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E-mail: simplegadi@uniud.it

Sede amministrativa / Address:

Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere

via Mantica, 3

33100 Udine

Italia

Tel: 0432556778



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Indirizzo Direttore responsabile / Address of Editor-in-Chief:

Prof. Antonella Riem Natale

Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere

via Mantica, 3

33100 Udine, Italia

e-mail: antonella.riem@uniud.it

tel. 0432 556773

E-mail: simplegadi@uniud.it

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Antonella Riem Natale

Lords of Peace, Lords of War: the Master and the Terrorist in *Child's Play* by David Malouf

Abstract I: Questo saggio intende dimostrare come il terrorista incarni un paradigma dominatore, che esalta e giustifica il ricorso alla violenza, mentre la capacità del Maestro di creare attraverso la scrittura è in sintonia con il paradigma di *partnership*. La narrazione in prima persona del terrorista, paranoica, lucida e arida, e la descrizione dei suoi preparativi meticolosi (quasi religiosi) dell'omicidio vengono giustapposte alla creatività intensamente poetica del Maestro, che dà voce alla bellezza e alla poesia della vita. Questo dialogo fra due modi diversi di percepire e filtrare la realtà si costruisce intorno alla metafora dei bambini che giocano. In una "volontaria sospensione dell'incredulità", il Maestro, come un bambino, costruisce la sua realtà immaginando i mondi che sono condivisi dai suoi lettori. Il terrorista, invece, cerca di imitare e mimare il suo *Maestro* pur essendo perfettamente consapevole della sua incapacità di *creare* come lui. La realizzazione della violenza a lungo elucubrata, che può solo annullare e distruggere ed è priva di potere, è il suo tentativo fallito di controbilanciare la sua mancanza di vera *immaginazione*, creativa e dialogica.

Abstract II: This paper argues that the terrorist embodies a dominator paradigm, exalting and justifying violence, while the Master's capacity to create through his narratives is attuned to a partnership paradigm. The terrorist's paranoid, lucid, and terse first person narration of his meticulous (almost religious) preparations for the assassination is set against the intensely poetical creativity of the Master, underlining the beauty and poetry of life. This dialogue between two different modes of perceiving and filtering reality is built around the metaphor of children playing. In a willing suspension of disbelief, the Master, like a child, constructs his own reality in imagining worlds his readers share. The terrorist tries to imitate and mimic his *Master*, perfectly aware that he is unable to *create* like him. The actualisation of his long-imagined violence, which can only annihilate and destroy and is powerless, is his failed attempt at counterbalancing his lack of true creative and dialogic *imagination*.

This essay focuses on how Malouf's novella *Child's Play* (1982) shows a profound desire on the part of the author to unveil the absurdities and uselessness of violence, and instead foster and implement a culture of peace as a creative model for transformation. This analysis is based on the work of the anthropologist and macro-historian Riane Eisler¹ that the international Partnership Studies Group (PSG)² applies to the study of world literatures, languages and education. In this essay I employ the terms *partnership* and *dominator* according to Eisler's *Cultural Transformation Theory* (Eisler 1987: xvii ff.), an interdisciplinary theory which examines cultural differences, gender relationships and, more extensively, creative processes and storytelling, in order to show how our cultural paradigms are constructed, not only in literature and in art, but also in our everyday reality by what 'stories' we are told and how these shape our frame of mind, culture and belief-systems (Eisler 1987: 75-77). According to Eisler, a "dominator model is what is popularly termed either patriarchy or matriarchy – the *ranking* of one half of humanity over the other" (Eisler 1987: xvii) and is characterised by "technologies designed to destroy and dominate", symbolised by the *Blade* (Eisler 1987: xx). In a partnership paradigm, represented by the *Chalice*, instead, "social relations are primarily based on the principle of *linking* rather than ranking", and "beginning with the most fundamental difference in our species, between male and female – diversity is not equated with either inferiority or superiority" (Eisler 1987: xvii); 'difference' therefore is positive, creative and fruitful rather than problematic and is an opening towards manifold different stories.

Similarly, Raimon Panikkar highlights the predicament of contemporary hyper-technological western societies, dominated by the *scientistic term*³, which limits our

¹ Riane Eisler is a social scientist and author whose work on cultural transformation has inspired scholars and social activists. Her research has impacted many fields, including history, economics, anthropology, psychology, sociology and education. She has been a leader in the movement for peace, sustainability and economic equity, and her pioneering work in human rights has expanded the focus of international organisations to include the rights of women and children. Eisler is known for her 1987 bestseller *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, now in 23 foreign editions. See: <http://www.rianeeisler.com/> and <http://www.partnershipway.org/>. The third Italian edition, with a new special epilogue by Eisler and a glossary on partnership language by Stefano Mercanti, was issued by Forum University Press, Udine. She is also famous for her second book *Sacred Pleasure. Sex, Myth and the Politics of the Body* (1995) and *The Real Wealth of Nations* (2007) also reissued by Forum University Press, <http://www.forumeditrice.it/percorsi/lingua-e-letteratura/all>.

² The Partnership Studies Group (http://all.uniud.it/?page_id=195) applies Riane Eisler's partnership model to literary texts of world literatures. By analysing the works of authors writing in the varieties of English including those of indigenous populations, the group explores the way these authors use the coloniser's word to transform the dominator values of colonisation and globalisation into cooperative and partnership codes, where often the dynamics at work are caring and sharing rather than exploiting and dominating (http://all.uniud.it/?page_id=198).

³ Raimon Panikkar was a leading scholar in interreligious and intercultural dialogue in world cultures throughout the second half of the twentieth century; his many publications were translated into French, German, Chinese, Portuguese, Czech, Dutch, Tamil and many other languages. See: <http://www.raimon->

creativity to only one aspect of our human mind – *Logos*, rather than taking into consideration the wholeness of our imaginative potential, involving also the *creative word* and *dialogic dialogue*, founded on the symbolic, poetic, epiphanic and spiritual power of language.

The intercultural, dialogic and partnership perspectives of Panikkar and Eisler are the philosophical and critical background of this essay. I aim at showing how Malouf, through the intensity of his poetic gaze upon reality, can describe everyday events and their impact on his characters' lives while giving voice to a *dialogic dialogue* fostering peace and transmuting plain objects into tools for introspection and meditation. I will show how simple elements such as *birdcages*, *clocks*, *piazas* become threads of a creative network aiming at a *partnership* dimension of life, where, going beyond the violence of the *dominator* model, one can recreate a paradigm characterised by creativity, peace, joy and care for every sentient and non-sentient being.

This essay argues that in *Child's Play* the terrorist embodies a *dominator* paradigm, exalting and justifying violence as a means to control others at a personal, social and political levels, while the Master's capacity to create through his narratives is more attuned to a *partnership* paradigm of peace and harmony, since *Child's Play* is also the title of the Master's 'Work in Progress'. The terrorist's paranoid, lucid, and terse first person narration of his meticulous, fanatical and almost *religious* preparations for the assassination, is set against the intensely poetical creativity of the Master, underlining the beauty and poetry of life, where language is connected to the physical and emotional expression of the body: a sort of *embodied* sacredness and spirituality that we often find in Malouf's work (Riem 2014)⁴. This dialogue between two different modes of perceiving and filtering reality is built around the metaphor of children playing; however, this turns out to be a deadly game, no childish make-believe.

panikkar.org/english/laudatio.html. Scientism is sometimes synonymous with positivism, however, while positivism may be used in a neutral way, scientism often has a negative connotation as it commonly identifies an exaggerated form of scientific thought that becomes unscientific in its exclusion a priori of all that cannot be (yet) demonstrated. This explains why Panikkar chooses 'scientistic term' rather than using the more common adjective 'scientific' (Panikkar 2007: 96-125). Panikkar appreciated science but not its degeneration. Being very concerned about language(s) and its manifold shades of meaning, he created neologisms which his proof-readers sometimes tried to correct and normalise. Panikkar stresses the distinction between creative word and scientistic term, where the creative, analogical and mythological function of the word is juxtaposed to the scientistic term of the *Logos*, which is devoid of symbolic echoes and of positive creative complexities. The scientistic term restrains and separates, pinning and limiting things to a specific and often univocal meaning that circumscribes and confines life into stereotypical patterns rather than opening up it to worlds of interconnected and dialogic significances. For a further analysis of this theme see Riem *et al.* 2013.

⁴ A similar way of finding the sacred in everyday objects is found in Patrick White: "its presence in the simple proximate reality of material things, and the persistent inability of language to fully apprehend it" (Ashcroft 2010: 96).

In a willing suspension of disbelief, the Master, like a child, imagines and constructs his own reality and the worlds his readers share and love, not knowing that his writing and actions are followed and mimicked by an anonymous young man, dominated by an absurd, unmotivated and inexplicable envy and hate against him. The terrorist vainly tries to imitate his *Master*, perfectly aware that he is unable to *create* like him; this increases his frustration, blind resentment and impassionate anger, which is a sort of cold and dead mental abstraction, empty of any feelings. It is as if only in fantasising and describing in his journal with detached 'scientific terms' the other's death, the terrorist can fill his inner emptiness and immense fear of living, typical of the dominator paradigm. At the end of the novella, the actualisation of his long-imagined violence, which can only annihilate and destroy another life, (together with his own)⁵, clearly demonstrates, even to the terrorist himself, his inner emptiness and creative powerlessness, proving how he totally lacks true creative and dialogic *imagination*. He fails in his attempt at counterbalancing his incapacity of building a positive interpersonal affective or even political *discourse*; this proves the absolute failure of his so-called and never clearly explained *ideals*. In this sense, the terrorist represents the typical dominator perspective, where power is understood as a hierarchical *power over* someone/something, expressed through the idealisation and exaltation of violence, supremacy and dominion as means of controlling reality and others, rather than a partnership *power to* do something together, within a community aiming at positively creating and sharing what is *good*⁶.

⁵ The terrorist did not have the same good fortune as the murderer Angulimal who was initiated by Gautam Buddha; he did not fully understand the message of peace and compassion in the Master's writing, letting it permeate his whole being. Here is the story: Angulimal had taken a vow that he would kill one thousand people; from each person he would take one finger to make a garland of fingers. Now he had nine hundred and ninety-nine fingers, only one was missing. Buddha came very close to him, and Angulimal's hands were trembling. This man was so beautiful, so innocent, so childlike. Angulimal had already fallen in love. He had killed so many people. He had never felt this weakness; he had never known what love is. For the first time he was full of love. So there was a contradiction: the hand was holding the sword to kill the person, and his heart was saying, "Put the sword back in the sheath". Buddha asked Angulimal to grant him a small desire before killing him. "Just cut from the tree a branch which is full of flowers". So Angulimal did and Buddha said, "This was only half the desire; the other half is, please put the branch back on the tree". Angulimal said, "Now this is the craziest desire. How can I put this branch back?" Buddha said, "If you cannot create, you have no right to destroy. If you cannot give life, you don't have the right to give death to any living thing". A moment of silence, a moment of transformation...the sword fell down from his hands and Angulimal fell down at the feet of Gautam Buddha, and said: "I don't know who you are, but whoever you are, take me to the same space in which you are; initiate me" (Buswel *et al.* 2013: 46-47).

⁶ Eisler calls this 'actualization power', "the power to nurture, to support, to create and to accomplish things together (*power with*) as opposed to the power to dominate, to inflict pain and destroy (*power over*) within the dominator model" (Mercanti 2014: 3). While the power against is a form of dominator power, "the power to destroy and dominate as symbolized by the Blade (the power to take life, power over/disempowering and coercive) in contrast to the power to sustain and enhance life represented by the Chalice (power to and power with/empowering and nurturing). To maintain domination and submission, the dominator power

My focus here is to investigate how the terrorist and Master's different use of language contributes in defining their way of thinking, writing and living, and how their different narrative *style* symbolically marks the cultural paradigm they belong to: *dominator* (the terrorist) and *partnership* (the Master), and therefore how far literature can be an instrument for nurturing peace:

His vision is epic, and it is an epic strength that he brings to its depiction; yet no one has written more delicately, or with greater compassion and tact, of life's ordinary occasions, of first love, first tears, or the taste of that first mouthful of bread a boy pays with his own earnings [...] (Malouf 1983: 40).

On the occasion of his eightieth birthday celebrations, Malouf, in conversation with Ivor Indyk, underlines the importance of the sacred in the world:

I don't like any of the views of the world which place the sacred outside this one. And so I don't see this world as fallen or as less than sacred. I think to do that is to enter a very very dangerous area where you think that the world and people in it are not sacred and the sacred is somewhere else. That's what seems to me to allow evil into the world. I think that this world is the only world and it is utterly sacred. But the sacred, whatever that is, is absolutely in it (Indyk 2014: 3).

This worldly, matter-of-fact, simple and immanent sacredness is embodied in every-day objects that fill our homes and lives as simulacra of our souls. This is how the terrorist describes the Master's vision, which has the same intertwining of delicacy, intensity, compassion and strength we find in Malouf's writing itself. Violence is part of it, with all its absurdity, as a reminder that life is to be celebrated for its simple beauty and sacredness.

The terrorist hates everything can insinuate doubts into his steely indoctrinated mind; he is fascinated but at the same times repelled by the Master's *style*, since he feels inadequate and unable to express life with such fullness and intensity:

There are times when simply to expose oneself to the hypnotic beauties of his style, to enter the labyrinthine sentences with their tortuous flashings and flarings, is to run the risk of a special sort of corruption, the corruption of the moral. I have come to distrust his high-toned achievements at the very moment when I am deeply moved by them (Malouf 1983: 54).

ranks humanity by relying on pain and violence instead of pleasure and love, thus suppressing and/or distorting caring and empathic relationships" (Mercanti 2014: 9).

The terrorist describes the qualities that he both appreciates and fears in the Master's writing, which he distrusts in the very moment he feels moved by them, since they may tempt him into another vision of things and life. He is afraid they might seduce him into a more poetic, sensitive, peaceful and warm approach that would make him feel compassion, understanding, sympathy, empathy for the other – feelings that he willingly excludes from his life to keep his steely violent purpose firm. The inevitable dominator win/lose outcome could be reversed with a partnership win/win resolution. When the terrorist finds himself described and understood in one of the Master's works, he feels naked and revealed, comprehended and therefore, to a dominator mind used to be in control, annihilated, 'written off':

reading his dark analysis, his infernal speculations about the origins of violence in our age, I feel myself first hot, then cold, as if a hand had been laid upon me in the silence and I might be recognized by any passer-by in the street. I feel anger as well. As if all things I have so painfully discovered and fought for in my life, were, after all, quite common and ordinary – predicted, described, made public a decade before my birth. [...] *His superiority is insufferable [...] because in comprehending me he has also written me off* (Malouf 1983: 55-56, my italic).

This poignant description shows how the terrorist fails to maintain his dominator control over the dissolution of his *identity*, purpose and reality accomplished by the Master's partnership capability of imagining him. The terrorist's sense of inferiority, emotional distance, suffering, anger, resentment, fear and envy are all negative feelings characteristic of a dominator society, which trains one to be *ranked* either above or below another, rather than being *linked* in the common circle of shared humanity. As a result of this mental conditioning the terrorist can only position/define the Master as *enemy*, someone the terrorist must fight, eliminate, destroy, for the Master is a mirror that can enable the terrorist to perceive too much of himself, even the shadows of genuine humanity he does not want to see. Understanding his inner flaws would mean imagining a different future for himself and the Master, a destiny that would diverge from his static and immovable idea of how things should or should not be. I agree with Hassan's statement: "What luxury, we want to cry, what corruption of the intellect in affluent societies! That boy has read too much!" (Malouf 1983: 3). Reading too much, through the filter of his rational mind only, means that the terrorist's psyche is corrupted by a cold dominator intellectualism; he is hyper-rational, uses only *Logos* – the scientific term, not interlaced and in dialogic dialogue with *Mythos* – the creative word. He is thus unable to feel compassion (which he can perceive only cerebrally, like a temporary *frisson*) and despises vulnerability, which is one of Malouf's focal points: "I don't say all writers are interested in vulnerability, but I think I am. [...] it's where people are weak in relation to a situation so that it involves your sympathy in some kind of way. That often engages me" (Indyk

2014: 3). Understanding the other's vulnerability is an act of acknowledgment of one's shared humanity, and this is the first step to create a *partnership* society/vision. In the story of the Zen Master Hakuin, anger brings the samurai to the desire to kill Hakuin – the gates of Hell – while understanding and being conscious of the sacredness of all life opens the gates of Heaven⁷. Malouf's Master seems to echo this ancient Zen wisdom. Through his feeling for the other's vulnerability the Master can fully give voice to his creative imagination, reaching "the savage and beautiful intensity, the impersonal truthfulness, of a child at play" (Malouf 1983: 90). Through his feeling for the other's vulnerability the Master can fully give voice to his creative imagination, reaching "the savage and beautiful intensity, the impersonal truthfulness, of a child at play" (Malouf 1983: 90). This intensity is savage, that is unsophisticated, natural, wild, and beautiful, for it expresses the Beauty and Truth of a child's profound feeling for the sacredness of life, and that "is all ye need to know on earth" (Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn").

The terrorist is also aware of the assassination as a linguistic act; it exists because he discusses and plans about it through language and will exist after it is committed because the press and media will *report* about it:

The crime will achieve its final reality at a point long past the moment of its occurrence either in his life or mine; the point, I mean, when it is reported. The true location of its happening in the real world is not the Piazza Sant'Agostino at P., but the mind of some million readers, and its true form not flesh, blood, bullets, but words: *assassination, brutal murder, infamous crime, mindless violence, anarchy*. Its needing a famous victim and a perpetrator are merely the necessary conditions for its achieving the headlines and attracting the words: we are instrumental for the transmitting of a message whose final content we do not effect. The crime becomes real because it is reported [...] because it breaks into the mind of the reader as a set of explosive syllables. These are language murders we are committing (Malouf 1983: 91, italic in the text).

Being unable to create his own 'story', one where he could express the fullness of his being, the terrorist needs somebody else, the press, the media, some million readers, to give reality to himself through *words*, "I am the perpetrator of the infamous crime"

⁷ A Zen story: Hakuin, the fiery and intensely dynamic Zen master, was once visited by a samurai warrior. "I want to know about heaven and hell", said the samurai. "Do they really exist?" he asked Hakuin. Hakuin looked at the soldier and asked, "Who are you?" "I am a samurai", announced the proud warrior. "Ha!" exclaimed Hakuin. "What makes you think you can understand such insightful things? You are merely a callous, brutish soldier! Go away and do not waste my time with your foolish questions", Hakuin said, waving his hand to drive away the samurai. The enraged samurai couldn't take Hakuin's insults. He drew his sword, readied for the kill, when Hakuin calmly retorted, "This is hell". The soldier was taken aback. His face softened. Humbled by the wisdom of Hakuin, he put away his sword and bowed before the Zen Master. "And this is heaven", Hakuin stated, just as calmly" (Yampolsky 1971).

(Malouf 1983: 91), otherwise he doesn't really exist, he feels as a character in one of the Master's fictions: "I am fitting myself to become at last one of his characters" (Malouf 1983: 92). If you do not have the capacity to create it is very easy to destroy. This inner lack obliges the terrorist to anchor himself to *reality*, the outside world, the painters on his "corner palazzo" (Malouf 1983: 93), the old neighbour who got lost and her extravagant collection of birdcages, with stuffed exotic birds inside, and of clocks (Malouf 1983: 103) that seem "profoundly crazy" (Malouf 1983: 104). At the same time, he feels threatened by the proximity of these elements of *real life* to his own plain cell, because it throws into the scene an element of the unpredictable that may also disrupt his obsessively thought and mentally re-enacted *plot*. Until this encounter with the elderly lady, his dream-life had been almost non-existent, but through the irruption of *realia*, living people and objects, his sense of security is disrupted. This gives rise to a flow of dreams: now he is in touch with his unconscious life again and his imagination thrives. Something he must keep at bay like a dangerous infection for his dominator mind:

An element of the unpredictable, that for weeks now I have kept deeply submerged, has forced its way to the surface. I am unwilling at times to lie down, turn off the light and expose myself to the vagaries, sometimes savage, sometimes I suspect merely ridiculous, of my own imagination.

I begin to understand a little what the Master calls 'The anti-Works' (Malouf 1983: 106-107).

The anti-Works are those creations the Master feels are not coherent within his great 'Work in Progress' and may lead him astray; in the same way the terrorist does not want distractions from his fixed goal.

The whole section sixteen of the novella deals with a dream the terrorist is unable to decipher, because he cannot understand the poetic and symbolic language of the creative word speaking in dreams, for once again he tries to analyse and vivisection the product of imagination only through his rational mind. Rather than telling his dream, though, the terrorist tries to recapture its "mood" describing in detail an old photograph he found in a book. It is a photograph of the early twenties, with five "figures" who are waiting for a boat, at sunset, "on the rocks of a little cove" (Malouf 1983: 108). They are of different ages, showing different moods or expectations, they look at their surroundings differently, they seem dressed for different seasons - the older man with a cloak, the girls in summery clothes, a casual young man, the young peasant in his heavy work attire - "They might be present at different events" (Malouf 1983: 109).

For the terrorist, they certainly embody his own experience of life, his total and absolute isolation and separation even from the other terrorists who for a short time share the flat with him and then go ahead towards their different destinies and stories. This photo and his dream fill the terrorist with "immense sadness" (Malouf 1983: 111), because,

like the old lady's stuffed birds in the cage, he is imprisoned in a dominator frame of mind. He cannot reconcile with the other, he is unable to perceive and project his life in a different direction, within another vision; everything for him is set and done, immutable and static like the old photo. He is unable to cross the inner threshold separating him from compassion; he cannot transform his frame of mind, opening to the imaginative perceptions that the dream and the photo are creating in him that could lead him to true imagination and a partnership sharing of feeling and love that leads to peace of body, mind and spirit. Like in *Macbeth*, the "deed" is already "done" in his mind and it "cannot be undone". He is unable to open to a broader vision, transcending and explaining the ordinary. He fears the Master's respect for peace and harmony resonating with the beauty and sacredness of life. He will therefore kill and possibly die because he cannot be like the Master, who still and always finds "the spring in himself that is in touch with the flow, the change, the renewed *life* of things" (Malouf 1983: 90).

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ANTONELLA RIEM NATALE is Full Professor of English Literature and Language, Pro-Vice Chancellor International, Director of the Department of Languages and Literatures, Communication, Education and Society, President of the Italian Conference of Modern Languages and founder of the Partnership Studies Group (PSG) at the University of Udine. She is also editor in chief of the series ALL published by Forum University Press and of the online A ranked journal on World literatures *Le Simplegadi*. Among her publications: "The Spirit of the Creative Word in Patrick White's *Voss*" (Cambridge Scholars 2014), *The One Life: Coleridge and Hinduism* (Rawat 2005), and, as co-editor, the volume *The Tapestry of the Creative Word in Anglophone Literatures* (Forum 2013). For the Forum ALL series, she edited the Italian publication of Riane Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade* (Forum 2011), *Sacred Pleasure* (Forum 2012) and *The Real Wealth of Nations* (Forum 2015). She is working on a volume on the figure of the 'Goddess' in the literatures in English, both within the 'canon' and indigenous 'minorities'.

antonella.riem@uniud.it



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Silvia Albertazzi

“And then I smiled”: Recent Postcolonial Fiction and the War on Terror

Abstract I: Nel saggio si mettono a confronto le reazioni di un autore americano e due postcoloniali all’attacco alle Twin Towers dell’11 settembre 2001. Il romanzo del pakistano Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* è analizzato in parallelo con *Terrorist* di John Updike e *The Unknown Terrorist* dell’australiano Richard Flanagan, lavori in cui si rappresenta, nell’un caso, il divenire di un terrorista, dall’altro la sua creazione ad opera dei media.

Abstract II: The aim of this essay is to compare the reactions to the 2001 attack to the Twin Towers as they are related and reflected upon in Western and non-Western fiction. We start from the analysis of a novel by a Pakistani author, Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Then, we compare the genesis of a terrorist, as it is depicted by the American author John Updike in *Terrorist*, and the creation of a terrorist by the media, which is the main subject of *The Unknown Terrorist* by the Australian 2014 Man Booker Prize Winner Richard Flanagan.

In his “Discours de l’histoire”, Roland Barthes affirms that “le discours littéraire comporte très rarement les signes du ‘lecteur’; on peut même dire que ce qui le spécifie c’est d’être – apparemment – un discours sans *tu*, bien qu’en réalité toute la structure de ce discours implique un sujet de la lecture”. He goes on to add that “dans le discours historique, les signes de destination sont communément absents” (Barthes 1984: 157).

We should bear these affirmations in mind when considering the most significant postcolonial novel written in the wake of 9/11, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, by the Anglo-Pakistani author Mohsin Hamid. What strikes us most in Hamid’s novel is that it is written in the second person, being the long monologue of a young Pakistani man who tells an unknown American how he lost his American job and love after 9/11, and came back to his mother country. Even though his interlocutor never speaks, Hamid’s protagonist keeps addressing him, in a continuous attempt to enchain him with his words. In this sense, Hamid’s discourse might be considered the opposite of Barthes’s ‘discours historique’, which is characterized by the absence of an addressee. In fact, not only do we find precise signs of destination throughout the novel, but also the marks of the reader

(here confused with the fictive listener) are everywhere. To paraphrase Barthes, you could even call this novel 'a discours *avec tu*', which is to say, a literary work very different from historical fiction and historiography. Moreover, if we note how the protagonist reminds one of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner (not to speak of the similarity between his listener and the Wedding-Guest), we can almost talk of 'discours poétique' as far as this novel is concerned. The deeper Changez, Hamid's main character, gets absorbed into his monologue, the more his speaking acquires the tone of an intimate conversation not so much with the unidentified American as with the reader.

Yet the unease we feel reading Changez's comments shows that Hamid's use of the second person is also significant from a political point of view. As Judith Butler has noted, if we want "to expand our understanding of the forms that global power has taken" (Butler 2004: 8) we must learn not only to narrate our stories from another point of view, but also "to receive an account delivered in the second [person]" (Butler 2004: 8). The 'I' we use when telling our stories is called into question when related to the Other: Hamid shows us that when the telling is done by this very Other, we, like Changez's American interlocutor, are left speechless. We are afraid of understanding the Other's point of view, of being convinced by his words, of being "infected in a morally perilous way by the thinking of the presumed enemy", as Butler puts it (Butler 2004: 8).

Between the lines of Changez's account of his falling out of love with America, it is impossible not to read all the ambiguities of the current East/West relationship, seen through mutual prejudices and misrepresentations (Lasdun 2007). Changez is the Other as we have created him on the basis of his diversity; a product of American cultural fundamentalism, his misadventures depict the darker side of globalization. It is not by chance that his story 'pivots on a smile', as the reviewer of the *New York Times* wrote (Olson 2007). Indeed, an uncanny smile is his first reaction as he watches the attacks of September 11, 2001 on television. "I stared as one – and then the other – of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (Hamid 2007: 72).

Obviously, this reaction comes from the identification of the Twin Towers as an emblem of American capitalism, and of US financial and technological power. While the towers, as Don DeLillo suggested, were "a justification [...] for technology's irresistible will to realize in solid form whatever becomes theoretically available" (DeLillo 2001: 466), the dramatic alteration of the Manhattan skyline stands for a huge change of perspective, imposed by a small group of 'Others' to that majority Changez never managed to be part of. "At that moment" – Changez explains – "my thoughts were not with the *victims* of the attack [...] no, I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees" (Hamid 2007: 73).

As we noted before, Changez's smile marks the turning point of the novel: a brilliant Princeton student, and later a highly regarded employee at an elite financial company,

Changez had already started doubting his role and place in the American affluent society before 9/11. Yet it is only after it that he reconsiders his life in New York to the point of loathing himself for accepting the American way of life, and being so eager to embrace Western capitalism. Reflecting on his former self, he comments: "I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with kinship to mine" (Hamid 2007: 152). Knowing that in the Ottoman empire the janissaries were Christian boys trained to fight against their own people, we realize how different the post 9/11 Changez is from the one who could affirm with pride that, though never being an American, he was "immediately a New Yorker" (Hamid 2007: 33).

In the wake of September 11, Changez starts being watched with mistrust; he loses interest in his job, is fired, and, while his American fiancée ends in a mental asylum, he returns to Pakistan, where he joins anti-American protests. Whilst, at the beginning of the novel, we identify Changez with the 'reluctant fundamentalist', the more he goes on with his tale the more we realize that the real fundamentalism at issue here is American capitalism, emblemized by the motto of Changez's former boss: 'Focus on the fundamentals'. This reversal leads to the impossibility of determining who is the potential killer and who the victim out of Changez and his listener. At the end of his long tale, Changez compares himself to an up-to-date Kurtz "waiting for his Marlowe" (Hamid 2007: 183). Yet throughout the novel, the reader is more likely to see him as a postmodern version of Conrad's narrator. If we agree with Christian Salmon when he says that Ground Zero is Narration Degree Zero (Salmon 2004: 16), Hamid's Changez is a narrator trying to build his tale on that void. "The narrative ends in rubble", wrote Don DeLillo shortly after 9/11, "and it is left to us to create the counter-narrative" (DeLillo 2001: 461). However, the true counter-narrative of September 11 is not his *Falling Man*, nor Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud, and Incredibly Close*, nor any other Western fiction trying to fit this anguished material into the frame of our 'postmodern' age (Versluys 2009; Albertazzi 2011; Albertazzi 2012). Only a non-Western author, an Other, could replace the old narrative with a new one. Changez himself lets us understand why when he describes his post-9/11 vision of America:

[...] it seemed to me that America [...] was increasingly giving itself over a dangerous nostalgia at that time. [...] I had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward; for the first time I was struck by its determination to look back. [...] I, a foreigner, found myself staring out at a set that ought to be viewed not in Technicolor but in a grainy black and white (Hamid 2007: 114-115).

To be free of that dangerous nostalgia, the counter-narrative of Ground Zero must be told by a foreigner and deal with the unpleasant truths that we, Westerners, would not like to hear. In this sense, Changez's listener is really compelled to "hearing beyond what we are able to hear", which, according to Butler, is the necessary condition for opening oneself to

“a narration that decenters [one] from [one’s] superiority” (Butler 2004: 18). It is quite useless, therefore, to doubt the reliability of Changez as a narrator. Changez is mainly asking for recognition by the American Other, and “when we ask for recognition for ourselves, we are not asking for an Other to see us as we are, as we already are, as we have always been, as we were constituted prior to the encounter itself. Instead, in the asking [...] we have already become something new, since we are constituted by virtue of language in the broadest sense, one without which we could not be” (Hamid 2007: 144). By depriving his listener of will through the violence of his addressing (Hamid 2007: 139), Changez creates his own counter-narrative of 9/11 far from America, in the “last days of what passes for spring [...] in Lahore” (Hamid 2007: 31).

The originality of Hamid’s novel is best appreciated if we compare it to an American work on the same subject, *Terrorist*, by John Updike. Here the popular chronicler of the American middle-class deals with the genesis of a potential terrorist, a New Jersey adolescent who embraces Islam both out of rage against US consumerism and in a pathetic attempt to retrieve the father figure he lost in his babyhood. Updike’s position is clear from the title, since, as the Italian critic Daniele Giglioli has observed, “Il terrorismo è la violenza degli altri. Non ci appartiene, arriva dal di fuori, non possiamo imputarcelo. È incomprensibile. Noi non lo faremmo mai. Noi chi? Tutti. Nessuno si definisce terrorista” (Giglioli 2007: 7). The setting of *Terrorist* is a cliché leading to the assumption that terrorism grows in situations of marginality: other clichés are the young age of the protagonist and his being unacquainted with sex - and even scared by it (Juergensmeyer 2000). Updike gives his protagonist, Ahmad, such a stereotyped voice that, as Amitav Ghosh commented, “Although he is a native-born American and has never left the United States, he speaks as if he had learned English at a *madrassa* run by the Taliban” (Ghosh 2006). Nor does any of the other characters defy stereotype: once again, we cannot but agree with Ghosh when he says: “only two of them are half-way believable, and they are Jack Levy and Ahmad’s Irish-American mother. It is no accident, perhaps, that neither of them is brown” (Ghosh 2006).

Jack is Ahmad’s opponent in an almost Manichean battle between Good and Evil: in an all-American view, Ahmad stands for merciless religious fundamentalism and Jack for secular humanism. At the end of the novel, preventing the realization of Ahmad’s suicidal act of terrorism, Jack becomes one of those heroes Americans need so badly, according to DeLillo. Moreover, preventing Ahmad’s tragic gesture, Jack also prevents the spectacularization of the terrorist act, which is at the basis of another novel coming from a postcolonial reality, *The Unknown Terrorist*, by the Australian author Richard Flanagan. Flanagan’s book does not in fact deal with the spectacular implications of the act itself, but with the creation of a terrorist by the media, in a kind of perverse show. The plot of the novel is very simple: after a one-night stand with a stranger during the Sydney Mardi Gras, a pole dancer, Gina, nicknamed the Doll, suddenly finds herself hunted by the police

as a dangerous terrorist. She is guilty only of being caught with the wrong man in the wrong place by a surveillance camera. Her dramatic persecution shows not only how morbidly terrorism attracts the media but also how the media themselves control and direct the way people see, and the interpretation of what they see. Gina's tragic experience is an ambiguous process of virtualization, leading, in Žižek's words, to a "dematerialization of 'real life' itself, its reversal into a spectral show" (Žižek 2002: 14). Since the beginning of her story Gina believes that the whole world is based on deception, because "people were never who they seemed" (Flanagan 2007: 47). Yet, it is only when a failed anchorman, Richard Cody, having been refused by her, uses his position to manipulate reality, that the Doll's life really "acquires the features of a staged fake" (Žižek 2002: 14).

Fundamental, for the creation of the terrorist, is the iteration of her image on the TV screen. The blurred video in which she is caught with the handsome foreigner who will later be identified as a terrorist is broadcast endlessly throughout the country. The repetition of Gina's video seems to confirm that, as Slavoj Žižek affirms, "the opposite of existence is not nonexistence, but *insistence*: that which does not exist, continues to *insist*, striving towards existence" (Žižek 2002: 22). By broadcasting Gina's image continuously, television creates a state of fear and anxiety around her face, which, with every new appearance, loses humanity and eventually becomes the face of evil itself. What is original in Flanagan's novel is that this face is white: it is a Western one: Gina belongs to 'us', yet she is accused of acting like (or for) 'them'. Therefore, Gina's fate might be *our* fate. In this sense, *The Unknown Terrorist* is a cautionary tale: the author wants to warn us against "the instrumental use of the threat of terrorism and the risk of totalitarian choices for our Western societies in a perennial state of emergency" (Wu Ming1: 2010, my translation).

In this universe of people made moral cowards by venality, and terrorized by economic anxiety and skulking xenophobia (Conrad 2007), the Doll and Cody "cling to their own varieties of emptiness with the ferocity of religious fanatics" (Iweala 2007). In particular, Cody seems to personify Žižek's "Homo sucker", who, "while he tries to exploit and manipulate others, [...] ends up being the ultimate sucker himself" (Žižek 2002: 71). Seeing in Gina's story the chance for a return to success and popularity, he builds a castle of suppositions around her guilt, never taking into account the possibility of her innocence, but easily convincing both public opinion and politicians of her being a dangerous terrorist. Wounded and terrified, Gina ends by being caught up in a horrific machine she is helpless to stop: in Butler's words, she is literally given over to the Others [no longer us, not yet them] in ways she cannot predict or control (Butler 2006: 46). Thus, her parable becomes the mirror of a crisis that, according to Flanagan, is not political. As the Australian author says, it is more "an epidemic of loneliness, of sadness – and we are completely unequal to dealing with it" (Moss 2007).

In her isolation, *The Doll* is the convenient scapegoat for a world of globalized terror and trade. Moreover, if it is true, as Butler says, that “each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies” (Butler 2006: 20), the choice of a pole dancer as a protagonist emphasizes the risk of violence each body is at just by virtue of its exposure. “A site of desire and physical vulnerability” (Butler 2006: 20), Gina’s body attracts envy from women, lust from men and contempt from both men and women. According to Flanagan, as a pole dancer she is “at [the] very point of intersection of the sadness and sickness and complete hypocrisy of the world” (Moss 2007). “A convenient place to start” for a writer, since, as Flanagan explained, “It’s good to have a character about whom people will arrive at an immediate judgement and that allows you then to take the reader to a different place. You can make them realise that perhaps their judgement was wrong, and perhaps the other judgements they live with are also as ill-based” (Moss 2007).

Here Flanagan’s work differs radically from *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum*, the 1971 novel by Heinrich Böll from which it takes its basic outline. In Böll’s plot, inspired by the terrorist craze that shook Germany in the ‘60s and ‘70s, the protagonist, a governess wrongly accused of being the accomplice of a terrorist, is so prudish that she has been nicknamed ‘the nun’. On the contrary, the Doll has no honour to lose. Consequently, whilst Katharina Blum ends by killing the journalist who has destroyed her reputation, the Doll herself is killed in a sort of “bloody day of judgement” (Conrad 2007), characterised by an apocalyptic scenery: the sudden ice storm that struck Sydney in the winter of 2004.

In fact, Sydney is more than just a setting in Flanagan’s book: in a way, the metropolis, with its lurid sights, its contradictions, its corruption and its dropouts, stands for Australia, the author’s mother country, towards which he shows an unconcealed rage. “I wanted to make a mirror to what I felt Australia has become”, he declared (Moss 2007). To stress his polemical intentions, Flanagan dedicated his novel to David Hicks, an Australian drifter converted to Islam, who was captured by the Americans in Afghanistan, where he served with the Taliban regime, in 2001. After spending five years in Guantanamo Bay, in accordance with a pre-trial agreement, out of his desperation for release, he pleaded guilty to the charge of providing material support for terrorism and was sent back to Australia to serve the remaining nine months of a suspended seven-year sentence, without any media contact. When asked by an interviewer whether he considered his dedication to Hicks “needlessly provocative”, Flanagan justified his choice with these words:

You don’t have to agree with [him] and I don’t. [...] I don’t support the murder of innocent people anywhere by anyone, but what really matters is truth and individual freedom, and when those things start coming under such heavy attack as they have in recent times, then people should be very disturbed (Moss 2007).

And he concluded:

The danger for western societies at this moment is that we seek to protect ourselves by creating and feeding difference and by making people feel alienated, and that's not possible to share with other human beings the possibility of being fully human. The best defence we can offer against evil is [...] by letting people back in (Moss 2007)¹.

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¹ This essay is an updated English version of "Sous les yeux de l'Orient" (Albertazzi 2013).

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Silvia Albertazzi is Full Professor of English Literature at the University of Bologna, where she is also Director of a Ph.D. program on World Literature and Cultural Studies. She is the author of the first Italian book on Postcolonial Theory, *Lo sguardo dell'Altro* (Carocci 2000). In 2006, her geocritical essay *In questo mondo, ovvero, quando i luoghi raccontano le storie* (Meltemi 2006) won the 1st Literary Prize for Essay Writing "Alziator". She is the author of the chapters on the XVII and XVIII centuries of *Breve storia della letteratura inglese* (Einaudi 2004). With Roberto Vecchi she edited *Abbecedario postcoloniale* (Quodlibet 2004), and with Ferdinando Amigoni, *Guardare oltre. Letteratura, fotografia e altri territori* (Meltemi 2007). Her latest works are the monographs *Il nulla, quasi* (Le Lettere 2010), on literature and photography; *Belli e perdenti* (Armando 2012), on the crisis of the hero in contemporary English fiction, and *La letteratura postcoloniale. Dall'Impero alla World Literature* (Carocci 2013).
silvia.albertazzi@unibo.it



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Carmen Concilio

Representations of the Lebanese Civil War and Peace in two Short Stories by Mai Ghoussoub

Abstract I: Questo saggio intende esplorare prose brevi di Mai Ghoussoub dalla raccolta *Leaving Beirut* (2007) che trattano della città di Beirut al tempo della guerra civile, negli anni settanta e fino al novanta. I suoi racconti e saggi brevi verranno analizzati alla luce delle teorie critiche della 'psicogeografia', e della 'geopolitica delle emozioni'. La difficoltà di riconciliare il proprio Sé con il proprio Paese e con la propria gente, dopo una guerra, è quindi particolarmente rilevante. Nei suoi racconti Mai Ghoussoub ritrae la normalità del tempo di pace e l'improvvisa metamorfosi indotta dalla guerra sui singoli individui, dal giorno alla notte. Le sue narrazioni, tra molte altre, affrontano l'esilio, la dislocazione e una visione della madrepatria vista da altrove, poiché molti intellettuali e artisti sono emigrati durante o dopo la guerra.

Abstract II: The present essay intends to explore some short stories by Mai Ghoussoub, from the collection *Leaving Beirut* (2007) which focus on the city of Beirut at the time of the civil war in the '70s and up to the '90s. Her works will be discussed taking into consideration 'psychogeography', and the 'geopolitics of emotions' as theoretical frameworks. The difficulty to reconcile one-self to one's nation and one's people, after a war, is particularly relevant here. In her stories, Mai Ghoussoub depicts the normality of a time of peace and the abrupt metamorphosis forced onto people by war, almost overnight. Her narratives confront, amongst other themes, exile, displacement and a vision of the motherland from abroad, since numerous intellectuals and artists migrated during or right after the war.

In this essay I would like to explore short narratives that epitomize – almost in the way moral parables do – representations of war and peace with protagonists who are teenagers or young adults. The two short stories and the short prose pieces taken into consideration belong to the collection by Mai Ghoussoub, *Leaving Beirut* (1998) about the Lebanese civil war that lasted fifteen years, from 1975 to 1990. These texts question the individual's and

the community's relation to a specific place in terms of his/their private and public engagement with it. Moreover, they pose questions of personal and collective agency, responsibility and memory. Finally they prefigure, study and define the precise positioning of the subject in our contemporary troubled world. Because of this they are best understood within the critical framework of Guy Debord's theory of psychogeography and of Dominique Moïsi's study on *The Geopolitics of Emotion* (2009). Psychogeography which examines the relationship between the city and the behaviour of its inhabitants and Dominique Moïsi's view of a 'negative culture of humiliation' appear particularly relevant for the present study. Humiliation, argues Moïsi, ends up nourishing vengeance and violence, just as is illustrated by Ghoussoub's tales: the concept of 'positive humiliation' that triggers healthy competition and aspirations is instead put forward in her essays.

Together, Debord's relationship between the individual and the city and Moïsi's 'negative humiliation' constitute the frameworks of Mai Ghoussoub's representations of war in Beirut as seen from the vantage point of the expatriate, for she left Lebanon for London in 1979. Her detachment, or 'outsideness', is only apparent, for the characters she selects are vividly portrayed and known to her.

In the short story "The Heroism of Umm Ali", for instance, the protagonist is a nine-year-old girl who is sold by her parents to a bourgeois Muslim family to work as housemaid in Beirut. Her drunkard father and her evidently weak mother never go back to reclaim her, and she lives a life of humble tasks and constant humiliations, even rape by the mistress's son, in the house where she lives almost like a slave. But one day, war

sprang upon the country [and] very soon engulfed the neighbourhood. [...] The cosy routines of its inhabitants were so abruptly disrupted, and their streets turned so easily into an apocalyptic battlefield, that it was as if it had all happened under the spell of some magician's wand (Ghoussoub 1998: 71).

On one of her errands, while going shopping at the outbreak of the civil war, Latifa sees the soldiers who have established their headquarters in the bakery down the street. She is immediately mesmerised by them and starts savouring her chance of freedom:

Every morning she stayed a bit longer at the baker's shop. She began to chat with the militiamen as they relaxed at the door of their headquarters. [...] she loved the way the fighters spoke to Mrs Saniya: casually, and with no special respect. Latifa needed passionately to be like them, to become one of them (Ghoussoub 1998: 73).

The long-suffered humiliation and Latifa's subaltern class consciousness lead her to join the soldiers, at the age of seventeen. She changes her name into Umm Ali, the sister of men, and decides she wants to turn into a legend. Thus Latifa is quite suddenly

metamorphosed from victim into monster:

Umm Ali was seen in many places at the same time. Once somebody had seen her in an Israeli jail [...] there were also tales of her exploits in the battle of the hotels in downtown Beirut. Umm Ali was neither woman nor man. Latifa was no longer the vulnerable little maid. Umm Ali died. [...] Latifa had never had her picture taken. She died as faceless as she had lived. [...] Umm Ali was a legend too, and she had no features either (Ghoussoub 1998: 77).

Umm Ali's notoriousness as "ruthless fighter who knew neither fear nor compassion" (Ghoussoub 1998: 66) has nothing to do with the frightened, little girl she once was. Her 'amputated childhood' marks the passage from Latifa to Umm Ali.

This story is only apparently a very simple parable about a sort of modern Cinderella who turns into a child-soldier. Her first life is lived within a culture of humiliation which is then replaced by a culture of violence. This cycle, from humiliation to violence, seen as a form of empowerment and emancipation, is not so much a gender issue, nor an individual destiny. It is, in fact, a stabilized pattern in our own contemporary World, as Dominique Moïsi claims in his essay *The Geopolitics of Emotion* (2009). Well aware of using a vocabulary which is normally associated with soft sciences – that is, feelings, emotions, and the semantic sphere of affect, which clashes with the classical or normative idea of Geopolitics as a rational science, made up of figures, statistics, stock exchange ratings and future calculable possibilities, the author persists in claiming that nowadays 'cultures of emotion' perfectly represent geopolitical realities and cultural clashes.

Dominique Moïsi is one of the major experts in international and political affairs. His accurate and informed analysis of contemporary Geopolitics has nothing to do with a sentimental approach to reality and to international relations. Moïsi rather speaks of emotions as cultural and collective constructs. He claims that the cultures of hope, humiliation and fear characterise our world and, respectively, influence three main geopolitical arenas. To begin with, the culture of hope, according to the author, seems to be peculiar of Asia, particularly of the area now known as Cindia, that is to say China and India, with their young population and demographic and economic never-ceasing expansion. This optimistic perspective excludes Japan, with its aging population, economic stagnation and loss of diplomatic influence. In contrast, humiliation seems to have spread all over the Arab-Islamic composite world, maybe with the exception of the Emirates, which constitute islands of hope and modernisation. Latifa's story is emblematic of this state of negative humiliation that inevitably turns into absolute violence. Lastly, fear is the cultural terrain now obsessively paralysing the Western World (Europe and the US), affected by islamophobia, or, more generally, fear of the 'other', and by demographic and economic crises.

In the final chapters of her work, which are dedicated to war tribunals, instead, Mai Ghoussoub provides an example of 'positive humiliation' when she considers other wars and other countries. She refers to Mandela: "his humiliations and those of his people made him hate the act of humiliation. [...] I cling to the example of Nelson Mandela, and I set great store by his decision to pardon and forgive and to turn the ugliest past into a bright future" (Ghoussoub 1998: 160).

According to Dominique Moïsi in spite of the fact that – demographically speaking – Islamism might outnumber other religious groups, both psychologically and emotionally, the Islamic world is now dominated by a sense of cultural and political humiliation, and is desperately asking for recognition of its dignity, even through violence and terror.

Thus, the shift from a culture of negative humiliation to a culture of violence – that Moïsi detects in phenomena such as Al-Qaeda, the creation of a pan-Islamic ever-growing alliance and Islamic terrorism – is similar to Mai Ghoussoub's portrayal of violence, although on a smaller and more private scale. Moreover, it must be said that Ghoussoub, too, sees her people as embodying a precise psychological geo-culture, for she claims: "Remember, we live on the shores of the Mediterranean. Honour, revenge and vendetta are virtues that our menfolk are supposed to have defended throughout their history" (Ghoussoub 1998: 35); or "Honour, revenge and identity are all very intertwined in my country of origin" (Ghoussoub 1998: 49).

Life in Lebanon and in Beirut has been affected by the search for balance between a composite mosaic of religious confessions, sometimes driven and manipulated by foreign powers. The Druze, the Maronite Christians, the Shi'ites, the Sunnis, and the Palestinians co-habit on a strip of land, which has turned from Eden into Hell. The translation of the Israel-Palestinian war into central Beirut, where Palestinians had their headquarters, and the indirect interference of Syria and Iran in the war has facilitated the prominence of one group over others. That is why words such as humiliation, frustration and revenge become recurrent as refrains in Mai Ghoussoub's work, providing grounding for Guy Debord's theory of psychogeography as the study of "the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals" (Debord 1981: 5) while at the same time demonstrating Dominique Moïsi's theories. The Lebanese war is mainly a war on a city, on Beirut's city centre, as many authors claim:

Everything began and ended in the city centre. That was why it was the civil war's primordial theatre. A country shatters when its capital is wounded, like a point and a circumference; a capital disintegrates when its city centre is destroyed, the two concentric circles make a nation. Or unmake it.

We had to walk across the Green Line to reach West Beirut, a zone which was to become a battlefield a few years later (Boulad 2004: 31-34).

Civil war in Beirut is depicted by Mai Ghoussoub, as well as by other intellectuals and historians, as a silent and abrupt transformation, which affects not only communities, political or religious parties, but single individuals, too.

The spark went out on Sunday, April 13 1975, at 'Ayn al-Rummaneh, a densely populated Christian neighbourhood where a Church was being inaugurated in the presence of Pierre Gemayel. After one of his body guards had been killed by a round of bullets, a bus carrying a group of Palestinians back to Chatila, following a commemoration at the camp of Tall al-Za'tar, was the victim of an ambush and twenty-seven people died. Immediately, warfare broke out between 'Ayn al-Rummaneh and the opposite Shi'ite neighbourhood of Chiyah, one of the mostly densely populated quarter of the belt of misery. In every neighbourhood, men with weapons appeared.

The night of that April 13 Lebanon entered war. [...] "Fronts" did not appear outside of the urban centre. [...] War was fought borough against borough ... (Kassir 2009: 617-619, *my translation*).

This metamorphosis, translated into East Beirut against West Beirut along the so-called Green Line, takes place almost overnight and changes individuals to the point of rendering them unrecognizable. Another testimony confirms this view:

I decided to leave my city to the invaders and those who wanted to fight them and move to East Beirut with my small family. We were among huge numbers of people who also moved eastwards. [...] The checkpoints shocked me even before my move to the East. [...] While in the west, there were daily, armed clashes, in the east we could go for long periods without gun battles. [...] Still, in 1982, I felt a bit out of place in East Beirut as I watched, from Beit Meri, the Israelis destroy the west side (Saghie 2004: 112-113).

Significantly, Mai Ghoussoub calls one of her short stories "The Metamorphosis of Said". Said is the smiling greengrocer's son, who helps his father after school in his corner-shop and delivers people's shopping in huge brown paper bags. He attends secondary school and seems a promising student. His father foresees a prosperous future for him at the *Ecole Hôtelière*, for hotel and catering businesses were flourishing in Lebanon. This simple, linear movement from present to future, made of educational opportunities, of upward social mobility, is suddenly interrupted. Linguistically, the text emphasises that abrupt change through a short statement: "But things changed" (Ghoussoub 1998: 81).

"Just a few weeks after the war broke out Said was no longer to be seen near his father", who had to admit: "Said has joined the fighters" (Ghoussoub 1998: 81). From that moment on, rumours spread about Said being a sniper, about Said organizing young men, about Said stealing cars and getting rich by stealing, about Said as a terrible torturer.

At this point the voice of the author is heard, out of the neighbours' chorus, in contrast with it because of the common sense it voices:

The young and smiling Said was now never seen. Instead he was now imagined in the most frightening terms. Said had been turned by the war into a small monster. He should have been suavely and efficiently managing a little hotel by now, somewhere in one of the famous tourist and holiday resorts that the Lebanese were once so proud of. Both these Sais are real. I have seen many of them. Too many of them. Both before and after the civil war. I have seen their bright hopeful faces, and I have seen them ready to kill and torture. [...] Who is to decide, now, who the real Said is – the Said who might be judged, now that everything is settling back into 'normality'? Where did Said create and store all the cruelty that made him so feared and famous? (Ghoussoub 1998: 82).

This passage is all built on the metaphor of a fracture. A fracture in time, before and after the war, and a fracture in personality, for Said has become two persons, exactly as happened to Latifa/Umm Ali. The war itself is that fracture, when time stops and becomes mere present, 'now'; it is a present of uncertainty, between 'what should have been' and 'what has become'.

It is here, in this passage, that the author stands outside her community and voices a kind of judgement: "I have seen many of them" (Ghoussoub 1998: 82). She is both an insider and an outsider, for after witnessing the civil war she emigrated, thus distancing herself from facts and starting to relate them through fictions. Although an expatriate in London, she does go back to Beirut now and then. Once back in Beirut, once the war is over, she happens to walk on that same pavement and to see the fruit and vegetables in their old place. What is lacking, however, is that old feeling of assurance and security. She cannot face Said, in case he be there, in the shop. At this point she asks herself as well as her own people: "Could we all start again, as if we had had a bad night and were leaving its horrible nightmares behind?" (Ghoussoub 1998: 82).

The difficulty of reconciling oneself to one's nation and one's people, even to one's neighbours, after a civil war, in times of peace, could not be expressed in clearer terms. Yet, in a recent film by Canadian director Denis Villeneuve, *Incendies* (2010) a Lebanese Christian woman dies of a stroke, because of the impossibility of coming to terms with History. While in a swimming pool with her daughter in Toronto, she recognises the man who had raped her while she was in prison during the civil war in Lebanon as her abducted first son and in him she also recognises the father of her younger twins. This absurd family matter, only apparently private, is in fact the product of the public, political and religious chaos produced by the civil war. The mother can by no means reconcile herself to her family, her country, her personal and national History, not even in Canada. War tracks her down, so to speak.

Not even a war-crime tribunal might be sufficient to restore a sense of security, Mai Ghoussoub claims. Back in London, safe again in her exile, Mai Ghoussoub realises that it is necessary to face the unacceptable reality: “that the line that separates the criminal from the next-door neighbour, the helpful lad from the torturer, is not as clear as I had always thought before the civil war” (Ghoussoub 1998: 83).

Then the story changes register, with the hero turning into a villain. The author is free to imagine the reasons for his wanting to become a fighter. It is here that Ghoussoub’s representation of a somehow typical fighter meets Moïsi’s concept of humiliation:

This infuriates Said, for he has often seen his father bending with humility in front of rich customers” [...].

His hatred for the other side, the enemy across the green line, is becoming unbearable. He wants to silence their shells, to catch their snipers, to frighten them and humiliate them in the same way that they are humiliating his father, destroying his mother, turning her into a hysterical, depressive woman (Ghoussoub 1998: 84).

Humiliation is a key word, here. It is the main reason why Said becomes fascinated with war, with the militiamen, who are young, powerful, self-confident with their Kalashnikovs and with cigarettes hanging from their mouths. They even look beautiful to Said, who “watches them from the balcony of his miserable little apartment” (Ghoussoub 1998: 84). In the next scene, the author imagines Said joining the militiamen. He is now one of them, with plenty of cigarettes and a Kalashnikov, too, and a Jeep:

Yesterday he noticed how Mr Rafiq, the haughty customer who always prompted big smiles on his father’s face whenever he stepped into the shop, moved to one side to allow Said and his fellow fighters to jump the queue at the bakery. Said could see and feel the fear in Mr Rafiq’s eyes. [...]

His anger at his father’s constant humility is never appeased. Humiliating others and watching how they fear him is endlessly exhilarating (Ghoussoub 1998: 86).

Said has become violent, people weave all sorts of stories about him as a torturer, a killer, a hero. In order to rewind history and meet again the smiling boy in his father’s shop, the author says, room must be made for forgiving and forgetting.

The two stories are quite similar. The paradigm of negative humiliation as the path to violence is reproduced. The first story immediately departs from the Cinderella type of tales: the protagonist is never rewarded for her services, that is, for silently and obediently putting up with subjugation and injustice on the part of her mistress, and she dies as a martyr at war, after living her whole life as a humiliated victim. She does not look for personal revenge, in the end; she rather fights a lost battle to free herself from her

socially doomed condition. The same sense of economic and social frustration is the cause of Said's metamorphosis. Thus, war does not prevent women from being equal to men, or poor people from humiliating the rich. Said is luckier, anyway; he survives and can go back to his normal life.

Peace-time to Mai Ghoussoub means exile in London, where she worked as an artist, a sculptor, a playwright, a journalist and a writer/activist before her premature death in 2007. In London she co-founded the Saqi publishing house, promoting publications of texts on the Middle East. Peace-time to her means elaborating on the possibilities of reconciliation with 'abnormality' and 'generalised dementia', a never fully attained target:

Beirut is living its peace now. Like all others who are returning here, and those who still live here, I wanted to believe in this peace. [...] But whenever I had a minute to myself I felt a strange malaise taking hold of me. [...] But why this malaise? [...] This war follows us in our peace (Ghoussoub 1998: 34-36).

War remains, war never ends. Mai Ghoussoub quotes John Steinbeck, who even claims that "one cannot photograph war, for war is mainly emotion" (Ghoussoub 1998: 143). This shows that psychogeography and a geopolitics of emotion are by no means irrelevant to the discussion of representations of peace and war, and that they are intrinsic ways of inhabiting our human history.

It is in times of peace, in her exile, when she retreats into art, that Mai Ghoussoub most critically and maybe even unwillingly is brought back to reflect on war:

In Europe I tried to change my skin [...]. I went on for years rejecting politics. [...] I trawled the art galleries of Paris and London looking for an art that was not concerned with social issues. I praised fun, kitsch and lightness. The intention of my sculptures was that they should be colourful, superficial and useless. [...] I painted them in silver and gold, and I painted my own lips with a striking red. 'Long live escapism' was the slogan by which I lived. But long it could not live. I find myself unable to switch off the TV... (Ghoussoub 1998: 160).

It becomes compulsive for her to compare the Lebanese civil war with civil wars in other countries: Chile, South Africa, Yugoslavia, Mali. Everywhere she detects that most brutal abjection that these lines from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* so powerfully illustrate:

Caesar
The time of universal peace is near. [...]

 Go charge Agrippa,
Plant those that have revolted in the van,
That Antony may seem to spend his fury
Upon himself (Shakespeare 1995: IV.vi. 4-10).

This image of an individual condemned to fight against his former friends, as if against himself, is the perfect translation of what a civil war is and does. No matter from what point of view one tries to look at it, it is a betrayal. Mai Ghoussoub never moved back to Beirut, in spite of her visits back home:

She feels at home in London [...] Now she is a British national but sees herself more as a citizen of Kensington. When people come to visit from Lebanon or France she is proud to walk them through the park, along the path by the Serpentine [...] She always ends her tour in a part of London that has no concern for periods, be they past or future: Portobello Road. There amid a feast of juxtaposed sounds and cultures, she asks her visitors if they have ever witnessed such an exciting mixture of styles and customs in their own countries. She now feels alien in cities that are not confused in their identities, cities with linear and local memories. She needs hybridity and clashes of colours in order to fit (Ghoussoub 1998: 150).

Nostalgia compelled her to go back to Beirut. Significantly the author uses the third person narration in this text, as if she were looking at herself as 'another'. She claims that "Maybe, after all, there should have been some trials, some assessment of responsibility in this terrible war. You can't wipe out ugly memories without also erasing some of your humanity" (Ghoussoub 1998: 153).

Civil wars take away one's humanity. That is why they can never be forgotten, even in times of peace. And if any war is emotion, civil wars are even more emotional. Therefore, Mai Ghoussoub sees the only possible solution for quenching uncontrolled and uncontrollable emotions in this:

If the need for vengeance is a fact of life, the meaning of civilized coexistence has long been rightly understood as the intervention by legal or social procedures in order to limit the possibility of this vengeance, and to use legal means and compensations in order to re-establish a possible coexistence between the one who caused the injury and the person injured (Ghoussoub 1998: 187).

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Carmen Concilio is Associate Professor of English and Postcolonial Literature at the University of Turin. Her research fields are postcolonial literature and theory, gender, translation studies, urban studies, Modernism. Her recent publications include *New Critical Patterns in Postcolonial Discourse. Historical Traumas and Environmental Issues*, (Trauben 2012); "Whose War? The Influence of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* on some postcolonial writers" (2013) and "Amitav Ghosh's and Madeleine Thien's Cambodia: What is Literature without a Language" (2014). She is currently Director of the AISCLI Summer School on World Cultures and Literatures in English.

carmen.concilio@unito.it



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Lucia Folena

“All That May Become a Man”: *Macbeth* and the Breakdown of the Heroic Model

Abstract I: Mentre sembra inizialmente conformarsi alla tradizionale rappresentazione epica della guerra come duello tra Bene e Male, o Diritto e Torto, *Macbeth* — all’incirca due secoli prima che un’analoga demistificazione si verifichi nel romanzo borghese — finisce per smantellare questo modello così geometrico e irrealistico, suggerendo che tutta la guerra è caos, e che valori antichi ed ereditati come l’eroismo e l’onore non bastano a salvaguardare le collettività dalla caduta nella confusione e nella distruzione.

Abstract II: While initially appearing to conform to the traditional epic representation of war as a duel between Good and Evil, or Right and Wrong, *Macbeth* — a couple of centuries before a similar debunking takes place in the novel — ends up deconstructing this neat, unrealistic model and suggesting that all war is chaos and that ancient, inherited values such as heroism and honour are not sufficient to preserve communities from falling into confusion and destruction.

The epic tradition of the West, at least from the *Iliad* onwards, has typically rewritten the unbearable disorder and the inevitable loss of ethical justifications which accompany any war into the simplified, comprehensible and tolerable scheme of the duel, in which, in most cases, labels of Right and Wrong get attached to the two opponents¹. This is also the image Carl von Clausewitz proposes in 1832 as the starting point of his analysis of warfare: the latter “is nothing but a duel on an extensive scale” (Clausewitz 1873: 1). It is, in fact, its being made up of a “countless number of duels”, he adds, that authorizes such a drastic reduction². A few years before writing *Macbeth*, Shakespeare had already suggested how arbitrary and at the same time unavoidable this synecdochic and symbolic compression was for a playwright confronted with the ‘wooden O’ of a stage; but he had

¹ Scurati 2007: 3-141; Folena 2013: 153-162.

² “War is nothing but a duel on an extensive scale. If we would conceive as a unit the countless number of duels which make up a war, we shall do so best by supposing to ourselves two wrestlers. Each strives by physical force to compel the other to submit to his will: his first object is to throw his adversary, and thus to render him incapable of further resistance”, Clausewitz 1873, I: 1.

also, differently from the Prussian general, called upon his audience to reverse the process and mentally reconstruct the postulated complexity of the picture³.

Along with the duel model, but outside the epic, literature has recurrently offered another, more realistic rendering of war, which seems to have gradually turned into the predominant modality of representing it — that of chaos. This is the “war of every one against every one”, as Thomas Hobbes defines it⁴, where no right and wrong can be distinguished nor any two sides identified. One of the best early pictures of this turmoil is offered by Ovid’s description of the Iron Age⁵.

The technical and logistic impossibility of staging a battle has led dramatists and directors ever since classical times to resort to simplifying modalities of representation⁶, two of which are particularly relevant to *Macbeth*. One is the third-person account provided by an eyewitness of events that have happened off scene. Thus a bleeding captain returning from the battlefield informs Duncan about the feats accomplished by his valorous general Macbeth; shortly thereafter Ross comes to report on the loyalist army’s victory and the enemy’s surrender (I.ii.7-41, 48-62). The second modality, much in the way suggested in *Henry V*, synthesizes the entire mêlée into a duel fought by two central characters who become the ‘champions’ of the two sides in conflict.

Two such duels — synecdoches and emblematic representations of clashes between two armies — are featured in *Macbeth* as the action’s points of departure and arrival. The opening one, seen indirectly through the captain’s narrative, finds a strikingly fitting counterpart in the concluding one, which takes place largely on stage. As a matter of fact the two wars that are recapitulated through them are reversed mirror images of each other. Each is caused by a rebellion of a part of the nobility against their ruler, and in each foreign troops — Norwegian in the first case, Anglo-Saxon in the second — intervene in support of the insurgents. Each conflict is the outcome of a clear-cut situation where one of the sides is immediately identifiable as right and the other as wrong, with a complete turnaround between the beginning and the end. For the initial revolt against ‘good’ king Duncan appears largely if not utterly unjustified, whereas an armed reaction to Macbeth’s tyranny and misrule, magnified by his criminal ascent to the throne, seems not only legitimate but morally necessary. And between the first and the last act the protagonist has shifted from the embodiment of Virtue — Machiavellian *virtù* (I.ii.17-19) joined with righteousness and justice — to that of Vice, good only for becoming “the show and gaze o’th’time” by being exhibited at fairs as the quintessential Monster, the antonomastic Tyrant (V.viii.23-27)⁷.

³ *Henry V*, Prologue, 9-32.

⁴ *Leviathan*, Chap. 13 (Hobbes 1962: 100-101).

⁵ *Metamorphoses* I.141-150.

⁶ Scurati 2007: 119-141.

⁷ For a “Machiavellian reading” of the play see Riebling 1991: 273-286.

This geometrical setup provides a frame within which the world around and inside humans gradually collapses into a state of chaos. What follows Duncan's victory, rather than actual peace, is a rapidly spreading web of fissures and rifts in the order of society as well as in that of the natural world. Things are beginning to work differently from what was expected. Language in particular becomes so ambiguous that contraries stop denying each other, so that the apparent paradoxes of fair being foul and battles being lost and won at the same time (I.i) become not just viable but typical of a serious disruption in ordinary communication. As Banquo suddenly realizes on his way back to Duncan's camp after the battle, one comes across beings who refuse to occupy a predefined, unequivocal position in the Great Chain of Being, disavowing any possibility of establishing clear-cut boundaries between terms which were previously thought of as mutually exclusive — spiritual and material, female and male:

What are these,
So withered and so wild in their attire,
That look not like th'inhabitants o' th'earth,
And yet are on't? Live you, or are you aught
That man may question? You seem to understand me,
By each at once her choppy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips; you should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so (I.iii.37-44).

If these forms of madness were confined to the Weird Sisters, they would be ascribable to their peculiar subversiveness — to their interfering with worldly affairs as human emissaries of infernal powers in order to bring about the disintegration of society. But the phenomenon is a far more general one. The gap between appearances and realities, surfaces and substances, is becoming unfathomable. "There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face", Duncan laments in an awkward attempt to justify himself for his failure in foreseeing the former Thane of Cawdor's treacherous intentions, adding: "He was a gentleman on whom I built / An absolute trust" (I.iv.11-14). And it is precisely the sovereign's utter inability to see beyond facades that later leads him to his death, and Scotland to ruin. Not only does he now build an "absolute trust" on Macbeth, but on approaching his castle he completely misreads its look, praising its "pleasant seat" and the nimble and sweet air that surrounds it as if they were a guarantee of peace and safety instead of a *trompe-l'œil* to mask the evil nested inside (I.vi.1-3).

On this level Duncan is a king of the past, fit to govern a simpler world where no particular interpretive skills are required of those in power because things may be taken at face value and the distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, is patent and given once and for all — a world where wars may all be legitimately simplified into duels and

the combination of valour, honour and loyalty provides a sufficient ethical model for any man, whether monarch, thane or warrior. His rule is in this sense anachronistic, and this makes his elimination politically inevitable, even though of course not morally justified. But he is not only a sacrificial victim, for he himself — otherwise a paragon of the traditional virtues of the 'good' king — suddenly also violates a rule, and one as important for the preservation of harmony among the nobility as that of tanistry, when he designates his elder son as heir to the throne (I.iv.35-39)⁸.

Some degree of disorder thus precedes and in more than one sense facilitates the ultimate transgression — the regicide. At that fatal moment the entire frame of both human and natural worlds starts falling to pieces, portending "dire combustion and confused events, / New-hatched to th'woeful time", as Lennox declares on entering the castle the following morning (II.iii.50-51). From now on images of chaos multiply. Dark night supplants daylight, falcons are killed by owls, horses devour each other (II.iv). Macbeth has knowingly caused this state of things and is determined in seeking to worsen it, if that is necessary in order to satisfy his greed for power. "But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer, / Ere we will eat our meal in fear", he says to his wife while waiting for news from the murderers hired to kill Banquo and Fleance (III.ii.16-17). In demanding answers from the witches he later constructs an articulated and ghastly picture of universal chaos:

Though you untie the winds and let them fight
Against the churches; though the yeasty waves
Confound and swallow navigation up;
Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down;
Though castles topple on their warders' heads;
Though palaces and pyramids do slope
Their heads to their foundations; though the treasure
Of nature's germens tumble all together,
Even till destruction sicken; answer me
To what I ask you (IV.i.51-60).

It is essentially the same kind of cosmic demolition which Malcolm, in testing Macduff's loyalty, falsely attributes to himself, were he to become king:

had I power, I should

⁸ In "the Celtic system of tanistry [...] the succession passed down not by direct primogeniture but by alternation between different branches of the royal house" and the monarch needed to be elected by the thanes (Norbrook 1987: 86; see Braunmuller 1997: 16). This system would have justified Macbeth's claim to the throne, as he was Duncan's first cousin. Historically, as a matter of fact, the rule of tanistry had already been violated by King Kenneth III, who had introduced primogeniture, opening up a phase of strife and instability in the country (Norbrook 1987: 87-90).

Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell,
 Uproar the universal peace, confound
 All unity on earth (IV.iii.97-100).

The “milk of concord” is produced by the “king-becoming graces” listed in the preceding lines (92-94: “justice, verity, temp’rance, stableness, / Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness, / Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude”), and it seems to have a very strong affinity with virtues that are traditionally seen as ‘feminine’, such as tenderness, compassion, empathy, gentleness — that part of herself which Lady Macbeth attempts to do away with when she asks the spirits to “take [her] milk for” the “gall” of ‘masculine’ resoluteness and ruthlessness (I.v.46), and when in putting her husband to shame for hesitating in displaying those selfsame qualities she depicts herself as the kind of mother who would be capable of dashing her baby’s brains out while breast-feeding it if she had promised to do such a thing (I.vii.54-59).

The boundary between misrule and anarchy is flimsy. Bad government — tyranny — tends to turn into no government at all, just as the language of equivocation spoken by the Weird Sisters, which eliminates any apparent difference between opposites, is here ultimately impossible to distinguish from the language of inversion, which confirms opposites by simply exchanging them⁹. Both are essentially carnivalesque in origin¹⁰, but with James Stuart’s ascent to the throne of England both tend to become dangerous, demonically subversive rather than useful as instruments to contain social discontent and potential lower-class upheavals. “[T]he deuill as Gods Ape”, James states in his *Daemonologie*, “counterfeites in his seruantes this seruice & forme of adoration, that God prescribed and made his seruantes to practise”¹¹. Likewise, that of the world-upside-down, from a playful consolatory fiction, is gradually turning into a serious threat to the traditional order of society: “freedom is the man that will turn the world upside down”, Gerrard Winstanley will promise in 1649¹². The witches’ and Lady Macbeth’s ‘masculinity’ is an integral part of this grim carnival.

Chaos seizes minds as well as bodies and things. The usurper’s and his wife’s mental landmarks are swept away by variants of madness. The country bleeds and suffers from a potentially mortal disease. A doctor must be found to restore its health (IV.iii.141-158, 216-217; V.i; V.ii.27-30; V.iii.38-55). All this makes the final duel not only inevitable, but also

⁹ Clark 1977: 156-181; Clark 1980: 98-127; Stallybrass 1981: 189-209.

¹⁰ Bakhtin 1968: 263-268; Davis 1975: 96-151; Burke 1978: 182-191; Stallybrass & White 1986: 27-79.

¹¹ James I 1924: 35.

¹² “A Watch-Word to the City of London and the Armie”; see Hill 1991: 87 ff. “Fantasies of inversion” linked to political or social discontent whether ritualized and defused in Carnival celebrations or placed in declared antagonism to the accepted order of the community — being engendered by ‘outsiders’ such as witches or insurrectionist groups — had already been circulating, at least in France, at the end of the 16th century. Cf. Le Roy Ladurie 1966: I.407-414.

desirable. Macduff is a synecdoche for right and legitimacy, and for the whole army which is fighting to restore those principles in Scotland. Yet this duel must be the 'end-all' of wars. Duel-warfare is no longer possible, for, just as misrule gives way to anarchy and inversion to equivocation, any confrontation in the form of a duel — which like misrule and inversion should confirm contraries — is now bound to disintegrate into chaos, the annihilation of any possible distinction.

The world has become too complex to be reducible to a neat antithesis. It has turned from Homeric into Machiavellian, and possessing, and abiding by, the ethical code which pertains to a true 'man' — king, aristocrat, warrior — though still essential, is no longer enough. Those who do not understand this and uphold the traditional values or simplified variants of them are wiped out, as happens to Duncan himself, to Banquo, and to young Siward in his hopelessly noble confrontation with the protagonist (V.vii.5-12). This code is what makes Macbeth hesitate before the regicide, when he is still mindful of the multiple loyalties he owes: "He's here in double trust: / First, as I am his kinsman and his subject, / Strong both against the deed; then, as his host, / Who should against his murderer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself" (I.vii.12-16). And it is what makes him rebuke his wife for calling him a coward by declaring: "I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none" (I.vii.46-47). A 'man' is someone whose potentially endless determination and aptitude for violence are always controlled by the rules of the group he belongs in. His wife's view is in fact absolutely one-dimensional and does not take into any consideration the social and political obligations and ties without which life in a collective context would inevitably become horrible if not impossible.

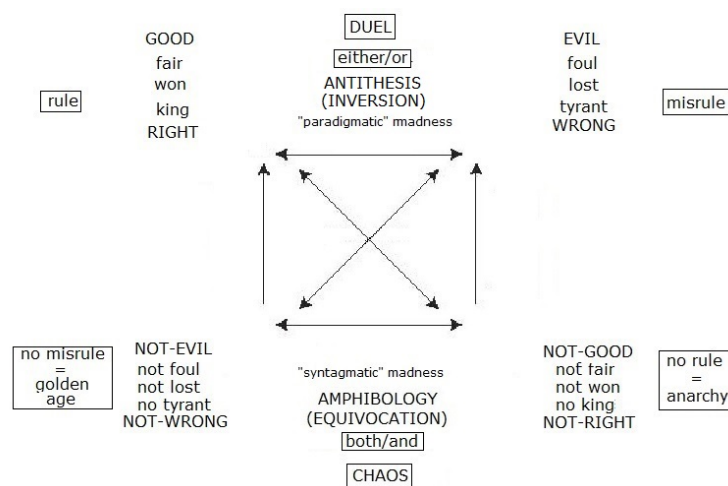
Lady Macduff, for all her being, differently from Lady Macbeth, a 'good' woman and a loving mother and wife, has a comparably simplistic (though opposite) notion of the duties which pertain to a 'real' man. She is unaware of the conflict between two separate loyalties — to his family on one side, to his legitimate king and his country on the other — which her husband had to face before deciding that the latter was at that moment a priority. Thus she completely misreads his motivations for leaving Fife and Scotland and accuses him of cowardice and treason: "When our actions do not, / Our fears do make us traitors". Evidently, she adds, he "wants the natural touch" which consists in a man placing his family above any other concern (IV.ii.3-4, 9).

On the contrary, Macduff is a figure of the 'new' man whose complexity suits the new times. His unfaltering allegiance to the cause of legitimacy and the restoration of right in the state is in fact accompanied by what his wife denied he had — feelings of love and tenderness for her and their children, their "pretty ones" (IV.iii.218). When Malcolm incites him to "[d]ispute" the terrible news of the massacre at Fife "like a man", he replies, "I shall do so; / But I must also feel it as a man" (222-224).

Yet combining the traditional heroic model with a gentler ethos which incorporates the 'feminine' side of affection and caring is not sufficient. Besides being tempered by the

Wren, that “most diminutive of birds” that is nonetheless “determined to fight, / Her young ones in her nest, against the owl” (IV.ii.9-11), the Lion must now be accompanied by the Fox. Diplomatic and political talents are literally vital, in particular that “art / To find the mind’s construction in the face” which Duncan knew nothing about but which Malcolm masters perfectly, as becomes evident when he deploys his rhetorical skills and his capability for deception in order to ascertain Macduff’s real intentions (IV.iii). Thomas Hobbes in the *Leviathan* (Chapters 26 ff.) stresses the need for any ruler aiming at building a firm control over his subjects and preserving peace and prosperity in his country to appropriate and monopolize the power of interpretation. True, he refers primarily to the interpretation of secular and divine laws and sacred texts; here, on the other hand, one is faced with a whole world, human as well as natural, which the confusion of anarchy and equivocation has made as ambiguous and undecipherable as the obscurest of texts. It is not only Duncan who falls victim to his inability to read words and people, but Macbeth himself, in his dealings with the “juggling fiends [...] / That palter with us in a double sense” (V.viii.19-20; see V.v.41-43) as well as in the paranoid mistrustfulness, stemming from his self-admitted ignorance of the art of interpreting human beings, which turns him into a ruthless serial killer: “Then live, Macduff, what need I fear of thee? / But yet I’ll make assurance double sure / And take a bond of fate: thou shalt not live” (IV.i.81-83).

This is a further reason, along with his crimes, that makes him an absolutely unsuitable king. No concord, no possibility of recovering the order and harmony which enable a community to live fully, can exist in a situation where the monarch, after spreading chaos around himself by breaking rules and social ties, is unable to restore them because he does not understand his people. From now on the preservation of peace by those in power will depend on their success in engrafting on the traditional ethos, with its rules of loyalty and honour, a new aptitude for deflecting hostility and strife through cunning.



Macbeth in a semiotic square

The transition between Elizabethan and early Jacobean cultures is marked by a tendency to what might be termed ‘ideological code restriction’¹³. Different figures of alterity — the witch, the Puritan, the New World native, the bearer of lower-class discontent, the sexually transgressive, the grotesque body of Carnival, and so forth — become ultimately reducible to one, thus automatically invested with negative moral connotations and implicitly reunited in an image of absolute otherness with regard to the community as a whole, to whose fundamental values and principles they embody a constant threat. To cite only one obvious example, when “the sinne of witchcraft” becomes interchangeable with political and social disobedience (James I 1924: 5) as well as with lack of respect for parents and princes (James I 1682: 24) and “wilful murther, Incest [...], Sodomy, Poysoning, and false coyne” (James I 1682: 23), this is precisely what comes into existence — a primary antithesis incorporating all imaginable variants of supposedly deviant practices or behaviours¹⁴.

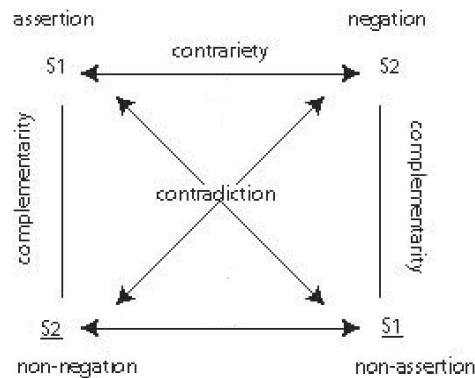
A number of plays written by Shakespeare in the decade after James Stuart’s accession to the throne of England — along with *Macbeth* one might mention, in different senses, at least *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* — seem to ‘resist’ this simplification of the ideological code. An antithetical scheme is initially set up in them only to be later challenged as providing an utterly inadequate representational model, incapable of accounting for the complexity of human affairs. The starting one-dimensional opposition is articulated and developed into a two-dimensional construct; the restricted code is dissolved into a more extended one.

The easiest way of synthesizing this, as far as *Macbeth* is concerned, is by making use of a ‘semiotic’ square. This figure has a long history, for it was invented by ancient logic — it is notably present in Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* — and widely employed by medieval and later philosophers, logicians and grammarians¹⁵, until A. J. Greimas (*Du sens* 1970) turned it into a valuable tool for semiotics and cultural studies, in the following form:

¹³ I am here combining Robert Hodge’s extensive definition of ideology as “a unitary object that incorporates complex sets of meanings with the social agents and processes that produced them” (Hodge 2016) with an adaptation of Basil Bernstein’s and Umberto Eco’s notion of restricted (as opposed to extended or articulated) linguistic code. See Bernstein 1971; Eco 1977.

¹⁴ I am applying the category of antithesis to “ideas” rather than “words”, along the lines already indicated by the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* (3rd century B.C.), Chap. 26. See Brogan & Halsall 2012.

¹⁵ See Parsons 2012.



Briefly, S1 and S2 are identifiable as 'contraries' (e.g., white vs. black); S1 and S1 are 'contradictories' (white vs. not-white), as are S2 and S2 (black vs. not-black); S1 and S2, on the one hand, and S2 and S1, on the other, are 'complementaries' (white being part of all that is not black, and black part of all that is not white). The left side of the square contains the 'positive' deixis, as opposed to the 'negative' one represented on the right.

The duel model initially proposed in *Macbeth* implies a clear binary opposition, constructing a situation where things are 'either' one way 'or' the contrary and no confusion is possible between any two possible poles — 'good', 'right', but also 'legitimate monarchy' ('king'), as well as 'hero', being incompatible with 'evil', 'wrong', 'tyranny', and 'villain'. Good rule is the exact reverse of misrule. In such a context, hypothetical dissent or subversion must needs take the form of linguistic and ideological 'inversion', displacing one or more of the terms from the right side of the square onto the left, thus subjecting them to an ethical re-investment which turns them from negative to positive. Thus, however declaredly antagonistic, inversion confirms the ideological antithesis it opposes by simply turning it upside down. In the very first scene of the tragedy, on the other hand, the Weird Sisters already signal that this neat scheme is more problematic than one might have imagined, and that "fair" being "foul" and "the battle" being "lost and won" at the same time might imply that no identifiable criterion for distinguishing the two supposed *antitheta* is now available. This announces a fall into the realm of 'amphibology' or equivocation (II.iii.1 ff.; V.v.41-43), where the either/or pattern gives way to a both/and possibility and the heroic paradigm of war-as-duel is replaced by an image of cosmic chaos, just as anarchy, as absence of rule, may indifferently take the form of golden-age bliss or Hobbesian generalized conflict.

Madness in *Macbeth* functions along the same lines. The protagonist mistakes hallucinatory figments — daggers, Banquo's ghost — for factual truths, thus substituting (in an either/or modality) the materializations of his fears for his ordinary reality in a way that is reminiscent of the 'metaphorical' or paradigmatic disturbance in language described by Roman Jakobson¹⁶. The owl killing the falcon and night replacing daylight in

¹⁶ See Jakobson 1990.

II.4 reproduce the same kind of inversion in the natural world. Contrariwise, Lady Macbeth — in V.i — seems to suffer from a ‘metonymical’ or syntagmatic disorder which leads her to combine and confuse (in the both/and form) the products of her imagination and the data of her waking life. This sort of equivocation, as loss of distinctions between opposites, corresponds to the “dire combustion and confused events” that start taking place around humans after the regicide and lead to absolute chaos.

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Lucia Folena is Associate Professor of English Literature at the University of Turin. Her principal research fields are Renaissance and early modern literature, theory, cultural studies, literature and philosophy, literature and the visual arts. Her recent publications include "Dark Corners & Double Bodies: Espionage as Transgression in Measure for Measure", forthcoming in *Plots: Double Agents and Villains in Spy Fictions*, ed. by C. Concilio (Mimesis); "Gardez mon secret: Giordano Bruno and the Historian's Spy Story" in *Spy Fiction: un genere per grandi autori*, ed. by P. Bertinetti (Trauben 2014); "Il ritorno di Cerere: la signora Ramsay e la guerra-caos" in *La Guerra e le armi nella letteratura in inglese del Novecento*, ed. by L. Folena (Trauben 2013); "La seduzione del linguaggio", and "Dove fioriva l'eloquenza: Satana seduttore in Paradise Lost" in *Retoriche del discorso amoroso nella letteratura in inglese*, ed. by L. Folena (Trauben 2012).

lucia.folena@unito.it



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Paola Della Valle

The Imperceptible Divide between Valour and Violence: Robin Hyde's *Passport to Hell*

Abstract I: Tra i numerosi testi sulla partecipazione australiana e neozelandese alla Grande Guerra, *Passport to Hell* (1936) di Robin Hyde è considerato uno dei romanzi migliori. Ispirato a una storia vera, quella dell'eroe di guerra ed ex ragazzo di riformatorio Douglas Stark, esso indaga la realtà dietro la quintessenza del soldato perfetto. Stark è un emarginato con un passato di violenza che in battaglia si tramuta in eroismo, un ribelle il cui disprezzo per il pericolo e la disciplina diventa una risorsa inestimabile. In questo preciso "discours" (secondo il concetto di Foucault) la violenza è un valore da manipolare e trasformare in strategia di guerra.

Abstract II: Among the multitude of books on the Australian and New Zealand participation in WW1, Robin Hyde's *Passport to Hell* (1936) is considered one of the finest novels. Based on the real story of an ex-borstal boy and war hero, Douglas Stark, Hyde's work offers an insight into the quintessence of the perfect soldier: a misfit with a past of violence transmuted into valour, a rebel whose contempt for danger and discipline alike becomes a worthy resource. In this particular 'discourse' (in Foucault's terms) violence is a value, manipulated and used as war strategy.

In her brief tragic life Iris Wilkinson (1906-1939), better known with the *nom de plume* of Robin Hyde, became one of New Zealand's most significant writers of journalism, poetry and fiction. A crusading journalist, she was an outspoken advocate for the marginalised and downtrodden. Her search of a distinctive New Zealand voice coincided with a deep concern for the injustices suffered by the disadvantaged in her country, in particular women and Maori. In 1932 she participated in the Queen Street riots in Auckland, where women were protesting for better working conditions, and in 1937 she wrote passionate articles in the *New Zealand Observer* on the expulsion of Maori from their land at Orakei (Bastion Point). She also challenged the boundaries of women's writing in journalism, broadening the range of subjects generally considered suitable to women and tackling controversial political and social issues as a lady editor of newspapers and magazines (Matthews 2014). In 1938 she travelled to the China-Japan war front, the first woman

journalist to do so (Robinson & Wattie 1998: 251-253). A fine poet, she was the first New Zealander to be included in Macmillans' *Contemporary Poets* series. The author of ten books of prose and poetry, she stands out as an original woman voice in the panorama of a rising national literature populated mostly by male writers¹.

In February 1935 Robin Hyde began a series of interviews with a notorious war veteran, private James Douglas Stark, also known as Starkie, which would become the basis of her novel *Passport to Hell*, published in 1936. Hyde had first heard of him in her investigative journalism on prisons for the *New Zealand Observer*. Starkie had been detained at Auckland's Mt Eden prison and was still in touch with its chaplain, George Moreton. The chaplain told her the veteran's story and gave her a manuscript with the account of his war adventures (Smith 1986: x). Starkie had served in the Fifth Reinforcement of the Otago Infantry Battalion within the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZE) and fought as a bomber in the Great War of 1914-1918, against the Turks in the Gallipoli campaign and against the Germans at the Somme Offensive and at Ypres. *Passport to Hell* is not however based on that manuscript – signed by another prisoner, C. Murhpy², that Starkie had used as a ghost writer – but rather on Starkie's direct oral tales: images collected in notes and then translated into writing by Hyde's fervent imagination. Hyde highlights in the "Author's Note" that the book is not a work of fiction (Hyde 1986: 1)³ and Calder defines it a "novelised biography" of Starkie's childhood and war experiences (Calder 2008: 67). In fact, as most war books, *Passport to Hell* is a mix of fact and fiction. It owes much to Starkie's ability in relating his adventures as a set of visual memories as well as to Hyde's capacity to see them and weave them into a story. In comparing the Murphy manuscript and Hyde's novel, Smith found some small but significant differences when the same incidents are described (Smith 1986: xi). He also underlines that Hyde's imagination was not the only one at work: Stark himself adapted his oral narrative to suit his hearer. A clear example is the veteran's account of his father's exotic figure, which Hyde followed carefully (expanding where she had the opportunity to do so) but which appears quite different from the old man's description in his obituary (Smith 1986: xiii). The veteran's 'creative' memories are also found in the Murphy manuscript including a passage on "Stark fondly leaving his parents on the way to the War when his father had been dead five years" (Smith 1986: xii). Altogether, Hyde's book can be defined as an imagined work "that uses the resources of fiction to tell a non-fictional story" (Calder 2011: 195).

¹ For Hyde's biography see also: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/people/robin-hyde> and <http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/writers/hyde.html> (accessed on 28 February 2016).

² In an interview with George Moreton reported by Smith, the chaplain says he gave Starkie's diary to Hyde. Smith comments that it would have been impossible and illegal for Starkie to keep a journal on the front. He therefore suggests that the manuscript could be the account of Stark's war experiences handwritten by Murphy, contained in a black exercise which is part of the collection of Hyde's papers assembled by her son.

³ Any other reference to *Passport to Hell*, henceforth added in brackets in the text, refers to this edition.

On publication, it raised amazement from the public that a woman in her late twenties, who had hardly ever left New Zealand, could describe the horrors of war so vividly. A returned serviceman like John A. Lee, author of *Civilian into Soldier* (1937), said it was the most important New Zealand war book yet published and made special mention of its realism (Smith 1986: xviii). Hyde had to face criticisms too, in particular that of John Tait, who had served in the Otago Infantry Battalion like Starkie and attacked her in two letters published by the *Southland Times*. While accepting Hyde's depiction of Starkie as a wild and reckless character, he corrected with obstinate pedantry factual details, spelling of names, and references to places, questioning the value of the book as a faithful chronicle of historical events. The point is that war books, like historical novels and even memoirs, are always "shaped" or, as William Blissett put it, "based on experience and thoroughly composed, 'a thing made'" (Smith 1986: xiv). *Passport to Hell* is not only an account of a soldier's war experience resulting from the interplay between two imaginations at work, it also reflects Hyde's interest in Starkie as both a psychological case study and a direct outcome of the contradictory social patterning functional to a certain 'discourse' – to use a term coined by Foucault, which will be explained later.

The narration of Starkie's life strikes the reader for the protagonist's total contempt of discipline and danger alike. During the war, Starkie was court-martialled nine times and amassed sentences totalling thirty-five years' penal servitude, most of which were cancelled for conspicuous gallantry in action. As Alex Calder underlines "Private Stark had cheek and charisma as well as bravery, and wore the stars of a captain of infantry *tattooed* on his shoulders – an indelible 'fuck you' to those in authority. Despite his insubordinate attitude he kept the respect of his often exasperated commanding officers and was a man his comrades looked up to – at least most of the time" (Calder 2011: 195). Most of his violations were committed when he was on leave and included drunkenness, assaults, jailbreak, blaspheming the King, Queen and Royal family, involvement in riots, and firing bullets through the locked door of a sergeant's latrine. On the battlefield, instead, he was an example of reckless courage and took part in the most dangerous actions, never withdrawing before barrages and the fire of machine guns, going back to No Man's Land to rescue wounded comrades or bury the dead ones out of pity, creeping into the enemy dugouts to shell bombs and clear the way to his troops. He risked death innumerable times and his lungs were permanently damaged by the bullets of enemy fire.

The inclination to break rules was actually present before his underage enlistment at sixteen and continued when the war was over. Starkie was the third child of a Spanish woman and a Delaware Indian from the regions of the Great Bear Lake, who had made a fortune with the Australian gold rush and had then landed in New Zealand with some "money and prestige" (Hyde 1986: 11). Starkie's features don't seem to fit in New Zealand's ethnic duality. He is too dark to avoid racial prejudice from white New Zealanders and not dark enough to identify with the proud Maori minority. Hyde's

original title "Bronze Outlaw", converted to "Passport to Hell" by the publisher, suggests the interconnection between Starkie's racial connotation and his unruly character: two features of diversity. She depicts Starkie's childhood as a period of unrestrained freedom outdoors, in Huckleberry Finn's style: catching eels in rivers, playing truant from school, and refusing to wear boots. "The New Zealand bush world was as disorderly as himself" (Hyde 1986: 17) says Hyde, alluding to that type of natural education that was common for a boy in an Antipodean Dominion. When he was forced to wear his first pair of boots to walk to school, he sold them to a friend for twelve marbles (Hyde 1986: 14). Once he got home, he was thrashed, but nothing could diminish the satisfaction of a boy whose "toes enjoyed an Arcadian existence of muddy freedom" (Hyde 1986: 17). No school except borstal would have him and he made the first of his many court appearances when he was twelve years old: "The rebel had two choices, to be trodden underfoot or to give battle. From the time when he could walk he had preferred to give battle" (Hyde 1986: 14).

Starkie's upbringing was mainly carried out through corporal punishment by his father and his elder brother George. While Starkie's father is described as a "dignified almost an austere figure, and physically superb" (Hyde 1986: 11) but is basically affectless, his big brother really cares for him and wants to act as a normative figure. His way to show his love, however, was by teaching him discipline through violence like their father. Starkie understood the extent of his brother's affection only when they met on the French front, a little time before George was torn into pieces by a shell during the Somme offensive (Hyde 1986: 138). What Starkie ultimately learnt from his upbringing is violence rather than discipline, as Calder contends: "You use violence to get your lesson across, but you don't teach a lesson, you teach the violence" (Calder 2008: 71).

Starkie joined the army to avoid a further detention in jail. Throughout all his life he kept escaping from normative environments only to get into similar ones: school, borstal, prison, army. As Calder puts it: "They are all places where people are knocked into shape" (Calder 2011: 201). It is as if Starkie needed, first of all, to be saved from himself: an enemy within. Hyde seems to allude to this in the scene where Starkie spends the night at Zealandia Hall, waiting for enlistment and watching the Union Jack fluttering: "The mere shadow of the arrogant little cotton flag was some ghostly protection to him" (Hyde 1986: 52). But after his return from the front he seemed not to have learnt much about legality and discipline. That is perhaps the reason why he was unable to settle back into civilian life.

Hyde met him in this period and found an ex-soldier with a lot of good stories to tell but no job prospects, a man who had accumulated a long series of sentences for petty theft, drunkenness, and assault. The paradox is that all the elements that make Starkie a delinquent, a nuisance and a criminal in the eyes of the society are the very qualities that also make him a perfect soldier in combat (Calder 2011: 200). Starkie's violent temper, instinctive nature, lack of control, and recklessness create a misfit at home and a hero on

the front. Some of his war actions recounted in the novel are questionable and oscillate between war crimes and conspicuous deeds of bravery deserving a Victoria Cross. For example, he likes playing cat and mouse with the enemy. When a Turkish sniper camouflaged in No Man's Land makes a mistake revealing his position, he enjoys killing him little by little, with a small fire: first injuring him, then keeping him under the fire, frightening him sadistically, until Starkie's captain finishes off the wounded Turk. On another occasion, in an eruption of rage after finding George's body ripped off in half on the battlefield, he goes back to camp and empties his revolver into a line of German unarmed prisoners. Sometimes he kills in cold blood just as a necessity of vengeance or because he wants to get even for some previous incidents (Hyde 1986: 174). But he is always pardoned because he is too useful in that context. At Ismailia, near Cairo, in a period of transit from one front line to another, he is taken up for court martial with the charge of using language to a colonel and trying to brain him with a tent mallet. He sends for Captain Dombey, his commanding officer, as a person who can speak for him. This is Dombey's testimony:

Presently he opened his mouth and said, "This man is the biggest, laziest, rottenest, most troublesome –" He stopped dead again, and I could see he was having a lot of trouble to keep his language what they call Parliamentary. "In times like this he's more trouble than half a battalion put together". [...]

I began to wish I had left Captain Dombey in the desert until he had melted there.

Then he said: "And in the trenches he's one of the best soldiers I ever had". He said a lot more after that, which I should blush to repeat, the end of it was that I got off with fourteen days" (Hyde 1986: 107).

The same system creates two opposite 'discourses', to use Foucault's term, one feasible in peace and another in war, one ruling over the civilians or the soldiers on leave and another over the combatants in the trenches or in No Man's Land. A 'discourse' is the conceptual territory in which knowledge and truth are formed and produced, and is the field within which language itself is defined. It is rooted in human practices, institutions and actions that vary according to different eras. In "The political Function of the Intellectual" Foucault underlines the interrelationship between truth and power. Truth is never outside power or deprived of power. The production of truth is a function of power and "we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (Foucault 1977: 12). This means that good and evil, legality and illegality are not absolute concepts but relative ones, determined within a certain discourse. Foucault also maintains that in modern states power is productive as opposed to the repressive power of the ancient regime, which was exercised through exemplary physical punishments such as torture and public executions. Power manifests itself not in a downward flow from the top of the social hierarchy to those below but, more obliquely, it extends itself in a capillary fashion:

it is part of daily action, speech and everyday life (Foucault 2003: 82-83)⁴. As Loomba underlines commenting Foucault's theory, "human beings internalise the systems of repression and reproduce them by conforming to certain ideas of what is normal and what is deviant. Thus our ideas about madness, criminality or sexuality are regulated through institutions such as the madhouse or the prison, and also by certain ideological 'regimes'" (Loomba 1998: 41). With ideological 'regimes', Foucault means the family, schools and mass media that help propagate the rules of a certain discourse. Starkie's story evidences the way power, even in the same age and within the same economic and political paradigm, can create different discourses – that is, different systems of values and disvalues according to changing situations and convenience – can define violence and valour as relative terms, and can manipulate truth.

Interestingly, in Starkie's antipathy to discipline Calder has seen "a sort of charismatic larrikinism" in which Antipodean men identify, since traditionally they don't like authority, are easy going and intolerant of petty forms of discipline, pride themselves on their "egalitarian matiness" – and so forth (Calder 2008: 70). In Australian and New Zealand English 'larrikin' means "a boisterous, often badly behaved young man"⁵, an equivalent of hooligan. Starkie comes to embody the 'larrikin' qualities of the typical Anzac soldier (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) and, ultimately, of Antipodean men. He represents the quintessential colonial combatant. According to D.I.B. Smith, "The troops from the Dominions were noted both for their magnificent fighting qualities and their casual attitude toward discipline The two aspects were not unconnected" (Smith 1986: xx). He continues by affirming that the British Old Army taught its men discipline by breaking them down with endless drill and repetitive burdensome trivial tasks. As long as a soldier could be guaranteed to obey all orders, he could be considered "trained". On the other hand, the Australian general Monash defended his men against criticism of unruly behaviour by stating that the notion of discipline had been misunderstood. It should not mean obsequious homage to superiors nor servile observance of forms and customs nor suppression of individuality. It was only a means to an end, that is, a way to coordinate the action of a large number of individuals. Whether the Australian general was right or wrong, concludes Smith, the colonials had proportionately nine times the number of men in military prison than had the British, but they also fought better, were better adapted to trench fighting and supplied the storm troops of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) to the end.

The origin of 'larrikinism' as a value can probably be found in the pioneer and early colonial period, which promoted an idealized masculinity rising from life in an idealized nature, and produced the cult of mateship and male camaraderie. The irrepressible male

⁴ For Foucault the 'modern epoch' starts from the beginning of the 19th century. See also Michel Foucault 2008.

⁵ See <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/larrikin>.

qualities of pioneers and settlers were the result of life in the bush, hardships, manual work, down-to-earth language devoid of intellectualism. Here we are in another discourse: the colonial one in a settler colony. In this context there is more flexibility in judging the intolerance of authority and undisciplined behaviour (at least of white settlers and colonists, not of the indigenous population) insofar as these (dis)values distinguish the colonial from the “feminised” British or the “New Chum” (the newcomer from Britain), who is “a gentleman in the drawing room, not in the bush”, as we can read in an early New Zealand short story entitled “A Tale I Heard in the Bush” (Wevers 1991: 204)⁶. The 1930s marked the beginning of New Zealand national literature. For the first time a group of writers were able to convey the preoccupations and the real voice of this Antipodean country as distinct from Britain. The works of Allen Curnow, A.R.D Fairburn, Denis Glover, Charles Brasch, and John Mulgan depicted the emerging prototype of New Zealander – encompassing the essence of what was true and vital in the colonial spirit as opposed to the sophistication of his European counterpart – and supported proud nationalist attitudes. They reflected, in fact, the preoccupations of the New Zealand white male subject over and against the ‘lower’ gender (the female) and the ‘lower’ race (Maori). Frank Sargeson and Roderick Finlayson also belong to this generation, although they stand out from the group for the complexity of their view (Della Valle 2010: 29)⁷. In representing the ultimate colonial soldier and indirectly the distinctive qualities of the Antipodean man, Starkie seems to be therefore altogether morally absolved within the imagery of an ex British settler colony like New Zealand and its system, which exalts him in war and ‘contains’ and tolerates him in peace, because he is functional to the discourse set by power.

In relating a man’s memories, Hyde’s position stands between the identification with the male point of view and her gender perspective. Her double-gendered position seems to be reflected in the choice of her pen name (the most used but not the only one adopted by the writer in her career): Robin can be both feminine and masculine and Hyde seems to allude to her concealment behind Starkie (Calder 2011: 196). Starkie’s oral narrative was certainly mediated by the imagery of war available to Hyde and women in general, consisting in war paintings, newsreels and photographs: the public visual memory of the war. Moreover, like many other women, Hyde had seen the men of her family going to the front. Her own father left in 1916 and returned two years later “without injury as a stranger to the family” (Calder 2011: 196); her uncle died at Gallipoli. So, while this is a book about Starkie, Hyde also conveys her own gendered response to the war. Two moments of the troops’ departure from New Zealand seem to exemplify this double register, as testified in the following quoted passages:

⁶ The story is from the collection *Literary Foundlings* (1864), quoted in Lydia Wevers.

⁷ Finlayson stands out for his anti-conformist focus on Maori life; Sargeson for the wide range of issues he raises and his complex condition of “founding father” of New Zealand Literature and closet homosexual.

They were lined up and told they were the finest body of men that had ever left New Zealand. This was not a new experience for most of them. On the Invercargill station a fat man had told them the same thing. At Christchurch, where the wet brigade had joined them and turned their progress into the first real grog party, a man yet fatter had repeated it. Once again on the Wellington wharves they were informed of their own fineness; and as with one voice the troop replied:

'Aw, go wipe your chin' (Hyde 1986: 64).

Father, lover, son, all drawn together in the one person, and the receptacle of your secret thoughts – in God's name, how can you lose that and remain the same? How could the men on the ship expect to come back to the same women when, departing, they had destroyed them? (Hyde 1986: 65).

Hyde first ironically depicts the disenchanted reaction of soldiers to war rhetoric, then in the next page she conveys, with lyrical sensitivity, the impotence of women's sorrow before being parted from their men. However, she was also aware of belonging to a generation of women that had contributed to idealising the patriotic war effort and making a romance out of the uniform; women "that gave to that grim uniform the unthinking hero worship which may have helped all modern men to despise all modern women", as she writes in an unpublished manuscript (Smith 1986: xxi)⁸. The scene that probably epitomises her thinking – and is completely different in the Murphy manuscript (Calder 2011: 207) – is at Invercargill station, where a woman, "healthy as a sheep-dog" but with "her apple-red cheeks streaming with tears", throws her arms at Starkie, kisses him passionately on the mouth, offers him a sewing kit and then, to Starkie's disappointment and jealousy, repeats the same performance again with the next (aroused) soldier and the next, and the next, in a sort of collective emotional/erotic ritual (Hyde 1986: 55).

In conveying Starkie's memories Hyde's main concern is however to be the advocate of the damaged war veteran. She wants to stand on Stark's side because she believes in the underdog and the possibility of change. This is in tune with her sense of the need for social justice, which we also find in her investigative journalism, and will be the subject of *Passport to Hell's* sequel: *Nor the Years Condemn* (1938). The gender motif is a minor thread, sacrificed to the larger scope of the book that Robin Hyde herself summarised in a letter, in which she explained her reasons for writing *Passport to Hell*:

I wrote the book because I had to write it when I heard his story, and because it's an illustration of Walt Whitman's line: "There is to me something profoundly affecting in large masses of men following the lead of those who do not believe in man" (Smith 1986: ix).

⁸ From an unpublished manuscript. Quoted from Smith.

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Paola Della Valle is a researcher at the University of Turin. She specializes in New Zealand and Pacific literature, postcolonial and gender studies. Her articles appeared in *English Studies*, *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *NZSA Bulletin of New Zealand*

Studies, Le Simplegadi, Il Castello di Elsinore, Quaderni del '900 and Loxias. She has published the monographs *From Silence to Voice: The Rise of Maori Literature* (Libro International 2010) and *Stevenson nel Pacifico: una lettura postcoloniale* (Aracne 2013). She has contributed to the volumes *Experiences of Freedom in Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures* (Routledge 2011), *Contemporary Sites of Chaos in the Literatures and Arts of the Postcolonial World* (Aracne 2013), and *L'immagine dell'Italia nelle letterature angloamericane e postcoloniali* (Trauben 2014). She is a member of the Advisory Board of the *Journal of New Zealand and Pacific Studies*.

pdella_valle@hotmail.com



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Serena Guarracino

Tales of War for the 'Third Generation': Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Abstract I: Di recente emersa come autrice principale della 'terza generazione' di scrittori nigeriani (Adesanmi & Dunton 2005), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie è approdata alla notorietà internazionale nel 2007, quando il suo romanzo *Half of a Yellow Sun* vinse l'Orange Prize for Fiction. Questo articolo analizza come la trattazione del tema della guerra nella scrittura di Adichie offra una nuova prospettiva sul ruolo dell'intellettuale impegnato in contesti postcoloniali e globali. Adichie sceglie di raccontare il conflitto attraverso diversi livelli di ri-narrazione, rifiutando in questo modo di porsi come portavoce di un'identità nazionale (nigeriana e/o biafrana), etnica (Igbo), o sociale tra le diverse posizionalità a cui il romanzo dà voce. Di conseguenza, *Half of a Yellow Sun* intende sostenere una cultura di pace per una generazione di nigeriani cosmopoliti, nati almeno una decade dopo la tragica fine del conflitto, invocando il diritto delle nuove generazioni ad una memoria senza ritorsioni.

Abstract II: As leading figure of a burgeoning 'third generation' of Nigerian writers (Adesanmi & Dunton 2005), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie raised to international fame in 2007 after winning the Orange Prize for Fiction with her novel on the Biafra war, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. This paper aims at investigating how the way Adichie's fiction deals with the subject of war offers new insights in the role of the *engagé* writer in a postcolonial and global context. Adichie chooses to narrate the conflict through multiplying layers of re-telling, and hence refuses to cast herself as the spokesperson of either a national identity (Nigeria and/or Biafra), an ethnic group (Igbo), or a social class among those featured in the novel. Hence, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is meant to foster a culture of peace for a generation of cosmopolitan Igbo Nigerians born at least a decade after the war's bitter end, advocating the new generations' right to memory without retaliation.

On May 30, 2015, *The New York Times* published a story by Nigerian-American writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, titled "My Father's Kidnapping". As the title immediately

makes clear the story, told in the first person, recounts the kidnapping and eventual release of the writer's father; since it appeared under the 'opinion' feature, readers immediately know this terrible thing happened to Adichie herself, and not to a fictional first person narrator. Indeed, one of the affective triggers of this piece of writing – one the story somewhat problematically capitalizes upon – is the very familiarity of Adichie's public persona to a wide public, due to the international visibility she has achieved in recent years. The writer's popularity is even mentioned in the piece as one of the possible causes of her father's kidnapping:

I constantly straddled panic; I was sleepless, unfocused, jumpy, fearful that something else had gone wrong. And there was my own sad guilt: He was targeted because of me. 'Ask your daughter the writer to bring the money', the kidnappers told him [her father], because to appear in newspapers in Nigeria, to be known, is to be assumed wealthy (Adichie 2015: n.p.).

This passage exemplifies one of the main stylistic features of the piece, i.e. the constant shifting between an informative register where the writer is offering information on Nigerian society ('because to appear in newspapers in Nigeria, to be known, is to be assumed wealthy') and what Derek Attridge would call a 'performed emotion', that is, the written depiction of feelings through either vivid word choices such as the immediate 'panic', or by building a crescendo such as 'sleepless, unfocused, jumpy, fearful', or again via the use of the possessive in 'my own sad guilt', thrown at the reader via a sparse and syncopated syntactic structure.

Attridge writes of 'performed emotion' in his analysis of Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* in his 2015 *The Work of Literature*, where he further develops the concept of 'literature' as event¹. According to him, one of the ways the literary text 'happens' to its readers is indeed by 'performing' emotions, that is, in his own words: "as literature, [the language of a work] *performs* hurting, encouraging, teaching, and so on, relying on the effectiveness of the *as if* to provide an experience that replicates modes of thinking and feeling in the non-literary domain" (Attridge 2015: 266). The non-literary domain, in this case, is the current security crisis in Nigeria: a crisis into which Adichie means to immerse the reader by channelling it through her own feelings and experience. Hence the piece goes from the writer's first and traumatic knowledge of her father's kidnapping through the events leading to his liberation after the family pays a substantial ransom, celebrating the affective ties supporting Adichie's family against what is described as "a dance of disappointment with the authorities" (Adichie 2015: n.p.): Nigerian officials are reported as either unable or unwilling to be of any help both during the kidnapping and

¹ For earlier conceptualizations of literature as event see Attridge 2004 and 2005; I have elsewhere discussed Attridge's previous work in relation to Edward Said's idea of contrapuntal reading (Guarracino 2014a).

afterwards, when they ask the family to pay for the equipment necessary to track down the kidnappers. Eventually, the crime goes unpunished, and the helplessness of civilians is embodied by Adichie's parents relocating (maybe temporarily, maybe not) in the US: "The next day, my parents were on a flight to the United States, away from the tainted blur that Nigeria had become" (Adichie 2015: n.p.).

This piece of writing, part reportage part short story, sheds a new light on Adichie's previous production and on her commitment to literature as a way to foster a culture of peace in present-day Nigeria. In recent years Adichie has emerged as a conspicuous public figure, a web star whose TED lectures score more than one million views on YouTube² and who is regularly asked for informed opinions on Nigerian society³. In her interviews and non-fictional pieces regarding Nigerian politics and the security crisis in the country, she has consistently supported Nigeria against Western intervention⁴; yet she has also investigated both the present and past of Nigeria to offer readers new narratives on her and their own country and exposing what, in a well-known lecture, she named "the dangers of a single story" (Adichie 2009).

Partially thanks to her notoriety, Adichie is also the headliner of the third generation of Nigerian writers (Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 16), a group of intellectuals – also including Teju Cole, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, Chika Unigwe and Helen Oyeyemi – who operate in a global literary market still mostly located in the West and driven by Western economic forces⁵, but also where "Nigerian readers [number] in the millions" (Griswold 2000: 4), both in Nigeria and abroad. The very definition 'third generation Nigerian writers', as Hamish Dalley poignantly notes, actually opens to questions such as "what it means for literature to belong to a generation, and to a nation" (Dalley 2013: 17); *Half of a Yellow Sun* answers to that question by claiming the difficult legacy of the Nigeria-Biafra war for a younger generation of Nigerians.

² Probably the most well-known of Adichie's lectures is the TEDxEuston lecture titled "We Should All Be Feminists" (2013), which was sampled in Beyoncé's single "****Flawless" and eventually published as a pamphlet (Adichie 2014a).

³ An example can be found in the BBC talkshow *Hardtalk* where Adichie was interviewed by Stephen Sackur on *Half of a Yellow Sun* and its representation of Nigeria's current and past history (BBC World News 2014).

⁴ For example, Adichie notoriously declared "We can solve our own damn problems" at the 2014 Hay Festival for Literature and Arts in Wales referring to US and French interventions following the kidnapping of 276 girls from a school in Chibok by Boko Haram: this statement received large attention and was amply referred to by commentaries in the general media (see for example The Herald 2014).

⁵ It must be remembered that *Half of a Yellow Sun* was awarded the Orange Prize for Fiction (now Baileys'), a UK-based prize devoted to increase the visibility of women writers and which has during the years scouted many postcolonial talents – before Adichie, Andrea Levy and Zadie Smith were awarded the prize (Bailey's Prize for Fiction n.d.).

For these often cosmopolitan Nigerians, this “seminal event in Nigeria’s modern history” remains a “shadow”⁶, not taught in schools, and only obliquely referred to by family and friends – even in families such as Adichie’s, whose grandfathers both died in refugee camps. The Nigeria-Biafra War, also called the Nigerian Civil War in an effort to efface the however brief existence of Biafra, originated in the separation of South-East Nigeria from the central government on May 30, 1967, and was preceded by two military coups in 1966 which saw Igbo and Hausa militants fighting for supremacy in the country, culminating in the anti-Igbo pogrom of September 1966. The secession of Biafra apparently put an end to the unrest by separating Northern (and mainly Muslim) Hausa from Southern (and mostly Christian) Igbo; but contention over control of oil-rich territories led to war on July 6, 1967, with Nigeria supported (among others) by former colonizing power Britain due to Shell-BP’s interests in the area. The war ended in 1970 with the incorporation of former Biafran territory in the state of Nigeria, but not before the humanitarian crisis of 1968 impacted the global imaginary by flooding Western news with the still proverbial Biafran starving children⁷.

Half of a Yellow Sun, whose title describes the flag of the short-lived Republic of Biafra, narrates this repressed history through the lives of three fictional characters, who tell their stories in a third person point of view narration; yet in the closing Author’s Note to the novel, it is stated that many events are actually based on Adichie’s own family history, a statement that creates a strong relationship between the writer’s life and the fictional stories from the novel, thus making them ‘authentic’ in an emotional, if not factual, sense. As in the later story about her father’s kidnapping, the writer asserts her presence in the events narrated, thus foregrounding her affective investment and exciting the same from the reader:

I could not have written this book without my parents. My wise and wonderful father, Professor Nwoye James Adichie [...] and my defending and devoted mother, Mrs Ifeoma Grace Adichie, have always wanted me to know, I think, that what matters is not what they went through but that they survived. I am grateful to them for their stories and for so much more (Adichie 2009; position 406).

It is through the authenticity of this appeal for emotional engagement, more than through the proposal of any social or political settlement, that *Half of a Yellow Sun* works as a model for a peace-making process in Nigeria.

Adichie’s account of the war eschews the authoritativeness of History, of great events and historical figures, an exception among the many novels on the Biafran war by

⁶ Adichie herself defined the war in this way as recently as 2014, writing in relation to the stalling of the distribution in Nigeria of the film based on the novel (Adichie 2014b).

⁷ For a thorough history of the conflict see Gould 2011.

Nigerian writers: as Jane Bryce notes, “though the ‘Biafran novel’ has been something of a rite of passage for Nigerian writers of the two previous generations, Adichie is the first to approach it entirely as *historical* fiction” (Bryce 2008: 61; italics in the text). The specificity of the novel lies in this interweaving of the ‘historical’, with its accuracy for events and locations, and fiction as a literary device, hence as a device for performing emotion. As Attridge states in his discussion of Kate Grenville’s *Sarah Thornhill*, historical detail may be part of the enjoyment in experiencing literature; however, “[this novel] works as literature not by imparting knowledge but by enabling the reader to feel, for a few hours (and then in memory), the intensity of a consciousness exposed to the particular passions, marvels and horrors of this time and place” (Attridge 2015: 8).

Adichie’s novel performs this by focusing on the personal lives of three characters: Olanna, a young Igbo woman who is just back from the UK and is involved with Odenigbo, a professor working at the university of Nsukka; Richard, a British journalist who is in a relationship with Olanna’s twin sister Kainene; and Ugwu, a home-schooled servant to Odenigbo. The relationships of love, lust, care and betrayal among these characters form the core matter of the novel; yet the war does not work as a mere backdrop, but as a counterpoint to their stories, constantly challenging the characters’ physical and emotional survival: the 1966 anti-Igbo pogrom, for example, represents both a historical and personal watershed: it triggers the secession, but it also haunts the memory of Olanna, who witnesses the slaughter of part of her family. As the proclamation of the secession is met with joyous celebrations throughout the university campus in Nsukka, she cannot but recall the traumatic memories of the carnage she has witnessed, which in its turn becomes a dark foreboding for the future of the Republic of Biafra: “Odenigbo raised his arm as he spoke, and Olanna thought how awkwardly twisted Auntie Ifeka’s arm had looked, as she lay on the ground, how her blood had pooled so thick that it looked like glue, not red but close to black. Perhaps Auntie Ifeka could see this rally now, and all the people here, or perhaps not, if death was a silent opaqueness” (Adichie 2009: position 154).

Indeed, it is the stormy relationship between Olanna and Odenigbo that especially mirrors the emotional trajectory of the Biafra state itself, alternating between moments of enthusiasm and dejection, everyday happiness and hair-breadth rescues, as when bombings disrupt the two characters’ wedding in Umuahia, the capital of Biafra at this time in the war. Here harsh living conditions emerge from even the smallest details of the ceremony, such as the plastic bouquet Olanna refuses to hold: “But nobody grows flowers in Umuahia. People here grow what they can eat”, retorts another character (Adichie 2009: position 192). Most significantly, as the bombing starts Olanna’s white dress, that over-signified element of any wedding ceremony, becomes not a source of joy but of danger to the bride and the people around her:

[The planes] spurted hundreds of scattered bullets before dark balls rolled out from underneath, as if the planes were laying large eggs. [...] A woman from the opposite house tugged at Olanna's dress. "Remove it! Remove that white dress! They will see it and target us!" (Adichie 2009: position 193).

The scene also symbolically entangles the public and private tragedies of the main characters: in particular the cruel mimicry of life the narrator Ugwu sees in the egg-laying planes also evokes Olanna's own inability to have children and the painful love she cherishes for Baby, the child that she is rearing but (as the reader will discover in the following pages) is actually her husband's daughter from an extramarital affair in the time before the war. Hence the material elements of war also become objective correlatives of the characters' own private dramas, preventing the reader from separating the grand narrative of history from the emotional struggles of the individual characters' lives.

Their stories are also framed in a metanarrative structure, in which the flow of narration by the three aforementioned characters is interrupted by bits of another story: the story of 'the book'. These chapters are also written in the third person, and tell of the writing of a book titled "The World Was Silent When We Died". The writer, as the reader understands from the first lines, is male, and recounts episodes from different parts of the novel. The first instalment, for example, opens with the following lines:

For the prologue, he recounts the story of the woman with the calabash. She sat on the floor of a train squashed between crying people, shouting people, praying people. She was silent, caressing the covered calabash on her lap in a gentle rhythm until they crossed the Niger, and then she lifted the lid and asked Olanna and others close by to look inside (Adichie 2009: position 76).

At this point, readers still don't know the story of the woman with the calabash; the characters, part of the intellectual elite in the relatively young state of Nigeria, are still at peace. Hence this insertion creates a sense of foreboding, anticipating a very traumatic event experienced by Olanna after eight more chapters, as she is fleeing from aforementioned 1966 anti-Igbo pogrom (Adichie 2009: position 139). Subsequently, the reader is offered seven more instalments of the story of the book, which sometimes take the story a step forward in time, but also include some information on the historical background of what is happening: hence the second instalment tells about British colonization in the region and the upturning of Igbo's "small republican communities" (Adichie 2009: position 109) by the appointment of warrant chiefs who ruled indirectly for the colonial government. Subsequently readers are told about post-independence Nigeria and British influence on local politics in order to preserve the unity of the country: "at Independence in 1960, Nigeria was a collection of fragments held in a fragile clasp" (Adichie 2009: position 146). Thus the story of the book offers the historical and social contextualization

that the novel's main narratives purposefully lack; it also carefully avoids blaming either side of the conflict, identifying the causes of the war in foreign intervention and the corruption of the elites more than in the clash among the different ethnic groups constituting the young state of Nigeria.

Early on, the reader is led to identify the writer of the book within the book with Richard, the British journalist who, as the novel proceeds, is actually planning to write a book: first it is meant to be a book about the Igbo-Ugwu bronze castings – a sort of archaeological and anthropological account of Igbo culture before British colonization; then, as the conflict explodes, it becomes a book about the war. The title comes to him as he is quarrelling with two foreign journalists who have come to cover the war: “the title of the book came to Richard: ‘The World Was Silent When We Died’. He would write it after the war, a narrative of Biafra’s difficult victory, an indictment of the world”. Yet his partner Kainene immediately retorts: “‘We? The world was silent when *we* died?’”. To which Richard humorously replies: “I’ll make sure to note that the Nigerian bombs carefully avoided anybody with a British passport” (Adichie 2009: position 349).

This exchange actually anticipates that Richard will not be the one to write *The World Was Silent When We Died*: in the last chapters, readers discover that it has been Ugwu, and not Richard, who has been writing “The World Was Silent When We Died”, as he dedicates it to his (former) master Odenigbo: “Ugwu writes his dedication last: *For Master, my good man*” (Adichie 2009: position 404; italics in the text). A village boy educated by his master, Ugwu follows Odenigbo and Olanna in their many trials, until he is kidnapped and enrolled in the Biafran army during the war’s last and more violent phase. Here he goes through some very traumatic experiences, including making use of drugs and being involved in gang rape: having barely survived the war, he comes out of it as a virtuous combination of village culture and university education, conjoined with a caring ability that is shared by very few other characters in the novel.

It is to this character that Adichie confers the privilege and responsibility of narration: Adichie, the daughter of a well-to-do Nigerian family, chooses low-born Ugwu as proxy writer, thus creating a multiple distance in the metanarrative: “this device allows Adichie gracefully to relinquish her position as narrative authority, in favor of a spokesman for the voiceless – which she does not claim to be” (Bryce 2008: 62). This distance is conspicuously missing in “My Father’s Kidnapping”, which also narrates traumatic events related to the Adichie’s family, but is written in a time when the writer’s public persona has perhaps become too pervasive to be dismissed. Yet while differing on a narratological level, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and the more recent short story both capitalize on the affective impact of personal experience, either individual or communal, as a shared platform for negotiating the present.

This emerges for example in the BBC World Book Club on the novel (BBC World 2013). Comments and questions from the audience and from the Internet feature a

substantial Nigerian audience across the generations: readers who have lived the war praise the novel for giving voice to their experience (both the painful and the joyous moments of it), while younger readers share Adichie's need to remember what has been a founding moment of Nigerian history ("we are the generation that will change Nigeria", the writer states at one point). This collective endorsement of Adichie's writing is consistent with comments to "My Father's Kidnapping" on *The New York Times* website, where readers express their sympathy. Here too comments feature a significant and quite vocal Nigerian and more generally what we could call a 'postcolonial' readership: some share their own experience with the kidnapping of civilians, and many others urge Adichie to use her popularity to denounce the state of things in Nigeria. One comment, for example, reads:

Thank you for sharing your story. Many have experienced [the] same and are too afraid, far too drained from the experience to share their story. This is the power of the pen, to bring out these negative actions that seem to eat into the Nigerian society and the response of our leadership. In speaking out you have shared the pain of many and given it more visibility (Adichie 2015, comment section).

These reader responses show the very complex context of production and reception in which *Half of a Yellow Sun* – and most of contemporary postcolonial fiction – participates. Adichie's works are clearly embedded in what Sandra Ponzanesi has called the "postcolonial cultural industry" (Ponzanesi 2014; see also Guarracino 2014b); yet they do it with a contrapuntal attitude, exploiting the inherent ambivalence of the industry as a "both enabling and constraining" environment for creativity in cultural production (Hesmondhalgh 2012: 70). It is in this context that Adichie exploits her visibility in global media to address sensitive political issues, but also soliciting a responsible readership especially in Nigeria and other African countries, including the African diaspora worldwide – a context that is crucial if one intends to open a discussion on postcolonial literature's contribution to a culture of peace.

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Serena Guarracino received her PhD from the University of Naples "L'Orientale" in 2005, and subsequently authored *La primadonna all'opera. Scrittura e performance nel mondo*

anglofono (Tangram 2010), and *Donne di passioni. Personaggi della lirica tra differenza sessuale, classe e razza* (Editoria & Spettacolo 2011), which deals with contemporary rewritings of Carmen and Madama Butterfly from a postcolonial perspective. She also edited with Marina Vitale a double issue for the journal AION Anglistica titled *Voicings: Musica across Borders* (2009). More recently, she has published a series of articles on the role of the postcolonial writer in the public arena, featuring as case studies Salman Rushdie, J. M. Coetzee, Caryl Phillips and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. She is currently teaching 18th and 19th century English Literature at the University of Naples "L'Orientale".

serena.guarracino@gmail.com



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Annalisa Pes

The Boredom and Futility of War in Patrick White's Fiction

Abstract I: Questo articolo prende in esame la rappresentazione della guerra come espressione di inutilità e spreco nella narrativa di Patrick White, e in particolare nel racconto "After Alep", scritto nel 1945 quando l'autore era arruolato nella RAF come Intelligence Officer. Analizzando il racconto alla luce dell'approccio di White alla guerra come alla "più spaventosa perdita di tempo" della sua vita (Marr 1992: 493), l'articolo cerca di dimostrare come le strategie narrative utilizzate da White contribuiscano a de-mitologizzare la retorica della guerra e dell'eroe di guerra in un modo che può essere strumentale alla diffusione di un messaggio di pace attraverso la percezione dell'estremo senso di futilità trasmesso da qualsiasi guerra.

Abstract II: This article investigates the representation of war in terms of uselessness and waste in the fiction of Patrick White, with a particular emphasis on the short story "After Alep", written in 1945 when the writer was enrolled in the RAF as an Intelligence Officer. By analysing the story in the light of White's approach to the war as to "the most horrifying and wasteful period" of his life (Marr 1992: 493), the article attempts to demonstrate how the narrative devices used by White contribute to demythologize the rhetoric of the war and of war heroes in a way that may be instrumental in conveying a message of peace out of the ultimate sense of futility transmitted by any war.

The intense world-wide debate that developed in the immediate aftermath of World War II on the role of literature in wartime, and on the social and political commitment of writers in a nation recovering from war (McKernan 1989: 6), lay emphasis on the responsibility of literary culture of contributing to a process of education that should give readers an anti-war message and promote anti-war sentiments. Nevertheless, as Clare Rhoden notices, a fundamental difficulty in writing for anti-war discourse purposes stands on the risk of describing war violence and horrors in a way that, despite being intended to generate repulsion for the war, ends up sensationalizing the very same waste and barbarity that are supposed to be abhorred (Rhoden 2012: 5). Likewise, the risk in portraying soldiers' heroism and endurance is that of overshadowing the disgust with the

war and promoting a feeling of nostalgia, in the meaning given by David Lowenthal of “memory with the pain removed” (Lowenthal 1985: 8) – which, necessarily, would make the use of war literature for pacifist ends inefficient. This article intends to analyse Patrick White’s war fiction in the light of this debate and it attempts to demonstrate that the writer’s refusal to exalt any heroic figures, or to depict gruesome pictures of the cruelty of war, can plausibly be interpreted as a precise anti-war narrative strategy, deriving both from the writer’s socio-political commitment to the cause of peace and from his personal experience of the war.

It must be pointed out that White’s involvement with the war tends to be considered by literary critics as a part of his life that somehow separates his juvenile, mundane, and mostly European experience from his more mature, retired, Australian years. The war is seen, in Michael Ackland’s words, as “a great caesura” (Ackland 2002: 402) in Patrick White’s life and work. And it is probably because it actually represents a ‘dividing line’ between what was before and what came thereof, that White’s engagement in it has hardly drawn critical commentary. As Bruce Bennett confirms, “a neglected aspect of White’s experience, from the standpoint of the literary historian, is the period from 1940 to 1945 when he worked in Air Force intelligence in North Africa, the Middle East and Greece” (Bennett 2010: 127). It is only in the careful and engaging biographical reconstruction by David Marr (1992) that a vivid picture of White’s war years is given. For this reason the present article will mostly refer to Marr’s biography and White’s letters (1996) and autobiography (1982) as the most authoritative and comprehensive sources to document the writer’s approach and response to the war.

When World War II breaks out White is in the USA where he has travelled to, after living most of his life as an expatriate in London, with the aim of finding a publisher for his first novel, *Happy Valley*, and where, soon after his arrival, he has meant to settle down and continue his career as a writer. But when his sense of guilt for living safe in Manhattan intensifies, he decides to go back to England and try to be useful somehow. A decision, however, that is made out of a totally un-heroic approach to the war: “I am doing this for no personal desire”, he confesses in a letter to a friend, “but just because I don’t feel I can ignore the war altogether” (Marr 1996: 32). A common sense of human responsibility, therefore, is what determines White’s intention to enrol – a situation which is significantly paralleled in the novel he has just finished writing, *The Living and the Dead* (1940), whose protagonist, Joe Barnett, resolves to go and fight in the Civil War in Spain for no heroic desire of glory, but for the mere realization that a war cannot be “other people’s business” to be read in the papers, it gets to “being part of yourself. You couldn’t keep out your feelings no more. It got mixed up with what you did” (White 1962: 288). By finding a moral justification for his character’s decision, White, as David Marr points out, “was drafting an unheroic formula for his own resolve” (Marr 1992: 200).

In the days of the Blitz in London, White is induced to think about the nature of heroism at war, scaling it down to a simple acceptance of the ordinariness and inevitability of death, as he appears to imply in a letter written to his New York agent, Naomi Burton: "I'm inclined to believe that heroism is probably also a myth and that the ones who go out and face death are as indifferent to it as the civilians who continue to work with the planes overhead, or at most, sit under the stairs with a cup of tea" (Marr 1992: 204). White's involvement in the war machine begins with his assignment to the Postal Message Scheme of the Red Cross, which helped members of families separated by war to keep in contact. His first approach to the factuality of war is therefore with the tragic personal and sentimental stories produced by it: families to be traced, lovers to be comforted, intimate messages to be delivered. When he is eventually appointed squadron Intelligence Officer of the R.A.F. and sent to the Middle East, Egypt and Greece, his duties continue to exempt him from active service. He is expected to pass on information of operations from the headquarters to the pilots of the squadron and then send back accounts; to retrieve any documents, maps, letters and diaries from the corpses of the enemies; to interrogate refugees to find out bombing targets; to censor the letters written by the airmen, most of which disclose, week after week, the tragedy of personal relationships falling apart. In short, to use David Marr's words again, "White fought a novelist's war" (Marr 1992: 203): it was his imagination as a creative writer that fed upon it, more than his loyalty as a heroic soldier. An opinion that is shared also by Bruce Bennett who, in an essay dealing with White's involvement in espionage during the war, lays emphasis on the connection between 'spying' and 'writing', stating that "many of the techniques of imaginative engagement and analysis required of the intelligence officer and the writer of novels are closely correlated" (Bennett 2010: 128).

"Hitler's War", as White will call it ever after, is the war of "that greater German megalomaniac" (White 1982: 104). But White's war is a war of ordinary human stories and consequent story-telling: enemies' stories, servicemen's stories, civilians' stories, the stories he cannot write, the stories that will come out of the war, the stories that keep him alive. Story-telling becomes in wartime a sort of survival strategy for White and it is, in a sense, his way to participate in the war even without experiencing actual combat and so, again, with no aspirations to heroism. White is not fighting for a cause. He is not fighting at all. Wearing a uniform is for him a matter of embarrassment, neither a source of honour, nor of pride, he feels the uniform is giving a wrong image of him, whilst inside it he is still himself. The sense of split identity caused by the war, the schizophrenic condition in which writer/officer, creativity/aridity, life/death coexist, emerges from the pages of a diary White kept for a few months while he was stationed on the West Coast of Africa: "Since joining the RAF I have lost what I know as myself. I want to say to the people who know me during this period. This is not I, I am somebody quite different" (Marr 1996: 36). The effect of the war is for the writer de-personalization, it is a sense of unreality, of "being

suspended in sleep somewhere between the living and the dead" (Marr 1992: 220). As Michael Ackland notes, a shared uniform, a common enemy and prescribed duties gave White only a "transitory sense of belonging", what the experience of the war enhanced, instead, was "his terrible sense of otherness" (Ackland 2002: 402). This feeling would accompany White for the rest of his life together with the anti-heroic perception that the war represented his loss of innocence. In a conversation with the Greek academic Vrasidis Karalis, a few years after White's death, Manoly Lascaris, White's life companion, refers to the war as to the main reason for their withdrawn life in Sydney. It was as a consequence of the impact and ravages of the war, in which they had both been involved, more than because of their homosexuality, that they had opted for a solitary existence: "Our chosen solitude was the only way to purify our existence from the stains of experience" (Karalis 2008: 133-134).

White's anti-heroic perspective is also evidenced by a recurrent feeling that accompanies his recollections of war, that is, the futile waste of time, the sense of time lost, "the long boredom and isolation of war in the western desert" (White 1982: 33). Boredom is described as "the worst enemy" (White 1982: 86) in the endless voyages from one post to another, when monotony and self-searching go hand in hand. "We are fighting this absurd war", he writes in his diary. "Absurd only in its necessity" (Marr 1996: 45). This sense of waste and apathy, divested of any heroic ambition, is contrasted by an insatiable thirst for reading, it is overcome by the books White devours when he is off duty. This is the real life to him, literature becomes in his words "the intact jugular vein of a life which must continue" (White 1982: 96). When the war is over, of course. In the so much longed-for peace in which he would finally be able to write the novels that were waiting in his mind to be written. Because if the war, as he admits, does not allow the brain to function creatively (Marr 1996: 34-35), still his nature of writer continues to emerge and so the pieces of information, of lives, of relationships scattered around by the war that he collects and puts together in his Intelligence reports become the seeds of his future novels (of *Voss*, of *Riders in the Chariot*, of *The Aunt's Story*) that will germinate when his creative will, frozen into silence by the war, will finally thaw in the warmth of peace. As White recollects in retrospection in his autobiography, "our activities were probably only of importance for the novelist in myself" (White 1982: 92).

As an officer entangled in the meaninglessness of warfare, White can only write letters, which help him face the sense of alienation and maintain the human relationships the war is disrupting, and very few short stories that allow him to give vent to his suffocated creative impulse. However, what he writes after the war is largely influenced by it. The war appears frequently, and since the earliest stages, in Patrick White's production but it is never described in terms of frontline fighting, killing and bloodshed. Instead of the heroic glaze which generally permeates the realistic accounts of war literature we find in White's references to the war a concern with more metaphysical

questions: the irrational nature of war, the sense of responsibility as human beings, the moral degeneration, the psychological side-effects, the sense of alienation and disease. Adding to this, as Brigid Rooney maintains, the experiences linked to World War II, and reflected in his writings, definitely contribute to shaping White's "visceral sense of apocalypse" (Rooney 2010: 5).

Starting with *Happy Valley* (1939), his first novel, written before the outbreak of World War II, it is soon evident that the Great War, introduced as just a vague experience in the background of the protagonist's youth, represents utmost futility. This is underlined by the 'embryonic' condition in which Oliver Halliday, who enrolls at the age of 16, remains closed for the rest of his life. The war is also the temporal frame of *The Living and the Dead* (1941), set in the span of time between the Spanish Civil War and the beginning of World War II, and tackling, as mentioned above, the issue of moral choice and human responsibility that makes one participate in a war in another country, fighting for foreign people. In *The Aunt's Story* (1948) the war, though remaining unmentioned again in the background of the second part of the novel, is to be interpreted as an objective correlative of insanity: the destruction of Europe brought about by World War II is implicitly paralleled to the fragmentation of Theodora's mind into madness. Metaphors of disease and mental derangement related to the war are to be found also in the genesis of *Voss* (1957), where the insane megalomania of the eponymous German explorer is derived by White from the conquering madness of Hitler. In *Riders in the Chariot* (1961) the war is epitomized by the madness of anti-Semitism and of the concentration camps where Himmelfarb is transported to, and its consequences are connoted with absurdity and irrationality through the lynching and mock crucifixion of the Jewish refugee many years later in Australia. In *The Vivisector* (1970) World War I represents for the young Hurtle Duffield an opportunity to escape from the oppression of his foster mother's near-incestuous love, but it turns out being an even more insane nightmare. In *The Twyborn Affair* (1979) World War II appears like the ultimate destruction of western civilization in the apocalyptic images of bombing raids on London, the apotheosis of corruption over the salvific transgenerational and transsexual regeneration of the protean protagonist, Eadie/Eadith/Eddie/Eudoxia. Eventually, the theme of the war also haunts White's final creative phase in his last, unfinished and posthumously published novel, *The Hanging Garden* (2012), sketching the story of two refugee children from World War II Europe to safe Australia, and facing the consequences of war in terms of disruption of family bonds and emotional wasteland.

In the short stories, where White's narrative bite is more sharp and immediate, the war – whether it is the Second World War or the 1922 sack of Smyrna (and the destruction of the Anatolian Hellenic community), of which he had direct knowledge from his life companion Manoly Lascaris and his family, and which represents a recurrent leitmotif in all his Greek stories – is presented as a destroyer of the spirit. In a story like "The Full

Belly", for example, the tragic dimension of the war is reduced by White to basic corporeal needs, especially hunger, that put virtue to the test and force characters to a slow, inexorable de-humanization and regression to the level of beasts. Again, White is not interested in writing the war as a piece of history, but in representing the personal tragedies, the individual facets, within the historical, collective event.

But what is definitely the most exemplary wartime story by White, thoroughly set in the context of World War II, and the only remaining creative piece written during this period, is "After Alep". The story, published in 1945 in the third series of *Bugle Blast. An Anthology from the Services*, and written when White was stationed in Palestine, reflects one of the most stagnant phases of the war for the writer. Taking part in an advance operation on Turkey, a feint to suggest to the Germans that the Allies' invasion of Europe might come through Anatolia, he got as far as Aleppo in a ramshackle train which then moved slowly into Turkey. The unreal, end-of-the-world atmosphere of wartime Aleppo, beaten by winter winds, is fictionally reproduced in the story in which the boredom and futility of war predominate and are reflected in the tedium of the protagonists, caught in a railway journey through the night and in the long expiring pauses *en route*:

Christ, it's a long wait, waiting to leave Aleppo, watching the Ankara Express go [...]
The rags wave on the roofs of the houses that nobody finished. As if they're so used to seeing what's tumbledown, they can't finish what they put up new. So the new houses in Alep finish off about the shoulders, and stand there waiting for more. They'll wait (White 1945: 147).

The story has no real plot and once again White focuses on the inner conflicts of his characters (reduced to ethereal voices and memories rather than physical presences), which are given additional depth through the use of the flash-back and the interior monologue. It is emotional privations, more than material hardships (although relevant themselves) that are emphasized, resulting in a story of psychological subtlety that neglects the typical elements of war fiction. The protagonists represent an ironic (and self-ironic) debunking of the war-hero fighting on un-heroic battlefields, in the rear, against abstract enemies, who are not less difficult to defeat: "We are the ones that fight the war in trains. The trains we fought in make many battlefields" (White 1945: 148), says the narrating voice underlining how the long-time stops from one station to the other and the never-ending journeys are their real enemies in this war that virtually imprisons them in a sort of "static movement". The time of private life that flies away is in sharp contrast with the time of the war that stands still. When Fred, the internal narrator of the story, is about to leave his wife and his civilian life, the minutes run fast on the clock, so that "you wanted to hold up that bloody clock while there was still time" (White 1945: 151) but when he travels with other soldiers from Alep to Tripoli, time becomes unbearably slow:

"if only you could shake up the clock" (White 1945: 151). Time is an enemy that does not threaten their lives and their bodies but tears their souls because there is no defence against its blows: "There's no blood, but there's just on everything else. Even the brave can die, many times over, waiting, counting up the years" (White 1945: 148).

Even the weapons of these un-heroic soldiers become insignificant objects, desecrated and deprived of their main function, they too symbolize the "non-condition" of these characters: a bayonet is carelessly dropped as the train jerks out, another one is used to beat the time of a song on the woodwork. Arms are useless and will not make them heroes: "It isn't us wins the war, that's certain", sarcastically admits Arthur, with a certain disillusion.

The sense of detachment, of non belonging brought about by the war, emerges in this story through images of cultural alterity surrounding the characters, everything around them looks and sounds incomprehensible, impossible to assimilate, thus enhancing their sense of isolation and loneliness, and the difficulty to communicate or to establish personal relationships: "The egg-shaped mud houses" (White 1945: 150), the "strange [Syrian] faces [...] talking their lingo", "The sharp words that you can't understand" (White 1945: 153). The feelings of disruption and disorientation caused by the war seem to require a reaffirmation of origins and the need to get back to one's family, to what was before Alep, even though only in memories, dreams and letters. Letter-writing is indeed ingrained in the structure of the story because, within the impressionistic sequence of blurred pictures reflecting the disconnected voices and thoughts of the four protagonists, White introduces the correspondence between Fred and his wife Lily as a story within the story that gradually reveals the breaking up of their marriage, a personal drama that White in his duties as a censor of letters knew all too well. The letters Fred receives from home are his only connection with life and, paradoxically, at the same time, they also cut the bond with his family by sentencing his sentimental life to death: "But it happened. I made my bed. Now, dear, I've sent the kids to Mum. Don't you worry for Kitty and Tom. I'm going up to London, because that's as how it's got to be. Never thought it would come to this. Now, Fred, try to forget" (White 1945: 154). The war destroys, it makes things change and lose their shape, it leaves behind only uselessness and waste and the incapacity to understand.

The anti-war message deriving here from the focus of the narration on un-heroic sentimental failure is enhanced by White's debunking of the centrality of war itself through the subversion of certain recurrent elements in war literature. First of all, the mateship usually associated in official war narratives to soldiers is ignored here, there is no sense of solidarity, of fighting for the same cause, of comradeship. The four characters share a constricted space, scarce and unpalatable food and physical hardships, but they do not really participate, emotionally, in each other's lives, they are all closed in their own personal tragedies, in their loneliness, in their boredom. Even the idea of masculinity, so often shaped by war literature, is de-constructed by White in presenting a soldier as a

victim of his wife's unfaithfulness and unable to react in his suspended condition, waiting for something to happen, wondering what will become of him after Alep. Moreover, the virtues of endurance, fidelity, ingenuity, calmness, embodied by these four anti-heroes, are irreconcilable with the codes of behaviour of war ethics, like aggression, violence, hatred and revenge, to which instead they do not conform. Each of them has a different enemy to fight (or, simply, to come to terms with) in a diverse battlefield: for Arthur it is the gonorrhoea he has caught from an Armenian girl, for Percy it is hunger and homesickness, for Bill it is the lack of human warmth, for Fred it is the incapacity to save his marriage. There is no heroic view of war in a war that is just a background to stories of personal loss and powerlessness.

These narrative devices, in which motifs of futility and anti-heroism appear to be employed in support of an anti-war ideology, also convey obliquely a message of peace and above all the author's wish to give prominence in his narrative to human beings. In the 1980s White became passionately engaged and socially committed as a spokesperson to the cause of peace. He was a leading figure in the front line of many Palm Sunday peace marches in Sydney, where he was especially keen on stating the need to eradicate "the habit of war" (Flynn & Brennan 1989: 110). He also became involved in the nuclear debate and, as a sponsor to *People for Nuclear Disarmament*, he gave a series of lectures for the anti-nuclear cause. In one of these speeches, delivered at La Trobe University in 1984, White refers to the Russell-Einstein manifesto that exhorted to "remember your humanity and forget all other things" (Flynn and Brennan 1989: 161). In the words of these two 'apostles of peace' as he defines them, White finds a correspondence with his own idea of peace and war – the former as the life force of 'humanity', the latter as an expression of the meaninglessness of 'all other things' – and with his own way of representing them in his narrative: it is the humanity of the individual, no matter how frail it can be in a war context, that deserves to be given a central place in order to exorcise the horrors, the devastations, the adulteries of war, to foster mutual respect and create faith in life and humankind.

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Annalisa Pes is Lecturer in English at the University of Verona where she teaches English and Postcolonial Literature. Her research interests are mainly in the field of Australian literature and Postcolonial studies. Her publications include articles on the works of Patrick White, Kate Grenville, Sia Figiel, Zadie Smith. She has written a book on the short fiction of Australian women writers in the nineteenth century, *Sermoni, amori e misteri*, (Liguori 2009) and co-edited a volume on madness in postcolonial literature, *Ex-centric Writing* (CSP 2013).

annalisa.pes@univr.it



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Irene De Angelis

From Propaganda to Private Grief: Rudyard Kipling and World War I

Abstract I: Come molti suoi contemporanei, quali Rupert Brooke, Jessie Pope o Ian Hay, allo scoppio della Prima Guerra Mondiale Rudyard Kipling scrisse con fervore della necessità di combattere gli “Unni [...] alle porte” (“For All We Have and Are”). Il ‘Grande Imperialista’ collaborava attivamente con il primo organo ufficiale di propaganda governativa, Wellington House. Con il progredire della guerra, tuttavia, il tono delle sue opere cambiò radicalmente dopo l’ottobre 1915, quando ai coniugi Kipling fu comunicato che il loro unico amato figlio maschio, John, diciottenne, era morto sul campo, e le sue spoglie non erano state trovate. Questo saggio partirà dalle poesie scioviniste di Kipling precedenti al 1915 fino a includere il racconto “The Gardener” (1925). Si metterà in luce come nonostante il suo estremo patriottismo, Kipling diede una dimensione universale al proprio personale dolore, nella speranza che “I loro nomi vivessero per sempre”.

Abstract II: Like many of his contemporaries such as Rupert Brooke, Jessie Pope or Ian Hay, at the outbreak of World War I Rudyard Kipling wrote fervently about the need to fight against the “Hun [...] at the gate” (“For All We Have and Are”). The ‘Great Imperialist’ collaborated actively with the first official government propaganda organization, Wellington House. As the war progressed, however, the tone of his works changed, most notably after October 1915, when he and his wife were told that their beloved only son John, aged eighteen, was missing, believed dead. This essay will move from Kipling’s pre-1915 jingoistic poems to his short story “The Gardener” (1925). I will show that notwithstanding his extreme patriotism, Kipling gave his private grief a universal dimension, in the hope that “Their Name [would live] Forevermore”.

The outbreak of the World War I, in August 1914, marked the beginning of a new age, one of total warfare, although it was believed the conflict would not last long. In Britain recruitment relied on mass public propaganda, which was officially promoted by Wellington House, the organization led by C. F. G. Masterman. The common aim of its

collaborators was to counter anti-British propaganda, spreading the image of Germany as the target enemy, while Britain was “the imperial protector of her allies” (Bick 2013: 2). As a firm promoter of the superiority of action over knowledge and a committed spokesperson for ideology, Rudyard Kipling the *homo faber* (De Zordo 2008: 9) was famous for his strong imperialist views and because of his propaganda during the Boer War. The ‘Great Imperialist’ felt deeply compelled to rely on his fame to call Britain and its allies to serve their countries and fight heroically, since he was firmly convinced that the Germans were fierce barbarians who threatened the power of the British Empire. He believed that his country fellows were destined to a supreme mission of command, and that hierarchies mattered more than individuals. His creed was to ‘serve and obey’, and domination was of the utmost importance, intended both as domination of the enemy and as self-regulation. In Kipling’s *Weltanschauung*, which he derived from the Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle, the continuous changes to which the world was submitted were the result of a single mysterious principle, both creator and dominator of the universe, that was inherent in every man and that everyone should rely on, since ‘might’ was ‘right’. This implied the exclusive survival of spiritually superior beings who left an imprint on reality, titanic heroes whose mission was to guide mankind, because they were a living manifestation of God on Earth.

Kipling the *Homo Faber*

There are several ways in which Kipling spread war propaganda, the principal one being pamphlets, whose rhetoric was reminiscent of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim Progress*, with its “ideas of sacrifice and spiritual progression” which appealed emotionally to the British population (Bilsing 2000: 76). Among others, *The New Army in Training* (1914) was very successful in helping recruit men for the army, reinforcing the idea that those who did not fight for their country were mere cowards. Kipling depicted war as “a crusade for civilization” (Buitenhuis 1989: 37), thus firing the imagination of the British “through the manipulation of civil emotion” (Bilsing 2000: 76). In his fervent pro-war campaign, Kipling, like other intellectuals, contributed to creating an image which did not take into account the degradation of the trenches, “the best kept secret of the war” (Buitenhuis 1989: 79). His tour of France at war, in August 1915, filled him with excitement, as shown by a letter addressed to his 18-year old only son John – destined to die in the battle of Loos within a few weeks – in which he spoke of “a grand life” without “a dull minute” (Birkenhead 1978: 266). John had failed his army medical examination on account of his short-sightedness, but his father applied to Lord Roberts to ensure the boy would be enrolled in the Irish Guards. This decision revealed itself to be “a deferred death warrant” (Brogan 1998: 4) and was destined to remain a heavy burden for Kipling, whose only consolation was that John died like a man, for a cause in which he and his parents believed.

The poem “For All We Have and Are” was first published in September 1914, only one month after the outbreak of the World War I, and it was later included in the collection *The Years Between* (1919). This call to arms was issued after the bad news from every front, when Liège, Brussels, Lille and Amiens had succumbed to the enemy, and it seemed that Paris would follow suit, no more than six weeks after the German mobilization. Noticeably, Kipling chooses to identify England with decadent Rome. On the one hand, since the Boer War he had seen his country as unprepared for the war to come, and was therefore calling for a reform. On the other hand, Rome can be seen as “the embodiment of order and law”, or “law as opposed to simple force” (Ragen 1996: 3):

Once more we hear the word
That sickened earth of old: –
“No law except the sword
Unsheathed and uncontrolled”.
Once more it knits mankind,
Once more the nations go
To meet and break and bind
A crazed and driven foe (Kipling 2009: 268).

Kipling equated Germany’s policy of *Schrecklichkeit* (frightfulness) in Belgium with the collapse of civilization. As Rodney Atwood points out, the atrocities committed by the Germans included the killing by firing squads “of over 600 men, women and children in the main square at Dinant, and [...] one other event, which may have triggered Kipling’s poem. Roughly a week before [its] publication, German forces burnt down the centre of the mediaeval city of Louvain with its priceless library of manuscripts” (McGivering 2011). The brutal rape of Belgium confirmed that the Germans had to be resisted and that war was a matter of honour. “Who dies if England live?”, asks Kipling in “For All We Have and Are”. “Answer: hundreds of thousands of young men, among them the prophet’s only son” (Brogan 1998: 10), but Kipling never swerved from believing in the tit-for-tat brutality of war. Until his death in 1936 he never ceased “to urge the importance of *keeping faith with the dead*” (Brogan 1998: 12, my emphasis).

A crescendo of rage: post-1915

In Kipling’s *oeuvre* of the war period there is a crescendo of rage against the Germans. Two of his short stories are particularly relevant in this context, “Swept and Garnished” (January 1915) and “Mary Postgate” (September 1915). The first story takes place in the Autumn of 1914: Frau Ebermann is a wealthy elderly lady in bed with flu. The tidiness of her immaculate Berlin flat constitutes her only comfort while her servant updates her on the war in Belgium: “another victory, many more prisoners and guns” (Kipling 2009: 228). Suddenly five young children stand before her in the room. When she tells them to go

home, they reply: "There isn't anything left" (Kipling 2009: 230), and the woman realizes that their villages have all been "wiped out, stamped flat" (Kipling 2009: 231). Her son had written letters to her from the front, saying that many Belgian children were hurt and maimed in war, so she is haunted by the presence of these little visitors, who show her their wounds and tell her that there are many more of them. After they bid her goodbye, the story closes with Frau Ebermann — a Lady Macbeth figure — frantically trying to clean the blood stains on the floor. The ghostly apparition of the Belgian children has destroyed the aura of safety she relies on, and her space becomes politicized as its safety is shattered by war.

"Mary Postgate" is a story equally steeped in the savagery and brutality of the Great War. Its protagonist is a repressed middle-aged woman, who becomes the surrogate mother of Miss Fowler's orphaned nephew Wynn. After joining the Flying Corps, the young man does not die in action but on a trial flight. Following the tragic news, the two ladies decide that Mary should get rid of Wynn's personal belongings in the garden incinerator. As she is going to buy paraffin, she sees a small girl die after a bomb is dropped from a German plane on the village. Soon afterwards, as she is burning Wynn's personal effects, she witnesses a second death, this time of the German airman who, after the bomb was dropped and his plane crashed, was slowly dying. The woman watches the scene with undisguised pleasure.

Literary critics have offered various interpretations of this short story. For J. M. Tompkins both "Swept and Garnished" and "Mary Postgate" "assault the mind", because "[t]hey are the utterances of deep outrage. Both have [...] the quality of a hardly suppressed scream, [...] both describe a repressed horror that in the end breaks out" (Tompkins 1959: 134-135). Drawing on psychoanalysis, Randall Jarrell comments on "Mary Postgate":

This truthfully cruel, human-all-too-human wish fantasy is as satisfying to one part of our nature as it is terrible to another. What happens is implausible but intensely actual: the German is not really there, of course, except in our desire, but his psychological reality is absolute, down to the last groan of the head that moved ceaselessly from side to side. [...] we are forced to believe in him just as Freud was forced to believe in his first patients' fantasies of seduction (Jarrell 1980: 85).

"Mary Postgate" is a whole-heartedly pro-British piece of propaganda, and the protagonist is the epitome of British womanhood represented in the recruiting posters. This de-sexed pseudo-mother is like a soldier who transforms death into a quasi-religious offering. The haunting ceremony of disposing of Wynn's possessions is reminiscent of Kipling's own ritual for the dead. He too eliminated anything, which could remind him of the physical existence of those he had loved and lost. In the same way, Mary and Miss Fowler eliminate Wynn's personal effects, material objects permeated by memory. Taking

advantage of the vulnerable state of the German soldier, Mary is tempted by “sadism and self-indulgent aggression” (Ruddick 1993: 119). A “militant” surrogate mother (Marcus 1989: 142), she has triumphed over the enemy and proved more deadly than the male. Rejecting her former domestic ritual for “the ecstasy of war”, she returns home and takes “a luxurious hot bath before tea” (Marcus 1989: 142). Violence and war are seen through the filter of the home front, and horror is expressed in a domestic language. The story offers “an understanding portrait of the pathological behaviour of a repressed woman under the impact of war’s horrors” (Wilson 1978: 310). Kipling is not saying that this is a natural reaction to the brutality of war, but he is considering that however inhuman, the desperate revenge of this woman is as *schrecklich* as the enemy.

The Epitaphs of the War: 1919 and Beyond

Some of the most tragic echoes of the 1914-18 conflict may be found in the *Epitaphs of the War* (1919), which were written after Kipling was appointed to the board of the Imperial War Graves Commission. Highly praised by T. S. Eliot and modelled on the Greek Anthology, Kipling’s lines are reminiscent of Simonides’ epitaph dedicated to the 300 Spartans who were killed at Thermopylae: “Go tell the Spartans passerby / That here obedient to their laws we lie” (translated by W. L. Bowles). But the Greek model was even more in the mind of English poets during the World War I “because of the tragic campaign at Gallipoli, where British and Australian soldiers died near the battlefields where their Greek, Persian and even Trojan predecessors perished” (Ragen 1996: 8). Kipling dealt with various aspects, not only of the war, and many of the epitaphs are either meditations on loss or explorations of the meaning of existence. Although his patriotism remained unaltered, his writings became works of contemplation, committed to creating a worthy legacy of the war and its dead. As Buitenhuis has it, “the war, which had begun for Kipling in a gust of exultation and relief and continued in a barrage of revenge propaganda, fiction and verse, concluded for him in *artistic versions of emotions too deep for tears*” (Buitenhuis 1989: 85, my emphasis). Although none of the epitaphs is openly on John, some of them are about “A Son”: “My son was killed while laughing at some jest. I would I knew / What it was, and it might serve me in a time when jests are few” (Kipling 2009: 321). Here suffering is counterbalanced by restraint.

“The Beginner” too may refer to John:

On the first hour of my first day
In the front trench I fell.
(Children in boxes at a play
Stand up to watch it well) (Kipling 2009: 322-323).

John, too, died on his first day, and although Kipling proudly believed that he had done his duty, it is impossible not to feel a silent grief in lines such as the following:

“R. A. F. (Aged Eighteen)”

Laughing through clouds, his milk-teeth still unshed,

Cities and men he smote from overhead.

His deaths delivered, he returned to play

Childlike, with childish things now put away (Kipling 2009: 323).

If the lines quoted above may express the disillusionment of a mourning father, in the extraordinarily piercing epitaph “Common Form” (1919) Kipling speaks in the voices of the dead: “If any questions why we died, / Tell them, because our fathers lied” (Kipling 2009: 324). This two-line poem is about “the angry and defrauded young”, as Kipling called them in another ‘epitaph’ (“A Dead Statesman”). Carol Rumens (2008) points out that “[p]robably nothing else he wrote is as simply, bluntly angry as that couplet” (Rumens 2008). Kipling the propagandist had to balance the “public figure, who could not retract the ‘old lies’ with the intensely private man, who with all his might wanted his child alive again” (Bilsing 2000: 74). Although pacifism is not the lesson Kipling takes from history, because until the end of his life he felt the unending need for struggle, for guarding the frontier of civilization, he gave his personal grief a universal dimension. This is best expressed in the poem “The Children” (1917, later added in *Verse*, 1919), in which he does not suggest that the enemy should be forgiven, or that the war, despite its evident miscalculations, should not have been fought. The poetic persona asks for atonement, knowing that it will never be adequate. The refrain “Who shall return us our children?” “becomes a chorus that speaks almost impersonally for all parents bereaved by war” (Rumens 2008). The bereaved mother Helen Turrell, in Kipling’s short story “The Gardener” (1925), finds the only consolation for the loss of her son in a ritual that Kipling was denied:

The body of Lieutenant Michael Turrell had been found, identified, and reinterred in Hagazeele Third Military Cemetery – the letter of the row and the grave’s number in that row duly given. So Helen found herself moved on [...] to a world full of exultant or broken relatives, now strong in the certainty that there was *an altar upon earth where they might lay their love*’ (Kipling 2009: 315, my emphasis).

Although no “altar upon earth” could console Kipling’s private grief, because John’s body was never found, his legacy of the World War I is enclosed in the biblical words he chose for the Stones of Remembrance: “Their Name Liveth for Evermore”.

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Irene De Angelis is a tenured Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Turin, co-editor with Joseph Woods of *Our Shared Japan. An Anthology of Contemporary Irish Poetry* (Dedalus Press 2007) and author of *The Japanese Effect in Contemporary Irish Poetry* (Palgrave Macmillan 2012) and numerous articles. Her research interests include Victorian Literature, Ecocriticism, Black British Poetry and Contemporary British and Irish drama. irene.deangelis@unito.it



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Loredana Salis

Writing Peace out of Conflict: Nancy Cunard, Carole Satyamurti, Frank McGuinness

Abstract I: La concezione di guerra intesa come fenomeno naturale e inevitabile è antichissima, e serve a giustificare la presenza costante di conflitti nella storia dell'umanità. Recentemente, tuttavia, e in particolar modo dopo gli avvenimenti dell'11 settembre 2001, il modo di condurre, descrivere e raccontare i conflitti è cambiato, e necessariamente è cambiata anche la retorica della guerra, che in passato ha legittimato il concetto di 'guerra giusta', e negli ultimi anni ha introdotto l'espressione 'War of Words', a sottolineare il ruolo fondamentale della lingua nelle dinamiche di conflitto. Per contro, si parla poco di 'peace talks' e di come la lingua sia fondamentale anche nei processi di costruzione della pace. In tal senso la letteratura costituisce una risorsa di grande valore per la realizzazione di una nuova cultura di pace. Ne sono un esempio le opere di tre autori presi in considerazione nel presente lavoro: seppur storicamente e culturalmente lontani, Nancy Cunard, Carole Satyamurti e Frank McGuinness condividono la visione di chi 'out of conflict' scrive di pace, e interrogando le logiche di guerra va alla ricerca del dialogo e dell'incontro interculturale.

Abstract II: In recent years, and more especially since 9/11, the way in which wars are carried out, spoken of, justified and (re)presented has changed significantly. Language plays a crucial role in the construction and consolidation of the rhetoric of war as exemplified by the concept of a 'just war' and the phrase 'War of Words'. Yet, the implications of language use in peace-making processes remain somehow largely underestimated or undervalued, when recognised. Faced with political and cultural intransigence, literature can create models for a co-operative culture enabling both writers and readers to contribute to the development of alternative peace discourses. Accordingly, this paper proposes a reading of pacifist works by Nancy Cunard, Carole Satyamurti and Frank McGuinness. Written out of conflict, and despite their different historical and cultural *milieux*, these texts demonstrate the power of the creative word to promote a new culture of peace based on intercultural dialogue and encounters.

The rhetoric of war is largely built upon discursive practices that seek to legitimise violence: the necessity of conflict, for instance, is one of History's most enduring and resonating myths, as is the notion of war as a natural process, notwithstanding the fact that what one calls cruelty, another calls justice¹. Men have engaged in 'holy' and 'preventive' wars; they have introduced the concept of 'a just war', which is fought to resist armed aggression (Walzer 1977: ix), and more recently have adopted the expression 'War of Words' to define a novel way of carrying out, recounting and speaking of wars. Undoubtedly, language plays a crucial role in popular constructions of (armed) conflict, whereas the implications of language use in peace-making processes remain largely underestimated². Faced with the culture of war and with political and ethnic intransigence, literature and the creative word can construct a rhetoric of peace which engages both writers and readers in a moral and intellectual interrogation of conflict and war and their consequences. What follows focuses on a selection of texts by Anglophone 'active pacifist'³ writers that do not simply explain or interpret conflict but rather pose questions as to its emergence and manifestations in language, while also interpreting the way violence should or should not have occurred at a particular point in time. Although from different historical and cultural contexts, this paper contends that Nancy Cunard, Carole Satyamurti and Frank McGuinness write of peace out of conflict; they use language to promote a new, alternative culture of peace that is based on intercultural encounters and dialogue. Cunard exposes the brutality and deceit of war which she experienced in the late 1930s. Satyamurti looks at the Bosnian conflict and reflects on the ways in which war is a social construct that legitimises discriminatory attitudes as well as creating often irreparable cultural fractures. McGuinness uses myth to expose the limits and faults of war discourses as he reflects on how language shapes reality and makes (armed) aggression sound almost just.

Born in 1896, Nancy Cunard was a key figure in the Western cultural scene of the first half of the twentieth century. She became the elegant muse of Man Ray, a fashion icon who was involved in several controversial love affairs. More important, for the present purposes is her work as an activist, a journalist, a translator and a poet. Cunard dedicated

¹ For the demythologisation of the necessity of conflict see Norberto Bobbio (1984: 29-98); the second part of the sentence recalls Hobbes's view that 'One calls cruelty what another justice', cited in Walzer (1977: 11).

² Peace is often defined generically in relation to and as opposed to war and conflict, but it clearly does not represent simply the absence or the negation of war. Peace rather coincides with a condition of political and social stability, and a lasting culture of peace begins with language and with a re-definition of peace in terms of a shared value and a good. Cfr. Norberto Bobbio's reflections on these aspects in *Il problema della guerra e le vie della pace* (1984: 121; 125-127); essays by Giuseppe Prestipino, Bernard Bourgeois, and Domenico Jervolino in *Guerra e Pace*, edited by G. Prestipino (respectively, pp. 9-28; 67-82; 283-292).

³ The notion of active pacifism, as opposed to passive pacifism, is owing to Bobbio's definition (1984: 56, 138-139) and to the work of the Italian philosopher Giulio Girardi on peace and revolutionary culture (cfr. Jervolino, in Prestipino 2004: 289, 291).

her life and wealth to numerous radical causes in the hope of establishing a just world free of racial discrimination and without totalitarian forms of power. Today she is known primarily for the vast *Negro Anthology* (1934) and for the pamphlet “Authors take sides on the Spanish War”⁴, but she also wrote poetry, published in four volumes between 1921 and 1925. In 1943 she began organising her poetic *oeuvre* into a collection, a task completed in 2005 by John Lucas under the auspices of the Bodleian Library, where the typescripts are currently housed. The thirty-five poems in the volume look at war or scenarios in-between wars⁵, providing accounts of different (armed) conflicts observed from within. The poetic ‘I’ is always a witness to violence and speaks from the frontline, from the trenches, from the street; what readers hear is the voice of despair and rage, raised from amidst the mayhem. War shatters people’s confidence and trust, Cunard observes in a poem entitled “Tell it Glen” (1934), in which she denounces those who say that “The world is beautiful” because “they lie”, and “life is a swathe of pain” (Cunard 2005: 41). A deep sense of betrayal haunts these lines, turning the poem into a call to understand “the cruel march of history” (Cunard 2005: 41). Cunard crafts a grammar that is designed to make sense of violence while also facilitating dialogue between opponents. To such purpose she often relies on the use of interrogative clauses, as is the case with a poem entitled “Yes, it is Spain”, whose opening stanza is worth considering:

What is a bomb?
 Something I can’t yet believe.
 What is a tomb?
 Something I can’t yet see.
 And what is a wound in its wounding
 and the shot cutting a vein and the blood coming
 Out of an eye, say, stabbed – are these things too for me? (Cunard 2005: 45).

“Yes, it is Spain” was written in 1937 – the same year as “Authors take sides” – in response to W. H. Auden’s “Spain”, based on his personal experience of the Spanish Civil War (Qwipp 2013: 171-187). In the poem, Cunard questions the reality of war and exposes its brutality: war is a bloody affair that ‘wounds’, ‘shoots’, ‘stabs’ and spares no one, not the innocent (who can’t yet believe) nor the young (who can’t see their tomb). “These things” (line 7) evoke images of an armed conflict that Cunard witnessed as a journalist and which

⁴ Published in the *Left Review* in 1937, the pamphlet was prompted by the threat of absolutist powers and a deep-felt preoccupation with the atmosphere of terror across the Continent on the part of a group of intellectuals who addressed “writers and poets from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales” and posed the following questions: “Are you for or against the legal government and the people of Republican Spain? Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism?”. The *Left Review* was a socialist, anti-fascist, and anti-imperialist British journal closely allied with the Pro-Soviet Writers’ International.

⁵ “Tell it Glen”, for instance, refers to the fifth National Hunger March of 1934, from Glasgow to London.

became one of her most engaging causes, probably because she regarded it as a prelude to another wider war ⁶ and felt that “the time for weeping was not over”⁷. She believed that artists had a moral responsibility to their current time – “Every man to his battle, child; this is yours, understand it” (Cunard 2005: 45-46). On a number of occasions, in both prose and poetry, she launches a poetic wake-up call for “artists in hesitations”, that they might “become the act” and speak up against Franco’s regime. Relying on a collective authoritative voice from the past, in “Yes, it is Spain” Cunard summons her favourite writers and painters – Bosch, Zola, Villon, Blake, Hogarth, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Marlowe, Goya, Heine, Daumier, Hugo and Dante – in an attempt to exhort her contemporaries to “learn from the day’s ruins and tombs” and act against the ongoing war (Cunard 2005: 46). The question of agency, which is crucial to Cunard’s activism and especially her pacifism, reflects a view of literature that is largely consonant with Raimon Panikkar’s own depiction of it in terms of an *agora*, that is to say a field of equal opportunities, where difference is discussed in a constructive and creative way (Panikkar 2002: 44). Unlike the *arena*, a place where enemies fight with no particular aspiration for peace, the *agora* is a site of resistance in the active pacifist sense of the term. And similarly, Cunard’s poem, which exposes “the ‘foolery’ and ‘lying’ of war, is the writer’s place to say ‘no’ to the living-dead” (Cunard 2005: 46).

An analogous atmosphere dominates another poem, entitled “To Eat Today” (Cunard 2005: 47-48), which reiterates Cunard’s ideological and aesthetic priorities, although, in this case, the language is not simply mimetic. It does not aim to represent an experience, but rather turns into the expression of that experience itself. “To Eat Today” was written on September 13th, 1938 during a Nazi air-raid in Barcelona; the rhythm reflects the immediacy of the events, and the verse is orally and visually pungent. An eye witness to that raid, the poetic ‘I’ reads in a newspaper (first stanza), the “codicils and the dashes along the great maniac speech” pronounced by Hitler in Nüremberg. The speaker then poses an evidently rhetorical question: “Is the mark worth the bomb?”

She is “sitting down to lunch” in a hotel when the air-raid strikes, unexpectedly, and kills “a woman ... four children outside, with the house, and the pregnant cat ... five mouths less to feed today” (47). The reaction is a surreal address to the pilot who has just dropped the bomb:

I wonder – do you eat before you do these things?
 ...
 Are you sitting at mess now saying “Visibility, medium”
 ... I wonder –

⁶ “You think this is something new? No, *this too* becomes Spain” (emphasis added, Cunard 2005: 45). See also the line, “Another country arming, another and another behind it”, in “To Eat Today” (Cunard 2005: 47).

⁷ Cunard, cited in Gordon 2007: 223, 224.

Or highing it yet on the home-run to Mallorca,
Cold at 10,000 up, cursing a jammed release... (Cunard 2005: 47).

The attack disrupts “the usual street of man’s middle day”, its contingency affects all, however differently. In an atmosphere of strange intimacy with the protagonists, the reader hears the voice of the pilot from above: “Give it ‘em, *puta Madonna*, here over Arenys – / Per Bacco, it’s nearly two - bloody sandwich it’s made down there - / Aren’t we going to eat today, *teniente?* Te-niente?” (Cunard 2005: 48).

War deprives everyone of food and its lack leads to death. In the poem’s present, the basic need to eat⁸ brings together two worlds, and on that day nobody eats: the people in the street die, the poet stops having lunch, while the “driver in the clouds” does not know whether *he* is going to *get anything to eat* – *te-niente* – or risk his life in this war. The inclusion of Spanish-sounding phrases adds to the chaos: it is a rather efficacious poetic device that is deliberately disorienting for the English-speaking reader, who, in Jane Dowson’s words, “might otherwise have some psychological immunity to the images of the suffering” (Dowson: 53). Both the pace and tone of the poem contribute to a disturbing depiction of the conflict, and chaos is echoed in the man’s curses and in the ‘jammed release’ of words. On the page, the pilot’s speech is marked with codicils and dashes as is Hitler’s manic speech (first stanza), his words are as heavy and devastating as his bombs. This analogy can hardly be ignored by the reader, and it is precisely this type of response that Cunard pursues and which is crucial to her pacifism. Indeed, a major preoccupation of pacifist writings lies with the risk of people becoming “comfortably numb” when immune to violence, somehow entranced by the alluring rhetoric of war. Alert to the danger of a sanitised war, Cunard seeks to draw her readers into the world of her poems and turns them into bystanders; no longer innocent nor placed outside the logic of conflict, the recipients of her message are expected to take sides – like the authors in her pamphlet – and face yet another taxing question: “Are you for or against this?”

Participation is fundamental to peace building, and dialogue plays a primary role in the process because it enables contact with the Other, even if only imaginatively. In this respect a poem entitled “Striking Distance” by Carole Satyamurti (born 1939) is a good example of the workings of contemporary war rhetoric. Written in 1991 and published three years later in the eponymous collection, “Striking Distance” is chiefly concerned with the, then current, Bosnian conflict. A poet, a sociologist and a translator based in London, Satyamurti observes the effects of that war and its consequences for ordinary people in their everyday lives, reflecting on the need for mutual and equal recognition to attain peace. The striking distance of the title is a relatively small gap of just nine inches

⁸ The emphasis on food is not accidental: the conflict caused an appalling lack of provisions, and Cunard committed herself to a food campaign in war-stricken areas at the time. In the poem, food signifies both the pleasures of sharing (gathering at the table) and the need to eat as a matter of survival.

between neighbours and friends, which grows inexorably wide as people are separated by the conflict. War is evidently “a social creation” (Walzer 1977: 24) that breeds hatred, intolerance, and more dangerously in-difference, a lack of concern and respect for ethnic difference. As with Cunard, Satyamurti’s poem deploys interrogative clauses to denounce intolerant attitudes and feelings, and to elicit the intercultural encounter through dialogue. As a result, the reader becomes a witness to violence, engaged in a process that equally aims at creating peace out of conflict.

“Striking Distance” begins with a question, and similarly ends with a question. A long sequence of interrogative clauses runs across the page and through the four stanzas of the poem, all of them demanding answers:

Was there one moment when the woman
 Who’s always lived next door turned stranger
 To you? In a time of fearful weather
 Did the way she laughed, or shook out her mats
 Make you suddenly feel as though
 She had been nursing a dark side to her difference,
 And bring that word, in a bitter rush
 To the back of the throat – *Croat/Muslim/
 Serb* – the name, barbed, ripping
 Its neat solution through common ground?

Or has she acquired an alien patina
 Day by uneasy day, unnoticed
 As fall-out from a remote explosion?

...

Do you sometimes think, she could be you,
 The woman who’s trying to be invisible?
 Do you have to betray those old complicities
 Money, worries, sick children, men?

...

One morning will you ignore her greeting
 And think you see a strange twist to her smile
 For how could she not, then, be strange to herself
 (this woman who lives nine inches away)
 In the inner place where she’d felt she belonged,
 Which, now, she’ll return to obsessively
 As a tongue tries to limit a secret sore?
 And as they drive her away, will her face
 Be unfamiliar, her voice, bearable:
 A woman crying from a long way off? (Satyamurti 1991: 477-478).

The need for responses and for a dialectical exchange requires “bravery” (line 6, third stanza) on the part of the protagonist and it will work only when it is borne out of reciprocal trust. References to trust and the lack of it are pertinent and eloquent: in line 6, in the first stanza, a neighbour sees that there is “a dark side” to the Other and fears her “betrayal” (line 3, third stanza). The poem presents strong images of hostility and cultural fracture that are striking in their dynamics and relentless in their outcome. Difference turns into in-difference when the woman “next door” becomes a stranger (first stanza), “acquires an alien patina” and her words are an “irritant” (second stanza); she tries to be “invisible” (third stanza), and finally turns “unfamiliar” (fourth stanza). Here too, visual and especially aural elements combine to articulate the tension, alliteration, repetition and accents ultimately shaping the poem’s distinctive sectarian idiom. In the second stanza,

She uses their word for water-melon
as usual, but now it’s an irritant
You mimic to ugliness in your head,
Surprising yourself in a savage pleasure (Satyamurti 1991: 478).

The sequences *Croat/Muslim/Serb* (first stanza) and *Muslim/Serb/Croat* (second stanza) are spelt as one single word on the page, morphologically reflecting the effacement of differences between three ethnic groups seen essentially as one, and at the same time ‘alien’, ‘strange’ and ‘sinister’ Other. In the stanza that follows, they turn into generic “people/Serbs/Muslims/Croats”, and in the end “*This*’ woman ... is strange to herself”, an exile whose voice is heard as “they drive her away” and she “cries a long way off” (fourth stanza). On the other side of the political divide, nine inches away, that woman is kept and watched at a distance while driven away. Her voice (“she cries”) contrasts with the silence of her onlooker, a condition shared by readers too as they witness the brutal eviction and become involved in the experience, finally partaking in a process that aims to overcome the boundaries of one’s culture in order to renegotiate distances. Dialogue – the breaking up of passive silence – is a viable way to a real intercultural encounter (Panikkar 2002: 49), and it is in these terms that Satyamurti’s poem exposes and weakens dominant war discourse.

In a similarly sympathetic and engaged manner, Frank McGuinness’s play *Hecuba* (2004) can be read as an exploration of the way language, especially verbal language, is used to consolidate conflict. Moreover, it also considers how disparate groups can construct a shared sensibility and a shared place of peace⁹. Born in 1953, McGuinness adds

⁹ This is Frank McGuinness’ second ‘Greek play’. It follows *Sophocles’ Electra* (1998), and is followed by *Sophocles’ Oedipus* (2008), and *Euripides’ Helen* (2009). For a comparative study of these adaptations see Salis 2014: 145-160.

to a long list of Irish writers who have turned to classical myth in order to deal not only with their homeland's history of violence, but also with the challenges of the contemporary, globalised post-national world. Myth has long provided artists with a special grammar to understand the unknown in cultures across the world, and it has proved remarkable in the Irish case. In McGuinness' reworking of Euripides' *Hecuba*, myth becomes a powerful means of posing the moral question of a 'just war' and the notion of "restraint of conflict as the beginning of peace" (Walzer 1977: 11).

The play is set in the aftermath of the Trojan war, and Hecuba, the Queen of Troy, is faced with the consequences of defeat – she has lost her sons and husband, her country, her home, her freedom and royal status. War spares her no pain, not even now that the aggression is over because the ghost of Achilles demands sacrifice: Polyxena, Hecuba's daughter, is to be immolated at his behest. Her youngest son, whom she believes to be safe in Thrace, has been killed by his host, her friend, the Thracian, Polymestor. The violence that she has suffered is morally indefensible to the point that in the play her revenge is legitimised. Indeed, Hecuba's emotional response and resolve to return evil for evil are both justified: "If you pay no penalty nor punishment", she says, "there is no justice among men – no justice" (39). Faced with the horror of Polymestor's blinding and the slaughter of his children, the audience somehow sympathise with the Trojan Queen and come to think that her war must be a just war. The question can be posed as to playwright's take on violence. In other words, if McGuinness does not condemn Hecuba's act of violence, does that mean that, for him, a war can be just, justified, justifiable? And as an audience, what are we to make of it?

McGuinness remains faithful to Euripides' plot but alters the language so as to modernise it and make it essential, simple in its syntax and vocabulary, with few descriptions and short dialogues. Characters speak a very basic idiom, an all-too-familiar war talk which is exemplified in Polymestor's words:

Polymestor: I will wreck this place
 You will feel the power of my fists
 ...
 Accursed dirt
 Filth of Troy
 Where do you snout,
 Pigs in your pen
 Fearing my fierce anger? (McGuinness 2004: 49-51).

These barbarous words echo the kind of sectarian language spoken by paramilitaries and politicians in Ireland (local expressions and accents are used strategically in performance), but it is a language that would strike a chord also with non-Irish audiences who watched the news of the war in Iraq and heard analogous talks in the media in September 2004,

when the play opened in London (produced by the Donmar Warehouse Theatre Company, it featured a memorial wall on the stage with names of the 9/11 victims and the victims of the Iraqi war)¹⁰. Thus, an overwhelming sense of hopelessness haunts the play: the war has ended but there is no peace. Neither the end of a war nor victory over an enemy can bring peace “automatically” (Panikkar 2002: 130, 108) for peace is built when and if there is a will to it and, especially, when and if there is no will to war. In the play, words are used to perpetrate violence and create divides, as with Satyamurti’s poem above, but McGuinness’ primary focus is on the legitimacy of aggression as reflected in the language, that is to say which dynamics lead to and ultimately justify the use of violence. A look at two sections will help explore both aspects in detail. At the start of the play Hecuba asks Odysseus to return her a favour and begs him to spare her daughter’s life (McGuinness 2004: 11-20). The Greek responds that *he will save her life*, as she once saved his, *but...*

O: But I have said this all along...

Troy is now ours –
And all in it.
Achilles died for Greece –
Died bravely, died nobly.
Lady, he must be honoured

*It is the curse of most states
They make no distinction
Between the strong and the spineless.*

...

Say there's another war,
Another gathering of the men –
Will we fight?
Would we prefer to live?
What point dying to be dishonoured?

...

Endure what is yours to endure.

...

¹⁰ According to Jonathan Kent, who directed the play in London, it would be a mistake “to set the action explicitly outside Basra or Baghdad [but] it would also be a sign of failure if the play didn’t bring Iraq to mind” (Kent 2004). When *Hecuba* was performed in Dundee, the audience were “invited onto the stage-set seating as radio recordings of the 2003 Iraq war and the imitated tone of George W. Bush crackle overhead” (Donaldson 2013). During rehearsal, another episode of violence occurred which influenced both the performance and its reception. This was the massacre of innocent children and teachers in an elementary school in Beslan. Again, the question of the necessity of war was inevitable, and the play denounced also the madness of that seemingly unnecessary aggression.

You are barbarians.
 You don't respect your own dead.
 You forget who your friends were.
 Is it a wonder Greece thrives,
 While *you get what you deserve?* (McGuinness 2004: 16-17, emphasis added).

Odysseus' remorseless logic requires nothing less than Polyxena's death and there is no arguing against this. And since Troy "is now ours", the exchange does not take place on equal grounds – that final question is evidently rhetorical because it does not open but rather it shuts dialogue. For Odysseus, Achilles' death and the Greek victory demand sacrifice, literally legitimising aggression even though the war has ended. The man fails to distinguish between the *jus ad bellum* (justice of war) and the *jus in bello* (justice in war) in that he fails to acknowledge the ideological and moral confines of a just war¹¹. Therefore, he denies Hecuba something that she is entitled to because, in his view, she deserves what she gets.

The Queen then seeks Agamemnon's help and asks him to delay Polyxena's funeral, so that brother and sister can be buried together. This time an encounter of some sort occurs between the Trojan woman and the Greek warrior:

A: How can women win against men?
 H: Who can stand against a tribe
 wild tribe of wise women?
 A: Wild, yes, but women cannot kill –
 I believe that.
 H: Why believe that?
 Women have slaughtered
 Their own sons.
 They have taught men
 A murderous lesson... (McGuinness 2004: 41-42).

In the end, as it were, the two agree to disagree. Agamemnon, who is not fully persuaded by Hecuba's argument, acknowledges the woman's misfortunes and acts as a judge in her confrontation against Polymestor. Unlike the previous exchange with Odysseus, this one occurs in an *agora* type of context because Agamemnon listens to Hecuba's plea and finally

¹¹ "*Jus ad bellum* requires us to make judgements about aggression and self-defence; *jus in bello* about the observance and violation of the customary and positive rules of engagement. The two ... are logically independent. It is perfectly possible for a just war to be fought in strict accordance with the rules ... It is a crime to commit aggression, but aggressive war is a rule-governed activity. It is right to resist aggression, but the resistance is subject to moral (and legal) restraint" (Walzer 1977: 21).

grants that the traitor be punished (63)¹². Polymestor pays for an act, his betrayal, that is beyond the necessities of war, but at the same time he is made to pay for endorsing a distorted view of war that admits reprisal¹³. Reprisal is different from revenge because it does not *return* evil but rather repeats it. Reprisal, in other words, affects essentially innocent people, and blood that is thus spilt calls for more blood. In this way peace is given no chance, and indeed the play ends *not* in peace; despite Agamemnon's wish that "May we have peace there in our homes, / now that the war is over" (63), *Hecuba* ends in the tragic realisation of what lies ahead for the women of Troy: "Begin our lives as slaves. / Fate is fate" (63). These women survive the massacre but their future is tainted; those who dissent die as free women, and like Polyxena show that their "worth is in their words" (Chorus). There is no winning a war, and everyone is a loser for everyone suffers in a conflict. The rhetoric of war is a "heap of empty words" and Good (capital letter) "speaks for itself", writes McGuinness, who knows all too well that conflict is often inevitable and for some also desirable.

To conclude, the authors considered in this study write about peace out of conflict situations in that they share an analogous view of literature as a site in which the logic and the rhetoric of war can be interrogated, exposed and eventually defied. In such terms, Nancy Cunard, Carole Satyamurti and Frank McGuinness act as pacifist writers who rely on the power of words to be creative, demanding, revolutionary, responsible, co-operative, and ultimately dialogic. Cunard pursues resistance to the foolery of a war she actually witnessed, and whose reality and brutality she spelt out in her poems. Satyamurti shows how (armed) conflicts are social constructs that legitimise discriminatory attitudes, and everyone, including those who remain silent and observe from afar, play their part in creating and widening cultural fractures. Similarly, McGuinness reflects on ways in which language shapes the contours of reality to the point of legitimising violence. His rewriting of the Hecuba myth exposes the limits and faults of current war discourse, ending in a tragic realisation that conflict is necessary often because it is thus willed. The primary obstacle to a culture of peace is the will to war, and in the face of it the texts presented here show how the politics of confrontation may also give way to the politics of encounter. This process eventually dismantles the myth of war as a necessity of life. Linguistically, the use

¹² Agamemnon's reasons are questionable, of course, and indeed he seems to cooperate more for his own sake than for Hecuba's ("I don't wish to be so accused", he says). His words to the Trojan queen reveal a moral dilemma – is Hecuba innocent, or is she not? – that is promptly dismissed only because Polymestor is considered to be more guilty:

A: I dislike passing judgement /On the errors of others,
But ... I can't walk away from it. /That would not be correct.
... If I pronounce you [Polymestor] innocent, / I would be of the guilty party.
I don't wish to be so accused. (59, emphasis added)

¹³ Cursing Agamemnon and foreseeing his bloody end, the Thracian king reveals that "That man's wife (Clytemnestra) will raise an axe, she will kill Agamemnon" (McGuinness 2004: 62).

of interrogative clauses, common to the poems and the play referred to, is functional to eliciting dialogue across enemy lines as well as engaging readers, both morally and intellectually: their participation is indispensable to the consolatory role of literature and to its power to create a new culture of peace.

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Loredana Salis is Researcher in English and Irish Literatures at the Università di Sassari. She has published a monograph on contemporary uses of myth (Pellegrini Editore 2009) and on stage representations of the migrant other (Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2010) with special attention to the Irish context. Her research interests include genere(d) and

migrant narratives, as well as the remediation and adaptation of the English canon, more specifically Shakespeare, Dickens, and Gaskell. She has published articles on Christopher Marlowe, Edna O'Brien, Frank McGuinness, Mary Morrissy, Seamus Heaney, Marina Carr. Recently, she has worked on Dickens' theatre and translated one of his theatre plays; she also co-edited the volume *Translating Yeats* (Aracne 2015).

lsalis@uniss.it



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Nicoletta Brazzelli

De-silencing the Past: Traumatic War Memories in Zimbabwean Narratives

Abstract I: Le contraddizioni e i traumi della guerra di liberazione in Zimbabwe (1966-1979), le violenze e gli orrori che hanno segnato quel periodo, vengono rappresentati attraverso prospettive diverse da Alexander Kanengoni, originario dello Zimbabwe, in *Echoing Silences* (1997), e da Alexandra Fuller, inglese vissuta in Rhodesia-Zimbabwe, in *Scribbling the Cat. Travels with an African Soldier* (2004). Scritte dopo il raggiungimento dell'indipendenza del paese africano, queste narrazioni raccontano il dolore e la sofferenza provocati dalla lotta di liberazione e la nascita della nuova nazione; la ricerca dell'identità, in un paese fortemente segnato dalla dominazione coloniale, unisce esperienza personale e memoria storica. Per quanto entrambe le narrazioni siano pervase dal senso del fallimento e della perdita, riportare alla luce eventi dolorosi del passato ha un effetto catartico, e apre la strada per la guarigione e la riconciliazione.

Abstract II: The contradictions and traumas of the national liberation war in Zimbabwe (1966-1979) as well as the horrors and violence that marked that troubled period are conveyed from different perspectives by the Zimbabwean writer Alexander Kanengoni in *Echoing Silences* (1997) and by the British writer Alexandra Fuller in *Scribbling the Cat. Travels with an African Soldier* (2004). In the post-independence period, Zimbabwean narratives disclose the pain and suffering associated with the liberation struggle and the birth of the new nation; the search for identity in Rhodesia-Zimbabwe, a country deeply fractured by colonial rule, combines personal experience and historical memory. Although a sense of failure and loss pervades both narratives, the painful process of de-silencing the past generates a cathartic effect, paving the path for healing and reconciliation.

Zimbabwe's liberation war is the central event in the history of modern Zimbabwe; the 1966-1979 conflict was a struggle for democracy and human rights. In the so-called Second Chimurenga the minority of European settlers, who had been responsible for the creation of a brutal apartheid regime, fought to preserve their power and privileges, while the

black nationalist movements saw the only route to freedom in the armed struggle. The armed resistance to the colonial regime consisted largely of scattered attacks on white farmers and the destruction of the property of white settlers. In 1980 Southern Rhodesia achieved its independence; Robert Mugabe became Prime Minister, opening up a new era, increasingly marked by ethnic cleansing, political corruption and economic regression (Harold-Barry 2005). During the war of independence, both the white Rhodesian Army and the black liberation forces committed atrocities also against civilians, and immediately after the end of the fighting the public silence falling on the most controversial past events became a way of putting aside the deepest contradictions of the struggle (Chiwome & Mguni 2000: 178-179).

Contemporary Zimbabwean narratives have disclosed the pain and suffering associated with the birth of the new nation, and they strive to understand the wounds of its violent past combining personal experience and historical memory (Zhuwarara 2001; Muponde & Primorac 2005; Primorac & Chan 2007). Writers such as Shimmer Chinodya, Chenjerai Hove, Dambudzo Marechera, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Yvonne Vera investigate issues of personal and national identity, also portraying the disillusion with the actuality of independence and exposing uncomfortable truths. The fictional narration of violence de-silences a traumatic past and is often connected to first-person testimonial accounts.

According to Dominick LaCapra, in the written testimonies of traumatic events such as apartheid and genocide the distinction between past and present tends to collapse, and the sense of absence and loss shape a human condition in which the representations of actions are obliterated by pain (LaCapra 2001: 185-186). As a disrupting experience, trauma disarticulates the self and creates holes in one's existence.

Because traumatic events are unbearable in their horror and intensity, they often exist as memories not immediately recognizable as truth. In Kalì Tal's theorization (1996), traumatic events are written and rewritten until they become codified and a coherent narrative form gradually replaces content as the focus of attention. When it is fictionalized by survivors, the traumatic experience is re-inscribed into the text as metaphor. The writings of trauma survivors give birth to a distinct literature of trauma.

According to Gabriele Schwab (2010), writing from within the core of trauma is a constant struggle between the power of words and the attempt at giving a shape to what is being rejected and silenced. Violent histories can be silenced and relegated to a level of secrecy in spite of the circulation of stories and narratives. Hiding in language exists even when stories are explicitly told; the traces of such hiding are to be found in the erasures and ruptures of the literary language.

In Alexander Kanengoni's *Echoing Silences* (1997), the liberation war scenario is gloomy, and guerrilla life is a nightmare where loyalty itself can be proven only by acts of violence; Kanengoni's narrative is one of unfulfilled ideals. Alexander Kanengoni joined the liberation army and, after the independence, became an officer in the Ministry of

Education and Culture, and then worked at the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Service. In 2002 he was allocated a farm thanks to the land reform, thus becoming a strong supporter of the Mugabe government. Nonetheless, *Echoing Silences*, with its visionary approach to the ghosts of war, stands apart from his author's subsequent political choices.

The novel opens up with the war veteran Munashe's disturbed perception of reality: "As always, it began with the cry of a baby somewhere – perhaps in his mind – and he instinctively reached for the bottle of sedatives in his pocket – but he knew it was hopeless" (Kanengoni 1997: 1). The central event of the novel sees Munashe murdering a woman and her child in a guerrilla base in Mozambique, in order to obey the orders of his commanders. Munashe is forced to beat her to death with a hoe, after she has dug out her grave, and to kill her baby. This is the most traumatising episode in *Echoing Silences*. The murder is illustrated through the painful and ever changing recollections of the main character; however, the narrative focus is on the fact that "there was nothing else to understand" (Kanengoni 1997: 2), because the events of the war are inexplicable: "The woman fell down with the first vicious blow and the sound of Munashe's jarred and violent cry mingled with that of the dying baby as the hoe fell again and again until Munashe was splattered all over with dark brown blood" (Kanengoni 1997: 21). Then Munashe throws away the blood-smeared hoe and walks near a huge baobab, moving towards nowhere: "All he could hear were the last cries of the baby as it died. Strangely, there was no trace of any smell of blood at all. He could not understand it, nor why it took the baby so long to die" (Kanengoni 1997: 21). Kanengoni's fragmented third-person narration conveys Munashe Mungate's experiences before, during and after the civil war: in particular, after fighting in the guerrilla army, the protagonist's life becomes a sequence of nightmares. His memories haunt him, he is pursued by horrible, confused, disjointed hallucinations and cannot make peace with the past. Traumatic memories come in flashbacks or nightmares. The end of the war is, for Munashe, "an inexplicable non-event" (Kanengoni 1997: 43).

Obsessed by the spirit of the woman with her baby on her back he had been forced to kill, he seeks redemption and tries to heal his painful memories through magical ceremonies. In this sense, for Munashe a new beginning can occur only after purification and expiation of the past (Chan 2005: 373). During the rite of the *bira*, ancestral spirits from the other world visit the community, and the ghosts of the dead speak to the living; the final tragedy, however, takes place in the forest, where Munashe dies. The villagers find his body in a gully at the foot of a mountain; nobody knows what happened, the women wail and look at the mountain as if it has something to do with Munashe's death. "At least, the war has ended for Munashe" (Kanengoni 1997: 89), says his wife, watching Munashe's body. Just few moments before, his eyes had met those of the young woman with the baby on her back. "It wasn't your fault" (Kanengoni 1997: 88), she had said, finally forgiving him.

The Rhodesian attack on the Chimoio camp in Mozambique, in which civilians and guerrillas die together, is another crucial episode, an example of utter brutality in a cruel war. Munashe's lover, Kudzai, a guerrilla woman, is killed in the fight. Speaking of the battle of Chimoio, Munashe observes that "life and death had become interchangeable" (Kanengoni 1997: 55); the thought of all the deaths he had caused in the war increases his sense of hopelessness and confusion: those experiences fill him with a sense of futility and loss. War for Munashe becomes an ontological category, a pervasive mode of existence (Primorac 2006: 136).

Echoing Silences includes flashbacks from Munashe's past life, and partly follows a linear structure, interrupted by visions, memories and the appearance of ghosts: he is constantly plagued by the *ngozi* (that is the avenging spirit of a wronged person) and the weight of grievous memories destroys his daily life, so he travels home in search of healing, then decides to visit the village of the woman he killed. The world of the spirits is also portrayed by Kanengoni, whose narration mixes the supernatural with the common experience (Vambe 2004: 6).

Kanengoni's novel makes clear that war has terrible effects on individuals: both men and women have their lives irreparably disrupted. Despite its political value, the struggle of national liberation is a source of evil, and the evil deeds committed during the fight do not disappear after independence. Munashe is portrayed as a victim, but also as a perpetrator. In the first ritual, a lioness, the spirit of the family, speaks through Munashe's aunt; during the second ceremony, he is possessed by the spirit of the woman with the baby on her back. Through "ceremonial cleansing", Munashe is able to join Kudzai, Comrade Bazooka, Comrade Sly. In his dream, he sees Herbert Chitepo and other dead heroes. The murder of the heroic Herbert Chitepo marked the beginning of the betrayal of the revolution: "It all began with silence. We deliberately kept silent about some truths, no matter how small, because none of us felt that we would compromise our power. [...] Then the silence spilled into the everyday lives of our people and translated itself into fear" (Kanengoni 1997: 87). In the insanity which engulfs the nation, the only hope is the refusal of silence. If nobody has the courage to speak aloud, healing and reconciliation are out of question. Kanengoni, the writer, has broken the silence, although his character Munashe declares that "telling the stories is an ordeal. It's as if the war has begun all over again" (Kanengoni 1997: 60). Each individual has a story to tell, or re-tell, or, rather, everybody "is" a story, because his or her story envelops the stories of the dead, who cannot speak any longer. To Kudzai's mother questioning him, Munashe answers "I am a long story" (Kanengoni 1997: 74). In this sense, literature has the function of de-silencing, it helps people remove the fears that make them un-free (Kaarsholm 2005: 14) and, in a wider context, maybe, allows the new nation to find a new identity.

Alexandra Fuller's *Scribbling the Cat. Travels with an African Soldier* is dedicated to Kanengoni. Fuller's novel, striving to establish the identity of its author as an 'African

writer', is framed with quotations from the guerrilla fighter and author of *Echoing Silences*. Fuller's parents moved from Derbyshire to Rhodesia in 1972; in *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* (2001), her first book, she tells the story of her childhood in various farms in Rhodesia and later in Malawi and Zambia (Harris 2005). Fuller fictionalizes her white Zimbabwean identity employing the discourses of belonging (Lewis 2003, Whitlock 2000, Simoes da Silva 2005).

The "white African writer" highlights the racial barrier dividing the different sides of the liberation war, because "on the whole, it was a war of race, but it was also a war of clashing nations and conflicting ideals" (Fuller 2004: 36). In *Scribbling the Cat*, she tries to engage a dialogue with Kanengoni's narration. This attitude seems to imply a desire of reconciliation with the past through the sharing of a common narrative. Reflecting on the war wounds, Fuller writes:

Those of us who grow in war know no boundaries. After all, that most sacred and basic boundary of all (Thou shalt not kill) is not only ignored in war, but outright flaunted and scoffed at. We (guilty and secret and surviving, and more cunning than the dead) will seep into unseen cracks to find solace (Fuller 2004: 250).

The idea of a shared consciousness suggests that silence can bring reconciliation better than words; yet, for Fuller words are crucial to shape the sense of uncertainty and anguish experienced by the survivors. Fuller's *Scribbling the Cat*, the first-person account of a woman writer now living in the USA, begins with Fuller's visit to the Sole Valley in Zambia, where her parents run a farm and where she meets K., a veteran of an all-white unity fighting against the rebel forces across the border in Mozambique. Fuller and the veteran begin a trip together through land-mine studded Mozambique towards the battlefields of more than twenty years before, in search of the origins of K's "spooks" and demons.

K. gradually unfolds the story of his personal failures, and most of all he remembers when he was a "hunter", who had to sniff out the "gooks" (a slang and disparaging word meaning black guerrilla fighters). He admits committing terrible crimes during the war, in the span of five years that were, nonetheless, in some ways, the best of his life (Fuller 2004: 58). K. has a deep knowledge of the land: "I know this place like the back of my hand. I've walked all over this land. Shit, I've crawled over half of it on my belly" (Fuller 2004: 172); this makes him very similar to the natives he had fought against. His strong affinity with the land across the border of Mozambique is emphasized by the author. During the war K. "sniffed" the enemies; now, travelling in the areas of the worst battles and ambushes, he becomes increasingly able to "smell" memories (Fuller 2004: 144), highlighting the relevance of his physical sensations in the environment, and thus linking and testing past and present.

By the end of the war, K.'s comrades were just "automatons" (Fuller 2004: 30), "killing machines" (Fuller 2004: 26). Collecting K.'s confessions, Fuller explores the shattered lives of the soldiers who struggled on the losing side of that bloody war, and, at the same time, she examines the psychological cracks she finds in herself, as her perception of her own life changes and she is both attracted and repelled by the harsh personality of the white soldier. War projects its dark shadows on the present: returning to the scenes of his war crimes does not provide K. with any kind of peace and reconciliation. "War is not the fault of soldiers, but it becomes their life's burden" (Fuller 2004: 38): both sides were brutalized by the experience of the war.

The complete dehumanization of the killers is revealed through the figures of other war veterans, whom Alexandra and K. meet during their trip; the former soldiers, just as K. does, still adopt their war names: they are tough guys, tattooed, with shaggy beards, shouting their ghosts away all night. "We were all mad in that war" (Fuller 2004: 197) one of them, Mapenga, admits. He adds: "I tormented people, but the person I tormented the most was myself" (Fuller 2004: 197). War created a world of insanity, of "spooks": the days of the former white warriors are marked by prayers and plenty of booze, the nights by soul-stirring nightmares.

As a sort of mutual understanding develops between the veteran and the young woman, K. recounts his darkest secret to Alexandra, the torture of a teenage girl: he remembers how he forced her to tell where the rebels fighters were hiding by pouring hot "sadza" (porridge) into her vagina; it was the worst savagery he ever committed, "I was an animal. An absolute fucking savage..." (Fuller 2004: 152), he says. And Alexandra exclaims: "This was my war too. I had been a small smug white girl shouting, We are all Rhodesians and we'll fight through *thickanthin*. I was every bit that woman's murderer" (Fuller 2004: 152).

Fuller unveils a postcolonial dilemma: which is the role played by former oppressors in postcolonial nations? Where will they go? Where will they live if their homes and properties in Africa are no longer theirs? Fuller's and K.'s whiteness in Africa, the colonial heritage inscribed in their very skin, is an unavoidable stigma (Rawerda 2009: 57). Fuller occupies the ambiguous position of the 'settler-invader' woman, she is both killer and victim. She confesses her complicity in Rhodesian atrocities and her childhood naturalization of the settler ideology. On the other hand, she becomes a victim in a gendered discourse which sees women as the object of male desire and exclude them from active roles in the war (Dodgson-Katiyo 2009: 71). By admitting she took part in the war, by suggesting she is "that woman's murderer", Fuller raises the issue of collective responsibility, and the question whether all the white settlers were accomplices to the brutal crimes performed by their soldiers. In a sense, Fuller identifies both with the black girl tortured and with the veteran, who tortured the black girl. K. reveals that after the

rape the girl told the name of the 'gooks' hiding nearby, so that K. was able to kill them; she died two weeks later from her injuries.

However, the discourse of guilt encompasses all the characters: both the white and black survivors owe their lives to the death of the others, and they have blood on their hands. The geographical dispossession enforced by colonialism and the subsequent liberation war generate a sense of displacement of the black as well as of the white people. As a double outcast (a white 'African' reclaiming an African identity, who has left her parents in Zambia and now lives in the US), Fuller acknowledges the trauma of a doomed war, in which her party was defeated, by proclaiming a sort of truce, a reconciliation based on the awareness that war is a tragic experience destroying the bodies and the souls of everyone involved in it also after the end of the conflict. This is nevertheless more a theoretical than a practical issue, because in countries occupied by settler communities such as Zimbabwe, reconciliation would need to be pursued as a multi-dimensional process aimed at rebuilding and healing society, and redefining political relationships.

An 'ontology of suffering' is disclosed in both Kanengoni's and Fuller's texts (Chan 2005): the complete dehumanization springing from the civil war creates a world of disorientation and insanity, and generates a sense of endless guilt in the survivors. In a sense, nobody gains an ultimate victory; every side of the civil war is made up of losers. In *Scribbling the Cat* the former Rhodesian soldiers with their devastated lives convince Fuller that no one ever recovers from the experience of war. The scars of the war are in the mind of the survivors and also in the bruised landscape. The bush appears as an enormous grave, and K. remembers when he was busy carrying away the body-bags full of corpses. Moreover, mines have been disseminated everywhere, in arable lands, bridges, railroads, schools and factories; the removal of mines has left holes in the surface of uneven roads, creating hellish craters. The damaged landscape of the present recalls the horrors of the past.

Kanengoni's territory of displacement and horror is equally disturbing. After the Nyadzonja massacre of civilians, the scenery is totally reshaped:

Whole bodies of little boys and girls, young men and women, old men and old women lay scattered amongst those with decapitated heads, crushed skulls, shattered faces, missing limbs and shredded stomachs. Flies, swarms of heavy, green flies hovered over the bodies moving from corpse to corpse like helicopters during an attack: the worms had not yet appeared, they would come later (Kanengoni 1997: 55).

In Kanengoni's novel, the soldier's visions enlighten a topography of war memories inhabiting a dreary post-colonial landscape; depicting the space altered by the war, the

writer unfolds the troubles of the new independent nation, through images that become tropes and metaphors of violence.

Kanengoni's and Fuller's texts mirror each other in several points and are connected not only by their traumatic recollections of personal experiences but also by their narrative techniques. Both their main characters explore the borders between Mozambique and Rhodesia, in a journey back to the source of their troubles: "There is no way that I can reconcile myself with the ghosts of the war without beginning in Mozambique" (Kanengoni 1997: 66), says Munashe, who nevertheless is unable to make the journey. In fact, when the war in Rhodesia was raging, Mozambique became a harbour and training ground for African soldiers fighting the whites. Fuller remarks that "of all the places we came to follow K.'s war, this was the most frozen in time. It was as if the war had stepped away from its desk for a moment, but would be right back" (Fuller 2004: 242).

Travelling through space and time facilitates the expression of memory. K.'s and Munashe's traumatic recollections focus on a crucial accident, the act of violence against a woman; however, K. tortures and rapes the black girl on his own account, whereas Munashe follows the orders of a superior, totally aware of the inhumanity of the action he is performing. This difference implies that K., the white soldier, is in a position of authority, while Munashe, the black fighter, is powerless, because he understands that his ideals of liberation must be measured against involuntary violence. Fuller seems to emphasize the issue of colonial guilt, Kanengoni the disillusionment of the liberation struggle.

The fragmentation of the recollections shaping the past and influencing the present establishes the major link between the two works (Norridge 2008); K.'s thoughts are mediated by Fuller's narrative voice, while Munashe's mind is represented through a third-person narration. The conjuring up of war memories, generating deep anguish, trauma and even hallucinations, is pursued in different ways by the two writers, who share the same purpose of healing the troubled mind of the main characters. This is true of most contemporary Zimbabwean literature, to which also Fuller belongs with a personal voice and perspective.

However, those fighting to maintain Rhodesia a white racist country and those struggling for freedom and black majority rule do have very different stories to tell. Can we detect a shared identity created through suffering? In the case of Kanengoni, only the figure of a Christ-like, mysterious rifleman (Kanengoni 1997: 31) suggests that there is a universal idea of justice and redemption. Instead, K. is a character rooted in the mould of the cynical and amoral white mercenaries, more similar to the South African commando ruthlessly ambushed and destroyed by Munashe and his comrades (Kanengoni 1997: 31).

In such a political and moral predicament, Fuller places herself as a hybrid subject, both an insider and an outsider in Africa: "I had shaken loose the ghosts of K.'s past and he had allowed me to enter into the deepest corners of his closet. Instead of giving each

other some kind of peace and understanding, we had inflamed existing wounds" (Fuller 2004: 238). A sense of loss pervades also Kanengoni's quest, while the possibility of a new beginning is envisaged; after crossing the river, a natural place polluted by the violence of the conflict but still rich of spiritual meanings, in his final dream Munashe "felt a strange sensation: as if he were born again. And once on the other side, he felt a new man and he could feel the light in his eyes and the spring in his stride" (Kanengoni 1997: 86). As a novel that comes out of a nation whose history has become embedded in violence, *Echoing Silences* implies a quest for redemption and the restoration of sanity. One can read the novel as an articulation of a past that the nation has shied away from confronting; in this way, the novel becomes a conduit through which tradition finds its voice to deliver a potent indictment of violence as a political tool.

In conclusion, a sense of uncertainty and instability shapes Zimbabwean narrations dealing with changing identities and responsibilities in relation to the past, as they strive to encompass the personal and the collective memories of the racially divided former settler colony and now independent country. Zimbabwe's postcolonial national history and cultural identity include differences and conflicts, as well as fluctuating interpretations of the past. Remembering the trauma of the civil war from opposite perspectives implies the construction of different narrative versions of it, but it also requires the act of unburying collective memories, belonging both to the former colonizers and to the black citizens of the new nation. In this way, maybe, literature provides a means for overcoming traumatic erasures and excisions. According to Wole Soyinka, reconciliation involves "a process of baring the truth of one's history in order to exorcise the past and secure a collective peace of mind, the healing of a bruised psyche" (Soyinka 1999: 23).

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Nicoletta Brazzelli is a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Milan. Her research interests include travel writing, exploration narratives, nineteenth-century romance, postcolonial fiction and the geographical imagination. She has published on Mary Kingsley, H. M. Stanley, H. R. Haggard, R. L. Stevenson, R. F. Scott, V. S. Naipaul, Beryl Bainbridge and Abdulrazak Gurnah. Her latest books are *Lands of Desire and Loss. British Colonial and Postcolonial Spaces* (Peter Lang 2012) and *L'Antartide nell'immaginario inglese. Spazio geografico e testo letterario* (Ledizioni 2015). Brazzelli also edited three volumes, on islands, rivers and seas between geography and literature (Mimesis 2012-13-14).

nicoletta.brazzelli@unimi.it



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Angelo Monaco

Post-Partition Conflicts and Diasporic Loss in Amitav Ghosh and Jhumpa Lahiri's Narratives

Abstract I: Il mio articolo analizza *The Shadow Lines* di Amitav Ghosh e il racconto di Jhumpa Lahiri "When Mr. Pirzada came to dine" proponendo un'analisi di narrazioni che hanno meglio rappresentato gli antagonismi nell'India della post-Spartizione. La lunga ombra della Spartizione del 1947 ha lasciato un'eredità di spartizioni, in scala ridotta, che hanno continuato a segnare la recente storia indiana. Le dislocazioni diasporiche sono pertanto documentate in narrazioni che, focalizzandosi su ricordi di smarrimento e tensioni, hanno illuminato il potere etico e trasformativo della letteratura transnazionale.

Abstract II: My article investigates Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Jhumpa Lahiri's story "When Mr. Pirzada came to dine" so as to propose an analysis of narratives which best capture the antagonisms of post-Partition India. The long shadow of the 1947 Partition entailed further small-scale partitions which have marked recent Indian history. Diasporic dislocations are hence documented in such narratives which, revolving around memories of loss and tensions, unveil the transformative and ethic power of transnational literature.

"What sense did the world make? Where was God, the Bloody Fool? Did He have no notion of fair and unfair? Couldn't He read a simple balance sheet? He would have been sacked long ago if He were managing a corporation, the things he allowed to happen [...]"
Rohinton Mistry, *A Fine Balance*

Scholars agree that the Partition was a moment of traumatic loss, a cataclysmic event which caused millions of people to cross the boundaries of their new homelands. "A time of great uncertainty, humiliation, anger, sadness and trauma" (Roy & Bhatia 2008: x), recalling Partition means remembering the massacre of nearly two million people,

thousands of abducted women, refugees mustered on trains on both sides of the border, forced religious conversions, and scenes of crude violence.

The 'long shadow' of Partition (Butalia 2015) also entailed traumatic after-effects. In the wake of 1947, further small-scale partitions – of not less heinous kind – have marked recent Indian history. Militarized violence, tortures and abuses have widened the gaps, constructing borders among new geopolitical spaces (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh), religious faiths (Hindu, Muslim and other minorities) and social classes. This is perhaps why, even years later on, memories of Partition and of its enduring consequences continue to inspire writers, journalists and scholars although they did not directly witness the violence and the troubles of the event. As the young Maneck comments in the epigraph to my article, Indian history encompasses images of chaos and upheaval while God seems to passively turn the gaze away from the disruptions in the lives of common people.

Diaspora is a necessary fall-out of such a complete mayhem: alienation, displacement and dislocation are documented in narratives revolving around memories of loss and tensions. In examining historical frictions and in recollecting and saving memories from slipping into the realm of negligence, literature enables readers to understand the emotional impact of these events. Diaspora studies, which hinge on a shift from the rigid borders of nation-states towards cross-cultural directions, look at narrative memory a site "where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed" (Brah 1996: 208).

My paper explores the narratives by Amitav Ghosh and Jhumpa Lahiri which best capture the antagonisms of post-Partition India, epitomizing the transformative power that creative writing can offer with regard to a history of anxiety and violence. Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and Lahiri's story "When Mr. Pirzada came to dine" – in her 1999 collection *Interpreter of Maladies* – exemplify through the traumatic experiences of their main characters a deep engagement with the way past violent history survives in diasporic literary imagination.

Amitav Ghosh's novel, *The Shadow Lines*, was published in 1988, only four years after the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her two Sikh bodyguards. The novel is a family-saga spanning three generations from Calcutta to London, combining personal and private stories with major historical episodes. The nameless narrator is a young Indian man who temporarily moves to London to study at university. Born in post-Partition India, in 1952, he tries to make sense of what happened years before and after his birth. On the threshold of his Indian descent and Western education, the narrator (in)directly witnesses and connects a multiplicity of upheavals. Travelling from Calcutta to London and then back home (the novel is divided in two parts entitled "Going Away" and "Coming Home"), the narrator tells the stories of his relatives, particularly of his grandmother Th'amma and of his adored second cousin Tridib, who like the narrator was educated in Britain.

The narrative chronologically shuttles from the outbreak of World War II to the 1964 riots in East Pakistan and West Bengal. It therefore moves back and forth in non-linear mode, revolving around important conflicts such as the Swadeshi movement, the Second World War, the Partition of India, the 1963-64 communal riots in Dhaka and Calcutta, the Maoist Movement, the 1962 India-China War, the 1965 India-Pakistan War, and the fall of Dhaka in East Pakistan which led to creation of Bangladesh. The juxtaposition of different places and historical conflicts exemplifies a dialogic perspective. Following Avtar Brah, I argue that Ghosh's 'shadow lines' suggest the concept of 'diaspora space' as a place which "includes the entanglement, the intertwining of genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'" (Brah 1996: 209). Diaspora space, therefore, captures ethnic diversity and a variety of racial, linguistic and religious differences.

In dealing with a complex and unstable concept as the nation, Ghosh makes it clear that nations are elusive and shadowy entities and that barriers between nations generate animosity and violence. The Indian-American writer explores the notion of freedom since the momentous event of 1947 when subcontinental citizens liberated themselves from the manacles of the British Empire. Th'amma, then a student in Dhaka, experienced the violence of the nationalist propaganda which led to the birth of the two countries, India, and West and East Pakistan. Born in Dhaka (East Pakistan), but separated from her birthplace by bloodshed and lines on maps, Th'amma moves to Calcutta (West Bengal) where her idealism rapidly turns into disillusionment. She experiences homeliness and gradual alienation, feelings that ultimately awaken a sense of hatred against her erstwhile West Pakistani fellow citizens. During the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war the old lady decides to donate her jewelry to support the fight for freedom against West Pakistan: "I gave it *away*, she screamed. I gave it to the fund for the war. I had to, don't you see? For *your* sake; for your freedom. We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them, out" (Ghosh 2005: 232). The 1965 war arouses the very same feelings of nationalist resistance against British imperialism in Th'amma who becomes "a hopelessly aggressive nationalist who never really comes to terms with the absurdity of her misplaced citizenship" (Ashcroft 2013: 24).

Diasporic dislocations and memories pervade the novel and Th'amma embodies the receptacle of a larger narrative which is buried at the interstice of private stories and historical events. The novel, hence, becomes the space where "the shadow lines" of collective and individual memories merge and collide, undermining the geopolitical boundaries within the Indian subcontinent.

With a consistent focus on violence and devastation, the novel charts ethnic and religious tensions which engender private disruptions. The narrator, for instance, conjures up Tridib's recollections of the 1940 September Blitz in London. The images of "the drone of the plans" (Ghosh 2005: 100) and "the realities of the bombs and torpedoes and the dying" (Ghosh 2005: 66) are juxtaposed to Indian conflicts, portraying a context of

devastation with multiple foci. Time and space are inexorably linked in the novel and the narrator feels haunted “by the ghosts of the nine-year-old Tridib, sitting on a camp bed, just as I was, his small face intent, listening to the bombs” (Ghosh 2005: 178). Such a ghostliness is “the absence of time and distance” (Ghosh 2005: 178) that blends official historical conflicts in India and Britain with private affairs.

Tridib’s death during the 1964 January riots that shattered the border between West Bengal and East Pakistan represents the core of the novel. His death, which is a personal loss to the narrator, represents the sacrificial victim of a conflict originating in the destructive forces of religious fundamentalism and in the nationalist rhetoric of the long shadow of Partition. The 1964 riots erupted in the aftermath of the incident in the Hazratbal mosque in Kashmir, when a sacred relic, a single strand of hair believed to be of Prophet Mohammad, was mysteriously stolen. The communal violence which broke out was a “massacre and ethnic cleansing of Bengali Hindus” (Butalia 2015: 176) while thousands of Hindus left East Pakistan to seek refuge in West Bengal. Yet, these skirmishes were not a major episode in official historiography and the narrator’s recollection is “the product of a struggle with silence [...] a silence enforced by a ruthless state” with “no barbed wire, no check-points” (Ghosh 2005: 225). The narrator will discover the truth about Tridib’s sacrifice only fifteen years later while attending a PhD conference on South Asian history in London. He then investigates archives and newspapers, recollecting the images of Calcutta’s empty streets and the eerie silence in a city that had turned against its own inhabitants, while “the riots had faded away from the pages of the newspapers [...] they had dropped out of memory into the crater of a volcano of silence” (Ghosh 2005: 226). Once more, space and time overlap in the narrator’s mental mapping and he finally finds a link between his “nightmare bus ride back from school and the events that befell Tridib and others in Dhaka” (Ghosh 2005: 214).

By evoking such events, Ghosh aims at showing how futile is to draw lines. The narrator’s final remark – while observing the old Bartholomew’s Atlas where Tridib used to show places to him – that borders had been drawn “in the enchantment of lines” (Ghosh 2005: 228) conveys a bitter critique of national and religious barriers. By the end of the novel, the narrator is aware that some people, like his grandmother, have been enchanted by the need to draw lines. Nevertheless, the narrator positions himself in connection with Tridib’s transcultural stance: as the embodiment of diasporic memory, his narrative ultimately rejects the idea of space and time as key features of division with no barriers to freedom being created. Behind Tridib’s death, Ghosh articulates a healing transcultural message. By blurring the lines that divide reality and imagination, the self and the other, the first person anonymous narrator tries to encompass disparate cultures, countries and histories within the trajectories of his own coming of age.

While *The Shadow Lines* only touches upon the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, this conflict is the historical event against which Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story “When Mr.

Pirzada came to dine” is set. The story is part of Lahiri’s 1999 debut collection *Interpreter of Maladies* which won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize. Using the diasporic viewpoint of Lilia, a ten-year-old American child of Bengali descent, the story features the Indo-Pakistan war which led to the creation of Bangladesh, a second, and in no way less disruptive, partition in the Indian subcontinent. Lilia confronts her ethnic origin by observing Mr. Pirzada who is a regular guest in her house for a short period. A Pakistani Muslim, the man is on study leave in the US and he visits Lilia’s parents, who are Hindus of Indian origin. Mr. Pirzada is anxious about his own family in Dhaka which is endangered by the terrible conflict:

In the autumn of 1971 a man used to come to our house, bearing confections in his pocket and hopes of ascertaining the life or death of his family. His name was Mr. Pirzada, and he came from Dacca, now the capital of Bangladesh, but then a part of Pakistan. That year Pakistan was engaged in civil war. The eastern frontier, where Dacca was located, was fighting for autonomy from the ruling regime in the west. In March, Dacca had been invaded, torched, and shelled by the Pakistani army. Teachers were dragged onto streets and shot, women dragged into barracks and raped. By the end of the summer, three hundred thousand people were said to have died (Lahiri 1999: 23).

Choosing the reportage mode, Lahiri opens her tale by associating Mr. Pirzada with contrasting images. For Lilia, the Pakistani man is a source of enjoyment, since he brings her confectionaries; on the other hand, Mr. Pirzada comes to be related to the scenes of violence broadcast through TV coverage, such as “tanks rolling through dusty streets, fallen buildings [...] boats with fan-shaped sails floating on wide coffee-colored rivers, a barricaded university, newspaper offices burnt to the ground” (Lahiri 1999: 31).

Lahiri’s story indirectly exposes the American endorsement of an undivided Pakistan, since “the United States was siding with West Pakistan, the Soviet Union with India, and with what was soon to be Bangladesh” (Lahiri 1999: 40). According to Naeem Mohaiemen, the 1971 Liberation War was the first TV war since “the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh marked a zenith in this media influence” (Mohaiemen 2008) with British and American reporters capturing the scenes of the conflict. Mohaiemen argues that the foreign TV narration served to erase the two main interests of the Indian government: the possibility to reduce the political power of Pakistan by splitting the country’s unity, and the tendency to avoid linkages between the conflict in East Pakistan and the Maoist riots of the Naxalites which had already inflamed West Bengal. The result was a TV narrative that depicted “a more palatable story of simple, gentle Bengali people, persecuted by more aggressive, militant and more Islamic Pakistan” (Mohaiemen 2008).

Yet, Lilia cannot but notice the many similarities her parents share with the guest that she still considers “Indian” in spite of her father’s clarification that after 1947 Mr. Pirzada is no longer an Indian citizen. The arbitrary line drawn between Hindus and

Muslims makes no difference to Lilia. Even when her father shows her the geographical map with different colours for India and Pakistan, she reflects upon the arbitrary use of colours. Borders, like “shadow lines”, illustrate the gap between political maps and sense of solidarity. For Lilia, geopolitical belonging conflicts with ethnic identity and the recollection of the 1971 events remains “a remote mystery with haphazard clues” (Lahiri 1999: 40). Because of her youth, Lilia cannot understand why a man speaking the same language as her parents has to be perceived as “other”. She therefore tries to learn more at the school library, but when her American teacher finds her with a book about Indian history she discourages Lilia by saying “I see no reason to consult it” (Lahiri 1999: 31). By highlighting that Lilia learns only American history and geography at school, Lahiri indirectly denounces America turning a blind eye to a genocide that Mohaiemen views as a “frozen object” (Mohaiemen 2011: 40) which still needs to be fully disclosed and investigated.

Lahiri’s diasporic viewpoint retains the trace of Indian post-independence traumas: the birth of a new nation, in the wake of the long shadow of Partition, is tied to Lilia’s awareness of her transnational citizenship. The narrative of the war episodes, through TV coverage, prompts a sense of guilt in the girl because of her privileged life in the US. Every night, Lilia enacts a ritual in order to exorcize her apprehensions about Mr. Pirzada’s seven daughters in Dhaka: she eats the candy the Pakistani guest gives her every evening praying for his daughters who are in danger. With this rite, Lilia tries to counterbalance the starving condition of the East Pakistani refugees she learns about on TV. Finally, when Mr. Pirzada is happily reunited with his family in Bangladesh, Lilia gives up eating confectionaries which she had been stocking up for their sake.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s light touch combines traumatic snapshots of the war with the naïf thoughts of a second-generation migrant child. By using the first-person narration in the perspective of a child, which reminds of Lenny in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man* (1988), Lahiri “blunts the sharp fears about complex historical processes that she [Lilia] cannot fully understand” (Monaco 2015: 83). On one hand, this narrative strategy reduces the political and historic burden of the event, while, on the other hand, the Indian endo-diaspora is symbolically scattered in America through TV news. Following Cohen, I suggest that Lahiri illuminates the claims that the country of origin can have on diasporic subjects because of “the acceptance of the inexplicable link with their past migration history” (Cohen 1997: ix). In this story, Lahiri gives voice to a child whose ethical concern towards the victims of massacres and rapes in Bangladesh poses questions about the implications of geopolitical divisions and nationalist discourses in the Indian subcontinent. Lilia’s narrative functions also as a counter-memory which criticizes the suppression of ethnic history by American hegemonic ideology, showing the limited access she has to the Bengali side of her hyphenated identity.

Ghosh and Lahiri belong to the new Indian diaspora literature (Mishra 2007) and they take a similar stance towards the ethical burden of traumatic narratives. The diasporic experience implies a significant crossing of borders, which may be the borders of a region, a nation, a religion, or a language. The diaspora, as a consequence, produces tensional crossings and traumatic loss. Like a never-healing wound, the absence of a motherland is then transmitted to the subsequent generations, transforming mourning into melancholia. Ghosh and Lahiri's fictional accounts employ the ingenuous eyes of children in order to depict the problematic dynamics of political and religious frictions. Their works mix religious and ethnic differences in a transcultural cosmopolitanism which perceives borders as porous and fluid. Whereas Lilia copes with geopolitical questions with a strategy that arouses humor, the narrator in Ghosh's novel interrogates ethical responsibility in transcultural space.

Both writers shed light on neglected and dim memories of the past, by overlapping borders, fragments of memory and media coverage in a multidimensional perspective. Unlike Ghosh who defies spatial and temporal specificities, Lahiri's tendency is more poised and ironical, even though not less intense and critical. Their works bring to the fore the transformative power of transnational literature, unveiling its relevant ethical function. By relating memory to diaspora, Ghosh and Lahiri provide examples of an ongoing displacement. Diasporic memory is a performative process shaped both by amnesia and recollection. Such a performative platform bridges individual and collective experiences, infusing historical memory with real and imagined meanings. In the attempts of meaning-making, these narrative are communicative mediums that expand collective memory. Through their ethical position, diasporic subjectivities appropriate and rewrite their marginalized stories. The "diasporic imaginary", hence, discloses its ethical turn to preserve cultural memory, its "ethical necessity to revitalize, to self-critique" (Mishra 2007: 210). The call to ethics in the South Asian texts analyzed here, in conclusion, alerts readers to their global membership, working out ethical connectivity between citizens of the same globe.

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Angelo Monaco is a PhD candidate in English Literature at the University of Pisa. His research interests focus on South-Asian literature, with particular attention to Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction, trauma studies, postcolonialism and ecocriticism. He has published articles on Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitav Ghosh, Monica Ali and Hanif Kureishi.
angelo.monaco@gmail.com



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Ellen Patat

"I timidi fiori del cuore e della mente": *Verses of a V.A.D.*

Abstract I: *Verses of a V.A.D.* di Vera Brittain s'inserisce nel genere della poesia di guerra, un dominio fortemente maschile, presentando al lettore i pensieri di un'infermiera volontaria durante la Prima Guerra Mondiale. Le emozioni catturate nelle immagini verbali presentate nelle poesie di questa raccolta non hanno segnato solo la vita della scrittrice britannica ma rappresentano i sentimenti delle donne che si sono ritrovate in una situazione analoga e che non hanno saputo o potuto dar voce alle loro pene. Attraverso la selezione di alcune poesie, proposte anche in traduzione italiana, si vuole scoprire il vissuto di una donna durante gli anni della Grande Guerra. La dialettica vita/morte si rispecchia nei versi dell'autrice che usa l'arte della poesia come strumento per l'elaborazione del lutto e delle difficoltà che si trova a dover affrontare separata dai suoi affetti più cari. Con poesie caratterizzate da uno stile essenziale, un lessico semplice e la brevità del verso, Vera Brittain mette su carta il proprio dolore in "timidi fiori del cuore e della mente"; una poesia concreta, testimonianza dell'addio a tante vite e della speranza di poter sopravvivere in un presente fatto di tanti vuoti e mancanze.

Abstract II: Vera Brittain's *Verses of a V.A.D.* belongs to the war poetry genre, a predominantly male domain, and presents the reader with the thoughts of a volunteer nurse during the First World War. Not only have the emotions evoked by the verbal images of the poems in this collection marked the life of the British writer, but they also represent the feelings of many women who found themselves in similar situations and could not or did not know how to give voice to their sorrow. Through the selection of some poems, also translated in Italian, the present paper aims to explore a woman's experience during the Great War. The dialectic life/death is reflected in the verses of the author who uses the art of poetry as a tool for mourning when deprived of her loved ones. Through poems characterized by an essential style, a simple vocabulary and brief verses, Vera Brittain puts on paper her sorrow in "shy flowers of the heart and the mind"; poems that bear witness to the passing away of many lives and to the hope to survive in a present burdened with so many losses.

Le poesie di Vera Brittain¹ sono “i primi timidi fiori del cuore e della mente di una giovane donna che ha lavorato incessantemente, dimenticando se stessa, per il bene degli altri” (Brittain 1918: ii)². Raccontano le storie di centinaia di soldati che come tanti Johnny e Mehmet³ sono caduti sui campi di battaglia; aridi elenchi, liste, ragguagli e relazioni sono stati stilati con cifre sconvolgenti ma ciò che è rimasto è il ricordo; la memoria della vita ma, soprattutto, della morte delle persone comuni segna, infatti, la storia di ogni conflitto armato. Il noto chiasmo brechtiano, “Fra i vinti la povera gente faceva la fame. Fra i vincitori faceva la fame la povera gente egualmente” (Brecht 1939), nella sua immediatezza riassume il pensiero, da molti condiviso, dell’autore tedesco sull’assurdità della guerra e il coinvolgimento della maggioranza della popolazione, appunto la gente comune, che spesso rimane in secondo piano nella storiografia evenemenziale e cronachistica. Durante un conflitto bellico di portata eccezionale come la Prima Guerra Mondiale, l’ordine e gli abituali ruoli sociali vengono sconvolti; finiscono per mutare, alle volte radicalmente, lasciando alle spalle un passato di nostalgia idilliaca, oppure sembrano cambiare ma sostanzialmente diventano le ridefinizioni di un ordine precostituito⁴. Ciò che è certo è che le classiche differenze di razza, religione e ceto vengono alterate, temporaneamente, perché nel dolore e nella sofferenza esse cessano di essere importanti. Numerosi sono i resoconti e le descrizioni di guerra che hanno portato alla luce la storia del singolo e che si sono concentrate su un tratto particolare della guerra o dell’esperienza, molto spesso maschile, al fronte. Senza dubbio, le tracce dei conflitti armati restano impresse sulle cose e sulle persone, ma sono le cicatrici interiori, quelle sull’animo, che provocano una metamorfosi profonda. “Le tue ferite di guerra”, scriveva Vera Brittain, “sono cicatrici sul mio cuore” (Brittain 1918: 33)⁵; un’immagine che può essere dilatata assumendo connotazioni universali attraverso le parole di Giuseppe Ungaretti, “È il mio

¹ Vera Mary Brittain (Newcastle-Under-Lyme 1893 – Londra 1970). Per ulteriori dettagli: Bostridge 2015; M. Bostridge & P. Berry 2002.

² È definendo i componimenti poetici della racconta in esame, *Verses of a V.A.D.*, “these first flowers of the heart and mind of a young girl who has worked unceasingly and self-forgettingly for the good of others” che Marie Connor Leighton nella prefazione del testo fa appello ad una certa considerazione e affettuosa partecipazione (“considerateness and tender sympathy”) nel giudicare i componimenti (Brittain 1918: ii).

³ Riferimento alle parole attribuite a Mustafa Kemal Atatürk riportate in traduzione inglese sulla lapide commemorativa nella Penisola di Gallipoli che accomunano i soldati dei due diversi paesi caduti sul suolo turco [*Testo parziale*: “Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives ... You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehments to us where they lie side by side here in this country of ours”].

⁴ Si pensi al ruolo delle donne e di alcune minoranze etniche. Si veda: Watson 2004 e Dowling 2006.

⁵ Poesia scritta in memoria del Capitano E. H. Brittain. Si veda il testo completo nella n. 6 di seguito. La traduzione dei componimenti della raccolta *Verses of V.A.D.*, qui come altrove in questo articolo, è mia.

cuore / Il paese più straziato”⁶ (Ungaretti 2009: 89). La dimensione personale, rappresentata da ciò che c’è di più intimo e vivo – il cuore – acquista così valore assoluto come somma di individui ed esistenze diverse perché vivere in un periodo bellico e postbellico crea un sentimento di compartecipazione; si tratta di una sorta di catabasi bellica condivisa. È nella comunanza delle esperienze che il vissuto del singolo diventa racconto collettivo.

L’opera di Vera Brittain – poetessa, scrittrice, oratrice, intellettuale femminista e pacifista inglese – spazia dalla poesia al diario, dalle memorie⁷ alle corrispondenze epistolari⁸. Le storie di due innamorati, di due fratelli, di rapporti d’amicizia e di lavoro forniscono un’interpretazione delle vicissitudini, delle perdite, del dolore ma anche della speranza, dell’amore e della resistenza nel periodo della Grande Guerra. Brittain trasmette attraverso le sue poesie, le sue memorie e i carteggi, in particolare, con il fidanzato Roland Aubrey Leighton (1895-1915) e col fratello Edward H. Brittain (1895-1918) le emozioni e le sensazioni suscitate dal conflitto su una donna che all’improvviso vede il proprio mondo cambiare e sgretolarsi. L’autrice non rimane relegata al ruolo di donna passiva e inerme ma, così come numerose altre donne allo scoppio della guerra, si dedica attivamente alla cura delle persone. La selezione di alcune poesie della raccolta *Verses of a V.A.D.*, in cui l’acronimo V.A.D. indica il Voluntary Aid Detachment, associazione nata nel 1909 che includeva uomini e donne e che operava a livello sia nazionale sia internazionale (Bowser 2003), consente di ripercorrere attraverso alcune immagini simboliche l’esperienza di un’infermiera durante la Prima Guerra Mondiale.

Nel titolo della raccolta *Verses of a V.A.D.*, dedicata alla memoria dell’amato Roland A. Leighton, tenente del reggimento Worcestershire e pubblicata già nell’agosto 1918 subito dopo un evento che segnerà per sempre la vita della scrittrice inglese, ossia la morte del fratello Edward, la poetessa si identifica come membro di un gruppo ben definito contestualizzando se stessa – utilizzando però l’articolo indeterminativo e diventando ‘una delle tante’ – e i suoi componimenti. Vera Brittain non è l’unica infermiera V.A.D. con aspirazioni letterarie, infatti, tra le sue colleghe si possono ricordare la famosa scrittrice

⁶ *Testo completo*: San Martino sul carso / Valloncello dell’albero isolato il 27 agosto 1916 – Di queste case / Non è rimasto/ Che qualche / Brandello di muro // Di tanti / Che mi corrispondevano / Non è rimasto/ Neppure tanto // Ma nel cuore / Nessuna croce manca / È il mio cuore / Il paese più straziato.

⁷ Nota al pubblico soprattutto per le sue memorie, *Testament of Youth* (1933) è divenuta una miniserie di cinque episodi (in cui la parte della scrittrice è interpretata da Cheryl Campbell) della BBC nel 1979 e rilanciata sul grande schermo nel 2014 da James Kent (regista) e Juliette Towhidi (sceneggiatrice). La prima raccolta di poesie è *Verses of a V.A.D.* (1918) e il primo romanzo è *The Dark Tide* (1923). A *Testament of Youth* fanno seguito *Testament of Friendship* (1940) e *Testament of Experience* (1957). Tra le altre pubblicazioni: *Honourable Estate* (1936), *Letters to Peacelovers* (1939) e *Massacre by Bombing* (1944). Famoso è anche il suo diario *Chronicle of Youth* (1981), il diario 1913-1917 utilizzato come fonte principale per le sue memorie.

⁸ Le lettere tra Vera Brittain, il fratello Edward Brittain, il fidanzato Roland Leighton, gli amici Victor Richardson e Geoffrey Thurlow si trovano nell’Archivio Vera Brittain nella divisione William Ready della Collezione Archivi e Ricerca nella biblioteca dell’Università McMaster (Hamilton, Ontario).

Agatha Christie e Enid Bagnold, autrice di *National Velvet* (1935). Le infermiere V.A.D. trovano spazio anche in opere di fiction di Ernest Hemingway, quali, ad esempio, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) in cui si ritrova la ricca e pluridivorziata Brett Ashley e *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), con il personaggio di Catherine Barkley, e ancora Celia Compleston, in *The Cocktail Party* (1949) di T. S. Eliot.

Il lavoro e i compiti svolti dalle donne durante la guerra si manifestano in forme ed aree diverse, spesso in settori considerati prettamente maschili. Alcune, come Vera Brittain, spinte dalle più svariate motivazioni, vivono la 'loro' guerra arruolandosi in organizzazioni militari o paramilitari (Noakes; Watson 2004: 19)⁹ in cui "Highly educated women have learned to scrub floors, to labour with their hands, to undertake disagreeable duties, with no thought of fame or glory, but simply for the sake of sharing in the huge fight which has been thrust upon the British Empire" (Bowser 2003: 24). Brittain ebbe modo di venire a diretto contatto con la guerra negli ospedali sul suolo nazionale e all'estero¹⁰.

L'interesse per la letteratura e la scrittura nasce in giovane età e continua poi durante tutta la sua vita (Brittain 2015); paradossalmente, la stessa guerra che le ha stravolto la vita dà la spinta per diventare una scrittrice (Bostridge 2014: xvii). Il testo in esame comprende 28 componimenti di breve e media lunghezza con strofe senza metrica fissa, incluse le elegie a Roland, Edward, Victor, Geoffrey e poemi dedicati alle sue colleghe, 'le V.A.D. sisters'. Alcune poesie riportano la data (mese e anno) tra il 1915 e il 1919 e il luogo (Oxford, Londra, Francia, Malta) ma senza una regola costante. I temi trattati spaziano dal paesaggio naturale alla sofferenza e al dolore della guerra, i riferimenti a Dio, i compiti quotidiani da infermiera, i rapporti affettivi e le speranze future.

In alcune liriche le ellissi temporali – dal periodo prebellico, allo scoppio e alla durata della guerra e al periodo postbellico – creano rimandi a un passato felice e a un presente inquietante spesso gravato dalla sofferenza e dalla nostalgia. Senza data, ma intrisa del passare del tempo è "Then and Now":

⁹ Ad esempio: FANY (First Aid Nursing Yeomanry), VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment), Women's Auxiliary Force, WVR (Women's Volunteer Reserve), Women's Legion, WAAC (Women's Army Auxiliary Corps), WRAF (Women's Royal Air Force), WRNS (Women's Royal Naval Service), QMAAC (Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps).

¹⁰ Come infermiera volontaria nel giugno 1915 comincia a lavorare all'Ospedale Devonshire a Buxton, sua città natale. Nell'ottobre dello stesso anno fino a settembre 1916 lavora come V.A.D. all'Ospedale Generale Londra 1. Da ottobre 1916 a maggio 1917 viene assegnata all'Ospedale St. George di Malta e successivamente nell'agosto 1917 in Francia a Étapes. Rientrata in patria per occuparsi dei suoi genitori, lavora brevemente in un ospedale civile e viene poi trasferita a Millbank all'Ospedale Militare Queen Alexandra fino all'aprile 1919.

THEN AND NOW

Once the black pine-trees on

the mountain side,

The river dancing down the valley blue,

And strange brown grasses swaying with
the tide

All spoke to me of you.

But now the sullen streamlet creeping slow,

The moaning tree-tops dark above my head,

The weeds where once the grasses used to
grow,
Tell me that you are dead.

IERI E OGGI

Un tempo i neri pini sul fianco

della montagna

Il fiume che danzava scendendo la valle blu,

5 E l'inusuale erba marrone che ondeggiava con la
marea

Tutto mi parlava di te.

Ma ora il fiumiciattolo cupo che avanza lento,

Le lamentevoli cime degli alberi scure sopra il mio
capo]10 Le erbacce dove una volta cresceva l'erba
Mi raccontano che sei morto.

(Brittain 1918: 24)

La poesia è costruita su un gioco di contrapposizioni paesaggistiche e sentimentali. La dimensione temporale, esplicitata già nel titolo del poema, si ripresenta all'inizio di ogni quartina così come nella trasformazione del paesaggio, scandendo il passare inesorabile del tempo. La natura, descritta con gli occhi di una giovane donna che sembra spensierata, piena di gioia e di speranze, all'improvviso si trasforma e diventa tetra, cupa, quasi asfissiante e, antropomorfizzata, parla di perdita, di assenza e di morte. Il ritmo del breve componimento è rapido, poiché veloce è la successione delle immagini: nella prima quartina la natura sotto forma di montagne, valli, distese erbose e di un fiume danza in armonia, nella seconda, introdotta dall'avversativo, il fiumiciattolo rallenta, le montagne diventano un copricapo oscuro e l'erba lascia posto alle erbacce. Il passato e il presente, la vita e la morte, la felicità che fu e l'infelicità che sarà si fondono lasciando solo dolore e un intenso sentimento di perdita annunciati da una natura funesta (v. 11).

Il rapporto con Edward ha segnato profondamente la vita e le opere dell'autrice. La traumatica separazione dal fratello, così come percepito nel componimento poetico appena citato, ha creato una ferita che non si rimarginerà mai, tanto da far sì che ella voglia ricongiungersi, metaforicamente, con il fratello dopo la morte chiedendo che le sue ceneri vengano sparse sull'altopiano di Asiago (Dogar 2015) dove Edward, all'età di 22 anni, aveva dato la vita combattendo sul fronte italiano¹¹. La poesia "To My Brother", composta

¹¹ Per meglio comprendere la relazione con il fratello si rimanda alla corrispondenza epistolare (es. Bostridge 1998; Miller) e alle memorie in *Testament of Youth*.

quattro giorni prima della morte del fratello, è divenuta famosa per il verso d'apertura, citato in precedenza, che ha dato il titolo all'antologia di Catherine Reilly, *Scars Upon My Heart: Women's Poetry and Verse of the First World War* (1984)¹², uno dei pochi testi che danno voce alla poesia di guerra al femminile.

TO MY BROTHER*

A MIO FRATELLO*

(IN MEMORY OF JULY 1ST, 1916)

(IN RICORDO DEL 1° LUGLIO 1916)

Your battle-wounds are scars upon my heart,
Received when in that grand and tragic
"show"

You played your part

Two years ago,

5

Le tue ferite di battaglia sono cicatrici sul mio cuore,
Ricevute quando in quel grandioso e tragico
"spettacolo"

Hai fatto la tua parte

Due anni fa,

And silver in the summer morning sun
I see the symbol of your courage glow-
That Cross you won
Two years ago,

E argenteo nel sole mattutino estivo
Vedo il simbolo del tuo coraggio risplendere-
Quella Croce che hai vinto
Due anni fa,

Though now again you watch the shrapnel 10
Fly,
And hear the guns that daily louder grow,
As in July
Two years ago,

Sebbene ora di nuovo vedi lo shrapnel
Volare,
E senti i fucili che ogni giorno diventano più intensi
Come a luglio
Due anni fa,

May you endure to lead the Last Advance 15
And with your men pursue the flying foe
As once in France
Two years ago.

Possa tu sopportare di condurre l'Ultima Avanzata
E con i tuoi uomini inseguire il nemico volante
Come al tempo in Francia
Due anni fa.

*Captain E. H. Brittain, M. C. Written four days
before his death in action in the Austrian
offensive on the Italian front, June 15th, 1918.

* Capitan E. H. Brittain, M. C. Scritto quattro giorni
prima della sua morte in combattimento durante
l'offensiva austriaca sul fronte italiano, 15 giugno,
1918.

(Brittain 1918: 33)

¹² Chaterine Reilly (1925-2005) ha raccolto, e successivamente pubblicato in due antologie, poesie scritte da donne più o meno famose durante i due conflitti mondiali: *Scars Upon My Heart: Women's Poetry and Verse of World War One* e *Chaos of the Night: Women's Poetry and Verse of World War Two*. Il canone della poesia di Guerra è ancora prevalentemente un dominio maschile: "We know of the male agony of the trenches from the poetry of soldiers like Sassoon and Owen [...] we know little in poetry of what that agony and its millions of deaths meant to the millions of English women who had to endure them to learn to survive survival" (Reilly 1982: xv).

Divenuta infermiera volontaria per poter condividere, in parte, i tormenti e i supplizi della controparte maschile (Badenhausen 2003: 424), Brittain, in questa lirica composta l'11 giugno 1918 in ricordo del ferimento del fratello il 1° luglio 1916, primo giorno della Battaglia della Somme, propone alcuni scorci dei combattimenti avvenuti sul fronte francese e di tanti scontri armati verificatisi in altri campi di battaglia. Rivive un evento a cui non era fisicamente presente ma che la coinvolge emotivamente, e racconta una storia personale che diventa anche la storia delle sorelle, delle madri e delle mogli di tanti altri commilitoni. Le quattro strofe, legate dall'epifora, portano il lettore dal presente dell'autrice al passato del giovane soldato, dall'immaginato presente di Edward al suo futuro; lo trasportano dal campo di battaglia alla sfera familiare nel grande "show" della Prima Guerra Mondiale. Edward Brittain, come soldato, ha fatto la sua parte (v. 4)¹³ ed è stato premiato (v. 8). La Croce, si noti la maiuscola ripresa anche nell'Ultima Avanzata (v. 15), è sì una medaglia, simbolo del valore dimostrato sul campo di battaglia, ma nella sua forma richiama, sia l'immagine del cimitero e, in senso traslato, la morte stessa, sia il sacrificio di Cristo. Così come avvenuto nel luglio 1916, Vera Brittain pensa ai frammenti dei proiettili e al rumore delle armi e, in ultima istanza, si augura che il fratello abbia la forza di sopportare, assieme ai suoi compagni, l'ultima avanzata che potrebbe indicare la vittoria, o, funestamente come in questo caso, la prematura dipartita del giovane milite.

Nella Premessa alla raccolta *Verses of a V.A.D.* Marie Connor Leighton sottolinea come tutte le poesie siano il risultato di avvenimenti sentiti nel profondo. È capace, condividendo il dolore insito in alcuni versi, di relazionarsi alle stesse sensazioni senza strumenti di mediazione. La creazione e la 'qualità pratica' di alcuni componimenti sono a scapito della 'perfezione del metodo', poiché "in such circumstances it is difficult to achieve any literary ornamentation and least of all that particular kind of simpleness which is the highest form of finished art" (Brittain 1918: II). A esempio di questa presunta mancanza, Connor Leighton cita "The German Ward", una poesia scritta nel settembre 1917 durante il servizio della scrittrice al 24 General Hospital a Étaples (Francia), in cui Brittain si trova a soccorrere i tedeschi feriti dagli alleati:

THE GERMAN WARD

("INTER ARMA CARITAS")

When the years of strife are over and my
recollection fades

LA CORSIA TEDESCA

("INTER ARMA CARITAS")

Quando gli anni del conflitto saranno finiti e la mia
memoria si affievolirà

¹³ Nella traduzione il verbo 'play' ["You played your part"] è stato tradotto come 'partecipare, fare la propria parte' – compito di ogni soldato – tuttavia, non sfugge la potenziale ironia, visto che nel verso precedente l'autrice si riferisce a uno "show" a cui sono associati i due aggettivi "grand" e "tragic" si potrebbe pensare al verbo "recitare una parte". A livello semantico, il verbo è emblematico; riprende, infatti, la natura rituale della guerra riflessa nella classica espressione "theatre of war".

Of the wards wherein I worked the weeks
away,
I shall still see, as a vision rising 'mid the War-
time shades,
The ward in France where German wounded
lay.

I shall see the pallid faces and the half-sus-
picious eyes,
I shall hear the bitter groans and laboured
breath,
And recall the loud complaining and the weary
tedious cries,
And the sights and smells of blood and wounds 15
and death.

I shall see the convoy cases, blanket-covered
on the floor,
And watch the heavy stretcher-work begin,
And the gleam of knives and bottles through 20
the open theatre door,
And the operation patients carried in.

I shall see the Sister standing, with her form
of youthful grace,
And the humour and the wisdom of her
smile,
And the tale of three years' warfare on her thin
expressive face-
The weariness of many a toil-filled while.

I shall think of how I worked for her with
nerve and heart and mind,
And marvelled at her courage and her skill,
And how the dying enemy her tenderness
would find
Beneath her scornful energy of will. 30

And I learnt that human mercy turns alike to
friend or foe
When the darkest hour of all is creeping
nigh,
And those who slew our dearest, when their
lamps were burning low,
Found help and pity ere they came to die.

So, though much will be forgotten when the

Delle corsie in cui ho lavorato per settimane
strenuamente,
5 Vedrò ancora, come una visione affiorata dalle
ombre del tempo di Guerra,
La corsia in Francia dove i feriti tedeschi
giacciono.

Vedrò i volti pallidi egli sguardi
quasi sospettosi,
10 Sentirò gli aspri gemiti e gli affannosi
respiri,
E ricorderò i lamenti ad alta voce e le stanche
tediose grida,
15 E la vista e l'odore del sangue e delle ferite
e della morte.

Vedrò le casse del convoglio, con sopra le coperte
sul pavimento,
E guarderò il pesante lavoro della barella
cominciare] 20
E il luccichio dei coltelli e delle bottiglie attraverso
la porta aperta del teatro,
E i pazienti per l'intervento [che vi vengono] portati
dentro.

Vedrò l'Infermiera in piedi, con la sua figura
di grazia giovanile,
25 E l'umorismo e la saggezza del suo
sorriso,
E la storia di tre anni di guerra sul suo volto sottile
ed espressivo -
30 La stanchezza di molti, tempo di duro lavoro.

Penserò a come ho lavorato per lei con
polso e cuore e mente,
E ammirato il suo coraggio e la sua abilità,
35 E come il nemico morente la sua dolcezza
trovasse
Sotto la sua sprezzante energia di spirito.

E ho imparato chela pietà umana si rivolge
parimenti all'amico e al nemico
40 Quando l'ora più buia di tutte si fa più
vicina,
E quelli che ammazzarono i nostri cari, quando le
loro lanterne erano fioche,
hanno trovato aiuto e pietà prima di venire a

sound of War's alarms
 And the days of death and strife have passed 45
 away,
 I shall always see the vision of Love working
 amidst arms
 In the ward wherein the wounded prisoners
 lay. 50
 FRANCE,
 September 1917.

morire.
 Così, sebbene molto verrà dimenticato quando il
 suono degli allarmi di Guerra
 E i giorni della morte e della lotta verranno
 meno
 Vedrò sempre la visione dell'Amore che opera
 tre le braccia
 Nella corsia dove i prigionieri feriti
 giacciono.

FRANCIA,
 settembre 1917.

(Brittain 1918: 38-40)

Questa lirica, il cui sottotitolo "Inter arma Caritas" (In Guerra, Carità) è il motto originale del Comitato Internazionale della Croce Rossa, riprende i leitmotiv del ricordo e della carità. Come precedentemente evidenziato, il tempo e la memoria, sia nella prosa sia nella poesia di guerra, stabiliscono il ritmo del racconto intarsiato e modellato dai ricordi. Tra le brutture della guerra emerge la grazia di un'infermiera che, nonostante sia stata testimone degli effetti provocati dai campi di battaglia sui soldati, esausta dal duro lavoro, riesce ancora a dimostrare tenerezza (v. 33) anche al nemico perché la "carità umana" non fa distinzione tra nemici e alleati (vv. 36-37) e prevale su ogni diversità anche di nazionalità. La morte pervade e soffoca la vita ma Vera Brittain è ancora capace di pensare all'amore (v. 47). Il tema della carità, che rappresenta l'amore per gli altri e che per il cristianesimo è la più alta realizzazione di perfezione dello spirito umano, richiama la sfera religiosa presente in più poesie: il componimento che apre la raccolta, "August 1914", scritto quando l'autrice si trovava ancora a Oxford, chiama in causa Dio e la redenzione che deve avvenire attraverso l'esperienza del dolore; "The Last Post" presenta il tema di una possibile resurrezione per i soldati che, rovesciate le croci grigie, ritornano in vita dimentichi del loro supplizio.

Versi di estremo dolore appartengono in particolare a due componimenti: "Sic Transit", elogio all'amico Victor, e "Perhaps", elogio a Roland, il fidanzato:

SIC TRANSIT –

(V.R., DIED OF WOUNDS 2ND LONDON
 GENERAL HOSPITAL, CHELSEA, JUNE 9TH
 1917)

I AM so tired.

SIC TRANSIT –

(V.R., MORTO PER LE FERITE ALL' OSPEDALE
 GENERALE LONDRA 2, CHELSEA, 9 GIUGNO
 1917)

SONO così stanca.

The dying sun incarnadines the West,
And every window with its gold is fired,
And all I loved the best
Is gone, and every good that I desired
Passes away, an idle hopeless quest ;
Had vanished with the rest.
I am so tired.

LONDON

June 1917

(Brittain 1918: 34)

Il sole morente tinge di rosso¹⁴ l'Ovest,
E ogni finestra s'infiama del suo oro,
E tutto ciò che amavo di più
5 Se n'è andato, e ogni bene che desideravo
È scomparso, un'inutile disperata ricerca ;
È svanita con il resto.
Sono così stanca

LONDRA

giugno 1917

La semplicità estrema dei versi di apertura evidenzia un preciso stato d'animo reiterato in chiusura e trasmesso anche dalla frammentarietà dei versi. Un nuovo richiamo alla sfera religiosa con parte della locuzione dal *De Imitatione Christi, Sic transit [gloria mundi]* - Così passa [la gloria del mondo]; ormai sempre più stanca dall'evolversi degli avvenimenti, dalle perdite subite, e dal lavoro a contatto con la morte e la sofferenza, Vera Brittain sembra essere sempre più conscia dell'effimerità di questa vita in cui "la storia della guerra comincia con volontari idealisti e termina con veterani distrutti e nomi incisi sulle lapidi commemorative" (Watson 2004: 5).

La poesia "Perhaps" risale a poco più di due mesi dopo la morte di Roland, nel dicembre 2015, e fu completata nell'agosto dello stesso anno (Brittain 2010: 37). La scrittura è per Brittain un modo per elaborare il lutto, l'unica forma di letteratura in grado di darle conforto (Brittain 2010: 5).

PERHAPS -

(TO R.A.L. DIED OF WOUNDS IN FRANCE,
DECEMBER 23RD, 1915)

Perhaps some day the sun will shine again,
And I shall see that still the skies are blue,
And feel once more I do not live in vain,
Although bereft of You.

Perhaps the golden meadows at my feet
Will make the sunny hours of spring seem gay,
And I shall find the white May-blossoms sweet,
Though You have passed away.

FORSE -

(A R.A.L. MORTO PER LE FERITE IN
FRANCIA, 23 DICEMBRE 1915)

Forse un giorno il sole splenderà di nuovo,
E mi accorgerò che i cieli sono ancora blu,
E sentirò ancora che non vivo in vano,
Sebbene senza di Te.

5 Forse i prati dorati ai miei piedi
Renderanno queste ore di sole primaverili
gioiose
E giudicherò i candidi biancospini¹⁵ dolci

¹⁴ Il verbo 'incarnadine' richiama l'Atto 2, Scena 2 di *Macbeth* di Shakespeare "The multitudinous seas incarnadine, / Making the green one red" (Shakespeare 2000: 50).

Perhaps the summer woods will shimmer bright,
And crimson roses once again be fair,
And autumn harvest fields a rich delight,
Although You are not there.

Perhaps someday I shall not shrink in pain
To see the passing of the dying year,
And listen to Christmas songs again,
Although You cannot hear.

But though kind Time may many joys renew,
There is one greatest joy I shall not know
Again, because my heart for loss of You
Was broken, long ago.

10

15

20

Sebbene Tu non ci sia più.

Forse i boschi estivi brilleranno luminosi
E le rose rosse ancora una volta saranno
graziose,
E i campi del raccolto autunnali una ricca
delizia

Sebbene Tu non ci sia.

Forse un giorno non soccomberò al dolore
Nel vedere il passare dell'anno quasi finito,
E ascoltare le canzoni di Natale di nuovo,
Sebbene Tu non possa sentire.

Ma benché il bonario Tempo possa rinnovare
molte gioie
C'è una gioia, la più grande, che non conoscerò
Di nuovo, perché il mio cuore per la Tua perdita
si è spezzato, tempo fa.

(Brittain 1918: 20)

Irretita dal trauma della perdita di una persona amata, la cui mancanza viene richiamata alla fine di ogni quartina, e di un passato il cui la natura, vivace nei suoi colori, accompagnava lo scandire delle stagioni, l'autrice cerca conforto nell'ambiente circostante e nei riti familiari. Tuttavia, è un conforto effimero, basato su un equilibrio o un pensiero precario; quel "forse" anaforico rimanda alla speranza e all'incertezza, ripresa nel titolo, di un futuro mitigato dal tempo. Nell'ultima strofa, introdotta dall'avversativo, Brittain, attraverso l'immagine del cuore spezzato (vv.19-20), accentua il crudo dolore della privazione affettiva (v.18) a cui è ineluttabilmente sottoposta. Le immagini presentate vibrano di semplicità e quotidianità; propongono una dimensione quasi pastorale e descrivono la proiezione di un desiderio che sembra irraggiungibile. La genuinità di questi versi sembra poter dar voce alle innumerevoli donne che durante il conflitto hanno vissuto una tragedia affine.

In conclusione, Vera Brittain rielabora il dolore patito negli anni del conflitto in componimenti suggestivi e toccanti. La pratica dello scrivere, volontaria, necessaria e dettata dal momento, ha fornito una testimonianza tutta al femminile dei drammi vissuti in prima persona dall'autrice. Le poesie prese in esame costituiscono uno strumento di esternazione, da un lato, dell'angoscia intima della scrittrice provocata da tutto ciò che la

¹⁵ "May-blossom" identifica i fiori del biancospino (*Crataegus monogyna*), una pianta ritenuta di cattivo auspicio (<http://www.plant-lore.com/plantofthemonth/may-blossom/>).

guerra le ha tolto e, dall'altra, dei sentimenti di molte altre donne che hanno avuto esperienze simili; infermiere volontarie, esempi di coraggio e altruismo, che hanno perso i loro affetti più cari. La giovane Brittain diventa la voce di coloro che non hanno avuto modo di trasmettere queste emozioni ai posteri. Plasma immagini familiari, spesso legate alla natura e al suo ciclo, e le incorpora a quelle delle corsie di ospedale e dei campi di battaglia. Lo scrivere poesia si fa mezzo di salvezza, "i timidi fiori del cuore e della mente" diventano una terapia per poter elaborare, in chiave autobiografica, gli anni della Grande Guerra.

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Ellen Patat holds a PhD in Comparative Literatures from the University of Udine (Italy). She has worked at BAU, Bahcesehir University, and Yeditepe University (Istanbul-Turkey) teaching Italian Language and Culture, Translation and Academic English. Her main areas of interest include: 20th century Italian literature, Travel Literature, teaching Italian as a foreign language, with particular focus on the integration of literature and technology in the FL class to develop multicompetence in multimodality.

ellenpatat@gmail.com



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Erica Maggioni

“This inexplicable war”. William Butler Yeats and his ‘Silence’ on the Great War

Abstract I: In occasione del 150° anniversario della nascita di W. B. Yeats e del centenario della Prima Guerra Mondiale, l’articolo si propone di studiare la risposta del poeta alla tragedia degli anni 1914-1918 analizzando la sua limitata produzione letteraria sull’evento. Mentre “On Being Asked for a War Poem” è un breve manifesto del suo distacco, poesie successive dedicate all’amico Robert Gregory, caduto in battaglia, documentano un coinvolgimento maggiore, ma un atteggiamento mutevole nei confronti di una guerra implicata nella complessa questione Anglo-Irlandese. La reticenza di Yeats può anche essere letta come una reazione alla crescente violenza della politica, da cui egli, quale personaggio pubblico con un’inclinazione per la pace, voleva distanziarsi.

Abstract II: On the occasion of W. B. Yeats’s 150th birth anniversary and the First World War centenary, this paper aims at investigating the poet’s response to the tragedy of 1914-1918 by analysing his limited literary output related to the event. While “On Being Asked for a War Poem” is a short manifesto of his detachment, later poems dedicated to his friend Robert Gregory, killed in action, document a closer involvement, but a shifting attitude towards a war entangled with the complex Anglo-Irish question. Yeats’s reticence might also be read as a reaction to the increasing violence of politics, from which, as a public figure with an inclination for peace, he wanted to distance himself.

The year 2015 marks the 150th anniversary of W. B. Yeats’s birth, an occasion which is being celebrated with publications, conferences and even a special edition euro coin that confirm the cultural relevance of the Irish poet in our time. 2015 is also the occasion to pay tribute to another important event: the centenary of the First World War, a four-year commemoration that started in 2014 and is particularly felt in the UK. It seems fitting, therefore, to pose the question of how the two anniversaries are related, and how an author like Yeats, often active in the public life of his time, has commented on and elaborated this defining event of the history of the period.

Yeats's personal and political involvement with the series of dramatic events that his native Ireland went through at the beginning of the twentieth century has long been underlined. A remarkable part of his production was inspired by his interest for current national affairs, especially after the Rising; "Easter 1916", "The Rose Tree", "Sixteen Dead Men", "Meditations in Time of Civil War" just to mention some among his most renowned poems. His first-hand experience of politics – Yeats was elected a Senator of the Free Irish State in 1922 – has also been a topic for academic discussion and many scholars have addressed the issue of the poet's changing political sympathies and how these permeate the poems¹. Less attention has however been paid to the poet's engagement with the Great War, which somehow appears to be marginal in his interests and writings. In the context of the 2015 anniversaries, the purpose of this paper is to explore how the poet reacted to the tumultuous years 1914-1918 by looking at the poetry he produced on the topic.

The first response comes in a text of just six verses and is unmistakably entitled "On Being Asked For a War Poem". The lyric is a short but powerful manifesto of his "studied indifference" (Perloff 2007: 227) and his decision to remain silent on the war. Significantly, it was not written out of his personal willingness to comment on the topic, but it is, as the title explains, a response to a direct request from someone else. It was his friend Henry James, the novelist, who had approached Yeats in 1915 asking him to participate in a new anthology, *The Book of the Homeless*, edited by Edith Wharton. The volume, which contained poems, music, art-works by some of the greatest artists of the time, from Thomas Hardy to Jean Cocteau, Igor Stravinsky and Leon Bakst, was one of the many fundraising activities for war refugees². For the occasion, Yeats wrote a poem "A Reason for Keeping Silent", whose title he changed later into "On Being Asked for a War Poem" for his 1917 collection *The Wild Swans At Coole*:

I think it better that in times like these
A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth
We have no gift to set a statesman right;
He has had enough of meddling who can please
A young girl in the indolence of her youth,
Or an old man upon a winter's night (Yeats 1997: 156).

Yeats's contribution to Edith Wharton's book presents a clear declaration of his stance and is formulated in a speech-like style as if the poet were actually answering to a friend who had asked for his view on the war; the "I think" which opens the poem is a

¹ For an overview of the literature on the topic, see Allison 2006b.

² The book was sold for the benefit of the American Hostels for Refugees and of The Children of Flanders Rescue Committee. Theodore Roosevelt provided an introduction.

straightforward indication of the personal nature of the opinion. The expression “in times like these”, with its melancholic and reticent intensity, places the reflection both in Yeats’s days and in an atemporal, universal moment. It speaks of the unprecedented and extraordinary quality of the Great War, while at the same time, it suggests that this war is similar to any other dark period of history. In situations such as this, Yeats believes that poets should not comment, and uses the metonymy “a poet’s mouth be silent” to confer concreteness and irony to his thoughts. Interestingly, the first version of the poem had an even stronger tone as it read “I think it better that at times like these / We poets keep our mouths shut” (Wharton 1916: 45). The reason for this silence – “We have no gift to set a statesman right” – hints at the issue of the role of the poets in public life. Ever since Plato, the question of whether it is appropriate or not for poets to intervene and try to influence the masses and their leaders has been debated. Yeats seems to imply that, in this case, it is not a matter of right or duty, but of ability; as a spokesperson for poets, he admits their impotence and incompetence on the matter. Self-irony shows through the lines in the informal language of “has had enough of meddling” – an expression which reveals Yeats’s discredit of the political engagement of literary intellectuals of the time, himself included. Poets are better suited for the more modest task of “pleasing” and Yeats humbly chooses two examples from his public, a young girl and an old man, who traditionally symbolize a sentimental, even superficial readership.

In writing that poem, in 1915, Yeats certainly had in mind a literary phenomenon of that period known as ‘war poetry’. More than two thousand British citizens wrote poems on the Great War; newspapers were flooded with verses and several best-selling anthologies were published. What is remembered and read today is the work of a limited group of writers, usually soldiers or officers, who put into verse their experience on the Western Front portraying and denouncing the appalling reality of their condition. What was popular at the time, however, were the patriotic, jingoistic verses of many civilians, and very few soldiers, who embodied the mood of enthusiasm and optimism at the outbreak of the war. Yeats did not want to have anything in common with that wave of poetry, and “On Being Asked For a War Poem” confirms his rejection. Not that the second phase of war poetry, the pity of Owen and the satire of Sassoon, interested him either. His decision to exclude most war poets from the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935* he edited in 1936, on the basis that “passive suffering is not a theme for poetry” (Yeats 1936: xxxiv), is notorious as it caused unanimous perplexity.

Even considering his personal distaste for war poetry, Yeats’s silence on the Great War might sound hypocritical on the part of a public figure who often participated, in life and in writing, in the political life of his time and did not abstain from setting statesmen right on multiple occasions (Allison 2006a: 217). Yet, one should remember that Yeats was Irish, and that the First World War occupies a peculiar and ambiguous place in Irish history. Scholars have identified in the poet’s Irishness the main reason for his

disengagement, with Giorgio Melchiori claiming that the war “was not the concern of an Irish nationalist” (Melchiori 1979: 63), Tim Kendall that it “was neither his own nor his country’s quarrel” (Kendall 2013: 22), and Samuel Hynes stating that “an English war fought in France was too remote to engage an Irish imagination” (Hynes 1989: 47). Fran Brearton, while defending Yeats’s attitude, finds that he “places the Great War on the English side of an English-Irish opposition” (Brearton 2000: 45).

Undoubtedly, the Great War broke out at a time when the Irish question was a flammable issue in British politics; rumours of Home Rule and independence had become more and more insistent since the 1870s and domestic rivalries between the Unionists and the Nationalists exacerbated the situation. The Liberal Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith was still looking for a compromise that would satisfy both parties, when war was declared against Germany on 4 August 1914. Priorities changed, Home Rule was postponed to quieter times and Irishmen were invited to join the army alongside their English comrades as if they were a truly united country. As was to be expected, the response in Ireland was divided and problematic, but did not stop around 200,000 Irish volunteers from serving in the military, with almost a quarter dead by 1918 (Grayson 2014). While troops were fighting abroad, in Dublin on Easter Monday 1916 a group of Irish nationalists staged a rebellion against the British government, which ended in a violent suppression³; after that, “All changed, changed utterly”⁴, as Yeats wrote in a famous poem commemorating the event. An anti-war, anti-British sentiment grew among part of the population that now looked with hostility at the Irish participation in the Great War. Entangled in the bloody and complex War of Independence that followed, Ireland tried to forget the war that had happened overseas. Yeats’s silence therefore fits into the silence of a country which still continues today to show uneasiness towards the memory of the First World War. Roy Foster has used the expression “therapeutic voluntary amnesia” (Foster 2001: 125) to refer to the way Ireland has treated the Great War; for years, the topic has been carefully avoided, even by historians, as it was a cause of ambiguity and embarrassment. The last two decades have seen a gradual reversal of the situation with more attention both in academia and among the public; volumes on the Irish engagement with the War have been published⁵ and national commemorations of the casualties have been held⁶.

³ For an account of this episode of Irish history see, for example, Chapter 19 of Foster 1988.

⁴ “Easter, 1916” (Yeats 1997: 182).

⁵ Among them, Horne 2008; Jeffery 2000; Johnson 2003.

⁶ An official commemoration of the Irish dead in the First World War was held on 1 July 2006 at the Irish National War Memorial Gardens in Islandbridge to mark the 90th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme. This was followed by a historic visit of Queen Elizabeth II in 2011. In 2014, President Michael D. Higgins and the Duke of Kent unveiled a Commonwealth Cross of Sacrifice to honour Ireland’s war dead at Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin.

When sending his “epigrammatic refusal” (Chapman 2006: 145) “A Reason For Keeping Silent” to Henry James, W. B. Yeats declared: “It is the only thing I have written of the war or will write” (Wade 1954: 600). However, in February 1918 he learned of the death of Major Robert Gregory⁷, the son of Lady Augusta Gregory, his long-time friend and patron. On the occasion, Yeats could not ‘keep silent’: current events were now involving his personal acquaintances and he felt he had a reason ‘to meddle’. Moreover, Lady Gregory herself asked him to commemorate Robert in poetry with the result of the almost immediate composition of three poems, all published later in a new edition of *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919). The first, “Shepherd and Goatherd”, is a long pastoral elegy which grieves the untimely death of Gregory on the model of what “Spenser wrote for Sir Philip Sidney” (Wade 1954: 646). The virtues of the young man are enumerated, with reference to his artistic and athletic skills, but the war remains an indefinite entity, “a great war beyond the sea” (Yeats 1997: 144). Also the second poem, “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory”, which the mother of the deceased found beautiful (Kohfeldt 1985: 255) and which commemorates the airman in an elegant and poised style, avoids direct reference to the actual circumstances of Gregory’s death. The third, “An Irish Airman Foresees His Death”, is the one which more openly addresses the topic of war also revealing Yeats’s attitude towards it.

I know that I shall meet my fate
 Somewhere among the clouds above;
 Those that I fight I do not hate
 Those that I guard I do not love;
 My country is Kiltartan Cross,
 My countrymen Kiltartan’s poor,
 No likely end could bring them loss
 Or leave them happier than before.
 Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
 Nor public man, nor cheering crowds,
 A lonely impulse of delight
 Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
 I balanced all, brought all to mind,
 The years to come seemed waste of breath,
 A waste of breath the years behind
 In balance with this life, this death (Yeats 1997: 135-136).

The poem is an atypical elegy, similar to a dramatic monologue, written in the first person as if Gregory himself were pondering on his situation just before the end of his life. The

⁷ Known as a painter, scholar and horseman, Gregory had enlisted in the army in 1915, was transferred to the Royal Flying Corps the following year and died while flying a plane on the Italian front, near Padua.

title, with its sad prediction of death, endows the poem with an initial tragic tone confirmed by the resignation inherent in the first verse, "I know that I shall meet my fate". However, as the poem continues, the tone grows more vivid, energetic, almost exultant. Flying above the clouds puts Gregory in a higher, extra-human position, which singles him out as no ordinary man. His reasons for enrolling in the Flying Corps seem different from all that is expected. His neutrality towards the opponents in the war – "Those that I fight I do not hate / Those that I guard I do not love" – mirror Yeats's⁸ and echoes Edward Thomas's "This is no case of petty right or wrong" that read "I hate not Germans nor grow hot, with love of Englishmen" (Thomas 2008: 104). Gregory's identification with a specific community, the little family village of Kiltartan Cross, is a further indication of his limited engagement with the cause of war and of his profound attachment to Ireland.

No patriotism and no dreams of glory lie behind his enlistment which is born out of "a lonely impulse of delight", a personal pleasure in flying, in the freedom and independence of a life of adventure. Yeats is depicting Gregory not as a victim of the war, but as a hero in full control of his situation despite the danger and precariousness of life as a pilot. This confidence and poise are overtly expressed in the last verses, not only in the choice of the verb "balance", but also in the image of the plane in equilibrium above the clouds, and in the careful construction of the sentence with its parallelisms. Yeats's recurrent theme of escapism finds here an appropriate application as a "recrudescent Romantic impulse" (Norris 2000: 41) seems to pervade the lyric. The airman is tranquil as he resigns himself to death, which finally seems almost welcomed, an alternative to "this life", to both the emptiness of the past, and the uncertainty of the future.

David Goldie considers the poem "deeply ambiguous" and states that it "can say nothing meaningful about the war or the Irish experience of it" (Goldie 2013: 168). In fact, the lyric reveals a powerful message, which resonates with a tragic joy of Nietzschean nature, as Roy Foster has noted (Foster 2001: 135). Yeats is attempting to give sense to the war, even to death, by transforming the experience of war into an aesthetic one. He is trying to explain the "inexplicable war", and what is interesting is that he does so, not through his own voice, the voice of a civilian and a public figure with no right to 'meddle', but rather that of a man who had actively participated in the conflict. In this way, Yeats somehow keeps faith to the vow of silence he had taken in "A Reason for Keeping Silent".

As the years passed, the positive, however unconventional portrait of Gregory in the poem became subject to revision. In 1920, with the ongoing Irish War of Independence, Yeats wrote "Reprisals", a fourth poem on Robert Gregory, which remained unpublished

⁸ Yeats expressed his concern for all the participants in the war. In a letter to Lady Gregory on 18 February 1915, he wrote: "I feel strangely enough most for the young Germans that are now being killed. These spectacled, dreamy faces, or so I picture them, remind me more of men that I have known than the strong-bodied young English football players who pass my door at Woburn Buildings daily, marching in their khaki, or the positive-minded young Frenchmen" (Gregory 1974: 521).

until 1948 because the mother and wife of the deceased did not appreciate it. The airman is indeed presented under a strikingly different light. Yeats imagines Gregory's ghost revisiting Kiltartan and beholding the atrocities that, in their attempt to repress the IRA⁹, the British paramilitary force Black and Tans were perpetrating against the nationalists. The airman is no longer a hero; he is not there to help his people as he has lost his life for a cause that is now being questioned. In the bitter, final line, Yeats invites him to "lie among the other cheated dead", the victims of a meaningless war. The verb "lie" might even be read as a pun on the deceitful service of Irishmen in the British army or a hint, along with "cheated", at the "old Lie" of the glorious death in battle¹⁰.

Some nineteen German planes, they say,
 You had brought down before you died.
 We called it a good death. Today
 Can ghost or man be satisfied?
 Although your last exciting year
 Outweighed all other years, you said,
 Though battle joy may be so dear
 A memory, even to the dead,
 It chases other thought away,
 Yet rise from your Italian tomb,
 Flit to Kiltartan cross and stay
 Till certain second thoughts have come
 Upon the cause you served, that we
 Imagined such a fine affair: [...] (Yeats 1997: 568-569).

The poet's change of attitude is discernible in his calculated use of the past tense to recall what had been a different consideration of the war and its casualties – "We called it a good death", "We imagined such a fine affair" – opposed to the use of the present when asking the alarming rhetorical question "Today can ghost or man be satisfied?". The pointlessness and inexplicability of the Great War is all those lines.

It is exactly by reflecting on the inexplicability of war that Yeats's silence appears to be more justified. In one of his frequent letters to Lady Gregory, in February 1915, he writes "I wonder if history will ever know at what man's door to lay the crime of this inexplicable war (Gregory 1974: 521)". The incommunicability of the tragedy and the difficulty to come to terms with the reasons that had sparked the First World War, and more specifically Britain's decision to intervene, are recurrent preoccupations of authors writing in the period. Moreover, Yeats found himself in a delicate position, as a

⁹ For extensive information on the Black and Tans, see Leeson 2011.

¹⁰ In 1917, the poet Wilfred Owen denounced the "old Lie" of war propaganda in his famous "Dulce et Decorum Est" (Owen 1994: 29).

distinguished public and literary figure, a Dubliner who had strong connections in London, an Irishman who had had nationalist sympathies in his youth but had later turned almost apolitical. He believed in the Home Rule, but refused to align himself either with John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party and supporter of the Irish participation in the war, or with Patrick Pearse, the advanced nationalist who dissuaded Irishmen from enlisting and was later to organize the Easter Rising. Taking sides was not what Yeats intended to do; he always revealed a tendency towards peaceful resolutions, judging with uncertainty even the Rising, admiration mixed with doubt.

Throughout the years, the poet showed an increasing dislike and mistrust towards politics, which he found too violent and partisan. If in 1918 he wrote that “I have no part in politics and no liking for politics, but there are moments when one cannot keep out of them”¹¹, in the 1930s he declared “I have a horror of modern politics...I’m finished with that for ever [*sic*]”¹². Some scholars have accused Yeats of deliberately ignoring the Great War; John Stallworthy has written that Yeats was unmoved by the war (Stallworthy 1969: 214), Declan Kiberd that he denied the reality (Kiberd 1995: 246), and even another great Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, in his Nobel lecture hinted at the older poet’s disengagement with political realities (Ryan 2014). However, Yeats’s indifference is only apparent and reveals a conscious reaction. His decision to dissociate from the Great War comes from the awareness of its futility, from the shock of its inhumanity, from the protest against its incomprehensible schemes. In the light of such a poor consideration of the war, it is now easier to understand why he found it “inexplicable”. If something defies explanation, we lack the appropriate words to speak of it and therefore may choose, as Yeats did, to remain silent, at least partially. In private, the poet defined the Great War as “the most expensive outbreak of insolence and stupidity the world has ever seen”¹³ and “a bloody frivolity”¹⁴; therefore his reticence on the topic in public is to be read as a form of quiet and strategic disapproval.

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¹¹ W. B. Yeats to Lord Haldane, October 1918, quoted in Foster 2003: 131.

¹² W. B. Yeats to Ethel Mannin, 11 February 1937 (Wade 1954: 881).

¹³ W. B. Yeats to John Quinn, 24 June 1915, quoted in Foster 2003: 5.

¹⁴ W. B. Yeats to Henry James, 20 August 1915 (Wade 1954: 599).

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Erica Maggioni is a PhD candidate in Linguistic and Literary Sciences at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan. Her research interests include: English poetry of the Romantic period and the early 20th century. She has worked on John Keats, W. B. Yeats and the British poets of the First World War.

Erica.Maggioni@unicatt.it