speak out more. When a masterful poet admits us into the intimate port of the heart, compassion for all the victims of a senseless war – like the ones encountered on *Station Island* – emerges from within, re-activating at the same time an inner cosmology of the spirit and a vision of old orders giving way to new.



Mena Mitrano

**On Diaspora, Coerced Mimeticism, and Surfaces:  
An Interview with Rey Chow**

**Introduction**

Rey Chow is Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Humanities in the Department of Comparative Literature and the Department of Culture and Media Studies at Brown University. One could typically remark about her, she has gone very far very fast. A native of Hong Kong, she was educated in the United States. She became a professor only nine years after getting her Ph.D. Between 1991 and 1998 she has written five books. Her *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (1995) won the James Russell Lowell Prize for MLA (Modern Language Association) authors, usually very hard to win. She serves on the editorial board of seventeen journals and is a compelling figure in the international scene. One of the main reasons for her fast career and her international renown is her contribution to the field of cultural studies. Cultural studies, Rey Chow contends, should not be seen as a poor relation of theory. She has especially exposed critical theory's almost ontological dependency on otherness, in particular theory's reliance on an internal otherness that obliterates other alterities. Accordingly, she has relentlessly exposed the racism and classism by theorists who denigrate cultural studies. If on the one hand she opposes seeing Western others as all the same, on the other, her work on China, as well as deconstructing the West/non-West bar, is especially attentive to the internal otherness in the Asian world.

I met Rey Chow at the School of Criticism and Theory at Cornell University where, from June 19 to July 26 2000, she taught a seminar, "Mimeticism and Cross-Ethnic Representation" and

delivered a lecture entitled "Fateful Attachments: On Collecting, Fidelity, and (the Modern Chinese Writer) Lao She". In the interview both the theme of her seminar and the argument of her lecture are taken up for discussion. Although the interview is meant as a general introduction to Rey Chow's work, the occasion in which it was taped inevitably determines its leitmotif, and this is Rey Chow's engagement of theory. Therefore a few words on her seminar might be a useful way of introducing the conversation below.

Rey Chow's seminar tackled the question of the imperative of mimeticism in an age of theory. Although with the rise of 'signification' mimeticism (imitation, representation, the literal, the thematic, etc.) became an outmoded concept, it continues to operate in representations of ethnicity. There seems to be an assumption that writing dealing with ethnicity must be realistic, must allegorize the nation, must pose the question of identity. So, if on the one hand mimeticism may be viewed as theoretically primitive, on the other it is imposed on the cultural productions of particular groups. The question of 'coerced mimeticism', as Rey Chow will refer to it in the interview, seems particularly relevant not only to scholars in the US but also to scholars in English Departments anywhere who, faced with the dilemma of having to 'package' ethnic or non-canonic authors, must choose between the imposition of national, historical allegory and the more textual, theoretical level, often struggling to find a fine balance between the two.

The interview took place at The School of Criticism and Theory, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2000.

### The Diasporic Critic

MENA MITRANO: I thought we could start by talking a little bit about your second book, *Writing Diaspora*. You have written about the diasporic intellectual. This is a Third World intellectual who lives in the West, specifically in North American academia. Here, throughout the Nineties, the diasporic intellectual has gained increasing visibility. Consequently, the expectation has grown that s/he have a certain investment in minorities, in suffering, and in victimization, as you write.

Since the early Nineties your work has been a search for new strategies – other than the investment in the oppressed – to deal with the First/Third World, East/West divide. This is one of the original aspects of your work, and it certainly distinguishes your earlier work. In a way, you have been pulling the rug from under the diasporic intellectual's feet, including your own. You have raised pedagogic issues about the kind of knowledge that is being circulated about the Third World. You've also raised political issues about the diasporic intellectual's privilege. You have warned against the illusion that through privileged speech one is helping to serve the 'wretched of the earth'. Ultimately your motto has been to write against diaspora. What kind of writing might this be?

REY CHOW: Yes. I think the particular piece of work you have in mind is that chapter in *Writing Diaspora* called "Against the Lures of Diaspora". I should add that it's not meant as writing against diaspora as such but against what I call the lures of diaspora. I haven't had the chance to reread *Writing Diaspora* and that chapter, so I am speaking from memory. I believe that that chapter deals specifically with the situation of the study of China in North America. I remember asking questions such as "What are we doing as academics in the Nineties studying Chinese women, talking about Chinese women in North America?" The question about the lures of diaspora was raised in that context.

By lures, of course, I'm talking about some of the privileges that intellectuals have by being intellectual. This is something I will continue to insist on. The question is how we deal with the fact that we do accrue certain privileges while we write about the minorities, the oppressed, and so forth and so on. By writing "against the lures of diaspora", I simply mean that we always have to remember there is that gap there between intellectual work and 'the wretched of the earth'. We should not allow ourselves the illusion that simply because we are talking about these people we are really helping them. The kind of writing I had in mind is a writing that attends to the historical relations that actually enable this kind of work. But at the same time it is a writing that would be critical of the reinscription – of the unproblematical reinscription – of ethnicity and so forth, a writing that, I hope, would be aware of the limits of intellectual work,

even if only belatedly. It's simply a writing that is aware of its own limits, and at certain times of boundaries which, no matter how hard we try as intellectuals, we will not be able to cross or completely abandon. I guess I am more conservative in that regard. I think that, as intellectuals, we have to have critical imagination; but we must also be aware that we too are situated in discourse and have certain limits imposed on us.

M.M.: Along those lines, i.e. the problematic of inscription and reinscription, and of a reinscription that's not to produce once again the same power relations, can we talk about the native?

R.C.: The native?

M.M.: Yes, the native's silence. In a sense, the diasporic intellectual is engaged in a work of translation. S/he must translate the native for the West. Traditionally, in the process of cultural communication between East and West – a process, as you pointed out innumerable times, mired in colonialist and imperialist power relations – the native has inhabited the place of silence. You invoke classic attempts to fill this silence: Julia Kristeva on Chinese women, Roland Barthes on Japan, Malek Alloula on Algerian women. In these famous examples the silence of the native is filled by agents or witnesses who aim at restoring the voice of the victimized. You argue that by so doing they “neutralize the intranslatability of the native's experience”. One of the major contributions of your work in the early Nineties is that you move beyond the native as silent image and thus beyond the opposition between speaking subject and mute object. You do so by critically engaging Spivak's subaltern's unconditional speechlessness and Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity, according to which the subaltern will always have already spoken in the master's text. By contrast, your position is that the native is an “*indifferent* defiled image” (my emphasis). That is, the native is both a silent object and the one who gazes at the colonizer in indifference, declaring the secret that the colonizer hopes to unveil in the silent object to be a phantasm. And this is really the point I wanted to get at.

You thus presuppose an “originary” gaze, one which is no more but which retroactively constitutes the colonizer's identity. This is

your theoretical move. We'll return to fantasy and how it has enabled your work in the second half of the Nineties. Right now, what makes your originary gaze different from a sort of native optical pre-symbolic? In other words, could you say more about the native's indifference?

R.C.: Yes, definitely. First, let me refer back to what you just said – for a couple of points of clarification. I think there are important differences among what you call ‘classic attempts’ to fill the silence of the native. Julia Kristeva was attempting to read in Chinese women a kind of unconscious for Western feminism. Roland Barthes translated Japan into what he called the empire of signs. In the case of Kristeva and Barthes, you can talk about a tendency on the part of leftist intellectuals in the West to go to places like China and Japan and discover some kind of alternative to the West. Now, Malek Alloula's book *The Colonial Harem* is different in nature because there his intention is really to return the Western gaze to the French colonizer. In other words, he is speaking as the protective male critic, defending the Algerian women who have been exposed to this relentless gaze of the Western camera. And there my critique of him is somewhat different, also it's more complex because in his case we have a native critic, a critic who, in fact, belongs to the same group as the women that have been objectified and who, in a paternalistic way, perhaps, offers a counter-attack on the Western critic. My critique is that in exposing the images of the Algerian women a second time, Alloula is unwittingly repeating precisely the very problem of objectification that he critiqued in the first place. I'd like to point this out as a clarification. As to Spivak and Bhabha, I think I am much more in agreement with Spivak's conclusion that the subaltern cannot speak, even though that has been very controversial, and she has herself subsequently modified and revised that argument.

I think Spivak's point originally was a simple one, namely that even when subalterns have spoken, their speeches are not necessarily heard. It is really a question of representations and how accessible those representations are. And I thought that her argument was simply that representation is always mediated by power relations so that when those who are disenfranchised attempt to speak, it is not regarded as a kind of representation that can be recognized.



Somehow, many critics, when they hear “the subaltern cannot speak”, tend immediately to jump to the conclusion that Spivak herself is denying the speech of the subaltern. I continue to think that that is a misreading of her very clearly articulated message. Bhabha’s argument about hybridity is something I am more critical of, because as I said in that essay, the notion of hybridity he proposes seems to imply that we can simply continue to look at the master’s text in order to find all the places, the gaps, the interstices where the subaltern has already spoken. I am skeptical of this because it can easily become an excuse not to deal with the subaltern at all. So, finally, I can now come to your question about the originary gaze.

I believe that I was thinking of the customary notion in colonial relations, the notion that it is the colonizer who begins the particular history of the place that he has conquered. Even today, the assumption is often that the history of the colony begins when the colonizer arrives. I can give you the example of my native place: Hong Kong. Very often when Hong Kong is discussed, the discussion typically begins at the point when the British arrived in the mid-nineteenth century. If the colonizer is the one who begins everything, then the colonized is always put in a reactive or secondary position. In *Writing Diaspora*, my attempt to argue that the colonized returns the gaze to the colonizer in the form of an indifferent defiled image is really an attempt to reverse that order of colonizer/colonized and the assumption that goes with it. I believe that that assumption is a suppression of the native’s history, and that history is not a pre-symbolic history. The colonized often already has a history but that history may not be recognized, as I said, because it is the colonizer who is seen as instigating reality in the colony. I think in the context of North America, too, the talk is such that there was nobody and nothing here until the white man arrived, and we know that is a myth and a historical lie. To add to that, at the end of my book on Chinese cinema, *Primitive Passions*, I offer a more detailed account of what such a gaze from the native might look like (in the very last section, when I talk about film, ethnography and cultural relations in the postcolonial age). I use the term translation in that context, in which the gaze of the native is really an objectified and commodified gaze. If you look at the images, let’s say, of Chinese women in the films of the 1980s and early 1990s, an argument could be made that there is a

kind of gaze there which is not entirely the result of the Western colonizer’s domination, rather the natives themselves – the native filmmakers, in this case – are in fact using the medium of film to construct some kind of counter-gaze via the objectified and commodified images of Chinese women.

### Ethnicity

M.M.: I’d like to move on to the question of multiculturalism, which has been debated so much over here. You have been very critical of the idealization of the other (actually, this might relate to the development of a counter-gaze) in the US academia at a time of multiculturalism. In fact, your 1995 article, “The Fascist Longings in Our Midst”, which I liked very much, and which is reprinted in *Ethics After Idealism* (1998), is an uncompromising critique of this phenomenon internal to American academic circles. It would certainly be wrong to call multiculturalism a fascist longing. Yet, multiculturalism seems to have performed an aestheticizing function. By projecting a landscape of ‘authentic’ differences that command contemplation rather than cognition, multiculturalism presides over the shift of politics (that is ethnic conflict) to aesthetics (the patchwork of differences), of the psychic realm (internal complexity) to the social realm (the surface of others). In particular, you point to the closing of the gap between the psychic and the social as a trademark of fascism. As I was suggesting earlier, multiculturalism runs the risk of shutting down critical inquiry in favor of the idealization of the other, as you phrase it. To what extent do you think the question of postcoloniality arises in response to the shortcomings of multiculturalism? To what extent does the postcolonial react to multiculturalism’s aestheticizing of political conflict – ethnic conflict, basically – and to its assertion of a socially complex landscape that in fact simplifies the psychic interstices, the in-betweens?

R.C.: It’s a very large question. I don’t know if I can do justice in my response to its complexity, but let me very quickly respond perhaps to some differences between postcoloniality and multiculturalism as I understand them.

I think if we are serious about the study of postcoloniality as such we have to do it historically. We have to do historical research on what kinds of postcolonial situations we are talking about. And it is through such research that we can really explore the racial-cultural differentiations that are, in turn, made into hierarchical differentiations. At the same time, the study of postcoloniality must address the colonial apparatus and the institutions that are put in place by colonialism in order to carry out its 'mission'.

M.M.: Education would be one...

R. C: Education, government, even urban architecture, because colonial powers have to have roads, for instance, means of transportation in order to perform their tasks. Wherever you go, where the British have been, for instance, the roads are always very good because they need the roads, they need the means of transportation and communication. . .

M.M.: Talk about translation and transportation...

R.C.: Exactly... in order to do what they need to do. Now the problem I have with multiculturalism, especially as a North American phenomenon: a lot of criticism that others and I have made of multiculturalism is really with a view to the fact that in contemporary America multiculturalism occupies a position to the postmodern that may be homologous to the position occupied by primitivism to the modern. In other words, we are talking about two comparable relations. If you think of the fascination with the primitive that is so much a part of high modernism and all the racial implications involved in that, it becomes possible to think that multiculturalism, too, occupies a position very similar to the fascination with the primitive, but it does so in the context of the postmodern. That's the context in which I would suggest that multiculturalism could be thought of in terms of some kind of fascist, primitivist longing. That is what I meant. My argument is a controversial one because, I guess, it undermines the more utopian and liberalist intentions behind many people's endorsement of multiculturalism. To that extent, I am not sure I see multiculturalism entirely in terms of an attempt to aestheticize political conflict. I agree

exactly with the way you put it. But, perhaps, rethinking my own argument, I would still put the emphasis on what I call idealism. In other words, whereas you think that there is a similarity in structure between idealism and aestheticization, I think idealism may also have to do with the attempt to simplify the complexities that structure our so-called others, and it is through such a simplification that the Western subject comes into its own complexity. For me, the whole point of idealism is that you render the other simple by turning her into something you adore, something you worship, something that is perfect in many ways. But the real purpose of that simplification is enabling the Western subject to become more and more *nuanced* and complex, and that's what I am critical of. That's the heart of my critique of idealism.

M.M.: I'd like to discuss a bit more your specific intervention in ethnicity now. Your most recent work, and in fact I am referring to the paper you presented here at the School of Criticism and Theory, "On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem", is a further elaboration of one of the mainstays of your critical intervention in general throughout the Nineties.<sup>1</sup> And the idea is that ethnicity is not simply a 'sociological fact' but a problematic in the transmission of knowledge. The case of the field of China studies, as you dealt with it, proves that this transmission is governed by a 'coerced mimeticism', and you coin this expression. As you write in "On Chineseness", this means that "minorities are allowed the right to speak only on the implicit expectation that they will speak in the documentary mode, 'reflecting' the group from which they come" (25).

Far from being limited to China-related studies, it seems to me that coerced mimeticism is an offshoot of the expansion and pluralization – via fragmentation – of the literary canon. While this expansion has here allowed a proliferation of new critical discourses, new voices can proliferate only on condition that they remain within the limits of 'reflectionism' as you term it, or the allegorical mode whereby text corresponds to nation or group. A text immediately implements a communitarian identity.

R.C.: Yes.

<sup>1</sup> "On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem" is forthcoming in *Critical Inquiry*.

M.M.: Now, this is quite a prohibition, it seems to me.

R.C.: Yes. Especially since it is being reinforced in an academic space that is profoundly sensitized to poststructuralism and theory in general, with their vocation for problematizing correspondence, closure and essentialism.

M.M.: My question to you is how do you explain this unlikely cohabitation?

(Brief moments of laughter)

M.M.: How can the anthropological preservation of savage thought implicit in coerced mimeticism, as you so clearly describe it, survive side by side with theory's dismantling of virginal origins?

R.C.: That's precisely the question. You have put it in such a manner that I can only agree with it. How can poststructuralist theory be so aware of all these problems – of correspondence, closure, and essentialism – and at the same time allow us to keep thinking about certain cultures and peoples this way? I think it's an excellent question, one that I hope will become discussed more and more in the years to come. For now I just have a few points in response to that because I am still thinking about it. I am thinking about exactly this question you posed. So, let me offer some speculative thoughts.

One convenient way to start thinking about this would be to think back to some of the earlier texts of what we now call poststructuralism. To take, for instance, Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, because it is such an important work. I want to continue to acknowledge the way Derrida has in fact laid the groundwork, in that early work, for all the subsequent work in postcoloniality and cultural studies that we are still doing today. But what's interesting is that even in that early work, in which he fundamentally critiques the logocentrism of the West and our structured thinking and so forth, there are moments in which the non-West has been retained as a reified limit. I'm thinking, of course, once again of the Chinese difference and the way Derrida, like many European philosophers before him since the Enlightenment, imagined the absolute difference

of the Chinese language as an ideographic language. I'm referring to that whole argument.

M.M.: And you critique that in "On Chineseness" as well. You take that point and develop it there.

R.C.: Yes. I've also done a more detailed discussion of this point in a forthcoming short essay called "How (the) Inscrutable Chinese Led to Globalized Theory".

(Laughter)

M.M.: The origins of theory...

R.C.: Again, even in this case when the West has been deconstructed, that whole operation is dependent upon a certain reification of the other as absolutely different, and my point again and again is: Well, how about the actual uses of the Chinese language, which are just as phonetic, you know, which are just as grammar-bound, and which are just as peopled with logocentric intentions?

M.M.: In other words, are you saying that a lot of rhetorical power is assigned to the Chinese language in Derrida's *Of Grammatology*?

R.C.: Exactly.

M.M.: Which is the objection that was made to you yesterday by someone in the audience: that [in your talk "On Chineseness"] you assigned too much rhetorical power to the term 'white'. That's interesting.

R.C.: That's exactly what happens, I think, in the poststructuralist critique of the West. The West is being deconstructed, debunked, criticized, and made entirely problematic but the West remains the focus of attention. The non-West turns into some kind of noble savage, noble image, actually silent. And so, in response to your question, I think it is now the time for us really to look at this problem seriously: what, after the idealization of the East in the

typical poststructuralist critique of the West? What do we move on to next? Perhaps this is the kind of place where we need to re-examine all the implications of poststructuralist theory while acknowledging the contributions it has made to the dismantling of Western thought.

M.M.: Isn't this one of the reasons why you were invited to The School of Criticism and Theory, because your intervention is a critique of post-structuralism from the point of view of someone who uses the tools of post-structuralism?

R.C.: I cannot speak for the directors of the School. I would certainly hope that that's one reason they feel they should have someone who speaks in a slightly different kind of voice.

### Fantasy, Surface, China

M.M.: China has been coming up, obviously, in our discussion so far. I'd like to focus on it more specifically. In order to put forth your view of ethnicity as a theoretical problem, you have relied on the case of China studies. In this field there seem to be two trends: on the one hand, the sinologist's nostalgia for an 'aboriginal' China that is no more and, on the other hand, the imperative of mimeticism in modern and contemporary Chinese literature. This is really a deadlock. You propose to break new paths in cultural translation by putting Chineseness itself under erasure, so to speak. Now, this does not mean doing away with the notion of Chinese identity – or indeed with any other notion of ethnic identity. It means that the notion of Chinese identity must, as you say, be "reevaluated in the catachrestic modes of its signification".

It seems to me that one such re-evaluation of the catachrestical meaning of 'Chinese' occasions your reading of David Cronenberg's movie *M. Butterfly*. There, a Western man, René Gallimard (played by Jeremy Irons) – and the spectator with him – is seduced by an Oriental woman and opera singer who turns out to be a man and a Maoist spy. The Chineseness of Song Liling (played by John Lone) is pieced together by serial imitations: she is a Chinese acting as a Japanese in Puccini's opera, a man acting as a woman, an Oriental

acting out the Westerner's orientalism. It is precisely these mimetic trajectories that, in your reading of Cronenberg's movie, permit one to arrive at a desubstantiation of identity and the exposure of the crafting fantasy (encapsulated by Gallimard's question to Song, "Are you my Butterfly?"). The movie, as you read it, retroactively constructs the Western man's identity as the melancholic attachment to an Orientalist fantasy, which Gallimard kills in the end as he kills himself. How does *M. Butterfly* complicate the notion of a coerced mimeticism, which you otherwise define as "the forced copulation at the juncture of text and ethnicity"?

R.C.: When Gallimard kills himself in that film, he is not so much killing the fantasy as he is completing it, because the fantasy about Madama Butterfly, you recall, is precisely the fantasy about her 'beautiful' self-sacrifice. So, if the fantasy is what he attaches himself to, then his suicide simply becomes a way to fulfill it, to completely act out the fantasy. Another way of saying it would be to say the fantasy plays him rather than him playing the fantasy. As to your much more difficult question of how the notion of coerced mimeticism could be read here, I'm not sure that I can pinpoint that in this particular text because the text is not really being produced from the perspective of an ethnic culture. Now, if you look at the play by David Henry Hwang, you may find it easier to make the argument about coerced mimeticism. Since this film was directed by David Cronenberg, who drastically changed the emphasis of the play, I'm not sure that my argument (about coerced mimeticism) would work here.

If you talk about the problem of Chineseness, your own explanation just now of the various changes undertaken by Song, I think, is itself an excellent way of dealing with the issue of mimeticism when it is connected to ethnicity. I must say that in my own reading I did not give Song that kind of complicated, *nuanced* reading. I was much more following the grain of Cronenberg's film text and my focus was on Gallimard himself. Perhaps we can talk about coerced mimeticism in the case of the Frenchman trying to become an oriental Butterfly. That would take the whole argument of mimeticism into a very new kind of dimension.

M.M.: Song, however, does exemplify a certain kind of mimeticist

act. It seems to me that in reading her (or him) you describe identity as a sliding chain of imitations.

R.C.: Yes, yes, I agree, and I think you have helped articulate that series of imitations extremely well.

M.M.: I really loved your reading.

R.C.: Thank you.

M.M.: Let's go back to the phantasm, to fantasy. In *M. Butterfly* an originary gaze from the Oriental retroactively constitutes the Western subject. This originary gaze – or, as we called it using your terminology, this indifference before silence – has allowed you to break away from the impasse of dichotomic thinking. It becomes clear that this indifference-before-silence that acts retroactively owes much to theory. This originary gaze you begin to theorize at the beginning of your career owes much to theory, in particular in your later work, it seems to me, and it owes something to psychoanalytic theory. But in the early Nineties you had some reservations about what you then termed “difficult” theory, which in your opinion functioned as a masquerade for guarding the dominant culture's equilibrium. Has your position changed since then?

R.C.: Are you referring to a particular text?

M.M.: *Writing Diaspora*. An essay in *Writing Diaspora*. In fact, if I am not mistaken, it is “Writing against the Lures of Diaspora”, I think.

R.C.: I see. I guess my position really has not changed. Beginning with my first book, *Woman and Chinese Modernity*, I have always presented theory as something with which you have to come to terms with. I don't think there is a choice there. But, as is always the case also, coming to terms with theory also means being aware of the implications theory has for the rest of the world. In this regard, I don't think my position has changed at all.

M.M.: Let me ask you, on that note, about psychoanalytic theory.

One of the questions raised here at the School of Criticism and Theory this summer has to do with the use of psychoanalysis by the literary critic. For example, Suzanne Gearhart raised it when she ventured that psychoanalysis can sustain – can be on the side of – a particular cultural politics.<sup>2</sup> By this she meant a politics of de-subjection in the Foucauldian sense. What about your use of psychoanalytic theory?

R.C.: Again, I would refer back to some of the discussions I offered in my first book, *Woman and Chinese Modernity*. There is definitely a place for psychoanalytical theory even in the context of non-Western and postcolonial studies. Here again, I think of the case of modern Chinese literature in which, as I said in that book, there has always been a resistance to this kind of theory, and for a long time readers and critics dealt with characters in novels as though they were real people. Insofar as psychoanalytic theory helps pry open the whole issue of the individual and makes us see subjectivity itself as a problematic, I think it can be a useful means of intervention in non-Western study.

My question now is more with psychoanalytic theory's own investment in lack, in injury, in the whole notion of wounding as the very grounds for subjectivity. In other words, if I do not always use psychoanalytic theory for my own arguments, it is because I feel that psychoanalytical theory itself must be historicized. For instance, Freud's whole enterprise, from which I have learned so much – he will always remain one of my most favorite writers – really depends, I think, on the notion of lack, and everything that follows is constructed by way of a set of binary oppositions vis-a-vis that lack. I'm still interested in psychoanalytical theory today, I'm more interested in the historical conditions that allow certain kinds of questions to be asked rather than others. I'm interested in exploring a question such as: Why is it that a kind of theory which privileges lack becomes so important as a way of thinking about the subject?

M.M.: The subject, China, and Chinese film, I'd like to talk about

<sup>2</sup> Susanne Gearhart, “Freud in Algeria and Paris: Ideology and Affect in the Work of Jean-François Lyotard”, July 4, 2000, and “Toward a New Feminist Theory of Culture?: Repression, Performance, and Civility in the Work of Butler and Balibar”, July 11, 2000.

your book on these questions. This is my longest question. Please, bear with me. *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) has won the James Russell Lowell Prize given by the MLA (Modern Language Association). In 1995?

R.C.: It was published in 1995 but the award was given in 1996.

M.M.: In this amazing book you take up directors like Wu Tiauming (*Old Well* 1987), Chen Kaige (*Yellow Earth* 1984), and Zhang Yimou (*Red Sorghum* 1988; *Judou* 1990; *Raise the Red Lantern* 1991) and argue for a continuity between these contemporary filmmakers and the use of the media by Mao at the time of the Cultural Revolution that was officially launched in 1966.

This continuity resides in what you call "primitive passions", meaning by that the search for "an imaginary foundation" of China's industrialized modernity. At the time of the Cultural Revolution, in the popular images of cheering crowds of Chinese waving their Red Book in a pose of adoration for their leader, you say Chinese people were knowing themselves as film, as individuals interpellated as film. They were therefore knowing themselves both as audience and spectacle, both as subject and object. This interpellation as film, you suggest, is simultaneous with the retroactive effect of film in creating an immemorial past, a past in which the Chinese, rather than shamed and humiliated by others (the Japanese in particular), are proud to be Chinese.

Now, can we move from the historical level to the theoretical one? I'm wondering how the mediatized subjectivity of film (which in your discussion is relevant to Chinese history) can be said to compare with a certain theoretical turn in the West toward 'film'. I understand film now as skin, membrane, as surface. I will explain.

Currently there is a generalized demand for a more extended notion of the political that can bypass, on the one hand, the paralyzing specularity of dichotomies and, on the other hand, the violence lurking in identity attachment such as nationalism, patriotism, etc. The need for an extended notion of the political has led to a rearticulation of the psychic and the social. It seems to me that, in this rearticulation, culture is now being reconceptualized as a

surface that lends itself to the registering of something that can easily slip away even from the most painstaking operations of ideological critique. That is, ideological critique is not useful anymore. We think of culture as a surface where something is registered, which means that it is both felt and unfelt at the same time.

I am thinking of Lyotard's unconscious affect: the forgotten before memory and forgetting. And I mention Lyotard because David Carroll has brought up the topic here at the School of Criticism and Theory this summer.<sup>3</sup> But I'm also thinking about one of your favorite writers, Walter Benjamin, and his wonderful domestic image of the sheets fluttering on the roofs of Marseilles, in one of his short essays. The sheets are surfaces affected by the immemorial action of the wind, so to speak. It's taking me a long time to ask this, but can China be construed, has it been construed, as the immemorial forgotten of Western theory? Has it been taken for the sign of a silent affection felt and unfelt at once by the Western surface?

R.C.: The immediate answer to your question, which I think is beautifully written up and thought up, would be: Yes, that in fact what we discussed a moment earlier has been this silent other surface. It's precisely what you are talking about here: that immemorial forgotten of Western theory. I'd like to add a little bit of a sociological note. In that essay that I referred to earlier, "How (the) Inscrutable Chinese Led to Globalized Theory", I argue that the phrase "the inscrutable Chinese" actually has two possible senses: one is, of course, as in Derrida's case, linguistic: the Chinese language is inscrutable because for most Westerners it is unintelligible; it cannot be read, and it can conveniently become a kind of surface, a kind of image from which to dart back to the profundities of the Western subject and Western logos. But there is a more common, sociological sense to 'the inscrutable Chinese' because the phrase is widely recognized now as a racial stereotype, as a racist way of referring to the Oriental: they are all impenetrable, incomprehensible, etc. To that extent, then, we have high theory and sociology (low culture) coming together in this notion of the other as

<sup>3</sup> David Carroll's six-week seminar was titled "Contested Memory: Problems of Representation in History and Fiction".

a silent image and as a face, as a face that cannot be read, when in fact the 'inscrutability' only reflects the Westerner's non-comprehension. That's why I think this whole notion of Chinese as a face or as a silent language, as an image, is so thought-provoking. These two aspects of the inscrutable Chinese would be precisely what you are calling the construction of the immemorial forgotten in Western theory.

M.M.: Thank you so much for answering that question. Let's stay on surfaces a little bit. Surfaces are important in Zhang Yimou's cinematography. With Chen Keige, Zhang Yimou is perhaps the most popular contemporary Chinese director in the West. In his famous *Raise the Red Lantern* (*Da hong denglong gao gao gua*; China Film Co-Production Corporation, 1991) he makes an exhibitionist display of a 'China' reduced to a seductive surface. Yet, you defend his self-subalternizing and self-exoticizing exhibitionism – the Oriental's Orientalism – as a tactic of defiance. Why?

R.C.: I will not go into how I defend him. People can read that in my text. Let me just say a couple of words about why I do that. Since I am a comparatist I'm always looking at things from both sides of the fence. One reason for defending Zhang is of course the whole discussion of Orientalism, the critique of Orientalism in the West. We are now so accustomed to criticizing Orientalism as 'bad' that we no longer are willing to understand the idea that perhaps Orientalism is not avoidable under certain circumstances. In addition, how do we begin to understand what looks like Orientalism that is being produced by Orientals themselves? It is in an attempt to respond to the latter question that I theorize what Zhang is doing by way of a sort of self-Orientalism.

But on the side of the China critics, readers, Chinese audiences, my point is rather that there is an overwhelming tendency to be invested in depth, in textual profundity, a tendency which comes with a lot of education and a lot of culture. Anything that seems to be about surfaces, such as Zhang's films, is immediately rendered suspect and all accusations of a collaborationist mentality, selling out to the West, pandering to the tastes of the Western audience, all of these very moralistic accusations tend to come out whenever the

issue of surface and profundity is being problematized in Zhang's earlier work. Because of this entrenched tendency in critical reading, I stand by my argument about Zhang's films as acts of defiance. If you understand the sort of contentious context in which his film must function, then his willingness to do what he does can only be seen as an act of confrontation; I'm using the term defiance in the sense of a deliberate confrontation with the forces that tend to be hostile to his innovations.

M.M.: Wouldn't his defiance also lie in the fact that he is aware that he is selling 'China' to a global market increasingly eager to know about China?

R.C.: Yes, I think so. I would like to emphasize that I don't know that Zhang himself consciously intends this kind of defiance.

M.M.: You wrote this in a chapter on him.<sup>4</sup>

R.C.: Because sometimes I listen to him talk in interviews and there seems to be no awareness at all of the theoretical implications of what he is doing. Hence I would trust his film texts rather than completely accept how he himself describes them. The other point, as you suggest, is that I believe that these contemporary Chinese films are really international films. Any attempt to just look for Chineseness or the lack of Chineseness in them would be a misguided attempt.

M.M.: Which takes us back to the importance of problematizing the issue of ethnicity. Last question. In the essay that gives its title to your most recent book, *Ethics After Idealism*, you discuss two critics' loves: Spivak's love for deconstruction and Žižek's love for the void and the world as a constant 'as if'. In these two loves you detect an ethics based less on the correction of error and more on openness. What is your love?

<sup>4</sup> "The Force of Surfaces: Defiance in Zhang Yimou's Films", in *Primitive Passions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 142-172.

R.C.: I have to say that I disagree with your reading of my reading of Žižek and Spivak. You recall that I associate love with Spivak because she uses the word again and again to refer to deconstruction. But Žižek, I'm not sure we need to use the word love on him. I think he was talking more about his own investment in the Kantian sense of resignation, I believe that's what he said, so that, even when you know it will all come to a kind of void, you continue with a kind of enthusiasm as if there is a point to what you are doing.

M.M.: Could you call it attachment to the void?

(Laughter)

R.C.: An attachment to the void would be a contradiction in terms! I don't know how I can respond to this question because of the way you have posed it. I don't know if I could call Žižek's a kind of love. As I grow older my position is, I think, going to become closer to Žižek's than Spivak's. Perhaps. I don't know at this point.

M.M.: If the theoretical edge of your work, and I know critics have commented on this, is your own questioning of a very flat and simplified notion of identity, ethnic identity that is, you also seem to be attached very much to what you do. Actually in your seminar you said, never give up.

R.C.: Yes, I believe that for anyone to do their work seriously that kind of love and attachment ought to be there. I think ultimately that's the difference that distinguishes serious work from not so serious work. For instance, at the School of Criticism and Theory this year we hear certain presentations of theoretical undertakings with which we may not agree, but the serious and dedicated way in which such presentations were made really became itself a moving force, making people understand and acknowledge the passion of the presenter. I would like to think that perhaps my work has a similar kind of directional imperative to it: I try to persuade people of my passion for a certain object of study, of my belief in a certain way of learning.

M.M.: Would it be wrong to say that there is love of theory in your work?

R.C.: No, it would not be.

M.M.: Thank you so much for the interview. We all hope to see you in Italy, to hear you lecture in Italy.

R.C.: Thank you.



A Rey Chow Bibliography

- "Playing on the Air: Recollections from a Hong Kong Childhood", *Polygraph* 11 (1999), 151-165.
- "Nostalgia of the New Wave: Structure in Wong Kar-Wai's *Happy Together*", *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 42 (1999), 31-48.
- Ethics After Idealism: Theory, Culture, Ethnicity, Reading* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998).
- "The Seductions of Homecoming: Place, Authenticity, and Chen Kaige's *Temptress Moon*", *Narrative* 6.1 (1998), 3-17.
- "Larry Feign, Ethnographer of a 'Lifestyle': Political Cartoons from Hong Kong", *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture* 24.2 (Summer 1997), 21-45.
- "Can One Say No to China?", *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 28.1 (Winter 1997), 147-151.
- Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).
- Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).
- "Rereading Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: A Response to the 'Postmodern' Condition", in Thomas Docherty, ed., *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 471-489.
- "Between Colonizers: Hong Kong's Postcolonial Self-Writing in 1990's", *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 2.2 (Fall 1992), 151-170.
- Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading Between West and East* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).
- "The Politics and Pedagogy of Asian Literatures in American Universities", *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 2.3 (Fall 1990), 29-51.
- "Virtuous Transactions: A Reading of Three Stories by Ling Shuhua", *Modern Chinese Literature* 4.1-2 (Spring-Fall 1988), 71-86.

SUMMARIES

The article sets out to explore the author's 'state' of the mind of bringing in the text this takes an interesting and unusual form, as it is not a straightforward account with a plotline, drawing on the postcolonial theory of the text and the imaginary, as well as on the author's concept of 'postcolonial' the article reads the scene of belonging and the 'culture' of 'China' of the text as a 'postcolonial' and 'postcolonial' and 'postcolonial'...

Mena Mitrano  
"England, Their England?"  
Mena Mitrano, *Journal of American Studies* 37 (2003)

In the wake of the 1990s, an alternative to the dominant view of the world as a series of unproblematic and unproblematic of unproblematic. The concept of 'Englishness' and specifically the idea of 'Englishness' plays a central role in the cultural debate and leads to its rethinking, particularly after the Second World War with the dismantling of Empire. In the literary and political writings of the 1970s it is already possible to trace several points which anticipate the concepts and, indeed, the actuality of a general and progressive reorganization of the social, cultural, political and cultural spheres of 'Englishness'. Thus the concept of 'Englishness' finally leads to the idea of 'postcolonial' at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. These last two decades have seen the development of a new 'postcolonial' theory which has led to the 'postcolonial' and 'postcolonial' of 'English'.

Silvana Carotenuto  
**Here and Now: the 'Leprosy of Nationhood'  
in Sonia Sanchez's Poetics**

In this article Silvana Carotenuto analyses Sonia Sanchez's recent poetry, reading her literalization of 'birthright' in terms of blood and soil (*jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*). The fluidity of blood and the common belonging to the country are the two material metaphors which circulate and inscribe elements of survival and racial awareness, on this earth and in this difficult time. Through the affective strength of her political poetry, Sanchez's re-inscribing of the American medical discourse of black inferiority is able to invert and subvert the racist configurations of the modern dialectics of death, and the abstract metaphysics of all notions of 'human right'.

Anna Maria Cimitile  
**Nation, Belonging and Méconnaissance:  
Pauline Melville's *The Migration of Ghosts***

Through an analysis of the short story by Pauline Melville *The Migrations of Ghosts* (1998), the article sets out to explore the contemporary 'state' of the sense of belonging. In the text this takes an interesting and unusual form, as it comes out of unexpected encounters with ghostliness. Drawing on the psychoanalytic notions of fantasy and the imaginary, as well as on the Lacanian concept of *méconnaissance*, the article reads the sense of belonging and the 'nations' it creates as 'detours' of sense – as signification, as produced in language – and non-concrete, phantasmatic entities.

Mario Faraone  
**"England, Their England":  
Ideas of Englishness in Some Political Writings of the 1930s**

In the whole of Europe, but above all in England, the 1930s constitute a key decade for a better understanding of some of the main themes of modernity. The concept of nationality, and specifically the idea of 'Englishness', plays a major role in the cultural debate and leads to its rethinking, particularly after the Second World War with the dismantling of Empire. In the literary and political writings of the 1930s it is already possible to trace several paths which allude to the necessity and, indeed, ineluctability of a general and progressive rearrangement of the social, economic, political and cultural nature of 'Englishness'. Here the concept of 'Englishness' rapidly tends to flow into the idea of nationalism on the one side, and patriotism on the other. Those intellectuals who remained to fight the threat of totalitarianism share with those who decide to go 'abroad' the awareness of a common 'state of grace' of being 'English'.

Sara Marinelli  
**Impossible Origins and Adopted Selves:  
 Traces of Identity in Jackie Kay's Writing**

The reading of some of Jackie Kay's writings proposed here follows the gradual passage from a culturally divided self in search of unity to the awareness of its hybridity. It also aims at showing how this is a process that, symptomatically, evokes a similar journey within Scottish culture. Stemming from the experience of adoption, here analysed as a metaphor for colonial relations and as a route to an imaginary/imagined self, the search for mothers and fathers reveals how origins can only be a vague trace. The stories the writer narrates, those of being black/Scottish/lesbian and of a living at the frontier between man and woman, come to represent those borderline figures in the territory of nation, gender, sexuality, who, previously dwelling on the margins, now come to inhabit the insides of the nation space and interrogate it.

Mena Mitrano  
**Che cos'è la teoria**

This essay argues for the historical, geographical, and rhetorical specificity of the much debated phenomenon of theory. Drawing on psychoanalytic discourse, Sedgwick suggests that theory is an attempt to represent differences internal to the United States while also protecting them from the anxiety of reductiveness and de-intellectualization to which anything 'American' is inevitably exposed, especially in Europe.

Floriana Perna  
**Englishness in Australia:  
 The Idea of National Identity in Peter Carey's Novels**

This article analyses the representation of English and Australian national identity in Carey's historical novels. The construction and deconstruction of Englishness and Australianness leads to a problematic question: is it desirable to erase the notion of national identity in the contemporary postcolonial world?

Jane Wilkinson  
**The Sickly Weal: Anglo-Scottish DissemiNations in *Macbeth***

*Macbeth* restages recent historiographical reconstructions of imaginings and questionings of the collective self in eleventh-century Scotland, construing them in a future preterite temporality as a pre-text to contemporary issues. *Macbeth's* reign can be taken either as the beginning of both the progression of the Stuart dynasty and the union or re-union of England and Scotland in the 'Empire' of Great Britain, or as an

archaic past that threatens uncannily to re-emerge *within* the civilized British present. In the disjunctive, displaced present of Shakespeare's Scotland, traditional definitions, mappings and genealogies of the nation have become inadequate. This essay analyses the way *Macbeth's* reworking of Holinshed intersects with contemporary practices and discourses of kingship and nationhood. The play's shifting, ambivalently self-regenerating images of sickness and health, maternity and death, wholeness and fragmentation, fixity and dispersal are seen as an example of the 'dissemi-Nation' theorized by Homi Bhabha.

Demetrio S. Yocum  
**In(ter)dependence: The Poetic Revolution of Seamus  
 Heaney's Troubled Poetry**

This paper explores the tragic beauty, the tormented sense of rootedness and of being wedded to the Irish land which resonates throughout the poetic writing of the internationally acclaimed Northern Irish writer Seamus Heaney. Starting from the reading of one of his most popular poems "Act of Union", in which the poet traces back to the genealogical intensity of the violence in Northern Ireland's historical past, the reader will be taken to *Station Island*, the poem in which Heaney evokes a time in the future when poetry and history rhyme, and peace becomes a possible reality.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Silvana Carotenuto** is Associate Professor of English Literature at the Istituto Universitario Orientale. Her publications include *Ellissi di senso: L' "altro" corpo della tragedia shakesperiana* (Bulzoni: 2000) and various essays and articles on deconstruction and *écriture féminine*. Her translation of Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* is forthcoming.

**Anna Maria Cimitile** holds an MA and a PhD in Critical and Cultural Theory, both pursued at Cardiff University. She has published on postmodern fiction and postcolonial theory and is author of *Shakespearean Orders: Language, Representation and Epistemic Subversions* (2000). She is currently working on spectral figurations of postmodernity.

**Mario Faraone** holds a PhD in Literatures in English (University of Rome "La Sapienza" - IUO, Naples). He has published *Un Uomo Solo*, a study on Christopher Isherwood's novels. Amongst his other publications are studies on Buddhist and Hindu influences on T. S. Eliot's writings and Giorgio Manganelli's re-writing of Shakespeare's *Othello*. He is at present teaching at the University of Cassino.

**Sara Marinelli** is completing her PhD in "Literatures in English" at the Istituto Universitario Orientale in Naples and the University of Rome "La Sapienza". She has published essays on contemporary Scottish Women's fiction and on post-colonial studies.

**Mena Mitrano** has a PhD in English from Rutgers University. She has published in *The Explicator*, *Modern Language Studies*, *College Literature*, and *Journal x*. She is currently at work on a project tentatively titled *Visitations: Gertrude Stein and the Act of Writing* for a PhD in "Literatures in English" at the University of Rome "La Sapienza" - IUO, Naples.

**Floriana Perna** completed a PhD in "Literatures in English" at the University "La Sapienza" - IUO, Naples with a doctoral dissertation on Peter Carey. She has written articles about T. S. Eliot, Bruce Chatwin, Nicolas Abraham, Mahasweta Devi, Anita Desai and contemporary Australian literature. Her book *Peter Carey's Australia* is forthcoming.

**Jane Wilkinson** is Professor of English Literature at the IUO, where she also teaches Postcolonial Literatures in English. The author of *Remembering "The Tempest"* (1999); *Talking with African Writers* (1992); *Orpheus in Africa* (1990) and a history of African Literature in English (1995), as well as articles on English and postcolonial literatures, she is currently working on twentieth-century rewritings of Shakespeare.

**Demetrio S. Yocum** is an English language assistant at the Istituto Universitario Orientale, Naples. He holds a doctorate from University of Rome "La Sapienza" and the IUO, Naples. He has published on contemporary literatures in English.

## STYLESHEET

Contributions should preferably be in English.

Articles should be double-spaced, with wide margins and should normally be between 5.000 and 7.000 words.

Authors should submit two copies of their paper, with their name and address on a different page. A summary of the article (no more than 15 lines) with a brief description of the authors' teaching-research positions and principal publications should be enclosed. Manuscripts will not be returned, whether published or unpublished. The editorial board can take no responsibility for any manuscript submitted to *Anglistica*.

Submission of work to *Anglistica* will be taken to imply that it is original, unpublished work. Once the article is accepted, authors will be asked to send a copy on a 3.5" floppy disk (Word 5.1 for Macintosh, or Word for Windows) with a paper copy of their contribution.

Copyright rests with *Anglistica*, though republication is permissible with credit to *Anglistica*.

### Formal and typographic conventions

Use italics for foreign words, with the exception of words and phrases now naturalized (e.g. *tour de force*).

Quotations longer than three lines should be set off from the main text, indented ten spaces and not enclosed within inverted commas. Quotations of words and phrases within the main text should be in double inverted commas; quotations within such quotations should be in single inverted commas. Single inverted commas should be used for 'scare quotes' (which should however be kept to the minimum).

Omissions within a quoted sentence or fragment of a sentence should be indicated by three ellipsis dots not enclosed in parentheses. Omissions between sentences should be indicated by four dots.

**Notes.** Footnotes should be placed at the end of the typescript under the heading NOTES. Numerals used for note reference numbers in the text should follow any punctuation marks except for the dash.

Where parentheses are present, numbers should be placed outside closing parenthesis. Where possible, note numbers should come at the end of a sentence or clause.

Presentation of notes should be as follows:

Articles in periodicals, essays or chapters in books should be in double inverted commas.

Titles of books and periodicals should be in italics. Titles of works appearing in italicized titles should also be given in italics and set off with quotation marks.

Works by more than three authors should be indicated with the full name of the first author given in the title page followed by "et al." without intervening punctuation. Where no author is indicated, the name of the editor takes the place of the author and is followed by "ed./eds.", preceded by a comma. Translators' names should be given

after the title of the work and preceded by comma and "trans."  
Place, publisher and year are enclosed within parenthesis, with a colon (and word space) separating place and publisher and a comma (and word space) separating publisher and year.

Periodicals should be followed by the vol. number and/or issue number, with the month/season and year of publication in brackets. The name of a periodical containing an article should follow the title of the article; that of a book containing an article or essay should be preceded by "in".

After the first, full reference to a source, subsequent references should consist in the author's last name (and initials if two or more authors with the same last name are cited), followed by a short title (key word or words from the main title) and page number. When successive references are made to a single work, without intervention of a reference to a different work, all but the first, full reference may be shortened by the use of "ibid." Frequently cited references may be included in the text by an abbreviation (in parentheses, followed by page number). Full title publication details and indication in parentheses of the abbreviation to be used for it thereafter must be supplied in a note at the first mention.

**Examples:**

Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986), 19.

Ibid.

Ibid., 23.

Jean Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visible", in Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath, eds., *The Cinematic Apparatus* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

Rose, *Sexuality*, 25.

Galbraith Miller Crump, *The Mystical Design of "Paradise Lost"* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1975).

Emile Benveniste, "La nature des pronoms", in *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

Perry Anderson, "Components of the National Culture", *New Left Review* 50 (July-August 1968), 44.

John Hollander, *Melodious Guile. Fictive Pattern in Poetic Language* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 73 (hereafter cited as MG).

P. D. Brett, S. W. Johnson and C. R. T. Bach, *Mastering String Quartets* (San Francisco: Amati Press, 1989), 32.

Maria Stella, "Il poeta e la lettura del cuore", in *La figlia che piange: saggi su poesia e metapoesia*, a cura di Agostino Lombardo (Roma: Bulzoni, 1995), 169-180.