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EDITORIAL

Santiago Sierra's latest exhibition at the Lisson Gallery in London (July-August 2004) was on as we went into print with this issue of *Anglistica*. The minimalist title of his work announces its crudeness and is already a statement about the subject matter: *Polyurethane Sprayed on the Backs of Ten Workers*. Sierra hired 10 Iraqis from the west London Iraqi community for his work. After arranging the seven women and three men in a line so that they all faced a grey wall, he covered them in plastic sheeting, then had their backs sprayed with solidifying polyurethane, insulating them in what, once hardened, became yet another wall. In the video shot during the action, the ten persons slowly emerge from the imprisoning material, but only after a few minutes of total stillness: then, after breaking the polyurethane that has entrapped them and leaving the hardened pieces on the floor, they go away. The video of the sequence was on display in the exhibition.

Torture, and the recent disclosures on Abu Ghraib jail and Guantánamo, come to mind; and more than that. A review in the *Guardian* suggests that "[t]hey make you think of monks, of women wearing the burka and the chador. The suits remind us of chemical attacks and of squads cleaning beaches after oil spills".[1] Covering as hiding, hiding bodies as well as the truth – about wars, prisons and the treatment of prisoners – is what Sierra's work tacitly refers to in its rich variety of provocative suggestions. Above all, in the 'remains' accumulated on the floor of the gallery and which are also part of Sierra's artwork, from the black plastics hoods to the polyurethane pieces, there is the testimony that at the core of the present violence, at the centre of all the discourses made to legitimise it and gain consent, where there were bodies, is a void; as the reviewer in the *Guardian* comments, "[e]mptiness is at the heart of it".[2]

[1] Adrian Searle, "Buried Alive", *The Guardian*, Tuesday July 13, 2004.
[2] Ibid.

In our Dialogue/Debate/Dissent opening section, Jacqueline Rose delves into a similar void in her article "The Body of Evil". This time the vacuum is produced in language: Rose's is a reflection on the emergence of "evil" in the news in the year after 9/11, and on the term's functioning in the same way as a linguistic "shifter". She argues for "the radical instability, or vacuity, of evil", something, she adds, that has the ideological effect of making history disappear: for those who claim that "evil" is at work in contemporary violent struggles of power the use of the term wipes out any considerations on "the great and uneven distribution of the world's resources". Rose considers definitions of "evil" that specifically counter the Arendtian definition of its "banality" as they appear in, among others, the testimonies of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*.

This miscellany deals with literatures in English. The articles engage with work from Ireland (W. B. Yeats), the U.S. (Sarah Orne Jewett), India, Australia (Mudrooroo). The definition "in English" pre-empties the reading practice of what could be termed as the 'cultural authenticity hunt', the craze for 'pure fruits'. Some of the essays specifically address issues that are inherent to a 'postcolonial condition' proper to the literatures. As there is no national culture or local knowledge that has not come out of cultural mobility, the term – and the language – "English" brings together the texts dealt with here and bears testimony to the encounters (mainly colonial) that have given rise to the cultures and literatures to which those texts belong. English outside its English boundaries, in an(other) state and 'beside itself' as it were, becomes something else, the language of redefinitions, of productive questioning ad re-mapping, of postcolonial awareness.

There is a 'lisping' comment on English history that I would like to quote: "The trouble with the Engenglish is that their hiss hiss history happened overseas, so they dodo don't know what it means".[3] This is Sisodia's remark in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and the perceptive consideration comes in broken English. The interrupted speech works in excess of English: it breaks, repeats, redoubles the

[3] Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (Dover, Delaware: The Consortium, 1988), 343.

language; in reading the brief statement we, like the English with their history, equally "don't know what it means".

In dialogic relation to Rushdie's character's statement I place a remark that comes from another text exploring intercultural zones, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. In conversation with Samad, one of the protagonists in the novel, his work-mate Shiva states: "'I been out with a lot of white birds, Samad. A lot.... But never an English girl. Never works. Never.'" And being asked why he thinks so, Shiva replies: "'Too much history,' ... 'Too much bloody history.'"[4] On the one hand, Rushdie states a break between the English and their history as this happened exclusively in another place. On the other, complementary to the first statement, is Smith's reporting of the idea that, precisely because of the fact that their history travelled abroad, relations are bound to go wrong. Today, the auspicable aim is that, as literary critics, in our work with and on literature we also get closer to that "overseas" space – i.e. to a comprehension of cultural encounters, and even more to an understanding of why some encounters have been missed or costructed as such (as is the case in the quotations above).

Statements like those by Sisodia or Samad permeate definitions of cultural specificity and cultural hybridity alike. To appreciate them and to get closer to the "overseas" where culture happens but goes somehow unrecorded does not mean to forget about or cross "borders" unheedingly; the knowledge of the local is important and cannot be bypassed. But this should not leave us with a criticism that seeks for and is possible only as local knowledge (the knowledge that comes from a position and place within the field of investigation). Literary criticism is a matter of positionality that involves the critic's 'locality' as well as the cultural space of the text. If the two are not one and the same this does not mean a lack of understanding (as Rushdie's character suggests) nor an impossibility of relation (as Smith's character claims).

The ear of the critic alert to the differences which the "*in*" of "literatures in English" opens up also means an openness to what Edward Said, rephrasing a statement by Ngugi wa Thiongo and in

[4] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Penguin, 2000), 146.

relation to a reflection on the English language, has referred to as "a critical use of the language to permit a decolonizing of the mind".[5] English outside Great Britain, in our case from Ireland (Yeats) to the U.S. (Orne Jewett) to India (contemporary women writers) and Australia (Mudrooroo), tells of its story outside the English borders: from the "postcolonial" Irish poetry of Yeats in Jefferson Holdridge's article to the Indian women writers analysed by Raffaele Celiento, from Sarah Orne Jewett's nineteenth-century American prose examined by Ludovico Isoldo to the Australian and Aboriginal writing of Mudrooroo in Katherine Russo's analysis.

More specifically about the articles brought together here: Caroline Rooney seeks other possible, interstitial definitions of postcoloniality, taking issues with Peter Hallward's recent theorization of "the singular" and "the specific", and engaging two texts, "Resident Alien" by Gayatri Spivak and "My Algeriance" by Hélène Cixous, where she reads "logics of individuation" which, she argues, are more fruitful for a conceptualisation of the postcolonial. Arts are also taken into account: the cultural issue of the representation of a monstrous feminine in cinema is addressed in Susanna Poole's reading of James Cameron's iconic *Alien*.

In the spirit of our journal, literary criticism and theory mingle in the articles present in this collection. The complexity of language in Tom Stoppard's revision of Shakespeare, read alongside Wittgenstein's language games, is the topic of Manuela Coppola's article. Other times a *rigour* imposes itself as "structuring structure" of the reading, as is the case in Ludovico Isoldo's narratological analysis of Sarah Orne Jewett's *A White Heron*.

Should I name one motive running through some of the essays, I would identify it as that of "the colony", in its wider sense. Although not always explicitly addressed as a topic in the articles, "the colony" and its bearings on language and writing enter the discussions of Yeats's poetry (here read as an example of postcolonial critique by Holdridge) and Mudrooroo's fiction (whose "multidimensional re-sighting, re-siting and re-citing" become modalities of literary production and cultural identification in Russo's analysis – a reading

[5] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994 [1993]), 370.

that is besides corroborated by her review essay of recent criticism on the work of the black Australian writer). Celiento looks to contemporary Indian women writers and to the way specific topics and motives (e.g. "the room of her own" and "women and writing") recur and are redefined in the texts he takes into account: here, the 'colony' is indeed that which 'writes back'.

Stephen Greenblatt, who writes about language as he considers literature, states:

> We need to understand colonization, exile, emigration, wandering, contamination, and unexpected consequences, along with the fierce compulsions of greed, longing, and restlessness, for it is these disruptive forces, not a rooted sense of cultural legitimacy, that principally shape the history and diffusion of languages. Language is the slipperiest of human creations; like its speakers, it does not respect borders, and, like the imagination, it cannot ultimately be predicted or controlled.[6]

Literature is the space and instrument of alterity.[7] Literary criticism, postcolonial or non, cannot but delve into it.

Anna Maria Cimitile

[6] Stephen Greenblatt, "Racial Memory and Literary History", *PMLA* 116.1 (January 2001), 62.

[7] See Gayatri C. Spivak, "Attraversare i confini", in *Morte di una disciplina* (Roma: Meltemi, 2003).

Santiago Sierra

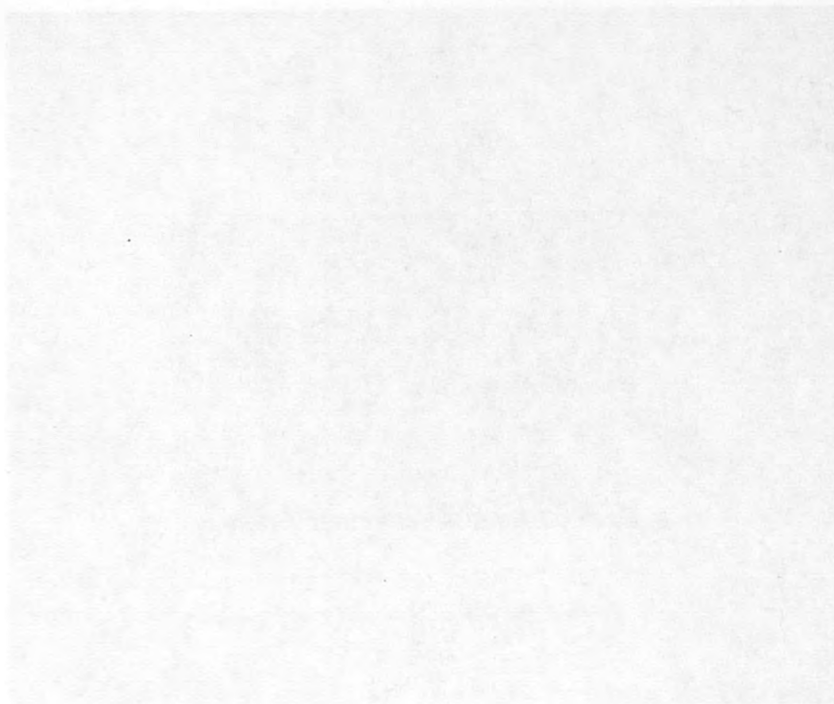
Polyurethane sprayed on the backs of 10 workers

Lisson Gallery, London, U.K. July 2004

10 immigrant Iraqi workers were hired for this action. They were protected with chemically resistant clothing and a thick sheet of plastic, then they were placed in various positions and sprayed on the back with polyurethane until large formations of this material had been obtained. All of the elements employed in the action were left in the space.

COURTESY LISSON GALLERY AND THE ARTIST

DIALOGUE/DEBATE/ DISSENT



Jacqueline Rose

The Body of Evil

"The wind of faith is blowing to remove evil from the peninsula." Osama Bin Laden, statement broadcast on al-Jazeera television, September 2001

"Out of the shadows of this evil should emerge lasting good." Tony Blair, Labour Party Conference, 2 October 2001

"The way of the wicked will be defeated, those who profess evil will not prosper." Ariel Sharon, cited *Sunday Times*, 10 March, 2002

Evil, as these quotes suggest, is a moveable feast. It has the strange characteristic of being at once an absolute and something far closer to what linguistics calls a "shifter". Pronouns, as we know, famously the pronoun "I", are purely indexical signs which refer only to the moment they are spoken. They only work for any one of us because they can be appropriated by everyone else. Hence "shifter". Their meaning resides in their capacity to move. There is of course something deeply unsettling about this – after all the pronoun "I" is the word in which we invest our most fundamental sense of self. Evil has something of the same aura. When people use the word "evil", it is very unusual to question whether they in fact know what they are talking about. And yet, in the above quotes, "evil" refers alternately to the United States, to Al-Qaida, and to suicide bombers in

Israel/Palestine. Read them out without identifying the sources, as I did at a debate organised by the *London Review of Books* in May 2002: "The War on Terror – is there an alternative?", and people are hard pressed to say, not only who is being referred to as evil, but more interestingly who is *speaking*. People using the term "evil" all sound the same.

In considering evil, we should perhaps start by noticing this contradiction. Surest of terms, invariably invoked with the most passionate if at times desperate conviction, evil also spins on its axis, loses its way. It behaves like that part of language which fatally, if invisibly, undermines the certainty of our speech. Evil is also mobile in another sense. Like all words for "immediately" which gradually degrade into meaning something like "in a while", "evil" has a remarkable capacity for extending and diluting itself. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists as the meanings for "evil": "wickedness, moral depravity, sin", then "whatever is censurable, painful, malicious or disastrous", and finally "any particular thing that is physically or morally harmful". Provided it is unwelcome, evil can be *any particular thing*. A void opens waiting to be filled. During his first election campaign (so before September 11), Bush commented on the enemies of America: "We're not so sure who they are, but we know they're there". More recently, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld explained the Pentagon's shift from a "threat-based strategy" to an offensive "capabilities-based approach" in terms of the need "to defend our nation against the unknown" (as Frances Fitzgerald puts it: "[this] means simply that the Pentagon can ask for whatever it wants without having to justify its requests by the existence of even a potential enemy").[1] In this essay, I want to pursue the radical instability, or vacuity, of evil – as distinct from the "banality of evil" – to take and remake Hannah Arendt's famous phrase.

Since September 11, 2001 evil, as one might say, is in the air. In an interview I conducted with Noam Chomsky for a television film on Israel, he described how Turkey, Israel and the United States are referred to in the Egyptian press as the "axis of evil": "plenty of evil", he continued, "in this case a real axis, not an invented one". Similarly,

[1] All quotes from Martin Kettle, *The Guardian*, 12 September 2002.

as Russian formalist Boris Tomachevsky pointed out in 1925, new literary schools, opposing an older aesthetic, nearly always proclaim themselves, one way or another, more "realistic" or attuned to reality than the one that went before. The issue here is not who has the greater right to make the claim, but the contested nature of its grounds. Sometimes vocally, more often silently, there is an argument going on whenever "evil" is proclaimed. Chomsky is in fact making a very simple point. He is suggesting that those who brandish the epithet "evil" post September 11, notably Bush in his "axis of evil" speech, ignore the uneven distribution of power (it was not, Bush has repeatedly insisted, America's power that was the target but her freedom). Choosy and yet indiscriminating, evil becomes the supreme and unjust equaliser between men. When you accuse someone of evil, history disappears. In the great and uneven distribution of the world's resources, it becomes strictly irrelevant where or who they are.

In the Report of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Commissioners point to a striking disparity – the "magnitude gap" – between the perception of violations of human rights under apartheid by the victims and by the perpetrators of the crime.[2] For the victims, such action either exceeds the range of the comprehensible, enters a realm of mystery, or it is "deliberately malicious", "sadistic", "an end in itself" (Gillian Slovo's account of the amnesty hearings of the man responsible for her mother's death was entitled by the *Guardian*, "Evil has a Human Face").[3] Either way, the act is beyond the pale; it fails to enter a world in which anyone would choose to recognise him or herself. For the perpetrators the same act is the rational consequence of historic necessity. South Africa defending itself by all available means from a Communist threat: as Archbishop Desmond Tutu puts it in his introduction, "The supporters of the previous regime have been at great pains to insist that the reason they did many of the unsavoury things that have since come to light was largely because they were fighting an evil and predatory Communism" (1, 13). The disparity is eloquent of the way

[2] *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, 5 volumes (London: Macmillan, 1999). (hereafter cited parenthetically in text).

[3] Gillian Slovo, 'Evil has a human face', *Guardian*, 31 October 1998.

evil "shifts" in another sense – more "shifty" as one might say. "I" am never evil; only "you" are. In this respect the term "evil" perversely mimics the first person pronoun in reverse. No one wants to wear it; unlike the "I" which each human subject spends a large part of their life rushing – however ruthlessly – to claim. But it may be too that the South African experience can help us understand one of the reasons why Arendt's "banality of evil" was such a controversial phrase. If evil, it must be total. No part of the personality must escape. "Evil", states Elizabeth Costello in J. M. Coetzee's essay/short story on this topic which will be the focus of much of this essay, "would not be true evil if it can be exited and entered at will".[4] Evil accepts no qualifiers. You can't do evil partly (it is never something you 'sort of' do). Reduce the force of evil one iota, and the perpetrator of atrocity has won the argument. His actions just might be reasoned, necessary. Or, simple, banal, they make up the colours of the day. For the victims, the Commissioners comment, the experience was sheer "horror"; for the perpetrators, more often, "a very small thing". "Perpetrators", they continue drily, "tend to have less emotions about their acts" (5, 271-72).

What seems to be at stake then is the issue of how much, or rather how little, it is permissible to feel. The worst outrage is for someone to have committed an atrocity without the requisite affect. In Gillian Slovo's memoir *Every Secret Thing*, she describes her encounter with the man who organised the murder of her mother as a moment of mutual dissociation: "Our meeting", she writes, "had been an exercise in dissociation from which I'd emerged in a stupor that had sent me straight into a dreamless afternoon sleep" (267). Craig Williamson is incapable – syntactically incapable – of recognising what he has done. Read the pronouns in this sentence when Slovo presses whether Ruth's death weighed on him:

[4] Coetzee's essays in the voice of Elizabeth Costello have now been published as *Elizabeth Costello – Eight Lessons* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2003), hereafter cited parenthetically in text. The original text has been slightly modified in the published version in which this quotation no longer appears.

> 'Yeah,' he said grudgingly, 'I said that you'll never get rid of. You can wish it or regret it or do as much as you like but you can't change it. What's done is done and if you try to analyse why it was done and how it was done and what the strategy and belief behind it was … it's difficult to believe that it could have been done but it was.' (268)

The "I" hardly figures here, nor indeed the crime "*that* you'll never get rid of". I spend sometime arguing with my students on a course I teach on South African writing, whether that last sentence "it's difficult to believe that it could have been done but it was" indicates a subject struggling to enter his statement, acknowledging that he is faced with something too dreadful to be thought, or is merely the voice, in Slovo's own words, of "a huge mountain of a man, all oil, and lies, and half-excuses" (266).

We could perhaps ask, then, whether it is the action that is the worst evil or the perpetrator's refusal to recognise the horror, to identify psychically with his victim, or in simpler language, to "connect". One of the wagers of South Africa's Truth Commission was to make victims and perpetrators go the distance and recognise each other across what the Commissioners themselves describe as an almost insurmountable abyss. In the trial of Ruth Ellis who murdered her lover in 1950s Britain (she was the last person to hang in this country) or in the response to social worker Marietta Higgs who, as some of you may remember, had withdrawn from their homes scores of children she suspected of being victims of abuse in midlands Britain in the 1980s, the worst outrage was the lack of emotion both women displayed. Higgs was of course wresting children from a crime many would classify as "evil", Ellis was technically on the other side. And yet the screaming outrage against these two women, partly one suspects because they were women, put something graphic on display. Anyone brushed with "evil" must, for *us* to survive *their* encounter, lose or appear to lose control of their minds. "Evil" is unbearable or it is nothing. Like death, it is something from which you don't return.

Two years ago I attended a conference organised by the Nexus institute in Tilburg entitled "Evil", part 2 of a series called "The Quest for Life". J. M. Coetzee accepted the invitation on condition that he could deliver his paper in fictional form. Returning to the format of

his Tanner Lectures of 1998, published as *The Lives of Animals*, now republished as *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee chose to use the occasion to revive the character of Elizabeth Costello, feminist, vegetarian and campaigner who chooses to give a prestigious series of literary lectures on the somewhat unexpected topic of animal slaughter (she was invited as the famous author of a 1969 novel about Molly Bloom, the wife of Leopold Bloom "nowadays spoken of in the same breath as *The Golden Notebook* and *The Story of Christa T* as path-breaking feminist"). In this instance she has been invited to Amsterdam to address a Conference on evil. Once again Coetzee doubles his character with his own position as speaker (although the immediacy of this is lost in the published version of the text). The story turns on a crisis. Costello has come to speak about a book – Paul West's *The Very Rich Hours of Count von Stauffenberg* – a book whose depiction of evil has deeply repelled her and led her to question the ethical limits of the writer's craft and task, only to discover that Paul West is attending the Conference. For Costello, the issue is precisely how or where to place evil in her mind. Paul West's *The Very Rich Hours of Count von Stauffenberg* tells the story of Hitler and his would-be assassins in the Wehrmacht, above all of their execution which is described in a physical and mental detail which she finds obscene. West goes too far into a realm where she now feels, as a result of the effect on her of reading this book, writers perhaps should not tread: "in representing the workings of evil, the writer may *unwittingly* make evil seem attractive and thereby do more harm than good" (164, that "unwittingly", in italics in the text, is a concession – Costello knows by now that West is in the audience). The story is wonderfully self-defeating, because its central proposition will only work if we enact in relationship to Elizabeth the very form of fictional identification she is now cautioning against. That is to say, it only works if we find ourselves, without let or inhibition, entering Elizabeth's own mind. A mind which includes, not just the horror of reading the book and the ethical protest it provokes on her behalf, but also the memory – reluctant but overwhelming – of a scene of sexual violence to which she was subjected as a young girl. As well as, in perhaps the most powerful moment of the essay, an instant where, in a shocking identification, Elizabeth looks at her own naked body and imagines herself as one of those women victims of the Nazis "at the

lip of the trench into which they would, in the next minute, the next second, tumble, dead or dying with a bullet to the brain" (178). In an ironical twist which makes her objections more not less poignant, it is Elizabeth, not Paul West, who – we might say – does the best line in forced identifications, throwing the reader into the arms of evil, or into the pit.

The point is that her critique of the power of writing only works because of the power of her own; because she does to the reader – through the strength of her ability to convey her experience – exactly what she objects to having had done to her by Paul West's book. Of course, being in a story by Coetzee, she is only too aware of this. Costello argues with herself: "Yet she is a writer too. She does the same kind of thing, or used to" (that "used to" is sleight of hand since Costello – Coetzee as writer – is doing it to the reader *now*) (179). Writing forces unexpected, often unwelcome identifications, or it does nothing. Coetzee knows well that scenes like the one where Elizabeth was assaulted, however repugnant, will be compelling to the reader. Designed to shock, they make the reader intimate with fear. In this case there is an added pull because the violence is conveyed as an almost reluctant memory, the narrator's private musings on an event which she has never communicated before. We are the hidden, privileged, party to a confession of something so devastating it has never, until now, made the passage into words. Nineteen years old, she has just been picked up by a docker and goes back to his room:

> 'I'm sorry,' she said, 'I'm really sorry, can we stop.' But Tim or Tom wouldn't listen. When she resisted, he tried to force her. For a long time, in silence, panting, she fought him off, pushing and scratching. To begin with he took it for a game. Then he got tired of that, or his desire tired, turned to something else, and he began to hit her seriously. He lifted her off the bed, punched her breasts, punched her in the belly, hit her a terrible blow with his elbow to her face. When he was bored with hitting her he tore up her clothes and tried to set fire to them in the waste paper basket. (165)

And so on… "It was", Costello comments, "her first brush with evil" (165). She is convinced that he liked hurting her more than he

would have liked sex. "By fighting him off, she had created an opening for the evil in him to emerge" (165). I should perhaps add – as it will be relevant to the discussion later – that while I am happy (although "happy" is not the right word) to reproduce these lines here, I found it very difficult and then impossible to read them out at the annual Conference of the Council for College and University English in Oxford and then at the Conference honouring Gillian Beer on her retirement in Cambridge last year (it gets worse).

It would, I think, be fair to describe such a moment as obscene (in the sense of what it wants to be). In fact Costello saves this epithet for the description of the bodies of the plotters on the point of execution, above all for the way the executioner humiliates and terrifies them, taunting them with the physical details of what is to come. Can there really, she asks, have been witnesses who wrote this down in such detail? Or is it West's fantasy – his passionate identification with the victims, but no less, of necessity if he is to render the scene faithfully, with the executioner – "the butcher with last week's blood caked under his fingernails" – whom he brings so intensely to life? ("terrible that such a man should have existed, even more terrible that he should be hauled out of the grave when we thought he was safely dead"; 158, 168). This is, for Costello, "obscene". Although it is not clear in the following sentence whether it is the grim abjection of the plotters or the no less grim perversity of the executioner which oversteps the bounds: "*Obscene*. That is the word, a word of contested etymology that she must hold on to. She chooses to believe that *obscene* means off-stage. To save our humanity, certain things that we may want to see (*may want to see because we are human!*) must remain for ever off-stage" (168-69; emphasis original). To rephrase: Obscenity must remain off-stage because, as humans, we want to see it so much. This, I would like to suggest to you, comes very close to making evil, if not the essence of writing, then no more than an exaggerated, or a kind of worse-case embodiment, of what compels us to read. Like evil, writing is enticing: "He made her read, excited her to read" (179). We want to get inside other people's skins even if they are about to be fleeced alive. In the throes of identification – with victim *or* executioner – there is no limit to how far people are willing to go. What Costello seems to be objecting to is not evil so much, as its *temptation*: "she had gone on reading, excited despite herself" (178).

The idea of evil as tempting has of course a long history (from the beginning, as one might say). One of the ways of thinking about the horrors of the last century – I leave aside for the moment those unfolding today – is as a transmutation in the age-old connection between these two terms. "Evil in the Third Reich", writes Hannah Arendt in her famous *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* of 1963, "had lost the character by which most people recognise it – the quality of temptation"[5] (she is of course writing about the same history as West's book). In civilised countries, she continues, the law assumes that the voice of conscience instructs its citizens: "Thou shalt not kill": "even though man's natural desires and inclinations may at times be murderous". But under Hitler, when the law changes sides, temptation follows suit: "Many Germans and many Nazis, probably an overwhelming majority of them must have been tempted *not* to murder, *not* to rob, *not* to let their neighbours go off to their doom … and not to become accomplices in all these crimes by benefiting from them, but, God knows, they had learned how to resist temptation" (471). Imagine then a situation where the law instructs you to commit acts you would barely entertain in your wildest dreams. In Freudian terms, the law is always a problem because our psychic enforcer, the superego, draws its energy from the unconscious it is meant to tame; which is why the superego's edicts often seem fierce or cruel. Laced with perversion. But this is something else. Now the superego is instructing you to let the most terrifying components of your own unconscious go stalking. Faced with such an edict, the voice of conscience pales, becomes a ghost of its former self. Tempting, but impotent. Like the memory of someone you might once have been. But it would be wrong to think that this is anarchy, a release into freedom, no holds barred. The strength of Arendt's analysis is that she recognises that there is something deadly in the law. Hence her repeated emphasis on the "reason of state" and its inherent violence: "the rule of law, although designed to eliminate violence and the war of all against all, always stands in need of the

[5] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1963; revised edition, Penguin, 1977), 150 (hereafter cited parenthetically in text).

instruments of violence in order to assure its own existence" (291). Likewise Chomsky, against the dominant rhetoric on terrorism, relentlessly charts acts of western-sanctioned state terrorism in the modern world.

Perhaps we are tempted by evil, find its literary representation so compelling, because evil is not just an outsider, nor just our guilty secret – the word "transgression" won't do here – but belongs at the heart of the very mechanisms we deploy in order to restrain it. Violence is never more terrifying than when it believes itself justified by the highest law (Bush has stated quite clearly that he has known his divine mission since September 11). In Coetzee's story, it is the law – brazen, mocking – that produces the excessive energy which Costello describes as obscene: "In his gibes at the men about to die at his hands there was a wanton, an *obscene* energy that exceeded his commission" (177). This energy is contaminating ("like a shock, like electricity", 176). If it weren't, Costello as reader would have no reason to object. West has thrust her, not just into the horror of what is still for many the worst atrocity of the twentieth century, but into its *mind*. Fiction's greatest offence becomes its ability to turn us into perpetrators, each and every one.

In their chapter on "Concepts and Principles", the South African commissioners feel the need to justify their exploration of the "Causes, Motives, Perspectives" of the perpetrators which appears in the final volume of Findings and Recommendations. Understanding can be seen as exonerating. Trying to get into the mind of the perpetrator is too risky : "Without seeing offender accountability as part of the quest for understanding, the uncovering of motives and perspectives can easily be misunderstood as excusing their violations" (1, 130). Far from fiction, even in the most sombre conditions of political assessment and analysis, to allow a mind to the perpetrators of atrocity is, it seems, to risk one identification too far. In fact in the chapter itself, the perpetrators emerge as oddly without character. Psychological analysis is more or less eschewed: "In such situations, people act primarily in terms of their social identities rather than personal attributes" (5, 288). "Political frameworks provide the fuel for atrocities" (5, 282). One by one, the Report rules out the argument from human nature (regression into atavistic behaviour), the argument from psychopathology (no psychological disfunction), the argument

from authoritarianism (a collective phenomenon, not a personality type). In fact in a report that has been severely criticised for its emphasis on individual actors at the expense of a critique of state power, it is striking how in this chapter the whole analysis scrupulously, repeatedly, swerves in the direction of what Freud famously called group (or "mass") psychology. Under apartheid, crime became the law: "[To paraphrase Hannah Arendt]", write the Commissioners at the end of the opening chapter on the historical context, "Twentieth century law in South Africa made crime legal" (1, 42). The perpetrators are best understood in terms of social coercion or "binding" ("compliance", "identification", "internalisation") (5, 292). Only acts, not individuals, can be described as "evil": "While acts of gross violations may be regarded as demonic, it is counter-productive to regard persons who perpetrated those acts as demonic" (5, 274). In a strange mimicry of what collective identification is presumed to do to individuals (take away their personalities), it is as if there is *nobody there*.

And yet, by the account of the Commissioners themselves, these explanations are unsatisfactory. There is a factor that escapes. On authoritarianism: "But does this offer an explanation for a predisposition to commit atrocities? Evidence is really rather thin" (5, 286); on social identity: "It may be noted that social identity theory does not explain violence itself, but the preconditions of violence" (5, 289); on group identification: "while these processes begin to explain why we become bound into groups, institutions and authorities, they do not yet suggest violence" (5, 292). "Do not *yet*" – something has to wait. Without final cause, atrocity resists explanation, draws a blank. Attempting to explain the demonic, the Commissioners find something invisible, unnegotiable, sinister (demonic?) at play. Evil, it seems, is not just an absolute, not just a shifter; it is an empty place. This may seem like a failure of explanation. Or it may take us, I want to suggest now, to the heart of the matter. In her famous exchange with Gerschom Scholem over her book on Eichmann, Arendt writes:

> It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never 'radical,' that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is 'thought-defying,'

as I said, because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because *there is nothing*.[6]

Could there be a connection, I want to ask for the rest of this essay, between evil as nothing, and evil as subject to, or even as the violent, intransigent – obscene – embodiment of the highest law?

Arendt's analysis of Eichmann suggests there might be. She is best known for describing him as petty, banal (her phrase is cited by the Commission, Arendt continues the quote above: "That is its 'banality'"). But in a less commented moment early in the book when she is introducing her main character, she tells of how he saw his birth as an "event to be ascribed to 'a higher Bearer of Meaning', an entity somehow identical with the 'movement of the universe'". She writes: "The terminology is suggestive. To call God a *Hoheren Sinestrager* meant to give him some place in the military hierarchy, since the Nazis had changed the military 'recipient of orders' the *Befehlsempfanger*, into a 'bearer of orders', a Befehl*strager*, indicating, as in the ancient 'bearer of ill tidings', the burden of responsibility and of importance that weighed supposedly upon those who had to execute orders" (27). Eichmann is dismissive of metaphysics – the moment is passed over – but it is nonetheless central to Arendt's analysis that Eichmann's "'boundless and immoderate admiration for Hitler'" (in the words of a defense witness) played a major part in his accepting that Hitler's *word*, without having to be written, had the force of law (149). Hitler, or rather love of Hitler, comes close to the sacred. Evil is tempting because the devil, however despicable to the sanguine mind, takes on the aura of a god. There may be something mysterious, resistant to final explanation, in people's ability to commit evil acts (although to say that is already to run the risk of mystification); but mystery might also be intrinsic to the process which enables individuals to violate,

[6] Arendt to Scholem, letter of 24 July 1963, in Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 251. My emphasis.

even in the name of legality, the bounds of all human law. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the Grand Inquisitor says to Ivan Fyodorovich:

> There are only three powers, only three powers on earth, capable of conquering and holding captive forever the conscience of these feeble rebels, for their own happiness – these powers are miracle, mystery and authority.[7]

Without depth – Arendt continues her letter: "Only the good has depth, can be radical" – evil relies on transcendance. This is of course to invert the normal order of things in which the devil is presumed to exert all his power from below.

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I am now going to take a detour via our most recent modern times before returning to Coetzee at the end. "Fear is a great form of worship, and the only one worthy of it is God" – these words are from "Atta's document", found in the baggage of Mohammed Atta, "the suspected ringleader" of September 11, thought to have piloted the first of the two planes into the Twin Towers and released by the FBI. Although its authenticity has been questioned by some (why wasn't his baggage on the plane?), and critiqued as a violation of Islam by others, it is such a bizarre mixture – in the words of *The Observer* who published it in full on 30 September 2001 – of the "apocalyptic", "dramatic", "sometimes downright banal", that it is hard to imagine it invented even by someone, post 9/11, intent on the most violent slandering of Islam (in fact it has turned out that no less than 3 copies were found – one more in the wreckage of the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania, another in a car abandoned by the hijackers outside Dulles airport). "It is [therefore] unlikely", write commentators Kanan Makiya and Hassan Mneimneh, "that many of the hijackers did not know the suicidal nature of their mission" (*Striking Terror – America's New War*, 303). The document is, as Makiya and

[7] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (London and New York: Quartet, 1990), 255.

Mneimneh put it, "an exacting guide for achieving the unity of body and spirit necessary for success" (304). That God is the instructor is unsurprising. Returning to the spirit of the Prophet, to the brief period of his rule between 622 and 632, the manual calls for a return to the path of *ghazwah*, best understood as a raid on the path of God:

> Consider that this is a raid on a path. As the Prophet said: "A raid… on the path of God is better than this World and what is in it."
>
> "It is enough that these are the words of monotheism which will make you steadfast in battle".

More striking, however, is the way the words work – divinely sanctioned performatives to be repeated at every stage: "Make supplications", "Remind yourself of the supplications and of your brethren and ponder their meaning", "Remember the supplication for entering a car, for entering a town, the supplication of place, and other supplications", "When you have reached (M) and left the taxi, say a supplication of place", "Say this supplication", "You must remember to make supplications wherever you go, and anytime you do anything". Like the God to whom they are addressed, these supplications are infinite but invisible: "No one should notice that you are making the supplication", "Be busy with the constant remembrance of God".

The preparation for the body is no less crucial than that of the mind: "Shave excess hair from the body and wear cologne", "Shower", "Tighten your clothes" (in square brackets we are told by the translator, Imad Musa: "a reference to making sure his clothes will cover his private parts at all times"), "Tighten your shoes well, wear socks so that your feet will be solidly in your shoes". The body must be perfectly in place so that it can most perfectly forget or let go of itself. Makiya and Mnemneih comment: "True selflessness requires an acknowledgement of the flesh-and-blood self in order to become estranged from it". If slaughter is, chillingly, a gift, it is not an act of aggression because there is precisely no-body there, only God: "Fight for the sake of God those who seek to kill you, and do not commit aggression. God does not favour those who aggress" (315). This is for the commentators the most frightening aspect of the document, which

inserts into the Muslim tradition the idea of the martyr who, void not just of personal but also of any communal purpose, acts solely to please God. Makiya and Mnemneih observe:

> Martyrdom is not something bestowed by God as a favor on the warrior for his selflessness and devotion to the community's defence. It is a status to be achieved by the individual warrior, and performed as though it were his own private act of worship.

Driven by fear of God – later developments of Islam relegate the most extreme forms of fear as worship to mystical experience, but not here – driven, then by fear of God, the martyr voids himself of all intention. The document relays the story of Ali Bin Abi Talib (companion and close relative of the prophet Mohammed) who, when spat on by a non-believer in battle, did not kill him immediately but raised his sword: "'After he spat at me, I was afraid I would be striking at him in revenge for myself, so I lifted my sword'. After he renewed his intentions, he went back and killed the man". Without qualities – remember Arendt on Eichmann: "he had no motives at all" – the document offers us an image of someone who purifies mind and body in the cause of slaughter ("You must make your knife sharp and must not discomfort your animal during the slaughter") and who then heads, in both senses, for the skies. Jane Smith, professor at Hartford seminary, Connecticut and author of *Islam in America*, comments:

> Apparently one can assume that what was done was done by people out of a genuine and sincere belief that they were helping bring about the will of God. And that, in turn, may be the most frightening thing about it.

Or in the words of John Esposito, director of the Centre for Muslim-Christian understanding at Georgetown University, "We have a certain need to explain what somebody does as totally irrational … the fact that they might come out of a pious background stuns us" (all quotes from *The Observer*, 30 September 2001).

It is often remarked that Freud did not live to witness the Holocaust. Refusing to lend his voice to Zionism in 1930, he shifted, after the rise of Hitler, and expressed support for the creation of the

state of Israel by the end of his life. Today we are left with another perhaps more interesting question than what might have been his at once passionate and pragmatic forms of allegiance after the Second World War. In his last great work, *Moses the Man and Monotheistic Religion*, Freud attributed the "rise in intellectuality" to the creation of the monotheistic faith in which he invested great hopes. Freud was eloquent on the subject of group insanity. But what would he have had to say about a superego carved so closely to the features of a monotheistic God that it would destroy half the world in His name? (a question, one should add, as relevant to Evangelical America – there are 70 million – as to fundamentalist Islam). Or was he already sentient of the dangers: "[in the history of religion] human beings found themselves obliged in general to recognise 'intellectual [*geistige*]' forces – forces, that is, which cannot be grasped by the senses (particularly by the sight) but which none the less produce undoubted and extremely powerful effects".[8] After all, in *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, he gave what remains today perhaps the most persuasive account of fear as the driving force of social life. The child lives in fear of a superego whose aggression knows no bounds simply because it has inherited all the aggressiveness which the child would herself like to use against it. There is something unavoidably craven, abject, masochistic – self-abolishing – in every subject's relationship to the law. When we read Atta's document alongside Freud's text in an MA class this year, it did seem as if there was only one step from this analysis to the idea of obedience as a form of divinely sanctioned fear. "Fear", Freud writes, "is at the bottom of the whole relationship".[9] In the link between superego and ego, which is what we rely on for entry into our social identities, fear is the key.

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In his essay on "The Structure of Evil", British psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas describes evil as a form of transcendance. "The

[8] Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* (1938), in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, Vol. 23, 114.

[9] Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930), in *Standard Edition*, Vol. 21, 136.

killer finds a victim who will die his death". The killer murders his victim, as it were, on his own behalf. Enacting death, he avoids his own subjection to its law. Every time the killer strikes, it is his own death that he avoids. In this analysis, murderousness is based on a passionate if involuntary identification. Like the term evil itself, killing serves to get rid of something felt as too threatening; you hand it over to someone else and then destroy it so that you can wipe your hands of the affair. Evil represents: "the unconscious need to survive one's own death".[10] Onto the other you slough off this mortal coil. If we go back to Costello, we could therefore say that every time fiction enters the world of evil, it is our own death that we escape.

Transcending one's own death might be a fair description of Atta's document. But Bollas's article can take us back to Elizabeth Costello in another sense. If we return to the passage of identification with the women victims of Nazism at the edge of the pit which I quoted earlier in this talk, it is a very specific body – the ageing, flagging body – that Costello finds herself in identification with:

> If there were a mirror on the back of this door instead of just a hook, if she were to take her clothes of and kneel here before it, she, with her sagging breasts and knobbly hips, would look little different from the women in those intimate, those over-intimate photographs from the European war, glimpses into hell, who knelt naked at the lip of the trench… (178)

Go back through the essay and ageing and its humiliations are something of a refrain: "Twenty million, six million, three million, a hundred thousand: at a certain point the mind breaks down before quanta; and the older you get – this at any rate is what has happened to her – the sooner comes the breakdown"; "She does not know how old Paul West is … Might he and she, in their different ways, not be old enough to be beyond embarrassment?"; "She does not like to see her sisters and brothers humiliated, in ways it is so easy to humiliate the old, by making them strip for example, taking away their dentures,

[10] Christopher Bollas, "The Structure of Evil", in *Cracking Up: The Work of Unconscious Experience* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 189, 193.

making fun of their private parts" (159, 163, 178). And this at the heart of the most offending, *obscene*, chapter from West's book:

> fumbling old men for the most part … their false teeth and their glasses taken from them … hands in their pockets to hold up their pants, whimpering with fear, swallowing their tears, having to listen to this coarse creature, this butcher with last week's blood caked under his fingernails, taunt them, telling them what would happen when the rope snapped tight, how the shit would run down their spindly old-man's legs, how their limp old-man's penises would quiver one last time? (158)

If this is the ultimate degradation, whose writing – it seems fair to ask – Paul West's, Elizabeth Costello's or the writing of J. M. Coetzee is repeating the offence?

Is the ultimate evil then a dying body that no ablution or supplication can save? Is such a body – which of course means all bodies – the real disgrace? In Coetzee's prizewinning novel of that title, the central character, David Lurie, meets with his estranged wife after his sexual harassment of a young student has driven him from his University position: "'Do you think', she asks, 'a young girl finds any pleasure in going to bed with a man of that age? Do you think she finds it good to watch you in the middle of your…'" Lurie muses: "Yet perhaps she has a point. Perhaps it is the right of the young to be protected from the sight of their elders in the throes of passion".[11] Again it is a refrain. Lurie takes tea with his daughter when he has just arrived at the farm: "He is aware of her eyes on him as he eats. He must be careful: nothing so distasteful to a child as the workings of a parent's body" (61). Explaining to her later why he will not appeal against his dismissal: "After a certain age one is simply no longer appealing, and that's that" (67). And perhaps most tellingly in the first chapter of the book:

[11] J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2000), 44 (hereafter cited parenthetically in text).

> He ought to give up, retire from the game. At what age, he wonders, did Origen castrate himself? Not the most graceful of solutions, but then ageing is not a graceful business. A clearing of the decks, at least, so that one can turn one's mind to the proper business of the old: preparing to die. (9)

We might note too in passing that in *Disgrace*, Lurie – following a violent assault by a group of black youths during which his daughter, Lucy, is raped – is forced to ask, when Lucy will not speak to him: "do they think that, where rape is concerned, no man can be where the woman is?" and then later to take his own question further: "He does understand; he can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself. The question is, does he have it in him to be the woman?" (141, 160) But in the story of Costello delivered at the conference on evil, Coetzee defied his own caution. He gives us Elizabeth's scene of sexual violence, puts us in the room with her, goes – one might say – to places where, by his own previous account in the novel, the man should not, or cannot, tread. Is the worst offence of this story, therefore, not West's forcing us to enter – body and mind – into Hitler's executioners and the hangmen, not Costello letting us into a moment of sexual violence from her past, but Coetzee entering the mind of his female character at the very point which, in *Disgrace* – and it is not an aside, it is absolutely central to the dilemma explored by the novel – was not possible or permissible for the man? Is Coetzee, advertently – or in fact as I am inclined to think in this instance inadvertently – indicting himself?

Coetzee's preoccupation with the ageing dying body gives us the other face – or underside – of transcendence. It suggests to me that the issue, in *Disgrace* but not only in *Disgrace*, is not just one of moral turpitude but also of physical turpitude, a turpitude of the body – utterly effaced in Atta's document, taken on by Coetzee – to which one moralism, *in extremis* as it were, may be a possible reply. As you will know, *Disgrace* ends with Lurie, having dedicated himself to the care of abandoned and stricken dogs, handing one of them over to die. Lurie's connection to these dogs is the key to his transformation in the book. Earlier, in a crucial moment of dialogue with Lucy, Lurie had made his view of the place of dogs in the scheme of things very clear:

"by all means let us be kind to them. But let us not lose perspective. We are of a different order of creation" (Lucy on the other hand is willing to envisage herself returning in her next life as a dog). Previously, like many other readers, I saw the last moment of the book as an act of compassion or mercy on the part of Lurie towards a degraded species: "Are you giving him up?" "Yes, I am giving him up." Now I am more inclined to see it as an act of mercy towards himself. Nor do I think we can read this as simply a metaphor for a dying white South Africa and its language although both can be read into the book (a reading confirmed by the fact the Coetzee has now left South Africa). Through Lurie and Costello, I see him therefore as giving us one of the barest accounts of the dilemma, for someone for whom transcendance is no option, of a body – aging, dying – repelled by itself.

At a seminar organised by Pittsburgh University for its visiting students in London to mark the first anniversary of September 11, seven minutes of footage were screened, footage only shown once on American and British television and then pulled as too disturbing by CNN. It consists mainly of bodies – visible, almost recognisable – plunging from the burning buildings to their deaths. There is, commented one participant in the seminar, a taboo on death in American culture (in Russia, the image shown repeatedly was of people in the building waving white flags, an image never shown on US television – presumably because it could be seen to signify surrender). Above all a body must not be seen to die. Bodies that fail and fall. To efface, or preempt, such images George Bush – with the full backing of Tony Blair – went to war against Iraq. The infinitely superior killing machines of the West took to the skies. Another way of saying, perhaps, that the greatest evil lies within ourselves.

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ARTICLES

Jefferson Holdridge

Grope With a Dirty Hand: W. B. Yeats and the post-colonial sublime

> The life instincts strive for the unification and enhancement of life; in nonrepressive sublimation they would provide the libidinal energy for work on the development of a reality which no longer demands the exploitative repression of the Pleasure Principle. The 'incentives' would then be built into the instinctual structure of men. Their sensibility would register, as biological reactions, the difference between the ugly and the beautiful, between calm and noise, tenderness and brutality, intelligence and stupidity, joy and fun, and it would correlate this distinction with that between freedom and servitude...
>
> Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*[1]

This essay explores W. B. Yeats's poetic relationship with Ireland's history of colonization and decolonization, focusing on select poems from the various phases of Yeats's career – one which spanned the move from colonization to decolonization – as examples of a postcolonial critique of civility.[2] The question of whether the famous Irish poet can be examined in the light of postcolonial theories has

[1] Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 91.

[2] One of the better known considerations of this question is Jahan Ramazani's "Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?", *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* 17.3 (Winter 1998), 64-89. This essay has been reprinted as part of a book by Ramazani entitled *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001). Like Ramazani, though for some different reasons, I hope to show that Yeats's "weightiest credential in

met various and sometimes conflicting responses, as is made evident in the recent collection of essays entitled *W. B. Yeats and Postcolonialism* and edited by Deborah Fleming.[3] In her introductory essay, Fleming draws a critical contrast between Edward Said's belief that Yeats was a postcolonial writer and Seamus Deane's belief that Yeats had a quasi-colonial mentality despite nationalist leanings.[4] These critics may form the most famous instance of opposing points of view on Yeats's relationship to the postcolonial world (and Fleming's analysis of them is quite thorough), but it is a mistake to divide subsequent critics into Said's or Deane's camp rather than assessing how they might combine them. Augustine Martin would probably have been surprised to find himself aligned with Said, while Declan Kiberd's analysis of Irish literature – in *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995) – is far too cognizant of Said's contribution to be unqualifiedly placed on Deane's side. An attendant problem not explicit in the introduction but manifest in some of the essays is the critical stance towards the aesthetic.

Denis Donoghue is often used within this volume as a foil against the excesses of postcolonial critics, but the force of the aesthetic, indeed what Donoghue sees as its autonomous function, is not given the place which it has in Donoghue's criticism – nor is the idea of aesthetic autonomy even parried. This may be the result of the political condition of much contemporary criticism, but the implications of the relationship between politics and aesthetics must be elaborated beyond the working assumption that they inevitably collapse into one another. Behind many political readings of

earning admittance to the postcolonial literary society is the cosmopolitan nativism he shares with many of its most esteemed members. Though white and canonical, though non-third-world and Anglo-Irish, Yeats has at least enough in common with the present members to make for some animated conversation". *Raritan*, 89.

[3] *W. B. Yeats and Postcolonialism*, ed. Deborah Fleming (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 2001).

[4] See Seamus Deane, "Yeats and the Idea of Revolution", in *Yeats's Political Identities*, ed. Jonathan Allison (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1995), 133-44; and Edward Said, "Yeats and Decolonization", in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

Modernist writers like Yeats is Walter Benjamin's critique of how Modernist writers had aestheticized politics, as well as his contention that now aesthetics must be politicized. One can easily forget that the two categories, aesthetics and politics, sometimes have different functions, however interconnected they may be. Theodor Adorno makes this point in a letter to Benjamin: "you now casually transfer the concept of magical aura to the 'autonomous work of art' and flatly assign to the latter a counter-revolutionary function … However, it seems to me that the centre of the autonomous work of art does not itself belong on the side of myth – excuse my topic parlance – but is inherently dialectical; within itself it juxtaposes the magical and the mark of freedom".[5] The effort to politicize the aesthetic should not simplify its inner workings, or its literary heritage. The following essay attempts to show how this may be accomplished, and how we may juxtapose "the magical and the mark of freedom". It offers a reading of the dynamic relations between the rational and irrational, the intellectual and the physical as they unfold in Yeats's creative articulations of self and other within the confines of a developing sense of nationhood. Successful forms of such articulation – here called the post-colonial sublime – rely on the retrieval of both morality and freedom (formerly opposed in the colonial order), and occur during that time when the violent struggle finds its reflection in the self's romances, in the forgiveness between opposites, however brief, that is necessary for the inevitable combinations of future life.

During this moment, the irrational anarchic body with which the colonized subject had been identified is given the transcendental status that is normally reserved for the colonizer. By disclosing the multifarious ways in which W. B. Yeats's poetry negotiates this dialectic for articulating a vision of decolonized identity, the essay aims to provide a new understanding of the difficulties inherent in the postcolonial effort to imagine such a vision of sublime wisdom, especially when confronted by the fractured and violent memory of colonization. The dialectic of decolonization, developed by Frantz Fanon and further investigated in the interstitial relations of self and

[5] Theodor W. Adorno, "Letters to Walter Benjamin", in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Ronald Taylor, with an afterword by Fredric Jameson (London: Verso, 1980), 121.

other by Homi Bhabha,[6] sets the stage for a larger aesthetic context which might map the itinerary of this pursuit. This dialectic offers a particular site, that of the post-colonial sublime, for establishing a concept of redemption which is promised within the confines of poetic form.

Extending the discussion of aesthetics and poetic form, this essay also speculates on the parodic possibilities opened up within this aesthetic order of the sublime by claiming that notions of community, self, and nature, which form the thematic strands of Irish post-colonial poetry in general, as well as Yeats's poetic example in particular, are themselves open to constant revision and rearticulation. Such constant revision and rearticulation is the result of a central psychological antagonism in both the sublime and colonial encounter. "The native's challenge to the colonial world is not simply a rational confrontation", writes Fanon, "it is not a treatise on the universal, but the untidy affirmation of an original idea".[7] That original idea is, in Bhabha's words, "the irremovable strangeness of being different". Such strangeness is the source of the sublime encounter between self and other, as long as there is a recognition of freedom, of the inhuman 'thing', the tortured body that has been colonized, the repressed other, the anarchic or feminized sexual body, what Bhabha calls "the historical relationality, the interstitial in-between that defines and divides them [colonizer and colonized] into antagonistic subjects".[8] The source of antagonism is often the effort not to be feminized. Such recognition of otherness could conceivably constitute the basis if not the revelation of positive sublimity, the positive resolution of the beautiful, which demands an elaboration of issues of gender and sexuality that are extremely difficult to express. Hence, the present use of the term for the inexpressible, the post-colonial sublime. There are essentially three stages in the development of the post-colonial sublime; it is an aesthetic that aligns the process of decolonization with Immanuel Kant's three stages of sublimity; that is, from balance

[6] See in particular, Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1991), 38-41; Homi K. Bhabha, "On the Irremovable Strangeness of Being Different", in *Four Views of Ethnicity*, *PMLA* 113 (1998), 34-39.

[7] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 41.

[8] Homi K. Bhabha, "On the Irremovable Strangeness of Being Different", 38.

between subject and object, or the idyll of pre-colonial wholeness, through aesthetic violence upon understanding, or colonization's disruption of native culture, to the transcendent powers of the imagination, or the forgiveness between opposites, however brief, that is necessary for the future. Obviously the transcendental nature of the third stage is problematic in any postmodern reading; the movement between the second and third stages, or the feeling of being caught between the blessings of the third and the curse of the second. In *The Romantic Sublime*, Thomas Weiskel presents a psychoanalytical model that is very similar in structure to that movement of Kant and Fanon. It is one in which "the sublime moment recapitulates and thereby reestablishes the Oedipus complex, whose positive resolution is the basis of culture itself".[9] As the discourse of colonization is primarily a patriarchal one, the parallels are obvious and the resolution equally elusive. Recognition of otherness could conceivably constitute the third stage of positive sublimity or the harmony of the beautiful and the maternal that are "the basis of culture itself". Here is a paradigm for the postcolonial sublime:

Kant	Fanon	Psychoanalytical
1. ravishment/ transport 2. reason's inadequacy during sublime moment 3. imagination's compensation	1. occupation/possible freedom 2. nationalism (difficulty of attainment; inadequacy) 3. liberation (freedom & whole identity)	1. guilt/sense of power 2. inadequacy in face of father's power 3. a) identification with father b) reconciliation through maternal force

[9] Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. P., 1986), 94.

In terms of Yeats's poetry, the early work is most definitely of the first stage, when Celtic is glorified; Saxon disparaged. In this stage Yeats suffers from a palpable inability to critique the current situation. This is truer of his poetry than his prose and political life, in which he was somewhat more advanced. The second stage begins in the volumes from *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921) and *The Tower* (1928), in which the violence of self and societal change are interrogated. The third stage is reached in Yeats's poems of the after-life, of Byzantium etc., or in those on Coole Park. It is best described in the volume *The Winding Stair* (1933), in which he imagines a balance between the various religious, political and sexual elements of his life and of Ireland. Such themes are explored best in the penultimate rejuvenated volume, appropriately entitled *New Poems* (1938). The political nature of this third stage is made clear in such poems as "The Curse of Cromwell", "Come Gather Round Me Parnellites", and "The Ghost of Roger Casement", the examination of which shall close this essay. Throughout Yeats's poetry, the post-colonial dimension is concurrent with philosophical, aesthetic and religious ones.

In "The Dedication to a Book of Stories selected from the Irish Novelists" from the volume *The Rose* (1893), we see an early attempt to explain why a vision of the beautiful has been so difficult to achieve in Ireland, and why the Irish have so often sought escapist forms of beauty (as Yeats does in this poem itself). There is little of the terrible sublime in this poem, but there is a great deal of the relationship between the temporal and eternal forms of beauty:

There was a green branch hung with many a bell
When her own people ruled this tragic Eire;
And from its murmuring greenness, calm of Faery,
A Druid kindness, on all hearers fell.

It charmed away the merchant from his guile,
And turned the farmer's memory from his cattle,
And hushed in sleep the roaring ranks of battle:
And all grew friendly for a little while.

Ah, Exiles wandering over lands and seas,

And planning, plotting always that some morrow
May set a stone upon ancestral Sorrow!
I also bear a bell-branch full of ease.

I tore it from green boughs winds tore and tossed
Until the sap of summer had grown weary!
I tore it from the barren boughs of Eire,
That country where a man can be so crossed;

Can be so battered, badgered and destroyed
That he's a loveless man: gay bells bring laughter
That shakes a mouldering cobweb from the rafter;
And yet the saddest chimes are best enjoyed.

Gay bells or sad, they bring you memories
Of half-forgotten innocent old places:
We and our bitterness have left no traces
On Munster grass and Connemara skies.

It is an obvious example of the first stage in the post-colonial sublime: the idyll of pre-colonial wholeness. The pagan bell, like the Christian Rose in "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time", charms the people away from realization of their sufferings and labor. The third stanza has particular significance as the Exiles find a homeward eternal meaning to their sorrows in a fashion which is very reminiscent of Wilde's comment that "what captivity was to the Jews exile has been to the Irish".[10] The Irish realize the power of their fanatic hearts in exile. Though this is not the place to examine this question, it is a critical commonplace to note that at various moments in the work of selected Irish novelists of the 19th century the harsh reality of nineteenth-century Irish experience is never fully considered. It either ruptured the narrative (this is apparent in the works of Maria Edgeworth and Gerald Griffin, among others) or else was impossible to describe (which explains Edgeworth's decision not

[10] Oscar Wilde, "Mr. Froude's Blue Book", in *The Critic as Artist*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Allen, 1970), 136.

write about Ireland as the country approached the period of the Famine). It was a reality which most writers avoided in favor of the gay bells, the mystical image of Ireland.

One of the main reasons for this avoidance is that this mystical image was as marketable to an English audience then (and the reading public of the nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish writer was primarily English) as memoirs of Irish misery are to an American and European one now. The truth is that the Irish, as Yeats writes, were "battered, badgered, destroyed and loveless". This is the truth which William Carleton captured in detail and that is why he was the local genius of the century. In stories such as "Wildgoose Lodge", documenting an armed gang's attack on a family home, he captured the savagery which had resulted from Ireland's violent history. Yet nevertheless there is something of eternal beauty in the mystical bells of tragic Eire, as the last stanza of Yeats's poem makes clear. The objective natural beauty of Ireland has remained ineffectual because it has not often enough found its reflection in Irish culture. There is something eternally beautiful about Irish landscape which remains untouched by the harshness of Irish history. It lent an image of the beautiful as it applies to the harmonious in society, to the pastoral, to the gentle and civilized, an image that was the more mysterious because so distant and unrealizable. The unaffected quality of the beautiful in nature was of some solace for the scarcity of the beautiful in society and history. Such an image of beauty gave the mistreated peasantry something with which to enrich their language in the midst of their historical poverty. Like Art's Utopia, that site of the post-colonial sublime, for establishing a concept of redemption which is promised within the confines of poetic form, the natural image of beauty would prove incendiary; Ireland as a distressed female land which must be defended. The increased division between these two types of beauty in Irish history, culture and politics, and the inability to achieve a real semblance of the beautiful in Irish life, would eventually lead to the birth of a "terrible beauty", to that conflation of terms which denotes the negative sublime's violent operation in the increasingly impoverished realm of the beautiful. This is the difficult second stage in the post-colonial sublime, in the colonized subject's move to sensible expression of freedom. At this point in his career, Yeats is still hesitating in the safer, mythological lands of the first stage.

The missing link in this discussion of the nineteenth century is, of course, the Irish Famine, which symbolizes colonization's disruption of native culture. To Yeats, it must have constituted a form of 'passive suffering' which was not suitable for poetry. As Chris Morash notes,[11] the literary tropes that have been used to represent the suffering, such as that of the Spectre, are cast in a negative Blakean light. To Blake, the Spectre is the "Nervous Fear" that undermines individual action.[12] As Yeats had grown up in the time of the sometimes violent actions of the Land League (he was beaten up in England because of his Irish accent for this reason),[13] he only knew the determination to act which had resulted from the Famine. One description of Famine suffering that moved Yeats, however, was Maud Gonne's description of a family walling themselves into their cottage in order to die unseen and therefore to die nobly.[14] This has a strong whiff of high Romantic stoicism, and avoids any description of the scale of the suffering. His famous reference to the Famine is the play *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), in which the heroine sells her soul in order to feed the starving Irish peasantry. This play and the poem "The Countess Cathleen in Paradise" are instances of the positive sublime in a very 19th-century mould. The sacrifice of the individual for an ideal. They are both indicative instances of Kant's sublime sacrifice, and, importantly for Yeats's conception of the beautiful, they are rooted in the feminine. The sacrifice that the Countess makes in the play is that of her entry into Paradise. To Kant, the sacrifice is an aesthetic one.[15] Imagination sacrifices its freedom for the benefit of a moral idea. The two forms of sacrifice are certainly analogous, but do not provide much room for political or even individual action, nor do they recognize the threat to identity, national and otherwise, of such events as the famine.

[11] See Chris Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) and his essay entitled "Literature, Memory, Atrocity", in *Fearful Realities: New Perspectives on the Famine*, eds. Richard Hayes and Chris Morash (Blackrock: Irish Academic Press, 1996). See also Margaret Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible?* (Durham, NC: Duke U. P., 1997).

[12] Peter Ackroyd, *William Blake: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 160-162.

[13] Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 33.

[14] Yeats, *Letters to New Island* (London: Oxford U. P., 1934), 149.

[15] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1928), 120-123.

In the poem, we see a version of her final vindication. Surrounded by such figures of self sacrifice as the Virgin Mary, and wearing only the vestments of duty, she enters the world of peace and "timid grace":

All the heavy days are over;
Leave the body's coloured pride
Underneath the grass and clover,
With the feet laid side by side.

Bathed in flaming founts of duty
She'll not ask a haughty dress;
Carry all that mournful beauty
To the scented oaken press.

Did the kiss of Mother Mary
Put that music in her face?
Yet she goes with footstep wary,
Full of earth's old timid grace.
'Mong the feet of angels seven
What a dancer glimmering!
All the heavens bow down to Heaven,
Flame to flame and wing to wing.

Yeats avoids the negative sublime on the way to positive sublimity. The atrocity of the Famine becomes only a "mournful beauty" put away like the passing season's clothes. The most important reason for this inability to give more than "a conventional nod in the direction of an unspeakable sublime"[16] is that, like the Holocaust, it broke down all attempts at coherent rendering. Yeats's vision of paradise would soon not be so timid. Another more active form of representation of the Famine is the hunger strike in Yeats's play *The King's Threshold* (1904). The idea of hunger strikes was meant to induce shame in the captors and the trope of a hunger strike is one of disappearance and death – an attenuating image of rebellion that ends with a gesture

[16] Morash, *Fearful Realities*, 117.

towards the inexpressible, or, to recall Bhabha's formulation once again, the "irremovable strangeness of being different".[17] Yeats would later look for an image of the unspeakable in such poems as "Leda and the Swan" that forces the sufferer to new forms of knowledge and power. The sonnet to Leda, originally intended as a political poem, is what Kristeva terms "an unveiling of the abject; an elaboration, a discharge, and a hallowing out of abjection through the crises of the word"[18] – one which in any version of post-colonial or psychoanalytical sublimity must lie in the resolution of "the crises of the word". The resolution is to "put" them "on" equally, to elaborate the colonial and colonized cultures (as seen in the term Anglo-Irish literature) and then to discharge their conflict. This balancing act has significant ramifications and is probably best explored in Yeats's later poetry, in which Yeats meditates on his career as artist and individual seeking independence coincidentally with his nation.

Before Yeats reaches overarching meditation on his career, and the testing of his ideals and systems of being, he must pass through the several social and political insights of the volumes *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921) and *The Tower* (1928). He must 'sail towards Byzantium', to put his position into his own words. At this point, he has not reached the sometime blessed states and "starlit air" of *The Winding Stair* (1933), especially of the poem "Byzantium", and cannot retrieve the sense of beauty that he felt so deeply in *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919). The beatific states are not simple demonstrations of transcendent faith untroubled by doubt, for like the sense of fading beauty that haunts *The Wild Swans*, the ecstasies he experiences while in these states of vacillation are all that Yeats knows of transcendence, but they are not in themselves transcendent. He attains only a glimpse of a transcendent vision, and remains haunted by the absence of any form of permanent transcendence that does not entail death. In many ways, certain poems are stricken by the thought that there is no transcendence at all. These transcendental

[17] Bhabha, "On the Irremovable Strangeness of Being Different", 38.
[18] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia U. P., 1982), 208.

meditations are almost necessitated by the social and political poems of conflict and transcendence that precede them.

"Easter 1916" is the closest Yeats comes to transcendence through societal or revolutionary violence. Yet, even its treatment is ambiguous. It is an expression of the tragic bitterness of the second stage of the post-colonial sublime in which one becomes aware of the impossibility of recovering the pre-colonial wholeness of the culture before the colonial rupture, and of the complicity the society and family have had in their own subjection; one also becomes aware of the violence necessary to free oneself, of violence which necessarily wounds both sides of the struggle, and threatens to make "a stone of the heart" ("Easter, 1916"). Yeats's attitude to such bitterness is two-fold; if the aim is worthy of such excessive feeling, it may produce something extraordinary such as the Ireland which Patrick Pearse and the other rebels of the ill-fated 1916 rebellion produced, and which serves in the poem as the palinode to the Ireland of 1913, to the place where motley is worn and which had made Yeats believe that "Romantic Ireland was dead and gone" ("September 1913"). If, on the other hand, the goal or the means was unworthy of such passion, or else is misconstrued by those possessed of the dream, then the character and the nation could be deformed as were Countess Markiewicz during the rebellion, the British during colonial rule, and many Irish during the Irish Civil War. For the Irish, in particular, the inability to achieve a positive version of the sublime is traced to unfamiliarity with the beautiful. According to Yeats, this lack gives them a "hopeless levity" and makes them seem "the harlequins of the earth".[19] The aesthetic of independence, of the freeing of desire from the constant mistaking of the goal, is bound to be "a terrible beauty".

The highly masculine stoicism so valued in the preceding two poems is offset by the wisdom which feminine experience presents in subsequent poems. We begin to have some idea of the third stage of the post-colonial sublime as defined by Weiskel.[20] The recognition of

[19] Yeats, *Uncollected Prose of W. B. Yeats*, vol. I, ed. John P. Frayne (London: Macmillan, 1975), 87.

[20] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime*, 94.

otherness constitutes the third stage of positive sublimity or the harmony of the beautiful and the maternal, but also bears the wounds of the struggle. It is a wise mournfulness that predicates the possibility of all tragic joy; like the subject of "A Crazed Girl", one must be "Heroically lost" in order to be "heroically found". In many of these poems, Yeats returns to the dialectic of self and soul, of sensible and supersensible, so that the synthesis he aims towards is one uniting the physical and the spiritual. He is aware that, for all his tragic joy, the division may be irreparable; the only hope exists in the primary principles of surrender and submission. In one sequence of separately titled but intricately bound poems, from *New Poems* (1938), Yeats uses the conventional idea of an upper-class woman as representation of the soul and of the servant, or chambermaid, as representative of the body. The chambermaid can go to bed with the lover, while the 'Lady' and soul remain pure. In this basic division of labor, there is a domination of the sensible, of the body by the soul; however, Yeats extends the pain of domination back to the soul in a symbiotic relationship, in order again to highlight the correspondence between sensible and supersensible ecstasy. Though body and soul represent different categories of experience, they must suffer the same impediments and replenishments as they seek their own rewards. As he writes in "The Lady's First Song":

What hurts the soul
My soul adores,
No better than a beast
Upon all fours.

In "The Lady's Third Song", he imagines a correspondence between the Lady's and servant's experience that unites body and soul in religious-erotic union, a union that is entirely interpenetrating as soul experiences physical, 'fallen', pleasure, and body experiences spiritual, prelapsarian, pleasure. For Yeats, transcendence remains a formal necessity:

... I may hear if we should kiss
A contrapuntal serpent hiss,
You, should hand explore a thigh,

All the labouring heavens sigh.

He imagines that the lover, loving both body and soul, is most assured of their transcendental union because he experiences a form of that union; or, as Yeats writes in "The Lover's Song",

Birds sigh for the air,
Thought for I know not where,
For the womb the seed sighs.
Now sinks the same rest
On mind, on nest,
On straining thighs.

The two songs of the sequence, "The Chambermaid's First Song" and "The Chambermaid's Second Song", illustrate how, though Yeats believes religious vision is erotic by nature, Eros is not necessarily religious. The sexual act is only a catalyst. Once finished, it bears no marks of the supersensible, without which the sensible, as the second song shows, is distinctly earth-bound:

From pleasure of the bed,
Dull as a worm,
His rod and its butting head
Limp as a worm,
His spirit has fled
Blind as a worm.

In a later poem, Plato, Yeats's foe and friend, questions the point of the social and amorous exercise so loudly that the erotic-religious basis of Yeatsian poetics begins to seem mistaken ("What Then?"), although Yeats continues to try to articulate it. Successful forms of such articulation – the post-colonial sublime – rely on the retrieval of both morality and freedom, and occur during that time when the violent struggle finds its reflection in the self's romances, in the forgiveness between opposites, however brief, that is necessary for the inevitable combinations of future life. During this moment, the irrational anarchic body of the servant girl with which the colonized subject had been identified is given the transcendental status that is

normally reserved for the colonizer, or the Lady. They switch roles. As Marcuse writes in *An Essay on Liberation,* such a synthesis allows for an alignment among sexual, political and aesthetic realms: "The life instincts strive for the unification and enhancement of life; in nonrepressive sublimation they would provide the libidinal energy for work on the development of a reality which no longer demands the exploitative repression of the Pleasure Principle. The 'incentives' would then be built into the instinctual structure … as biological reactions, the difference between the ugly and the beautiful, between calm and noise, tenderness and brutality, intelligence and stupidity, joy and fun, and … would correlate this distinction with that between freedom and servitude". W. B. Yeats's poetry negotiates this dialectic for articulating a vision of decolonized identity, especially when confronted by the fractured and violent memory of colonization.

The volume, *New Poems* (1938), has moved towards a sense that the formal world demands what the empirical world cannot give. In political terms, we see that, because a materialist world-view impedes the completion of an idealist one, rather than complementing it, imagined forms of society are not easily realizable in empirical terms. The opposites are linked, but by a bridge arched over a steep divide. As much as poems such as "Beautiful Lofty Things" and "To Dorothy Wellesley" heroically try to cross the bridge, the lyrics remain suspended. This is the curse of the materialist conqueror of Ireland Oliver Cromwell who, in Yeats's rendering, is the force of the bourgeois capitalist world. His Spartan, martial knowledge "destroys" the poet's heart by reducing sexuality to its commodity value. It then mocks the transcendental, stoic preparation for death of the idealist:

... for money's rant is on,
He that's mounting up must on his neighbor mount
And we and all the Muses are things of no account.
They have schooling of their own but I pass their schooling by,
What can they know that we know that know the time to die?
O what of that, O what of that?
What is there left to say?

Yeats tries to maintain that his hierarchical society will return, that eternal recurrence does offer solace, but, by the end, the force of the

refrain proves his vision, his *aisling*,* to be only a dream. He can find companionship among animals that do not experience the divide between the physical and spiritual and live life instinctually. This strong move towards the sensible, indeed animalistic, is important to Yeats, and can be instructively examined in colonial and post-colonial terms, by say comparing it to the last voyage of *Gulliver's Travels* where instinct and spirit hopelessly confront one another; but whereas Lemuel Gulliver is willing to abandon his emotional life for his rational one, Yeats feels that the rational life is worthless and would willingly abandon it for the power of the emotional one. The harshness of Cromwell (as Yeats saw him) and of the English occupation drove the Irish to emphasize what to Yeats was already a proclivity for the emotional, for the dream-state, for the mystically minded ways of being which, over a period of exaggeration and acceptance into social convention, have become their trademark. The poems that follow "The Curse of Cromwell" are distinguished by the increasing significance of the sensible – by the revolt of Nature and the irrational, by the rebellion of the anarchic colonized body.

In "The Ghost of Roger Casement" there is mystical connection between Nature and the ghost of Casement, who had been tarnished in public eyes as a homosexual and a spy, as a social subversive in every sense of the word. As sexual deviant/Irish rebel, Casement, then, was the colonized body incarnate. Though his homosexuality has been proved true, Yeats did not know it at the time because the charge had been refuted, as is acknowledged in an epigraph to the previous poem, "Roger Casement". As champion of homosexual Oscar Wilde at the time of his trial for sexual 'indecency' and after, Yeats would have hardly been one to condemn Casement either way. More importantly, he certainly understood the connection between political and sexual subversion; he gave Casement's ghost a numinousness that is preternaturally at sympathy with nature, that seems to divine the final end, the purposiveness, of the sea, the supersensible movement of the

* *Aisling* is a visionary allegorical poem from the Gaelic Jacobite Tradition that imagines Ireland as a woman being forced to marry a foreigner (the English), or raped by one, and which calls for help from abroad, usually France or Spain.

water, and he does so especially when he is on the attack, causing those who charge him of homosexuality to be afraid:

O what has made that sudden noise?
What on the threshold stands?
It never crossed the sea because
John Bull and the sea are friends;
But this is not the old sea
Nor this the old seashore.
What gave that roar of mockery,
That roar in the sea's roar?

The ghost of Roger Casement
Is beating on the door.

Using the last two lines as refrain, Yeats makes Casement a natural and potentially subversive force, particularly subversive of the lie. The roar in the sea's roar hearkens back to the last line of Aogán Ó Rathaille's "Is fada liom oídhche" (circa 1708), in which the poet, outcast from the court of his Gaelic lord since the English invasion, threatens to thrust what he sees as the mocking clamor of the sea down its (and by implication the invader's) throat. We must remember that Ó Rathaille is the wandering poet, the "old beggar", cast out by English rule, who haunts "The Curse of Cromwell". As Yeats writes in that poem:

You ask what I have found and far and wide I go,
Nothing but Cromwell's house and Cromwell's murderous crew,
The lovers and the dancers are beaten into the clay,
And the tall men and the swordsmen and the horsemen where are they?
And there is an old beggar wandering in his pride,
His father served their fathers before Christ was crucified.

O what of that, O what of that?
What is there left to say?

Yeats is hearkening back through Ó Rathaille to preconquest days, to the pre-colonial idyll its memory and nostalgia has made it. Such an idyll, like any pastoral, has a libidinal force at work behind its imagery,

which, whether directly acknowledged or not, expresses the crisis of the present. Both Ó Rathaille, through the *aisling* tradition, and Yeats, through the various metamorphoses of Maud Gonne, express it directly.

The angry libidinal force that had been cast out by Cromwell has returned in the guise of Casement to usurp British rule and social convention with the same mocking voice that had hounded Ó Rathaille some two hundred years before:

John Bull has stood for Parliament,
A dog must have his day,
The country thinks no end of him
For he knows how to say
At a beanfeast or a banquet,
That all must hang their trust
Upon the British Empire,
Upon the Church of Christ.

The ghost of Roger Casement
Is beating on the door.

In the next poem, "The O'Rahilly", we see a similar connection between nature, the subversive sensible portion, and the Irish rebellion, captured in the refrain, "*How goes the weather*?" as though it were a pledge or cryptic threat of a secret society; only now we see them coupled to the violent redemption that is associated with rebellion, for The O'Rahilly has "christened himself with blood". This coupling makes the political poems of this volume harsh images of the revolt of the irrational, of that suppressed other, the darkly sexual subject that must be colonized or it may run out of control. In these poems we hover between the second and third stages of the post-colonial sublime.

The three stages of the post-colonial sublime are part of an aesthetic aligning the process of decolonization with the three stages of sublimity; that is, from balance between subject and object, or the idyll of pre-colonial wholeness, through aesthetic violence upon understanding, or colonization's disruption of native culture, to the transcendent powers of the imagination, or the forgiveness between opposites, however brief, that is necessary for the future. Obviously

the transcendental nature of the third stage is problematic in any nuanced reading; the movement between the second and third stages, or the feeling of being caught between the blessings of the third and the curse of the second, is a troubled state. In this light, the adulterous Parnell is uncrowned Dionysian king of the Irish libido, precisely because he was sacrificed at the altar by the Catholic Church, as a result of his affair with the married Kitty O'Shea, and so deeply split Irish nationalist opinion. For the Parnellite Yeats, Parnell's love of country and sensual transgressions are intimately related. As he writes in "Come Gather Round Me Parnellites":

... stories that live longest
Are sung above the glass,
And Parnell loved his country
And Parnell loved his lass.[21]

The Irish rebellion, which resulted many years after Parnell's efforts were frustrated, proves that the repressed sensible aspect of the soul must return with a vengeance; however, such a rising of the sensible portion as Parnell represents is not easily figured.

Yeats is looking for a complementary balance between the sensible and supersensible, the antithetical and the primary,[22] but, having swung so much towards the British version of the primary, administrative and practical world, the perspective must be corrected

[21] Yeats makes an interesting comment on Parnell in *A Vision* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 124, one that illustrates how Parnell's famously reticent character could also be quite frank in sexual matters, a combination of mask-like opposition, balancing decorum and bacchanalia, that accords well with Yeats's ideas of Unity of Being. He writes, "One of his followers was shocked during the impassioned discussion in Committee Room No. 15 that led to his abandonment, by this most reticent man's lack of reticence in allusion to the operations of sex, an indifference as of a mathematician dealing with some arithmetical quantity...".

[22] Yeats schematically renders the difference between the two terms primary and antithetical thus: "the primary dispensation look[s] beyond itself towards a transcendent power, [it] is dogmatic, levelling, unifying, feminine, humane, peace its means and end". Its characteristics are "necessity, truth, goodness, mechanism, science, democracy, abstraction, peace". The antithetical dispensation "obeys imminent power, [it] is expressive, hierarchical, multiple, masculine, harsh, surgical". Its characteristics are "freedom, fiction, evil, kindred, art, aristocracy, particularity, war". *A Vision*, 52 and 263.

by looking through an eye filled with lust and rage. The sensible basis of the beautiful, so long repressed, rises in a terrible form, a "terrible beauty". This bitter, subjective, antithetical vision is nevertheless not the goal; it is the purgative. Yet, if English rule has repressed Irishness, or the emotional, feminine and mystical, Irish Independence has ironically resulted in Irish repression of the same force, in an effort to put the lion back in the cage. The rage of "The Wild Old Wicked Man", like Crazy Jane's anger, is a reaction to the repression of sexuality in independent Ireland. Yet, the raging portion of the sensible is not sufficient to cure him of his suffering because it is not allied to the supersensible; it is merely forgetfulness:

> 'That some stream of lightning
> From the old man in the skies
> Can burn out that suffering
> No right-taught man denies.
> But a coarse old man am I,
> I choose the second-best,
> I forget it all awhile
> Upon a woman's breast.'

The sensible must join with the supersensible, the physical with the spiritual as in Kant's and Schiller's ideas of the marriage of the beautiful and the sublime, of feminine ideals of objective beauty, based in desire, and masculine ones of subjective perception, based in moral ideals, which makes the consummate individual, family and nation. Such a union hints at what might be the source of the third stage of the post-colonial sublime: an aesthetically rendered concept of identity as promised in the confines of poetic form. The dawn of the soul and the end of night's desire should be the same, as the refrain, *"Day-break and a candle end"*, is meant to remind the old man; however, the fear is that transcendence merely equals death and no more. There desire is a fusion of parts, politically of Irish and English, female and male, the beautiful and the sublime, grandly sublimated like body into spirit.

Similar relations between the feminine, old age, the irrational and the sensible, and, in turn, their relation to Yeats's religious vision are further entertained in the poem "The Pilgrim". Again, one must

reckon with the colonized body. First, the pilgrim endeavors to mortify the flesh, but is reminded of its power by the sight of passing women. Then he goes to a religious retreat, but meets an old man who embodies the revolt of the irrational and the sensible at the approach of death. He is later confronted with death's purgation of the sensible and an image of evil that drive him to repeat the incantation of nonsense syllables, "fol de rol de rolly O", which the women and old man had uttered; these sounds, it seems, are meant to ward off purgation and to save the flesh. By the end of the poem, confronted by the women in silk or rags, he repeats their words:

> Now I am in the public house and lean upon the wall,
> So come in rags or come in silk, in cloak or country shawl,
> And come with learned lovers or with what men you may
> For I can put the whole lot down, and all I have to say
> Is fol de rol de rolly O.

This contradicts the "right-taught" man's transcendental wisdom at the close of "The Wild Old Wicked Man", and thereby forms one of Yeats's paradoxical truths, one of his dialectics that only occasionally can be synthesized, which need constant revision and rearticulation to remain vital.

"The Spirit Medium" is one such synthesis. As such, it is an example of the third stage of the post-colonial sublime, that dialectic which offers a site for establishing a concept of redemption which is promised within poetic form. It is a poem on the Platonic banishment of the arts, as a futile celebration of this world of shadows, but it is one which ends by paradoxically embracing the arts as an expression of Neo-Platonic form. It is not the abandonment of the sensible which occurs in Kant's moral, positive sublime, for like Plotinus, whom Yeats had read closely, the Irish poet insists that the way to the transcendental is through the physical realm. In the face of those whose perception has been purified by death, the poem is a form of profane transfiguration:

> Poetry, music, I have loved, and yet
> Because of those new dead
> That come into my soul and escape

Confusion of the bed,
Or those begotten or unbegotten
Perning in a band,
I bend my body to the spade
Or grope with a dirty hand.

In the last stanza, we see that the lightning from the close of "The Wild Old Wicked Man" has struck again. Like the pure realm of the soul, it is a supernatural incarnation. To be there is to abandon the known world:

An old ghost's thoughts are lightning,
To follow is to die;
Poetry and music I have banished,
But the stupidity
Of root, shoot, blossom or clay
Makes no demand.
I bend my body to the spade
Or grope with a dirty hand.

He does not want to follow the old man because he does not want to renounce the sensible world. He seeks instead to embody physically that spiritual power, to unite sensible and supersensible, in "root, shoot, blossom or clay".

It is interesting that Yeats would want or need to banish poetry in order to do so. Perhaps it is the abstraction of poetry and music, being based in 'numbers' as opposed to the concrete basis of the plastic arts, which makes them hindrances to embodiment, because they do not embody, but merely represent. As in Yeats's evocation of Byzantium in *A Vision*, certain sacred unions of antithetical and primary – or, for the present purposes pagan and Christian – realities are beyond discursiveness or abstraction and, more importantly, they express through "the delicate skill of the craftsman, the murderous madness of the mob";[23] in other words, art can be both an instinctual and spiritual expression. It can "grope with a dirty hand" while "ascending

[23] Yeats, *A Vision*, 237.

breathless starlit air" ("A Dialogue of Self and Soul"). If language has grown too abstract, it must be discarded for the sake of image, as Yeats believed it was at the height of Byzantine culture. Unity of Being and Culture can only be achieved through concrete metaphors, as they are examples of earthly sacredness. For all of its banishment of poetry and music, however, there is something in this poem that moves towards the union of the empirical and the formal, which is the aim of the Yeatsian lyric and which, as the third stage of the post-colonial sublime, is where one may establish the concept of redemption that is promised in the confines of poetic form. Moreover, one asks, can poetry be banished from a poem without banishing with it the inner world? All of the arts try to escape their own forms, try to overcome their inherent limitations. The source, the inspiration, the formless idea, has overcome the limitation of form, but in order to do so it must plunge into the base material and find the source of its mystery. The dirty hand has all the profane, erotic significance that we often see in Yeats's concept of the source of poetry and religious vision as he gropes towards the wisdom of the post-colonial sublime.

Caroline Rooney

Postcolonial Complementarity

This article will attempt to introduce a theory of postcolonial complementarity. In order to open up this possibility, it will first engage with two mutually defined logics, that of the singular and the specific, as deployed and refined by Peter Hallward in *Absolutely Postcolonial*. It will then go on to give some concrete elaboration of its hypothetical conceptual paradigm through a juxtaposition of Cixous' "My Algeriance" and Spivak's "Resident Alien". I will come to suggest that these two works serve to advance complementary yet radically different understandings of what, loosely speaking, 'deconstruction and cultural studies' might mean, considering the ethico-political and literary implications of this proposed divergence.

Before I embark on the proffered readings, some indication of what this term "complementarity" signifies should be set out. It is a term that derives from quantum physics, as proposed by Niels Bohr. Roland Omnès in *Quantum Philosophy* provides a succinct definition of it, as follows:

> [A] given quantum system may be described by many different families of histories ... [F]or example, we could specify at a given instant the velocity of the neutron instead of its position. Depending on our choice, we would have two different domains of propositions (or of histories), two different logics that cannot be embedded into some larger and consistent logic.[1]

[1] Roland Omnès, *Quantum Philosophy: Understanding and Interpreting Contemporary Science*, trans. Arturo Sangalli (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 181.

This could be compared, in passing, to Lyotard's notion of the differend. The differend concerns two logics that are valid in their own right but are mutually exclusive and cannot be comprehended or reconciled within a totalising, over-arching logic. Lyotard states: "As distinguished from a litigation, a differend would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments. One side's legitimacy does not imply the other's lack of legitimacy".[2] As for Omnès, he goes on to say of the differing, non-totalisable logics that he outlines:

> Bohr was already aware of this peculiar fact, and had even raised it to the level of a principle: complementarity, one of the pillars of quantum mechanics. In reality, he was referring to the knowledge acquired by using two different experimental devices. For instance, if a silicon crystal diffracts a neutron we should, according to Bohr, speak of the neutron as a wave, while its detection by a counter would force us to construe it as a particle. Quantum logic shows that such a multiplicity of representations is not just imposed by external instruments but is truly intrinsic to the quantum realm, even when it remains unobserved.[3]

What this suggests is that our representations are provisional, but also that this provisionality is not a mere fiction or illusion for it refers to a real potentiality. Thus, even if representations are mutually exclusive this does not necessitate a discrimination that would deny the potential of one or the other. Now, the perhaps somewhat odd task is to try and bring Hallward's terms, 'the singular' and 'the specific', into an understanding of complementarity.

Hallward introduces the terms as follows: "'Specific' and 'singular' are posited here as *general* logics of individuation. These logics are not themselves reducible to the postcolonial domain, nor indeed to any given domain; rather, I posit them for heuristic purposes

[2] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), xi.

[3] Omnès, *Quantum Philosophy*, 181-182.

as the abstract invariants necessary for the comparison, across distinct contexts, of dissimilar variant situations".[4] So, each refers to a different logic, two logics to be understood in a provisional manner. Hallward defines the singular as follows:

> A singular conception of individuation recognises only one entity as fully individual ... I will refer to such an individual as 'Creative' as distinct from the 'given' or 'created' ... *The singular creates the medium of its own substantial existence or expression.* (2)

This creativity is something that I wish to speak of as the generative or auto-generative, since this terminology will prove useful in later clarifications. In contradistinction to this, what defines the specific for Hallward is relationality and positionality. Hallward writes: "The specific, then, maintains the relation between subject and object (and between subjects) *as a relation* in the strict sense" (330). He also maintains that specific writers provide "a way of making sense of a position, of choosing between positions" (333).

A further definition may be advanced with regard to the criteria Hallward sets out. It might be possible to conceive of what Hallward terms "the singular" or creativity in terms of movement and momentum. This consideration is raised since I have elsewhere treated of African philosophies and literature in terms of a preoccupation with movement that they serve to bring to the fore.[5] And then, regarding the positional specific, such would surely presume a logic of spatio-temporal co-ordinates. These two logics would somewhat accord with Bohr's principle of complementarity: you can measure either the momentum of a neutron, its velocity, or you can measure its position, although you cannot do both at once.

I have, however, some difficulties with how Hallward defines the singular, as will be attended to. Firstly, I should say that I welcome

[4] Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 2. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[5] Caroline Rooney, *African Literature, Animism and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000).

Hallward's fruitful attempts to engage with postcolonial literature as creative, where he generally contests the bias within postcolonial criticism towards an overwhelming insistence on a material specificity, that of particular location and history. That said, my main difficulty is with how Hallward 'specifies', so to speak, the singular in terms of a monistic and monotheistic logic. Just after maintaining that the "*singular creates the medium of its own substantial existence or expression*", he goes on to state: "The singularity of a Creator-god provides it with its exemplary form" (2). At this point, there is a fleeting reference to Spinoza. However, it could be objected that Spinoza does not himself believe in conventional understandings of a Creator-god nor that creativity could be provided with an exemplary form. Spinoza, commonly regarded as a pantheist, writes that no image can be made of God: "Deum enim non est imaginari".[6] Thus, there could be no exemplary form, and the point of clarification is that the generative could not be thought of as generic. Hallward goes on to state:

> [T]he big bang posited by most contemporary cosmologists is a singularity ... A similar logic helps legitimate the expansion of the contemporary multi-national market, the all-inclusive market of global capital. A 'specific' understanding of the market would have to follow Marx's lead and analyse its emergence and procedures as abstractions of class *relation* i.e. as a function of class struggle ... Once the class confrontational approach has been pushed aside ... the market begins to look like a fundamentally *singular* institution – singular in the sense that it is neither specific to any particular place nor constrained by any logic outside the immanent criteria of its own operation. (2-3)

Allowing for different appearances or viewpoints, it may yet be objected that while capitalism might 'look like' it generates itself, in a manner independent of the generic conflict of class, and while it might market itself as 'all-inclusive', such were the deceptive appearances that Marx sought to contest in the first place. Capitalism

[6] Baruch Spinoza, Epistola LVI, in *Opera*, vol. 4 (C. Winter, Heidelberg), 261.

may be said to performatively mimic an auto-generative movement in a virtual and mechanical way without being actually auto-generative. Moreover, as Zygmunt Bauman has shown, capitalism may well seek to disavow its dependence on particular locations – sweatshops for example – but this is precisely a disavowal.[7] It seems as if Hallward is assuming an ideal origin – Capital or a Creator-god – as a real source of generativity. Thus, he perhaps singularises in terms of a centralising logic what cannot be singularised, or treats of the cosmic in terms of a universal or simple singularity. It would be a question of logocentrism, and also of the incommensurability of the virtual ideal and the potentiality of the real.

Hallward proceeds to assert of the logics he is concerned with in the writers that he engages with that: "each equates true reality with the expression of one principle to the exclusion of all rival principles – the One God, the void [*sunyata*], vital energy or virtual differenciation, market forces" (7). It may be correct to propose that the writers in question may each be concerned with a special principle; however, it seems to me impossible to conflate according to a logic of singularity or a certain monism Islamic mysticism, Buddhism, vital energy, the virtual and capitalism. For instance, Buddhism cannot be said to have a monotheistic logic where it endorses a principle of a yin-yang duality of energy. In spite of Hallward's emphasis on monism, it should be pointed out that he yet also speaks of a singular Creolization, as follows: "Today's *créolité* extols a purely fluid difference beyond relations-with-others: through its constant self-transformation, it creates the dynamic medium of its own existence" (23).

Hallward proposes that the three thinkers of the singular are: Spinoza, Hegel and Deleuze. What is problematic here is that there is arguably a differend between the thinking of Hegel and Spinoza, where Hegel may be said to be concerned with an eventual unity between man and God whereas, as already touched on, such would be at odds with Spinoza's non-anthropocentric pantheist thought. In fact, Hegel explicitly writes to refute Spinoza. Furthermore, regarding

[7] Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

Deleuze, there is arguably sometimes an effort to force together what this essay refers to as the generative and the generic. For example, in his reading of Bergson, Deleuze transcendentalises creativity in an elite of Creators: firstly, in man the species, and secondly, within a sub-group of "privileged souls".[8] My hesitations regarding such conflations are as much political as they are philosophical, for I believe that it is the conflation of the generative with a generic ideal that can lead to forms of fascism or fundamentalism, as will be further elaborated.

Hallward in *Absolutely Postcolonial* does explicitly distance himself from 'cultural authenticity' in his discussion of nationalism where he is in favour of a political rather than cultural nationalism. However, it would remain troubling to treat of creativity in political terms without taking political histories into account, where Hallward is dismissive of postcolonial critics who insist on the approaches of historical materialism.

I wish now to turn to Spivak and Cixous in order to elaborate more concretely on the two logics in question. The two pieces selected, Spivak's "Resident Alien" and Cixous' "My Algeriance", are both autobiographical in nature and thus may be said, loosely speaking, to possibly have to do with the logics of individuation which Hallward sees the singular and the specific as pertaining to.

There are striking points of intersection between the two essays. Both writers mark their historical consciousness in terms of World War Two, and whereas for Cixous this is a matter of the Algerian-French ostracism of Jewish Algerians, Spivak writes: "The horror of the Holocaust was what made [WW2] European. It was a *world* war because for us ... and subsequently a number of colonies – the war was a remote instrument for the end of specifically territorial imperialism".[9] As Spivak speaks of this 'world consciousness' in terms of decolonisation, one that fails prompting migration, Cixous speaks of her awareness of being a temporary settler awaiting the

[8] Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Haberjam (New York: Zone Books), 111.

[9] Gayatri Spivak, "Resident Alien", in *Relocating Postcolonialism*, eds. David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 48. All further references to this work will appear in the text.

moment of decolonisation, of Algerian liberation. So for both, a history of fascism alongside decolonisation is at stake. Then both Spivak and Cixous speak of their trajectories away from a country of origin to the metropolitan West, where for Cixous this is a question of a continuous non-belonging and for Spivak a matter of a shuttling back and forth between semi-belongings.

Each speaks of her relation to her passport. Cixous writes: "*Passport*: I cannot look at it without trembling for fear of being unmasked, because it is a fake, always has been".[10] And Spivak, with a less alienated relation to her passport, writes: "A bit of anachronistic nationalism clings to me still. I retain an Indian passport and remain no more than a permanent resident in the U.S." (48). Both seek to find new terminologies for their own and possibly related uprootedness, such as Cixous' "Algeriance" and "passance" (a being in passage), and Spivak's "Resident Alien". Both are facilitated in their cosmopolitanism by speaking more than one language, and both address colonial education as a certain rite of passage. What each also attends to at length is the violence of the histories they inherit, and, finally, each takes into account the role of funeral rites in establishing identity: identity not merely as a matter of birthplace but also place of death.

However, in spite of these similarities, the two essays are extremely different, as each comes to affirm a perspective exclusive of the other. Thus, I want to register how each may be valid in its logic even as the two logics may implicitly entail an exclusion of each other.

In reading "Resident Alien", the thought occurred that Spivak may have been tacitly aware of Cixous' essay or that the several tangents between the two works could constitute coincidences due to a shared intellectual milieu. Spivak begins her essay by stating:

> Derrida has opened hospitality into teleopoesis—a structure of touching the distant other that interrupts the past in the sense of the

[10] Hélène Cixous, "My Algeriance, in other words: to depart not to arrive from Algeria", trans. Eric Prenowitz, in *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (London: Routledge, 1998), 154. All further references to this work will appear in the text.

future rupture that is already inscribed in it. But his specific figurations remain named *arrivant* and *revenant*, arriving or returning. The figure of the Resident Alien is extrinsic to this dynamic. (47)

Spivak goes on to refer to Réda Bensmaïa, an Algerian intellectual who writes of immigrancy, and she comments: "Being an Algerian by birth, he generalises from the Algerian case" (47). Thus, she signals that generalising from the specifics of the Algerian case will not do for her. While she refers to the *arrivant* and *revenant* as specific figurations, I am not sure if they are. At least as far as the *arrivant* is concerned, that which arrives is for Derrida not specifiable in advance, constituting an unforeseen event (which could still be a telepathic one), therefore, something that may be a matter of the creative, the not yet created. It may even be that the *arrivant* concerns the generative whilst the *revenant* concerns the generic as virtual or ghostly ideal.

In *Absolutely Postcolonial*, Hallward maintains that Spivak's work bears a "fundamentally singular orientation" (27). I myself tend rather to regard Spivak as more a thinker of the specific, but it is not necessarily easily resolved. It is in the deconstructive aspects of her work that Hallward detects a singular orientation: that is, in her scepticism of the identitarian and in her emphasis on self-displacement, and in her thinking implying what Hallward sees as the "medium of Creative movement" (29). Yet Spivak may nonetheless be seen to insist on questions of positionality, particularly as regards the Resident Alien.

In order to explicate the figure of the Resident Alien, Spivak turns to Tagore's novel *Gora* in which an Irish foundling grows up thinking he is a Brahman's son, only to find out with the adoptive father's approach of death that he cannot perform the funeral rites for he is not truly a Hindu Indian. She states that "Tagore imagines the unwilling imperialist as a sort of 'Resident Alien'" (49), and she accounts for the strangeness of reversing the host-guest relationship as follows: "*Gora* is a singular novel, an unusual novel, a peculiar riff on mere nationalism" (49). So having put aside the specifically Algerian case, Spivak takes up this singularity where the singularity is given in terms of a creative strangeness. And rather strangely, Spivak says of this creative experiment: "I want to see my own civil status replicated in it" (49). That is, presumably she wishes to see herself represented in the figure of Gora – that of the European man masquerading as Indian? This might be a matter of 'Indianizing' a Western subjecthood (one that is masculine in its structure while available to both sexes). However, it may not be a transferential investment so much as a strategic ploy of re-appropriating an accidental hybridity, giving it a further spin. More particularly, Spivak reads *Gora* in terms of an historical transition from a caste-riven, religious traditional culture to a modern secular nationalism, since Gora comes to affirmatively renounce his Hinduism for the sake of a national inclusiveness.

Spivak maintains that she is the implied reader of *Gora*, being "the emancipated secularist Bengali middle-class woman in the future anterior of the book" (50). However, Spivak adds that her mother is perhaps "closer to the mark" since Spivak says: "I escaped before my MA" (50). It is notable that she chooses the term 'escaped'. This suggests that she avoids her mother's destiny, where her mother did a degree in Bengali literature, the 'embarrassing' term for which, as Spivak tells us, is "Indian vernaculars" (50). Against the possibility of this maternal, 'vernacular' predicament, what Spivak escapes to is a cosmopolitan scene of teaching where we find her engaging with a philosophy of grammar, a grammatological move from, we might say, a spoken or everyday language to a structure of writing, which affords the insight that "Subject-position is *assigned*" (51). The move may be from a mother-tongue, a local language, to a general grammar whereby identity is a matter of inscription. Spivak speaks here of "the locative as the genitive" (51), and we could infer that she may be located as being 'of India' through a written sign-system. For Spivak, assigned subject-positions are, in the expression of Henry James, "'Figures in the carpet'" (50). That is to say, these figures are already woven, textualised, already given.

I would like to contrast the above with a moment in Cixous' essay. Cixous writes: "Neither France, nor Germany, nor Algeria" (155). That is, she is not 'of' any of these places. She goes on to say: "Freedom, an inconvenient, intolerable freedom, a freedom that obliges one to let go, to rise above, to beat one's wings. To weave a flying carpet. *I felt perfectly at home, nowhere*" (155). Thus, whilst Spivak sees she has an assigned subject position, 'of India', in terms of an already woven carpet, Cixous, of no country, is obliged to

weave herself a flying – mobile – carpet, a weaving in motion. What is further amusing to note is that Spivak turns to an American novelist for her metaphor whilst Cixous deploys an Orientalist trope. Moreover, Spivak, maintaining the genitive, maintains a certain possessive trait, whilst Cixous says she lets go. She also speaks of it being a family tendency to have as few possessions as possible.

Spivak proceeds to contrast *Gora* with Kipling's *Kim*, saying that in relation to the name 'India' they offer a different 'being-in-space'. Above, I touched briefly on how Cixous is working with a logic or dynamic of movement, of which further exemplification will be given. Spivak is clearly working with a spatio-temporal logic of positionality. This different being-in-space for *Gora* and *Kim* turns out reasonably to be a different being-in-time. Spivak treats of a Hindu-nationalist Gora who would aggressively cathect the name 'India' with "prior religio-philosophico-cultural meaning" (51). She calls this an abreaction, and I think that she means something along the lines of a secularised subjectivity trying to return to a formerly religious or mystical state. She argues that Kipling is unable to enter that space, presumably of Hindu religion and philosophy, although he has a vague sense of it.

Spivak's compelling analysis of imperialism is that it thinks and plays itself as a "Great Game" (52). It is, Spivak shows, a performative theatre in which Western men play at being others. Thus, Kipling may be seen to play at being a child and a native in *Kim*, whilst revealing something of the nature of imperialism. And, in an insightful footnote, she writes: "In this new episode of the Great Game, we see the same lineaments appearing. George W. Bush as boy-hero ... It is the adolescent who reduces everything to black and white" in, as she maintains, a Wild West sort of venture (62). I will return to some of the implications of this analysis later. For the moment, this characterisation of imperialism offers us a reversal of time's arrow, from adulthood back to a pretended childhood or adolescence. The difference for a Gora is that the trajectory is from childhood to manhood, as Spivak explicitly addresses. Thus, paradigmatically, imperialist and native inhabit different spatio-temporal positions in Spivak's reasoning. She says of Benedict Anderson and Etienne Balibar on nationhood that: "The word that is translated 'nation' names a hardy 'residual', not an

'emergent' which would allow us to claim that 'citizenship' ... 'and nationality have a single, indissoluble institutional base'" (53). National residence would in this, it seems, be not a case of a movement of emergence, but a matter of the remaining of something that has been established.

Spivak, at this point, turns to a reflection on the question of funeral rites with particular respect to the burial of the foreigner-guest or the enemy-outlaw. This pertains to Gora not being allowed to conduct funeral rites since he is not a Hindu. Somehow, this moves Spivak on to a discussion of Aristotle, Socrates and Sophocles. She identifies Aristotle as a Resident Alien and conjectures that his theory of tragedy concerns affective responses of pity and fear to those we see as other, as strangers. She writes:

> Tragedy purges by calling up all the positive and negative elements that the other as other – hero or villain, but precisely not me – can call up: *elios* (inadequately translated as 'pity'), all the positive feelings toward the other alien-ated by the tragic aura; and *phobos* (inadequately translated as 'fear'), all the rejecting/repelling affects toward a similarly alienated figure. (55)

Spivak has a footnote here that directs us to Lacan on the figure of Antigone. I find myself slightly implicated in this as I have written on the Algerian provenance of the work of Cixous and Derrida referring to Lacan on Antigone (in fact, alongside a reading of Spivak).[11] Thus, bringing out some of the possible subtext in the footnote, it may be that Spivak is hinting at a complex reaction to the *pieds-noirs*, black-soled (white-skinned, black-souled?) lot, not merely settlers but the unsettled non-belongers or, as she says, the alienated, as the discussion of Cixous will come to substantiate. That this reaction is expressed in terms of attraction/repulsion vaguely suggests a sexual element to it, but not sufficiently to analyse. Nonetheless, what I wish to draw from this speculation is that Spivak's spatio-temporal logic is a masculine one:

[11] Rooney, "Clandestine Antigones", *The Oxford Literary Review* 19 (1997), 47-78.

it is specifically of that genre. I think that she wants it to be: this is not a deconstruction.

It is at this point in her essay that Spivak does become taxonomic, which is to rely on a generic logic. She maintains that the category of Resident Alien is something that must be delineated since it is potentially limitless where, she says, "at the limit one could suggest that we are nothing but resident aliens on earth" (55). This observation brings to mind a line from a poem by Mahmoud Darwish: "We are the guests of eternity".[12]

Spivak, however, leaves the poetic as such behind, stating: "I wish to confine 'Resident Alien' to abstract juridico-legal structures, as does Aristotle. It would indeed involve a movement, from home to elsewhere, but full citizenship of that elsewhere would not be forthcoming, withheld, or unsought" (55). Does this mean that full citizenship would be sought ("not ... unsought"), but neither given ("not ... forthcoming") nor not granted ("not ... withheld"): an unanswered or ignored rather than definitely refused request? Or might it mean that full citizenship would not be granted, whether or not it were a case of it being applied for: the right to apply foreclosed? In either of these cases, there would be a certain pre-emptive refusal, a quasi-categorical one, although I am not sure what would define the category in question. For example, would it be a matter of political laws regulating immigrancy and residence, or would it be a matter of a philosophical prescription determining qualification for citizenship, as can be found in the Enlightenment equivalence of citizenship and manhood? Either way, with this, Spivak offers a strictly qualified or limited welcoming of colonialism as a certain temporary event that pharmakonically has the ability to bring not only ills but curative gifts. She shows too how the coloniser-as-would-be-redeemer can turn butcherous traitor, and she cites a poem about the Sepoy mutiny by Farhad Mazhar, called "The Corpse-Keeper of Revolt", about burial rites and remembrance of the massacred. That a poem is cited does yet problematise the distinction between the abstract juridico-legal structures and identification on an affective basis being worked with.

[12] Mahmoud Darwish, "A State of Siege", trans. Ramsic Amsun, http://www.arabworldbooks.com/Literature/poetry4.html.

Spivak further singles out the Westernised middle-class Indian as a kind of traitor when caught in a certain gap between the traditional world (of poetry, spirit, song) and the modern, professional world.

Spivak, referring to the Bauls, implies that mysticism is to be left behind: "It is as if Gora celebrates the trajectory of the goddess who is resident in all things ... as error ... I am not explaining a modern Indian text of secularism, like a Hindu cultural conservative" (58). This is illuminating in that it indicates that Spivak's most pressing anxieties concern cultural nationalisms, and (since quite of a lot of the essay is about the history of Afghanistan), religious fundamentalism. It may be proposed that for Spivak modernity is a matter of adopting generic ideals, a simple singularity that has the capacity to unify – for example, 'man' as a generic ideal for humanity; 'India' as a generic ideal for a nation – to the exclusion of something more cosmic or more pantheistic. That is to say, if you adopt such generic ideals, you cannot invest them with the affective power of the creative or generative. As formulated earlier, this could constitute the error of fascism and fundamentalism, conflation of the generic ideal with the generative. Or, it would be a matter of conflating the poetic and sacred with the political. Spivak is not here a thinker of a singular orientation, as Hallward suggests, but a spatio-temporal thinker of positionality and relationality, a thinker of the specific or abstractly generic where such a logic is single since it elevates one term of a binary and subordinates or represses its other; although there is not necessarily an oppression. Spivak approves of the role of women in Gora as "radical yet willingly subordinate" (59). Subordinate to a Man Ideal but not thereby subordinate to men? Would this be the point? It may purport a secularisation of the feminine, presumably for the sake of equal citizenship, Spivak identifying herself as an emancipated secularist subject. Spivak's favourite Resident Alien, she finally concludes, is a character from a story by Mahasweta Devi. This character is a militant, half-white, half-tribal woman who, in the story, takes revenge for a history of sexual violence against the feminine.

I will now turn, more briefly, to Cixous. Spivak reads Tagore's and Kipling's texts as historical allegories that may afford us ethico-political lessons: but, somewhat deliberately, our affective responses to these texts are rather bracketed off. Kipling and Tagore are also

poets, as is Cixous. In fact, in "My Algeriance" there is a passage in which Cixous puts herself forward as a poet through an identification with the character of Cinna in *Julius Caesar*. She adaptively cites from the play as follows:

> *(Enter the Algerian plebeians)*
> —What is your name? Whither are you going? Where do you dwell?...
> Cinna: I am going to Caesar's funeral.
> —As a friend or an enemy?
> —As a friend.
> —Your name?
> —My name is Cinna.
> —Tear him to pieces.
> —I am Cinna the poet!
> *(They tear him to pieces.)* (161)

Cixous comments:

> This little ephemeral character, the poet who paid with his life for the misfortune of being the namesake of Cinna the politician friend of Brutus and Cassius, this was us. The Cixous children those not really Jewish false French odd inadequate people who loved the Algerians who spurned us as enemy Francaouis, Roumis and Jews .... [I]t was in vain that we cried Friend, Friend, the shibboleth did not pass. (161)

So, offers of friendship are rejected by both the French and the Arabs and met with violence and hatred but this is due to the error of taking the poet for a politician: either politics blots out a recognition of the poetic or there is (an unconscious) political hostility towards the poetic. And the poet is prevented from attending the civic funeral, the scene of mourning that is inflected with questions of inheritance. Cixous speaks of hating the French for being racists but says that although the Arabs hated her she did not hate them back because she could understand their resentment of her as a sort of 'resident alien.' Thus, whilst Spivak, from a trajectory of Westernisation, may feel a phobia towards the alienated stranger, such as Cixous, this phobia is not reciprocated.

The bit of Lacan's reading of Antigone that Spivak refers to concerns her transgression of a limit into what is a temporary state of inspiration or enthusiasm. Lacan decrees that it is not a state you can remain in. However, all that really means is that it cannot be sustained for very long. Cixous uses the adjective 'ephemeral' for Cinna, and that would be it: an 'in passing', a state without spatio-temporal establishment. Cixous' text is addressed to her brother, and therefore is framed by the brother-sister relationship, a relationship that does have a bearing on poetic inspiration: as you can find, for example, in Wordsworth, Goethe, Shelley, Byron, and others. This would concern Cixous' notion of creative writing as bi-sexual or androgynous or neutral, as opposed to generically singularised and centred. In his discussion of the differend, Lyotard speaks of a "periodic unbridling", thus transient experience, of enthusiastic pathos and his comments on this can be brought into a relation with Spivak's reading of Aristotle, as inflected by Lacan. Lyotard writes:

> As can be seen, the 'passage' [the impasse of a presentation of the Infinite associated with the affect of enthusiasm] does not take place, it is a 'passage' in the course of coming to pass. Its course, its movement, is a kind of agitation in place, one within the impasse of incommensurability, and above the abyss, a 'vibration', as Kant writes, that is a quickly alternating attraction toward, and repulsion from, the same object. (167)

Would this affective disturbance of attraction-repulsion that the philosopher is met with or imagines be one of empathy-phobia? For the poet, however, there would probably be no negativity in enthusiasm where also, agreeing with Hallward, a subject-object relation would not pertain here. The poetic agitation might be one of attempting to present the utopian and synchronous in a spatial or temporal medium: poetry as vibration in this sense.

Cixous begins her essay by stating: "My way of thinking was born with the thought that I could have been born elsewhere" and she imagines herself born of an "accidence" (153):

> Rain of atoms in raining, the atom of my father had met the atom of my mother.

The strange molecule detached from the black skies of the north had landed in Africa. (153)

It sounds like a strange quantum birth, as random as events in the quantum realm. Accordingly, Cixous speaks of lacking a sense of spatio-temporal determination as she arrives out of nowhere with: "The obscure feeling ... of not belonging to any here by inheritance or descent" (153). Instead, there is a sense of on-going movement. Her French passport, which she says feels fake, she transforms into French 'passporosity', a matter of sailing into and out of ports, and a non-matter of porosity, passing through. In a section called "Passance", she writes of Algeria rising and affirming its own destiny, stating: "The strange thing is that this coincided with my own chronology. In 1954 Algeria and I went to sea in the same year. I waited for it, I knew it, it was the movement of life itself" (169).

This double movement of uprising/departure is the movement of life asserting itself against oppression; it is a freedom of spirit. That said, the tragedy is of the consequent impacting of this ontological necessity with ideals of ethnic and national identity in the violence that ensues. Still, the point is that Cixous willingly abrogates her hegemonic position, and as Algeria rises, takes to the sea: "I took my leave like a bird, like a liberation: to drop pretence, errors, pains and penalties. Given wholly over to my momentum" (169).

If Spivak's 'particle' is positioned, Cixous' 'wave' is momentum. Two different incompatible logics, although what is entailed may also be a divergence between conceptuality and a dynamism of rhythm and tempo. Appropriately, Deleuze, in a short essay on a work by Cixous, notes that what is distinctive about Cixous' writing is its velocity: "in my opinion, Hélène Cixous has invented a new, original kind of writing, which she grants [*donne*] an entirely singular place in modern literature: a kind of stroboscopic writing, where the narrative comes alive, and the different themes inter-connect, and the words form variable figures, according to the accelerated speeds".[13] *Algeriance*, *accidence*, *passance*, *arrivance* require a tempo more

[13] Deleuze, "Hélène Cixous or Stroboscopic Writing", *The Oxford Literary Review* 24 (2002), 204.

than a temporality, a keeping in motion, or to use a Deleuzian concept, a nomadology. What is possibly troubling about this free-wheeling yet necessary motion is the implied escapist lack of commitment. Cixous writes: "I left. The certainty I would never return. Without regret" (172). As a kind of retort, Hallward may be cited here: "Morrison's fiction ... asserts again and again that 'you can't just fly off and leave a body' (*Song of Solomon*). The ghosts return, the bones must be collected ... the leap into flight must first be grounded" (331-332). That is, what of the sense of historical responsibility? Even if you are not personally responsible for colonialism, beyond personal abdications, there are questions of legacies you do not choose yet cannot just leave behind, as I think Spivak would see it.

However, returning to Cixous' perspective, the emphasis seems to be on a present continuous, albeit with leaps, and this emphasis on continuous movement and freedom of spirit, together with the brother-sister relationship, is not without its affiliations to African literature and philosophy. Although Cixous stresses her non-belonging, there would be the thought that a certain if marginal Africanisation may occur that does not have to do with national identity as such. This would entail a thinking not of the national or the universal but of the cosmic. Moreover, her essay's sub-title, "to depart not to arrive from Algeria", suggests, in a departure without arrival, an endless departure, that the point of departure is not broken with.

Whilst Spivak treats of a father who does not die and for whom funeral rites are suspended, Cixous treats of a father who dies, is buried in Algeria, and deeply mourned. Cixous writes of her own father, and I cannot interpose myself there. Rather, on a symbolic level, I wish to suggest that for Spivak there is a paternal principle, a law, that it would be untimely and frightening to forego. On the other hand, Cixous writes of how she has been forced to witness in Algeria scenes of great hardship and dejection on the part of the colonised and scenes of violent prejudice. She says: "I was near-sighted, but I lacked blindness. I would indeed have liked not to see. It was impossible" (164). What is witnessed inescapably goes against any generic ideal: there are but "Caricature-camps" (156), the demons of colonialism; monsters; false communities or communities of hostility.

The domains respectively depicted by Spivak and Cixous seem

incompatible in their logics, and yet they are thereby complementary. Each serves to keep apart, through different renunciations, the generic and the generative, as two different possible responses to their knowledge of violent histories, perhaps particularly as regards violence against women. Cixous comes to denounce a postcolonial Algeria as "Enemy of women" (172), whilst Spivak, as mentioned, comes to entertain the figure of a militant woman, a figure of vengeance against abuse of the feminine.

Although from Spivak's perspective Cixous might seem simply alienated, Cixous' text ends far more hopefully than that of Spivak. She speaks of an unforeseen coming together with "unexpected sisters", Algerian women refugees, an event of which she writes:

> As if there were something stronger than wars, repression, forgetting, resentment, the centuries of misunderstanding, something gentler, more immediate, more fleshy, more free, a force independent of all struggle, that laughs at championshipings, claims and reproaches, and which I would call 'Algeriance.' (172)

This – and read it for the tempo – is not exactly cosmopolitanism for it is utopian, utopian not in the sense of impossibly idealistic but in the sense of what cannot be assigned a place or position: the 'cosmonautical' perhaps, thinking of 'passporosity'. Of course I agree with Spivak's emphasis on the secularisation as well as the democratisation of the political nation. There is, though, something beyond or outside of national citizenship, similar perhaps to Adorno's notion of artistic autonomy which he pits against political commitment. It concerns also Bergson's notion of the open society, but this one is without elite Creators. It is or should be poetry as friendship, the friendship without hostility, which perhaps means without belonging(s).

Coming to the end of this reading of the two essays, I wondered if it would be possible to begin again, inverting the attention, thus looking for a treatment of the specific or generic in the writing of Cixous and a deployment of the generative in that of Spivak, especially given that the principle of complementarity shows that the means of observation determine the representation that arises. Moreover, it is possible that within any text there may be leaps

between different domains and textualities. Whilst what has been offered here is schematic, deliberately so for the sake of a clarification, nonetheless it does seem that the respective writings of Cixous and Spivak do in themselves offer different orientations. Not least, Spivak writes as a critic and theorist and Cixous as a poet, where, as touched upon, their particular cultural experiences and backgrounds have some bearing on such orientations. However, I am not trying to suggest a divide between the literary and the critical, for the literary may be a matter of a writing that may be understood in terms of both the generative and the generic. These two orientations might, finally, further be explained in the respective terms of prospective and retrospective logics.

In her essay, Spivak works with a logic of maturation, one that seems to reflect the notion, incidentally employed by both Marx and Freud, of phylogeny recapitulating ontogeny. Within this logic, a certain creativity is sometimes associated with childhood, a childhood that it would be regressive or an error for the adult to attempt to recapture. For instance, Marx writes:

> A man cannot become a child again unless he becomes childish … The Greeks were normal children. The charm their art has for us does not conflict with the primitive character of the social order from which it had sprung. It is rather the product of the latter, and is due rather to the fact that the immature social conditions under which the art arose and under which alone it could appear and can never return.[14]

Regarding this logic of maturation as traced in "Resident Alien", it remains necessary to distinguish between the imperialist or politician, whose gaming may well be analysed in terms of a nostalgia for lost youth or adolescence, and the creative writer, a writer such as Cixous. Cixous' perspective could not really be called regressive, even as it may persist with a childhood scepticism of adult political ideologies.

[14] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse,* in *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 360.

Cixous offers rather a prospective condition, constantly moving on, in fact, not looking back with nostalgia or a desire to return to some former state. It could be argued that art is not quite so dependent on historical development and determination as Marx maintains.

As cited earlier, for Lyotard, the differend could allow for a double legitimacy: "One side's legitimacy does not imply the other's lack of legitimacy". As a kind of elaboration, in terms of a logic of political maturation, enthusiastic pathos would be regressive or dangerous. However, that is only so for this logic: enthusiasm is not in itself regressive or illegitimate. In glossing Kant on enthusiasm and the sublime, Lyotard writes:

> Historical-political enthusiasm is thus on the edge of dementia, it is a pathological outburst, and as such it has in itself no ethical validity, since ethics requires one's freedom from any motivating pathos; ethics allows only that apathetic pathos accompanying obligation that is respect. In its periodic unbridling, however, enthusiastic pathos conserves an aesthetic validity, it is an energetic *sign*, a tensor of *Wunsch*.[15]

What I should like to add is that "[h]istorical-political enthusiasm" is indeed on the edge of dementia because of the conflation of the historical-political with enthusiasm where, ethically speaking, the two should be maintained apart in the mutual exclusiveness of complementarity: this, rather than the mere repression of enthusiasm as illegitimate. Implicitly, Lyotard signifies a differend between the ethical and the aesthetic here, as two potentially incompatible genres. Much of *The Differend* is devoted to conflicts that arise from incommensurate genres of discourse, Lyotard stating:

> There are stakes tied to genres of discourse … At bottom, one in general presupposes *a* language, a language naturally at peace with itself, 'communicational,' and perturbed for instance only by the wills, passions, and intentions of humans. Anthropocentrism. In the matter of language, the revolution of relativity and of quantum theory remains to be made. No matter what its regimen, every phrase is in principle what is at stake in a differend between genres of discourse.

[15] Lyotard, *The Differend*, 166-167.

Firstly, to avoid confusion, it should be pointed out that the revolutions of relativity and quantum theory are quite distinct, where the former does not break with the tradition of classical physics in the radical way that the latter does. For the purposes of this discussion, the principle of complementarity is not a relativistic one but one of an indeterminacy of mutual exclusion, whilst this has been obviously been drawing on the principle in an analogous and impressionistic rather than properly scientific way. Although this would require further thought, there are yet different ways in which the relational may be conceived: either in terms of a quasi-transcendental, generic logic or an immanent, holistic one (in which everything would be connected). Secondly, what this speculation has been trying to entertain is that the crucial distinction may be between the generic and the generative, rather than between genres of discourse as Lyotard considers. Cixous describes herself as a poet, but generically speaking, she is not a writer of poems as such (that I know of), hence, it could be argued that the designation points, with difficulty, to an a-generic writing or one that would be difficult to generically determine, Deleuze speaking of how her writing intimately combines fiction, theory and criticism, and Cixous speaking an intention to capture the act of writing in advance of the written.[16] Both the logics of the generative and the generic may be accorded validity in their own right, where the further ethical dimension would be of each allowing for the other, their incompletion even holding out for the potentiality of each other, in order to pre-empt a logic of totalisation, be such a would-be totality a matter of conflation with or denial of the other.

The significant ethical point is that the differend need not be a matter of conflict, as Lyotard contends with, but a matter of grasping the necessity of mutual exclusions, a matter of complementarity.

[16] Deleuze, "Hélène Cixous or Stroboscopic Writing", 203.

Raffaele Celiento

Postcolonial Images of South Asian Women: A comparative and intercultural reading

Indian Women's Literatures in English and Globalization

I speak three languages, write in two and dream in one. 'Don't write in English', they said, 'English is not your mother tongue!' Why not leave me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins, every one of you?
Kamala Das

The voices of South Asian women writers have been raised in the last three decades against essentialistic images fixed on them by age-old oppressive prejudices and traditions, and against epistemic, political and economic violence from both the East and the West. In this study I am interested above all in the way they deal with questions of identity, self-assertion and diasporic dispersion. I am reading Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and migrant/diasporic/hyphenated/trans-national women writers living and telling stories across three continents ("You see the folly of trying to contain writers inside passports"[1]). 'Literatures' in English: although they are written in (almost) the same language, they are expressions of a plurality of cultures and languages.[2]

[1] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Granta Books, 1992), 67. First published in 1991.

[2] The adjective 'Indian' and the term 'Hinduism' are themselves synonyms of comprehensiveness and tolerance. See Nandine Ghosh, "Fixing the Language, Fixing the Nation", *Jouvert* 5-3-2000.

Indian women writers have successfully come to light in a worldly dimension thanks partly to their choice to write in English; but what surprises me most about Anglo-Indian language is also the use of subcontinental words and Italian words (or elements of Italian culture: neo-realistic cinema, music, art) mixed with the English language – terms taken sometimes from sojourns in Italy, as in the case of Anita Desai, who revised *Diamond Dust* (2001) in Umbria.[3] Indian languages and cultures are contaminating English vocabulary and life styles all around the world and letting themselves be contaminated; something India has been doing for millennia. Change comes after encounters, exchanges and interactions with the unknown. If all the abilities of communication were to play their fundamental part in these processes, in the definition of the Western contemporary society the adjective 'multicultural' could easily be replaced by the adjective 'intercultural', the latter implying a more active role for both the subjects involved in social relationships.

Indian women writers offer samples of the pluralities and specificities of Indian women's identities, in a style that I see very close to what Hélène Cixous calls *écriture féminine*. With a subtlety and wit that recall Mirabai and Kamala Markandaya in the East, and Virginia Woolf and Toni Morrison in the West, they have found new and original ways to say the unsaid and let the (female) subaltern speak. With their cross-cultural voices they have erased the binary division of the world. They seem to adhere to the same school of creative writing, using the same poetical, metaphorical and anti-theoretical style; the same verbalizations of perceptions, psychological activities and free associations in a fluid magical writing; the same themes: history, re-memberings and re-mappings, communication, self-assertion and interculture; even the same motifs, images and symbols: room, view/window, important historical dates/events, silence and food.

Is this due to the effects of globalization (Pier Paolo Pasolini's *omologazione*) or have women just found their own specific global/cosmopolitan voice and fullness connecting themselves to archetypal images, specificities totally out of time and place, joining a

[3] Anita Desai, *Diamond Dust* (London: Vintage, 2001). First published in 2000.

worldwide female for whom the crossing of borders is the norm? In *Banana-Flower Dream* by Bulbul Sharma this is represented by a precise image: the water of Ganga – a feminine name – in which generations of women from past, present and future ages melt and flow; and, in the Foreword to *Blood into Ink*, Meena Alexander writes: "[I]t is through the border crossings undertaken by the female body, the living 'I', that the creative potentiality of the world is inscribed afresh".[4]

Indian women have gained a voice that is other-than-Western with which to speak about the East, the West and East-West matters in a Western (?) language. Affected, in Melanie Klein's sense, by Western feminism, they have recently re-explored the alternative ideal of self-assertion (keeping always an ear to mythology, by which they have been nurtured since birth). They are re-reading and re-writing His-story (white-Western-man's, as well as black-South-Eastern-co-responsible-man's) and images of women from their own perspectives, finding, as Virginia Woolf writes in *Three Guineas*, new words and methods to tell the untold. "[F]eminist historiography often excavates", as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes.[5] Sometimes the writers even dare change the names of important historical events, so that "Mutiny" becomes "Revolt" in Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron*, because "Mutiny implies it was confined to a section of the armed force", and literature becomes a mix of Ghalib's *ghazals* in Arabic-Persian letters, Greek mythology (Zeus' rape paralleled by her ancestor's), and Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, Franz Fanon and popular film in quotation, allusion and parody. "[A]ncient Greek texts were kept alive through Arabic translations, which were translated from Arabic back into European languages when Europe was ready to stop being barbaric and have a cultured moment".[6]

[4] Bulbul Sharma, *Banana-Flower Dream*, trad. it. Claudia Tarolo, *Banana-flower* (Milano: Marcos y Marcos, 1999); Miriam Cooke & Roshni Rustomji-Kerns, eds., *Blood into Ink: South Asian and Middle Eastern Women Write War* (Boulder-San Francisco-Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), xvi.

[5] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1999), 198.

[6] Kamila Shamsie, *Salt and Saffron* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), 66; ibid., 17.

The theme of women and war has always been a part of South Asian writings. The issues of the (female) body, territory and nationhood are intertwined in the plots of the Orientalist narrative. Edward Said's *Orientalism* unveils the impulse to sexualize colonial/postcolonial encounters. Sara Suleri warns us that too easy equations (and alteritisms) could be dangerous. "The geography of rape ... serves as a subterfuge to avoid the striking symbolic homoeroticism of Anglo-Indian narrative".[7]

In such a vast landscape choices in terms of literary genres, themes and forms are necessary. I am presenting excerpts from novels, short stories, and essays by Indian women in the endeavour to understand the changes in the representation of women operated by diasporic Indian women's writing from the '70s on in the English language, i.e. from an élitarian position to an élitarian readership – a provincial one, Dipesh Chakrabarty would say. I am focusing on two themes, the 'room' and 'writing', representing the first steps towards women's self-assertion. The room seems to represent a setting to be 'inscribed in' with magic words performing the re-appropriation of the meaning of living. (Re-)Writing can be a good training to consciousness meant as the process of re-perceiving what has been perceived (re-experiencing the experienced), possibly re-expressing it with an awareness of political, psychological and cultural manipulations.[8]

These themes characterize almost all the works of the most recent generation of Indian women writers, too, with few changes in the complexity of forms, velocity of rhythm, or use of cinematic techniques, satire and of daily tone of language, irony, jokes and puns. The room is very often relocated to other continents, consequently involving all sorts of intercultural questions and problems of communication. Food emerges as passion, penance, obsession, and as a substitute for homelands, a ritual to restore peace, health and good time, connecting people to memories of homeland.

Like itinerant modern-sufis, they travel by plane, no longer on

[7] Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 21.

[8] See also Anita Desai, *In Custody* (London: Vintage, 1999). First published in 1984.

foot, and like the 'mistresses' in Chitra Divakaruni's novel *The Mistress of Spices*, landing somewhere around the world with specific tasks, they reconcile desires and responsibilities, affects and mind, past and present, the East and the West.[9] Radical feminism, in its critique of patriarchal norms, raises "burning questions about class and gender". Aamer Hussein reports the case of Jamila Hashmi who insisted "on giving equal space in her fiction to Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, stressing a common cultural experience"; ancient sufis did this, too.[10]

The Indian Women's Postcolonial Room

> In my grandmother's home, I didn't need a window to look at a mysterious, unknown world outside.... My grandmother's stories were no ordinary bedtime stories.... She had an answer for every question. But her answers were not simple: they had to be decoded. A comparison had to be made, an illustration discovered, and a moral drawn out.
>
> Githa Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*

Who is in the 'room' of this essay? It isn't so large, so I could just 'invite' a few women's characters telling stories from women's works chosen according to a chronological and thematic approach. I will try to read them in the light of two complementary masterpieces of literary criticism: Suleri's *The Rhetoric of English India* and Spivak's

[9] Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices*, trad. it. Federica Oddera, *La Maga delle Spezie* (Torino: Einaudi, 1998).

[10] *Hoops of Fire: Fifty Years of Fiction by Pakistani Women*, ed. Aamer Hussein (London: Saqi Books, 1999), 10. What contemporary women writers do is a sort of renaissance which had its precursor in the medieval period of Indian Literature, a period in which it was a 'system in movement', not only metaphorically, throughout South Asia which started to explore pre-Aryan ideas – no caste system and patriarchy but tolerance; a period of splendor in which besides itinerant poets such as Surdas, Kabir and Nanak we find a woman, Mirabai (1498-1546), a young widow-princess who left her privileges to be not a *sati* but a *sat sangi*. "The roots in the first part of *sati* and *satyagrha* are the same", Spivak notes in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (298); i.e., *sat* (truth); with *sangi* it implies also *inter esse*.

A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. I have chosen Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* (1975) because of its forceful attempts to question tradition, the untold of His-story, and because of the presence of independent women's characters, including non natives living in India in two different ages.[11] I have also chosen a story from Anita Desai's *Diamond Dust* collection (2001) – the hardest and most fragile natural element – to give a more complete idea about roots/routes and to introduce a comparison with and a brief analysis of some works by the last generation of women writers: Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* (2000) and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999).[12] A very few allusions to Bulbul Sharma's *The Anger of Aubergines* (1997) are made in order to have a wider picture of the writers' inventive affinities.[13] In this way I am confronting different generations of women writers, different narrative genres (novels and short stories) and East-West points of view deriving from the presence of migrant writers, natives and non natives (élitarian but extremely multi-cultural writers). Although they occupy different geopolitical positions, with twenty-five years distance between them, the main characters in Jhabvala's and Shamsie's novels share the same will to know the missing pieces of their family's story, involving problems of caste, class and interculture, and to "listen to the weeping of ghosts" unwilling to surrender to mores.[14] Desai's and Lahiri's collections, too, seem to share many characteristics beside the fact that both contain nine stories, the third of which gives the name to the entire collection, and in both short stories the main characters' names are Mr and Mrs Das.

The room

> [M]y child, a woman meets her fate alone.
> Githa Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*

[11] Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, *Heat and Dust* (London: Penguin, 1994). First published in 1975.
[12] Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies* (London: Flamingo, 1999).
[13] Sharma, *The Anger of Aubergines* (North Melbourne: Spinifex, 2000). First published in Delhi in 1998.
[14] Shamsie, *Salt and Saffron*, 172.

"The Treatment of Bibi Haldar", a story from Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* collection, is about a woman suffering from epilepsy, "an ailment that baffled family, friends, priests, palmists, spinsters, gem therapists, prophets, and fools" (*Interpreter*, 158). After her father's death Bibi Haldar was entrusted to a mean and careless cousin. She was

> trusted neither to cross a street nor board a tram without supervision. Her daily occupation consisted of sitting in the storage room on the roof of our building, a space in which one could sit but not comfortably stand, featuring an adjoining latrine, a curtained entrance, one window without a grille, and shelves made from the panels of old doors. There, cross-legged on a square of jute, she recorded inventory for the cosmetics shop that her cousin Haldar owned and managed at the mouth of our courtyard. For her services, Bibi received no income but was given meals, provisions, and sufficient meters of cotton ... (Ibid., 159)

When the Haldars' baby was ill they increased Bibi's segregation; marriage was suggested by neighbours, but Haldar thought it was expensive, why should he waste his profits? But her crisis changed his mind and convinced him to place a cheap one-line advertisement in the town newspaper, "GIRL, UNSTABLE, HEIGHT 152 CENTIMETRES, SEEKS HUSBAND" (ibid., 165); no results (stories about this kind of ad are very common in Indian writers, one of the funniest appears in Sharma's collection *The Anger*). Bibi was confined in the storage room, nights included, with her belongings in a trunk, meals left at the top of the stairs.

> 'I don't mind', Bibi told us. 'It's better to live apart from them, to set up house on my own.' She unpacked the trunk – some housecoats, a framed portrait of her father.... 'Don't worry, it's not as if they've locked me in here,' she said in order to set us at ease. 'The world begins at the bottom of the stairs. Now I am free to discover life as I please.' (Ibid., 170)

Then her cousin escaped with his wife and baby, leaving a little money to Bibi who never left the rooftop. Some of the neighbours began to wonder if she was dying, others thought she had lost her mind. In April (the most quoted month by Indian women writers) they

discovered Bibi was about four months pregnant. "She said she could not remember what had happened. She would not tell us who had done it." They instructed her and helped her to cope with the baby as they did in teaching her how to behave with a man and in attempting to find her a husband. This sense of community – note the use of the first person plural by the narrating voice – from a collection of stories about isolation and alienation comes from a story set outside America, stressing that isolation exists even in an Indian courtyard, and Bibi's capacity to be independent and survive only comes from herself.

> Within a month Bibi had recuperated from the birth, and with the money that Haldar had left her, she had the storage room whitewashed, and placed padlocks on the window and doors. Then she dusted the shelves and arranged the leftover potions and lotions, selling Haldar's old inventory at half price … she went by taxi to the wholesale market, using the profits to restock the shelves. In this manner she raised the boy and ran a business in the storage room…. She was, to the best of our knowledge, cured. (Ibid., 172)

"In trying to understand the question of communalism in the writing of ancient Indian history", Romila Thapar wrote as long ago as 1969, "it would perhaps be best to examine the influence of contemporary ideas on the writing of Indian history in recent centuries…. [T]hree major trends of thinking are discernible[:] the views of the Orientalists, the Utilitarians and the Nationalists".[15] In Lahiri's story, beside the theme of self-assertion/room, there is a clear attempt to dismiss the question of communalism, too.

*

> I will simply develop the suggestion that nineteenth-century feminist individualism could conceive of a "greater" project than access to the closed circle of the nuclear family. This is the project of soul making beyond "mere" sexual reproduction.
>
> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*

[15] Romila Thapar et al., *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1969), 2.

"The Rooftop Dwellers", the last story in Desai's collection, is about Moyna, a young woman who, "such was her determination to make her new life as a working woman in the metropolis succeed, and such was her unexpected, unforeseen capacity for adjustment, that after a month or so the minimalism became no longer privation and a challenge but simply a way of life" (*Diamond Dust*, 162). She found a job in Delhi with a magazine about books directed by Tara, who "had been working in non-governmental organizations simply to escape from home and her mother-in-law"/the Dragon Lady (ibid., 173), and "had taken the job at *Books* to escape from housewifeliness" (ibid., 204). "'You don't understand. You're too young. At our age, we need our own place,' Tara explained loftily" (ibid., 205).

> Moyna had no work experience at all, having only just taken her degree, in English literature, at a provincial university. She managed somehow to convey her need to escape from family and home, and Tara felt both maternal and proprietorial towards her, while Moyna immensely admired her style, the way she smoked cigarettes and drank her coffee black and spoke to both Raj Kumar and Bose Sahib as equals, and she hoped ardently to emulate her, one day. (Ibid., 174)

> Here she was, entertaining friends on 'her terrace' on a starry evening, just as she had imagined an adult working woman in the metropolis might do, just as she had imagined *she* would do – and now it was happening. (Ibid., 183)

The story depicts a realistic India, including *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata* time on tv ("that the whole city of Delhi watched, along with the rest of the country, on Sunday evenings – everyone, except for her"), movie soundtracks, and all sorts of problems a single working woman encounters on her way to making a living in a metropolis: women's hostels, male hands on the buses, mockeries, thieves and rapists. Moyna's tape recorder and cassettes are stolen, and although she can hear her cassette of Joan Baez playing downstairs she cannot denounce her landlord's servant boy: "she found herself silent ... she knew it would be unwise to tell her mother that she lived among thieves" (ibid., 204). "[H]er mother did not understand even now the attraction of living, alone, in Delhi, and could think of it only as a poor

substitute for living at home" (ibid., 207). The first thing she did on arriving at Moyna's barsati was to fill her cupboards with food and to buy curtains, cushions and kitchen gadgets.

Days after her "Mama"'s departure, Moyna receives a letter from her, hinting at a possible engagement; Mao (her clandestine cat/her transgression)

> gave a leap off the bed as Moyna flung herself backwards, at the same time throwing the letter into the air with a shout of laughter…. Mao had not seen such behaviour in a long time…. She was free, she was determined, she had made her decision, and she sat up, laughing.
>
> In the kitchen below, the Ballas' servant boy turned up the music and sang along with it. (Ibid., 207)

Moyna is a sort of "guardian of the margin" in-between her singular and individual self-assertion and "the closed circle of the nuclear family". From the magazine staff to her landlords, she can only listen to family matters: the special cooking of the family, the prospective bride or nest, the importance of a tv set at home. But Moyna "was trying to suppress the most childish urge to run and hide her head in her mother's lap" even when her "strength were gone" (ibid., 189). This is a part of her "project of soul making", paralleled by the project her personal taxi driver makes for his little daughter and, uselessly, for his boy. She feels empathy for *this* story of family emancipation.

Re-writing: a Western eye…

> *16 February*. Satipur. I have been very lucky and have already found a room here. I like it very much. It is large, airy, and empty. There is a window at which I sit and look down into the bazar….
>
> Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, *Heat and Dust*

The novel *Heat and Dust* by Jhabvala represents India in its different aspects (women, power, riots, love, death and *sati* or suttee), each seen in two different years: 1923, the year of the last *sati*, and about fifty years later, in the seventies, when an unnamed character, the first person narrator, went there in search of her (-self?) lost

relative. The meaning of the title could be both realistic (Indian weather) and metaphorical (passion, riot, mess, sati and death). According to Suleri it could also be an expression of the the Anglo-Indian woman's peculiar condition of confinement to the body. "That heat and dust would be its most immediate expression of confinement is unsurprising..." (*The Rhetoric*, 91). "[T]he body signified a neurasthenic privacy rather than a public and viable medium of economic exchange"; the feminine picturesque expresses "a hidden recognition that the Indian courtesan [the nautch-girl] provided an uncannily literal replication of the part Anglo-Indian women had been imported to perform" (ibid., 93).

In the novel there are all the themes I have chosen to analyse in this study: the room (with a window) and re-writing (the novel itself is a sort of journal the narrator keeps from February 2 to August 31, presumably in the '70s). But also re-reading (of Olivia's letters to her sister in Paris dated 1923 – the number is repeated frequently to mark the shifts of time in the novel; and re-readings of mores, the functions of buildings, cults, power, sexuality). It is a recording of a journey, both in space and time, and of history re-visited by ethnomethodology, feminism, postcolonialism and the will to independence, exchange and knowledge.

From the first line we are told "Olivia went away with the Nawab". This is the main – later defined as "forbidden" – topic, and Olivia is the main female character in the 1923's story, the first wife of the grandfather of the seventies woman/narrator who, years later, tries to know or understand her. Throughout the story she seems to perform Olivia's life and walk in her footprints, in the same places and almost in the same mood. The magic element in the story is this parallelism, doubleness shifted in time. In the end she learns about Olivia's cremation and decides to go away from Satipur and stay in "X town" till her child is born, but, unlike Olivia, to do it alone. The narrator has become pregnant after her visit to Baba Firdaus Temple with Inder Lal but, again unlike Olivia, she does not procure an abortion.

As the narrator shows, many things have changed in fifty years:

> I think my landlord, Inder Lal, is disappointed with the way I live in my room. He keeps looking round for furniture but there isn't any. I

sit on the floor and at night I spread my sleeping bag out on it. The only piece of furniture I have so far acquired is a very tiny desk the height of a foot-stool on which I have laid out my papers (this journal, my Hindi grammar and vocabulary, Olivia's letters). It is the sort of desk at which shopkeepers do their accounts. Inder Lal looks at my bare walls. Probably he was hoping for pictures and photographs – but I feel no need for anything like that when all I have to do is look out of the window at the bazar below. I certainly wouldn't want to be distracted from that scene. Hence no curtains either....

It would have been easier for him if I had been like Olivia. She was everything I'm not. The first thing she did on moving into their house (the Assistant Collector's) was smother it in rugs, pictures, flowers. She wrote to Marcia: 'We're beginning to look slightly civilized.' (*Heat and Dust*, 6-7)

As Suleri asserts in "The Feminine Picturesque", women were required to remain on the peripheries of colonization and to enter the political domain in order to aestheticize with the impulse of a collector rather than to analyze.

The novel affords intercultural questions from different points of view: Muslim, Hindu and British. There are many references to power changeovers (and consequences), from Muslims to English people, see Olivia's story set in 1923, and then to Hindus, as told in the story set in the '70s. The novel's palimpsest of cemeteries from different cultures/ages seems a proof of these passages. Throughout the ages, processes of exploitations and transformations have involved temples, territories and everything/body on them that could be taken as an object of conquest and transformation. These processes in the age of late multinational capitalism are very fast and devastating, as shown by Naomi Klein in *No Logo*, as well as by Spivak, in relation to the question of women and "exploitation as development".

Inder Lal is always eager to hear Chid's letters ... He likes all that philosophy ... I tell him that many of us are tired of the materialism of the West ... He feels it to be a mockery ... He says ... by Western standards, his house as well as his food and his way of eating it would be considered primitive, inadequate – indeed, he himself would be

considered so because of his unscientific mind and ignorance of the modern world. (Ibid., 95)

"The manipulation of the pedagogy of this science is also in the 'interest' of creating what will come to be perceived as a 'natural' difference between the 'master' and the 'native' – a difference in human or racial material" (Spivak, *A Critique*, 216).

The narrator takes us where Olivia hardly could, into the 'purdah' and into the 'democratic' country. She goes out with merry widows, on visits and pilgrimages, without needing any man's protection. She integrates and lives like Indians do, by the way she lives, dresses and eats – it is cheaper. She is an open-minded woman, happy to interact with them, to listen to them and see, know everything. Olivia's social life was less variegated.

They usually spent the day in the large drawing-room in the Palace. This was overlooked by a curtained gallery from which the ladies sometimes watched them; but Olivia never looked up. Besides the Nawab and Harry, there were the usual young men lying around in graceful attitudes. They drank, smoked, played cards, and were perfectly content to go on doing that till the Nawab told them to do something else. (Desai, *Heat and Dust*, 85)

The alternative for Olivia was to stay alone at home.

"She could not escape him now even if she had wanted to" (ibid., 137). The Nawab is so different from all the "British hands" settled in the colony for years, with their "droning voices", they "know everything" about India but they are so dull. She was completely conquered when she visited his Palace in Katam, but everybody agreed that the Nawab wanted her just for revenge against the British, as a proof of power, just as he seems to do when he takes Harry, a young English man who seems more than anything else to be a prisoner. She is not at ease among the British hands, especially when they speak about the Nawab's involvement with the dacoits (bandits or patriots?). "The narratives of English India are fraught with the idiom of dubiety, or a mode of cultural tale-telling that is neurotically conscious of its own self-censoring apparatus." (Suleri, *The Rhetoric*, 3) To her the Nawab is just an emancipated person, and a good

friend/host, a real giver. The distance between Olivia and the English people/Douglas (her husband) emerges in a discussion about *sati*, as we will see later.

Let us return, now, to the narrator's time and meet some typical characters: widows, daughters-in-law, beggars and mistresses.

> A few nights ago there was such a strange sound.... By the time I had sat up, Inder Lal's mother had got to Ritu's bed and was holding her hand over the girl's mouth. Ritu struggled....
>
> *20 March.* After that night the mother and I have drawn closer together....
>
> She has told me that the first years are always difficult because of being so homesick and thinking only of the father's house: and it is difficult to get used to the new family and to the rule of the mother-in-law....
>
> Unlike Ritu, she doesn't spend all her time at home but has outings with friends who are mostly healthy widows like herself. They roam around town quite freely and don't care at all if their saris slip down from their heads or even from their breasts. They gossip and joke and giggle like school girls: very different from their daughters-in-law who are sometimes seen shuffling behind them, heavily veiled and silent and with the downcast eyes of prisoners under guard. (Ibid., 52-54)

Inder Lal's mother is just an example of a 'merry' widow, while as to daughters-in-law, Ritu is an example of the unhappy victim of a combined marriage (compare them to the images of widows and daughters-in-law in Bulbul Sharma's collection *The Anger* to see that there is no difference between the characters created by a native or a non-native writer). Her husband tells the narrator that Ritu is not intelligent, not educated, this is the reason his mother chose her; during the first years of their marriage she never stopped crying.

India is the country of devotion. Through the discussion at Crawford's party (the Collector in the twenties), in which the main topic was suttee, and the figure of Leelavati in the seventies we are introduced to an upsetting aspect of the image of Indian women. It is anticipated by a visit to the suttee shrines, "not much bigger than milestones ... Inder Lal's mother devoutly joined her hands before the

shrines. She decorated one of them with a little string of roses and marigolds". Widows worship

> widows who have made the highest sacrifice. She sounded really respectful and seemed to have greatest reverence for that ancient custom. She even seemed regretful – this merry widow! – that it had been discontinued (it was outlawed in 1829). She showed me the shrine of the last suttee which of course I knew about as it had taken place during Olivia's time....
>
> 1923
>
> ... A grain merchant had died and his widow had been forced by her relatives to burn herself with him on his funeral pyre. Although Douglas had rushed to the scene the moment information reached him, he had arrived too late to save the woman. All he could still do was arrest the main instigators who were her sons, brothers-in-law, and a priest.... 'it seems my prisoners – the unfortunate woman's relatives – are in some quarters regarded as martyrs.' (Ibid., 55-56)

Of course the (Muslim) Nawab makes a point of congratulating him, and uses the same adjective the British use to define suttee, i.e. barbaric.

At the party only Major Minnies and Olivia take into account the possibility of voluntary suttee and willing participants. "'I don't think your suttee lady was an altogether willing participant,' Mr. Crawford twinkled at Douglas. 'No,' said Douglas, holding in a lot more. Olivia looked across at him and said 'How do you know?' It was like a challenge and she meant it to be" (ibid., 58). Even Olivia admits she could do this "*noble*" act, "I'd want to. I mean, I just wouldn't want to go on living. I'd be *grateful* for such a custom" (ibid., 59-60).

The narrator on the other hand can only meet a would-be suttee, a very old beggar woman she notices dying on a mound of refuse. She uselessly goes to the hospital in search of help, which she finds in Maji, instead. Then they find the old woman near the suttee stones.

> 'You see,' said Maji, 'I knew she would come here.'... as if she were proud of her for having done something special. She began to tell me about the old woman's life: how she had been left a widow and had been driven out of her father-in-law's house. Next her parents and

brothers had died in a smallpox epidemic, leaving her homeless and destitute.... (Ibid., 113-115)

I'd like to conclude my discussion of suttee by quoting Olivia's words at the party: "It is part of their religion, isn't it? I thought one wasn't supposed to meddle with that ... it is their culture and who are we to interfere with anyone's culture especially an ancient one like theirs" (ibid., 58). "[T]he British ignore the space of *Sati* as an ideological battleground, and construct the woman as an *object* of slaughter" (Spivak, *A Critique*, 235).

... Eastern ears, Eastern mouths

[O]nce the words are out of my mouth I cannot push them back in. So it is better that I think carefully before I allow them to escape.

Anita Rau Badami, *The Hero's Walk*

In *Salt and Saffron* by Kamila Shamsie, Aliya is a sort of Sheherazade with plenty of stories to tell, especially about her Pakistani family history and the curse of "not-quite-twins" which affects her "royal family of Dard-e-Dil" (i.e. aching heart); "five hundred years of empirical evidence on which to base our fear" (*Salt and Saffron*, 1). The curse of not-quite-twins refers to caste and class differences in the family, marked on the Dard-e-Dils' family tree/map (they live across three continents) with stars of different colors, in accordance with people's 'color' of blood: blue, purple and even red.

At college I was famous for my storytelling abilities, but I never told anyone that my stories were mere repetition, my abilities those of a parrot. (Ibid., 18)

This is why it is good you are in America, where there are so many books. Study history, my darling Aliya, but not the history of the Mughals or the British in India, although our stories intersect theirs in so many ways. Study the Dard-e-Dil family. (Ibid., 20)

This last quotation is from a letter written by her grandmother, Adiba, who married Akbar, one of the three not-quites, born just

before midnight on 28 February; the other two were Sulaiman, born after midnight on 29 February, and Taimur, born just at midnight; secretly loved by Adiba, Taimur went away and married a servant. This is one of the (magical) ways the Dard-e-Dils' stories are intertwined with tragic contemporary Indian history:

When Partition actually took place, one country coming to life on 14 August, the other on 15 August, the Dard-e-Dils sighed, said, "Born on opposite sides of midnight like Akbar and Sulaiman," and took that as a sign that the family rift was inevitable. It was the curse of the not-quites raining on the Dard-e-Dils yet again, except this time, instead of losing land, wealth or architectural plans, they were losing each other.

(Later, during the bloodshed of 1971, when East Pakistan became Bangladesh, there were those in my family who said it was inevitable. Because there had been three brothers.... Stupidity is too tame a word to describe justifications of genocide and rape....) (Ibid., 164)

Aliya falls in love while flying from Boston, where she finished her studies in English Literature, to London, with a boy from the "wrong" side of Karachi, Liaquatabad, where "the poor, the lower classes, the not-us" live (ibid., 31), as her cousin Samia told her at the airport in London. Aliya believes she is a not-quite-twin, paralleling her scandalous and mysterious aunt Mariam (Taimur's daughter), who lived in Aliya's family till her elopement with Masood, the cook. Aliya was told Mariam was ill, she needed Masood's food. She went away to him.

Mariam had come to Aliya's family with a letter informing them that she was Taimur's daughter. She only spoke to the cook to suggest food ("she spoke in questions not in imperatives"; ibid., 214) and ate only what he put before her. Nobody knew why she did not speak.

Virtually everyone in the family had a favourite theory about Mariam's silence, long before she became our official black sheep. My father's theory was among the most succinct. 'She's taking the notion of a woman's traditional role a little too literally,' he had said after one of his attempts to get her to talk about her early life. Mariam

Apa had smiled and walked towards the kitchen, from where I heard '*biryani*' just before the door swung closed. (Ibid., 131)

Aliya's cousin, Sameer, had the most political theory about it: "So her silence was subversion.... Basically, she was undercutting the whole employer-servant paradigm" (ibid., 214), and by eloping with a servant she made this kind of elopement possible. Maybe she never spoke because she was unable to explain the story of Taimur, her father (he loved Adiba and left because he loved Akbar, too, his twin), or because she could no longer speak the language of her childhood since she left when she was very little. Aliya's family even thought she was not Mariam. Her silence could also be pride and self-defence – see also Nandana's silence in Badami's *The Hero's Walk*.[16] Nevertheless, Mariam succeeds in awakening both senses and consciences using food as a cross-national/class language – just as music does.

Mariam is a sort of heroine in Aliya's eyes, but the latter felt humiliated by Mariam's elopement, and when her grandmother, Adiba, called Mariam "a whore", Aliya slapped her,

> because whoever Mariam might have married she was still Mariam and I would defend her against all those who couldn't see beyond their own class prejudices.
>
> Bravo, Aliya. (Ibid., 112)

> Just because a thing has always been so, it does not always have to be so. (Ibid., 193)

Then Aliya realized she had slapped her Dadi just to prove she thought differently from her, that is to prove something that was actually untrue. In the end Aliya thanked God for giving her "the chance to know her again". Her grandmother was an emancipated woman and her class prejudices were just hate for Mariam's mother, who eloped with Taimur, her best loved. "Adiba who went to college, Adiba who rode on donkey-carts to the refugee camps in 1947 to help

[16] Anita Rau Badami, *The Hero's Walk* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2001).

those who needed it, Adiba who told me I had to learn to be independent because she didn't want me to become one of those women who relied on their husbands for everything" (ibid., 219). Two generations earlier, Adiba's grandmother had lived and died in purdah.

Here, too, like in Jhabvala's novel, there is re-writing and re-reading: a story to be completed with a dignified ending, Mariam Apa's ("I don't tell that story, because it still doesn't have an ending" ibid., 10), and Dard-e-Dils' story ("This is how the history books sum it up: Near the turn of the century the state's fiscal debt to the English was so vast the Company annexed half the lands of Dard-e-Dil ... there must have been people on those lands, too. I only just thought of that"; ibid., 119). But whereas Jhabvala finds in *sati* the tragic element for her story, Shamsie finds it in the Partition and its consequences (see also her novel *Kartography*). To stress the differences between them we have to remember they speak from a different position: as a native, Aliya's 'window' can also be a mirror; in this case, ethnomethodology is successfully applied. She seems to adopt the same method of investigation/interviews as Morrison does in *The Bluest Eye*. She becomes a sort of intercultural operator who mediates between opposite polarities: noble/non noble, rich/poor, quite-twins/not-quite-twins, mind/affects, the East/the West.

> There was such an air of familiarity about the silence in the room. I looked out at Mariam's hibiscus branch. The glass between it and me was both a window and a mirror. (Ibid., 224)

In this postcolonial scenario

> The style of neo-Kantian humanism dominant today does no more than renew the promise of moralizing politics, all the while offering law the weapons of a politics that has yet to be moralized.... The return of the figure of war corresponds to an exasperated desire for legitimation and/or finality, at exactly a time when no one can believe that economics has its own, universally legitimated finality, anymore.
>
> J. L. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*

In the scenario depicted above by Jean-Luc Nancy, neo-liberal globalization – about the tenth version of colonialism – still seems to find its bases in the negation of human rights and in the renunciation of civilization. A State, which should work as a mediator between citizens and capital (Gramsci), and at this point we could say a 'global State', remains a promise (as democracy does), both in the West and in the East. As a consequence of this cynical renunciation/negation, there is a return of barbarity in the empty places left by dead law, dead politics, as well as dead aesthetics. Terrorism returns from the periphery, to which it has been chased during the modern age, to the centre (the Twin Towers, the Theatre of Moscow, Jerusalem): to understand this, Robert Young suggests we go back to the Tricontinental Conference in Cuba and think of the words Che Guevara pronounced there in 1967).[17] In the age of dead politics, war is no longer the continuation of politics by other means but *a* means in the economic battleground.

According to Spivak, militaristic and capitalistic globalization has even seized what was the ideal of its opposers: the Socialists' 'emancipation'.[18] Here we are in the age of cunning and blind "tactics", no intelligent and peace-building "strategies" (I borrow the terms from De Certeau even though Hardt and Negri define them as surpassed: what seems surpassed in two years of war is their idea about the end of the nation/imperialism).[19] It is an age in which genocide (of others) and (national) suicide are strictly connected.

> Women wash their thighs / in bloodied river water / over and over / they wipe their flesh. (Meena Alexander, from the poem "No Man's Land", in *Blood into Ink*, 45)

A few words from the three stories in the middle of the *Interpreter* collection, where three female characters live the devastating impact

[17] Robert Young, «Germinazioni Postcoloniali: da Bandung a L'Avana», trad. it. Federico Rahola, *DeriveApprodi* (Summer 2003), 37.

[18] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, interview by François Cusset, «Il dominio è di ogni colore», trad. it. Ilaria Bussoni, *DeriveApprodi* (Spring 2003), 20.

[19] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Impero* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2001). First published in 2000.

of 'progress', sexism and eternal exodus focusing on the core of "maladies" which affect both the East and the West, because both are subjugated by the fundamentalism of the neo-liberal/imperial market. These characters hardly find a 'room' and 'writing'. They are: Boori Ma, in "The Real Durwan", as "the victim of changing times" (the partition and 'modernization' of the Indian subcontinent which left her chronically homeless); Miranda, in "Sexy", an American woman who, thanks to an Indian child, understands the difference between being sexy or beautiful and decides to tell her Indian lover, who called her 'sexy', "that it wasn't fair to her, or to his wife, that they both deserved better, that there was no point in it dragging on"; and Mrs. Sen, in "Mrs. Sen's", a Bengali woman who explains to an American child that his "life will be in places you cannot know now".

> I am like a piece of silk   Fluttering in the middle of the market Knowing not into whose hands it will fall. (Trinh T. Minh-ha, from her film *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*)

When reality exceeds fantasy one may find oneself without words. Nevertheless the human, as a 'reasonable' and social being, has to find them. That is what the characters do in the stories discussed here. Iain Chambers would say that Indian women, as migrants, rewrite the urban script, the previous social order and cultural authority. As he reminds us, James Clifford would add that they represent an interruption in the preceding sense of our lives, cultures, languages.[20] This interruption suspends and interpellates me/us. As Indian women who have chosen to write in English, they mainly address me/us, as Westerner(s).

According to Paul Gilroy, to give sense to the dead poetry of the Human Rights we need to rewrite History in the light of colonialism: reparation is the only solution.[21] Meanwhile oppressed people are

[20] Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 5.

[21] Paul Gilroy, «Atlantico Nero», interview and trad. it. by E. Rigo and N. Dines, *DeriveApprodi* (Summer 2003), 23.

involved in migration projects as forms of reappropriation and reparation in autonomy, but are not so keen on assimilation.

> [T]he South Asian diaspora – which, as Amitav Gosh has argued (1989), is oriented not so much to roots in a specific place and a desire for return as round an ability to recreate a culture in diverse locations – falls outside the strict definition.... Diaspora discourse articulates, or bends together both roots *and* routes to construct what Gilroy (1987) describes as alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference.[22]

As Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Ania Loomba – besides Suleri, Spivak and many other feminist writers – suggest, racial, cultural and gender differences interact producing not only new forms of subjugations but also new forms and practices of difference and resistance (to racism, exploitation and sexism/patriarchy).

[22] James Clifford, *Routes* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1997), 249-251.

Manuela Coppola

Games of Power and Language: *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* by Tom Stoppard

> Words have no power, truly. They, like a zen master's definition of 'Buddha' are no more than 'dried dung'; with it you and I hold our preaching houses together. Wet dung remains an environmental potential.[1]

Words and their potentiality are the main topics of Tom Stoppard's *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth*. Written in 1979, the play combines two separate playlets: the first, *Dogg's Hamlet*, is itself a conflation of two experimental pieces – written for Ed Berman's theatre group – staging a language game from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. The second, *Cahoot's Macbeth*, draws inspiration from Stoppard's 1977 visit to Prague, where he met Czech playwright Pavel Kohout and actor Pavel Landovsky, both banned by the ruling Communist regime. Stoppard thus became aware of the situation of various dissident artists compelled to exile or to inactivity because of their involvement in anti-government activities, such as the signature of "Charter 77", a paper drafted by many intellectuals denouncing the abuses of the post-Dubcek regime. Persecuted by Czech 'normalising' politics, in 1978 Pavel Kohout was to found the "Living Room Theatre", an itinerant company performing its repertory in Prague living rooms. Yet, as Stoppard states in his

[1] Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 53-54.

introduction to the play, although it is dedicated to Kohout, *Cahoot's Macbeth* is not supposed to be a fair representation of the elegant seventy-five minute reduction of the *Macbeth* performed by the "Living Room Theatre".[2]

Nonetheless, Stoppard's peculiar use of language in the play and his intent to subversively play with words illuminate the parallel with the Czech political situation.[3] In fact, words are used by Stoppard in their sheer potentiality, either to be transformed into extensions of power or into sites of resistance; as Susan Rusinko notes, "[t]he usual dislocated characters, their Magritte-like situations and Wittgensteinian language games, and the witty intellectual debates combine with the repressive abuse of language as a political weapon".[4] The Cartesian logic of representation – considering language as a mere translation of thought – is disrupted by the invention of Dogg, a completely arbitrary language running through the text with different and opposite purposes. Stoppard is clearly conscious that "the only possible mirroring does not rise from transparency, but from *opacity*",[5] for he performs his linguistic experimentation by dissolving the biblical transparency and correspondence between object and image, and thus exploiting the potentialities of linguistic arbitrariness.

The idea of language as a fixed system representing the perfect coincidence between object and image, as postulated in the Bible, had persisted for centuries. According to the principle of similitude, names were intrinsically connected to the things they indicated: such a transparency elides any distinction between signs, erasing difference under the sovereignty of the Same. The old dream of symmetry is

[2] Tom Stoppard, *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth*, in *The Real Inspector Hound and Other Entertainments* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993), 143. Future references will be given in the text.

[3] Martin Prochazca has underlined the role of both Shakespeare and linguistic emancipation in his delineation of a history of Czech resistance. M. Prochazca, "Shakespeare and Czech Resistance", in H. Kerr, R. Eaden, M. Mitton, eds., *Shakespeare: World Views* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996).

[4] Susan Rusinko, *Tom Stoppard* (Boston: Bloomsbury University of Pennsylvania, Twayne Publishers, 1986), 88.

[5] Achille Bonito Oliva, *L'ideologia del traditore. Arte, maniera, manierismo* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1978), 135. My translation.

thus reflected by the struggle for a total and absolute identity between signs and images – strengthened by the divine origin of language as the image of truth. However, the biblical episode of the Tower of Babel marks the disruption of such an Eden-like identity. As a punishment for their blasphemous daring, men are condemned to incommunicability by the confusion of languages, and the primary, univocal correspondence of name and object is permanently erased. From then on, every language has been spoken "only against the background of this lost similitude" in the attempt to recreate the 'authenticity' of the old symmetry.[6] Linguistic arbitrariness is thus a mirroring of the original closeness to God, bearing witness to the lost state of grace, and Babel, a synonym of confusion according to an erroneous etymology, has become the symbol of the dangers of pluralism threatening the identity of the One.

It is significant that representing the language of the coloniser as the 'language of the chosen' has been one of the main strategies of linguistic imperialism in the colonial period. The imposition of the language of the coloniser has often been justified by its divine origin; recomposing the lost biblical identity between object and sign, it provided the "linguistic means of escape from the dark Tower of Babel".[7] As guardian of truth and expression of power, the Logos is legitimated by its self-identity. Multiplicity, chaos and absolute alterity, stigmatised in the biblical episode of the Tower of Babel, are sources of fear and a threat to social order. According to the anthropologist Luigi Lombardi Satriani,

> The other substantiates our fears; it is the deformed image of our face, the one we refuse to recognize. Changing this fear into language is an adequate strategy to face it. What cannot be said is an impending danger menacing us with its contingence, in a sort of pre-linguistic compass. Language is the only possible way to overcome such a situation ... Through the mastery of words we transcend the event and

[6] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966) (London: Tavistock Publications, 1974), 36.

[7] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom* (Nairobi: EAEP; London: James Currey, 1993), 32.

we insert it in a system of relations. After all, the process of overcoming our terror and fears is articulated as a journey towards language.[8]

The impossibility of understanding the other opens up a *fracture* in the homogeneous and unbroken world of identity, subsequently leading to the effort to reduce multiplicity to unity, diversity to sameness, in order to regain control over the system of signification. The imposition of a language that could be connected to the primordial Logos thus constitutes one of the main repressive tools used to fill the 'gaps' created by difference.

According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, imperialism operates as a 'linguistic homogenisation' generating a hierarchical relation – a relation of dependency – between two or more languages. In a colonial situation, or in any other relation of power, the encounter between two languages never occurs on democratic bases, since "the oppressor nation uses language as a means of entrenching itself in the oppressed nation".[9] The suppression of 'other', non-official languages responds to the strategy of elevating the language of the oppressor to the status of the only possible language. Trying to make the oppressed language conform to the colonising language is a way to erase the potentially dangerous plurality of the "incomprehensible noise from the dark Tower of Babel".[10]

Linguistic control is thus one of the most effective tools of power: as Ronald Hayman has pointed out in his study of Stoppard's work, in a totalitarian State "a word can be made to mean whatever the government wants it to mean".[11] In Stoppard's text a schoolmaster and an Inspector are in fact the main agents of the State's politics of linguistic repression. A stern Professor Dogg – the strict supervisor of a students' rehearsal in *Dogg's Hamlet* – exercises his authority through the imposition of Dogg, an invented language in which words are arbitrary signs taken from the conventional system of reference.

[8] Luigi Maria Lombardi Satriani, *De sanguine* (Roma: Meltemi, 2000), 184. My translation.

[9] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre*, 31.

[10] Ibid., 31-32.

[11] Ronald Hayman, *Tom Stoppard* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 159.

The myth of the biblical correspondence between object and sign is here definitely disrupted by upsetting usual semantic relations. Although it uses English signifiers, Dogg uncannily distorts their meanings and disorients the audience. In some cases the semantic shift from English is merely arbitrary; in others the connection between the two linguistic codes is an oppositional one. Yet, despite the ambiguous language games, the text is made comprehensible by the use of Wittgenstein's linguistic theories. As one of the students tests the microphone on stage at the very beginning of the play, saying: "Breakfast, breakfast, sun-dock-trog" (147), the audience is already able to grasp a few words in Dogg. The exploitation of the performing potentials of language thus allows the audience to share and even learn the unknown linguistic code.

As arbitrariness becomes an instrument of power, linguistic repression is often accompanied by a skilful manipulation of language. The linguistic politics undertaken by Professor Dogg – careful supervisor of the 'purity' and correctness of his own idiom – is reminiscent of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s censoring of linguistic ambiguities, cautiously erased to meet Ingsoc ideological needs. Since polysemy acquires a great political value, potentially dangerous words are carefully erased by Newspeak, Oceania's official language in Orwell's book, whose vocabulary is built in order to give "exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a Party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meanings".[12] Such a strict linguistic imposition is mirrored by Dogg's choice to perform *Hamlet*, viewed as a canonical text and a safe keeper of order. As the mythicization of Shakespeare's texts implies a 'tamed' reproduction of the play, its subversive potential needs to be cautiously erased. Such texts are therefore reinterpreted and purged in order to 'produce assent' in a way, according to Maria Cristina Cavecchi, that strikingly resembles the ideological translation of canonical texts in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Moreover, it is significant that Dogg's students are compelled to perform a play written in English – a foreign and incomprehensible language and the vehicle of an elitist culture – which is consequently

[12] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) (London: Penguin, 1990), 312-313.

perceived as hostile. Stage directions suggest a sort of non-acting, an indistinct monotonous muttering lacking pathos: "*They are not acting these lines at all, merely uttering them, tonelessly*" (150). Shakespeare's English is here perceived as the language of power, the vehicle of a 'universal' culture tamed and made inoffensive by Dogg's personal interpretation; in his hands the Shakespearean text is transformed into a "tool of the oppressor, or at least the tool of his oppressive idea of education".[13]

Yet, it can be assumed that Dogg is perceived with as much hostility by the students as Shakespeare's old-fashioned English. The boys' aversion to Dogg can probably be explained by the latter's status as 'lawful language'; since it is tightly linked to the State's foundation and to its social customs, a lawful language homogenises its linguistic community and strengthens its symbolic mastery through its imposition on the speakers. Pierre Bourdieu has underlined the compulsoriness of the linguistic law, whose observance is secured by "its body of jurists the grammarians – and its agents of regulation and imposition – the teachers – who are empowered *universally* to subject the linguistic performance of speaking subjects to examination and to the legal sanction of academic qualification".[14] As a matter of fact, professor Dogg's function is to guarantee the official language's correct use and, as a consequence, he also acts as the keeper of order and unity within the linguistic community.

The propriety of language

Language is often associated with moral characters and 'adequate' behaviour: in his analysis of English, Einar Haugen has stated that "'proper' English is associated with proper morals, 'correct' language

[13] Elin Diamond, "Stoppard's *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth*: The Uses of Shakespeare", *Modern Drama* 29.4 (December 1986), 589. The Professor's self-celebration is particularly evident in a line of *Hamlet*'s prologue in which he replaces the Bard: "Cat will mew, and Dogg will have his day!" (64). Such an ideological exploitation clearly recalls the slogans invented by totalitarian governments in order to create assent.

[14] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, transs. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 45.

with correct behaviour, and words like 'good' and 'bad' are equally applicable to a person's language and his moral character".[15] However, the linguistic normativeness imposed by Dogg's power is disturbed by the entrance on stage of a lorry driver, Easy, who has to deliver and assemble the blocks for the play's platform. Since he does not share the linguistic code of Dogg's students – he only speaks English – Easy will be the source of misunderstandings and tensions during the rehearsal. Yet, as the spectators have meanwhile grasped the rudiments of Dogg, the communication failure caused by the entrance of Easy will produce a series of comic situations for the audience. Although Easy ignores the reason why as he greets professor Dogg with "Afternoon, squire" he is threateningly grabbed by his lapels (152), the spectators enjoy the sketch as they are now aware that the sentence in Dogg means "Get stuffed, you bastard!"

The fact that the 'improper' language used by Easy is mirrored by his equally improper social behaviour is particularly meaningful. The lorry driver will assemble the building blocks at random on stage, unaware of the fact that the blocks bear a letter on each side and ignoring the plan imposed by Dogg, unconsciously creating dangerous linguistic combinations. As Easy appropriates the words, he uses them artistically, thereby questioning Dogg's authority. The danger of such linguistic inventions (MATHS OLD EGG, MEG SHOT GLAD and GOD SLAG THEM) is patent in Dogg's annoyed reaction: as the letters on the randomly assembled block have presumably formed an obscene (or simply non-authorised) sentence in Dogg, he twice throws Easy into the wall they have built. As Elin Diamond asserts, "[n]ot understanding the prevailing language game can prove dangerous, particularly when there is someone larger and stronger to enforce its rules".[16] Semantic experiments, however unconscious they may be, are nonetheless a threat to the dominant linguistic system. Order will only be restored by the final correct combination of blocks forming the only possible sentence: DOGGS HAMLET.

[15] Einar Haugen, *Blessings of Babel: Bilingualism and Language Planning* (Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: Mouton de Gruyter, 1987), 56.

[16] Diamond, "Stoppard's *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth*", 596.

However, the power of words cannot be said to lie in words themselves, but rather in their *spokesperson*. According to Bourdieu, "authority comes to language from outside", thus implying that language "at most *represents* this authority, manifests and symbolizes it".[17] The spokesperson – in this case the schoolmaster or the Inspector in *Cahoot's Macbeth* – embodies the authoritativeness of institutionalised language and guarantees political stability and unity to the linguistic community. As Bourdieu has pointed out, the *normalization* of language is a fundamental task in the making of a 'nation' or community, and "in the process which leads to the construction, legitimation and imposition of an official language, the educational system plays a decisive role".[18] Yet, professor Dogg goes further and even manages to become the guarantor of a completely new linguistic system that, quite significantly, is named after him. As Dogg claims the possession of and identification with this newly invented language, the language of authority and its delegate merge into one name, becoming the substance and form of the same power.

Likewise, the character of the Inspector in the second part of Stoppard's text is relevant in the analysis of the institutional power of language. The anonymous inspector – deprived of his own name, a mere tool of power – will burst into a Prague living-room where a clandestine performance of *Macbeth* is taking place, presenting himself as the guardian of order in 'normalized' Czechoslovakia. Exactly like professor Dogg, the Inspector is just a spokesperson representing language authoritativeness through the control of linguistic forms. The Penal Code, symbolising the Word *par excellence*, is often invoked to defend order through the imposition of repressive and hierarchical linguistic relations. The Inspector's reiterated appeals to the 'Word of the Law' ("I have the Penal Code tattooed on my whistle", 193) legitimate and strengthen his control over unauthorised and thus potentially subversive words. Needless to say, free and unscrupulous use of words is allowed exclusively to government officials, the only ones capable of using language in accordance with the system.

[17] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 109.
[18] Ibid., 48.

The Inspector consequently orders the actors to *interrupt* the unauthorised performance of Shakespeare's play. Quite significantly, the Inspector enters the stage when the Shakespearean text suggests '*a knock within*' which introduces the Porter's scene. As the entrance of Malcolm and Lennox is replaced by the Inspector's irruption, the metatheatrical confusion between the Shakespearean knocking and the 'real' knocking interrupts and disturbs the performance. As has been noted, if *Macbeth*'s Porter "made believe he was the Gatekeeper of Hell and thus transformed Macbeth's castle into hell, the Inspector's arrival transforms the flat into a hell for the dissident actors".[19] Substituting the liminal figure of the Porter, the Inspector will thus open a gap of power and authority in the 'other' space of the clandestine performance.

Once a text has been elevated to the status of the 'canon', it has to be transmitted and preserved in the same mode, identical to itself, as unchangeable guarantee of the stability of the monolithic and homogeneous system that has legitimated it. Since the performance of a clandestine *Macbeth* by dissident actors is a threat to the canon and a dangerous subversive act (the characters are named after some of the members of Kohout's underground "Living Room Theatre"), the command to perform the only one possible *Macbeth* is a clear call for the 'normalization' imposed by the system:

> INSPECTOR: ... you'd better get rid of the idea that there's a special *Macbeth* which you do when I'm not around, and some other *Macbeth* for when I *am* around, which isn't worth doing. You've only got one *Macbeth*. Because I'm giving this party and there ain't no other. It's what we call a one-party system. (188)

The dangerous parallels between the Czech situation and Macbeth's story have necessarily to be erased by the intervention of authority. The Inspector imposes his personal ending of the story by hailing the crowning of the usurper as "a happy ending" (190) in the attempt to normalize the Shakespearean text and restore his control

[19] Richard Andretta, *Tom Stoppard: An Analytical Study of His Plays* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1996), 305.

over it. Faithful officer of a power that appears as an *emerging machine*,[20] as a possibility to let conflicts inside language emerge through brutal political realism, the Inspector represses any potential subversive action by wisely using language to stage social conflicts and to let them emerge through his words. As Macbeth appropriates language and the desire for power, so the Inspector usurps the dissidents' language, re-appropriating and re-using it in order to mock them.[21]

Language ambiguity: normalization and subversion

The delegation of power obtained from the government authorises the Inspector to utilise any instrument of surveillance and repression. Linguistic arbitrariness is now exploited as an effective tool of power, transforming language into a shrewd instrument of abuse. The Inspector is obviously fully aware of the powers of linguistic manipulation when he states: "Words can be your friend or your enemy, depending on who's throwing the book, so watch your language" (191). Moreover, he will also remind the actors that "anything you say will be taken down and *played* back at your trial" (206, emphasis added), thus restating his power not only to record but 'play' with words, transforming and retorting them against those who have uttered them.

"The cosmos becomes a complex weave of 'correspondences' based on analogy, metaphor and metonymy":[22] metaphors and puns seem to be the Inspector's favourite weapons to preserve the integrity of the cosmos, while language games are transformed into instruments of linguistic repression able to silence the dissidents. Since the Inspector has been chosen by the government for his skilful manipulation of language potentialities, he plays with polysemies in order to exercise his power. Indulging the double meaning of 'to act',

[20] Bonito Oliva, *L'ideologia del traditore*, 131.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 29.

he warns the actors that a clandestine performance, according to the law, is "acting without authority" (188). Not only are acting and performing connected by the same signifier, but they are also bound to an equal submission to the law; just because the recitative *act* is considered *acting* without authority, a play acted under the gaze of the authority is "quick and casual" (188). Again, playing with the meanings of 'entertain', he ambiguously accuses the hostess of the flat where the performance is taking place of using her house "for entertaining men" (191).

Victor Turner traces the origin of the verb "to entertain" back to the old French *entretenir*, "to hold apart", or "to create a liminal or liminoid space in which performances may take place".[23] Hence, *Macbeth*'s clandestine performance is more than simple 'entertainment'. The secrecy of places and actions recalls the exoteric atmosphere that permeates the rites of passage, marginal and transitional rites that reduce the trauma of passing of status through the creation of transitional and segregated spaces. The play opens a liminal space inside the rigid despotic system by creating a 'suspension area', separated and isolated from the normative space: an opening therefore to a place characterised by anomie and ritual suspension.

It is significant that Easy, a constantly displaced and 'marginal' character, unconsciously promotes the opening of such liminal spaces inside the normative system. Although in the first part of the play his entrance produces misunderstandings and linguistic confusion, even inciting a rebellion against the authority of Dogg, in the second part his at first silent apparition – during which he will superimpose himself on Banquo's ghost on the stage of the clandestine *Macbeth* – will subsequently provide the actors with a new voice to play their Shakespeare without censorship or interferences. The one-party system's stability starts to stagger as soon as Easy enters the scene; he is speaking Dogg, now an incomprehensible idiom, confusing the Inspector, who worriedly asks: "What's the language he's talking?" (205). The irruption of Dogg on the stage of a *Macbeth* that "is normalizing nicely" (195) in the words of the Inspector, threatens the

[23] Ibid., 41.

artificial order that is laboriously being restored. The Inspector's linguistic power is becoming dangerously unsteady: the incomprehension of the language worries him since he knows he is not able to control the words he is being addressed in ("What the hell are you talking about?", 195).

As the actors have quickly 'caught' Dogg, they introduce a language game the Inspector is – for once – unable to play. Such ignorance dangerously lets the actors elude his censorship and, moreover, makes him vulnerable to Cahoot's insults. The puzzled Inspector is clearly unaware that, while greeting him with "Afternoon, squire" (205), Cahoot is reminding the audience that the sentence means "Get stuffed, you bastard" in Dogg. If the Inspector had perfectly mastered the potentialities of language with his first irruption on the stage, dominating the situation with a skilful normalizing action, now the unexpected arrival of Easy upsets and worries him, making him lose his habitual self-confidence.

The incapacity to name our fears, to define what frightens us, is exactly what characterises the destabilising encounter with Alterity: "If it's not free expression then *I don't know* what it is!" (207, emphasis added). As the Inspector admits his failure to name what is happening on stage, he implicitly reveals that words, useful weapons to legitimise our status, are not sufficient to 'say' our fears:

> INSPECTOR: Thank you. Thank you! Thank you! Scabs!
> Stinking yobs – crooks. You're nicked, Jock.
> Punks make me puke. Kick back, I'll break necks, smack chops, put yobs in padlocks and fix facts. (210)

The mastery of language eventually fails and the once skilfully controlled words are now juxtaposed in a disordered nonsensical play that is paradoxically very close to Dogg.

The clinic condition of language

The 'other' is frightening and disturbing. It can possibly be *tolerated* only by assimilating it to the fool, the 'other' par excellence. The threatening other is Easy, a marginal character throughout the play

who is excluded from communication since he does not share his interlocutors' linguistic code. Being the bearer of structural danger due to his alterity, Easy becomes a modern Shakespearean fool by utilising a "linguistic tool that enables him to look at the world from an estranged perspective," as Maria Cristina Cavecchi points out,[24] subverting logocentrism and the established order. The fool and the poet, symmetrical figures that are both bearers of the subversive potential of differences and identities, are traditionally situated at the margins of a linguistic system based – on the contrary – only on similitude.

The fool's ravings and stammering, often associated to the dissident's words of protest, are usually censored because of their power to voice difference, dissonance, asymmetry. Both the fool and the dissident play with words and appropriate them in order to create new languages, not conforming to the imposed and lawful language, whose symmetry of form and meaning is disrupted by the "fools" destabilising asymmetry.

Moreover, the connection between mental illness and subversion is made explicit by the Inspector's threats, clarifying the government's position towards dissidents: "what we don't like is a lot of people being cheeky and saying they are only Julius Caesar or Coriolanus or Macbeth. Otherwise we are going to start treating them the same as the ones who say they are Napoleon. Got it?" (192-193). The commitment of dissidents to a mental home clearly meets the authority's necessity to isolate those who use language in an 'inappropriate' way, and to keep such potentially destabilising elements in a separated space, just as a contagious disease is restricted and kept constantly under control.

Yet, as Stoppard suggests, all the Inspector's normalising attempts fail miserably precisely because of their 'asepsis'. Playing with the medical metaphor, the actor interpreting Macbeth ironically advises the Inspector to provide the system with a few antibodies: "If you're afraid to risk the infection of an uncontrolled area, the first time a new one gets in, it'll run through your system like a rogue bacillus" (194).

[24] Maria Cristina Cavecchi, *Shakespeare mostro contemporaneo. "Macbeth" nelle riscritture di Stoppard, Brenton e Marowitz* (Milano: Unicopli, 1996), 67. My translation.

Still, everything deviating from the norm possesses a structural danger rooted in its difference; rather than being integrated into the system, it is more simply expelled and ostracised, in a ritual process of purification of the social body.

The uncertain definition of Dogg ("we're not sure if it's a language or a clinical condition", 205) is therefore particularly meaningful. In a normalising country it is necessary to isolate and prohibit any – potentially dangerous – 'other' language, and to subsequently commit anyone speaking it: in its lack of reference, a subversive and 'foolish' language clearly implies an equally foolish and dangerous personality. After being infected by Dogg, the actors significantly start playing their *Macbeth* in that language, thereby avoiding the Inspector's repressive efforts: once again, the only possible tool of the oppressor is the commitment of the dissidents' nonsensical words, building a wall around the actors so as to restrict the 'infected area' and prevent the diffusion of the illness. As has been noted, the metaphor is brilliant: "artists under a totalitarian regime are physically walled in, but their thought and creative imaginations find their own form of expression – if necessary, a whole new language".[25] Besides, such insistence on normalisation leads the reader or spectator to question the very notion of normality, whose meaning in reference to linguistics is redefined as follows by George Steiner:

> Meaning is at all times the potential sum total of individual adaptations. There can be no definite lexicon or logical grammar or ordinary language or even parts of it because different human beings, even in simple cases of reference and 'naming', will always relate different associations to a given word. These differences are the life of the *normal* speech.[26]

Ambiguity, polysemy, opacity and reciprocal misunderstandings do not constitute language pathologies, but rather "the roots of its genius".[27] Not only has Stoppard re-mapped the relations between

[25] Felicia Londré, *Tom Stoppard* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1981), 164.

[26] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 197. Emphasis added.

[27] Ibid., 235.

things, images and names, cannily playing with ambiguities, but he has also re-appropriated the richness of language revealing its creative and even subversive potentialities.

Language *as* game

The discovery of language potentialities is supported by the use of the game in all its meanings. Indeed, Stoppard's play is permeated by a playful atmosphere from the very first scene; starting from the ball crossing the stage hinting at a game taking place behind the scenes, to the students' reiterated exchange of objects, the whole play is dominated by playful language exchanges. Moreover, the connection between language and play is strengthened by the use of the same verb ("to catch") both for the *game* of the platform building and for the *game* of learning Dogg.

By building the platform, passing and catching the blocks, Easy and the students – who at first do not share the same linguistic code – eventually start to communicate, transforming Dogg into "a natural, playful and contagious language of co-operation that enables us to surmount if not destroy the prey walls of usurping tyranny".[28] Above all, as an infectious disease, Dogg can be *caught* by contagion ("you don't learn it, you catch it", 206); or even *caught* as a building block ("a plank is thrown to BAKER, who catches it", 153); as with any other language, it is the result of an interaction, a social activity, like a game that can be easily learnt.

The inspiration for this fundamental scene is provided by a section of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, establishing a parallel between the play and the process of language learning:

> Let us imagine a language [that] is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building-stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs, and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting in the words "block", "pillar", "slab",

[28] Thomas R. Whitaker, *Tom Stoppard* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 121.

"beam". A calls them out; B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call.[29]

As a game is learnt by observing others playing, so language is learnt through the exchanges of social activity. Yet, linguistic terminology ('mother tongue', 'language families'...) can often prove deceptive; as Einar Haugen has pointed out, "[*t*]*here are no genes in language*; ... there is only learning".[30]

Linguistic arbitrariness analysed to this extent only as a tool of repression now acquires a positive value; once the identity between object and sign is disrupted as a divine punishment, it proves to be a potentially destabilising weapon. Stoppard's text provides us with several visual metaphors of linguistic confusion, from the ball bouncing from hand to hand, "signifying linguistic give-and-take",[31] to the "tottering tower of cubes" (159), a clear reference to the Tower of Babel. Yet, despite the several languages intertwining under the shadow of the tower of confusion, communication will eventually take place, transforming Babel into a space of repressed potentialities and productive encounters. As Haugen explains in the preface to his book, significantly titled *Blessings of Babel*, "I turn the story around and see the tower of Babel as a symbol of the unity of mankind".[32]

The use of Dogg testifies to the positiveness of the disruption of the identity between object and sign, showing the richness of linguistic plurality. Introduced as the lawful language of a stern school system, Dogg later becomes a surreal and arbitrary idiom linking the two parts of the play, revealing the creative and subversive potentialities of language. After teaching his audience the rudiments of Dogg by putting Wittgenstein's theories into practice, Stoppard can now let the lorry driver Easy irrupt on the stage of the clandestine *Macbeth*.[33] Since Easy has learnt Dogg during *Dogg's Hamlet*

[29] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 3e.

[30] Haugen, *Blessings*, 2.

[31] Diamond, "Stoppard's *Dogg's Hamlet*", 596.

[32] Haugen, *Blessings*, 2.

[33] As Stoppard states in the introduction to his play, the appeal for him "consisted in

through the platform building scene, he can provide the actors with an alternative language to evade the regime's censors. The actors' use of Dogg radically transforms professor Dogg's language, turning it into a destabilising idiom; the 'sacred' Shakespearean lines ("Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow") are replaced with apparently nonsensical words that dare utter Shakespeare's text in an unorthodox linguistic code. Nonetheless, the surreal "Dominoes, et dominoes, et dominoes" (209) is a clever reference to the *playing* engaged in by the dissident actors in order to avoid the Inspector's censorship and to rescue the Shakespearean text from the manipulations of power, transforming it into "Cahoot's Macbeth". As Elin Diamond underlines, a "non-canonical Shakespeare, a deinstitutionalised Shakespeare, is no longer a monument but a minefield".[34]

As we keep on playing with words, it is interesting to focus on the etymological connections between Stoppard's *play*, the *playful* atmosphere pervading it, and the *struggle* against the regime's abuses performed in the text. Victor Turner traces the origin of *play* back to the Anglo-Saxon word *plega*, meaning 'game, sport' as well as 'fight', 'battle.'[35] Considering the double meaning of play as 'game' and as 'dramatic piece', it can be assumed that Stoppard's play uses the play-as-game's positive potentialities to denounce the abuses of the repressive system and the plight of Czechoslovakian actors and actress. As Cavecchi has pointed out, relating the three terms by citing Lyotard, "to speak is to fight, meaning playing"; speech acts thus depend on a 'general agonistic' which allow us to read the Inspector's linguistic politics as a peculiar form of institutional belligerence.[36]

The analysis of a peculiar kind of *play*, meant both as performance and as game, is contained in an essay by Jean Piaget on the child's symbolic playing. Piaget individuates in child-play the space "which transforms reality by assimilation to the needs of the self, whereas

the possibility of writing a play which had to teach the audience the language the play was written in" (142).

[34] Diamond, "Stoppard's *Dogg's Hamlet*", 599.

[35] Turner, *From Ritual*, 33.

[36] Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, quoted in Maria Cristina Cavecchi, *Shakespeare mostro contemporaneo*, 50.

imitation ... is accommodation to external models".[37] Moreover, language is considered the main instrument of the child's social adaptation but, since it is "not invented by the child, but rather transmitted to him in ready-made compulsory, and collective forms",[38] it proves unsuitable to express his needs or his experiences of himself. Symbolic play consequently constitutes an indispensable means of self-expression, "a system of signifiers constructed by him and capable of being bent to his will".[39] According to Piaget, the play's symbolism represents for the child what interior language represents for the adult. It can therefore be assumed that the exchange of objects taking place in *Dogg's Hamlet* reveals the need of the students – who have regressed to obedient children – to express what, in their experience, could not be formulated and assimilated through language. The language they have learnt from Dogg does not satisfy their needs so that, by playing with objects and passing them from hand to hand, they express their demand for the exchange of new words and for building other meanings, in order to free themselves from the linguistic impositions (both Dogg and Shakespeare's English) they perceive as hostile and unsuitable to communicate their experience.

A first, clumsy attempt to satisfy such a necessity is made by the inventive Abel, who freely re-utilises the block Dogg had destined to other uses. Unconsciously rejecting Dogg's power, Abel invents a different reality by using the blocks to create something totally different from the Headmaster's plans. According to Piaget, symbolic play is set in motion by such unconscious conflicts, while the performance and unravelling of these conflicts have the purpose of compensating for unfulfilled needs. It can thus be presumed that the student's construction – ending up in a Tower of (B)Abel – gives voice to the wish for a linguistic plurality, staging the will to disrupt the exclusivity of a hostile language repressing subjectivity. Although in his "Des tours de Babel", Derrida lets the idea of the Tower as a failure survive, considering it a symbol of the impossibility to

[37] Jean Piaget and Bärbel Inhelder, *The Psychology of the Child* (*La Psychologie de l'enfant*, 1966), trans. Helen Weaver (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 58.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

complete and saturate, the tower of Abel upsets such a conception, suggesting, on the contrary, an anxiety to build and create, a will to found a profoundly new language free from impositions.[40]

As has already been noted, Easy also unintentionally plays with the blocks, dismantling Dogg's plans by freely re-composing the letters printed on them. Yet, in a normative system, some kinds of infantile games can be tolerated if deemed 'structurally irrelevant'; but when the game is prolonged to the adult age, such behaviour is judged unsafe for the economy of society. Meaningfully enough, whenever Dogg comes on stage every playful activity is abruptly interrupted and somehow prohibited. When the subjectivity expressed by the play – and especially by language games – liberates its playful dangerousness, punishment becomes the main tool of power.

The game, permeating Stoppard's play in all its forms, reveals its destabilising potential. The anti-structure of the play's liminal space represents the latent system of potential alternatives, from which newness will emerge. As noted earlier, liminality consists exactly in the disassembling of culture into its constitutive factors and in their free or ludic re-composition.[41] It is through the play that Abel gives voice to his aspiration to have a new Tower, expressing his rejection of Dogg's oppressive linguistic regime. And the play – in the form of a Dogg now become an 'othered' language – will provide an alternative to the canonical Shakespeare imposed by authority, impudently disassembled and re-composed, transforming it into a subversive weapon.

As words are freed from the similarity of object and sign, offering new interpretations and opening up to new meanings, the Shakespearean text is similarly displaced and deprived of its sacredness, enriched by contamination and re-appropriation. The canon, fragmented and dissolved in its authority, itself becomes a play of destruction and construction. The displaced Shakespearean text is revived by new interpretations, re-invented on the basis of ever differing rules, in an endless play of death and rebirth.

[40] Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel", in Joseph Graham, ed., *Difference in Translation* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985), 165-248.

[41] See Turner, *From Ritual*.

Ludovico Isoldo

The Implied Author in Sarah Orne Jewett's "A White Heron"

Take me home
where canals
flow
between iris-banks:
where the heron
has her nest...
H. D., "The Walls Do Not Fall"

It is a critical commonplace that the otherwise linear structure of "A White Heron" (1886), is altered, especially in the last part, by the presence of some cases of metalepsis. Meta-narrative structures are used to express a point of view problematically and give "A White Heron" a particular formal organisation that has been subject to critical attention over the years. For my part, I wish to start out by stressing the fact that the "intrusion" of the narrator, who is only seemingly extradiegetic, and hence the consequent transfer of focalisation give the text an analeptic construction. Although this is at no point made explicit, it brings an interesting retrospective vision to bear on the events related.

This second narrative voice, both extra- and intradiegetic, is seen by Heidi Kelchner as "a separate narrative presence and consciousness",[1] perhaps the true *agens* of the whole tale, which at

[1] Heidi Kelchner, "Unstable Narrative Voice in Sarah Orne Jewett's 'A White Heron'", *Colby Quarterly* 28 (1992), 89.

intervals shunts the main character off into a heteronomous role. In my opinion, it is a self-referential voice; indeed, many textual signals suggest that it might actually be identified with Sylvia herself, who, as an adult, with hind-sight, seems to look back on the story of which she, as a child, was the protagonist.

To start from the hypothesis that Sylvy's adventure, in a decisive phase of the diegesis, can be re-read or, better, commented on by her after a fairly long time, means bestowing on this narrative voice the role of implied author, one who poses as the moral reader of the events, the ethical interpreter of the tale.[2]

Hence arises a formal need to introduce meta-narrative structures which, according to some readers, sound too much like captions in this tale. Actually though, the intrusion of this "second narrator", while admittedly disrupting narrative organisation, does not weaken the idyllic, romantic, substantially fairy-tale tone of the story, since only at intervals does a clear-cut, realistic narrative register come into play, marked especially by changes in tenses. As Weinrich has noted, tales typically switch between ordinary narrative tenses and extraordinary "commentative" tenses, the latter being used in a retrospective mode with an analeptic role.[3]

[2] Although Kelchner does not speak explicitly of the presence of an implied author in her penetrating reading of "A White Heron", she brings out how "Narrative intrusion complicates the reading of the story because the reader is ... forced to consider the motivations, feelings, and intentions of the narrator. The narrator seems to become a character herself, wrapped up in the dynamism of the fiction" (Kelchner, "Unstable", 90). See also Terry Heller, who holds that the "duplicity" – and I would add, the ambiguity – of the narrating voice is due to the rhetorical organisation of the tale, or rather to the "rhetoric of communion", which prevents the narrator, reader and main character from acting as autonomous structures in the dialectic of the text (Terry Heller, "The Rhetoric of Communion in Jewett's 'A White Heron'", *Colby Library Quarterly* 27 [1990], 193 and 190).

[3] Harald Weinrich, *Tempus. Besprochene und erzählte Welt* (Stuttgart-Berlin: W. Kohlammer, 1971) singles out two basic groups of "*tempora*": the so-called commentative tenses – generally including the present, present perfect and future – and the narrative tenses, such as the imperfect, simple past, past perfect and conditional. The sudden passage from narrative to commentative tenses makes it clear that the teller of the tale is also assuming a hermeneutic role: he interprets the text, and is often involved with it ideologically.

In any case, in "A White Heron" one finds features of both the mimetic-realistic genre and the romantic, fairy-tale genre.[4] As critical literature has often brought out, the structure and content of this story allow it to be read as a fable, an idyllic tale.[5] Suffice it to mention Sylvy's complete acceptance of the world of nature, whose codices she knows and interprets, a world which at the last she will refuse to betray. Moreover, the tale follows Propp's model,[6] with the yearned-for "object of search" located "'in another' or 'different' kingdom. This kingdom may lie far away horizontally, or else very high up or deep down vertically".[7] Sylvy finds the heron near a lofty pine tree, in an unfrequented, magic area of the wood. Another ingredient of Propp's model is the never lacking initiatory rite of the character undergoing the trial, who is required to give up his ethical horizon in exchange for an attractive reward, a "gift". The prodigious area in the tale – the wild wood where the heron has built its nest and the giant tree is located – is part of the typical ambience of a magic fable. Indeed, the imposing tree dominates the place, giving it a spellbound atmosphere with its archetypal connotations. At first the tree is hostile to Sylvy, hindering her progress, but then, in accord with the animism of the imaginary world of the fable (we continue to follow Propp's terminology), the tree becomes a sort of "magic helper", facilitating the little girl's climb to the top. However, Sylvy switches roles at a key point in the tale. First she is a "helper", determined to work with

[4] Jewett herself was convinced she had written a "romance" not at all in line with the dominating social realism of William Dean Howells, for whom she had some polite criticism. "Mr. Howells thinks that this age frowns upon the romantic, that it is no use to write romance any more; but dear me, how much of it there is left in every-day life after all. It must be the fault of the writers that such writing is dull, but what shall I do with my 'White Heron' now she is written? She isn't a very good magazine story, but I love her" (Louis A. Renza, *"A White Heron" and the Question of Minor Literature* [Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984], 71).

[5] See Theodore R. Hovet , "'Once Upon a Time': Sarah Orne Jewett's 'A White Heron' As a Fairy Tale", *Studies in Short Fiction* 15.1 (Winter 1978), 63-68, and Renza, *"A White Heron"*, 134-141, on this aspect.

[6] Hovet singles out in the text the first twenty functions identified by Propp (Hovet, "Once", 63).

[7] Wladimir J. A. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1971), 50.

the hunter to win the reward she has been promised; then she becomes his "antagonist".

In the fairy tale, to stick with Propp's paradigm, the "*villain* [antagonist]" comes from elsewhere and is put "in the tale as a person who has been sought out, usually as the result of guidance".[8] Furthermore, "The *donor* [the hunter is both antagonist and donor] is encountered accidentally, most often in the forest".[9] All these circumstances are to be found in "A White Heron".

The romantic, fairy-tale dimension can already be found in the *incipit,* which proleptically delineates a utopian space, a sort of *locus amoenus*,[10] that has a central role in the symbolism of the text, an extraneous space, far from the tensions of modernity, the conflict-ridden, chaotic industrial society, with its programme for an irrational exploitation of nature. Sylvy and the heron are the poles of an ideal natural equilibrium, coexisting peacefully, in complete harmony, which the anonymous hunter, an invader and coloniser, is out to upset by force with his thirst for gain, precisely because he is ideologically outside this idyll. Hence, right after the prologue, it is made evident that the little girl "had tried to grow for eight years in a crowded manufacturing town [but] it seemed as if she never had been alive at all before she came to live at the farm".[11]

The *incipit* of "A White Heron" marks one of the most intensely meaningful moments in the narration and spells out its allegorical framework. In fact, the development of the rhetorical organisation of the text is already present in the archaic initial scene. Sylvy and the cow are coming home from the pasture at dusk, while "[they] are … striking deep into the dark woods" (1). The dark wood is, of course, a *topos* of allegorical fables; passing through it is a strong, traumatic

[8] Ibid., 84 and 90.

[9] Ibid.

[10] An "Adamless Eden", according to Elisabeth Ammons, "The Shape of Violence in Jewett's 'A White Heron'", *Colby Library Quarterly* 22 (1986), 8; whereas Margaret Roman holds that in this Eden "Sylvia is the new Eve and Adam combined" (Margaret Roman, *Sarah Orne Jewett: Reconstructing Gender* [Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992], 198).

[11] Sarah Orne Jewett, *A White Heron and Other Stories* (New York: Dover, 1999), 2. Hereafter page references will be given between parentheses in the text.

experience – in the "dark woods" the little girl meets the antagonist, the hunter – and is coherent with the "initiatory scheme" of the story (in the end Sylvy, having overcome the "trial," abandons her infancy and moves toward maturity).[12] Clearly the little girl's woodsy name has an allegorical connotation. The story should be read as a sort of apologue, since it uses the allegorical scheme to convey an ideological message. The structure of the text is always underlain by a contradictory dynamic, the opposition of two universes, the animal and the human worlds, city versus country, Sylvy against the hunter. This is the hermeneutic scheme – with an intra-textual investigation as its objective, the overall "semanticisation" of "A White Heron", the search for a horizon of total meaning – from which various codices arise: first of all a mythical, archetypal codex, furnished above all by the space of the narration as an Eden; a historico-social codex based on the opposition of two social classes, the first bound to the emerging industrial culture (the hunter, an embalmer and ornithologist), the other bound to a declining romantic and idealistic Jeffersonian agrarianism (the grandmother and the girl); and finally an ideologico-existential codex, closely tied to the previous one, which gives substance to the conflict between two different conceptions of nature (once again, Sylvy and the animal and vegetable world – often significantly anthropomorphic – versus the hunter).[13] It is through these oppositions that the ideological conflict is expressed in the story.

The text is short enough for the reader to take its syntagmatic connections into account, following the itinerary of the main character, always present on the scene from start to finish.[14] The reader can single out formal passages (in particular the meta-narrative

[12] In this connection I find Ammons's position very interesting; she considers "A White Heron" an "anti-bildungsroman" (Ammons, "The Shape", 10).

[13] For this construction of the text, see: Ammons "The Shape", 6, and Catherine Barnes Stevenson, "The Double Consciousness of the Narrator in Sarah Orne Jewett's Fiction", *Colby Library Quarterly* XI (1975), 3-4.

[14] The only moment when the little girl is not present is almost at the end of the story when the grandmother one morning enters her granddaughter's room and discovers her absence: "'Sylvy, Sylvy!' Called the busy old grandmother again and again, but nobody answered, and the small husk bed was empty, and Sylvia had disappeared" (8).

passages) where the antitheses on which "A White Heron" is built are set up.

Along with the "dark wood" in the beginning scene, two other *topoi* are to be noted: the road and, unfailingly, the encounter, which, as we have seen, can be identified as a prolepsis thanks to various signals. In the meantime, it is to be noted that in the structure of "A White Heron," just as the textual phases are tied to the "main narrative", so in the diegesis they are entrusted to a narrative register that is clearly romantic, whereas the digressions and above all the mimeses are marked by a realistic or naturalistic tone (here one notes the characteristically paratactic syntax in Mrs Tilley's language and in the hunter's too). The *incipit* introduces us into a bucolic atmosphere typical of a pastoral or elegiac romance, as other scholars have brought out,[15] and Sylvy, a metamorphic, taciturn forest creature, is like a character out of "Arcadia":

> The woods were already filled with shadows one June evening, just before eight o'clock, through a bright sunset still glimmered faintly among the trunks of the trees. A little girl was driving home her cow, a plodding, dilatory, provoking creature in her behavior, but a valued companion for all that. They were going away from the western light, and striking deep into the dark woods, but their feet were familiar with the path, and it was no matter whether their eyes could see it or not (1).

The Eden-like, pastoral image is conveyed by the language – which has estranging connotations, but then the main character too has an estranging, visionary dimension – and also by the fact that all the creatures that populate this idyllic universe, from the cow to the birds, are described in anthropomorphic, animistic terms. And one notes that Sylvia belongs to the forest and partakes of the harmony that reigns there:

[15] See Renza's elaboration of the relationship between Jewett's "tale" and the European and American pastoral tradition (Chapter III). See also Joseph Church's discussion of the relationship with Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" in "Romantic Flight in Jewett's 'White Heron'", *Studies in American Fiction* (Spring 2002), 22.

> The cow stopped long at the brook to drink … and Sylvia stood still and waited, letting her bare feet cool themselves in the shoal water, while the great twilight moths struck softly against her. She … listened to the thrushes with a heart that beat fast with pleasure … the air was soft and sweet … She was not often in the woods so late as this, and it made her feel as if she were a part of the gray shadows and moving leaves (2).

Against this idyllic consonance is set the "crowded manufacturing town" that the little girl left a year earlier, a choice that everyone approved of: "Everybody said it was a good change for a little maid ". But what strikes the reader is the expression of a point of view – "but, as for Sylvia herself, it seemed as if she never had been alive at all before she came to live at the farm" (2) – unlikely for a little girl; still unlikelier is the consideration, which follows right on the heels of this one, that the character is to be interpreted as a metaphor for the relationship or contrast between town and country: "She thought often with wistful compassion of a wretched dry geranium that belonged to a town neighbor" (2). Is it likely for a similar idea to come to the mind of a nine-year-old girl? Or is it not more likely for it to be present in a more "adult" perspective, a point of view that is at all events extradiegetic?[16] Still more marked by the topical contrast between town and country is the observation made by Mrs Tilley,

[16] Another consideration of Sylvia's is instead quite believable: "[She] whispered that this was a beautiful place to live in, and she never should wish to go home" (2). This is not the only point in the tale in which the importance and complexity of point of view are indicated. See Richard Cary, *Sarah Orne Jewett* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962), on the purposeful ambiguity, or even "manipulation of point of view" with which the "prospective" of the story is marked, and on Jewett's excessive "jostling" in her presentation (101-102). See also Kelchner ("Unstable"), according to whom the narrative "I" "seems to play mult.ple roles" (90), and, in certain passages, as when metalepsis is used, to lose "control of the narration" (90), becoming "increasingly unstable and contradictory" as the story proceeds (90). According to Heller the sudden shift in verb tenses and the introduction of meta-narrative structures induce the critical reader to see "the narrator and reader as selfconscious co–creators of the narration", reducing the "distance in time and mental location between narrator and reader" (Heller, "The Rhetoric", 187). For Barnes Stevenson, the narrative voice, whose perceptions and emotions are far more complex than has generally been recognized" (1), has "[a] double consciousness … a double awareness" (Barnes Stevenson, "Double Consciousness", 1 and 2-3).

Sylvia's grandmother, who, passing suddenly to "mimesis", breaks with the lyric tone of the "diegesis ":

> "Afraid of folks", old Mrs. Tilley said to herself ... after she had made the unlikely choice of Sylvia from her daughter's houseful of children, and was returning to the farm. "Afraid of folks", they said! "I guess she won't be troubled no great with 'em up to the old place" (2).

This character's remarks to herself – *ex abrupto*, almost without mediation by the narrator – with the intentional repeated "afraid of folks", clearly has a proleptic function; narratologically it might well be taken as a typical "clue", since it comes shortly before the girl's traumatic encounter with the hunter and the sudden recollection of the "noisy town" and above all "the thought of the great red-faced boy who used to chase and frighten her" (2). Here the idyll is broken, the space is no longer recognisable as a *locus amoenus*, and Sylvia's confidence in surrounding nature is impaired. Up until a few moments before, the girl felt herself to be "a part of the gray shadows and the moving leaves", now she is impelled to lengthen her stride "to escape from the shadows of the trees" (2), and she senses a tension that is foreign to the place. All of a sudden a shrill whistle strikes her ears and "the woods girl is horror stricken" (2), as the text stresses, for the whistling bears no resemblance to the sibilant but harmonious song of a bird, which "would have a sort of friendliness"; in fact, it is "a boy's whistle, determined, and somewhat aggressive" (2-3). This is the prelude to a typical fairytale situation. Sylvia thinks she has fallen into some kind of ambush, and after opportunistically breaking the solidarity pact with her friend, the cow – "[she] left the cow to whatever sad fate might await her" – she looks for a hiding place, "but she was just too late. The enemy had discovered her" (3). At this point an antagonist appears: "The enemy had discovered her" (3). The point of view is Sylvia's; indeed, one senses clearly the detachment of the narrating "I" and her benevolent irony. We are still square in the canon of magical fables; the antagonist is a stranger, coming from elsewhere, met by chance in a wood "as the result of guidance".[17]

[17] Propp, *Morphology*, 84.

"Halloa, little girl, how far is it to the road?" he says; and one notes that the question is asked "in a very cheerful and persuasive tone" (3). So begins the hunter's sly "courtship" and the girl's "falling in love", although they are interpreted as such by the implied author only in retrospect.

Beyond these considerations, the reader must not miss the use of the simple present tense ("the woods-girl is horror-stricken"), the first of a series which is fairly consistent considering the brevity of the tale. As we have said at the beginning, it is important to take good note of the verb tenses, following Weinrich's distinction between narrative and commutative tenses. More simply, however, with this first of the series of simple present tenses, since "A White Heron" is a typical oral tale, "Der Sprecher gibt ... zuerkennen, daß er beim Horer fur den laufenden Text eine Rezeption in der Haltung der Gespannheit fur angebracht hält".[18] The intent, then, would be to actualise the action, so to speak, and solicit the participation of the reader or listener.[19] In any case, what seems clear is that through the use of this rhetorical strategy, the narrator also intends to assume the point of view of the character deliberately, entering into her emotional horizon and making it his or her own. This is the position of an implied author who "enters" the text with his or her own axiological itinerary, and in the present case perhaps with his or her own life experience. Further on we will see clearly that the choice of "commentative tenses" in "A White Heron", once the story's self-referential matrix has been recognized, unequivocally reveals the presence of this implied author with the subjectivity and the will to act as interpreter of the text.

From this point on, one notes that Sylvia's viewpoint is emphasised and her sense of the events prevails; but it is no less true that it is always a retrospective "narrational center" that I have defined above as more "mature," i.e., presided over by an adult

[18] Weinrich, *Tempus*, 33.

[19] On the use of verb tenses and the "dialectic" between past and present, there are brief discussions in Gayle L. Smith, "The Language of Transcendence in Sarah Orne Jewett's 'A White Heron'", in Gwen L. Nagel, ed., *Critical Essays in Sarah Horne Jewett* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984), 73-74, and Sarah Way Sherman, *Sarah Orne Jewett, An American Persephone* (London: Univ. Press of New England, 1989), 159. See especially Kelchner, "Unstable" and, above all, Heller, "The Rhetoric".

presence, as when the little girl is too perspicacious in bringing out her grandmother's superficiality, even before taking cognisance of it, when the latter loses no time in extending trust to the young stranger and taking him into her home: "she knew by instinct that her grandmother did not comprehend the gravity of the situation. She must be mistaking the stranger for one of the farmer-lads of the region" (3). There is surely a degree of mediation by the implied author in a zoom-in on the hunter who, not without a hint of romanticism that can only be read retrospectively, lets his gaze dwell on "Sylvia's pale face and shining gray eyes with ever growing enthusiasm" (4). The youth's interest in the little girl is tendentious (the sentimental cast belongs to the implied author and, as we have said, is retrospective), and it grows when he realises that Sylvia, thanks to her knowledge of the territory and her organic integration within it, can act as a sort of "forerunner" to lead him to the heron's nest (with the hope that the rare, longed-for fowl may be "one of her acquaintances" [5]). This time it is the grandmother who lays out the pastoral framework in which Sylvia moves and recalls her Arcadian connotations:

> There ain't a foot o' ground she don't know her way over, and the wild creatur's counts her one o' themselves. Squer'ls she'll tame to come an' feed right out o' her hands, and all sorts o' birds. Last winter she got the jay-birds to bangeing here, and I believe she'd a' scanted herself of her own meals to have plenty to throw out amongst 'em, if I hadn't keep watch (4).

Thus an Eden-like space is re-proposed wherein birds, which the girl is especially fond of and whose trust she enjoys, are described in anthropomorphic terms: they "seem to have reason same as folks" (4). It is this trust that the hunter is ready to take advantage of. "So Sylvy knows all about birds, does she? … I am making a collection of birds … There are two or three very rare ones I have been hunting for these five years. I mean to get them on my own ground if they can be found" (4). The two universes are in stark opposition, an ideological contrast due to different relationships to the animal kingdom. The hunter expresses a strong will to power and dominion over nature and its weakest creatures that is far from the girl's ideal horizon. The birds

"are stuffed and preserved, dozens and dozens of them … and I have shot or snared every one myself" (4). The youth does not follow the ordinary, primary law of nature according to which one hunts to satisfy one's survival need but the sort of logic that governs processes of exploitation and transformation of nature (taxidermy). The hunter is an emblematic ideological expression of the "manufacturing town" – that has entrusted its destiny to economic industriousness and factory production – which the little girl has left behind her and of which she has a traumatic recollection. Here the text clearly reveals another of its "semantic oppositions": life versus death, implying two different axiological bases. Sylvia wants to protect and conserve animal species, whereas the hunter and taxidermist preserves a mere icon; in his intentions, ideally, he aims at eternalising life, but in fact he perpetuates death, making a gruesome simulacrum into an object of aesthetic enjoyment.

The relationship that is established now between the girl and the young man during the latter's dialogue with Mrs Tilley is singular. Sylvia seems mentally distant from the two speakers, and this estrangement is stressed by the narrative "I". For his part, the hunter casts an eye on the girl now and then, as if he feared losing sight of her. But Sylvia is actually following the conversation with interest. The little girl is the young man's real interlocutor; between the two of them a curious, "mute" dialectic is established, mediated by the implied author; moreover, this strange textual phase has a retrospective cast. In turning his gaze on Sylvia, the hunter expects his intuitions to be borne out: he has guessed that the little girl must be aware of the heron's presence in the neighbourhood. Speaking to the grandmother as the knowledgeable expert he is, he describes the fowl he is searching for in detail, including the characteristics of its nest, but it is the granddaughter who reacts: "Sylvia's heart gave a wild beat" (5), whereas there is no response from the elder woman, a surrogate interlocutor for the girl. Sylvia, who has spied the fowl, mentally reconstructs as well the space where she saw it, but she says nothing of this discovery,[20] not even when the young man utters his

[20] Most certainly retrospective, since it is part of the implied author's nostalgic re-reading of past events, is the final part of the diegetic segment: "Not far beyond [which]

fervent desire to get to the nest, an objective he pursues obsessively. "'I can't think of anything I should like so much as to find that heron's nest … I would give ten dollars to anybody who could show it to me'" (5). Here of course Mrs Tilley's attention is awakened, whereas Sylvia's is aroused only retrospectively. "Mrs. Tilley gave amazed attention to all this, but Sylvia still watched the toad … No amount of thought, that night, could decide how many wished-for treasures the ten dollars, so lightly spoken of, would buy" (5).

There seems to me little doubt that this last sentence is metanarrational. The idea attributed to Sylvia by the implied author is retrospective, in so far as the money does not come within the horizon of expectancy of the little girl, who is far removed from the hunter's economic system of values. Thus the cultural conflict is proposed again, and still another semantic opposition is brought out: wealth versus poverty. But in effect it is not the offer of money that brings the girl to make up her mind to help the hunter in his undertaking, but the "attraction" she feels for this fascinating man – this "handsome stranger" (5). Clearly the hunter is counting on the child's liking for him in order to win her trust, an object he obtains readily. However, Sylvia's "falling in love" is framed in the analytic construction of the text. The presence of the implied author even in this basic circumstance, which is clearly retrospective in nature, is quite evident:

> Sylvia still watched the young man with loving admiration. She had never seen anybody so charming and delightful; the woman's heart, asleep in the child, was vaguely thrilled by a dream of love. Some premonition of that great power stirred and swayed these young foresters (6).

One notes that, always from the point of view of the implied author, the Eden myth is repeatedly evoked; the two young people, in

were the salt marshes and beyond those was the sea, the sea which Sylvia wondered and dreamed about, but never had looked upon, though its great voice could often be heard above the noise of the woods on stormy nights" (5). The ocean reaches are a much yearned-for spatial dimension, which, understandably, enters into Sylvia's visual horizon only at the end of the tale.

an idyllic communion, walk through "the solemn woodlands with soft-footed silent care" (6). Moving with religious discretion through the woods, which now take on a meaningfully sacred connotation, that of a sort of *lucus,* a holy wood, they experience a sense of beatitude. Indeed, the hunter momentarily shares Sylvia's condition of forest creature, a sylvan spirit, no longer in conflict with nature but in a state of perfect reconciliation. "They stopped to listen to a bird's song; they pressed forward again eagerly, parting the branches, – speaking to each other rarely and in whispers; the young man going first and Sylvia following, fascinated, a few steps behind" (6). Between the two of them a tacit solidarity or complicity is established: it is stressed that "She grieved because the longed-for white heron was elusive" (6). But one also notes that it is not the girl who is leading but the hunter. This means that although she has decided to help, Sylvia still has not come out with a direct statement, telling the guest where he could find the heron. The strategy of "seduction" is working, but is not dominant. Besides, just a bit earlier the ideological conflict had come to the fore. The hunter is clearly a man who shoots birds – "he brought down some unsuspecting singing creature from its bough" (5). The child is well aware of the violence of this act and grieves over it – "Sylvia would have liked him vastly better without his gun" (5) – unable to understand the young man's love-hate attitude toward these defenceless creatures, "why he killed the very birds he seemed to like so much" (5). Sylvia cannot fathom the meaning underlying the art of taxidermy; on the other hand, ethical evaluations are extraneous to her, taxidermy is in a certain sense a "necrophilic" practice. The taxidermist does love birds but, paradoxically, only when they are disembowelled, inanimate, preserving only the appearance of life, albeit forever.

After an ellipsis, which interrupts the diegesis, breaking the rhythm of the story, suddenly, through an intriguing, descriptive structure that is in part an elaboration of Sylvia's perception, the gigantic tree appears, the pine, "the last of its generation" (6). The description clearly assumes a proleptic function, in that it anticipates the tree's central role in the tale – it will soon be a protagonist, and for this reason it is given a humanised "nature", an inner "life" – but it is probably also a retrospective sign. It is thus from the standpoint of the protagonist that the majesty of the pine tree is expressed with

rhetorical emphasis. It had been spared by generation upon generation of woodsmen, outliving all the other plants in the area where it is rooted, surmounting a hillock where its lofty tip allows it absolute dominion over the surrounding space and the younger trees. The secular pine thus marks a boundary between the forest and the swampy, brackish areas where the heron has its nest and which signal the presence of the ocean, becoming an important point of reference. Furthermore, an aura that is both magical and mythical cleaves to the tree – the pine, like the cypress, is among the "attributes" of the god Sylvan, protector of the woods – and its hieratic functions will be made explicit later on. The girl is sure that from the top of the tree one must have an extraordinary view of the ocean. To climb up to the top of the tree, especially at dawn, when favourable atmospheric conditions allow for a clearer view, one's prospective could be broadened, to the point where one could not only view the sea, but encompass "all the world" in one's vision (6), making it possible to single out the fowl's territory and the place where it has built its nest (6). The possibility of carrying out this undertaking and being able to communicate the grandiose discovery thrills her intensely. But at this point the implied author intervenes ironically or perhaps self-ironically with a typically editorial and above all retrospective comment. "What a spirit of adventure, what wild ambition! What fancied triumph and delight and glory for the later morning when she could make known the secret! It was almost too real and too great for the childish heart to bear" (6).

By now Sylvia has made her plan: she will stay awake all night and before the crack of dawn, unbeknownst to her grandmother and the guest, betake herself to the foot of the pine. The interval between her vigil and her arrival at the destination is marked significantly by the friendly, comforting presence of birds, whose affinity with the girl is stressed yet again. Indeed, from here on one notes a strengthening of this "bond". Once again there is a break in the diegesis to introduce a meta-narrative "parenthesis" whose retrospective function seems to me unmistakable. Can Sylvia's "falling in love" bring about the irreparable rupture of her idyllic relationship with nature, the loss of her enchanted forest, and, finally, a sort of betrayal, when she points out the heron's nest? "Alas, if the great wave of human interest which flooded for the first time this dull little life should sweep away the

satisfaction of an existence heart to heart with nature and the dumb life of the forest!" (7). As always, the intervention of the implied author connects the linguistic register with the stylistic modes of romanticism, rhetorical and estranging (it is to be noted that "the great wave of human interest" goes in just this direction).

At last Sylvia reaches the area where the great pine tree stands, its actantial role ever more evident. Indeed, its anthropomorphic character is stressed at once – "There was the huge tree asleep yet in the paling moonlight" (7). Perhaps one might say, still more significantly, that the pine was "ornitomorphic": when the girl begins to climb, the tree at first hinders her ascent, as the boughs "scratched her like angry talons" (7). But one notes as well that Sylvia's bare hands and feet "pinched and held like bird's claws to the monstrous ladder" (7). Thus both the protagonists are caught up in a metamorphosis that is fraught with meaning. The climb is a long, wearying and painful one; Sylvia's hands and feet are scratched, but in spite of the discomfort she is determined to go higher and higher, "almost to the sky itself" (7). Before taking on the pine, the child had to climb up an oak, whence she made a bold movement and shifted over to her tree; it is only then, as the text makes clear, that her "grand", "epic" undertaking has its start. "There, when she made the dangerous pass from one tree to the other, the great enterprise would really begin" (7). During her ascent Sylvia observes the flight of sparrows and robins who greet the dawn with their chirping, something she had always wanted to do. Perhaps her unconscious desire for total identification with the birds is about to be realised. In the meantime she has the privilege of sharing their element. Thence comes a new state of awareness,[21] a sensation of levitation, of extreme bodily lightness; like the birds, the little girl might seem to prevail over the law of gravity: "it seemed much lighter there aloft in the pine-tree" (7).

The last stretch of her "voyage" is a very hard one. It is as if the tree – now openly an "antagonist", to stay with the actantial, fairy-tale scheme – were obstructing Sylvia's "mission". To her eyes, it thrusts

[21] According to Barnes Stevenson, "The Double", Sylvia matures "a new awareness" (5).

aloft, stretching its length even higher, like a ship's mast (the simile calls to mind the topical moment when the child reaches the top and can see the ocean in the distance). "The tree seemed to lengthen itself out as she went up, and to reach farther and farther upward. It was like a great main-mast to the voyaging earth" (7). Then it is that the humanising nature of the pine tree is definitely ratified; at the same time the meta-narrative signals of this long, striking textual structure, present since the beginning, become more frequent, more romantic in tone. Now more than ever the diegesis is governed by the implied author, and the text delineates its analeptic structure and its underlying symbolism more explicitly.

In the meantime, the pine, struck by Sylvia's brave determination, assumes the role of "helper". As if by magic, the girl's ascent is made easier; her body, which hitherto had been withstood, now cleaves naturally to the trunk, almost like ivy: "it must truly have been amazed that morning through all its ponderous frame as it felt this determined spark of human spirit creeping and climbing from higher branch to branch" (7). No longer reluctant and hostile, this haughty giant actually reinforces its stability, deviating even the direction of the wind and the consistency of its frailest branches, in order to guarantee that Sylvia, unharmed, will be welcomed in the number of its most beloved "creatures".

The old, humanized pine-tree fondly gathers the girl into his nuclear family; Sylvia is now definitely part of the forest and its natural order. The age-old tree is like an *alma mater* who "adopts" Sylvia who, as we recall, has left her original family (it is significant that her father is never mentioned, as if she had none). Here the fairy-tale nature of the text is accentuated, and it takes on an allegorical, pastoral cast; the wise, generous tree assumes mythical proportions, and a sort of elysium is suggested once more, an Arcadia whose peaceful order the hunter, bearer of a violent, grasping ideology, would destabilise.

Sylvia, weary and trembling, has reached the tree top to her immense satisfaction where she looks on the long-awaited scene. In the distance she spies the sea, a mythical, unexplored horizon she had been yearning for. To the east she is pleased to look down from above on two hawks in flight and finally undergoes the metamorphosis that had only been hinted at earlier. The girl, like the two birds and the

heron she is searching for, feels as if she could take to the air and soar aloft: "Sylvia felt as if she too could go flying away among the clouds" (8). She has reached her goal and, like a bird, can take in the three spatial dimensions from above – earth, sky and sea – and dominate them. Now, thanks to the tall tree, the symbolic value of which is rhetorically stressed, the child can broaden her perspective enormously; she has gained a new perception of space, and the world appears to her for what it is: "vast and awesome" (8).

In league with dawn and the birds, Sylvia enjoys the awakening of the forest, and with the first lights of day she can make out white sails on the horizon. But the enchantment of this atmosphere does not distract her from her objective: indeed, at first she wonders where the heron's nest might be; then, in a meta-narrative and retroactive dimension belonging to the implied author, she also asks herself: "was this wonderful sight and pageant of the world the only reward for having climbed to such a giddy height?" (8). From this point on, in the concluding phases of Sylvia's adventure, the presence of the implied author will become ever more evident and in a certain sense dominant, expressed through the cases of metalepsis mentioned above, consisting in part in the replacement of narrative tenses with commentative tenses, such as the present and the future, thereby simultaneously expressing and glossing the diegesis. The realisation of the events, or, rather, the retroactive way in which they are recalled, gives the text more tension and, from the viewpoint of the implied author, delineates an ethical interpretation of the tale. In "A White Heron" the beginning of the use of the present tense, and hence of the commentative phase, marks a sort of limit, a "textual frontier", beyond which the comment gives both the *narratio* and the diegetic tension an ideological dimension. The shift from *narratio* to *interpretatio* destabilises the text. In the meantime, the implied author answers the girl's first question: "Now look down again, Sylvia, where the green marsh is set among the shining birches and dark hemlocks; there where you saw the white heron once you will see him again" (8). Here the role of the implied author is overtly ideological. A curious mechanism of persuasion comes into play the intent of which is to wean Sylvia from her plan. This is surely the purpose of the sudden appearance of the solemn heron with his elegant profile as "[he] plumes his feathers for the new day!" (8), in the spellbound,

mystical aura of the newly awakened forest; of his imposing aspect, the grace and lightness of his flight with his unpredictable turns; and of the invitation to the child to observe great discretion, to respect the sacredness of the place and of the heron's presence there:

> … look, look! A white spot of him like a single floating feather comes up from the dead hemlock and grows larger, and rises, and comes close at last, and goes by the landmark pine with steady sweep of wing and outstretched slender neck and crested head. And wait! wait! do not move a foot or a finger, little girl, do not send an arrow of light and consciousness from your two eager eyes, for the heron has perched on a pine bough not far beyond yours (8).

How could such a brutal procedure as embalming make up for the imposing vitality and grace of such a prodigy of nature? This is the grave, ethical question the implied author puts to the girl. It will perhaps have a decisive role in changing her ideological orientation. At last Sylvia has received proof of the presence of the heron and his nest in the immediate neighbourhood. On the other hand, the fowl fully corresponds to the ornithologist's description: "She knows his secret now, the wild, light, slender bird that floats and wavers, and goes back like an arrow presently to his home in the green world beneath" (8). One notes the significant change from "nest" to "home". The capture of the bird would probably entail the destruction of a family nucleus. From the commentative standpoint of the implied author all this is to be interpreted as a further, ethical admonishment for Sylvia, who only now, overjoyed at the happy discovery, "makes her perilous way down again" (8), her heroic mission now at its end.

If only for the briefest span of time, the diegesis returns to narrative tenses, and we are made privy to the protagonist's thoughts as she wonders what the reaction of the fascinating stranger will be to the gratifying news she is about to give him. Strangely though, during the walk home the relationship, the diegetic connection with the character is broken off. This is a pause, the paralepsis I mentioned at the beginning, during which a crisis takes place in the character, a determining ideal change certainly preceded by an inner reflection, probably the product of some kind of travail, which is not revealed to the reader.

With Sylvia's return home, the diegesis recovers tension, and the commentative tenses are taken up again. The re-entry of the heroine, worn out and "wounded" by the pine needles, has an epic dimension. However, only from the hunter's standpoint has the mission had a successful conclusion; in fact, he expects that Sylvia will finally be the bearer of the solemn revelation: "Here she comes now, paler than ever, and her worn old frock is torn and tattered, and smeared with pine pitch. The grandmother and the sportsman stand in the door together and question her, and the splendid moment has come to speak of the dead hemlock-tree by the green marsh" (9). But the youth's facile optimism evaporates in a flash when the child remains mute notwithstanding her grandmother's scolding, the handsome stranger's last, vain attempt at seduction and her awareness that she will not receive the promised gift of ten dollars, a large sum in her eyes.

At this point the implied author steps into the text again with yet another severe, pithy admonition to Sylvia, which reinforces the ideological weight of his presence: "No, she must keep silence" (9). Then he asks rhetorically and provocatively whatever might have moved her to hold her peace: love of nature? Can one pass over a tempting economic and sentimental prospect (by now there is no need to stress the analeptic character of these meta-narrative considerations, once again signalled by the commentative verb forms) to save the life of a heron? "What is it that suddenly forbids her and makes her dumb? Has she been nine years growing, and now, when the great world for the first time puts out a hand to her, must she thrust it aside for a bird's sake?" (9). "Of course!", one might answer. In effect the girl has already renounced that "great world", a metaphor for the industrious urban world of "getting" rather than "being", alien to the forest, that the hunter offers her. Sylvia, as an elect creature, the most beloved, "more than all the hawks, and bats, and moths, and even the sweet-voiced thrushes" (7), has thus been chosen by the great pine tree (a metaphor for nature)[22] for a hallowed mission: to

[22] In the hermeneutic horizon I have chosen, actually the pine, like Sylvia's climb, covers a broad semantic spectrum (see Renza, *"A White Heron"*, 82-83 and 110). Obviously phallic, as Renza suggests (110-111), it can also be seen as part of an initiation

save the life of the heron with which she has enjoyed the blissful experience of gazing on the ocean at sunrise.

With the great pine, a hieratic shaman figure who has initiated her into the mysteries and secrets of nature, Sylvia has struck an ethical pact that can never be broken: "remember[ing] how the white heron came flying through the golden air and how they watched the sea and the morning together … Sylvia cannot speak, she cannot tell the heron's secret and give its life away" (9). Now more than ever, nature, in the eyes of the little girl, is what she enjoyed from the top of the tree, a living nature, generous and lush, immanent in the archaic, rural environment in which she has chosen to live. Quite different, in this sense, from the static, inanimate idea of nature that the taxidermist offers her.[23] Life versus death is perhaps the controlling semantic opposition in this text.

At this point the story comes to an end, and the reader is required simply to apprehend a final textual segment, actually extra-textual, which is purely commentative, managed retrospectively by the implied author, significantly separated from the diegesis by an ellipsis which, in my opinion, indicates that time – a long time? – has passed (in effect, the text allows for an indefinite temporal indication and the ellipsis is typographical, an empty space). The implied author who has stage-managed the tale has marked off a further hermeneutic space, definitive this time, as a repository for an ethical reading of the events. Retrospectively there emerges the state of mind of Sylvia just after the stranger's departure: there is some regret for the lost occasion (the epic dimension of the tale is furnished also, indeed mainly, by the heroine's sacrifice):

process (see Cary, *Sarah Orne Jewett*, 100, and Marilyn Sanders Mobley, "Folk Roots and Mythic Wings", in *Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison: The Cultural Function of Narrative* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1991], 49 and *passim*), a trial to overcome. According to Roman, in this episode, in which "the sexual identities of the participants", the girl and the tree, are strongly marked, "[t]he characteristics usually attributed to either male or female are malleable, exchangeable" (Roman, *Sarah Orne Jewett*, 202).

[23] Ammons ("The Shape", 12) has written: "In contrast to this lover [the tree], the male encountered by Sylvia in real life kills things. He is committed not to supporting life but to conquering and destroying it". See also Roman, who compares the hunter to the "satanic snake in the garden of paradise" (*Sarah Orne Jewett*, 199).

> Dear loyalty, that suffered a sharp pang as the guest went away disappointed later in the day, that could have served and followed him and loved him as a dog loves! Many a night Sylvia heard the echo of his whistle haunting the pasture path as she came home with the loitering cow. She forgot even her sorrow at the sharp report of his gun and the piteous sight of the thrushes and sparrows dropping silent to the ground, their songs hushed and their pretty feathers stained and wet with blood (9).

But the implied author comes forward again with a consideration that is only seemingly rhetorical and detached but is actually clearly ideological, in which the ethical option of the child is sustained. It is an option that implies a pledge of chastity: Sylvia is seen as a symbol of a "virgin forest", a sort of "virgo vestalis"[24] destined for a salvific role: to watch over and preserve the secrets and values of nature. "Were the birds better friends than their hunter might have been?, – who can tell? Whatever treasures were lost to her, woodlands and summer-time, remember! Bring your gifts and graces and tell your secrets to this lonely country child!" (9). This last metalepsis – which sounds like a sort of apostrophe or formal address and acts as the *explicit* to the tale – confirms, if there were any need of confirmation, the implied author's full involvement in this event, marked politically by his omnipresence.[25] It is certainly significant that the story ends with a

[24] Renza's vision of Sylvia as endowed "with certain male-defined qualities" and associated with Artemis: "a figure of radical feminine independence in the classical patriarchal tradition" (*"A White Heron"*, 80) convincing only in the specific context he mentions. In my opinion, the perfect embodiment of the goddess is rather the hunter, with Sylvia, at least in the beginning, acting as one of the auxiliary nymphs. Another intriguing association is with Persephone. Both Way Sherman, *An American*, 166-68, and Sanders Mobley, "Folk Roots", 57-58, suggest that "A White Heron" represents "a narrative inversion" (Mobley, 57) of the Persephone myth. I find it hard to think of Sylvia as a chthonic figure.

[25] Renza himself has no doubt that these intrusions by the narrator are unequivocally ideological (*"A White Heron"*, 53 and *passim*). Even if he never explicitly speaks of the presence of an implied author, he rightly brings out the complex dialectics between character, narrator, author, and reader (105-107, 112, 161-62 and 166). Jewett, he says, is writing "in the (Lacanian) 'name of the father'" (102).

meta-narrative structure, an exhortation that is commentative, expressed by a tense used for a "commented world", as Weinrich maintains.

What if this meta-narrative presence – which is an organic part of the text: "The narrator seems to become a character herself"[26] – veils the same character as an adult? For Renza Sylvia's choice "strikes us as an adult decision";[27] more explicitly, Church notes that the narrating "I" comes across as "an adult version of the … innocent girl, a wise woman".[28] May there not, one wonders, be a partial identification of the implied author with the character? – a hypothesis that is reinforced by the use of commentative tenses, present and future. The protagonist, as a grownup, passes abruptly to the present tense to comment rather than narrate, or rather to comment and narrate at the same time. As I have repeatedly stressed, hers is an ideological reading of an experience had in the past and relived, in a sense, in the present. This textual strategy employed by Sylvia, as an adult, aims somehow at a "re-writing" of the story and the elaboration of a sort of "subtext" as a repository of its deep meanings.

The textual dynamics that inform "A White Heron" can be found in part also in *What Maisie Knew,* and it is not surprising that in a recent staging of James' novel, the director, Luca Ronconi, who clearly feels the text is structured analeptically, gave the role of Maisie to an adult actress who tells the tale retrospectively, reliving her experience. In my opinion, this is Sylvia's role too. It should however be stressed that this narrative option, albeit an interesting formal experience, limits the canonical functions of the main character, for it marginalises her from the dialectics of the tale in the moment of greatest diegetic tension (this might justify her "aphasia"), supplementing her with an *alter ego* that determines a sort of structural crisis in the character. Moreover, the reader is deprived of the possibility of exploring the main character's inner world, a hermeneutic exercise that becomes the prerogative of the implicit narrator. With this operation, Jewett tends to destabilise the code on which realistic writing was based at her time.[29]

[26] Kelchner, "Unstable", 90.
[27] Renza, *"A White Heron"*, 105.
[28] Church, "Romantic Flight", 32.
[29] Heller, as we have seen, brings out another important motive for the break with the realist mode (see note 2).

The semantic opposition between the rural and industrial environments brings out the ideological and political matrix of "A White Heron". In the ideal choice of the author/protagonist one senses the influence of the romantic Jeffersonian agrarian myth that is immanent in the text and to some degree informs its pastoral, Arcadian view of nature, to which, in long passages, a metaphysical aura is conferred; but perhaps, as Marilyn Sanders Mobley feels, the whole tale, with its rich symbolism, has a metaphysical character.[30] In effect, the text harks back to universal archetypes from which it distils a magical, ancestral filter. But if the romantic, agrarian myth triumphs idealistically in Jewett's story, it is no less true that the Jeffersonian ideology of the time was heading to an irreversible failure determined by the impetuous, unchecked advance of industrial culture in the 1880s and 1890s that was radically changing the face of the country, demanding a frenzied urbanisation of numerous rural areas for its economic development, after having violently seized the vast vital spaces of the Native Americans.[31] In conclusion, in the ethical choice of the protagonist of "A White Heron" (a choice that ratifies her ideal, organic bond with the elysian space) one senses a strong, rebellious potential, a form of dissent, of political and cultural opposition to a system that mistrusted, then as now, any model of development that was not inspired by the logic of a radical, irrational exploitation of nature.

However one may interpret "A White Heron", I believe one cannot separate the formal aspects of the tale, apart from any presumed structural weaknesses, from its underlying social and cultural values. The implied author expresses a basically political function, since in the re-evocation and reading of the events it is his/her point of view and world view that prevails. For this reason, the analeptic structure of the text, with a prospective that is both internal and external, is all one with the ideological message.

[30] Mobley, "Folk Roots", 58.
[31] Renza returns several times to the role of Jeffersonian ideology (*"A White Heron"*, Chapter I and *passim*).

Susanna Poole

Each Man Kills the Thing He Loves: *Alien* and the feminine uncanny

Yet each man kills the thing he loves,
By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word.
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword!
Oscar Wilde, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*

I want to look at Ridley Scott's film *Alien* (1979) through the question of female sexuality as a source of disruption and uncanniness. The film's narrative turns around the main characters' efforts to defend themselves against the psychological and physical menace of the Alien, an E.T. monster overridden by disturbing sexual and bodily connotations. Female sexuality in all its uncanny power appears in a series of terrifying scenes of birth, fecundation, and pregnancy. These images can be read as the phantom of regression, the abyss of un-differentiation; a fundamental threat to the integrity and autonomy of the subject. Not surprisingly, the film has been discussed by feminist film critics such as Annette Kuhn, Barbara Creed and Judith Newton.[1] I shall be engaging in particular with

[1] Annette Kuhn has edited two volumes on science fiction film inspired by the *Alien* film series and featuring many essays dedicated to the *Alien* issue: Annette Kuhn, ed., *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema* (London and

Barbara Creed's essay "*Alien* and the Ancestral Mother", which I am going to partly criticise.[2]

The uncanniness of sexual difference

For a woman, reading the key texts of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis means having to face definitions of female sexuality as castration, lack, enigma, annihilation… It means having to acknowledge the deep-seated hatred and disgust that female genitalia inspire in both men and women.

According to Freud the female sex is perceived as uncanny insofar as it represents castration. What terrifies boys is women's lack of a penis, imagined as being the result of a violent act, the same act of punishment they themselves fear as heirs to Oedipus. For a girl, on the other hand, the recognition of sexual difference entails awareness of her own castration, which causes bitter resentment towards her mother for not having doted her with a penis.

This theory has been revised by feminist scholars, from Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*, 1949) down to contemporary scholars such as Juliet Mitchell, Luce Irigaray, Nancy Chodorow and Julia Kristeva.[3] Their first act has been to culturally contextualise Freudian concepts such as "castration complex" and "penis-envy" within the

New York: Verso, 1990); Annette Kuhn, ed., *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema* (London: Verso, 1999). Judith Newton contributed to Kuhn's first collection with her essay "Feminism and Anxiety in Alien", in Kuhn, ed., *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory*. Barbara Creed discusses *Alien* in the light of Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject in "*Alien* and the Ancestral Mother", in *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

[2] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*.

[3] Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949); Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (London: Allen Lane and Penguin Books, 1974); Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977); Nancy Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press and London: Polity Press, 1989); Nancy Chodorow, *Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky and London: Free Association Books, 1994); Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

scenario of Patriarchy. Thus Freud's formulae about the structure of sexual difference have been de-essentialised, liberating us from the Oedipal anathema, the depressing idea of one psychological complex, standing as a general foundation, a pattern of the human psyche, genetically inscribed and as such absolutely inescapable.

Feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva points out that the feminine body can always become uncanny, as it evokes the maternal body, the repressed pre-Oedipal stage of undifferentiation. In discussing images of the "monstrous feminine" in contemporary horror films, Barbara Creed draws on Kristeva's notion of the "abject". The abject is that which has to be excluded in order to make sense and to keep our proper place as subjects.

> We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger.[4]

Abjection remains on the border between animal and human, organic and inorganic, the mother's body and the child's body, and is ultimately related to feminine bodies. Their being different from the male norm is frightening, as they continually question the notion of a whole, unique and separated body. Women's bodies bleed without being damaged, and undergo the most appalling metamorphosis when pregnant. Given our cultural definition of the subject, what could be more disturbing than a pregnant woman? How can she be measured by our philosophical criteria? Is she not a monster, is she not uncanniness made flesh, when judged against our traditional definitions of subjectivity from Descartes to Freud? She is the living icon of the double: a deformed body with two pulsing hearts, two beings merged into one, undifferentiated in their developing communion of blood, nourishment and feelings.

In addition, the foetus itself cannot be considered fully human; its existence lies before and beyond humanity, in a philosophical no-man's-land. It blurs the distinction between vegetable, animal and

[4] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 34.

human by commencing its life in the ancestral mystery of a monocellular organism and gradually travelling through the ages of life's development on Earth. In nine months it reflects the progress of millions of years: from monocellular organisms to reptiles, up to mammals and primates. Symbiosis with the mother continues after birth, with the breast-feeding time in which the baby feels it is one with the nurturing flesh.

What Kristeva says, drawing on Lacan, is that as the child grows and strives to get herself a place in the symbolic through the acquisition and use of language, the mother's body is destined to become abject: something the child has to separate from in order to become a whole and unique subject. The intimate relationship of mothering must be forgotten, and with it the primal stages of our childhood. In fact women and particularly mothers – being an exception to the notion of human subjects – are also connected to another chapter of abjection, that of bodily functions. In patriarchal cultures women have to take care of that which we refuse and disavow: bodies that are ill, suffering, dying or dead, and bodily wastes. The wastes are abject because they pass the border between the inside of our body and the external world, moving from life to death and corruption. Before, they were part of the living organism; after being ejected, they lie outside as dead objects. As children, we have to learn to define our body by abandoning the wastes, expelling them and continually eliminating them from view: what used to be a form of narcissistic pleasure must become disgust. The mother has the fundamental function of teaching the child how to control its bodily functions, how to keep a clean and proper body. So again women are on the border; they are closer to the abject than men and must not be over troubled by bodily imperfections.

Horror films usually deal with abjection, with the taboos of blood, the dead, filth, incest, and in general with the borders that threaten our symbolic order. Contemporary horror movies usually abound in splatter scenes, showing an excess of all the awful liquids – vomit, blood, saliva etc. – forcing the audience to go back to that primal "knowledge without shame" of their own body. There must be a pleasure in returning through fantasy to that earlier stage of psychological development, when we were free from the filth taboo. While maintaining our safe position in movie theatre armchairs, we

engage in a struggle with our fears and finally have the chance to eject the abject from us once again. Thus we confirm our position as whole and separate subjects, after undergoing a sort of purificatory ritual.

In her essay on *Alien* Barbara Creed underlines the presence of femininity as abject in the film's images of birth and copulation. I am going to use some of her ideas in a closer textual analysis of some of the film's most thrilling scenes. Looking more specifically at the use of colours, shapes, and sounds, I will discuss how the film undermines a set of given oppositions (which is a common device in many a sci-fi movie). At the same time I will hint at something which Creed's essay leaves out: the film's ironical subtext.

Mind the gaps!

Ridley Scott's 1979 sci-fi horror is a visually powerful and entertaining movie about a crew of seven people, trapped in their space-ship with an altogether terrifying and apparently invincible alien creature. As in most sci-fi movies, we get a fascinating representation of our future technological world. At first it seems perfect and safe, but its apparent perfection is soon undermined by the appearance of new, inconceivable dangers from outside (Space) or inside technological progress itself (as, for example, in the film *Videodrome* by David Cronenberg). In *Alien*, as we will see, danger comes from both the outside and the inside of the human futuristic world.

From the very beginning the film sets up a series of clear-cut oppositions through the use of colours, light, shapes and sound. The space of the known and that of the unknown, the clean and the dirty, the aseptic and the visceral, the good and the evil, are clearly depicted, divided and recognised in the first sequences. Thus, the spaceship and its people are clean, good, rational, familiar; while the planet and its obscure living matter are dirty, irrational, uncontrollable, unknown, evil... But, as the narrative unfolds, the audience is more and more disturbed by the blurring of those distinctions. Events will prove once more that you have to mind the gaps; the borders dividing our symbolic categories are uncertain, and

things are not as they seem. As the sequences unravel, the spectators are led, through sudden shocks, to adjust to a completely different scenario.

In the first scene the camera explores the interior of the space-ship. It is a white, comfortable, aseptic world, where the members of the crew lie in peaceful lethargy. They are naked and clean, sleeping inside egg-shape incubators of clear glass, disposed symmetrically like the petals of a flower. The computer gently wakes them up, one by one, for there is an S O S message transmitted from a planet. They all call the computer "Mother".

What we see here is clearly the metaphor of a pure, hygienic birth, a birth "in vitro", finally purified of all the disgusting waste of the feminine body: a silent, technological birth with no screaming, no pain or passion. This is a fascinating representation of the myth of a technological world where everything is easy and under control, where our animal, and especially feminine, part has been repressed in favour of a rational, androgynous, peaceful organisation. The function of mothering has been appropriated by artificial intelligence; in fact, it is the computer that tells the crew what to do, it is up to "her" to wake them up, give them instructions and information. However, for all her protective powers, she, like all mothers, has her secrets too.

This virginal, immaculate, bloodless birth, in which the individual coming to life is already whole and complete, is opposed by a subsequent scene of birth taking place on the planet where the space-ship crew goes on exploration. The planet is an inhospitable, cold, dark world. Here the four explorers find what looks like the ruin of a huge space-ship. Through a large hole, which clearly evokes the vagina, they enter the dark ship, where they are to find the corpse of a big creature that, as they say, seems to have exploded from the inside. The grey walls of the caves they are visiting are covered with layers of round shapes resembling human intestines (the grey interior of the star-ship caves evokes Max Ernst's neo-gothic sci-fi paintings). The texture of the surfaces surrounding them is strange, something between organic and inorganic matter. As we see the astronauts walking, we can hear their breathing inside the helmets, which gives them a sense of sensuality and vulnerability. Kane gets to a large space, where he is amazed by the presence of a whole series of mysterious ovules. Through the sanguine, transparent flesh of one of

these, he can see the pulsing presence of an amorphous organism. As soon as he touches it, the "thing" opens up as a flower of flesh. The moment he dares to put his hand on the embryo inside, he is assaulted by an abominable creature, something between a reptile and a crab that sticks to his face, holding onto his flesh as if it were a vampire.

Interestingly enough, while these two scenes of birth are constructed as opposites (clean/dirty, pure/sexual, peaceful/aggressive etc.), they actually show several points of similarity when viewed more closely. First of all, the soundtrack is the same in both scenes. Secondly, in both cases there is the association between uterine cocoons and the vegetable world, in that the set of mechanical incubators has the same symmetrical flower-shape as the evil alien womb. This use of parallel aesthetic elements, if only on a subconscious level, hints at uncanny analogies and connections between the two worlds described in the film's opening scenes. The narrator seems to be suggesting the principle, familiar to ancient Greek playwrights no less than to Freud, according to which you should never believe your eyes, for the rational and the uncanny, mind and flesh, good and evil, are not so distant as they seem to be. In consequence, we may find out that what we struggle to define as alien, the "other" or the enemy, is as much inside us as outside. Thus, on a purely aesthetic plane, spectators are introduced to what will be the real nexus, both political and psychological, of the film: not only a drama of our split ego, but also the non-accountability of what is presented to us as "reality", the reassuring surface, the hypocritical display of technological power which actually fails to grant human welfare and survival.

We have already discussed the first two scenes of birth in the film. The third one, in every way the most unsettling, is also – perhaps not surprisingly – the most similar to the actual reality of childbirth. The alien's fecundating amoeba, stuck on Kane's face, is revealed under x-ray to have deeply penetrated into his body through a phallic organ that prolongs into his throat. After a while the amoeba leaves its prey and dies; Kane seems alright, but this is just a prologue for the worst that is yet to come. All of a sudden he is seized by an epileptic fit and, while the others hold him down, his belly grows and is finally split open from the inside by the abominable newly born alien. The male-pregnancy scene is a parody of a Caesarian delivery, depicted in its most frightening aspects: in a few seconds we go through pregnancy,

labour pains, birth, and the death of the "mother". The scene is all the more uncanny since it starts abruptly while all the members of the crew are having lunch and discussing food:

INT. MESS 117
The entire crew is seated. Hungrily swallowing huge portions of artificial food. The cat eats from a dish on the table.

....

PARKER
I mean I like it.

KANE
No kidding.

PARKER
Yeah. It grows on you.

KANE
It should. You know what they make this stuff out of...

PARKER
I know what they make it out of. So what. It's food now. You're eating it.

Suddenly Kane grimaces.

RIPLEY
What's wrong.

Kane's voice strains.

LAMBERT
What's the matter.

KANE
I don't know... I'm getting cramps.

The others stare at him in alarm. Suddenly he makes a loud groaning noise. Clutches the edge of the table with his hands. Knuckles whitening.

ASH
Breathe deeply.

Kane screams.

KANE
Oh God, it hurts so bad. It hurts. It hurts.

(stands up)

Ooooooh.

BRETT
What is it. What hurts.

Kane's face screws into a mask of agony. He falls back into his chair.

KANE
Oh my gooaaaahh.

A red stain. Then a smear of blood blossoms on his chest. The fabric of his shirt is ripped apart. A small head the size of a man's fist pushes out. The crew shouts in panic. Leap back from the table. The cat spits, bolts away. The tiny head lunges forward. Comes spurting out of Kane's chest trailing a thick body. Splatters fluids and blood in its wake. Lands in the middle of the dishes and food. Wriggles away while the crew scatters. Then the Alien being disappears from sight. Kane lies slumped in his chair. Very dead. A huge hole in his chest. The dishes are scattered. Food covered with blood.

LAMBERT
No, no, no, no, no.

BRETT
What was that. What the Christ was that.

PARKER
It was growing in him the whole time and he didn't even know it.

....

Slowly they gather around Kane's gutted corpse. Then they all look at one another. Then at Kane. Dead on the table.[5]

Since they are eating lunch, references to artificial food as something either disgusting and unnatural (for Kane) or good (for Parker), something which "grows on you", cunningly anticipate the monstrous birth of baby-alien. The alien, as artificial food, grows on/in you... Again, the excesses of technology and nature seem to coalesce, inducing similar reactions bordering on nausea and pleasure at the same time.

There is something ironical in this horrible scene, when the little alien comes out screaming, as if it were an ugly newborn, and then runs away incredibly fast and leaves the room. In fact, at several points in the film, especially when tension is at a peak, the director seems to be making fun of the audience. This happens at moments when the spectators are supposedly most scared, so that they feel that something in them wants to laugh while their nerves are totally gripped by fear. It creates a level at which the plot of the film, its symbols, and any consequent "serious" critical appreciation of it are playfully undermined. This is why it is most important for a film critic to point out the presence of ironical elements, which act as a built-in – sometimes almost subliminal – deconstruction of the film's main plot, and add complexity to the different discourses embedded in the text.

From this moment onwards the space-ship will be polluted by the alien's presence, and through sudden traumas the film will reveal the rotten nature of the whole system supporting the expedition. In fact, the fuel company which owns the vessel and launched the expedition

[5] Quotations from the script are taken from Dan O'Bannon, *Alien: Full Revised Script* (1978), published on the "Movie Database" website at http://members.tripod.lycos.nl/Reinmovie/Scripts.html.

wants the alien to be protected and transported to Earth so that it may be used as an invincible weapon. Once the secret objectives of their employers come to the fore in all their cruelty, the disempowered employees, the victims of the ordeal, will realise they are alone and can only count on their own forces to get rid of the alien and save their lives. As soon as the mysterious being enters the white, silent rooms of the boatswain, the script concentrates on the relationships among the characters and between them and the dangerous creature. In fact, the alien deeply affects the hospitalised atmosphere of the ship, even while its real dangerousness still remains undisclosed. Right from the beginning, its mere presence provokes the sudden free flow of all characters' human emotions: they quarrel, scream, fight each other, cry, and become sexually aggressive.

A revealing climax is reached in the scene when Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) and the space-ship science officer, Ash (Ian Holm), have a spat. Ripley has just found out that both Ash and Mother, the domineering computer, want to protect the alien and refuse to help in saving the lives of the crew. She is in the computer room, interrogating Mother on the alien only to get a most revealing answer: the secret aim of the mission is to insure that the alien organism is preserved and brought to earth, the crew is "expendable". Ash appears next to her, smiling, and says "there is a reason for that". At that point she cannot control her anger and violently pushes him away. Then she calms down, but he loses control and attacks her, displaying incredible strength. The scene gets suddenly uncanny when we discover that there is something wrong with him: he seems to be possessed, a white, spermatic liquid starts dripping from the side of his head, while his eyes wander as in a state of dementia. The whole scene is crammed with sexual undertones. There is a moment when he chases her into the mess room, grabs her and bangs her around until she is unconscious, and finally tries to suffocate her, hitting her mouth repeatedly with a rolled girly magazine. The violent oral coitus takes place against a background of pornographic photos, hanging on the wall behind them (something altogether unfit for the ship's professional and scientific look, where equality between the sexes would seem not even to be an issue). When Parker, the black male engineer, and Lambert, the white female navigator, come to help Ripley, their fight with Ash becomes a carnival of splatter effects. The

spectators now realise Ash is not human: his neck breaks with disgusting, orgasmic sprouts of white liquid, covering Parker's face.

Once the fight is over the audience apprehends that Ash is a robot, programmed by the company which sponsored the expedition to protect every extraterrestrial species they would encounter. For the same reason "Mother" is not going to protect their lives against the ugly monster; the computer will keep stating that the alien's survival is an absolute priority, showing that the aim of the expedition is precisely to catch the beast and bring it to Earth (possibly to employ it in warfare as an invincible weapon). The opposition between a white, safe, unsexed, technological world and the dark, dangerous, unclean, sexually disturbing alien has clearly been done away with. The computer, representing the economic interests of the company that sponsored the expedition, is utterly unconcerned with preserving human lives. Critics have already pointed out the anti-corporate implications of the Alien film series. Judith Newton notices how the name of the spaceship, Nostromo, echoing Conrad's pun on "nostro omo" (our man, the company man betrayed by economic interests), sums up the Company's tyrannical treatment of its employees.[6] Lauren Fitzgerald draws a parallel between the alien and the Company that extends through the later films of the series.

> In the later films, the Company exhibits its claims to its employees through increasingly alien behavior, "surgically" implanting the colonists of *Aliens* with "personal data transmitters" just as the aliens implant them with alien larvae, and taking possession of a sleeping crew in *Alien Resurrection* just as the aliens do at the beginning of *Alien 3*. These parallels reflect not only the "doubling" of the Company and the aliens, but the Company's all-consuming desire for the creatures.[7]

More reference to the films that have followed the trace of Ridley

[6] Judith Newton, "Feminism and Anxiety in *Alien*", in Kuhn, ed., *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory*, 82.

[7] Lauren Fitzgerald, "(In)alienable rights: Property, Feminism, and the Female Body from Ann Radcliffe to the *Alien* Films", *Romanticism on the Net* 21 (February 2001).

Scott's *Alien* is due. The whole Alien saga, especially the third and fourth films, explores the privileged position of women in relation to "otherness" and abjection. In fact, Ripley seems destined by some inner predisposition to get closer and closer to the alien being. At the end of *Alien 3*, having been raped by the creature, Ripley commits suicide in order to avoid reproducing the beast. Thus she sacrifices her life for the sake of the human species.[8] In the fourth film, *Alien Resurrection*, scientists create a clone from cells of Ripley's dead body. Since the cells have been contaminated by the alien, the new Ripley is a living fusion between human and alien. The new hybrid woman-alien, the ultimate proof of feminine (m)otherness but also of women's liberating potential, is now empowered with alien qualities: acute senses, immense strength, acid blood.[9] No longer a prey of the Company's machinations, she has finally become part of the alien family. Later in the film, in a horrific "family" scene which verges on the ridiculous, she will show how friendly she is with the other alien creatures.[10]

In Ridley Scott's *Alien*, evil keeps being associated with aspects of the body and sexuality (above all female sexuality): Ash's body becomes disgusting and outrageously erotic precisely when he is revealed to be an "other", an evil robot subservient to technological and economic power. The alien figure itself displays throughout the film an excess of bodily and sexual connotations. It has an anthropomorphic figure, with a big foetus-like head. Instead of blood, a highly corrosive yellow pus circulates in its body. The outer skin of the whole creature is constantly slimy and leaves wet traces which clearly evoke sexual secretions. Its double set of teeth, constantly salivating, recalls the double set of lips of the female genitalia (see Barbara Creed's description of the castrating myth of the "vagina

[8] *Alien 3*, dir. David Fincher (Twentieth Century Fox, 1992).

[9] Catherine Constable, "Becoming the Monster's Mother: Morphologies of Identity in the *Alien* Series", in Kuhn, ed., *Alien Zone II*, 193.

[10] In what seems a soap-opera climax, Big-Mother Alien, Brother Alien, Sister Alien, and Cousin Ripley are all embracing and whimpering together in their beasty language. But here, as spectators are most frightened, once again we can hear the director having a good laugh at us. As if to say "each man kills the thing he loves", it is sad and true but, please, take it with a pinch of irony.

dentata").[11] At the same time, the alien displays a sort of toothed phallic organ that protudes through its jaws towards the victim, before snatching it.

The monster first kills Kane, having feminised his body, using it as host womb to reproduce itself into a new, more developed shape; then Ripley discovers that Mother and Ash are both complicit with the creature, and Ash is put out of commission. The characters now split up and start to look for the creature individually, searching the inner passages and spaces of the ship. Now the white, rational world of the Nostromo shows a very different face and atmosphere. The camera discovers dark spaces, which resemble abandoned industrial stores; neglected utility corridors, dusky machines and pipes. It is in the spaceship's bleak womb and intestines, reminding us of the huge alien carcass on the dark planet, that the alien hides to kill and feed on human flesh. The fusion between the two opposite worlds is complete; everywhere is darkness and evil, unless fragile humans manage to destroy the abject, or at least get loose from its hold. Here comes another ironical moment worthy of notice. The camera follows Brett, the engineering technician, as he explores one of the ship's large stores in search of the alien. The music suggests that he is about to encounter the beast and probably be devoured. While he walks, there is water dripping from above and he stops under the fortuitous shower to wet his face and refresh his lips. Soon after he finds out to his disgust that the creature, grown huge, is behind him with its hideous dripping jaws ready to snatch at him. What is implied here is that the water dripping from above was nothing else but saliva from the monster's fauces, and that the victim was getting sensual pleasure from those same ugly jaws that were about to snatch him.[12]

It is only at the very end of the film, thanks to warrant officer Ripley, the only survivor, that the alien-abject is expunged and the

[11] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 41.

[12] Ironical hints often appear in the film's death scenes. For instance, there is one scene in which the alien meets Dallas in one of the corridors and suddenly grins and open its arms as if to give him a hug. Also, there is a scene when the cat is mistaken for the alien; later on, the alien meets the cat, tenderly looks at it and doesn't kill it (recognising the animal as friend).

evil technological mother is destroyed. In this way, the film suggests, a more natural equilibrium may be regained, one overtly evoked by the naked and immaculate heroine going to sleep with her cat.

The connection of the disgusting and terrifying alien with pleasure, femininity, pregnancy, birth, male and female genitalia, perfectly fits with the whole Freudian notion of the abject. By representing what has been repressed, what dominant culture is continuously at pains to repress, the alien refers to something we used to be utterly in love with: the mother's body. Through guilt-ridden deformed reflections, it brings back that childhood intimacy with our body that Kristeva describes as "knowledge without shame".[13] Thus the alien seduces for the same reason it repels: it is the "thing" we have to learn to be scared of. It is what we want to eject and be free of, and what nonetheless still has the power to give us intense pleasure. We have to destroy it, or at least hold it at bay, in order to safeguard our proper place as subjects in the symbolic. That dangerous thing, the mother's body, is what every female body (and not necessarily the biologically female body) can come to incarnate in the outburst of love. Hence Oscar Wilde's words from *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (I, 7-9), "each man kills the thing he loves", may take on the valence of a universal, psychoanalytic destiny:

> Yet each man kills the thing he loves,
> By each let this be heard,
> Some do it with a bitter look,
> Some with a flattering word.
> The coward does it with a kiss,
> The brave man with a sword!
>
> Some kill their love, when they are young,
> And some when they are old;
> Some strangle with the hands of Lust,
> Some with the hands of Gold:
> The kindest use a knife, because
> The dead so soon grow cold.

[13] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 53.

Still, we shouldn't forget that the poem uses the word "man" to define the person who loves and eventually kills his love, and "thing" or "their love" to indicate the beloved. How interesting that Wilde should adopt these un-gendered words, thus leaving open the question of what sex the loved ones are, while maintaining the masculine identity of the lover. "Thing" evokes something falling short of definitions: not human, maybe not even living, inexplicable. The word brings to mind *Hamlet* (IV, 2, vv. 27-28), "The king is a thing … of nothing", Cole Porter's jazz song "What is this thing called love?", and officer Ripley, defined by Call in *Alien Resurrection* as "a thing, a construct, [grown] in a fucking lab".[14] Although in Wilde's poem the word suggests the existence of un-definite, multiple bodies as the object of men's passion, it does explicitly refer to women, for the poem focuses on a man sentenced to death because he has killed his woman. That is to say, there is no such thing as universal destiny in patriarchal culture: women's bodies and queer bodies as a cultural construct are other than men's, they keep being associated with otherness as menace and lust, evil and ecstasy.

[14] *Alien Resurrection*, dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet (Twentieth Century Fox, 1997).

Katherine E. Russo

Magic Spilling Over the Country: Re-sighting, re-siting and re-citing reality in Mudrooroo's *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series

White travellers of the eighteenth century's colonial project 'perceived' the Australian continent as an empty and silent void, a *terra nullius* or no man's land. It was a 'trackless wilderness' waiting to be filled with reassuring and familiar names, a blank page upon which a new history could be written. As Paul Carter explained, the traveller feels an existential necessity to name "these culturally invisible intervals, unnamed and silent", which is not related to "nature at all. It is language".[1]

The "temporary amnesia"[2] of the first settlers who declared 'possession' of an unnamed and unoccupied space, was enabled by the devaluation of the oral recordings of Indigenous culture and by the failure to understand that what we call 'writing' need not always

[1] Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987), 42-46.

[2] In *Haunted by the Past*, the Koori writer Ruby Langford Ginibi addresses and re-names the mendacious historical account of the 1788 'discovery', "Then with what we termed the invasion of 1788, you mob came from England…. The first squatters fenced the land off, claiming it their own, declaring it was *terra nullius*, empty land. Yet that was a big lie! … We were always here you know!". Ruby Langford Ginibi, *Haunted by the Past* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1999) 166. Furthermore, as Anne Brewster observes, "if nations are defined against their 'others', they are formed by the dual processes of inclusion and exclusion, of remembering and forgetting. Colonial myths of 'discovery' ignored the histories of Aboriginal people and their experience of the violence of the colonising project". Anne Brewster, *Literary Formations: Post-colonialism, Nationalism, Globalism* (Carlton South, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1995), 15.

be defined by the Gutenberg tradition. Therefore, the hegemonic in*script*ion of self as present was functional to the erasure of Indigenous voices, who were represented as an invisible other. As Kateryna Arthur argues, the obliteration of Indigenous culture in Australia has been as much the work of the pen as of physical violence and might be defined as "a kind of cultural write-out or white-out".[3] Moreover, according to the Black Australian writer Mudrooroo, the colonial mapping of the Australian cultural/spatial landscape was achieved through the imposition of a monologic "so-called natural reality" based on eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scientific thought, which displaced

> The shaman or maban from the world and with him or her the magic implicit in the world.... This reality dominance proved to be just as disastrous to the native as did the weapons which had manifested from it. In effect, and from this viewpoint, native reality was simply superstition.... 'Truth' was positioned only in natural sciences, and 'untruth' in maban reality.... There was no either/or, or multiplicity of realities, able to be accepted. There was only one reality and aspects of this had to be proved from the natural sciences as formulated in earlier centuries.[4]

Mudrooroo highlights that maban reality wasn't completely obliterated but it was placed at the bottom of a hierarchy dominated by a scientific view of reality. In fact, the subtext of Australian colonisation was that of referentiality and positivism. The latter's 'world-shaping' and its belief in the truth and transparency of the gaze positioned the anthropological 'eye/I' with its 'scientific objectivity' clearly in the west. In the words of Trinh T. Min-ha, "One of the conceits of anthropology lies in its positivist dream of a neutralized language that strips off all its singularity to become nature's exact,

[3] Kateryna Arthur, "Fiction and the Rewriting of History: A Reading of Colin Johnson", *Westerly* 1 (March 1985), 55-56.

[4] Mudrooroo, *The Indigenous Literature of Australia, Milli Milli Wangka* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1997), 90-91.

unmisted reflection".[5] The covering of the fictional nature of "so-called natural reality" was part of the positivist project of colonialism, which sought to mask its existence as a linguistic system portraying its meticulous observations as true, natural and objective. However, once the presence of the writer's eye is admitted, the notion of truth as an absolute has to be abandoned and its ideological nature is uncovered. Hence, the ethnographic, anthropological and photographic texts were supposed to function as a language used transparently to tell us about the 'real', but these texts were representational codes and therefore 'transformed' or 'translated' the whole sense of what was represented. As Mudrooroo points out, "so-called natural reality" is a linguistic construct and those who have always been considered the holders of truth and could distinguish the real from the false are "translators, and their works should not be seen as examples of scientific objectivity, but as translations (of varying degrees of worth) of maban reality into natural scientific discourse".[6] Illusion and the appearance of reality were collapsed in the natural and, therefore, ideological construct of "so-called natural reality" whose truthfulness and objectivity was guaranteed by the factuality of written documentation, the transparency of observation and the unquestioned referentiality of description.

According to Marshall McLuhan, the linearity and uniformity of western psychic and social organization and the belief in sequence as the principal sign of logic was introduced by the invention of the alphabet. The phonetic alphabet is the technology that has served to create "civilized man", replacing his "ear" with an "eye" and freeing him from the "tribal trance" of the "spoken and resonating magic word". Furthermore, he argues that the written word has been the secret weapon used by Western power to conquer other men and nature and that, on the contrary, tribal cultures organise their experience mostly around sound systems, hence their defeat.[7] It is

[5] Trinh T. Min-ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 53.

[6] Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka*, 90, 92.

[7] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 84-88.

important to note that McLuhan's analysis is clearly influenced by his own reliance on visibility as the primary source of epistemology and is therefore highly questionable as a report of contact history. However, McLuhan's writing can function as a registration of the widespread assumption that written forms are of a higher order than spoken forms, which has often provided an arbitrary universal standard against which other cultures can be defined. Analysing the different relation between epistemology and conditions of production in "traditional Aboriginal verbal Art" and in writing, Stephen Muecke alleges that if we use the term "traditional Aboriginal literature",

> [t]raditional performances … may be seen as preliterate, as in some way preceding literary productions, as if they lie at the end of a progression. They could then be seen as unelaborated or unsophisticated, in a comparison which always treats writing as more powerful a medium than speech.[8]

The blind spot of both McLuhan's and Muecke's reflections is that they seek to explain or modify the power relations that link technology and knowledge in a way that doesn't take into consideration that other ways of knowing, seeing and organising reality might exceed our power of classification and might already be operating in a space we perceive as ours and unoccupied. In fact, writing is definable as any sort of meaningful inscription, and in the case of Indigenous Australia "this would include sand paintings and drawings.… Body markings, paintings as well as engravings on bark or stone".[9] These inscriptions were already present at the moment of invasion and continue to operate today through an enduring reiteration of the same patterns and themes which is increased by the introduction of new or different elements. The latter constitute an uncontrollable and unclassifiable excess which resides 'in' the process of reiterating traditional knowledge. Therefore, the cyclical and

[8] Stephen Muecke, "Body, Inscription, Epistemology: Knowing Aboriginal Texts", in Emmanuel S. Nelson, *Connections, Essays on Black Literatures* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988), 42.

[9] Jack Davis et al., eds., *Paperbark: A Collection of Black Australian Writings* (St. Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1990), 3.

migratory nature of this writing praxis allows a journey of perpetual becoming, which reiterates traditional knowledge only to transform and recreate it anew. As Kim Scott highlights in *Benang*, the only solution to the epistemic violence of Western representational paradigms is in movement,

> But I found myself among paper, and words not formed by an intention corresponding to my own, and I read a world weak in its creative spirit. There is no other end, no other destination for all this paper talk but to keep doing it, to keep talking, to remake it.[10]

This mode of reiteration and renewal is strategically adopted by Mudrooroo in the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* tetralogy in order to re-inscribe an Indigenous view of reality and writing in the historical account of the British invasion of Tasmania.[11] In fact, the inspiration for the tetralogy stems from the *Journals* of the Aboriginal Protector George Augustus Robinson. However, Mudrooroo unsettles the documentary authority of Robinson's accounts by strategically interweaving them with other historical, geographical and literary inscriptions which have contributed to the fabrication of Australia's "so-called natural reality". Hence, through a multidimensional re-sighting, re-siting and re-citing he displaces the teleological conceptualisation of the journey of the first Australian discoverers, explorers and settlers, and opens up a space for the registration of the failures of Western systems of representation.

Mudrooroo's reflections on representation have often focussed on the power of Western realist/referential discourse to incorporate other ways of seeing and writing with an imposed pretension of transparent cross-cultural communication. This preoccupation was prompted by the fact that the majority of the Indigenous authors who started writing in the politically engaged 1960s adopted the mode of social

[10] Kim Scott, *Benang: From the Heart* (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1999), 472.

[11] The tetralogy is composed by: *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1991); *The Undying* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson,1998); *Underground* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1999); *The Promised Land* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 2000).

realism to make a clear report of the conditions under which the Indigenous lived in white Australia. Many of these texts were overtly political and were often disregarded by critics as un-poetical and repetitive. Mudrooroo has stated that many Indigenous writers were merely concerned with showing "what they done to us" and expressed his belief in the need for Aboriginal writers to embrace an alternative form of writing to realism. He suggests that through the Dreaming, "the field of creation", a new Aboriginal literature can be developed:

> There's too many plays and stories in which the reality is very flat and is only "what they done to us". As I said, I find this exceedingly tedious. I have a big problem with this sort of realism. Aboriginal reality is more akin to surrealism in fact, because it's based on the Dreaming – the "dreaming" we did when we had really dynamic traditional culture.... So, I think that in order to create a dynamic Aboriginal literature we have to go back to the very roots of Aboriginal culture.... Dreaming is the field of creation.[12]

Mudrooroo's strict antithesis between realist and non-realist texts is highly questionable. However, this is an accurate description of the recent move made by some writers of Indigenous literature such as Sam Watson, Archie Weller, Kim Scott and Lionel Fogarty who have put the West's exclusive ownership of truth in doubt, mobilising different ways of seeing and constructing knowledge. Mudrooroo himself has variously followed this direction going "back to the roots of Aboriginal culture" and exploring the possibilities of his affiliative relation to Indigenous beliefs.[13]

In the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, the history of the colonisation of Tasmania is revisited from a Black Australian perspective and the justification of invasion as a missionary civilising project, the 'white man's burden', is decentered. Jangamuttuk, an

[12] Mudrooroo, "Mudrooroo Narogin: Writer", in Liz Thompson, ed., *Aboriginal Voices: Contemporary Artists, Writers and Performers* (Sydney: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 58-59.

[13] For a discussion of Mudrooroo's relation to the Indigenous communities of Australia see my review in this issue of *Anglistica* of Annalisa Oboe, ed., *Mongrel Signatures: Reflections on the Work of Mudrooroo* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003).

Indigenous shaman, is concerned with converting the European intruders to the Indigenous way of seeing and, referring to Robinson, remarks, "I got better skills than he has.... I Master of the Ghost Dreaming, and he a ghost". Paradoxically he must first get inside the Europeans' heads – the 'ghosts' of the title – in order to create and perform a song-cycle that can keep away their invasion. For example, in the opening chapter, Jangamuttuk, as "dreamer of the ceremony.... creator and choreographer", is directing a ritual that will enable him to penetrate "the realm of the ghosts".[14] However, the scene is also intended as ironical, for irony instals a "difference between ideology and reality".[15] The assimilationist power of the Christian ritual, which exercises its control through repetition, is displaced through an unsettling mimicry. All of the members have arranged their hair into the shape of European hats and have painted their bodies to look like formal European clothing:

> Their body painting had been designed to signify European fashion, both civilian and military. The stripes of military jackets were painted across chests; lapels and buttons, even pockets had been painted with an attention to detail that was quite startling – that is if there were European eyes present to be startled; but for the moment there were none, and even if there were been, it was highly doubtful that the signifiers could have been read. What was the ultimate in a sign system, might still be read as primitive.[16]

The panoptical control of the European gaze is omnipresent and self-imposed by the participants, but it is important to note that Jangamuttuk and his followers are neither simply imitating the invaders, as could seem at a first 'glance', nor representing their assimilation by Christian and European culture. In fact, Mudrooroo seems to be referring to the notion of "imitative magic", which was interpreted by Sigmund Freud as primitive and neurotic, and, therefore, he seems to be playfully addressing the work of the father

[14] Mudrooroo, *Master*, 30, 3.

[15] Theodor W. Adorno, *Mimima Moralia* (London: Verso, 1978), 211.

[16] Mudrooroo, *Master*, 3.

of psychoanalysis.[17] Moreover, Mudrooroo questions and explores the issue of 'colonial mimicry', in Homi Bhabha's words "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*".[18] It becomes explicit when he writes:

> Jangamuttuk … was not after a *realist* copy, after all he had no intention of *aping* the European, but sought for an adaptation of these alien cultural forms appropriate to his own cultural matrix…. The need for the inclusion of these elements into a ceremony with a far different purpose than mere art. He, the shaman, and purported Master of the Ghost Dreaming, was about to undertake entry into the realm of the ghosts. Not only was he to attempt the act of possession, but he hoped to bring all of his people into contact with the ghost realm so that they could capture the essence of health and well-being, and then break back safely into their own culture and society.[19]

Jangamuttuk is unable to ignore the consequences of invasion, so he appropriates its culture. The attempted colonisation of the Indigenous minds by the Missionary power is turned against itself and Robinson is re-named Fada. In the repetition and representation of the Western modes, the threat of Jangamuttuk's ceremony emerges. In other words, the ceremony acts as a 'mirror', which is an image favoured by the positivists as a cipher for the referential relationship between writing and reality. However, the mirror that Jangamuttuk holds up to the coloniser's eye is laden with discrepancies and ambiguities revealing its inherent potential for distortion and optical illusion. As Lilian R. Furst explains in an attentive analysis of realist fiction, "A mirror image has its parts reversed by an intervening axis or plane".[20] Jangamuttuk as a maban, shaman or trickster (and as

[17] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. James Strachey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 82.

[18] Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 86.

[19] Mudrooroo, *Master*, 3-4, emphasis mine.

[20] Lilian R. Furst, *All Is True: The Claims and Strategies of Realist Fiction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 8.

Mudrooroo), is able to use key verses of the ghosts' scopic culture, in this case Australian Pioneering Ballads, and reflect them against their gaze and their assumption of holding the only true representation. The entry into the spiritual world of the conquerors is always accompanied by the repetition of these key lines:

> 'They made me
> A ghost down under,
> Made for me
> A place to plunder,
> A place to plunder,
> Way down under.'[21]

Only the cleverest of tricksters could turn the ghosts' own music against them in truly 'Calibanic' fashion. As Bhabha explains, it is the very power of colonization that "alienates its own language and produces another knowledge of its norms".[22]

In *The Master of the Ghost Dreaming,* instead of the travel accounts of the pioneers' perception of the natives, we find a multiplication of perspectives with the whites often described through displacing Aboriginal eyes. In the first page of the novel Jangamuttuk describes the exile of his people in their own country as opposed to the recurrent *topos* of exile of Australian literature. For example, Alexander Pope, in his famous poem *Australia*, portrayed the vast desert spaces of the continent as a metaphor of the intellectual void of its inhabitants and as a contrast to the prosperous Britain landscapes. An old woman populated by moribund and monotonous tribes:

> A Nation of Trees, drab green and desolate grey
> In the field uniform of modern wars,
> Darkens her hills, those endless, outstretched paws
> Of Sphinx demolished or stone lion worn away.
> They call her a young country, but they lie:
> She is the last of lands, the emptiest

[21] Ibid., 4.

[22] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86.

A woman beyond her change of life, a breast
Still tender but within the womb is dry.
Without songs, architecture, history:
The emotions and superstitions of younger lands,
Her river of water drown among inland sands,
The river of her immense stupidity
Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth.
In them at last the ultimate men arrive
Whose boast is not: "we live" but "we survive",
A type who will inhabit the dying earth.[23]

This perception of Australia is echoed in the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* by the thoughts of Robinson's wife, Mada, who hates the island to which her husband has banished her. Mudrooroo draws a clear link between this woman and the natives who both feel foreign to the island and are the objects of Robinson's action. Like Salman Rushdie's writers in exile, when Mada thinks about England she creates "fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands"; and she and the Aborigines are both "haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back":[24]

She lay there, desperately trying to come to grips with yet another manifestation of what she had come to accept as her pain, her anguish, her hatred and loathing at being forced to continue living on in this awful colony, isolated far from the nearest decent-sized town on a dreary island.... Beyond the drawn, thick curtains the alien stars shone and the pain-laden wind rustled the foreboding trees in the threatening forest.... She sighed alone in exile and with the pain eating away at her. Over the years her memories of London had dimmed. Now it was a fairyland free from suffering. How she hated that pig of a husband snorting beside her.... His stupid ideas about

[23] Quoted in Lilla Maria Crisafulli Jones, "La letteratura australiana", in *Verso gli Antipodi*, a cura di Agostino Lombardo (Roma: La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1995), 126-127.

[24] Salman Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands", in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Penguin, 1991), 10.

serving humanity and taking the message of Christian caring and goodwill to benighted savages like the ones dying all around her.... Dying off under the ministering hands of her inept husband. He would be the death of all of them, just as he would be the death of her.[25]

As Edward W. Said explains, "Exile is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home".[26] In searching for a resemblance to her motherland, Mada is longing for self-reflection and is physically alienated both as an exile and as a woman. However, her spiritual malaise is a consequence of her complicity in the colonizing project while the colonized have been forced to inhabit the island. The opening of the novel shows how the silence and darkness of the land is an effect of the coming of the white invaders who, establishing the realm of the ghosts, have rendered the stars alien and have instigated the genocide of the people who inhabited it. Therefore, this reflection on exile is interesting in the light of two etymologies of the word. One refers to *exul, exsul* "a banished person, a wanderer",[27] the wandering that was denied to the Indigenous nomadic population by the 1905 Aborigines Act; the other as a development of the word "exterminate":[28]

Once, Morning Star had shifted from its course and had drifted far from the dawn. It continued to shine, continued to be a beacon, but became not the harbinger of the morning, of the light, but a marker of the density of the night which has overtaken us. It illuminates our misery and tugs our souls far from day. Our spirits roam the realm of the ghosts – an unfriendly land where trees and plants, insects and serpents, animals and humans wither and suffer. Now, we, the pitiful fragments of once strong families suffer on in exile.... All around us is the darkness of the night; all around us is an underlying silence of a

[25] Mudrooroo, *Master*, 5-7, 9.

[26] Edward W. Said, "The Mind of Winter, Reflections on Life in Exile", *Harpers Magazine* (1984), 49.

[27] Ernest Klein, "exile", in *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Publishing Company, 1966).

[28] "In OF. the vb. has chiefly the sense to ravage, devastate; for the development of meaning cf. exterminate", *O.E.D.*

> land of death. Where are the crescendos of Cicada; the watching eyes of Kangaroo; the scuffling of Bandicoot? They have been swept from this land. All are gone.... Surrounded by ghosts, worse, in the arms of ghosts we die to ourselves.... Anxiously we wait for the ceremony to begin. We wait for our *mapan*, the Master of the Ghost Dreaming to deliver us. From him we demand release from the land of ghosts. We demand healing from our shaman, Jangamuttuk: he who is the custodian of the Ghost Dreaming; he who can sing the way of release through song....
>
> Thus Jangamuttuk interpreted the collective feelings of his people, as he waited for the correct moment to begin the ceremony.[29]

The issue here is that of an "entire history, an entire vision of the world, a lifetime story".[30] Jangamuttuk as a maban, a healer and a storyteller, acts as an interpreter of the collective feelings of his people and as a custodian of their knowledge. The story functions as an hi-storical transmission of knowledge that doesn't belong to him but will be transmitted through the 'recreating repetition' of his followers. In fact, one of the tasks of Indigenous writers has been to "deconstruct European representations.... to re-present Australian history as Aboriginal history"[31] and to show how a very important source of knowledge of post-contact history lies in Indigenous literature. Since no text or history book can neutrally portray events, paradoxically Mudrooroo's novel has more authority than earlier accounts because the writer admits the interpretative, tropological and subjective nature of history refusing every kind of "academic even-handedness".[32]

The *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* functions on one level as a kind of 'fantastic' adventure, with Jangamuttuk engaging in a quest to create a song-cycle that can win over the ghostly invaders, and on another level it addresses the 'real' themes of contact history. For example, Mudrooroo makes it clear that the refusal and apparent

[29] Mudrooroo, *Master*, 1-2.

[30] Trinh T. Min-ha, *Woman, Native, Other*, 121.

[31] Ariss, *Writing Black*, 134.

[32] Adam Shoemaker, *Black Words, White Page: Aboriginal Literature* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1989), 151.

inability of Jangamuttuk and Ludjee to pronounce Fada's official name 'Commandant' is one way of denoting the Aboriginal rebellion against imposed authority and the transmission of that authority, both in the person of Fada and on paper. This involves an exploration of the much-debated question of English language as an agent of domination, and of writing as a way of silencing Aboriginal voices. Significantly, when the Black Australians triumph at the end of the novel, all the pages which contain an inventory of the settlement stores are taken by a gust of wind out to sea. Jangamuttuk observes the paper flying and sarcastically mocks Fada's son, Sonny, saying, "Strong paper, eh, boss?"[33] Similar comments can be made about Fada's diary, the Bible and many other forms of inscription referred to in the novel. For example, when Fada sketches the naked Ludjee there is a meaningful conversation. The scientific discovery and the voyeurism of Fada's gaze share a common language of "opening, uncovering or bringing to light ... to the eye's inspection what had been secret, closed, or hid".[34] Both the homeland (through the process of the colonizers' re-naming) and the woman's body are the object of a strategic pen abuse. A clear parallel is established between the frequent rapes of the Tasmanian women in post-contact history and the metaphorical rape of the land, of the sacred sites and of spirituality:

> Fada was not to be denied his little pleasures and Ludjee was to perform for him yet again. The excuse ... was to sketch a primitive scene for the chapter on food gathering in his definitive work ... finally he looked up at Ludjee and ordered the woman to divest

[33] Mudrooroo, *Master*, 137.

[34] Patricia Parker highlights that since the first travel narratives of Africa appeared, indigenous female bodies have functioned as scopic signifiers of the colonised lands. Patricia Parker, "Fantasies of 'Race' and 'Gender', Africa, *Othello*, and bringing to light", in Margo Hendricks et al., eds., *Women, Race and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (London: Routledge, 1994), 87. Furthermore, in his analysis of the processes that form and control subjectivity, Michel Foucault describes power as "[t]he pleasure that comes exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light". Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 45.

herself of her clothing. Ludjee knew what his flushed face could mean, but … she didn't care. It was just another thing wrong with the ghosts and perhaps one day they would learn to accept the human body as it was.… It was really strange, even if she did not fully accept her husband's theory that their bodies were made of solidified fog and that if they went unclothed for any length of time, they would slowly begin to evaporate. This might make sense to Jangamuttuk, for he had never felt the heavy solidity of a ghost body. Ludjee on more than one occasion had felt the hardness of a ghost body, not only pressing on her, but penetrating her as well, and it had felt solid as her own husband's.… Fada feasted on her body, his eyes misting with memories.…

'I want you to pose for me. I'll put you down on paper.'

'Capture my soul,' the woman whispered.[35]

Ludjee recognizes the inherent threat of Fada's sketch as an endeavour to capture her identity, to 'embalm' it on paper, to rob her of her spirituality. Fada, as the 'Superintendent of the Government Mission for Aborigines', aspires to become a member of the Royal Anthropological Society (that is, a member of the intellectual wing of imperialism), and is obsessed with the writing of a report His curiosity about Indigenous customs is part of the characteristic Western preoccupation with the ocular, an appetite which involves the hunger to know and possess as a desire to 'see'. Nonetheless, in the discovery of this previously hidden world he fails to understand what is happening because he is influenced by the Western epistemology of the gaze and believes that the way he perceives events holds absolute truth. One night Fada is awakened by a ceremonial chanting and creeps outside to watch the ritual from a distance, but, in the words of Mudrooroo, "It was highly doubtful that the signifiers could have been read. What was the ultimate in a sign system, might still be read as primitive".[36] Even when he hears the mimicking of Mada's voice and watches the ceremony, he doesn't understand that the entire ritual is a mocking re-cital of his own church ministry:

[35] Mudrooroo, *Master*, 51-53.
[36] Ibid., 3.

Fada had rather enjoyed the mimicry. He took great pleasure in the natives and their simple, but effective ways. In fact, so much were they in his regard, that he was in the midst of writing the definitive text about them.… It was with such amusing anecdotes that he wished to lighten the heavy brief of his volume: the taking of the message of goodwill to the poor natives of the Empire. He sighed at the greatness of his mission.… it might prove to be the basis of an entire chapter of his volume.… There in a forest fastness, his charges, supposedly safe from his all-seeing eye, were indulging themselves in a ceremony which reminded him of the mass of the Popish Church of Rome.… On the way back to his house, his mood lightened as he began to plan out an interesting paper for the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society.[37]

In *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* the colonial world is described in 'realistic' detail by the narrator who relates Fada's conventional western point of view, but the same mode of narration is used to describe "abnormal, experientially impossible, and empirically unverifiable events"[38] such as Jangamuttuk's and Ludjee's power of metamorphosis. Suzanne Baker, in "Binarisms and Duality: Magic Realism and Postcolonialism", states that "it is as if there are two worlds which interact, interpenetrate, and interwind, unpredictably but in a fully natural manner".[39] 'So-called' normal, plausible, and everyday events co-exist with 'so-called' supernatural, extraordinary and fantastic ones. It seems that magic realism with its creation of a hybrid space, or as Wilson calls it "dual spatiality",[40] offers a place where alternative realities and different conceptions of the world may be conceived. Therefore magic realism may provide a more appropriate mode of representation for Indigenous writers:[41]

[37] Ibid., 10-12, 18.
[38] Robert Rawdon Wilson, *In Palamedes' Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game and Narrative Theory* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 204.
[39] Suzanne Baker, "Binarisms and Duality: Magic Realism and Postcolonialism", *Span: Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies* 36 (1993), 2.
[40] Wilson, *In Palamedes' Shadow*, 204.
[41] Baker, "Magic Realism as a Postcolonial Strategy: The Kaidatcha Sung", *Span* 32 (1991).

> Maban reality is akin to magic realism and I will try to explain what I mean by maban reality using some of the work done by Latin-American magic realism.... Maban reality might be characterized by a firm grounding in the reality of the earth or country, together with an acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality. It is difficult for many these days to accept a so-called rational worldview, such as the natural reality based on eighteenth and nineteenth century European sciences, when it relegates much everyday experience to the realm of superstition, when it is precisely this supernatural or magic which keeps spilling over the country.[42]

Magic realism attempts to shake the sense of the normal or rational, opening the way for the reader to question what has previously been accepted as 'real', and therefore 'true'. Mudrooroo 'describes' a world that is as 'real' as that constructed by European imagination, thereby allowing "for the opening of the doors of perception through language and imagination".[43] Participating in the ancient ceremonies that alter reality into that of the maban, the reader can enter the more advanced states of the Dreaming reality:

> After, or before, now, he reached out for his *mapan* power living in the pit of his stomach. Standing, he took a look about him. Mist and the smell of decay. In the distance, but what was distance, close, rose a hill fantastically shaped by the weather of this forbidding country. Such was his human reasoning, but then his special ghost knowledge entered his mind. It was a castle, a dwelling of the higher ghosts who would hold the medicine that would bring health to his people. He had to get inside, but as he looked, it receded from his vision. The tall foreboding walls were unbroken and mocked his fragile humanity. He needed his Dreaming companion. With longing, he sang for him. Sang a song that came from his secret initiation. His clapsticks tapped out the strong rhythm.... The back of Goanna was ancient and even

[42] Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka*, 96-97.
[43] Ibid., 98.

> his sacred skin patterns were faded.... It always amazed Jangamuttuk how swift and agile his Dreaming companion was – and how sure in his knowledge.[44]

In *Milli Milli Wangka*, Mudrooroo emphasises that maban reality doesn't exist only as the exotic and recently discovered domain of the Indigenous person.[45] Monstrous and barbaric figures inhabited the space of the exotic other since the times of the Ancient Greeks, while ghost stories and vampires haunted the space of modern scientific discourse from its inception. As Fred Botting argues, Gothic figures emerged at the end of the nineteenth century as projections of the anxieties about the stability of the social and domestic order and the effects of economic and scientific rationality. Moreover, Botting explains that these ghostly returns might be regarded as an uncanny re-emergence of 'primitive' animist beliefs:

> The ghostly returns of the past in the 1890s are both fearful and exciting incursions of barbarity and, more significantly, the irruptions of primitive and archaic forces deeply rooted in the human mind. Supernatural occurrences, also, are more than manifestations of a metaphysical power: they are associated, in scientific and quasi religious terms, with the forces and energies of a mysterious natural dimension beyond the crude limits of rationality and empiricism, exceeding the reductive and deterministic gaze of materialistic science.[46]

In the realm of positivism the vampire embodies a haunting figure springing from past narratives, legends and folklore, and a disturbing irruption of unavowable energies rising from the primitive past of human sexuality. Inhabiting the modern age with forms of magic and power that cannot be reduced to mere tricks of superstition, vampires demand the reawakening of spiritual energies and seriously threaten the progress of modernity.

[44] Mudrooroo, *Master*, 12-14.
[45] Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka*, 91.
[46] Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), 136.

In the Gothic novels of the nineteenth century, these unrepresentable and untameable forces were often captured and explained by European scientific discourse to allow the restoration of its order. However, Mudrooroo maintains that, with the growth of postmodernism and its acceptance of co-existing multiple realities, many European narratives have started to refuse the limitations of the natural scientific reality. As a consequence, fantasy, ghost stories, vampires and a whole range of other supernatural entities, are now presented "not from a position of non-belief, or of superstitious belief, but from an acceptance that there are many realities and the writer is simply describing one such".[47] Following this path in *The Undying*, the second book of the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series, Mudrooroo introduces the figure of a lesbian vampire who cannot be destroyed by the technology of natural science and must be counterfeited by Jangamuttuk and his tribe. Thus he acknowledges that the 1890s vampires were also a cultural response to the sexual figures of women, who threatened the hierarchy of male-ordered society through their battle for economic and political independence, and homosexuals, who were becoming more and more visible in the fin de siècle decadent society:

> Once, how long ago it seems, I was Amelia Fraser…. I did have my small pleasures then, and these I managed to turn to a profit which supplemented the family income. I had discovered that I had a gift for rendering images onto cards, that is to draw and colour was my skill and my figures were the first to render faithfully those languorous females…. And so even though a young woman, I had a small income which gave me visions of an independence…. The shadows of an early night were deepening around us…. It was then that I became aware of a figure in the shadows of a building: a male form. I began to tremble as I darted a glance which struck his eyes. They glowed an eerie red, piercing my soul with afire which was cool rather than overheated….
> "So you are that young lady who gives shape to those marvellous females", he said in a rich educated voice with a lingering foreign accent…. He stood over me and then pressed himself against me…. His hands … held my head in place for along moment until I tasted his blood…. "You have bitten me and there is my blood on my lips. You little fool, it will change your life and I need blood for my blood"…. My eyes appeared a darker blue and were filled with mystery. They set off my complexion which was pale and almost bloodless.[48]

[47] Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka*, 98.

The character of Amelia Frazer brings together the figure of the vampire, who threatens the whole European world of reason and science, with a desiring, and, therefore, monstrous woman.[49] Therefore, in this occasion Mudrooroo subversively relocates the western cultural signifier of the vampire and the representational pattern of the Gothic novel within a process of *bricolage*. However, it is important to note that this unsettling re-citing or quoting is part of his general subscription to Roland Barthes's notion of intertextuality and it is impossible to ascribe a single reading or meaning to his playful journey across different subcultures and subtexts. In fact, his significant quote of the *The Death of the Author* at the end of his first comprehensive analysis of Indigenous literature entitled *Writing From The Fringe* draws our attention to a rewriting of culture that is performed in dialogue with the reader:

> … a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.[50]

[48] Mudrooroo, *The Undying*, 66-74.

[49] Sue Ellen Case, in "Tracking the Vampire", argues that lesbians and vampires represent similar identities to the dominant sexual discourse. The threat and fascination towards the vampire exemplifies a widespread cultural sensitivity to the loss of both bodily and ethnic integrity. Sue Ellen Case, "Tracking the Vampire", in Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, Sarah Stanbury, eds., *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[50] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in *Image-Music-Text* (Glasgow:

In his weaving together of stories, quotations and experiences of what has been already told, of what has been passed on through generations and has no identifiable origin or ending, Mudrooroo re-visits many 'great' subtexts of Western culture. Particularly interesting in relation to the figure of the vampire is Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, which has greatly contributed to the construction of the binary opposition of reason and imagination. This dyad was constituted by Kant as a scarcely disguised hierarchy. In fact, the attainment of the Kantian sublime was dependent upon the sacrifice of the imagination, considered unable to comprehend reality and to represent the unknown. Therefore, Kant's aim was to demonstrate that reason could master and comprehend an excess that surpasses the grasp of the imagination. The interaction between reason and imagination was a relation of subservience and the sublime should have provoked "*religious* sentiments that give rise to 'reverence', as opposed to *superstition* that instills 'fear and dread' ". Furthermore, Barbara Claire Freeman, in the *Feminine Sublime*, argues that gender has a crucial role in the construction of the sublime and that "imagination is gendered as feminine and its sacrifice functions rhetorically to ensure the sublime moment". It could be added that Kant's "topographical, and territorialistic, view of knowledge as a geographical realm that reason can chart, divide, bridge"[51] can be related to maban reality which has been sacrificed by European ruling reason and has often been disregarded as 'superstition'.

In *The Undying* Mudrooroo reveals this subtext of Western Enlightenment by creating Amelia Frazer who clearly resembles the threat of the late Eighteenth century new woman, who sought to gain her independence through writing and the fine arts, and must therefore be defeated or sacrificed by the establishment. However, the author succeeds in subverting the Kantian discourse of the omnipotent reason because Amelia's force is beyond control and, inhabiting the

Fontana, 1977), 146, quoted in Mudrooroo, *Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1990), 194.

[51] Barbara Claire Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 80, 69, 87.

realm of the 'unseen', she easily feeds on humans. Only Aboriginals, by drawing on every resource, both physical and psychic, can overcome this threat to their existence. The character who will be most involved in this battle is Jangamuttuk's son George, whose dreaming companion is a dog and who encounters Amelia in her bat form:

> This is what occurred last night when, tired of the confines of the ship, I transformed.... exulting in the thrust of my wings, exulting in my freedom of flight which took me beyond all care.... I turned my attention on a sly young dog who savaged me when I struck.... I was insensate in my play and did not detect the approach of creatures much like myself, neither human nor non-human ... until I, in turn, became the pursued.... The new land, yes, and now it fills my senses as the blood that the young dog took from me does its work, and I dream his dream, not as a dog but as a human. How strange it is for Amelia Frazer to dream strong male dreams, and to know that he is sharing mine....[52]

George, at the beginning of the novel, clearly sets a parallel between himself and Amelia with whom he has exchanged his dreams. They are both strangers:

> *Jangamuttuk, Ludjee, Augustus yale George,*
> *Yenger jarm garana,*
> *Yenger jarm garana.*
>
> ... I, the stranger with strange habits which make me avoid the full light of day, enter into the warm circle of your fire and will exchange my yarn for your company. It is all that I have, all that I, the undying, have left at the end of that western voyage.... He, my father, our shaman, the dreamer of visions which receded as we sailed westwards, ever westwards until we became as ghosts and ghosts became real men and women. My father, Master of the Ghost dreaming, sang his ghost songs which were.... to close the gate leading from the ghostland to our world, but he failed and wherever

[52] Mudrooroo, *The Undying*, 67.

we hesitated, wherever we stopped to rest, there were they. Worse, far worse, at least for me, an old granny ghost touched me with her teeth and followed after us. She gave me dreams that were not my dreams, and that is part of my story.[53]

In this passage, maban reality and Indigenous knowledge, with its traditional family transmission, are set alongside the European invasion and the Darwinian scientific discourse of the 'Survival of the Fittest'. However, including an Indigenous language without translation and a foreign way of perceiving, Mudrooroo positions Aboriginal discourse at the centre and the non-Aboriginal reader at the margins. The 'transparency' of perception and the 'universal' capacity of decoding reality are unveiled as ideological linguistic constructions by the interruption of difference.

The unconquerable space of translation reminds us that "one of the major strategies whereby Aboriginal people have retained a value for their culture is silence",[54] a subtext we would not be able to classify or interpret even if we wanted to. However, in *Milli Milli Wangka*, Mudrooroo asserts if we adopt a process of "creative reading"[55] in approaching Indigenous Literature, the text will speak and disclose its multi-leveled meanings in different ways constantly referring to a hidden "metatext of maban reality".[56] Consequently, we come to realize that "what founds the text is not an internal, closed, accountable structure, but the outlet of the text onto other texts, other codes, other signs; what makes the text is the intertextual":[57]

> When entering and living in a subtly adapted scientific reality (whilst holding on to a more mythic reality), magic begins to work and the resulting intertextuality shifts into strange beasts of quotations which do not belong to those who read books like this, and who often have no entrance into any reality pertaining to another people's reality

[53] Ibid., 1-2.
[54] Muecke, "Body, Inscription, Epistemology", 49.
[55] Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka*, 84.
[56] Ibid., 87.
[57] Roland Barthes, "Textural Analysis of Poe's 'Waldeamar'", in Robert Young, ed., *Untying the Text* (London: Routledge, 1975), 137.

> which passes beyond such a European construction which has been created from eighteenth and nineteenth century scientific discourse....[58]

Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, in *Dark Side of the Dream*, highlighted the importance of this approach and clarified that "like a taboo, a sacred ritual, aboriginal literature does not open its secrets readily to the uninitiated". Probably acknowledging Mudrooroo's Buddhist beliefs they affirmed, "A text's Aboriginality ... like the processes of Buddhist nirvana, unfolds as it disentangles or lays bare the world of illusion".[59] The text speaks and means within the location of the intertextual, where the signified and the signifier mobilise the inherent instability of their relation in order to regain their spiritual significance and power. According to Peter Sutton:

> In a traditional Aboriginal sense, the world is made of signs. One may not know more than a fraction of their meanings, and not all their meanings are of equal significance, but the presumptive principle is that there is no alien world of mere things beyond the signing activity of sentient, intelligent beings. Idle doodling, or the making of meaningless marks, is alien.[60]

Therefore, the function of the fabric of the imagination or of the text is to "work to establish homologies, analogies between the ordering of nature and that of the social domain of official Reality and of official languages of representation".[61] The mission, the Anthropological book, the minutiae of the physical world are articulated alongside the markings of the Dreaming Ancestors by

[58] Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka*, 89-90.
[59] Mudrooroo has overtly expressed his Buddhist creed, which he feels very similar to the Aboriginal beliefs of the Dreaming. He spent seven years in India and three of them as a Buddhist monk (1966-1974). See Bob Hodge, Vijay Mishra, *The Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), 113-115.
[60] Peter Sutton ed., *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia* (New York: George Braziller with the Asia Society Galleries, 1988), 13.
[61] Webb, "Poetry as Guerilla Warfare", 46.

means of a logic that is not usually their pattern of organized signification. Bruce McGuinness explains very clearly the process adopted by Aboriginal writers:

> When Aboriginal people write they write in a style. They're able to adopt various styles of writing so that what they really want to write is there. It's hidden. It's contained within their writing, if one can go through the subterfuge, the camouflage that they use when they're writing.[62]

In the past the recurrent relegation to the realm of the un-disturbing and exotic fiction has forced Indigenous writers to adopt the mode of realism and to camouflage their vision of the world but, according to Amaryll Chanady, magic realism can avoid the menace of this classification and at the same time offer a more adequate mode to express Aboriginal culture and beliefs:

> The presence of a realistic framework … constitutes the primary difference between magical realism and pure fantasy, such as that found in fairy tales. Not only is the story set in the contemporary world but it also contains many descriptions of man and society.[63]

One of the difficulties encountered in presenting Aboriginal mythology as a form of 'realism', is that it was often reduced to childlike tales. White readers perceived the 'real' mythology and magic of the Aboriginals as 'fantastic' and 'fictional'. Referring to the words of E. B. Taylor, Sigmund Freud stated that the principle of magic lies in a "confusion of an ideal link with a real link".[64] In fact, the strategy of relegating Aboriginal expression to the innocuous and controllable field of fairy-tales and fiction goes back to Freud, who considered magic, witchcraft and the 'old animist view of the world' of 'primitive populations' or 'wretched cannibals' as the first

[62] Bruce McGuinness, Denis Walker, "The politics of Aboriginal Literature", in Jack Davis, Bob Hodge, eds., *Aboriginal Writing Today* (Canberra: A.I.A.S, 1985), 47.
[63] Amaryll B. Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1985), 20.
[64] Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 62.

prehistoric phase of human evolution and equated it to the first childish phase of the human psychic development, maintained only by neurotics. Elsewhere, Freud explains how one of the causes of the unsettling experience of the uncanny, which reveals the presence of something that cannot be completely removed and will reappear, is the belief in the "omnipotence of thoughts" traceable to 'primitive' animism. However, he states that the same effects are not present in the controllable world of fairy-tales, where animistic beliefs are accepted and the author, displacing the 'real world' from the first moment, is free to choose his own mode of representation. The situation changes completely when an author describes the 'world' in a realistic manner because all the elements that would produce an uncanny sensation in 'real' life have the same effect in the book and in the mind of the readers.[65] So, when the discrimination of imagination and reality is blurred, uncanny presences and beliefs appear to question the rational and evolutionistic view of the world.

The Indigenous writer weaves together spiritual and natural scientific reality and the western construction of hierarchical oppositions – which has informed our vision of the world since the foundation of metaphysics by Greek philosophy and its "dark night of the soul"[66] – undergoes a process of dialectical interplay that undermines the fixity of the borders drawn between them. To ask whether the story is true or factually possible is to cause confusion by an incorrect question. At the end of *The Promised Land*, the fourth novel of the series, Mudrooroo literally repeats the first novel's beginning and Fada witnesses Jangamuttuk's ceremony once again. But a change occurs, because Fada "had almost stepped on a snake"[67] and his new female companion affirms "I imagined serpents crawling over my feet"[68]: the rainbow snake of Aboriginal Dreaming has entered the colonizer's world. Furthermore, the novel ends with an "Extract from her Majesty's Diary" in which she relates that she has

[65] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", in *Writings on Art and Literature* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997).
[66] Ibid.
[67] Mudrooroo, *The Promised Land*, 216.
[68] Ibid., 218.

been to an exhibition of Sir George Augustus' natives in London and accepted a gift from an old man who seemed to be their chief.[69]

The *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series exceeds the boundaries of sequential time and truth and challenges the limits imposed by genre, discourse and authorship. It overflows the notion of story as a finished product, never leaving our minds at rest. As Adam Shoemaker asserts:

> Like in a traditional song cycle, themes appear, reappear, are transformed and re-formed in [Mudrooroo's] writing…. it considers the past while it anticipates the future. For the author, Aboriginal life is a great continuum and there is no point on the circle which is not related in some way to every other point. Like the great song circles of his ancestors, Mudrooroo's stories often end where they began, with the process of knowledge or enlightenment gained along the way being the crucial element.[70]

Moreover Mudrooroo claims that "Postmodernism",[71] as the 'natural' scientific reality of the nineteenth century, it is trying to conquer the whole world. Postmodernism, though, is not a monolithic structure and has a schizophrenic nature "so that myriad realities may exist within it".[72] One of these is the maban reality which has resisted the holocaust produced by natural scientific reality, displacing questions of authenticity with its continual transformation and retelling of a past pregnant with present meaning:

> When sitting with my people and talking about our writing, there are two *strands* which emerge in our yarns, one is the urge to tell our history as it is, not relying on those documents of the past which after all are the records of the colonizers who had other animals to hunt and plants to gather from a place other than Australia and the other is the magic of our Dreaming, of our own genres and ways of speaking.

[69] Ibid., 232-233.
[70] Shoemaker, *Mudrooroo,* 4.
[71] Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka*, 104.
[72] Ibid., 105.

> Language after all is a magic construct and to try and gain truth from it is a dubious undertaking, especially when even now the European way is the best and too often they create and seek to impose hard realities existing on nothing but the words and marks of language, and so if we believe in ourselves we must continue the struggle to define our reality and to live in this land of ours which thousand of years we sang into culture and spread a tapestry of language over its living reality.[73]

[73] Ibid., 89.

REVIEWS AND REVIEW ESSAYS

Katherine E. Russo

Self-definitions and Multiple Identifications: Mudrooroo's 'Mongrel Signatures'

Annalisa Oboe, ed., *Mongrel Signatures: Reflections on the Work of Mudrooroo* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003)

Mongrel Signatures: Reflections on the Work of Mudrooroo[1] is a challenging collection of essays that participates in the lively debate on the life and oeuvre of the Australian writer Mudrooroo, whose Indigenous Nyoongah[2] identity was dramatically 'scrutinised' in 1996 revealing serious doubts on his claim of belonging to the Bibbulmun tribe of Western Australia. The numerous, diverse and interdisciplinary contributions to this collection, offered by some of the most engaged scholars of Mudrooroo's work, will be interpreted as performing a unique dialogue on the construction of identity

[1] Hereafter indicated as *MS*.

[2] As Anne Brewster, Angeline O'Neill and Rosemary van den Berg note in their "Introduction" to the anthology of Aboriginal writing *Those Who Remain Will Always Remember* (2000), it is necessary to be "aware that regional and cultural specificities are important. [They] have for example maintained the different spellings of Nyoongah throughout the anthology as Nyoongah people come from distinct regions and groups, a fact which is also reflected in the different pronunciations of this word". Jack Davis also highlights the ambivalent meaning of this word, "Nyoongah: Aboriginal, literally 'man' in the languages of the South West. Some time after 1829 it entered common usage as a term denoting Aboriginality, similar to *Wongai* in the eastern goldfields and *Yamatji* in the Muchison". Even if Nyoongah is a language, it is generally more accurate to refer to more specific tribe or language names as for example Bibbulmun, Wiradjuri, Gooreng Gooreng. Anne Brewster, Angeline O'Neill, and Rose van den Berg, eds., *Those Who Remain Will Always Remember: An Anthology of Aboriginal Writing* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000), 9. Jack Davis, *Kullark/The Dreamers* (Sydney: Currency, 1989), 75.

and representation through language, inscription, memory and desire. These reflections on the social and epistemological functions of language and inscription will be prompted by engaging in a multi-dimensional reading between Mudrooroo's writing, with its recurrent meta-literary and meta-representational reflections, and Mudrooroo's admission that his Indigenous identity is a social construct, "a textualisation of identity".[3] As Maggie Nolan observes in "Identity Crises, Orphaned Rewritings" (*MS*), it is worth remembering that 'Mudrooroo' is the Nyoongah translation of the English word 'paperbark' and that, therefore, Mudrooroo's choice of this name was determined by an act of identification with the Nyoongah community and with writing.[4]

As the editor Annalisa Oboe emphasises in the "Introduction", naming, writing and language become central issues in *Mongrel Signatures* because they are closely related to the social and cultural formations of identity. The assertion that language is a tool of definition, representation and ideological interpellation becomes far-reaching in reading this study because both Mudrooroo's writing and identity inhabit the 'interstitial' spaces of contemporary neo-colonialist configurations and don't fit in an 'either/or' definition of authenticity. Moreover, Oboe is successful in positing a path that re-establishes the moment of enunciation and of lived experience as the fundamental moment of language in order to expose and unsettle the arbitrary but dis/empowering role of the "proper-name paradigm of identity as unity".[5] Thus, she redresses the imbalance between the individual experience of the writer, who endlessly creates/performs multiple

[3] Mudrooroo, "'Tell Them You're Indian': An Afterword", in Gillian Cowlishow and Barry Morris, eds., *Race Matters: Indigenous Australians and 'Our Society'* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1997), 263.

[4] In the "Introduction" to the first comprehensive collection of Black Australian writing entitled *Paperbark*, the editors, Jack Davis, Stephen Muecke, Mudrooroo Narogin and Adam Shoemaker, explain that "Paperbark is a multi-layered [term]. Eucalyptus tree provides the canvas for the Arnhem land bark-painter just as pulped and processed European trees provide the neat white sheets on which much contemporary black literature is written. 'Paperbark' is also the term chosen by Aboriginal authors such as Oodgeroo Noonuccal [and Mudrooroo] to indicate their representative role and their traditional affiliation". Jack Davis et al., eds., *Paperbark: A Collection of Black Australian Writings* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1990), 5.

[5] Annalisa Oboe, ed., *Mongrel Signatures: Reflections on the Work of Mudrooroo* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), viii (herereafter cited as *MS*).

names/identities,[6] and the set codes of the 'disciplinary' system of definition, (constituted by the 'disciplinary' society of Australian Institutions, the academic 'disciplines' puzzled by Mudrooroo's interdisciplinary approach, the investigatory essays on Mudrooroo's degrees of blood and family history, etc.). In her words, "Mudrooroo's writing re-stages the drama of subjectivity in terms of 'articulation' rather than 'authentication'" (*MS*, xi).

The painful debate about Mudrooroo's identity was instigated by his sister Betty Polglaze who, in 1996, after a long search into family history, seriously put in doubt Mudrooroo's Indigenous 'origins'. This information was announced to the readers of *The Australian Magazine* in the article by Victoria Laurie entitled "Identity Crisis".[7] The journalist employed the detective story genre and was followed by numerous academic and journalistic responses, which often displayed an investigative narrative or the language of scientific 'discovery'. In bringing to light hidden secrets, unseen genealogical reports and written evidence as unquestioned truths, these researchers served the scopic/colonising function of informants. Even though many observed that Mudrooroo 'experienced' the same hardships as many members of the Nyoongah community he claimed to belong to (for example, being black in Australia, the Christian Brothers' orphanage known as Clontarf Boys Town, and the prison of Fremantle) Mudrooroo was accused of having created a 'hoax'.[8] This "trial by genealogy" staged the drama of 'authenticity' and was surrounded by a profound anxiety in the intellectual and political communities, reaching its apex in the declaration of an Indigenous spokesperson of Perth, Robert Eggington, who "called for Mudrooroo's books to be removed from educational syllabi and for his novels to be pulped" (*MS*, 4).

[6] Naming and name shifting have been an essential part of Mudrooroo's creative work since he published the 'first Aboriginal novel', *Wild Cat Falling* (1965), whose protagonist was nameless. Furthermore, in 1988 Colin Johnson re-inscribed himself as Mudrooroo Narogin, then as Mudrooroo Nyoongah, and then just as Mudrooroo. For a further explanation of Mudrooroo's name shifting, see interview with Liz Thompson from Liz Thompson, ed., *Aboriginal Voices: Contemporary Aboriginal Artists: Writers and Performers* (Sydney: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 55.

[7] Victoria Laurie, "Identity Crisis", *The Australian Magazine* (20-21 July 1996).

[8] For a recent detailed discussion of Mudrooroo's autobiographical history see Maureen Clark, "Colin Johnson (Mudrooroo)", in Selina Samuels, ed., *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 289: Australian Writers, 1950-1970* (Detroit: Gale and Thomson, 2004).

These painstaking inquiries about Mudrooroo's 'authenticity' resulted in the silence of many academics, which according to Linda Alcott is sometimes "the result of a desire to engage in political work without engaging in what might be called discursive imperialism".[9] In fact, the desire to know 'who' 'signs' a given text is only a matter of the Western 'Subject' who needs the signature of the 'Other', the trace of his presence, to mirror himself as the authenticating or authorising 'Subject'. Throughout his writing Mudrooroo has performed a Barthesian "destruction of every voice, of every point of origin"; in accordance with the storyteller's function of custodianship, he has diversely shown that "writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing". It is thus a sad twist that his work should recently have been judged only in relation to his auto-biographical history and subjectivity.[10] As Adam Shoemaker observes in his interesting discussion of Australia's obsessive relation to the issue of 'authenticity', Mudrooroo lost the right to speak for himself because the 'politics of identity', perpetuated by experts, authorities and government policies, turned him into an object of knowledge – "the author of the book *becomes* the text" (*MS*, 12). To borrow Trinh T. Minh-Ha's words, Mudrooroo experienced "the dehumanization of forced removal-relocation-reeducation-redefinition, the humiliation of having to *falsify* your own reality – your voice" and he has "tried and kept on trying to unsay it, for if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said".[11]

[9] Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others", *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991-1992), 17.

[10] Mudrooroo has shown his debt to the work of Roland Barthes through the continual shape-shifting of his self, names and characters, returning and recalling one another throughout his oeuvre, as if to demonstrate that when writing begins a "disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters his own death", in Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: The Noonday Press Edition, 1977), 142. Furthermore, Mudrooroo has expressed his debt to the work of Barthes by significantly quoting "The Death of the Author" at the end of *Writing From the Fringe* and again in an interview with Janine Little: see *Writing From the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1990), 194; and Janine Little, "A Conversation with Mudrooroo", *Hecate* 19.1 (May 1993), 144.

[11] Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 80.

Already in 1993, Shoemaker had observed that Mudrooroo's refusal to be categorised as just one type of writer and activist (or even theoretician) was a

> means of escaping the prison of non-Aboriginal Australia.... He is like a literary shape-shifter, who always stays one step ahead of those who think they are shape-masters. Just when you think you know him, he changes his identity again; just when you understand his strategic literary interpretation ... he changes it again.... Mudrooroo derives energy from this process and specialises in reflecting back at the reader the image which was there yesterday but is gone today – always leaving open the tantalising possibility that it will reappear tomorrow. Put another away, Mudrooroo is like a literary trickster.[12]

Mudrooroo's creative identifications and his diffusion of co-existing names and identities open up a space of 'mongrelness' and 'camouflage', which threaten the defined borders of fixed origins necessary to the control of imperial organisations. As Shoemaker explains, "Mudrooroo just does not fit the available categories of Australian racial discourse" (*MS*, 19). Therefore, Mudrooroo's shifting identities/names unsettle the hegemonic catalogue of body subjects which requires a collapse of the tropological arbitrary relationship between metaphor and referent, name and identity, chromatic or genetic signifier and body.

> Colonial discourse emphasizes referent and content, appropriating the epistemes of 'truth' and 'reality' in an endeavour to surpass metonymy and to achieve the status of mirror, where the word reflects exactly and uniquely the world.[13]

The collusion of power and knowledge serves the colonial strategy of representation and control and as Edward Said explained, "in the new post-colonial international configuration.... National security and identity are the watchwords".[14]

[12] Adam Shoemaker, *Mudrooroo: A Critical Study* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1993), 98-99, 3-8.

[13] Alfred Arteaga, *An Other Tongue* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1994), 20.

[14] Edward Said, "Figures, Configurations, Transfigurations", in Anna Rutherford, ed., *From Commonwealth to Post-Colonial* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1992), 7.

In the world-system of barriers, maps, frontiers, and Immigration departments, photo images and DNA tests are considered proofs of identity. In fact, the word 'identity' etymologically derives from the Latin word 'idem' and, therefore, means "The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances", but also has the same root of the Ancient Greek verb 'idev' which means 'to see' and is the root of the word 'idea'.[15] Furthermore, the frequently reiterated opinion that 'authentic' 'Aboriginality' lies in Aboriginal blood confirms an epistemological approach based on the distinction between body and mind which colludes with arbitrary definitions of visibility. A consequence of this distinction is that those subjects who are more visible and those who exceed the boundaries of a clear corporeal essence are defined solely by their body and lack the possibility of defining themselves through their own cultural and social identifications. Words, images and bodies are articulated by acts of inscription which serve a mechanism of ideological reproduction.

Therefore, it is important to remember that this taxonomic categorisation of identity defines the subject solely as racially in/authentic, as a unitary image or signifier but that, as Jacques Lacan emphasised, the development of the ego is a consequence of a process of internalisation in which the subject finds itself by identifying with the other.[16] "Identification is, from the beginning, a question of relation, of self to other, subject to object, inside to outside" (*MS*, xiv) which forces us to face the other within, "our mongrel selves", Oboe observes (*MS*, xviii).[17] As Maggie Nolan highlights in her psychoanalytical interpretation of Mudrooroo's colonial characters, it is important to deconstruct those arguments that elide the complex processes of identification implying that identification:

[15] "Identity" and "Idea" in *Oxford English Literature*, 2nd ed., prep. by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

[16] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience", in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

[17] In a personal interview with Adam Shoemaker Mudrooroo described himself as "some kind of weird mongrel". Adam Shoemaker, Personal interview with Mudrooroo (Brisbane: 17 April 1991) quoted in *MS*, 19. This label recalls Salman Rushdie's articulation of the term in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), 394.

> … is of a different order, in that it is historically determined, to the ontological 'truth' of identity, a truth that is associated with blood…. Identification, although making possible the illusion of identity as secure and immediate, simultaneously prevents our identity from ever being identical with what we can only problematically call ourselves" (*MS*, 109).

The purpose of drawing attention to the constructed, textual or 'fabricated'[18] nature of identity is to highlight that the nature of our interior lives is unstable because it is characterised by a process of experiential becoming and not by the repetition of 'sameness'. As in a black and white photo, seen and constructed by a photographic lens, black and white, normal and deviant mesh together and are never opposed. The discovery that Mudrooroo's father, T. C. P. Johnson, might have been of African-American descent, as Shoemaker points out,[19] reveals that already in the first pioneering moments race relations were "more complex than the simple binary opposition which has been tacitly assumed by colonial historians" (*MS*, 25). An uncanny sense of occupation stems from this blurring of the boundaries between foreign and civil, outside and inside, familiar and unfamiliar, which are already occupied by 'adulterating' mixtures. Therefore, even if we try to create a separate and defined space for the other – the sameness of the authentic and the truly different of tradition – s/he always succeeds in crossing those limits and barriers. While nations harden their frontiers and multiple their border controls, a people's nation works in another way. My own experience as a Neapolitan, an Italo-Australian migrant and a reader of post-colonial literatures, is that a people's solution to

[18] In the debate about Mudrooroo's origins this term has assumed a negative connotation. Interesting for the discussion on inscription, filiation and affiliation, and for Mudrooroo's relation to Barthes, is the fact that Mudrooroo was first identified as Aboriginal by the extremely paternalistic foreword to his first novel, *Wild Cat Falling* (1965), by the famous Dame Mary Durack. In *Mongrel Signatures*, Cassandra Pybus notes "What other narrative was there available to him to explain his identity in the 1950s and 1960s, but that he was Aboriginal? Indeed, it was an identity which was given to him by the literary establishment, in the form of Mary Durack" (*MS*, 37). Moreover, Mary Durack's sister, Eleanor, was the actual creator of an imaginary Aboriginal painter named "Eddie Burrup" whose signature she used to sign her own paintings.

[19] According to Adam Shoemaker, genealogical research didn't uncover any proof and "no one really knows for sure" (*MS*, 6).

the imposition of borders is an incessant movement across the lines of the map, as well as smuggling enterprises of resistance.

However, *Mongrel Signatures* also meditates on how to re-read Mudrooroo's works after 1996 and constantly questions the limits of textualisation and performance. Graziella Englaro and Lorenzo Perrona diversely indicate the area of literary genre as another site of the controversial battles over the definitions of 'authenticity'. In fact, even before 1996 Mudrooroo's adoption of the novelistic genre was put under scrutiny and he, among many other post-colonial writers, was implicitly accused of extending the great tradition of the western nineteenth-century novel and the imperialistic ideals it conveyed.

The contributors to *Mongrel Signatures*, who variously demonstrate how Mudrooroo has appropriated the symbolic form of the novel and blurred its generic boundaries, discard the accusation. While Clare Archer-Lean revisits Shoemaker's observations about the trickster, which shares "across the world common traits of disruption, creation, subversion and ambiguity" (*MS,* 207), Maureen Clark reflects on the imposition of a single concept of reality conveyed by the realist texts of Western literature using Mudrooroo's *Wildcat* trilogy as a study case.[20] Moreover, Mudrooroo's subversive appropriation of the novelistic genre is re-elaborated in Oboe's analysis of *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for enduring the End of the World* to suggest a blurring of the Western binary opposition of fiction/history and an exposure of the "narrative quality and rhetorically constructed nature of historiographical texts" (*MS*, 93). According to Oboe, in the process of re-telling the history of Tasmania from an Indigenous perspective, historical recollection takes the form of a nomadic journey, similar to Paul Carter's concept of 'spatial history', which subverts the imperial palimpsestic inscription of the empty Australian 'space'. The displacement of the teleological principle of Western historical narrative is enacted through a linguistic recuperation of 'place' as a site where traces of history exist in the erasures and re-inscriptions of language, "the kind of history where travelling is a process of continually becoming".[21] Furthermore, Oboe

[20] Maureen Clark is also the author of "Unmasking Mudrooroo", *Kunapipi* 13.2 (2001), one of the most famous essays regarding Mudrooroo's family history and of "Mudrooroo and the Death of the Mother", *New Literatures Review* 40 (Winter 2002), an analysis of Mudrooroo's relation to his mother, Maureen Clark.

[21] Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987), iv.

explains that this process of historical/spatial nomadism allows a 'situated' discourse, an effective response to the politics of location:

> Mudrooroo's desire is to speak out of a neatly identified space that will allow him to control its geography and, also, the portion of past he is (re)collecting in the novel. Here place comes before time, it precedes the hi/story that is going to be told and makes possible a 'situated' discourse which will speak the past into being.... And the contact takes place, coherently with Mudrooroo's nomadic tradition, via the writer's own feet.... This 'footwork' establishes for Mudrooroo and his readers a recognizable topography, it draws the map on which the past can be inscribed and in which the present can find its ancient roots. (*MS*, 91-92)

According to Gerry Turcotte, Mudrooroo undermines European historiography, through a re-writing of authoritative generic forms, such as the novel, and majority cultural codes, such as the Gothic mode. Mudrooroo's creation of the generically and intertextually 'promiscuous' novel, *The Undying*, and his mobilisation of the figure of the vampire are read as an insurgence of biological and narrative 'contamination'. In Wendy Pearson's Derridean interpretation, "Mudrooroo appears to mobilize vampiric immortality as precisely this combination of deconstructive and infectious" (*MS,* 189). Pearson also suggests that these vampiric figures of undecidability open up a space for the hybrid and unsettle the "mythologized and fetishized sign of the authentic".[22]

Nevertheless, these readings of Mudrooroo as a writer of creolité, hybridity and black diaspora seem to be contradicted by the fact that Mudrooroo, "as one of the most representative voices of Aboriginal literature in the past", acted as a sort of arbitrator of what is and what is not authentically Aboriginal, dismissing Sally Morgan, the author of the famous *My Place*, as "not an Indigenous person writing about her community from a position of knowledge, but an outsider discovering that culture and an

[22] Gareth Griffiths, "The Myth of Authenticity, Representation, Discourse and Social Practice", in Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson, eds., *De-scribing Empire, Post-Colonialism and Textuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 71.

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identity".[23] Mudrooroo's assertion of the strategic importance of grounding his identity in essentialist difference coexists with his definition of the Aboriginal writer as "a Janus-type figure with one face turned to the past and the other to the future while existing in a postmodern, multicultural Australia in which he or she must fight for cultural space".[24] Therefore, it becomes evident how the academic distinction of 'essentialism' and 'hybridity' doesn't register the 'experience' of 'becoming' a writer who tries to redefine the centre in terms of slippage "as that blank space where innovation inscribes itself on the ground of tradition".[25] As Homi Bhabha has recently suggested, to regard the "politics of difference" as obsolescent is to forget that those who experience the partial incipient conditions of global life with the greatest intensity and inequity, are minorities who have always been denationalised subjects and whose 'free attempt of recognition' is denied in name of a majoritarian normalisation or neutralisation of "difference":

> At its best, I believe, the politics of difference lives on to rethink the minority not as an identity but as a process of affiliation.... that eschews sovereignty and sees its own selfhood and interests as partial and incipient in relation to the other's presence. This form of minoritarian identification converts the liminal condition of the minority – always partially denationalized – into a new kind of strength based on the solidarity of *the partial collectivity* rather than the sovereign mastery.[26]

In the conclusive essay of this collection, the prominent Koori writer Ruby Langford Ginibi highlights Mudrooroo's right to be considered an Aboriginal writer as a consequence of affiliation. The Sydney based Ruby Langford Ginibi had already shown her solidarity in 1996 when she leapt to Mudrooroo's defence "calling him a 'spiritual brother' and offering to adopt him in New South Wales if his own people would not have him in Western

[23] Mudrooroo, "Tell Them You're Indian", 195.

[24] Mudrooroo, *Writing From the Fringe*, 76.

[25] Russell McDougall, "Achebe's *Arrow of God*: The Kinetic Idiom of an Unmasking", *Kunapipi* 9.2 (1987), 23.

[26] Homi K. Bhabha, "Statement for the Critical Inquiry Board Statement", *Critical Inquiry* 30.2 (Winter 2003-2004), available online: *www.uchicago.edu/research/jnl-crit-inq/issues/current/30n2.Bhabha.htm*.

Australia" (*MS*, 11).[27] Therefore, Mudrooroo's experience of affiliation and mis-recognition, which contrasts the patriarchal and constraining relation of filiation, forces us to acknowledge that identity is a 'necessary' process of becoming which is denied to some and easily dismissed by those who possess it. My experience of mongrelness becomes one of privileged movement, one of free self-definition and multiple identification - an unscrutinised image and undramatic performance. The way knowledge locates, defines and maps human behaviour still plots out the possibile ranges of behaving and being. As Oboe explains, to continue to pose the question of identity is to rethink 'identity' as no longer a pre-established position or a uniform entity, but – as Judith Butler puts it – "as a part of a dynamic map of power in which identities are constituted and/or erased and/or paralysed" (*MS*, xv).[28]

[27] See Ruby Langford Ginibi, "The Right to Be a Koori Writer", Letter to the Editor, *Australian* (7 August 1996).

[28] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 117.

Maria Teresa Chialant (a cura di), *Incontrare i mostri. Variazioni sul tema nella letteratura e cultura inglese e angloamericana* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2002)

Reviewed by Rossella Ciocca

In her enthralling opening essay which functions as a sort of introduction to the proceedings of the international congress "Incontrare i mostri" (Salerno, 2001), Laura Di Michele draws a trajectory of signs: a series of minor epiphanies and a track of mental connections stretching over genres and epochs. Following the traces of monstrosity, her theoretical and critical quest in "Perché i mostri" is triggered off by her mental vagaries and short-circuits as a tired voyager. Between flight and train journey her receptive mind is taken aback and impressed by sudden apparitions of monsters in nature and quality as diverse as the different languages in which they are engendered (advertising, narrative, cinema, comics, painting, architecture and gardens, epic, bestiaries, journalism etc.). Leading us along her apparently casual train of thought, she testifies conclusively to the pervasiveness of the category of monstrosity. Being a cultural construct, the phenomenon has changed shape and even meaning in the course of time, but recurring on the scene of human drama, it keeps visiting consciousness and negotiating deep needs. In its very peculiar compromised kinship with compulsions and drives, the monster always has a role to play and functions to satisfy. Through her introduction to this interrogation of the monstrous, Di Michele is also setting the limits of the operation. In *Incontrare i mostri*, each contribution will help locate and fathom, circumscribe and decode the historical occurrences of monstrosity but it is clear from the start that questioning the category, far from solving its mystery, will result in adding again and again to its rich ambiguity and irreducible complexity.

The scholars engaged in this collective enterprise strive in turn to reduce the metamorphic nature of the monstrous and the ominous reasons of its pervasiveness to more general and analytical outlines, facing a multifarious plurality of recurrences. As historical and ideological, literary and visual, artistic and chronicle perspectives are turned over, the task of drawing even rough conclusions appears arduous. And yet essay after essay, configurations of meanings gradually emerge to group the analysed monsters in rough constellations which, by mapping their articulations, locate them into a less nebulous universe.

1. Violent 'otherings': the monstrous as scapegoat and victim

This first category focuses on the process of structuring 'sameness' through the depiction of alterity. Drawing a positive portrait of one's own culture, society, religion etc., implies the well known operation of delineating its symmetrical contraries. Diversification is usually recognized as a general, even though not neutral, function of identification. When in critical circumstances, the common identity of the group proves particularly weak or loose, binary logic is susceptible to generating monstrous overtones which, subsumed within the 'othering' practice, will be able to reinforce the internal cohesiveness of society against the external barriers represented by emphasised deviance. As the receptacle of sexual, racial, ethnic, cultural, religious or social diversities, otherness has the crucial function of compacting the 'sameness' and strengthening the bonds of belonging. When uncertainty threatens to precipitate the community into civil disorder, the monstrous is ready at hand to act as a catalyst, and through a sudden release of violence, for which it is usually held responsible, the deviant other is ultimately converted into a scapegoat. As René Girard has splendidly shown in *La violence et le sacré*, the scapegoat, a potent overdetermined victim, is the element able to dissolve chaos by a single burst of blind violence which burns social tensions and gives society the opportunity of a fresh start. "The Postcolonial Jew: Trauma, Race and Nation c.1144" by Jeffrey J. Cohen seems to move along the same lines. The trauma of the Norman conquest and the subsequent crisis of identity experienced by the English community appears paradoxically solved by a particularly cruel child-murder and equally cruel epilogue to the case when a renovated social cohesion was gained in Norwich at the expense of a new kind of monster: 'the murderous Jew'. "Primal foe at the origin of a unified Norwich of a harmonized England", the sacrificial victim, as Cohen is able to demonstrate, was an especially suitable culprit, managing to elide the differences between the autochthonous old town and the royally administered 'new burgh', reuniting Anglo-Saxons and Normans around the common Christian bond against the economically potent but culturally marginal Jewish identity.

But innocent victims return to haunt the conscience. From metaphorical 'monsterization' to the actual reduction to physical monstrosity, the shift doesn't appear to exceed the common field of canalised violence. The need to demonise the other in order to keep social cohesion is the same as that which leads to demonise the enemy to justify war. But when the eye has to face the monsters the fury of the war has in a literal sense created, the sight often

proves unbearable. In Carlo Pagetti's "Mostri di Hiroshima", the monstrous victims are the ibakusha or 'explosion-affected persons'; girls who survived the nuclear explosion, carrying the absolute horror of the bomb engrafted in their tortured bodies. Representing the impossibility to forget, their monstrosity had then to be reduced and weakened. Reparative politics tried to expiate but the, sometimes also ineffectual or partial or even deadly, surgical remedy couldn't erase the horror, couldn't eradicate the terror from their limbs, let alone their souls. There was no relief, no possible solace to be had from the unhealing scars of the hibakusha, only the indelible mark, and warning, of monstrous violence forever impressed upon 'dead human beings walking'.

2. Surrealist landscapes/ aesthetical monsters: natural curiosities, ghosts and freaks

A whole fascinating universe opens in a series of essays invaded by natural, supernatural, exotic and counter-cultural prodigies (Maria Concolato "Mirabilia in un pamphet cinquecentesco: *A Thousand Notable Things of Sundry Sort*, di Thomas Lupton; Maria Teresa Chialant, "I mostri della mente: ambigue presenze nella *ghost story* del Secondo Ottocento"; Franco Minganti, "American Monstrosities: from P. T. Barnum to Charles Fort").

What strikes the reader, from the weird creatures of the Middle-Ages to Pop Culture's freak performative creativity, via the emergence of phantasmatic crowded scenes in XIXth century novels, is the unbounded scope of surrealist productivity of human cultures all over the ages. As in a Bosch painting: imaginary landscapes, geographical as well as mental, are peopled by every sort of whimsicality and wonder giving shape to the undisputable necessity for the human mind to escape from mere reality and realistic aesthetics into the world of fantasy. A world where monsters and mirabilia answer otherwise unhosted drives of fear and desire, translating surpluses of existential expectancy in terms of torment or of pleasure. A dreamlike scene which likewise defies rational logic and creates in '900 avant-gardes the short circuit which links the experiment of irrational or automatic creation with the experience of plunging into the depths of human consciousness. What Breton in his Manifesto had summed up as the aesthetics of a new kind of reality: a sur-reality connecting powerful and liberating human imagination with Freud and his explorations of the unconscious. What in the lively Sixties led freak culture to shake off restricting and conventional habits and etiquette in the name of free expression and limitless curiosity and experimentalism.

Thinking of the etymology of the term *aesthetic*, which primarily means something that strikes the senses, the stress given by all three authors to the visual nature of the monsters they deal with results not casual.

From visuality to voyeurism, Concolato and Minganti make us follow a route leading from the medieval strange and fantastical beings, which struck the eye and impressed the mind (and even the wombs of pregnant women making them procreate monsters), to modern human oddities exposed for amusement and profit in circuses and fairs; antique natural monsters converted into contemporary fake curiosities in turn reduced to the presentday exhibitionists of tele-visual perversity of talk-and-reality shows.

Maria Teresa Chialant, on her side, underlines the semantic sharing of the gaze-area by spectres and monsters and, linking the emergence of the genre of the ghost story to the dialectic between science and magic on the threshold of the birth of psychoanalysis, she explains also the inward turn in fiction at the end of the XIXth century. Phenomenon, sign, apparition, revelation: the ghost comes to dis-cover and make visible something that has been covered up or disguised. Its message has to be listened to if its haunting is to be stopped, as with the psychoanalytical curative unearthing of buried contents, hidden or lost in the recesses of conscience. At the same time, highlighting another peculiarity of spirits, Chialant concentrates on another aspect that is centrally relevant to monstrosity, as she had already anticipated in her Preface when she defined the Sphinx as a monstrous combination of dissimilarities. Since ghostliness is located on the border between materiality and immateriality, life and death, visible and invisible, body and soul, its undecidable, unfixed, slippery nature leads to the most emphasised aspect of monstrosity: its hybridity.

3. Uncanny hybrids: trespassing borders, undoing classifications

Most of the contributions analyse the way the monstrous defies the binary logic of differentiation and categorization. Both human and mechanic, male and female, horrid and wondrous, supernatural and unnatural, the same and the other, the monster is a coalescence and a mixture which is neither one thing nor the other, a nondescript being whose deformation and disproportion call all classifications and strict definitions into question. A metamorphic figure which is always many things and no precise thing, the monster occupies the site of cognitive and ontological uncertainty. It continuously re-emerges to bewilder knowledge and break up schemes with its mixed morphologies, its symbolical articulations and disarticulations of meaning.

In "Speaking in terror: femininity, monstrosity and 'race' in early modern culture", Maurizio Calbi interrogates sexual and gender identities starting with an incursion into early modern conceptions of femininity (enriched in the second part of his essay with considerations on masculinity and race drawn from a reading of Shakespeare's *Othello*). Following a well established critical trend, he argues that, being built on the one hand on her thorough reducibility to sheer corporeality, and on the other on a scheme of missing symmetry which confers her the mere status of a deprived and lacking male, woman is conceptualised as dangerously susceptible to reveal at every moment her latent monstrosity. Her womb as introverted phallus is seen not in the terms of a reassuring double but as a menacing, uncanny replicant: "potentially threatening castration precisely because, in mirroring the penis, it inscribes a potential withdrawal of the ratification of masculinity it is supposed to ensure".

The overlapping between usually distinct categories is also focused on in Laurel Brake's "Pater's Body Shop: Homoeroticism and the Monstrous" where the permeability between male and female, animal and human, or human and demonic identities is set against a pre-Socratic, Dionysian, pre-Christian background. Refashioning ambiguity in terms of symbolic richness, the Satyr for example, half-way between man and beast, is viewed by Pater as a strange-familiar hybrid which, far from eliciting repugnance, becomes the unexpected source of erotic seduction and empowered fecundity.

A radically different meaning is attached to monstrosity in Antonella Piazza's "Paternità mostruosa: trinità diabolica in *Paradise Lost*", where it is conceived as generalized destructive violence, threatening to erase and dissolve the social and cultural systems of classifications. Boundaries, structures, roles, polarities which sustain civil order and human society are menaced by the entropic forces of a mimetic desire which covets no specific object but serves the sole purpose of precipitating sexual and familiar spheres of coexistence into collective and in-differentiated chaos.

Metaphorical embodiment of this disordering threat is a peculiarly disturbing sequence of monstrous generations in Milton's work. Sin, a double-shaped woman/serpent bred from Satan's head, lying incestuously with her father, gives birth to Death, an unsubstantial amorphous being which, in turn raping his own mother, will generate the hell-hounds that with relentless fury continuously prey on abused Sin's womb. Blurring again the borders between human and bestial, shape and shapelessness, shadow and

substance, Piazza's uncanny monsters preside over the weaknesses and critical points of cultural edifices representing the looming perennial risk of their involution and regression.

One last remark is to be devoted to Massimo Fusillo's essay "Doppi, automi, mostri. Il Golem dal romanzo allo schermo", where the overcoming of the true/false, natural/artificial, original/copy oppositions is investigated on the fictional ridge between narrative and cinema, word and image. The Promethean gesture of disobedience to divine authority which transforms man into creative god and human creature into mechanical/human hybrid is generally also set in a suspended atmosphere which blurs the difference between waking and dreaming, reality and hallucination amplifying the sense of displacement and dislocation.

In conclusion, as its very title implies, *Incontrare i mostri. Variazioni sul tema nella letteratura e cultura inglese e angloamericana* represents a precious opportunity to meet the monstrous in some of its innumerable manifestations. Attempts to sound its polymorphous nature and symbolical profundity confirm its deviousness: never to be fully understood, the monster is an excessive figure, it can be circumscribed in one of its embodiments but it is always ready to transmute into something quite different and equally portentous. By way of confirmation, we can end with Margaret Atwood's lines (quoted and used to interpret three of the novelist's recent works by Coral Ann Howells in "Despite the propaganda there are no monsters", the final essay of the collection): "there are no monsters, / or none that can be finally buried./ Finish one off, and circumstances and the radio create another".

Pietro Deandrea, *Fertile Crossings: Metamorphoses of Genre in Anglophone West African Verse*, Cross/Cultures 53 (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2003)

Reviewed by Robert Fraser

In July 2003 I chaired a panel at a symposium held at the University of London to mark the annual Caine Prize for African Writing. Among the people scheduled to speak was a very senior British literary academic. In fact in some people's eyes he is *the* most senior British literary academic, not an Africanist but a man of considerable professional experience and former

judge of the Booker Prize for Fiction. As I entered the room where our deliberations were to be held, I noticed he was not there. Five minutes before we were scheduled to start he still had not appeared, to my mild surprise, since he is famous for punctuality. Panellist after panellist spoke, and still there was no sign of our illustrious guest. Just as the last of our speakers was winding up, the door edged open and through it crept a dishevelled and well-known figure to seat himself sheepishly in the back row. After conferring with the organisers, I decided that under these circumstances we should extend the discussion, though this meant postponing later sessions. Our celebrity then took the stand and stammered his apologies. His remarks were succinct. The explanation for his lateness was this: he had recently returned from a conference in Turin, where he had encountered young genius in the flesh. So strong had been the impact on him that he had spent the hours since his return slumped at his office desk in an ecstasy of wonder. The genius in question, he declared, was an Italian student of African literature. His name was Pietro Deandrea.

I would wish to spare the blushes of the author of *Fertile Crossings* by confessing the above anecdote to be apocryphal. As a matter of fact, it is true. It is thus with the very highest expectations that I opened his book. It is a pleasure to report, after reading the last page, that I am not in the least disappointed. The principal idea behind this delightfully written exposition, like so many good notions, is a simple one proliferating in countless directions. It has often been noted when talking about of African literature in general, and West Africa in particular, that classical definitions of – and distinctions between – genres do not stick. Poems become songs, songs poems; stories are dramatic, and dramas strongly narrative; novels are like oral tales, and oral tales novelistic; prose has a lyric feel, and all lyrics possess the nerve-endings of well-written prose. All of these observations have been made at one time or another, in various specific contexts. In my book *West African Poetry* of 1986, for example, I had reason to draw attention to the persistent orality of much African poetry; eleven years later in his *Stategic Transformations* the Ghanaian critic Ato Quayson pointed to the porous quality of Nigerian fiction. Nobody so far as I am aware has thought of bringing all of these insights together into one holistic theory of genre. It is an overdue task with broad implications, and Deandrea has carried it through with vigour.

As he does so, one overwhelming fact strikes the reader. An account of cross-generic transpositions would seem to be a cue for an inventory of

exceptions to some general rule, or rules. In Deandrea's hands, however, it becomes normative. Once one has habituated oneself to the idea that violation of generic precepts represents a particular strength of African literature, one starts to perceive this as the very quality marking all truly worthwhile writing in the field. It is not merely eccentric and oddly interesting works of the imagination to which this criterion applies, but books that by this worthwhile definition happen to be the best. This in turn gives rise to an implicit and alternative canon of writing in which elected works occupy their position by very reason of generic transgression. Deandrea has an uncanny eye for such books, and it is thus that his dissertation consists not of a careful consideration of the high road of African writing, well trodden and for that very reason stale. Who, after all, wants yet another discussion of *Things Fall Apart*? It is quite true that I have never read a half way decent one, but it is for this very reason that we owe it to everyone, and not least to Chinua Achebe, to turn aside for a while and industriously to search elsewhere. In neglected and "fertile" corners, to adapt Deandrea's metaphor slightly, we discover – if not King Solomon's mines – then sparkling Tarkwa gold.

Which, for example, is Ben Okri's most rewarding novel? Many would point to his tripartite *The Famished Road*, which for this very reason, and because a prize-giving committee in 1991 looked on it with favour, has received a lot of media attention, much of it hyperbolic or ignorant. Deandrea also does not disregard it, and his discussion of it, in which he traces the antecedents of its vision, is trenchant and astute. For my money, however, the real clue to Okri's *oeuvre* lies in a small parable of invisibility, *Astonishing the Gods*, published in 1995, which has so far been more or less overlooked by the critics. I am not sure that Okri himself would agree with my assessment, being far more likely to cite his recent story *In Arcadia*, which appeared too late for Deadrea's purposes. The latter's highly intelligent section on the earlier parable, however, proves so illuminating that one does not regret the omission. And who is Ghana's most interesting twentieth-century novelist? It is a harder question than the first, but most respondents would mention Ayi Kwei Armah who shot to notoriety in 1968 with his scabrous satire *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. But Armah's work eventually guttered into a dull routine of repetitive, righteous mantras. Again, Deandrea deals with Armah's work in masterly fashion. Far more versatile, however, has been the poet-novelist Kojo Laing, author of the exceptional *Search, Sweet Country*, of which even some "specialists" have not heard. Deandrea devotes a whole absorbing section to Laing, and again

he gets him right. Why? Because both men have thrown out the rulebook, and with it the usual truck of postcolonial clichés that for the most part express nothing but confusion, intellectual laziness and guilt. Laing and Deandrea possess, in other words, true originality, the one of creation the other of perception: rare and impressive gifts.

I have only two caveats. Though it carries a bibliography that will be invaluable to newcomers, the book does not posses an index: disastrously, since it is just the kind of wide-ranging volume that most requires one. Naturally enough its sub-title ties it to a region, but how far – we must then ask – are the kinds of productive instabilities of *genre* to which it points inherent in the forms themselves? Deandrea does not fall into the basic solecism of ascribing all novelties in African literature to some bland global tendency such as "Modernism". However there is a sense in which questions of comparative exegesis such as those with which he deals invite general re-definition of a kind that transcends pure cliché. The energizing corollary to *Fertile Crossings* is that, in several important respects, West African literature has not followed but rather led the world. Indeed one of Deandrea's own chapters is entitled "Beyond Magic Realism", and the prophetic bias of his argument lies precisely in the preposition within that phrase. African literature is usually most rewarding exactly at the point where it forges *beyond*. With critics of this calibre as guide, the world – its critics and its authors – would be advised to take note, to learn and to build.

Riccardo Capoferro, *Defoe: Guida al Robinson Crusoe* (Roma: Carocci, 2003)

Reviewed by Rosamaria Loretelli

Charles Sanders Peirce made a few notes in the margins of his copy of *Robinson Crusoe* (now in the Huntington Library, Boston). These are almost all of the same tenor and dwell insistently on the novel's lapses from verisimilitude, the points where Peirce regards Defoe as contradicting himself or falling short of credibility. What struck the philosopher on reading Defoe's book must therefore have been its explicit and implicit commitment to fact and being true to "reality", otherwise he would hardly have been so fussy about tiny slips. Peirce was evidently so captivated by the novel's effect of realism as to demand complete consistency throughout.

"Realism" is also the figure deftly woven into Riccardo Capoferro's *Defoe: Guida al Robinson Crusoe*, pervading its critical discourse and underpinning the discussion of the various aspects of the novel. This is, however, not due to ingenuousness but is partly an obligatory stance and partly the result of deciding to place *Robinson Crusoe* against the background both of seventeenth-century non-fictional literature and, by way of contrast, of the western narrative tradition from Greek romances through the books of chivalry to the French seventheenth-century heroic romance and some early specimens of realism, such as Aphra Behn's *Oronooko*. As Capoferro rightly points out, Daniel Defoe has distanced himself from the tradition of the *romance*, assembling heterogeneous codes drawn from the paraliterature of the time, not necessarily characterized as inventive literature.

Capoferro's idea of the novel is Bakhtinian, as is shown by his definition of the novel as an omnivorous genre, echoing the babel of dialects, idiolects, technical, journalistic and ideological languages of its world and feeding on its dialogue with non literary forms. It is in the light of this that he interprets not only Defoe's novels but also Henry Neville's successful *The Isle of Pines* (1668), which he mentions briefly, and the narratives of Jonathan Swift, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Laurence Sterne, where he follows a longstanding critical tradition in seeing realism as what distinguishes the novel from romance.

As its title states, *Guida al Robinson Crusoe* is intended as a guide for students, and it certainly achieves its goal. It is a useful tool, especially as it never lapses into simplification and gives a great deal of information about the novel and its cultural background in a limited number of pages. There is nothing obvious or commonplace in this book. On the contrary, it presents an original outlook and shows great awareness of recent criticism.

Let us have a look at the chapters and their content.

The first chapter provides information about the historical background and Daniel Defoe's life and works. Then follows an interesting section entitled "An ocean of printed paper", dealing with the different types of printed matter with which eighteenth-century Britain was being increasingly flooded. Three more subchapters discuss the novel/romance question, the eighteenth-century novel after Defoe, and the sources and fortunes of *Robinson Crusoe*.

The second chapter, "Plot and narrative organization", focuses on the plot of *Robinson Crusoe* and expands upon its narrative sequences, the narrating voice, the fictional character of the editor, and narrative time. There are some very perceptive pages here, indicative of first-hand research.

Chapter three addresses the themes that are most prominent in the novel and have formed the object of recent and past criticism, including religion, economics, science, the mechanical arts, colonialism and representation of the Other. This is followed by a chapter on style with an excellent section on the "Rhetoric of solitude" focusing on the interplay of metaphors.

Capoferro then draws his conclusions in a subchapter entitled "The realism of *Robinson Crusoe*". Realism is not an absolute category. It changes over time, and what one epoch feels to be realistic can be later perceived as romance. The innovation of *Robinson Crusoe*, says Capoferro, lies in its prolonged and almost maniacal descriptions of humble everyday actions, where mimesis is now divorced from the comic. The events that the novel relates are as fabulous as those of romance, but here they are embedded in the language of realism, managing to "give bodily form to the most romanzesque fantasy".

This statement is, in my view, what would allow Capoferro to include the gothic novel in his theory of eighteenth-century narrative. He does not, however, mention the gothic here, apparently sharing the embarrassment of recent and past theoreticians of the rise of the novel, who have ended up either passing over the existence of that literary genre in silence or labelling it as a revival of romance.

The noteworthy closing chapter is no longer on *Robinson Crusoe* but on the Crusoe myth, and tackles both imitations and rewritings as well as the character's vitality outside the pages of the book that created it.

As we have seen, Riccardo Capoferro's *Defoe: Guida al Robinson Crusoe* addresses a broad range of issues and has various merits, by no means the least of which is a smooth and engaging style.

Eleonora Rao, *Heart of a Stranger: Contemporary Women Writers and the Metaphor of Exile* (Naples: Liguori, 2002)

Reviewed by Rita Monticelli

Exile, the punitive form of expulsion of a person from his or her native land, has, over the centuries, been both a spatial and existential condition which has often been influential in literary production and the writer's state of mind through two orders of meaning.

On the one hand exile, the enforced expulsion, has always enabled the

exile to observe his or her native country through the eyes of a stranger and to look at the former home from a certain distance. Exile was the necessary spatial shift, the undesired exclusion which however allowed the writer to reflect on the abandoned place in a critical way, providing the hermeneutic tools which would allow him or her to observe and speak freely about a reality hostile to them.

On the other, instead, exile became a metaphor of the existential condition in which the exile was both a stranger to his or her homeland, through enforced abandonment, and a stranger and outsider to the reality providing his or her new home and which often belonged to the exiled writer neither linguistically nor culturally.

It is, in particular, the existential component of exile, the indication of a state of mind rather than isolation determined by spatial distance, which forms the centrepiece of the book by Eleonora Rao, which is dedicated to the important study of the metaphor of exile in the literary production of contemporary women writers. *Heart of a Stranger: Contemporary Women Writers and the Metaphor of Exile* in fact explores the different uses of the metaphor of exile in a series of texts which belong to both widely recognised writers of the canon, such as Jean Rhys or Margaret Laurence, from whom Eleonora Rao also borrows part of the title of her book, and less well-known figures, or figures less appreciated by academic criticism, such as the complex Anna Kavan. The aspect which is most common to these writers is the double experience of exile which they exorcise knowingly through the construction of profoundly autobiographical female characters. The women writers that Eleonora Rao chooses to analyse, and the majority of the protagonists of their works, are strangers to the cultural-linguistic context both of their new home and of their abandoned homeland and as women and writers they experience a double exile since they represent "the quintessential stranger in the paradise of male letters" (2). Women writers live "inside and outside the male tradition" and, although they are not able to see themselves as an integral part of a precise spatial setting, they have the advantage of being able to observe the world from the outside. Their taking up an outside/marginal position in a male cultural system allows them to be in a culture and, at the same time, to be able to observe it from a distance. This is a possibility which is itself determined by the estrangement the state of exile produces in those who observe from the outside a world which no longer completely belongs to them.

There are, however, numerous aspects which the works of Jean Rhys,

Anna Kavan, Margaret Laurence, Smaro Kamboureli, Daphne Marlatt, Margaret Atwood and Eva Hoffman share in this insightful critical study. Eleonora Rao shows that in their works exile is not lived exclusively as an absolute loss – a metaphor which has been widely exploited in the literary field – but rather as a necessary condition for the development of new experimental forms of writing. It is not by chance, therefore, that in *Heart of a Stranger* texts belonging to hybrid literary genres are analysed - diary, short story, novel, autobiography and travel literature.

In this respect, as the first chapter of the book shows, Anna Kavan's heterogeneous literary production not only allows the reader to understand the state of mind of women who are "strangers" to themselves and do not belong to a specific place, but it also reveals how the writer's assiduous search for meaning leads to the development of continual creative processes. Moreover, by continually living in-between a real world and a reality transformed by the destabilising effects of acid, the protagonists of Kavan's stories in reality have the advantage of "living simultaneously in different dimensions that can create the possibility of formulating alternative perspectives" (41).

Like Anna Kavan's literary production, Margaret Laurence's also contains profound autobiographical references and stages a continual attempt to reinvent, through writing, an identity/subjectivity marked and broken by the traumatic experience of exile. In *The Diviners* (1974) the presence of a fictitious female narrator who, far from home, attempts to write about herself as if she were back in her homeland, allows Laurence to experiment with new languages and new literary forms. The sense of loss and dislocation experienced by the protagonists is compensated for by the act of writing which is *per se*, as Julia Kristeva shows, the product of a continual and necessary form of exile. But writing is a kind of therapy also for Daphne Marlatt and, above all, Eva Hoffman. For example, in order to rewrite history from the margins, Daphne Marlatt chooses in *Ana Historic* (1988) to express that which has never been said by using a language in which rules of syntax and punctuation have been radically overturned. This is because an alternative history which comes via the difficult terrain of subjective memory, requires a language which distances itself from tradition.

In her autobiography, *Lost in Translation* (1989), Eva Hoffman goes back over her personal experience of exile, her unwanted abandonment of her homeland at an early age for the impenetrable and faraway city of Vancouver. In comparison with the other texts, central to Hoffman's

autobiography is exile experienced as the loss of the mother tongue, a loss which becomes more intense as the writer of Polish origins attempts to fit into the new Canadian reality. The abandonment of her language is thus experienced as a feeling of dispossession, a breakdown of subjectivity and loss of identity which not by chance "started with the abrupt change of her first name from Ewa into Eva" (127).

But crucial in Hoffman's text is also the awareness that the migrant identity is not the result of a specific spatial and static belonging, but rather a continual act of repositioning made possible by the act of writing.

The place of origin to which the women writers analysed by Rao tend is ultimately *writing*. Writing therefore becomes a space which offers not only the exile, but also all people in *transit* the possibility to rediscover a spatial and cultural identity and which provides them with a temporary home.

Marc Colavincenzo, *"Trading Magic for Fact," Fact for Magic: Myth and Mythologizing in Postmodern Canadian Historical Fiction* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003)

Reviewed by Eleonora Rao

Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957) provides the methodological starting point for this study on Canadian postmodern historical fiction. Barthes's paradigm of myth and of naturalization processes turns out to be extremely useful to the author's argument.

In order to challenge the traditional positivist historiography, or what Marc Colanvincenzo calls "the myth of historical discourse", the author uses Barthes's study as a main theoretical framework for his reflections. He shows how historical practice mythologizes itself in order to give itself a "natural and eternal justification" (Barthes, 143). At the level of myth, historical discourse signifies nothing other than its own reliability and authority; in other words, it conceals the fact that is constructed, thereby – the author remarks – naturalizing or rather istitutionalizing itself.

Barthes's intent in *Mythologies* is to show how culture is disguised as nature, something that is and always has been. Such a process, which "transform(s) history into nature" (129) is what Barthes calls myth. For the semiotician, "myth is a type of speech … and cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form" (108). Barthes then

proceeds to show the transformation of history into nature. The essential point is as follows: an historically contingent and determined sign/meaning is deprived of its history and becomes an empty signifier/ form which signifies a new idea. It is this loss of history (all that leads to and is behind the sign / meaning) that "*naturalizes*" the myth which feeds off it. The consequences of this naturalization, according to Barthes, is that "the historical quality of things" is lost and "things lose the memory that they once were made" (142) – history has become nature. This is the guiding principle of myth: it "gives (things) a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact" (143). Thus myth assumes, incorporates in itself what is constructed – that which has a history – and changes it into nature, covering its own presence as it goes along.

Colavincenzo proceeds to list and analyze the moves, stances and assumptions by which historical discourse naturalizes itself in this way: *Objectivity – What Really Happened? – Selection – This is Worth Being Told – Historical Discourse as Nature.*

In the second chapter "Trading Magic for Fact" Colavincenzo discusses such processes in relation to postmodern historical fiction which in fact has the ability to show the illusion or magic trick performed by historical discourse: "The magical myth and illusion of historical discourse – objectivity, certainty, unquestionable selection, and *telos* – are traded for the facts of subjectivity, uncertainty, problematic selection, and open-endedness" (44).

The myths of history are discussed here with reference to contemporary Canadian authors such as Timothy Findley, Robert Kroetsch, Gwendolyn MacEwen, Michel Ondaatje, Susan Swan, and Rudy Wiebe. The novels analyzed include both well and lesser known texts; among them it is worth mentioning MacEwen's *Noman's Land* (1985); Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970), *Coming through Slaughter* (1976), *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987), *Running in the Family* (1982); Sawn's *The Biggest Modern Woman in the World* (1983); and Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973).

The Barthesian approach is a welcome novelty in critical studies on postmodern historical fiction and this is what makes this study an interesting contribution to the existing scholarship on the topic, by now quite extended.

The critical analysis of the texts at hand, however, also, of course, makes use of other major contributions on the debate on history and fiction; in

particular Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973); Michael Stanford's *The Nature of Historical Knowledge* (1986); and Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988). Such theoretical premises are very poignantly used by Colavincenzo to cast light on these novels, which are not always accessible. The results are very legible and enjoyable chapters, with insightful readings of the texts.

Of particular interest and especially original are the analyses of Michael Ondaatje's texts, especially *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, and Gwendolyn MacEwen's *Noman* and *Noman's Land*. The inclusion of Ondaatje's 1992 novel, *The English Patient*, would have been a welcome addition. In *Noman's Land* the focus lies on history itself and its processes with special emphasis on the relationship between public history / time and private history / time; how the past and history are actually made in the present. The challenge taken up by the text is the history of Canada – or rather the "non-history" of "Kanada". The novel thus has a double focus: the possibilities for history in Canada and also the question of the constitution of history in general. Colavincenzo manages to show the complex implications and contradictions of Canada's multiculturalism at the turn of the XXth century and of Toronto as a global multicultural city. In this novel the protagonist Noman indeed comes from a "Noman's land" whose inhabitants are rootless and lonely in a country without a national past, neither at home here nor where they come from.

However, there are a few good things to be said about myth. As Warner Berthoff (1970) explains: "The basic function of myth is thus not *explanation* (in the sense of interpretation) but *recovery, preservation, organization, continuance*". The empowering quality of these fictions can be found also in their defiance of the dominant world-view by making recourse to the dynamic openness of myth, and to its ability to elicit wonder.

Laurence Coupe reminds us of the presumed 'inferiority' of myth: "Myth originally meant 'speech' or 'word', but in time what the Greeks called *mythos* was separated out from, and deemed inferior to, *logos*. The former came to signify fantasy; the latter, rational argument" (1997). But, as we know, postmodern fabulations have taught us a great deal about enchantment and the power of stories and of myth. As Barthes points out: "The best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth*: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology" (135).

Faye Hammill, *Literary Culture and Female Authorship in Canada 1760-2000* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003)

Reviewed by Eleonora Rao

In this study on female authorship in Canada Fay Hammill devotes ample space to two XIXth century literary figures, Susanna Moodie and her sister Catharine Parr Trail, and analyses their production as well as its effects on contemporary authors. These two authors haunt in fact the literary imagination of such writers as Margaret Atwood, Carol Shields and Margaret Laurence, Timothy Findley, and Robertson Davies.

Susanna Moodie in particular, being, as she is, an icon of XIXth century Canadian pioneer literature, has become a source and a burden for many contemporary writers and critics. For writers such as Atwood and Shields, Moodie embodies the Canadian literary canon. As Hammill shows in the parts of the book devoted to contemporary authors, which discuss Atwood's poems *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) and the novel *Alias Grace* (1996), as well as Shield's *Small Cerimonies* (1976), her influence is still very much alive.

In the chapters on Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852) and *Life in the Clearings* (1853), Hammill highlights the author's ambiguities and contradictions in her representations of life in the wilderness; in her sense of national belonging; her feelings towards the Canadian natural and social environment, unable, it seems, to inspire an artistic mind; her sense of being in exile in Canada and in extreme isolation; all of this also by making recourse to her vast volumes of letters (which are in this case of great importance).

A very different angle is provided by Sara Jeannette Duncan's trilogy *The Imperialist* (1904): Duncan, a Canadian who lived most of her life in the USA and then Europe, offers a vision of Canada as a source of great inspiration for the protagonist; unlike Moodie, Duncan appreciates and values writing out of one's own place.

For the early XXth century Hammill selects L. M. Montgomery; in addition to the author's well known *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) she includes *Anne's House of Dreams* (1917), *The Blue Castle* (1926) and *Emily of New Moon* (1923).

As for the contemporary literary scene, the author privileges two writers, namely Atwood and Shields. Particularly interesting is the critical discussion

of Shield's lesser known and in fact underrated novels: *Swan: A Literary Mystery* (1987) and *Small Cerimonies* (1976); Hammill shows how the former investigates the pitfalls of academic literary circles, appropriating and manipulating the materials at hand; and how the latter explores questions concerning the Canadian heritage in quite an unprecedented manner, anticipating ideas and positions that will be widespread in the 90's in a variety of authors, including Atwood.

Hammill includes a section on Margaret Atwood which focuses on some short stories from *Wilderness Tips* (1991), a collection which so far has not received great critical attention. This collection, however, is crucially important – and Hammill shows it well – as it marks a turning point in Atwood's poetic development, acting as a sign post for her post-nationalist phase.

The analysis of "Isis In Darkness" and "Uncles" focuses on the Toronto cultural scene, while "Death by Landscape" and "Wilderness Tips" are analysed by taking into consideration Atwood's position *vis à vis* Canadian history and the question of national belonging.

The book has an appendix containing a detailed description of the presence of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Trail in contemporary Canadian literature spanning from 1950 to 1997.

Hammill's approach is in fact, for the most part, descriptive and informative; the book contains, however, some interesting critical insights in the analysis of the texts. She covers the main scholarship on the texts at hand but makes almost no reference to the body of feminist criticism on both centuries. Despite its title her subsection in chapter 1 "Canadian Women Writers: nation, gender and genre" does not in fact include any of the contributions to the debate on such – by now very trendy – themes in contemporary criticism.

Michael T. Gilmore, *Surface and Depth: The Quest for Legibility in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Reviewed by Carlo Martinez

An experience common to every foreign student in the United States is that as soon as you get there you are given some kind of leaflet titled something like: The culture shock: what it is and how to cope with it. The handbook

usually goes to great lengths to describe how confused and anxious you feel at the beginning of the experience, and to urge you to adjust to the new reality by suspending judgment and learning how to read it. But this effort to explain and to make the experience as transparent as possible also voices a specific anxiety as regards the unreadable and the opaque. This can be taken as just one ordinary example of what Michael T. Gilmore, in his powerful, complex, and beautifully written book, defines as the quintessentially American "demand for legibility". In *Surface and Depth: The Quest for Legibility in American Culture*, Gilmore explores the cultural, social, and literary dimensions of this anxiety, by setting out to investigate what appears to him as a revealing paradox: the enthusiastic reception, simultaneously, of psychoanalysis and cinema in America. Hence the title: *surface*, or the figural reality of the cinematic medium, and *depth*, or the immersion into the inner depths of the self, as promised by the psychoanalytic method. According to Gilmore, the concurrent welcome paid to both indicates something unique to American culture, which the book traces back to the foundational epoch of the United States. It is in the early Republic that the quest for legibility begins to take shape and model American society, as Gilmore shows in three "foundational documents" – John Winthrop's "A Model of Christian Charity", William Penn's *Some Account of the Province of Pennsylvania*, and *The Declaration of Independence* – which he unexpectedly, subtly, and provocatively interweaves with other phenomena of culture at large, such as phrenology, confessionalism, psychoanalysis, the right to privacy, and, above all, the race issue. Such diverse social and cultural discourses all testify to the same quest for legibility that from the very beginning has haunted the American experience and marked a radical break with the European tradition of obscurity and opaqueness.

Gilmore offers a number of fascinating readings of both canonical and popular texts, spanning from Fanny Fern to Henry James, from Ernest Hemingway to Philip Roth, where authors have variously dealt with legibility and the impulse to know. An interface between the foundational texts and the following ones, however, is provided by a chapter where legibility carried to an extreme engenders its opposite: the illegibility of the color line, or slavery and racism. Here, Gilmore cunningly builds on Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and especially on Beaumont's *Marie; or, Slavery in the United States* to show how democracy, racism, and slavery are interlaced: "egalitarian liberty is the foundation for the aristocracy of color. It at once allows the return of feudal hierarchy and hustles it out of

sight" (57). This is the crux at work at the heart of American history: legibility meant as a drive illuminates and obfuscates at the same time, whereas legibility understood as a cultural paradigm comes to be the unavoidable ground of any critical investigation.

It is on this basis that Gilmore reads the rise of some typically American literary genres such as the Western as invented by Cooper, the detective tale as invented by Poe, and the celebrity novel, as employed by Fern. He shows how legibility in these works crosses several boundaries – of genre, setting, high vs. popular art. The writings of Cooper, Poe, and Fern constitute another foundational moment, in that they transfuse the quest for legibility into the national literary imaginary. Gilmore follows its permutations in classics such as *Moby Dick*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Walden*, and *The Great Gatsby*. Each, in its own way, contributed to voice in distinctly American modes the quest for legibility as a discourse which in time develops into an identifiable tradition within American culture. Although articulated through a wide number of different discourses such as psychoanalysis, literature, cinema, social sciences, politics, and religion, to name only a few, legibility has a rhetoric of its own, which has significantly contributed to forge the US, and whose continuity and pivotal aspects *Surface and Depth* retraces along the history of American culture, in an explicitly historical perspective. Gilmore clearly maintains that his aim is to reassess continuities, rather than epistemological breaks after the poststructuralist fashion; his aim is not to deny the latter but to assert the preeminence of the former, and therefore the existence and distinctiveness of those cultural, social, political, and ideological practices which together constitute what is commonly defined as American culture.

This is why *Surface and Depth* draws on an impressively wide range of subjects and discourses and engages several among the manifold veins of contemporary theoretical stances, while discussing legibility as one of the main undercurrents of this culture. Although Gilmore cautions the reader against interpreting his book in a strictly Foucaldian perspective, it is clear at this point that the two primary fields where the American anxiety of legibility has manifested itself are knowledge and power. Here, Gilmore puts forward a revealing reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* where class turns out to be as crucial, though hidden, an issue as race. At these crossroads, the quest for legibility functions as "blindness and insight" at the same time: not only does it highlight as much as it hides, but it can also turn from a utopic design into a frightening dystopic one; not, as Gilmore very aptly

notes, because an excess of legibility can degenerate into the totalitarian state, but because the democratic myth of total accessibility can generate its own specific ghosts.

While at times it might seem tainted with a touch of old-style exceptionalism rinsed in cultural studies and New Historicism, *Surface and Depth* casts a very provoking light on the current situation. Although focusing almost exclusively on American culture, the study constantly compares that culture to the European tradition: hence its fascination and its danger. Providing a timely and salutary antidote to facile analogies between the worst of Europe, i.e. Fascism and totalitarianism, and what appears as the worst of America, this book points out, through its notion of legibility, a structural difference in the conception and practice of power between the two sides of the Atlantic. On how to read this difference Gilmore is less clear, in that it might be seen as the validation of some kind of intrinsic value in the culture of legibility, notwithstanding its historical shortcomings, slavery included. Thus, *Surface and Depth* bears on the hottest issues of our time as much as on the American literary tradition, and its currency extends far beyond the interest of scholars and students of American Studies. One cannot help but connect Gilmore's notion of legibility to what is happening at Guantanamo, which seems a revised version of the Foucaldian paradigm of the panopticon, on the one hand; and to the CIA opaqueness in preventing the terrorists' attacks and in reading evidence where presumably there was none in the Iraq war on the other. Although such connections are clearly beyond the scope of this volume, from a foreign perspective one wonders whether the paradigm of legibility can be seen to apply only to internal polity, or also to the relations between the US and other countries. Were this the case, one couldn't avoid invoking such a paradigm to study the processes and practices of globalization at large.

Simonetta de Filippis, Nick Ceramella, eds., *D. H. Lawrence and Literary Genres* (Napoli: Loffredo Editore, 2004)

Reviewed by Laura Sarnelli

> Man is a changeable beast, and words change their meanings with him, and things are not what they seemed, and what is becomes what isn't, and if we think we know where we are it's only because we are so rapidly being translated to somewhere else (D. H. Lawrence, *Pornography*, 64).

In the past few decades literary criticism has contributed to a revival of Lawrence's reputation, reinterpreting him with the new postmodernist sensibility. Movements such as deconstruction, postcolonialism, postfeminism have given new rigour to Lawrentian criticism, challenging traditional readings imposed by the literary canon. This volume, in fact, shows how Lawrentian criticism has undergone a deep reconfiguration in recent years, due probably to a focus on a number of theoretical statements and reflections which have contributed to consider his work as a surprising and unexpected anticipation of some of the new postmodern theories. As Simonetta de Filippis points out in her introduction to the volume, the challenge issued by *D. H. Lawrence and Literary Genres* lies exactly in posing the question: "Can an author like D. H. Lawrence – white, European, male, belonging to the western culture and to the traditional literary canon – be read in new ways?" (16); indeed, Lawrence's work can be considered in a new light, from a non-eurocentric point of view, according to the new paradigms of multiculturalism and post-imperialism. This book, insofar as it tries to give an answer to this bold question, offers itself as a provocative tool that defies canonical criticism, providing new perspectives and new approaches through which Lawrence's texts can be read.

This volume presents a collection of papers delivered at the VIIIth international D. H. Lawrence conference, *D. H. Lawrence and Literary Genres*, organised for the first time in Italy at the Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale" by the Dipartimento degli Studi Letterari e Linguistici dell'Europa. The papers collected in this book are divided in six sections by theme, both theoretical, on the concept of genre, and according to the various literary genres that Lawrence's work includes: travel writings, theory and literary criticism, poetry, short fiction, fiction, prose writing, painting and visual arts.

All the essays focus, as the title of the volume suggests, on the question of genre. The opening section, *Crossing the Border*, devotes attention to the question of travel as a main issue in Lawrence's production. And indeed, as Nick Ceramella points out ("Lorenzo's Quest for the Mediterranean Sun"), journey is a central metaphor to both Lawrence's life and writing. The author's restless need towards travelling in quest for a place where he could escape the moral conventions of his society, overcome the geographical

boundaries of his country and cross new territories in search for different places and cultures, is reflected in his writing in which he 'transgresses' the conventional limits set up by literary genres. As Sheila Lahiri Choudhury observes ("Trascending Boundaries, Crossing the Territories: a Study of Lawrence's Travel Writings and Fiction"), the innovative forms of fiction that defy rigid distinctions of genres witnessed by contemporary authors such as Amitav Gosh, who weaves antropology, history, travel and fiction, are foreshadowed by Lawrence's writing, both in his fiction (*Aaron's Rod*, *The Lost Girl*), travel writing (*Twilight in Italy*, *Sea and Sardinia*) and non fictional prose works (*Movements in European History*). Lawrence "clearly demonstrates his ability to shift from one form of writing to another, phisically crossing the boundaries of different territories and in the process trascending the limits set by different genres" (78).

The essays collected in the section entitled *Discussing genre* provide an interesting discussion about Lawrence's aesthetics and theoretical conceptions in relation to the philosophical insights of postmodern and postcolonial writers and thinkers. An interesting analysis in this sense is offered by Michael Bell ("Thinking Genres: D. H. Lawrence and J. M. Coetzee on the Lives of Animals"), who reads Lawrence's poems and essays in the light of Coetzee's *The Life of Animals*. Lawrence's interest in the otherness of animals is well known and considered as a symptom of the "cultural change" in the understanding of animals: "The older attitude to animals is something linked to Descartes while the new attitude is often seen as a working through of Darwin's reflections on the question of animal emotion" (99). What is striking about the analysis proposed by Bell is his discussion of the way Lawrence, by expressing a new recognition of the otherness of animals, provides a broader existential reflection on the mutual otherness of human beings too, with reference to the postcolonial debate on racial difference. The comparison between Coetzee's fiction about Costello's lecture against the killing of animals with its analogy with Shoah and some of Lawrence's writings on animals, such as *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine* and *The Plumed Serpent*, throws light on the darker question of racism, whose prospect is traced in a quite uncomfortable way by both authors. Reading Lawrence in the light of Coetzee offers, moreover, a way of focusing on the problem of the appropriate mode of thought, since "thinking about animals, and their possible internal states, raises a question about the nature of thinking at large" (93). In mixing genres of writings such as essays and fiction, academic discussion and poetical discourse, both Lawrence and

Coetzee exemplify Heiddeger's view that poetry and discoursive thought are complementary and yet distinct at the same time. In fact, their response to the question of racism is one oscillating between "emotional convinction" and "philosophical reasoning". As a matter of fact, Lawrence and Coetzee's reaction to the otherness of animals is a way of posing a "fundamental existential question, not amenable to purely discursive resolution, [which] is left painfully open, like a wound that cannot heal" (100). Anyway, the comparison between Lawrence and Coetzee proposed by Bell reveals how Lawrence had been ahead of his time in his sensitiveness towards the radical otherness of animals as an anticipation of the broader understanding of human cultural and racial difference in the context of our later postcolonial and post-holocaust modernity.

The intermingling of fiction and philosophical writing is foregrounded in several essays in the volume. Another interesting perspective proposes, once again, a fruitful dialogue between Lawrence and a contemporary philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas. The analysis provided by Barnard Turner ("Criticism and/as Life: D. H. Lawrence and Emmanuel Levinas") traces lines of "cross-pollination", as the author himself suggests, between the novelist and the philosopher, producing a productive dialogue indeed, insofar as it provides the reader with new ways and new modes of approaching Lawrentian texts, widening, therefore, the writer's reception and helping a broader understanding of his works for the new century. Through an accurate and complex analysis of both authors' works, Turner shows the way Lawrence's views on criticism, literature and art represent an anticipation and an intimation of some of Levinas' philosophical insights on ethics. According to Levinas, philosophy, as it refers to the question of being, is primarly about the relationship with the other, upsetting, thus, the relation of priority between self and other. The self is such insofar as it is a self for the other, since it has to answer "the neighbour", for its own being. Therefore, philosophy is a cognition of "proximity" that, in turn, is "conceived as a responsibility for the other". Levinas' ethics is based on the concept of "the face of the other" meant as presence, body and gaze, potential for contact and touch, as foundation of dialogue and communication; the presence of the other as an "interpellation" and a call to engagement, being the self continually asked to take on responsibility for the other. As Turner argues, Tarquinia tombpaintings in Lawrence's *Sketches of Etruscan Places* seem to reflect the Levinasian concept of the face, as they call on to a living contact, to a dialogue "face to face" between self and other, conveying, as Simonetta

de Filippis affirms in her introduction to the book *Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Italian Essays* (1992), "the sense of physical and pre-mental communication" (xxxi). Moreover, reading Lawrence in Levinas' terms offers new perspectives and new ways to consider the importance and the priority given to the body in his works, seen not just as "a movement away from Victorian prudery and a loosening of its psychosexual baggage, but an act of exteriorisation, a going beyond, almost – but not quite – a 'substitution' in Levinas' terms of taking on (and taking responsibility for) the Other" (109). For Lawrence, critism is a relation between self and other, representing a metonymy for living itself. And all his writing, from fiction to non-fiction, is permeated by a conception of human intercourse as based on a constitutive relation between self and other, foreshadowing, in this sense, Levinas' theory of being for the Other. Yet, neither criticism nor living is reducible to the other, and indeed this "adumbrating" Levinas is not always valid in Lawrence and is quite questionable if one thinks that the author does not ever highlight alterity over selfhood. Lawrence feels the "alterity of the other" and admitts difference in a surprisingly "modern" way, since in his encounter with different cultures he expresses a positive attitude of respect and tolerance; yet, he recognises his limits in understanding the other and stands aside, as it is discussed in the introductory essay by de Filippis with reference to a description of Lawrence's encounter with the Red Indians in an Apache encampment:

> As for me, standing outside, beyond the open entrance, I was no enemy of theirs; far from it. The voice out of the far-off time was not for my ears. Its language was unknown to me. And I did not want to know...I stand on the far edge of their firelight, and am neither denied nor accepted. My way is my own, old red father; I can't cluster at the drum any more. (D. H. Lawrence, *Phoenix*, 98)

Here, self and other are two separate beings in their aloof behaviour; the "I" is not "interpellated" by the other, is not reduced in the "accusative", that is, in the condition of being asked to justify its exsistence and the place he occupies in the world and that the other does not. Here, there is no "substitution", no "responsibility for the other". Levinas, in fact, speaks of the impossibility of indifference, of "good conscience" towards the other. Thus, it is not enough "to be there" in order to get "the perfect human intercourse" as Turner seems to argue (113).

The section *Rites of Passage* considers Lawrence's poetry in a new critical fashion by analysing aspects not contemplated by traditional criticism. For example, Robert Simmonds ("Transgressing Genre: a Historical Investigation into D. H. Lawrence's *Pansies*") observes that the collection of poems *Pansies* cannot be examined according to the conventional criticism applied to poetry since it has proved to be reductive; indeed, *Pansies* has often been dismissed for its refusal to conform to a set of standards which are, a priori, assumed to constitute a properly poetic language. Instead, these poems, in their use of "a variety of discourses from different, and even antagonistic, linguistic worlds" (131), are considered in their "transgressive" peculiarity to attack, in both form and content, the hypocrisy and the conventions of bourgeois society.

A further unconventional reading is offered by Camille Roman ("Gender/Sexual Fluidity in Lawrence's Lyrics and Elizabeth Bishop's Lesbian Legacy: a Transnational Literary Phenomenon") who discusses Lawence's influence on the poetry of the lesbian writer Elizabeth Bishop; an influence that "seems so unlikely at first glance" (146), given Lawrence's well known negative attitude towards lesbianism. Roman argues that Bishop's ability to express her hidden female desire and sexuality is in large part indebted to Lawrence's poetry in which she discovered a discourse to express "her socially suppressed and self-censored sexuality" (145). By comparing both authors' use of the imagery to express female sexuality and such literary devices as animal allegory, Roman provides an "unexpected transnational dialogue about female sexuality between Lawrence and Bishop" (156), recognising herself at the same time the differences and the points of clash between them.

Lawrence's short fiction is examined in the section *Reality and Romance* which analyses the coexistence of realistic, symbolic and romance elements in that kind of literary genre. This aspect is typical of Lawrence's short stories and is analysed, in fact, in all the essays included in the section. The perspective offered is still postmodern, as Edina Pereira-Crunfli ("Romance Elements in Four of Lawrence's Short Stories") reminds us when, in her discussion of the difference between novel and romance, observes: "'what reality are we talking about?' With the present crisis of representation, and the belief that linguistic reference to whatever may be out there is nothing but linguistic self-reference, the whole concept of the definitions [about reality] becomes problematic" (178).

The way postmodern theories have influenced Lawrentian critism is

visible in other sections of the volume too. A further example is provided by Robert Burden in his essay "Gender Politics and Modernism: D. H. Lawrence's Fictions of Masculinity" contained in the section *Surgery for the Novel*, devoted to fiction, which shows the impact of Derridean deconstruction on literary criticism of Lawrence's novels. Burden argues that the fiction of the 1920s registers a cultural shift in gender politics, since it represents, as recent feminist theory has argued, a masculinist reaction to that "feminisation" of culture which characterised the years before the First World War. Postwar writings, in fact, express the assertion of a new masculinity based on a conservative theory of gender difference, which reflected more in general a broader modernist preoccupation with gender at a time of postwar disillusion and dislocation. What is challenging in the analysis proposed by Burden is the claiming that it is just in the so-called 'leadership novels', the novels of the 1920s – *Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo*, *The Plumed Serpent* – that masculinist doctrines of male supremacy are questioned through different degrees of deconstruction. In his deconstructive reading, Burden shows the way phallocentric ideology, so firmly asserted in Lawrence's essays, is decentred, in his fiction, from the margins of the text, through destabilising strategies which position women characters as "focalisers with mixed feelings about male supremacy" (238). Female critical voices speak from the margins, undermining all doctrinal masculinist certainties, and in so doing, they offer a different perspective from which to deconstruct the text "by repositioning what is marginal" (239). Through a Derridean approach, Burden provides an analysis as provocative as destabilising, by showing the possibility to challeng monolithic readings imposed by traditional criticism.

The closing section *Echoes from the Past – Vision for the Future* provides further examples of the interweaving of philosophical insights and literary criticism on genre, as it is related to Lawrence's prose writing. One of the many suggestive readings proposed in this volume considers Lawrence's prophetic voice, in his capacity to express many crucial issues and anxieties of the contemporary world, analysed, once again, with reference to the theoretical pronouncements offered by postmodern critics, such as Ernst Bloch, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Donna J. Haraway. Discussing Lawrence's unfinished autobiographical fragment, the utopian tale "A Dream of life", Aline Ferreira ("Dreams of the Future, Texts from the Past: Utopia and Ecology in Lawrence's 'A Dream of Life'") throws light on the way the author's concern for the fundamental interconnectedness of people and

things as well as the interrelated ecological anxieties foreshadow those kinds of "rhizomatic configurations" and alliances between humans, plants and animals envisaged by Deleuze and Guattari in their rhizomatic politics of interdependence and affiliation. Lawrence's "A Dream of Life", by imagining a future Eastwood in 2927, reflects the utopian vision of a world characterised by a perfect interaction between living organisms and ecosystems in a reciprocal respect for the envirooment and its inhabitants. This aspect is analysed in comparison with Haraway's pronouncements too, with her provocative theorisation of hybrid organisms and her celebration of porous frontiers and fluid boundaries amongst human and non-human beings. As Ferreira observes: "Lawrence's repeated engagement with the utopian impulse and its importance in helping to shape our world and the future can be seen as calling forth a hermeneutics grounded on hope" (310), reflecting in this sense Bloch's marxist philosophy based on his conception of a "poetics of hope". Utopian genre, thus, gives us a further example of the way Lawrence is able to address contemporary issues and concerns about present and future.

Lawrence's utopian tale represents, indeed, a moving forward to a reflection on the fruitful intersection of past, present and future, in which the present – our own – engages with the past in order to reflect on the future.

The papers collected in this volume exemplify, each in its own way, the tendency in recent scholarship to go further than the author's own view by reading texts from a critical perspective which, by focusing on linguistic and representational codes, implicitly questions fixed meaning and "grand narratives". The variety of approaches and the multi-faceted critical perspectives offered by *D. H. Lawrence and Literary Genres* bear out postmodern criticism's reliance on the idea of the impossibility of a final and last analysis and of monolithic readings according to a uniform critical line. Indeed, Barthes' theory on the "death of the author" still proves to be valid insofar as, in re-reading Lawrence's texts, these scholars have shown the possibility of truly re-writing them, in an active process of bringing new and different meanings to the texts.

This volume, therefore, suggests new readings of Lawrence presenting him as a writer who has still something to offer to the new configuration of our postmodern world.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Laura Colombino, *Ford Madox Ford. Visione/Visualità e scrittura* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2003)

Pietro Deandrea, *Fertile Crossings: Metamorphoses of Genre in Anglophone West African Literature* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002)

Geneviève Fabre and Klaus Benesch, eds., *African Diasporas in the New and Old Worlds: Consciousness and Imagination* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004)

Simonetta de Filippis and Nick Ceramella, eds., *D. H. Lawrence and Literary Genres* (Napoli: Loffredo, 2004)

Monika Fludernik, ed., *Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Common Traditions and New Developments* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003)

Mary Gallagher, ed., *Ici-Là: Place and Displacement in Caribbean Writing in French* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003)

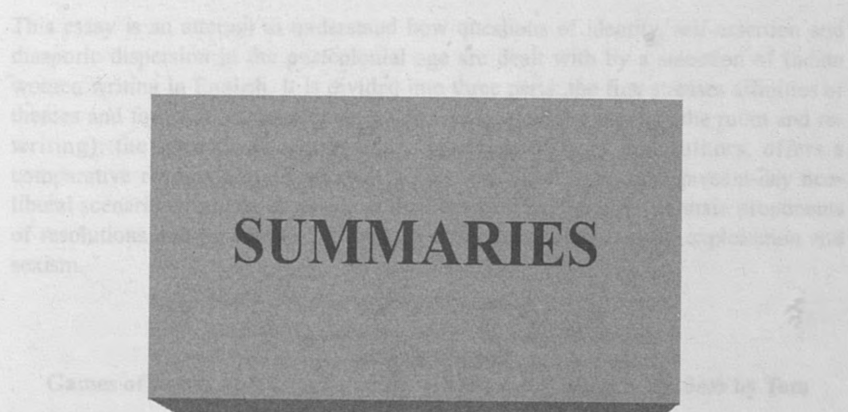
Eva Rask Knudsen, *The Circe & the Spiral: A Study of Australian and New Zealand Maori Literature* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004)

John Joughin and Simon Malpas, eds., *The New Aestheticism* (Manchester: Manchester U. P., 2003)

Francis Ngaboh-Smart, *Beyond Empire and Nation: Postnational Arguments in the Fiction of Nuruddin Farah and B. Kojo Laing* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004)

Annalisa Volpone, *"Speak to us of Emailia". Per una lettura ipertestuale di Finnegans Wake* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2003)

Chantal Zabus, *Tempests after Shakespeare* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002)


SUMMARIES

Raffaele Celiento

Postcolonial Images of South Asian Women:
A comparative and intercultural reading

This essay is an attempt to understand how questions of identity, self-assertion and diasporic dispersion in the postcolonial age are dealt with by a selection of Indian women writing in English. It is divided into three parts: the first stresses affinities of themes and forms at a transnational level, focusing on two themes (the room and re-writing); the second, after a brief introduction of texts and authors, offers a comparative reading around the two themes; the third depicts the present-day neo-liberal scenario in which, as usual, women are victims, but also the main proponents of resolutions and practices of difference and resistance to racism, exploitation and sexism.

Manuela Coppola

Games of Power and Language: *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* by Tom Stoppard

A clever combination of two playlets, *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979) emphasises Tom Stoppard's ability to use words in their sheer potentiality. Since the Cartesian logic of representation is disrupted by the invention of Dogg, a completely arbitrary language running through the peculiar Shakespearean rewritings with different and opposite purposes, the text is made comprehensible by the use of Wittgenstein's linguistic theories: as a game is learnt by observing others playing, so language is learnt through the exchanges of social activity.

Moreover, as words are freed from the similarity of object and sign, offering new interpretations and opening up to new meanings, the Shakespearean text is similarly displaced and deprived of its sacredness, enriched by contamination, puns, nonsense. The article focuses on Stoppard's playful use of Dogg, gradually transformed from an instrument of linguistic repression into a tool of resistance against political censorship, revealing the parallel with the Czech political situation of the post-Dubcek regime.

Jefferson Holdridge
Grope With a Dirty Hand:
W. B. Yeats and the post-colonial sublime

"Grope With a Dirty Hand: W. B. Yeats and the post-colonial sublime" explores W. B. Yeats's relationship with Ireland's history of colonization and decolonization, focusing on select poems from the various phases of his career as examples of a postcolonial critique. It begins by considering the question of how the famous Protestant Irish poet can be examined in light of postcolonial theories, without over-politicizing his aesthetic. From this perspective, the essay offers a reading of the relations between the rational and irrational, the intellectual and the physical, as they unfold in Yeats's creative articulations of self and other – here called the post-colonial sublime – within the confines of a developing nation.

Ludovico Isoldo
The Implied Author in Sarah Orne Jewett's "A White Heron"

The structure of "A White Heron" is altered by the presence of some cases of metalepsis. Metanarrative structures are used to express a point of view problematically and give the text a particular formal organisation, an analeptic construction that brings an interesting retrospective vision to bear on the events related. The "intrusion" of the narrator "generates" a second narrative voice that can be seen as an implied author, one who poses as the moral reader of the events, the ethical interpreter of the tale. This second narrative voice is a self-referential voice and the thesis proposed in this study is that it might actually be identified with Sylvia herself, who, as an adult, with hind-sight, seems to look back on the story of which she, as a child, was the protagonist.

Susanna Poole
Each Man Kills the Thing He Loves:
***Alien* and the feminine uncanny**

Ridley Scott's film *Alien* (1979) is examined through the question of female sexuality as a source of disruption and uncanniness. The feminine appears in a series of disturbing images of fecundation, pregnancy and birth. Not surprisingly *Alien* has been discussed by several feminist film critics, particularly by Barbara Creed in her essay "*Alien* and the Ancestral Mother" (in *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, 1993). The paper starts from Freud's interpretation of female sexuality and the feminist deconstruction of his theory. There follows an analysis of the film focusing on its representation of a feminine uncanny, not so much in terms of narrative as in terms of colours, images and sounds. The paper refers to and partly criticises Creed's interpretation, which seems to miss the hints of irony in the movie's most horrific scenes.

Caroline Rooney
Postcolonial Complementarity

This essay experiments with a concept of complementarity that is partially comparable to Lyotard's notion of the differend. It elaborates on this concept of complementarity, as loosely derived from quantum physics, through close readings of Cixous' "My Algeriance" and Spivak's "Resident Alien" in order to show how these two essays may be seen to foreground two different logics, a spatio-temporal one and one of momentum. It goes on to consider the ethical significance of complementarity in terms of a resistance to totalitarianism and fundamentalism.

Jacqueline Rose
The Body of Evil

Evil is a shifter, a category which is at once powerful and in many ways hollow. This article tracks the fortunes of evil through contemporary political discourse, back to Hannah Arendt, into the manual of the first hijacker of 9/11, and through to the recent study of the topic by J. M. Coetzee, uncovering in the process a drive for transcendance and a fear of the mortification of the body and the failings of the human condition.

Katherine E. Russo
Magic Spilling Over the Country: Re-sighting, re-siting and re-citing reality in Mudrooroo's *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series

This essay seeks to explore the possibility of unveiling the palimpsestic nature of Australian space through a reading of Mudrooroo's *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* tetralogy. Through a re-sighting, re-siting and re-citing of the elements that have created the ideological construct of "so-called natural reality", Mudrooroo makes us aware that other ways of knowing, seeing and organising reality might exceed our power of classification and might already be operating in a space we perceived as ours and unoccupied.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Raffaele Celiento After graduating in English and Hindi at the Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", Raffaele Celiento specialized in the teaching of English and Italian L2 at the Istituto Universitario Suor Orsola Benincasa, Naples, and in Intercultural Education at the Università degli Studi di Roma Tre. He collaborates with universities, schools and immigrants' associations on teaching projects, and as consultant on issues of immigration. Forthcoming publications: *In Classe: grammatica, lessico e funzioni comunicative essenziali della lingua Italiana per stranieri* and *Garbhaghra: nel cuore della Nuova città*, a collection of short stories for schools.

Anna Maria Cimitile teaches English Literature at the the Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale". She holds an M.A. and a Ph.D. in Critical and Cultural Theory from Cardiff University. Among her publications: *Shakespearean Orders* (2000), and articles on contemporary women writers, feminism, ghostly figurations of postcoloniality. She is currently working on literary ghosts as well as contemporary revisions of Shakespeare.

Manuela Coppola holds a Ph.D. in Anglophone Literatures and Cultures (Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale") with a doctoral dissertation on Caribbean female genealogies. She has published articles on Shakespeare, Jamaica Kincaid and South African women writers.

Jefferson Holdridge teaches at Wake Forest University, where he is also Director of Wake Forest University Press, the premier publisher of Irish poetry in North America. He is the author of *Those Mingled Seas: The Poetry of W. B. Yeats, the Beautiful and the Sublime* (2000) and of essays on Irish and American literature, which have been published in various scholarly journals (*New Hibernian Review, Colby Quarterly, Irish University Review, Irish Journal of American Studies,* among others).

Ludovico Isoldo teaches American Literature at the Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale". His main publications include *L'immaginario sociale di William Dean Howells* (1987) and *"Hills and Big Halls". Spazialità e scrittura in Henry James* (1999). He is currently working on William Dean Howells and "local colour writing".

Susanna Poole teaches English language at the Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", where she has taught seminars on film studies since 1998. She holds an M.A. in Art, Design and Visual Culture from London Guildhall University. She has researched and written above all in the field of women film studies. Her recent publications include "The Touching Camera/La cinepresa toccante", in Silvana Carotenuto, Annamaria Morelli, eds., *Frontiere del corpo, frontiere dell'identità* (2004).

Caroline Rooney is a senior lecturer at the University of Kent. She works in the areas of postcolonial literature and literary theory. She is the author of *African Literature, Animism and Politics* (2000) and co-author of a special issue of the *Oxford Literary Review* on 'Monstrism' (2001). She has recently written articles on psychoanalysis and on film theory for the *Journal of European Studies* and *Angelaki*.

Jacqueline Rose teaches at Queen Mary University of London. Her most recent publications are the novel, *Albertine*, and *On Not Being Able to Sleep: Psychoanalysis and the Modern World*. She was the writer and presenter of the C4 television documentary "Dangerous Liaison – Israel and America". Her Christian Gauss seminars "The Question of Zion" will be published by Princeton University Press in Spring 2005.

Katherine E. Russo graduated at the Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", Italy. In the past, she has primarily focussed on the issues of imprisonment, identity and representation in Indigenous Australian Literature. Currently a PhD student at University of New South Wales, Australia, she is working on the Indigenous Australian appropriation of mediums of communication, performance and white/Indigenous literary relationships.

Jane Wilkinson is Professor of English literature at the Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale". She has published articles on African literature, transculturations of Shakespeare and the Bible, exile, prison poetry, South African women's poetry and postcolonial representations of the city. Her most recent volume is *The Cripples at the Gate: Orson Welles's Voodoo Macbeth* (2004).

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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.
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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.

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