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

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

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Dislocated Subjects
(Editors for this issue: Patrizia Fusella – Donatella Izzo)

EDITORIAL

Our readers may be surprised to find that the issue of *Anglistica* we are presenting, *Dislocated Subjects*, does not conform to our custom of alternating miscellaneous to thematic issues. As a matter of fact, in spite of our original non-thematic call for papers, the contributions we received spontaneously seemed to cluster around two definite sets of themes, which in turn, as we were ourselves surprised to realize, tackled similar questions and were inspired by the same critics and theorists – a fact that should perhaps be taken as a tribute to our journal's perceptible cultural identity. All we had to do, then, was to recognize and foreground the lines of thought connecting both our individual contributions and our thematic clusters. The triangular relation between discourse, power, and subject is the shared terrain where all our contributions meet: one way or another, they call into question the relation between power and discourse and the ways in which such relations are embedded in the subject, constitutive of subjectivity, and are as well made the object of literary or theoretical reflection. Michel Foucault's influence across a number of disciplines echoes through the essays, which seem to share the method of enquiry he put forth in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: they "substitute for the enigmatic treasure of 'things' anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse [and] define these *objects* without reference to the *ground*, the *foundation of things*, but by relating them to the body of rules that enable them to form as objects of a discourse and thus constitute the conditions of their appearance."[1]

[1] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1972 [1969]), 47-48.

The essays in the first section, *Migrating Texts, Migrating Issues*, focus on the relationship between tradition and innovation and interrogate the ways in which the latter displaces the former, but also, the ways in which thought migrates and bears fruit under different discursive conditions. In the first essay, devoted to the legacy of Antonio Gramsci in the work of such contemporary thinkers as Stuart Hall, Edward Said and Etienne Balibar, Giorgio Baratta – a celebrated Gramsci scholar and the President of the International Gramsci Society – underlines that one of the achievements of Gramsci was his capability of *displacing* part of the inheritance of Marxism, regarding it as "'a particular fact' … a temporary and transitory event in history." This non-dogmatic attitude enabled him to enter into an "open-minded dialogue with all those who had something worthwhile to say" in his own time, as well as with many thinkers of the generations that followed. Through a subtle analysis of the concept of hegemony and other Gramscian key notions, Baratta discusses the different use of his writings made by different intellectuals, from Togliatti, at the time of the ideological master narratives, to those contemporary intellectuals who, after the demise of the master narratives, still aim at the intellectual progress of the masses and side with the minorities' effort to counteract hegemonic discourse.

A similar counteraction was effected by Jonathan Swift, whose "Battle between Ancients and Moderns" is emblematic of the spatial, material problems involved in the act of "writing against writing." In her essay on "the arts of dislocation," Maria Laudando – drawing again on Edward Said, particularly on some of his early contributions to general literary theory such as *Beginnings* (1975) and *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983) – assesses Jonathan Swift's relevance as an example of the basic complexity of textual practices and of the relation between power and writing. The work of Said provides her with an interpretative key to evaluate the eighteenth-century satirist's manipulation of print and public opinion during his career as a militant writer: "extraordinarily 'reactive' to the events of his times," Swift "conceived his own texts as events, interventions in the emergencies of his age, while always ironically reflecting upon their status as transient objects/commodities literally dispersed on the streets of London or Dublin." Thus, by "focusing on the very

'modernity' of the cultural issues at stake in Swift's authorial ventures as mythmaker, perilous propagandist and popular – indeed sensational – writer against the dominant, canonical view of Swift as the censorious and conservative Augustan spokesman," Laudando foregrounds his subversive aspects and provides a case study both of the fruitful migration of theoretical ideas and of the displacement of certain inherited traditional discourses.

An explicitly central presence in the first section of this issue, Edward Said is an equally central, if more covert inspiration in the second one, *Asian American Subjectivities* (to the best of our knowledge, the first special section to be devoted to Asian American Studies by a European journal). Said's description of Orientalism as the means by which European culture was able to "manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively"[2] has been a crucial force behind the emergence of Asian American theoretical discourse. Building on Said's deconstruction of the Orientalist gaze, Asian American theory has articulated it with a variety of other contributions, ranging from postcolonial to gender studies and from Althusserian Marxism to queer theory, and resulting in new and exciting insights into the joint operation of gender and race ideology at both the domestic and the global level. The notion of 'migrating texts' and 'migrating issues,' employed to define conceptual negotiations through space and time in the first section, takes on a whole new meaning in this second one, where all texts examined, in one way or another, deal with literal migrations across geographic, political, linguistic, and cultural frontiers. Reversing the Orientalist gaze, these works stage their own version of the East-West encounter, and while confronting the power of discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, to enforce beliefs, values and categories, they try to produce what – to take up again Said's and Gramsci's categories, discussed in the first part – might be described as counter-hegemony.

The Asian American literary tradition has been widely explored over the last couple of decades and by now it has given rise to a canon of its own. The essays we are presenting bear witness to the stage of

[2] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 3.

maturity achieved by Asian American literary studies in that they do not tackle those texts that have been established as the Asian American classics, but address a number of more recent and/or lesser known works in order to re-examine, enrich, and complicate the Asian American literary landscape. Focusing on the manifold intersections between the literary and the experiential, the subjective and the geo-political in a race-, gender-, and nation-inflected context, they coalesce around questions of subject-formation and self-representation. Rocío Davis, a leading scholar in the field, in her essay offers an alternative approach to the vexed question of autobiography in the Asian American context – a question originally raised by Frank Chin's attack on *The Woman Warrior*, and ever since hotly debated in Asian American criticism. Starting once again from that debate in an attempt to leave it behind, she proposes 'life writing' as a wider notion capable of including the inter-subjective, dialogic, and relational dimensions of self-representation as a process that involves collective as well as individual configurations. Through an analysis of the overtly relational processes of identity-formation enacted in texts such as Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days*, Adam Fifield's *A Blessing Over Ashes: The Remarkable Odyssey of My Unlikely Brother*, May-lee and Winberg Chai's *The Girl from Purple Mountain*, Garrett Hongo's *Volcano*, and Helie Lee's *Still Life with Rice*, Davis argues that these writers have self-awarely embraced a notion of literary and experiential authenticity that unsettles and rewrites conventional notions of ethnic autobiography in that it is plural and multilayered, rather than based on exclusivist and essentialistic paradigms of ethnic identity.

In the essay that follows, Vincenzo Bavaro offers a reading of a number of Asian American short stories from the 1990s – by Darrell Lum, R. Zamora Linmark, and Monique Truong – sharing a common focus on children as protagonists and the classroom as the social arena where their identity-formation processes are played out. Bavaro's reading of these stories is centered on the ways in which the Althusserian dynamics of interpellation are both enacted and resisted in a multiethnic school context: faced with a dominant discourse that simultaneously constructs them as subjects and marginalizes them on grounds of race, sexuality, or both, the young protagonists of these

stories negotiate their position vis-à-vis the demand that they identify with the (hetero)normative national subject, and in the process, they lay bare the operation of racism and heteronormativity through national pedagogy and disciplinary power. Building on the increasing critical focus on queer childhood of the last few years, and bringing it to bear on questions of race and ethnicity, Bavaro shows the crucial importance of the classroom as a central locus of both national and gendered subjectification, thus offering a forceful argument for a recognition of age as a category of difference to be reckoned with in the Asian American discourse.

Nationality and the ways it intersects with gender within an Asian American context is also the main focus of Raffaella Malandrino's essay, an analysis of a few selected stories – "Fathering," "Orbiting," "Jasmine," and "Fighting for the Rebound" – from Bharati Mukherjee's 1987 collection *The Middleman*. Set in the context of the South-Asian immigration to the United States of the 1980s, *The Middleman* stages the complexity of transnational relations through the encounter between immigrant characters and white Americans. In the eyes of the newcomers, the icons of the 'American Dream' become invested with a transformative power and become the object of multiple processes of identification and counter-identification. The process being enacted in the stories is undoubtedly an assimilatory one (which accounts for the harsh criticism the author has often met with in Asian American scholarship). And yet, as Malandrino argues, the gendered narratives that make up this collection depict assimilation as a two-way and mutual process, where the immigrant is empowered by her increased agency, and mainstream America – frequently embodied by white male characters – is as much unsettled by the transformative potential of the encounter with the Other as the immigrants themselves.

With Manuela Vastolo's final essay on *When Fox Is a Thousand* by Larissa Lai (1995), the focus shifts from the United States to Canada, a fairly recent object of interest for Asian Americanist scholars. Lai's experimental novel is based on multiple, interweaving stories that span from ninth-century China to twentieth-century Canada and range from legendary (the immortal shape-shifting Fox) to historical (the Chinese priestess/poet Yu Hsuan-chi) to realistic and contemporary

characters (the young lesbian Chinese Canadian student Artemis Wong). In her astute textual reading, Vastolo focuses on the twofold cultural politics of the novel on the one hand, and of its readers and critics on the other. The novel's clever use of sophisticated postmodern strategies, Vastolo argues, should be read as the young Chinese Canadian author's attempt to evade the limiting prescriptions of ethnic 'authenticity' that go hand-in-hand with the autobiographical form, as discussed in Rocío Davis's essay. While challenging the white readers' horizons of expectation through its rejection of auto-ethnography, however, the novel panders to their Orientalist assumptions through other aspects of its composition, such as the strong ahistorical implications of its use of Chinese legends. Thus, its textual politics – which is a daring one on some levels, such as the use of a queer sexuality to complicate the easy picture of Canadian multiculturalism – is ambiguous when it comes to challenging cultural stereotypes that ensure the novel's legibility and hence its success.

What this Asian American section depicts is a complex and heterogeneous field, where any easily mimetic definition of ethnic writing and any essentialized notion of ethnic identity are called into question, minority and dominant representations in turn converge and collide, and subjects are 'dislocated' not just physically and geographically, but by the defamiliarizing literary staging and self-aware questioning of the manifold forces producing and re-producing them. On such a field, the fight for hegemony that was the subject of Gramsci's powerful theoretical investigations becomes multiplied and complicated by a number of new factors. Itself 'dislocated' by historical process, and filtered through the prism of Hall's and Said's post-WWII and post-colonial awareness, the 'subject' of Gramsci's discourse has acquired, if anything, more and more relevance by its travels through time and space. Like the "Song for a Barbarian Reed-Pipe" in the memorable conclusion to Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, "it translated well."[3]

Patrizia Fusella and Donatella Izzo

[3] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior. Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (London: Picador, 1981 [1978]), 186.

MIGRATING TEXTS, MIGRATING ISSUES

Giorgio Baratta

Gramsci among Us: Hall, Said, Balibar*

An open Marxism

In the 1990s a remarkable thing happened regarding Gramsci: he was the sole Marxist thinker to emerge unscathed from the collapse of what had become known as actually existing socialism. There followed, one after another, new editions and translations of his writings, new research into and analysis of his life and work.

It is evident that, after that extraordinary and awe-inspiring 1989, studies underwent a paradigmatic shift though it is not easy to single out a basic affinity between the different interpretations that may be observed in Italy and in the world at large. Certainly it was inevitable that a sore point was represented by Gramsci's relationship with the traditions of the workers' movement and its classic thinkers, in particular with Marx and Lenin and, in what obviously had to be quite a different way, with Togliatti. From this point of view, however, there is nothing new under the sun. Here one goes from the emphasis placed on Gramsci's contemporary originality and continuity with Marxism, i.e. Gramsci as a 'critical' or 'democratic' communist, to the attempt to shift his intellectual heritage over lock, stock and barrel into the social democratic or even the liberal democratic camp (as D'Alema would seem to wish).

The question of whether there is significant novelty in Gramsci's approach, and, if so, what this lies in, is to be situated in a subterranean stratum that should not be kept separate from the

*Translated from Italian by Derek Boothman.

recurrent ideological-interpretative conflict, which, in fact, it reproposes at a less obvious and more 'philological' level. Gramsci's mature thought is today being subjected, as it requires and deserves, to a work of 'excavation' or, as Gerratana has written, 'restoration.'[1]

We have perhaps now finally entered a more 'scientific' and 'objective' phase of reading Gramsci, and thus one that is nearer the truth. Truth however is not neutral. Its universality is partisan, in the sense that there is always one part of society that has the strength and courage to seek it out and develop it in the most appropriate way. Such at least was the opinion of Gramsci, who posed 'philology,' that is to say "the methodological expression of the importance of particular facts,"[2] as the highroad of research, which cannot be subordinated to any 'generic' assertion of principle at the theoretical level, and who at the same time maintained that Marxism "opens up a completely new road, renewing from head to toe the whole way of conceiving philosophy."[3]

It is impossible today to make any precise hypothesis regarding which social group or class, which party, which social area of reference is capable of inspiring some overall manifestation or new development of Gramsci's ideas. In the absence of this element we must limit ourselves to a general indication of the novelty that is taking shape from the studies being carried out. The application of Gramsci's own method to Gramsci himself is the new paradigm, the

[1] Valerio Gerratana, *Gramsci. Problemi di metodo* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1997). The first half of the book deals with the preparation, results and confirmations and then, in hindsight, the details of the author's 'restoration' of Gramsci's hand-written notebooks for his 1975 critical edition.

[2] Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere* (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), Notebook 7 §6. See the revised form in Notebook 11 §25 translated in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. by Q.Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 428 and henceforward referred to as *SPN*. We shall for convenience refer in these notes to the three-volume Lawrence and Wishart anthology of the *Notebooks* (*SPN, Selected Cultural Writings* and *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*) which include in some form more or less everything here cited from the Notebooks; alternatively for the first Notebooks, Joseph Buttigieg's integral translation (New York: Columbia University Press, first volume 1992) includes the earlier writings cited here and may be consulted by referring to the Notebook and paragraph numbers given.

[3] Gramsci, Notebook 4 §11; as regards this phrase, the rewritten form in Notebook 11 §27, translated in *SPN*, 464 includes only the word 'itself' added after 'philosophy.'

challenge that his thought launches to our own times, thanks to the successful insight into the future that it offered.

But, we have to ask ourselves, what does this challenge consist of? It means reading his writings with "the most scrupulous accuracy and scientific honesty," as he asked should be done with Marx.[4] This means not just reading his writings without distortion of any sort, but even, within the course of the research, leaving in abeyance any prior judgment or preconception. It means reading his writings in their context (the early writings) or in the only partially structured ongoing development in which he conceived them (the prison writings), and then comparing them with reality by using the methodology used in his 'past and present' notes. In so doing, one must keep in mind a theoretical horizon which may be compenetrated with certainty (the case of Gramsci's Marxism) or with Hamlet-like doubt (as our testy *fin de siècle* suggests), but which in any case has assimilated the basic Socratic lesson of scepticism, of caution and of self-interrogation when faced with each and every 'particular fact.' It is indeed a fact that, for Gramsci, Marxism (or historical materialism) too was 'a particular fact' and thus a temporary and transitory event in history. And thus it is that certainty and doubt, truth and error meet in the Notebooks, and bring about what, following the title of Carl Marzani's 1957 English-language Gramsci anthology, Stuart Hall has, in a non-conventional sense, called an "open Marxism."[5]

The legacy question

"Within the Marxist tradition, it is Gramsci more than anyone else who has posed the question of [intellectual] legacy."[6] But what we are dealing with here is not a question of settling accounts within the family. It is instead the question of the nodal point of the relationship of Gramsci to Croce, analogous to that of Marx's to Hegel, which

[4] Gramsci, Notebook 4 §1; the same wording is in Notebook 16 §2, translated in *SPN*, 382.

[5] B. Wagner, "Antonio Gramsci, la radicale provvisorietà del suo pensiero. Questioni di metodo: una rilettura di Gramsci," *Il manifesto*, November 6, 1991.

[6] D. Losurdo, *Antonio Gramsci dal liberalismo al 'comunismo critico'* (Roma: Gamberetti, 1997), 252.

leads us back to the much more contentious nexus of historical materialism's connection to idealism, of Marxism's connection to bourgeois thought, of communism's connection to liberalism, and beyond. We have moreover to take into account, not so much the wilder inventions or conscious manipulations that have emerged from the tortured pathways of the so-called 'historical revisionism' of our own day, but questions that stem from complex problems of our own legacy, such as the Nazi-fascist attempt to appropriate the legacy of socialism or the pan-Russian extension of Stalinism. The most insidious mystification in the current historical debate is undoubtedly the construction of a liberal and democratic virginity as compared with the twentieth century's opposed 'totalitarianisms.' It is however true that Gramsci, who denounced the 'disasters of democracy,' in many ways still belongs 'to everyone,' as Togliatti wanted, just because in all their complexity, his writings present us without frills or simplification with notions such as 'freedom,' 'democracy,' 'socialism,' of which there is a widespread need but which run the risk of seeming worn-out and ambiguous. Re-reading Gramsci in the light of these problems of intellectual legacy means not losing sight of his guides - his Marx, his Lenin, his Machiavelli - but at the same time it means totally assimilating his courage, as well as the freedom with which he entered into an open-minded dialogue with all those who had something worthwhile to say.

Etienne Balibar has in effect summed up this attitude of Gramsci's in writing that "the key to his whole life and thought is *risk*. I would say that the real area of operations in which this risk was run was the proximity to the devil, in other words proximity to the adversary."[7]

Toward a 'collective thinker'

Are we now ready to pose the question of the legacy of Gramsci, just as Gramsci did with Marx and Marxism? Can *we* do so *now*? And who is the '*we*'? Gramsci thought and wrote in the isolation of his cell; he worked on his own, a 'part-time philosopher,' in the name of something yet to come, but which however already appeared to him

[7] Etienne Balibar, "Mao + Spinoza", *L'Indice dei libri del mese* 2 (1993).

as something coming into being at that very moment: the 'collective thinker.' We think, or perhaps are thought, in the phantom worldwide network of information, communications, interactions, but never like today has thinking seemed such an individual or even an unrelated undertaking: is it just a useless luxury?

To apply Gramsci's method to today's world, and not only to the study of Gramsci himself, means to commence that extraordinary, adventurous and risky undertaking of reconsidering our present as history, using the instrument that he defined a 'democratic philosophy.' Gramsci looked to the Risorgimento for the key to understanding the revolution that had not been created and the fascism that had. Communism was for him a far-off star that lit the way, or, as Luporini was to say, it was a horizon. Now at best, it seems to most people a dream that has already come and gone. But can the traces it left at least shake us out of the torpor of present-day reality? Can it persuade us to take a healthy leap back into the past?

To interrogate, together with Gramsci, the dawn and first developments of the new mass society and of globalisation may help us gain some insight into how the 'hypermodernity' we are now experiencing seemingly reproposes the capitalist model in its 'pure' state. By Americanising itself in the twentieth century the bourgeoisie succeeded in getting to the root of power and of the taste for continuously revolutionising relationships that Marx and Engels in the *Manifesto* attributed to the bourgeoisie in its 'European' phase. The current stage might be defined as that of a 'permanent passive revolution.' And maybe it is on account of this truth, which the short circuit sparked off by 1989 has made more evident, that Gramsci's thought now seems more directly relevant to us.

The 'uses' of Gramsci

The renewal of Gramscian studies has passed through a Vico-like marriage of the *certain* and the *true* and indeed this is brought out in Juan Carlos Portantiero's fine 1981 book *Los Usos de Gramsci*.[8] Its approach, a useful and intelligent one, rather than aiming at any

[8] (Mexico City: Folios Ediciones, 1981).

global interpretation, seems suited to uniting Gramsci's 'certain' and 'true.' Indeed Gramsci did not leave books or theoretical systems, but simply individual analyses and well-defined general categories, thus demonstrating his extraordinary capacity to read, utilise, deconstruct and reconstruct, incorporate and eliminate the thoughts of others. Moreover, Marx himself in *Capital* and the *Theories of Surplus Value* was very cautious and even modest in claiming originality for himself as compared with the classical economists. Thought on the grand scale, like that of Marx, like that of Gramsci, thought that was born and then developed in an entirely new and cross-disciplinary domain of science, and could therefore not be easily fitted into traditional disciplinary categories, represents both a long and a complex route through the most complete expressions of already-codified knowledge and the creative 'use' of such knowledge.

Just because the work of Gramsci, like that of Marx, "was never systematically expounded by its author-thinker,"[9] a patient and far-reaching systematic historical research that has in its sights "the process of intellectual development of the thinker," the "rhythm of thought," and thus the unity of genesis and structure in their becoming, of diachrony and synchrony, appears absolutely indispensable. In the absence of a well-defined and fully-expounded system and, as Edward Said has remarked, in the presence instead of a style that is always "exploratory, provisional, experimental and neither doctrinaire nor given over to formulae," only the meticulousness of a disinterested but by no means dispassionate philology can stand up against arbitrary and not always well-founded interpretations. Unfortunately, as we know, this has happened quite often to both Marx and to Gramsci, but all in all this too is a proof of their vitality.

In the history of its intellectual fortunes, the work of Gramsci – the expression of an intellect in "continual creation and perpetual movement," in constant tension between "theoretical and practical activity"–[10] has demonstrated a singular and almost structural

[9] Gramsci, Notebook 4 §1. There is a slightly different wording in the revised version of this paragraph, Notebook 16 §2; see *SPN*, 382.

[10] Gramsci, Notebook 4 §1; see the revised form, Notebook 16 §2, in *SPN*, 383.

aptitude to being used. The case of the use made of it by Togliatti is only the most integral (i.e. organic) and macroscopic example, the most original – as well as hegemonic – one in all its *chiaroscuro*.[11] That took place in the era of the grand ideological narratives. The *true* appeared more important than the *certain*.

Today, in a period that seems to have lost the Hegelian 'courage of the truth,' the value of the *certain* appears in the foreground not as an end in itself, but as an unavoidable premise to be able one day to re-establish Vico's equilibrium.

A critical or 'national' edition of the whole of Gramsci is thus now on the agenda. We already have a critical edition of the Notebooks, admirable both for having restored the materiality of the text and for its impeccable editorial appendices. It now needs revision, not at all because its basic structure needs modifying (except for inevitable textual emendations and corrections that have come to light) but in order to make it more usable for a systematic labour of 'excavation,' both as regards the internal, spatial and temporal, articulation of the texts, and as regards the extreme density and intertwined nature of the nexuses and cross-references, beginning with the lexical ones.

There is another aspect to consider: that of a 'democratic philology.' Experience teaches that the 'certain' of a critical edition like that of the Notebooks must inevitably remain the possession, albeit a highly treasured one, of a small number of people, even though with a more intelligent and politically committed cultural policy on the part of the publishers that small number could have been and still could be increased by many more. Gramsci's work is however aimed at 'the many,' beginning with students still at school. With this in view we have to order things chronologically, thematically and critically as regards the choice, translation and editorial montage of the texts. The quite extraordinary expansion of Gramsci's ideas in the English-speaking countries owes not a little to those wide-awake 'workers' who have been 'tooled up' for all the various phases of this job. The question itself is a complex one: we are dealing with the translation of Gramsci *even* into Italian, in other

[11] G. Liguori, *Gramsci conteso. Storia di un dibattito 1922-1996* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1996).

words with the task of making him understandable to a non-specialist readership.[12]

To understand the meaning of this statement let us take the Notebooks as an example. Only at the formal level are they divided into 'miscellaneous' and 'special' notebooks. In actual fact they consist of 'notes' and 'jottings,' flowing along in a long stream, in their sole, first or second formulations, which correspond to 'main arguments' and which bear partial titles through the use of particular or recurrent names of 'headings,' the most important of which is 'past and present.' Gramsci had neither the time nor the material conditions to leave us an 'authentic' version of his treatment or even a 'systematically expounded' one.[13] A 'democratic philology' has the task of carrying out a selection *cum* editorial montage of the 'notes' (more than of the 'jottings') in the absolute respect of their language and almost always of their unity, attempting to articulate and present them as integrally as possible, while simultaneously taking into account the most important parameters that distinguish them. These parameters are the 'main arguments' and the 'subject groupings,' the 'rhythm of development,' the notion of work in progress, along the mountain ridge that defines a difficult balance between 'fragment' and 'system.'

The goal of this work is not a Gramsci who belongs 'to everyone,' an expression that we have already recalled, but that errs in being basically both exaggerated and too ambiguous. Rather, it is a Gramsci who can be put to critical use by a wide public, a Gramsci who can be used for the goal of that "intellectual progress of the masses and not only of small intellectual groups" for which he toiled and suffered.[14]

[12] See Antonio Gramsci, *Filosofia e politica. Antologia dei 'Quaderni del Carcere'* a cura di F. Consiglio and F. Frosini (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1997). The editors indicate in the 'wide ranging and dense research' of Gramsci's Notebooks 'three possible directions, which however often intertwine and overlap.' The third of these is the subject of the anthology, whereas the other possible ones concern, respectively, a 'historico-political problematic' beginning with the crisis that set in 'after the world war' and a 'detailed analysis of Italian intellectuals,' which also touches upon the various areas of the deployment of their functions, from language in the school, through literature to journalism.

[13] Notebook 4 §1, and *SPN*, 382-6.

[14] Notebook 11 §12, *SPN*, 333.

Cultural Studies. Stuart Hall

Togliatti's Gramsci, that unique combination of Croce and Lenin, was in its time the banner of a movement, of the penetration of ideas, of a conquest: it was the standard held aloft in a war of position, and highly effective it was. There is no doubt that Togliatti's aims were less advanced and more in the nature of a compromise than Gramsci's programme for the defeat of fascism on the basis of a 'popular-based Constituent Assembly.' He was, after all, operating at the time of Yalta. It was however a strategy that involved the active participation of the broad popular masses. Its structural limitation, from a Gramscian standpoint, was represented by its 'politicism,', in other words the subjugation of the elements of 'spontaneity' and 'autonomy' of the 'subaltern social groups' without which 'conscious discipline'[15] cannot produce what Gramsci called a 'living philology.'[16]

It was in the Britain of Margaret Thatcher, if I am not mistaken, that the most important paradigm shift so far in the *uses* made of Gramsci at the international level took place. His thought was purged of Leninism, understood as the theory and practice of revolution, and used as a methodological *passe-partout* for analysing the then recent great defeat of the labour movement. This defeat came about on the terrain of mature capitalism when, breaking what Hall refers to as the British post-war 'historic compromise' between Labour and the Conservatives, with a view to reaggregating the dominant social bloc by an aggressive relaunch of 'individual freedom' against the 'welfare state,' the 'new right' went on the attack in a wide-ranging hegemonic

[15] See Gramsci's fundamental §48 of the third notebook ('Past and Present. Spontaneity and conscious leadership') found in *SPN*, 196-200. Here Gramsci affirms the continuity between his *Ordine Nuovo* experience and the successive development of those ideas, thus including his work within the party and the writings in the Notebooks.

[16] Cf. Notebook 11 §25, *SPN*, 429: "Knowledge and a judgment of the importance of [popular] feeling on the part of the leaders ... is acquired by the collective organism through 'active and conscious co-participation', through 'com-passionality', through the experience of immediate details, through a system which one could call 'living philology'." In this way a close link is formed between the great mass, the party and the leading group: and the whole complex, thus articulated, can move together as a "collective-man'."

struggle that paradoxically was able to claim for itself the strategies and watchwords of 'popular' tradition.[17]

Between 1978 and 1990 Stuart Hall, back in 1960 the first editor of the *New Left Review* and then for many years the leading light first at Birmingham then at Milton Keynes of the Cultural Studies movement, was the author of a number of writings on Thatcherism as the expression of the new hegemony in Britain.[18] In the 1988 essay "Thatcher among the Theorists," after first giving a masterly account of the Thatcherite shift in the economy, culture and politics of post-war British history, Hall subjected to examination the categories and methods of analysis of a number of philosophers (Althusser, Foucault, Gramsci), all of whom in one way or another draw inspiration from Marxism, in order to test their validity in explaining the phenomenon under consideration. Hall's position was in favour of Gramsci for not having compressed 'civil society' into the 'state,' as Althusser does, and for having instead 'articulated' the nexus between 'power' and 'hegemony' in a way that escaped Foucault.

The theoretical debate that here, as on numerous other occasions, Hall was launching deserves great attention starting with the very conception of 'culture' and 'cultural studies.' It is worthwhile drawing attention to something also noted by Edward Said, namely the potentialities of a comparison between Gramsci and Foucault, with the former coming out better. The most original and important fact is however the absolutely 'Gramscian' way in which Hall links up to Gramsci in a three-fold sense. Like these other thinkers Hall is looking not immediately for a theory of society but for a concrete analytical method, and it is as such that he enters into dialogue with

[17] See the evidence adduced by Donald Sassoon in Giorgio Baratta and Gianni Amelio's film-essay *Gramsci l'ho visto così*, directed by Gianni Amelio, Raitre, 1988.

[18] In 1983 Hall together with Martin Jacques, then the editor of *Marxism Today*, published the book *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983) and in 1988 he was the author of *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988). 1989 saw the publication of "'Authoritarian Populism' in Thaycherism" in a miscellany on the topic edited by Bob Jessop and others, while the previous year, in a collection of essays dedicated to *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988), Hall published "The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism among the Theorists."

his intellectual interlocutors. (Such too was Gramsci's approach to Machiavelli, Croce, Pareto, Maurras, De Man etc.) Both Hall and Gramsci reason in structurally 'collective' terms, as leaders of either a real cultural movement (*L'Ordine Nuovo*, Cultural Studies) or a hypothetical one, such as 'the review', or in any case the organisational undertaking towards which Gramsci was evidently looking in the first-draft stage of the Notebooks, even if only in a 'metaphorical' sense. Lastly Hall, like Gramsci, with a 'pessimism of the intelligence' but an analogous and exuberant 'optimism of the will' is reflecting in and on a situation in which the 'left tendency' has suffered a total and overwhelming defeat. And it is for this reason, as moreover happened in Gramsci's case too, albeit for different reasons, that any revolutionary perspective seems to be either in suspended animation or to have been internalised.

Making use of a consideration that calls to mind Sartre's 'other movement' ('from the individual to the structure' rather than the Marxian 'from the structure to the individual')[19] Hall emphasises that Gramsci's thought in its "profoundly fragmentary nature" often appears decidedly "conjunctural" and "almost *too* concrete: too historically specific, too delimited in its references, too 'descriptively' analytic, too time and context-bound"; and as regards being "able to make more general use of them [his illuminating ideas and formulations], they have to be delicately dis-interred from their concrete and specific historical embeddedness and transplanted to new soil with considerable care and patience."[20] In this way, however, by criticising the objections of 'theoretical insufficiency' made on Gramsci by Althusser and Poulantzas and, rather by claiming that Gramsci is fully and 'maturely' Marxist in his method and analyses (and here he makes explicit reference to *Capital*) Hall praises Gramsci and clarifies his 'own particular' way of posing the question of his 'legacy' and, through him, that of

[19] See Jean-Paul Sartre, "Questions de méthode" in *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

[20] Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity" (1986) now in D. Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall. Critical Dialogues on Cultural Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 413.

Marx, within the perspective of a 'marxism without guarantees' but rich in its 'articulations.' He went on to write in 1992 that "while Gramsci belonged and belongs to the problematic of marxism, his importance for this moment of British cultural studies is precisely the degree to which he has radically *displaced* some of the inheritances of marxism".[21]

Central to Hall's interpretation and use of Gramsci is "the enormously productive metaphor of hegemony."[22] In an incisive contribution an important member of the Cultural Studies movement, Lawrence Grossberg, in referring to a 'non-humanist' or 'anti-humanist reading of Gramsci' of Hall's dating back to 1977, outlines the genesis of the concept of hegemony for Hall and Cultural Studies, and shows how its meaning developed for them.[23] The genesis is to be located in the very creation of the Centre for Cultural Studies, of which Hall was co-founder at Birmingham in 1964 and director from 1968 to 1979. According to Hall 'contemporaneity' has its origins in the advent of the 'mass society' which, in Walter Benjamin's words, determines an unlimited and continuous process of 'adaptation of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality' and produces a constant disarticulation and rearticulation of the structures of political and economic power. This implies the "mobilisation of popular support" and a struggle to redefine "the terrain of the 'common sense' and consciousness of the people." With the advent of a mass society the 'people' came to an end as a separate entity that, romantically speaking, was the guardian of a *pure* culture of its own. There no longer existed anything 'popular' that was not tied up with the multifarious ways in which power is structured and thus with the formation of 'hegemony.' Even class conflict, whose centrality is emphasised by Hall, loses its structural 'purity' and is indissolubly intertwined with 'cultural struggles' whose function is that of ensuring control for the dominant *élites* or power bloc over the

[21] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies", now in D. Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds, *Stuart Hall*, 267.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Lawrence Grossberg, "History, Politics and Postmodernism. Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies" (1986), now in D. Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall*, 151 ff.

popular masses and over the various strata of society. In this way there is a justification for the stress that Hall lays on the necessity to arrive, through Gramsci and his methodological-categorial apparatus, at a concept of 'people,' both 'nationally' and 'internationally,' that is appropriate to 'contemporaneity.' It is on this point that we see the richness of his approach to the Thatcherite hegemonic offensive, a political and cultural strategy that aimed at 'neutralising the opposition between the people and the power bloc.'

Stuart Hall has observed that "the concept of hegemony, while not universally used in an explicit sense, was one of the organising ideas of the Centre" at Birmingham.[24] This is an important consideration not only because, as Hall says, "hegemony has its base in the way that the productive life of societies is organised"[25] but also because the theory and practice of the 'organisation of culture' is the concrete terrain of struggle and activity, which is the starting point from which Hall considers it necessary to relaunch, in the modified conditions of today, the Gramscian idea of the 'organic intellectual' in a polycentric situation *à la* Foucault, in polemic with the perspective of the Frankfurt school, limited as it is to 'cultural power.'

Hegemony, people, intellectuals: the interplay of these terms defines the network in which Hall articulates his attempt to appropriate *the* or *a* legacy of Gramsci. Unlike Perry Anderson he does not believe that Gramsci developed a theoretical approach that was limited to an analysis of the advanced societies, and was thus not able to take account of backwardness and unequal development. Quite the contrary. By throwing into relief Gramsci's 'Sardinian' intellectual roots, Hall sees him as a forerunner for the analysis of national and regional specificities, of differences in the cultural, social and territorial levels that, in today's era, characterise world development. It is certainly not by chance that Hall's two concrete examples of the applied analysis of Gramsci's thought regard, on the one hand, an advanced society like that of Britain and, on the other, the problems

[24] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems" (1980) now in Stuart Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe and P. Willis, eds., *Culture, Media, Language* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 286.

[25] Hall, "Cultural Studies", 35 ff.

of 'ethnicity' and 'race.' In both cases the hegemonic conflict between 'populism' and 'popular' reality comes over as decisive. Just because no such thing as either people or popular culture in a pure state exists (and on the other hand mass society is the society in which the powers that be require the involvement of everyone) their importance is vital if the left wants to reopen a battle for hegemony. Curiously, on the subject of popular action, Hall formulates an expression that recalls a celebrated Sartrian definition of freedom: "the people have always had to make something out of the things the system was trying to make them into."[26]

'Particular histories take on life only within the framework of world history': Edward Said

It has been said that Marx's *Capital* is *also* a work of geography, just as it is a work of logic, of morals, of history, of anthropology etc.[27] More cautiously a number of other people say that *Capital* forces various disciplines to reconsider their status, both by carrying out a thorough-going internal renewal and by opening itself up to an interactive relationship with external disciplines. Those who are of the opinion that this is an ongoing process maintain that, in the school as in the university, the 'epistemological revolution' introduced by Marx, in tune with few others, has *still* not brought about the necessary change in structure in the way knowledge is exercised. Suffice it to bear in mind that the traditional dichotomies, between humanism and science, between theory and practice or between general culture and special expertise, have not yet been overcome or digested.

It has been claimed, and by now it is a widespread opinion, that Marx's thought is water under the bridge, not only because of the political horizon that informed it but also because of its epistemological reductionism. According to this viewpoint it had and indeed has a debatable influence on the various disciplines it has come into contact with, in eliminating the 'differences' between them

[26] Stuart Hall, "The Cultural Gap", *Marxism Today* (January 1984), 19.
[27] See C. Lacorte, *Herodote Italia* (Venezia: Bertani, 1978), 82 ff.

and attempting to bring them back into the straitjacket of a presumed 'totality' or poisoning them with an overdose of economics.

Without doubt Marx reasoned in a totally different era from our own and the question of 'reductionism' is on target as regards one of the historically determined 'vices' of his socio-historical research. Suffice it to consider the role played by British economic structure and culture in the architecture of *Das Kapital*. Britain is there presented as a 'model': every citizen of a country that is or will be involved in capitalist development is aware that '*tua res agitur*': it is your affairs we are dealing with. The whole poison of inter-imperialist conflicts was not yet perceptible, despite the war between the European nations.

'Mass society' and 'globalisation,' which have been amply characteristic of the past century, have progressively negated the hypothesis of a model of development which reduces specificity to examples of a common identity and which, instead, has given rise to the creation of the reality of a growing unequal interdependence between areas, countries and regions of the world. The world is being decomposed and recomposed under the pressure of multinational economic and social power centres. Everything disintegrates yet still holds together. The 'United Nations' and a 'world order' are only fleeting institutional and ideological expressions of an effective process of unification of humankind, only, the traits of such a unification come over as the perverse caricature of the cosmopolitan and universalistic utopias in which perhaps especially western culture was rich.

There are those who would maintain that, to paraphrase the title of an unfinished essay by Antonio Labriola, Gramsci's work still represents today a robust vessel that allows Marx's thought to be ferried over 'from one century to the next.' There is not just symbolic significance in the fact that it is a Jamaican cultural organiser transplanted into England, Stuart Hall, who, taking Marx and Gramsci as reference points, developed categories for the analysis of the contemporary mass society, the dawn of which coincides with the sunset of the British 'model' of capitalism. Nor is it of merely symbolic significance that it is a Palestinian-American literary critic and political leader, Edward Said, who introduced 'globalness' and 'globalisation' into the analysis of literature and into cultural studies in general.

Said too, just like Hall, has Gramsci as a principal reference point (and Marx, too, in a much less explicit but, to my mind, methodologically essential way). And like Hall, but in general like left political leaders having a strong theoretical bent, Said too has a very particular approach to Gramsci, very different from the purely analytical one that is shown towards Lukács or Althusser, towards Benjamin or Adorno, towards Foucault or Derrida and so on. His attitude to Gramsci shows simultaneously very strong human and political sympathy (as towards an authentic non-authoritarian 'master') and a theoretical admiration characterised by a certain detachment. I would say that this latter is the fruit of an understandable 'philological' cautiousness in the case of an author known to Said, as to Hall, mainly through anthologies and whose study is therefore difficult and limited.

A former member of the Palestine National Authority (and for a long time in open dissent with Arafat), professor of comparative literature at Columbia University, 'amateur' musician, author of works specifically devoted to literature, like *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* and *The World, the Text and the Critic*, of grand social-cultural-historical frescoes like *Orientalism* or *Culture and Imperialism*, of political writings like *The Question of Palestine*, of pamphlets like *Musical Elaborations* and *The Representation of Intellectuals*, and finally of *Out of Place*, Said has succeeded in the very tricky task of gaining a front-rank place in the United States and international academic community, at the same time imbuing *all* his writings with a structural and intransigent political nature. The secret of this achievement is to be found in the absolutely sincere and disinterested *engagement* that he demonstrates as a student *both* of cultural phenomena *and* of political facts. Herein, I think, lies the source of Said's constitutive Gramscianism.

The references to Gramsci in Said's writings are fairly sparse, but he too makes extremely good use of him. In his recent most important work, *Culture and Imperialism*, the reference to Gramsci is however of strategic importance in the global design of his research and as such stimulates a new direction of enquiry into the approach towards Gramsci.

As well as being an 'economic,' 'political,' and 'cultural' category,

for Said *imperialism* is a 'geographical' and 'cultural' category, of decisive importance for understanding how, particularly in the modern and contemporary era, the world has developed and been structured as an ensemble of 'overlapping territories' and 'intertwined histories':

> Western cultural forms can be taken out of the autonomous enclosures in which they have been protected, and placed instead in the dynamic global environment created by imperialism, itself revised as an ongoing contest between north and south, metropolis and periphery, white and native. We may thus consider imperialism as a process occurring as part of the metropolitan culture, which at times acknowledges, at other times obscures the sustained business of the empire itself. The important point - a very Gramscian one - is how the British, French and American cultures maintained hegemony over the peripheries. How within them was consent gained and generally consolidated for the distant rule of native peoples and territories.[28]

The 'very Gramscian central point' of the analysis of the relationship between culture and imperialism is developed by Said through the use of an illuminating presentation of *Some Aspects of the Southern Question*, which in his view represents an 'explicit geographical model' for political and cultural analysis, at the same time as being a positive conception of 'intellectual labour' as the agent 'connecting apparently autonomous and disparate regions of human history.' In Gramsci's description, according to Said, while Croce prefers to look towards Plato and Europe, rather than at his 'ruined Southern environment,' the Northerner Gobetti emphasises how the 'Southern question' is of direct relevance to the North of Italy, in so far as this latter *depends* on the South, on exploiting it, just as Israel *depends* on Palestine.[29] Said speaks explicitly of a 'Gobetti factor' as an example and index of the necessity of

[28] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 51 (first published New York: Knopf, 1993).

[29] See Edward W. Said, "Gramsci e l'unità di filosofia, politica, economia," in G. Baratta and A. Catone, a cura di, *Tempi Moderni. Gramsci e la critica dell'americanismo* (Milano: Edizioni Diffusioni '84, 1989), 353 ff.

introducing 'organic ruptures,' as Gramsci calls them, into the relationship between intellectuals as individuals and as a 'mass,' and the subordinate social groups. Said shows how Gramsci's unfinished essay on the South "constitutes the climax of the journalistic activity he had carried on up to then, and on the other hand is a prelude to the *Prison Notebooks*, in which he, differently from his great contemporary Lukács, focuses on the territorial, spatial and geographical bases of social life."[30]

With his acute comparative insight, Said proposes re-examining 'the archive of culture' by beginning to "re-read this not in a unilateral fashion but in *counterpoint*, with the simultaneous perception of both the metropolitan history that is being narrated and those other histories against (and with) which the dominant discourse interacts."[31] This 'counterpoint' metaphor, which Said analyses and uses with refined musical expertise, is a frequently recurring theme in his writings, almost a methodological *leitmotif*. It may explain in broad terms his preference for Gramsci as against the Hegelian Lukács, interpreter as the latter is of the 'development' and 'temporality' of social phenomena, and for whose analyses the other metaphor of the 'sonata form' might be more appropriate. The 'counterpoint' underlines the overlapping nature of spatial and temporal coordinates, of the horizontal and vertical development of human life, as well as the study of that life.

On a par with Hall, Said continues to go back to the centrality and hermeneutic significance of the Gramscian category of hegemony. From the time of the publication of Franco Lo Piparo's book on Gramsci a debate has been going on between those who emphasise the linguistic components and those who favour the political (and thus also Leninist) components in the formation of the concept of hegemony in Gramsci's thought. Recently Gianguido Piazza has made a significant contribution to this research by illustrating both the geographic and territorial 'metaphors' and problematics and the more broadly naturalistic and biological ones in Gramsci's world.[32] I would

[30] Said, "Gramsci", 49.

[31] Ibid.

[32] See F. Lo Piparo, *Lingua intellettuali egemonia in Gramsci* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1979), and G. Piazza, "Metafore biologiche ed evoluzionistiche nel pensiero di Gramsci",

maintain that Said's intuitions represent an extremely precious reference point for a detailed analysis of the nexuses in Gramsci's conception of hegemony, between culture and politics, between geography and history, between the study of language and the analysis of social factors.

Gramsci too, like Said, was a 'comparative scholar': "Historical grammar cannot but be 'comparative': an expression that, analysed thoroughly, indicates the deep-seated awareness that the linguistic fact, like any other historical fact, cannot have strictly defined national boundaries, but that history is always 'world history' and that particular histories exist only within the framework of world history".[33] I do not know if Said was aware of this text, which is in the last notebook, significantly entitled *Notes for an Introduction to the Study of Grammar*. It may here be cited as a premise to the following 'five points' in which, summarising an interview with Joseph A. Buttigieg, in the *Indice dei libri del mese*, Said's debt to Gramsci is traced:

> Gramsci had "a well-developed spatial sense" and indeed "all his analytical categories are fundamentally territorial"; his mode of working was always "exploratory, provisional, experimental and neither doctrinaire nor formalist", always reserving "a space for scepticism, for a certain measure of irony and self-consciousness"; Gramsci "never divorces himself from life, ... from the historical experiences of classes and individuals, ... from the culture of even the most disadvantaged of human beings"; he read and referred to "more or less everything that he managed to lay hands on. Nothing in this world was alien to him."[34]

in *Antonio Gramsci e il 'progresso intellettuale di massa'* (Milano: Unicopli, 1995), 133-40. Differently from Lo Piparo, Piazza brings out the basic 'evolutionistic' component in the linguistics of Matteo Bartoli, the established source of Gramsci's ideas on the subject. In emphasising Gramsci's aversion to the positivistic conception of evolutionism, he draws attention to the presence of a different evolutionistic component in Gramsci's thought which, as well as Bartoli, leads him back to Bergson. Despite its brevity, Piazza's essay is illuminating in launching a wide-ranging debate on the connections between historicism and naturalism, between temporal and spatial aspects in the Notebooks.

[33] Notebook 29 §2; see also *Selected Cultural Writings*, ed. by D. Forgacs and G. Nowell Smith, trans. by W.Q. Boelhower (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), 181.

[34] Edward W. Said, "Un'opera mondana," in *L'Indice dei libri del mese* 2 (1993).

Gramsci as a philosopher: Etienne Balibar

An apparently simplistic, schematic and rather sibylline comment of Said's reads as follows:

> I maintain that Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which has political, intellectual, economic and cultural implications is not, in the last analysis, the same thing as Foucault's idea of discourse and the supremacy of discourse, since the concept of hegemony, as I seem to understand it in Gramsci, always implies the need to conquer hegemony; in other words it implies that the subaltern classes should wrest hegemony from the dominant class. If one finds oneself on the other side, if that is one is on the side of the oppressed, one must recognise that it is the duty of the emerging classes, organised by the intellectuals, to attempt to take back hegemony. In my book on Orientalism therefore the idea that the East has to win back its own history is the central aspect of hegemony. Hegemony is not a natural fact of life or one that can be taken for granted, but a historical product, around which there is a constant battle.[35]

What does the 'need to conquer hegemony' mean? And what is meant by hegemony not being a terrain of 'discourse' but of 'battle'?

We are here dealing with a decisive question for the understanding of Gramsci's thought. Just as it is not possible to detach Marx's concept of 'value' from that of 'exploitation' and *thus* from the theory and practice of the 'class struggle,' or Freud's concept of the 'unconscious' from that of the 'interpretation of dreams' and *thus* from 'psychoanalytic activity,' in the same way Gramsci's theoretical concept of 'hegemony' refers us back to an eminently practical dimension through the mediation of a practical-theoretical moment. This latter may be singled out in the *articulation* of the 'economy-civil society-state' nexus, which opens up the vast political and cultural terrain of struggle occupied by the mutual action of 'intellectuals,' 'party,' and 'masses,' a terrain which in its turn implies as its basis the underlying Marxist one defined by the value-exploitation-class struggle nexus.

If the path through these categories, as reconstructed here with all

[35] Edward W. Said, "Gramsci e l'unità di filosofia, politica, economia", 355.

its inevitable approximations, is at all valid, then one can attempt to use it to make a comparison between Gramsci and Balibar. This is indeed then in the nature of a comparison because Balibar has written an outstanding essay on Gramsci,[36] because he makes frequent reference to him, particularly in his most recent writings as "the greatest intellectual leader of the European workers' movement after Lenin,"[37] but above all because he *uses* the Gramscian concept of 'hegemony' in a strategic, albeit still generic, way (i.e. without analysing it). In this latter comment I am referring above all to his recent politico-philosophical reflections on the problems of citizenship, violence, democracy and the frontiers of the current international conjuncture.

A more detailed development of the comparison between Gramsci and Balibar would not be painless, in other words it could not represent a pure interpretative operation, since it would require a *shift*, a *translation* of Gramscian categories into an economic and political, and hence also cultural, situation neither foreseen nor foreseeable by Gramsci and in many ways antithetical to him. It is as if today, in its own way and without any planning by 'associated individuals,' the world were realising a paradoxical form of communism or of unification of humanity along certain lines which are partially rooted in the 'mass society' and in 'Americanism' as described by Gramsci, but which are also determined by totally new factors, both technological-communicative ones (in the economic sphere) and cultural and political ones. It is on these latter that Etienne Balibar has quite markedly concentrated his attention.

One could sum this up by saying that Gramsci traces a picture of a 'hegemonic struggle' in the horizontal perspective of a socialist internationalism characterised by the persistent 'universality,' and thus political centrality, albeit a relative and transitory one, of national states. Balibar, on the other hand, confronts today's world in the rather less enticing perspective (for a left intellectual) of the

[36] Etienne Balibar, "Gramsci, Marx et le rapport social" in André Tosel, ed., *Modernité de Gramsci? Actes du colloque franco-italien de Besançon*, 23-25 November 1989 (Besançon: Annales Littéraires de l'Université de Besançon, 1992).

[37] Etienne Balibar, *La filosofia di Marx*, trad. A. Catone (Roma: manifestolibri, 1994), 57.

hegemony represented by *capitalist internationalism*, in a tendentially *post-national* situation. Hence the importance assumed in his reflections by a problem that is simultaneously complex and tricky, highly contradictory, ambiguous and of an almost Da Vincian-like 'haziness,' i.e. the question of 'frontiers.'

If one may use a play on words, 'hegemony' for Gramsci is a multiple 'front' of a variegated 'frontier'. Between praxis and theory, between politics and culture, between economy, civil society and state, between structure and superstructure, between leaders and led, between the rulers and the ruled, between masses and intellectuals, between the 'heads,' middle-level cadres and the base of the party, between centre and periphery, between world history and particular histories, between the world and nations, between blacks and whites, between women and men, between all these ... there *passes* hegemony. Along all these frontiers, there lurk the many real or possible fronts of struggle, patiently disinterred and delineated by Gramsci in his analyses of historical, geographical or literary, economic, political or military factors etc.

The nodal point of all these frontiers is found in humankind itself. Not at all in the Fichtean sense, which Balibar recalls, of the internalisation of external frontiers (like the one that in Fichte's view defines national consciousness), but in the immanent sense that, if anything, recalls the Spinozan fluidity of joining the self to others, the individual to the masses,[38] reason to the imagination,[39] or, in Marxist terms, reality and ideology.

[38] Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza et la politique* (Paris: PUF, 1985) and "Spinoza, l'anti-Orwell. La crainte des masses," lecture given during the Spinoza colloquium at Urbino in 1985, now in Balibar, *La crainte des masses. Philosophie et politique avant et après Marx* (Paris: Galilée, 1997), 57-99, I would point out here, *en passant*, that the reading and interpretation of Spinoza occupy a fundamental position in Balibar's politico-philosophical reflections.

[39] See D. Bostrenghi, *Forme e virtù della immaginazione in Spinoza* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1996), 170 ff.: "We might perhaps say that Spinozan imagination, considered in its ideologico-political manifestations, takes on the traits of a Gramscian 'spontaneous philosophy of the masses.' At the moment in which this is emancipated from the hegemony exercised over it by the dominant classes, it liberates itself from the passive and acritical nature of the 'folklore of philosophy,' the 'living fossil' of archaic knowledge acquired by hearsay and then precipitated out over time into superstition and ignorance, to then become a spontaneous 'philosophy of non-philosophers,' in which there find an expression the elements of a sound 'common sense,' i.e. 'good sense,' enjoying full dignity

'What is man?' Gramsci asked. The reply to this question, absolutely central in the Notebooks, drove him to formulate one of his most individual theorisations, which took in the nexus between being and becoming, between the self and others, between knowledge and imagination, between matter and mind, between history and nature.[40] We are here dealing with a conception of man that Balibar, in a contemporary anti-individualist and anti-'organicist' or anti-'totalitarian' perspective, calls "transindividual"[41] and whose direct affinity with Gramsci's thought has recently been emphasised by Fabio Frosini.[42] (For purposes of comparison, it may be recalled that Gramsci conceived of man as a "historical bloc"[43] and within the individual saw the unfolding of a 'struggle between conflicting hegemonies,' following on a line going from Spinoza through Marx, which it seems Gramsci assimilated through the filter provided by Alfred Fouillée and Jean-Marie Guyau).

even in its difference from the 'high' forms of knowledge"; see also 171n. I would here refer readers to my "Corpo e immagine: Leonardo, Spinoza, Merleau-Ponty," in G. Baratta, *Leonardo tra noi* (Roma: Gamberetti, 2000).

[40] As one might understand, the answer is extremely complex. A first point of reference is to be found in the fifteen pages of §§ 48-55 of Notebook 10 Part II, for which in English see *SPN*, 347-48 (on 'common sense' and 'good sense'), and 351-54, 357-60 and 363-4; and *Further Selections from the Prison Noteooks* (hereafter *FSPN*), ed. and trans. by D. Boothman (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), 226-9 for Notebook 10 §§ 53 and 55, 569 n.38, and 572-3 n. 21.

[41] Etienne Balibar, *La filosofia di Marx*, 36. In this context, Balibar does not quote Gramsci. In a lecture at Besançon cited there, instead, on this exact point the reference to Gramsci is central: "If [in Gramsci] there is an attempt at a recommencement of Marxism, it is because Gramsci, going beyond a whole cycle of orthodoxy and revisionisms, in effect reopens the question of the transindividual relationship, without however designating it with a theoretical concept, or at least with a unique concept ('praxis' remains on this subject terribly ambiguous: *praxis* is not *practices*)." In a footnote Balibar observes that "only Freudian Marxism with all its excesses (Reich) can be compared to him [Gramsci] on this subject, in the same conjuncture." See Etienne Balibar, "Gramsci, Marx et le rapport sociale," 265 ff.

[42] See F. Frosini, Introduction to Antonio Gramsci, *Filosofia e politica*, xlviii ff. and lv-lvi.

[43] For human kind as a historical bloc, see §48ii of the second part of Notebook 10, in English in *SPN*, 360.

We may observe Balibar in the act of using the concept of 'hegemony,' taking as our examples three passages from *Razza, nazione, classe – Le identità ambigue,* a book dating to 1988:

> In the last analysis the hegemony of the dominant classes is founded on the ability to organise the labour process and, beyond this, in the reproduction in the broad sense of the labour force itself, including here both the physical subsistence of the workers and their "cultural" training.[44]

> I deal with the problem of the constitution of the people (what I call *fictitious ethnicity*) as a problem of internal hegemony, and try to analyse the role that is played in its production by the institutions which give form to the linguistic and racial communities respectively.[45]

> We may then turn to "neoracism". What seems to me to give rise to difficulty is not so much the *fact* of racism … but knowing to what extent the relative novelty of the language used translates a *new* and lasting articulation of social practices and of collective representations, of sophisticated doctrines and of political movements. In a nutshell, expressing this in the language of Gramsci, we wish to know whether in this case too something in the nature of a hegemony takes shape.[46]

I would here limit myself to observing the reference in these passages to processes (as Stuart Hall would say) of the *articulation* of different structures and dimensions, both ideal and material, which are then set in motion and one in relation to another every time that a real question of hegemony or struggle for hegemony takes shape within society.

In Balibar's recent *La crainte des masses. Philosophie et politique avant et après Marx* the question of hegemony touches on territories that are even more central both from the theoretical and from the thematic point of view. Above all there is a remarkable intuition of the

[44] Etienne Balibar in Balibar e I. Wallerstein, *Razza, Nazione, Classe. Le identità ambigue*, trad. O. Vasile (Roma: Edizioni Associate, 1996), 14.

[45] Ibid., 21.

[46] Ibid., 34-35.

deep-rooted reasons for the widespread present lack of currency of the concept of hegemony among the Western 'left.' This may be seen, for example, in the anti-Hegelian line of thought that from Foucault passes through the anarchist anti-fascism of Deleuze and Guattari. By upholding a 'micropolitics of desire' these two criticise "the organisation of the mass movements that aim at controlling the state and therefore at penetrating it from the inside, at winning its recognition or at its revolutionary transformation" because this strategy is "closely linked to a hegemonic project, to the constitution of a 'total' if not totalitarian ideology and to the representation of society as divided into antagonistic camps that always run the risk of spilling over into an 'idealisation of hatred.'"[47]

We may immediately draw attention to the importance in Balibar's work of a dialogue with a 'nominalistic' and 'eventualistic' line of thought that, by focusing on the 'body,' refuses 'mediations,' 'dialectic' and 'totality.' Balibar prefers to measure himself up to a 'heretical stance' as represented by Foucault, rather than continuing to 'ruminate on Marx.'[48] The fact remains, however, that Balibar's conception of the "key structures of hegemony" or of the "deep structures of hegemonic 'reason'"[49] has that self-same Hegelian source that Deleuze and Guattari object to. Balibar defends the line of thought that from the Hegelian 'totality' leads to the Gramscian 'hegemony,' in the knowledge of its capacity to stand up to and renew itself in any collision, even an explosive one, with a shattered world like that of today. Along the lines of a discourse that makes use of "the vocabulary of Gramsci," by which "one may speak of *hegemony* within ideology itself,"[50] Balibar goes as far as identifying 'the constitution of historical and social *hegemonies*' with the formation of 'total ideologies' in the declaredly Hegelian sense of 'pluralistic,'

[47] Balibar, *La crainte des masses*, 52.

[48] Ibid., 303.

[49] Ibid., 430 ff. See also 452: "The point which I have wanted to insist on is this: although, by definition there is a *construction*, a 'second nature', or rather because there is this, hegemony always involves a real and proper element of universality, which is precisely the recognition of wo/man as an individual."

[50] Ibid., 366; see also 442 ff.

'dialectical' or 'fictitious' universalities – such as national identity or religion – which create a 'second nature' for the individual leaving for him/her the freedom and space for other particular multiple identifications, which thus however are 'relativised.'[51] One may here emphasise that Balibar is moving cautiously but also decisively along the ridge that separates a political evaluation of the objective, though ideological and therefore 'fictitious,' totality of the structures and 'hegemonic institutions' from the denunciation of their presumed inevitable 'totalitarian' nature.

The contiguity between hegemony and ideology, between the 'mechanism of the constructions of hegemony and the fabrication of consensus' and the 'ideological universalisation of principles,' that is necessary for the maintenance of an 'established order' enables Balibar to take the 'freedom' of putting 'on its feet' a famous theorisation of Marx's regarding Hegel, and thereby maintaining that the 'dominant ideas' are not those of the 'dominant class' but of the 'dominated.'[52] One might here object that Balibar's 'putting Marx on his feet' does not hold for the era described by Marx, in which to an economic polarisation there corresponded an evident cultural and political polarisation of society, but it is instead appropriate for today's mass society, where the question of hegemony and consensus, as furthermore Gramsci was well aware of, takes on a previously unthinkable importance. It is not by chance that on this question Balibar himself takes his guide from Nietzsche when he explains that all democratic politics is the expression of a "slave morals." It is obviously not a case of Balibar's sharing this 'counter-revolutionary' thought of Nietzsche's: instead he shows up the provocatory value that stimulates a positive recognition of the constitutive *ambiguity* of the 'universal principles' of a hegemonic ideology, to which both those who uphold and those who contest the established order appeal.[53] There stems from this analysis the indissoluble intertwining of 'hegemony' and the 'struggle for hegemony' which Said has drawn attention to: "there is indeed no surer way of testing whether a

[51] Ibid., 25-6; see also 442-3.

[52] Ibid., 439.

[53] Balibar, *La crainte des masses*, 362 ff.

hegemonic structure is universal than contesting it by denouncing, with greater or lesser success, the gulf that separates its principles from its real practice, and thus bringing out its self-contradictions."[54]

In this, which can be taken as a conclusion to Balibar's discourse on 'fictitious universals,'[55] we may note the echo of a central idea of Gramsci's when he says:

> The philosophy of praxis … does not aim at the peaceful resolution of existing contradictions in history and society but is rather the very theory of these contradictions. It is not the instrument of government of the dominant groups in order to gain the consent of and exercise hegemony over the subaltern classes; it is the expression of these subaltern classes who want to educate themselves in the art of government and who have an interest in knowing all truths, even the unpleasant ones, and in avoiding the (impossible) deceptions of the upper class and – even more – their own.[56]

In relation to today's world this self-projection forwards of the 'philosophy of praxis' seems mere dreaming. And Gilles Deleuze (certain aspects of whose thought moreover show surprising points of convergence with Gramsci) would see a great deal of 'totalitarianism' in this 'theory of these contradictions.' Valentino Gerratana, on the other hand, has attached full value to this thought, laying bare the insurmountable, though anything but metaphysical, contrast between one type of hegemony which, as Gramsci says, 'tends to hide the antagonism of different interests' and an opposite 'perspective' for which "the vital question is not one of passive and indirect but of active and direct consent, and hence that of the participation of single individuals, even though this gives an impression of disintegration and chaos."[57]

[54] Ibid., 439

[55] Balibar had already established the concept of 'fictitious universality' in *La filosofia di Marx*, 54 ff., where he cites Marx's *German Ideology* on the 'universalisation of particularity' as the 'counterpart of the constitution of the state, the fictitious community whose power of abstraction compensates for the real defect of community in relations between individuals'. The question is of great importance, for example, for the dialectic of 'citizenship'.

[56] Gramsci, Notebook 10, part II, §41xii; see *FSPN*, 395-6.

[57] V. Gerratana, "Le forme dell'egemonia" (1987) in *Gramsci. Problemi di metodo*, 126, quoting Gramsci's Notebook 15 §13 (*FSPN*, 16 in English).

Certainly it is water under the bridge – historically, and therefore something that has actually gone by – that is represented by a certain contrast. The contrast we are referring to is that between one form of hegemony based on deception and manipulation, and a different hegemonic form that involves 'the way of telling the truth' – as a 'pedagogical relationship' intended to progressively lessen the distances between the leaders and the led, between the rulers and the ruled – and to this contrast there corresponds the opposition between "the normal form of political consensus in bourgeois-democratic or authoritarian regimes" and the "perspective of the hegemony of the proletariat."[58]

The greatness and farsightedness of Gramsci, who on this question had to settle accounts definitively with Mosca and Pareto, lies in his having developed in a structural, and one might almost say 'systemic,' way his ideas on the functioning of the hegemonic, and thus also ideological, mechanism in advanced or 'complex' societies. It is this that explains the enduring relevance of his thought, together with the understandable, even if unjustified, attempts to purge it of its 'proletarian' or 'communist' matrix.

Balibar can help us 'ferry' Gramsci across 'from one century to the next.' The discussion we have here attempted represents only the beginning of a comparison. In the important chapter of his book on 'universals,' of which regarding Gramsci we have brought to the fore the part concerning 'fictitious universals' (which follows that on 'real universals'), the discourse opens up onto 'ideal universals' – the source of 'negative' or 'subversive' struggles – which one could say, by forcing the language of Balibar, lead to the articulation of 'counter-hegemonies' as opposed to pre-constituted 'total ideologies.'

The forcing would however be of no small entity. Indeed Balibar, despite his cogent analysis of the 'ambivalence' of 'hegemonic reason,' and thus of the broad spectrum of contradictions and struggles that characterise it, has too harmonic and objectivising a vision, one that is too 'normal' or productive of the 'normality' (his expressions) of this reason. It is as if he sees too many 'hegemonies' and too few 'struggles for hegemony' or, in another way, as if he

[58] Gerratana, "Le forme dell'egemonia", 124 and 126.

recognises too much 'reason' and too little 'passion' in hegemony. And yet he states very well, in having 'ideal universals' emerge from within his phenomenology, that

> what does not cease from obsessing every hegemony is not the simple fear of conflicts or even of radical social antagonisms, however much these may threaten the power of the dominant classes, and not even on the other hand the existence of 'deviant' individuals or groups, of 'subversive' movements directed against the norms of normality and culture, but *their combination*, which comes to the fore whenever it seems impossible to claim individuality and its right without coming into conflict with the rules of normality and shedding doubt on them.[59]

But this is precisely the terrain of culture of 'hegemonic struggles.' By its nature 'hegemony' always implies, both in the moment of the exercise of power and in an opposition movement, a confluence between *different* social groups and classes, just as it implies the *actualised* 'combination' of different material and ideal, subjective and institutional or organisational, moments. The very category of hegemony could not hold if it originated from a Hegelian 'objective spirit' or from a Marxian 'ideology.' Its origin is Gramscian 'civil society' in its articulation, on the one hand with the economic structure and the state, or political society, and on the other with the dialectic between people (and masses) and intellectuals. Through these transverse and relational natures, 'hegemony' is, as Stuart Hall has demonstrated, a dynamic category in motion, appropriate for conjunctural analyses but with strategic objectives. Otherwise, it risks being confounded with other environments or levels of discourse.

Paraphrasing Foucault one might say that the Notebooks define a sort of 'microphysics of hegemony.' Herein lies the constitutive particularist, fragmentary and philological aspect (philological in the sense of a 'living philology') of Gramsci's method and 'system' of thought. At the base of this there is a 'transindividual' conception, as Balibar says, of wo/man, without which the problematic of hegemony would not even be conceivable. The existence of wo/man, not only in

[59] Balibar, *La crainte des masses*, 441.

the sense of consciousness or ideological dimension, is constantly traversed by the 'struggle of competing hegemonies.'

It is perhaps not improper to speak of 'microphysics' if one thinks of the patient labour of *decomposition* carried out by Gramsci. "It is necessary to reform the concept of man" he says, in opposition to "all hitherto existing philosophies" that on the model of 'Catholicism' "conceive of man as an individual limited to his own individuality." One must instead conceive of wo/man "as a series of active relationships (a process)" and conceive "humanity which is reflected in each individuality" as "composed of various elements: 1) the individual; 2) other men; 3) the natural world."[60]

One must then go along with Balibar, beyond Balibar towards the wholly political, in other words practical-theoretical rather then theoretical-practical, philological (in the sense of 'living philology') and philosophical (in the sense of 'democratic philosophy') 'locus,' in which, in their concrete and particular analyses, both Hall and Said have recognised the operative presence of 'hegemony' and 'hegemonic struggles.'

The Notebooks are shot through with the notion of 'hegemony'. And yet Gramsci never tries to give a broad overall definition of it, like he does for other categories such as for example 'historical bloc,' 'passive revolution,' and 'war of position.' The reason, in my view, lies in an understandable caution. He is aware of the pregnant nature but also of the problematic quality of an essentially *pragmatic* category, one that is a research engine that cannot be contained in its entirety within the dialectical, Hegelian and Marxist, horizon, within which his own thought basically unfolds. By 'pragmatic' I here mean instrumental, practical, an element for use. It is not by chance that, exactly on the subject of the theory of hegemony, Gramsci refers to the 'politician' Lenin rather than to the 'philosopher' Marx.

Hegemony is never a 'given' or an acquisition, but a process, a reality in motion. Its depth may be gauged above all in the phases of transition, at the moments of great change, of rupture (even 'transformistic' ones), of conflict. In a nutshell: hegemony is a

[60] Notebook 10, Part II, §54, see *SPN*, 352.

practice more than a *theory* or a conception of the world ('hegemony' is not 'ideology'). To reconstruct the conditions for a struggle for hegemony *by the left* is the practical orientation that inspires Said, as it does Hall, as it does Balibar, both in their analyses and in their propositions, but it is difficult for it to have one or more political 'loci' of reference – areas, groups, movements – in the mass critique of the dominant ideology, which increasingly threatens to merge itself into the ideology of the dominated and thus efface the very sense of 'hegemony.'

C. Maria Laudando

Jonathan Swift and the Arts of Dislocation

By engaging in the Trade of a Writer I have drawn
upon myself the Displeasure of the Government
(J. Swift, *The Drapier's Letters*)

The labours of the months are now memory,
indigent wordplay, stubborn, isolate
language of inner exile.
(G. Hill, *The Orchards of Syon*)

Jonathan Swift has always occupied an embarrassing position within the canon of English Literature where for long only the 'chosen morsels' of his otherwise outrageous and offensive works have found access and recognition. Celebrated and pitied at the same time as the prototype of the melancholic, frustrated satirist run 'mad' (almost exemplary object of providential vengeance for his merciless creation of lunaticks and madmen), his figure and his writings have undergone a constant process of critical 'disarming' through repeated acts of 'classical' reduction, manipulation, marginalization. As Attilio Brilli has argued, every text by Swift has been condemned – even before any reading – to bear the mark of monstrosity in order to account for the subversive and forbidding aspects of his author.[1] Indeed, his case may be paradigmatic of the ruthless selective force underlying the constitution of any literary archive and the notorious image of the writer dying in the desperate isolation of mental decay can be read as the fee paid for his admittance to the Augustan Olympus. This paper

[1] Introduction to Jonathan Swift, *I viaggi di Gulliver*, trans. and ed. by Attilio Brilli (Milano: Garzanti, 1998), vii.

aims to interrogate the very reasons of such controversial critical heritage, trying to recover the silenced fragments, the neglected aspects of his intellectual enterprise focusing on the very 'modernity' of the cultural issues at stake in Swift's authorial ventures as mythmaker, perilous propagandist and popular – indeed sensational – writer against the dominant, canonical view of Swift as the censorious and conservative Augustan spokesman. In particular, it concentrates on his 'Battle between Ancients and Moderns' in order to address his own problematic dislocation of cultural spaces and temporal/canonic preservation.

One of the most decisive and engaging contributions to the debate is Ann Cline Kelly's study devoted, as the title declares, to *Jonathan Swift and Popular Culture. Myth, Media, and the Man*, where the many and contradictory aspects associated with the name 'Swift' – English haughty literate, Irish freedom fighter, misanthropic satirist, atheist, priest, and so on – are discussed as strategic steps in the construction of his own legend – a construction that undoubtedly Swift himself was eager to create and sustain during his life through his congenial use of print, thus:

> Swift's extraordinary celebrity results from several canny decisions he made about managing his career as an author: to write for the broadest possible audience rather than a discriminating elite, and to create an enigmatic and provocative print identity. These two strategies reinforced one another. Strangely reluctant to write like a pious gentleman as befitted his class and vocation, Swift evoked constant criticism of his character that kept him in the public eye.[2]

Since then, this 'legendary Swift' has, on the one hand, posed a long series of biographical and philological problems to scholars and editors, and, on the other, has also uncontrollably stimulated a continuous proliferation of appendages, notes, and all sorts of fictitious and factitious interpolations.[3] Among the huge collection of

[2] Ann Cline Kelly, *Jonathan Swift and Popular Culture. Myth, Media, and the Man* (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 1.

[3] Kelly illustrates the point thus: "The general public, though, consumes Swiftiana of all sorts without much regard to its historical authenticity. Indeed, extravagant fictions seem to sell better than dry facts. Irvin Ehernpreis, author of the standard biography of Swift, must warn his readers that they will not find their favourite stories: 'Here, neither Swift nor Stella is made a bastard'; Swift does not say, 'My uncle gave me the education of a dog'; Dryden does not say, 'Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet,' The fictions that Ehrenpreis dismisses have a persuasive verisimilitude and, because continuously repeated, an impressive authority. The proliferation and persistence of these narrative testify to Swift's power to fire the imagination" (Ibid., 4).

works inspired by such Swiftiana, a recent text worth mentioning is Bartholomew Gill's mystery novel *The Death of an Ardent Bibliophile* (1995) where the strategically elusive print identity of the Dean of Saint Patrick represents the most puzzling challenge for detective McGarr:

> … Swift seemed to have purposely obscured the details of his life. To this day, it was not certain whether Swift had been celibate throughout his life or a womanizer, a confirmed bachelor or secretly married perhaps to his own half sister and the father of a child by her. All the while simultaneously conducting at least two long-term affairs with other women, one of whom might also have borne his child. In other words, he had been a "master of disinformation." … In Swift as in life, McGarr decided, there were no easy answers.[4]

It is Swift's ability to manipulate his own authorial identity artfully that provides the key of access (even if only to prove almost prohibitive) to the victim's eccentric personality, Brian Herrick, who secretly aspires to be himself the eighteenth-century "master of disinformation." That this double character is the 'ardent bibliophile' of the mystery's title, with reference to his job as Librarian in Dublin, adds an ironical stroke to the cobweb of allusions and references to the 'obscure details' of Swift's own life and temperament, and to his contradictory attitude – of love and hate, attraction and repulsion, respect and derision – towards the library itself, the cultural archive and the literary canon. As such, this is a point that needs stressing here because sofar the satirist's position has been too often unjustly reduced only to a sort of conservative move on the part of the Augustan ambitious writer in that 'Battle between Ancients and

[4] Bartholomew Gill, *The Death of an Ardent Bibliophile* (New York: William Morrow, 1995), 187-8.

Moderns' that marked the beginning of the eighteenth century.[5] Far from being just a question of aesthetic controversy or a complacent intervention in defense of his benefactor, William Temple, the homonymous booklet first published in 1704 as appendix to *A Tale of a Tub* is already a powerful example of that poetics and politics of satiric dislocation that will characterize all Swift's authorial strategies.

To begin with, the farcical account of the dispute is preceded by a paratextual fringe – from "The Bookseller to the Reader" – which, after explaining the topical circumstances that inspired the writing, ironically highlights the indeterminacy of the victory and the literal, material dimension of the parties involved:

> ...At length, there appearing no End to the Quarrel, our Author tells us, that the BOOKS in St. *James's* Library, looking upon themselves as Parties principally concerned, took up the Controversie, and came to a decisive Battel; But, the Manuscript, by the Injury of Fortune, or Weather, being in several Places imperfect, we cannot learn to which side the Victory fell.
> I must warn the Reader, to beware of applying to Persons what is here meant, only of Books in the most literal Sense. So, when *Virgil* is mentioned, we are not to understand the Person of a famous Poet, call'd by that Name, but only certain Sheets of Paper, bound up in Leather, containing in Print, the Works of the said Poet, and so of the rest.[6]

And, if the insistence upon the incomplete manuscript and the very material conditions of authors/books in part also belongs to the tradition of learned wit of Rabelaisian memory, in the transitional age towards modernity that spanned Swift's life – marked as it was by rapid changes in print technology and in the legal regulation of book trade – it assumes a more compelling resonance here demanding a

[5] On the critical remapping of the eighteenth century as a turning point towards modernity exists a vast bibliography. A recent study worth mentioning, in the limited space of this contribution, is Laura Brown, *Fables of Modernity. Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca and London: Cornell U. P., 2001), which intriguingly investigates the experience of modernity related with the collective effects of print culture in that age.

[6] Jonathan Swift, *The Battle of the Books*, in *A tale of a Tub and Other Satires*, ed. by Kathleen Williams (London and Melbourne: Dent, 1987), 139 (hereafter cited as BB).

radical re-definition of the 'literary' space and fame. As elsewhere in the Swiftian macrotext, here too, through the intervention of the bookseller, that is the commercial intermediary of the process, the satirist elicits the paradox that, as Kelly puts it, "in a print-constructed world, texts create authors, not the other way round" and that authors are subject, to an extent up to then unthinkable, to the fluctuant and capricious demands of the market.[7] These preoccupations constitute the very plot of the *Battle* where the spark that sets off the war is the application, by Richard Bentley, Keeper of St. James's Library and member of the Royal Society, of more democratic principles such as the admission to the archive also of topical pamphlets as cultural testimony of an age. This 'modern' implementation immediately calls for trouble: the new species of writings, because of their very 'controversial' nature, foment all the other Moderns to dislodge the Ancients from the top of hierarchy. Even if the narrator's allegiances lean to the latter, the victory, as already anticipated in the prefatory material, remains in doubt and, in my opinion, is perhaps not even important to assess. What matters more is the author's constant, almost obsessive, attention to questions of location and dislocation of material and imaginary spaces as acts of empowerment and disempowerment – an obsession that indeed represents Swift's most problematic response to modernity, even before his dramatic experience of exile in Ireland, and that, not surprizingly, has found in Edward Said one of the most sensitive and alert readers, given the latter's militant engagement with all sorts of issues related to the geo-politics of archiving. Already in his first critical labour of *Beginnings* (1975), this scholar offers deep insights into Swift's awareness of the spatial, material problems involved in his acts of 'writing against writing':

[7] Kelly, *Jonathan Swift and Popular Culture*, 21. I have dealt with related issues in "The *Double* Nature of Art in Eighteenth-Century England" in Michele Stanco and John Roe, eds., *Inspiration and Technique. Theories on Beauty and Art from Antiquity to the Present* (forthcoming by Peter Lang). For a thorough recognition of the transformations that affected the literary market see, among many others, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1979).

> Just as the modern writers in the *Battle of the Books* precipitate a quarrel with the Ancients because the latter block their view, so too does the hungry Grub Street scribe wish to write in order to prevent other writing from first occupying the space he hopes to find for his own. Every bit of writing is imagined as mass which occupies scarce space. It is the duty of writing, therefore, to admit no other writing, to keep all other writing out.[8]

Not only is such anxiety concerning the mass and space of the coeval cultural scene a dominant note of Swiftian satiric imagery – always threatening, as it were, its precarious balancing between excess and penury, excrescences and *lacunae*, expansions and reductions – but the very texture of his writings is continuously fractured by the parodic impersonation of other voices and authors, or, to use again Said's appropriate diagnosis, it is "extraordinarily addicted to quotation" and, thence, to its radically disruptive force:

> ...quotation is a constant reminder that writing is a form of displacement. For although quotation can take many forms, in every one the quoted passage symbolizes other writing as encroachment, as a disturbing force moving potentially to take over what is presently being written. As a rhetorical device, quotation can serve to accommodate, to incorporate, to falsify (when wrongly or even rightly paraphrased), to accumulate, to defend, or to conquer – but always, even when in the form of a passing allusion, it is a reminder that other writing serves to displace present writing, to a greater or lesser extent, from its absolute, central, proper place.[9]

In a sense *The Tale* and *The Battle* dramatize, or better textualize – though in the oblique, almost hysterical manner peculiar to their narrators – that relentless tension between individual aspiration and, on the one hand, the prohibitive burden of tradition and, on the other,

[8] Edward Said, *Beginnings. Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1984; 1st ed. Basic Books, 1975), 21.

[9] Ibid., 22. I discuss this quotation, from a different perspective focused on Said's contribution to the beginnings of the novel as a genre, in the essay "Al crocevia di fertili negoziazioni" in Daniela de Filippis and C. Maria Laudando, a cura di, *Le origini e le forme del romanzo inglese. Teorie a confronto* (Napoli: Università degli Studi di Napoli 'L'Orientale', 2005), 237.

the new competitive challenges posed by the literary market, so acutely felt by the young Swift in his own 'beginnings' as writer. Hence that oscillation, often abrupt and abrasive, between melancholic austerity and flaunting contempt towards the spaces of cultural debate and power, as an attitude provocatively suggested by this metaphor of libraries as burial grounds:

> In these Books, is wonderfully instilled and preserved, the Spirit of each Warrier, while he is alive; and after his Death, his Soul transmigrates there, to inform them. This, at least, is the more common Opinion; But, I believe, it is with Libraries, as with other Cœmeteries, where some Philosophers affirm, that a certain Spirit, which they call *Brutum hominis*, hovers over the Monument, till the Body is corrupted, and turns to *Dust*, or to *Worms*, but then vanishes or dissolves: So, we may say, a restless Spirit haunts over every *Book*, till *Dust* or *Worms* have seized upon it; which to some, may happen in a few Days, but to others, later (BB, 144).[10]

Here, in the dusty and gloomy atmosphere of St. James's Palace (the perfect setting for the quarrel as the prime location of aristocratic privileges that the modern vindications of access call into question), the Swiftian 'Historian' of this 'impartial Account' seems to recognize in the ambiguous, protean figure of Aesop a felicitous example of authorial investment. Even if equivocally or perhaps only at the cost of equivocation, the figure seems capable to cope with the challenging demands of the new print culture and, as such, to mediate between the two parties. This helps to explain why he is the first 'book' allowed to speak at the climax of the story:

[10] A more explicit echo to the library's deadly effect of levelling all books to the same double status of monuments/perishable commodities recurs in a letter dated 5 April 1729, thus: "I hate a crowd where I have not an easy place to see and be seen. A great Library always maketh me melancholy, where the best Author is as much squeezed, and as obscure, as a Porter at a Coronation." Harold Williams, ed., *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963-65), vol. III, 330. For a comment on this quotation, cf. Daniel Eilon, *Factions's Fictions. Ideological Closure in Swift's Satire* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991), 125.

> It happened upon this Emergency, that *Æsop* broke silence first. He had been of late most barbarously treated by a strange Effect of the *Regent*'s *Humanity*, who had tore off his Title-page, sorely defaced one half of his Leaves, and chained him fast among a Shelf of *Moderns*. Where soon discovering how high the Quarrel was like to proceed, He tried all his Arts, and turned himself to a thousand Forms: At length in the borrowed Shape of an Ass, the Regent mistook Him for a Modern; by which means, he had Time and Opportunity to escape to the Ancients, just when the Spider and the Bee were entring into their Contest (BB, 150).[11]

Then follows Aesop's lengthy discourse which, though openly in defence of the ancients, also proves, analogously to his unsteady position, permeable to the enemies's infiltrations, thus reinforcing the impression that Swift himself is not exempt from the infectious, rampant manners of the moderns. In reality, his efforts at finding, so to speak, a commanding authorial voice were compromised from the very beginning by a characteristic so unmistakably 'modern' as his penchant for controversial, highly topical, sensational matter. And if Kelly's suggestion that this was a well-chosen strategy to stay in the public eye is intriguing and worth consideration, it seems to me that even in the positively ascertained case of such powerful manipulation of print and public opinion, Swift's very modernity still remains problematic exactly because of the occasional,

[11] As Kelly has extensively argued, the preeminence accorded here to the most popular narrator of fables is due to the very contradictions that surrounded his legendary figure, which provided Swift with a model for moulding his own print identity accordingly: "... Aesop straddled the boundaries between the Ancients and the Moderns, for although Aesop had the respect of the literati and the enduring fame that qualified him as an Ancient, Modern writers, intrigued by his life and works, kept his name alive in popular literature by appropriating his character for new purposes and continuing to speculate about him.... Represented as powerful or enslaved, able-bodied or deformed, Greek or African, it was impossible to say with certainty who he was.... Far from being a static character, Aesop continued to assume new identities and to exist in the present. Æsop in Europe, Æsop at Oxford, Æsop in Portugal, Æsop in Scotland, Æsop in Southwork, Æsop in Spain, Æsop the Wanderer, Æsop at Court, Æsop in Paris all appeared between 1700 and 1710. Although Swift did not put them to use in The Battle of the Books, the lessons in mythmaking taught by Aesop's example were not lost upon him" *(Jonathan Swift and Popular Culture,* 24).

parasitical, ephemeral nature of his works. Again Said's insights into the questions raised by this unconventional, uncanonic Swift – Swift the propagandist, the pamphleteer and political agitator – prove indispensable to fully comprehend the satirist's disturbing awareness of the equivocal marginality which accompanies any act of writing in a world of power. It is not surprizing, then, that in the pages which close the Introduction to his collection of essays *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1984), programmatically entitled "Secular Criticism," the scholar openly acknowledges the relevance of Swift as an example of the basic complexity of textual practice and of the relation between power and writing:

> A word is in order about the special role played by Swift in this book. There are two essays on him, both of them stressing the resistances he offers to the modern critical theorist (resistance being a matter of central relevance to my argument in this book). The reasons for this are not only that Swift cannot easily be assimilated to current ideas about "writers," "the text," or "the heroic author," but that his work is at once occasional, powerful, and – from the point of view of systematic textual practice – incoherent. To read Swift seriously is to try to apprehend a series of events in all their messy force, not to admire and then calmly to decode a string of high monuments. In addition, his own social role was that of the critic involved with, but never possessing, power: alert, forceful, undogmatic, ironic, unafraid of orthodoxies and dogmas, respectful of settled uncoercive community, anarchic in his sense of the range of alternatives to the status quo. .... He stands so far outside the world of contemporary critical discourse as to serve as one of its best critics, methodologically unarmed though he may have been. In its energy and unparalleled verbal wit, its restlessness, its agitational and unacademic designs on its political and social context, Swift's writing supplies modern criticism with what it has sorely needed since Arnold covered critical writing with the mantle of cultural authority and reactionary political quietism.[12]

[12] Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (London: Vintage, 1991; 1st ed. Faber & Faber, 1984), 27-8.

The two essays that, accordingly, illustrate Swift's resistance to contemporary critical discourse, devoted respectively to "Swift's Tory Anarchy" and "Swift as Intellectual," help to map the steps of Swift's career as a militant writer extraordinarily "reactive" to the events of his times and who, as a consequence, conceived his own texts as events, interventions in the emergiencies of his age, while always ironically reflecting upon their status as transient objects/commodities literally dispersed on the streets of London or Dublin. Almost all his writings are indeed responses to specific occasions which simultaneously urge the reader's attention to the abuses to which language is exposed and to the local, topical circumstances attending their publication.[13] The key word in Said's secular re-reading of Swift is 'discontinuity,' whose unsettling force is nicely highlighted both in the satirist's position as an outsider and in his works as occasional moves oscillating between writing as event and writing as surrogate - a discontinuity that, obviously enough, the experience of exile in Ireland made all the more exacerbated and irrevocable:

> … If previously Swift had seen his pamphlets as events that existed in a state of homology, or as coevals, with political reality, after 1714 he saw that both he and his writings repeatedly demonstrated the intractable opposition between language and actuality, two versions of inauthenticity cut off from what he called nostalgically "life in the common forms."
> This is why the role of Irish patriot suited him so eminently: it was a role full of the infuriating contradictions between the pen and the polity. Perfect in itself, the written language of Irish protestation exacerbated the discontinuity between the intolerability of what was (Ireland) and the improbability of what could be (English colonialist plans for it).[14]

[13] Said's confutation of the critical reception of Swift's reactionary or moralistic position is itself a masterpiece of devastating irresistible irony, worth quoting at some length: "As for the canonical view of Swift as a Tory satirist, it too diminishes Swift the activist and promotes Swift the producer of teleological images. My impression is that too many claims are made for Swift as a moralist and thinker who peddled one or another final view of human nature, whereas not enough claims are made for Swift as a kind of local activist, a columnist, a pamphleteer, a caricaturist. Even the useful analyses of Swift's satiric methods, his use of personae for example, are sometimes vitiated by this prejudice. It is as if critics assume that Swift really wanted to be a John Locke or a Thomas Hobbes, but somehow couldn't: therefore it becomes a critic's job to help Swift fulfill his ambition, turning him from a kind of marginal, sporty political fighter into a pipesmoking armchair philosopher" (Ibid., 77).

Once in exile, before the intolerable sight of the brutal signs of English colonial abuses written upon the spectral bodies and brutish lives of the Irish subjects, Swift's writing not only maintains, but further sharpens its agitational, reactive method and his so-called Irish treatises come to re-fashion, after years of silence, a print identity more controversial than ever, destined to become, in Kelly's incisive expression, "the embodiment of English nightmares,"[15] by denouncing repeatedly England's rapacious exploitation and by inviting Ireland's citizens to sabotage and boycotting in defiant contrast to his station as an Anglican priest. Paradoxically, though betraying a more anxious concern for his own condition of 'ineffective remnant' isolated from the main stream of history that he had so ambitiously hoped to influence and record, Swift all the same still manages to intervene again into reality – as had already happened

[14] Ibid., 62-3.

[15] Kelly, *Jonathan Swift and Popular Culture*, 58. The scholar illustrates the contradictions endorsed by Swift's print identity in exile thus: "As Dean of St. Patrick's, Swift should have been acting in concert with the English Lord Lieutenant. Instead of supporting English policy, Swift condemned it. Instead of maintaining the peace, he fomented rebellion. Instead of publishing sermons, he published inflammatory pamphlets. 'Dean Swift' was thus an oxymoron, 'Dean' connoting authority and 'Swift' connoting subversion. Swift never stepped away from either identity or tried to resolve them." The section she devotes to Swift's harsh criticism of English policy in Ireland is accordingly entitled "Subversive Authority: The Dean as Agent Provocateur" (56-64). Among the pamphlets of the exile, apart the shocking image of cannibalism which has made *A Modest Proposal* (1729) one of Swift's most fiercely discussed works and the most exemplary of his satiric art, the first treatise to be published, *The Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* (1720), also proved "a bombshell" and would inspire the IRA motto "Burn everything English but their coal" (58 and 178). For a different perspective which concentrates on Swift's mixed response to the problems of physicality that the Irish exile imposed upon himself, see Carol Houlihan Flynn, *The Body in Swift and Defoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1990): "The ubiquitous presence of poor bodies dismays and offends, pushing the viewer back into an awareness of bodily need made personal. Swift doesn't much like the sight, but he offers it obsessively and aggressively, forcing his readers to see what stands in the public way" (164).

in the golden years between 1711 and 1714 in support of the Tory government – even if only to fight now the 'fictions' imposed by colonial authorities, like the scheme of William Wood's half-pence denounced in *The Drapier's Letters*, with the arms of his own alternative, satiric fictions still capable to displace real events. His anonymous pamphlet dramatised a relatively local and apparently marginal issue of economic politics in the thundering terms of a call to arms on all Irish citizens to join in the decisive battle between freedom against oppression, rights against wrongs. And his drumbeat succeeded. As is well known, not only was the government obliged to retire the patent, but nobody dared to denounce Swift in spite of a reward of 300 sterlings for information about the true identity of the Drapier. That the author was fully and ironically aware of the risks implied in this outrageously renovated identity – an identity more than ever exposed now both to the readers' interpretation and to the power's reaction – is textualized within the work itself as a melancholic and belated admission of imprudence:

> I am now resolved to follow (after the usual Proceeding of Mankind, because it is too late) the Advice given me by a certain Dean. He shewed the mistake I was in, of trusting to the general good Will of the people; that I had succeeded hitherto, better than could be expected; but that some unfortunate circumstantial Lapse, would probably bring me within the reach of Power: that my good intentions would be no Security against those who watched every Motion of my pen, in the Bitterness of my Soul.[16]

Though at stake is the author's very vulnerability to all forms of equivocation and violation - from mistakes and misunderstandings to indictment and censorship - the confession is not direct and personal but mediated through the fiction of "the Advice given me by a certain Dean," which - ironically enough - alludes to Swift's public,

[16] Jonathan Swift, *The Drapier's Letters*, in *Prose Works*, ed. by Herbert Davis, 14 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964-68), vol. X, 89. With the same quotation, Said concludes his essay on "Swift as Intellectual" as exemplary of both the author's general alertness and of "the mastered irony of the intellectual's true situation" (*The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 89).

respectable identity as a clergyman, thus making the author's sense of discontinuity between expectations and restrictions all the more palpable and cutting. As usual with his Irish texts, the style impersonates the manner of economic expertise, of someone who annotates gains and losses of his writing with consummate and laconic precision, as if he were reducing to a balance sheet not only the relation between England and Ireland, but also the irreconcilable, unaccountable needs of his authorial identity.

If we return to *The Battle* in the light of Said's reflections, the theme of discontinuity cunningly insinuated in the paratextual fringe from the 'persona' of the Bookseller is further developed in the title itself where the Author claims to offer "A Full and True Account of the Battel Fought last Friday, &c." and, accordingly, the text's very opening mimics the peremptory, assertive tone of someone delivering a universal truth, but only to refute and correct it with the opposite argument:

> Whoever examines with due Circumspection into the * *Annual Records* of *Time*, will find it remarked, that *War is the Child of Pride*, and *Pride the Daughter of Riches*; The former of which Assertion may be soon granted; but one cannot so easily subscribe to the latter: For *Pride* is nearly related to Beggary and *Want*, either by Father or Mother, and sometimes by both; And, to speak naturally, it very seldom happens among Men to fall out, when all have enough: Invasions usually travelling from *North* to *South*, that is from Poverty upon Plenty (BB, 141).

Apart from the controversial matter introduced by the quotation on war, a series of issues is elicited in the very intricate layout of this beginning: the paragraph is preceded by the repetition of the title whose bombastic tone conflates both high and low genres (on the one hand the aspiration of an impartial historian and on the other the ephemeral equivocal discourse of the 'news') and is interrupted on the right side by a marginal note signalled by the asterisk which refers to the *Annual Records of Time*, thus suggesting a crowded, dense spatiality of the page where every word in the most literal, concrete sense has to fight in order to gain its own place. That in this note Swift not only reports the original phrasing and word order of the

quotation altered in the main text ("*Riches produceth pride; Pride is War's Ground*") but also makes clear that the bibliographical source is not some scholarly historical work but just Vincent Wing's almanac, *Ephemeris* – cited in spite of this in the terms of *optima Editio*, a phrase more appropriate for a learned text – rather confirms the ironical interplay devised by Swift between his functions of historical narrator and journalistic reporter, of editor and annotator, his conflation between erudite and popular writing, past and present, ancient and modern, writing against writing and writing as surrogate and endless displacement. Even if they do not reach the abnormal dimensions of the *Tale*,[17] nonetheless also the paratextual features of the *Battle* materialize at the typographical and editorial level the complex entanglement of poetics and politics, of aesthetics and economics, of the textual body and the social body, literally reproducing on the very page the spatial and temporal aggression inherent in any act of writing and all the more so in this specific and topical writing which intervenes in the literary querelle of the moment. At the thematic level, this temporal and spatial aggression is indeed represented as a colonial dispute, as a scramble for the best prospect, thus anticipating, even if only in mock-heroic terms, major concerns of the Swiftian writings of the exile, as this instance may suffice to illustrate here:

> … This Quarrel first began (as I have heard it affirmed by an old Dweller in the Neighbourhood) about a small Spot of Ground, *lying* and *being* upon one of the two Tops of the Hill *Parnassus*; the highest and largest of which, had it seems, been time out of Mind, in quiet Possession of certain Tenants, call'd the *Ancients*; And the other was held by the *Moderns*. But, these disliking their present Station, sent certain Ambassadors to the *Ancients*, complaining of a great Nuisance, how the height of that Part of *Parnassus*, quite spoiled the Prospect of theirs, ….
> … To which, the *Ancients* made Answer: How little they expected such a Message as this, from a Colony, whom they had admitted out of their own Free Grace, to so near a Neighboorhood. That, as to their own Seat, they were *Aborigines* of it, and therefore, to talk with them of a Removal or Surrender, was a Language they did not understand (BB, 142-43).

[17] The most significant examples of the *Battle*'s paratextual strategies are to be found both in its rows of asterisks which mark in several decisive points the *lacunae* of the manuscript and in its puzzling mixture of footnotes and marginal notes dispersed at random in the text which alternate true bibliographical references with witty or satiric commentary in contradiction with the narrator's 'report.' Here I concentrate my analysis on the *Battle*. For a discussion extended to the *Tale*'s paratextual manipulation see my contribution "La testualizzazione della modernità in *A Tale of a Tub* di Jonathan Swift", in E. Siciliani et al., a cura di, *Le trasformazioni del narrare* (Fasano: Schena, 1995), 323-33, and my doctoral thesis *Parody, Paratext, Palimpsest* (Napoli: I. U. O., 1995), chs. 1-2, 27-123, where I discuss the complexity of the Swiftian strategies as 'beginnings' for Sterne's own writings.

This sounds as the 'same old story' of abusive appropriation but in spite of its adamant clarity, is preceded by the narrator's cautious suspension of judgment: "the Issue or Events of this War are not so easie to conjecture at: For, the present Quarrel is so enflamed by the warm heads of either Faction, and the Pretensions *somewhere or other* so exorbitant, as not to admit the least Overtures of Accomodation" (142). It seems to me that this ironical reflection somehow mirrors the resistance of Swift's own 'exorbitant' strategies to any critical accomodation insofar as they continuously shift their perspective angle and mobilize an endless array of satiric dislocations. As *The Battle* suggests, acts and counteracts of aggression and defence, sabotage and banishment, rebellion and exile were deeply embedded both in the material and symbolic process of his print identity. In this respect, the work's obsession with temporal duration and with the scarcity of space left to authorial manoeuvres textualizes on the spatial and temporal axis Swift's preoccupations with the 'modern' politics of archiving, expressing his contradictory and exasperated reaction to a world of irreversible transformations which seemed already destined to cultural amnesia and narcotic commodification.

On the whole, the author's sharp sense of discontinuity between the various stages of his life and between the very locations of his intellectual investment, which affects every level and aspect of his writing (stylistic, thematic, textual, paratextual), ultimately issues in that peculiarly 'Swiftian' timbre and inflection of language which proved so hard for his coeval readers and still proves so hard for the contemporary ones, immediately calling to mind unpleasant ideas of shocking reductions and dissections, and, thus, unremittingly

dismantling those complacent fictions of the so-called age of cultural Enlightenment and progress that too often still linger in our own age. His is a language which, in Said's words, "can scarcely bear the weight of some urgency or other and thereby becomes at once, with equal force, afflicted and afflicting,"[18] always insinuating a pervasive sense of loss, either impending or actual, which concerns the fundamental aspects of human life, such as language, memory, tradition, and community. In more than one sense, Swift's writerly embodiments of losses of every sort, his merciless representations of contested spaces, 'ineffectual remnants' and 'flayed bodies' still haunt our own 'posthumous' condition and 'infected' culture.

[18] Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 74.

ASIAN AMERICAN SUBJECTIVITIES

Rocío G. Davis

Relational Lives: Identity and Authenticity in Asian American Life Writing

Highlighting new perceptions of cultural contexts and generic possibilities, Asian American life writing has become a contested terrain of critical and creative production that stresses the performative potential of the ethnic experience by exploring strategies of self-representation. The current canon of this production includes numerous works that limn diverse formal strategies and thematic concerns: from early texts that sought to introduce Asia to American readers, like Lee Yan Phou's *When I Was a Boy in China* and Etsu Sugimoto's *Daughter of a Samurai*, from the 1920s, to narratives about Chinatown, such as Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and of the Japanese internment by Monica Sone, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, and Yoshiko Uchida, postmodern collagic texts like Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Garrett Hongo's *Volcano: A Memoir of Hawai'i*, to more recent recuperations of historical connections and family histories, like Connie Kang's *Home was the Land of Morning Calm* and Duong Van Mai Elliot's *The Sacred Willow*.[1] Issues regarding self-definition and self-representation, the

[1] Lee Yan Phou, *When I was a Boy in China* (Boston: Lothrop, Lee, & Shepard,Co., 1928); Etsu Sugimoto, *Daughter of a Samurai* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, Co., [1925] 1966); Jade Snow Wong, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, [1945] 1989); Monica Sone, *Nisei Daughter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, [1953] 1991); Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar* (New York: Bantam, [1973] 1995); Yoshiko Uchida, *The Invisible Thread* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991); Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (New York: Vintage Random House, [1975] 1989);

negotiation of cultural and historical authenticity, and complex manners of enacting those concerns intersect with American contexts that offer generic models that require the writers to make thoughtful choices regarding specific manners of formulating their life writing exercises.[2] In this essay, I want to examine some recent life writing texts by Asian American writers that occupy an interesting intersectional position between fiction and non-fiction, and between biography and autobiography in the context of the debates/dialogues on 'authenticity' that exist in criticism.[3] I propose that recent relational approaches to life writing allow us to discern renewed concepts of 'authenticity,' which complicate notions of self-representation and itineraries of self-formation in the text by privileging the intersubjective rather than the merely individual. By attending to how Asian American writers operate textual and subjectival configurations, I analyze alternative designs for thinking through these vexed issues in the context of life writing.

The infamous authenticity debate in Asian American literature, starring Frank Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston, raged long and loud in the 1980s and 90s and continues to nuance many of the ways we deploy Asian American literary criticism today. The publication of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, as well as the rising popularity of Amy Tan and David Henry Hwang, led Chin on a crusade to defend an alleged purity of Chinese American writing that was highly problematic and which only emphasized the complexity of this

Garrett Hongo, *Volcano: A Memoir of Hawai'i* (New York: Vintage Departures, 1995); Connie Kang, *Home was the Land of Morning Calm: The Saga of a Korean-American Family* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1995); Duong Van Mai Elliot, *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[2] I will use the term 'life writing' in this context because I believe it is imperative to emphasize, when we consider these highly dialogic texts, the inclusiveness of the term accommodates the intersection-indeed the juxtaposition-of 'biography' or 'autobiography' and allows us to negotiate more precisely the multilayered processes at hand.

[3] One of the most interesting recent creative negotiations on the question of Asian American authenticity is Han Ong's *Fixer Chao* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2001), where a gay Filipino man poses as a Feng Shui expert and deceives high society New York. Ong simultaneously subverts traditional stereotypes about Asians (particularly Asian men) and illustrates how those stereotypes can be used by Asians to their advantage.

creative endeavor. Chin's manifesto, "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake," sets out most cogently the parameters of his argument.[4] This foreclosed debate hovers on a simplistic binary that Chin sets up: the *real* – posited as works that have their uncontaminated sources in the Asian fairy tale and the Confucian heroic tradition – and the *fake* – works that emerge from Christian heritage and Western philosophy, history, and literature. In general terms, Chin's accusations centered on two issues: first, he charges these writers with inventing Chinese history and misrepresenting what he calls the "form and ethics of the classic heroic tradition";[5] and secondly, he challenges the use of the label 'autobiography' because he claims it is a non-Chinese form. He therefore accuses Kingston, Tan, and Hwang of being "reflexive creatures of the stereotype," who "talk about the agony of the stereotype but, when pressed, have no idea how to describe it."[6]

Kingston's responses to Chin's accusations, in her essays and interviews, but most notably in her novel *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*, have made us rethink not only the issue of authenticity, but the formal and aesthetic projects of Asian American writers in general.[7] Kingston's protagonist, Wittman Ah-Sing, resonates in several contexts: he recalls Walt Whitman as much as Frank Chin

[4] Frank Chin, "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake," in Jeffery Paul Chan et. al., eds., *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature* (New York: Meridian, 1991), 1-92.

[5] Ibid., 4.

[6] Ibid., 9.

[7] Maxine Hong Kingston, *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (New York: Knopf, 1989). It is not my intention here to analyze this novel in depth. For a discussion of *Tripmaster Monkey* that highlights issues of representation in the context of the current debate, see, among others: Patricia P. Chu, *Assimilating Asians: Gendered Strategies of Authorship in Asian America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); King-Kok Cheung, *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Mita Banerjee, "Black Bottoms, Yellow Skin: From Ma Rainey to Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey*," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 45.3 (2000): 405-23; Irma Maini, "Writing the Asian American Artist: Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*," *MELUS* 25.3-4 (Fall-Winter 2000): 243-64; Jennie Wang, "Tripmaster Monkey: Kingston's Postmodern Representation of a New 'China Man'," *MELUS* 20.1 (Spring 1995): 101-14.

himself. Most importantly, through this character, Kingston formulates an aesthetic project that invalidates Chin's objections. Subverting his complaints so creatively is the mark of Kingston's genius. Patricia Chu's thoughtful reading of the nuances of this debate is the most intelligent analysis I have discovered, and I will quote some of her points as a paradigm to set up my arguments, and as the basis of the proposal regarding Asian American forms of authenticity in the context of relational life writing that I will negotiate in this essay.

Chu points out that Kingston's novel disputes Chin's readings of heroic texts on two levels: she challenges his emphasis on the tradition's "hypermasculine, martial ethos," and notes his repugnance to what he deems current Asian American writing's feminization of men. Second, and more importantly for our purposes, Kingston "dramatizes an interactive reading strategy that emphasizes the texts' collaboration with various communities of readers."[8] Because of Kingston's stress on the evolving nature of texts, she has consistently "challenged the authority of both Chinese and American traditions by inscribing Chinese, American, and European narratives into her work, yet transforming and subverting them in ways that have been, or could be, described in terms of feminist revision or postmodern parody."[9] Specifically, "Kingston's view of representation as a collaborative matter, and texts as the product of collusions (and collisions) between authors and readers, is illustrated

[8] Chu, *Assimilating Asians*, 171.

[9] Ibid., 172. In this sense, Chu argues, Kingston "is essentially a writer of postmodern parody, in the terms defined by Linda Hutcheon … ; in freely improvising variations on themes taken from Chinese or other texts, she both celebrates and criticizes her originals. On the whole, she seeks to vest authority in individual readers or communities of readers. While Chinese and other narratives are valuable to her, she sees the texts themselves as open-ended sketches, like the themes and chord progressions in the 'fake book' that a musician uses as a basis for improvised performances, or the story outlines offered by the traditional promptbooks of Chinese storytellers. She herself is an improviser whose work enriches and revitalizes her originals by adapting them to address the needs of her audience. Deliberately inverting the negative charge that Chin attributes to 'faking' Chinese culture, her novel's subtitle (His Fake Book) takes the trope of jazz improvisation as a metaphor for her view of the Chinese heroic tradition (as well as Western cultures) as a rich but open-ended source of inspiration for her Chinese American cultural creation": Ibid., 173. The reference to Linda Hutcheon in Chu's text is to *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), 93-177.

within *Tripmaster Monkey* by her representation of Wittman's own art as a collective rather than individual achievement," highlighting the intertextual process involved in the fashioning of a play and, by extension, that of a novel or a life-writing text.[10] The dialogic – relational – approach to life writing and textual construction becomes axial to Kingston's revised paradigm of authenticity. Moreover, Kingston adopts the postmodern perspective that privileges dialogue with readers, traditional texts, and interpretive communities, portraying literary composition "as a process enriched rather than threatened by dialogue, whether between a text and its predecessors, or between an author and her audience."[11]

Though the question of whether autobiography is a valid form for Asian American writing has ceased to be an issue, we need to continue to examine these concerns in life writing, the enactment of authenticity *par excellence* – this is *my* life, this is my *true* story. We need to interrogate the forms authenticity takes, and how these are determined in Asian American life writing, a genre positioned in palimpsestic contexts of history, immigration, marginalization, and affiliation. We must now ask: what kind of authenticity should we attend to? How is this realized and deployed in particular texts? Issues of formal and aesthetic negotiations in this endeavor are also consequential because of the intrinsic relation between the context and text, and the increasingly creative strategies writers employ in articulating life.[12]

These ideas invite us to consider a renewed concept of authenticity in the context of life writing. Deborah Woo posits a tension between what may be called "historical authenticity" and "experiential authenticity" as pivotal to Kingston's writerly position.[13] Woo explains that,

[10] Chu, *Assimilating Asians*, 173, 175.

[11] Ibid., 181.

[12] Though some of the life writing texts I negotiate have been marketed as fictionalized accounts, I argue that a certain amount of recreation is necessary. In general, life writers' understanding of story is that all people need working myths that can be retailored for the needs of the day, and that revisioning generic forms is part of the process of self-inscription. As such, they often not only tell "what *really* happened," but include "what *might* have happened" and "what *should* have happened."

[13] Deborah Woo, "Maxine Hong Kingston: The Ethnic Writer and the Burden of Dual Authenticity," *Amerasia* 16.1 (1990), 175.

> although Kingston as author dismissed historical research, as narrator and protagonist she gropes for ways to link the past with the present.... Part of her story is to show how ignorance of the past is the basis of personal crisis, having consequences for experiencing the present. Without the security of certain knowledge, Kingston finds this security in language and the ability to create a coherent reality, even if it is a contrived, fictitious one: "Language is important to our sanity. *You have to be able to tell your story, you have to be able to make up stories or you go mad.*"[14]

This tension between historical accuracy and personal experience lies at the basis of the revised concept of authenticity prevalent in Asian American life writing, constitutive of processes of identity.[15] I will use the term 'experiential authenticity' to refer to the strategies that many contemporary Asian American writers manipulate - designs based primarily on a revision of standard generic and ideological criteria for autobiography, which mostly privileges anthropological wholeness and conformity with societal norms.[16] Specifically, I want

[14] Ibid., 187.

[15] Shirley Neuman notes that a much more complex difficulty with the categorization that underlies all these problems is what Trinh Minh-ha calls "planned authenticity." "Every notion in vogue," Trinh Min-ha reminds us, "including the retrieval of 'roots' values, is necessarily exploited and recuperated" and the invention of the need to recover an "authentic" "ethnic" self goes hand-in-hand with the hegemonic culture's role of "saviour" of the "endangered species." "Today," she further explains, "planned authenticity is rife; as a product of hegemony and a remarkable counterpart of universal standardization, it constitutes an efficacious means of silencing the cry of racial oppression. We no longer wish to erase your difference. We demand, on the contrary, that you remember and assert it": quoted in Shirley Neuman, "Autobiography: From Different Poetics to a Poetics of Difference," in Marlene Kadar, ed., *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 220.

[16] Emblematic critics of autobiography have stipulated these formulations as axiomatic of the genre, as Georges Gusdorf explains: "Autobiography requires a man to take a distance with regard to himself in order to reconstitute himself in the focus of his special unity and identity across time": Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," trans. James Olney, in James Olney, ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 35. According to Roy Pascal, this search for a meaningful unity is the essential 'structural law' of autobiography; the genre "imposes a pattern on a life, constructs it out of a coherent story": Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 9. This was particularly true during the pre-modern period in America, dominated by Benjamin Franklin's model of autobiography as a triumph of will over circumstances. As Jerome Buckley argues, "[t]he ideal autobiography retrospectively describes a voyage of self-discovery ... reading at last a sense of perspective and integration": Jerome Buckley, *The Turning Key: Autobiography and the Subjective Impulse since 1800* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 39-40.

[17] Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 43.

[18] Ibid., 99-100.

to evince the heightened relational quality of this writing as axiomatic of experiential authenticity, as deployed by Kingston and successively retaken by later writers in a variety of forms.

The Asian American challenge to the pervasive notion of the individual as the prime subject of autobiography begins with Kingston's text, which illustrates how the first person in autobiography is, as Paul John Eakin argues, "truly plural in its origins and subsequent formation," as it addresses "the extent to which the self is defined by-and lives in terms of-its relations with others."[17] The links Kingston establishes between her evolving selfhood and a community of women prove stronger than any assertions of individuality. As King-kok Cheung notes, "By giving voice to various female ancestors in this work of putative self-representation, she acknowledges the familial and cultural influences on her formation as an intertextual artist."[18] The 'authenticity' Kingston deploys and defends is personal – experiential – rather than historical or cultural. The basis of her itinerary of personal subjectivity and narrative coherence lies in the intersection – even juxtaposition – of her life with those of the women that form her community.

The idea of 'experiential authenticity' acquires renewed relevance as we explore contemporary Asian American life writing projects to understand the complex dialogues articulated in these texts. If we acknowledge, as Betty Bergland argues, "that human beings are positioned in multiple and contradictory discourses," then the effect of that multiplicity shapes the ethnic subject in significant ways (134), requiring us to address its enactment in the text itself. Awareness of multiplicity nuances current autobiographical theory as well. Several

recent critical studies on autobiography have emphasized a new discernment of inscribing the self-in-relation. The relational configuration of autobiography necessarily controls the shape of the text, leading to originative formal and aesthetic choices in this process of self-representation. Eakin, in *How Our Lives Become Stories*, defines the most common form of what he calls the "relational life" as those autobiographies "that feature the decisive impact on the autobiographer of either (1) an entire social environment (a particular kind of family, or a community and its social institutions-schools, churches, and so forth) or (2) key other individuals, usually family members, especially parents."[19] The writing subject therefore views and inscribes his or her story from the prism of intersecting lives. Susanna Egan, defining her eponymous operative term, 'mirror talk,' argues that this process begins

> as the encounter of two lives in which the biographer is also an autobiographer. Very commonly, the (auto)biographer is the child or partner of the biographical subject, a relationship in which (auto)biographical identity is significantly shaped by the processes of exploratory mirroring. ... Such 'reflections' within a text repeat processes common in lived experience, where one person is formed in proximity to another, often but not always by genetic inheritance as well as by proximity in life.[20]

These perspectives require us to revise our perceptions about identity and strategies of self-representation on diverse levels, as well as the possibilities of signifying for the writer of the autobiography, specifically the formal remembering and re-imagining of intersecting lives.[21] In the context of Asian American writing, these theories illuminate vexed questions of identity and authenticity.

[19] Ibid. 69.

[20] Susanna Egan, *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 7.

[21] For more perspectives on the relational component to life writing, see Michael M.J. Fischer, "Autobiographical Voices (1,2,3) and Mosaic Memory: Experimental Sondages in the (Post)Modern World," in Kathleen Ashley, Leigh Gilmore, and Gerald Peters, eds., *Autobiography and Postmodernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 79-129.

Relational life writing challenges the fundamental paradigm of the unified self of traditional autobiography, as well as the concept of monologic representation. Philippe Lejeune, in his classic article on collaborative life writing, notes that "the essential point: a *life* (that is, a written and published story of a life) is always the product of a transaction between different postures."[22] In a sense, this form of autobiographical inscription corresponds to a logical reality, as Michael Jackson explains:

> Life stories emerge in the course of *inter*subjective life, and intersubjectivity is a site of conflicting wills and intentions. Accordingly, the life stories that individuals bring to a relationship are metamorphosed in the course of that relationship. They are thus, in a very real sense, authored not by autonomous subjects but by the dynamics of intersubjectivity.[23]

Indeed, the renewed formal and aesthetic experience of these autobiographical texts stems precisely from the unique tension created by this complex dialogue, the performance of intersubjectivity, evidence of experiential authenticity. One of the constitutive thematic/textual markers of this life writing exercise involves an emphasis on the intersection of biography and autobiography, locating the narrating subject most often in the context of a community of women - family or ethnic group. This relational component, already limned in Kingston's text, continues to mark the development of much subsequent Asian American life writing. This concern necessarily operates on a formal level as well, proposing a renewed aesthetic that subverts the concept of the individuality of the narrator, and revising our perspective on the intersection between experiential authenticity and narrative coherence.[24]

[22] Philippe Lejeune, "The Autobiography of Those Who Do Not Write," in Paul John Eakin, ed., *On Autobiography*, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 197.

[23] Michael Jackson, *Minima Ethnographica: Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 23.

[24] More specifically, Joan Lidoff points out how many women's autobiographies today are often written as biographies, where "the story of the other is foreground: the story of

Contemporary Asian American writers use diverse relational strategies in their texts, and I will tease out possible consequences for discussions on authenticity. Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* emulates Kingston's strategy by positing a relational identity that involves the stories of the women, and some of the men in the narrator's life (I hesitate to call Suleri the 'protagonist' in her text, because she so decenters herself that she is to be found only through the stories of others). *Meatless Days* constructus an authorial subjectivity that is multiple and discontinuous, denoting palimpsestic layers of reference and meaning. Suleri therefore resists the reader's attempt to 'fix' her identity by undermining the basis on which the identity is founded in traditional autobiography: chronology, personal history, and evolving perceptions of self. In *Meatless Days*, written self-consciously in an attempt to understand the peculiarities of Suleri's life and associations in Pakistan, as well as the impulse to leave that she and her siblings gave in to, the author weaves the history of Pakistan with her intimate and often tragic memories of family members, friends, and experiences of living in the West. The nine sections, each centering on a different character, foreground the account of Suleri's own process of self-awareness and need for representation, of the complex interactions that characterize roles and identities in Pakistan. Though none of the stories center on Suleri herself directly and exclusively, the writer as first person narrator uses all the personal pronouns - I, they, everyone, we - to bridge the distance between herself and the subjects of her tales, as well as her cultural materials. By shifting the pronouns, Suleri widens the sphere of possibilities for subjectivity, in which all the experiences are subsumed by the necessarily multiple self, in Chantal Mouffe's words, "the articulation of an ensemble of subject positions, corresponding to the multiplicity of social relations in which it is inscribed" (quoted in Smith, "Memory" 40). This

the self emerges from the interstices and the background. This form of women's autobiography validates a speaking voice by placing it in the service of another; it does not place itself center stage but understands itself in context by trying to re-create the parent as other-to see the mother in her own terms and not just as mother": Joan Lidoff, "Autobiography in a Different Voice: *The Woman Warrior* and the Question of Genre," in Shirley Geok-lin Lim,ed., *Approaches to Teaching Kingston's* The Woman Warrior (New York: Modern Language Association, 1991), 117.

perception allows an examination of a "shared sense of identity with other women, as aspects of identity that exist in tension with a sense of... uniqueness"; Susan Stanford Friedman suggests that this sense of "collective identity" marks a distinctly female sense of self (44, 39).

Mia Carter contends that because Suleri's gaze never rests extensively on herself, the reader must gauge the author's "self-nonrepresentation against the alternately caustic or romantic representations of familiars" (163). Indeed, it appears that the text does not merely tell an autobiographic tale, but re-presents a racial and gendered consciousness as it interrogates other identities and locates them within a complex emergent self. This is where Suleri's mode of experiential authenticity is enacted. Challenging the form's established individualism, the author foregrounds a community of women and men in her life writing exercise. By giving voice to relatives and friends, she acknowledges the familial and cultural influences on her personal and artistic formation. As such, Suleri creates a singular narrative voice with collective formation, by telling her life literally through the stories of others. This technique locates Suleri's discourse clearly within a maternal cultural tradition, offering insights into her own process of narrative maturity. Women are at the center of her narrative – Dadi, Mair Jones, Mustakori, Ifat, and Nuzzi – giving a particular disposition to their personal histories. Importantly, the experience of loss characterizes the different accounts, foreshadowed from the first line of the book: "Leaving Pakistan was, of course, tantamount to giving up the company of women."[25] This introduction suggests that a constitutive impulse of Suleri's life writing project involves her attempt to recover an absent community of women. Her move to the United States initiates a separation from the women in her family, "a connection she consistently seeks to reestablish by privileging the presence of her grandmother, mother, sisters, and friends in a textual celebration of

[25] Sara Suleri, *Meatless Days* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1. Further references will be provided parenthetically in the text. For a more detailed analysis of Sara Suleri's and Garrett Hongo's texts, see my *Transcultural Reinventions: Asian American and Asian Canadian Short Story Cycles* (Toronto: TSAR, 2001).

hegemonic heterogeneity."[26] The text may thus be taken as an individual attempt to rebuild or simply to remember the lost community, as the deaths of the grandmother, mother, and sister make its reestablishment impossible. Though she insists that "memory is not the work of mourning" (171), and that "to mourn, perhaps, is simply to prolong a posture of astonishment" (172), Suleri's account carries the unmistakable elegiac tinge of a valedictory. The centrality of the deaths of three emblematic female characters leads to important interrogations about the epistemology of women within the context of maternal and cultural loss, and the possibility of a narrative strategy of recovery.

In this context, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson posit remembering as a "collective activity."[27] The dialogues enacted in relational text foreground the collective nature of memory, which in turn, becomes a strategy in favor of authenticity. Moreover,

> the collective nature of acts of remembering extends beyond the acknowledgement of social sites of memory, historical documents, and oral traditions. It extends to motives for remembering and the question of those on whose behalf one remembers. Precisely because acts of remembering are implicated in how people understand the past and make claims about their versions of the past, memory is an inescapably intersubjective act, as W.T.J. Mitchell insightfully suggests: "memory is an intersubjective phenomenon, a practice not only of recollection of a past *by* a subject, but of recollection for another subject."[28]

In Asian American texts, where a necessary negotiation with structures of dominance and power guides the representational impulse, the dialogue between two people often becomes a dialogue between two binary positions. Eakin considers the most common form of the relational life is "the self's story viewed through the lens

[26] Sangeeta Ray, "Memory, Identity, Patriarchy: Projecting a Past in the Memoirs of Sara Suleri and Michael Ondaatje," *Modern Fiction Studies* 39. 1 (Winter 1993), 52.

[27] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Narratives* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 19.

[28] Ibid., 21-22.

of its relation with some key other person, sometimes a sibling, friend, or lover; but most often a parent – we might call such an individual the *proximate other* to signify the intimate tie to the relational autobiographer."[29] In some cases, the writer will present the biography of the other as constitutive of his or her own life writing exercise, sometimes to the extent of writing the 'autobiography' of that other. When this happens, it is vital to establish the authority of the experience of the narrator, for rhetorical reasons, based primarily on the existence and validity of the autobiographical pact. We also need to consider the role of the writer in relation to that of the subject. In the relational lives I consider here,

> the story of the self is not ancillary to the story of the other, although its primacy may be partly concealed by the fact that it is constructed through the story told *of* and *by* someone else. Because identity is conceived as relational in these cases, these narratives defy the boundaries we try to establish between genres, for they are autobiographies that offer not only the autobiography of the self but the biography *and* the autobiography of the other.[30]

The voices elicited in these texts are often posited as mirroring, highlighting the intersubjective, and postulating the advantages of double-voicing in the process of experiential authenticity.[31]

Adam Fifield's *A Blessing Over Ashes: The Remarkable Odyssey of My Unlikely Brother* illustrates these points in significant ways.[32]

[29] Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories*, 86.

[30] Ibid., 58.

[31] In certain cases, Asian American writers have reconstructed the life story of proximate others in books marketed as novels. Among these are Milton Murayama's *Five Years on a Rock* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), which tells his mother's story of a young picture bride brought to Hawai'i, and Kien Nguyen's *The Tapestries* (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 2002), presented by the author as the inscription of his grandfather's stories. Because the grandfather was left behind when Nguyen and his family abandoned Vietnam, the story recounted in his autobiography, *The Unwanted* (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 2001), this text enacts a strategy of recovery-and attests to Nguyen's remembrance of his lost family. Frances and Ginger Park also inscribe a fictionalized version of their parents' story in *To Swim Across the World* (New York: Miramax, 2002).

[32] Adam Fifield, *A Blessing Over Ashes: The Remarkable Odyssey of My Unlikely Brother* (New York: HarperPerennial, [2000] 2001).

Though Fifield is clearly not an Asian American writer, his text – the story of his adopted Cambodian brother, Soeuth – may be located within the discussion of Asian American relational lives and issues of experiential authenticity. The narrative opens as the Fifield family – parents, 11-year old Adam and the younger Dave – await the arrival of 14-year old Soeuth, who had already been living with another family. Soeuth's incorporation into this middle-class WASP family alters their lives, and the text is Fifield's attempt to engage his 'unlikely' brother's past and present. After two introductory chapters that describe how the well-meaning family tries to welcome Soeuth, Fifield narrates, in alternating chapters, his boyhood in Vermont and Soeuth's in the killing fields of Cambodia, to explore the nature of childhood, of family, and of brotherhood. Though Fifield chronicles the sections about Soeuth in third person, he clearly appropriates the story, and develops this irreconcilable parallel to the point of their shared lives. The narrative ends when Fifield accompanies Soeuth back to Cambodia to visit the intact family left behind, a journey that highlights their mutual ambivalence towards their experience of adoption and the manner in which historical circumstances modified both their families. Fifield, who is trying to collect Soeuth's story from his parents, makes Soeuth's parents face the reality of what happened to their son when they allowed him to be taken away by the Khmer Rouge, and demonstrate their remorse.

Fifield regards Soeuth's arrival as a disruption of the organized harmony in his family life: the nuclear unit was, in a sense, invaded by a character whose tragic history challenged their comfortable complacency and required them to reexamine their perspectives on Asia and on relationships. By inscribing this doubled life story, Fifield recognizes that the revisitation of his own past – and his own process of identity – must be negotiated through the destabilizing lens of his older brother's history: the juxtaposition therefore signifies on several levels – rhetorical, symbolic, and cultural. By obliging his brother to reconstruct both their histories, Soeuth becomes a protagonist in Adam's life story – the insistent concern with 'brotherhood' in this text highlights the implications of the term in the renewed context of adoption, the recovery of the biological family, and ultimately, decisions about personal location. To Fifield's credit,

he tries to avoid the oversimplification of these issues, as well as American cultural stereotypes about Asians and the situation in Asia. Discursively, this text widens the possibilities of the 'authentic' Asian American canon as well - it can arguably be defined as an ethnic text, if we read its fundamental interactions and consequences of American interventional policies in Asia, and its contextualization of sociopolitical factors of international adoption, and issues of identity, race, ethnicity, and marginalization.

In a similar vein, May-lee Chai and Winberg Chai's father-daughter collaborative life writing exercise struggles to give voice to a lost character whose presence significantly influenced their family. *The Girl from Purple Mountain* opens with family matriarch Ruth Mei-en Tsao Chai's instructions to bury her in "a spot where she would be encircled by strangers, where my father could not be buried beside her."[33] This dictum unsettles the family and inspires her eldest son and biracial granddaughter to revisit her life – an odyssey of civil and foreign wars, revolution, betrayal and tragedy, and immigration. In her introductory note to the text, May-lee explains how, in the process of writing this story, she discovered that the story of her family did not involve "only what actually happened to them in China, but also how these events were later both remembered and repressed in America" (xi). Caught as a child between the tension of remembering and ignoring the past, May-lee collaborates with her father in alternate chapters, to attempt to trace and understand the life of her remarkable grandmother, one of China's first college students.

The tension between forms of knowing is textually represented by the discrete chapters. The Chais' approach is complementary: May-lee provides historical background information that supplements Winberg's childhood memories. This strategy evinces May-lee's own attempts at solving the confusion of her childhood-because her first-hand knowledge of her grandmother was limited by their generational and cultural gap, she resorts to other forms of knowledge, in a sense, to contextualize her grandmother. As she explains, "it was this

[33] May-lee Chai and Winberg Chai, *The Girl from Purple Mountain: Love, Honor, War, and One Family's Journey from China to America* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2001), 1. Subsequent references will be provided parenthetically in the text.

atmosphere of political intrigue, of paranoia, of assassinations and executions, that I needed to understand before I could begin to comprehend my grandparents' life" (189). Indeed, May-lee's chapters are historically and culturally grounded, and based on scholarly insights rather than on the filial perspective Winberg provides. These complementary operations evince a doubled relational strategy and a layered approach to experiential authenticity. Nonetheless, in spite of the discerning juxtaposition of family stories, historical data, and cultural analysis, the axial point of this multilayered construct – the grandmother – remains elusive. What is enacted, nonetheless, is a renewed locating of both son and granddaughter in the larger story of 20th century Chinese history of revolutions and diaspora. As they tell Ruth's story, Winberg and May-lee stress their affiliation to that story, and the larger context of Chinese and American history, claiming a place for themselves in both spaces. But they also enact a liminal space – the gaps between their narratives attest to an irrecoverable loss – of a history, of unquestioning belonging, of family.[34]

When the life writer goes a step further and appropriates not only the *story* but the *voice* of the proximate other, the implications for life writing in the context of experiential authenticity multiply. Garrett Hongo, in *Volcano*, narrates family stories as he hears them, and speaks in the voice of his lost grandfather, in a doubled strategy of recovery. This poetic memoir becomes the record, not only of Hongo's experiences growing up Japanese American in Hawai'i and Los Angeles, but of his necessary recovery of the Hawaiian village of his birth, his lost family, and ethnic history. The unique achievement of his life writing exercise lies in the manner in which the writer blends the external and the internal, through the imaginative recuperation of the place of beginning and in the reconstruction of the dispersed community through the building of the text. Having moved away from Volcano as an infant, and losing contact with the paternal side of the family, Hongo tells the stories as he hears them from his

[34] For an extended discussion of the possibilities of collaborative auto/biographical writing, see my "Performing Dialogic Subjectivities: The Aesthetic Project of Autobiographical Collaboration in *Days and Nights in Calcutta*," in Rocío G. Davis and Sue-Im Lee, eds., *Literary Gestures: The Aesthetic in Asian American Writing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 159-172.

relatives, the accounts modifying his memories, allowing for an opening up to new versions of previously unquestioned facts or events. Hongo uses vivid images from nature to illustrate his process of reconnection with his past: "I was not who I had thought myself to be, the nothing sprung from a nothing without history. I'd been born to an amazingly twisted line, to a dancer and a libertine, equally prodigal, and to a filial but orphaned father, each of us a descendant of shame, inheritors of no tangible patrimony. I had sailed back, but no tie but this ripped and jagged story bound me to this place. Outside, I saw banana leaves bouncing in the wind and rain, tearing themselves into sheets and strips of vivid tropical life."[35]

The central theme of Hongo's memoir is detachment, and the author's growing consciousness of how this quality had characterized the Japanese American community and, by extension, his family, producing in him the vacuum he struggles as an adult to fill. His return to Volcano becomes a corrective strategy, as he understands how alienation had scarred his parents, his grandparents, and himself. His father's "life of serene, self-enclosed detachment" (333), from the events and people of his past, made it difficult for the son to understand what it was the father cared for. Hongo comes to Volcano because "I wanted an encounter, an embrace or a showdown with the past" (83). His realization that even "my face had a meaning" (50), posits his place in that society. Independently of his own achievements in life, in Volcano, he was primarily "the son of Albert and grandson of the man who'd built the general store nearly sixty years before" (50). Meetings with relatives add to his growing sense of belonging to both the land and the family. As he listens to his aunt tell part of the family story, he understands that, more than mere facts, she "was giving me a dimension to things which had been veiled and excised from consciousness and curiosity almost since my own birth. She told me who I was" (52).

But the injunction to tell his real story comes from his grandfather. The memory of Kobota telling him at the age of thirteen the truth about the wartime experiences changes his manner of viewing the old

[35] Hongo, *Volcano*, 69-70. Subsequent references will be provided parenthetically in the text.

man. Kubota, in telling the boy the stories, was "determined that his stories be part of my making....'I give you story now,' he once said. 'And you learn speak good, eh?'" (271). But the completion and retelling of the family stories requires more information than Hongo can actually gather. He then turns to his own imagination to fill in the gaps, his yearning for completion resisting the vacuum of stories untold. Hongo writes biography in "The Hongo Store" where he inscribes his aunt's version of her family's life and in "Kubota," the story of his maternal grandfather. The story "Ghost" tells of his absorption with the figure of the paternal grandfather he had never met, and how, at one point, he finds himself able to write a poem about the man: "I imagined him talking to me from the fogs of thirty-five years, refusing to explain himself, confessing no crimes or shortcomings, giving me nothing except his pride and resolve.... I gave my words over to him... He spoke to me. For a moment, death flickered away" (140-41). In this poem, presented as the next story, "The Unreal Dwelling," Hongo appropriates a voice he had never heard, centering on the old man's need to reclaim his past, and his son: "Before I cross, I know I must bow down, / call to my oldest son, say what I must / to bring him, and all the past, back to me" (146).

Hongo's appropriation of his grandfather's voice to tell a story he himself had never heard becomes a necessary part of his writerly strategy of authenticity, in the context of a family history and a land that he had lost. Helie Lee operates a similar approach in *Still Life with Rice*, where she speaks in her grandmother's voice, to claim a past she had previously refused to acknowledge.[36] Lee's itinerary of experiential authenticity lies in intersubjective identification, which foregrounds the need for mutual recognition by the protagonists of the life writing exercise. As Jessica Benjamin explains, "[t]he idea of mutual recognition...implies that we actually have a need to recognize the other as a separate person who is like us yet distinct."[37] Lee undergoes the emblematic Asian American process of rejecting her mother and grandmother, espousing the typical "I am who I am.

[36] Helie Lee, *Still Life with Rice* (New York: Touchstone, 1996). Subsequent references will be provided parenthetically in the text.

[37] Quoted in Egan, *Mirror Talk*, 8.

I'm not like you" (12) declaration of independence. As she narrates: "Once someone said to me I am my mother's daughter. I never believed it to be true and now I believe it even less. I've always hated being Oriental/Asian. I hide my face and camouflage my eyes, but not my mother or grandmother. They are both the same, so proud and certain of their identity. They annoyingly intimidate me, yet at the same time, their stubborn loyal spirit draws me toward them. The more I attempt to figure out these two women, the more confused I become as to who I am and where I belong" (14). Lee's mother points out: "Your father and me give up everything, our home, our life, to bring you kids to America, not to be American people, but so you can be Korean. Here, there is no Cold War, no hunger, no losses. ... [w]hen others see your Oriental face, I want them to say, 'Ah, she Korean lady, they so proud people'" (13). This is precisely the identification that Lee rejects, until she impulsively leaves the U.S. at the age of 25, to spend two years in Korea and China. Her serendipitous discovery of displaced Korean communities in China becomes an epiphanic moment: seeing those persons makes her want to recover their erased histories. And seeing her face in those *Hangooksahlam* – Korean persons – "I realize for the first time that I am my mother's daughter and my grandmother's granddaughter" (24).

There is a strong metafictional quality to Lee's narrative. She admits at the beginning, that "[l]ooking at myself through the prism of their lives, I've finally come to peace with who I am. The emptiness and chaos I once felt is not filled with the past I rejected and the future I will passionately embrace" (25). Having arrived at this conclusion, she proceeds to narrate her grandmother's story in first person. A short third-person chapter that recounts her grandmother's birth separates the two parts of her text, which then centers wholly on the grandmother's story. This intelligent, independent, resourceful woman recounts the story of survival-of the Japanese occupation of Korea, of exile to China and a victorious return after the war, of the Korean's indomitable pride and courageous fight for democracy, of her husband's infidelities and her unwavering loyalty to him, of the Christian faith that uplifts them, of the loss of her oldest son when the two Koreas were created by violence. Lee enacts a fascinating strategy: using her grandmother's voice, she explains to the implied

reader numerous details of Korean life and customs – the rituals that surround birth, marriage, death, architecture, culinary customs, philosophy, and religion. The authoritative first person insider voice implicates the reader as it attests to its own authenticity. Yet, because Lee admits to writing the text as a strategy for recovering the grandmother she had refused to acknowledge, we realize that the principal implied reader is Lee herself. By performing her grandmother's voice, Lee gives herself the chance to listen to the stories she had previously ignored. Lee's appropriation of her grandmother's voice is complex and nuanced. She does not skim over the less positive episodes of her grandmother's life, like her experiences as an opium smuggler, recounting as well moments of selfishness and cruelty, balanced by the story of her genuine devotion to her family. Indeed, Lee does more than just appropriate her grandmother's voice, she enacts her grandmother's life, to provide herself with the basis of her experiential authenticity as an Asian American, connected to a history and rerooted because of that history.

The moment of mutual recognition is the central point of the text. At the end, the grandmother narrates how her granddaughter, Helie, comes to "ask me questions about our family. I am looking forward to seeing her. She has been gone two years, working in Korea and traveling through China. Just imagining her following my footsteps all over the Orient fills me with pride. Of all my grandchildren, she reminds me the most of myself. She has the same stubborn, spunky streak. There is no place in the world she cannot go" (312). This affirming recognition validates Lee's role as granddaughter, her relational position, and authorizes her to write the text. Though we might read this affirmation as self-serving, we can also read it as necessary. Just as Lee learned how much she needed the connection to her foremothers, she feels compelled to establish the mutuality of that identification. The maternal story of *Still Life with Rice* concludes on this note of mirrored recognition.[38]

[38] But there is another story that Lee uses to extend her grandmother's narrative: the chronicle of her struggle to find the son who disappeared during the war at the age of 14. The life story thus ends with Lee's parents and her successful contact with her uncle, still trapped in North Korea, and with a grown family of his own. The story of the grandmother's only wish, to hold her son again, is deferred-Lee's final words are a celebration of her grandmother's devotion. Paraphrasing St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Lee concludes that the greatest of all things is a mother's love (320). The story of Lee's journey to North Korea to rescue her uncle and other family members is the subject of her next book, *In the Absence of Sun: A Korean American Woman's Promise to Reunite Three Lost Generations of Her Family* (New York: Harmony Books, 2002).

By privileging the relational quality of their lives, and positing processes of identity in the context of intersubjective identification, these Asian American writers enact a paradigm of authenticity that is based not on unalloyed cultural heritage, but on the dynamic constituted by their multilayered cultural contexts. The strategies I have explored in these life writing exercises require us to reexamine our notions of narrative selfhood and the processes by which Asian American writers inscribe their inherently relational processes of subjectivity in the context of experiential authenticity. These writers create singular narrative voices with collective formation; they tell their own stories by telling those of others, often *through* those of others. Though memory is a necessary condition of the autobiographical act, the memories evoked are not all personal, as they appropriate the myths and stories of the women and men who have formed their consciousness. Unlike traditional autobiography, in which the author *of* the text is squarely the protagonist *in* the text, many of these writers are to be found obliquely, *in relation* to the figures, or even to the protagonists, in the texts. This strategy posits identity as inseparable from history, culture, and family, and negotiated precisely in the stories inherited from others and which occasionally need to be transformed to accommodate current demands. What these writers negotiate, ultimately, in their narratives, are models for authentic ethnic and personal identity.

Vincenzo Bavaro

Tongues Untied: Children's Strategies of Classroom Survival in Darrell Lum, R. Zamora Linmark and Monique Truong

Asian American studies and Asian American literatures emerged in a cultural and historical environment – namely, the civil rights movements in the 1960's – when a focus on the importance of racial and class oppression was crucial and seemed mandatory. During the following decades there has been a heated and prolific debate about the complexities and heterogeneity of Asian American identities and of the political coalition itself; this debate has highlighted issues of power and powerlessness, visibility and marginalization inside the community, thus widening the focus also to categories of gender, sexuality, immigration, and nationality.[1] Despite this emphasis on social realities and power imbalances, however, the critics who address marginality have rarely considered age as a category of difference and identity.[2]

In this essay I will consider four short stories written by three Asian American writers. All of them stage the social dynamics within

[1] The Asian American Studies debate has been so wide and lively over the last couple of decades that any list of references, however cursory, would take several pages. A short and effective survey of its main themes and trends, however, is provided in the editors' introduction to a recent collection of essays: Shirley Geok-lin Lim, John Blair Gamber, Stephen Hong Sohn, and Gina Valentino, eds., *Transnational Asian American Literature. Sites and Transits* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 1-26.

[2] To the best of my knowledge, the only book entirely devoted to Asian American children in literature is Alicia Otano, *Speaking the Past: Child Perspective in the Asian American Bildungsroman* (Münster: LIT, 2004).

groups of young children – fifth graders and younger – and between pupils and teachers. The setting of these stories is the classroom, the central arena for the socialization of children and the battlefield on which minority and immigrant subjectivities try to negotiate their own position within a public sphere that marginalizes them in multiple and entwined ways. I suggest that the classroom is a privileged locus for an analysis of what Althusser termed the "social interpellation" process, through which a subject identifies her/himself and becomes identifiable by others as she/he accepts the abstract norms of personhood.[3] These norms are represented as natural and universal by the ideological apparatuses and, in turn, produce subjects who confirm their very naturalness. As Beverly Clark observes in her *Regendering the School Story,* "schooling ... succeeded in hierarchizing students even while homogenizing them, individualizing them by subjecting them to the adult gaze."[4] Even though Clark's analysis of the school story as a genre focuses on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, some of her observations will prove to be very useful in order to better understand the politics going on within these classrooms and within the stories staged by these writers.

My argument, as will be apparent, is rooted in a challenge to the "childhood idyll" theme, that is, to the representation of children either as totally clueless, innocent, and stuck in an imaginary time of heavenly harmony, or as powerless victims in the hands of some unquestionable authority. I do not mean to disavow the children's limited agency; rather, I will insist on the limits of their agency (and indeed of their self-expression) by analyzing how those limits are structured and justified by the cultural discourses on innocence and experience, on simplicity and complexity. Judging from the short stories considered here, we would have to face the fact that childhood, rather than being a "lost Eden," is more frequently "something we

[3] I am of course referring to Althusser's theory of ideology in its classic formulation: Louis Althusser, "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'état," *La Pensée* 151 (1970); English tr., "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)," in Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Mapping Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 100-140.

[4] Beverly Lyon Clark, *Regendering the School Story: Sassy Sissies and Tattling Tomboys* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 11.

would rather forget," as Truong writes in her story,[5] a time when both dynamics of oppression and strategies of resistance can be fiercely enacted and clearly recognized.

The works I will consider here are Darrell Lum's "What School You Went?," R. Zamora Linmark's "Tongue-Tied" and "The Two Filipinos," and Monique Truong's "Kelly," all of them published during the 1990's.[6] To some extent, all of these writers are from the periphery of Asian America rather than from the centers of Asian American cultural production, that is, either the big cities or the West coast. The first two authors are from Hawai'i: even though Hawai'i has a long history of immigration from Asian countries and a population predominantly of Asian-Pacific descent, the daily experiences of these writers and the history of their immigration – not to mention the very language they use in their works – are considerably different from the ones shared by Asian American writers in continental United States. Writers from Hawai'i, moreover, claim their affiliation, as we will see later, primarily in terms of "local community of Hawai'i" rather than in terms of Asian America. The third writer, Truong, instead, comes from and focuses on a rural reality "east of California," in the southern United States: her explicitly autobiographical story is set in Boiling Spring, North Carolina. "East of California" is indeed a geographic area whose peculiar material conditions are often underplayed by the Asian American discourse at large;[7] this creates a noticeable difference with

[5] Monique Thuy-Dung Truong, "Kelly," *Amerasia Journal* 17.2 (1991), reprinted in Shawn Wong, ed., *Asian American Literature: A Brief Introduction and Anthology* (New York: Longman, 1995), 288-293, here 288. All the quotations from the short story are taken from this latest edition; page numbers will henceforth be included parenthetically in the text.

[6] Darrell Lum, "What School You Went?", in Eric Chock and Darrell Lum, eds., *The Best of Honolulu Fiction. Stories from the Honolulu Magazine Fiction Contest* (Honolulu: Bamboo Ridge Press, 1999), 169-176; R. Zamora Linmark, *Rolling the R's* (New York: Kaya, 1995). Page numbers will henceforth be included parenthetically in the text.

[7] I am referring to an essay by Sheng-mei Ma, "The Politics of Teaching Asian American Literature Amidst Middle-Class/ Caucasian Students 'East of California'," in Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, ed., *Teaching Asian America: Diversity and the Problem of Community* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1998). The author stresses the peculiar conditions of teaching and writing about Asian America from a standpoint "East of California."

the two Hawaiian short stories, since the childhood experiences of the last story's protagonist are set in an environment marked by a significant absence of people of Asian descent and a particularly recent immigrant history; it is a place that neither her parents nor herself have ever heard of, "a place," to the eyes of the writer, "that had not changed since the Civil War" (289).

"What School You Went?"

Darrell H.Y. Lum, born in 1950 in Honolulu, is one of the key figures of the "local" literature of Hawai'i; he is editor and founder, with Erick Chock, of the Bamboo Ridge Journal and Press, which from 1979 have been central in promoting the literatures and the arts of Hawai'i. Lum is a local Hawaiian of Chinese descent, he is the author of two collections of short stories, *Sun: Short Stories and Drama* (1980) and *Pass on, No Pass Back!* (1990), and the editor of several collections and anthologies of local literatures. In the Hawaiian context, "local" generally indicates the population of settlers of Asian Pacific ancestry, and it is employed as much to link together different ethnic groups as to separate them both from the Caucasian population (called *haole* in Hawaiian) and from the Native Hawaiians, the inhabitants of the islands before the arrival of the first travelers and merchants from Europe.

Locals share a common history of immigration, dating back to the 1830's, and of labor in the plantations, where a Creole language was first developed, the Hawaiian Creole English, or simply the Hawaiian Pidgin. Pidgin, as other Creole languages, contains elements from many languages, mainly English, but also Hawaiian, Portuguese, Tagalog, Japanese, Chinese, and Spanish; it is, as Rocío Davis writes, "a child of many parents";[8] it is a language of self-determination, and while it identifies the speaker's class, it also, as Stephen Sumida emphasizes, "opposes and transcends colonial standards."[9] It has been

[8] Rocío G. Davis, *Transcultural Reinventions: Asian American and Asian Canadian Short-story Cycles* (Toronto: TSAR, 2001), 31.

[9] Stephen Sumida, "Postcolonialism, Nationalism, and the Emergence of Asian/Pacific Literatures," in King-Kok Cheung, ed., *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 280.

a stigmatized language, banned from public instruction from 1898, when Hawai'i became an annexed territory, to 1986: significantly enough, children and schools were at the centre of this process of language stigmatization, and the educational system, once again, proved to be one of the most powerful sites of normalization, where the subjects who failed to conform to the standards underwent a process of "rectification." The stigma regarding the use of pidgin, as will be seen, is also central to the dynamics staged in the stories.

Local literature is written mostly in Pidgin, and a number of Hawai'i local writers center their works around children characters and on childhood as a favorite "mode of expressing and examining the experience of being local."[10] Darrell Lum, along with Lois-Ann Yamanaka, is arguably one of the masters in the literary use of pidgin, on the one hand engaging in his writings the oral storytelling tradition in Hawai'i – called "talk-story" – and on the other hand creating stories full of allusions to things, places, words and activities known only to a child growing up in the particular times and places where the stories are set. The short story I will consider now is not from any of Lum's major collections, but it was submitted to the "Honolulu Magazine" fiction contest and is now collected in *The Best of Honolulu Fiction.*

"What School You Went?" is divided into four sections, "Kinnigarden," "Firs Grade," "Fort Grade," and "Fit Grade," and as the reader goes on with the story she/he gets acquainted with a recurring group of children: Throw Up Shirley, Fat Frances, Bungy, Alfred, and the narrator who recollects the events, whose name is apparently Daniel. Each section starts with the narrator recalling the names of the teachers, or the principal, and all the events and the characters seem to gather around the teacher being remembered and in particular around what she made them do. "Mrs. Wagnah," the kindergarten teacher, made them sleep during nap time – "she was strick about dat" (169) – even if it was too hot to sleep or most of the children did not want to, and nobody was allowed to talk or move around. Mrs. Wagnah just fell asleep on the desk, but everybody "was

[10] See Stephen H. Sumida, *And the View from the Shore: Literary Traditions of Hawai'i* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 108.

peeking and wearing their eyeshade on their forehead by da time naptime was pau [*finished*]" (169). In the first grade there was Mrs. Perry, who made them eat everything on their lunch tray, especially the vegetables, even though some of the children could still find a way to ditch them in the bushes, and Shirley still threw them up all over the room. The demands of the teachers are presented as strictly normative gestures, but the young characters still manage to find ways to disobey them. Interestingly, the dynamics among these classmates also parallel those of society at large under another respect: even though they are subordinated to and oppressed by a common authority – and here I refer, at a very basic level, to the fact that they are subject to a rule, to a standard, and if they fail to reply affirmatively to it they will be punished – nonetheless they are unwilling to build coalitions among them, especially insofar as they fail to realize that those norms are arbitrarily built. This is the case of Shirley, who gladly accepts the role of the "room monitah [*monitor*]" (170) while the teacher is out of the room and hysterically and compulsively reports to another teacher that one of the boys got up from his sleeping mat and went outside the room when it was forbidden. In that scene, actually, all the pupils were out of their classrooms, because Mrs. Wagner had fainted, and was indeed lying on the corridor floor while her little substitute, Shirley, was performing "da boss" (170) with no adult authority left to legitimize her position. The failure to recognize the arbitrariness of those very standards of the 'appropriate behavior' results, in the young room monitor, in a parodic embodiment of the power figure itself, exaggerated in her obsession for surveillance, with a bad timing (since Shirley does not know what happened outside of the classroom) and with no adult legitimation – in fact, the other teacher answers "okay, thank you, young lady" (171) and keeps ignoring her.

In fourth grade the teacher was Mrs. Von, and after Fat Frances brought her a big purple orchid, the pupils started an undeclared competition, during the "show and tell" time, that consisted in bringing to class some amazing stuff, or showing, or telling something even vaguely 'educational' to please Mrs. Von and to surprise the classmates. The "show and tell,"as an educational praxis, is aimed at valorizing daily life experiences and objects as a source of

knowledge and a learning device, but, as is evident in this scene, individual daily life experiences are evaluated in different ways and can, in fact, be counterfeited to make them sound *more* educational. Everybody could arrange to do something, bringing fighting fishes, telling stories about Australia, or even just bringing some leaves of eucalyptus in a jar explaining where koalas live and what they eat, but the narrator, once again, could not think of anything to join the contest: "What I going tell? Dat my fahdah went sell six refrigerators in one day? Dat my muddah and me went pinch da tail off one whole bag of bean sprouts?" (175).

The characters in Lum's story are often depicted in a sketchy way, but the situation they live in and the relation they have with the surrounding environment are clear and strong enough for the reader to sympathize with the young characters and to enjoy both the story and Lum's pidgin.

> [Mrs. Perry] tink I stupid like Alfred cause we both write left hand. She like me write like everybody else…[O]ne time, she went tell everybody dat your *right* hand was your *writing* hand. Wasn't. She lie. (172)

While the narrator can easily affirm that Mrs. Perry was a liar, he is also remembering that at that time he perceived his left hand-writing as a lack, or rather as something he would prefer not to have; a few lines later, he praises his father's successful switching from left to right hand-writing, thanks to a teacher who "used to whack his hand wit da ruler" if he used his left hand (172). When his father tells him that he is lucky Mrs. Perry doesn't do that, the narrator says "I nevah feel lucky. Hard, you know. *You* try skip right hand way if you left hand" (173). The "unluckiness" does not lie in the punishment itself, but rather in the fact that the teacher still identifies a correct way of doing things, and hierarchically subordinates the deviations from that imagined standard, which the pupil internalizes as a universal criterion of 'correctness' and beauty he is incapable to fulfill.

Lum's juxtaposition of a series of different teachers with different obsessions and standards crucially undermines the perception of those

standards as a serious affair or as the bearers of some absolute and objective validity; indeed, the author seems more willing to work on comic associations and contrasts between what the children are supposed to do and what they actually do. A particularly amusing example of this attitude is the scene where the narrator is chosen by "one nice lady from da Art Academy" (173) as the winner of the painting contest during first grade:

> Den Mrs. Perry wanted to be my friend cause j'like was cause of her dat my painting was da best. But wasn't. Most time she no even like da way I paint. She said everything had to be correck: yellow sun, green tree wit red apples, white clouds, blue sky, green grass and flying birds dat look like one V.
> … Must be cause I went make da clouds and da lamb and da grass all look da same, all curly and fuzzy and funny-kine colors, cause Bungy went take da good colors and all I had left was purple, black, brown, and orange. Mine was most circles… (173)

This time the failure to fulfill the demands of the teacher results in a success, since the judge of the contest is not Mrs. Perry. The scene highlights that 'correctness' is an inappropriate standard of evaluation for several aspects of life, and certainly for artistic expression: Lum's success as a writer depends, in fact, exactly on his mastery of pidgin, an 'incorrect' and stigmatized way of speaking and writing. At the same time, though, Lum is also making fun of the judge, who misunderstands material lack of the 'right' colors for original artistic expression, thus subtly undermining the objective value and unquestioned relevance of *any* standards.

Looking at the children in Lum's short story, the readers can recognize a certain degree of compulsion and hierarchy, structured and supported by the teacher's authority, in the first place, and by the school system in general; in a hierarchical system, in fact, a peer-to-peer relation is a very hard goal to reach, and the pupils define their position also in relation to the power they have over other pupils. A silent protagonist of "What School You Went?" is indeed one of the characters who suffer this condition of internal oppression, even in the short story itself: each section ends, in fact, with a mention of Alfred, the uku-boy (the boy with the fleas), the one who is always

sleeping, the dirty one, the stupid one. He sits next to the narrator for most of the time, but Daniel, like the other classmates, tries hard to distance himself from Alfred, to show that he is not an uku-boy or stupid like him, that he is not "Alfred's bruddah" (173). Lum reveals Alfred's oppression and his nightmarish years of primary school – even on the only occasion when he apparently triumphs, bringing a jar of eucalyptus leaves to the teacher, everybody starts teasing him – but the position the writer provides for him does not allow room for empowerment or self expression. The short-story's final lines show Alfred being punished by the principal for something he was told to do by his classmates: they had convinced Alfred that Louise, another girl student, liked him, and had therefore invited him to lift up her dress, saying that everybody knew she "wanted to show him what color her panties was" (176). Of course, the classmates were lying, and the story ends on Alfred who comes back to the class, without crying, or sleeping, or looking at anybody, "he jes put his head down and nevah say nutting to us, evah again" (176). To some extent, this final stressing of the cruelty within the group of children, rather than between teachers and pupils, while balancing the previous emphasis on teachers, calls into question the shifting boundaries between oppressors and oppressed, since Daniel himself is self-consciously ascribed to the first group. Alfred's inability to find a way out of his condition of marginality, an empowering gesture within the short story, is crucially linked to the struggle of the other classmates for privilege and visibility, in this battleground of compulsiveness called classroom.

"Tongue-Tied"

Sanctions regarding the ways children talk or write and the whole social dynamics within the classroom are also central in R. Zamora Linmark's "Tongue-Tied" and "The Two Filipinos," two stories published in *Rolling the R's*. The latter work is in fact "a novel," and such is the genre affiliation displayed on its cover; however, my dealing with these two chapters as separate stories is to some extent legitimized by the fact that the author himself published parts of his book separately, as well as by the book's strikingly unconventional

narrative structure: divided into short vignettes, it alternates different genres – poems, a litany, a book report, a dramatic dialogue, letters, disco-music lyrics, a grammar exercise – but also different narrative points of view. Throughout the novel the narrative voice switches from one character to the other, in third person or in first person, inside or outside of the narrative space.

The stories in *Rolling the R's* refer to the lives of a group of fifth grader boys and girls during the year 1979-1980 in Kalihi, an impoverished area of Honolulu, where Linmark himself was educated after he left Manila, Philippines, and before he moved to San Francisco, where he presently resides. The first section of "Tongue-Tied," HISTORY, introduces the readers to the children protagonists and to two adult characters: Mrs. Takemoto, the teacher, and Ms. Takara, who visits the class once a week: "while Mrs. Takemoto is burying her students' heads in Plymouth Rock or George Washington's cherry tree or the big migration to the West, Ms. Takara checks up on how Florante, Vicente, and Mai-Lan are adjusting to their newly adopted home"(50). Florante and Vicente have recently emigrated from the Philippines – Florante's family was almost completely killed by the soldiers of Ferdinand Marcos; Mai-Lan, instead, is a recent immigrant from Vietnam.

In the very first lines we witness an interesting reversal of perspective in the teacher-pupil relation: in fact, all the young characters are judging the two adults. Even though Ms. Takara, with flowers pinned to her hair, can pass as a model for Hilo Hatties (a Hawaiian chain of stores), Florante whispers to Vicente that those flowers are "so huge she looks like Nagasaki, blooming" (48), and a few lines later, he adds that the teacher is two-faced, "a Japanese and an American wrestling in one mind"; Edgar and Katrina see Ms. Takara as Sabrina, the teenage witch from *the Archie Comics*, "a professional back-stabber because she is too nice to be true" (48). The very features that Ms. Takara employs to appear pleasant, friendly and reassuring to the children, such as her "konnichiwa smile" (48) are reframed in their minds as threatening or as elements of a strategy aimed at deceiving them. Ms. Takara's chosen title, Ms., contributes to her characterization as a self-styled politically correct advocate for integration and liberal multiculturalism: unlike the more traditional

titles *Miss* and *Mrs*, it does not bear any reference to the woman's marital status, as *Mr* does not for a man, and is typical of the non sexist language created by first-wave feminism.

For Mai-Lan, instead, Ms. Takara is "a guide, a once-a-week fairy godmother" (49) who takes her to a safe place where she feels free to speak, to express herself without people around ready to judge her for her pronunciation:

> Words come out like a free-flowing river. No pauses, no hesitations, no tongue too embarrassed to release the right Englishy words. And no need to think American to speak English because, to Mai-Lan, language is not words, but rhythms and sounds. (49)

Ms. Takara takes the three children to a room that Florante calls "the asphyxiating room" (49), talks to them, and makes them talk about general topics to test their "integration" and their language skills, and to correct their pronunciation. The readers, though, exit the asphyxiating room before anything has happened: they are in a position similar to that of the other classmates, who stay outside of that room and can only imagine what really happens inside.

The second half of "Tongue-Tied" consists of three progress notes written by Ms. Takara and Mrs. Takemoto to the parents of the three children: the teachers' comments are very much alike – as if the teachers had started from a standard form and changed just a couple of things, from time to time – and ironically, they bear out the cliché suggested by the children of the two-faced, back-stabber teachers. In fact, in the first lines they express their appreciation for the pupils (who are happy, friendly, and neat in appearance, with the exception of Florante, who is "introverted" but, in turn, a "true perfectionist" [53]), and sometimes add some quite irrelevant observation all too obviously meant to convey a positive and encouraging attitude, like the following remark about Vicente: "Ms. Takara and I especially like his flaming orange and green and purple jumpsuit" (51). The juxtaposition of the three notes challenges the very credibility of these teachers, not only because it betrays the existence of a standardized and impersonal form of "progress notes" but particularly because they make the very same remarks about

three radically different children: one of the lines we find in each note, and one that is especially hilarious exactly because of its alleged personalization, affirms that that child "has the most beautiful and unique penmanship" (51; 52; 53). This insistence on "penmanship" clearly bespeaks an obsession with norms and standards, and similarly to what happened in Lum's story, it relies on a shared understanding of what is "correct" and what is not; the complexities and contradictions of these children are easily dismissed for an appreciation of the way they fit the standards of penmanship.

The latter half of the notes, quite in a back-stabber fashion, consists of some advice to the parents, regarding in particular the people the children choose to be friends with:

> [W]ill you also discourage him from associating with Edgar Ramirez and Katherine Cruz? Ms. Takara and I think that they are the primary cause of Vicente's inattentiveness. (51)

> [We] noticed that Mai-Lan constantly talks to Katherine Cruz [who] only speaks pidgin, and Ms. Takara and I think that she is the reason for Mai-Lan's inattentiveness and worsening study habits. Will you discourage Mai-Lan from associating with Katherine Cruz? (52)

> Ms. Takara and I noticed that the other students Florante does associate with are Katherine Cruz and Edgar Ramirez. Will you discourage him from further associations with these two? Their use of pidgin endangers Florante's appreciation and skillful usage of the English language. (53)

Actually, the alleged threat of Katherine (the girl previously identified as Katrina) and Edgar does not lie only in the language they speak, but also in the ways they challenge the representation of what children are expected to be, with particular regard to gender roles: their interest in sex – and specifically in trans-generational and homosexual sex – transforms them into irreparably bad subjects, into pariahs that the panicked teachers need to isolate in order to safeguard the other students' integrity. Taboos concerning children's sexuality are primarily connected

with the adults' own fears, as several works have brought to light;[11] the panic surrounding children's sexual desires actually highlights "the threat posed by the sexual child to the serenity of adult self-understanding."[12] In a dynamic similar to the one staged in Lum's story, pidgin here speaks, in the teachers' notes, for the children's refusal to recognize the authority of the Norm itself.

Another recurring concept referring to all three pupils, denoting a significant twist from the stigma on friendship to a more clearly paternalistic concern, is the one stating that "Vicente needs to gain confidence in himself" (51); "[Mai-Lan] needs to learn to control her emotions and to take her time when expressing herself" (52); and finally, "will you help [Florante] gain confidence in himself?" (53). The irony of these invitations is that they are expressed along with a set of interdictions and proscriptions, concerning the language the children speak, their English pronunciation, and even who they choose to "associate with"; and this parallels "the irony," acknowledged by Florante, "of Ms. Takara wanting to remove him, Vicente and Mai-Lan from class to teach them a thing or two about integration" (49). The incongruence implicit in the act of *taking them away* in order to *integrate* them, and of *censoring*, *inhibiting* them in order to increase their *confidence* in themselves, is the space where Linmark articulates his challenge to authority and to those discourses that claim to be univocally righteous and universally "correct." Even the teacher's request, at the end of "Tongue-Tied," that the children mind the R's (54), is actually quite vague: "*Do not roll the R's*" can indeed be a plausible suggestion for Filipinos, as well as for Latinos or Italian immigrants, but it is pointless when applied to immigrants from Eastern Asia or Vietnam, like Mai-Lan, who, possibly, should rather learn how to roll the R's. Once again, what is the pupil's individual pronunciation? What is the standard? And what is the R in the teacher's mind?

[11] See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "How to Bring your Kids up Gays: The War on Effeminate Boys," in *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), and Clifford Chase, ed., *Queer 13: Lesbian and Gay Writers Recall Seventh Grade* (New York: Weisbach Morrow Books, 1998).

[12] Kevin Ohi, "Narrating the Child's Queerness in *What Maisie Knew*," in Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, eds., *Curiouser: On the Queerness of the Children* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 82.

"The Two Filipinos" is set in the classroom, and stages the animated discussion among the students, following the declaration of a Filipino American student who affirms that he is not Filipino and that he doesn't want to be one. Before focusing on that discussion's dynamics, I would like to pay attention to the beginning of the story: Mrs. Takemoto is walking row by row asking the children their ethnicity, and everybody seems to be answering properly until Nelson Ariola says he is American. Mrs. Takemoto, then, corrects him by noting "your nationality is American, but your ethnicity is Filipino" (67). The teacher is now highlighting the difference between the one and the other, even though all the other students – as clearly reported by the narrator – answered her question by stating their ancestors' national affiliation, or naming places that are seldom synonymous with an ethnic affiliation, that is, by answering "Vietnamese," or "Japanese," or "Filipino." Most of the Asian countries are, in fact, radically multiethnic; for example, in Vietnam there are more than 54 ethnic groups, and many ethnic groups are not necessarily nation-based, so that for a person to say that she/he is Vietnamese can only make sense outside of Vietnam, in a foreign country that misunderstands nationality for ethnicity or that ignores the ethnic complexity of other countries. We can easily imagine that Mrs. Takemoto would have been confused if a pupil had answered "Kinh"(or Viet, the largest ethnic group in Vietnam) or "Llocano" (the largest Filipino ethnicity in Hawai'i); actually, the children in the story identify correctly Llocano or Tagalog as two ethnic groups (and two dialects) in the Philippines, but when asked by Mrs. Takemoto, they simplify it into "Filipinos" (67). Even though Linmark does not seem interested in stressing this point, it is nonetheless significant that the very criterion endorsed by the teacher is eventually inappropriate and ineffective.

Nelson Ariola says he is not Filipino because he is not an immigrant (unlike Florante and Vicente), because he does not "speak English like [he] got a plugged nose" (67) (unlike Mai-Lan), and because his parents did not come to Hawai'i to work in the sugar plantations (unlike Benjamin's). But most of all, Nelson does not want to be a Filipino because "the only Filipino everyone knows is the Filipino that eats dogs or the Filipino that walks around with a

broom in his hands" (68). While the debate goes on in the classroom, the Japanese American teacher, Mrs. Takemoto, loses control of the situation, and only manages to say, from time to time, "that's enough, that's enough," or "quiet down" (68, 69). Nelson is the son of a lawyer and a nurse, and the stereotypes about Filipinos as dog-eaters, custodians, or gardeners are a real obsession for him; Katrina and Edgar, instead, keep telling him not to care about what other people think and attack him for his disdainful consideration of Filipinos, staging a hilarious performance for their classmates' delight. Other pupils join the discussion, in particular a Haole (Caucasian) classmate, Stephen Bean: "Nelson, if you're such an American, then what am I?" (69); from the moment the upper-class Haole pupil enters the debate, exasperation grows and the teacher's bias becomes evident. The teacher's bias, though, is not merely personal (Katrina's mother is the lover of Takemoto's husband, and everybody knows that); besides the fact that Stephen comes from a rich white family, it mirrors the particular hierarchy of ethnic groups in Hawai'i and the economic inequality between Filipina/o and Japanese Americans in the archipelago.[13] When Stephen insults Katrina for being fatherless and Edgar for being a faggot, Takemoto only interrupts the two Filipinos' replies, as Edgar points out: "Why no tell the haole for sit down, too?" (70).

At the end of the story Edgar speaks out, questioning the role of the teacher – "Mrs. Takemoto, you open one case but you no can close 'em, so I goin' close 'em once and for all" (70) – and, referring to Stephen and Nelson, he displays an extremely acute, if cynical, view of the social situation in Hawai'i, dismantling the liberal representation of the multicultural paradise implied in American

[13] The Census of the year 2000 in Hawai'i revealed that only 78.6% of the population is mono-racial; 24.3% was White, followed by Japanese (16.7%), Filipinos (14.1%), Native Hawaiians (6.6%), Chinese (4.7%) and many other ethnic groups. See *Census 2000 Data for the State of Hawaii. General Demographic Characteristics (DP-1)*, April 1, 2000; http://www.census.gov/census2000/states/hi.htlm. The Japanese, together with Whites, constitute most of the upper-middle classes and are often employed in the tourist industry and in federal and institutional jobs – as is also evident from the names of the teachers and the principals in Linmark's story – while Filipinos and Native Hawaiians are often employed in low-income jobs and they experience a high rate of unemployment and poverty.

propaganda, as well as in Takemoto's attitude: "You guys think you so hot-shit, but you know what? The ground you standin' on is not the freakin' meltin' pot but one volcano. And one day, the thing goin' erupt and you guys goin' be the first ones for burn" (70). To believe the common representations and the views the History teacher endorses, means to "burn" oneself once the harsh reality of class and ethnic conflicts surfaces. The skeptical attitude toward dominant narrations displayed by some of Linmark's characters, and very much by the writer himself, constitutes a way to ground oneself on "the volcano," to show that the real volcano is inside that classroom, and it has always been there, long before the teacher decided to test the multicultural paradise of Hawai'i by checking her classroom's ethnic diversity.

"Kelly"

In Lum's story the readers cannot easily identify the distance separating the time of the story from the time of the telling/writing, while in Linmark's stories the narrative experimentation effectively fragments time and disguises the writer's temporal position – even though he constantly declares his very agency – thus trapping the reader in a constant fragmentary present. In Truong's short story, on the other hand, the distance between the story being told and the subject who is telling it is consciously handled and memory has a crucial role to play.

Monique Thuy-Dung Truong was born in 1968 in Saigon, South Vietnam, but has lived in different places all over the United States – North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, Connecticut – and she presently resides in New York City. "Kelly" is a short story written when the author was 21 and published in a prominent journal in 1991; in 2003 she published her first novel, *The Book of Salt*, a bestselling and a critically acclaimed debut.[14]

"Kelly" is written in the form of a letter by a young Vietnamese woman, Thuy, to her friend Kelly, a classmate in their elementary

[14] Monique Thuy-Dung Truong, *The Book of Salt: A Novel* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003).

school in Boiling Spring, North Carolina, in 1975 and a best friend "by circumstances of being outcasts":[15] "I write to remind us of the fat girl and the freak who were so much of you and me" (288). In this highly autobiographical work, the writer recalls the History classes taught by Mrs. Hammerick, a very painful moment for the young Vietnamese immigrant:

> Pearl Harbor…she would never look at me when she said those two words, but I knew, Kelly, that she wanted to take me outside and whip my behind with that paddle…You have to know that all the while she was teaching us history she was telling, with her language for the deaf, blind and dumb; she was telling all the boys in our class that I was Pearl and my last name was Harbor. They understood her like she was speaking French and their names were all Claude and Pierre. I felt it in the lower half of my stomach, and it throbbed and throbbed until I thought even you sitting three rows away could hear it. (289)

The teacher, in the narrator's memory, articulates a coded dialogue with the boys; in that lesson, the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor is directly associated to the Vietnamese pupil, who is interpellated into the lesson while, at the same time, she is being excluded from it by the symbolic use of a linguistic code 'other' than English. The quoted passage highlights the teacher's oversimplifying perspective on Asia and the ability of American nationalism to misunderstand and minimize other historical and political backgrounds: not only do Japan and Vietnam become two interchangeable countries, but also Japanese imperialism in the 1940's and Vietnamese resistance to American aggression, in the 1970's are understood as comparable phenomena. One of the aspects of the story I would like to stress now, however, is the process of interpellation and subjectification of the students enacted by national ideology and authority, whose symbolic embodiment here is Mrs. Hammerick not only as the teacher but also, in the words used by Truong to introduce her, as "the mayor's wife" (289).

The Vietnamese girl feels interpellated by the lesson: it seems to

[15] Monique Thuy-Dung Truong, "Notes to 'Dear Kelly'," in Shawn Wong, ed., *Asian American Literature,* 293-295, here 294.

her that the teacher is talking directly *of her*, that she's giving her a new name, Pearl Harbor; the power inherent in naming things and persons is, in fact, a white man's privilege, and the gendered or racialized Others are traditionally excluded from it. To put it differently, the teacher is claiming the Lacanian position of the father, who names and thus determines symbolic reality. This process subjectifies the pupil as the Asian Other: she is reified as a foreigner, the yellow peril, the passive object of a discourse that she is not fully capable of grasping, a discourse whose terms she cannot entirely comprehend. The boys, instead, understand perfectly what the woman is talking about, just as if she were speaking French and their names were all Claude and Pierre.

The lesson in history seems actually to be, in the narrator's painful memory, a lesson in patriotic militancy and in imperialistic militarism: the telling of the past war melts into the allusions to the present war – the story is set during the Vietnam war – and the boys are interpellated by the national-militaristic discourse as active subjects. Many works, both in history and in gender studies, have analyzed the processes whereby nationalism aims to construct the "national body" in terms of a "male body," systematically employing a binary logic that extols militarism, violence, hierarchy, and physical strength, while codifying these as masculine prerogatives.[16] It is no wonder, therefore, that the intended recipients of this lesson are "all the boys" (289).

The letter's addressee, Kelly, is "the fattest girl I had ever seen" (290), a white child who belongs to a much higher social status than the narrator does, and who lives in a nice big house rather than in a trailer house like Thuy; but their friendship is grounded in the space between their respective marginalizations, in their shared throbbing, since both girls exceed the expected Norm for national affiliation.

[16] See, among others, Jeffrey D. Mason and J. Ellen Gainor, eds., *Performing America: Cultural Nationalism in American Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies. Volume 1: women floods bodies history* (Oxford, UK: Polity Press, 1987); R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (Oxford, UK: Howard Fertig Press, 1997).

Their relation attempts to overcome different conditions of oppression and to build an oblique coalition, across race and class, although Kelly sometimes seems to be a hesitant if not unwilling participant in this process.

The isolation of the Vietnamese girl is also related to the setting of the story, that Boiling Spring, North Carolina, which has such a prominent position in the whole tale:

> …I was lost because my parents were lost in a place that they had never heard of and had never planned to be. The United States, you understand, is a place marked by New York City on the Atlantic Side, with a middle filled in by Chicago and The Alamo, and then Los Angeles is on the Pacific closing it all in. (288)

Truong has a contradictory relation to that place, as she states in her "Notes to 'Kelly'," both as a young woman and as a writer: "I know that there is an affiliation, an empathy on my part … that connects me with this region of the United States that did not want to see me then in 1975 nor now in 1990" (294); the recurring sentence "Boiling Spring is a place that had not changed since the Civil War" (289; 291) stresses not only the enduring racism – since she means "pre- not post-Civil War" (291) – but also the fact that racialization in that little town only knows black and white, and the child does not fit either of those categories: "when people like you looked at me and my yellow skin, you didn't see color, you saw dirt" (290). Her marginality is not only determined by the distance separating her from the image of the United States she had in mind, but also by the fact that there is no Asian America in Boiling Spring apart from her own parents. This is particularly relevant to understanding her position as a writer. In her "Notes" she writes: "When I read William Faulkner's *Absalom! Absalom!* here at Yale my freshman year, I understood that narrative climate better than Kingston's" (293). "Kelly" gives evidence of the author's attempt to find a way to write about life in southern United States when you are neither black nor white, and "when everyone else out there expects you to write about mothers and talk-story" (293); she seems to be claiming what might be defined as a queer position, as regards both the U.S. and Asian America: "queer" not in the sense of failing to accept the rule of hetero-normativity, but

rather understood in wider anti-identitarian and anti-normative terms, not as an identity but as a practice. In this sense, Truong's refusal to recognize herself in the names others give her, and her willingness to claim multiple and oblique affiliations, articulate what I would term a queer attitude.

The racialization of Thuy's body is as complex as her literary affiliations: in Boiling Spring her mother can meet Kelly's mother, she can be invited to Kelly's house, and Mrs. Hammerick can even, eventually, hug her in front of her mother: the narrator is quite aware of the fact that this would never happen if she were black. In their classroom there is a black girl, Michelle Hammerick – and the fact that she shares her last name with the teacher, rather than being a mark of empathy, seems only to betray the dark reality of slave ownership and of name-giving in the slave-master relation. Kelly and Thuy never talked about her; however, even the two girls, the fat girl and the freak, knew that "Michelle was something that the good people of Boiling Spring didn't want to see" (292).

The issue of language, the notion of the classroom as the site where deviations from the standard are detected, corrected, or punished, and the alleged power of these acts of rebellion to 'endanger' the integrity of other pupils, surface again at the end of the story, as they did both in Lum's and in Linmark's works.

> Michelle had a mouth like no one I had ever heard. She said words that you knew were dirty even if you didn't know what they meant. It's all in the way she'd spit it out and then smile like we were all going down to hell with her just cause we had been in hearing reach. She'd crawl underneath the tables in reading class and scream dirty, bad, foul, absolutely bright and wonderful words at the rest of us….
> I liked her. (292)

While the narrator's position as a marginal, and indeed as a queer subject, does not guarantee her unconstrained access to the society of the "good people of Boiling Spring," it nonetheless can enable her to feel sympathy for Michelle, and to admire her strength and her unwillingness to stay silently at the margin of the classroom. Thuy had never told Kelly of her visits at Michelle's poor house, and of the way her siblings watched the freak guest with almond-shaped eyes; to

suit Kelly's bias against black people, and poor people as well, the Vietnamese girl had also kept the fact that she once lived in a trailer house a secret. The recollection of all the silenced things brings to light that their friendship was actually contingent and partial, and relied more on the narrator's desire to be accepted among the "good people" than on their mutual acknowledgment of their oppressed status. The adult narrator is now more willing to admit her connection with the black girl than she was when she was a child. In fact, she remembers that Kelly and she were both invited, fortuitously and unexpectedly, to the party for a rich classmate's eighth birthday, but they were eventually excluded from the "tea-party" (293) and had to stay in the kitchen with the classmate's mother. While recollecting that, she asks "Why did our mammas let us go? None of the black girls in our homeroom came that should have been our sign" (293), thus explicitly associating her friend and herself with the black girls, the abjected outsiders.

Even when the ideological apparatuses interpellate the young girl as a reified Oriental, dismiss her complexity and her history, and transform her into a silenced freak, she still manages to appreciate difference and to claim transversal affiliations, while, as an adult writer, she recognizes the instability and provisionality of those very ties.

As I have tried to argue above, confronting the classroom means analyzing multiple power dynamics, between teachers and pupils and among pupils; the Asian American children inhabiting the stories we considered are liminal subjects, 'on the threshold' in several ways. Some of them have recently emigrated from Asia and some were born in the U.S.; they occupy the space in-between their community language and the national language, the time between childhood and adulthood, between the private and the public sphere, between their family and the outside world. What happens in the classroom is of crucial importance for the emergence of their subjectivity, since it is there that they first confront the outside world, the expectations that world has on them, and the standards they are expected to fit (or to challenge). Moreover, they do so in a place and in an institution that potentially positions side by side different ethnic groups, different

social classes and cultural backgrounds, and at a time in life when school distances them from the only authority they have hitherto known – that of the family.[17] The relations these children manage to build are therefore as much entwined in a compulsory system of domination and privilege as they are born out of a desire to resist, and to recognize the powers they are subjected to.

To some extent, all the teachers in these stories are 'evil teachers,' lacking the ability to understand their pupils. My focus here, however, was not on the existence of standards secured by the figure of the teacher, but rather on the arbitrariness of those standards, whose function is to guarantee the coherence of the nation state, and is symptomatic of the anxiety regarding national identity. Asian American discourse over the last few years seems to have been focusing on issues of national subjectification and on the challenge that notions such as trans-nationalism, multilingualism, queerness, and diaspora pose to the authority of the nation state. A serious analysis of school stories and power dynamics within the classroom might offer a significant contribution to an understanding and a critique of the very ideology inherent in the assimilation process and in the interpellation of the ethnic subject into the national identity, and to a critical recognition of power imbalances within an oppressed community.

[17] Beverly Lyon Clark, *Regendering the School Story*, 12.

Raffaella Malandrino

Immigrant Narratives of a Gendered American Dream. A Reading of Bharati Mukherjee's *The Middleman and Other Stories*.

American trans-formations. Bharati Mukherjee's personal narrative of migration.

Within the United States the people who identify themselves as 'foreign born' constitute an extremely heterogeneous group of migrants, whose experiences confound attempts to define clearly what it means to be an American citizen. Transnationalism, created by the flow of people, goods, capital and labor (and knowledges), mostly from the Third World countries to the West, has produced, in the last decades of the twentieth century, complex, overlapping subjectivities, straddling the line between the inherited culture and identity of their sites of 'departure' and their new status in the hosting society. Diasporics, therefore, endorse transnational connectivities through their previous, often colonial formations, and at the same time claim a space, whether institutional, psychological, or emotional, within the American landscape. Hyphenated, hybrid subjects and their histories lead us to rethink over and over the concepts of State, Nation, and belonging.

The whole of Bharati Mukherjee's considerable creative production – novels, short stories, and non-fiction prose – is focused on the diasporic imagination and the politico-cultural implications of late twentieth-century migrations from the Asian countries to the United States. The writer, born in Calcutta in 1940 from an upper-class family and emigrated in the United States in the 1960s to pursue higher academic education at Iowa University, emerges on the

American literary scene in the 1980s, following the publication of two earlier novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972) and *Wife* (1975), and a collection of short stories, *Darkness* (1985). This last work marks her transition from Canada, where she had spent some years after her marriage with the writer Clark Blaise, back to The United States.[1]

The stories of *The Middleman* came to her in "intense flurries," although she had been contemplating the volume for some time. It is no coincidence that the collection was published a few months after she became an American citizen in February 1988. The fictional mood that characterizes *The Middleman* and the following novel – her most renowned work, *Jasmine*, in 1989 – is captured in her essay "Immigrant Writing. Give Us your Maximalists!", published in the *New York Times Book Review*, in which she recalls the ceremony in a Federal District Court House in Manhattan that made her a citizen of the United States.[2] This event fuels the writer's need to express her literary agenda, focused on the intent to speak for "the new Americans from nontraditional immigrant countries, … bursting with stories," and the piece establishes Mukherjee as a decisive voice in the US multiculturalist debate.[3] Indeed, *The Middleman* and *Jasmine* represent a crucial and distinctive phase in Mukherjee's career. While the *Darkness* tales were mostly centered on the lives and the experience of South Asian immigrants in Canada, and were characterized by a dark and negative narrativization of the country's

[1] Cfr. Gita Rajan, "Bharati Mukherjee," in Emmanuel S. Nelson, ed., *Writers of the Indian Diaspora. Bio-bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), 235-241. Many of the proliferating biographical and auto-biographical references emerge from interviews, personal articles and essays. See also Runar Vignisson, "Bharati Mukherjee: An Interview," *Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies* (July 25, 1999), available online at wwwtds.murdoch.edu.au/-cntinuum/litserv/SPAN/34/diasporas.html; Bharati Mukherjee, "Two Ways to Belong in America," *The New York Times* (September 22, 1996), 1-2; Bharati Mukherjee, "A Four-Hundred Year Old Woman," in Janet Sternburg, ed., *The Writer on Her Work* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), Vol. 2, 33-38; Bharati Mukherjee, "American Dreamer," *Mother Jones* (January/February 1997), available online at www.motherjones.com/commentary/columns/1997/01/mukherjee.html

[2] Bharati Mukherjee, "Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists!," *The New York Times Book Review* (28 August 1988), 28-29.

[3] Ibid., 28.

socio-political backdrop, in this new fiction the author boldly decides to expand her reach, to articulate the lives of Americans who have made their way to the United States from Asia, Africa and the West Indies in the last two decades. In Mukherjee's view, *The Middleman* not only emphasizes the variety and the possibilities of Third World immigrants to the United States, but, above all, it charts the emergence of an America un-settled by the inevitable demographic changes of the late twentieth century:

> The new, changing America is the theme of the stories in *The Middleman*. For me, immigration from the Third World to this country is a metaphor for the process of uprooting and rerooting, … "unhousement" and "rehousement." The immigrants in my stories go through extreme transformations in America and at the same time they alter the country's appearance and psychological makeup.[4]

And the change occurs as gain, not as loss. In Mukherjee, uprooting oneself from the cultural registers of gender, class and ethnicity is shown to have a deep impact, and sometimes a liberating one, for both 'new' and 'old' Americans, through an assimilative process which is not univocal, but mutual, interactive,[5] and which comes to revitalize the American myths of frontier-spirit and the unlimited possibilities of the American Dream.[6] Thus, the characters in *The Middleman* are 'pioneers' who path their way through the

[4] Bharati Mukherjee, quoted in Andrea Dlaska, "Ways of Belonging: The Making of New Americans in the Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee," *Austrian Studies in English* 85 (1999), 95.

[5] Cfr. Bharati Mukhrjee, "Beyond Multiculturalism, Surviving in the Nineties," in Ishmael Reed, ed., *MultiAmerica. Essays on Cultural Wars and Cultural Peace* (New York: Viking, 1997), 129-138.

[6] These myths, framed within American exceptionalism, have been historically built upon the perception and ideological representation of the United States as a unique place in the world, one that offers opportunities and personal fulfilment to its people and to the millions of immigrants that, throughout much of American history, have crossed its borders with the hope of a better life, and of personal freedom and choices. The American Dream acted as a driving force during the gold rush of the second half of the 19th century, and had a great magnetic power for the impoverished Western Europeans in the 19th and early 20th century. Its attraction has still not diminished, as one can see the rush of legal and illegal immigrants from Latin America, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe.

American territories, framed within what Helena Grice has defined Mukherjee's discursive engagement in a "performative patriotism."[7] Through the logic of *trans-formation,* Mukherjee sees migration as a process of self-reinvention, and she is often offering herself as an example of someone who negotiated the "no man's land," the shift being from "the country of my past" to "the country of my present."[8] Her claim for an identification with the American nation and with an American ethnic identity, but one that is purged of its hyphenated reference, is a claim for an America that accepts all kind of migrants, whose participation in its political fabric empowers them: her claim finally coincides with a vision of democracy in which ethnic identities are produced and racism overcome through free choice and individual will and acts; the link between biopolitics and geopolitics, thus, sets the discursive conditions for developing narratives about people who, in *The Middleman*, struggle to realize their individual potentials.

Family, heroes, and the ghost of American transnational policies. Narratives of manhood in "Fathering" and "Orbiting"

The extensive critical commentary on Bharati Mukherjee's fiction reveals the variety of concerns among scholars and of approaches to issues of multiculturalism and citizenship in contemporary America. As Anthony C. Alessandrini suggests, this is also revealed by the fact that Mukherjee's works have been easily plunged into whatever disciplinary or political argument a critic wishes to make, and what mostly emerges in this literature is that the writer's appropriation of

[7] The author argues that, from the earliest works to the recent ones, the characters progressively embrace the process of Americanization. While in *Wife*, for instance, the main protagonist is left in a state of anguish in her inability to cope with her cultural conflicts and reconcile "two worlds," the India left behind in immigration and the new adopting country, the narrativization of characters in *Jasmine* and *The Middleman* is precisely focused on their successful becoming "full fledged, self-confident and self aware members of American society." Helena Grice, "Who Speaks for Us? Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction and the Politics of Immigration," *Comparative American Studies* 1.1 (2003), 87.

[8] Bharati Mukherjee, "American Dreamer," www.motherjones.com/commentary/columns/1997/01/mukherjee.html

powerful American myths and transnational American dreams, in the rewriting of hyphenated Americans as just *Americans,* walks a critical tightrope.[9]

Postcolonial critics, with their focus on the role that the representation of the immigrant Other plays in her writing, have often denounced Mukherjee's work for presenting a too simplistic, stagnant and unproblematic picture of the Third World realities of her immigrant characters, on behalf of the dynamic, everchanging and energetic American Nation they might be longing for. Mukherjee's novels and stories are often being accused of lacking an adequate confrontation of the complexities of diasporic subject-formation, rejecting, for instance, expatriate nostalgia, and promoting an overly enthusiastic acceptance of 'indigenization' as enclosed into white hegemonic criteria of culture and cultural relations, thus "valorizing the dominant power structure".[10]

But other scholars, such as Cynthia Sau-ling Wong, have also recognized that Bharati Mukherjee very early on engaged, for example, the issue of U.S military involvement in Asia, and she expressed it in the ways it affects the lives of her characters. Her vast vision, though, which is often interpreted as seemingly arrogant and as too ambitious an attempt to span the experiences of different ethnic subjects, shows also a deep awareness of the interconnectedness of nations and of the repercussions of actions in one sphere of the globe upon peoples in another. And she was displaying this mind set some years before words and concepts like 'transnationalism' and 'globalism' gained widespread recognition. As Wong observes,

[9] Anthony C. Alessandrini, "Reading Bharati Mukherjee, Reading Globalization," in Amitava Kumar, ed., *World Bank Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 265-279.

[10] Inderpal Grewal, "The Postcolonial Ethnic Studies, and the Diaspora: The Context s of Ethnic Immigrant/Migrant Cultural Studies in the U.S.," *Socialist Review* 24 (1994), 60. Above all, this kind of criticism has pointed to class issues and to the historical elision of the circumstances, such as the professional-oriented immigration policies of the Sixties, that made the author's personal experience of migration a privileged one in comparison with her characters' working class background or refugee status. See also Lavina Dhingra Shankar, Rajini Srikanth, "Introduction: Closing the Gap? South Asians Challenge Asian American Studies," in Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Rajini Srikanth, eds., *A Part, yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 1-22.

> Mukherjee is perhaps the first Asian American writer to exhibit a full awareness of the global context of contemporary Asian immigration: she ... looks beyond the push-pull between two nations to acknowledge the reality of the world economic system, and sets her tales against a background of intertwined, transnational, economic activities and mass uprooting caused by proxy wars in the Third World.[11]

In fact, in *The Middleman*, the author raises questions related to a particular historical stage of global relations, including communal violence in India ("The Management of Grief"), an American society dealing with the after-effects of the war in Vietnam ("Fathering" and "Loose Ends"), the military involvement of the US in Asia (as it trickles through "Orbiting" and "Fighting for the Rebound"), issues that cannot be ignored in addressing the narrative strategies deployed in the creation of *The Middleman*'s characters.

As Anne Brewster interestingly suggests, the fantasy of America as a land of opportunity could be described as a "phantasmatic hegemonic nativist counternarrative," to describe a hidden preoccupation with reclaiming the "real." By taxonomizing the "genuine foreignness" of her immigrant characters (a move that is very evident in Mukherjee's tendency to overemphasize the foreign bodily appearance of her characters), for instance, the author's performative nationalism seems, consciously or not, to be claiming a "hyperreal America," one "that fills the absence of the real in the current demise and crisis of America's global power."[12]

In the light of the fertile critical interpretations of Mukherjee's fiction, therefore, I wish to analyze a few selected short stories from *The Middleman* where issues of immigration are interwoven to gender relations. In particular, this paper will focus on the symbolic representation of the male characters and protagonists: at the

[11] Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, *From Necessity to Extravagance: Reading Asian American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 54.

[12] Anne Brewster, "A Critique of Bharati Mukherjee's Neo-nationalism," *SPAN, Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies* (July 25, 1999), http://wwwtds.murdoch.edu.au/-cntinuum/litserv/SPAN/34/diasporas.html.

historical moment of the publication of *The Middleman*, the 1980s, the cultural re/construction of manhood was a determinant aspect of narratives of Nation and national belonging.[13] This element, in my view, has been quite ignored by the previous critical literature on Mukherjee's fiction, whose analytical engagement with issues of gender and national identity has been, nonetheless, intense, but mainly framed within postcolonial feminist discourses. It is not surprising, thus, that more consideration has been devoted to the political identity formation of the female immigrant subjects of the novels and the stories than to their (frequently) white male counterparts.

Most of *The Middleman* stories staging white male subjectivities are narrated in the first person, in the monologic tone of "compulsively fluent talkers whose lives are too urgent and mobile for them to indulge in the luxury of the retrospective past tense."[14] To them, the presence of the new immigrants that shape the American landscape of the 1980s and enter their personal lives is disruptive and redemptive at the same time: the logic of migration-through-transformation involves a discovery and retrieval of myths and heroes, and, finally, a sort of epiphanic re-cognition of realities that have been forgotten, ignored, or repressed.

Thus, Mukherjee's awareness of the effects of the transnational contacts between America and its diasporics brings home the Vietnam war in "Fathering," undoing stories about the American family and the American masculinity, and telling "a story about the impossibility of possessing yourself, your child, your sense of nation."[15]

[13] Susan Jefford's discourse on American masculinity, and, in particular, on the iconic meaning of the white male body in the cultural representations during Reagan's political decade offers the main source for my interpretative analysis of the stories. Cfr. Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New. Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994) and *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1989).

[14] Jonathan Raban, "Savage Boulevards, Easy Streets," *The New York Times* (June 19, 1988). Available online at query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res= 940DE1DC1330-F93AA25755C0A96E948260, no pagination.

[15] Jennifer Drake, "Looting American Culture: Bharati Mukherjee's Immigrant Narratives," *Contemporary Literature* 40 (Spring 1999), 1-17.

The arena is the neo-imperialist, neo-capitalist United States, where Jason, the male American protagonist and white Vietnam veteran, and his Vietnamese daughter Eng, try to cope with the trauma of war. Jason has been uprooted from his conventional American life as a family man and a teacher by his war experience: after holding onto a sense of normalcy for years, his family finally collapses and his wife and children relocate to an alternative community in the American Midwest. Encouraged by his new partner Sharon, he decides on "coming to terms with the past"[16] and manages to bring his unknown daughter to America. But forging a cross-cultural family soon frustrates Jason and Sharon's easy expectations: re-rooting and re-housing a "frightened, foreign kid" (119) involves more than unconditional love and middle-class ideals of life. Eng doesn't fit: neither in her frilly, girlish bedroom, nor at the family doctor's, where all the other kids would go with – as the bewildered father informs – "diseases with easy names, diseases we knew what to do with" (123).

Mukherjee's narration seems to convey a desperate plea for the figure of the father as a means of recovering a sense of national and personal identity, through the logic of genealogy and family relations. In "Fathering," the violent incursion of history in Jason's life enlightens a story of crisis. Jason's caring attempts to establish a connection with his daughter and to read through the signs of Eng's distress are also a strenuous attempt to recover his own sense of masculinity and to re-establish a role for himself in American society.

As Mark Gerzon underscores in his study of American masculinity and war heroism, the Vietnam war was considered an undefinable war, with no clear mission or easily identifiable enemy, and with no heroic meaning to victory. To most of the American soldiers it was a war against a domestic population and a political war.[17] This marked the basic difference between the mission of the Second World War soldiers and that of their sons. For the men who came home from Vietnam, unlike the ones in the V-J Day of August, 1945, no people

[16] Bharati Mukherjee, *The Middleman and Other Stories* (New York: Fawcett, 1988), 118. Subsequent references will be included parenthetically in the text.

[17] Cfr. Mark Gerzon, *A Choice of Heroes: The Changing Faces of American Manhood* (N.Y.: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 125-126.

crowded in celebration, there were no parades but only hostility. It seemed that all standards of masculinity, all the proofs of manhood, all the liberating influences of victory were gone. So the sense of loss and frustration from the Vietnam war, the shame deriving from it, translated into the crisis in masculinity of the following years: Vietnam vets, and American men in general, all wanted acceptance from their fathers, a sense of connection to what they had represented, and to belong to their country and their generation.

Da Zheng's interesting essay on "Fathering" highlights ambiguous elements in the story, related to the indeterminacy of the biological relation between Jason and Eng.[18] The dual possibility of the latter resides, on the one hand, in Eng's natural bond to Jason, as the child would have been born from his relationship with the "honeyest-skinned bar girl with the tiniest feet in Saigon" (117). But on the other hand, the scanty description of Eng's mother, which sounds more as a retrospective exotic fantasy about Vietnam than a concrete reference to Jason's past, can be read as an attempt by the male protagonist to come to terms with moral, ethical responsibilities. Eng, therefore, could alternatively be Jason's adopted child, and on this interpretative suggestion would rest a 'constructed', de-biologized patriarchal relationship between them, fraught with political and personal implications. This relationship, in fact, could symbolically function both as an imperialistic attempt to restructure domination upon and control over a subaltern Other, and as Jason's attempt to redeem himself from the shameful experience of Vietnam and to heal his psychological wounds.

For Alpana Sharma Knippling, "Fathering" involves the mobilization of a double mode of representation of the main characters: a white Vietnam veteran being represented, who, in turn, represents his Vietnamese daughter.[19] Jason's description does not seem very problematic, as it takes its assumptions from the dominant

[18] Da Zeng, "Ambiguity in Bharati Mukherjee's 'Fathering'," in Esther Mikyung Ghymn, ed., *Asian American Studies. Identity, Images, Issues Past and Present* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 101-111.

[19] Cfr. Alparna Sharma Knippling, "Toward an Investigation of the Subaltern in Bharati Mukherjee's 'The Middleman and Other Stories' and 'Jasmine'," in Emmanuel S. Nelson, ed., *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives* (New York: Garland, 1993), 143-60.

Western narrative of the binary division West/East. What is at stake, instead, is the description of Eng's behavior, to which an overemphasized strangeness is attributed: she comes from the *outside*, and she engages in strange acts, such as self inflicted injuries with coins that the Viet mamas used to stick in the wounded skin to heal napalm burnings, or delirious hallucinations. Thus, Jason's first person recounting of Eng's symptoms often becomes a "naturalization of her trauma"; Eng is shaped as an icon of the Vietnamese war, her suffering being the only key that makes her accessible to Jason's reading of her Otherness.

In many passages Jason assimilates his daughter within the parameters of his American views, but the pivotal moment comes when the delirious girl rebels against the doctor's attempts to sedate her:

> But Eng is listening to other voices. She pulls her mitts off with her teeth, chucks the blanket, the robe, the pajamas to the floor; then, naked, hysterical, she presses the quarter I gave her deep into the soft flesh of her arm (124).[20]

> ..."Get the hell out, you bastard!" Eng yells. "Vamos! Bang Bang!" She's pointing her arm like a semi automatic, taking out Sharon, then the doctor. ... "You Yankees, please, go home." She looks straight at me. "Scram, Yankee bastard!" (124)

But Jason, instead of leaving, joins his daughter in her frightening fantasy world of war and enemies, retreating with Eng from Sharon, the doctor and, symbolically, from a hostile and dangerous America. Most significant, at this point, is the term "My Rambo" (124) that Jason uses to address Eng, before "rescuing" her. Identifying Eng as Rambo, Jason finally confronts Vietnam, but looks at it through the lens of a past which has undergone a deep *restructuring*, a past that the cinema of the 1980s contributed to promote. Rambo, the archetypal, strenuous hero is tied to the political climate of that time.

[20] This is an instance of iconic hyper-symbolism: many people would be able to visualize this literary passage in terms of Huynh Cong Ut's picture of a little girl running naked down a road, screaming in agony from the napalm, one of the most in-famous images of the Vietnam war.

As Susan Jeffords argues in her study of masculinity in the Eighties, it is under Reagan's symbolic and political empire that the Vietnam syndrome could be finally left behind in America, through movies circulating a new image of the American soldier in Vietnam. The Rambo saga, by re-proposing the Hero, redeemed manhood and reasserted male dominance, and thus the imperialistic imaginary, in the United States.[21] Significantly, Jason's last assertion about Eng involves a strategic de-sexualization and masculinization of the girl: "My Saigon kid and me... we are a team" (124) is also a claim for *his* salvation, the salvation of his wounded masculinity, through a sense of community and male bonding, a sense of community among veterans, that the filmic imaginary of those years had created.

Similarly, in "Orbiting," Renata both accommodates and resists the transformations that the presence of a new American brings into her narrative, and she exploits an imaginary of manhood that draws on popular culture. Her American story is a story about ethnic whiteness, since she was born from first – and third – generation Italian American parents, fully assimilated into the American way. The family gathering for a Thanksgiving dinner offers her the opportunity to introduce to her parents her new lover Ro, born Roashan, an Afghan who fled three months before from a war-devastated Kabul. The concern Renata's family – and Renata herself – feel about Ro's name, clothes, speech, looks, and Ro's – a story marked by torture, detection, and escape – forces the de Marco family to re-examine its cultural rituals and social practices; they are uncomfortable with Ro's culturally specific masculinity, his political passion, his inability to abide by the common stereotypes of American manhood. Ro's "foreignness" disrupts the de Marco family's comfort zone, but, most importantly, it transforms Renata's life in a way that makes her look "at America through the wrong end of a telescope. He makes it sound like a police state, with sudden raids, papers, detention centers, deportations and torture and death waiting in the wings." (66) She faces the contact with the Other as an "unwelcomed revelation," but

[21] Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New. Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994) and *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1989).

in a way that, in bell hooks' words, makes her "leave behind white innocence and enter the world of 'experience'."[22]

But at the end of the story Renata elides Ro as a "Clint Eastwood, scarred hero and survivor." (252) Once again, the Other gets swallowed in the celluloid Hollywood imaginary. Renata constructs Ro as desirable and masculine, rejecting American stereotypes of Asian men as unattractive and effeminate; but in her turn, she articulates her desire in the language of foreignness and exoticization, which falls into a familiar language of domination. Ro's entrance into American citizenship is proclaimed and made imaginatively possible through a desire for a masculinity which has to be moulded according to familiar, domesticated icons.[23] "I will give him citizenship if he asks. Vic was beautiful, but Vic was self-sufficient....I shall teach him how to walk like an American." (74) The Clint Eastwood persona, as Paul Smith shows, corresponding with the narrative structure of Western and action movies, represents a male body subjected to a process of eroticization, destruction, and finally of re-generation,[24] just like Ro's body, as well as Ro's self, is re-moulded and re-transformed into an American hero by Renata. In the quest for an American masculinity, a 'hard body' becomes necessary for the narratives of the American nation.

Thus, in the movement from immigrant subculture to mainstream culture, the optimism expressed in "Orbiting" and the symbolic meaning of Thanksgiving day epitomize what might be termed, after Helena Grice's critique, a "patriotic performance," and subsume the full celebration of the process of Americanization, a process that allows immigrants from Asia to successfully root themselves in the New World and to transform that world as well as themselves.

[22] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (South End Press: Boston, 1992), 23.

[23] Jennifer Drake, "Looting American Culture: Bharati Mukherjee's Immigrant Narratives," *Contemporary Literature* 40.1 (Spring 1999), 60-84.

[24] Paul Smith, "Eastwood Bound," in Maurice Berger, Brian and Simon Wallis, eds., *Constructing Masculinities* (London and New York: Watson, 1995), 81.

The erotic, the exotic. Romantic encounters as a cross-cultural challenge in "Jasmine" and "Fighting for the Rebound"

This optimism is mirrored, and maybe most intensely illuminated, in the exuberant story of "Jasmine," whose narrative pattern would be developed into the full length novel bearing the same title the following year. In both the novel and the short story the controlling trope is the inscription of an immigrant woman's subjectivity into an American mainstream space – both creative and political – that conventionally positions immigrants as racial outsiders. Patricia Chu has focused her analysis on the way the Jasmine in the novel engages in stepping up the ladder of American upward mobility and Americanization by giving up and challenging her old culture and her traditional obligations. As Inderpal Grewal has also emphasized in her critique of the novel, the U.S. becomes the land of hope, freedom, and independence for Third World women like Jasmine, a problematic formulation that erases issues of gender oppression in the U.S. and denies women's agency in the de-colonized spaces. As studies on Orientalism have taught us, the discourse of 'freedom' and 'individual empowerment' has always been an essential rhetorical tool for the construction and consolidation of Western state power structures as opposed to the colonized and de-colonized spaces, and the ideology of American 'freedom' specifically, constructs U.S. nationalism.[25]

Similarly to what happens both in "Orbiting" and in the later novel, the protagonist of the short story "Jasmine" in *The Middleman*, an Indian Caribbean teenager, decisively comes into her own in America and gets empowered through a romantic encounter with a white, mainstream America.[26] Leaving her parents back in Trinidad, she has come to Michigan as an illegal immigrant via Canada after

[25] Cfr. Patricia Chu, *Assimilating Asians: Gendered Strategies of Authorship in Asian America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 128-138; Inderpal Grewal, "Reading and Writing the South Asian Diaspora: Feminism and Nationalism in America," in The Women of South Asian Descent Collective, eds., *Our Feet Walk the Sky* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1993), 187-199. See also Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 65-74.

[26] Fakrul Alam, *Bharati Mukherjee* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996).

negotiating a smooth, bargain-priced emigration in Port of Spain. Unsatisfied with her underpaid job in a motel owned by a family of Trinidadian Indians, she feels impatient to do something of her life; after breaking away from the Daboos, she moves to Ann Arbor, where she gets employed as a household helper by a white couple: Bill, a university professor, and Lara Moffit, who, she gathers, is a "performance artist." (128)

On a day when Lara is away on a tour with her performing group, Jasmine lets herself be seduced by Bill, and in the solipsistic ecstasy of the sexual encounter she gets the sense of having reached a moment when she is empowered and in control of her destiny.

> She felt so good she was dizzy. She'd never felt this good on the island where men did all this all the time, and the girls went along with it always for favours. You couldn't feel really good in a nothing place. She was thinking this as they made love: ….she was a bright girl with no visa, no papers, and no birth certificate. No nothing other than what she wanted to invent and tell (138).

Many have seen in Jasmine the example of the illegal immigrant exploited by her white male employer, a view Mukherjee rebukes by pointing at these last lines, expressing Jasmine's deep power of sexuality. And the story might be ending in the political displacement of someone like Lara, "whose feminism and professionalism are built on the backs of underemployed Caribbean or Hispanic au-pair girls."

But it is this last political implication, in my view, that has to be taken into account, as it reaches out to a constant narrative element in *The Middleman*, that is, the displacement of white female characters on behalf of the emergence of both the immigrants' agency and their masculine counterparts.

As Sharon is being symbolically "shot out" of the story by Eng's imaginary weapon, Lara's role as a mother and wife is replaced by Jasmine's presence in the Moffitts' household, where "Bill, Muffie, and she were a family, almost" (156); and deep down within Jason's desire for stability and normalcy, for his role as a father and husband in a heteronormative family, lies the ghost of an ex-wife who is far away, after choosing to live in "some organic-farming lesbo-commune." (118)

Ironically enough, the neoliberal idea of freedom and choice through which Mukherjee's heroes and heroines can fulfil their individual potentials, seems to mimic the tropes and ideologies of those Western feminist agendas that they apparently wish to disrupt, and corresponds to a desire to participate in the dominant culture, which, in the narrations, implies an alignment with white male characters.

Both in the novel and in the short story, the two Jasmines' advancement occurs by embracing men who possess them – as protégé, mistress or wife – in a well intentioned but clearly paternalistic way that is strongly reminiscent of an orientalistic and imperialist mentality. This enhances rather than challenges the male characters' superior status as white men:[27] the exotic Jasmine becomes an object of erotic desire for Bill Moffit by virtue of her role, that is, her capability to re-construct (even before she is able to reconstruct and transform herself) an American society traditionally built around the patriarchal family, something that feminist Lara seems to be neglecting.

A romantic encounter also dramatizes the relationship between multiculturalism, nationhood and transnational issues in "Fighting for the Rebound."

The first-person male narrative voice also occurs in this story, set in the sterile, anodyne world of yuppiedom. In Mukherjee's representation of reconstituting American families, the traditional family as an arena where the struggle for belonging and identification and for conventional forms of cohabitation takes place is totally rejected: the shift is in favor of a new singledom. Griff, an Atlanta money manager, lives in a world of tv, jogging, and a weary relation with Blanquita, the daughter of a former Marcos supporter from the Philippines. Through the male protagonist's erratic thoughts, the story focuses on the struggle of a man who tries to save his own independence and individualism from Blanquita's pleas for emotional connection and commitment.

In "Fighting for the Rebound" the plot rests on a world-wide vision narrative, but one that only filters through Griff's maniacal tv

[27] Patricia Chu, *Assimilating Asians*, 135.

zapping. South Africa, Bophal, Mexico, are kaleidoscopic, yet phantasmagoric realities that set the pace of his private life. Everything is consumed from the still and steady position of the sofa and the bed, in a voyeuristic process that also involves and absorbs his mode of interaction with Blanquita herself: in his unproblematic view, she is exotic and beautiful, to be consumed through her "frilly see-through apron." (79) Griff's America is epitomized by his remote control: the countries and the life buzzing on his TV bounce, according to his free will, in a narcissistic, self-referential space. In Griff's stance, American imperialism rests its strength on the centripetal force of its immigration flows:

> The less I know growing up in Manila … the less foreign feels. Dear old red neck Atlanta is a thing of the past, no need to feel foreign here. Just wheel your shopping cart through aisles of bok-choy and twenty kinds of Jamaican spices at the Farmers' Market, and you'll see that the US of A is still a pioneer country. (81)

> But Griff's view is also haunted by a true fear of what Blanquita, with her demand for a more complicated and intense relationship, might unexpectedly reveal.

> But, Christ, there's a difference between exotic and *foreign,* isn't there? Exotic means you know how to use your foreignness, or you make yourself a little foreign in order to appear exotic. Real foreign is a little scary, believe me. (81)

Blanquita herself is a colonizer, seeking out patterns she expects to find in a culture alien to her. She is a Philippine trying to be American, and "for all the rotten things she says about the Philippines, or the mistiness she reserves for the Stars and Stripes, she's kept her old citizenship." (79) Griff recognizes this fact, and recognizes the position in which they stand, each reaching across the cultural barrier, absorbing a little of the other's understanding, but never stepping beyond it, toward interpersonal and intercultural confrontation. In her desperate attempt to connect, he has come to perceive the woman as helpless precisely because of her cultural differences, just as Renata sees Ro as a man and a hero, but still not

'self-sufficient.' He admits it even to her: "'You think I can't handle the situation, right? You think I'm just a dumb, naive foreigner you have to protect, right?' 'Yeah'." (90) And, in spite of Blanquita's tough stance and her final resolution to leave the man, getting engaged in a carefree relationship with her chief, in the conclusion of the story this will happen: while Griff's America goes back to its normal landscape of joggers and shopping malls, untouched and shielded from the rest of the world – the "scary, real foreign" part – by the TV screen, Blanquita bounces back in his life, hysterically crying on the phone and pleading with him to pick her up.

The language of conquest is doubly reiterated in Banquita's displacement of Griff's new white girlfriend, Maura, with whom he had managed to soothe the distress of her absence. Deciding that a call from his ex-lover is a sign for abandoning him, she declares: "I don't want to start anything complicated." (94) Mukherjee concludes the story in a way that leaves the reader wondering whether Griff will go beyond his noncommittal perspective on life and respond to Blanquita's cry for love, whether he will be her savior or not.

In her revisionary-subversive response to the nativist ideologies of the American nation and citizenship, Bharati Mukherjee's narrative strategy involves the re-articulation of myths and images that are traditionally associated to such ideologies, such as progress, conquest, and a pioneering attitude. Her immigrant subjects become inscribed in those myths, and made into heroes and heroines who move forward within these figural loci of possibilities, which enable them to actively advance into an unknown but promising future, and toward a full agency in their new American lives. Her view is best illustrated by the often quoted passage from the novel *Jasmine*, where the protagonist states: "There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake ourselves. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the image of dreams."[28] And indeed, in *The Middleman* every story ends on a new point of departure. People are last seen walking out through an open door, planning an escape, or suspended on the verge of a sexual transport. The futures toward which they propel themselves – and the premises of change and rebirth – are not guaranteed to be

[28] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* (London:Virago, 1989), 25.

successful, but do have the potential for personal, material and spiritual fulfilment. But the ability to change, adapt and fit into new circumstances displayed by the migrant characters of *Jasmine* and *The Middleman* is replete with a deep ambiguity.

Referring back to the passage from *Jasmine* that I quoted above, one should perhaps add a question: "*...but of whose dream?*" The change or transformation that Ro, Eng, Jasmine and Blanquita might go through, occurs under the control of a dominant inscription, often in the shape of male fantasies; this, in fact, may disguise an *imperial subject* dreaming, and a violent remaking of a third world "Other" to fit those dreams.

On the other hand, one should also acknowledge the deep sense of displacement and instability the mainstream characters go through in the encounter with their immigrant counterparts, and their struggle to keep their selves, and their histories, comprehensible. Theirs, therefore, is an attempt to resist incomprehensibility by animating narratives that constitute 'self' and 'other' in a comfortable and familiar fashion, in order to re-make sense into their unsettled lives. Mukherjee's fiction, thus, enacts and enlightens that 'losing of the self' that characterizes the contemporary moment of global diasporas. In this context, it is significant that critics and readers seem to focus on Mukherjee's immigrant Americans, Americans in the making, to the exclusion of the stories that represent 'white' Americans as *also* Americans in the making, immigrants to a new and multicultural land.

Manuela Vastolo

"A Familiar Shape": textual dynamics and horizons of expectations in Larissa Lai's *When Fox Is a Thousand.*

One of the trends in contemporary Asian American criticism is the definition and the analysis of Asian American literature in historical-ethnic-socio-cultural terms and the erasure of the aesthetic sphere. Texts are more often seen as reflections of the social reality, as exemplifications of a particular ideology or specific political and economic concerns than as 'literary objects' having their own rules.

This sociological and cultural-materialist approach is deeply connected to the function Asian American literature and criticism had when the Asian American discursive field emerged during the 1970s: its aim was to give voice to those who had been hitherto invisible, silenced and made alien. Social history, communal responsibility, collective ethnic identities were examined and greatly emphasized in the works of many Asian American authors in the name of a communal political struggle towards visibility and the claiming of American citizenship. The paradigm shift that occurred during the 1990s from an identity primarily defined in terms of essentialist ethnicity to the emphasis on multiple positionings, differences, and diaspora has had the effect of unveiling the constructedness of human-made categories, such as race, class, gender, sex.[1] Nevertheless, the tendency to read and value Asian American works primarily as ethnographic accounts and to critically privilege and valorize those texts that subscribe to specific political projects has not changed much.

[1] King-Kok Cheung, "Re-viewing Asian American Literary Studies," in King-Kok Cheung, ed., *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-36.

The white literary establishment, for different reasons, has unproblematically contributed to the same ethnological and sociological approach: selected Asian American texts have been taken as representative of entire groups and a few Asian American writers as representative of the entire community, their texts often having the function of what Sau-ling Cynthia Wong defines as "guided Chinatown tour",[2] that is, ethnic texts become a way of 'peeping into' what is otherwise considered alien, mysterious, exotic. The denial of an aesthetic dimension to these texts, seen as transparently mimetic, is a useful means of preserving the hierarchical division between high, canonical literature – written by white, male authors and dealing with issues of language, form, genres, interestedly seen as universal and ahistorical – and ethnic literature, rather more often commodified with the aim of reinforcing the illusion of a multicultural society.[3]

North American subjects of Asian ancestry living in the US and Canada have been confronted with a number of similar experiences on issues regarding identity, racist discrimination, multiple cultural allegiances, as well as marginalization vis-à-vis mainstream society. My focus on some of the reception dynamics in the Asian American context in the preceding paragraphs starts from this consideration, but it is by no means intended to obscure the cultural and political differences between the US and the Canadian context, as well as the different paths that led to the formation of an Asian Canadian literature and identity.[4]

My aim in this essay is the analysis of one of these Asian Canadian texts, the first novel written by Larissa Lai, *When Fox Is a Thousand*,

[2] Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour? Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior and the Chinese-American Autobiographical Controversy," in James Robert Payne, ed., *Multicultural Autobiography: American Lives* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 248.

[3] This may explain why some Asian American texts, such as the last two novels published by Maxine Hong Kingston, have gained scant critical attention even in the last decade.

[4] Eleanor Ty and Donald C. Goellnicht, eds., *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2004), 1-14. For a detailed introduction to Asian Canadian Literary Studies, see Donald Goellnicht, "A Long Labour: the Protracted Birth of Asian Canadian Literature," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 72 (2000), 1-41.

published in 1995.[5] Born in California, raised in Newfoundland and now living and working in Vancouver, Lai was awarded an Astrea Foundation Emerging Writers Award in 1995, while the novel was short-listed for the Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award in 1996.

The plot intertwines three parallel stories: the story of the Fox born in China and migrated to Canada, reincarnated for one thousand years in women's bodies; the story of Artemis, a young lesbian Chinese Canadian middle-class girl, who discovers her queerness through her relation with other female characters (Diane, Claude, Mercy) and becomes aware of her racialized identity, after dealing with the discovery of her adoption; the story of the young Tang woman poet and Taoist priestess Yu Hsuan-chi,[6] who first works in a tea-house as poet and guest entertainer, then starts a lesbian relation with another woman that lasts longer than her short marriage, and in the end dies in prison.

In this essay I wish to investigate some of the narrative strategies of the novel, more specifically the intertextuality weaving together ancient Chinese fictional and historical figures (the Fox and the poet/priestess Yu Hsuan-chi) with modern Western narrations and the triple temporality. I will also attempt a stylistic and linguistic analysis of the novel as well as of some of its paratextual aspects. What I would like to argue is that, on the one hand, by deploying many postmodern narrative strategies, concepts in what might be called the 'cultural studies department style,' and contemporary critical categories, the novel successfully resists any easy cooptation in the well-known patterns of interpretation of 'ethnic' literature as authentic auto-

[5] My analysis refers to the second edition of the novel published in 2004 by Arsenal Pulp Press, which perceptibly differs from the first one. A comparative analysis of the two versions, although presumably worth undertaking, goes beyond the scope of this essay. Larissa Lai, *When Fox is a Thousand* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004). All quotations are from this edition; page numbers will be henceforth included parenthetically in the text.

[6] In the course of the essay I will use both Wade Giles and pinyin systems of transliteration in order to provide the same terms Lai uses in the text, hence the inevitable absence of uniformity. Pinyin system will be anyway preferred for all the other Chinese words employed.

ethnography, thus apparently challenging the horizons of expectations of the white readers and the publishing market and affirming a constructionist and historicist vision of the world. On the other hand, as I will try to show, some textual inconsistencies and stylistic features of the text as well as some aspects of its narratological design strongly encourage an ahistorical reading that, paradoxically, can be situated not far from the orientalist discourse that the text explicitly disavows through the characters' statements.[7]

The assumption I start from – one that it is worth foregrounding in this context and for the purpose of my analysis – is the distinction between the 'real' world of the author and of ourselves as readers, and the 'represented' world of the text. The world represented in the text enters the real world, which serves as the source of representation, but it is not the world itself. It is their mutual interaction as autonomous, although connected, entities that I would like to explore. Consequently, while on the one hand I will offer a textual analysis of the novel, on the other hand I will try to investigate the readers' response to the text, that is, what happens to the text when it enters the world again and what process of exchange with the readers it sets in motion.

Forays into Chinese literature

The fox, a central figure in *When Fox Is a Thousand*, is a traditional character in Chinese literature, an animal/spirit protagonist of many *chuanqi*, *zhiguan* and other Chinese folktales varying in length and time of publication. In the Chinese literary tradition the fox is a tricky animal figure endowed with supernatural powers, endowed with the ability to transform and get a human shape. After acquiring a female human shape, she often seduces young men and breathes life out of them. Moreover she is able to animate dead bodies into life in order to

[7] I am using "orientalism" here in the sense first outlined by Edward Said in his well-known book, that is, as a consistent narrative produced by Western culture that projects a group of connotations on the 'Orient' seen as a homogeneous, exotic, fascinating 'Other.' It is a discursive formation where a 'textual' Western Orient replaces different identities and erases difference. Cfr. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), It. trans *Orientalismo* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991).

become immortal on her thousandth birthday. Almost always causing mischief among human beings, the traditional Chinese fox has strong negative connotations: her ability to cross the boundaries between 'natural' and 'non-natural,' between the living and the dead, between women and men, as well as her dangerous sexuality make her a symbol of the transgression of the moral *status quo* and institutional hierarchies.[8] The most famous collection of folktales featuring the fox as a character (in more than eighty tales) is Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi*, one of the intertexts of Lai's novel, a text that she explicitly mentions having read in an English translation and that appears in the Source Notes.[9] Today the pervasiveness of the fox's negative connotations in China is shown by the the term 'fox spirit' (hŭlijing), which is a derogatory expression for 'seductive woman.'

In *When Fox Is a Thousand* Lai revisions the Chinese fox, modifies the ideological focus of the traditional narrative, and transforms the trickster figure into an empowered and 'positive' one, thus providing what is today quite commonly defined a postmodern parodic representation, to borrow Hutcheon's definition of parody as a "repetition with critical distance."[10]

First of all, the Chinese fox is a common trope recurring in a number of short stories, and multiple, but very short versions of fox stories can be found in the Chinese tradition, where no depth or development are allowed to this character. On the other hand, only a single, though ever-changing, fox is represented in *When Fox Is a Thousand*. The novel as a genre is not just longer than the short story; in its traditional eighteenth- and nineteenth-century form, it is also generally reputed to focus on the construction of the subject: this is perhaps the reason why, instead of many Chinese versions with many foxes, we get a single version with a character who is given room to develop, grow, and

[8] Edoarda Masi, *Cento trame di capolavori della letteratura cinese* (Milano: RCS Rizzoli Libri, 1991), 216-221 and 363-366; Tak-hung L. Chan, *The Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts: Ji Yun and Eighteenth-Century Literati Storytelling* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998).

[9] It is translated in English as *Strange Tales from the Liaozhai Studio*, trans. Qingnian Zhang, Ciyun Zhang, Yi Yang (Beijing: People's China Publishing, 1997).

[10] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Metheuen, 1985), 37.

change. The numerous Chinese figures become a single myth in Lai's novel.

Moreover, in the traditional Chinese tales the fox has always been denied a point of view and a voice, while the incipit of Lai's novel "I come from an honest family of foxes" (13) immediately signals that she has been allowed a voice and an individual identity.

The killing and transformative powers of traditional foxes, who, according to the legends, kill people to get their shape, become life-giving powers in the words of the Fox: "The word, I believe, is *animate*, although I much prefer *inhabit*. In this act I cease to be a mere animal. Nor am I a parasite. To inhabit a body is to create mass out of darkness, to give weight and motion to that which otherwise would be cold". (27, italics in the text)

In this Chinese Canadian novel sexuality, and queer sexuality in particular, also lose the threatening and negative connotations they had in the Chinese stories, which represented the Confucian patriarchal value system founded on a rigid order and hierarchies that placed female subjects in inferior positions. From the very beginning the novel portrays a lesbian love story where the Fox's shrewdness plays a crucial role in the achievement of a happy ending, and a number of lesbian relationships constellate the whole text: Artemis and Diane, Artemis and Claude, Claude and Diane, Artemis and Ming in the contemporary Canadian context, Yu Hsuan-chi and Lu Ch'iao in ninth-century China, just to name a few. Exploring the intersection of race and ethnicity with sexuality and gender, Lai successfully undermines the essentialist definition of both axes and their artificial mutual exclusion. As Donald Goellnicht points out in his essay "Forays into Acts of Transformation," where he investigates the ways in which diasporic/transnational and queer/lesbian concerns overlap, "sexuality becomes the agent that levers a traditional diasporic Chineseness out of its self-sustaining myths of homogeneity predicated on masculinist and ethnic-absolutist assumptions, at the same time as both sexuality and a provisional ethnicity become the agents that destabilize traditional notions of Canadianness predicated on whiteness and heteronormativity."[11]

[11] Donald C. Goellnicht, "'Forays into Acts of Trasformation': Queering Chinese-Canadian Diasporic Fictions," in Tseen Khoo and Kam Louie, eds., *Culture, Identity, Commodity: Diasporic Chinese Literatures in English* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2005), 156.

To sum it up, all the connotations of the Chinese fox are revisioned and acquire positive traits in Lai's novel and the Fox, a figure crossing the boundary between the living and the dead, the past and the present, questioning the humanness and the naturalness of established systems, comes to represent the contemporary queer Chinese Canadian identity crossing national, geographical, and historical boundaries. It programmatically becomes the fluid racialized positioning of many Chinese Canadians who wish to dismantle the idea of a necessary, essential and fixed individual and national identity, based on whiteness and masculinity, to show the constructedness of the norms of any identitarian discourse – both individual and national –, and to open up new and alternative spaces.

The changes undergone by the myth are even deeper, because by breathing life into the dead, the Fox does not only transform the dead into the living but she transforms herself, thus suggesting continuous performative recreations of identity where there is no 'real', no core below the surface. Nonetheless, on the one hand, the reiterated "shape-shifting, name-changing, gender-crossing, and cross-dressing"[12] that take place throughout the novel in all three narrative lines show the multiple possibilities of this identity; on the other hand, the performativity of identity is repeatedly called into question, its limits more than once foregrounded. Artemis's disguise as a man in order to enter a bar with Eden, even though it is a men's night, which initially promises to be funny, turns into an uncomfortable mask: "here she felt like a dwarf in the land of giants. There was not the mediating presence of women to make a gradation between them and her."(104) One of the female characters that undergoes a radical transformation, Mercy/Ming (she changes her name in the course of the book), ends up being killed.

Both the performativity of identity and its limits are staged at a thematic level as the central theme of the novel, while multiple female choices are represented by means of the triple narrative at a compositional level. The mode of presentation nevertheless seems to highlight some contradictions.

[12] Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu, "From meta-morphing t'ien hu: sexual transgression & textual transposition in When Fox Is a Thousand," *West Coast Line: A Journal of Contemporary Writing & Criticism* 38.2 (Fall 2004), 157.

The revisionist mythmaking of traditional trickster figures is a common postmodern strategy and it is not new to North American writers of Asian ancestry, the most celebrated text displaying such a strategy being *The Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston.[13] In Kingston's text two classical figures, the legendary fictional warrior woman Fa Mulan and the historical figure of the woman poet Ts'ai Yen, are evoked and their stories revisioned. Lai's recourse in her own novel to a fictional figure like the Fox and a historical figure like the Tang priestess/poet is explicitly intended to remind the reader of that precedent. That is why analogies and differences are, to my mind, worth exploring through a brief overview in order to better understand *When Fox Is a Thousand*, by taking into consideration not the thematic content of both texts, but their stylistic and linguistic quality.[14]

The voice of the Fox

The realm of the fantastic allows both Larissa Lai and Maxine Hong Kingston to take a distance from the realistic, ethnographic accounts supposed to mimetically show the 'reality' of the ethnic community. At the same time, though, the lyrical, mythical, dreamlike quality of their stories, set apart from the realm of social facts (Lai also resorts to Western fairytales revised from a feminist, postmodern point of view), easily appeals to readers interested in an ethnographic, Orientalist flavor, thus potentially encouraging exactly the kind of reading that these texts are otherwise meant to counter. Mode of presentation in these texts becomes crucial to an understanding of their difference.

The Woman Warrior is written with what Jeanne Rosier Smith calls a "trickster aesthetic": it is a narrative that keeps contradiction and paradox always in play, and that lacks any closure or resolution. If the protagonist in her self-determination process struggles to verify

[13] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (New York: Knopf, 1976).

[14] Lai uses also Western sources as intertexts of her novel, such as science fiction films. For her use of Blade Runner, see Robyn Morris, "Making Eyes: Colouring the Look in Larissa Lai's When Fox Is a Thousand and Ridley Scott's Blade Runner," *Australian-Canadian Studies: a Journal for the Humanities & Social Science* 20.1 (2002), 75-98.

the truthfulness of the stories she hears, the narrator refuses any distinction and defines herself as an "outlaw knotmaker" whose story merges actual and fictional events, legend and reality, without allowing its readers any comfortable idea of truth that is not multifaceted and provisional.[15] That is to say, the narrator keeps deconstructing her own point of view and narrative authority, so that the central theme of *The Woman Warrior* becomes her epistemological difficulty, her constant and inescapable process of negotiation in the interpretation of reality. In spite of the first-person narration, the narrator/protagonist has no superior knowledge, no "referential advantage"; she is an interpreting character, programmatically unstable all the time: what is foregrounded is the process of interpretation.[16]

If *The Woman Warrior*, in its continuous refractions of points of view, its lack of closure and resolution, and its refusal of any hierarchical discourse leading to a stable 'truth', can be considered an "interrogative text", according to Catherine Belsey's definition, *When Fox Is a Thousand* fits into the category of the "declarative text."[17] In this sense, as I will try to show, there seems to be a fracture between what is said and the way things are said in the novel.

The novel shows a structural sophistication from the very beginning. It is divided in four perfectly balanced parts: two shorter parts comprising two longer ones. Each part includes several micro-sections – fifty-seven in all – that alternately focus on three different interwoven narrative lines: the first on the supernatural Chinese figure of the Fox, the second on the figure of the Chinese woman poet Yu Hsuan-chi, the third on the life of the young female Chinese Canadian character, Artemis Wong. The balance in the length of the sections is reproduced at the level of content: the Fox appears in the titles of the first and the fourth section, "When the Fox Came to Live Alone" and "When Fox Is a Thousand," and it is the Fox that frames the story: she is the first and the last speaking character of the book and the pro-

[15] Jeanne Rosier Smith, *Writing Tricksters. Mythic Gambols in American Ethnic Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[16] Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, "'Sugar Sisterhood': Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon", in David Palumbo-Liu, ed., *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, Interventions* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1995), 174-210.

[17] Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (New York: Methuen, 1980).

tagonist of its central microsection. As the title itself makes explicit, its figure spans one thousand years. Thus, the Fox frames the novel at a structural, narrative, and temporal level.

At the level of narration, moreover, she immediately defines herself as the 'knowing' subjectivity: her superior knowledge and her shrewdness lead to the transgressive and unexpected resolution of the first anecdote in the first two pages – the housewife and the concubine running away together and leaving the man alone at home – and, from that moment, the readers know the Fox will be their "friendly guide" to the fairy-tale and potentially exotic world the book is disclosing. The powerful 'I' of the Fox becomes the center of knowledge and the reassuring interpreting filter of the world that we, as readers, are confronted with.

Moreover, in order to assert more explicitly her superiority, the Fox states "It is other foxes who are strange, not me," (27) thus distancing herself from the traditional community of other foxes. On the one hand, Lai is claiming the visibility of silenced and doubly marginalized subjects, the Chinese Canadian lesbians, and rejecting the heteronormative male Canadian centrality; on the other hand, she is making the Fox the new normative subject, the new center. Normativity and centrality are subverted, but by no means questioned.

Different types of narration alternately occupy the three narrative lines: a third-person omniscient narrator for contemporary Vancouver, a first-person narrator for the Chinese Tang priestess/poet Yu Hsuan-chi and a first-person narrator for the Fox. Nevertheless, the characters are not allowed the same level of autonomy. Even though Artemis is a character in the second microsection of the novel, where her visit to the Seattle museum exhibition together with Mercy is narrated (16-20), we are not provided any information about her till the third microsection, where the Fox introduces her, "Her name is Artemis Wong and it suits her, since she belongs to no one" (20) and entirely fills the gaps of her past as an adopted child: Artemis's story is framed by the authoritative point of view of the Fox. And it is the Fox, in the microsection exactly in the middle of the book, that describes Artemis's feelings and thoughts in Hong Kong: "She knows these are the things that a Western tourist would see. This disturbs her. … She does not know that beneath every mirage is another mirage." (124) At

a diegetic level, Artemis's complex and overdetermined reaction to Hong Kong – she is an outsider who has ironically almost acquired the gaze of a Western tourist – is a way to describe the delusion of any kind of originary culture that can be retrieved by a racialized subject and highlight the absence of any Chinese essence or absolute racial truth;[18] but at the level of presentation it is again a way to authoritatively frame the story from a "wiser" stance: "She does not know." The Fox explains Artemis's feelings to the reader from an outside, universal position, even going beyond Artemis's thoughts to share a superior knowledge with the reader. The authoritative knowledge belongs to the Fox, who spans through time and presumably cultures and adds a knowledge of all the other characters' thoughts and of their past, present and future actions to the authority deriving from first-person narration. She offers a single, unified, coherent, truth, ultimately non-contradictory and reassuring: "I know we will meet again." (249)

The second microsection portrays the relation between the reader and the Fox:

> Her friends call her Art, or sometimes Artless, depending upon the degree of guile she is capable of in any particular situation.
> *You say*: A funny name for a Chinese girl. *I will correct you.* Chinese-Canadian. Make no mistake, because her name is a name that marks a generation of immigrant children whose parents loved the idea of the Enlightenment and thought they would find it blooming in the full heat of its rational fragrance right here in North America. (20, italics mine)

The Fox answers a not yet formulated objection of the reader and 'neutralizes' his/her possible wandering thoughts, again from an authoritative position, that of a 'teacher.' The reader is supposed to passively hear the rest of the introduction, which shifts to other alternative Greek names for Artemis. On the one hand, in this sentence the novel seems to expose and counteract the orientalistic approach of a naïve reader, on the other the Fox, by way of her explanatory tone, becomes the easy bridge to the other culture/perspective, in effect inviting trust in her as a reliable cultural insider and an expert guide.

[18] Goellnicht, "'Forays into Acts of Trasformation'," 169.

This does not mean the reader does not get involved in the narration. The reader's active role is hinted at more than once – for example, in the questions: "Have I already mentioned that we foxes are generally predisposed towards intellectual types?" (133) – but then reduced to that of a passive as well as ignorant listener who must be educated: "You wouldn't, for instance, catch me haunting a welder....You wouldn't catch me following dancers or acrobats around either....You wouldn't catch me trailing political activists." (133). Since the Fox's point of view is all-encompassing, the reader is not allowed any possibility of questioning the content of the novel, the book being reassuringly ready to provide the 'politically correct' answers.

Incredible time travelling

Even before the incipit, both the title of the novel and the key to symbols with captions point to the question of time, the former mentioning the age of the Fox, the second declaring the temporal setting of the three narrative lines: timelessness for the Fox, the ninth century for Yu Hsuan-chi, contemporaneity for Artemis. The importance of passing time is reiterated throughout the novel by the Fox because it is to time that her transformative abilities are connected. According to the Chinese legend told in the ex-ergo on page 92 (the micro-section itself told by the Fox) the Fox can acquire the ability to change into a woman at fifty, she can get the shape of a beautiful girl at one hundred, while at one thousand she becomes immortal. The referential precision – real time as opposed to fairy-tale time – is foregrounded all along the novel by dates mentioned in each of the narrative lines: "In 1258, I fell in love with the Chinese princess who was sent as a tribute to the Prince of Persia" (102); "It was 1989 and she was sitting in a café". (16) So the timeless time of the Fox is nonetheless human time at a diegetic level.

We read the analectic tale of the Fox's first fifty years and her transformation (92-93), and are told that Yu Hsuan-chi is the Tang woman poet the Fox has "inhabited" for nine hundred years (28), while she is waiting for her thousandth birthday in 1989: "My thousandth birthday is coming sooner than I thought. A week tomorrow, to

be precise." (196) The question is: how is it possible for the Fox to be one hundred in the ninth century (the Tang poet died approximately in 868)[19] and await her one thousandth birthday in 1989, when, going by the dates, she should be more than 1200 years old? It is a temporal inconsistency at a diegetic level, whose importance is emphasized by its taking place in spite of the temporal details provided and of the scholarly sources mentioned *in* the text, when the Fox goes to the library in search of information about Yu Hsuan-chi (236-237) and after it (251-252). The explicit reference to all this material – available to the Fox as well as to us – actually seems to prove the factual verifiability of all the dates and stories, while on the other hand there is no textual evidence that such historiographical precision is being used ironically or parodically.

The implications of this temporal anomaly are worth exploring. Dismissing it with the easy answer that it does not matter at plot level can be a solution, and to some extent it is also true, but then, what is the function of including all these gratuitous details? Subscribing to the idea that referential accuracy has no importance implies that these details serve mainly to create what Sau-ling Wong has termed an "Oriental effect". The expression "Oriental effect" enlarges and recontextualizes Roland Barthes's concept of "reality effect." Barthes argues that in novels apparently superfluous details have the function to signify the category of the 'real' – to stress that what we are confronted with is 'a real world' and we are not reading a written text. Similarly, Wong's concept of the "Oriental effect" accounts for the existence of details that cannot be justified on structural and informational levels and whose function seems to be the stressing of the 'Oriental' origin to the mainstream reader. Authenticity is implicit in the very existence of such details and we do not think Asian cultural practices can be different. Thus, references to Asian or, in the present case, Chinese cultural realities end by signaling a reassuring affinity between the novel and the North American readers' preconceptions of what the Orient is/should be. Their overall effect, in other words, can be addressed with the question of the readers' reception in mind, wondering about the implied reader of this novel. So far the North

[19] See the entire section at http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/chinese/yu.

American reading public has responded positively to *When Fox Is a Thousand*; a new edition came out two years ago. Most probably, the novel appeals to both readers with quasi-ethnographic inclinations and to 'politically correct,' well-learned readers, who can easily find the critical theories studied at university reproduced, and to a certain extent trivialized, in the novel. That is to say, on the one hand the text elicits an Orientalistic approach and voyeurism, on the other hand it produces admiration, self-mirroring and self-gratification.

Needless to say, the notion of 'effect' does not imply that the author subscribes to these views, nor that these are overtly goal-oriented artistic decisions. On the contrary, Larissa Lai in a number of interviews and in the afterword that follows the second edition of the novel has made clear her rejection of the "native informant on an exotic and distant culture," (257) disclaiming her role of cultural interpreter and the authenticity of her work: "I got this story from library books. I don't read Chinese. I read it in English translation" (257). What I wonder is whether the author's explicitly declared intention is actually conveyed by the text and whether the overall effect this book conveys is not quite different.

In *The Dialogic Imagination* Mikhail Bakhtin defines the novel as a "dialogized heteroglossia," that is, the co-existence of a multiplicity of points of view in conflict with one another. It is in the interaction of the voices – characters' voices and narrative voices – that the novel flees from "the hegemony of a single and unitary language" and any single worldview is decentralized.[20]

When Fox Is a Thousand displays an interesting variety of narrating voices that span across times and places, but on a stylistic level all the refractions get lost and the novel is characterized by an overall uniformity: "In the year 1071, ten thousand men wearing chainmail and wielding crosses sacked the fabled city of Byzantium," (16) "My mother's blood thundered in my ears and in my heart, which still beat in sympathy for her," (36) "Her name is Artemis Wong and it suits her" are three different beginnings of the three narrative lines, but the voice in each does not change and it has the effect of creating a world

[20] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

where apparently the same experiences are interchangeable and keep repeating. The temporal and geographical distance of events and the content of each individual narrative line can be inferred within a couple of paragraphs, but the manner of presentation is not distinguishable. In other words, although there are a number of voices, the multivoiced and polyphonic resistance is neutralized, all the voices being ultimately eclipsed by the 'absolute' and all-encompassing voice and perspective of the Fox.

Actually, it is the symbols opening each microsection that suggest the right path to the reader. Once again, from the point of view of reception analysis, this is highly significant of the readers' position: the symbols appear as a classic postmodern device, on the one hand creating a semblance of difficulty and on the other successfully preventing the reader from paying attention to the lack of differentiation between the alternating voices. There is no need for any deeper interrogation on the mode of presentation; the narration fascinates the readers with a flavor of the unknown, but culturally meaningful distinctions are erased. The intellectual consumer of Orientalism can find the right amount of intellectual pleasure and satisfy his/her curiosity about 'Chinese myths' in a wholesale fashion (this text does not at all suggest that the Fox as a figure has Chinese multiversions behind it; quite the reverse, a foregrounded and normative Fox is the protagonist). The anti-Orientalist intellectual – and especially those who share feminist concerns – can detect and appreciate the denunciation of naïve voyeurism (Saint's father or Eden as the quintessence of the white, male subject) and of the Orientalistic attitude displayed by Artemis's parents (50-51), together with a statement of pluralism and an awareness of the connection between global and local issues. As Sau-ling Wong says, "A credible cultural middleman for the contemporary 'mainstream' reader needs to demonstrate, in addition to access to an authentic originary culture (or the appearance thereof), some sophistication regarding the limitations of monologism."[21]

Finally, just one more note on the paratext to stress once more the 'marketing effect': the cover, far from resembling the embroidered and highly exotic colored covers of many Asian North American nov-

[21] Wong, "'Sugar Sisterhood': Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon," 190.

els with explicit 'Chinese' markers on it, is at a first glance more discreet. Nonetheless it shows a human face with 'Chinese eyes' whose hair is thick and depicted in cartoon fashion, with the shape of a fox in the shadow of a full moon in the background. On the first page, the three intriguing and still undecipherable images of the fox, the lantern, and the book appear. There is enough to appeal to someone interested in exotica and it does not displease a contemporary intellectual.

From the point of view of reception analysis, this text seems to play with its readers at different levels; this is caused, as I have tried to show, by the presence of contradictions between its content and its form. What does this mean on a political and cultural plane? In some ways, as Donald Goellnicht repeatedly points out in his essay, Lai's political project – the renegotiation of a Chinese Canadian queer subjectivity in the context of the Canadian multiculturalism, which refuses sexuality as a cultural category – is a daring one.[22] On other planes, nonetheless, the text's way of conveying this implication shows how this novel also mirrors the contending needs and projections of the contemporary North American reading public, interestedly ready to respond to its Orientalistic flavor and classify it as 'ethnic literature.'Only time will tell whether this multidimensional cultural product will still be read and positively assessed another decade from now, once the political and cultural needs to which it responds in the present juncture are no longer as cogent as they are today.

[22] Goellnicht, "'Forays into Acts of Trasformation'," 153-182.

REVIEWS

Rosamaria Loretelli e Ugo M. Olivieri, a cura di, *La riflessione sul romanzo nell'Europa del Settecento* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2005),164 pp.

Reviewed by C. Maria Laudando

Since the pioneering work by Laura Brown and Felicity Nussbaum vindicating the emergence of a 'New Eighteenth-Century' (*The New Eighteenth Century. Theory. Politics. English Literature*, 1987), a number of studies have significantly changed the scenery of the ongoing debate concerning the origins and theorizations of the English novel. Thanks to the disruptive impact of new critical perspectives, from Culturalist to Feminist and New Historicist, on that age, they have contributed to a greater or lesser degree to a radical revision of the national and patriarchal canonization that genre had undergone in the past two centuries. On the one hand, the critical re-mapping of the eighteenth century as a turbulent, transitional, unstable cultural era, instead of the complacent commonplace of the Augustan celebration of peace and serenity, has turned the attention to the complex and delicate interplay between tradition and innovation, conformism and transgression, 'Ancients' and 'Moderns' at stake at the core of the novel itself as a flexible and omnivorous genre, a 'new' and privileged site of cultural production for the agenda of national, social and sexual acculturation; on the other hand, the rediscovery of a huge mass of so-called minor works – unduly neglected in the past and mostly by female writers – has dramatically enlarged and enriched the field of investigation. The debate has invested not only the status of eighteenth-century studies in Britain and in the anglophone critical world but has also contributed to revising critical approaches to the literary canon of the age in other European countries such as France, Germany and Italy, stimulating a renovated sense of ferment and vigour in the field of interdisciplinary and comparative studies. Such lines of inquiry characterize all the contributions now gathered in the volume edited by Loretelli and Olivieri, *La riflessione sul romanzo nell'Europa del Settecento*, which present the proceedings of a Conference devoted to one crucial aspect of its subject: the variegated forms of theoretical speculations which accompanied the emergence of the eighteenth-century novel in Europe – indeed an aspect which lends itself perfectly to a promising convergence of interdisciplinary and comparative interests – as already evident from the plurality of the sponsoring institutions then involved: the Italian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, the Italian Institute for Philosophical Studies and the Department of Modern Philology of the University of Naples "Federico II" .

As one of the editors makes clear in his introduction to the volume, the most innovative element common to the theoretical reflections of that age on

the novel is to be found in the strict interdependence between "the transformation of the narrative forms and the change in the modes of reception and fruition of the novel form" (8). This explains the particular relevance in the volume accorded to the reader-oriented approach which is adopted not only in the essays on the theorizations and forms of the English novel but in those devoted to the related issues in Italy and in Europe as well, thus helping to underline everywhere "the 'open' and problematic character" (9) which marks the critical debate on the genre.

The volume opens with the brief but dense contribution by Giorgio Cusatelli who highlights an exemplary contradiction underlying recent theoretical efforts at dealing with the novel as a systematic genre: the willingness 'to measure', so to speak, the very imaginative exuberance of narrative invention and the application of parameters which in any case end up in more or less imperfect, disputable taxonomies, given the omnivorous, hybrid nature of the genre itself. A perspective which proves more flexible than others is probably the sociological, which in the Italian case opportunely calls attention to the leading role played by the female audience, while on the European scene the comparison between Italy and Germany undoubtedly marks a much more articulated and lively landscape for the native country of Goethe and Herder thanks to the deep impact of Idealism on the new narrative genre flourishing there.

Then follow the two essays devoted to the English field and, as such, of more immediate interest for the very readers of the present review: one by Rosamaria Loretelli who nicely focuses on the problems of narrative unity and the other by Annamaria Lamarra who discusses the more specific case of the novel of manners as theorized and practised by Francis Burney. The first of these contributions locates in the changes concerning the psychological process of reading the very key of access to the origins of the novel in the eighteenth century. What has so far received relatively scarce attention is precisely the reader-oriented approach which, instead, in Loretelli's view, indelibly marks the beginning itself of the new genre capable as it was of mediating between unity and variety, curiosity and sympathy by channelling the disruptive force of digressions into the new and more cohesive, 'circumstantial', forms of realistic narrative. In other words, the element of consistency and unity is no longer intrinsic to the text but to the reader's perception of the text according to the new lines of inquiry suggested by David Hume's philosophy which, not surprisingly, figures among the most influential sources of Henry Fielding's masterpiece *Tom Jones*.

For her own part, Lamarra contextualizes Burney's novels of manners within the debate on the dichotomy nature *vs.* life which spans the whole eighteenth century as a central argument for the philosophical reflections on

modernity. In this respect, the concept of a human nature which still maintains the character of universality in spite of the extraordinary variety of its particular manifestations functions as a powerful defensive bulwark against the crisis of cultural relativism set in motion by Descartes and Hobbes. Strictly related with this humanistic heritage is Burney's trust in the category of 'common sense' which guarantees the very readability of her characters, thus enabling the process of maturation of her young female protagonists, such as Evelina, as social and sociable beings in opposition with the undisciplined and problematic personalities of the coeval gothic narrative.

Mirella Brini Savorelli focuses on the experimental and pioneering dimension of the French novel, and in particular addresses Diderot's metanarrative discourse in comparison with his English precursors such as Richardson and Sterne, while all the other contributors concentrate on the Italian situation questioning not only the often lamented inexistence of the genre (as provocatively suggested and discussed in Pino Fasano's essay "Il romanzo inesistente") but also its marginal and undervalued role. Indeed, the pre-eminence accorded to the complex process of fruition and reception has decisively helped to disprove the prejudice that excluded the presence of the novel and its related debate from the coeval Italian cultural scene, as Daniela Mangione persuasively argues in her article. Even if a relevant temporal delay is undeniable for our country, the critical rediscovery of much neglected works of that century and the sociological investigation of the literary market have called attention to the intellectual vitality of several publishing centres of our peninsula, as demonstrated in the Neapolitan case of Galanti's editorial and cultural project of sustaining sentimental novels for the education of the female audience which is thoroughly examined in Carlo Madrignani's contribution.

Another important thread of the Italian debate has followed the issues of acculturation, a sort of poetics and politics of the genre and its development, at stake in the so-called metacritical discourse of major novelists such as Foscolo and Manzoni: the relationship between Foscolo and the novel is nicely discussed in Matteo Palumbo's essay, while Manzoni's position is examined both in Clotilde Bertoni's article on metanarrative discourse in *Fermo e Lucia* and in Grazia Melli's contribution on the writer's reflections on tragedy, novel and Catholic morality.

On the whole, the stimulating confrontation of divergent arguments and the fruitful variety of critical perspectives (the sociological, the philological, the philosophical, the narratological, and so on) at work in this volume enrich and complicate our perception of the affinities and discontinuities between different national traditions confirming once again the fascinating and open character of the most contaminated and hybrid of all genres.

T.J. Cribb, ed., *The Power of the Word / La puissance du verbe - The Cambridge Colloquia*, Cross/Cultures 83 (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), xxiv + 197 pp.

Reviewed by Maria Cristina Nisco.

The colloquia held at Churchill College, Cambridge (of which this volume is a record) are part of a broad debate regarding the relation between the so-called 'formerly colonial languages', English and French, and the colonized ones, specifically, African languages. Scholars, artists, writers and intellectuals working in different fields discuss in pairs representing the two cultures which mainly spread their word all over the world: the English and French cultures (as the title of the book suggests). The concept of 'word' is central in all the discussions, and it is understood in relation to a variety of topics ranging from oral and written languages to the Nobel Prize, from theatre to music, from poetry to images.

In the first dialogue, "The Power of the Word between Word and Word", Niyi Osundare (Professor of English in Nigeria and winner of numerous poetry prizes) and Henri Lopés (Ambassador of Congo in France and Britain and formerly Director General for Culture and Communication for UNESCO) focus on the borderline territory emerging when two languages meet. In spite of the walls and barriers deemed to exist between them, between English and Yorùba for instance, words manage to escape, travelling back and forth, so that the person speaking the two languages represents an interface, he/she finds him/herself at an intersection. The problems often faced when trying to move from Yorùba words to English words concern the different music and rhythm of the two languages: "in Yorùba, poetry is music. You do not read poetry in Yorùba; you chant it, you utter it, you sing it....The English poem may be read with the eye; the Yorùba poem is 'read' with the ear" (5).

Unfortunately, the power words have in African languages is mostly appreciated in the Western world as the absence of publishing houses in Africa makes it impossible for words to reach the villages and the rural areas. This question leads to the second dialogue, "The Power of the Word in the Arena of Theatre", where the Director of Lagos' National Theatre, Femi Osofisan, and Christiane Fioupou, Professor of French at the University of Toulouse, underline the importance to convey words and communicate with as many people as possible in Africa. Literature and theatre (in the specific case) cannot represent a simple form of entertainment, they must be part of the struggle for independence that the writer engages.

Wilson Harris and Daniel Maximin, both writers of novels, poetry and

essays, also refer, in the third dialogue " The Power of the Word in Space and Place", to the act of speaking and writing as a form of stuggle, actually, as the first cultural form of resistance against a process of dehumanization (as the one enacted at the African slaves'cost). This act of resistance may find its own expression as a cry, a song, a dance, or also a silence.

Proceding through the dialogues, new paths emerge, trying to conciliate resistance with flexibility and cohabitation by using unconventional means. A particular kind of music is, in fact, the focus of the fifth dialogue, "The Word in Music: Chaka", where the Director of the Centre for Intercultural Music and Arts, Akin Euba, gives the audiencé an idea of what the composition of chaka is and defines it as an intercultural composition deriving its elements from many different cultures. He also mentions his theories of composition regarding the modalities in which African poetry, together with elements coming from Western cultures and the instruments deriving their origins from the Middle East (most of the instruments of the Western symphony orchestra actually came from that area, in spite of what is commonly thought), all flow together in chaka.

Following a thread presenting the concepts of word and meaning through several contexts and forms of experience, the fourth dialogue, "The Power of the Image", offers an insight on three different elements of the visual fields: signs, symbols, and images. Drawing on their great experience in the field of media images, Gerard Houghton and Julien Singozan concentrate on the different layers of meaning applied to each element, so that written languages – defined as specific sets of signs (alphabets) – become symbols, just like symbols then become images. Houghton and Singozan focus on the logo of the colloquium which is based on a sign developed by the Akan people of Ghana. Among the Akan, each sign represents an idea, always implying a complex of meanings. The sign chosen as logo of the colloquium recalls the idea of "*adaptability*, since it indicates the ability to transform and adapt positively to inevitable changes in circumstance" (56). This fluidity also recalls the difference the two authors trace between a piece of writing and a picture or an image: whereas the former develops linearly, the latter has no fixed point standing for a beginning or an end.

The sixth dialogue, "The Power of the Prize", draws the audience's attention to the very few African and Caribbean writers awarded with a Nobel Prize (only five out of the ninety-six Prizes awarded so far). This time, two writers and a historian, in order Anthony Appiah, George Steiner, and Marika Hedin, mention a 'cosmopolitan reading' as the way through which novels and poems travel between places, receiving a different understanding according to different people and places welcoming them. They claim that 'cosmopolitan conversations' are possible not on the basis of shared or universal

principles, but thanks to the capacity "to read novels across gaps of space, time and experience" (98).

The necessary overcoming of traditional boundaries is also pointed out by Lorna Goodison (winner of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize) and Véronique Tadjo (writer, illustrator and painter), in the seventh dialogue, "The Power of the Poem". They define poetry as a free territory, as something in which music and dance, dreams and reality, past, present and future, all join together, merging into each other. Poetry is deemed to be a power, but never a tyrannical one; in Goodison's words, "the poem's power is the antithesis of power as we know it. It does not render us mighty ... it disarms us, leaves us vulnerable and open" (115).

Drawing again on a spatial definition, in reference to the free territory of poetry Goodison delineates, Wole Soyinka gives an account of languages as "an autonomous territory of history and aesthetics ... not hermetic, not closed, constantly evolving" (146). In the eighth dialogue, "Powers that Be and Words that Will", two well-known writers, Soyinka and Assia Djebar, deal with the question of the abuse of words and the violence between languages. Djebar, in particular, refers to the experience of her country, Algeria, where, in spite of a multilingual and multiracial context, French was imposed as a unifying (colonial) language. The politics of monolinguism then emerges as a brutal form of violence between languages. Djebar also concentrates on one of the main features of Algerian literature: it has always functioned within what she calls a 'linguistic triangle' having its angles in Berber, French and Arabic. In her view, being a writer in Algeria today implies the attempt to resist violence, first of all linguistic violence, to re-establish the deep connections between different languages, in order to write a text based on dialogue and 'metissage'.

As emerging in the last and ninth dialogue, "The Word in Disguise", translation is presented as a form of journey, a passage between languages. In relation to the act of translating African poetry, the author Biyi Bandele and the Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the Republic of Benin for UNESCO Olabiyi Yaï define translation as the expression of a meaning in a different language, but also, and more importantly, as a process through which the African poem aims at a change of place, finding a new position and spreading the potentialities of literary creation beyond its linguistic boundaries.

This is what this number of the series Cross/Cultures tries to underline. The volume is dedicated to discuss the complexity of a world where the construction of bridges between cultures and languages is necessary in order to share a common space. It adopts a non-totalizing approach, focusing on the many different meanings and nuances that words (oral, written, painted,

sung, or in any other form) can assume and exchange. The contributors gathered at Churchill College improvised their talks on the spot (apart from a few contributions that had been written in advance) and all discussions (including the participation of the audience) were recorded and then transcribed. Distancing themselves from dominant current criticism (a criticism descending from Freudian, structuralist and poststructuralist theory, as editor Cribb notes in his introduction) the speakers managed to show ways to bridge what is often presented as the 'gap' of difference, a sort of separating obstacle, through intercultural dialogue and debate. Communication is successful only if people accept to play with words, refusing univocal or single meanings: otherwise they kill words and also kill each other. Differences, whether linguistic, geographical or cultural, thus become challenges to negotiate, as communicating always implies reaching a compromise, finding new paths to follow.

Brian T. Edwards, *Morocco Bound: Disorienting America's Maghreb, from Casablanca to the Marrakech Express* (Durham, U.S.: Duke University Press, 2005), 352 pp.

Reviewed by Maria Porras

In *Morocco Bound: Disorienting America's Maghreb, from Casablanca to the Marrakech Express*, Brian T. Edwards achieves no small feat, listing and reviewing the critique on the American representations of Morocco from 1942 to 1973. Throughout these crucial years in what is known as the "American century," the American mind considered the Maghreb, and more specifically Morocco, as the location of the exotic Orient. As Edwards points out, Americans perceived the Maghreb through French eyes, their vision being thus deeply imbued with French colonialism. Edwards comments not only on the literary manifestations that (re)presented Morocco, but also researches the cultural, cinematographic, anthropologic, and musical representations of the country. In addition, he offers a wide range of bibliography, appraisingly including the work of several Moroccan scholars in American cultural studies.

Edward Said's works are a constant reference in this volume, and the major topic of Orientalism as the Western discipline that captures, reproduces, and recreates the East is explored by Edwards in his analyses of the American representations of Morocco. Wisely enough, Edwards also reflects on how domestic issues at home had a correlative in North Africa, how these correspondences changed at different moments of the "American century",

and how they either threatened or confirmed the dominant national narratives. As the title suggests, despite their differences, Morocco is 'bound' to America in the sense that it is tied, confined, limited and restricted by its representations.

The book is divided into three sections; in the first one, "Taking Casablanca", Edwards introduces a topic that reappears in the subsequent sections: how America transferred the 'frontier myth' outside its own limits and projected it into North African lands. The military experience of Gen. George S. Patton in Morocco provides an example of the American government's increasing interest in this area; and these early years of the so-called 'American Orientalism' would produce a good number of films as well. Obviously, Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* is the film Edwards chooses to analyze. For him, it is "the paradigmatic example of American Orientalism... a key turning point in the cultural history of Western representations of the Maghreb", (71) and a drift from the French colonial supremacy to American military superiority. As a counterpoint, Edwards gives examples of postcolonial Moroccan films that recall *Casablanca*, in which the presence of the U.S. is simultaneously felt as a liberating alternative and as a new form of domination. The final chapters in this section explore some of Paul Bowles's early works. In Edwards's view Bowles produces a kind of frontier narrative in which the characters get lost when they cannot interpret and survive this frontier – that is, the Sahara or its inhabitants in his well-known, *The Sheltering Sky*. To prove his point, Edwards explores the uses of dialectal Arabic in the novel, maintaining that Bowles is not the classic Orientalist, as he finally refuses to represent several aspects of Morocco by not translating them.

The second section, "Queer Tangier", explores the special status of the International Zone of Tangier and the different products of such a context. For Edwards, 'queerness' is the perfect concept to refer to a place which was sexually, linguistically, culturally and geopolitically diverse, a place which was reported at home by the mass media as intimately linked to exotic luxury and excess. Much critical attention has been paid to Tangier in the 40s and 50s, but Edwards' approach offers a new light on the complexity of the city, comparing the Cold War context at home with the different narratives it produced: as the author states, "Tangier... threatened the dominant national narrative of the period" (145), and a writer like William S. Burroughs is the best example of this tendency. Edwards also analyses in this section Alfred Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and the works of Jane Bowles and Mohammed Mrabet. The latter is a unique example of the collaboration between an illiterate author and a famous translator (Paul Bowles) which produced a hybrid literature which could have never happened anywhere

else. According to Edwards, these works started an Anglophone Moroccan literary tradition that has survived and has even grown today.

The final section, "Hippie Orientalism", focuses on the different interpretations that this counterculture of the 60s and 70s proposed of Morocco. Not as analytic as the previous sections, this one examines cookbooks, anthropological texts, music recordings and song lyrics (the "Marrakech Express" included in the title is the name of a song by Crosby, Stills & Nash), which are deeply embedded in the logic of Orientalism. Such Orientalism is defined as 'hippie' because, unlike the previous ones, it tries to grow closer to the culture. This approach, however, remains insufficiently explored.

On the whole, the reader will be surprised to find a book in which American, postcolonial, and North African studies go hand in hand. This overlapping of categories will prove to be extremely valuable in the understanding of the varied and specific context of colonial and postcolonial Morocco, and to a larger extent, of the general context of globalisation.

Andreas Gaile, ed., *Fabulating Beauty: Perspectives on the Fiction of Peter Carey* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005), xxxv + 438 pp.

Reviewed by Katherine E. Russo

Fabulating Beauty: Perspectives on the Fiction of Peter Carey marks an important moment in the reception of the work of Peter Carey. As Paul Kane writes in the preface, "a collection of critical essays is a tacit acknowledgment that the academy is in fact serious about a writer" (xi). However, this collection of essays eschews a systematic canonization and unilateral reception of Carey's work. The essays and writings of *Fabulating Beauty*, by juxtaposing alternative approaches to the work of Carey, gesture towards what is absent in a contrapuntal manner. An unforeseen path often stems from the heart of one essay to recall the alternative contention of another, thus interrupting the 'suspension of disbelief' of the academic reader who seeks a coherent argument and hypothesis. Each essay's beginning unsettles the certainty of having reached a secure reading frame of Carey's work in a way that reminds me of Italo Calvino's *Se una Notte d'Inverno un Viaggiatore* (*If On a Winter's Night the Traveler*). As Kane notes, this might be due to the nature of Carey's work, which breaks out of any frame we might design for him (xiii).

The bibliography of *Fabulating Beauty* includes over 1,300 items and is an outstanding guide to the abundance of critical responses to Carey's work. This consists of four monographs, seven dissertations, dozens of chapters in

academic publications, and a couple of hundred articles and reviews in scholarly journals and international publications. In fact, Carey is at present Australia's most discussed contemporary writer. His reputation as one of the most important Australian fiction writers has been substantiated by the ample attention he has received by literary critics and prizes. He has won every foremost fiction award in Australia, including the Miles Franklin award three times, as well as international prizes such as the Commonwealth Writer's Prize, for *Jack Maggs* (1997), and the Booker Prize, which he won twice for *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988) and *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000). Moreover, the figure of the real-life author has become increasingly prominent in the last ten years, with over a hundred published interviews with the author. Hardly a week goes by without a news item on Carey's life and his New York residence provides intriguing news for journalists in Australia and in the USA. Furthermore, Carey's winning of the Booker prize has prompted much attention by critics and journalists who have increasingly constructed Carey as a mythical national icon. *Fabulating Beauty* contributes to the construction of Carey as "author" with the first part of the collection which includes an interview with Carey by the editor, Andreas Gaile. However, it also questions the figure of Carey as a national prize-winning icon in Karen Lamb's engaging essay on the conservatism ingrained in the Booker prize.

The myth of Carey as an enduring conveyor of a self-conscious "Australianess" is diversely problematized in several essays of this collection. In "Towards an Alphabet of Australian Culture", Andreas Gaile argues that Carey's novels constitute a mythistory of Australia. According to Gaile, Carey helps non-Indigenous Australians to claim their country through the imagination by "building up a reservoir of myth, a narrative treasure-trove which will eventually provide Australians with the material they need to celebrate their antipodean existence" (49). However, this search for an Australian *grand récit* is contradicted by Carey himself, who, in the interview with Gaile, alerts us to his desire to revision Australian history and adopt a "contrarian streak" (8). As Carey observes, his aim is to ask the reader a very serious question: "have you even bothered to imagine other possibilities?" (8). Indeed, many of the critics of this collection comment on Carey's use of competing versions of the same event, on his unreliable narrators, and on his playing with reader expectations. As Carey notes, representing reality is similar to cubism, a representation of conflicting points of view. In Picasso's words, which Andrew J. Hassall uses as an epigraph to his essay, "we all know that art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth, at least the truth is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies" (319).

In an often quoted interview with Nathaniel O'Reilly (2002), Carey called for "some sort of return to the old fashioned close-reading of texts" (167). In the past, many postmodernist readings of Carey's work have taken up this challenge and have focused on the narrative strategies that Carey uses to interrogate notions of truth and authenticity and to play with the constructedness and arbitrariness of representations of reality. On the other hand, as Carolyn Bliss notes, postcolonial readings have concentrated on the ethical vision of Carey's storytelling (276). As an alternative to these two greatly simplified approaches, many essays contained in *Fabulating Beauty* go a step forward. They engage in close-readings of Carey's work to suggest that the diverse narrating devices he adopts are strategic to a critique of the most controversial political issues of neocolonialism such as British-Australian relationships and American cultural "cocacolonisation". For instance, while building, architectural metaphors, and *bricolage* are carefully studied as they artfully play with national constructions in Brian Edwards' essay on *Illywhacker*, Nicholas Birns considers the concrete political circumstances of Carey's fictions and his use of architecture to refer to political repression and tyranny. As Bill Ashcroft argues, in his absorbing essay on *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*, Carey demonstrates with mischievous clarity the historical connection between British and American forms of colonial control and the mendacity of Australian political life. According to Ashcroft, in *Tristan Smith*, the post-colonial struggle over representation, the interface between the material experience of colonization and the necessary discursive strategies by which that experience is formed, is driven by the consuming cultural thesis that "all culture, identity, and the power relationships they invoke are a product of simulation" (199).

Indeed, simulation, deception and lies are at the centre of Carey's creative concerns. In his latest novel, *My Life as a Fake* (2003), Carey places Australia's long series of literary hoaxes at the centre and imagines the perpetrator of a literary hoax menaced and eventually led to his death by his creation come to life. The epigraph from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* alerts the reader to the potency of narrative imagination run amok, but most importantly, as Robert MacFarlane explains, making and faking collapse into near-identity. Carey's characters, as Carolyn Bliss writes, are faced with the challenge of seeking or escaping authentic selfhood or existential good-faith. Recalling Sartre, Bliss argues that routine actions and familiar roles serve the purpose of hiding from our own freedom and responsibility in acting out cultural 'masterplots'. As Anthony J. Hassall further explains, Carey distorts and defamiliarizes his subjects, "thereby enabling readers to see them free of those other distortions naturalized by habit and conventions" (331). This has wide implications in reference to Australian historical episodes such as the

problematic attitude of denial towards the issues of the Stolen Generations and *terra nullius*. As Susan K. Martin claims, novels such as *The True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000) stage the search for white male heterosexual heroes in the face of the current Australian government's treatment of asylum seekers, and of the enduring incorporation of Indigenous and Immigrant issues in a sidelined homogenous sameness. As Bliss notes, Carey's heroes and characters try on "for size virtually every lie his culture has on display" (281). Lies engineer individual and national, albeit inauthentic, identities into reality (281-282). Ultimately, Carey unveils Australian "masterplots" as either "lies" or "silences". As Herbert Badgery, the greatest liar of Carey's work, muses, "lies, dreams, visions – they were everywhere. We brushed them aside as carelessly as spider webs across a garden path. They clung to us, of course, adhered to our clothes and trailed behind us but we were too busy arguing to note their presence."

BOOKS RECEIVED

Merete Falck Borch, *Conciliation – Compulsion – Conversion. British Attitudes Towards Indigenous Peoples, 1763-1814* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2004), xv + 318 pp.

Iain Chambers, a cura di, *Esercizi di potere. Gramsci, Said e il postcoloniale* (Roma: Meltemi, 2006), 140 pp.

Judith Lütge Coullie and J.U. Jacobs, eds., *a.k.a. Breyten Breytenbach. Critical Approaches to his Writings and Paintings* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2004), xxii + 336 pp.

Marco Fazzini, ed., *Resisting Alterities. Wilson Harris and Other Avatars of Otherness* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2004), xiv + 255 pp.

Hena Maes-Jelinek, *The Labyrinth of Universality. Wilson Harris's Visionary Art of Fiction* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006), xxvi + 564 pp.

Clara A.B. Joseph and Janet Wilson, eds., *Global Fissures. Postcolonial Fusions* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006), xxv + 326 pp.

Peter Morey and Alex Tickell, eds., *Alternative Indias. Writing, Nation and Communalism* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2005), xxxviii + 238 pp.

Claudia Polo, *Immaginari verdiani. Opera, media e industria culturale nell'Italia del XX secolo* (Milano: Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, 2004), xxii + 287 pp.

SUMMARIES

Giorgio Baratta

Gramsci among Us: Hall, Said, Balibar

The essay aims at establishing a dialogue, or better a counterpoint, between Gramsci's thought and the cultural/postcolonial studies that acknowledge his thought as one of their main sources, while not necessarily or generally being sufficiently acquainted with it. From this point of view, Hall and Said constitute an exception, at the same time as also proposing an innovatory interpretation within Gramscian studies.

In the 80s, starting among other things with his original analysis of the "authoritarian populism" of Margaret Thatcher, Hall brought Gramsci into play as the "theoretician of defeat," to use a phrase of Donald Sassoon's, as the one thinker, more than anyone else (Foucault here springs to mind), who was able to maintain a high level of interpretation of the dynamics of power, of hegemony and of the culture of the new ruling classes of national and international capitalism. Said on the other hand recognized in Gramsci's thought a new paradigm in the development of Marx that, moving beyond traditional historicism, was able to open up new spatio-territorial vistas of the international social and political set-up. By highlighting various aspects of Gramsci's "worldly" material approach, Said recognized its fundamental importance within the perspective of a new secular and democratic humanism, through which European culture projects itself outward into the rest of the world, a humanism based on civil life, as it may be termed, which thus makes common property the above-mentioned counterpoint between him and Gramsci.

Vincenzo Bavaro

Tongues Untied: Children's Strategies of Classroom Survival in Darrell Lum, R. Zamora Linmark, and Monique Truong

This article focuses on four short stories written by three Asian American writers. All of them stage the social dynamics within groups of young children – fifth graders and younger – and between pupils and teachers. The setting of these stories is the classroom, the central arena for the socialization of children and the battlefield on which minority and immigrant subjectivities try to negotiate their own position in a public sphere that marginalizes them in multiple and entwined ways. The young characters in these stories exceed, resist, and deliberately play with norms and prescriptions, showing the complexity and heterogeneity of subjects who are interpellated and defined by several categories of identity (and difference), such as language, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality. This reading of these short stories attempts to highlight, on the one hand, the process of subjectification – in particular, how the young *minority* subject is taught to become a *national* subject – and, on the other hand, the strategies employed by the national authority to defend an idea of homogeneous national identity in spite of all its pluralistic claims. While facing the power of a social order that attempts to discipline, to punish, and to normalize them, the children in these short stories still manage to survive in a hostile environment, envisioning cross-gender, cross-racial, and cross-national coalitions.

Rocío G. Davis

Relational Lives: Identity and Authenticity in Asian American Life Writing

In the context of continuing debates on the notion of 'authenticity' in Asian American writing, this essay proposes that recent relational approaches to life writing allows us to discern renewed approaches to 'authenticity' that complicate notions of self-representation and itineraries of self-formation by privileging the intersubjective – which privileges the dialogic and relational – rather than the merely individual. By attending to how Asian American writers operate textual and subjectival configurations, I analyze alternative designs for thinking through these vexed issues in the context of life writing. Using the debate on Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* as a starting point in the debate on what constitutes autobiography in Asian American writing, I consider the strategies enacted in texts such as Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days,* Adam Fifield's *A Blessing Over Ashes: The Remarkable Odyssey of My Unlikely Brother*, May-lee and Winberg Chai's *The Girl from Purple Mountain,* Garrett Hongo's *Volcano,* and Helie Lee's *Still Life with Rice.* I contend that by privileging the relational quality of their lives, and positing processes of identity in the context of intersubjective identification, these Asian American writers enact a paradigm of authenticity that is based not on unalloyed cultural heritage, but on the dynamic constituted by their multilayered cultural contexts.

C. Maria Laudando

Jonathan Swift and the Arts of Dislocation

The essay discusses Jonathan Swift's controversial position within the canon of English literature calling attention to his textual and paratextual strategies of satiric and parodic dislocation as ambitious mythmaker, occasional agitateur and popular, indeed, sensational writer against the dominant view of Swift as the censorious and conservative Augustan spokesman. Following the suggestions of Ann Kelly's recent study devoted to Swift's artful construction of his own provocative print identity but especially taking into account Said's seminal insights into his work as uneasy intellectual, the article focuses on the restless discontinuity which characterizes Swift's writings from the very beginning of his lifelong 'Battle between Ancients and Moderns' in order to address his own problematic dislocation of cultural spaces and temporal/canonic preservation aa well as his powerful interrogation of the unbearable costs of modernity.

Raffaella Malandrino

Immigrant Narratives of a Gendered American Dream.
A Reading of Bharati Mukherjee' *The Middleman and Other Stories*.

Bharati Mukherjee's 1987 collection of short stories *The Middleman* confirmed her literary success and placed her within the American literary canon. *The Middleman* exhibits the author's deep concern and awareness of the global context of immigration in the 1980s, and of the intertwined transnational relations between nations: the immigrant characters of the stories, from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, enter the American territory and culture bringing with them the complexity of their realities outside the United States. At the core of the author's literary agenda in *The Middleman* is the process of transformation undertaken by both immigrant and white American characters, a process that is fundamental to her narrativization of the American Dream.

The essay, a comparative analysis of a few selected stories, "Fathering," "Orbiting," "Jasmine," and "Fighting for the Rebound," addresses the literary representation of Otherness and the encounter with America. Issues of race and gender are discussed, highlighting the stories' problematic approach to the imaginary of this transformation, which often occurs through the agency of the white male characters: to the immigrant protagonists, these seem to function as icons of national strength and imperialist power, to be embraced in order to gain a new beginning and a sense of belonging.

Manuela Vastolo

"A Familiar Shape": Textual Dynamics and Horizons of Expectations in Larissa Lai's *When Fox Is a Thousand*

One of the trends in contemporary Asian American criticism is the analysis of Asian American literature in historical-ethnic-socio-cultural terms and the erasure of the aesthetic sphere. For different reasons, the white literary establishment has contributed to the same ethnological approach, emphasizing the representativeness of a selected group of Asian American authors and texts.

Starting from the consideration that North American subjects of Asian ancestry have been confronted with similar experiences on issues regarding identity and racist discrimination, I move from the reception dynamics in the Asian American field to the Asian Canadian context where my focus is on the novel *When Fox Is a Thousand* by Larissa Lai, published in 1995. I investigate some of its narrative strategies, specifically its intertextuality with Chinese classics, and analyse its stylistic and linguistic texture as well as its paratext. What I argue is that by deploying postmodern narrative strategies, and contemporary critical categories, the novel resists the cooptation in the well-known patterns of interpretation of 'ethnic' literature as authentic auto-ethnography, thus apparently challenging the horizons of expectations of the white readers; on the other hand, some textual inconsistencies, stylistic features, and narratological designs encourage an ahistorical reading that can be situated not far from that Orientalist discourse that the text explicitly disavows through the characters' statements.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Giorgio Baratta is in overall charge of a number of cultural and scientific projects at the University of Naples "L'Orientale". Until recently he taught philosophy at the University of Urbino and is currently president of the International Gramsci Society-Italia and of the network "Immaginare l'Europa". He is the author of studies on the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, on Hölderlin, Marx and Husserl (*Il pensiero fenomenologico di E. Husserl*, Urbino: Argalia, 1968), Sartre, as well as on Brazilian culture and other topics. He has written widely on Gramsci and is author of the volume *Le rose e i quaderni. Il pensiero dialogico di Antonio Gramsci* (Roma: Carocci, 2003) now translated into Spanish, German and Portuguese. He has edited several other works and is also the moving force behind conferences in various fields of study and research. Baratta has made two films: *Gramsci l'ho visto così*, together with Gianni Amico in 1988, and *Viaggio nel mondo di Gramsci* in 1994, and is also the author of a play for the theatre *Dialogo di Gramsci con una sua ombra.*

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Patrizia Fusella teaches English Literature at the University of Naples "L'Orientale". She is the author of a volume on Samuel Beckett, *L'impossibilità di non essere* (1995) and co-editor of *Geographies of Knowledge* (1997) and

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Raffaella Malandrino is a Ph.D. student in Comparative Literature at the University of Naples "L'Orientale." Her research project addresses gender issues and transnational discourses in South Asian diasporic literature, both in English and Hindi. She is the author of two essays on the collection of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies*, by Jhumpa Lahiri, published in *Ácoma: Rivista Internazionale di Studi Nordamericani* and in the volume *Suzie Wong non abita più qui*, edited by D. Izzo (Milan: Shake, 2006), and of a paper to be published in the Proceedings of the XVIII International Conference of the Italian Association of American Studies (AISNA), held in October 2005.

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STYLESHEET

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Examples:

Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986), 19.

Rose, *Sexuality*, 34.

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Ibid., 23.

Jean Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visible", in Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath, eds., *The Cinematic Apparatus* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 156-183.

Emile Benveniste, "La nature des pronoms", in *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 20-45.

Perry Anderson, "Components of the National Culture", *New Left Review* 50 (July-August 1968), 44.

Harold Williams, ed., *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963-65), vol. III, 330.

Williams, ed., *Correspondence*, 345.

Marwat Fazal-ur-Rahim et al., eds., *Afghanistan and the Frontier* (Peshawar: Emjay Books International, 1993), 36.

John Hollander, *Melodious Guile. Fictive Pattern in Poetic Language* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 73 (hereafter cited as MG).

Galbraith Miller Crump, *The Mystical Design of "Paradise Lost"* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1975).

Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979-1985), 25.

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