Associazione Laureati in Lingue
Università degli Studi di Udine

Le Simplegadi

Rivista internazionale on-line di lingue e letterature moderne
International refereed online journal of modern languages and literatures

http://all.uniud.it/simplegadi
ISSN 1824-5226

Sacred Journeys: Exploring Literature at the Intersection of Aboriginality, Sexuality, Nature and Spirituality

Anno XIV, Numero 16
Novembre 2016

Le Simplegadi
http://all.uniud.it/simplegadi

Rivista accademica on-line dell'Associazione dei Laureati in Lingue Straniere dell'Università di Udine
International refereed online journal of modern languages and literatures

Direttore responsabile / Editor-in-chief: Antonella Riem
Segretario di redazione / Editor: Stefano Mercanti

Comitato scientifico / Scientific Board:
Satish C. Aikant (H.N.B. Garhwal University, India)
Roberto Albarea (University of Udine, Italy)
Paolo Bartoloni (University of Galway, Ireland)
Paolo Bertinetti (University of Turin, Italy)
Maria Bortoluzzi (University of Udine, Italy)
Veronica Brady (†) (University of Western Australia, Australia)
Alessandra Burelli (University of Udine, Italy)
Maria Luisa Camaiora (University "Cattolica" Milan, Italy)
Silvia Caporale Bizzini (University of Alicante, Spain)
Franca Cavagnoli (University of Milan, Italy)
Saumitra Chakravarty (Bangalore University, India)
Andrea Csillaghy (University of Udine, Italy)
Anna Pia De Luca (University of Udine, Italy)
Maria Renata Dolce (University of Salento, Italy)
Cynthia vanden Driesen (Edith Cowan University, Australia)
Riane Eisler (Center for Partnership Studies, USA)
Alessandra Ferraro (University of Udine, Italy)
Armando Gnisci (University "La Sapienza" Rome, Italy)
Alessandro Grossato (University of Trento, Italy)
Linda Hutcheon (University of Toronto, Canada)
Michael Hutcheon (University of Toronto, Canada)
Paul Kane (Vassar College, USA)
Mark Klemens (Independent scholar, USA)
Renata Londero (University of Udine, Italy)
Richard Nile (Murdoch University, Australia)
Annalisa Oboe (University of Padua, Italy)
Nduka Otiono (Carleton University, Canada)
Federica Pedriali (University of Edinburgh, UK)
Deborah Saidero (University of Udine, Italy)
Andrew Taylor (Edith Cowan University, Australia)
John Thieme (University of East Anglia, UK)
Itala Vivan (University of Milan, Italy)

Comitato di redazione / Editorial Board:
Direttore responsabile / Editor-in-chief: Antonella Riem antonella.riem@uniud.it
Segretario di redazione / Editor: Stefano Mercanti stefano.mercanti@uniud.it
Redazione: Caterina Colomba, Simona Corso, Maria Paola Guarducci, Giulia Lepori, Maria Maddalena Lorubbio, Lidia De Michelis, Alessandro Romanin, Loredana Salis, Roberta Trapè.
E-mail: simplegadi@uniud.it

Sede amministrativa / Address:
Dipartimento di Lingue e letterature, comunicazione, formazione e società
Palazzo Antonini, via Petracco, 8
33100 Udine
Italia
Tel: 0432556778

The articles of this issue are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 unported license available at http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/
This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the work; to adapt the work and to make commercial use of the work. The work must be attributed to the respective authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).

Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Udine N.2 del 5 marzo 2003
ISSN 1824-5226

Indirizzo Direttore responsabile / Address of Editor-in-Chief:
Prof. Antonella Riem Natale
Dipartimento di Lingue e letterature, comunicazione, formazione e società
Palazzo Antonini, via Petracco, 8
33100 Udine, Italia
e-mail: antonella.riem@uniud.it
tel. 0432 556773

E-mail: simplegadi@uniud.it

Rivista Annuale - Pubblicazione del numero in corso: 30 novembre 2016
Issued on 30th November 2016

Rivista accademica fascia 'A'- Anvur
Refereed 'A' ranked journal

Sacred Journeys: Exploring Literature at the Intersection of Aboriginality, Sexuality, Nature and Spirituality

Le Simplegadi

Anno XIV, Numero 16, Novembre / November 2016

http://all.uniud.it/simplegadi - ISSN 1824-5226

POETICHE / POETICS

ARTICOLI / ARTICLES

Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XIV-No. 16 November 2016 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-35

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

Antonella Riem Natale

When the Time Comes

This is how Veronica Brady was, in a conversation about literature (and life) she would throw in a sentence, word, quotation, memory, idea that would start resonating inside, amplified by her buoyancy and enthusiasm, by her strength of character and determination to help, participate, teach, guide, relate, speak, tell and *storytell*, drive you around Perth in her red car that she described using the masculine pronoun, as if it were a 'mate': "my red car, he is reliable and beautiful, isn't he?"

She was like this when I first met her, in Venice, with another great doyen of Australian studies, Bernard Hickey, back in 1983. I had just finished my degree in Udine and was attending his course out of a deep desire to continue reading and working on literature. The course was on Patrick White's work and on *Voss*.

Invited by Bernard, Veronica shared her infinite knowledge on White, *Voss* and spirituality, with her unique energy, irony and ease, gently challenging us students into discussion. What a beautiful memory! I can still see her and us, sitting in Bernard's magnificent Australian library, talking, engaging, thinking about literature and (our) life, dreaming about our future.

Afterwards I met her many times, we visited her, she visited us. She sent books, articles, poems, essays, via snail mail first and then also via email. Books on women's *Thealogy* [*sic*] and poetry, on Aboriginal beliefs, art and world. Her books and books by others, as a sharing, a gift of the soul, source of nourishment and ever-fresh commitment. It was a conversation, a dialogic dialogue continuing from a distance … but distance does not matter. She was one of the first great Australian critics to adhere enthusiastically to our Partnership Studies Group, which uses Riane Eisler's work on partnership to *read* literature. She was one of the first to get passionately involved with the *ALL* series and our online journal *Le Simplegadi*. Therefore, it is very apt that we are dedicating this *Le Simplegadi* number to her memory. Her involvement and spurring kept us going at all times. Still does.

I remember another occasion, in Udine, she was talking about Blake's "Tiger" with a student who was full of theories about Blake's metaphysical views, and elaborate critical interpretations. I can hear Veronica very kindly saying "Don't you think Blake is (also) describing the tiger's energy and beauty, full stop?" A different, simpler, but not simplistic, less 'canonical' point of view, stemming from her love for literature, from her constant desire to show and share the glory and power of a text and from the art of teaching literature she practised with such wisdom and fervour.

Another time, at my place, she was over seventy then, she was telling me about her morning gym routine. "We need to keep our body and mind fit, in order to enjoy every step of our life story", she told me, "then we need to let the spirit go, when the time comes".

I keep this teaching of yours safely in my heart, for when the time comes …

Thank you, Veronica, *ad maiora.*

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

Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XIV-No. 16 November 2016 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-36

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

Susan Ballyn

For Veronica Brady

The news of Veronica Brady's death, while not unexpected, was still a shock to everybody who knew her. I have written elsewhere about my adventures when travelling with Veronica, journeys packed with unexpected things. Our first meeting was and always will be one of the landmarks in my life.

When we were at a conference in Kuala Lumpur she told me that she had greatly enjoyed a poem I had written on the occasion of Anna Rutherford's death. She encouraged me to continue writing but I found that academic life and writing were just too much. Occasionally Veronica would ask me if I continued to write to which the reply was always the same, "Not really". Now, however, in honour of her memory I would like to share two pieces she did read, "The Wind and the Moon" and "South Atlantic Dispatch" and other poems.

During my one and only sabbatical I started a collection *Water Whispers* which was largely written in Byron Bay and Tasmania. It needs heavy editing and perhaps one day I will follow Veronica's advice and get it finished. In the meantime, I shall continue to miss a great friend and colleague.

The Wind and the Moon
All night
The wind has buffeted
The dark world outside my window,
Whirling
In the silent ears of cattle
Haunched in monolithic stillness
Under shifting skies.
The spirits of elm-grove and oak-forest
Muttering and moaning
Before the rolling eye of the wind,
Have eased great tap-roots
Through memories born before time.

The wind has discarded their gift.

The moon climbed out of the sea
Dragging pale souls behind
To hang
On the pointing finger of yew

Alone on the hill;
Twirled and twisted
Pale ghosts on a gibbet,
Wind-chased screaming
To that silent place
Of which only the moon knows something.
The wind and the moon strive on
In total disregard of me.

Shadow
This thing that haunts me
Is strange –
Evading all capture, all attempt at dominance.
Rarely assuming its recognized shape,
It is gross in deformity,
Creeping large behind, dissolving forwards –
But never really gone.
Defying analysis
Its mobility amazes,
Sectioning into jigsaw puzzle pieces,
Furtively lurking round corners,
Up walls, down drains,
Always one step ahead – or behind –
The reminder of an existence
I'd rather forget.
This impossible tyrant
Is my constant companion
Leaning wise-guy
Into the sun and moon,
Living on my life,
Dying with my death
Slipping into my tomb.

South Atlantic Dispatch

The waters are still,
closing over these strange intruders
dropping white – limbed, bald – eyed
into the terrible silence.
No neat philosophies for them,
only the ultimate reality

of a sudden tomb
for which there is no logic.
No mahogany – polished words
serve now the tumbled figures
settling slowly through the sea-bed dust,
startling a thousand alien eyes.

The waters are still again,
closing over present insanity,
future history. Ensuing silence echoing
what was, what could have been –
but never is.

No. 6 from *Water Whispers*
Nothing disturbs
The inverted
Landscape –
Except, perhaps,
The silent wailing
Welling up
Inside – like
A storm brewing,
Threatening but
Unable to unleash.
The upside down
State must
Be mine,
A mirror image
Is true to
My nature –
Reflecting back
What others
Wish to see.

Susan Ballyn is Professor Emerita, founder and director of the Australian Studies Centre (ASC) and co-editor of the journal *Coolabah* at Barcelona University. Her research focuses on Postcolonial Studies, English Renaissance Poetry, Australian and Pacific literature, Convict History of Australia, detective fiction and Ageing Studies.
susan.ballyn@gmail.com

Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XIV-No. 16 November 2016 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-37

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

John Thieme

Seeing the World Anew: Thanks to Veronica Brady

I'm not sure how many times I met Sr. Veronica (née Patricia Mary) Brady of the Order of Loreto. Certainly not many. Perhaps only three or four, but a particular moment on a day spent with her, a particular conversation, a particular inspiration made me see the world anew.

We were first introduced at a conference. I already knew her reputation as a distinguished academic and fearless campaigner for Aboriginal Rights. Later we met at a few similar gatherings. Just a few, and it was only on that one particular day that I spent a significant amount of time with her. In 1986, with my wife Barbara, I visited Australia for the first time. Perth, where Veronica worked at the University of Western Australia, was our point of arrival. Veronica was one of a number of people who were kind towards us. She was a perfect host, particularly when she took us for a day-long drive out of the city – to York and Beverley. Without this we would have seen nothing of Western Australia apart from Perth and Fremantle. Thanks to her we saw more and spent a very pleasant day with a very special person. But it was a memorable day for more than just this, because something else happened that day. That was the particular day when that particular conversation that had such an influence on me occurred, though it wasn't until a few days later that I appreciated its import.

Veronica talked to us about our impending flights across the continent and she told us something which, to be honest, coming from almost anyone else, would have filled me with deep scepticism. She said that, observed from the air, the central Australian landscape bears an uncanny resemblance to that depicted in much traditional Aboriginal art. Viewed from a Western perspective – and it may be mistaken to try to apply such vocabulary in this context – such art might, I suppose, be described as 'abstract' or 'expressionist', labels usually attached to art forms that void pictorial representation of any direct, referential significance, whether social, spiritual or geopolitical. If such art claims a relationship with an observed physical environment, it seldom, if ever, does so by presenting itself as a mirror-like reflection of an observed landscape. Yet here was the suggestion that the apparent 'expressionism' of Aboriginal painting, invested as it is with complex spiritual layers, was in fact a mimetic response to an actual landscape – as seen from the air!

So, as I say, I was sceptical and only my personal and academic respect for Veronica and my knowledge that she was not only an expert on Aboriginal affairs, but also one of the most frequent of 'frequent flyers' – nicknamed the 'flying nun' because of her regular trips to Canberra for committee service – made me consider lending any credence to what would otherwise have seemed an extraordinary remark. I appreciated her sincerity, but took what she said as an assertion of belief, an act of faith, which I doubted I could share, however much I might wish to. Ready though I was to believe in assertions of Aboriginal spiritual

wisdom, it was hard to entertain the possibility that traditional Aboriginal artists had been able to paint their environment from the skies and how else could they have achieved an aerial view of their landscapes?

During our subsequent flights there was ample opportunity to put the claim to the test. The evidence from the first section of landscape viewed from the air was far from compelling and then there was a long segment flying over water, the Great Australian Bight, but a second flight, travelling north from Adelaide towards the 'red centre' over more undulating country, confirmed what Veronica had said beyond the shadow of a doubt. Sweeping layers of bright primary colours took us into a landscape that, quite simply, shatters Western preconceptions about the separateness of the 'realistic' and the 'abstract', the 'civilized' and the 'primitive', the 'secular' and the 'spiritual'; and it seemed clear that traditional Aboriginal art had managed to depict the unique interior landscape of Australia with representational accuracy, albeit presumably from a terrestrial vantage point.

Such oppositions as 'civilized' and 'primitive' are, of course, part and parcel of the binary thought-systems of many kinds of Western discourse, among them colonial constructions that locate colonized peoples as inferior partners in asymmetrical power relationships and structural anthropology of the kind practised by Claude Lévi-Strauss. So the challenge afforded by an artistic practice that appeared to collapse such dualities made me all too aware that in this instance *my* mind had been implicated in imagining such divisions and had misunderstood the aesthetics of traditional Aboriginal art. At best I could claim that I was an 'innocent' product of forms of Western socialization that define identity through contradistinction with alterity. Equally, this experience prompted me to ask what values are inscribed in an art that appears to see itself, completely unself-consciously, as an outcrop of the landscape. My rudimentary knowledge of the Aboriginal Creation myth of the Dreamtime provided the beginnings of an answer. Unlike Western Creation myths, the Dreamtime is considered to be immanent in the present, not just an account of human origins, since the creating spirits live on in the landscape's sacred sites. As Mudrooroo once put it, the Dreamtime is "the time of Creation that symbolizes that all life to the *Aboriginal* peoples is part of one interconnected system, one vast network of relationships which came into existence with the stirring of the great eternal archetypes, the spirit ancestors who emerged during the Dreamtime"[1]. Particular Aboriginal ceremonies function as rites that reaffirm the connection with the ancestral spirits and the Dreamtime, enabling Aboriginal peoples to preserve and renew the spiritual energy of the period of Creation, so that analogous processes of cosmogony and transformation can take place in the present.

"One interconnected system, one vast network of relationships": the terms echo the rhetoric of contemporary globalization – and in particular the Internet – where chaos theory seems to abound: a feather falls in the Australian desert and Washington shudders. Yet the Australian Aboriginal world-view and that of many other Native peoples, such as the descendants of the pre-Columbian inhabitants of the Americas and the tribals of South Asia, could hardly be more removed in outlook from the 'one-world' vision of global consumer

[1] Mudrooroo. 1994. *Aboriginal Mythology*. London: Aquarian, 52 (italics in original).

capitalism. It is a world-view that in its ancestral iterations does not need to argue for a holistic vision of landscape and the social and cultural formations that this gives rise to, because it simply takes such a view for granted. I learnt that on that flight into the centre – thanks to Veronica Brady's tutelage and her rare capacity for reading across cultures. I cannot claim to have known Veronica well, but I owe the personal epiphany I experienced on that day to her and remembering it has provided a legacy that has served me well on those occasions when I have been able to distance myself from the invariably shallower world-view of contemporary global cosmopolitanism. And it seems appropriate to be writing these words of thanks to Veronica here – for a journal whose involvement with the Partnership Studies project is playing a similar part in challenging the divisive 'norms' of consumer society.

John Thieme is Senior Fellow at the University of East Anglia, UK. He previously held Chairs at the University of Hull and London South Bank University, and has also taught at the Universities of Guyana and North London. His books include *Post-Colonial Con-Texts: Writing Back to the Canon*, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Essential Glossary*, *Postcolonial Literary Geographies* and monographs on Derek Walcott, V. S. Naipaul and R. K. Narayan.
johnthieme@gmail.com

Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XIV-No. 16 November 2016 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-38

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

John Stanton Davis Mellick

Poems

The Jurors
In the square they sit
like an extended jury
on separate seats,
mute,
autumned,
each a book of yesterdays.
The unaware stream by
locked in docks peculiar
pressing petals and fragrance
into an unheeding pavement.

In the sun they sit,
age dumb and grey,
watching,
seeing only
last year's petals
last years leaves.

Till The Next Time
When you have pressed
your last handkerchief,
placed its edges lip to lip
rearranged the drawer,
smoothed,
patted
tidied,
and put it in its place
do you wonder
what happened to the wrinkles?

Sunborn of water
midwifed by the wind,
somewhere they lie
kink straightened and flat –
till the next time.

The Way Home
(For VCM)
A Davis she was
as was your mother
and gently brushed your hair
and I entering
knew that this was your time of going,
as slow as dawn coming.

Me you leave softly
your last breath
your goodbye
and that long wrestle
to make meaning
in a brown land
for a dark-haired man under the Crown
far from the green fields of Drumadoan
and the cobbled streets of Derry
has ceased.

It was my duty, you said,
and though I would have
I would not hold you
for your way of going
was your way home.

Jsd Mellick is a retired senior English lecturer, University of Queensland. His publications include: *A Centennial History of the Pharmaceutical Society of Queensland* (1980); *The Passing Guest, A Life of Henry Kingsley (1982); The Portable Henry Kingsley* (1982); editor with Patrick Morgan & Paul Eggert, the Academy of the Humanities edition, *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* (1996); associate editor, *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia (1987); Writers' Footprints, A Literary Guide to Queensland* (2010). His poetry has appeared in U.S.A. and Australian journals.
jsdmell@gmail.com

Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XIV-No. 16 November 2016 DOI: 10.17456/simple-49

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

Gail Jones

Five Meditations on a Moonlit Night
(I. M. Veronica Brady)

(I) Footprints and Bereavement

In 1969 human beings stamped their footprints on the surface of the moon. They did not tread lightly, but bounded boldly and emphatically, impressing the soft lunar dust with their heavy ridged boots. The photographer Michael Light, who is responsible for collecting hundreds of photographs taken on the moons' surface, says that what is remarkable about these traces is that they will not fade or diminish. Because the moon has no wind, no rain and no forms of erosion, the astronautical footprints will exist for a hundred million years.

Why is this idea disquieting?

I want to use this small detail – this notion of human figuration (photography, artworks) and human disfiguration (the marking of the face of the moon, the leaving of traces) to meditate on the dialectic between art and the natural world. And I want to ask - and this is a very personal question – why it seems to me that these footprints, these trans-historical footprints, are somehow associated with grief or bereavement.

The knowledge of ineradicable footprints is paradigmatic of many things: the imperial gestures by which we try to claim the earth and the sky, the persisting contest between tradition and modernity, the scientific aspiration to capture the natural as a material resource. I think of televisual images of men in cumbersome suits, each looking awkward, cartoonish, absurdly misplaced, each bobbing and heaving in a place that had hitherto been mysterious. The astronauts' faces are obscured by reflecting glass panels, so they appear as anonymous, as representative human shapes. Yet their movements and actions seem to signify disparagement: there is no sense that they have entered a place of mystery or strangeness: the moon is a golf course, it is a mine, it is a workplace, it is a playground; it is, above all, a television event. The flag they leave behind them is an artificial and almost ludicrous token of conquest.

Implicit here is the violation of the aesthetic and symbolic autonomy of the moon, and beyond that, an example of the subordination of mystery to instrumentality. We have gazed at the moon for millennia and its enchantment was in part its utter remoteness. We love what evades our grasp; we admire radical otherness, we adore the sublimity of natural phenomena that imply a completely separate scale of being. While art strives to register our forms of interconnection and correspondence, it also seeks, I think, to affirm this separateness – that humanity is not, after all, the measure of all things, but that we exist in local, planetary and cosmic contexts that require our humility and our awe. Something in the technical markings left on the moon offend this principle, this link between correspondence and separation. And since we often speak of the face of the moon, these everlasting marks can be read as a kind of defacement, as a persistent scarring.

Grief is the emotional registration of loss. Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, the natural world carries loss, just as it carries renewal and redemption. This loss takes the shape of a human footprint.

(II) The Gift and Forgetfulness

What is nature? Nature is the gift. Let us imagine a new economy. In conventional terms, economies are ways of deciding and locating value: these are systems in which value is transferred, traded, accumulated and so on. However there is also, of course, the economy of the gift. In this symbolic model there is a circuit of exchange and a profound sense of value, but the ethic is of generosity, not possession or profit, and the value is incalculable. Oceans, forest, desert, sky: these are gifts. We receive them but we do not possess them: they are the generosity of Being itself. Art has a function to reinstate an understanding of the gift economy, because it recognises metaphysical, not just physical forms of value, and because in our representations, our music, poetry, craft work, photographs, we attempt to honour the gift by increasing its presence in essentially metaphoric forms. Perhaps, too, we could say that the finest artworks recover in us the experience of gratitude. When I think about the night-sky, and about the footprinted moon, I am conscious that the gift of night is the gift of wonderment. Who among us has not wondered at the loveliness of stars or the dark glossy sweep of the Milky Way?

For writers the night offers an alternative poetics. Night is mythic, it is a space of fantasy, meditation, desire, romance, yearning – the promissory state, that is to say, of many stories – but it is also redolent of a whole constellation of gifted perceptions: luminosity, tranquility, suspension, infinity.

Let me now offer a metaphor for our forgetting of the gift. Since the moon takes 27.3 days to go once around the earth, and 27.3 days to spin on its axis, it always keeps the same face turned in our earthly direction. Before 1959, when the Russians sent the third Lunik rocket around the moon, no one had seen its enigmatic far side. The dark face of the moon. The inscrutable face. However the moon is unstable as well as regular in its movement. It wobbles and oscillates – these minor shifts in space are called librations. Because the moon librates, selenographers have seen fifty-nine per cent of its surface, even though no more than fifty per cent is visible at any one time. So there is always a margin between the seen and the unseen, and only forty one per cent of the moon is permanently hidden.

This anomaly appeals to me because it reminds us that behind every shiny visibility lies its dark elaboration, and that our scientific knowledge can never quite encompass the distance between seeing and knowing. It reminds us that the entirety of things is always hidden. The philosophy of black ink painting, of Japanese Sumi-e, suggests that art must assume only sixty per cent visibility of whatever it paints. The missing forty per cent, in both creation and reception, is the act of aesthetic experience.

Remembering the unseen face, like remembering the economy of the gift, is also the work of art.

(III) Approximations

This section takes as its starting point a quote from the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his famous essay on nature. He wrote: "We live in a system of approximations. Our music, our poetry, our language itself, are not satisfactions, but suggestions" (Emerson 2009: 44)[1].

As the Sumi-e wisdom implies, art is not an act of completion or replication; in Emerson's terms it is like a *suggestion.*

Why might this idea be important? The idea, of approximation instills in us the humility of any attempt at meaning. Since our meanings are provisional and not absolute, art too is the expression of our honourable contingency and incompletion. No artist would claim perfection: this is truly inhuman. However it is perhaps another aspect of our forgetfulness that we do not cherish the idea of approximation, even the idea of failure, as we should.

Error and illusion are central to art. Think, by way of analogy, of the illusion of the moon's size. When it is situated low down, near the horizon, it appears quite large, and it seems to shrink, often remarkably, as it appears to ascend. Everyone has seen it: the big fat moon shining like a spoon, and the high small dot, remote and reduced. These moons are, of course, exactly the same size; even Ptolemy, one of the earliest astronomers, knew this to be so. But scientific knowledge does not diminish our human apprehension or pleasure of illusion; nor does it require us to rescale the moon to its actual consistency. Instead, art is our form of negotiation between the real and the visionary, and a fat moon in a poem is not untrue. Van Gogh's sky is not untrue. A piece of music, like Holst's *Planets Suite*, is not untrue. In fact approximation, we could say, is the quality of celebration in art.

When we configure or transfigure in musical notes, or paint, or clay, or in frail written words, we do not *figure out* meaning. We figure suggestions. We figure illusions. And our responsibility is not to *disfigure*, or dishonour. Astronomers tell us that the world carne into existence, in a big bang, about 15 billion years ago. Stars, planets, entire whirling galaxies, all swept into being. The universe is expanding, getting thinner and thinner, and apparently is 90 to 99 per cent composed (depending on estimates) of what has been called 'missing' or 'dark' matter, an inexplicable form of mass which includes, among other things, the black hole remnants of dead stars. In this context human existence is incredibly tiny, but also magnificently implausible, and the idea that a kind of darkness is the main substance of the universe is almost too strange for one person to consider. I have no particular knowledge of science – but what I want to affirm is the patterning impulse that such a discrepancy inspires, and I want to think about how we aestheticize darkness. Here is a piece of writing from one of my favourite authors, John Berger:

> We are both storytellers. Lying on our backs, we look up at the night sky. This is where stories began, under the aegis of that multitude of stars which at night filch certitudes and sometimes return them as faith. Those who first invented and then named the constellations were storytellers. Tracing an imaginary line between a cluster of stars gave them an image and an identity. The stars threaded on that line were like events

[1] R. W. Emerson [1836] 2009. *Nature and Other Essays*. Mineola-New York: Dover Publications.

> threaded on a narrative. Imagining the constellations did not of course change the stars, nor did it change the black emptiness that surrounds them. What it changed was the way people read the night sky (2005: 8)[2].

What moves me about this paragraph is its affirmation of the wish to place patterns over the darkness, to praise in the face of emptiness, and to trade certitude for faith. Stories change nothing in our relation to eternity, but the human capacity to design is a loving return of the gift.

(IV) The Man in the Moon

With some hesitancy I wish now to introduce my own fiction.

I spent my childhood in several areas in rural Western Australia, in a remote region by the ocean in the far north west, in the goldmining district of the desert in the centre, and in dairy farming land near the south west coast. I have inhabited, therefore, a series of landscapes, each with its own claims of beauty and specialness. Child-knowing keeps safe images and experiences of place in highly particular ways, and I believe that the landscapes of childhood have particular relevance to artistry. The heart has many chambers, one might say, to house all it has lived in.

Of the desert I remember not just terrestrial enlargements, endless horizons and exceptional distances, but also the immensity and scope of the night-time sky. One of my stories, called "The Man in the Moon" (1997)[3] attempts to understand the metaphor of the moon as a face. The story is about mourning; a young woman remembers her father and her mother, and connects her father's obsession with drawing and studying the moon to a kind of terrible loneliness.

The tone of the story is very sombre and restrained and it tries to link scientific discourse with the emotional territory of grieving and the complexity of memory. It also implies that memory is a telescope, bent on the concentrated and dispassionate scrutiny of distant meanings. This is a section from the middle of the story:

> Aeons ago, when Stella and I were children, we lived with our parents in the Western desert. Father worked for a mining company; mother, still complete and still carrying presence rather than absence, worked as a writer in the caravan which was our home. It was a simple austere life, governed by isolation.
> How can I tell you about our desert? The spaces were so huge that we sometimes felt suspended, as though dangling from silk parachutes, between earth and sky. Wind blew up from the gulf, carrying the fragrance of sea water, and thin grasses quivered, and heat cracked open granite stones, and the umber earth shifted and stirred and rose in small restless spirals. Light was bent in the wind so that the look of things distorted: trees hung upside down and figures floated towards us in trembling dark verticals. Distance of any sort was impossible to calculate. We lived, that is to say, in

[2] John Berger [1984] 2005. *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief As Photos*. London: Bloomsbury.

[3] Gail Jones. 1997. *Fetish Lives: Stories*. South Fremantle, (W. A.): Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

a field of abstraction. And there was, moreover, a strange sound in the air, like the after-echo of a bell, like the memory of a sound.
At night-time outer-space was altogether everywhere. Our caravan was a tiny bubble of kerosene-yellow illumination; but outside great patterns of white stars slid; in the cupola of heaven it was all immensity. The moon drifted upwards, a sovereign bright face. When it was full my father stood for hours beneath it, peering into his telescope. We resented him for his obsession and his self-enclosure. Mother grumbled and complained; her husband gave as peace-offerings delicate pencil drawings, curiously florescent, of the moon's visible surface. He kissed her on the forehead: it was his most typical gesture.
(In the desert moonlight that issued in rays through the windows we could see his narrow body undulating slowly above hers. A nebulous shape in a milky way).
The famous seas of the moon are not seas at all. They have never contained any water, but are lava-plains, once fluid, but now completely dry. Nevertheless these seas have remarkable names, names of antique and Latinate redolence. There is the Mare Imbrium (the Sea of Showers), the Oceanus Procellarum (the Ocean of Storms) and the Mare Serenitatus (the Sea of Serenity), to mention just three. The moon has drawn poetic impulses, just as it draws the heavy sad tides. It invites metaphorics. It recruits metaphysics. It is a round-shaped screen, obligingly receptive, for any number of loony projections.
According to my father our desert was once an ocean. He would return from geological excursions with pockets-full of fossilised evidence. A complete ancient fish, a sea-star missing one limb, ammonites, pretty cockle shells, odds and ends prehistoric. Imagine, my father said, we are living beneath ghost waves. Imagine this place totally oceanic. We're like the Oceanus Procellarum, someone's imagined sea.
Leonardo da Vinci believed that moonshine was the reflected brightness of the oceans of the earth. So there were seas on the moon, in this fanciful manner of imagining, just as there were, in my own childhood, desert memories of waves.

Towards the end of the story, the focus returns to the father:

When in July 1969 Apollo 11 landed on the moon, depositing itself, flagrantly, in the Sea of Tranquility, my father was unexcited. He was already by then living permanently in the desert, away from television, away from cities, away from western community, and already imagining, through sand-drawings, alternative cosmologies. Nevertheless, for all his denunciations and disavowals, he mentioned the moon-landing often: it seemed his preoccupation. Among my father's belongings I found boxes of newspaper clippings: the one-small-step that was the one-giant-leap, Edwin Aldrin and Neil Armstrong planting an American flag, scientific instruments of impressive complexity, astronauts engaged in chubby-suited leaps and bounces. And in the note he left behind, there beside his body in the desert, he said we could locate his spirit through the telescope, moon-walking on the Sea of Tranquility. The moon, he wrote, was his own and particular totem.

When we write of nature we are both burdened and empowered by already existing versions. In the Western tradition, the moon is coded – since Aristotle – as corruptible, transient, deceptive, feminine, a symbol of potentially evil force in comparison to the supra-lunary world of pure, indestructible and unchanging space. In Eastern traditions the moon is often a symbol of constancy and eternity: the moon is the greatest of the yin powers in the Chinese cosmos, for example, and a manifestation of *qi*, or the breath of heaven. Moon-watching is associated with meditation, wisdom and the understanding of beauty. In Australian Aboriginal traditions the moon is masculine, and it symbolises a man who dies and is reborn again and again. In the Northern Territory story I'm familiar with, there is *literally* a man in the moon, and I wanted to take this idea as a sort of emblem for imagining relations between people across vast lonely spaces, and to try to speak of the estrangements that exist between families. There are as many cosmologies as there are people.

My work is concerned with metaphor, and with the idea that art is a kind of longing for completion. This story, "The Man in the Moon", includes the suggestion that in Australia there is an entirely other meaning to the world, that which is indigenous. When the father says that the moon is his own and particular totem, he is indicating how far he has moved from Western science: the totemic is a belief in sympathetic magic; it is an essentially spiritual and symbolic connection. The artist in indigenous cultures is the true magician: he or she serves as a medium for the sacred to be known through revelation. Here I am reminded of the words of Walter Benjamin, which I think have relevance for all nature-writing: "Truth is not the unveiling that destroys the secret, but the revelation that does it justice" (45)[4].

(V) The Sacred and Death

Highly technological societies everywhere can learn from traditional cultures, and the uncanny other-side to secular Australia is Aboriginal meaning. Conceived as a 'dreaming', a mythic world perpetually in existence, in Aboriginal versions of the land all is sacred and inter-connected. The land is reverenced because it is of the same spirit as each individual and because it is irreplaceably precious. This is a system of belief built up over 60,000 years of continuous settlement.

Part of my adult life was spent by the Swan River in Perth – a river which lost its indigenous name in 1827, when the English sea captain James Stirling sailed the blue water, saw flocks of shiny black swans, and arrived at a little bay at the foot of a hill which is just down the road from where I lived. Stirling called the area Mount Eliza, but the Aboriginal name still exists: Goonininup. The region is now the site of an old brewery, but for the Nyoongar community, the local tribe, it is a resting place of Wagyl, a rainbow snake that moved through the whole area, creating with its body and movements the shape of the river, the hills, the springs and the bays. The site was the basis of a legal dispute; Aboriginal people demanded recognition of the sacredness of the area.

I mention this example because it deeply concerns me: one aspect of the gift is obligation; the obligation of respect and preservation. Where there are contending claims on land

[4] Walter Benjamin [1955] 1999. *Illuminations*. Hannah Harendt ed. London: Pimlico.

and meaning, it would seem fruitful to insist that many meanings are possible, and that in any case Western imperial meaning should not take automatic precedence. I think of art as a kind of proliferation of meanings, and these take place in contexts of moral community.

Here is an Aboriginal man speaking of his relationship to the world. The voice is of Bill Neidjie, of the Bunitji clan in the Northern Territory, and his oral narratives have been recorded under the title *Story about Feeling* (1989)[5].

> Well e tell you about this story,
> about story where you feel ... laying down.
> Tree, grass, star ...
> because star and tree working with you.
> We got blood pressure
> but same thing ... spirit on your body,
> but e working with you.
> Even nice wind blow ... having a sleep ...
> because that spirit e with you.
> Listen carefully this, you can hear me.
> I'm telling you because earth just like mother
> and father and brother to you.
> That tree same thing.
> Your body, my body I suppose,
> I'm same as you ... anyone.
> Tree working when you sleeping and dream.
> This story e can listen carefully, e can listen slow.
> If you in city well I suppose lot of houses,
> you can't hardly look this star
> but might be one night you look.
> Have a look star because that's the feeling.
> String, blood ... through your body.

Neidjie's cosmology makes no distinction between human life, which breathes, pumps blood, dreams, watches, and the life of the moon, the trees and the pulsating stars. *Have a look star, because that's the feeling*. This is not my tradition and I cannot appropriate it. Yet other knowledges instruct us in modesty and respect, and unlock and enrich our own cultural imaginaries. I find this fragment of story lyrical, moving and conceptually complex: it indicates an audaciously imagined world, and seems to confirm an intuition we all have at some stage, that the body is also the universe.

In 1999 I went for the first time to an observatory, in the hills outside Perth, to look closely at the heavens. It was a balmy clear night; there was a light wind and the scent of eucalyptus floating in streams in the air. Apart from the large observatory, there were three smaller telescopes set up outside in the bush, and I was led through complete darkness – gradually finding my night-vision – to where each rested, already focused on planets and

[5] Bill Neidjie. 1989. *Story About Feeling*. Keith Taylor ed. Broome (W. A.): Magabala Books.

stars. In the darkness I climbed a ladder to look into a telescope turned to the moon. The magnification of detail was wholly astonishing: the moon's face met me with the dazzling unreality of hallucination. White, ghostly, exquisitely detailed: I saw no footprints, no human marks, but only the bright intensification of an already familiar face. I remember feeling very excited; my heart was pounding and I felt both energised and transfixed. Yet when my time was up I had to be helped in a slow decent down the ladder, because the after-effect of gazing at the moon in darkness is blindness. I was blind for two or three minutes after descending, and found this proximity of the visionary and loss of sight beautifully compelling.

This is the allegory of art and death at work. We treasure the vision, the gift, because it in some way contests the annihilation of life itself. The beaming moon, the changeable emblem, returned to its tiny size, but the moment of changed perspective and bizarre intimacy remained in the pounding heart, as though there was indeed a connection between single bodies and entire cosmologies, between private inner-space and distant outer-space. Transcendental radiance is no more the 'essence' of art than is the darkness that surrounds it, but the encounter of each together, so close and inter-implicated, seems to suggest something fundamental about why we bother to paint, or write, or compose a piece of music. I don't wish to end on a grand rhetorical point but on a small and simple one: the gift returned outweighs all our intuitions of nothingness. The smallest ephemeral artwork, the smallest figuration, is testimony to the act of remembering that all is not lost.

Author's Afterword

Five Meditations on a Moonlit Night is an 'old' piece of writing. It was written in the year 2000 as a talk to be delivered at the Toji Cultural Centre in South Korea on the very general topic of "Nature and Art". I'd been invited at the last minute by DFAT (the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) through ASIALINK (a cross-cultural agency based in Melbourne) – to speak in Korea. Someone had dropped out at the last minute and I had only a few days, while teaching, to prepare the talk. Among other things, I included a few extracts from one of my short stories, "The Man in the Moon". It suited my purpose because the story was written in an oddly scientific register, and because I was perhaps somewhat panicky at so urgent a task. I'd been asked to speak mainly about my own work, but felt reluctant to do so, so this paper was a compromise in many senses – its simplicity a symptom of nervousness about translation, its citation of other texts rather too obviously expedient.

I lost my copy of the paper and it was never published, but it arrived by email, out of the blue, in November 2016. When I read it I recovered some of my initial embarrassment – the sense that it was hasty, thin, unworthy except as a friendly talk – and also that the short story it quoted from seems nowadays heavy-handed and problematic. It is reproduced here without changes, except to reference that I no longer live in Perth. But I was also powerfully reminded of how central Veronica Brady's teaching and friendship were to this talk, and indeed to the trajectories of my own intellectual life. We had often spoken together of the concept of gift economies; we had exchanged books and articles on the topic, and enjoyed vigorous arguments (the nun and the atheist) about the meanings of the universe, about what is given and gifted, about what remains lacking or occluded. She had always liked

"The Man in The Moon", and one night we shared a meal in which, rather inebriated, she began by citing it. We joked about astronauts and explorations. We waxed and waned on the night sky. We concurred happily in our wish to remain solidly earthbound. The evening ended with our toasting Bill Neidjie and his radical-materialist model of the sacred. So this casual piece of writing, still carrying my ambivalence and the fraught time of its composition, is also replete with Veronica's energetic presence, with her influence, spirit and loving goodwill. I now dedicate it to her memory.

Gail Jones is the author of two short-story collections and six novels, the most recent of which is *A Guide to Berlin* (2015). Her fiction has been translated into sixteen languages, won awards in Australia, and been short-listed for international awards. She has been the recipient of writing fellowships in India, Ireland, Germany, France, the USA, China and Italy. She is currently Professor of Writing in the Writing and Society Research Centre at the University of Western Sydney.
gail.jones@westernsydney.edu.au

Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XIV-No. 16 November 2016 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-39

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

Paolo Totaro

Poems

Fence Sitters

I love fence sitters [who are] true to peace
[as to] war [equidistant from] law [as to] crime.
Dexterity [is] gauche. Sinisterness [may be] right.
Cast[ing] a shadow over the truth
of a [midnight] moon in sunlight.

[But] fence sitters [require more
than love] require the dark wild forces
that make the skies rotate from right to left
and [when not observed] from left to right,
upside down, until all [views] are a-blend[ed]
[with what were] swishes and zigzags
[be]yond with[in] the fence sitters' minds.

I love them in [the] a world now coming
where [all ideas are a-blend[ed]
Good [cute] bad [acute] obtuse [moral]
ambiguised supremized lethalfellated
mighty sitters [right and] left brain
anastomized [now] scream
cream [with me]: Hurray yarruH!

Fence Sitters

I hate fence sitters [who are] untrue to peace
[as to] war [as distant from] law [as to] crime.
Dexterity [is not] gauche. Sinisterness [won't be] right.
Cast[ing] no shadow over the lie
of a [midnight] sun in moonlight.

[When] fence sitters [want less hate]
they reject the luminous forces
that stop the skies rotate from left to right
and [when observed] from left to theft,
head upturned, until all [views] are suspended
[with what will be] christmas wishes
[be]yond with[out] the fence sitters' minds.

I hate them in [the] a world now gone
where [all ideas are separated
Good [cute] bad [acute] obtuse [moral]
ambiguised supremized lethalfellated
mighty sitters [right and] left brain
anastomized [now] scream
cream [with me]: Hurray yarruH!
... the melancholy souls of those
Who lived without either infamy or praise
(Dante/Longfellow III).

Sydney, June 2016

Naples, June 1944
Yes, we started not with Snow White but with Boris Karlóff.
We would rather take fright at one monster than scoff at seven dwarfs.

Soppy scenes with heart-shaped apple pies, birds, dewy-eyed foal
were no match for the giant man-made Man trudging to the Pole.

We were allowed to go to the nearby cinema, me and my then soul-mate.
She and I were all of eleven, intrepid explorers, but home by eight.

It was the end of bombings. But then Vesuvius erupted. The counterfeit.

countervailed life's ongoing horror. Frankenstein made us used to it.
... l'anime triste di coloro
che visser sanza 'nfamia e sanza lodo (Inferno, III).

Paolo Totaro was born in Naples in 1933 and migrated to Sydney in 1963, where he joined the Australian Council as the first Director of Community Arts. Among several other public positions, he was appointed Founding Chairman of the New South Wales Ethnic Affairs Commission, Visiting Professor of the University of Western Sydney and Pro-Chancellor at the University of Technology (UTS, Sydney). He has written poetry most of his life. *Conversazioni Mute* was published in the anthology *Two Hundred Years of Australian Poetry* (OUP 1991), followed by *Collected Poems 1950-2011* (Padana Press 2012).
ptotaro@bigpond.net.au

Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XIV-No. 16 November 2016 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-40

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

Michael Ackland

"Reclaiming the Rubbish": Outcasts, Transformation and the Topos of the Painter-Seer in the work of Patrick White and David Malouf

Abstract I: Colonizzata da detenuti bianchi e spesso da persone con poche prospettive nel Vecchio Mondo, l'Australia è stata talvolta considerata negativamente come una 'discarica' di criminali e buoni a nulla. Questo saggio dimostra come, nel dopoguerra, questa percezione è stata messa in discussione nella prosa di Patrick White e David Malouf, che mette in luce versioni locali dell'artista emarginato in discariche reali, e le trasformazioni rigenerative, creative che possono avvenire in quei luoghi.

Abstract II: Settled by white convicts and often by people with few prospects in the Old World, Australia was sometimes thought of negatively as a dumping ground of miscreants and ne'er-do-wells. This paper traces how, post-war, this perception was challenged in the fiction of Patrick White and David Malouf, which depicts local versions of the outcast artist in actual rubbish dumps and the creative, regenerative transformations that can occur there.

One of the most persistent images of Australia, and an abiding source of deep local shame, has been the notion of the country as a rubbish dump. Reputedly a barren waste land inhabited by indigenous peoples doomed to extinction, the country formally entered European history as the last stop for Britain's die-hard miscreants, and as a potential breeding ground of ill repute where, in keeping with the biblical adage, little good was to be expected of progeny in whom the sins of the fathers were bound to be visited on later generations. Admittedly, over ensuing decades, some observers nourished utopian dreams for the Great Southland, but the naysayers were not to be silenced. Their descendants have scoffed at the outcast, the disinherited, the socially downtrodden and under-privileged, who have found their way to antipodean shores, labelling them variously 'refos', '$10-Poms', 'wogs', 'daggos' and most recently the dreaded boat people: diverse undesirables whose arrival signalled that Australia remained an inveterate dumping ground from which only rubbish or worse could be expected. Post the Second World War, however, some of Australia's finest creative talent has revisited these inherited tropes, and sought new ways of understanding and laying claim to the continent. And two of the most prominent, Patrick White and David Malouf, have, as I hope to show, endeavoured to re-envisage the eye-sore, mind-sore of the antipodean dump, that quintessential marker of national shame, as a site of regenerative hope and empowerment.

This occurs most prominently in the novels *Riders in the Chariot* and *Harland's Half Acre*, works which focus on a marginalized painter as a representative visionary, in depictions which betray both an indebtedness to European prototypes and the influence of a peculiarly antipodean problematic. White's Alf Dubbo and Malouf's Clem Harland fit effortlessly into the traditional gallery of *poètes maudits/artistes maudits*, popularised in France, while their characters' constant dissatisfaction and ongoing creative travail recall the Romantic advocacy of endless striving as the hallmark of, and pathway to, genius[1]. Also Dubbo and Harland's withdrawal to the outer fringes of society to pursue their art has crucial precursors. The most obvious and exemplary is the dedicated life of modernism's first great master, Paul Cézanne, the famed recluse of Aix-en-Provence who spurned the distractions of Paris to paint and repaint Mont Sainte-Victoire. A local equivalent was afforded by the secluded and starkly focused existence of Ian Fairweather on Bribie Island, upon whom Harland is modeled. Fairweather's achievement fascinated both novelists, and his canvases, according to Murray Bail, offer intimations of 'the eternal mystery of the world' and 'its comprehensibility' (128) – an evaluation presumably shared by White and Malouf[2].

To this rich thematic palette are added dilemmas posed by indigenous creation. Inherited artistic prototypes are deftly transposed by White and Malouf to uncomfortable or unsavoury local habitats, from tips to tropical bushscapes, and infused with aboriginality. These decisions reflect changing local attitudes towards Australia itself, as well as afford challenging, potentially rich, alternatives to empty mainstream norms. Long gone was the period when the *indigène* could be banished or reduced to a diminutive supernumerary, his culture dismissed as unworthy of serious attention (Ackland 1984). Similarly, the colonial notion of the 'unimproved' countryside as virtually worthless had yielded to a recognition that the antipodean landscape needed to be respected, carefully studied, and that in many instances it was best used and 'possessed' on its own terms. In response, White made Dubbo part-aboriginal, Malouf his powerful, life-changing *genus loci* black, while the crucial rite of passage of both painter-protagonists – the seminal turn in their visionary development and augmenting life-knowledge is – conspicuously set in a local tip.

At one level Dubbo's story seems an antipodean tale almost worthy of inclusion in a new, Vasari-inspired *Lives of Antipodean Artists*. It traces a trajectory shared with many masters of *Quattrocento* Italy: from family-less poverty, through chance but fortuitous instruction, towards the unfolding of irrepressible, God-given gifts. His instinctive urge to drawn

---

[1] Key Romantic writers also identified perennial dissatisfaction and striving as humankind's distinguishing trait and chance of immortality or salvation, perhaps most famously in Goethe's *Faust*, Parts One and Two. It was memorably expressed in artistic terms in Browning's "Andrea del Sarto": "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,/Or what's a heaven for" (ll. 96-97, Loucks 187) – that imperfect but glorious reach which allegedly distinguished the ineffable life-force captured by Raphael from the colder, purely technical mastery of Del Sarto. White's prototypal painter in *The Vivisector*, of course, dies reaching upwards and striving: "Only reach higher. Could. And will" (641).

[2] Bail (1981: 128). Fairweather has proved to be not just the painter's painter but also the writers'. After all, White acquired one of his major works, *Gethsemane*; Malouf drew on his life-story in *Harland's Half Acre*, and Bail wrote a definitive, specialist tome on this painter's achievement, which was reworked and reissued in 2008 with the same title *Ian Fairweather*.

and an amateur training in the arts are ultimately subsumed within an idiosyncratic but recognisable paradigm of genius and spiritual vision[3]. Dubbo of course is no biblical prophet, but a half-caste aboriginal who appears to the outside world stereotypically as drunken and bruised, or "a brute that no decent man would touch" (White 1964: 309)[4]. He is depicted as a rootless, unformed youth who passes from an initial struggle to comprehend his own intuitions, through moments of searing insight, to "a rage to arrive at understanding" of the divine mystery that surrounds him (371). His work, once he discovers a "tube of supernatural blue" and other oil paints (322), will eventually become "a bonfire", a "blaze of colour" (35)[5]. Yet Dubbo as artist is no simple *ingénu* let loose with a box of oil paints. Instead, at the hands of a minister's sister, the lack-lustre Mrs Pask, he passes through an artistic apprenticeship familiar from colonial times on, gaining "technical facility" and learning "the principles of drawing" (315). But thanks to innate gifts his learning is accelerated, his application of the basics masterful and manipulative: "with a few ingratiating strokes the boy might reproduce the whole world as his teacher knew it" (321).

The turning-point in Dubbo's career occurs at a site traditionally associated with decay, wastage and blighted endings – a rubbish dump. Its location is Mungindribble, a representative country town (only "hotter, dustier and … drier" than many others [334]), where wealth clusters towards the centre and outcasts around its rim, making this the natural site for a tip. White, however, rather than embroidering on the dump's distasteful properties, uses its detritus as an ongoing revelation of local character, as well as a spur to creativity. For here "it seemed the inhabitants of Mungindribble had shed their true selves…and he [Dubbo] would lie on an old mattress, where its overflow of springs and stuffing allowed, and dream the paintings which circumstances prevented him temporarily from doing" (336). The tip's human correlative and virtual custodian is hard-bitten Mrs Spice, who lives in a makeshift humpy at its edge. During daylight hours she is "in the empty-bottle business" (335). At night she turns tricks with an itinerant clientele, who do not baulk at a once-white woman, merely because she is scrawny, without teeth and "the colour and texture of mature bacon" (335). Her fierce coupling with Dubbo leaves him barely "wearing his skin, which was all she had left him" (338) – and blightingly diseased. Like Thomas Mann's Leverkühn (and his likely model Nietzsche) in *Dr. Faustus*, Dubbo is fated to suffer the scourge of advancing syphilis and attendant moments of blinding vision. "The furtive destroying sickness" becomes the accompaniment and precondition of the "regenerating creative act" (341). White's path to the Blakean palace of wisdom (evoked in the novel's epigraph from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*) leads via an innocuous dump, revelatory of suburban destitution, and via the frenzied cominglings of blasted species (archetypal 'burnt ones'), which drive Dubbo ever "deeper into himself" and towards "crystallizing … understanding" (341).

---

[3] This tradition is evoked by the book's epigraph, drawn from Plate 12 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which recounts a conversation between Ezekiel, Isaiah and William's Blake precocious narrator.

[4] All quotations are from this edition.

[5] Key elements of White's depiction of the archetypal painter remained stable and remarkably consistent over decades, right to the death as his artist-as-vivisector, who dies "acknowledging with all the strength of his live hand the otherwise unnameable I-N-D-I-G-O" (641).

Ultimately, however, Dubbo remains the focus of numerous artistic traditions rather than a new type of the painter – the full potential inherent in his characterisation and imagination-inspiring surroundings is not realised[6]. On examining the work of a fellow artist he is able, like Browning's Andrea del Sarto, to correct a mis-drawn arm. But Dubbo goes beyond Del Sarto in being capable of infusing a lapidary depiction with deeper spirit: he would paint it "dropping sparks. Or stars. Moving" (320). What he produces in response to his own daemon is shocking to weak and conventional minds. "Things are not like this", expostulates an overtaxed Mrs Pask (326). "It's downright madness", she adds, thereby placing his works in the exalted company of Blake's and Van Gogh's. White prefers, in brief, to evoke the familiar equation of personal affliction as the yin to the yang of high creative endeavours ("They were the two poles, the negative and the positive of his being" [341]), rather than to tap into Dubbo's putative indigenous heritage[7]. In fact, the latter is deliberately gainsaid: even this protagonist's "expected laziness" (that is, the disinterested attitude of the blackfellow) might have been inherited, the narrator is at pains to point out, "from some Irish ancestor" (314). Instead the painter's aboriginality serves primarily as a marker and guarantor of his alienated status, like Jew or feral old woman do for respectively Himmelfarb and Miss Hare – all of whom are destined to feel firsthand the evil that resides in mankind, or, as White puts it, to "experience the knife" (309). Thus White creates a familiar *artiste maudit*, who differs from the stereotype principally in being aboriginal, yet does not exploit the native's putative oneness with the land. This would have fitted neither a plot that calls for similar visionary status in four characters, three of them white, nor a conception of the spiritual informed by Judeo-Christian and occult Western heritages.

Three years later in *The Burnt Ones* White completed his trans-valuation of the generic rubbish tip. In "Down at the Dump", the final story of this collection, the stakes are simplified. Aboriginality and the preconditions for vision yield centre stage to a re-envisaging of the austral tip's possible role and connotative range. Starkly different assessments of it are offered and dramatized by antithetical social groups. One group, the Whalleys, live opportunistically from scavenging refuse and bottles (they "did the dumps" [1968: 286][8]), and gravitate to tips for recreation. They are aligned with authenticity, fecundity, unconditional love and visionary promise. All this repressive, shortsighted mainstream society, represented by the stifled family of Councillor Hogden, would 'dump' or reject, together with the corpse of Daisy Morrow (his deceased sister-in-law), who dared to love a social untouchable out of wedlock. Now, too, the town's tip abuts its cemetery: "only a couple of strands

[6] Nevertheless, early commentary on White, responding to the innovative characterisation of Dubbo, were usually warmly in their praise of the writer's conception. According to Kiernan, Dubbo was unquestionably "a triumph" (75). Colmar praised the successful mixture of "realism and archetypal symbolism in his presentation" (45), and Burrows both the way White fused stereotypes in him and used him to project aspects of his own dilemmas as an artist (52-60). Fifty years later understanding of and expectations about indigenous characters have changed considerably.

[7] The thesis that creativity springs from personal wounding or trauma was handled definitively by Edmund Wilson, while more recently McGann, in relation to White's novel, has redefined the thesis as one of the "relationship between abjection and cultural production" (McGann 1947: 153).

[8] All quotations are from this edition.

of barbed wire" separate them (297). This collocation brings into uncomfortable proximity corpses with domestic waste, as well as orthodox rites with all they try in vain to suppress. Hence Meg Hogden, a fledgling poet-seer, passes easily to the other side, and in the dump exchanges forbidden kisses with young Lum Whalley. Their amorous overtures hint at possible reconciliation and emotional resurgence, while in the cemetery deceased but present Daisy demonstrates to unprejudiced eyes that there is a morrow after physical death, as her spirit stands beside the grave and holds forth to deaf mourners.

The story's other major innovation is in its depiction of the actual contents of the dump. In *Riders in the Chariot* these scarcely extend beyond familiar literary clichés. Smashed bottles and jagged edges evoke the ever-waiting 'knives' and misadventures of existence. A broken clock with its 'insides' on show (334), which Dubbo keeps, suggests that ensuing events occur outside time, yet lends them a fateful inevitability. The short story, on the other hand, describes the accumulated rubbish in much greater detail, embracing a plenitude of objects from sun-buckled footwear and a dismantled doll to mangled mattresses and "stained asbestos" (297). They afford a snap-shot of local conditions, phases, fads and detritus. Occasionally they serve as potential indicators of the individually repressed, the socially disdained, most obviously in 'a disemboweled mattress' that escapes out onto a road, where it "looked like a kind of monster from out of the depths of somebody's mind, the part a decent person ignored" (298). But crucially, among this communal debris, independent eco-systems emerge, as well as suggestions of subtly supportive interaction between human and natural needs:

> Here and there it appeared as though trash might win. The onslaught of metal was pushing the scrub into the gully. But in many secret, steamy pockets, a rout was in progress: seeds had been sown in the lumps of grey, disintegrating kapok and the laps of burst chairs, the coils of springs, locked in the spirals of wirier vines, had surrendered to superior resilience. Somewhere on the edge of the whole shambles a human ally, before retiring, had lit a fire, which by now the green had almost choked, leaving a stench of smoke to compete with the sicklier one of slow corruption (297).

Here even metal meets its match. Hard yields to soft, inert industrial matter ultimately succumbs to nature's processes. From amidst the at-first-sight, seemingly intransigent trash, strong grounds for hope emerge.

The hackneyed image of local shame, the rubbish dump, is finally identified as a veritable incubator of true progress and 'superior resilience'. Neither the existence of intransigent, man-produced impediments nor stinking, putrid decay is denied. But they are presented as part of a dynamic pattern, which continually ushers in creative forces of unforeseeable, exciting amplitude. Again, too, Australia's inherited social mores are devastatingly critiqued, together with notions of irrevocable inferiority, through the instinctive, liberating values of a despised underclass to which an indigenous presence is peripheral. Tellingly the shambling 'human ally' is distinguished by neither race or gender. In place of Alf Dubbo the story only offers sporadic references to Darkie Black, a truck-driver of indeterminate race. He appears occasionally in Lum's thoughts, where "his hands, twisting the wheel, appeared to

control the whole world" (297). A vague but potential role-model, Darkie is identified with everything that is lacking but desired in Lum's life: from domestic order to on-the-road freedom and fellowship. Far more important, however, is Lum's budding romance with Meg and his native affiliation with the dump.

Both tip and cementery, then, testify not merely to wastage and corruption, but to renewed life, vigour and what the narrator dubs 'superior resilience'. Here fearful as well as liberating deeds can occur, which unnerve those like Gil the grocer, who only understood what "was punctual, decent, docketed" (313), whereas they teach Meg that she must transcend her prescriptive socialization: "to reach understanding she would have surrendered her cleverness. She was no longer proud of it" (305). For in White's hands this terrain beyond normal controls offers hope of a better society that accommodates difference, fosters rather than suppresses the potential of youth, and opens avenues to unconventional actions and understanding. Overall the indispensability of 'rubbish' to free, vibrant creation is roundly affirmed, in a story that ends with "the warm core of certainty" (316) afforded by the happy Whalleys homeward-bound and, beyond their vehicle, with unprepossessing "flattened heads of grey grass always raising themselves again again again" (316).

A generation later the postponed day of the *indigene* in the complex calculus of waste and enhanced potential came in Malouf's fifth novel, *Harland's Half Acre*[9]. Like *Riders in the Chariot*, this book is concerned with the possibility of a thoroughly unorthodox way of laying claim to the land. The novel first documents shifts in temporal possession of a given terrain: how it passes from aboriginal to white hands after "one brief bloody encounter" (1984: 3)[10], then how the invader-settler, having won it, is in turn dispossessed by his fellows[11]. Among the progeny of these feckless whites is another painter-in-the-making. Stage one of his *Werdegang* (his coming-into-being), associated with the use of water-colours, involves recording the countryside: "His pictures were a reminder and inventory … a first act of repossession" that partakes of diluted magic (31)[12]. Up till now Harland knows the land visually and through hearsay; it has not deeply penetrated his being. To reach this higher stage he must become one with his subject. Malouf, a careful reader of Patrick White, locates this transformative event in a dump (though this time of derelict cars) on the edge of an unnamed town. There one night, feverish young Harland washes up, unaware that he is on the brink of an epochal life-change that will enable him to realise in his own person a version of the unexplored native potential of Alf Dubbo.

Malouf's dump differs from its literary precursors in its intense identification with a pre-Caucasian, primal state. It exists not merely beyond the limits of a straggling rural township, but has aspects that lie beyond conventional notions of space, time and human

---

[9] On the place of this work within the well established tradition of portraits of an artist see Knox-Shaw and Ross.

[10] All quotations are from this edition.

[11] As Indyk remarks, the novel depicts a failure of male succession, so that "the whole question of succession [is] now subsumed under the agency of art" (99).

[12] On Harland's artistic development see Neilsen (135-154) and Roslyn. Neilsen's reading is also representative of the usually cursory treatment given to Harland's night among the derelict vehicles (137-138).

agency. Cumulative clues suggest it predates creational schemata. The derelict cars stand less on land than in "infected water puddles" (46) or half-submerged, so that "the least weight, a night-cricket or a fingertip, might take them down" (46). Here normal means of orientation are lost or non-existent: of direction, of the elemental environment, and of assumed teleological purpose. Spreading, all-obliterating darkness evokes intensely untrammeled regression. A putative observer would feel "on the edge", without a firm foundation underfoot or, more extremely, on a "not-yet-formed or created continent" (46). Yet with each burst of "sickly [moon]light" the recognisable, wreck-blighted paddock reappears. The scene thus reverberates uneasily between the primordial and the decaying present, with the artist poised as potential envisager of present, past and future conditions. In current terms the site is therefore both a "graveyard of journeys" (47) as well as a fluid sphere, in which the gifted individual may be granted a transformative encounter with the original guardians or spirits of the land[13].

Exploiting the conceit of Harland's fevered condition, Malouf makes him undergo in the dump an ultimate bonding with the great south land. Quickly the youth's plan to sleep in an abandoned car is thwarted when he finds a terrifying black apparition already in possession of his chosen wreck (47). He reels back, falls to the ground, then experiences a violent, antipodean version of *Walpurgnis Nacht* when he is hurled aloft, shaken, clawed at, has his ribs crushed, and is finally "spat … out" (48) in an exhausted state. His tormentors, in fact his initiators, are dark regal "spirits, older than the ghosts of cars and their owners" (47-48), to whose overwhelming power he can only submit. Vaguely he intuits that "he had disturbed a rite, or interrupted an assembly of the dispossessed" (48). Malouf stops just short of transforming his painter into an *indigène*, but Harland does become one with the natural surroundings:

> When he came to his senses it was daylight. Damp red soil was at his eyeball with blades of blunted, razor-sharp grass sprouting from it, so coarse you could see the crystals that would cut. A host of ants was going about its business all around him, intent and scrambling, as if he were just another element in the landscape they had to negotiate and had been lying here from the beginning, or had dropped from the sky overnight. He lay watching them, their furious, fiercely organized life.
>
> His back, he discovered when he tried to move, was sun-burned right through the shirt, but when he staggered to his feet at last it was into a feeling of wholeness, of renewed power and strength, though he could never be sure afterwards which side he had come out on, or what pact he had made with his native earth (48).

Here, in an evocatively primordial setting ("you might have stepped back into a time before creation" [46]), the primal emergence of humankind from earthly mould or clay is reenacted in terms appropriate to the birth of an authentic local celebrant. His eye stares out from the red, life-sustaining soil onto a heightened vision of the inherent danger, vibrancy,

[13] On the more general use of place and space in the novel see Dever and Malouf (1989).

beauty and order of antipodean creation. Like Dubbo after his seminal encounter, Harland too is barely left with his skin intact and his body profoundly impregnated. Now red like his native soil, he represents a new kind of 'burnt one', rendered whole and creatively potent through the 'mystery' of intimate union with the tropical landscape[14].

Presiding over the dump, and over Harland's initiation, are black, wraith-like figures of indistinct identity but irresistible strength. Their depiction is intentionally open-ended:

> [Harland] tried the handle [of the car's door], turned it, and was hurled back by a blood-curdling cry. Crouched there on the seat was a black devil, all blue-black hair and breathing fire. Its look of prior right and of fierce dark ownership went right through him … He had no wish to dispute possession with the spirits of the place or with the ghosts of previous owners (47).

Whether itinerant aborigines, their ancestors or the *genus loci*, all are interchangeable as original custodians who were driven from their lands, undervalued and, for a time, profoundly dispossessed. But, as this rubbish dump starkly signals, all is not well with the new claimants' plans. The promise of endless technological advances, commodity improvements and consumer freedom, summarised by the mass-produced automobile, has issued in failed artifacts: charred hulks and "derelict bodies" (47). Rootless, questing Harland is a product of this car wreck. What will save him, and by extension society, is repossession by and bonding with indigenous creation. Its representatives, black "stately figures", sit "behind the webbed and frosted glass of every car" (47). Though usually "watchers", they seem poised to reassume control, as they do in orchestrating Harland's redemptive, nocturnal "accident" (47). After it he, though not black, is no longer merely a floating, impotent figure. Through this serendipitous rite of passage his former self has been broken down, transcended. This supposed "graveyard of journeys" (47) has actually marked their new beginning. Finally, expectations are high as this otherworldly "pact" (48) has been made not with a Mephisto-surrogate, but his native land.

For two centuries, variations played on the topos of Australia as rubbish dump have faithfully reflected the changing attitudes of white settlers to the great south land. Initially the waste land of *terra australis incognita* was deemed a fit dumping ground for England's outcasts. Subsequent attempts to document, master and possess the continent relied heavily on imposing transplanted techniques and methodologies onto an unfamiliar and often unsuited landscape. Generations later reconciliation was sought. Indigenous forces were appreciated in their own right; discovering and tapping into their secrets became a matter of urgency[15]. What once had been viewed as rubbish could, in short, yield up lessons, even artistic

---

[14] The scene is of course open to numerous interpretations. It also deftly evokes and assimilates cognate traditions, such as the spiritual notion of having to lose the self in order to regain it and far deeper insight, invoked just as Harland's harrowing is about to begin: "the silence was wide enough to get lost in" (47).

[15] This Australian turn has an unrecognised Romantic dimension, and specific affinities with Eichendorff's faith in untapped indigenous forces, identified with a slumbering universal song or "Lied": Schläft ein Lied in allen Dingen/Die da träumen fort und fort/Und die Welt hebt an zu singen/Triffst du nur das Zauberwort ("Wünschelrute", Dieter 1924: 97). Literally translated, Eichendorff's words mean: "A song sleeps in all things which dream on and on, but the world bursts into song, once you find the magic word".

gold. Hence the compositions of modern painters, in the fiction surveyed, seek at their best to replicate and plumb these forces. In White's precursor text Dubbo's artistic firstlings were "scribble[s] on the walls of the shed, the finespun lines of a world he felt to exist but could not yet corroborate" (314). Malouf makes that corroboration and locates their prototype around Harland's Bribie Island campsite. Among the usually hidden doings of nature he has discovered "scribbles under bark that might have been the most ancient indecipherable writing" (186). These reappear on Harland's canvases, together with "the wandering crimson of ant-lines, companionable trickles" (186). Now, too, the Wordsworthian corresponding breeze, that famously buffets the speaker in the opening lines of *The Prelude*, is surpassed by a constant interchange of "spirit that moved back and forth in him … like the breeze that swung between land and sea, or the tides to which sandfly bites responded with itch and quiet" (187). Ultimately Harland does "not so much" paint nature "as paint … out of it" (184). The long-despised antipodean dump proves to be a site of wonder, as well as a fit seedbed for supreme artists willing to enter into a daunting 'pact' with this regenerative earth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ackland, Michael. 1994. *That Shining Band: A Study of Australian Colonial Verse Tradition*. St. Lucia (QLD): University of Queensland Press.

Bail, Murray. 1981. *Ian Fairweather*. Sydney: Bay Books.

Burrows, John. 1970. Archetypes and Stereotypes: *Riders in the Chariot*. G. A. Wilkes ed. *Ten Essays on Patrick White*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 47-71.

Colmar, John. 1984. *Patrick White*. London-New York: Methuen.

Dever, Maryanne. 1994. The Politics of Space in David Malouf's *Harland's Half Acre.* Nettelbeck, 117-131.

Dieter, M. 1924. *Eichendorffs Werke*, Vol. I. Berlin-Leipzig: Deutz Verlag.

Indyk, Ivor. 1993. *David Malouf*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Kiernan, Brian. 1980. *Patrick White*. London: Macmillan.

Knox-Shaw, Peter H. 1991. An Art of Intersection: David Malouf's Künstlerroman, *Harland's Half Acre. Antipodes*, 5: 31-39.

Loucks, James F. ed. 1979. *Robert Browning's Poetry*. New York: Norton.

Malouf, David. 1984. *Harland's Half Acre*. London: Chatto & Windus/Hogarth Press.

Malouf, David. 1989. Space, Writing and Historical Identity. Interview with Paul Carter. *Thesis Eleven*, 22: 92-105.

McCann, Andrew. 1997. The Ethics of Abjection: Patrick White's *Riders in the Chariot*. *Australian Literary Studies*, 18: 145-155.

Neilsen, Philip. 1996. *Imagined Lives: A Study of David Malouf*. St. Lucia (QLD): University of Queensland Press.

Nettelbeck, Amanda ed. 1994. *Provisional Maps: Critical Essays on David Malouf*. University of Western Australia: Centre for Studies in Australian Literature.

Ross, Robert L. 2000. *Harland's Half Acre*: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Australian. *World Literature Today,* 74: 733-738.

Roslyn, Jolly. 1986. Transformations of Caliban and Ariel: Imagination and Language in David Malouf, Margaret Atwood, and Seamus Heaney. *World Literature Written In English,* 26: 295-330.
White, Patrick. 1964 [1961]. *Riders in the Chariot*. Ringwood (VIC): Penguin.
White, Patrick. 1968 [1964]. *The Burnt Ones*. Ringwood (VIC): Penguin.
Wilson, Edmund. 1947. *The Wound and the Bow*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Michael Ackland is the Colin and Margaret Roderick Professor of English Literature at James Cook University. His publications cover the breadth of white settlement in Australia, and include biographies, critical studies and editions. His latest monograph is *Christina Stead and the Socialist Heritage* (Cambria 2016).
michael.ackland@jcu.edu.au

Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XIV-No. 16 November 2016 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-41

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

Antonella Riem Natale

Theodora as an Unheard Prophetess in Patrick White's *The Aunt's Story*

Abstract I: Il saggio analizza alcuni temi cari a Veronica Brady, presenti nella sua profonda analisi critica della letteratura australiana. Veronica ha spesso letto l'opera di Patrick White alla luce di una ricerca spirituale e di una visione mitico-mistica. Obiettivo di questo saggio è studiare come la figura della zia in *The Aunt's Story* (1948) incarni uno dei personaggi isolati e visionari di White che si fanno portavoce di un messaggio incomprensibile per la società contemporanea, incapace di vedere oltre la realtà ordinaria. Intendo dimostrare come il suo ruolo di esploratrice nella terra interiore del Sé connetta Theodora Goodman agli antichi archetipi di partnership (Eisler 1987) e della Dea, in particolare della vecchia saggia (Crone), che incarna una "woman of age, wisdom and power" (Bolen 2001). Questa figura aveva un ruolo importantissimo, ora dimenticato, nelle antiche società gilaniche (Eisler 1987). *Theadora*, il dono della Dea, come dovrebbe suonare il nome della protagonista, rimanda in termini chiari alla funzione spirituale e sacra delle antiche donne-sacerdotesse. Theodora è in realtà *Theadora*, una sacerdotessa amata dalla Dea, ma la società contemporanea, incapace di vedere oltre la realtà ordinaria, può solo catalogare queste figure sacre come 'pazze'.

Abstract II: This essay takes into consideration some of the themes dear to Veronica Brady's heart and present in her profound critical analysis of Australian literature. Veronica often read Patrick White's work in the light of a spiritual quest and a mystical-mythical vision. Aim of this essay is to investigate how the figure of the aunt, in *The Aunt's Story* (1948), embodies one of the isolated and visionary characters in White's work who transmits a message that superficial contemporary society is unable to understand. I will show how Theodora Goodman's role as explorer in the inner land of the Self connects her with ancient partnership (Eisler 1987), Goddess' archetypes, in particular that of the Crone, embodying a "woman of age, wisdom and power" (Bolen 2001). This figure had an important but now forgotten role in ancient gylanic societies (Eisler 1987). *Theadora*, the *Goddess' gift*, as the protagonist's name should read, is a powerful reminder of the sacred spiritual function of ancient women-priestess. Theodora is *Theadora*, a priestess beloved by the Goddess. Contemporary society, being unable to see beyond the ordinary, can only catalogue these sacred figures as 'mad'.

Introduction

The Aunt's Story is a challenging novel, published in 1948, regarded by some critics as genuinely experimental, for it moves between realism, stream-of-consciousness and a visionary and surrealist writing that were rather original in those times. The novel is divided into three parts, indicating at first the *places* (physical and symbolical) Theodora inhabits: *Meroë*, the name of the Goodmans' home, which Theodora inherits when her mother dies, to the anger and regret of her sister Fanny; *Jardin Exotique*, the garden of the Hôtel du Midi in France, where she lives for some time; and finally a small village in America, where she meets Holstius in a lost hut in the woods.

Since "the relationship between reader and writer, or reader and text, is never innocent, but reflects the social concerns of the time" (Ashcroft 2014: 22), *The Aunt's Story* has received manifold readings and interpretations. White's fiction has often been "discussed in the context of building Australian identity, or of challenging the realist tradition by insisting on a mystical or transcendental dimension of human life" (McLaren 2014: 82-83). These areas of critical interest are certainly focal in a reading of *The Aunt's Story* as a journey of self-discovery, a "Modern Odyssey" (Morley 1972: 63), a search to "achieve a state of wholeness" (Panaghis 1977: 30) in the mystical/mythical sense. As Ashcroft aptly points out, for White this wholeness is not a utopia "imbued with the idea of the sacred" but could rather be seen as Foucault's heterotopia, which is a reflection of that utopia: "This partially desacralized space is perfect for the author's task of chasing down a postcolonial earthed sacred" (Ashcroft 2014: 26). Theodora is looking for this *earthed sacred* and, as Veronica Brady states in one of her many seminal studies on White's work, the heroine is:

> a Ulysses figure, seeking to return home to the land of vision she knew as a child on her parents' property in Australia – named significantly Meroë – the name Herodotus gives to the capital of Abyssinia, traditionally the seat of the Happy Valley (Brady 1981: 70).

Also Gail Jones in her insightful analysis of White's 'ambivalent Modernism' in *The Aunt's Story*, notes how Ulysses is an important myth underlying the text: "Theodora's mother is at one stage figured as Penelope, her father as Ulysses, then Theodora is Ulysses *becoming-man* as it were" (2015, 157 italics in original). Aruna Wittman touches upon another field of analysis drawing an interesting comparison between *The Aunt's Story* and Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness* (1902), focussing on White's representation of madness (often a *sign* for the visionary character) and on how his stylistic effects "recreate encounters with radical, altered states while debating the issues of sanity" (Wittman 2015: 141). In White's work, these encounters give access to "liminal, often luminous, states of perception and consciousness" (Wittman 2015: 144) that are fundamental in Ulysses' journey, where the hero/heroine must face the continuous intersecting between the physical and spiritual worlds in search for a final, redemptive harmony that White concedes his characters often at the approaching of death, for: "the attempt to fix impermanence or to wed the personal to the universal brings death. The quest for certainty in a doubt-ridden world must be resisted" (Wolfe 1982: 68).

In most of her critical and teaching career, Brady, like White, was perfectly aware of the limitations and heaviness of physical reality and at the same time always alert to notice any opening towards the numinous, the luminous, the liminal. Her scholarly work (not only on White) has a depth of scope and knowledge that one can only aspire to emulate. She was always very well-versed in the most recent critical theories. However, she did not allow the excesses of leading theoretical *fashions* to condition her readings, for she believed that "every reading involves a kind of reinvention of the text" (Brady 1992: 24). This 'reinvention' had to take White's reader:

> behind the reticulated screen of language to the sources of the writer's creativity, the crossroads between *physical and psychic existence*, the inner and the outer dimension, the public and the private, between belonging and the sense of alienation, all so important in White's life and work (Brady 1992: 24, my italics).

In order to follow Brady's blueprint for critical analysis as 'reading' and 'reinvention', this essay sets *The Aunt's Story* within the frame of *Partnership Studies* literary criticism, highlighting dominator narratives and cultural belief-systems hidden "behind the reticulated screen of language" (Brady 1992: 24). This critical approach draws on Eisler's *Cultural Transformation Theory* (1987: xvii ff.), which shows two cultural paradigms at work in most Westernized cultures: the *partnership*, which Brady shared and fostered, and the *dominator*, which Brady trenchantly criticised. The dominator model, usually termed either patriarchy (or, less frequently so, matriarchy) – posits the ranking of one half of humanity over the other" (1987: xvii) and operates through "technologies designed to destroy and dominate" (1987: xx). On the other hand, the partnership paradigm, works on the principle of 'linking' rather than 'ranking', and otherness and diversity (both in gender and cultural terms) are positive elements and not "equated with either inferiority or superiority" (1987: xvii), as in dominator systems.

Aim of this essay is to investigate how the figure of the aunt embodies one of the isolated and visionary characters in White's work, who transmits a message the superficial middle-class is unable or unwilling to understand. She is naturally endowed for psychically *linking* with the other, while the society she lives in is continuously *ranking* everybody and, in her case, labelling her as alien, different, non-conforming to the accepted social norms. I will show how Theodora Goodman's role as explorer in the land of the Self connects her with ancient *partnership* Goddess' archetypes, in particular that of the Crone, which embodies wisdom and power (Bolen 2001). This figure had an important but now forgotten role in ancient *gylanic* societies (Eisler 1987). *Theodora*, the *Goddess' gift*, as the protagonist's name should read, is a powerful reminder of the sacred spiritual function of ancient women-priestess. Theodora is *Theadora*, a priestess beloved by the Goddess. Contemporary society, being unable to *see* beyond the ordinary, can only catalogue these sacred figures as 'mad'. This critical *reading* is in line with Brady's frequent reading of Patrick White's work in the light of a spiritual quest and a mystical/metaphysical/mythical vision, where the "search for God is also at the same time a search for a place for the outsider, a demand for the acceptance of difference" (Ashcroft 2014: 24).

The Aunt as Goddess' Prophetess

Theodora Goodman, the "mystical aunt" (Jones 2015: 156) of White's post-war novel, is the plain daughter of a vain mother and a dreamer father; her sister is the conventionally beautiful and socially gifted Fanny. Theodora is one of those typical White's characters who are outsiders, often despised, derided, excluded or ignored by middle-class society. She is a *spinster*, an outsider, an *odd one*, an elderly lonely woman who has visions. White presents her as a sort of prophetess in a society that has no respect or understanding for her role. She can tell other people's stories, even live their lives in her imagination, but only a few can notice and appreciate the richness of insight and illumination that she experiences: "This *thing* a spinster, she sometimes mused, considering her set mouth; *this thing* a spinster which, at best, becomes *that institution* an aunt" (12, my italics).

The objectification of herself, "this thing", is due to the patriarchal stigma on unmarried women as useless because lacking something or someone – a husband, children, a family, a house; the derogatory term 'spinster' enhances this idea of uselessness. Only her family relation to her sister's children can improve the absolute disapproval of patriarchal society. She can be at least 'that institution', something predictable, which can be classified and named within an ordered system of accepted normality. She can be 'at best' an aunt, the maximum recognition of existence this society allows her. However, the novel suggests that "Theodora is limited neither by sex or age, as her face appears ageless by early middle age [and] fertility or creativity is not limited to physical reproduction" (Morley 1972: 77).

This was especially true in ancient traditional cultures, orienting to the partnership matrilineal paradigm, which do not centre on 'male' lineage and give a great importance to the network of female relationship within societies, clans and families. For Australian Aboriginal groups, or for the Mosuo people, children are not a personal family *property*, they do not *belong* to their parents, but rather the whole community, or tribe or group, lovingly protects and looks after them. According to the wisdom of these cultures, the aunt's role is extremely significant and as important as that of the mother; actually, their roles are interchangeable and equal. For example, in ancient Egypt there are no specific words to differentiate family relationships. 'Mother' is also used for 'grandmother', and 'father' for 'grandfather'; likewise, the words for 'son', 'grandson', and 'nephew', or 'daughter', 'granddaughter' and 'niece', are the same; 'uncle' and 'brother', or 'sister' and 'aunt' are also described by the same word (Douglas & Teeter 2001: chapter 7). Moreover, often 'sister' is used for 'wife' as an indication of the deep and equal relationship between spouses and of the importance of sisterly/brotherly relations. The aunt in Aboriginal Australia, as with other family ties, is a very important figure, who keeps the group safely together and transmits the Ancestral wisdom and lore:

> When you go to community events there's Aunties and Uncles and extended community that watch your children. That's what I like about the Aboriginal community. Wherever you go, and there's a group of you, your child's safe. You know, you might misplace them for a few minutes, but they're off playing and someone else is watching them…You'll go looking for them and they'll go, "It's alright Aunt, they're here". Your child's always safe, there's never a moment when they're not in the community. That's what I like! Aboriginal Auntie and grandparent (Vic) (Lohoar *et al.* 2014: 5).

Theodora, though, lives in a Westernised society that exclusively values blood ties with the male, the patriarch, God the Father, who destroyed women's ancient communities:

> Patriarchy breaks up the female collective by forcibly capturing and imprisoning each woman's female energy within the patrilocal family. Within this isolation cell, each woman's creative energy becomes servant energy, dictated and owned by men (Sjöö & Mor 1987: 241).

Theodora, like many women, will be 'imprisoned' only in her outward existence, while inwardly being a visionary priestess able to perceive the sacred secrets of life, which are untellable and unexplainable, but which can be spiritually experienced as "the mystery of unity" (Morley 1972). In the ancient ecstatic rites priestesses led pythonic divination and the celebratory cults of regeneration and rebirth in the rhythmical cycles of Nature. Adolescence is the age of initiation into adulthood and it is especially important for the gifted girls who are to become priestesses of the Goddess. Theodora, at twelve, is struck by a lightning together with an oak, symbol of the rootedness and grounding force of the feminine. Theodora survives this symbolic *striking* that re-enacts and recalls the typical death/rebirth experiences of initiation rites. Because her gift cannot be openly manifested in patriarchal society, like many other White's characters, Theodora has to live a double life: in the dominator patriarchal paradigm she is the spinster, isolated from everyone else, apart from her nephews and most especially her beloved niece. Lou, being defined by her mother Fanny as "yellow, scraggy, and unattractive" (18), can be seen as an heir to the feminine lineage of priestesses that Theodora leads: "As Theodora nears Ithaca, Lou is about to embark" (Morley 1972: 81). On the other hand, in the partnership world of those few who can perceive Theodora's gift, she is a true visionary:

> "You'll see a lot of funny things, Theodora Goodman. You'll see them because you have eyes to see. And they'll break you. But perhaps you'll survive. No girl that was thrown down by lightning on her twelfth birthday, and then got up again, is going to be swallowed easy by the rivers of fire".
>
> And now Theodora began to think that perhaps the man was a little bit mad, but she loved him for his madness even, for it made her warm (45).

The warmth and love the young Theodora feels for the man springs from a sense of unity with the deep beauty and truth of life and other human beings and nature, which she can sense and perceive. What will break Theodora are not the things she sees, but the impossibility to act out her role as priestess publicly, fully voicing her powerful visions to her community. She will survive, but society will judge and catalogue her as 'mad', like she is herself doing with the Man Who Was Given His Dinner, because he tells her a visionary truth. She is 'mad', like him, because they do not conform to the expectations of dominator society. Like White himself, who strives to "create completely fresh forms out of the rocks and sticks of words" (1958: 39), Theodora would like to write "a poem about rocks […]. And

fire. A river of fire. And a burning house. Or a bush fire" (53). She wants to plunge into the depth of a burning spiritual fire, to capture the essence of a rock, the foundation of the Earth, thus she too begins "to see things for the first time" (White 1958: 39). However, the conformist society she lives in will not allow her to manifest her gift publicly:

> But she knew already that he would not come. In all that she did not know there was this certainty. She began to feel that knowing this might be an answer to many of the mysteries. And she felt afraid for what was prepared. The magpies sang in the warm air of Meroë (46).

Magpies, like crows, carry wisdom and ancient medicine, they help shaman/priestesses enter into the darkness of the Self, the obscure recesses of the psyche; their crowing often signals a transmutation of conscience, of a further step into the sacred mysteries. In her naked simplicity and poetry, but also in her inner strength and clear purpose, Theodora well represents a powerful Goddess archetype, the Crone, or old wise woman, who is able to listen to the voices of nature and whose function in matrilineal societies is that of prophesising for her tribe, of seeing and telling stories that can elevate her people in the understanding of the mysteries of life. Magpies were also sacred to Hecate of the crossroads (Walker 1985), indicating the capacity to discern the path to be chosen. In her ability to ride and hunt in the bush with her father, she is close to the Artemis archetype, a virgin Goddess. She does not need the company of a man to feel complete, she is "one-in-herself", motivated by her need to follow her own instincts; she is not conditioned by the male-determined dominator social and cultural expectations on what a woman must be like; she keeps her secret life "sacred and inviolate", without "modification to meet male standards" (Bolen 1984: 36).

Fellow Seers

Only a few characters can understand and endorse Theodora's gift of poetic vision and prophecy: her father, to a certain extent, the Man Who Was Given His Dinner, the Syrian hawker who tells her she has eyes to *see*; Moraïtis, a visiting Greek cellist, who recognises in her a kindred prophet-spirit and tells her it is good "to come from a country of bones", like Greece or Meroë, because it is "easier to see" (108); and Holstius, at the end of the novel. Also Miss Spofforth, a spinsterly headmistress, acknowledges a spiritual kinship with her, even if never outwardly spoken:

> She would have touched her head and said: Theodora I shall tell you the truth. Probably you will never marry. We are not the kind. You will not say the things they want to hear, flattering their vanity and their strength, because you will not know how, instinctively, and because it would not flatter you. But there is much that you will experience. You will see clearly beyond the bone. You will grow up probably ugly, and walk through life in sensible shoes. Because you are honest, and because you are barren, you will be both honoured and despised. You will never make a statue, nor write a poem. Although you will be torn by the agonies of music, you are not creative. You have an artist's vanity, which is moved finally to express itself in its objects. But there

> will be moments of passing affection, through which the opaque world will become transparent, and of such a moment you will be able to say – my dear child.
>
> All these things would have been said by Miss Spofforth if they had struggled out of her squat body and her heavy face (63).

Solid as a fortress (*fort*), the headmistress is anchored to her proper place (*spot*) in society. She is familiar with what Theodora will have to face, but cannot tell her. Social conventions and mores would never accept such a declaration as goes on in her mind. White's satire of the hypocritical society of Australia is at its best here, when the inner voice of Miss Spofforth is subdued but definitely clear in its criticism.

Different Therefore Mad

For the rest of the world, for her mother and her mother's friends, her sister, for all the exponents of that Australian middle-class White so much criticises, Theodora is just a funny child and later old lady, a spinster, disturbing in her difference and strangeness, or, maybe, even madness: "Theodora had begun to accept both the contempt and the distances. Because there are also moments of insight, whether with Father, or the Man Who Was Given His Dinner, or even with the Syrian" (52). However, her journey is not that of a madwoman, but it embodies the "more difficult and worthwhile quest of a visionary in pursuit of authentic being" (Lang 2015: 196). As Foucault shows, we know that madness is connected to 'civilisation' and is a cultural stigma used across cultures to dominate and control:

> Throughout Europe, confinement had the same meaning, at least if we consider its origin. It constituted one of the answers the seventeenth century gave to an economic crisis that affected the entire Western world: reduction of wages, unemployment, scarcity of coin (Foucault 1972: 49).

In particular, madness is used to demonise someone who does not conform to the social norms, especially if a woman:

> Another means of controlling large numbers to their detriment is the invention of madness, and its institutional punishment. Among all ancient, pagan and shamanic peoples, "madness" is a spiritual category; exotic behaviour, "schizophrenia", or hallucinations can mark a person destined for seership or shamanic psychic powers (Sjöö & Mor 1991: 295).

Laura Trevelyan, in *Voss*, lives under very similar circumstances and is criticised by the Bonners and their friends because she is not married; they cannot understand the depth of her feeling, she goes against their utter materialism describing Australia in mystical terms, thus upsetting their material certainties. According to this dominator society, the main concern of a woman should be that of getting married, but Theodora, like Laura, rejects this imposition and convention from the start. According to the standards decided by others, she

is not pretty like her sister and lacks the accomplishments required for a woman: she does not embroider or play the piano; she can use a rifle instead, to the horror of her mother. Theodora is different from the other girls even at an early age; she does not want to get married but wants to *see* (52); and, as the Man Who Was Given His Dinner perceives and anticipates, she will see. These qualities remain in her older age; she preserves her deep understanding and affinity with nature and people, especially if young. When her mother dies, "But old Mrs Goodman did die at last" (11), Theodora can finally lead her own life and become an explorer of life and the Self. Before, Theodora was imprisoned in her role as *caregiver* (Pearson 1991); she "was the spinster. She had lived with her mother, and helped into her clothes. She came when the voice called. […] I am free now, said Theodora Goodman" (11).

Theadora*, the *Goddess' Gift

Now she can fully be *Theadora*, the *Goddess' gift*, like *Godiva*, the Anglo-Saxon *gift* of God; and she is *Goodman*, the Good human being, the good woman, a sort of medieval *everywoman*, who experiences other people's lives and dreams. Her surname, Goodman, is a status name from Middle English *gode* 'good' and *man* 'man', in part from use as a term for the master of a household. In Scotland the term denoted a landowner who held his land not directly from the crown but from a feudal vassal of the king; from the Old English personal name *Guðmund*, composed of the elements *guð* 'battle' plus *mund* 'protection', so she also is protector and fighter.

There are many important Theodoras in history and White was always particularly purposeful in choosing his characters' names. His aunt has a long-standing genealogy of powerful women behind her, and this signifies her important status, in spite of her low social consideration in a world dominated by "material ugliness" (White 1958) rather than visionary power. Just to mention a few: a famous Theodora, probably born in Syria, was actress and temple priestess-prostitute (a later derogatory term indicating the temple-priestesses, who also had the role to sexually initiate men into adulthood), and then became the wife of Emperor Justinian I and thus Empress of the Byzantine Empire in the sixth century. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, Theodora and Justinian are saints. Theodora of Alexandria, who married a prefect of Egypt, is a Desert Mother and Eastern Orthodox saint who, dressed as a man, joined a monastery in Thebaid. Theodora Tocco was the first wife of Constantine Palaiologos, the last Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire. Episcopa Theodora is the mother of Pope Paschal I, who was known for her Christian virtue and purity. We find her in the Greek inscription on a 9th century Christian mosaic in the Chapel of Bishop Zeno of Verona, in the Church of Saint Praxedis the Martyress in Rome. Such a lineage of powerful and spiritual women guarantee aunt Theodora important antecedents for her sacred quest for inner freedom and understanding of the Truth. She can see beyond the limitations of what we consider reality and enter into a spiritual realm, full of welcoming, love and acceptance, where differences are annihilated and we all are one with the divine source.

The Aunt's Visionary Journey

After her mother dies, Theodora can finally move away from Australia, where past and present are too closely interwoven. She realizes how the possibilities of being understood

by the "nearst of kin" are very limited and soon you "have to enter the solitary land of individual experience" (epigraph to part I, *Meroë*).

In Part Two, we encounter Theo in a small hotel in southern France with an eccentric list of fellow guests in the years just before World War II. In the decadent "Jardin Exotique" of the Hôtel du Midi/Europe, she will discover and experience "the great fragmentation of humanity", (epigraph to part II, *Jardin Exotique*). Here, at first, she seems completely severed from her past and plunged into a totally new and often obscure series of visionary experiences: "She could breathe the soft light. She could touch the morning, already flowering heliotrope and pink" (180). However, past and present, both on the personal and socio-historical levels, are never completely disjoined.

The image of the garden is symbolic of the elevation and refinement of art, indicating at the same time the danger of a decadence into mere aestheticism. European society has a great cultural tradition that is however already showing signs of decay. The "Jardin Exotique", that at first sight Theodora would like to consider as "the goal of her journey" (103) is smothering in its over-abundant growth. The garden of the Hôtel du Midi is connected inevitably to the "Gothic Shell of Europe" (146) and Theodora soon realises that her journey might have brought her nowhere. She "might have returned to where she had begun" (146), in the historical sense, for she is not in touch with a new culture but with an older one still characterised by a dominator paradigm – and in the psychological one, for she is immersed in her own personal past still. She seems not to have moved away from Meroë, for all the important figures of her life are there, duplicated in the guests of the Hotel: her father is Alyosha Sergei Sokolinov, her mother Madame Rapallo, Katerina Pavlova is Theodora herself when young. However, in the process of understanding these figures of her past through their doubles, Theodora liberates herself. As a shaman priestess does, in order to prophesise and heal, she lets herself be possessed by them, becoming a figment of their imagination, a creation of their minds, but, at the same time, she accomplishes what Henry Miller's epigraph (part II) had anticipated, in that she unites in herself the "myriad iridescent fragments" of which we are composed:

> Henceforward we walk split into myriad fragments, like an insect with a hundred feet, a centipede with soft-stirring feet that drinks in the atmosphere; we walk with sensitive filaments that drink avidly of past and future, and all things melt into music and sorrow; we walk against a united world, asserting our dividedness.
>
> All things, as we walk, splitting with us into a myriad iridescent fragments. The great fragmentation of maturity (133).

In this section realism is abandoned for an overly-symbolic stratification of often contradictory meanings and everything fades, veiled by the haze of pre-war decadent Europe: it "can be read an almost Vorticist explosion, its imagery is reminiscent of surrealism" (Jones 2015: 159). Theodora does tell the stories of other lives, she begins to experience and inhabit different personalities. Her fellow guests seem to be vivid tale-tellers but the whole experience could also be Theodora's stream-of-consciousness: she projects into the screen of her

mind a series of stories that she uses to describe the inhabitants of the Hôtel du Midi and her own personal and family history. The hotel's name itself represents the middle passage, the 'middle-world', or *mundus imaginalis* (Corbin 1979), which is the connecting link between the material world experienced in Australia (in spite of her obvious gift for seeing) and the spiritual world she will experience with Holstius.

In this liminal space (*mundus imaginalis*), one of the ancient prophetess' testing grounds, she dreams of herself as "Epaphroditos" (198), the "beloved of Aphrodite" (Bliss 1992: 47), even if sensual Aphrodite seems to be the most distant goddess from the spinster Theodora. However, having both feminine and masculine traits, she is also *Hermaphroditos*, the son/daughter of Hermes and Aphrodite and can represent both "bisexuality (erotic attraction toward both sexes) or androgyny (the existence, in one person, of qualities and abilities traditionally considered either masculine or feminine)" (Bolen 1984: 235). Working through "attraction, union, fertilisation, incubation and a new creation" (Bolen 1984: 241), Aphrodite is the powerful force of transformation Theodora needs to activate when she decides to move onto the next phase of her journey.

The Woods of Revelation

The place suddenly changes in section three and Theodora leaves a train on which she is travelling across the United States, supposedly on her way back to Australia. Having crossed the Great Plains, Theodora decides not to go back home. Theodora leaves the train at a small station, moves up into the wooded hills and takes temporary refuge with the Johnson family, who are yet another manifestation of her own. She shares closeness with their son Zack, but when Mrs Johnson asks her name, she renames herself "Miss Pilkington" (269). Finally deciding to abandon her own identity, she destroys all the tickets that are supposed to take her back to Australia, which "have the purpose of prolonging herself through many fresh phases of what was accepted as Theodora Goodman" (263). In ancient traditional societies, names are given and changed according to the different stages of a person's growth in the community. Thus, the act of changing her name marks *Theadora*'s final acceptance of her role as Goddess' priestess. She is ready to pass the last tests of her initiation, and moves further into the woods, which from time immemorial have always been the Goddess' temples, where rites and festivities took place. The oak struck by lightning when she is twelve, and all the native woods in "what is now called America", both represent the rootedness of feminine spirituality on the earth, the "earthed sacred" (Ashcroft 2014: 26). *Theadora* is slowly reaching her full maturity as a priestess/shaman; of course this can only be labelled as *madness* by dominator society. *Theadora* has an inner dialogue with Holstius, a sort of pagan-like shamanic counsellor. Since the German word *Holz* means wood, his name connects him to the woods-as-temples, and White "liked the suggestion of *Holz* (wood) for a sturdy, though non-existent character" (*Southerly* 1973: 141). It is not important to establish whether he exists within or outside *Theadora*'s mind, for, as he tells her, "there is little to choose between the reality of illusion and the illusion of reality" (278). With this acceptance of the perennial dialogue and interchange between the physical and spiritual planes of life, Holstius brings *Theadora* to a poetic and loving reconciliation with all her multiple fragmented selves:

> In the peace that Holstius spread through her body and the speckled shadow of surrounding trees, there was no end to the lives of Theodora Goodman. These met and parted, met and parted, movingly. They entered into each other, so that the impulse for music in Katina Pavlou's hands, and the steamy exasperation of Sokolinov, and Mrs Rapallo's baroque and narcotized despair were the same and understandable. And in the same way that the created lives of Theodora Goodman were interchangeable, the lives in which she had entered, making them momently dependent for love or hate, owing her portion of their fluctuating personalities, whether George or Julia Goodman, only apparently deceased, or Huntly Clarkson, or Moraitis, or Lou, or Zack, there were the lives of Theodora Goodman, these too (284).

The novel ends with *Theadora* meekly accepting to be brought to a place "where there are folks who'll make you comfortable" (287). Holstius explains this is the way the dominator world works:

> "They will come for you soon, with every sign of the greatest kindness", Holstius said. "They will give you warm drinks, simple nourishing food, and encourage you to relax in a white room and tell your life. Of course you will not be taken in by any of this, do you hear? But you will submit. It is part of the deference one pays to those who prescribe the reasonable life. They are admirable people, though limited". […] "If we know better', Holstius said, 'we must keep it under our hats" (283).

"Reasonable" people are "limited", they live on the surface only for they fear the depth and chasm of the psychic life: they want to define, circumscribe, control and restrict. In this dominator society, Theodora can only submit, but in the outward appearances only, under the mask of deference, while her spiritual visions will continue to illumine her life. She must accept this duality, because, as Holstius tells her, one has to accept the "two irreconcilable halves" (277):

> "You cannot reconcile joy and sorrow", Holstius said. "Or flesh and marble, or illusion and reality or life and death. For this reason, Theodora Goodman, you must accept" (278).

Theadora's illumination comes from the firm acceptance of what is and must remain hidden from uncomprehending society, which considers her spiritual understanding as madness. Wisely, she hides her gylanic partnership knowledge under her hat: "The hat sat straight, but the doubtful rose trembled and glittered, leading a life of its own" (287). Like the black rose of her hat, trembling and shining of the secret sacred Goddess' wisdom, *Theadora* will hide her inner visions of beauty and peaceful reconciliation, to be the silent Goddess' prophetess and lead a life of her own.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A Conversation with Patrick White. 1973. Australian Writers in Profile. *Southerly*, 3: 132-143.

Ashcroft, Bill. 2014. Horizons of Hope. Vanden Driesen Cynthia & Bill Ashcroft eds. *Patrick White Centenary. The Legacy of a Prodigal Son*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 22-42.

Bliss, Caroline. 1992. *Patrick White's Fiction, The Paradox of Fortunate Failure*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bolen, Shinoda Jean. 1984. *Goddesses in Every Woman. A New Psychology of Women*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Bolen, Jean Shinoda. 2001. *Goddesses in Older Women. Archetypes in Women over Fifty*. New York: HarperCollins.

Brady, Veronica. 1978. The Novelist and the Reign of Necessity: Patrick White and Simone Weil. *Patrick White. A Critical Symposium*. R. Shepherd & K. Singh eds. Adelaide: Centre for Research in New Literatures in English, 108-116.

Brady, Veronica, 1981. *A Crucible of Prophets, Australians and the Question of God*. Sydney: Australian and New Zealand Studies in Theology and Religion [chapter 4, *Patrick White and the Difficult God*, 69-89].

Brady, Veronica. 1992. To Be Or Not To Be? The Verbal History of Patrick White. *Westerly*, 2 (winter): 23-34.

Corbin, Henri. 1979. *Corps Spirituel et Terre Céleste*. Paris: Buchet-Chastel.

Devlin-Glass, Frances & Lyn McCreddon eds. 2001. *Feminist Poetic of the Sacred. Creative Suspicions*. Oxford: University Press.

Docker, John. 1973. Patrick White and Romanticism: *The Vivisector*. *Southerly*, 33, 1: 44-61.

Douglas J. Brewer & Emily Teeter. 2001. *Egypt and the Egyptians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eisler, Riane. 1987. *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Foucault Michel. 1972. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* [*Folie et Déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*]. New York: Random Vintage.

Hardgraft, Cecil. 1977. The Theme of Revelation in Patrick White's Novels. *Southerly*, 37, 1: 34-47.

Jones, Gail. 2015. Desperate, Marvellous, Shuttling: White's Ambivalent Modernism. *Patrick White Beyond the Grave*. Henderson & Lang, 155-162.

Lang, Anouk. 2015. Queering Sarsaparilla: Patrick White's Deviant Modernism. *Patrick White Beyond the Grave*. Henderson & Lang, 193-204.

Lohoar Shaun, Nick Butera & Edita Kennedy. 2014. Strengths of Australian Aboriginal Cultural Practices in Family Life And Child Rearing. *CFCA (Child Family Community Australia)* paper no. 25, 1-20. September 2014 https://aifs.gov.au/ cfca/sites/default/files/publication-documents/cfca25.pdf (consulted on 10 May 2016).

McLaren, John. 2014. Patrick White: Crossing the Boundaries. *Patrick White Centenary. The Legacy of a Prodigal Son*. Vanden Driesen & Ashcroft, 82-97.

Morley, Patricia. 1972. *The Mystery of Unity*. Brisbane, St. Lucia (QLD): University of Queensland Press.

Panaghis, Afroditi. 1997. Questing for Identity in Patrick White's *The Aunt's Story*. *The International Fiction Review*, 30-35.
Pearson, Carol S. 1991. *Awakening the Heroes Within. Twelve Archetype to Help us Transform Ourselves and Our World*. San Francisco: HarperCollins. New York: Harper & Row.
Riem, Antonella. 2014. The Spirit of the Creative Word in Patrick White's *Voss*. *Patrick White Centenary. The Legacy of a Prodigal Son*. Vanden Driesen & Ashcroft, 222-240.
Sjöö, Monica & Barbara Mor. 1987. *The Great Cosmic Mother. Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
Walker, Barbara. 1985. *The Crone. Woman of Age, Wisdom, and Power*. New York: HarperCollins.
White, Patrick. 1959 [1st ed. 1948]. *The Aunt's Story*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode.
White Patrick. 1958. The Prodigal Son. *Australian Letters*, 1, 3: 37-40 [also reprinted in Christine Flyn & Paul Brennan eds. 1989. *Patrick White Speaks*. Sydney: Primavera Press: 13-17].
Wittman, Aruna. 2015. The Doubling of Reality in Patrick White's *The Aunt's Story* and Paul Schreber's Memoirs of My Nervous Illness. *Patrick White Beyond the Grave*. Henderson & Lang, 141-154.
Wolfe, Peter. 1983. *Laden Choirs: The Fiction of Patrick White*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

WEBLIOGRAPHY

http://www.surnamedb.com/Surname/Goodman (consulted on 26 April 2016).
http://www.rianeeisler.com/ (consulted on 26 April 2016). http://www.partnershipway.org/
http://all.uniud.it/?page_id=195 (consulted on 26 April 2016).
www.forumeditrice.it/percorsi/lingua-e-letteratura/all/ (consulted on 26 April 2016).
http://www.hanksville.org/storytellers/henson/ (consulted on 26 April 2016).

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

Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XIV-No. 16 November 2016 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-42

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

Anne Holden Rønning

Multiple Homes and Unhomely Belonging

Abstract I: In una società in cui la migrazione assume un ruolo significativo le nostre identità diventano ambivalenti per noi stessi e soltanto parzialmente comprensibili agli altri. Questo articolo riflette sul ruolo della parola scritta, ruolo politico, sociale e letterario, come una narrativa di 'case multiple'. Tra le questioni che determinano i discorsi e le narrative di 'case multiple' e di 'non-appartenenza' vi sono il linguaggio e la politica del linguaggio (situazionale o reale), idee di identità come solide e identificabili, l'attraversamento costante di frontiere come elemento centrale nelle vite di molte persone, e la collisione dei codici sociali e culturali nelle pratiche e nei significati assegnati agli 'stranieri'.

Abstract II: In a society where migration plays a significant role our identities become ambivalent to ourselves and only partly legible to others. This article reflects on the role of the written word, political, social, and literary, as a narrative of multiple homes. Among the issues which determine the discourses and narratives of 'multiple homes' and 'unhomely belonging' are language and language politics (situational or real), beliefs about identities as solid and identifiable, constant border-crossings as central to many people's lives, and the collision of social and cultural codes in the meanings and practices assigned to 'the foreigner'.

and this each human knows:
however close our touch
or intimate our speech,
silences, spaces reach
most deep, and will not close.
"Space Between" (Wright 1991: 166)

Many in today's global world, dominated as it is by the migration of peoples, have a multicultural and multilingual background. Historically, however, migration, whether voluntary or due to conflict, meant being cut off from the country of one's birth, and in some cases also mother tongue. With today's freedom of movement the finality of migration in earlier times is lost. Many migrants are in a situation of having multiple 'homes', and concomitant with that an increased feeling of 'unhomely belonging' since they are not cut off from their

roots in the same manner. They may live in another cultural and social environment, but still retain, and can update, some of their former beliefs and cultural connotations. The sense of loss, which Said writes of, is no longer the case.

> Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and a real bond with one's native place; the universal truth of exile is not that one has lost that love or home, but that inherent in each is an unexpected, unwelcome loss (1993: 336).

What do we then mean by having 'multiple homes'? We live in a transcultural age when all are influenced, albeit at times unwillingly, by social media which have radically changed how we see the world. We have the possibility of being omnipresent. However, the constant interaction with, and exposure to, other cultures and languages and ways of life, as well as the intermingling of cultures, reveals an increasing tendency to create binary divisions in society. This leads to the stereotyping of the migrant and 'other', and results in a sense of 'unhomely belonging' – one is *of* the country but not wholly part of it – one does belong, yet feels a sense of alienation from one's country. The Australian writer Ania Walwicz has an ironic comment on this in one of her prose poems:

> They're not us they're them they're them they are else what you don't know what you don't know what they think they got their own ways they stick together you don't know what they're up to you never know with them you just don't know with them no we didn't ask them to come here they come and they come there is enough people here already now they crowd us wogs they give me winter colds they take my jobs they take us they use us they come here to make their money then they go away …. . "Wogs" (1982).

The recent refugee crisis in Europe illustrates the complexity of this issue, as one of the prime causes of fear in European societies is that the balance of cultural and social codes will be upset. To some conceptualising and valorising what it is to have multiple homes is complex and ambiguous, despite the fact that historically from the time of the Romans migration has been a constant. We need to discuss how belonging to a global community is valued and understood, and to ask to what extent the historical past, long gone or recent, affects the way in which we define our sense of belonging.

> It would not be an exaggeration to say that from ancient times until now, there has not been a period in which this question [of why you left your country] has not been put to a writer or an artist without regard to his nationality or the motives for his departure (Wali: 2003).

Transculturality is an appropriate term for describing this phenomenon as it illustrates clearly the constant fluctuations that people of mixed heritage experience, often unconsciously. It is this that gives a sense of 'unhomely belonging'.

This state of inbetweenness – neither at home nor away, is often expressed in literature,

in the theatre, in song and even in politics, and is a key to understanding our new global world, providing us with space to step back and evaluate the feeling of inbetweenness. Literature tells the lives of peoples, their reactions both as individuals and as a group, and therefore has both a pedagogical and informative purpose. The intersection between the literary text and its wider social and cultural context is central as Veronica Brady so rightly insisted. Her mantra was "through the medium of great literature we can grow as human beings". Her contribution to current debates put this into perspective historically, and literally with her fight for the inclusion of Australian literature in schools and higher education. She understood that one of the main sources for understanding others and other cultures is the literature of a nation and peoples, and the views expressed therein. We may not agree, even dislike, some of the author's attitudes, but nonetheless their narratives enlighten us and are part of the discourse of a nation.

One text that portrays the complexity of 'unhomely belonging' is *The Book of Negroes* by the Canadian writer, Lawrence Hill. This epic novel of slavery covers six decades, from being traded into a state of slavery to when the African slaves gained their freedom in the US and moved to Nova Scotia. Captured as a young girl and transported to America as a slave, the protagonist, Aminata Diallo, after experiencing the emancipation of slaves, and reporting to the Abolition committee in London, finally decides to return to Africa only to find she no longer belongs there, but has become a 'foreigner' to her own origins. Neither can she accept some of their cultural ways of life, especially those gender-related. In other words, the return home, as so many have found, is fraught with frustration and disillusionment.

But it is in world literatures in English that we find some of the most expressive narratives of the sense of unhomely belonging which, not least, former empires have impacted on other peoples, as the ubiquity of English proves. Texts, fictional in particular, have been used to debate social and health issues as in *The Invisible Weevil* by the Ugandan writer Mary Karooro Okurut who depicts the effect of AIDS on Ugandan society, and how one family deals with this situation. Human rights are frequent themes for transcultural literature, for example in Ngugi's work, and in Mudrooroo's early novels and short stories such as "Struggling". This story illustrates the discriminating treatment of Aborigines. The young people are also depicted as torn between city life and their Aboriginal homelands. "Once we had to run away from our homes in the country and come to the city, but now things are different. It wouldn't be running away, just returning, coming back to where you belong" (Paperbark 1993: 269).

Three major aspects of inbetweenness are language, identities and social and cultural codes answering questions such as which languages you think in, dream in and count in, where you belong, and certain things which one does intrinsically, socially and culturally, that betray oneself as a 'foreigner'.

Communication and language

Among the issues which determine the discourses and narratives of unhomely belonging are language and communication, both situational and real. A view echoed by the Iraqi writer Najem Wali in the journal *Words without Borders*:

> For in the end, the writer's homeland is the language in which he writes, and his house is the world that he constructs through his work, just as the homeland of the traveler is wherever his feet may fall (Wali: 2003).

It is not coincidental the Ngugi's famous text *Decolonizing the Mind* has played such an important role in all discussions of language and writing. He pointed out in a lecture in Auckland that the language writers choose and how "the use to which language is put is central to a definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment" (1985, cited in Rønning 2009: 18).

In many countries in our postcolonial and transcultural global world people are bilingual and trilingual, yet social and political reasons make them feel not entirely at home. Why is this? To what extent does language define who we are? Language has a "dual character" both as a means of communication and a carrier of culture since "language and culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history" (Ngugi 1981: 93; 15-16). This history is not only in the past but equally in the present. Certainly the first language often has cultural connotations that are automatic, and by contrast one may express oneself differently when using a second or third language where competence is not an issue, but sometimes the small and petty details of con-text. It is not necessarily the words themselves which cause racial and disparaging comments and reactions, but the body language with which they are expressed, and the tone patterns used. Issues of encoding and decoding are paramount. Language skills do not mean just speaking a language grammatically correct, but knowing the social codes and connotations that are associated with the words. Here many transcultural/bilingual people fall short. As Brian Castro says in "Writing Asia" (1995):

> Language marks the spot where the self loses its prison bars – where the border crossing takes place, traversing the spaces of others. […] Each language speaks the world in its own ways […]. Other cultures and languages reinforce and enrich us by powerfully affecting or destabilising our familial tongue. We gain by losing ourselves.

Linguistic border-crossings occur when countries are bilingual at the political and educational level. For many African writers this has meant not writing in one's native tongue. For example, when the South African writer Lauretta Ngcobo was asked at a conference in Bergen why she did not write in her native language, Zulu, she pointed out that her whole education had been in English – that was the language in which she had learnt to express herself.

Linguistic hybridity is a term which has been used to express this feature of language, defined by Mikhail Bakhtin as "a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor" (1981: 358). An understanding of dialogism gives us insight into the creative process of communication – the effect of social and cultural milieux. Stuart Hall states that "to speak a language is […] also to activate the range of meanings which are already

embedded in our language and cultural system" (1999: 122). The language of meanings is particularly visible in translated texts, when often the source language is still apparent in the target language. Such language interference is exemplified in an interview with Ania Walwicz where she comments on a translation of her work into Polish: the translator told her that "she found this very easy to do, that the structures of the language I use, are the same as in Polish. I wasn't aware of this. So the language I use in writing has incorporated the first language. Perhaps this is a kind of fusing of the two languages. It is a kind of incomplete English using Polish structure" (Lysenko & Brody 1982). In the late 80s early 90s critics such as Ashcroft saw linguistic hybridity as a process of appropriation and abrogation but this is no longer the case. Instead we get a plethora of language mixes such as in Zakes Mda's *Heart of Redness* where he consciously writes a new kind of South African English, what Noussi has called "the Xhosa-ification of the English language" that also has a political and ideological purpose (2009: 291).

Language also makes others unhomely – it can be subversive as when the use of foreign or indigenous words in a text makes the reader for whom these are not familiar the 'other'. This is common in literature written by First Nations peoples, and today also those of former colonies. One interesting phenomenon is that many of these words which make us the 'stranger' are words for flora, fauna, food, artefacts, and buildings (for instance, New Zealand natural flora and fauna are untranslatable). This adds to a language a whole cultural context which turns the tables on who is the 'other'.

Identities: an Unhomely Belonging

Descartes' "I think therefore I am". Is this our identity? The issue of where I belong and who I am is highly complex, and has a long history. With the growth of the independence of nations in the late twentieth century issues of identities became prevalent. Belonging and cross-cultural border-crossings became part of the individual's everyday life and therefore in a transcultural world our identities become ambivalent to ourselves and only partly understandable to others. The legacy of Empire means that the culture of the colonizer often dominates that of the native, as the ubiquity of English proves. This, of course, results in us living in a world of inherent 'contra-diction' as very few countries have a relatively homogenous population. Just as texts are suspended between the past and the future, so are our identities, both closely interwoven. Stuart Hall suggests that

> rather than speaking of identity as a finished thing, we should speak of *identification*, and see it as an ongoing process. Identity arises, not so much from the fullness of identity which is already inside us as individuals, but from a *lack* of wholeness which is 'filled' from *outside us*, by the ways we imagine ourselves to be seen by others (1994: 122, italics in original).

In his book *Calibrations* Ato Quayson has compared this interweaving and interdependence between identities and languages to the dependency of wheel cogs on each other in machinery. Our identities are irrevocably linked to each other and will vary according to time and place.

In one of his many essays on identity Hall suggests, following Freudian ideas that "identity is actually something formed through unconscious processes over time", and "[t]here is always something 'imaginary' and fantasized about its unity" (1994: 122). His work thus counters narrowly cultural identitarian thought by supporting 'becoming' rather than 'being', and the 'routes' taken in the course of this, as a more profitable way of constituting ourselves than looking at our 'roots':

> Actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we come from,' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves (1996: 4).

Thus we become outsiders and insiders to the society in which we live, and therefore insiders or outsiders to our own lives. This is particularly true in our attitudes, and in our critique of writers. Salman Rushdie suggests that writers who have migrated, especially from countries with a very different culture, "are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective: because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society. This stereoscopic vision is perhaps what we can offer in place of 'whole sight'" (1992: 19). But he has also warned against the construction of an imaginary identity:

> Writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by an urge to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – […] that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind (1992: 10).

This is equally true of all who live in more than one country in their lifetime and especially those who settle elsewhere, a not uncommon theme in Australian writing; the glorification of 'home' into something it never was, for instance, by the Scottish family, the McIvors, in David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*.

There is a wealth of literature that has the conflict of identities as a theme. One interesting text, which won the *Sunday Times* Fiction Award for 2004, is that by the South African writer Rayda Jacobs. *Confessions of a Gambler* (2004) is about a Muslim woman of Indian heritage in Cape Town who juggles two existences. Outwardly she is dressed and behaves as a good Muslim mother, but she is also another person who spends most of her days gambling at the Casino, hooked on the freedom it gives her. The depiction of Abeeda's double life not only describes brilliantly the compulsive gambler's mindset, but also illustrates the juggling of lives which many people with multiple home backgrounds experience in today's society, in their attempt to combine traditional and religious attitudes and life in a new, and often very different, society. We can ask which of Abbeda's lives is the 'real' Abeeda.

Similarly Patricia Grace and Alan Duff analyse aspects of dual racialism in their texts. In *Mutuwhenua* Grace depicts a young girl, Ripeka, who, in an effort to assimilate, rejects her Maori ancestry, and gives herself an English name, Linda. It is only when she herself be-

comes a mother that she acknowledges her ancestry. Here Grace, though writing from a New Zealand perspective, touches on one of the criteria often used when evaluating people who apply for a job – their name immediately identifies them as from a different background. This is a form of discrimination, especially in Europe, which has been highly criticised. In much of Alan Duff's writing, especially *Once Were Warriors* and *Both Sides of the Moon,* the issue of 'unhomely belonging' and intercultural awareness[1], the protagonists being neither Pakeha nor Maori, is a paramount theme, though the solution is vastly different in the two books. Gang mentality is opposed to historical, mythological genealogy, though both texts express violence. Literature of this kind which counterposes the loss of the past and centres on problems of fitting in with the present is, in my opinion, of fundamental importance in helping individuals to understand our contemporary multicultural world, and should be included much more in language courses as a starting point for discussions of cultural difference. Such courses often put primary emphasis on correctness of language skills, and culture is treated as a separate issue, but literary texts provide insight into both.

Social and Cultural Codes

The fluidity of any meaning is influenced by cultural codes. As Benedict Anderson has said, nations "express an immemorial past and a limitless future, working alongside and against *large cultural systems that preceded* them" (1991: 19, italics in original). Edward Said points out that "all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (1993: xxv.) Central to transculturalism are border-crossings, often subconsciously, of cultural and social codes and ideas – a perpetual back and forth, a weaving of different strands of one's life to become an ever changing someone else. Elsewhere I have called persons who mix social and cultural codes 'hyphenated people' (*JEASA* 2009). Such people often have a constant sense of alienation, even after generations in the new country. For others, however, the situation may be different as Soyinka suggests:

> If the nature of departure from homeland has been marked by total rejection, by the necessity for a near-total obliteration of memory, then an encounter with an environment that is a complete antithesis of the place of setting out – from topography to emotive and sensory properties – may find the wanderer breathing a sigh of relief. Finally, I have arrived (2002).

However, today's society demands intercultural competence, a context and a con-text. It is vital to address the issue of the background and con-text, (by that I mean environment in its widest sense,) in which ideas and behaviour originate. Social codes vary from nation to nation, but also operate at the glocal level, for example, codes of manners and politeness, clothing, etc. It is a question of what to do and what not to do in a given situation and place. Many international negotiations and meetings have failed for this very reason – people

[1] For a more detailed discussion see Rønning's "Intercultural awareness and understanding identities in Alan Duff" (Riem *et al.* 2013).

not understanding the social and cultural codes of those they are dealing with. One might ask whether such knowledge is necessary, but, in my opinion, an appreciation that others have different approaches to the same issue can not only be intellectually stimulating and lead to new thought and action, but is also a prerequisite for intercultural communication. Social media is disruptive in this respect as not only are many unfortunate attitudes flourishing there, but they are given a credibility which often ignores the con-text in which such utterances or the topics were written originally. Attempts have been made to encourage an understanding of interculturality, institutionalized in programmes such as The Pestalozzi programme, *Recognising Intercultural Competence* (2012)[2] with its emphasis on attitudes, empathy, skills and knowledge, and in the "Hordaland model", a programme on intercultural understanding in the workplace that has been developed in Norway.

One ideal way of learning these codes is to turn to the theatre. It is not coincidental that Shakespeare and Ibsen are still performed frequently, as fundamental to their texts are an understanding, and not least critique, of social and cultural codes looked at through a dramatist's eye. Though the ideas and codes of manner are portrayed in a different age or place they have a universality that makes them equally applicable in another setting and culture such as the present. The universality of literature, be it fiction or drama, is one of its most wonderful features.

The collision of social and cultural codes is a frequent theme in much Australian writing. David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* raises some interesting questions regarding the issue of codes. There is a marked contrast between the attitudes of the settlers to Australia and to their home country, and that of Gemmy. He is born white, in Britain, but was shipwrecked in Australia and brought up by the Aborigines. His attempt to return to a white settlement illustrates the complexity of social and cultural codes. Where does he really belong? Sadly probably nowhere, as the lack of closure in the text demonstrates. This theme is also central in Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*. Kate Grenville, and Brian Castro are other Australian writers who deal with the conflict of belonging, whether due to issues of ethnicity or history.

In conclusion I will refer to two Australian authors who have addressed the conflict of belonging at the personal and the global level. David Ireland's *Burn*, a text from 1974, illustrates how a family, multicultural and racially mixed through three generations, is received in Australian society. Written against the background of the White Australian Policy this text at one level discusses the treatment of Aborigines and people of mixed race, but at another it illustrates clearly the confusion of the younger generations as to where they belong. Their great-grandfather, Gorooh, is Aborigine, and their grandfather, MacAllister, Scottish. One of his grandchildren, Gordon, has received education, but he is not accepted in social circles in the city since he is neither brown nor white. On returning home, "[l]ooking at the brown skin on the backs of his hands, [he says] 'I know it's not dirt […] But while they look on it as dirt, it's dirt […]. Getting the poison out of my family in the future will be just like getting white myself'" (1974: 132), because "[no] amount of schooling could integrate me" (133). In other words integration is a failure. Interwoven with the family story Ireland contrasts, in

[2] A tool developed by a group of 30 teachers from all over Europe under the sponsorship of the Council of Europe.

a stream of consciousness narrative style, the position of Gunner, MacAllister's son, in the Second World War when his mixed race made little difference whereas now, suffering from post-traumatic syndrome he is only thought of as an Aborgine. This text thus typifies one of the many human rights issues for which Veronica Brady campaigned.

One author who, in my opinion, epitomizes in her writing and stage performances the outsider/insider cultural and social conflict is Ania Walwicz. In "Look at me Ma-I'm Going to be a Marginal Writer!" she maintains that literature "is processed, a salami sausage and packaged", but

> literature is not static. It exists as a living organism, expanding and re-creating itself, metamorphosing […]. My own work has been identified with the positions of marginality, multiculturalism, ethnicity, migration, abjection, experimentation, feminist literary theory, postmodernism, the avant-garde. [And she asks] Do I have to provide […] a sense of belonging to a group? (1995: 162-163).

Her narratives are an ironic critique of Australian views, but also have a universality. Many of her prose poems illustrate how social and cultural codes enforce feelings of 'unhomely belonging' in people's failure to accept difference. Walwicz describes herself in the prose poem "Europe" thus: "i'm europe deluxe nougat bar i'm better than most i'm really special rich and tasty black forest cake". And in "Australia" she concretises difference:

> You never accept me. For your own. You always ask me where I'm from. You always ask me. You tell me I look strange. Different. You don't adopt me. You laugh at the way I speak. You think you're better than me (1981).

These are just some reflections on this topic. We will soon all have 'multiple homes' and increasingly a sense of 'unhomely belonging'. Is this a negative factor? We need to debate the role of literature as a bridge and mediator of national, ethnic and global or glocal cultures and cultural forces, thus assisting the general public in understanding our own and others' positions. That is something which I am sure Veronica Brady would have approved of. We need to acknowledge the unhomeliness of our being in this global world, expressed so clearly by Najem Wali, whose comments need not only refer to writers, but also to all who have moved elsewhere:

> Writers in exile [and migrants] often face the question of why they left their countries, and whether this departure has not resulted in a loss of memory, a vagueness about those cherished places where they lived – whether it hasn't made their writing lose the heat and immediacy of those who are still living inside, made their positions lose the same degree of credibility […]. And whatever the explanation that those posing the question – usually more interested in politics than they are in literature – claim to have arrived at, in the end they don't look at the writer by what he writes, but rather evaluate him by where he lives, or by the location of "the room" from which he writes, as the Peruvian writer Vargas Llosa noted in his commentary on the issue in one of his articles (2003).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

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

Castro, Brian. 1995. Writing Asia. *Australian Humanities Review*, http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-April-1996/Castro.html.

Davis, Jack, Stephen Muecke, Mudrooroo Narogin & Adam Shoemaker eds. 1993 [1990]. *Paperbark: A Collection of Black Australian Writings*. St. Lucia (QLD): University of Queensland Press.

Duff, Alan. 1990. *Once Were Warriors*. Auckland: Tandem Press.

Duff, Alan. 2000 [1998]. *Both Sides of the Moon*. Auckland: Vintage.

Grace, Patricia. 1988 [1978]. *Mutuwhenua. The Moon Sleeps*. London: The Women's Press.

Hall, Stuart. 1994. The Question of Cultural Identity. Ed. *The Polity Reader in Cultural Theory*. Cambridge (UK): Polity Press, 119-126.

Hall, Stuart. 1996. Who Needs Identity? Stuart Hall & Paul du Gay eds. *Questions of Cultural Identity.* Thousand Oaks (CA) & London: Sage, 1-17.

Hill, Lawrence. 2007 [2010]. *The Book of Negroes*. London: Transworld Publishers, Black Swan edition.

Ireland, David. 1989 [1974]. *Burn*. North Ryde (NSW): Angus & Robertson.

Lauritsen, Kirsten & Berit Berg. 2004. *Med kurs for transculturell kompetanse* (trans. *Ways to Crosscultural Competence*. Amsterdam-New York) Hordalandsmodellen. Bergen: Hordaland fylkeskommune.

Jacobs, Rayda. 2003. *The Confessions of a Gambler.* Cape Town: Kwela Books.

Malouf, David. 1994 [1993]. *Remembering Babylon*. London: Vintage.

Mda, Zakes. 2004 [2000]. *The Heart of Redness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o. 1986. *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Literature in Africa.* Oxford: James Currey.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o. 1985. The Sir Douglas Robb lecture. Cited by Michael Neill, Coming Home: Teaching The Postcolonial Novel. *Islands*, 2, 1: 50.

Noussi, Marie Chantale Mofin. 2009. Translation, Multilingualism, and Linguistic Hybridity. A Study of *The Heart of Redness* by Zakes Mda. Petra Rüdiger & Konrad Gross eds. *Translation of Cultures*. Cross/Cultures 106. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 291-301.

Okurut, Mary Karooro. 2000 [1998]. *The Invisible Weevil.* Kampala (Uganda): Femrite Publications.

Quayson, Ato. 2003. *Calibrations: Reading for the Social*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Rønning, Anne Holden. 2009. Cultural Encounters and Hyphenated People. *Journal of the European Association for Studies on Australia*, 1: 97-107.

Rønning, Anne Holden. 2013. Intercultural Awareness and Understanding Identities in Alan Duff. Antonella Riem Natale, Maria Renata Dolce, Stefano Mercanti & Caterina Colomba eds. *The Tapestry of the Creative Word in Anglophone Literature*. Udine: Forum, 219-230.

Rushdie, Salman. 1992. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta Books.
Said, Edward. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage.
Soyinka, Wole. 2002. *The Guardian* (14 July), https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/jul/13/poetry.wolesoyinka (consulted on 30/06/2016).
The Pestalozzi Programme. 2012. *Recognising Intercultural Competence. What shows that I am interculturally competent?* The European Wergeland Centre.
Wali, Najem. 2003. Homeland as Exile, Exile as Homeland. *Words without Borders*, http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/homeland-as-exile-exile-ashomeland#ixzz3_viJAVN6d (consulted on 30/06/2016).
Walwicz, Ania. 1995. Look at me Ma- I'm going to be a marginal writer! *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australia. Crossing Lines: Formations of Australian Culture*, 162-164.
Walwicz, Ania. 1982. Interview by Myron Lysenko & Kevin Brophy: Ania Walwicz. *Going Down Swinging*, 5: 43-49, http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;_dn=987332122768850;res=IELLCC (consulted on 1/09/2009).
Walwicz, Ania. 1982. Wogs. *Mattoid*, 13: 16-17.
Walwicz, Ania. 1985. Europe. Peter Skzynecki ed. *Joseph's Coat: An Anthology of Multicultural Writing*. Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 195-196.
Walwicz, Ania. Australia. 1981. Damien White & Anna Couani eds. *Island in the Sun: Anthology of Recent Australian Prose*. Glebe (NSW): Cruise Books, 90-91.
Wright, Judith. 1991 [1990]. *A Human Pattern. Selected Poems*. North Ryde (NSW): Angus & Robertson.

Anne Holden Rønning is Associate professor emerita at the University of Bergen, Norway. Her research areas and fields of publication are Women's Studies and postcolonial and transcultural literatures and ideas, especially from New Zealand and Australia. She has co-edited several volumes of essays in these fields notably *Identities and Masks: Colonial and Postcolonial Studies* (2001), *Readings for the Particular: The Postcolonial in the Postnational* (2007) and *For Was I not Born here? Identity and Culture in the Work of Yvonne du Fresne* (2010). She has also edited an issue of the online journal *Otherness* and some issues of the online journal *Coolabah*, and one for *Otherness*. She was chair of the European Association for Studies of Australia 2001-2005. She has also published in and co-edited two books with Mary Louise Kearney of UNESCO: *Women and the University Curriculum: Towards Equality, Democracy and Peace* (1996) *Graduate Prospects in a Changing Society* (1998).
achrroen@gmail.com

Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XIV-No. 16 November 2016 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-43

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

Maria Renata Dolce

Reconciling Nature and Culture for an Eco-sustainable World: Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*

Abstract I: *The Heart of Redness*, pubblicato da Zakes Mda nel 2000, è oggetto d'analisi di questo articolo che, alla luce della Teoria della Trasformazione Culturale proposta dalla studiosa Riane Eisler, prende in esame la dialettica natura-cultura al centro del romanzo per esplorare la tensione tra tradizione e modernità dalla prospettiva della specificità sudafricana dell'autore. L'articolo mostra come i concetti di 'progresso' e 'civiltà' vengano rivisitati e contestati nel testo denunciando le catastrofiche conseguenze generate da una cieca rincorsa dei miti occidentali ai danni di una rispettosa e pacifica convivenza sul pianeta. Particolare attenzione viene rivolta alle forme e alle modalità attraverso le quali i confini tra natura e cultura, tradizione e progresso, passato e presente sono decostruiti e attraversati nella complessa struttura narrativa di un romanzo che conferma la preoccupazione centrale dello scrittore per questioni etiche, sociali e ambientali. Mda sollecita un ripensamento critico di opposizioni dicotomiche radicate e di assunti preconcetti quale tappa fondamentale per prefigurare un mondo più equo e sostenibile e per re-immaginare un futuro di effettive pari opportunità. In questa prospettiva si rivela di primaria importanza il ruolo giocato dalla letteratura, dal linguaggio, dall'educazione (Eisler 2013), una responsabilità che lo scrittore si assume in prima persona attraverso la sua scrittura creativa di impegno e di riflessione critica.

Abstract II: Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000) is investigated by adopting Riane Eisler's 'Cultural Transformation Theory' in order to highlight the culture-nature dialectic at the core of a novel that explores the long-lasting conflict between tradition and modernity through a distinctive South African perspective. The article shows how in Mda's novel the notions of 'progress' and 'civilization' are called into question by denouncing the catastrophic consequences that ensue when they are blindly pursued at the expense of a respectful and harmonious cohabitation on Earth. Particular attention is given to the forms and ways in which the borders between nature and culture, tradition and progress, past and present are deconstructed and traversed within the complex narrative framework of the novel which testifies to the central and permanent concern of the writer for ethical, social and environmental issues. Mda, as I intend to demonstrate, encourages a critical re-thinking and re-orientation of ossified dichotomical oppositions and prejudiced assumptions as a necessary first step in fostering a more equitable and sustainable world so that a future

of equal opportunities available to all can be re-imaged. From this perspective, fundamental is the role played by literature, language and education (Eisler 2013), a responsibility the writer fully endorses through his committed and challenging fiction.

Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000) is investigated by adopting Riane Eisler's *Cultural Transformation Theory*[1] in order to highlight the culture-nature dialectic at the core of a novel that explores the long-lasting conflict between tradition and modernity through a distinctive South African perspective. In the novel the notions of 'progress' and 'civilization' are called into question by denouncing the catastrophic consequences that ensue when they are blindly pursued at the expense of a respectful and harmonious cohabitation on an Earth whose ecological balance is increasingly menaced. Even if the drive towards progress and change is irrepressible, this does not exempt us, the writer suggests, from proceeding with intelligence, caution and moderation. Among the many possible critical approaches that this complex and challenging novel would warrant because of the multiple layers of interweaving political, social and ethical discourses, the chosen focal point of analysis is intended as a tribute to Veronica Brady whose whole life and intellectual commitment were inspired by the founding values of partnership and cooperation[2].

The Heart of Redness confirms Mda's unswerving preoccupation and interest in producing a creative work deeply rooted in the social arena. The novel's strength lies in its potential to awaken its readers' conscience, stimulating a positive drive for change and promoting a critical interrogation of the past and the present, with a view to constructing a more democratic world of effective mutual respect, partnership and reconciliation. The writer's work as a playwright, starting in 1985 with the Theatre-for-Development Project at the University of Lesotho and with the experience of the Maratholi Travelling Theatre, was driven by the declared aim of encouraging the development of self-determination and empowerment among rural communities by actively involving people in the plays through participatory techniques. The "Theatre for Development" naturally leads the way, in the post-apartheid years when Mda turns to writing fiction, towards a "Fiction for Development", as Mervis

[1] Eisler's Cultural Transformation Theory identifies the crucial role literature, language and education play as source and basic roots for a radical, structural transformation of the world in terms of the urgent and necessary shift from a dominator system to a partnership model which guarantees more equitable, peaceful and democratic relations both at a personal and at a collective level. Eisler's theory contests the conventional notion of the linear progression in the history of mankind from 'barbarism' to 'civilization', a progression which has traditionally been seen as related to scientific, technological and economic advancement (Eisler 1987; 2000; 2007).

[2] Veronica Brady was one of the founding members of the Partnership Studies Group (PSG), a research group based in Udine which works in close collaboration with the Centre for Partnership Studies (CPS) in California (www.centerforpartnership.org). The PSG (http://all.uniud.it/?page_id=195) applies Eisler's 'partnership model' to the study of world literatures and cultures exploring how literary texts, cultural products and language itself reflect partnership/dominator configurations and how they contribute to foster values of cooperation, sharing and care.

(1998) defines it in her analysis of Mda's debut novel *Ways of Dying* (1995). The writer's concern with the dynamics and transformations of the contemporary world is confirmed by his subsequent works of fiction which investigate the new South Africa in its difficult and demanding passage from a regime of segregation to a post-apartheid democracy vitiated by new forms of injustice and exploitation, a conflictual society over which the burden of the past looms large. This powerful social and ethical agenda is the structural motif underlying and sustaining also his third novel *The Heart of Redness*, a challenging and demanding post-apartheid text revealing an "ability to grapple with legacies of oppression and imagine new states of being and even new beings of the state" (Durrant 2003: 441). Mda's literary writing thus manifests its transformative potential and establishes itself as a site for the reinvention and reintegration of a wounded community dis-membered by colonization, which did not limit itself to acts of destruction and appropriation, but deprived the oppressed of their past, their memories, their histories, their voices. The process of re-membering is an essential phase in healing the wounds of the past: it entails the recreation and restitution of erased, distorted and manipulated traditions and stories which guarantee and preserve a dignified collective identity. The critical re-discovery and re-reading of the past and of its legacy in the present become of crucial importance in this perspective. As Riane Eisler maintains, myths, stories, literature and language play a foundational role in the shaping of our individual and collective selves (Eisler 1987). They are responsible for the construction of systems of oppression, of alterity and difference, by erecting insurmountable barriers which exclude, segregate and marginalize the 'Other'. And yet, they can offer a fundamental contribution to the dismantling of simplistic and arbitrarily forged binary categories, walls apparently enclosing us within the safety of protective/protected territories, but that can be easily transformed into prisons, as Edward Said warns us (Said 1984).

The journey of the novel's main protagonist Camagu into the 'heart of redness' is illuminating in this respect because it symbolizes the attempt to overcome artificially constructed ethnic, racial, social and gender boundaries through a critical analysis of the past and its retrieval as an empowering source of affirmation. Grounded firmly in the present, the novel draws on the past in order to project proactively into the future. The borders between nature and culture, tradition and progress, past and present are deconstructed and traversed within the complex narrative framework of a novel which testifies to the central and permanent concern of the writer for economic, social and environmental issues. Mda encourages a critical re-thinking and re-orientation of ossified dichotomical oppositions and prejudiced assumptions as a necessary first step in fostering a more equitable and sustainable world and in re-imagining a future of equal opportunities available to all.

The structure of the novel, which is developed on different time levels that constantly overlap and intersect with one another, reveals the writer's attempt at a revisionist re-reading of the past as a means of investigating its inevitable consequences and reverberations in the present. Drawing on postmodern strategies to disrupt the idea of a coherent, stable and monolithic culture rooted in the Western vision of a teleologically orientated world of

progress and advancement, this peculiar form of postcolonial 'historical novel' intermingles the memory of the destruction and violence brought about by colonization with its legacy in the present, a present which is overburdened with new forms of invasion, exploitation and control on the part of the superpowers of the globalized market with their affiliations in South African society. In light of such a history, at the core of the novel lies the reflection on whether the local and the traditional have to be preserved at all costs or whether they should enter into the global economy, on the condition that their specificity and uniqueness are preserved. Despite the apparent simplicity of the plot, the novel, which revolves around the story of a community torn between tradition and modernity, foregrounds delicate and urgent issues that reflect a central concern with the preservation and re-forging of a cultural identity closely connected to environmental questions. The relationship with nature and with the land stands out as one of the preeminent preoccupations of the novel, a sort of *fil rouge* which interlaces the past with the present. The land has always occupied a peculiar position in the South African imagination, representing the source not only of material, but also of spiritual life: it is the place of the affirmation and negotiation of collective and individual identities, a metaphor of oppression and dispossession, but it is also a symbol of renewal, rehabilitation and liberation. In this novel the struggle with the British for the land in the XIX century, with the disastrous consequences that ensued from that conflict, continues to reverberate in the post-apartheid fight waged between the Believers and the Unbelievers who quarrell about the future of Qolorha-by-Sea, a pristine paradise doomed to be transformed into a tourist site for the use of rich and greedy foreigners. Qolorha is the central geographical location of the story, which constantly shifts between the mid-XIX century colonial invasion to a postcolonial, post-apartheid present in which local people are facing a different invasion, that of Western capital, with its lure of economic progress and wealth that the planned holiday village would bring. The conflict between the two factions, which disrupted the traditional community during the previous century, is thus replicated in the present among their descendants who contend fiercely about the touristic transformation of the area. The intersecting of the two temporal levels, signalled by the duplication of the names of the characters such as those of John Dalton, Twin, Qukezwa and Heitsi, displaces the reader who is urged to cross the border between past and present in order to reflect on the dangers deriving from an overenthusiastic and simplistic celebration of the forces of progress at the expense of traditional cultures and ways of life. What is at stake, moreover, is the disruption of an the ecological balance already severely threatened.

During colonial times, when the Xhosa people were being increasingly subjugated by the white settlers and their cattle were dying from a lung disease imported by foreign herds, the Believers trusted in the prophesy of the young girl Nonqkawuse who announced that an act of mass sacrifice would save them from the British invasion and oppression. Following her vision many destroyed their crops and slaughtered their animals, the result being the spread of famine around the country and the inevitable surrender of the local people to the colonizers. Twin, at the head of the Believers, claims that: "You cannot stop the people from believing in their own salvation! [...] A black race across the sea, newly resurrected from the dead, is surely coming to save us from the white man" (Mda 2003: 84). The cattle killing of

1856-7 is thus re-read by Mda who places it in the specific context of the desperate search for an escape from the brutal oppression of the colonizers whose aim was to "destroy the political independence of the Xhosa [...] to make their land and labour available to the white settlers, and to reshape their religious and cultural institutions on European and Christian models" (Peires 1989: 312-313). As Camagu tries to explain in the contemporary timeline of the story, "it is wrong to dismiss those who believed in Nongquawuse as foolish [...]. Her prophesies arose out of the spiritual and material anguish of the amaXhosa nation" (Mda 2000: 245).

In colonial times Twin's brother Twin Twin, leading the Unbelievers, is even ready to side with the British agent John Dalton in order to save his people from the total annihilation which will be caused by the blind and insane belief in the prophesy, despite the fact that the much hated Dalton murdered the twin brothers' father and boiled his head in order to send it back to the British Museum as a specimen of the barbarous race that the English had been able to 'tame' and 'civilize'.

A new John Dalton, a descendant of the XIX century British trader, reappears in the contemporary story line as the village shopkeeper with a much contaminated identity. Symbolic of the inevitable process of cross-fertilization that colonization determines, he speaks the Xhosa language and has gone through such traditional rituals as circumcision, showing himself to be in much closer contact to the local culture than Camagu himself, who has spent most of his life in the US and who, despite his origins, has undergone a process of westernization. In the hybridized context of the present the clash between *ubuqaba* (which stands for backwardness and heathenism) and *ubugqobhoka* (which stands for enlightenment and civilization) is reawakened through the feud between the descendants of the twin brothers: on the one hand Bhonco, who is the leader of the Unbelievers, and on the other Zim, descendant of Twin, who strenuously contests the planned transformation of the little town on the Wild Coast into a water-sports theme park and a casino. Bhonco, though determined to back the project which will bring wealth to his people, is nonetheless perplexed by its implications. If he affirms that "the Unbelievers stand for progress [...]. We want to get rid of this bush which is a sign of our uncivilized state. We want developers to come and build the gambling city that will bring money to this community. That will bring modernity to our lives, and will rid us of our redness" (Mda 2000: 92), he states at the same time that he is "suspicious of this matter of riding the waves. The new people that were prophesied by the false prophet, Nongqawuse, were supposed to come riding on the waves too" (Mda 2000: 199). The failed promises of the young woman's prophesy in the past resurface in the glare of success and richness that progress and civilization promise to bring. The Unbelievers, in the present timeline, are paradoxically those who fall prey to a foolish belief when they ingenuously embrace the myth of newness. It is Bhonco as well who, while aspiring to get rid of the "redness" which is a marker of backwardness, objects to his daughter Xoliswa's western education that has blinded her by detaching her from traditional customs: "Education has made this girl mad, thinks Bhonco. Has she forgotten that, according to the tradition of the amaXhosa, bees are the messengers of the ancestors? When one has been stung, one has to appease the ancestors by slaughtering an ox or a goat and by brewing a lot of sorghum beer" (Mda 2000: 227).

The irresolvable conflict between the Believers and the Unbelievers finds a dialogical though problematic space of negotiation in Camagu's contemporary journey of enlightenment and discovery into the 'heart of redness'. After 30 years of voluntary exile in the United States where he earned a doctorate in communication and economic development, Camgu returns to South Africa full of enthusiasm about the idea of contributing to the advancement of the young democracy. However, disappointed by the general corruption and disgusted by the cronyism pervading the country, unable to find a place and a high-level job in the new South Africa because he is 'overqualified', he is succumbing to the temptation to go back to the United States, when he finds himself hypnotically driven to follow a beautiful woman, NomaRussia, whom he has met at a wake in Johannesburg. In tracking her, he arrives at the main location of the novel, the village of Quolora by Sea, where he becomes involved in the fierce debate between the traditionalists and the innovators, a conflictual situation in which he is, at first, reluctant to take part: "I am not an Unbeliever. I am not a Believer either. I don't want to be dragged into your quarrels" (Mda 2000: 118). As a returnee with a top class education, he feels deracinated and estranged from contemporary South African political culture, unable to perceive and participate in its new internal dynamics because "he never learnt the freedom dance" (Mda 2000: 28) that was fashionable at the political rallies during the apartheid years when he was abroad completing his doctoral degree. Gradually, however, he "strips off the white mask of a Westernized African" (Bell 2009: 20) and begins to retrieve his amaXhosa identity, an identity radically reforged in consequence of the cross-cultural contaminations and hybridizations determined by his in-between status as an exile both in the Western world and in his own country. In the course of this process of change and inner development Camagu abandons the role of an indefinable, amorphous and detached "transnational hybrid" (Dannenberg 2003: 4) and begins to take sides and make specific choices as a member of a community for which, like every individual, he is responsible. If, at the beginning of the novel, Camagu seems to be a potential bridge between different worlds apparently able to challenge, thanks to his position, a politics of polarity and exclusion (Bhabha 1994), he actually discovers that in everyday life the precious heritage represented by the complex and cross-fertilized background does not relieve the subject from his/her obligation to consciously choose a definite, unambiguous life project and system of values. Camagu refuses to maintain his stance as the unconcerned and passive witness of the 'peaceful' penetration of Western economic powers into a traditional South African world which has already been wounded in the past by the plague of colonialism in its most virulent and degenerated forms and which is victim in the present of the assimilationist forces of a Western-directed globalization. On the contrary, relying on his knowledge and the experience he has acquired during his formative years in the West, he plans and fosters a dignified and intelligent project of local development that preserves the specificity and peculiarities of the area without surrendering the opportunities offered by foreign capital. He realizes a project of cooperative ecotourism which is an alternative to that promoted by multinational investors, one which is in tune with the values and ethical principles of the local community, respectful of and caring for its history, culture, tradition and for the ecological balance of the environment (Eisler 2007).

Camagu's developmental journey is marked by crucial moments of insight occasioned by a respectful confrontation with other characters in the novel. The strengths and potentials of a 'dialogical dialogue' (Panikkar 2007) as a catalyst and resource for mutual recognition and comprehension (Eisler 1987, 2000) loom large in the novel and play a preeminent role in the inner transformation of the characters. Dichotomical world views are explicitly embodied and voiced by the two female characters Camagu is attracted by, women who affect and determine his growth as a conscious man and citizen of the world, enabling him to question the myth of modernity and reappraise tradition as a valuable source of identity and empowerment for the whole community.

Xoliswa Ximiya is constructed within a binary pattern which opposes her character as the westernized subject *par excellence*, "prepared to die for civilization" (Mda 2000: 259) in her father Bhonco's words, to that of Qukezwa, Zim's daughter, who lives in tune with nature and breathes the spirit of the land, defending its traditional laws and values. Xoliswa's cold beauty and what, according to Western standards, is the physical perfection of her figure is juxtaposed against the joyous and very earthly allure of Qukezwa's plump and voluptuous body. Although at first Camagu is dismayed by Qukezwa's earthly instinctual behaviour, her contagious energy and smile, directness and sensuality, and the woman's creative and independent spirit in perfect tune with nature, draw him towards her:

> Qukezwa sings in such beautiful colors. Soft colors like the ochre of yellow gullies. Reassuring colors of the earth. Red. Hot colors like blazing fire. Deep blue. Deep green. Colors of the valleys and the ocean. Cool colors like the rain of summer sliding down a pair of naked bodies (Mda 2000: 193).

Contrasting with Qukezwa is Xoliswa, rigid and controlled in her body and personality, who after her studies abroad has become the local school principal and who betrays her infatuation with Western culture by celebrating uncritically the myth and icons of progress and civilization. She perceives all traditions as detrimental to her people inasmuch as they keep them in a state of backwardness, as symbolized by the 'redness' of the ochre with which they decorate their bodies. Her dream of civilization and advancement will eventually cause her to join the "Aristocrats of the Revolution" (Mda 2000: 33) in Pretoria where she will obtain the prestigious job of deputy-director in the National Department of Education.

Through a series of dialogues, in particular with these two women in his life, about the status of the local people, their habits, rituals and presumed backwardness, and about the project of civilization and advancement and the concept itself of primitiveness, Camagu gradually detaches himself from the values and way of life embodied by Xoliswa, who is unable, in her enthusiastic adherence to the dream of economic and cultural advancement, to detect the consequences that the development of a tourist village would have for the local people and their culture: "You have seen – she claims – how backward this place is. We cannot stop civilization just because some sentimental old fools want to preserve birds and trees and an outmoded way of life" (Mda 2000: 67).

Camagu's grateful and respectful response to the appearance of a snake in his hotel room – an animal in which he recognizes Majola, the totem of his clan, so that he does not

allow the staff to kill it – gains him the esteem of the local community, but at the same time arouses Xoliswa's contempt for a gesture she thinks reinforces and keeps alive all that she considers as barbarism and heathenism (Mda 2000: 172): "You are an educated man, Camagu, all the way from America. How do you expect simple peasants to give up their superstitions and join the modern world when they see educated people like you clinging to them?" (Mda 2000: 150). In the instinctual comparison Camagu draws between the two women, the route he is ready to follow is clear. Talking to Xoliswa about Qukezwa he caims: "where you see darkness, witchcraft, heathens and barbarians, she sees song and dance and laughter and beauty" (Mda 2000: 219).

Qukezwa is the primary agent of Camagu's inner transformation, the spiritual guide who reveals to him the sacredness of the land and its most profound secrets. Thanks to her, he comes to re-discover and re-appreciate once again the values of his traditional culture rooted in a profound respect for nature and its laws. While fascinated by the intellectual and cultural appeal of Xoliswa, a fierce native woman who vindicates her rights in the difficult context of a patriarchal community, Camagu surrenders to the seduction of the rebellious and joyful spirit of Qukezwa, an "ecofeminist" (Sewlall 2009: 216) who lives in symbiosis with nature and is respectful of its laws. She is the depositary of precious knowledge concerning the local flora and fauna, and the guardian of her people's traditions such as the dying one of split-tone singing (Mda 2000: 152). The beauties and magic of the land are arrayed before Camagu's enchanted eyes thanks to Qukezwa's mediation. His journey into the 'heart of redness' thus re-reads and overturns Marlow's tragic path into the hellish 'heart of darkness' of Conrad's novel which the title explicitly echoes. In contrast with the appalling blank space, the site of the most atrocious evils and barbarity which Marlow describes as peopled by unhappy savages, more shadows than human beings, the novel introduces the reader to what Camagu enthusiastically considers the most beautiful place on earth, vibrant with an inner mysterious energy, a sort of gift on the part of a "generous artist [...] using splashes of lush colour" (Mda 2000: 55). This view is reinforced by Camagu's physical and spiritual entrance into the lively landscape of the Valley of Nongqawuse, with its indescribable explosion of colours, a paradisical garden in which plants and animals compose a natural work of art on a fascinating canvas.

It is this land, with its prerogatives and its rights, a land which is the source of physical and spiritual life, that Qukezwa tries to preserve at all costs by invoking the wisdom of traditional laws to protect the threatened environment. She turns up in front of the local court, which accuses her of having vandalized the trees without even using them as fuel, dressed in an evocative and symbolic red blanket, insisting on her right to be judged for what she did even if, according to Xhosa customs, it is the father who should be charged for a crime committed by his daughter. In her defence, she proclaims herself guilty but explains the reasons behind her act:

> The trees that I destroyed are as harmful as the inkberry. They are the lantana and wattle trees. They come from other countries [...] to suffocate our trees. They are dangerous trees that need to be destroyed [...]. Just like the umga, the seed of the wattle tree is helped by fire. The seed can lie there for ten years, but when the fire comes

> it grows. And it uses all the water. Nothing can grow under the wattle tree. It is an enemy since we do not have enough water for this country (Mda 2000: 216).

The court is impressed but cannot absolve her because there is no specific legislation concerning wattle trees. However, it is evident from the court's deliberations that traditional laws, though infused with superstitions and popular beliefs, aim at preserving ecological balance and thus forbid wicked acts of destruction. The court asserts: "When we punish boys for killing red-winged starlings, we are teaching them about life. We are saving them from future misfortune" (Mda 2000: 217). In its deliberations, it is trying to protect not only the isomi bird, which is considered holy, but also the sacredness of nature at large, a nature which has to be honoured and preserved. Thus, an ecological education becomes an imperative "without which – the writer seems to suggest – the future of any nation, no matter how sophisticated, would be doomed" (Sewlall 2009: 217).

Qukezwa brings her powerful message to bear against the insane exploitation of the land's resources. As in the past, during colonial times, the imperialistic venture disguised its destruction and plundering of the land by representing it as the inevitable price to be paid for the diffusion of the light of civilization among the 'savages' and the 'heathens', in the present the lure of progress, technological advancement and money impedes a full comprehension of the disastrous consequences of economic projects which enter into conflict with the ecological balance of the Earth at the expenses of local populations. In the past timeline of the novel the governor Sir George Grey, ironically referred to by the local people as "the Man who Named Ten Rivers", asserts: "The Advance of Christian civilization will sweep away ancient races. Antique laws and customs will moulder into oblivion [...]. The ruder languages shall disappear, and the tongue of England alone shall be heard all around. So you see, my friends, this cattle-killing nonsense augurs the dawn of a new era" (Mda 2000: 206). His enthusiastic celebration of the White enterprise into the heart of savage Africa, is echoed in the present timeline by the developers during the public meeting they hold with the villagers to explain their plan of development for the area (Mda 2000: 197-200).

Men's greed and lust for power and wealth are thus explored and exposed by the writer as representing, though with different manifestations and justifications, a continuum from the colonial past to the present. They are patent expressions of a system of domination that Riane Eisler synthesizes in the following terms:

> So what you see in European history starting from the Middle Ages onwards is an upward spiral with dips. We are in a similar dip today. The growing gap between haves and have-nots worldwide, the re-concentration of economic power in the hands of giant multinational corporations, which are really the new international fiefdoms of our time; the mantra of let's get women back into their 'traditional places', which is a code word for subservient, male controlled place [...]; the rise of religious fundamentalism, which is really dominator fundamentalism [...] and worldwide now the increased reliance on violence in intertribal and international relations, they are all part of the regression to the dominator system (Eisler 2007: 30-31).

The gloomy vision of ineradicable economic interests on a global and local level partially darkens Camagu's project for a holiday camp operating as a village-owned cooperative venture. Cynical power plays, lust for money, lack of reciprocal respect represent serious hindrances to the development of a partnership society based on the principles of sharing, mutual support and communal benefit, a society respectful of the precious ecological balance essential for the survival of humankind. However Mda, though conscious that political and economic interests are driving forces at both a national and international level, fosters through his character's project of eco-sustainable tourism a viable alternative to the violent penetration of foreign capital and the commodification of the local by the globalized market ruled by the interests of the multinationals. By expressing his dismay at the absence of a serious concern for ecological issues, he urges the necessity of a thorough and honest reflection on the massive and uncontrolled exploitation of the environment, and on the progressive annihilation of local traditional cultures that are stifled by a western-dominated globalization with the consequent crisis of individual and collective identities. Significantly Camagu, while drawing upon both worlds he has been living in and upon their respective cultures, gradually detatches himself from a vague "hybrid" status which has served as an excuse not to take sides. Fully aware of its complexities and contradictions, he comes to see it as a source of empowerment and agency enabling him to foster his project. He overcomes the binaries of Eurocentric thought symbolically embodied by the two factions so as to adopt the "post-dialectical (and post-*anti*-apartheid) mode of secular intellectual politics" (Titlestad &Kissack 2003: 268). Endowed with the knowledge and experience attained in the Western world, he is ready, thanks to his precious and complex heritage, to "recuperate a qualified form of the indigenous – and with it, a form of belonging plausibly available within conditions set by the late twentieth century" (Vital 2005: 308). Local culture, according to Camagu and Mda himself, has to be protected from violent manipulation and erasure, although the hybridization processes will inevitably alter and transform it. In *The Heart of Redness* the indigenous Xhosa culture is represented as having been already contaminated in colonial times, thus debunking the myth of a pure, original and monolithic tradition and identity. The process is continuous, irrepressible and increasingly accentuated in present times. In such a context and in the face of, but also thanks to, inevitable cross-cultural fertilizations, Camagu's project of ecotourism seems to guarantee the autonomous survival of the local community by preserving its traditional social values and customs without renouncing the advantages of a modern business system, which would allow the South African people to enter the global economy on their own terms. His plan – an environmentally orientated, ethical project of development – is formulated in clear, rational terms and is based on the establishment of the village as a national heritage site (Mda 2000: 201), one to be viewed not as a relic of the past to be preserved immune from all forms of contamination, but as a vital, vibrant and constantly moving reality which progresses and transforms itself. He promotes "a kind of tourism that will benefit the people, that will not destroy indigenous forests, that will not bring hordes of people who will pollute the rivers and drive away the birds" (Mda 2000: 201).

Camagu organizes a cooperative of local women who harvest the sea, make and sell

traditional Xhosa clothing and jewellery, thanks to which the Department of Arts, Culture and Heritage declares Qolorha to be a national heritage site and rejects the project to build the casino and the tourist resort. Camagu's plan triumphs, though he is aware that it is only a contingent success and that the future of his country is in the hands of the powers that will come:

> As he drives back home he sees wattle trees along the road. Qukezwa taught him that these are enemy trees. All along the way he cannot see any of the indigenous trees that grow in abundance in Qolorha. Those who want to preserve indigenous plants and birds have won the day there. At least for now. But for how long? The whole country is ruled by greed. Everyone wants to have his or her snout in the trough. Sooner or later the powers that be may decide, in the name of the people, that it is good for the people to have a gambling complex at Qolorha-by-Sea (Mda 2000: 277).

Camagu's experiment represents an exception in the disquieting panorama determined by the invasion of the global market, with the consequent corruption of traditional values and ways of life by a capitalist economy under the control of Western neo-imperialist powers with their headquarters in Johannesburg among the black ruling élites. Despite the fact that the village is doomed to undergo inevitable transformations, Camagu and his people have won, at least temporarily. Camagu, once a returned exile, feeling out of place in his own country, frustrated and rendered impotent by the widespread corruption, has become a fully integrated and settled member of his community, a devoted husband and father, a small but successful businessman who has retrieved once and for all the sense of belonging to his mother country. He refuses to peddle the fascination and lure of his traditional civilization as an exotic commodity for credulous tourists, as John Dalton, the white man with a umXhosa heart (Mda 2000: 8) but with a British mind, suggests. Dalton's plan to re-create a fictional pre-colonial world in a "cultural village" to be offered to foreigners (Mda 2000: 286) meets with the stern opposition of Camagu: "That's dishonest. It is just a museum that pretends that it is how people live. Real people in today's South Africa don't lead the life that is seen in cultural villages. Some aspects of that life perhaps are true. But the bulk of what tourists see is the past ... a lot of it an imaginary past" (Mda 2000: 247-248). He is in favour of using Xhosa tradition to sell tourists the ecological attractions of the village, but also determined to preserve its vital culture as living, dynamic and authentic: "I am interested in the culture of the amaXhosa as they live it today, not yesterday. The amaXhosa people – he claims – are not a museum piece. Like all cultures their culture is dynamic" (Mda 2000: 248).

The banal and oversimplistic polarity between nature and culture, constructed within the Western imagination as dichotomical and irreconcilable, nurtured by the myth of progress identified with technological advancement and economic growth, is definitely called into question in *The Heart of Redness*, which foresees and encourages a critical and responsible process of negotiation between tradition and modernity, proposing a site of encounter and dialogic interaction that eschews the vagueness and ambiguity of a hybrid, amorphous and aseptic third space.

When the protagonist, at the end of the novel, asks Dalton to work together for a different future – "This rivalry of ours is bad. Our feud has lasted for too many years" (Mda

2000: 277) he claims – it is such a new site of partnership and collaboration that it is tentatively delineated. Camagu's journey into the heart of 'redness', through the rediscovery of his roots and traditions and a close communion with nature, has 'educated' him in new ways and determined his growth as a man and as a responsive and caring citizen of the world. Mda's point is that too often Western culture, with its profoundly individualistic and auto-referential bias, fails to provide a partnership education based on respect for the other and for the land we inhabit. "You know nothing about love, learned man", Qukezwa significantly shouts at Camagu, "Go back to school and learn more about it!" (Mda 2000: 194). As Eisler suggests, a true partnership education requires a "multidisciplinary and integrated approach to helping human beings acquire the tools, knowledge, skills and dispositions they need to live their lives in empathic and gender-balanced ways in harmony with each other and with nature" (Eisler 2013: 44).

From this perspective it is undeniable the role played by literature in educating the individual as a conscious, critical and active agent of social change. The writer is thus invested with the responsibility of demonstrating "that a partnership future is not a utopia or no place, but a pragmatopia, a possible place" (Eisler 2014), a role Zakes Mda has fully endorsed and exercised in his literary works with conviction and determination.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Atwell, David. 2001. Mda turns to Nongqawuse for inspiration. *Sunday Independent*, January 28: 14.

Bell, David. 2009. Embedded in History: Camagu's amaXhosa identity in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness. Moderna Språk*, 103, 2: 19-26.

Bell, David & Johan Jacobs eds. 2009. *Ways of Writing: Critical Essays on Zakes Mda*. Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Dannenberg, Hilary P. 2003. Post/Colonial Alterities and Global Hybridities in the Contemporary South African Novel: Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow*. http://www.uwc.ac.za/arts/auetsa/hilarypdannenberg.htm (consulted on 5/03/2016).

Durrant, Sam. 2015. The Invention of Mourning in Post-Apartheid Literature. *Third World Quarterly*, 26, 3: 441-450.

Eisler, Riane. 1987. *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Eisler, Riane. 2000. *Tomorrow's Children: A Blueprint for Partnership Education in the 21st Century*. Colorado: Westview Press.

Eisler, Riane. 2007a. The Goddess as Metaphor in the Cultural Transformation Theory. A. Riem, L. C. Camaiora, M. R. Dolce eds. *The Goddess Awakened. Partnership Studies in Literatures, Language and Education*. Udine: Forum, 23-37.

Eisler, Riane. 2007b. *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Eisler, Riane. 2013. The Power of the Creative Word: From Domination to Partnership. A.

Riem, M. R. Dolce, S. Mercanti & C. Colomba eds. *The Tapestry of the Creative Word in Anglophone Literatures*. Udine: Forum, 33-46.
Eisler, Riane. 2014. http://rianeeisler.com/partnership-education-nurturing-childrens-humanity-riane-eisler/ (consulted on 10/02/2016).
Eprile, Tony. 2002. The Shock of the New. *The New York Times*, August 11. http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/11/books/the-shock-of-the-new.html?pagewanted=all (consulted on 6/03/2016).
Jacobs, J. U. 2002. Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*: the Novel as *Umngqokolo*. *Kunapipi*, 24, 1-2: 224-236.
Koyana, Siphokazi. 2003. Criticism, Place, Setting in *The Heart of Redness*. *Current Writing*, 15: 23-26.
Malan, R. & M. Mashigoane. 2004. *The Heart of Redness Study Notes*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
Mda, Zakes. 2000. *The Heart of Redness*. New York: Picador, Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
Mervis, Margaret. 1998. Fiction for Development: Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*. *Current Writing*, 10, 1: 39-56.
Panikkar, Raimon. 2007. *Lo spirito della parola*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.
Peires, J. B. 1989. *The Dead Will Arise*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
Said, Edward. 1984. The Mind of Winter. http://harpers.org/archive/1984/09/the-mind-of-winter/ (consulted on 10/02/2016).
Sewlall, Harry. 2003. Deconstructing Empire in Joseph Conrad and Zakes Mda. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 19, 3-4: 331-344.
Sewlall, Harry. 2009. The Ecocritical Imperative in *The Heart of Redness*. David Bell & Johan Jacobs eds. *Ways of Writing: Critical Essays on Zakes Mda*. Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 207-227.
Titlestad, M. & M. Kissack. 2003. The Foot Does Not Sniff: Imagining the Post-*anti*-apartheid Intellectual. *Journal of Literary Studies*, December 19, 3-4: 255-270.
Vital, Anthony. 2005. Situating Ecology in Recent South African Fiction: J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, June 31, 2: 297-313.
Wark, J. n.d. *Interview with Zakes Mda*. http://www.Zakesmda.com/pages/Interview Wark.html (consulted on 3/03/2016).
Woodward, Wendy. 2003. Postcolonial Ecologies and the Gaze of Animals: Reading Some Contemporary Southern African Narratives. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 19, 3-4: 290-315.

Maria Renata Dolce is Associate Professor of English literature at the University of Salento where she teaches English literature and Postcolonial literatures. Her research focuses on exile, liminality, transculturalism and the definition of diasporic and polyphonic identities, with specific reference to Irish, Australian, South-African, Caribbean and Nigerian literary cultures. Her publications include a monographic study on Peter Carey, *Dialoghi con la storia* (2000), and a critical work on the relationship between the literatures in English and the canon of English literature, *Le letterature in inglese e il canone* (2004). She is currently working on the volume *The Black British Novel of Partnership*.
mariarenata.dolce@unisalento.it

Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XIV-No. 16 November 2016 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-45

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

Lars Jensen

The Narrow Road to the Deep North and the De-sacralisation of the Nation

Abstract I: *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, romanzo di Richard Flanagan, costituisce un nuovo contributo nel catalogo della letteratura australiana sull'esperienza di guerra. I riconoscimenti e gli elogi che il romanzo ha ricevuto sin dalla sua pubblicazione nel 2013 riflettono l'apprezzamento diffuso per la sua capacità di *re-immaginare* l'Australia in un terreno già saturo. Il romanzo di Flanagan può essere letto come una critica all'ascesa del nazionalismo militante, che emerse sull'onda del sostegno dato dall'Australia alla 'guerra al terrore' di Bush, e una critica all'idea che l'arrivo per mare di rifugiati richieda un intervento militare e una risposta militante. Questo saggio suggerisce che la sostituzione dell'eroismo sul campo con il calvario dei prigionieri di guerra nella giungla thailandese rappresenta un modo di re-immaginare, se non di sfidare apertamente, lontano dal motivo della battaglia epica, l'idea diffusa che le storie di battesimo del fuoco siano le uniche vere storie nazionali.

Abstract II: Richard Flanagan's novel *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* represents yet another addition to the catalogue of Australian war experience literature. The awards and accompanying praise the novel has earned since its release in 2013 reflect a widespread appreciation of its ability to *reimagine* Australia in a saturated terrain. Flanagan's novel can be read as a critique of the rise of militant nationalism emerging in the wake of Australia's backing of Bush's 'war on terror' and the idea that the arrival of boat refugees requires a military and militant response. This article discusses how the novel's shift from battle heroics to the ordeal of POWs in the Thai jungle represents a reimagining – away from the preoccupation with epic battles – but not necessarily a challenge to the overriding emphasis on baptism of fire narratives as the only truly national narratives.

Writings about war is not exactly a rarity in Australia. Walking through an Australian bookshop will take you past shelves of books dealing with the First and Second World Wars, and to a much lesser extent the many other theatres of wars in which Australian troops have fought, from Sudan over the Boer War to Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, it is not unfair to suggest there is an obsession in Australia about war that manifests itself in the military paraphernalia of war – including books – and culminating in the annual parades on Anzac Day[1].

[1] For a critical assessment of the resurgent interest in 'the Anzac legend' see Lake & Reynolds (2010).

Apart from the apparently endless supply of books about particular campaigns and the literature with a fixation about equipment, vehicles, ships and planes, there are the (auto) biographical accounts of war veterans. Beyond this, Australian literature dealing with war experience or the war as a backdrop to other Australian experiences lives a largely separate and far more withdrawn life. Richard Flanagan's novel *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* is yet another addition to the catalogue of war experience literature. The novel's anti-war sentiment is far from unique in Australian literature. Its novelty lies in its graphic account of the dehumanising experience of Australian POWs dying in droves while constructing the railway track for the Japanese war machine eager to move troops from Thailand through Burma to pave the way for the invasion of India.

The many books, including literature, on war suggest the attention granted to Richard Flanagan's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, is not because it deals with the experience of war and its consequences on the home front and in the military afterlife, but because of the way it does. The awards and accompanying praise the novel has earned since its release in 2013 reflect an appreciation of its ability to imagine Australia differently, to *reimagine* Australia in a terrain already covered by numerous other accounts. Reimagining Australia in Flanagan's novel is then less an exercise in, to invoke Richard White's classic text (1981), inventing or reinventing Australia, but more relevantly discussed as a critique of the nation's prevalent form of narrating its past through 'the war effort'. Reinvention, by contrast, questions the war experience as the defining moment for the nation. It rejects the exclusivist nation narration (Bhabha 1990) of baptism of fire, and through this raises a critique of whiteness, of Anglo-centred accounts displacing other nation narratives through the indisputable supreme sacrifice of laying down lives for white dominion Australia. Alternative nation narratives include the white invasion of the country itself in 1788, the mid-nineteenth century gold rush (Jensen 2014), political nationhood (and the birth of a white Australia policy and denial of Aboriginal citizenship), the post-1945 massive migration influx and its eventual transformation of a white Australia into a multicultural Australia. In a more contemporary vein one could add the arrival of neoliberal Australia with an increasing disparity of income, increasing poverty pockets accompanied by a dehumanising refugee policy (Hage 2003) and how this has already led to a less inclusive conceptualisation of what constitutes the nation.

Flanagan's novel does contain traces of some of the alternative national narratives listed above. The contemporary spread of poverty pockets in Australia is matched by the novel's references to the depression in the 1930s and 1980s leading to people dying "of starvation on the streets of Hobart" (Flanagan 2013: 5). Black-white history and the racism embedded in it remains peripheral only manifesting itself in the presumably part-Aboriginal character, Gardiner. Racism in the novel is primarily directed at the Japanese and people in the Middle East. There are occasional gestures towards multicultural Australia, for example the Greek fish-and-chips shop owner who lost his son in New Guinea. But they remain mere traces as the novel's main concern as nation narration rests solidly with the impact of war on prevalent notions of Australian identity, not least the construction of a national identity through a post-war representation based on tropes of male heroics in theatres of war. The

choice of the terrible ordeal of POWs over the customary war legends in the Second World War, the Rats at Tobruk and the Kokoda Track, raises the question whether POWs can be hero material, but the few battle scenes in the Middle East expands the scope of the question whether there are any heroes in war[2]. Flanagan laconically narrates how the POWs suffering fails to qualify as subject material of heroism in the national reconstruction after the war:

> When they were demobbed the army quacks told them and their families not to talk about it, that talk was no good. It was hardly a hero's tale in the first place. It wasn't Kokoda or a Lancaster over the Ruhr Valley. It wasn't the *Tirpitz* or Colditz or Tobruk. What was it, then? It was being the slave of the yellow man. That is what Chum Fahey said when they met up at the Hope and Anchor (Flanagan 2013: 341).

The Battle Over Australianness

The novel depicts an old antagonism between a British-derived conceptualisation of Australia complete with its inherent notion of cultural-racial superiority and a belief in the benefits of keeping social hierarchies intact, pitted against a larrikin, anti-authoritarian, anti-hierarchical definition of Australian identity characterised by social mobility against the odds set by those seeking to preserve privilege as hereditary (Jensen 2005). Flanagan's dismissal of the first understanding of Australian identity is palpable:

> Colonel Rexroth, a study in irreconcilable contrasts: a highwayman's head on a butcher's body, a pukka accent and all that went with it in the son of a failed Ballarat draper, an Australian who strove to be mistaken as English … Colonel Rexroth … said he believed all their national British strengths would be enough, that their British esprit de corps would hold and their British blood would bring them through it together … [Rexroth] thanked the entertainers, then spoke of how the division of the British Empire into arbitrary nationalities was a fiction. From Oxford to Oodnadatta they were one people (Flanagan 2013: 45-48).

Rexroth is not only 'a study in irreconcilable contrasts', a man of an outdated First World War vision of Britain as an imperial bulwark defending its overseas territories. Flanagan's choice of narrating the war experience as an integral part of a broader twentieth-century Australian history rather than writing a novel exclusively about war means the war experience is both a chronology of unfolding historical events and a history retrospectively viewed. The latter works to historically distance the way the war was understood at the time. Through this Rexroth along with Rooster MacNeice (shooting a parachuting enemy pilot in mid-air to the disgust of his mates, being responsible for the Japanese thrashing of Darky Gardiner leading to Gardiner's death, bragging about his war heroics after the war) become characters whose main function is to depict an unappealing narrative of Australia which has also become historically redundant. Given the dismissive attitude towards those protecting either their British-derived notion of an Australian national identity, the other

[2] Garton addresses the distinction between First World War heroics and Second World War ambiguity and relates it directly to the POW experience (1998: 88).

characters espousing values of an egalitarian Australian identity tested by the horrors of war and life as POW camp inmates are granted a much larger albeit also ambiguous space.

Three key episodes give some indication of what Flanagan identifies as the antidote of the imperial propaganda that characterises the Anglo-Australian definition of nationhood – and which continues to haunt Australian discussions of nationhood, not least in connection with Anzac Day. The first passage presents a condensed narrative of their descent into hell in the POW camp depicting classic Australian virtues of fatalistic stoicism, resilience and humour[3] pitted against the futility of these defences when confronted with the crushing dehumanising experience:

> They tried to hold together with their Australian dryness and their Australian curses, their Australian memories and their Australian mateship. But suddenly *Australia* meant little against the lice and hunger and beri-beri, against thieving and beatings and yet ever more slave labour. *Australia* was shrinking and shriveling, a grain was so much bigger now than a continent, and the only things that grew daily larger were the men's battered, drooping slouch hats, which now loomed like sombreros over their emaciated faces and their empty dark eyes, eyes that seemed to be little more than black-shadowed sockets waiting for worms (Flanagan 2013: 52).

Starvation and other forms of privation make resistance pointless yet the stubborn rituals of attempting a dignified life under impossible circumstances lend the account a blend of stark realism, surrealism and empathy. These strands come together in moments of acute crisis; the random and pointless thrashing of Gardiner; the men limping and crawling along The Line (their name for the railway track) where those who manage to get there are too weak to do anything; picking out the ablest men to walk to Burma even if they all know most of them will die as a consequence. Acts of solidarity are inconsistent, at times paradoxical, but also considered necessary to ensure their survival as a group:

> He had to help Tiny. No one asked why he did; everyone knew. He was a mate. Darky Gardiner loathed Tiny, thought him a fool and would do everything to keep him alive. Because courage, survival, love – all these things didn't live in one man. They lived in them all or they died and every man with them; they had come to believe that to abandon one man was to abandon themselves (Flanagan 2013: 195).

The collectivity of the men stands in contrast to their commander, Dorrigo Evans, whose weight of responsibility places him in a separate space. Standing up to and constantly negotiating with the Japanese commander, Nakamura, whose blind loyalty to military rank forces him to respect Evans, cannot be shared between Evans and his men. This sets Evans apart, a situation enhanced by Flanagan's choice to make him the protagonist. The men's inner feelings, the glimpses of their lives before and after the war – very often detailing their future deaths – are generic representations of soldiers' lives, whereas in Evans the

[3] A similar depiction can be found in Bowden (1998).

struggle for survival and their meaningless lives in the camp, is mirrored by his struggle to make sense of life in Australia – before as well as after military service. If Evans represents the hollowness of man, they represent the pointlessness of life in nihilistic times:

> Dorrigo Evans is not typical of Australia and nor are they, volunteers from the fringes, slums and shadowlands of their vast country: drovers, trappers, wharfies, roo shooters, desk jockeys, dingo trappers and shearers. They are bank clerks and teachers, counter johnnies, piners and short-price runners, susso survivors, chancers, larrikins, yobs, tray men, crims, boofheads and tough bastards blasted out of a depression that had them growing up in shanties and shacks without electricity, with their old men dead or crippled or maddened by the Great War and their old women making do on aspro and hope, on soldier settlements, in sustenance camps, slums and shanty towns, in a nineteenth-century world that had staggered into the mid-twentieth century (Flanagan 2013: 213).

There is a striking contrast in the image of a cross-cultural section of Australian male volunteers set against the opening statement 'Evans is not typical of Australia and nor are they'. Because the catalogue of them means that they are in fact 'typical'. It operates as an ironic exposure of an Australia where the poor and middle classes enlist in the army, while the upper middle class and elite stay out. Yet it is those who stay out who take it upon themselves to define what Australia is and how Australian identity is given shape through what they claim is war experience as *meaningful* – proven through excellence in the battlefields. POW experience does not qualify, it is an embarrassment to the idea of the soldier fed by the glorification of the First World War experience. What constructs the war experience is the propaganda of the war machinery and the subsequent post-war reconstruction based on narrations of uniquely Australian fighting skills – not futile endurance in a labour death-camp in the Thai jungle.

The Narrow Road to the Deep North is marked by a number of deeply distressing features. Most poignant amongst these is the theme of pointless suffering and death. While the novel is a war novel, the violence it depicts is not the 'spectacular' brutality of epic battle scenes. The prevalent form of violence is the suffering, punishment and slow death that saturates the novel and which is reproduced as an after-effect of the war experience. Protracted scenes, such as the punishment of Gardiner, the simultaneous terrible operation on an already partly amputated leg, and the later dissection of the live American prisoner by the Japanese in Japan, are merely some of the more graphic examples of a prominent feature of the book. Flanagan here seems bent on de-romanticising the post-war reconstruction of war heroics, which began on a national level in 1930s Australia with the erection of war monuments and the 'consecration' of the disastrous Gallipoli landing as *the* Australian war experience[4]. Ironically, the Gallipoli was also primarily about endurance, as soldiers on both

[4] Inglis (2008 [1998]) has written a detailed account of the history of war memorials in Australia. While their construction in many parts of Australia began soon after, and in some cases even during, the war these were locally based efforts to honour the local soldiers. The monuments in the capital cities were national and erected in the 1930s. For a more nuanced discussion of the social lives of war memorials in Australia see Taylor (2005).

sides were trapped in trenches with little hope of military success. Clearly, Flanagan's novel is also written with a view to the contemporary post-Keating militant nationalism continuing to feed and feed on the national commemoration of earlier military campaigns.

Flanagan's ghastly realism can also be explained with reference to a desire to tell it as it was – to raise the lid of a tabooed history about the suffering of Australian captured soldiers at the hands of the Japanese, adding weight to a counter-narrative of the Second World War as an alternative to the monolithic tales of First World War heroics. But also as a long overdue replacement of the distant war in Europe fought on behalf of the empire by an obedient white settler society, with the Second World War as the war which finally confronted Australia with its geopolitical reality. Yet, the gory scenes are so numerous and protracted that more must be at stake here for Flanagan. He shows how atrocities, deliberately inflicted suffering and death during the war permeates the society for decades to come, since clearly all the surviving POWs and the Japanese camp runners are marked by the war for life. It mars their lives; they die prematurely, they commit suicide. Even the next generation's lives are marked by it (Flanagan 2013: 340). This theme is also mirrored in the life shattering experience of taking another man's life (Kato's predilection for beheading prisoners after his initiation in Manchukuo). But even this fundamental disrespect for life can be taken to another more sinister level. The connection between the live heart still beating outside the American captive soldier's body and the tremors associated with earthquakes foreshadows the atomic bombs dropped over Nagasaki and Hiroshima. It becomes evidence of an escalating violent madness suggesting violence once released has a built-in propensity for spiralling out of control. It points ahead to the nuclear arsenal of the Cold War, but also to how violence escalates in any theatre of war. In a more contemporary frame relevant reference points are the almost incomprehensible levels of violence and atrocities committed in the Middle East and Afghanistan by militants, by the Afghan, Syrian and Iraqi governments, by the Israeli government and by Western military forces – whether committed by boots on the ground or drones.

The POW Camp as Displaced War

The novel's war period setting in a POW camp in Thailand obliterates the European theatres of war from the novel. In the broader frame of national historiography the novel's setting marks an altered perspective away from the customary preference for narrating the Second World War mainly through the battles in Europe (and North Africa) between Allied powers and Nazi Germany. Part of the traditional focus also on Australia's participation in the European theatres of war is due to the legacy of the First World War working as an assertion of Australia's belonging to the circle of Western nations[5]. Shifting the focus from the First World War to the Second World War inevitably entails a change from an exclusive focus on Europe to a combined focus on Europe (where the Middle Eastern and North African theatres

[5] My point here is not to ignore the battle over the significance of Australian First World War participation, between seeing Australians as loyal supporters of the British Empire and Australians as fighting on their own behalf under an alienating empire. Rather it is how these seemingly antagonist narratives are united through the paradoxical mutually exclusive commemorations of Gallipoli and Anzac Day.

of war were seen as part of the European war) and the Asia-Pacific region. The Australian participation in the Second World War is inextricably linked to the Japanese bombardment of Darwin and the sinking of a Japanese submarine in Sydney Harbour. Events irretrievably placing Australia in a fight for survival on its own doorstep (with many of its troops overseas), and through this a belated and reluctant acknowledgement of Australia's position on the outskirts of Asia.

The Narrow Road to the Deep North reinforces this geopolitical shift through its attention to the 'Japanese holocaust' in Manchukuo, which, as the novel reveals, did not meet the condemnation and trials caused by the holocaust in Europe. Hence the novel's triple displacement from the First World War to the Second, from Europe to Asia, and from combat to POWs leads to a radical new narration of war as nation narration. Flanagan leaves it to the Japanese POW guard, Tomokawa, to observe the obvious Western hypocrisy and racism in the distinction between war crimes: "At the beginning I was terrified they'd pick me up as a war criminal. And I used to think: What a joke! Because they only cared about what we did to the Allied prisoners … And when I think about all that we did with the chinks in Manchukuo …" (Flanagan 2013: 406). The anti-Chinese Japanese racist acts are graphically narrated and the post-war Japanese burial of its genocidal war record is unequivocal. Yet, as the novel makes it clear it is the American occupational forces which ensure the 'rehabilitation' of the Japanese war criminals after the war (some high ranking Nazi war criminals also escaped justice through their Allied protection – see Goda 2009). The Second World War as the just war against unmitigated evil perpetrated by totalitarian empires is not questioned, but certainly compromised by political game play surrounding the establishing of the Cold War order following hot on the heels of the Second World War. There are a number of ironies suggesting Flanagan aims to question the idea of 'valiant' warfare, which haunts the propaganda during the war and the nation rebuilding after the war. The Korean POW camp guard, Choi Sang-min, is hanged on evidence provided by the Manchukuo war criminal, Kota, who lands himself a prestigious job with Japan Blood Bank after the war. Choi Sang-min is portrayed as a plain war criminal but also as a colonial subject of the Japanese occupation tried for crimes committed by an army that considers him racially inferior. The Senegalese black troops dying for Vichy France in the Middle East represents another more peripheral example of confused loyalties. The part of the novel dealing with the war finishes with the confinement of the Japanese troops in Changi prison in Singapore, where the POW experience began for the Australian troops at the opening of the war in this part of Asia.

Read from the perspective of the emotionally crippled male suffering from PTSD the novel can be seen as a belated articulation of the terrible – literally unspeakable – ordeal of the Japanese POW camps. But violence also ties the novel together outside the POW camp setting, from the early episodes in the Middle Eastern theatres of war to the later depiction of a post-apocalyptic Japan, strikingly reminiscent of Akira Kurosawa's post-apocalyptic Japan film, *Dreams*[6]. In post-war Japan, the slow but inevitable grinding towards death of the POWs has been replaced by instantaneous death by explosives and casual murders by

[6] The segment 'Tunnel' is a nightmarish return to the aftermath of the Second World War where a Japanese commander is haunted by the ghosts of the soldiers he led to their deaths.

people who have lost all confidence in society's ability to regenerate itself. The string of deaths continue throughout the novel, not only as casualties of war, but of sickness, of accidents, freaky and planned. Almost all characters are killed off one by one and even a few extremely peripheral characters' deaths are described. The centrality of the theme of death and dying is clearly related to the novel's many references to the Japanese death poems and to the shadow of death hovering not only above the POWs death camp but also over those left behind in peaceful Australia. Death, it seems, is almost contagious.

Intertextualities

There are a number of intertextual reference points for *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. They are mine rather than Flanagan's but they represent parts of the catalogue of canonical Australian art works (novels and paintings) that speak to the themes represented in the novel. Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* is one obvious reference point: the quintessential Australian as convict, thief, the one who looks after his mates, displays fearless egalitarianism, and the rejection of those who believe in British inherited values. All of these are located in Gardiner, also known as the Black Prince, because of his uncanny ability to survive through surgically executed acts of stealing from the Japanese. Rooster who thinks Gardiner has stolen a duck egg from him, who later indirectly causes Gardiner's death, is shown up for his inability to read what solidarity-based mateship is about. Albert Tucker's apocalyptic paintings inspired by his visit to Hiroshima in 1947 represent an interesting comparison showing how the shadow of death hovering during the war lingers on after the war. Arthur Boyd's *The Mourners* and *Melbourne Burning* (1945) were a response to the revelation of atrocities in Europe and Asia (Heathcote n.d.).

Two watershed publications from the 1960s bring us to *The Narrow Road to the Deep North's* central preoccupation – war and how it relates to subsequent national identity formation in Australia. The first text is Alan Seymour's play, *The One Day of the Year*, considered so controversial it was taken off the Adelaide Festival program in 1960[7]. Also, in this play the character who only speaks at the end of the play, is the only character with actual war experience from Gallipoli. Other characters hotly debating the meaning of Anzac Day were either not involved in the war, or they were involved in the wrong war (the Second World War), which at the time was considered secondary to the untouchable sacrifice of the First World War. When the only 'real' war hero finally speaks he recounts the horror of what it was like, not the Anzac Day trumpeted narrative of heroic military prowess, and celebration of white Australian maleness. Also, in Seymour's play the nationalistic rhetoric surrounding April 25 is an outlet for the returned soldiers' frustrations over the sad post-war lives as unrecognised labourers. The class society which is partially abandoned through the egalitarian myth of mateship in war is left unchallenged and merely picked up again at the end of the war. Flanagan clearly reiterates this position in his representation of working-class Tasmanian POWs.

The second text Flanagan's novel invites comparison with is George Johnston's 1964

[7] For a discussion on the controversy and the life of Seymour's play see Anne Pender's essay 'The One Day of the Year' (2014).

novel, *My Brother Jack*, where the crippled and psychologically damaged returned soldiers after the First World War form the childhood backdrop for the protagonist and his brother's lives. The novel portrays the brother, Jack, initially as the classic Australian war hero material, only to account how he actually fails to join the overseas campaign during the Second World War, whereas the non-fighting non-heroic protagonist puts his life at risk covering the war in New Guinea. The novel suggests the national male heroics and the singular focus on Gallipoli and the First World War is out of touch with the reality of the Second World War and its Asian-Pacific theatre with a war on Australia's doorstop. Australia's inability to come to terms with its post-war reality that requires other forms of nation narration better in touch with the lives lived by Australians is what propels the protagonist into a self-imposed exile[8]. Both *The One Day of the Year* and *By Brother Jack* also represent a stepping away from Australian blood sacrifice for an imperial British whiteness towards a 1960s informed perspective overtly preoccupied with its own contemporaneity; youth rebellion, class rebellion and women's liberation – and anti-war sentiment in the wake of conscription for the Vietnam War.

If *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* represents a critical revisiting of the question of war as nation narration it also enters the critical space opened by Seymour, Johnston and a range of subsequent books and films. Albert B. Facey's autobiography *A Fortunate Life* and Peter Weir's film, *Gallipoli*, represent important early 1980s revisions of the early glorification of blood sacrifice beginning with Bean's legendary accounts from the First World War – later consecrated through the erection of endless war monuments and their hybrid mausoleum temple forms in Sydney and Melbourne and other capital cities. What is often forgotten is how such monuments are not coterminous with the sacrifice but erected typically later as parts of the reconstruction of national narratives. The whiteness of these monuments is easily associated with the idea of reinvoking Roman and Greek classical antiquity as a way of reasserting white Australian sovereignty over relatively recently illicitly occupied land. In this way the memorials contribute to the 'endowment' of the white Australian occupation as both timeless and indisputable through the voluntary blood sacrifice of its citizens.

The Narrow Road to the Deep North and its Contemporary Ghosts

Flanagan's novel is written at a time when this critique has long been established – even if far from broadly endorsed. Indeed as Lake and Reynolds (2010) argue contemporary Australia is going through a resurgent interest and renewed consecration of the Anzac legend. The novel can be read as a critique of the renewed bellicose nationalism beginning with John Howard's anti-invasion rhetoric (as a way of evading the responsibility for refugees in spite of Australia's international commitment) combined with his role in pushing Australia into a range of quagmire conflicts in the Middle East and Central Asia. The bellicose nationalism has since partly been picked up by subsequent governments from Rudd, over Gillard, then vigorously reinforced by Abbott. Nothing suggests it is about to be finished. If both current

[8] In an article commemorating the 50th anniversary of the publication of *My Brother Jack* (2014) Nadia Wheatley (2014), discusses the novel's ambivalent attitude to the Anzac legend and its conformist burden on national identity formation.

major party leaders appear preoccupied with other matters than promoting further futile military adventures, their complete lack of interests in alleviating the situation of refugees remains intact, from mandatory detention to refusal to process asylum seekers arriving by boat[9].

The Narrow Road to the Deep North is both about being at war and its long-term and long-distance consequences. One can imagine Medicins Sans Frontiers hospitals in Syria and elsewhere operating under similar conditions to those Dorrigo has to perform under, when he is operating on an already amputated leg of an Australian POW. Through Flanagan's laconic depiction of a desperate lack of supplies, lack of facilities, and constant pressure, he helps the reader understand through its uncompromised attention to gory details, what ordeal the POWs were passing through – but it also finds contemporary repercussions in the war zones, refugees are desperately trying to escape from. The parallel invited through the depiction of an 'Australian ordeal' does exactly what governments fear most – it makes us see refugees as humans not as abstract numbers whose quantity 'we' need to be protected from, producing fear that makes 'us' demand the prevention of their arrival. It would be an outrageous claim to insist Flanagan's novel is written in response to this, but it is part of the contemporaneity to which the novel speaks. And the novel offers a space for the reader to comprehend the monstrosity caused by war, then and now.

Historically, the novel is both a revisiting of the Second World War and the narrations and mythologising surrounding the war. Although April 25 remains solidly associated with the First World War, it has altered its significance away from an exclusivist pride in Anglo-Australian nationhood assertion to a more inclusive but obviously still war focused event celebrating Australian citizenship as an identity based on unconditional loyalty to the nation. Here, inclusivity is clearly not on the rise. The question is, how the shift from a focus on the First World War to the Second as the nation-shaping event for post-war Australia which already Prime Minister Keating called for in the 1990s has remapped war as a quintessentially Australian experience. The several wars Australia has participated in since the early 2000s have demonstrably not demanded the same level of involvement nor the same number of casualties. The Second World War has emerged as the last war involving mass mobilisation in Australia and the last clearly defined just war.

Conclusion

Since the 1960s and 1970s Aboriginal and multicultural Australia have been chipping away at the monolithic Anglo-Australian constructions of Australia as a British or British-Irish derived society. Anglo-Australians who remain the most privileged group in Australia have sought not so much to fight back as to solidify their hold on Australian identity as predominantly white, Anglo-Australian and male dominated. The legacy of war, the idea that white Anglo-Australians (we grew here) fought for the land, while others (you flew here) came as a result of the valiant struggles first in Gallipoli and the Western front. Tobruk, the

[9] While these observations are mine, they are not dissimilar from the critique Flanagan has raised as a public intellectual, for example in his columns written for *The Guardian* (http://www.theguardian.com/profile/richardflanagan).

Middle East and the Kokoda Track represent the last post of identitarian whiteness. *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* occupies an ambivalent space in the dispute over suitable material for nation narration. It clearly opens up a new front in terms of the very different narrative it presents in terms of what constitutes war experience, what constitutes heroism and what constitutes Australian maleness. The silence it replaces with a nation narrative is not necessarily the result of stoicism but of deep psychological wounds too painful to lay open. Yet there is not only silence but also *silencing* which is the result of nationalistic manipulation shaming the POWs into silence. Flanagan adds further weight both to the need to shift the historiographic discourse on national experience away from the First World War to the Second World War and through this from Europe to Australia's own geopolitical neighbourhood. He draws attention to how racism raises its ugly head in the commemoration of war, both in relation to the two important Australian sites, the death railway and the Kokoda Track. Visits are geared to the commemoration of the dead POWs and Australian and American soldiers, the innumerate Asians dying remain anonymous and of little interest to these exercises in dark tourism. Hence the visits reproduce the racial hierarchy of the war through the commemorative act. Flanagan's novel also implicitly raises the point about the Eurocentricity inherent, also in Australia, in the emphasis on the European holocaust and the lack of attention granted to the Manchukuo genocide.

When Flanagan through his acceptance of the Prime Minister's Award ended up on stage with Tony Abbott, champion of militant nationalism, it was not only a baffling moment. It was also a confirmation of the unresolved question whether the novel, while opening up critical spaces considered too sacred to the nation to be open for questioning, ends up involuntarily reinforcing war experience in its new, broader, and far more reflexive form as the quintessential, national experience. And in doing so, it lends its weight to the continued marginalisation of less national, because less spectacular, less specific event focused, but nonetheless immensely nation-shaping experiences of Australian history – from Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal contact history, over multicultural history, and less male-centred forms of nation narration, to mining and environmentally based/ecologically inspired accounts of Australian history – and Australian contemporaneity. The novel through its concluding episode with the Tasmanian bushfires of 1967 suggests the birth-by-fire narrative is not necessarily about one particular form of manmade war, but can in fact take many different forms.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bhabha, Homi. 1990. *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge.

Bowden, Timothy. 1998. *Northern Exposure. Becoming Australia*. Richard Nile & Michael Peterson eds. St. Lucia (QLD): University of Queensland Press, 149-154.

Garton, Stephen. 1998. War and Masculinity in Twentieth-century Australia. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 22, 56, 86-95.

Goda, Norman J. W. 2009. Goda on Salter, Nazi War Crimes: Intelligence Agencies and Selective Legal Accountability. *H-German*, https://networks.h-net.org/node/35008/reviews/45766/goda-salter-nazi-war-crimes-intelligence-agencies-and-selective-legal (consulted on 1/03/2016).

Hage, Ghassan. 2003. *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society*. Sydney (NSW): Pluto Press.
Heathcote, Christoffer (n.d.) Arthur Boyd. The Mourners, https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/21362/lot/24/ (consulted on 1/04/2016)
Inglis, K. S. 2008 [1998]. *Sacred Places. War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
Jensen, Lars. 2005. *Unsettling Australia. Readings in Australian Cultural History*. New Delhi: Atlantic Books.
Jensen, Lars. 2014. Giving Diggers a Rest, or Resurrecting Them? (Under) Mining the Australian National Narrative. *Australian Cultural Studies*, 1: 118-133.
Johnston, George. 1967 [1964]. *My Brother Jack*. London: Fontana Books.
Kurosawa, Akira. 1990. *Dreams*. Warner Brothers.
Lake, Marilyn & Henry Reynolds eds. 2010. What's Wrong with Anzac? The Militarisation *of Australian History*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.
Pender, Anne. 2014. The One Day of the Year. An Essay. *Reading Australia*, http://readingaustralia.com.au/essays/the-one-day-of-the-year/ (consulted on 2/07/2016)
Seymour, Alan. 1958. *The One Day of the Year*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.
Taylor, William. 2005. Lest We Forget: The Shrine of Remembrance, Its Redevelopment and the Heritage of Descent. *Fabrications*, 15, 2: 95-111.
Wheatley, Nadia. 2014. The 50th Anniversary of *My Brother Jack*. George Johnston's Classic of Australian War Literature. *The Monthly*, https://www.themonthly.com.au/ issue/2014/may/1398866400/nadia-wheatley/50thanniversary-my-brother-jack (consulted on 1/05/2016).
White, Richard. 1981. *Inventing Australia. Images and Identity, 1688-1980*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

WEBLIOGRAPHY

http://www.theguardian.com/profile/richardflanagan (consulted on 1/07/2016).

Lars Jensen is Associated Professor at Roskilde University. He is the author of *Beyond Britain: Stuart Hall and the Postcolonializing of Anglophone Cultural Studies* (Rowman & Littlefield 2014) and is currently working on a manuscript situating postcolonial Denmark in a broader European perspective. His most recent Australian studies articles are "Giving Diggers a Rest or Resurrecting Them? (Under)Mining the Australian National Narrative" (*Australian Cultural Studies*) and "Unextractable Differences?" (*Cultural Studies*).
hopeless@ruc.dk

Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XIV-No. 16 November 2016 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-46

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

Adelle Sefton-Rowston

Healing, Catharsis and Reconciliation: Water as Metaphor in *Ghost River*

Abstract I: Questo articolo esplora la possibilità di catarsi interculturale attraverso la letteratura, le connessioni metaforiche e le rappresentazioni del luogo ne *Il fiume fantasma* di Tony Birch (2015). L'acqua, la pioggia ed essenzialmente il fiume, simboleggiano la costruzione di una nazione e la riconciliazione di relazioni razziali tra indigeni e non indigeni. La teoria della catarsi aristotelica è dunque decostruita e ricostruita sulla base delle filosofie indigene e il dialogo interculturale per esplorare le idee relative alla costruzione di relazioni come viaggio spirituale collegato alle direzioni testuali del paesaggio.

Abstract II: This article explores the possibility of intercultural catharsis through literature, metaphorical connections and representations of place in Tony Birch's *Ghost River* (2015). Water, rain and essentially the river, symbolise the building of a nation and the repair of Indigenous and non-Indigenous race relations. Aristotle's theory of catharsis is deconstructed and built upon using Indigenous philosophies and intercultural dialogue to explore ideas about relationship building as a spiritual journey connected to the textual directions of the landscape.

> *But I believe, nevertheless, that it is possible to reinvent the world since, by and large, it is evident that its shape reflects our notions of reality and value, the way we weave together the various strands of existence.*
>
> (Brady 2006: 103)

A flood of metaphors enliven Australian Indigenous literature and characterise it as first peoples' writing – its unique distinctions are captured in the visceral depictions of country, home and land which do more than simply describe place but provoke social and political consciousness. Indigenous writing, in its many forms, pushes against the currents of colonialism and engages with intercultural dialogue through creative penmanship that includes literary metaphors capturing the spiritual connection Indigenous people have with land and their deeply cultural understandings of place. These understandings are often portrayed by metaphors belonging to Australia's natural landscape – they are used with artistic purpose and, they too have power. Water, air and various elements of Australia's landscape inform more obvious and literal meanings of texts, yet serve as metaphorical

signifying systems in Indigenous writing – working perhaps intentionally (and unintentionally) to articulate more than a text's setting – speaking to Western discourses and ideas of belonging to country from Indigenous viewpoints. These authors are continually shaping and hydrating literary tradition in distinctively 'Indigenous' ways, approaching writing or storytelling from always within their own imaginations, always pushing against the current to prove that colonial ways of reading and writing are not given but are metamorphic, shifting, changing and, at the same time, inviting readers on a sacred journey of transformation whether they identify as Indigenous or not. Readers come to a text from extensively diverse backgrounds, many of whom may argue that the literature of Australia's first people does not solely belong to them, and stories, tropes and messages speak also to readers who are non-indigenous and open to textual understandings about who *they* are, how to belong to nation and the possibilities of where to set forth as people(s) of many backgrounds seeking to understand home.

This essay will argue that reading and writing can offer non-Indigenous readers an opportunity for catharsis, as it is understood to be a spiritual journey, changing the ways in which readers imagine Indigenous others, understand nationhood(s), and explore inter-cultural relations as meaningful for reconciliation rather than symbolic to the perpetuation of neo-colonialism. This essay will analyse the ways in which Australian Indigenous author Tony Birch uses the river as a metaphor to represent healing, renewal and transformation in his most recent novel *Ghost River* (2015). In his text Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters navigate friendships in a place which is being deliberately fenced-off and destroyed, reflecting Australia's relational politics and the possibilities of reconstructing 'home' alongside a politics of reconciliation. Water and rain, as written in *Ghost River*, symbolise the constant and fluid nature of nation building, social renewal and relational repair.

Western conceptualisations of the land typically include scientific representation or associations with geography, topography, climate, terrain, towns, sites and the 'bush', whereas Australian Indigenous writers inform representations of place as more than a setting or back drop for a plot to unfold – the role of land, including water has its own literary functions and creative powers within a text that can narrate stories, influence characters and ultimately move readers' perspectives of belonging to place and, who they are, alongside others. The focus of water in Indigenous writing should not to be confused with reducing Indigenous literary representations with only the landscape – there is a long history of seeing Indigenous people as part of the landscape in order to make them 'othered' and reduce their humanity. On the contrary, water is commonly represented in Indigenous writing as metaphors for connecting with and belonging to place, for example in *Watershed* (2005) female Indigenous author Fabien Bayet-Charlton, likens the link between her Indigenous people and the river to that of a mother and child: "The sucking and pushing of the womb, through the cervix and vagina, is, to a baby, like the surging swimming heartbeat of a river. It is the river, my soft safe mother. It is the rivers the Murray Cods swim on forever" (Bayet-Charlton 2005: 3). This text is a stark reminder of the poor state of the Murray Darling Basin and that the River is a place in need of protection like a mother protects her own child. Similarly Oodgeroo Noonuccal's first prose work *Stradbroke Dreamtime* is described by CA Cranston

as a collection that names the island that gave birth to the Dreamtime stories: the emphasis therefore is on stories *from* place, rather than *about* place (Cranston 2007: 247).

Another Indigenous author who includes water as metaphor is Bruce Pascoe in the short story *Tired Sailor*. In his story non-Indigenous female character Em is burdened by the crime of her great-grandfather Craypot, who drowned an Aboriginal child by tying him to the bottom of a craypot for bait. Pascoe writes of the boy kicking and screaming in the net as he is lowered into the water, then juxtaposes this image from the colonial past with an image belonging to that of a postcolonial future. Em imagines she is making love with a man who returns from the sea: "waiting in certainty for him who would come with the hands shaped to the geography of her own undiscovered land" (Pascoe 2000: 114). Em's place within Australia is not inherited from her ancestors but informed by hope for a different future where renewed relations constitute the social and political geography of place. In this short story water is a metaphor for the dynamics of relational repair – as it is continually reconstructed rather than passively bequeathed from one generation to the next – dependent on polemical frameworks created from her own experiences and not those belonging to settlers of the past. The future is therefore yet to be realised, belonging to those who choose to imagine it.

In *How a continent created a nation* Libby Robin's explores Leopold's essay 'Think like a mountain' to see how non-human actors like mountains and deserts inform history and Australian national identity (Robins 2007: 2). While rivers are not discussed in great detail in Robin's work, her ideas about land having agency in building culture, point to alternate perspectives from the ground up. She begs the question how constructions of land have created the 'Australian nature'. If interpretations of the land have created a culture of isolation then these interpretations can be recreated to allow nature, or in this case a river, to interpret new ways of being in place with others. If polemical prose suggests reconciliation can be written as a spiritual journey, rivers as metaphors allow for textual experiences with new opportunities perhaps even forcing political debate in particular directions. Water may be a metaphor for that pitcher of hope, forgiveness and renewal, a textual passage for catharsis and the possibilities for redirecting the mind's eye through the practice of reading.

In *Poetics* and later *Rhetoric* Aristotle showed how the practice of writers was utilised through various means of persuasion including, the evocation of emotions as well as style and argument in the construction of speeches. He argued that poetry could have a positive emotional effect on an audience which he termed *Katharsis*, describing the value of moral purification or "the final cause" (Leitch *et al.* 2001: 88). Modern literary critics however use Aristotle's theory of *Katharsis* to support the significance of literature as affective theory with the ability to shape historical and political discourse and explore discursive ideas about nation, how logical and reasonable persuasion operates in a range of texts, not only political speeches. Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology to the stolen generations does however, make for an interesting example of textual catharsis, as his speech was based on historical and political facts placed alongside emotional persuasions, inviting an entire nation to acknowledge Australia's 'Black' history and seek metaphorical forgiveness through this speech act. While speeches are beyond the scope of this article, in vein of Aristotle's theory of catharsis, we can explore the ways in which water as metaphor

acts as emotional persuasion of "the final cause" or social purification as it is represented in longer texts. Although Aristotle belongs to the school of classical philosophy and it seems commonplace to start, it is argued that intercultural philosophies and the discussion of Indigenous ideology should inform the worlds from which we read Indigenous writing. An inclusive approach to philosophy works to decentralise Western representations of the other, refusing to examine "culture as human enterprise" (Mall 1998: 15) while formally recognising the complex and evolving knowledge systems of Indigenous people in the academy, philosophy and politics. A completely Aristotelian reading of water as metaphor for catharsis is in danger of embarking on a Western gaze of the other through text, rather than engaging in intercultural dialogue about the complex nature of race relations and realising how to change the mind's eye of non-Indigenous readers.

Since ancient times Indigenous people have participated and contributed to their own systems and laws – many of these social and legal systems already bound to philosophical and spiritual ways of seeing oneself in relation to others and how to 'be-long' to place. Indigenous writer Bruce Pascoe argues in *Dark Emu Black Seeds: agriculture or accident* that:

> Colonial Australia sought to forget the advanced nature of the Aboriginal society and economy, and this amnesia was entrenched when settlers who arrived after the depopulation of whole districts found no structure more substantial than a windbreak and no population that was not humiliated, debased and diseased (Pascoe 2014: 17-18).

Thus Indigenous people do not require advanced teachings about the art of storytelling – their ways of understanding and articulating culture have for long been represented in sophisticated iterations of stories such as rhythmic and lyrical forms of song-circles, intricate paintings and, poetry and plays represented in the embodiment of music, song and dance to communicate intergenerational knowledge, beliefs and principles for cultural survival. Perhaps it is the power of these stories which have allowed for the continuing survival of Australia's first people once "humiliated, debased and diseased" to keep their cultures strong and continue expressing who they are in unique ways. Literature has become somewhat a platform for the expression of Indigenous peoples' stories and, modern-day texts are capturing ancient teachings and philosophies for all readers wanting to learn more about themselves and learn more about the intersection of whiteness and Aboriginality on a sacred journey towards healing and catharsis.

Indigenous writing gives way to new languages which inform the belonging rather than the unbelonging of place which colonial writing and European languages have attempted to articulate. For example, the French term, *a joure* captures a sense of being both home and away (Dixon 2009: 15), while the German term *unheimlich* meaning 'un-homelike' describes the unusual experiences to be had in familiar places or what Freud translated in English to mean, 'uncanny' experiences of place (Gelder & Jacobs 1998: 26). Yet there are Indigenous terms that represent the unique experiences for peoples both belonging and un-belonging to Australia. Margaret Kemarre Turner is an Indigenous woman from Central Australia who has published a number of non-fiction texts on Indigenous culture. In *Iwenhe Tyerrtye – What it Means to be an Aboriginal Person* (2010) she argues that race relations have

come to reflect a reconciliation between the social and political constructs of cultural identities and that "two cultures *can* hold each other". She describes, for example how non-Indigenous people working on *Arrente* country are referred as *Penangke* – a term which renders "a different feeling for people when you learn, like you're really close' … '*ikirrentye*' and that this 'feeling brings you into the system somehow, even non-Aboriginal people, joining them together with us in *anpernirrentye*"(Kemarre Turner 2010: 220). Bhabha's notion of hybridity is similar and refers to the historical and cultural necessity for any postcolonial society to produce revolutionary cultural change through the principle of "political negotiation" (Bhabha 1949: 2388). However, Kemarre Turner's concept of "holding each other" as two cultures extends this principle to point to the possibilities for relationship rather than a hybrid existence obligated to negotiate from separate yet sometimes similar cultural positions.

Being open to the effects of Indigenous writing also means acknowledging that there is still a lot about Indigenous writing which may and may not ever be understood. What cannot be seen by (white) 'eyes' or one's own languages and epistemologies can instead welcome you and 'I' to read more openly, more deeply, more reflectively, and change the face of postcolonial politics as they appear textually – as Joan Copjec's argues: "semiotics, and not optics, is the science that enlightens us for the structure of the visual domain" (Ravenscroft 2012: 1). Writing by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors (about interracial characters), creates textual opportunities for catharsis – to know and understand the other and oneself – an offering of intercultural dialogue – or in a postcolonial context, possibly a moment for healing, discursive/symbolic/ideological renewal and for the reconciliation of ideas about nation to transform in the mind's eye of a reader. There must be new ways for white readers to 'see' Indigenous subjects and their writing – perhaps as sovereignty unto itself, where aesthetic practices are not read to be assimilated or colonised but appreciated for being radically different (Ravenscroft 2012: 2).

Ghost River is Tony Birch's third novel and like *Blood* (2011) it is narrated from the perspective of children to reacquaint us with the deeper meaning of simple things. The earlier and most ordinary experiences of human existence can, as children, over-awe and frighten us but it is these experiences that impassion our beliefs about who we are and what we stand for as adults. Sonny and Ren are the main characters of this recent text and as the story progresses, so too do their experiences of the River, punctuating their changing perceptions of who they are and possibilities for coming of age. The novel starts when Sonny moves into the same street as Ren and, although they are in the same class together at school, Sonny looks at Ren with his "demented eye" and does not "invite friendship" (Birch 2015: 7). From the onset, the politics of their friendship are not based on the commonalities of belonging to the same age, race, gender or economic status but on reciprocity – what each offers the other ideologically while finding their identity outside of school. For example, Sonny earns Ren's respect when he defends him against *Milton the Monster*, a bigger and more powerful boy in the playground who targets Ren because he is vulnerable. Readers learn that according to Sonny, "Milton's a bully and he got what he should've" (Birch 2015: 9). From this point, in the text, social justice becomes a developing trope pointing to the foundations of both equity and respect in the politics of a friendship that advocates difference and continual maturation.

The River implies a third aspect to the boys' friendship with its metaphorical presence it influences the boys' relationship throughout the text and appears more than a backdrop for which the plot unfolds. Readers are for example introduced to the River at the same time as they are introduced to the boys: as it runs "through the suburbs and inner city" from the hills (Birch 2015: 6)[1]. At first we sense the River may hold an antagonist's position with its introductory description as polluted and a haven for human and animal waste – it is the colour of "strong black tea", it is dangerous, and stinks; it is where gang members dump dead bodies, and people, mostly women, commit suicide in an effort to find "peace and salvation" (6-7). The River's textual powers grow alongside the main characters self-awareness as the boys discover a secret spot located further down the River hidden away by trees; it is a safer, more pristine and welcoming place because it has not been contaminated with waste or built up with human development. It is here the boys bond with the River and ultimately each other, but uncannily it is the camp of several homeless Indigenous men or as Birch calls them, "river men" (13). This secluded part of the River plays an important role as metaphor and synecdoche because it is here the boys learn about racial, political and economic power structures and, by doing so, they each locate a more awakened and purified version of themselves. As such metaphorical imagery transcribes:

> Ren dipped his hand in the water and scooped out a bug. It swam in circles in the small pool of water cupped in his hand. He was about to slam his hands together and squash the bug, but changed his mind and dipped his hand into the water a second time and watched as the bug swam away. He stood up, dived, turned under the water and swam across the river backstroke, catching the sun on his chest (59).

Initially, the river men are uncomfortable with the boy's intrusion to their camp, and rightfully so, as Sonny approaches them with a metal pipe lifted to his shoulders (like a gun) and takes "aim at the men" (14). Collective memory translates this scene to a historical time of Australia's European invasion carried out by war and force. In true fashion of history repeating itself, the river men put up their hands to surrender, yet this time it is in jest and they invite the boys in to introduce themselves. Perhaps this welcoming of 'others' was possible in historical times too and Europeans and first peoples may have had the chance to pervade violence through a willingness to understand each other? As research suggests, on first seeing white people, Indigenous people believed they were "ghosts" returning to country – an idea colonialists may have felt "comforting" as it denotes they were not an enemy but "could be accepted as kin" (Cowlishaw 1999: 9). This view may be in danger of being appropriated to justify Australia as Terra Nullius and belonging to no one worthy enough of fighting for its original ownership. As Indigenous writer and historian Pascoe laments, Australia's mainstream historical discourse reads as "national myopia" because it fails to include the ways in which Indigenous people fought for their land and this separates us "from our soul and soil" (Pascoe 2007: 255).

Viewpoints are critical for interpreting a text like *Ghost River* and Birch creates new ex-

[1] Tony Birch (2015). All quotations are from this edition.

periences for his main characters (as children who own their future) as this allows them to *see* the River differently and belong to it alongside the river men in a different way to their forebears. For example, one of the river men is bewildered by Sonny's demented eye: "That eye you have there, I believe it may be a true wonder … we have someone special visiting this morning. How'd you earn such an eyeball as that, son?" Asks Tex (15). The men are not so much talking in riddles as withholding cultural information about how they should relate to the boys. Sonny's "demented" eye orients us to Ravenscroft's theories about visuality and knowledge: as she reminds us that the postcolonial 'eye' is intrinsically linked to 'I' in intercultural dialogue about race. Assumedly, it is the innocent and less provincialised minds of these boys which allow them to 'see' the river men in ways which are not based on racialised anxieties about the black male other, allowing them to become open to the men's stories and their strong connection with the River. It is ultimately through these stories that the boys' ideological understanding of the River shifts. For example, the River is at first feared for its dead trees lurking at the bottom – known as "preachers" because they could grab you from the bottom and never let you back up, leaving "a preacher" to stand at your funeral over an empty coffin" (33). Contrary to these earlier fears, the boys come to learn through the river men's stories that "the river took such good care of the men" and that the River "was their *mother*" (21).

When one of the river men, Doc, suddenly passes away, the boys are left to fully grasp the powerful connection the men have with the River as they witness them sending Doc into the River as a ceremony in lieu of a "pauper's funeral". Tex assures "if all goes right for old Doc, the ghost river, she'll care for him" (108). Big Tiny steps forward to say a few words; "You was an arsehole sometimes, Old Doc. But at the same time you was one of us" (107). His words capture the true nature of relationships as always intersecting between enemies and friends – not always loving, not always oppositional, but some of the time understanding each other when on common ground.

Just as the river men acquired their own various nicknames (Tex, Doc, Big Tiny) the meaning of Birch's titled work *Ghost River* is revealed through a traditional story the river men share of how she got her name. The metaphorical meaning of the River is necessarily clearer if the story is quoted in full:

> This is a story from the other time when this river she did not end where she is today. There weren't no boats for travel back then. And there weren't no bay at the end of the river. The land was full and the river was a giant. Then one time more water come and stayed. Years and years of rain. The land filled up and there was the bay that come, drowning the old river. But she's still there, under this one. The old ghost river. This is her and when a body dies on the river, it goes on down, down to the ghost river. Waiting. If the spirit of the dead one is true, the ghost river, she holds the body to her heart (108).

This traditional story speaks of a time in history when Australia was colonised (perhaps by ghosts). It also rings true of a present time when cultures have become hybrid or represented as palimpsestic over time. The River symbolises how water works as a textual

metaphor to renew the ways in which one can belong to place in a postcolonial context – with hope for reconciliation – with possibilities that "two cultures *can* hold each other" – as the boys' relationship with the river men portrays this two-way relationship building.

By the end of this chapter Sonny and Ren have learned of the River's power and readers become aware of its textual prowess. The plot changes on cue with the rain, indicating maturation and change: "walking home from their excursions upriver Ren would feel a little different. He couldn't make sense of it. He knew it was a feeling he craved, but one in danger of slipping away from him" (113). Winter begins, and with it so too does the challenge to stop a road being built through the river men's camp and destroying the special place they share with them. Ren and Sonny become advocates for social justice on this mission to save the River and the dignity of the river men who will otherwise become displaced and eventually die as "paupers" who are disconnected from people and place. Most uncannily, it is this group of alcoholic and homeless men who are the benefactors for healing and the 'for-givers' of hope because they let the boys into their world and share a new way of living together: *Alakenhe athewe* or as Kemarre Turner translates: "working together as real champions for language; for culture; for Land, and for relationship" (Kemarre 2010: 221).

Tony Birch's *Ghost River* is a reminder that colonisation has changed Australia's landscape forever, but it is this very landscape that invites us on a spiritual journey of cultural renewal and purified perspectives of 'seeing' and feeling about home with others and, at home with ourselves: "As his skin dried he noticed specks of dirt, fine as baby powder, covering his body. From that day on, the boys carried the river home with them" (34). The River as metaphor flows towards an approaching reality which drowns out the colonial discourses of Australia's past, offering transformation of the textual space as opportunity for cultural healing, catharsis and changing race relations. Stories should not be ignored for their effect on broader relationships because it is stories which evoke feelings and thoughts about radical possibilities for the future. This essay has argued that Aristotle's philosophy on the principles of evocation or catharsis remains important in the literary analysis of modern-day Indigenous texts. Building on his classical theories however, requires the wisdom of Indigenous philosophies to contribute to intercultural dialogue, particularly on Australian literature and its decolonisation. There are some aspects of Indigenous culture and spirituality which cannot or should not ever be seen by readers, but metaphors, like that of water is an essential life-source; translucent or accessible enough for anyone wanting to make sense of their own emotional worlds, and how they wish to nurture concepts of belonging. Tony Birch has successfully used water as a symbol for cultural healing, and showed his readers that transformation or cultural renewal is dependent on stories about Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters whose lives intersect because there is nothing else left but the land and water at their feet – a cyclical realisation of the first time Indigenous people came into contact with their invaders and there was nothing else that stood between them. *Ghost River* emblematises the sheer difficulty of reconciliation and that a process of changing national consciousness or collective 'catharsis' is not for the faint hearted, it needs protecting, fighting for, and continual championing: *Alakenhe athewe*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bayet-Charlton, Fabienne. 2005. *Watershed*. Alice Springs: IAD Press.
Bhabha, Homi. K. 2001. 'The commitment to theory' in *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2377.
Birch, Tony. 2015. *Ghost River*. St Lucia (QLD): University of Queensland Press.
Brady, Veronica. 2006. 'How to Reinvent the World: The hope of being true to the earth'. *Colloquy: Text Theory Critique*, 12: 103-113.
Cowlishaw G. 1999. *Rednecks, Eggheads and Blackfellas: A Study of Racial power and Intimacy in Australia*. St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin.
Cranston, C. A. & Robert Zeller. 2007. *The Littoral Zone: Australian Contexts and their Writers*. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi.
Dixon, Robert. 2009. 'Home or Away? The Trope of Place in Australian Literary Criticism and Literary History'. *Westerly*, 54, 1 July: 12-17.
Jacobs J. M & K. Gelder. 1998. *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
Leitch, Vincent B. 2001. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: Norton & Company.
Mall, Ram Adhar. 1998. Philosophy and Philosophies – Cross-culturally Considered. *Topoi* 17. Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers: 15-27.
Pascoe, Bruce. 2007. *Convincing ground: learning to fall in love with your country*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
Pascoe, Bruce. 2014. *Dark Emu Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident*. Broome: Magabala Books.
Pascoe, Bruce. 2000. 'Tired Sailor'. J. Douglas & K. Akiwenzie-Damm eds. *Skins: Contemporary Indigenous Writing*. Alice Springs: IAD Press-Jukurrpa Books, 177.
Ravenscroft, Alison. 2012. *The Postcolonial Eye: White Australian Desire and the Visual Field of Race*. Farnham (UK): Ashgate.
Robin, Libby. 2007. *How a Continent Created a Nation*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.
Turner, Margaret Kemarre, OAM. 2010. *Iwente Tyerrtye – What it Means to be an Aboriginal Person*. Alice Springs: IAD.

Adelle Sefton-Rowston lectures in Common Units and Literary Studies at Charles Darwin University, Australia. She is the winner of the 2015 & 2016 Northern Territory Literary Awards Essay Prize and has published widely in peer-reviewed journals and anthologies. She writes poetry and short stories and is committee member of Australasian Universities Languages and Literature (AULLA) and Association for Studies of Australian Literature (ASAL). Adelle is Vice President of the Northern Territory Writers Centre Management Board.
adelle.sefton-rowston@cdu.edu.au

Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XIV-No. 16 November 2016 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-47

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

Roberta Trapè

A Sacred Journey to Naples: Michelle de Kretser's *Questions of Travel**

Abstract I: All'interno del tema del viaggio australiano in Italia, l'articolo analizzerà le immagini di Napoli nel romanzo di Michelle de Kretser *Questions of Travel* (2012). Inizierà con una breve introduzione alla storia del viaggo australiano e con un resoconto dei viaggi in Italia di de Kretser, accompagnato dai suoi commenti sulla sua esperienza (Trapè 2015). Proseguirà con il trattamento dell'Italia nel romanzo. Analizzerà quali immagini dell'Italia la scrittrice presenta in *Questions of Travel* al fine di definire il suo atteggiamento nei confronti di questo paese. L'analisi verrà condotta con il supporto teorico dello studio di Philippe Hamon sulla descrizione.

Abstract II: Within the theme of Australian Travel to Italy, the article will analyse images of Naples in Michelle de Kretser's novel *Questions of Travel* (2012). It will begin with a short introduction to Australian travel and an outline of de Kretser's journeys in Italy, as well as her comments on her Italian experiences (Trapè 2015). It will then move on to the treatment of Italy in her novel. I will analyse which views of Italy the writer presents in *Questions of Travel* in order to define her way of approaching and responding to this country. I will do this by focusing on her descriptions of Italy and will avail myself of the theoretical discussions of description provided by Philippe Hamon.

In the nineteenth century, affluent travellers from the "New Worlds", first from the United States and later from Australia, added to the flow of visitors who for centuries had journeyed to Italy to quench their thirst for history, art and beauty. For my purposes, writers and artists will be considered the most important category of travellers, since they are the ones who usually leave the most articulate and eloquent records of their travel experience. Not surprisingly, during the first two phases of Australian travel to Italy – from the first settlement in 1778 up to the 1950s[1] – the responses of Australian travellers had much in common

* I acknowledge the support of the University of Melbourne, in the form of the Macgeorge Fellowship for 2015, which enabled me to conduct my research and interviews in Australia. I am thankful to the Macgeorge Bequest Committee and I am particularly beholden to the School of Languages and Linguistics for the support received during my time in Melbourne.

[1] Three different phases may be distinguished. The first lasted over one hundred years, from the first settlement in 1778 to the 1890s. In this period, Britain, or "Home" (either literally or metaphorically), was the

with those that the British and the Americans gave until the 1920s; "[t]heir images of Italy derived from English literature and travel guides as did the widely, but not universally held assumption that Italians were a people inferior to the British race" (Pesman 1994: 96). Like their American counterparts, the majority of Australians in Italy had little doubt as to the superiority of their own country in terms of material progress, people's health and happiness and their country's wonderful prospects for the future. Therefore, they shared most of the common perceptions of Italy and of Italians that are found in British and American travel literature and fiction: complaints concerning the physical hardships of travelling in Italy, diffidence concerning the sort of Italians with whom travellers were obliged to come into daily contact, the blooming of the traveller's sensuality thanks to the country's mild climate, the haughty derision of Italian superstitions, and the disconcerted discovery of the importance placed on 'appearances' in Italy (Prampolini 2007: 200). Most Australians also commented on the supposed lack of industriousness of Italians, the oppressive preponderance of the past over the present, and the all-pervasive decay overpowering a long-gone grandeur.

After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and up to the 1960s, for the majority of Australians travelling to Europe Naples was the first port of call or a disembarkation: "[a]s the point of entry and exit, Naples was for Australians the boundary of Europe just as London was the centre. It was also a kind of synecdoche for Italy, for Southern Europe, for Mediterranean society" (Pesman 1991: 46). For some travellers intent only on Britain, a day in Naples was their only experience of Italy, the only basis for the views which they expressed. For others, it was the most important segment of the Continental tour, the place where more time was spent, and the place which absorbed more space in the accounts of their travels. Therefore, to Australian tourists travelling by ship, it was Naples that usually represented Italy and confirmed all their preconceptions:

> [a]ll the common images and stereotypes which Australians associate with Italy – noise, colour, dirt, passion, excitability, sensuality, indolence, devotion to pleasure – could be confirmed in the south. Thus Italy becomes Naples; and the *Italianità* of the rest of Italy was judged by its degree of conformity to the Neapolitan norm. In Naples the travellers from the land of sun and warmth of the south met southern Europe and the Mediterranean. And it is possible that part of the explanation for their hostility and rejection might be that when the Australians confronted the Other in Naples, they confronted their hidden fears of the impact of a seductive southern sun and warmth on the moral fibre of their people – of indolence, sloth, sensuality, pleasure-seeking (Pesman 1991: 46).

---

longed-for goal of the trip and the continental tour was usually a popular addiction. In the nineteenth century, the typical Australian visitors to Italy were members of the wealthy colonial elite who could afford extended and leisurely tours; sojourns of several weeks in Rome or Florence were not uncommon. With the rapid demographic and economic expansion of Australia in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the rise of a prosperous middle class, the number of Australians going 'overseas' increased and so a second phase of Australian travel to Italy can be identified lasting from the 1890s up to the 1950s. In this phase, Australians began coming to Italy also in order to study the language, literature, history, art, architecture, archaeology and music of the country. A third phase started at the beginning of the 1950s. In retracing Australian travel to Italy, I have referred to Roslyn Pesman's contributions to the study of the subject.

Sensuality, pleasure, but also dirt and indolence were associated with this warm South, and contemporary Naples and its people were judged – and usually condemned – by most Australian travellers by the standards of the British colonial bourgeoisie: sobriety, order, cleanliness, comfort, industriousness and material progress. In their view, filth and dirt were associated with immorality and decadence; working-class Neapolitans were often described as dishonest, impulsive and lazy. Disgusted by filth and squalor, the bourgeois travellers do not appear to have grasped the main cause of such flaws: poverty. On the other hand, it is worthwhile noticing that some Australian travellers already showed a genuine interest in Italian history, and people as well, and a strong hostility towards British imperialism[2]. However, it was not until the late 1930s that an awareness of the country's poverty began to emerge in Australian writing on Italy in the works of writers and artists who lived in the Italian South in the twentieth century[3].

The South of Italy and the Mediterranean were portrayed in a new light in British travel writing between the two world wars; Paul Fussell argues for the unique character and literary quality of the works by author such as D. H. Lawrence, Graham Greene, Robert Byron, Norman Douglas and E. M. Fortser (Fussell 1980). The chronic bad weather, restrictions from the Defense of the Realm Act (DORA), the implementation of passport and the proliferation of nation-state borders are well-documented as both inhibitors and catalysts for travel. "After 1918 it is as the weather worsens to make England all but uninhabitable to the imaginative and sensitive" (Fussell 1980: 21); among the young men of the twenties the cult of travel became an obsession. The Mediterranean becomes the model for the concept south, embodied by the south of Italy and France. In the 1920s and 30s the sun was redeemed from the social stigma it had carried in the nineteenth century; in the twentieth century the sun brought health, strength and mystical emanations. "John Weightman has called [it] the Solar Revolution, and it is one of the most startling reversals in modern intellectual and emotional history" (Fussell 1980: 137). Lawrence can be seen as merely the vanguard of the British Literary Diaspora, the great flight of writers from England in the 1920s and the 30s. The post war flight from the Middle West of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Sinclair Lewis is the American counterpart of these European flights from a real or fancied narrowing of horizons (Fussell 1980: 10-11).

A new vigour is also traceable at the beginning of the 1950s in Australian travel to Italy; it marks the starting of a new phase. Australia entered a period of unprecedented prosperity at the end of the Second World War, and cheap berths on the returning migrant ships opened the possibility of travel abroad to a wider group of Australians. This third phase was characterized by a consistent increase in the number of travellers, including many writers, painters and intellectuals who rejected and fled, at least for a while, an overwhelmingly Anglophile and conservative Australia. From the 1950s on, a growing number of Australian writers and artists chose to live in Italy in search of a place where they could express themselves more freely. To artists and writers, travelling to Italy meant reclaiming a European

[2] Among them Randolf Bedford (1868-1941); James Smith (1820-1919); Samuel Griffith (1845-1920).

[3] Writers Christina Stead (1902-1983) and Morris West (1916-1999), and painter Alan Mc Culloch (1907-1992).

heritage which did not necessarily coincide with Great Britain[4]. Martin Boyd's Italianate novels project traditional British images of Italy as well as images that correspond to the new awareness of Australia's European cultural roots in the nineteen-fifties, as expressed in A. D. Hope's "A letter from Rome" (Bader 1922: 277): "The source is Italy, and hers is Rome/ The *fons* and *origo* of Western man;/[…] Here the great venture of the heart began./Here simply with a sense of coming home/I have returned with no explicit plan/[…] to find/ Something once dear, long lost and left behind" (Hope 1966 [1958]: 143). The powerful recognition of Italy as the source of Western European – and therefore also Australian – culture in this phase of travel, generates a longing for return, reinforced by the distance of Australia from this ancient civilized world. During this phase, which can be seen as distinguishably Australian, the common attitude towards Italy was of a dreamland fostering transformation, discovery or construction of a new self or new aspects of the self; in their recognition of the Italian cultural heritage Australian writers and artists represent that awareness of the importance of Classical antiquity and Italian cultural roots for Western culture and civilization which were so prominent in the Australian post-war literature on Italy (Bader 1922: 316). In Italy they found a home not only of the spirit, but also of the senses, because the Italy they discovered offered areas of experience which in the English-speaking world were not as easily accessible.

Jeffrey Smart and Shirley Hazzard can be considered two of the last major representatives of this traditional Australian attitude towards Italy; despite being aware of the deep transformations industrialization and mass tourism have brought to the country, for them Italy continued to be the source of an aesthetic experience not to be found anywhere else.

---

[4] Most of them returned home, some remained abroad for years, some others never went back. Martin Boyd (1893-1972), A. D. Hope (1907-2000), Morris West (1916-1999), Shirley Hazzard (b.1931) and David Malouf (b.1934) travelled to or resided in Italy in the 1950s. Morris West's novel *Children of the Sun. The Slum Dwellers of Naples,* published in 1957, goes against the nineteenth-century colonialist stereotyping of Naples focusing on the reasons of the city's poverty. Peter Porter (b.1929), who moved to London in 1951, also travelled to Italy in the 1960s and continued to visit frequently. In 1958 Patrick White was staying in Italy as well. A great number of young Australian scholars, artists and writers went to Italy in the 1960s and in the 1970s: Jeffrey Smart (1921-2013) moved permanently to Italy in 1964; Robert Hughes left Australia for Europe in 1964, and lived for a time in Porto Ercole, Tuscany; Germaine Greer (b. 1938) acquired a property in a valley in Tuscany; Tom Shapcott (b.1935), Judith Rodriguez (b.1936), Janine Burke (b. 1952) travelled to Italy and were inspired by this country in their work. Artists and writers became a significant presence in Italy also as a result of generous scholarship schemes and the expansion of Australian universities. In the early 1970s there was in fact a sense of new vigour in Australian culture, also due to the foundation of the Literature Board of the Australia Council in 1973, whose main purpose was to support artists and writers in developing their work. In December 1972 Gough Whitlam was elected Prime Minister of Australia, reinstating Labour Party rule after twenty-three years of Liberal party dominance. This political change created a new confidence and a new hope among Australian artists and writers; they believed that arts and culture in Australia would at last have genuine government support under Whitlam. Whitlam himself has felt a life-long fascination with the history of Italy; he went there first in 1962 and continued to visit regularly. *My Italian Notebook* (2002) covering art, architecture and politics, is the record of his profound interest in this country. The 1980s saw other writers significantly affected by their journeys in Italy: Leon Trainor (b.1945); Kate Grenville (b.1950), who resided in a Tuscan farmhouse, and David Foster (1944). Poet Diane Fahey (b.1945) travelled to Italy in 1987 and 1989, moving from Venice through Florence to Rome. Peter Robb (b.1946) visited Italy in 1974, returned in 1978 and lived in Naples for fifteen years. Robert Dessaix visited Italy a number of times in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

Smart moved to Italy in 1964 and since then found in this country a place where he could be free to develop his art and realize his self without inhibitions; until his death in 2013 he found in Italy the nourishment coming from the light and purity of high Renaissance. Hazzard was sent on a year's mission to Naples in 1956 while she was working in New York at the UN Secretariat, and since then she has continued to spend her time between Manhattan and Italy, mainly on Capri and in Naples. She wrote a novel inspired by her sojourn in this city: *The Bay of Noon* published in 1970, and a collection of essays *The Ancient Shore. Dispatches from Naples* (2008). Notwithstanding the still only too visible scars left by World War Two, Hazzard's first encounter with the city and its surroundings was ecstatic, and none of the subsequent visits and stays had her revise and change her original response. The approach and the response to Italy take on quite a different form with Australian writers of younger generations, among them Peter Robb and Robert Dessaix. Robb's life in Naples had considerable bearing on his remarkable books set in Italy: *Midnight in Sicily* (1996), *M.* (1998), and *Street Fights in Naples* (2010), which offer poignant images of the city. Robert Dessaix sets his novel *Night Letters* (1996) in Venice and closes his book *Arabesques* (2008) with a chapter set in Naples. Whether the home of fifteen-year-long residence – as for Robb – or mainly a place of transit – as for Dessaix – for neither writer was Italy the final, dreamed-of goal of pilgrimage to discover their roots or an attempt to re-connect with the source of Australian culture. Neither of them saw Italy as the ground for a transformation of their own identities, as many of their Australian predecessors did. Neither Robb nor Dessaix come to Italy in search of antiquity and art. The images of Italy which emerge from their works are starkly different from the one that prevailed in the writings deriving from the entire tradition of Australian travel to Italy; so different, indeed, that one is tempted to see these writings as marking the beginning of a new phase (Trapè 2012: 167). In Robb's *Midnight in Sicily*, despite the author's passionate attachment to the Italian South, the descriptions of the cities of Naples and Palermo he revisits in 1995 depict a country at the mercy of criminal organizations abetted by unprincipled politicians; in *Night Letters* Dessaix portrays late 20th century Northern Italy as disfigured beyond recognition by savage anthropization. While in Hazzard's *The Ancient Shore* Naples still exerts the powerful fascination with which her 'Italian' writings, from the earliest to the most recent ones, are infused, Robb and Dessaix introduce elements of novelty in the treatment of Italy, which I also detected in Michelle de Kretser's *Questions of Travel*.

Nowadays, artists and writers no longer form the larger component in the flow of travellers to Italy. However, contemporary Australian literature clearly suggests that travel to Italy remains a phenomenon of great significance. From the beginning of the 1990s onwards there has been a sizeable output of books set in or having to do with Italy, adding to a considerable corpus of texts by Australian writers based on their travel experiences in this country[5]. In the same period there has been a spate of best sellers, written mainly by

[5] Among them books by scholar Paul Carter (*Baroque Memories*, 1994; *Metabolism. The Exhibition of the Unseen*, 2015) and writer and translator Robert Dessaix (*Night Letters*, 1996; *Corfu*, 2001; *Arabesques*, 2008); David Malouf's short story "Around Midnight" (in *Every Move you Make*, 2007), but also Jeffrey Smart's autobiography (*Not Quite Straight. A Memoir*, 1996); Peter Robb's *Midnight in Sicily* (1996), *M* (1998), *Street Fight in Naples*

Australian journalists who have spent time in Italy. Basically meant to serve as guidebooks for tourists, these works focus on the pleasures of living in Italy[6]; they correspond to a sort of global genre, a new kind of travel book that is fast proliferating and to which Australia is contributing in a surprisingly large measure. This new kind of travel book has mainly originated from the great emphasis on lifestyle in global consumer culture and does not represent a peculiarity in Australian literature, although it powerfully proves the great curiosity felt by Australians for Italy and the fascination that this country still exerts on them.

In contemporary Australian literature inspired by Italy, Michelle de Kretser's novel *Questions of Travel* (2012) stands out for its depth and originality, also in the author's treatment of this country. Short sections of the novel are set in Naples. My study will analyse images of Naples in *Questions of Travel*; accordingly, it will begin with a short outline of de Kretser's journeys in Italy and with her comments on her Italian experiences. It will then move on to the treatment of Italy in her novel. I will analyse which views of Italy the writer presents in *Questions of Travel* in order to define her way of approaching and responding to this country. I will do this by focusing mainly on her descriptions of Italy and will avail myself of the theoretical discussions of description provided by Philippe Hamon.

Michelle de Kretser is an Australian novelist who was born in Sri Lanka in 1957, and migrated to Australia in 1972 when she was fourteen. She was educated in Colombo, Melbourne and Paris. In Australia she has worked as a university tutor, editor and book reviewer. From 1989 to 1992, de Kretser was a founding editor of the *Australian Women's Book Review*. While on a sabbatical in 1998 from Lonely Planet, where she worked as a publisher, she wrote her first novel, *The Rose Grower* (published in 1999). Her second novel, published in 2003, *The Hamilton Case*, won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Southeast Asia and Pacific region), the Trans-Tasman Prize for Fiction and the Encore Prize. Her third novel, *The Lost Dog*, was published in 2007; it won the Christina Stead Prize for Fiction and was longlisted for the Man Booker and Orange Prize. Her fourth novel, *Questions of Travel*, won several awards, including the 2013 Miles Franklin Award, the Australian Literature Society Gold Medal (ALS Gold Medal), and the 2013 Prime Minister's Literary Award for Fiction, and was shortlisted for the 2014 Dublin Impac Award. De Kretser's novel *The Life to Come* will be published in 2017.

At the University of Melbourne, de Kretser studied French and beginners' Italian. She remembers her first trip to Italy in 1981. While in Florence, she remembers how intensely she responded to the built landscape, to the history of the city. She recalls her stay in a *pensione* owned by three sisters; for the shower you needed a *gettone*. "I remember buying a *gettone* and the water was cold, and it was winter; and I was shocked, and screamed in the

(2010) and *Lives* (2012); Shirley Hazzard's *Greene on Capri. A Memoir* (2000) and *The Ancient Shore: Dispatches from Naples* (2008); Gough Whitlam's *My Italian Notebook* (2002); Michelle de Kretser's *Questions of Travel* (2012).

[6] I refer to such works as George Negus's *The World from Italy. Football, Food and Politics* (2001); Carla Coulson's *Italian Joy* (2005); Sara Benjamin's *A Castle in Tuscany* (2006); Penelope Green's *When in Rome: Chasing La Dolce Vita* (2006), *See Naples and Die* (2007) and *Girl by Sea: Life, Love and Food on an Italian Island* (2009); Peter Moore's *Vroom with a View. In Search of Italy's Dolce Vita on a '61 Vespa* (2003) and *Vroom by the Sea. The Sunny Parts of Italy on a Bright Orange Vespa* (2007). I have selected a few titles; the complete list is very long.

corridor 'acqua calda' (hot water), but I meant to say it was cold, confusing cold with *calda* (hot). The landlady calmly replied, 'Si, si calda'"[7]. In the same year while de Kretser was working in Montpellier, as an *assistante* in a lycée, she and a friend travelled around Europe by train with a Europass ticket. She went back to Italy, visiting Venice, Bologna, Florence, Siena, San Gimignano, Perugia and Rome. They didn't visit the South.

Looking back on this trip, de Kretser says:

> We started that trip in June. I remember travelling by train through Germany and Switzerland. It was cold and grey and rainy. Then, early one morning, the train pulled in to Venice, and it was summer. I remember how wonderful the sunshine was, and the warmth (de Kretser 2015).

This response is typical of travellers arriving in Italy from Northern Europe.

> We wanted to go to Naples, but it was 1981, the year after the earthquake, and people said to us that it was not a safe city for two young girls on their own: that Naples was a difficult place, especially now, in the aftermath of the disaster. So we didn't go further south than Rome (de Kretser 2015).

After her first visits in 1981, de Kretser returned to Italy in the 1990s, always visiting the north and the centre, specifically Florence and Tuscany. In September 2008, she travelled to the South of Italy for the first time with her partner, Australian poet and translator Chris Andrews. They visited Sicily and Naples; they had never been to Italy together, having always travelled there separately. De Kretser found those places extraordinary, extremely moving, and loved them immediately. She felt as if she had travelled back in time.

Recollecting her emotional responses to Palermo and Naples, de Kretser remembers that in the city centre of Palermo, which had been gutted by bombs in 1943, she saw the ruins of the old city still there, decades after the war, and trees and plants growing among them. In Naples, she strongly felt that the city belonged to the people who lived there – to the poor as well as to the affluent, who lived side by side:

> in Palermo and Naples, there is still a power which has disappeared in the rest of Europe. These are cities where the poor and the bourgeoisie live together. They are not like Paris, and not even like the north of Italy. I feel this is how Europe would have been in the 1950s or the early 1960s. These are cities that don't cater to tourism. I love Paris and Florence and Venice, but they perform themselves, they are spectacles, whereas I felt that Naples and Palermo were not like that. I felt that I was seeing the last glimmer of a world that had vanished elsewhere. My sense of bearing witness to last traces, to something passing was strong (de Kretser 2015).

[7] Roberta Trapè. Unpublished interview with M. de Kretser, Sydney, 2 September 2015. Henceforth all the quotations referring to de Kretser's journeys in Italy will be taken from the above mentioned interview. I wish to express my most profound gratitude to Michelle de Kretser.

> They were places that reminded me a little bit of Colombo, where I lived as a child. In September, when I visited Naples, it was humid, and there was a lushness and a fecundity in the vegetation that seemed tropical; there were palms and bougainvillea, tropical plants. The buildings had not been cleaned: they were often filthy, grand but dilapidated, falling down but fabulous, fantastic. I know it's not good that they are falling down, but this decrepitude, which makes them moving, also gives them beauty (de Kretser 2015).

> Baroque in Rome can sometimes be too overwhelming; it's beautiful but designed specifically to make you feel small. Of course it originally served the same purpose in Palermo and Naples, but now, after centuries of neglect, the buildings there no longer feel grandiose and crushing. The opposite: I found them moving because they seemed in need of protection. Often, all of a sudden, you come across marvellous churches or wonderful, huge blackened monasteries or convents, in a state of decay; they arrive with no warning. In Naples along the Roman streets like Spaccanapoli, there are stunning buildings, but you don't have a clear view of them because you can't step back far enough to see them whole, the streets are narrow and so crowded with buildings (de Kretser 2015).

De Kretser, as Hazzard had noticed before her, thinks of Naples as a city of surprises: when you least expect it, you discover one of its many treasures. Like Hazzard, de Kretser is fascinated by the millennial history of Naples. She can't help but recall that this is a city that has existed since before the birth of Jesus, for three thousand years. She mentions Hazzard's point that Naples is the only Classical city to have survived to the present day. De Kretser also mentions Peter Robb, admiring both authors' skills in portraying Naples.

De Kretser shares Robb's view of Naples when he wrote in *Midnight in Sicily* that Naples seems to belong to the people who live in it; the richness and splendour of the city, the spirituality, culture, and sensuality of Naples depend on its people, who noisily shape the life and rhythm of their city. De Kretser observes:

> Naples seemed to me a place that was marvellously alive and very moving; and the people, especially the poor, play a large role in this. I don't intend to idealise poverty. But I noticed in Naples that people, poor people, value simple things, and that is another reason that it reminded me of Sri Lanka. You still see families living in a single room, and their children playing in the streets with a plastic bottle – that's their toy. That's another reason why it reminded me of the Sri Lanka of my childhood. It wasn't a place given over to consumption (de Kretser 2015).

De Kretser comments that before visiting Naples she had known the city only through the pages of Hazzard's and Robb's books, and did not know as much about it as she knew about other Italian cities. During her first visit to Naples, she thought the city was like a treasure trove. You have to earn the city's treasures – they are not given to you. There is wonderful art, but several buildings are falling down. She recalls wandering through the streets of the city and coming across beautiful things – a fresco or a classical column, for ex-

ample – stuck in a side street, without a sign to point the way. "While Paris, Venice, Florence parade their treasures", she comments:

> in Naples you have to look for the city's precious secrets. They are not displayed, you have to discover them. I felt as if I was discovering a secret when I went to that place: the whole city was like a secret. It's there and has been there for a very long time, but it's not yet been discovered by mass tourism because the city's reputation for danger and crime keeps tourists away. Naples is not on the touristic routes. In guidebooks, it is often associated with rubbish, dirt, danger and robbery, and consequently not many foreign tourists go there. That kind of bad reputation protects the city in a way - not that I mean to glamorize crime. I remember that at the hotel where we were staying in Naples they told us not to wear jewellery in the street. I had been to Rome on the same trip, and the number of tourists there was incredible; there weren't nearly as many in Naples. Talking to other tourists in Rome, I realized that many of them didn't stop off in Naples even when going to visit Pompeii (de Kretser 2015).

Going south from Rome, de Kretser encountered a society that had been a lot less transformed by the post-war boom than the North, and also a society that was less visited by foreigners, like Naples. She adds: "I felt that we are getting the last glimpse of Western Europe as it was before it became Disneyfied" (de Kretser 2015). It is worth considering that while for the majority of Australian visitors travelling by ship to Europe through the Suez canal Naples was first port of call, the shift to air travel – safe and efficient international jet service began in earnest in 1957 – moved the travellers to Italy northwards to Rome and Milan.

De Kretser has always travelled in Italy for short periods only, but this notwithstanding, her experience has been of great use to her in writing part of her truly valuable novel. *Questions of Travel* charts two very different lives. It has two main characters separated by time and space – Laura, born in Australia in the 1960s, and Ravi, born in Sri Lanka, first seen as a child in the 1970s. Laura travels the world before returning to Sydney, Ravi dreams of being a tourist until he is forced to leave his country. The novel twines structurally – Laura and Ravi each have near-alternating chapters through forty years of separate travels, restlessness, and movement. The story proceeds in a series of episodes, over the years to 2004, changing location in history and geography.

The counterpointing of Laura's story with Ravi's throws a particular critical light on the former; this is central to the novel as a whole. While Laura is not a tourist in Naples, she lives the relatively privileged life of an expat: she can leave any time she doesn't like it. And of course elsewhere she is a tourist; she travels for pleasure. Travel is generally easy for Laura, since she has the money to do so and her passport carries her easily over borders, whereas it's difficult for Ravi, who is poor and whose Sri Lankan passport is not looked on favourably. De Kretser wanted to show that tourism is based on privilege: on leisure and money and possessing a 'desirable' passport. Central to the novel is the contrast between those who travel for pleasure and those who are forced to travel. When we speak of travel we tend to think of tourism, and the number of tourists around the world currently stands

at more than one billion. But most of the people moving around the world for purposes other than tourism are extremely poor. This group includes guest workers – typically doing menial work in a host country – as well as seasonal workers – usually employed in agriculture. It includes asylum-seekers fleeing war or persecution or famine, and it includes illegal immigrants, who will typically spend years, perhaps their whole life, with no formal status in their new country.

Laura settles for some time in London, and here she has the chance to write for a travel magazine, *The Wayfarer*, and the brand-new editor Meera Bryden, knowing she is going to Naples, asks her to write about the city.

The shrewdly devised paratext of which the title is a part includes two epigraphs. De Kretser's book is entitled *Questions of Travel* as a tribute to Elizabeth Bishop's poem of the same name which de Kretser quotes as one of two epigraphs, the second being from E. M. Forster's *Howards End*. The epigraphs question each other. The Forster quote, which comes first, is, "Under cosmopolitanism, if it comes, we shall receive no help from the earth. Trees and meadows and mountains will only be a spectacle …". Forster was using cosmopolitanism to mean a personal style or a future intellectual type into which we will ultimately all be shaped as we abandon nationality and become global or, as the OED defines it – being the condition of free from national limitations or attachments. The Bishop poem is quite long. The lines used by de Kretser are: "But surely it would have been a pity/ not to have seen the trees along this road/ really exaggerated in their beauty". They hint at the theatrical exaggeration of the travel experience, especially when we return to tell travellers' tales. About the book, de Kretser points out that

> this is a book which is not anti-tourism, but which questions tourism. I didn't want to do the kind of writing that is required from Laura by Meera, a kind of writing which accentuates the positive, the beautiful, the fascinating, and is aimed at attracting visitors to a place. I wanted to explore both the pleasure of tourism, a good sense of pleasurable 'disorientation', and also the loneliness and estrangement that it brings. You readily feel estranged when you're a tourist, you don't have any deep connection to the places you're visiting, and you feel alone (de Kretser 2015).

In questioning tourism de Kretser implicitly explores the issue of tourism and travel, and shows the 'snobbery' about places spoiled or not by tourists that runs through both the novel and her interview. The author's conscious desire to critique the tourist industry in the novel is set against an unavoidable complicity in the tourist experience. Fussell discusses the snobbery shown by tourists: "It is hard to be a snob and a tourist at the same time. A way to combine both roles is to become anti-tourist […]. But the anti-tourist deludes only himself. We are all tourists now, and there is no escape" (Fussell 1980: 46-49).

Laura Fraser is born in Sydney in 1964; her story opens with her eight-year-old twin brothers deciding to drown her in a swimming pool when she is two; when she is four their mother dies. Her father's aunt, Hester, who has spent seven years of her life in India and is recently back in Sydney after half a lifetime in London, comes to look after Laura and her two older brothers. She stays until Laura leaves school. She brings with her the "sky-blue

travel case in which Hester kept her souvenirs of the Continent" (de Kretser 2012: 5); "Laura would beg for the stories attached to these marvels. Because otherwise they merely thrilled […]. Hester saw a small, plain face that pleaded and couldn't be refused" (de Kretser 2012: 6). This is Laura's first contact with the idea of travelling, with the fascination of distant countries and the stories attached to them.

Donald Fraser, Laura's father, thinks of her as "the repository of all that was massive and defective in Donald's lineage;" "he couldn't conceive of the absence of beauty in a woman as anything other than a misfortune" (de Kretser 2012: 14). Laura enrols at an art school, but after her first year she decides she is not good enough, and withdraws her enrolment. All of a sudden Hester dies, and leaves her "a surprising sum"; "[a]nd so, like a heroine, Laura came into an inheritance. There was only one thing to do. She set out to see the world" (de Kretser 2012: 44).

At the beginning of each chapter, the decade in which the narrative takes place is indicated. In the 1980s Laura first travels to Bali; a man staying in the same losmen in Ubud, who has been spending his holidays in Bali since 1971, addresses Laura speaking of the forested acres felled since he had first come to the island, the multiplication of hotels, the destruction of reefs, the corruption of values, the poisoning of water and air (de Kretser 2012: 46).

> What she couldn't know was that Darrell was only a prefiguration. Across the world, the world-weary were waiting. Time after time, Laura would learn that she had missed the moment; to be a tourist was always to arrive too late. Paradise was lost: prosperity had intervened, or politics. The earthquake had finished off Naples. Giuliani has wrecked New York. Immigrants ruined wherever they squatted (de Kretser 2012: 48).

Through a prolepsis the narrator introduces the idea of the traveller's inevitable experience of present-day changes and losses. The offences that tourists in ever-increasing swarms, greedy developers and politics have caused speak of a lost beauty which will be never recovered; it will always be too late. This is the first time Naples is mentioned in the book, and it is as an example of 'lost paradise'. The recourse to anachronic distortions, and specifically of prolepsis, is systematic in the narration of Laura's story. It is worth noticing that Naples is mentioned in a context where de Kretser questions travel and tourism using, often ironically, the typical, most common views on places being spoiled over time: "Laura would learn that she had missed the moment; to be a tourist was always to arrive too late" (de Kretser 2012: 48).

The perception of places is mostly the prerogative of the main character, and occurs in those "interruption[s] in the syntagmatics of the narration" (Hamon 1982: 150) which provide descriptions. A description is often the result of the combining of one character with a setting, a *milieu*, a landscape. When the story comes to a temporary halt a description stands out against the narrative background; it is an interruption in the narration and thus a prolongation of the act of looking of the character/narrator who is assigned the description (Hamon 1982: 150). When in *Questions of Travel* Laura looks at a certain place, speaks of it, or acts on it, the description is felt by the reader to depend on the view and vision of the char-

acter, on her ability to see; the character's prolonged gazing at her surroundings appeals to a desire and a capacity to see.. The reader supposes that the character is 'absorbed', 'fascinated', 'loses track' of time because of what she is looking at, and that she has been able to abstract herself for a while from the plot. Two possibilities are especially common: a stationary character/narrator (leaning on something, laying down, sitting, standing motionless) before a panorama or an object which is moving or changing; a moving character (walking, visiting, a tourist, an explorer) observing a fixed but complex scene, for instance a street, a landscape, a flat (Hamon 1982: 150).

In the 1980s, after travelling to India, Laura goes to London; she makes up her mind to find a job when Hester's money runs out; she imagines herself staying there, but in the 1990s

> [w]hen it became clear that January intended to go on forever, a ticket from a bucket shop carried Laura over clotted skies. Two hours from London, a sunlit planet was waiting. There was trudging and happiness. […] There were angels in the architecture, and cypresses and tombs, and strangers with known faces: they had floated free of seventeenth-century paintings. It was true that to try crossing the street was to be plunged into terror. And there was that day she saw a girl lean from a pillion to detach a bag from a negligent arm. But for the space of a whole morning, street led to street and brought nothing that didn't please. She had to look at everything. […] In every direction, buildings were ochre, burnt orange, the rosy-red of crushed berries (2012: 71).

The first experience of Italy for Laura is staying in a *pensione* in Rome. She found herself in a "[s]unlit planet" which immediately brings "[t]rudging and happiness": sunshine, slow time and joy. They are counterbalanced by the character's perception of Rome's dangerous traffic and robbery in the streets. From this first short description of Rome and Italy, beauty and flaws emerge, and beauty and pleasure prevail. Laura compares herself to a toddler she sees in a café in an Italian *piazza* exploring the surroundings with elated statements: "they were not so different, really, each marvelling at the wonders of the world" (de Kretser 2012: 72). A typical scene in descriptions is the character intruding upon an unknown place, a plausible padding which justifies the introduction of the description (Hamon 1982: 157); "trudging" "street led to street". The character's psychological motivations, curiosity and interest, are clear: "she had to look at everything" (de Kretser 2012: 71).

The sunny morning of Laura's arrival in Italy is followed by "[a] sunless afternoon [which] brought the pitiless arches of the Colosseum".

> Out-of-place figures, shivering in synthetics, came slipping out. They offered carvings, and beads hefty as sorrows. One elongated, knife-thin form, a Giacometti sculpted from ebony, knelt to release a white bird at Laura's feet. Together they watched it whirr heaven-wards, a soaring no less full of hope or being mechanical. They could only try to replicate it later in a room at the end of a bus line, far from the relics of emperor and saints.
>
> Afterwards, Laura stood at a terminus in a road where rubbish blew. […] The people passing had cheap coats, and eyes full of calculations. But unlike Laura, they were

> hurrying home. The stout African waiting for the bus, her hair bound in a gaudy cloth, was privy to knowledge enjoyed equally by the apricot-complexioned rich admiring each other on the via Condotti. It was the reason why tourists read travel guides like missals. If they chose the correct street, dined on a particular terrace, went through a crucial door, everything would be different. Laura felt in her bag for her guidebook; she needed to check that it hadn't been left behind, along with the starburst of joy, in the room with the exposed wiring and the single, cold-water tap (de Kretser 2012: 72).

The image of the *piazza* in the city centre is juxtaposed to an image of the suburbs where immigrants live, "far from the relics of emperor and saints". A contrast is skilfully offered between wealthy people admiring each other in Via Condotti, and poor ones, with cheap coats and "eyes full of calculations" in the suburban areas of the city. Reading travel guides like missals becomes something strictly connected to a certain way of travelling and consuming food in our increasingly consumerist postindustrial western world. The idea is introduced that visiting certain cities and consuming certain food in certain places can contribute to the realisation of a 'meaningful' self[8]. With a railway pass Laura travels to France:

> [t]he windows of meandering *diretti* framed towns and towers and rounded hills. They were teasingly familiar, touched with déjà-vu. After a while, Laura realised that she was looking at the bland, pretty vistas with which the minor masters of the Quattrocento filled in their backgrounds (de Kretser 2012: 73).

As happened in the description of Rome with the 'known faces' she met, in the surrounding environment Laura sees landscapes familiar from Italian paintings, which reveal the protagonist's fascination with Italian visual arts. From France she travels to Madrid, then Portugal. Laura's money is running out; she goes back to London, where she meets Theo Newman, twenty-seven, son of a German refugee from the Second World War, who is three years younger than Laura. Theo is working on a DPhil about nostalgia in the twentieth-century European novel; "Theo loved men. He loved the unrepentantly hetero, men who had wives or girlfriends, men who didn't love him in return" (de Kretser 2012: 108). At one of the Sunday evening gatherings Theo likes to host, Laura meets Bea Morley. "Laura found her way to friendship with Bea, a bedrock attachment that would last all her days" (de Kretser 2012: 119). During her travels Laura has flings, affairs with married men, but

[8] Various theorists of cultural criticism have explored the issue of how people in postindustrial societies strive to form 'meaningful' selves through both the consumption and production of material culture in leisure. Among them: David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (1989); Fredric Jameson in *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic Of Late Capitalism* (1991) and Zygmunt Bauman in *Consuming Life* (2007). They have widely examined, within the rise of postmodernist cultural forms, the process of capital as the reproduction of social life through commodity production, and the continuous creation of new desires, wants and needs. The acquisition of an image (through the purchase of a sign system such as designer clothes and the right car, or eating or cooking the right food in the right place) becomes a singularly important element in the presentation of the self in the market and, by extension, becomes integral in the quest for individual identity, self-realization and meaning.

nothing lasting. Love is absent, or reduced to sudden, short outbursts of joy. Bea's cousin Vivienne, who lives in Naples, is returning to England because her father is ill. She doesn't want to give up her apartment or the students with whom she is paid to converse in English; Bea reports all this idly to Laura, and Laura decides to leave for Naples.

Two nights before she leaves, Meera Bryden, one of Theo's friends, calls her. Laura had written a piece on the cathedral in Strasburg for her magazine, a piece which Meera found "utterly chilly" and "so original. She loved it and was sorry they couldn't run it […]".

> But now it appeared that Laura was going to Naples, how clever of her, the Mezzogiorno was the coming destination. Meera would love to run a feature on Puglia or Sicily – something a trifle less cerebral than Laura's Strasburg piece, a touch more sensual? At the magazine they had been thinking about food, the simple, earthy dishes of the south, people adored reading about eating in exotic locations and you could run such glorious photos. Was Laura by any chance tempted … ? (de Kretser 2012: 153).

This section emphasises Meera's touristic gaze on the South of Italy and on its food[9], the ideal of Italy as a beautiful place where to enjoy 'pleasure and simplicity' through 'the simple, earthy dishes of the south' to be eaten in exotic locations[10]. At the airport in Naples

> [t]he last bag from the London flight was claimed […], and Laura was left alone … A uniformed figure approached, officials spoke into walkie-talkies; Laura filled out forms; it was foolish, she was telling herself, to think in terms of signs. Then a panel in the wall slid open like magic: a man in overalls emerged. He handed Laura the case. It had been retrieved from the tarmac, where it had fallen, unnoticed, from a trailer (de Kretser 2012: 155).

As soon Laura arrives, she realises that her luggage has not arrived, but "like magic" the problem is solved.

> By the time the airport bus pulled in, Naples stood in a brownish, benzene dusk. What had Laura expected? Arias, gunfire, the ghosts of centurions perhaps? Certainly her pocket explored by expert hand. Circles of traffic tightened and hummed. *Just a*

[9] In *The Power of Glamour: Longing and the Art of Visual Persuasion* (2013) Virginia Postrel points out that nowadays tourists travelling to Italy "yearn […] for *pleasure* and *simplicity*: good, fresh food in a beautiful place without too much bustle. So now they dream of Italy, minus the inefficiencies and frustrations of real Italian life and, of course, without the other tourists" (Postrel 2013: 20).

[10] In *How Italian Food Conquered the World* (2011) John Mariani tells the story of how Italian cuisine rose to its place as the most beloved fare in the world. By the 1990s Italian food was gaining real stature, status and class: "[t]he Italian food gospel was being spread more enthusiastically than ever by the media in the twenty-first century, not least among book publishers […]. Television also jumped on the Italian food bandwagon, both in Italy and abroad" (Mariani 2011: 235-236). Cooking shows on Italian cuisine became immensely popular in English-speaking countries. Within this phenomenon it has to be stressed that in the 1980s a spectacular visual presentation of cooking or eating in advertisements, magazines and cookery books, cooking shows or other visual media as TV programmes and cinema started to emerge. It offered perfectly lit details of dishes which were meant to arouse a desire to eat them or wish for them.

> *short walk*, said the letter Vivienne had sent with a map. She began to make her way through the crowd, between folding tables on which were set out socks, combs, pocketknives, cheap, useful things. A shadow came whispering of hashish and a hotel. Laura walked faster, tried to look purposeful and knowing. An enormous square had been dug up and barriers erected around the excavations. She had to cross it – but how? An iron hand seized her arm: it had prevented her from stepping in front of a bus. Laura thanked, wanted to cry, fled into a narrow street (de Kretser 2012: 155-156).

Laura's arrival in Naples from the airport takes places in "brownish, benzene dusk". The alliteration underlines the unpleasant combination of darkness and the stench of polluted air; the other alliteration "hashish and a hotel" talks of a sinister presence in the streets at night. Laura's expectations of Naples are connected to expert robbers. Entering an unknown place is one of the typical demarches used in literature to justify the description of the place itself, while arousing suspenseful curiosity in the reader (Hamon 1982: 156). What is described is traffic circling closely around Laura, the crowd, and folding tables with useful things. She sees barriers that stopped her from crossing the streets, and is saved by "an iron hand" when about to step in front of a bus; this reiterates the idea of protection introduced with the magic appearance of her piece of luggage. From the very first description, Naples is associated with problems but also solutions, danger but also protection and magic, the elements that characterise this new unknown place at the beginning. Laura is walking through the city at night; the descriptions follow the shifts of her gaze. They are short and fragmented; these glimpses of Italian settings are not simply lovely backdrops: significant details tend to take on a symbolic power and reveal the character's emotions.

> The evening had deepened. Large spots of rain came padding. A bouquet of umbrella materialised, thrust at her by a dark man. There were few streetlights and no pavement. She put up the hood of her jacket. A cat cried thinly under a parked car. The rain slanted and steadied. Laura's shoes were sodden, then her feet. Her wheeled case lurched over flagstones, always one heavy step behind, a club-footed stalker from an evil dream. A shining electric eye flew straight at her – she flattened herself against hard-hearted stone. The Vespa sped past, spraying laughter. Then there was a shrine enclosing a rouged and solid Infant: a trashy brooch pinned to a wet, black façade. Its neon illuminated the name of a *piazza* that Laura spent minutes failing to find on her map. She went on past the sound of someone coughing. […] there was always a scooter coming fast out of the dark (de Kretser 2012: 156).

The difficulties in approaching the place continue: there are few streetlights and no pavement; she is wet from the pouring rain; her heavy suitcase, bumping as it is dragged over the pavestones, resembles "a club-footed stalker from an evil dream"; scooters come fast out of the dark with dashes of light and laughter. She passes by a crowded pizzeria; she doesn't enter and trudges on. Despite all this, "Laura turned a corner and before her like a vision, a flight of shallow steps led to an archway surmounted by a bell. She knew that she was lost. She knew that she loved the place" (de Kretser 2012: 156).

When she arrives in Naples, Laura is disturbed by the traffic and chaos, but what

emerges is her immediate fascination with the city; she feels that things won't be easy, but that there is beauty. Laura's ambivalent attitude towards Naples is expressed through the reiterated opposition of beauty and decay. Beauty is not easily detectable, since the flaws of the city seem to overcome it; but she sees it, and discovers it continuously in the coexistence of an ancient grandeur with a decadent present in this millennial city: "Vivienne's flat, reached across a courtyard filled with motorbikes and cars, was on the fourth floor of a former palazzo. A mechanic's workshop gave on to the street" (de Kretser 2012: 157).

> Laura had time and occasion enough, during the months that followed, when she was lonely, when the temperature and her spirits dipped, to marvel at her sympathy with the city. It was inexplicable. Naples was indefensible: a callous city, a raddled grande dame with filth under her nails (de Kretser 2012: 157).

The opposition between defects and lures is continuously reiterated. While showing the city to her friend Bea who visits her in Naples, Laura intends to speak of the city's attractions but lists its flaws instead, believing that Bea disapproves of Naples because she stalks about the streets saying little.

> The traffic didn't stop for pedestrians, the post office had run out of stamps, she had lost her sunglasses to a pickpocket, damp afternoons brought the scent of drains, the traffic didn't stop for red lights, there were battalions of stray dogs, she had lost her keys to a pickpocket, rubbish lay rotting on the pavements, the traffic didn't stop for ambulances, the headlines were proclaiming another Mafia murder, and the window of Vivienne's bathroom was stuck (de Kretser 2012: 157).

On Bea's last morning

> [t]hey were on their way to a collection of pictures housed in a monastery. Afterwards, Laura opened a door at the foot of a flight of stairs. They went through into a cloister. It was lush with *o*vergro*w*n *o*ranges, l*o*quats, figs. *W*eather, *w*orking at the *w*alls, had turned them a creamy yell*ow* – the colour of fading gardenias, said Laura. The leaves of the orange trees were as glossy and distinct as if cut from green tin. That evening, on the station platform, surrounded by shouts, clan*k*ing, an aria oozing from the tannoy, the squea*k* of snea*k*ered feet, Bea said that she would always remember the cloister. 'A *wo*nderful place.' She couldn't understand why Laura kept complaining about Naples. 'You're so lucky to live here,' said Bea (de Kretser 2012: 158, my italics).

We notice de Kretser's meticulous choice of words in the vocabulary that capitalizes on phonic and every other sensory connotation so as to intensify the juxtaposition of the marvel at the magnificent cloister they saw in the morning, conveyed through vowel sounds, and the effect of chaos and noise at the station.

> Other cities – Venice, Rome, Florence – offered riches to the casual eye. Naples chose secrets and revelations. Laura learned to follow the dingy street, to descend the un-

> promising stair. There would be a vaulted ceiling, or a family feasting on melons under a *pergola*, there would be the trace of a fresco or a damaged stone face. A dull thoroughfare brought a red-robed saint with an arrow in her breast- Laura turned her head and saw the painting propped in the window of a bank. So it was to be a day bracketed by Caravaggios: she had sat before another in the cold blast of a church that morning. There was no end, it seemed to these stagings of discoveries. Wrong turnings took Laura to an industrial zone near the port; every truck, slow with freight, coughed in her face. Then came a row of grimy archways and waiting in the depths of each one, the sea. It was polluted and shining. Laura remembered the treasure hunts of childhood: mysteries, astonishments, gifts that weren't delivered but earned (de Kretser 2012: 158).

Laura makes the effort to follow Naples' 'unpromising' signs and is rewarded by finding beauty. The dichotomy of decay and beauty is reinforced by the ingenious and recurrent use of antithetical adjectives: for example, the sea is polluted and shining. The most 'expected' linguistic grouping in a description is the combination adjective and noun; in *Questions of Travel* recurrently the adjectives used in descriptions express the character's view. Descriptions in fact are also the point in the text at which, in the most 'natural' way possible, an ideological competence may be inserted. This is evidenced by the incorporation in the text of evaluative comments: the character's seeing is often the occasion for the aesthetic evaluation of what she is looking at; comments about the effect of the sight on the looker are introduced (Hamon 1982: 155). Meanwhile, Vivienne Morley has fallen in love and wishes to remain in England. Laura accepts Vivienne's offer to prolong her stay in Naples.

> An anniversary came, the first day of Laura's thirty-four year. Birthdays are a time of reckoning and wishes. Laura spent hers writing about marzipan and a cake called the Triumph of Gluttony. […], Laura's thoughts were still of *transience* and sugar. […]. The evening held the knowledge of *passing unnoticed in the world*. Where was the gaze that would gather up her worthlessness and invest it with loving sense? (de Kretser 2012: 161, my italics).

The idea of transience and fleetingness creeps in. Vivienne had spoken to Laura of a "whispering wall in the flat"; she explained that it means that Signora Florescu watches soap operas in the adjacent room at all hours with the sound turned right up; "[s]he's from Romania or one of those places – harmless and quite mad" (de Kretser 2012: 157). On Bea's last day in Naples, walking past newsstands patch-worked with images of a dead woman, Bea has described the hillock of flowers outside Kensington Palace after Princess Diana's death, marvelling at the way in which the British had reacted to this event: "[y]ou couldn't joke about it. People you'd have sworn were sane took offence. But the funeral was brilliant – about the time they were getting to the abbey, I drove from Notting Hill to Battersea in only fifteen minutes. I must say I wouldn't mind a royal shuffling off every week" (de Kretser 2012: 157-58). Laura remembers that on the day the world learned of Diana's death, someone had banged on her door.

> Beyond the safety chain, an old woman scarcely taller than a child stood sobbing. Signora Florescu's Italian, stressed in all the wrong places, was a puzzle in which the dead woman's name recurred. She was crying for her: that much was plain. Laura put her arm around her neighbour – the bent neck was surprisingly thick. Placed in a chair and offered tea, the signora only cried harder. […] Signora Florescu had reverted to her own tongue, but Laura knew exactly what she was saying. Diana didn't come into it: she was only shorthand for the unbearable sadness of being. Laura could tell, because the same shapeless grief was working in her (de Kretser 2012: 161-162).

Laura's neighbour living alone and continuously watching soaps brings in the idea of unbearable loneliness and sadness, which inevitably belong to life. These two women's worlds come together.

> On Laura's birthday, the signora's TV kept up its whispered assault: *I may be your teacher, Massimo, but I am a woman first. And now another year has ended*. Laura countered it by cranking up the volume on Vivienne's boombox. A boy sang, *Hallelujah! Hallelujah!* His voice had always been unearthly; now he, too, had joined the dead. Laura Fraser sat alone, and turned her heavy rings, and wished what everyone wishes (de Kretser 2012: 162, my italics).

The idea of ending, of death is progressively introduced. Theo comes to Naples in the spring; "[h]e brought a star made of ruby-red glass […]. The hinged central compartment swung open so that a tea light could be placed inside. That evening, they looked at it shining in the window" (de Kretser 2012: 170). Emphasis is given to beautiful little things, but also to cheap useful things, valuable meaningless clutter, from the beginning, when Laura, on her arrival in Naples, notices folding tables in the streets full of small objects. When walking with Theo, she observes that

> [t]here was always rubbish for sale in the streets, someone sitting beside oddments of nylon lace or rickrack braid, broken-down shoes, chipped enamelware. It was one of the ways Naples affected her, said Laura, this wringing of worth from things that would be discarded in wealthier places. Scenes she had once associated with far, tropical countries flashed up throughout the south of Italy: concrete-slab tenements festooned with exposed wiring, women fetching water from a public standpipe, children whose games centred on a plastic bottle – a worldwide web of making do (de Kretser 2012: 171).

What de Kretser affirmed in the interview, where she connected Naples to Colombo, is the value given to worthless little objects. They keep on walking.

> Streets laid down by the Romans were unflinching: narrow, *sunless*, slabs of *black* volcanic stone underfoot. A piazza or crossroad brought a shock of *light*. Theo was dawdling […]. Theo made his way towards her, now *shadowed*, now *lit*, through the blindingly obvious: the origins of chiaroscuro, the cosmic on/off of *brilliance* and *dark* (de Kretser 2012: 171-172, my italics).

Progressively, Laura's perceptions of the city of Naples bring her to reflect on the eternal balance of darkness and light. Still walking, Laura and Theo find themselves in

> [a] nineteenth-century arcade named for a king was colossal and derelict, historical as royalty […]. She took his arm as they left the arcade, but the ice-cream cart intervened. A wish for closeness melted in indecision over pistachio or hazelnut, in Theo's remark that *all the things Neapolitans loved* – gelati, fireworks, music – *were fleeting*.
> Theo wanted to buy a postcard. After a long search, a rack was found. All the legendary images – the bay, the volcano, the opera house – were out of focus. Naples could madden by refusing to perform itself. It was such a slovenly, neglectful place. The cat hit by a scooter remained in the street to flatten slowly, the best room in the museum was closed without explanation, the seventeenth-century courtyard had been turned over to cars. Laura said, 'I'd like to stay here forever'. […]. They were having lunch in a restaurant that catered to the staff at a nearby hospital. Two doctors in their white coats had just come in; […]. 'I know it's squalid', said Laura. 'And to be honest, I can't bear it a lot of the time'. '*It's squalid because it's still alive*', Theo said. 'Only the dead are perfect'. On their way home he returned to the theme. Paris, Florence, Rome were superb mausoleums. 'Europe's buried there. This is a deathbed'. He took Laura's hand, gripped. 'Every time I walk down a street here I feel I might burst into tears' (de Kretser 2012: 173, my italics).

Theo is about to go back to London. He is sleeping on the pull-out sofa. Laura notices that he has neglected to blow out the tea light; the upper part of the star still gleams. She wonders if she should do something about the candle. She closes her eyes; when she opens them, the reddish glow looks weaker. It will soon wear itself out, she thinks.

The ideas of things dying or wearing out is reiterated. Laura finds herself in the grip of nostalgia; Naples' sultry dampness recalls childhood and triggers her joyful Australian anticipation of rain. The twentieth century is coming to an end. Laura leaves Naples; in Prague she receives a phone call telling her that Theo has died. It's 2000, Laura is back in London, but continuously travelling for her work; she decides to go back to Sydney.

In the descriptions of Naples, which convey Laura and Theo's gaze when walking together through the city, there is an important factor of cohesion (Hamon 1982: 159) which should not be overlooked: the theme of life and death, which functions to 'seed' the descriptions it introduces becomes progressively more profound. The role these descriptions play in the narrative is fundamental. In fact a description is the point where the narrative stops, is suspended, but also the indispensable point where it is 'preserved', where its information is 'pulled together', where it sets and is reduplicated, where the setting participates in a redundancy (Hamon 1982: 167). Here the setting confirms, sharpens and reveals the characters' thoughts, and one of the main themes of the novel, a reflection on life and death.

What did Laura find in Naples? The decadence of Naples that moved Theo to tears is gradually associated with life, the city is alive, but we understand, it is also connected to the sense of death, of things dying. From Laura's perception of European places we gather that she sees cities like Venice and Paris as frozen, mummified and embalmed, preserved, but the life has gone. Naples is alive, and just because it is alive, it reminds Theo and Laura (and

the reader) that life is moving towards death; that's why they find it touching. In Naples the inescapable condition of mortality looms in the dialogues of Laura with Bea, with Theo, and in the encounter with Signora Florescu. Laura's 'sacred journey' to Naples is related to the occasion for coming to terms with the awareness of death, with the recognition of mortality, the necessity of living with mortality.

It is worth noticing that the descriptions of Naples in *Questions of Travel* rarely perform the 'decorative function' Hamon identified in any decorative unit meant as a functional element in a coherent, overall system. In fact, because of the protagonist's perceptual activity, the narrative never comes to a standstill during the descriptions of places: they are less descriptions of what is contemplated than narratives of the perceptual effort of the observer, of her impressions, progressive discoveries, enthusiasms or disappointments; a very active contemplation indeed, containing a whole story. The descriptions of Naples are not moments of ecstatic recollection in tranquillity: describing is an activity, mental and physical at the same time – it is an action just like any other in the narrative. This diegetic function of descriptions conveys a fascinated attraction to the South but also denunciation of its present decay, interwoven throughout *Questions of Travel*.

How much do Laura's attitude and responses to Italy correspond to de Kretser's? We have to consider that *Questions of Travel* is a work of fiction and that consequently there must be some distance between de Kretser, the historical, empirical person of the traveller and writer, and Laura, the former's creation. However, if we refer to the interview with the author, we clearly perceive that Laura's experiences in Italy are very similar to her creator's; in Laura's account of the city the flaws are more accentuated than in de Kretser's perception of Naples, but in both cases the author's and her character's sympathy for the city is powerfully evident. De Kretser did not want Laura to be a caricature; she is good-hearted and well intentioned, she doesn't judge from first appearances, she is open and accepting. However, Laura's litany of complaints about Naples[11] is basically a list of cliched tourist complaints about the city, which might recall the nineteenth-century colonialist stereotyping of places in Southern Italy. The bathetic note on which it ends – a window in her apartment is stuck – indicates that these 'typical' complaints should be read ironically. The nature of travel description in *Questions of Travel* shows that de Kretser has unquestionably advanced beyond the stereotyping of the city. There is in actual fact something profoundly different in the novel by virtue of the implied distance between Laura and the narrator/author; this is where irony comes in. Irony, a distancing trope, is often applied to Laura's actions and reactions, in Naples and throughout the novel. For instance, Laura believes that Bea dislikes the city, and produces her list of complaints partly to anticipate those she thinks Bea is silently formulating; but as Bea's parting remark at the station shows, Laura has mistaken her friend's reaction to the city.

[11] "The traffic didn't stop for pedestrians, the post office had run out of stamps, she had lost her sunglasses to a pickpocket, damp afternoon brought the scent of drains, the traffic didn't stop for red lights, there were battalions of stray dogs, she had lost her keys to a pickpocket, rubbish lay rotting on the pavements, the traffic didn't stop for ambulances, the headlines were proclaiming another Mafia murder, and the window of Vivienne's bathroom was stuck" (de Kretser 2012: 157).

The extremely happy result is a novel which cannot but involve the reader, startling them into reflections on uprootedness and travel, and flight from terror; on the difference between those who travel for pleasure and those who are forced to travel and leave their own country, between tourism based on privilege and money, and escape from terrible conditions. In the tantalizing rhythm of this beautifully constructed novel, the descriptions of Italian places, and particularly of Naples, given through Laura's gaze, contribute to explore one of the novel's main themes: a reflection on life and death, echoed in the extraordinary ending. Laura's Italian experience is in fact related to the occasion for coming to terms with life, but also with death: Italy has worked as a catalyst and become a 'spiritual' home. Death, a crucial element in Ravi's story, is introduced, mainly through the descriptions of Naples, in Laura's story as well. The vitality and decadence of Naples gives the character, and the author, the opportunity to think and talk about death. Italy awakens an awareness of beauty in life, but also of our inescapable condition of mortality.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bader, Rudolf. 1992. *The Visitable Past, Images of Europe in Anglo-Australian Literature*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2007. *Consuming Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Benjamin, Sara. 2006. *A Castle in Tuscany*. Sydney: Murdoch Books.

Carter, Paul. 1994. *Baroque Memories.* Manchester: Carcanet.

Carter, Paul. 2015. *Metabolism. The Exhibition of the Unseen.* Kew (VIC): Lyon Housemuseum.

Coulson, Carla. 2005. *Italian Joy*. Camberwell (VIC): Penguin Books Australia, Lantern.

De Kretser, Michelle. [2012] 2014. *Questions of Travel*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Dessaix, Robert. 1996. *Night Letters*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, Picador.

Dessaix, Robert. 2001. *Corfu*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, Picador.

Dessaix, Robert. 2008. *Arabesques*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, Picador.

Fredric, Jameson. 1991. *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic Of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press & Bauman.

Fussell, Paul. 1980. *Abroad.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Green, Penelope. 2005. *When in Rome. Chasing la Dolce Vita*. Sydney: Hodder Australia.

Green, Penelope. 2007. *See Naples and Die*. Sydney: Hachette Australia.

Green, Penelope. 2009. *Girl by Sea: Life, Love and Food on an Italian Island.* Sydney: Hachette Australia.

Hamon, Philippe. 1981. Rhetorical Status of the Descriptive (trans. by Patricia Baudoin). *Yale French Studies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 61: 1-26.

Hamon, Philippe. 1982. What is a description? (trans. by R. Carter). Tzvetan Todorov ed. *French Literary Theory Today.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 147-178.

Harvey, David. 1989. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge (MA): Blackwell.

Hazzard, Shirley. [1970] 1984. *The Bay of Noon*. Ringwood (VIC): Penguin Books Australia.

Hazzard, Shirley. 2000. *Greene on Capri. A Memoir*. London: Virago Press.

Hazzard, Shirley. 2008. *The Ancient Shore. Dispatches from Naples*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
Hope, A. D. 1966 [1958]. *Collected Poems: 1920-1965*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.
Johnston, William M. 1987. *In Search of Italy. Foreign Writers in Northern Italy since 1800.* University Park (PA) London: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
Kent, Bill, Ros Pesman & Cynthia Troup eds. 2008. *Australians in Italy: Contemporary Lives and Impressions*. Clayton (VIC): Monash University ePress.
Malouf, David. 2007. *Every Move You Make*. London: Chatto & Windus.
Mariani, John. 2011. *How Italian Food Conquered the World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Moore, Peter. 2003. *Vroom with a View. In Search of Italy's Dolce Vita on a '61 Vespa*. Sydney-London: Bantam.
Moore, Peter. 2003. *Vroom by the Sea. The Sunny Parts of Italy on a Bright Orange Vespa*. Sydney-London: Bantam.
Negus, George. 2001. *The World from Italy. Football, Food and Politics.* Sydney: Harper Collins.
Pesman, Roslyn. 1983. Australian Visitors to Italy in the Nineteenth Century. Gianfranco Cresciani ed. *Australia, the Australians and the Italian Migration*. Milano: Franco Angeli, 124-141.
Pesman, Roslyn. 1991. Majestic Nature – Squalid Humanity: Naples and the Australian Tourist 1870-1930. *Australian Cultural History*, 10: 46-57.
Pesman, Roslyn. 1994. Some Australian Italies. *Westerly*, 39, 4: 95-104.
Pesman, Roslyn. 2008. Australians in Italy 1788-1988: the Long View. Kent: Pesman & Troup, 1-15.
Pine-Coffin, R. S. 1974. *Bibliography of British and American Travel to Italy to 1860*. Firenze: Olschki.
Postrel, Virginia. 2013. *The Power of Glamour: Longing and the Art of Visual Persuasion.* New York: Simon & Schuster.
Prampolini, Gaetano. 1988. La letteratura di viaggio. *Il ponte*, 44: 259-268.
Prampolini, Gaetano. 2007. Metafiction in the Italianate Novel. *South Carolina Review*, 40: 199-204.
Prampolini, Gaetano & Marie-Christine Hubert eds. 1993. *An Antipodean Connection. Australian Writers, Artists and Travellers in Tuscany*. Geneva: Slatkine.
Robb, Peter. 1996. *Midnight in Sicily*. New York: Random House, Vintage.
Robb, Peter. 1998. *M*. Sydney: Duffy & Snellgrove.
Robb, Peter. 2010. *Street Fight in Naples*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
Robb, Peter. 2012. *Lives.* Collingwood (VIC): Black Inc.
Smart, Jeffrey. 1996. *Not Quite Straight. A Memoir.* Milsons Point (NSW): Random House Australia, Vintage.
Trapè, Roberta. (Sept.) 2015. Unpublished interview with Michelle de Kretser. Sydney.
Trapè, Roberta. 2011. *Imaging Italy Through the Eyes of Contemporary Australian Travellers (1990-2010)*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
West, Morris. [1957] 2000. *Children of the Sun. The Slum Dwellers of Naples*. Melbourne: Bolinda Press.

Whitlam, Gough. 2002. *My Italian Notebook*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Roberta Trapè is an Honorary Fellow of the School of Languages and Linguistics at The University of Melbourne, where she lectured in Italian Studies for five years and where she was recently awarded a Macgeorge Fellowship to conduct research as a visiting scholar. She holds a PhD in English and American Studies from the University of Florence and works extensively on the theme of Australian travel to Italy in contemporary Australian fiction and non-fiction. She has also written on notions of space in narrating history, and more recently has examined travel ideals of Italy in food in contemporary North American films.
rtrape@gmail.com

Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XIV-No. 16 November 2016 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-48

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

Giulia Costanza Caterini

Da *Things Fall Apart* a *Il crollo*: note dall'analisi della traduzione

Abstract I: Tratto da un lavoro, in fieri, di analisi critica di *Il crollo* (1977, trad. Silvana Antonioli Cameroni), traduzione italiana di *Things Fall Apart* (1958, Chinua Achebe), l'articolo analizza e riconduce a uno schema generale le scelte della traduttrice riguardo a due nodi fondamentali del testo: la specificità culturale del narratore e la ricchezza iconografica della lingua ibrida di Achebe, l''igblese'. Il progetto segue il modello di Antoine Berman per una critica della traduzione etica e produttiva. *Il crollo* è valutato secondo i criteri di eticità e poeticità, che evidenziano l'inadeguatezza di questa traduzione e le mancanze nel ricreare la ricca complessità del testo fonte.

Abstract II: This article is developed from an in fieri critique of *Il crollo* (1977), Silvana Antonioli Cameroni's Italian translation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Following Antoine Berman's project for an ethical and productive translation criticism, this article focuses on the translator's attitude towards two main topics: the unique cultural constitution of the narrator and 'Igblish', Achebe's hybrid postcolonial language. *Il crollo* is evaluated in the light of Berman's ethic and poetic criteria, stating the inadequacy of this translation and its failure in understanding and recreating the complexity of the source text.

Perché una critica della traduzione

La critica della traduzione è una disciplina che mira a rendere la valutazione della letteratura tradotta un atto critico equilibrato e produttivo. In Italia, dove le opere tradotte occupano la gran parte del mercato editoriale, questa giovane disciplina dovrebbe essere tenuta in grande considerazione e sfruttata come strumento di crescita per la pratica traduttiva e la cultura letteraria.

Questo articolo è parte di un lavoro (*in fieri*) di analisi critica della traduzione, incentrato sullo studio di *Things Fall Apart* e di quella che è stata per diversi decenni la sua principale versione italiana: *Il crollo*. Fino alla metà di ottobre, quando la Nave di Teseo ha proposto *Le cose crollano*, ad opera di Alberto Pezzotta, quella di Silvana Antonioli Cameroni – datata 1977, e dunque ormai quasi quarantenne – era l'ultima traduzione del capolavoro di Chinua Achebe. Mentre l'originale veniva imitato, riletto e ristampato in tutto il mondo, *Il crollo* era fuori catalogo, praticamente introvabile. Sorti così diverse hanno innescato un'accurata analisi testuale che ha scandagliato i testi in cerca di una spiegazione. Per fare questo si è scelto

di seguire le linee guida proposte da Antoine Berman in *Traduzione e critica produttiva* (2000). Vista la brevità del contributo, si rimanda il lettore a questo testo, e ci si limita qui a delineare i tratti essenziali del metodo. La "critica produttiva" considera i due testi (fonte e tradotto) fondamento e motore dell'analisi ed è pensata come uno strumento di comprensione e studio del testo; aspira all'oggettività, motivo per cui non si basa su una singola teoria della traduzione o su specifiche letture critiche, ma cerca di comprendere i meriti e i problemi del testo tradotto in modo autonomo. Il lavoro prevede anzitutto svariate letture della traduzione e, solo in un secondo tempo, dell'originale, per evidenziare i passaggi problematici e quelli riusciti del testo tradotto. In seguito si confrontano i due testi, con particolare attenzione ai passi cruciali individuati. Il critico deve poi cercare informazioni sul traduttore, sul suo 'progetto traduttivo' e sul contesto culturale, solo in seguito potrà ricondurre i brani individuati a 'nodi fondamentali' e scegliere gli esempi emblematici dell'atteggiamento del traduttore verso il testo. A questo punto ha inizio l'analisi (sempre a confronto con l'originale): anzitutto dei brani selezionati, poi delle 'zone problematiche' e 'miracolose'; seguono il confronto con altre traduzioni (anche in altre lingue), il confronto tra progetto e traduzione, e infine il giudizio, basato sui criteri etico e poetico.

In questo contributo si è scelto di presentare alcuni passi dell'analisi de *Il crollo*, emblematici di due dei temi fondamentali emersi: la specificità culturale del narratore di *Things Fall Apart* e la ricchezza iconografica della lingua di Achebe. È bene sottolineare due punti fondamentali: anzitutto, è vero che un particolare da solo non trasforma una cattiva traduzione in una buona, ma i passi scelti sono sempre evocativi di fenomeni estesi, e segnalano carenze diffuse, non casi eclatanti. In secondo luogo, 'fare a pezzi' un testo è un modo sicuro di fargli un torto; i brani scelti, tuttavia, non sono tasselli presi qua e là, avulsi dal contesto, ma brani, appunto, brandelli di una cosa viva e ricca di interconnessioni, adatti a illustrare una caratteristica pervasiva.

Il narratore

Il narratore di Achebe è il risultato di una precisa sintesi creativa: è parte della comunità, ma la osserva da una prospettiva privilegiata, appartiene a quella cultura, ma è in grado di comprendere chi la giudica, racconta Umuofia rappresentando i costumi igbo e legittimandoli in una celebrazione che "does not mean praise or approval" (Achebe 1990: 9).

L'unicità della voce di questo narratore è segnata da caratteristiche macro e microscopiche. Tra le prime si distinguono gli elementi puramente igbo proposti al lettore. Luoghi, persone, regole, festività vengono menzionati, non spiegati; anziché adottare la prospettiva di un lettore non-igbo, (come nei modelli europei) il narratore tratta questi elementi come familiari. In questi casi la resa di Antonioli Cameroni resta vicina all'originale; non sempre, però, la voce del narratore e il suo rapporto con la storia sono trattati con rispetto. Per quanto l'atto narrativo sia extradiegetico e il narratore eterodiegetico, la narrazione in *Things Fall Apart* è intessuta di un senso di appartenenza. Una serie di sfumature avvertono il lettore che il narratore è un membro della comunità che descrive, con importanti conseguenze sul punto di vista. Sono questi 'modi microscopici di estraneità' a essere ricondotti alla norma in italiano. Se nei brani cruciali la traduttrice è attenta al ritmo, alla sintassi e ai segnali

più evidenti del legame narratore-comunità, lo stesso non si può dire per le vene sottili di estraneità. Cameroni non falsa in modo macroscopico l'alterità dei luoghi rispetto alla norma eurocentrica: proprio come in *Things Fall Apart*, non si dice che *Il crollo* è ambientato in "Africa" o "in Nigeria", ma "a Umuofia", "nel più lontano dei nove villaggi", "a Mbanta". In questo modo i luoghi sono restituiti a chi li ha sempre vissuti, tramite una rappresentazione che fa uso di nomi e di una prospettiva autoctona. La stretta relazione tra la voce narrante, lo spazio e il tempo, però, non è formata solo dai nomi, ma pervade l'intero testo. Verbi e avverbi deittici e stratagemmi della narrazione orale creano complicità e vicinanza tra chi narra e chi legge. Scrive Chantal Zabus: "When transposed to the written text of West African novels, in an attempt to recapture traditional speech and atmosphere, these discursive elements constitute what Alioune Tine has called the 'ethno-text'"; ne *Il crollo* gli elementi più sottili dell''etno-testo' vanno irrimediabilmente perduti. Una delle sfumature sistematicamente cancellate riguarda la gestione del tempo. In generale il narratore si riferisce al tempo della storia con un normale passato narrativo, ma ecco come riprende il racconto dopo le digressioni:

> That was many years ago, twenty years or more, and during this time Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan (*TFA* 1).
> Questo era avvenuto molti anni prima, venti o più, e da allora la fama di Okonkwo era cresciuta come un fuoco di bosco quando soffia l'harmattan (*Il crollo* 9).

L'impressione è che il narratore si sia accorto di essersi lasciato trasportare e recuperi il filo del discorso. Il nodo centrale dell'effetto digressivo – nonché un caso esemplare dell'uso di elementi temporali per caratterizzare il narratore – è "That was many years ago, twenty years or more". La traduzione lascia cadere più di un elemento, ma il problema principale riguarda "ago". La parola indica "remoteness in time from the present"; il riferimento temporale, quindi, è dato in rapporto al tempo della narrazione; il rimando è – a seconda delle interpretazioni – o a un presente condiviso da narratore e lettore, come in un racconto orale, o semplicemente noto anche a chi legge. Il modo più comune di tradurre tutto questo sarebbe stato "fa" e non "prima". La scelta della traduttrice rimuove un riferimento temporale che situava narratore e lettore in un presente almeno concettualmente condiviso. Cameroni non può aver pensato a un uso non standard dell'avverbio, poiché in contesti diversi il narratore si riferisce al passato nel modo più tradizionale. Il narratore usa "ago" quando sta andando indietro rispetto al tempo della narrazione, mentre "before" viene usato per discostarsi dalla sequenza temporale primaria. Talvolta, "ago" è impiegato anche in frasi del secondo tipo. In questi casi ha l'effetto di avvicinare la voce del narratore a quella del personaggio, in modo simile al discorso indiretto libero, nei passaggi con un forte coinvolgimento emotivo. Comunque lo si interpreti, l'uso di "ago" è stilisticamente rilevante e intensifica il collegamento tra il lettore-ascoltatore e il narratore o tra questi e il personaggio. Il numero di occorrenze (diciannove in tutto, sempre tradotte con "prima") non ammette la possibilità di una svista. Si tratta di una scelta che compromette un elemento essenziale del testo e impoverisce la tecnica narrativa.

Un altro caso ricorrente di alterazione di espressioni temporali rilevanti per la costru-

zione del narratore è l'uso di "tomorrow", di cui si riportano alcuni esempi. All'inizio del capitolo due Okonkwo, steso a letto, sente:

> *Gome, gome, gome, gome*, boomed the hollow metal. Then the crier gave his message, and at the end of it beat his instrument again. And this was the message. Every man of Umuofia was asked to gather at the market place tomorrow morning (*TFA* 7).
> Il suono del metallo cavo rimbombava cupo: *gome, gome, gome, gome*. Poi il banditore annunciò il suo messaggio e alla fine battè ancora il suo strumento. E questo era il messaggio.
> L'indomani mattina tutti gli uomini di Umuofia dovevano raccogliersi sulla piazza del mercato (*Il crollo* 15).

Le note positive sono il mantenimento dello schema di lunghezza delle frasi, la 'non-punteggiatura', corrispondente a quella del testo fonte, e la conservazione dell'inizio di frase con la congiunzione, non ben visto in italiano. Stupiscono, invece, alcune caratteristiche: la divisione del paragrafo prima dell'inizio del messaggio, l'inversione dei "*gome*" e della loro spiegazione e la manipolazione della forma del messaggio.

Iniziando dai "*gome*" (che, per lo meno, vengono lasciati identici), probabilmente l'ordine invertito suono-spiegazione mira a rendere la frase meno insolita per il lettore italiano e a preparare all'onomatopea. È un peccato, dato che posto all'inizio della frase, "*Gome, gome, gome, gome*" risulta inatteso, straniante e prolungato, tutte caratteristiche dell'*ogene* del banditore nella notte. Questa simmetria è certamente intenzionale e sarebbe stato bene mantenerla in traduzione. Inoltre, l'opposizione suoni-rumori / silenzio è centrale in questo brano – e infatti dal banditore si passa al silenzio, alla voce della notte, poi *di nuovo al silenzio, e infine di nuovo al banditore*.

Per quanto riguarda la forma rielaborata del messaggio, la razionalizzazione di Cameroni – che riordina gli elementi per ricondurli a un normale discorso indiretto – è inadeguata. Il narratore usa due forme temporali diverse per ottenere un risultato ibrido: "was asked" e "tomorrow morning". È proprio la giustapposizione tra un comune passato narrativo con discorso indiretto e "domani mattina" che fa compiere al lettore un balzo nel tempo fino alla notte in cui il messaggio è stato diffuso. Tutto questo a maggior ragione perché il narratore – dopo aver parlato delle notti buie e di quelle illuminate dalla luna – torna al messaggio e all'espressione mista del tempo:

> But this particular night was dark and silent. And in all the nine villages of Umuofia a town crier with his *ogene* asked every man to be present tomorrow morning (*TFA* 8).
> Ma quella notte era buia e silenziosa. E nei nove villaggi di Umuofia un banditore con il suo *ogene* chiamava tutti gli uomini a raccolta per il mattino dopo (*Il crollo* 16).

Ne *Il crollo* si perdono alcuni elementi: la ripetizione di "tomorrow morning" non è né tradotta in una forma che si riferisca al futuro dal punto di vista dei personaggi (come "domani mattina"), né ripetuta uguale alla prima occorrenza. Questo accade invece in inglese ed è rilevante specialmente per la posizione a fine frase, che pone in risalto la scelta poco ortodossa del complemento di tempo.

Si noti anche "this particular night was dark and silent", che diventa "quella notte era buia e silenziosa"[1], appiattendo la qualità orale e il valore deittico dell'originale[2]. Da ultimo, "And in all the nine villages of Umuofia" diventa "E nei nove villaggi di Umuofia". La perdita di "all" sottrae universalità a questi luoghi; i nove villaggi sono *il* luogo in questo romanzo, e se qualcosa li pervade, pervade tutto il mondo conosciuto. Questa è una caratteristica importante del testo, che lo pone in aperta sfida alla classica prospettiva eurocentrica e colonialista come strumento della "contro-storia" di Achebe (1997: 84). È fondamentale mantenere in traduzione questo genere di piccoli rimandi, di cui il romanzo è disseminato, per non impoverire rovinosamente i modi della rappresentazione di *Things Fall Apart*.

Un altro elemento fondamentale del rapporto tra il narratore e Umuofia è la rappresentazione della vita spirituale nei nove villaggi e del confitto con il bianco. Achebe evita le dicotomie e, tramite una prospettiva allora inedita, mette in discussione il concetto lineare di progresso. A livello macroscopico, è vitale non assimilare i nomi degli dei, dei riti e delle cariche igbo a quelli noti al lettore italiano, per non appropriarsi dei rituali autoctoni, costringendoli a indossare una maschera e facendo un torto alla specificità culturale del testo. Alcuni esempi positivi in questo senso sono "the naming ceremony" (*TFA* 68) che conserva la sua estraneità e diventa "la cerimonia dell'assegnazione del nome" (*Il crollo* 75)[3], o termini come "*egwugwu*" e "*chi*", lasciati in igbo come nel testo fonte e spiegati solo se lo fa l'originale. Parzialmente negativo è invece "chief priests" (*TFA* 133) che diventa "sommi sacerdoti" (*Il crollo* 138), richiamando impropriamente l'antica religione ebraica; la scelta sarebbe accettabile se in inglese i termini corrispondessero, ma in questo caso si dovrebbe avere "high priests".

Uno dei passaggi in cui Cameroni compromette il rapporto narratore-comunità è quello che svela la presenza di Okonkwo tra gli *egwugwu*:

> Okonkwo's wives, and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second *egwugwu* had the springy walk of Okonkwo. And they might also have noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men and elders who sat behind the row of *egwugwu*. But if they thought these things they kept them within themselves. The *egwugwu* with the springy walk was one of the dead fathers of the clan. He looked terrible with the smoked raffia body, a huge wooden face painted white except for the round hollow eyes and the charred teeth that were as big as a man's fingers. On his head were two powerful horns (*TFA* 79).

---

[1] Il suono e il ritmo della frase richiamano "Era una notte buia e tempestosa", che tuttavia in inglese è "It was a dark and stormy night" quindi senza legami con il testo fonte (Cfr. Bulwer-Lytton 1873: 17. Si tratta del famoso incipit di *Paul Clifford*, reso ancora più celebre da Snoopy, il bracchetto dei *Peanuts*, di Charles M. Schulz).

[2] I riferimenti spazio-temporali sono spesso alterati nel *Crollo*; un esempio fra tanti è "This year they were the wise ones", "Quell'anno risultarono i più saggi" (*TFA* 20, *Il crollo* 28).

[3] In altri casi, come nella versione tedesca di Heusler-Petzold (1983), il traduttore addomestica in "battesimo"; la scelta, oltre che eticamente discutibile, è anacronistica, dal momento che situa un rituale cristiano in epoca pre-missionaria.

> Forse le mogli di Okonkwo, e probabilmente anche altre donne, avrebbero potuto notare che il secondo *egwugwu* aveva l'andatura elastica di Okonkwo. E forse avrebbero anche notato che Okonkwo non era in mezzo agli uomini di titolo e agli anziani che sedevano dietro la fila degli *egwugwu*. Ma se pensavano a queste cose, le tenevano per sé. L'*egwugwu* dall'andatura elastica era uno dei padri defunti del clan. Aveva un aspetto terribile con il corpo in rafia annerita dal fumo, con quell'enorme faccia di legno tutta dipinta di bianco, con i rotondi occhi infossati e i denti color del carbone grossi come le dita di una mano. Sul suo capo c'erano due enormi corna (*Il crollo* 86).

In italiano il narratore sembra subito più distaccato. A cambiare la prospettiva sono soprattutto i verbi dei primi periodi: "Forse […] avrebbero potuto notare", "forse avrebbero anche notato". Sembra sottinteso "se avessero prestato più attenzione", il che dà al brano un tono paternalistico, quasi ironico. In teoria "might have noticed" può essere tradotto sia con "avrebbero potuto notare" che con "potevano aver notato". Tuttavia, mentre la prima scelta comporta gli svantaggi di cui si è appena detto, la seconda opzione non sottintende alcuna nota di derisione né allontana il narratore. Anzi, la scelta scartata otterrebbe un effetto simile a quello del narratore di Achebe, sottolineando la consapevolezza delle donne del clan e l'irrilevanza dell'identità dello 'spirito' ai fini del rito. Anche la descrizione dello spirito non convince: un solo "with" è tradotto da tre "con", ripetuti prima di ogni caratteristica, che ricordano lo stile e la cantilena di un libro per bambini; la stessa impressione si ha con "i denti **color del** carbone" e "**quell**'enorme faccia di legno **tutta** dipinta di bianco", che non trovano riscontro nel testo fonte. Gli occhi sono "hollow", dunque "cavi", "scavati" nella maschera e lasciati vuoti e neri, un tratto molto più impressionante della constatazione fisionomica della traduzione, in cui gli occhi "infossati" (assieme ad "aveva un aspetto terribile") fanno venire in mente una persona brutta o con una pessima cera, più che un'apparizione terrificante. Infine, le corna sono "powerful", dunque "vigorose", "possenti", non "enormi", differenza che in traduzione dà un tocco finale grottesco. Il narratore sembra descrivere una messinscena, non un rito solenne, e si ha l'impressione che prenda le distanze dalla folla ingenua.

Da ultimo, è interessante osservare alcuni esempi di come la gente di Umuofia parla dei missionari:

> The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay (*TFA* 158).
> L'uomo bianco è molto astuto. È venuto adagio e in pace con la sua religione. Noi ridevamo della sua follia e gli abbiamo permesso di restare (*Il crollo* 164).

Richiede particolare attenzione "we were amused at his foolishness": in questa frase, e in particolare in "amused" e in "foolishness", c'è l'atteggiamento di un superiore verso un inferiore – quasi di un adulto verso un bambino. Si tratta di una presa in giro benevola rivolta a qualcuno che non sa cosa sta facendo, il che non si riscontra affatto in "ridevamo di" e "follia", più maligni e meno accondiscendenti. Questi sono solo alcuni esempi di una fitta rete che costituisce la risposta polemica di Achebe all'immagine degli africani come

selvaggi, "strange beings jumping up and down" (Achebe 1990: 7); questi dettagli, tutt'altro che trascurabili, mostrano un punto di vista autoctono in cui sono i bianchi a sembrare un gradino più in basso nella scala dell'evoluzione[4]. Per le stesse ragioni è ottima la scelta di "gli abbiamo permesso" per "[we] allowed him".

Come si è ribadito, un testo letterario raramente "gioca un solo gioco"[5]; questo è naturalmente il caso di *Things Fall Apart.* Il narratore di Achebe, nella sua complessità, non si limita a includere elementi aborigeni, ma si appropria (oltre che della lingua) della cultura inglese. Uno dei passaggi più evocativi in questo senso è riferito al primo missionario che arriva a Umuofia, di cui si dice che "[…] Mr. Brown came to be respected even by the clan, because he trod softly on its faith" (*TFA* 159); in queste parole si sente l'eco del verso finale della poesia "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven", di W. B. Yeats: "Tread softly because you tread on my dreams"[6]. La traduzione italiana "non ne calpestava la fede" (*Il crollo* 165) mantiene solo in senso lato, lessicale, l'immagine. Cameroni sottolinea il concetto di 'camminare sopra' in modo piatto, superficiale, e perde la complessità del delicato rimando. In primo luogo "tread softly" è il gesto di chi cammina con attenzione, circospezione, delicatezza. L'immagine (negata da Cameroni) è quella di qualcuno che non può fare altro che camminare su qualcosa, ne è consapevole, e decide di farlo con tutta la delicatezza di cui è capace. Una metafora raffinata che celebra il lavoro di Mr. Brown e anticipa per antitesi la violenza che sarà propria di Mr. Smith e dei colonizzatori che, loro sì, calpesteranno la fede e le usanze del clan. Resa in modo adeguato, questa immagine è l'estrema sintesi della complessità con cui Achebe rappresenta l'uomo bianco, che nonostante tutto non viene ridotto a uno stereotipo. "Non ne calpestava la fede", invece, reincarna lo stereotipo, e rinuncia alla possibile intertestualità. È piatto, nel senso che "calpestare la fede" o "calpestare i diritti di un altro" sono espressioni usate e abusate, e in quanto tali scivolano facilmente lasciando poco o nulla; "he trod softly on its faith" è un'espressione elegante e musicale, da cui anche il lettore anglofono che non conosca Yeats (e non si deve pensare che non ne esistano) ricava l'impressione che ci sia un 'qualcosa' oltre le parole. Questo 'qualcosa' è la poeticità del verso, e anche se si è convinti che nessuno in italiano riconoscerà il poeta, il compito del traduttore qui è fare sentire il ritmo e il respiro della *poesia*. Una soluzione sul genere di "si

---

[4] Uno degli obiettivi di Achebe è restituire a questi punti di vista dignità storica/di storia: "I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past […] was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (Achebe 1973: 4).

[5] Si veda Coetzee: "[…] the offensiveness of stories lies not in their transgressing particular rules but in their faculty of making and changing their own rules. There is a game going on between the covers of the book, but it is not always the game you think it is. No matter what it may appear to be doing, the story may not be really playing the game you call Class Conflict or the game called Male Domination or any of the other games in the games handbook. While it may certainly be possible to read the book as playing one of those games, in reading it in that way you may have missed something. You may have missed not just something, you may have missed everything" (1988: 3).

[6] "Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths / Enwrought with golden and silver light, / The blue and the dim and the dark cloths / Of night and light and the half-light, / I would spread the cloths under your feet: / But I, being poor, have only my dreams; / I have spread my dreams under your feet; / Tread softly because you tread on my dreams" (Yeats 2007: 190).

muoveva con passo leggero sulla loro fede" o "camminava leggero sulla loro fede", senza allontanarsi troppo dalla lingua usata nel testo, lascerebbe trasparire, in modo sottile, che la scelta delle parole ha una ragione precisa. Il lettore superficiale non vi farebbe caso – come non ne fa al testo originale; il lettore che conosce la poesia di Yeats ne sentirebbe l'eco; il lettore curioso potrebbe anche scoprire la poesia seguendo la traccia lasciata dal traduttore. La ricchezza della lingua non porta solo una serie di immagini, ma anche un arricchimento del testo sia verso l'interno che verso l'esterno. Cameroni rinuncia al suono e alla delicatezza della frase, oltre che a conservare la citazione di Yeats. È possibile che la traduttrice abbia omesso il rimando ritenendolo troppo oscuro in italiano. Tuttavia, viene spontaneo pensare che varrebbe la pena, e il testo non potrebbe che guadagnare, di fidarsi dei propri lettori. Forse non tutti coglierebbero il verso di Yeats, ma molti potrebbero sentirne *la poesia*. Si rimanda (eccezionalmente) alla nuova traduzione, che restituisce Yeats a questo passaggio, traducendo: "procedeva con passo leggero sulla religione altrui" (Achebe 2016: pos 1970). Pezzotta esplicita addirittura il legame con la poesia di Yeats in una nota a fine volume, in cui cita l'ultimo verso. Queste prime rilevazioni lasciano senza dubbio trapelare un atteggiamento di maggiore attenzione e rispetto verso il testo; naturalmente servirà un'analisi completa per sviluppare un giudizio critico su quest'opera, ma le premesse sembrano essere delle migliori.

A proposito del rapporto autore-narratore-missionari vale la pena aprire una piccola parentesi sulla casa editrice: la Jaca Book è tradizionalmente legata alla saggistica di tema religioso, in particolare cristiano, e vanta un importante catalogo di testi dedicati al dialogo culturale tra religioni e alla storia del cristianesimo[7]; viste queste premesse ci si sarebbe aspettati una traduzione più attenta agli elementi microscopici e alla conservazione della complessità originale. Il critico della traduzione, tuttavia, non deve confondere l'operato del traduttore con quello della casa editrice, né può ipotizzare una falla nel progetto traduttivo senza le necessarie informazioni sul traduttore e le sue intenzioni (Berman 2000: 71). Ciò detto, le scelte di Cameroni rispettano ancora una volta gli elementi macroscopici e impoveriscono quelli più sottili, e dunque semplificano i livelli di maggior ricchezza del testo fonte.

'Igblese'

La necessità di preservare le caratteristiche dell'originale è ancora più forte quando riguardano l'impronta igbo. Mescolandosi con l'inglese e appropriandosene, questa lingua dà origine a qualcosa di unico: l''igblese'[8]; si tratta di una lingua particolare, con ritmi e lessico propri e un proprio repertorio di metafore, in parte autonomo e in parte acquisito dalla lingua dei colonizzatori e contaminato. In questa 'lingua nuova' Achebe è riuscito a integrare "the distinctive rhetoric of African speech into the conventional western novel" (Irele 1990: 60). Riguardo alla forma da dare al testo postcoloniale, secondo Achebe non conta tanto in che lingua si scrive, ma che cosa si può fare con la lingua. L'autore sceglie l'inglese per appropriarsene e trasformarlo in "a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral

[7] Cfr. "Numero speciale sulla situazione editoriale e sulla Jaca Book", editoriale straordinario estate 2000, http://jacabook.it/presentazione.htm.

[8] Il termine è di chi scrive.

home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (Achebe 1965: 349). Prende così vita in *Things Fall Apart* una forma di inglese nuova, "recognizable to metropolitan Anglophones yet compellingly familiar to readers versed in Igbo language, culture, and thought" (Okeke-Agulu 2011: 71). In questo contesto le singole scelte acquistano un peso diverso e partecipano maggiormente alla struttura semantica del testo.

La ricchezza figurativa della lingua di Achebe è dunque parte integrante dello schema dei personaggi, della narrazione e della rappresentazione della cultura igbo con termini autoctoni. In questo senso, l'evocatività visiva della lingua deve essere rispettata a diversi livelli, a partire da quello basilare della raffigurazione. Una traduzione che sottovaluti questo aspetto danneggia anzitutto gli oggetti che compaiono più volte nel testo, creando una rete di immagini improprie. Un esempio tra tutti è quello di "recinto" per "compound". Un "compound" è una proprietà composta da più edifici e circondata da un muro; "recinto" evoca, nella migliore delle ipotesi, uno spazio circondato da uno steccato e, nella peggiore, una gabbia o un serraglio. È vero che anche in traduzione viene detto che la tenuta è circondata da "uno spesso muro di terra rossa" (*Il crollo* 19), ma la parola "recinto" è citata sessanta volte nel testo, e l'impressione che determina una ripetizione così frequente è più forte di una singola descrizione all'inizio del libro. Inoltre, "recinto" si presta a storpiature eclatanti, come quando Okonkwo "walking about aimlessly in his compound" (*TFA* 33) diventa "camminava avanti e indietro per il suo recinto senza uno scopo preciso" (*Il crollo* 40-41). L'immagine non è quella di un uomo che si aggira inquieto per la sua proprietà, ma piuttosto quella di un leone in uno zoo. È importante ricordare che "recinto", negli anni Settanta, era la traduzione normalmente adottata per "compound", in ambito letterario e istituzionale. Questo spiega la scelta di Cameroni, ma la soluzione rimane inadeguata. Non è solo una questione di precisione terminologica, ma anche di visualizzazione e di caratterizzazione dei personaggi; sostituire il noto all'ignoto, applicando una strategia traduttiva addomesticante, dà vita a immagini sbagliate, che influenzano passaggi chiave e ne compromettono la duplice ricchezza, inglese e igbo. Vista la natura del testo, è importante mantenere le immagini igbo di cui è trapuntato il romanzo; questo vale non solo per gli oggetti, ma anche per l'uso insolito, 'contaminato', di termini comuni in inglese con un altro significato. Un esempio di quest'ultimo caso è "scrub the church" (*TFA* 144); la traduzione italiana "fare bella la chiesa" (*Il crollo* 149) è fuorviante: il lettore non igbo, senza filtri linguistici imposti, non vedrà terra rossa e paglia, ma marmi lucidi e decorazioni floreali.

Uno degli strumenti dell''igblese' è l'inserimento di metafore provenienti dall'etno-testo igbo. Non sono abbellimenti fini a se stessi, ma passaggi in cui il narratore sta traducendo dalla sua lingua madre in inglese. Sono i momenti in cui l'inglese viene messo da parte per fare spazio all'igbo. Anche altrove la sintassi e il lessico sono quelli della lingua di Umuofia, ma qui si tratta di un procedimento diverso: a parole e sintassi inglesi comuni si associa un concetto igbo. È intuitivo che una traduzione che si proponga di rispettare il testo fonte – e magari di arricchire la lingua e la cultura d'arrivo – deve preservare questi tratti e fare in modo che il testo tradotto mantenga la doppia complessità. Ne *Il crollo*, però, questo non accade e le interferenze vengono livellate. In questo modo, ad esempio, viene trattata la metafora "not find the mouth with which to tell of one's suffering" (*TFA* 42, 158). L'idea

di dover trovare non solo le parole, ma addirittura la bocca adatta per poter esprimere il proprio dolore è potente, tanto più perché del tutto inconsueta per un lettore non igbo. Si tratta di un'immagine che proietta il lettore in panni nuovi e in nuovi termini entro cui definire la realtà: quelli del narratore e dei personaggi. La traduzione italiana normalizza tutto questo, e cancella l'evocatività della lingua optando per un semplice "non trovare la forza di raccontare le proprie sofferenze" (*Il crollo* 50, 164). Un caso simile è quello in cui il concetto di "riunirsi per discutere" viene 'tradotto' in inglese con "whisper together" (*TFA* 64, 77, 134). In italiano questa espressione viene resa con "consultarsi" (*Il crollo* 70, 84, 139), e perde tutta la segretezza, la coralità e l'estraneità dell'originale. Senza dubbio soluzioni più vicine al testo fonte sarebbero un inciampo per il lettore e lo farebbero riflettere sulla lingua del narratore; curiosamente, questa è allo stesso tempo la ragione per cui allora furono scartate e per cui ora sarebbero preferibili.

Conclusioni

Come prevede il modello di Berman, la valutazione finale è basata su un duplice principio: etico e poetico. "L'eticità è rappresentata dal rispetto, o meglio, da un certo rispetto dell'originale" (Berman 2000: 76). Il critico deve verificare che il testo sia rispettato non solo superficialmente, ma soprattutto in profondità, da una traduzione che, invece di imitarlo, lo "sfidi", creando un linguaggio nuovo con strumenti analoghi a quelli originali. Come mostrato, questo non accade ne *Il crollo*, nel quale sono i livelli macroscopici dell'estraneità a essere riprodotti, mentre le vene sottili che scorrono sotto il primo strato della lettera vengono annullate.

Per quanto riguarda la poeticità, il giudizio è almeno in parte positivo, nel senso che la traduzione "costituisce un'opera organica" (Berman 2000: 76), e non una serie disarticolata di frammenti. D'altra parte, l'organicità de *Il crollo* e la sua testualità non "corrispondono"[9] a quelle del testo fonte per intensità: la rete di rimandi intratestuali e parole chiave viene spesso violata; inoltre, l'alterazione degli elementi appena riassunti per il criterio di eticità intacca anche la struttura formale della traduzione, che in superficie "corrisponde" per molti versi all'originale, mentre lo segue molto meno quando la si analizza in profondità.

In conclusione, *Il crollo* non soddisfa i criteri di eticità e poeticità; per questo, e per i progressi fatti dagli studi traduttologici e dalla pratica traduttiva dal 1977 a oggi, si ritiene che la nuova traduzione (Pezzotta 2016) sia un passo ormai indispensabile. In attesa di un'analisi completa di questa nuova versione, è auspicabile una valutazione di quanto Pezzotta abbia rispettato i principi di accoglienza ed eticità in modo più avanzato di Antonioli Cameroni, estendendoli agli elementi microscopici. Questi elementi sono la carne viva del testo, e conservarli il più possibile è la chiave della differenza fra dare vita a un'opera ordinaria costellata di elementi stranianti e creare un qualcosa di profondamente ibrido. La voce di *Things Fall Apart* non può essere replicata in italiano, ma l'italiano deve creare, con gli stessi mezzi ideati da Achebe, una voce nuova che rifletta la complessità di quella originale.

[9] Si intende qui "corrispondere" nelle varie accezioni in cui il termine è usato da Berman (2000: 78).

BIBLIOGRAFIA

Edizioni consultate
Achebe, Chinua. 1958. *Things Fall Apart.* Oxford: Heinemann.
Achebe, Chinua. 1962. *Le locuste bianche*. Verona: Mondadori.
Achebe, Chinua. 1977. *Dove batte la pioggia*. Milano: Jaca Book.
Achebe, Chinua. 1978 [1958]. *Things Fall Apart*. Oxford: Heinemann.
Achebe, Chinua. 2002 [1977]. *Il crollo*. Roma-Milano: Jaca Book ed edizioni e/o.
Achebe, Chinua. 2016. *Le cose crollano*. Milano: La nave di Teseo.

Bibliografia critica
Achebe, Chinua. 1965. The African Writer and the English Language. *Transition*, 75/76: 342-349. http://doi.org/10.2307/2935429 (consulted on 02/05/2016).
Achebe, Chinua. 1973 [1965]. The Novelist as a Teacher. G. D. Killam ed. *African Writers on African Writing*. London: Heinemann, 1-4.
Achebe, Chinua. 1978b. An Image of Africa. *Research in African Literatures*, 9, 1: 1-15.
Achebe, Chinua. 1984. *The Trouble with Nigeria*. London: Heinemann.
Achebe, Chinua. 1997. *Conversations with Chinua Achebe*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
Achebe, Chinua, J. Mapanje & L. Fish. 2011. Chinua Achebe in conversation with Jack Mapanje and Laura Fish. David Whittaker ed. *Chinua Achebe's* Things Fall Apart. *1958-2008*. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 3-9.
Albertazzi, Silvia e Roberto Vecchi (a cura di) 2004. *Abbecedario postcoloniale 1-2: venti voci per un lessico della postcolonialità*. Macerata: Quodlibet.
Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, eds. 1989. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge.
Bartoloni, Paolo. 2003. Translating from the Interstices. Susan Petrilli ed. *Translation Translation.* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 465-474.
Bassnett, Susan & Harish Trivedi eds. 1999. *Post-colonial Translation. Theory and Practice*. London-New York: Routledge.
Beier, Ulli. 1959. In Search of an African Personality. *Twentieth Century*, 165, 4: 324-344.
Berman, Antoine. 1997. *La prova dell'estraneo. Cultura e traduzione nella Germania romantica*. Macerata: Quodlibet.
Berman, Antoine. 2000. *Traduzione e critica produttiva*. Salerno-Milano: Oedipus.
Berman, Antoine. 2003 [1991]. *La traduzione e la lettera, o l'albergo nella lontananza*. Macerata: Quodlibet.
Brown, Hugh. 1981. Igbo Words for the non-Igbo: Achebe's Artistry in *Arrow of God*. *Research in African Literatures*, 12, 1: 69-85.
Brown, Nicholas. 2011. Chinua Achebe and the politics of form. *Research in African Literatures*, 42, 2: 87-90.
Carroll, David. 1990. *Chinua Achebe: Novelist, Poet, Critic*. London: MacMillan.
Cavagnoli, Franca. 2010a. *Il proprio e l'estraneo nella traduzione letteraria di lingua inglese*. Monza: Polimetrica.

Cavagnoli, Franca. 2010b. Le insidie della razionalizzazione. Stefano Arduini e Ilide Carmignani (a cura di). *Le Giornate della traduzione letteraria. Nuovi contributi*. Urbino: Iacobelli, 97-102.
Cavagnoli, Franca. 2012a. *La voce del testo. L'arte e il mestiere di tradurre*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
Cavagnoli, Franca. 2012b. Tradurre la letteratura: Fra negoziazione e compromesso. *Letteratura e Letterature*, 6: 85-94.
Cavagnoli, Franca. 2014. Translation and Creation in a Postcolonial Context. Simona Bertacco ed. *Language and Translation in Postcolonial Literatures: Multilingual Contexts, Translational Texts*. New York: Routledge, 165-179.
Coetzee, John Maxwell. 1988. The Novel Today. *Upstream*, 6, 1: 2-5.
Eco, Umberto. 2003. *Dire quasi la stessa cosa. Esperienze di traduzione*. Milano: Bompiani.
Ekwe-Ekwe, Herbert. 2001. *African Literature in Defence of History: an Essay on Chinua Achebe*. Dakar: African Renaissance.
Gagiano, Annie. 2012. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* 1958-2008. David Whittaker ed. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 4: 461-463.
Gikandi, Simon. 2001. Chinua Achebe and the Invention of African Culture. *Research in African Literatures*, 32, 3: 3-8.
Gołuk, Dorota. 2011. Chinua Achebe Translating, Translating Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart* in Polish and the Task of Postcolonial Translation. David Whittaker ed. *Chinua Achebe's* Things Fall Apart. *1958-2008*. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 197-218.
Grandi, Nicola. 2008. Pidgin e creoli. *Le lingue extraeuropee: Americhe, Australia e lingue di contatto*. Roma: Carocci, 273-318.
Hamadi, Lutfi. 2014. Edward Said: the Postcolonial Theory and the Literature of Decolonization. *European Scientific Journal*, 10: 39-46.
Innes, Catherine Lynnette. 1990. *Chinua Achebe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Irele, Abiola. 1990. The African Imagination. *Research in African Literatures*, 1: 47-67.
Izevbaye, Dan. 2009. Chinua Achebe and The African Novel. Abiola Irele ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 31-50.
Jardin, Michael. 2011. Achebe and the Politics of Magic. David Whittaker ed. *Chinua Achebe's* Things Fall Apart. *1958-2008*. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 13-34.
Jervolino, Domenico. 2009. Berman e il problema della traduzione. *Kainos. Rivista online di critica filosofica*, 2, http://goo.gl/UQjNFF (consultato il 23/05/2016).
Killam, Gordon Douglas. 1977. *The Writings of Chinua Achebe*. London: Heinemann Educational.
Kolb, Waltraud. 2011. Re-writing *Things Fall Apart* in German. David Whittaker ed. *Chinua Achebe's* Things Fall Apart. *1958-2008.* Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 177-196.
Mccarthy, Eugene. 1985. Rhythm and Narrative Method in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. *Novel: a Forum on Fiction*, 18, 3: 243-256.
Meschonnic, Henri. 2009 [1973]. Proposizioni per una poetica della traduzione. Siri Nergaard (a cura di). *Teorie contemporanee della traduzione*. Milano: Bompiani, 265-281.
Nadiani, Giovanni. 2000. La critica della traduzione letteraria nell'epoca della letteratura digitale. *inTRAlinea*, 3, http://www.intralinea.org/archive/article/1629 (consultato il 15/05/2016).

Naumann, Michel. 2011. The Semantic Structure of *Things Fall Apart* and Its Historical Meaning. David Whittaker ed. *Chinua Achebe's* Things Fall Apart. *1958-2008*. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 55-66.
Nkosi, Lewis. 1973. Fiction by Black South Africans. Gordon Douglas Killam ed. *African Writers on African Writing*. London: Heinemann, 109-117.
Obiechina, Emmanuel. 1993. Narrative Proverbs in the African Novel. *Research in African Literatures*, 24, 4: 123-140.
Ogbaa, Kalu. 1981. Interview with Chinua Achebe. *Research in African Literatures*, 12: 1-13.
Ogede, Ode. 2011. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. *Research in African Literatures*, 4: 102-104.
Ojaide, Tanure & Joseph Obi. 2002. *Culture, Society and Politics in Modern African Literature: Texts and Contexts*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press.
Ojinmah, Umelo. 1991. *Chinua Achebe: New Perspectives*. Ibadan: Spectrum.
Owusu, Kofi. 1991. The Politics of Interpretation: The Novels of Chinua Achebe. *Modern Fiction Studies*, 37, 3: 459-470.
Ravenscroft, Arthur. 1969. *Chinua Achebe*. Harlow: Longman for the British Council and the National Book League.
Ricoeur, Paul. 2001. *La traduzione: una sfida etica*. Domenico Jervolino (a cura di). Brescia: Morcelliana.
Paustian, Megan Cole. 2014. "A Real Heaven on Their Own Earth": Religious Missions, African Writers, and the Anticolonial Imagination. *Research in African Literatures*, 45, 2: 1-25.
Peresson, Giovanni. 2014. *Rapporto sullo stato dell'editoria in Italia 2014*. Ediser, http://goo.gl/BbVDdF (consultato il 20/05/2016).
Rogers, Asha. 2013. Good Lord, These Africans are Writing Books! *Postcolonial Writing and Theory Seminar. Chinua Achebe and the African Writers Series at 50*. University of Oxford, http://www.oxonianreview.org/wp/good-lord-these-africans-are-writing-books/ (consulted on 26/02/2016).
Shelton, Austin. 1969. The "Palm-Oil" of Language Proverbs in Chinua Achebe's Novels. *Modern Language Quarterly*, 30, 1: 86-111.
Singh, Rashna. 2011. The Art of Conversation. How the 'Subaltern' Speaks in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. David Whittaker ed. *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart. 1958-2008.* Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 35-53.
Snyder, Carey. 2008. The Possibilities and Pitfalls of Ethnographic Readings: Narrative Complexity in *Things Fall Apart*. *College Literature*, 35, 2: 154-174.
Stock, A. G. 1978. Yeats and Achebe. Catherine Lynnette Innes & Bernth Lindfors eds. *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*. Washington (DC): Three Continents, 86-91.
Toury, Gideon. 2010 [1980]. Principi per un'analisi descrittiva della traduzione. Siri Nergaard (a cura di). *Teorie contemporanee della traduzione*. Milano: Bompiani, 181-223.
Toury, Gideon. 2012. *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
Venuti, Lawrence. 2012. *Translation Changes Everything. Theory and Practice*. London-New York: Routledge.
Vivan, Itala. 2012. La fortuna delle letterature africane in Italia nei cinquant'anni della postcolonialità, 1960-2010. *Scritture Migranti*, 6: 249-271.

Wren, Robert. 1981. *Achebe's World: The Historical and Cultural Contexts of the Novels of Chinua Achebe*. Harlow: Longman.
Yeats, William Butler. 2007. *Poems*. Raleigh: Hayes Barton Press.
Zabus, Chantal. 1990. The Logos-Eaters: the Igbo Ethno-Text. *Kunapipi* (Special Issue in Celebration of Chinua Achebe), 12, 2: 19-30.
Zabus, Chantal. 1993. Criticism of African Literatures in English: Towards a Horizon of Expectation. *Revue De Littérature Comparée*, 67, 1: 129-148.
Zabus, Chantal. 2007. *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Giulia Costanza Caterini is a translator, interpreter and teacher of English as a second language. Her research focuses on translation studies, literary translation and postcolonial studies, particularly on productive translation criticism and translation practice.
gccaterini@gmail.com