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Pietro Deandrea

Always on the Other Side

*We do return and leave and return again,
criss-crossing the Atlantic,
but whichever side of the Atlantic we are on,
the dream is always on the other side
(Pauline Melville, *Shape-shifter*)¹.*

In her article on postcolonial studies in Italy, Marta Cariello aptly writes that if the cyborg represented the critical body par excellence in the 1990s, early 21st-century theory is bound to be faced with the migrant body as the quintessential critical presence (Cariello 2016: 35)². In order to reflect on this inescapable and urgent presence for our times, Issue no. 18 of *Le Simplegadi* delves into the multifarious relationships between migrating subjects – both human and artistic – and notions of identity. We simply believe that topical issues related to migrations and the ever-contested concept of identity deserve an articulate analysis, not least because their points of intersection offer numerous suggestions capable of undermining the apparently monolithic structures of neoliberal globalization. These structures are certainly rooted in a long history of colonial oppression in its various forms and localities. More recently, to quote Achille Mbembe, they have been deteriorating into “obsession with boundaries and visas, the emergence of racism in most parts of Europe, the strengthening of right-wing parties in the context of an economic crisis”³.

In their critical analysis, many of the articles included in this issue explicitly or implicitly address the facile and inhumane solutions to this (much more than economic) crisis proposed by most institutional actors. The first group of contributions is the most overtly topical for our present-day crisis. Roger Bromley’s study of the Equatorial Guinean writer Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel centres on the EU’s southernmost border and provides an opportunity to reflect on the colonial nature of European powers together with decolonial possibilities of counter-thinking. Carmen Concilio’s pages on NoViolet Bulawayo’s novel *We Need New Names* touch upon issues of invisibility and mental condition among illegal immigrants in the US, whereas Pietro Deandrea focuses on refugees in the UK from a spatial perspective, considered in both their oppressive forms of confinement and in their liberating strategies

¹ Pauline Melville. 1990. *Shape-shifter*. London: The Women’s Press.

² Marta Cariello. 2016. Il corpo critico: Pensare ai limiti dell’Europa. *From the European South: A Transdisciplinary Journal of Postcolonial Humanities*, 1: 35-41.

³ Thomas M. Blaser. 2013. Africa and the Future: An Interview with Achille Mbembe. *Africa is a Country blog*, 20th November, <https://africasacountry.com/2013/11/africa-and-the-future-an-interview-with-achille-mbembe/> (consulted on 4/10/2018).

of counter-actions. Similar questions are examined in Paola Della Valle's article on Caryl Phillips, a second-generation Black British author whose recent prose shows an increasing preoccupation with globalization migrants. Like Deandrea in the article mentioned above, Ilaria Oddenino and Daniela Salusso concentrate on the literature concerned with present-day refugees in Europe, but from their peculiar perspectives – Oddenino on the Calais jungle as depicted in a graphic reportage by Kate Evans, Salusso on the linguistic strategies to de-simplify and problematise the complexity of migrations. Between these two articles, Ellen Pataf's reflections centre on how Muslim women are represented by some authors within the context of the so-called clash of civilisations in contemporary Europe.

In her contribution, Salusso mentions British Prime Minister Theresa May's declared intention of creating a "hostile environment" for unlawful immigrants. Sadly, as recent news confirmed, this also led to the institutional persecution of elderly Windrush immigrants who could not provide evidence of their living and working in the UK and were thus targeted as 'illegals'. This is a clear example of how the recent 'refugee crisis' does not imply that the issues around earlier, apparently settled migratory waves should be seen as pacified and solved. Accordingly, the second group of articles collected here examines key historical events (including migratory phenomena) from colonial and postcolonial times. Adriano Elia touches on the African American Great Migration and identifies, in Langston Hughes' poetical reconfiguration of the blues, gestures towards collective change. Nadia Priotti examines Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt* and its depiction of 1930s multicultural Paris, where various strands of migratory movements crossed and sometimes replicated colonial hierarchies. Paola Carmagnani offers a genre-oriented analysis of the translation of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* for the stage by the Indian-born American writer Santha Rama Rau, throwing light on her re-articulation of the English novelist's Eurocentric vision. The two pieces closing the second section share an interest in more recent historical tragedies of the Indian subcontinent: through his reading of Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan*, Giuseppe De Riso unravels multiple perspectives on identity within and among the fighting and migrating ethnic groups scarred by the 1947 Partition (with an emphasis on the role of rumours); and Pier Paolo Piciucco analyses the protagonist of Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* following the contradictory strands which compose her identity. Similarly to stances in other articles included here (such as Concilio's references to Roberto Beneduce's ethno-psychiatric studies), Piciucco makes use of critical paradigms pertaining to Trauma Studies: the increasing presence of these critical tools for the study of migration-related literature certainly shows how urgent these issues are.

The contributions composing the third and final group of *Le Simplegadi* no. 18 go further back in time in their studying of identity-formations and their relationship with migratory processes, since they share an interest in the presence of myth as a crucial element. In what represents an exception to the Anglophone scope of this issue, Fabiana Di Brazzà identifies in the figure of the siren a crucial crossroads between Tomasi di Lampedusa and classical sources. Maria Camilla Di Tullio reads Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, including its central image of the ocean voyage, through the lenses of Hindu mythology and ethics. Mattia Mantellato investigates Derek Walcott's *Omeros* as a poem where colonised peoples

develop their sense of identity through ecocritical relations with nature. Pierpaolo Martino emphasises how Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* tackles questions of identity-in-migration through metamorphic translations of ancient myths into new forms such as pop culture. Miriam Sette recounts Norman Douglas' search for an identitarian rebirth in the wake of the traces of ancient Greece which he found in the Italian deep south. Finally, Roberta Trapè focuses on the Australian artist Paul Carter and, in an original co-authorship with Carter himself, reflects on his involvement with Italian urbanism, classical art and philosophy, culminating in what she defines as a "migrant epistemology".

By and large, these articles testify to the far-reaching range of configurations of identity within the field of colonial and postcolonial literatures and arts. All these configurations are bound to be confronted with different forms of coloniality of power – stumbling blocks like the Simplegadi, the mythical rocks which were believed to cause so many shipwrecks. At the same time, they open opportunities towards badly needed forms of counter-actions and self-affirmation.

Pietro Deandrea is Associate Professor in English and Postcolonial Literature at the University of Torino, Italy. Amongst his publications, *Fertile Crossings: Metamorphoses of Genre in Anglophone West African Literatures* (Rodopi 2002) and *New Slaveries in Contemporary British Literature and Visual Arts: The Ghost and the Camp* (Manchester University Press 2015).
pietro.deandrea@unito.it

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Roy McFarlane

Arms Outstretched

Dis Rasta arms outstretched
has been chained to rocks, adamantine steel
has held him down, he who dared to defy the Gods
breaking the mold, pulling the pattern apart,
to imagine something new, something beautiful
that begins within and heals without. Dis Rasta
is brown-eyed, dreadlock Christ nailed to a cross,
blood pouring across centuries, a piercing of the side
by the state and the pious church that watched
and hide as waters flowed with healing beyond borders
of religion and rituals *for as much as you did unto them
you did unto me*. Dis Rasta is the thousands of women
arms outstretched pleading for mercy when forced,
sitting on ducking chairs, the ones that sunk
and the ones that survived only to be burnt as witches
by the devils wrapped in cloaks of patriarchy
and a god that looked like them. Dis Rasta
followed Paul Bogle with hundreds of peasants
to Morant Bay. Dis Rasta threw rocks and sticks
and ran as the militia opened fire. Dis Rasta escaped
the flogging of six hundred and the execution
of four hundred more, Dis Rasta is running.
Dis Rasta is the chopped limbs
of the people of Congo under King Leopold's rule.
Dis Rasta is in ghettos, wearing the star of David,
dis Rasta is barefoot walking through *Kristallnacht*.
Dis Rasta is resurrected out of the ashes of holocaust
climbing from under the bones of genocide
only to change garments with Palestinians.
Dis Rasta is a shadow left on the playgrounds
of Hiroshima, arms outstretched against a red sky
running to waters filled with bodies, bloated horses
and black rain, black rain everywhere.
Dis Rasta is running for his life, her life,
running from atrocity to atrocity.
Dis Rasta is a child, dead, curled up on a beach

picked up by the outstretched arm of a stranger
because borders have closed their arms.

Roy McFarlane was born in Birmingham of Jamaican parentage and spent most of his years living in Wolverhampton and the surrounding Black Country. He has held the role of Birmingham's Poet Laureate and presently the Birmingham & Midland Institute Poet in Residence. His poems have appeared in anthologies: *Filigree* (Peepal Trees 2018), *It All Radiates Outwards* (Verve Poetry Press 2018), *Dissonance* (Hesterglock Press 2017), *Somewhere to Keep the Rain* (Winchester Poetry Festival 2017), *Out of Bounds* (Bloodaxe 2012). His previous publications include *Celebrate Wha?* (Smokestack Books 2011) and *Beginning with Your Last Breath* (Nine Arches Press 2016). His latest collection *The Healing Next Time* will be out in October 2018 and he is also completing his MA in Writing Poetry with The Poetry School and Newcastle University.

royjazzoetry@hotmail.co.uk

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John Thieme

In Memoriam: Wilson Harris

Sir Wilson Harris' passing at the age of 96 represents the loss of the most famous Guyanese writer of his generation, an author whose dazzlingly original expansion of the boundaries of the novel form made his work seem opaque to some, inspirational to others. In an early essay, he expressed the view that the 'West Indian' novel 'belongs – in the main – to the conventional mode', a mode that he associated with nineteenth-century realism and which he considered inappropriate to convey the realities of Caribbean and South American societies, fractured by the legacies of colonialism. He also came to believe that such realism was an inadequate medium for representing twentieth-century experience more generally and his lifelong pursuit of cross-cultural ideals had much in common with the goals of Udine's Partnership Studies Group.

Theodore Wilson Harris was born into a mixed-race family on 24 March 1921 in New Amsterdam, the second city of what was then British Guiana. He was educated in the capital, Georgetown, where he attended the country's leading secondary school, Queen's College, from 1934 to 1939. One of his school contemporaries remembered him as 'not like us others'. Harris' individuality was to find a channel, when, after leaving school, he studied land surveying. Subsequently, between 1942 and 1953 as a government surveyor, he made numerous expeditions into the Guyanese interior, a region little known to most of the country's inhabitants, who live on its narrow coastal littoral. He was deeply influenced by his experience in the largely untouched rainforest landscape, a location that introduced him to the cultures of Guyana's indigenous Amerindian peoples. As well as providing the setting for much of his fiction, the interior sparked a vision of consciousness that was a world away from the values of the late colonial culture in which he had grown up and convinced him that he needed to find a different language in order to convey its atmosphere.

By the early 1950s, Wilson Harris was writing poetry and developing an interest in world mythologies. Several of the poems in his early collection *Eternity to Season* (1954) took their subjects from Greek myth, anticipating Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990) in finding parallels between Homeric figures and everyday Caribbean life. He was, however, yet to discover his real métier as a novelist and produced three drafts of his first novel, *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), before he arrived at the revolutionary technique, which, with variations, would characterise all his subsequent fiction. It was a technique heavily reliant on layers of metaphor, in which a dream-like logic blurs the distinction between actual and imagined events, in which past and present are merged and in which the dead can return to life. In *Palace of the Peacock* a multi-racial crew, representative of the various ancestral strands of Guyanese society, travels into the country's heartland, a journey into a psychic as well as a physical interior. It culminates in a mystical vision, in which deaths usher in a resurrection and Christian symbolism is fused with Amerindian myth.

Palace of the Peacock was followed by three novels with similar settings and themes: *The Far Journey of Oudin* (1961), *The Whole Armour* (1962) and *The Secret Ladder* (1963). The four novels were later published together as *The Guyana Quartet*. Subsequently Harris wrote nineteen more novels, all published by Faber and two collections of 'fables' that drew on Amerindian mythologies. The novels included *Heartland* (1964), *Carnival* (1985), *The Infinite Rehearsal* (1987) and *The Dark Jester* (2001). Increasingly, his fiction stressed the cross-cultural nature of all experience and he set novels in a variety of locations, including England, Scotland and Mexico. *Jonestown* (1996) took the People's Temple massacre, which occurred in the Guyanese interior in 1978, as its departure-point and moved between Guyana and California. Its emphasis on metaphorical transformations was a world away from the documentary-like reportage of other accounts of the Jonestown tragedy. Occupying characteristic Wilson Harris territory, it suggested that psychic renewal offers the only real hope for human fulfilment. In addition to his fiction, Harris also published an innovative body of critical work that also challenged the conventions of Western rationalism. His critical books include *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (1967) and *The Womb of Space* (1983).

In 1959, Harris emigrated to Britain, settling with his second wife Margaret (née Burns), a Scottish lyricist and writer, in the Holland Park area of London, which also became part of his fictional territory, first providing a backdrop for his 1977 novel, *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness*. The Harrises lived there until they moved to Chelmsford in 1986.

An aura of other-worldly intelligence surrounded Wilson Harris in life, mirroring the hermetic aspects of his fiction. Always kind and never pretentious, he nonetheless had the reputation of having mystical powers. Before my first visit to the Harris' Holland Park flat, I had heard several stories about his supposedly preternatural gifts, which I had listened to with a degree of cautious scepticism. Over the phone, Wilson insisted I received directions from Margaret, whose practicality was the perfect foil to his own more ethereal flights. Born in London, I dutifully took the directions down, thinking that I never got lost in London and besides I would be going armed with an A-Z street guide. Perhaps predictably, I couldn't locate their flat and had to phone from nearby to ask to be found. Like a spirit-guide from his fiction, Wilson was with me in two minutes. Inside the flat, his apparently paranormal powers were further in evidence. He told me that I had published two articles on V. S. Naipaul. I replied only one. Wilson then gave me the details of a second, which I recognised as a piece sent to a journal that had subsequently denied having received it, though they had actually published it three years previously. There was a perfectly logical explanation. Wilson had come across the article in one of his favourite haunts, the nearby Commonwealth Institute library, but for me it was an experience that resonated with other stories of Harris' uncanny gifts.

Wilson Harris was knighted in the Queen's Birthday Honours list in 2010 and was the recipient of numerous awards and accolades, including the Guyana Prize for Literature and a Guggenheim Fellowship. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature on a number of occasions. In 1945, he married Cecily Carew, whom he divorced in the late 1950s. In 1959, he married Margaret Burns, who predeceased him in 2010. He is survived by his four children from his first marriage, who include the former Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Professor Eon Nigel Harris. He passed away on March 8 2018.

John Thieme is a Senior Fellow at the University of East Anglia. He previously held various appointments at UEA and Chairs at the University of Hull and London South Bank University. He has also taught at the Universities of Guyana and North London. His books include *Postcolonial Con-Texts: Writing Back to the Canon*, *The Arnold Anthology of Postcolonial Literatures*, *Postcolonial Studies: The Essential Glossary*, *Postcolonial Literary Geographies: Out of Place* and studies of *Derek Walcott*, *V. S. Naipaul* and *R. K. Narayan*. He was Editor of *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* from 1992 to 2011 and is General Editor of the Manchester University Press Contemporary World Writers Series. His creative writing includes *Paco's Atlas and Other Poems*, and the novel, *The Book of Francis Barber: A Legatee's Journal*.

J.Thieme@uea.ac.uk

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Lance Henson

Bridging the Divide (A Voice from the Other)

So many indigenous voices have risen to the occasion to address you as human beings. Across the years before you were born. The message remains the same. For we are not human beings on a spiritual journey, we are spiritual beings on a human journey. We bring messages from the most powerful consciousness that exists, mother earth.

This day as I speak to you there is no economic or political justice for the poor, the people of colour, women or workers within the framework of global corporate capitalism. Corporate capitalism uses identity politics, multiculturalism and racial justice to masquerade as politics that will never halt the rising social inequality, unchecked militarism, evisceration of civil liberties and omnipotence of the organs of security and surveillance. Corporate capitalism cannot be reformed. Despite continually rebranding itself, corporate capitalism is Supranational. It owns the banks, owes no loyalty to any nation/state. It cannibalises everything it touches to extinction, human, mineral, even the water we drink and the air we breathe.

Bridging the divide. Looking from an indigenous perspective at the monstrous dehumanising objectives of corporate capitalism. It is as if we are viewing our realities destroyed by a living breathing monstrous entity. To confront this entity, I wish to share with you one of the origins of indigenous resistance. Postcolonial Theory from the (other) involves a conceptual re-orientation towards perspectives of knowledge, as well as needs, developed outside the west.

A lot of Anglo theorists, including most recently the attorney general of the United States, don't like the term postcolonial. It disturbs the new world order.

The third world, a postcolonial term was originally invented on the model of the third estate of the French Revolution. It was a political pamphlet written in January 1789, shortly before the outbreak of the French Revolution. The world was divided according to two political systems. Capitalism and Socialism. The first and second world, the third world comprised what was left over. The third world was made up of what was left over; the non-aligned nations. The new independent nations that had formerly made up the colonies of the imperial powers. It was not until 1955, in Bandung (Indonesia) that 29 mostly independent African and Asian countries initiated what became as the non-aligned movement, which constituted an independent power bloc. It was a third world perspective on political economic and cultural priorities. It was an event of enormous proportions. It symbolised the common attempt of people of colour in the world to throw off the yoke of white western domination. However, this third world way was slow to develop and define itself, and gradually became associated with the economic and political problems these countries encountered. Poverty, famine, unrest. Mostly caused by the colonial systems that continued to impede their cultural and political lives. The Bandung conference therefore marks the origin of postcolonialism as a self-conscious cultural political philosophy.

A more militant version of the third world came 11 years later, 1966, the tricontinental conference in Havana, Cuba: the first time Latin America, Africa and Asia, the three continents of the south would gather. This conference produced the journal *Tricontinental* and for the first time it published the writings of postcolonial theorists and activists such as Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, Ho Chi Min and Jean Paul Sartre. The journal celebrated not a single political, cultural position but a transnational body of work with a common air of popular liberation. The message stated that the exploited people of the world must eliminate the foundations sustaining imperialism, including cheap labour and raw materials controlled by colonial governments which further deepened indigenous peoples into absolute dependence. As terms both tricontinental and third world retain power because they suggest an alternative culture, an alternative epistemology.

The human community is being challenged in ways that test all the usually supportive foundations of culture, politics and religion. These signalling truths are reminiscent of ancient stories of the hero's journey. We are being asked to enter areas of human history that challenge all our notions of reality. To enter areas of human experience without a cultural foundation, we place ourselves in jeopardy. We are in a world where something that takes place on another continent has a direct bearing on our lives. We are being asked to enter areas of human experience that place us in a highly mythological period. In this often-illusive landscape with no apparent answers, where can we turn? Mythology and metaphorical logic offer a way to question ourselves in ways that do not destroy our soul's true nature. Life is sorrow, life is joy. These are the temporalities of being. We are fortunate if we have a choice as to how to conduct our daily lives. Most people believe they are searching for a meaning for life, what they may really be seeking is the experience of being alive.

Lance Henson is a poet of the Cheyenne nation of Oklahoma. He has published 43 books in 23 languages. An ex-marine and mixed martial artist, he has maintained a cultural indigenous world-view that opposes the mistreatment of indigenous peoples the world over. His literary project *Words from the Edge* has invited poets from endangered tribal peoples to Europe to share their stories and poems. He is an adjunct Professor of the Cheyenne Arapaho tribal college of Oklahoma. He lives in Bologna, Italy.

lancehens@yahoo.com

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Tom Petsinis

Poems

Flight of the Triangles

(After the artwork School of Fish, by Brody Xarhakos)

You've been held captive far too long,
Not only by bloody nails and rusted bolts
And pencil lines finer than greying hair –

But by logic underpinning rigid proofs,
Faith in a trinity synonymous with one,
The lyric of your differentiating names:

Oh, sad scalene, isosceles, equilateral –
We sang you high in three-part harmony
As a silver frame tingled each syllable.

But the time's less than a thought away
When you'll break free from roof trusses
And skeletal pylons shouldering clouds,

From pyramids facing fears and hopes,
Diamonds born of a rain-forest's death,
Stars complicit in proliferating triads.
With the joy of a mirror shattering,

You'll fly off to your vanishing point,
Leaving us breathless in your wake.

The Old Maestro

(Mikis Theodorakis in concert)

He plods, flat-soled, to the waiting stand,
Head bowed from eight decades of dreams,
Compositions that defied parallel lines,
Discarded versions of Zorba's last dance.

Hair grizzled, an ancient prophet's,
And too wild for brush from years of exile,
He sounds the score's unscripted rustle
And readies the orchestra with a nod.

Allegro: hands plump as spotted toads
Become swallows unravelling winter clouds
Above the village square, weaving nests
From bits of hope, darkness, despair;

The master potter's, working as one,
Kneading, turning, moulding mute time,
Giving roundness to a rousing tune –
An amphora with youths in Pyrrhic step;

The old midwife's, fearless of life,
Plunging wrist-deep into the cello's womb,
Extracting an infant note, a protracted cry,
Raising it high for all to celebrate.

Pianissimo: his gestures caressing,
Comforting the girl hounded from Salonika,
Who, crying a concentration of stars,
Braids barbed wire twisting from her scalp;

Embracing a cemetery ploughed by tanks,
Covered in soft moonlight and lime;
And souls, gathering their scattered bones
To join the bride in tomorrow's dance.

Crescendo: eyes closed for sound,
He struggles in a net of wrinkled skin,
Grapples with gravity and space,
Punches back the silence between notes –

His angled shoulder blades protruding,
As though becoming archangel's wings,
To raise not only his heaviness
But the breathless audience to paradise.

His left heel lifts, a fraction, stays,
As though his body's poised to levitate,

But only for a heartbeat, or a half,
When it drops, together with his arms.

Encore: after a moment's hesitation
They spring up, scatter in applause,
Strain on tip-toe, wanting more from him –
Musician, magician, miracle worker.

Exhausted from giving of himself,
He acknowledges all with barely a bow
And walks off the way he came:
Alone, midway between mute fists.

Tom Petsinis is an Australian poet, playwright and novelist. He was born in Macedonia, Greece, and emigrated to Australia as a child. The Australia Council has awarded him a Writers' Fellowship and a Residency at the B. R. Whiting Library in Rome. He lives in Melbourne and works as a mathematics adviser at Deakin University. His writing includes the novels *The French Mathematician* and *The Twelfth Dialogue*, the plays *The Drought* and *The Picnic*, the poetry *Naming the Number* and *Four Quarters*, and a collection of short stories *The Death of Pan*. His most recent publications are the novel *Quaternia* and the collection of poetry *Breadth for a Dying Word*. Translations of his work are available in a number of languages. tom.petsinis@vu.edu.au

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Jaydeep Sarangi

Poems

Another Day in Kolkata

Chances are she'll lose the dream
 settle for fast growing metro links, high sky rises.
 Knight Riders fan the tempo,
 the fire of Bangla poems doubles the impact
 with cigarette in hands, high thoughts
 Marx to Ambedkar, Neruda to Tagore
 designed to impress sweet college girls
 scribble and gobble wordy *rosogolla*
 and sweet curd, expressions everywhere.
 In time, she wins the day. Drinks mouthful
 political poems, *Not in My Name*.
 A memory of oozing silence, slow rain.

The Trusted Army

(for Manohar Mouli Biswas, Bangla Dalit writer and activist)

If you need a band of active
 peace Army, I bet for poets.
 Poets give law
 of the land and the seas.
 Poets are humanists,
 who break walls
 in silence. Sign peace accord
 With owners of law
 rulers of the code. Frontiers of
 several environmental zones.

I bet for them.
 give them a job.
 they will pay you back.
 In words, words and volumes of words
 for peace of the land and mind.

I bet for them.
They can give us a green earth
of values and morals
poets shake hands with green grammars of the land.

I bet for them.
They usher hopes for tomorrow, beyond all
doubts and uncertainties. They are formidable
forces of all nations. They keep guns alive.
Slogans ready:
your name, my name, their name: poets!

We cross corridors of haziness
mistrust and exploitation. They write.
They are busy. For all seasons.
Long Live kings! Power of poems!

Alienation

Hi my conscience! Touch me, take me, and control me
Awaken me, broaden me, and enlighten me
You say, did you ever love a Sudra in life?
Did you eat with him happily, with heart's content?
You tell me, I want to know it from your mouth.

Hi Swami Vivekananda, I'm at your door, knowing and knowing.
I'm that fire ball who made you cry.
Rice cooked in my house
I eat near the broken door, in a slum
I eat pork, snake, rat, half cooked
Had you ever been there? I'm tempted to know that.

I suffer from a disease, alienation.

All humanitarians, please tell me
You have never put me on the edge.
Prove that you loved me without any doubt.

I have been suffering from a disease – alienation

I'm tired of pangs of friendly separation.
Let me accept my end with this angst and pains of separation
Kill all evils. Let me be part of everyman, united.

HI God, you are all powerful
It's my cry at your feet to heal my broken mind.

Oneness

Someone told me near the river Koshi
In the northern slopes of the Himalayas
To plant a tree
A door of high thoughts.
I embraced simple minds,
Crafted stories between the stars.
Sublime thoughts live; they travel far.
My boat is ready to move, after a spell
When failures, little backslidings rained
In the summer draught.
Each stone scripted stories
Of the Hills
Lifeline murmurs its recorded silence.
When I pass through a busy street. Somewhere.
My mind connects with a sovereign nation.
My friends remind me how they are connected
With my Sindhu land. They visit the holy basin
By walking pass Vistula
When unknown birds twitter.
Heavy hearts cry for their families.
Rivers watch courtship of clouds,
Channel thoughtful minds; life moves fast.
Roots of civil societies
Rice deep understandings.
All bridges are doors
From separate homes, beyond this wood
All hearts are red.
The earth is enjoyed by riding heroes.
What cuckoo will coo
My prayers in murmuring rhymes?

Jaydeep Sarangi is Principal at New Alipore College (affiliated to the University of Calcutta) and a widely anthologised poet with six collections in English. His recent publications include: *Faithfully, I Wait* (2017). At present, he is the Secretary of Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library in Kolkata.

jaydeepsarangi@gmail.com

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Roger Bromley

Elsewhere and Here: Revisiting the Colonial Encounter from the Perspective of the Global South in *The Gurugu Pledge*

Abstract I: L'articolo presenta un'analisi del romanzo *The Gurugu Pledge* (2017) dello scrittore della Guinea Equatoriale Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel. Partendo dalle teorie sulla natura coloniale del potere sviluppate da una serie di teorici latino-americani, queste pagine sostengono che il romanzo in questione costituisce una contro-narrazione sulle masse di sfollati in Africa (immaginata soprattutto dalla prospettiva dei rifugiati stessi), oltre che un'illustrazione delle modalità in cui la razzializzazione rappresenta una delle principali eredità del colonialismo. La narrazione qui analizzata si focalizza in un luogo particolare: il Monte Gourougou (Gurugu) in Marocco che dista 2 chilometri e a 500 anni dall'enclave autonoma spagnola di Melilla, il confine più a sud dell'Unione Europea, sebbene si trovi nel continente africano. Il Monte Gourougou è il luogo dove centinaia di migranti e rifugiati dell'Africa occidentale vivono nello squalore, in attesa di un'opportunità per entrare in Europa scalando la barriera che circonda Melilla. La barriera incarna il divario narrativo tra privilegio e abiezione, tra l'occidente e i suoi 'altri'.

Abstract II: This article presents an analysis of the novel *The Gurugu Pledge* (2017) by the Equatorial Guinea writer Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, based upon theories developed around the coloniality of power by a range of Latin American thinkers. It is argued that the novel is a counter-narrative of displacement in Africa, primarily imagined from the perspective of refugees, and an illustration of the ways in which racialisation is one of the primary legacies of colonialism. The narrative which is the focus of this article is symbolised in one particular location. Mount Gourougou (Gurugu) in Morocco is 2 kilometres and 500 years from the Spanish autonomous enclave of Melilla, the EU's southernmost border, although it is on the African continent. Mount Gourogou is the place where hundreds of West African migrants/refugees live in squalor while waiting for an opportunity to enter Europe by scaling the fence which borders Melilla. The fence epitomises the narrative divide between privilege and abjection, the West and its 'others'.

Unlike almost any other work of its kind, *The Gurugu Pledge*¹ only exists in published form as a translation into English of an unpublished collection of typed manuscripts in Spanish, the colonial language of the writer, Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, from Equatorial Guinea. I stress 'colonial' language because the novel is an exemplary instance of decolonial thinking in which a group of refugees and migrants from Anglophone and Francophone (both terms derived from the 'New Imperialism' of the late 19th century) African countries are confined on Mount Gurugu, a volcanic mountain two kilometres southwest of Melilla, a Spanish territory in Northern Morocco: "the backdoor to cherished Europe" (GP 45). The word "cherished" is crucial because it articulates the colonised mentality which had driven the residents of Gurugu to the threshold of Europe; a mentality which is not able to envisage any other alternative to their desperate plight in their own countries, other than reaching the wealth and power of Europe. The novel reveals how exclusive this wealth and power is and shows how the journey to Europe, even if successful, may be illusory. Wordless and rendered worthless, these men and women communicate in the imposed language of the coloniser, and the camp itself is divided in ways which reflect this linguistic hegemony and discourses of power which control their subjectivities and knowledge. From these voiceless and fragmented identities, the novel opens up spaces for their stories as ways of countering the epistemic violence of Empire.

The narrative is multi-voiced with many shifts in register, tense and mode of writing. It often deploys a satiric form by magnifying the follies of those complicit with neo-colonialism into grotesque and absurd behaviour. Examples of this are the former aide of Amin bloated into obesity by greed and gluttony (leading 300 men to their deaths at the Victoria Falls), and the lengthy, and absurd, backstory of Omar Salanga, a brutal former soldier who arrives at Gurugu and continues his violence and exploitation of women. Some of the stories follow a realist trajectory, while others are more irrealist in the sense that they edge towards fable and folk tale, the tall tale, in an attempt to replicate African oral traditions. Although each character has a name and their story is distinctive, there is a sense also that both characters and stories are generic as is much in the novel. Specific incidents and journeys are illustrative, exempla in the medieval sense, as the novel has a metonymic structure. Even Melilla becomes more than a place on a map as its 'border spectacle' is not just a local staging of the Europe/Global South division but comes to synthesise the historical colonial encounter and its political, economic and cultural violence. In synoptic form it represents the fences and walls in almost 70 countries, designed to prevent the flow of migrants.

The first-person narrator opens and closes the novel but, episodically, hands over the narrative to other voices, as well as intermittently adopting both third and second person stances. The overall narrative is punctuated by speculative discourses, like the lengthy one on football in an African context (discussed below) and others which subjunctively propose dialogues between scholars who are in actuality conspicuously absent from, and uninterested in, the plight of the people in the camp. The scholars are presented as elite beneficiaries

¹ Henceforth GP followed by page reference. I should like to acknowledge the very generous editorial assistance kindly offered by Pietro Deandrea when I was incapacitated for a period during the completion of this article.

of colonialism, or neo-colonialism, immured in their academic privilege, metaphorically arguing over how many angels can dance on the head of a pin as their arguments are reduced to a similar absurdity. These imagined dialogues are one of many critiques in the text of neo-colonialism in contemporary Africa, contrasted with the immiseration of those forced to flee from their countries:

Instead of bringing a political response to the structural causes of the poverty and destitution spreading through the African continent, and which are the result of structural adjustment policies and the neocolonial pillage of strategic resources by multinational companies, Europe continues to build barbed-wire fences. Immense strategic wealth [...] is shamelessly plundered, while the victims of this, namely the great majority of Africans, are forbidden to enter the Schengen area (Lecadet 2017: 149).

Although, as I have said, the novel individualises each person's flight, it gives fictional shape to the situation of poverty and destitution described, as well as the plundering of gold, oil, and other mineral resources which have devastated the African continent and produced the perilous and tortuous journeys which have culminated in Gurugu.

The subjunctive interludes introduce an irrealist mood which contrasts sharply with the wretchedness of the indicative mood, the quotidian reality, which 'entangles' the refugees. I conflate refugee and undocumented migrant because, whatever the motivation for flight, all have been rejected, abandoned and neglected, and have become the marginalised in their country for whom leaving is the only option. The journey to the European border is not only a flight from the residues of the colonial but from what has been termed "the post-colonial neocolonised" world of the Global South (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 28). According to Mbembe, what he has called the "Postcolony" is a composite of past, present and the future which has created an "entanglement" which is interpenetrating and intersecting – Africa in Europe, Europe in Africa (Mbembe 2008: 4). It is this "entanglement" which the novel seeks to articulate fictionally with its allusions to the colonial past, references to the violence of neo-colonial dictatorships (with Idi Amin the paradigm case), and the fantasy of the People's Republic of Samuel Eto'o founded by "disregarded subjects" from a range of West African countries on Mount Gurugu (GP 60).

Africa is not romanticised, as is evidenced by the extended, if humorous, critique of Amin and of two disruptive figures in the camp (Omar and Aliko), nor is it simply anti-colonial, but it works with the idea of the coloniality of power:

the heterogeneous and multiple global structures put in place over a period of 450 years did not evaporate with the [...] decolonisation of the periphery over the past 50 years. We continue to live under the same "colonial power matrix" [...]. We moved from a period of "global colonialism" to the current period of "global coloniality" (Grosfoguel 2007: 219).

Grosfoguel is referring primarily to Latin America but, in broad terms, much of what he says can be applied to the African continent where the "coloniality of power" can be seen

as “a crucial structuring process in the modern colonial/world-system” (Grosfoguel 2007: 219-220). Notionally independent and decolonised, most African countries experience, at a range of levels – epistemological and structural – continuities from the colonial past in the form of neo-colonialism.

By way of placing the novel in its wider context of decolonial thinking, an outline of what is meant by the coloniality of power and what shaped it will be provided. In so doing, it is hoped to situate the mindset which has led to European ways of seeing refugees in particular and migrants in general. A useful starting point is Sylvia Wynter’s “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation” (2003) and Catherine Hall’s “The Racist Ideas of Slave Owners Are Still with Us Today” (2016). To speak of Eurocentrism is something of a cliché now, but in order to understand European attitudes to refugees at the level of the State and in popular terms, it is still necessary to produce an explanatory account by going back and thinking about what Wynter calls the Western bourgeois conception of the human, Man, which *overrepresents* itself as if it were the human itself. The idea of the Western European as over-representing itself as human is of value because it helps to see why refugees are seen as disposable/expendable en masse, regarded as less than human, without value. Once the idea of dehumanisation takes hold it is accompanied by impunity and indifference at the level of the State and in terms of the popular imaginary. How, otherwise, do we make sense of negative responses to the deaths of thousands of refugees at sea, and elsewhere, in recent years (more than 35,000 since 1990), and of policies of exclusion which consist of building walls and fences to keep out would-be asylum-seekers? Refugees are the modern version of Fanon’s “wretched of the earth”, as much of what he had to say about “les damnés” applies to refugees.

Any attempt to unsettle this overrepresentation necessitates an understanding of what a number of Latin American theorists (Quijano; Mignolo) have called “the coloniality of power”. In writing about displacement, generally, we need to ask ourselves why, and how, we distance ourselves from refugees, what set of values enables us to do so. One part of the answer is racialisation, one of the primary legacies of colonialism, with the idea of race – “the most efficient instrument of social domination invented in the last 500 years” (Mignolo 2007: 46). From another perspective, Catherine Hall speaks of how “in order to make money the [slave] traders had to create a new discourse on ‘race’; and the impact of those ideas needs to be remembered too” (Hall 2016: n.p.). Race as a master code, or narrative *mentalité*, has entered so deeply into common sense and daily discourse as part of the construct of the white Euro-American that the “epistemological disregard” of the Other informs all other forms of “disregard”. Global inequality is one of the root effects and premises of this racialisation and a reason why degradation, immiseration, and the violent deaths of refugees are met with indifference. They are, in Judith Butler’s words, “the ungrievable”, “lives regarded as disposable or are so stripped of value that when they are imperilled, injured or lost, they assume a social ontology that is partially constituted by that regard [...] their potential loss is no occasion to mourn” (Butler 2014: 35). Systematically representing refugees as figures of lack, without worth or value, and as lives not worthy of living, derives from ideas “about racial difference that began with slavery [and were] recalibrated across the centuries to encompass other colonised subjects” (Hall 2016: n.p.).

As an imperialising force, Western Europe not only practised slavery and extensive forms of exclusion but also developed an accompanying ideological narrative related to this which persists today. As James Baldwin wrote, “the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do” (Baldwin 2016: n.p.). Nationalism, the source and corollary of imperialism, is one way in Europe in which history is still present in all we think and do. As Mbembe says, when it comes to imagining the inhumanity of foreign peoples, “race has been the ever-present shadow in Western thought and practice” (2003: 4).

Until recent years, the “wretched of the earth” would comfortably have been applied to those outside the West but neo-liberalism, austerity, and growing inequality mean that this term now also resonates within the West, hence the growth of populism, the fear of ‘invasion’ and the political response in the form of intensified bordering – fences, walls etc.

Refugees are seen as waste to be excluded, refuse to be discarded, unproductive lives but, at a deeper level, they symbolise a precariousness, a liminality, which serves as an unsettling, unwelcome reminder of how many lives in the privileged West are now also potentially remaindered. Refugees occupy the borderland between abandonment and value now shared by many.

Any attempt to unsettle common sense thinking about refugees confronts ideological forms of nationalism, coloniality, and the state. Overcoming prejudice towards refugees is an agonistic process, a struggle on several fronts – generational and demographic. One of the major problems to contend with is the notion of the commonality, or identity, between always-existing national subjects, a fundamental aspect of subjectivity at the level of the symbolic: a taken for granted European and white ethnicity (nativism). Refugee representations have to somehow interrupt/disrupt this “continuity” and introduce new levels of diversity and antagonism, expose the contingency and emptiness of nationalist signifiers, and to go beyond the nation to formulate other, perhaps global, but not necessarily territorial, allegiances.

In order to resist seeing the refugee as a knowing subject, with autonomy and agency, many Europeans essentialise the ‘others’, reduce them to a set of invariable and negative characteristics and this enables us to regard their deaths with indifference. This indifference, this disengagement and emotional disidentification can be challenged partly by coming to terms with narratives that originate beyond the coloniality of power, or which interrogate it such as *The Gurugu Pledge*. It might be argued that the refugee crisis has a lot to do with a nation, or nations, in search of its ‘not self’, only secure in the knowledge that ‘out there’ there are still the barbarians of myth, displaced from the self’s identity. To dehumanise others is a form of displacement, to remove them from their identity (and ‘ours’) so that you can be reassured that those who drown or are killed are not your own kind, because they are sub-human. As Mbembe has pointed out:

It is now widely acknowledged that Africa as an idea, a concept, has historically served, and continues to serve, as a polemical argument for the West’s desperate desire to assert its difference from the rest of the world. In several respects, Africa still constitutes one of the metaphors through which the West represents the origins of its own norms, develops a self-image, and integrates this image into the set of signifiers asserting what it supposes to be its identity (Mbembe 2001: 2).

In the argument which follows an attempt will be made to trace the ways in which Western signifiers have so deeply imprinted themselves upon African consciousness as to thwart the development of a meaningful self-image and African identity.

Apart from these theoretical concepts, and connected to them, it is necessary to consider a range of issues related to the often reductive representation of refugees in Western discourses/texts/media – the sentimentalised, passive victim, the vulnerable person, the object of compassion – “often, they are given no story at all, reduced to a shadow that occasionally flits across European vision” (Trilling 2018: 9) – and replace these with the agential subject, the resistant activist and the newly emergent citizen. How we render the refugee “knowable” is another challenge, the challenge of representation at a time when, not only is there a lack of empathy but also a populist clamour in Europe against refugees and migrants. On the other hand, where there is humanitarian concern and sympathy, there is, as has been said, a growing focus on vulnerability, and, of course, the vulnerable have to be protected, but to see all refugees as victims, or vulnerable people, needs to be critically examined for its reductiveness and refusal of agency.

This involves a number of methodological challenges. The experience of refugees is unrepresentable in a sense, an unimaginable existence, and representational forms are always inadequate but this does not mean giving up on any attempt. Rather, it means the development of other lenses for perception, a greater aesthetic-political reflexivity and sensitivity, a search for new, and radical, rhetorical strategies, linguistic and stylistic resources which unsettle, defamiliarise, and disrupt expectations and preconceptions. From the standpoint of power, the historical narrative is always set in stone. Unsettling this power is the task of provocative narratives designed to rebut the defensive, and fatalist, illusionism which claims that how things are is immutable. So, the forms of representation are crucial and the central point of radical narratives is to highlight precarity and maintain that intervention in the refugee crisis is possible. By exploring the limits of sympathy, the shortcomings of the liberal claim of common humanity, and insisting on the ethical dimensions of representation, it may be possible to discover interventions in films, novels, art, music and drama which subvert the presumption of ‘knowing the refugee’. *The Gurugu Pledge* is a relevant example in such a respect.

The search for what is described in the novel as a “brilliant future in Europe” (GP 25) is the product of “the colonisation of African imagination and displacement of African knowledges” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: xi) and this is only partly ironic because it refers to the fact that “European culture was made seductive: it gave access to power [...] European culture became a universal cultural model”. European football, to cite an example from the novel, has today become a universal cultural model at the expense of African football. It is this continuing European hegemony which means that the “imaginary in the non-European cultures could hardly exist today and, above all, reproduce itself outside of these [colonial] relations” (Quijano 2007: 169).

The novel is constructed as an ‘entanglement’ of two imaginaries. One is that indicated by Quijano, the continuing seduction of Europe (*Elsewhere*), the other is the tentative and speculative emergent African imaginary proposed in the subjunctive interludes which I spoke of earlier and which the novel as a whole represents, the re-casting of an alternative

African imaginary (*Here*). *Here* is Mount Gurugu, symbolically condensing the experiences of the colonised and neocolonised African Continent; *Elsewhere* is Melilla, Europe's border with Africa in which the cartography, ideology, and coloniality of Europe are conflated:

a space and a life where they feel they are going somewhere as opposed to nowhere, or at least, a space where the quality of their "going-ness" is better than what it is in the space they are leaving behind. More often than not, what is referred to as "voluntary migration" then is either an inability or unwillingness to endure and "wait out" a crisis of existential mobility (Hage 2009: 98).

In the novel, this waiting out forms part of its resolution. Mount Gurugu in Morocco is the site of an informal refugee camp inhabited by between 500 and 1,000 people, mainly young men, from West Africa. To screen its squalor and their shame, the men ironically name part of it "the residence". The camp is situated two kilometres from the Spanish autonomous, and anomalous, enclave of Melilla, which is on the African continent yet marks Europe's border with the Global South. It is structurally liminal but actively signified as "European", with "Europe as a master signifier in discourses of exclusion and deportation zones" (Soto Bermant 2017: 138). Melilla, with its 11-kilometre long, six-metre high, three-tiered razor wired fence, represents in microcosm the conflict of which I have been speaking, the paradigm case of the narrative encounter between entitlement and disposability: what Derek Gregory (2004) has termed "the colonial present". This representation of the border, marked by Melilla, is symbolic, physical, and historical. It was captured by Spain from the Moors in 1497 and established as a military outpost. Its CETI (Centre for the Temporary Stay of Migrants) holds hundreds of migrants/refugees. The divide between Africa and Europe here is 500 years or a twenty-minute walk for a young person.

Storytelling, playing football, scavenging for food and water, and preparing to jump the fence comprise an active existence which moves the representation of the refugee away from the object of pity, the hapless victim. They *are* victims, of repressive regimes, of hunger, war, poverty and unemployment, but the narrative reverses the European gaze and presents the active point of view of those held in time by the proximity of the fence and the desire to jump it. The temporariness, and the improvised quality, of their lives feature throughout, with men cooking food over an open fire, clothes hanging out to dry on trees, with plastic and cardboard sheets their only bedding. Men scavenging for food and water in the nearby city of Nador hover between hope and despair, death and life.

The narrative underscores the fact that lives are at risk from a number of perspectives, from the police who raid the camp and burn all the meagre possessions of the inhabitants, and also attack them, as well as the clandestine journey to the fence and the obvious hazards of the attempt to scale the fence. The shared strategy of the men is to approach the fence en masse, so as to outnumber the police. The sense of collective solidarity is shown, without sentimentality or romanticisation, as also shown is the "trial" of the men who exploited and violated a woman resident which, after much discussion, leads to a verdict which "departs from the logic of vengeance" (Mbembe 2008: 11), an important break with neo-colonial law. *The Gurugu Pledge* shows Fanon's "wretched of the earth" as subjects. The novel gives

fictional form to what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013: 11) has described as “a dominant Western power backed up by Euro-American epistemologies which resulted in the colonisation of African imagination and displacement of African knowledges”. The fact that everyone in the “residence” is displaced from the heart of Africa and has a past, but also speaks in French or English and is in thrall to Europe (a phone call or a letter from a European address would be a high point) articulates this hegemonic colonial legacy. The narrator comments ironically on “the brilliant future that awaited them in Europe” (GP 25). All of the people on Mount Gurugu have a life and a story which Europe cannot ignore and the novel gives them subjectivity and agency. In Mbembe’s words, “the colonized person is a living, talking, conscious, active individual whose identity arises from a three-pronged movement of violation, erasure and self-writing” (Mbembe 2008: 4). The novel articulates this violation, writes against the erasure by the European gaze, and presents an opportunity for self-storying. It begins with a first-person narrator who then hands over to the stories of a range of other men, stories which are related with frequent interruptions, often witty and ribald, by the listeners. Although each story is different, there is a narrative convergence in the sense that they share a metaphorical ‘neighbourhood’ of displacement and deprivation, the racialisation of the Black ‘other’, driven from their home countries by, variously, religious bigotry, violence, poverty, hunger, superstition and lack of work. Added to this are the cronyism, violence and corruption of African dictatorships, with Idi Amin singled out as the representative, neo-colonised figure, and the more recent build-up of armaments, the desertification of Africa, the destruction of biodiversity, and the reduction of African agricultural knowledge and expertise to the service of corporate capitalism. The narrator’s role is to make sure the stories will cross the sea and be told on the other shore.

The inhabitants are divided into language groups: “eat or manger according to whichever History the whites chose for you” (GP 65). The passivity of the syntax emphasises that, literally and metaphorically, these are “disregarded, discarded subjects”; they live in the colonial present. In the words of one man, “they told me I no longer have a country, that’s what they said at the border: you’ve no country any more, now you’re just black” (GP 75). This epitomises the racialised abjection, the precarity and lack of value I have been referring to. The lengthy sequence on football is of interest in envisioning an alternative to Europe:

People played football on Gurugu to keep warm and busy, for the hours were long and football enabled them to lose track of time, but in a different set of circumstances, they’d have read all day and into the night. And in a different reality, a team of African scholars would have come to Gurugu mountain to talk to the inhabitants and ask them to comment on Peter’s father’s poem (GP 87).

Peter is one of the mountain dwellers whose family had lost their social status years before because his father had written a poem, in a *Conceptismo* (later sixteenth/early seventeenth century) Spanish style, for which he had been expelled for its supposed indecency. That the inhabitants of Gurugu would have been able to discuss such an arcane poem indicates a different, non-colonial, reality in which learning and dignity would have been possible. It also posits an image of African identity beyond the categories imposed by Europe.

The scholars did not come but had they, the narrator suggests, this positive image might have caused some of the refugees to retrace their steps and return to their country of origin.

In an earlier, and unpublished, novel, called *Ahmed the Arab, or the Desert's Embrace*, Ávila Laurel wrote of a group of African migrants who, with the help of a millionaire, founded a city in the desert. Some of the men in this novel fantasise that if they owned Mount Gurugu they could cultivate it, grow food, and become self-sufficient; in other words, produce an Africa in miniature, free from exploitation and which they would not have to leave. The republic created would be called the Republic of Samuel Eto'o (the world-famous Cameroon player) as football is the one preoccupation which distracts them from their wretchedness. The exodus of African footballers to Europe (e.g. the current 'hero' Mohammed Salah) is held up as a model of their own ambition and names of players and European clubs are reeled off like sacred icons. What these footballers have is what is known as *exit capacity*, the mobility denied to those stuck on the mountain. The narrative is critical of these models of aspiration as the only value they represent is that of the market and a focus on the exceptional; according to Ávila Laurel (2018), football has the capacity "to interfere with African lives". Football is a sustaining, if illusory, fantasy, with men keeping fit until signed by a European club, but with no ambitions to stay and play in Africa, underlining a residual colonial legacy and the persistence of colonial rhetorics and practices, including the 'importing' by European clubs of teenage footballers who are left to fend for themselves if they do not succeed. As it is, on the mountain football is the only available reality and is more than just the opium of the people, but in different circumstances, of their own choosing, other realities might have prevailed. This is one of the features of the novel: its refutation of the de-humanising colonial argument that the Africans were naturally inferior, and its gestures towards other potentialities.

The novel does not sentimentalise the figures in the camp, as blackmail and corruption are shown, and women are used and sexually abused. Compared with the journey most of the residents have endured, including violence at bandit African checkpoints, the mountain is the least racist place they have experienced, and "it's the place they live with the most dignity on their migratory journeys" in the view of the author (Ávila Laurel 2018). Despite the appalling conditions, there are traces of conviviality and reciprocity. Some of the stories told are like moral parables, they synthesise qualities or faults which are generic. For example, the illness of one of the two women featured in the text, and her subsequent miscarriage, encapsulates the shared narrative of hope, renewal and despair. What is also shared is the humiliations and terrors faced, the common perilous journey across hundreds of miles of inhospitable terrain: "the rule of thumb was that the closer you got to the gates of Europe, the more you disposed of anything linking you to a concrete African country" (GP 90). Tactically, this makes sense, but it also marks the emptying out of a *repertoire of identities* as well as the emptying out of a continent in order to go to another one. As one other person comments, "the closer we get to the finishing line, none of us is from anywhere" (GP 121). What the novel shows critically is the existence of dependent voices combined with seeds of independent thinking: "Until we show them any different, what's written in books will be what's read out on the radio, day and night" (GP 120). This is an argument for alternative voices, counter-narratives, no longer hooked on Europe.

The Gurugu pledge itself was a collective action – contrary to the individualism of neo-liberalism – an act of unified solidarity, a mass stamping on the ground prior to an attempted scaling of the fence, during which they spoke of the colonial history of Africa. The novel concludes with this scaling and demonstrates a certain generosity of spirit and evidence of a collective African identity. The Melilla Africans, the Africans in Spain, came to the fence to hail those in the act of climbing but these failed, their failure synthesised by the shape of two figures, out of the hundreds, stuck with one leg either side of the fence. In an act of self-sacrifice and altruism those who failed the climb took the two sick women to the top of the fence in the hope that they would be rescued and given medical help. This act of solidarity undercuts the patriarchy and misogyny shown earlier in the text, a form of overcoming in itself.

The final chapter – “The Beginning and the End” – departs radically from many similar narratives in that the first-person narrator steps forward to tell his own story with a very different outcome. “I’m African”, he declares, and what follows is in keeping with one of the main themes of the novel: the construction of a potential African identity, complex and diverse, freed from the chains of dependence on Europe. This is a reminder that the people on Gurugu are not only, but also much more than, refugees. What they share is the lack of exit capacity, to use marketing jargon.

The ill-treatment of a fellow teacher, an albino, and the irrationality of followers of the occult who had damaged the man, caused the narrator to set out on “the long road to nowhere”. On the mountain he decided, after an earlier failed attempt, not to join in the attempt to scale the fence and abandoned his quest to reach Europe. Images of Africans dead on a Spanish beach confirmed him in his decision. He reflects on the impunity with which Africans are killed in Europe and on the lack of respect for their lives: “They didn’t kill you for not having papers, that was just the excuse they used” (GP 180). Symbolically, he makes his way to the mountain’s southern face, to the sides that the lights of Europe do not reach and his story becomes a narrative of decolonial thinking from the Global South: “I chose the southern face, that my gaze was turned towards the River Zambezi” (GP 183). It lays bare and makes visible the European narrative of power and casts the whole preceding narrative as “a committed epistemological resistance against epistemic violence that had prevented imaginations of the world and freedom from knowledges and cosmologies of the Global South!” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 264). The narrator’s decision to stay on the mountain is linked to the hope that he will be able “to make the story known”, and perhaps inhabit a different reality which others might also strive for. The story is the one we have just read which is both a personal story and a symptomatic one generated by a critical, decolonial lens.

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Roger Bromley is Emeritus Professor in Cultural Studies at the University of Nottingham. He worked for forty-four years in a range of UK Higher Education institutions. He is the author of *Lost Narratives: Popular Fictions and Politics* (1988); *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions* (2000), *From Alice to Buena Vista: The Cinema of Wim Wenders* (2001) and four other books, as well as more than 50 scholarly articles. His current research interests include migration, diaspora, and cinematic representations of refugees and asylum seekers.

rogbrom@yahoo.co.uk

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Carmen Concilio

We Need New Names by NoViolet Bulawayo. Paradigms of Migration: The Flight and the Fall

Abstract I: Il saggio analizza i paradigmi che definiscono l'esperienza della migrazione nel romanzo di NoViolet Bulawayo (n. 1981, Zimbabwe), *Abbiamo bisogno di nomi nuovi* (trad. it. 2014), un esempio della nuova letteratura africana, (o 'afropolitan'?). La migrazione verso gli Stati Uniti, vista dagli occhi di una ragazzina, assume il valore di un volo emancipatorio, soprattutto visti i fallimenti di altri flussi migratori interni (forzati), oltreconfine (Sudafrica), o persino verso l'Inghilterra. Per contrappunto, al volo si alterna il paradigma della caduta. La prima esperienza americana è la neve che cade, in seguito sarà l'inciampare nella lingua inglese a essere paragonato ad una caduta; infine, la caduta fisica e psichica dei migranti illegali nell'invisibilità di lavori indesiderabili e nella 'bugia' (Mehta 2016) lascia il posto alla caduta nella psicosi e nel disordine mentale, visto attraverso gli studi di etnopsichiatria di Roberto Beneduce (2015-2016) e un recentissimo racconto sulla migrazione, di Maaza Mengiste, "This is What the Journey Does" (2018).

Abstract II: This essay analyses paradigms of migration in *We Need New Names* (2013) by NoViolet Bulawayo (b. 1981, Zimbabwe), a recent example of new African (or 'Afropolitan?') literature. A teenager idealises migration to the United States as a flight to emancipation, if compared to internal flows of forcedly removed people, or unsuccessful flows to South Africa, or even to Britain. As a counterpoint, a downfall follows the flight. The first American experience is a snowfall, then stumbling on the English Language is compared to a fall; physical as well as psychic downfalls send illegal migrants into the invisibility of undesirable jobs and into lying (Mehta 2016) but also into a mental condition. This final outcome of migration has been approached with the tools of ethno-psychiatry (Beneduce 2016-2018) and the recently published short story about migration by Maaza Mengiste, "This is What the Journey Does" (2018).

In the debut novel by the Zimbabwean writer NoViolet Bulawayo (Elizabeth Zandile Tshele, born 1981 in Tsholotsho) *We Need New Names* (2013), various paradigms of migration are at play. In particular, 'flight' and 'fall' as paradigms of migration come through the eyes of a ten year-old child. In the words of Darling, the protagonist and first-person narrator, migration is synonymous with emancipation from starvation, illiteracy, unemployment, forced

removals, epidemics, structural violence, and it pivots around the metaphor of a flight away from home. Reviewers, among whom Helon Habila, have highlighted how all this appears to mirror a checklist of African bad news. Bulawayo belongs to a new generation of African writers (Bwesigye 2013), whom the novelist Taiye Selasi (Taiye Tuakli-Wosornu) named 'Afropolitans': "the newest generation of African emigrants. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world" (Selasi 2013).

Selasi's new coinage was met coldly by the scholar and media expert Marta Tveit on the basis that the definition creates a ghetto for an élite of westernised, well-off people, more generally definable as "disembedded, modernised, travelling global citizens" (Tveit 2013). Similarly, the Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina dismissed the concept as "commodification of African culture" and proposed the notion of 'Panafrikanism', thus marking identity with a more political and philosophical bias (Wainaina 2013). Quite interestingly, Selasi then twisted the concept towards a more individual rather than a collective life experience: "what it means being a local" (Selasi 2014). However, the concept goes back to the 1990s (Hanerz 1990; Schone 2009: 2) and, later on, to what the African philosopher and anthropologist Achille Mbembe wrote about Africa being itself a varied space and identifying Johannesburg with the thriving centre of Afropolitanism¹.

These writers have also been defined as 'transnational' or 'post-national', for they belong to two or more nations, languages, and cultures and freely move across them. Yet, it is necessary not to idealise trans- or post-nationalism as a wished-for condition. In his essay *The Secret Life of Cities* (2016) the Indian-New York writer Suketu Mehta warns us all that to transcend nationality is something a migrant is not ready to do, nor ready to accept at all. His/her loyalty stays with both nations. In his study on urbanized migrants in the States, Suketu Mehta claims that even the term 'globalized' is not correct, for it only applies to rich business people, floating between airports, five-star hotels and conference-halls, without grasping the reality of the surrounding 'local'. The new definition coined by Suketu Mehta, as an alternative also to 'Afropolitan', which stigmatises people from one continent, is 'inter-local': meaning, a person who is able to connect with two or more places that concern him/her, who is not linked to one single nation, who is connected and interacts with the texture of his/her surrounding physical reality, and who is characterised by multiple, heterogeneous belongings (Mehta 2016: 79).

Another possible definition for these writers could be 'transatlantic', a term suitable for writers who feel they share a common history with the Atlantic slave trade and see both sides of the Atlantic as having African roots. The latter definition is less pertinent if referred to Bulawayo, for the transatlantic perspective is marginal to her discourse². Conversely,

¹ "A way of being in the world, refusing on principle any form of victim identity – which does not mean that it is not aware of the injustice and violence inflicted on the continent and its people by the law of the world. It is also a political and cultural stance in relation to nation, to race and to the issue of difference in general" (Mbembe 2007: 28).

² Bulawayo makes one passing reference to the States as the final destination of the slave trade: "Is not 'Melika also that wretched place where they took looted black sons and daughters those many, many years ago? [...] In the footsteps of those looted black sons and daughters, we were going, yes, we were going" (Bulawayo 2013: 241).

‘panafrican’ is a term that has been recently revived and foregrounded by those African writers, artists and intellectuals who live in Africa rather than in the West³, and who give a more political bias to the debate that on the one hand tries to define the condition of migrant and diasporic people, but on the other hand pivots only around those privileged ones who are working for the cultural industry.

NoViolet Bulawayo, after all, is a young African writer. Somehow, she has a lot in common with all the writers quoted by Ugandan writer Brian Bwesigye, who are the protagonists of the brain drain that characterises African countries⁴, but, differently from them, she portrays her own Africa, thus avoiding ‘Afropolitanism’ as “the new single story about Africa”; most interestingly, she consciously adopts specific linguistic features: her mother tongue, together with African tropes (metaphors), rooted in Africa’s nature, culture and imagination⁵.

Migration as a Flight to Emancipation

Bulawayo’s novel makes it clear that previous generations used to connect migration with England, the colonial motherland. Godknows, one of Darling’s child-mates, has an uncle who migrated to London, but is moving to Dubai. Similarly, Darling indirectly refers to Britain: “Maybe it’s a British Airways plane like the one Aunt Fostalina went in to America. It’s what I will take myself when I follow Aunt Fostalina to America. [...] But I don’t know why I have to take a British Airways plane to go to America; why not an American Airways one?” (Bulawayo 2013: 34). In Darling’s childish mind the experience of migration to Britain and the States conflates.

The novel covers the decade after year 2000, when Mugabe was re-confirmed and the efforts for a real change in the country failed dramatically. The new generations started migrating either to the now democratic South Africa, or to the States, remaining the main dream country and land of opportunity. Darling is the lucky one, the pre-destined one of a gang of children living in the dispossessed neighbourhood of Paradise. With Darling, Bastard, Godknows, the pregnant eleven year-old Chipso, Sboh and Stina share an insatiable hunger that they try to satisfy by stealing all the guava fruits from the trees of the house-gardens in the well-off neighbourhood of Budapest, where mostly white people live.

When Darling thinks of “migrating” to her aunt Fostalina, to Detroit, Michigan, she thinks she will exclude herself from poverty and hunger, and will spare herself the need for stealing:

³ This is the case with Yewande Omotoso, daughter of the Nigerian writer and academic Kole Omotoso now living in South Africa, who has revived the term ‘panafricanist’. Cp. Michele Farina, ‘Sono ‘panafricana’, non afropolitan’, *Corriere della Sera. La lettura*, May 13, 2018: 21.

⁴ Brian Chikwava’s *Harare North*, about Zimbabweans in London; Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street*, about African prostitutes in Belgium; Dinaw Mengestu’s *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, about Ethiopians in Washington (DC); E. C. Esondu’s collection of stories, *Voice of America*, about Nigerians in America; Teju Cole’s *Open City*, set in New York (Bwesigye 2013).

⁵ A thorough stylistic analysis of metaphors and tropes is not possible here for reasons of space, although it would deserve to be delved into. Just one example is enough “Paradise is all tin and stretches out in the sun like a wet sheepskin nailed on the ground to dry; the shacks are the muddy colour of dirty puddles after the rain” (Bulawayo 2013: 34).

Bastard says when we grow up we'll stop stealing guavas and move on to bigger things inside the houses. I'm not really worried about that because when that time comes, I'll not even be here; I'll be living in America with Aunt Fostalina, eating real food and doing better things than stealing. But for now the guavas (Bulawayo 2013: 10).

Darling sees herself projected into a future and an elsewhere that will free her for ever from any needs. When she tells that to her friends, they respond with a less idealised perspective, based on what they often hear from adults:

Well, go, go to America and work in nursing homes. That's what aunt Fostalina is doing as we speak. Right now she is busy cleaning kaka off some wrinkled old man who can't do anything for himself, you think we've never heard the stories? Bastard screams to my back but I just keep walking (Bulawayo 2013: 15).

The other children have a much more realistic view of migration, as nothing but a chance to fill in the job vacancies that most people despise in the West and that are therefore available to foreign workers.

What Darling also "flies away from" is gender violence, of which the novel presents three episodes, all narrated with total detachment by unsympathetic and cynical children. First, they discuss Chipó's pregnancy only to tease and convince her to tell them who is responsible for her condition. Yet Chipó has withdrawn into complete aphasia. She plays with them but does not verbally interact with them. They seem indifferent as if such a condition were normal after all, even at such a young age. Second, while on their hunting expedition for guavas, they see a woman hanging from a tree. They are totally indifferent – "Can't you see she hanged herself and now she's dead?" (Bulawayo 2013: 17). Again, they do not perceive anything wrong with that: "a tall thing dangling in a tree like a strange fruit. Then we see it's not a thing but a person. Then we see it's not just a person but a woman" (Bulawayo 2013: 17).

The vision is both frightening and mesmerising and the way it has been worded, in spite of betraying a childish, naïf, and metaphoric translation of something unfamiliar into something familiar, "a strange fruit hanging from a tree", is in fact a refined citation from the poem "Strange Fruit", published by Abel Meeropol, in 1937, and famously sung by Billie Holiday in 1939, to remind people of the racist, lynching practices against African Americans. This might count as one more tribute to a transatlantic or black Atlantic history. It also shows that children's speech, idioms, and jargon sometimes may easily overlap with the speech, idioms, and jargon of adults, creating complex intertextual meanings. Indeed, the woman looks like a fruit or a flower. She hangs from a green stripe, which is like a stem, she wears a yellow dress, which is like the corolla of a flower and has red shoes, which are like stamens. This image of eerie beauty scares the children, who throw stones at her and even think of stealing her shoes in order to sell them and then buy some bread with the money they might get. However, the woman's dead body leaves them completely indifferent. Death thus appears as absolutely 'normal'.

The third episode of violence takes place grotesquely and spectacularly during the religious service, on Easter Day, when Darling puts on her good, yellow dress and goes to church with her grandmother. Here a woman is dragged on the ground while screaming insults and pleas to the men who hold her, then the Prophet, a corrupt preacher, who while presiding the ceremony, points his stick against the woman and orders the demon who he says inhabits her to leave her body. In the end, he physically assaults her in what should be a ritual of exorcism. This time young Darling sympathises with this woman, she mentally talks to her in order to claim she is not part of that violence. Chipso, on her side, reacts to this public show as if she were undergoing a psychic transfer by speaking for the first time ever since she became pregnant to reveal that her grandfather raped her, recognising in the Prophet's gestures the violence of sexual intercourse.

Darling had also submitted herself to a ritual of exorcism. The Prophet had shaken her to the point of causing her to vomit, and by doing so suggesting that he was freeing her from the spirit who possessed her, that is to say, the spirit of her dead grandfather. He had been killed by the whites in a colonial war and had been denied proper burial.

This idea of 'possession' is clearly manipulated by the fake prophet. He does not 'embody' a syncretic religion inspired by both Christian Evangelism and local Animism. He rather seems to keep the two religious systems separate, in order to make profits according to the situation, since he wants to be paid in Dollars or Euros for his services.

Yet, possession also alludes to what the ethno-psychiatrist Roberto Beneduce analyses as the embodiment and incarnation of one's past history⁶. Darling identifies – or is identified by her community – with her grandfather, a man who once had been photographed with "a bone going through his nose and wearing earrings" (Bulawayo 2013: 24). He had fought against colonial expropriation of the land and had died for it. When analysing the experience of suffering of the African migrants to Italy, Beneduce writes:

By approaching the symptom as a fluctuating signifier which cannot be circumscribed, or linked to a single event, I seek here to explore its ghostlike nature, its power to reveal the past and its painful knots. By "past" I mean not just the individual past of the patient, but also the collective, haunting past s/he has inherited. This past we call "history" is a past always confronted when stumbling upon other people's memories (Beneduce 2016: 264).

Parenthetically, one might notice that another way 'to incarnate' one's past history is symbolised by the author's pen-name, which is the toponym of her place of origin. This is another type of the symptoms Beneduce elaborated on to identify the migrants' condition (2016: 262). Bulawayo's pen-name becomes a symptom of her will 'to incarnate' her (people's) land and history. Like Jamaica Kinkaid (Elaine Cynthia Potter Richardson) before her, who migrated from Antigua to New York to become a successful writer and who similarly chose to name herself after an island, so that her provenance would become self-evident and

⁶ Here the term 'possession' seems to correspond to "a mnemonics able to transfer from generation to generation the incorporated memory of precise historical events" (Beneduce 2008: 96-97; my translation).

able to construct her Caribbean identity in the face of the world. Bulawayo, too, has built her Zimbabwean identity quite clearly and meaningfully⁷.

Never naming the country nor its dictator, Mugabe's Zimbabwe is depicted as a famished and despondent country, now left in the hands of Chinese entrepreneurs. In addition to hunger and gender violence, endemic structural violence⁸ is one more reason for migrating to the US, because its alternative, migration to South Africa, has proven more than an unsuccessful move for many. Once in the land of gold and diamonds, the male migrants disappear as if swallowed by the mines in which they work. Moreover, they never send anything back home, or when they do come back, they do so only to die of Aids.

Darling is a traumatised child. She is scared by a recurrent nightmare, and as a consequence she resists sleep. She experienced a forced removal, after witnessing the destruction of her village by bulldozers and a baby killed and maimed under the ruins. Chased by armed policemen, she and her family lost their nice, "real" house with running water. Later on, she observed the humiliation of many, their families and their astonished children in a chapter where the personal pronoun "they" is stressed: *How they appeared*. "They did not come, no. They just appeared [...] like a wretched sea. [...] They appeared with the dust from their crushed houses clinging to their hair and skin and clothes [...] they appeared broken – shards of glass people" (Bulawayo 2013: 74).

In this emblematic, short, elegiac and mournful chapter, the grief and the suffering of the people, their complete destitution and loss is symbolised by a single missing item: a stool. This singled out object can be referred to as the "unhappy object" that characterises the "melancholic" migrant's fixation on a sore, a scar, or a negative experience (Ahmed 2007: 131-135).

Woman, where is my grandfather's black stool? I don't see it here.

What, are you crazy, old man? I don't even have enough of the children's clothes and you're talking about your dead grandfather's stool!

You know it was meant to stay with the family – my greatest grandfather Sindimba passed it on to his son Salile, who passed it on to his son Ngalo, who passed it on to his son Mabhada, who passed it on to me, Mzilawalandelwa, to pass on to my son Vulindlela. And now it's gone! Now what to do? [...] All I'm saying is that stool was my whole history-

And like that they mourned perished pasts (Bulawayo 2013: 75).

⁷ In a public interview the writer explained that Violet was the name of her mother, who died when she was only 18-months old, that "No" means "with", thus NoViolet is a way to honour the memory of her mother, while Bulawayo is the name of her hometown and alludes to her feeling homesick, for she could only go back to her country from the States after 13 years (Bulawayo 2013). Cp.: *Eat, Drink and Be Literary: NoViolet Bulawayo presented in partnership with the National Book Foundation, Moderated by Ben Greenman, BAMCafé, 19 March 2014*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjOGa5BH8Ok> (consulted on 25/05/2018).

⁸ "First used by a Norwegian researcher, Galtung (1969), the term refers to any limitation to human needs, both political and economic, it involves contexts of social inequality in contemporary anthropology. Moreover, it has come to cover notions of violence caused by international trafficking and labour or infantile exploitation. Paul Farmers (1999) uses it to refer to violence inherent in political and economic relations" (Beneduce 2008: 129-130; my translation).

The missing stool is a fracture in the pattern of life, a gap between the past and the future that does not allow tradition or even only a family genealogy to establish themselves; that does not allow a father to leave anything to his descendants: his own he/story. The stool has, indeed, a very important meaning. Like the traditional headrest, the stool is one of those objects that are “common, individually owned and used, but they were also cherished. Like other personal objects, headrests were associated with the body” (Becker 1999: 82). Becker goes on quoting the art historian Roy Sieber: “Objects constantly handled [...] are believed to be imbued with a physiological exuviae as well as with the mystical quintessence of his [owner’s] individuality, creating a powerful psychic bond between owner and object” (Sieber 1980: 17).

The stool is an object with accumulated content and meaning, it represents “connection to one’s kin, one’s ancestors and one’s home, intended as a place of tradition and custom (a sanctuary), of family and value (a temple), and of history and memory (an archive)”. It is a deeply significant home item. Losing it while one’s home has been bulldozed meant to have lost everything, for that home was much more than a simple shelter and the stool was itself that home (Becker 1999: 81-83). Finally, even internal migration might equal total loss.

Darling has to undergo one more trial, she has to see her father die of Aids, after his unexpected return from South Africa. At this stage, Darling confesses that the children had found a letter in one of the pockets of the dead woman. She had taken her life because she, too, was infected by Aids.

There is one more act of violence Darling and the children witness: a pro-Mugabe riotous mob is ready to loot white people’s homes, and to confront the whites with racist slogans. Thus, a white man and woman are chased out of their home, they are given a document announcing the expropriation of their possessions, they are taken away as prisoners, most probably to be executed. The children visit the looted house, and when they open the fridge they enter a different world of bounty and food never seen before nor dreamed of (Concilio 2018: 227-242).

Another eye-opener on a world of violence is represented by the funeral of Bornfree. In his case, not only a youth of twenty-five is buried, but also the dream of a postcolonial, post-Mugabe country. After the elections nothing changes. That is why Darling chooses to leave the country. She can migrate to join her Aunt Fostalina and this will be her pass to emancipation from starvation, precocious death, illiteracy, unemployment and, above all, endemic structural violence.

A short chapter, just two pages long, like a litany, liturgically acknowledges all those who go away, the children of the land: *How they left*. The narrator steps aside and becomes external, a heterodiegetic and omniscient observer:

Look at them leaving in droves, the children of the land, just look at them leaving in droves. Those with nothing are crossing borders. Those with strength are crossing borders. Those with ambitions are crossing borders. Those with loss are crossing borders. Those in pain are crossing borders. Moving, running, emigrating, going, deserting, walking, quitting, flying, fleeing-to all over, to countries near and far, to countries unheard of, to countries whose names they cannot pronounce. They are leaving in droves (Bulawayo 2013: 145).

It is easy to understand why Darling sees migration as a flight from a country that is not at war, if not with itself, where people are famished, droughts and climate can challenge human and animal existence, political dissidents are tortured and killed, whites are persecuted, and from a country where Aids kills. Sara Ahmed acknowledges how, in specific contexts, “planes are happy objects [...] associated with flight, with moving up and away” (Ahmed 2007: 134).

Migration as Fall

There are various ways in which this novel is a bildungsroman in reverse. It is not necessarily a straightforward journey into happiness, to use Sara Ahmed’s paradigm in discussing multiculturalism and integration. All the rites of passage, the steps into knowledge and consciousness and, ultimately adulthood are for Darling a slow and gradual descent into hell, rather than a paved way to her individual development and personal progress: the hanged woman, her dying father, the abduction of the white couple, the arrival of homeless people and the departure of masses, the funeral of a young activist are all experiences that accelerate the child’s maturity, rocketing her into the realm of adulthood and life as it can be. Similarly, migration to the US, rather than being the dreamed-of flight towards liberation, is also looked at as a fall.

Thus, migration is a sort of downfall, from Paradise to paradise. Paradoxically, Paradise is the poverty stricken slum where Darling and her friends live, and yet it is the longed for space of infancy. The true paradise must be elsewhere. “America” materialises on Darling’s lips as “Destroyedemichigen”, once again, a crooked, broken – at the very level of language – version of a paradise. Once looking out of the window, the girl only sees a heavy downfall of snow. And snow means rejection. The rejection the landscape and the climate exert on the subject: “like it’s telling you, with its snow, that you should go back to where you came from” (Bulawayo 2013: 148). The world is not at all as it should be, as it was imagined: “this place does not look like my America, doesn’t even look real” (Bulawayo 2013: 150).

Slowly, with the snow melting, Darling adapts herself to life in the States, she even participates in a wedding where an African man gets married to a white woman, most probably to get a green card. Here, Darling meets an amazing character: Tshaka Zulu.

People are standing in a circle, listening to Tshaka Zulu sing a traditional song. Even though his body is all wrinkled with age, he looks beautiful and fierce in a knee-length skirt made of sharpened bones, and hoop earrings dangle from his ears. On his head is a hat made of animal fur. He wears matching armbands around his thin arms. In one hand is a long white shield scattered with little black spots. Tshaka Zulu has the large booming voice [...]. When the song finishes everybody applauds, and Tshaka Zulu beams with pride. It is his thing to perform at weddings and wherever people from our country are holding events and looking at him at it you would never think there was something wrong with him, that he was really a patient at Shadybrook (Bulawayo 2013: 178).

Tshaka Zulu's attire and ceremony is too carefully staged to be just a fake show. In this grotesque marriage, Tshaka Zulu is the only serious person, 'embodying' the figure of a Shaman, or the most cruel and violent soldier king in the history of Africa, a leader who was able to unite the Zulu nation, and successfully lead his people against the British colonisers, as Thomas Mofolo's historical-novel hero shows⁹.

Tshaka is "true", is real, is sincere. His performance is neither a game nor a mere performance like back home, after the funeral of Bornfree, when all the children started mimicking the torture and death of the young political activist, and when the BBC journalists asked "What kind of game were you just playing?", the children answered: "Can't you see this is for real?" (Bulawayo 2013: 144).

As specified before, this novel plays on reversals. In order to create a world looked at through the eyes of children, reality and fiction are turned upside down and are difficult to tell from each other. Thus, Tshaka has to be taken seriously, in spite of the fact that he is resident in a local mental health clinic. This ceremony anticipates his final flight/fall.

The fall becomes relevant in one more episode of the novel, when Darling observes her Aunt stumbling on the English language, while on the phone:

The problem with English is this: you usually can't open your mouth and it comes out just like that – first you have to think what you want to say. Then you have to find the words. Then you have to carefully arrange those words in your head. Then you have to say the words quietly to yourself, to make sure you got them okay. And finally, the last step, which is to say the words out loud and have them sound just right. But then because you have to do all this, when you get to the final step, something strange happened to you and you speak the way a drunk walks. And because you are speaking like falling, it's as if you are an idiot [...]. And then the problem with those who speak only English is this: they don't know how to listen; they are busy looking at your falling instead of paying attention to what you are saying (Bulawayo 2013: 193-194).

The fall is not only psychological. It does not only involve stumbling on the language, in terms of a Freudian twist of the tongue. In fact, migrants can perfectly master the language that constitutes the new reality in which they live. Switching from one's mother tongue to English is seen as both a flight and a fall: "When we were alone we summoned the horses of our languages and mounted their backs and galloped past skyscrapers. Always, we were reluctant to come back down" (Bulawayo 2013: 240).

When Darling eventually receives a phone call from home, from her own mother, after a long time, she is asked what it felt like falling down:

How was it falling? Mother says.
Falling? I say, racking my brain to figure out what she means.
Falling from where? I say.

⁹ Originally written in Sesuto and in a biblical style, it is one of the first novels written in Africa, as a product of Missionary education (Mofolo 1931).

Falling from the sky because I apparently did not give birth to you. Maybe an angel did because otherwise you'd know you actually had a mother and you'd maybe call her every once in a while to see how she's doing, Mother says (Bulawayo 2013: 205).

The idea that migration is like falling from the sky, a sort of new birth that erases the past and provides only the future, had already been employed by Salman Rushdie in that unforgettable opening of his novel *Satanic Verses* (1989):

'To be born again' sang Gibreel Farishta tumbling from the heavens, 'first you have to die. Ho ji! Ho ji! To land on the bosomy earth, first one needs to fly. Tat-taa! Taka-thun!' [...] Just before dawn one winter's morning, New Year's Day or thereabouts, two real, full-grown living men fell from a great height, twenty-nine thousand and two feet, towards the English Channel, without benefit of parachutes or wings, out of a clear sky (Rushdie 2008: 3).

Recalling an air accident occurred over London, Rushdie imaginatively, literally drops two Indian migrants on English territory as angels falling from the sky. Their arrival and their presence in the country is as that of aliens, and soon they are even transformed into monsters – once again, literally and not only metaphorically – by the simple power of description the British exert over them. This is Rushdie's way to describe the process of "othering" to which migrants are subjected by a racist gaze.

Differently from Rushdie, Bulawayo chooses the paradigm of the fall as a way to describe the full immersion of the migrant into a totally new reality. No matter how distant the two narratives might appear, the urge to equating migration to fall also hints at the implied idea of integration as "a key term for what we now call in the UK 'good race relations'. Although integration is not defined as 'leaving your culture behind' (at least not officially), it is unevenly distributed, as a demand that new or would be citizens 'embrace' a common culture that is already given" (Ahmed 2007: 131). The fall is the perfect metaphor of that 'leaving everything behind' and 'embracing' a pre-packed culture.

The fall is also paired with what Bulawayo explicitly calls "the costs" of migration, or "to pay for a new life". In her novel, actual falls are also part of the price paid for integration, such as that of a worker in the building industry: "Ecuador fell from forty stories working on a roof and shattered his spine, screaming, ¡Mis hijos! ¡Mis hijos! On his way down!" (Bulawayo 2013: 244).

Another type of fall is the fall into invisibility that affects all migrants and seems to be a universal experience, as well as the fall into lies. This is a common preoccupation of both Suketu Mehta and Roberto Beneduce, who look at the effects of migration on people's daily lives. The lies to those who remained at home and the lies to the authorities or their representatives in the host country. When Darling writes her first letters back home, she is careful to:

leave out some things as well, like how the weather was the worst because there was almost always something wrong with it [...]. That the house we lived in wasn't

even like the ones we'd seen on TV when we were little [...]. I didn't tell them how in the summer nights there sometimes was the bang-bang-bang of gunshots in the neighbourhood [...] and how one time a woman a few houses from ours drowned her children in a bathtub, all four of them, how there were poor people who lived on the streets [...]. I left out these things and a lot more, because they embarrassed me, because they made America not feel like My America, the one I had always dreamed of back in Paradise (Bulawayo 2013: 188).

Migrants more often than not need to tell lies to those back home, to omit what is unbearable and to show that they are successfully improving their social status. Suketu Mehta provides examples of how a Bengali in New York used to live with a big Mercedes-Benz parked in his lane. The car's maintenance had cost much more than the family could afford. But, once photos were sent back home, that was a message of prosperity (even though only apparent prosperity). Rwandans, on the other hand, are financed by the Netherland's Government to buy furniture. In turn, they buy very cheap pieces of furniture, and save money for their journey back home, where they arrive equipped with the most expensive and eccentric shoes and clothes on. These kinds of lies also might entice other people to leave their countries. A man from Delhi eventually visited his legendary cousins in Kentucky, only to discover what a squalid life he was living there and became furious at his lies (Mehta 2016: 17-22).

Roberto Beneduce detects the same attitudes towards lies in migrants to Europe and to Italy, while quoting Sayad (2004: 17-25) and Bourdieu (2004: xiii): "when they analysed the silences and the lies told by immigrants to their families about all things concerning their jobs, the difficulties of integration, and life in Europe with its misery and loneliness, they talked about 'innocent' lies" (Beneduce 2015: 557).

Much more tragically, claims Suketu Mehta, migrants inevitably live in a world of lies. They lie in order to survive. They must wear masks. An asylum seeker from Congo testified what it means to be paperless in New York: it means you are not yourself, for most of the time you are someone else. A first person with a name rented from a legal migrant; a second person, victim of rape and torture; a third person, the true young middle-class African woman living in the States under a secret name (Mehta 2016: 22). Both Mehta and Beneduce stress that migrants are forced to tailor and stage their narratives to satisfy the authorities' and bureaucrats' hunger for gruesome stories and atrocities. And yet, "Changing name, inventing a story, disavowing your birth-town, or your age, constitute a painful process, perceived as both a necessary tactic and a dispassion with little possibility of redemption" (Beneduce 2015: 564).

Darling, too, is ready to narrate this fall into invisibility conferred by the lies forced upon migrants by state bureaucracy, for, as Beneduce reminds us "lying is often the only possible reply to the hypocrisies that regulate migration, or the laws on the recognition of human rights" (2015: 562):

For the visas and passports, we begged, despaired, lied [...] we applied for school visas because that was the only way out.

Instead of going to school, we worked. [...] Security cards said Valid for work only with INS authorization, but we gritted our teeth and broke the law and worked; [...] And because we were breaking the law, we dropped our heads in shame; [...] we were now illegals. [...] And because we were illegal and afraid to be discovered we mostly kept to ourselves. [...] We hid our names, gave false ones when asked. [...] And when at work they asked for our papers, we scurried like hens and flocked to unwanted jobs (Bulawayo 2013: 240-243).

Moreover, the costs of migrating also affect the psychic life of migrants. There is another type of fall: Tshaka's fall into madness. Tshaka lives in a mental health clinic, where now and then he gets into fits of eccentricity, and Aunt Fostalina is called in to help. She just stays there and listens to whatever Tshaka has to say:

Tshaka Zulu is wearing his traditional dress and standing on the bed. [...] Tshaka Zulu picks up his shield, raises it above his graying head, and shouts, Bayethe, I welcome you to my kraal, do you want to see my spear? And I have to try hard to suppress a laugh. I know he is not himself and all, but this is something else. The good thing, though, is that he is not dangerous. He gets down from the bed and proceeds toward his wooden stool, the kind that old men used at home, and sits under the poster of a topless Masai girl, crazy beads all over her body (Bulawayo 2013: 234-235).

Tshaka Zulu is not the only character affected by mental disorder in the novel. Born-free's mother, after the death of her 25-year-old son, runs away from the cemetery and ever since she never stops walking around aimlessly. Prince, a newly arrived cousin, on his way to Texas, stops at Aunt Fostalina's place, he "has burn scars on his arms and back where they burned him. He is young but now he looks aged. [...] His face is hard and terrible and the light in his eyes is gone" (Bulawayo 2013: 155). Perhaps, Prince is a political dissident who underwent tortures back in Zimbabwe, now he is in the States with his little zoo of wooden animals, probably to sell them as Africa's exotica. He polishes them, he plays with them, as if he were a child. Only Aunt Fostalina understands that "he is coping with everything that happened there" (Bulawayo 2013: 158). And still:

Prince is talking to himself more and more, like maybe the people in his head have really come out and he can see them. Sometimes he yells and screams and kicks like somebody is trying to do things to him. Aunt Fostalina shakes Prince to make him stop but she is not strong enough. He is flailing his burned arms and screaming for help now. When he stops Aunt Fostalina wraps him in her thin arms like he is a baby. [...] When he starts talking again she sings him a lullaby (Bulawayo 2013: 159).

Finally, Uncle Kojo, Fostalina's partner, turns mad when his son TK enrolls to go to Afghanistan and does not send news. His father starts driving his car all over the place without a precise destination, to the point that Darling now calls him 'Vasco da Gama', for he never stops driving around, to assuage his grief.

All these cases of fragility and vulnerability that affect those who have experienced a

tremendous loss, also affect migrants, whose unstable life and whose adaptability undergo unbearable trials. It seems that the condition of migrancy – no matter where from – always involves traumas and mental breakdowns. Or at least a clash between “traumatic pasts, myth production, politics of self, historical imagination, as well as contemporary threats, new conflicts, and individual trajectories” (Beneduce 2016: 262).

Perhaps, this is why Bulawayo forges chapters where the collective pronouns ‘they’ and ‘we’ become symbols of universality, of a common, shared experience and destiny for migrants. The chapter entitled *How they lived* is clear example of this:

And when they asked us where we were from, we exchanged glances and smiled with the shyness of child brides. They said, Africa? We nodded yes. What part of Africa? We smiled. [...] Is it where the old president rigged the election and people were tortured and killed and a whole bunch of them put in prison and all, there where they are dying of cholera – oh my God, yes, we’ve seen your country –, it’s been on the news [...] water in our eyes broke [...] we wept (Bulawayo 2013: 238).

The first person plural pronoun ‘we’ does not only include Zimbabweans, naturally, but migrants as such. They are described as taken by fits of bulimia for in the US they see more food than in all their life, they “eat like pigs, like wolves, like dignitaries, like vultures, like stray dogs, like monsters [...]” (Bulawayo 2013: 239). Their dreams soon come to an end, they leave school and go to work, they become illegals. And once illegal, they start providing false names, they even start calling one another with the name of their countries, “crafting a different subjectivity for themselves”¹⁰. Now, for real. Not as in the games of the nations Darling used to play with her mates as a child back home. Now in the real world any bad job is a good job: low-paying, backbreaking, cleaning toilets, picking tobacco, butchering animals, working like donkeys, like slaves, like madmen in order to send money home, without any chance to go back to visit relatives and old parents, for the lack of the right papers. The life of the migrant is the life of an exile, for ever excluded, for ever elsewhere, never able to re-enter the land of the ancestors. An endless fall:

For the visas and passports, we begged, despaired, lied, grovelled, promised, charmed, bribed – anything to get us out of the country. For his passport and travel, Tshaka Zulu sold all his father’s cows, against the old man’s wishes (Bulawayo 2013: 240).

Tshaka Zulu’s case is emblematic. In his case, there appears an intertwining of “cultural idioms of suffering and forms of historical consciousness” (Beneduce 2016: 263). On the one hand, like any other migrant he had invested all his possessions to pay for his journey, he lost everything, he had to give up everything. At home, Tshaka Zulu might have been a shepherd or might have become a shaman¹¹. Here, in the US, he only incarnates the delu-

¹⁰ “Inventing a new name, age, and, in some cases, even nationality, are acts that represent a complex and tiring work of bricolage aimed at overcoming problems. We should ask what its psychological costs are” (Beneduce 2015: 563).

¹¹ “I don’t know exactly what kind of craziness Tshaka Zulu suffers from; Aunt Fostalina told me the name

sional phantasy of a warrior king without a kingdom, without a war to fight. And yet, the allusion to the fact that he had to sell and sacrifice all his father's cattle, without the old man's consent, permission and blessing seems to echo a historical event. In 1856, a fifteen year-old Xhosa girl named Nongqawuse produced a prophecy, claiming that all the cattle should be killed so that the Xhosa people would regain their supremacy and would be able to defeat the white men, when the dead would rise again and come to their help. The killing of the cattle and the destruction of the crops caused starvation and destitution. Xhosa people, the survivors of this silent massacre, were removed as slaves by colonial authorities, causing the complete debacle of the Xhosa nation. Tshaka Zulu's sacrifice of his father's cattle sounds reminiscent of that terrible historical fact, that instead of stopping colonialism, ended up paving the way to it. Selling his cattle and buying his flight to the United States, Tshaka Zulu had earned his downfall:

At Shadybrook, Tshaka Zulu meets us at the door [...] hands me a real spear, and says, Be armed, warrior, those white vultures, wretched beaks dripping with blood, must not be allowed to settle on this black land. [...] In addition to wearing his dress, Tshaka Zulu has painted his body a bright red color, and his head is all red and black and white feathers. [...] Tshaka Zulu is rushing, his animal-skin skirt swooshing, the colourful feathers on his head dancing. Then he breaks into a run, [...] Tshaka Zulu's spear sails in the air, but it doesn't go far before falling on the pavement. By the time he bends to pick it up, the police cars have descended. Doors open and bang and I'm seeing guns all over [...]. Drop your weapon! Stop! Get on the ground! Show your hands! Drop your weapon! Drop your weapon! And I know that Tshaka Zulu will not drop his weapon. When I look over my shoulder, he is lunging skyward like some crazy plane trying to take off (Bulawayo 2013: 273).

In this tragi-comic climax, Tshaka Zulu's flight of freedom is symbolic of his condition, but also of his aspiration. He had become enslaved by his own migrancy and his derangement now works as a "counter-memory" in Beneduce's terms (2016: 264). In this final scene, that looks like an episode of a typical American TV criminal series, where the police always comes right on time to save the good ones and punish the bad guys, the police is waging war against a harmless old man, staging the hallucination of a warrior king defeating white colonial powers (or, his own "internalization of hegemonic forces" – Beneduce 2016: 263) on the land of the Blacks. Darling knows and is sure that he will never drop his weapon.

What Beneduce writes about migrants 'embodying' their past history is quite clear here. The failures of one's life "namely social marginality, paranoid symptoms, racial phobia, violence, an unaccountable resentment of the small pitfalls of daily communication, and

one time but I have forgotten it because it was a complicated name" (Bulawayo 2013: 236). This seems to match the term 'Shamanism' intended as having to do with "the experience of suffering and illness in Shamans' biographies (Lewis). They were described as "hurt doctors. This does not match, conversely, the assumption that Shamans are affected by serious psychic problems (Davereux). Today there are an increasing number of occurrences of 'urban Shamanism' or 'Neo-Shamanism', a phenomenon that originates in social, economic, moral and cultural uncertainty (Lindquist 2006)" (Beneduce 2008: 112; my translation).

an overwhelming feeling of dispossession" (Beneduce 2016: 264), become the symptoms of mental disability, fragility and vulnerability. Migrancy turns into a mental condition. Tshaka's flight, his attempt at taking off towards the sky is, in fact, a final fall. Derrida reminds us that the word symptom "means 'fall': case, unfortunate event, coincidence, what falls due [échéance], mishap" (Derrida 2002: 374). Similarly, Sara Ahmed speaks of the melancholic migrant, who "cannot let go of his suffering, as incorporating the very object of own loss":

The melancholic migrant holds onto the unhappy objects of difference, such as the turban, or at least the memory of being teased about the turban, which ties it to a history of racism. Such differences – one could think of the burqa – become sore points or blockage points, where the smooth passage of communication stops (Ahmed 2007: 133).

A similar occurrence has been detected by the Ethiopian writer Maaza Mengiste, who tells of a similar experience¹². She describes a man in a café, in Florence: "I recognize him for the East African that he is, a young man of Eritrean or Ethiopian origin with a slender frame, delicate features, and large eyes. He has the gaunt look of other recently arrived immigrants whom I have met, a thinness that goes beyond a natural state of the body" (Mengiste 2018). The man seems to want to pass unnoticed, to recoil and shrink, to make himself invisible, till the moment he goes out and, almost tipping over, gains speed and bumps into passers-by:

Then, abruptly, he stops. He is so still that curious eyes turn on him, this sunlit figure stepping calmly into the middle of the busy intersection. He stands there, immobile and slightly stunned as cars come to a halt and motorcyclists slow. Traffic waits for him to move. Instead, he begins to gesture, a conductor leading an invisible orchestra. His bony arms bend and extend, propelled by an energy only growing stronger. Each sweep of his hand pulls the rest of him upward then twists him in an awkward circle. He continues as observers pause, then shake their heads and walk on by. Soon, he is working his mouth around words, and even before he starts, I know he is about to shout (Mengiste 2018).

The man has become visible and audible, although no one pays attention to him, he is shouting in order to feel alive, suggests the author, acting as if in a Shakespearian drama, conducting an invisible orchestra, twisting his body in an urban and trafficked space. He is not mad, he is not a lunatic. On the contrary: this is "what the journey does". He incarnates his journey, the violence, the traumas, possibly even the tortures, or simply the loss of a whole life.

"Lazarus", writes Mengiste, he is like the biblical one, who has come back alive from a journey that had deeply transformed him: "You did not leave home like this. This is what the journey does" (Mengiste 2018) and the author cannot but empathically feel ache in her chest:

¹² *The New York Review of Books* (Mengiste 2018).

It comes again, that ache in the middle of my chest. For a moment, it is so strong that I am sure he can feel it. I am certain it is a tether binding us together and he will turn in just the right way and I will be exposed. If he looks at me, then our lives will unfold and in front of us will be the many roads we have taken to get to this intersection in Florence and we will reveal ourselves for what we are: immigrant, migrant, refugee, African, East African, black, foreigner, stranger, a body rendered disobedient by the very nature of what we are (Mengiste 2018).

Both the East African man of Mengiste's short story and Tshaka Zulu's performance in Bulawayo's novel are clear examples of "what the journey does", as well as ways to acknowledge symptoms in migrants' narratives, avoiding "compulsive diagnoses" (Beneduce 2016: 271).

Beneduce claims that "after all, asylum seekers, immigrants, and refugees are, broadly speaking, 'dominated subjects'. They are a heterogeneous group, but they all react in the face of unbearable situations of injustice" (2015: 560). Similarly, in spite of the fact that individual experiences of migration are all different from each other and that flows of migration in different countries are not necessarily comparable, indeed there are certain affinities of vulnerability among migrants, whatever the countries they come from, whatever their age and gender, that often enough pass through the lies of their lives, as both Suketu Mehta and Roberto Beneduce say, by providing a psychological profile of migrants from a variety of places of origin. As a final remark, it must be added that both Mengiste and Bulawayo do not surrender to a representation of happy integration. Indeed, they do neither obliterate nor negate the migrant's 'melancholia', thus refusing one single story about migration and including cases of male mental disorder – or, better, "traces of historical events, expressions of present dispossession, and symptoms, all at once" (Beneduce 2016: 273) – in their narratives.

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Carmen Concilio is associate professor of English and Postcolonial Literature at the University of Turin. Her research fields include British Modernism, Postcolonial Studies, Eco-Digital Humanities, Migration and Partnership Studies. Her most recent publications include, as editor and author, *New Critical Patterns in Postcolonial Discourse. Historical Traumas and Environmental Issues* (Trauben 2012), *Word and Image in Literature and the Visual Arts* (Mimesis International 2016), *Antroposcenari. Storie, Paesaggi, Ecologie* (Il Mulino 2018), *Imagining Ageing. Representations of Age and Ageing in Anglophone Literatures* (Transcript 2018). She has published articles on postcolonial Anglophone literature in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *Le Simplegadi*, *Anglistica Aion*, *Altre Modernità*, *Il Tolomeo*, *English Literature and RiCognizioni*.

carmen.concilio@unito.it

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Pietro Deandrea

In Every Holt and Heath: Spatial Counter-Actions in Contemporary British Literature on Migrants

Abstract I: Nell'occuparsi della letteratura sui migranti nella Gran Bretagna della globalizzazione contemporanea, questo articolo prende in esame le forme di segregazione spaziale che imprigionano questi nuovi schiavi – siano essi rifugiati, richiedenti asilo o 'migranti economici'. Nello specifico, il contributo si concentra sulle forme *istituzionali* degli spazi di detenzione, mettendone in luce le affinità con le forme di sfruttamento illegale. Opere come *The Bogus Woman* di Kay Adshead e le raccolte sul tema dei rifugiati come *Refugee Tales*, *Over Land*, *Over Sea* e *A Country of Refuge* mettono all'indice le modalità in cui i migranti vengono brutalmente detenuti e come forme più subdole di detenzione indotte dalle istituzioni siano disseminate nel territorio; allo stesso tempo, queste opere propongono azioni di contrasto che cercano di re-inventare gli spazi in questione. Su questo aspetto conclusivo, l'articolo identifica quattro strategie principali: meta-letteraria, metaforica, re-immaginativa e riappropriativa.

Abstract II: Focusing on the literature on globalisation's migrants in contemporary Britain, this article examines the forms of spatial seclusion imprisoning these new slaves – be they refugees, asylum seekers or 'economic migrants'. More specifically, the contribution concentrates on the *institutional* forms of spatial imprisonment, highlighting their similarities with illegal exploitation. Works like Kay Adshead's play *The Bogus Woman* and collections on refugees such as *Refugee Tales*, *Over Land*, *Over Sea* and *A Country of Refuge* point to the ways in which migrants are brutally detained and at how subtler forms of institutionally-induced detention are disseminated through the country, while proposing counter-actions which aim at reimagining contested spaces. On this final aspect, the article identifies four main strategies: meta-literary, metaphorical, re-imaginative and re-appropriative.

New forms of slavery induced by migratory phenomena have been spreading in Britain since the early 1990s¹. In August 2017 the National Crime Agency reported that more than 300 policing operations were underway throughout the country "with cases affecting every

¹ The use of the term 'slavery' in this context is supported by a substantial bibliography on the topic, and it is based on the United Nations 1982 new definition of slavery: "slavery is any form of dealing with human beings leading to the forced exploitation of their labour" (Anderson 1993: 11).

large town and city” and trafficking “so widespread that ordinary people would be unwittingly coming into contact with victims every day” (Casciani 2017: n.p.).

On a global scale, critical and creative literature on these new slaveries often refers to their invisibility and consequently has recourse to the trope of the ghost. Benjamin Skinner, for instance, writes: “Slavery is the greatest human rights challenge of my generation. [...] But in the first couple of weeks in any new country that I visited, my greatest challenge was finding a single slave” (2008: xvii). In the British context, this invisibility is produced by series of illegal sites of detention including private homes, brothel-flats, agricultural fields, factories, building sites, homes for the elderly, means of transportation and beaches, to mention a few. All these places where human trafficking thrives are related to Britain’s illegal labour market, which in turn rests on the highly unregulated features of the British labour economy. As a consequence, literature on the issue witnessed the emergence of the trope of the concentration camp – and all those sites may be seen as forming a “concentratory archipelago” (Deandrea 2015: 16-17). As Giorgio Agamben writes, “We must learn to recognize it [the camp] in all of its metamorphoses” (2000: 44). Great Britain is crisscrossed by a diversity of internal borders segregating migrants from other sectors of society: Étienne Balibar (2004: 1) identifies, within European countries, a proliferation of borders, transversal to the national space rather than located at its confines.

This article is concerned with the legal and institutional forms of imprisonment detaining migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in contemporary Britain, operated by a series of criminalising governmental policies which produce effects similar to illegal forms of trafficking and detention. Through an analysis of some literary works on the subject, the following pages highlight the spatial boundaries which constrain the lives of these migrants and the ensuing impact on their identity. The final section focuses on some artistic forms of counter-action which share a drive to reclaim spatial freedom. Some of the works analysed were produced in the wake of the media-amplified ‘refugee crisis’ of summer 2015 and benefited from the participation of renowned authors who took a great interest in the issue.

Institutional Detention

First performed and published in 2001, Kay Adshead’s *The Bogus Woman* has enjoyed constant popularity in the following years, testifying to the undiminished urgency of the issue of criminalised migrants². The play is a monologue delivered by a single actress who acts out more than forty roles including the protagonist, an African human-rights journalist who flies to London to escape those who exterminated her family and then brutally raped her. Having arrived on forged documents, she is sent to one of Britain’s infamous detention centres:

YOUNG WOMAN (*astonished*):
Campsfield Detention Centre.

² In her “Author’s Note” (2015) to the play’s latest edition, sixteen years after its first publication, Adshead writes: “And still, victims of the most horrendous crimes [...] are still being locked up as criminals [...] still [...] I am so glad my play is being seen again in this fine new production, but very sad indeed that the story it tells is more resonant than ever” (Adshead 2015: n.p.).

A tangled tower
of twenty foot high razor wire
secretly coils all the way
from Oxford

(*Very anxious*) Where am I?
How long will I be here?
What happens next?
What happens now?

YOUNG WOMAN AS GUARD:
Shut up
little nigger woman (Adshead 2001: 23).

Quite clearly, the young woman finds herself jailed, indefinitely and abusively. The use of prison-like spaces as destinations for non-criminal migrants constitutes a widespread practice in contemporary Britain. On their visits to a detention centre, Marina Lewycka writes that “the furniture was bolted to the floor and there were bars on the windows” (2016: 86), while Ali Smith recounts having to go through four security checks:

after she’s searched me from head to feet, the woman will unlock a door and we’ll go into a waiting space and the woman will open another locked door on the other side of the room which will open into a yard with a razor-wire fence so high and encircling such a tiny yardspace that it would pass as a literal example of surreality (2016: 57).

Understandably, the protagonist of *The Bogus Woman* expresses anxiety at her imprisonment, exacerbated by the institutional and inhuman practice of indefinite detention. In David Herd’s words:

a person who is not [...] charged with any crime can be detained for months or years, pending their removal. At the recently closed Dover Immigration Removal Centre, for example, the longest period of detention was over four years. Pending is the word. We are deep, here, within the lexicon of suspension (Herd 2016b: 135).

This might seem to lie beyond the spatial analysis offered in this article. On the other hand, given that indefinite detention is not permissible under British criminal law, the dilemma expressed by Herd is crucial:

how is the institution of the removal centre legal? Or, rather, since, in conventional terms, it plainly offends legal principles, what relation does such a site have to the law? The answer is that it seems to stand just outside: subject to the law’s authority but not governed by its defining protections; a setting where different rules of sovereignty and temporality apply (2016b: 138).

Herd's question points to Agamben's concept of "state of exception" (Agamben 2005) and to Balibar's vision of transversal borders. The scenario is further complicated by the institutional practice of arbitrary and punitive transfers of detained migrants:

YOUNG WOMAN:

Following his
complaint
about the food
the day before

the Gambian
is being
'bumped out'

forcibly removed
to Winston Green
or
Rochester
or Reading gaol

on some
trumped up
charge (Adshead 2001: 55).

Here there are evident similarities to other illegal forms of imprisonment composing the fluid, ever-shifting concentrationary archipelago of British new slaveries, aimed at stifling any form of solidarity and collective reaction. In the case of Chinese sexual slaves, for instance: "The Misses get rotated each week, sent to different parlours. [...] Swapping, I discovered, is standard practice in the sex trade" (Pai 2008: 102).

The workers implementing the system, as Adshead writes, are used to behaving abusively, if not in a racist manner:

YOUNG WOMAN:

(*Whispers*) Group 4
Prison for Profit
wardens
ex army
hired to brutalise
in twelve-hour shifts
at four pounds an hour (Adshead 2001: 23)

G4S, which has had to face numerous scandals because of its abuses of power, also profits from the US and Israeli detention systems (Solombrino 2017: 79). Multinational private companies dealing with security management represent the opposite facet of Balibar's

transversal borders restraining globalisation's migrants: they easily cross national boundaries, and thus provide an example of what Laleh Khalili defines as "imperial isomorphism" (2010: 415).

Disseminated Detention

In *The Bogus Woman* the period of the protagonist's detention is later replaced by a different sort of captivity:

YOUNG WOMAN

I have at last been granted
Temporary Admission.

If I break conditions
I can be deported
at any time. [...]
I cannot
change address
without permission.
I must report weekly
to the police station
and the
Department of Social Services
to receive
my thirty-pound food voucher.
Of course,
I cannot work (Adshead 2001: 97-98).

All these rules, whereby one cannot even make use of public transport, gradually drive the Young Woman to a state of 'managed' destitution, against which she will resort to prostitution. The constant threat of detention and deportation – or "deportability", as defined by Nicholas De Genova (2002: 438-439) – may be conceived of, psychologically, as a torturing prolongation of indefinite detention. As Ali Smith writes: "And being out of detention, and knowing they can put you back in detention? It is all like being in detention. Detention is never not there" (Smith 2016: 55).

Here, too, Balibar's vision can apply: Britain's landscape seems to be traversed by a series of ethereal, invisible borders between various categories of people. Commenting on the spatial restrictions mentioned above, David Herd states that their general effect "is to fix a person in a given location, often for months and years on end (over a decade is not at all uncommon) [...] ex-detainees [...] have a deeply compromised relation to public space" (2016b: 36).

The migrant voiced by Abdulrazak Gurnah concludes his story on a similar note: "I have no choice but to live where I am told to live and wait for the next hearing to allow my application to be considered. Do you know what limbo means? It means the edge of hell" (Gurnah 2016: 39). Jerome Phelps aptly declared that, for these people designated as outside the political community, "necropower is to a large extent organized spatially" (2016). Conse-

quently, potential relations with the so-called ‘citizens’ are foreclosed: “We hesitate to relate to them, and vice versa, because the state they find themselves in, while occupying the same geographical space, is so fundamentally different” (Farrier 2012: 58)³. It is this difference in state, we may assume, that makes Adshead’s Young Woman proclaim in disbelief: “This can’t be happening / in England, August nineteen ninety-seven” (Adshead 2001: 63).

Recent history (from autumn 2017 to spring 2018) has shown how these sorts of persecuting restrictions are not limited to globalisation’s migrants, as might be expected. I am referring to the criminalisation of members of the so-called ‘Windrush generation’ (Khomami & Naujokaityte), a migratory wave which tends to be considered by many to be a pacified and well-established sector of contemporary Britain. Amongst other things, the whole affair suggests the aptness of another reflection by Balibar, when he considers migrants to be only the vanguard of a European “recolonization of social relations” mounting to “an exclusion from all or part of social rights on the basis of nationality but, little by little, to an increased vulnerability of all workers” (Balibar 2004: 1)⁴.

Spatial Counter-actions and the Arts

YOUNG WOMAN:

[...] Out!

Out into the courtyard.

Fifty brothers and sisters

spill

suddenly dangerous

into the mean sunshine

The air smelling like freedom

Some will lose their voice

at the injustice of it.

An old man

kicks down a wooden door

finding pots and planks,

and paints

‘prisoner of conscience’

pointing his placard

at the cameras (Adshead 2001: 60).

³ Liz Fekete describes these migrants as “quarantined within an alternative welfare system” (2018: n.p.).

⁴ The Windrush scandal represents the culmination of Theresa May’s infamous Home Office policy of “hostile environment”. Since 2013, it set up a net of controls involving employers, landlords, banks, doctors and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency – thus creating further internal borders: “aliens, at every identity check or internal control, carry the border within them” (Fekete 2018: n.p.).

When the umpteenth abuse by the guards sparks a revolt inside Campsfield, fire and smoke drive the detainees to break into the open, lamenting their situation in the face of people watching them from outside the centre (this is based on real events which were to lead to the trial of the ‘Campsfield Nine’). Their rebellion is far from being a ‘breaking out’, of course. Nevertheless, it constitutes a significant re-appropriation of spaces which have been institutionally negated or restricted to them, as the reaction of Campsfield authorities suggests:

LOUDSPEAKERS:

Please leave the courtyard

I repeat

Leave the courtyard [...].

You are in serious breach of the law (60).

The gesture of the old man, whose desperate energy is reinforced by a phonetic pattern alliterating on [p] and [k], is meant to make his ordeal known to the greater public, thus establishing a connection with the media and society at large and breaking, albeit briefly, the segregated nature of detention centres for migrants and the transversal boundaries identified by Balibar. Ali Smith’s story “The Detainee’s Tale” comes to the same realisation:

On the train home this evening, I’ll think of the moment you say to me, as we’re saying goodbye: people don’t know about what it’s like to be a detainee. They think it’s like what the government tells them. They don’t know. You have to tell them (Smith 2016: 61).

Among the many organisations which fight against immigration detention⁵, Freed Voices is composed of former detainees who work for similar aims: mapping detention back onto the communities from which detainees are usually excluded; raising awareness by campaigning at local and national level. They also produce “psycho-geographic maps” of detention centres “with different colours to represent different emotional states” (Phelps 2016). Their attempt to recreate the experience of detention, then, goes beyond denouncing, describing and analysing, and presents the phenomenon as a wholly human experience – their participation in the making of *Invisible*, a virtual reality film about indefinite detention in the UK, is another case in point (Ben).

I consider this approach as not dissimilar from the unique opportunity offered by literature and the arts, insofar as they manage to convey the experience of detention in its emotional coordinates. The imaginative force of *The Bogus Woman*, too, is founded on an expressionistic and lyrical monologue, which reaches way beyond simple denunciation, description and analysis. Agnes Woolley aptly considers its poetic and “self-conscious dramatic means” as problematising the overly factual and objective tenets of both refugee docudrama and asylum procedures: the “privileging of historical, rather than emotional, accuracy in

⁵ See, for example, the grassroots campaign These Walls Must Fall, and the many City Councils that have been passing motions against indefinite detention.

asylum narratives is problematic because it fails to account for the ways in which narrative is troubled by trauma" (Woolley 2012: 32-34). In the following paragraphs I intend to focus on other examples of literary attempts to counter-act *spatially* the paradigms of confinement that characterise migrants' lives.

The first type of counter-action may be defined as meta-literary. In Chris Cleave's novel *The Other Hand*, the Nigerian teenager Little Bee laments the insufficient space that she is allowed for the narration of her own story:

They gave you a pink form to write down what had happened to you. This was the grounds for your asylum application. Your whole life, you had to fit it onto one sheet of paper. There was a black line around the edge of the sheet, a border, and if you wrote outside the line then your application would not be valid. They only gave you enough space to write down the very saddest things that had happened to you. That was the worst part. Because if you cannot read the beautiful things that have happened in someone's life, why should you care about their sadness? (Cleave 2008: 315-316).

Against those margins, literature may constitute a counter-narration to dominant practices. In Kate Clanchy's short story "Shakila's Head", a teacher of creative writing works with a class of teenagers that includes many migrants. Shakila from Afghanistan recalls having seen a terrorist who made himself explode in the market of her hometown:

He exploded. You heard it. Boom.
And then the bell rings for a long time, and we flinch from its noise.
Priya says: You need a frame. For your poem. Miss. Give her a frame.
A frame. I have taught them this. Each week, we look at a literary shape, a form, a piece of rhetoric, and they try it out for themselves. I don't suggest what they might write about, just the way they might write it. A frame, I say every week. Try this frame. Never: tell me about [...]. Certainly not: unload your trauma. And still, they tell me these terrible things (Clanchy 2016: 114).

Against the symbolic margins imposed on Little Bee by asylum procedures in Cleave's novel, literature presents itself as having boundary-less imaginative "frames", where narrations and expressions of humanity can be expanded infinitely and freely.

The second type of counter-action is metaphorical. One recurrent image in the literary productions on this topic is, quite predictably, related to the semantic field of the house/home. The poetry collection *Over Land, Over Sea*, produced in the wake of the great 2015 'refugee crisis', is a case in point, given the number of poems structured on house metaphors. Lydia Towsey's "Come In", for instance, is composed of an extended metaphor where the many facets of the home are re-imagined from a migratory perspective. Here are its opening and closing lines:

We are sorry for our neighbours,
those of them that do not know

the way to show a welcome;
they have read the book of doors
but forgotten how they open.

We are sorry for the landlord,
he's always been a problem
and the agents in his office,
need we say they do not act –

[...] I am sorry for our manners,
when we visited you last
the mess we left,
the reason you have had to call today (Towsey 2015: 16)⁶.

The founding image of the home offers here a series of suggestions on the self-centredness of culture, when not employed for one's neighbours' sake (stanza one); on the British government and its institutions (two); and on the colonial policies which produce humanitarian crises (closing stanza).

The two following types of spatial counter-action are based more on the materiality of space. I would call the third type re-imaginative, because it entails a re-conceptualising of existing spaces, in spite of their boundaries, from a different perspective. Roma Tearne's short story "The Blue Scarf" describes the deeply emotional journey of an old Tamil couple from the Swedish village of their exile to Stockholm airport. Thanks to the many flashbacks during their train journey, the reader learns that they had to flee Sri Lanka to escape political persecution. Four years later, their son is about to land in Stockholm with his wife and newborn baby, whom they have never met, but the final *coup-de-theatre* is based on a re-imagining of physical boundaries. After his plane has landed, their son calls them on the phone:

"Papa," he says, his voice tired. "We are here. Our connecting flight is in half an hour".
"Are you okay?"
"We're all fine. You know we can't come out, don't you?"
"We know, don't worry. We just wanted to [...] you know [...] be in the same building
[...] oh here's your mother [...]" (Tearne 2016: 25-26).

The fourth type of spatial counter-action implies a re-appropriation of traditional British spaces. This is the founding idea at the core of *Refugee Tales*, one of the collections analysed in this article. Its aim – "to call for an immediate end to indefinite immigration detention in the UK" – was inextricably linked with the modalities around which it was produced: a nine-day walk on Chaucer's "Pilgrim's Way" interspersed with narrations emerging from collaborations between established writers and refugees or people involved with immigra-

⁶ See also, from the same collection, Sally Flint's "The Big House" (84); John Ling's "Safe" (88-89); and Carol Leeming's "Song for Guests" (92-93).

tion issues⁷. As David Herd writes in his “Afterword” to the collection, this mobile location along this specific route was chosen in order to re-configure a “culturally charged sense of space” (Herd 2016b: 133). He explicitly calls for a re-making of the individual’s relationship with such spaces:

Refugee Tales was one form of that re-making: the crossing of a deeply national space by people whom the nation has organised itself in order precisely that they be kept from view. [...] Deep within the *Refugee Tales* project is a proposal that the language of national space be re-read, that we read back through to find the expression that gestures outwards (138-139).

This “ethically sustainable” relation to national spaces also implied a reformulation of the *Canterbury Tales*. In his poetic “Prologue” to the volume, Herd quotes Chaucer’s poem while describing the British concentrationary archipelago:

People are picked up and detained.
Routinely and
Arbitrarily
In every holt and heath
Under the sun while
Small fowles maken melodye
And why we walk is
To make a spectacle of welcome [...]
How badly we need English
To be made sweet again (Herd 2016a: vii).

A final example of re-appropriation of traditional spaces is identifiable in the locus of the garden. David Belbin’s novelette *Secret Gardens* is set in Nottingham’s public allotments, “the oldest allotments in the UK” (Belbin 2011: 28). There two teenagers, Aazim (on the run from a deportation raid) and Nadimah (escaping sexual slavery) find temporary shelter:

“Maybe we can stay here forever”, Nadimah says. “We grow things. We catch things. We earn money for milk and bread and stuff to keep us clean. It could be a good life”.
“A good life”, I agree (59).

This bucolic retreat carries utopian features that could hardly stand the pressures of contemporary migration policies. In the context of the British concentrationary archipelago, I felt the temptation to read Belbin’s cultivated garden through the lens of Raymond Williams’ *The Country and the City* (1973): as the umpteenth attempt to recapture a golden age which is irretrievable, if it ever existed; as the latest step of what Williams called “the escalator”, a longing in every epoch for a nostalgic Eden back in time: “Against sentimental and

⁷ This took place in June 2015, thus anticipating the mid-August ‘crisis’. In 2017 the collection was followed by a second volume, *Refugee Tales II*, by the same editors and publisher.

intellectualized accounts of an unlocalised 'Old England' we need, evidently, the sharpest skepticism" (Williams 1993: 10).

On the other hand, the public allotment does not point so unrealistically backwards, in Belbin's book. Things do not turn out as well as Aazim and Nadimah expected, and they resort to escaping again. In the context of globalisation's migrants, we should refer to one of the concluding chapters of Williams' book, "The New Metropolis", where he examines a series of colonial and postcolonial novels and notices how the country/city interaction was expanded on a global scale: "Thus one of the last models of 'city and country' is the system we now know as imperialism" (Williams 1993: 279). Some of his observations on neocolonialism can be taken as perceptive anticipations of the globalisation to come:

It is now widely believed in Britain that this system has ended. But political imperialism was only ever a stage. It was preceded by economic and trading controls, backed where necessary by force. It has been effectively succeeded by economic, monetary and commercial controls which again, at every point that resistance mounts, are at once supported by political, cultural and military intervention. The dominant relationships are still, in this sense, of a city and a country, at the point of maximum exploitation (283-284).

Williams' closing chapter also echoes eco-critical ideas, where he deems it crucial for human survival that "work on the land will have to become more rather than less important and central", even though this idea "can be easily diverted into yet another rural threnody, or into a cynical fatalism" (300-301).

Bearing Williams' warning in mind, *Secret Gardens* may be seen as something other than a nostalgia for an Edenic past, but rather as offering suggestions for the future. Against the transversal borders imposed by the concentrationary archipelago, Belbin's book imagines a site of spatial resistance, a sort of Foucauldian heterotopia⁸ where two asylum seekers reformulate one of the most popular spaces in grassroots British culture, thus calling for a redefinition of national identity. Not by chance, *Secret Gardens* closes on an optimistic note: "Later, I will pick some vegetables. I will make soup for lunch. Tomorrow, if I am still here, I will plant some seeds" (Belbin 2011: 109).

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⁸ Foucault describes heterotopia as "a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy" (1986: 24).

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Pietro Deandrea is Associate Professor in English and Postcolonial Literature at the University of Torino, Italy. Amongst his publications, *Fertile Crossings: Metamorphoses of Genre in Anglophone West African Literatures* (Rodopi 2002) and *New Slavery in Contemporary British Literature and Visual Arts: The Ghost and the Camp* (Manchester University Press 2015).

pietro.deandrea@unito.it

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Paola Della Valle

Migration and Multiplicity of Belonging in Caryl Phillips

Abstract I: L'identità, l'appartenenza e il suo opposto, l'esclusione, sono temi di grande rilevanza nella saggistica e narrativa di Caryl Phillips. In particolare, alcuni saggi pubblicati in due raccolte, *A New World Order* (2001) e *Colour Me English* (2011), e il romanzo *A Distant Shore* (2003) esplorano in che modo immigrati e rifugiati stiano ridisegnando un nuovo ordine nel moderno mondo globalizzato e nuovi concetti di appartenenza e identificazione fondati sulla pluralità culturale. L'articolo seguirà l'evoluzione del pensiero di Phillips nel primo decennio del nuovo millennio, concentrandosi in particolare sui testi sopra indicati.

Abstract II: The themes of identity, belonging and its reverse, exclusion, have always been central to Caryl Phillips' works of non-fiction and fiction. In particular, some essays published in two collections, *A New World Order* (2001) and *Colour Me English* (2011), and the novel *A Distant Shore* (2003) investigate to which extent refugees and immigrants are redesigning a new order in the modern globalised world and new notions of belonging and identification based on cultural plurality. In my article I will show the evolution of Phillips' view on these topics in the first decade of the new millennium, with particular reference to the above-mentioned texts.

Most of Caryl Phillips' works, be they drama, fiction or non-fiction, are centred on the notion of belonging and identity of the migrating subject. Born on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts in 1958, Phillips was brought to the UK by his parents when he was four months old and raised in the industrial north of England, precisely in Leeds.¹ Throughout his infancy and adolescence, although he had a British passport, was an Anglican churchgoer and proficient in English, he felt a deep sense of exclusion and un-belonging in British society. As the author underlined, he and his two younger brothers were the only black children both at primary school and Leeds Central High School. They survived being victims of bullying and abuse because they "knew when to fight and [...] when to run" (Phillips 2011: 3). Phillips studied at Queen's College, Oxford, and later moved to London, but the sense of racial isolation is something that has accompanied him throughout his life, despite the changes that were turning Britain into a multi-cultural society. In the late 1980s, following the advent of what

¹ See his official site: <http://www.carylphillips.com/> (consulted on 18/09/2018).

he calls Mrs. Thatcher's "neo-imperial rhetoric of exclusion" (Phillips 2001: 304), he decided to spend more and more time in the United States, teaching in prestigious universities, but never renounced his British citizenship, as he felt he "had a responsibility to address British society from within" (Phillips 2001: 304). After being a permanent resident in the US for thirteen years, he also gained American citizenship (Phillips 2011: 35). The non-fiction volume *Colour Me English* (2011) shows his emotional attachment to both countries. Its introductory essay, bearing the same title, describes his shock at discovering that the 2005 suicide bombings in London were carried out by people who were British-born and that three of them were from Leeds like him (2011: 14). He forcefully hopes that his Muslim ex-schoolmate Ali (to him, a symbol of immigrants who had to confront not only racial but also religious prejudice) has not "given up on Britain" (15), that is, has not renounced contributing to a steady but peaceful evolution of British society. The next section opens with a vivid recollection of the attack on the Twin Towers in the essay "Ground Zero", defined a "communal trauma" (26) for all New York residents like him. His bond with the United States, however, is not less troubled than his involvement with Britain. As he explains in the same volume, Phillips had been mesmerised by the hope that the United States could be "everything that Britain was not" (29), namely a multi-racial and multi-cultural country where "a sense of pride in claiming the more inclusive American identity would far outweigh any profession of loyalty to a particular racial or ethnic group" (28). Conversely, he was faced with the reality of a country dominated by racial discrimination and a huge social inequality (31). He seems to suggest that the foundational "melting pot" ideal underpinning US society is a rhetorical device of a constructed self-celebrative mythology rather than effective practice.

Phillips has defined his sense of continued alienation in the British context "the high anxiety of belonging", an issue he discussed in the conclusion of the earlier collection *A New World Order* (2001). My article aims at analysing the development of the notions of belonging, home and identity of the migrant's subject in some of Phillips' works published in the first decade of the new millennium. I will refer to some essays from the collections *A New World Order* (2001) and *Colour Me English* (2011), and to a novel about recent migration and inter-racial relationships in Britain, *A Distant Shore* (2003). These texts reveal a gradual change in the perception of multiple identity, from an experience still imbued with a deep sense of loss to a conscious valorisation of its potentialities in the context of a changing multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. Phillips' view seems to be an inflection of theoretical positions in postcolonial criticism and Afro-American studies (for example, Stuart Hall's and Paul Gilroy's) that see identity as a process rather than an entity, as mutable and instable rather than fixed and rooted. I will also make use of the concept of transnation, recently elaborated by Bill Ashcroft, for depicting a new possible view of contemporary society.

The high anxiety of belonging is something Phillips shares with the flow of immigrants, refugees or asylum seekers presently trying to enter Europe from North Africa, the Middle East or Southeast Asia. At the 2014 Venice International Festival of Literature "Incroci di Civiltà", Phillips still defined himself as a "migrant"². His parents belong to the mul-

² See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqYnsoUs71s> (consulted on 18/09/2018).

titude that arrived in Britain from the colonies after WW2. As Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe explain, “the Empire was coming ‘home’ claiming their rights of abode as British citizens holding a British passport” (1988: 79). Since the country was beginning to rebuild its broken cities, there was a great demand for workers of any kind, especially in jobs of low status and low pay. West Indians, in particular, came “with a sense of cultural identification with the ‘Motherland’” (80): they had been educated according to the British system, their language was English or English-based, their religions (Anglican, Methodist, etc.) had been passed on to them by British missionaries. Nevertheless, it was a journey to an illusion. Despite their feeling British, West Indian immigrants had to face the reality of being rejected by British society: “They may have believed passionately in their closeness and affinity to Britain and possessed a sense of belonging, but the British were equally convinced of their alienness, their otherness” (81).

Phillips knows very well that it may take years and even more than one generation for immigrants to become socially confident. In “Rude Am I in Speech”, an essay written in 2008 and included in *Colour Me English*, he describes his father’s persistent social uneasiness in British society after being a resident for forty years. He claims that first-generation immigrants could find the only “zones of psychological relief” from the “anxieties of belonging” (Phillips 2011: 134) in the family (where they were free to eat their food and maintain their habits) or in social gathering places such as pubs or clubs, (where they could keep contact with their fellow migrants). Phillips also explores the social isolation of a character defined by him a “pioneer migrant” (137), who becomes the prototype of all first-generation black immigrants: the eponymous protagonist of Shakespeare’s *Othello*. The title of this essay comes from a scene in which Othello, standing before the Duke of Venice, must defend himself from the charge of having beguiled Desdemona into marrying him. Despite his obvious eloquence, Othello protests his inability to speak, since he is a soldier, not an orator: “Rude am I in my speech, / And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace” (I.iii.81–82). Phillips considers Othello as the most isolated character in literature, despite his persuasive rhetoric and his being an “exotic celebrity” in Venice (Phillips 2011: 135), because he has no Venetian home to return to or peer group to be part of: places where he can “recuperate from the daily fatigue of living a performative life” (135). Othello is a racial and social outsider. Phillips maintains that Othello’s “diversity” creates that “knot of anxiety” (2011: 132) eventually exploited by Iago. Like most black people, Othello is characterised by a “double conscience”, in Du Bois’ terms (Gilroy 1993: 126): he is inside and outside mainstream society, he is a brave military leader in the service of Venice but he is not a fully Venetian citizen. As a second-generation immigrant, Phillips was a witness of his parents’ insecurity and still affected by it. So much so that he reckons that a full acquisition of social knowledge and understanding possibly rises from the third generation onwards (Phillips 2011: 138). This is in tune with Stuart Hall’s assertion that: “Third-generation young Black men and women know they come from the Caribbean, know that they are Black, know that they are British. They want to speak from all three identities. They are not prepared to give up any of them” (Hall 1997: 59).

Phillips’ search for “home” is further complicated by his West Indian background,

which has created an ambivalent feeling towards Britain. In *A New World Order*, he says he cannot consider Britain as home, after having been asked too many times in his life the question “Where are you *really* from?” (303). He also witnessed politicians, from the far left to the far right, using the cry of “send them back!” to collect votes from different strata of the population interested in blocking immigration fluxes from the ex-colonies (303-304). This sense of dislocation and marginalisation is something that Phillips shares with many other immigrants in Britain. But the history of Caribbean people, rooted in the predicament of slavery, the middle passage and the African diaspora, also carries a sorrowful inheritance of exploitation, abuse and violence. This casts another shadow on Phillips’ idea of Britain as “home”. Being unable to elude the sombre previous stages of his personal story and collective history, he has claimed his desire to cultivate a “plural notion of home” (Phillips 2001: 304-305), which takes into account his multiple origins from and (complex) attachment to Africa, North-America (including the Caribbean) and Britain. So he rejects the idea of Britain as his “sole home”:

As a young boy growing up in Leeds, I was both confused by, and afraid of, the word “home”. [...] Over the years I have written about my relationship to the word “home” and I have also read and reread literature which bears some relationship to this word, [...]. I have tried, by some process of literary osmosis, to enter England, to *feel* England, to feel *for* England to the exclusion of the Atlantic world, but I have failed. Something in me rejects the idea of standing alone with Britain as my sole “home” (308).

He therefore imagines that his “home” is located in an equidistant point in the ocean between these three geographical regions: what he calls his “Atlantic home” (304).

This idea is akin to Gilroy’s concept of “black Atlantic”, the “modern cultural and political formation” which transcends “both the structures of the nation-state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity” (Gilroy 1993: 19). Identity, argues Gilroy, is unfinished, instable and mutable. It is as a process of “movement and mediation” that overcomes the idea of “roots and rootedness” (19). While rejecting nativist and essentialist assumptions of primordial black identities, established by either nature or culture, Gilroy surprisingly defines his view as “anti-anti-essentialist” in its giving centrality to the diaspora as a common denominator, which valorises intra- and trans-national kinships and formations. The concept of diaspora, he claims, “should be cherished for its ability to pose the relationship between ethnic sameness and differentiation: a changing same” (Gilroy: xi). As Mellino explains, Gilroy rejects both essentialist pan-Africanism, founded on a quasi-ontological view of black identity, and the anti-essentialism of more recent critical positions within the postcolonial paradigm (Said, Bhabha and Spivak) that, by deconstructing the idea of cultural subjectivity – and consequently of black subjectivity, too – and by working on the idea of difference rather than similarity, have proved ineffectual in tackling racial discrimination (Mellino 2003: 9). The black Atlantic is therefore a delocalised, hybrid, cosmopolitan space where the black diaspora can consider itself a “community” with its inner particularities, similarities and discontinuities and with specific modes of expressions and cultural production, particularly visible in black music. It is therefore “a non-traditional tra-

dition, an irreducibly modern ex-centric, unstable and asymmetrical cultural ensemble that cannot be apprehended through the Manichean logic of binary coding" (Gilroy 1993: 198).

Phillips' imaginary "Atlantic home" reminds us of the delocalised space Gilroy calls "black Atlantic". However, the lyrical mode used by Phillips in describing this place, has nothing of the assertiveness and actuality of Gilroy's concept. Rather, it conveys a sense of nostalgia and displacement. It reveals, in fact, the "anxiety of belonging" announced in the title of the essay and conveys the need to compensate a lacking or ambivalent sense of "home". His disillusion and frustration lead him to seek a consolatory refuge, a projection of a desire of belonging, which is however a non-place, as these lines indicate:

My continued sense of alienation in a British context is hardly original. The roots are racially charged, but others have felt similarly excluded on grounds of class, gender or religion. [...] Some people have little choice but to live in this state of high anxiety. Some others make plans to leave. I have chosen to create for myself an imaginary "home" to live alongside the one that I am incapable of fully trusting. My increasingly precious, imaginary, Atlantic world (Phillips 2001: 308).

Phillips seems pervaded by that sense of social insecurity that characterises first-generation immigrants and persists in their children, as described in "Rude Am I in Speech". His uneasiness is also analysed in psychological terms in the same essay and defined as an ambivalence that can appear "at best cranky" or "at worst paranoid" (309) to people with an established home and sense of belonging. Such a plural notion of home, identity and belonging is therefore invested with a negative connotation: it is a compensatory measure to trauma, dislocation, and deprivation.

Many other forms of discrimination and marginalisation occur within a country like Britain that cultivated "the mythology of homogeneity" (Phillips 2001: 288), based on class, accent, gender, sexuality, religion, or culture (Phillips 2001: 290-291). This concept is forcefully reiterated in the introduction to *Colour Me English* (2011), when Phillips reflects on the reasons behind the act of the four British Muslim suicide bombers. He narrates the story of his Muslim schoolmate Ali – another outsider like him, harassed and bullied at school – whose situation was aggravated by his smaller build and stature, and, most of all, by his different religion and culture. Ali could have easily been one of the bombers. Phillips also points to the current rise of nationalistic parties in most European countries, aiming at re-defining a nation (white, Christian, European) within the boundaries of each nation-state. Muslim religion is depicted by them as a reactionary, monolithic creed, without nuances of belief or practice, and Muslims as a separate and antisocial community. In actual fact, he continues, the vast majority of Muslims in Europe have never followed a rigid interpretation of sharia and are therefore willing to conform the practice of their faith to the basic human rights, as they are understood in the West. Writing ten years after his lyrical search for a refuge in the "Atlantic home", Phillips' conclusion is more confident and constructive:

Successful integration does mean that immigrants adapt to the new country, but it also means that the new country adapts to them. It demands that the residents cultivate

the capacity – and courage – to change their ideas about who *they* are. [...] Europe is no longer white and never will be again. And Europe is no longer Judaeo-Christian and never will be again. There are already fifteen million Muslims in the European Union, and the figure will grow. All of us are faced with a stark choice: we can rail against European evolution, or we can help smooth its process. And, if we choose the latter, the first thing we must remind ourselves of is the lesson that great fiction teaches us as we sink into character and plot and suspend our disbelief: for a moment, “they” are “us” (Phillips 2011: 15-16).

The power of literature, and in particular of fiction, to act as a moral force against intolerance is something Phillips forcefully highlights here and in other writings and interviews. Also, what emerges in this essay is his conviction that the outsider/insider question can be overcome by valorising a fluid notion of belonging and identity: a plural sense of oneself. The same concept, which had been previously imbued with a sense of melancholy isolation and passive desire, is now articulated in a proactive approach. Phillips seems to embrace Stuart Hall’s idea that “all of us are composed of multiple social identities” (Hall 1997: 57) and advocate “the politics of living identity through difference” suggested by the Jamaican sociologist (57). This means a politics that “increasingly is able to address people through the multiple identities which they have” (Hall 1997: 59). Hall suggested that complex societies in a depersonalising global world should work at the local level, activating a counter-politics that acknowledges a multiplicity of identifications and develops a dialectic between local and global (62). In a 2012 interview Phillips underlined that today younger people are able to “synthesize” many different influences much better than when he was young. And he praises the younger generation’s fluidity and hybridity, which endow them with “that ability to flaunt a plural identity without apology” (Ward 2012: 645).

The endorsement of multiple identities and belonging is also implicit in Ashcroft’s “transnation”, a concept that disrupts notions of centre and periphery in a globalised world, surpassing terms such as diaspora, cosmopolitanism, international and transnational. According to Ashcroft, “transnation is the fluid, migrating outside of the state that begins within the nation” (Ashcroft 2010a: 73). It can be geographical, cultural and conceptual, and it is particularly visible in China and India in that a huge number of people are dislocated from their “homes” and, whether inside the state borders or outside (and all over the world), have formed transnations. As Ashcroft maintains: “This is because, most noticeably in the case of China and India, the nation is already a migratory and even diasporic aggregation of flows and convergences, both within and without state boundaries” (73).

Ashcroft studies the potentials of mobility and transitivity. This in turn offers new perspectives on notions of identity, belonging and place-making. He views the transnation as “a way of talking about subjects who live their ordinary lives in-between categories by which subjectivity is normally constructed” (Ashcroft 2010a: 73) and a space which is “negotiable and shifting” (77-78). In a global world with a rapidly increasing ability to travel back and forth between “homes”, mobility “*need not* be a permanent condition of displacement, loss or exile. [...] The mobility and in-betweenness of the transnation injects the principle of hope” (Ashcroft 2010a: 75).

This principle of hope can also be found in *Colour Me English* when Phillips reaffirms the idea of a fluid and plural sense of self, which has been fed and sustained by travelling:

The gift of travel has been enabling for me in the same way that it has been enabling for writers in the British tradition, in the African diasporan tradition and in the Caribbean tradition, many of whom have found it necessary to move in order to reaffirm for themselves the fact that dual and multiple affiliations feed our constantly fluid sense of self. Healthy societies are ones which allow such pluralities to exist and do not feel threatened by these hybrid conjunctions (Phillips 2011: 131).

Phillips' current condition, like that of other postcolonial writers, seems actually to embrace the concept of cosmopolitanism rather than transnation. Ashcroft defines cosmopolitanism as "an attitude of mind rather than a subject position" (Ashcroft 2010a: 76) and reconnects it more to the movement of an elite than to migratory fluxes: "[T]he person who is able to travel freely, to experience and participate in other cultures for long periods, who has the time to engage with the Other in a 'cosmopolitan' way, must inevitably be a person with considerable material resources" (76). However, Phillips' early life in Britain connects him to the mass of migrants whose stories fill the newspapers at present. He might belong to a cosmopolitan elite as a writer, but he belongs to a transnation as a second-generation Caribbean immigrant.

One of Phillips' novels, *A Distant Shore* (2003), deals with today's hotly debated question of illegal migration from Africa to Europe. Two "diverse" outsiders – a British retired teacher with psychiatric disorders, Dorothy, and a refugee from an un-named African country, Gabriel/Solomon – begin a tentative friendship, which is abruptly interrupted by the young man's murder at the hands of local hooligans. Dorothy's intervention will be decisive in convincing a girl involved in the attack on Solomon to identify his killers to the police. The novel intertwines two main plots. One follows Dorothy's story of social advancement from northern working class to bourgeoisie through high education and marriage to an upper-middle-class university mate. All her life is marked by intellectual honesty, social inadequacy and a rigid character, which make her the object of repeated "abandonments": by her husband, her two subsequent lovers (a local newsagent, Mahmood, and a supply teacher) and her school entourage. Her sense of alienation is augmented by an early retirement and the transfer to a new residential area, which worsen her fragile psychological condition. The other thread reports the narrative of Gabriel/Solomon, sent by his father to fight in a civil war, hunted as a war criminal and forced to flee his country to save his life, an enterprise in which he succeeds at the expense of the life of all his family, brutally massacred by governmental forces. Gabriel/Solomon's past is also stained with the brutal killing of his former employer Felix to get the money for his passage across the Mediterranean. Gabriel/Solomon represents one of the "ordinary" stories of genocide, warfare and escape that constitute the background of many refugees to Europe. After an imprisonment on unfair rape charges, Gabriel must change his name into Solomon. Then he is helped by an Irish truck driver, Mike, and his Scottish landlord and landlady, and will finally find a job as a caretaker in Dorothy's housing estate. These two threads of the plot intertwine against the background

of multi-cultural Britain, torn between well-meaning solidarity and xenophobic prejudice, an ambivalent legislation towards immigration and a changing collective sense of identity.

The novel has received different readings. Gunning has explored the racial harassment suffered by Solomon. Britain's conditional hospitality implies his "loss of voice" (Gunning 2011: 146), a descent to anonymity and his necessary infantilisation in order to be accepted. Using Gilroy's distinction between "non-racial humanity" and "racialized inhumanity", Gunning underlines Solomon's reduction to the inhuman status of the refugee: not an individual human but a "being-with-rights" (144). If Gunning emphasises the defects of British multiculturalism presented in the novel, McLeod's view is more optimistic. He identifies a utopian potentiality in Phillips' work, grounded in intense moments of interpersonal communication that provide evidence of "Phillips' binocular focus upon the everyday refusals of racism and division within the grim context of stubbornly prejudicial milieu" (McLeod 2008: 14). Dorothy and Solomon's friendship is based on their impossibility of communicating with the society around. Solomon perceives her as someone he can tell his story and, in the closing page of the novel, Dorothy remarks: "I had a feeling that Solomon understood me" (Phillips 2003: 312). Another powerful encounter in the book is between Solomon and Denise, a girl abused by both her father and her boyfriend, who finds in Solomon's non-sexual embrace a protection and somebody willing to listen to her. When they are discovered asleep by her father in the derelict house where they meet, Solomon is charged with sexual assault but the girl refuses to testify against him and the case is dropped. Finally, the support given to Solomon by Mike and the Scottish couple are signs of an enlightened humanity. According to McLeod, the novel records that Britain's transformations occur mostly at the personal level: "Phillips looks to the business of everyday life for the principles of a truly progressive and transformative prospect" (McLeod 2008: 9).

As Ellis shrewdly underlines, McLeod's reading can be linked to Ashcroft's notion of transnation in "this emphasis upon new routines of everyday life as a site of struggle and transformation within a national setting" (Ellis 2013: 418). Ashcroft is, in fact, "arguing openly for a Utopian form of thinking here, what he terms an 'idea/l'" (418). The transnation begins in these quotidian exchanges and interactions between individuals of different cultures and races within the state boundaries. In Ashcroft's terms, "it is not an ontological object, but a way of understanding the possibility of ordinary people avoiding, dodging, circumventing the inevitable claims of the state upon them" (Ellis: 418; quoted from Ashcroft 2010b: 13). Ellis' conclusion is that Phillips' novel "contains evidence of a nascent polyculturalism from which an idea/l of post-racism might be drawn" (Ellis 2013: 412).

McLeod's and Ellis' readings of *A Distant Shore* are in tune with Hall's idea that the process of change cannot but be conducted locally through a politics of "living identity through difference" (57). Despite its tragic ending, this novel also indicates the beginning of a centripetal movement for Phillips back from his Atlantic refuge to valorise the local efforts to change society from within. Contemporary societies evolve thanks to the exchange and mutual influence between migrating and local subjects. Notions of self, nationhood and nation are therefore continuously transformed and made anew, as Ashcroft's concept of transnation underlines.

Importantly, both Ashcroft and Phillips highlight the crucial role of literature in foster-

ing this process. Ashcroft underlines the utopian dimension of literature, its horizon of “absolute potentiality”, and the fact that “it releases the writing subject from the myth of a fixed identity” (Ashcroft 2010a: 82). In a 2014 interview he also said that literary works have the power to produce empathy in the reader by “showing” rather than “telling” and that they might be more potent than theoretical discourse because they rely on the power of affect and the power of imagination (Ashcroft 2014: 136). Similar ideas are forcefully articulated by Phillips in *Colour Me English*:

As long as we have literature as a bulwark against intolerance, and as a force for change, then we have a chance. Europe needs writers to explicate this transition, for literature is plurality in action; it embraces and celebrates a place of no truths, it relishes ambiguity, and it deeply respects the place where everybody has the right to be understood, [...] in the hope that by some often painfully slow process of imaginative osmosis one might finally recognise what passed before one’s eyes today, what occurred yesterday, and what will happen tomorrow, and it implores us to act with a compassion born of familiarity towards our fellow human beings, be they Christian, Jew, Muslim, black, brown or white (Phillips 2011: 17).

It is therefore the writers’ duty to continue writing, fictional and non-fictional works, to participate in this process and support this vision, so that utopia can become reality.

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Paola Della Valle is currently working as a researcher at the University of Torino. She specialises in New Zealand, Māori and Pacific literature, postcolonial criticism, and gender studies. Her articles appeared in *Textus, the Journal of Commonwealth Literature, the NZSA Bulletin of New Zealand Studies, Le Simplegadi, Il Castello di Elsinore, and Loxias*. She has published the monographs *From Silence to Voice: The Rise of Maori Literature* (2010), *Stevenson nel Pacifico: una lettura postcoloniale* (2013) and *Priestley e il tempo. Il tempo di Priestley* (2016). She has contributed to the volumes *Experiences of Freedom in Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures* (2011), *Contemporary Sites of Chaos in the Literatures and Arts of the Postcolonial World* (2013), and *Uncommon Wealths in Postcolonial Fiction* (2018). She is a member of the International Advisory Board of the *Journal of New Zealand and Pacific Studies*.

paola.dellavalle@unito.it

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Ilaria Oddenino

Re-Drawing Heterotopias: Challenging Refugee Camps as Other Spaces in Kate Evans' *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis*

Abstract I: Questo lavoro analizza gli spazi "altri" che migranti, rifugiati e richiedenti asilo si trovano ad abitare all'interno dei confini degli stati europei. Si concentra sui campi rifugiati in generale e sulla "Giungla" di Calais in particolare. Seguendo il modello di Michel Agier, parlerò del campo come "eterotopia", adattando il concetto sviluppato da Michel Foucault nel 1967. Mi concentrerò poi sul *graphic reportage* di Kate Evans, *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis* – testimonianza diretta dell'esperienza dell'autrice a Calais – e su come il fumetto possa illustrare, ma anche sfidare, la natura eterotopica di questi luoghi.

Abstract II: This essay deals with the "other" spaces that migrants, refugees, asylum seekers find themselves inhabiting within the borders of European nation states. It concentrates on refugee camps in general, and on the Calais "Jungle" in particular. On the model of Michel Agier, I will talk of refugee camps as "heterotopias" adapting the concept developed by Michel Foucault in 1967. I will then concentrate on Kate Evans' *graphic reportage*, *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis* – a first-hand account of the time the author spent in the Calais camp – and I will explore how the comic book illustrates, but also challenges and resists the perception of the camp as "other space" and, therefore, as a space of otherness.

Introduction

In recent years, the graphic novel as a genre has known an unwavering surge in popularity, establishing itself as a compelling form of fictional entertainment as well as a favoured means of representation of the most pressing issues of the contemporary world. It is therefore not surprising that more and more comic books are being dedicated to the portrayal of the 'damaged life' (Adorno 2006) of displaced people around the world, from the inhumane living conditions in their countries of origin¹, to their life-threatening journeys², to the precarious positions in their countries of arrival³.

¹ See for example Glidden 2016; Sulaiman 2016; "Madaya Mom" by ABC news and Marvel Comics 2016.

² For example: "A Perilous Journey" by Benjamin Dix and Lindsay Pollock, serialised in the *The Guardian* and *Aftenposten* (11-13 Nov 2015); Colfer & Donkin 2018.

³ For example: Joe Sacco's "Not in My Country" published on *The Guardian* (17 July 2010) and Visintin's "Mare Nostrum" (2014).

Quite interestingly, as pointed out by L. K. in *The Economist*⁴, different countries around the world have recently started to produce state-sponsored “comics” themselves, often in the form of graphic guides to integration. Think, for example, of “Germany and its People”, posted online in October 2016 by the German state broadcaster Bayerischer Rundfunk, where “proper behaviour” is prescribed through cartoons reminiscent of airplane safety cards. Here, immigrants (Middle Eastern in particular) are instructed not to sexually assault women, not to hit children and not to harass gay couples, and they learn that in Germany – unlike, one must assume, in their own countries – conflicts must not be solved with violence⁵. Another example comes from Russia, where in 2017 the Department of National Policy, Interregional Relations and Tourism in Moscow released a 100-page comic guide featuring popular characters from traditional Russian fairy tales illustrating desirable behaviour and providing practical information on matters such as Moscow’s complex network of public transport⁶. A third and last example worth mentioning is a campaign launched in 2014 by the Australian government’s Department for Immigration and Border Protection, with the aim, in this case, to deter potential asylum seekers from attempting to reach Australia by boat. By detailing the dangers of a rough sea journey and the horrible life that awaits them in offshore detention centres, it aimed at demonstrating why these people should not embark on such a disastrous enterprise; and even if they choose to, there is no way, as clearly stated in the campaign’s slogan, that they will be able to make Australia their home⁷.

The choice of resorting to illustrated guides is easy to understand, as their immediacy and trans-linguistic potential make them powerful communicative and educational tools. Apart from the practical information they provide, what some of these graphic guides seem to have in common is the way they “deploy visual language to paint a cohesive portrait of their respective nations”, depicting, for example, “Russians as descendants of their fairy tale heroes and conquering knights, or Germans as law-abiding, egalitarian citizens”⁸, while inevitably constructing the image of migrants and refugees as “other” and inhabiting “a space separate to the fairy tale of the nation”⁹.

This essay deals with this separate space that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers find themselves inhabiting within the fairy tale of the European nation states. It concentrates on refugee camps in general, the new “ghettos” of the contemporary world, and on the Calais “Jungle” in particular. On the model of Agier (2012), I will talk of refugee camps as “heterotopia” (literally: “other spaces”), adapting the concept famously introduced to

⁴ *The Economist* (23 February 2017), <https://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2017/02/frame> (consulted on 20/02/2018).

⁵ <https://www.br.de/fernsehen/ard-alpha/sendungen/punkt/kulturguide-arabisch-100.html> (consulted on 20/02/2018).

⁶ <http://www.ntv.ru/video/1380146/> (consulted on 20/02/2018).

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/11/government-launches-new-graphic-campaign-to-deter-asylum-seekers> (consulted on 20/02/2018).

⁸ *The Economist* (23 February 2017), <https://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2017/02/frame> (consulted on 20/02/2018).

⁹ *The Economist* (23 February 2017), <https://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2017/02/frame> (consulted on 20/02/2018).

the social sciences by Michel Foucault in 1967. I will then return to the graphic novel and present Kate Evans' latest work, *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis* – a first-hand account of the time the author spent in the Calais camp – and I will explore how the comic book illustrates, but also challenges and resists, the perception of the camp as “other space” and, therefore, as a space of otherness.

Part 1. Refugee camps as Heterotopia

According to the UN Refugee Agency website, we are currently faced with the highest levels of displacement on record:

An unprecedented 65.6 million people around the world have been forced from home. Among them are nearly 22.5 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18. There are also 10 million stateless people who have been denied a nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement [...] nearly 20 people are forcibly displaced every minute as a result of conflict or persecution¹⁰.

What these figures tell us is that refugees and displaced people should be the central subjects of our political history, and yet they are invariably relegated to the margins of our institutions, cities and consciousness. In Europe, those countries which have built their modern (political) identity on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen are not prepared to protect the rights of people who cannot be identified as citizens, people who have “lost every other specific quality and connection except for the mere fact of being humans” (Arendt, quoted in Agamben 1995: 116). This paradox is implicit, Agamben writes, “in the ambiguity of the very title of the *Declaration of 1789, Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, in which it is unclear whether the two terms name two realities, or whether instead they form a hendiadys, in which the second term is, in reality, already contained in the first” (Agamben 1995: 116). Living outside of the holy “trinity of state/ nation/ territory” (Agamben 1995: 117) results in ever-growing aggregates of people loitering in what Said called a “perilous territory of non-belonging” (Said 2000: 177), of which refugee camps, such as the infamous “Jungle” in Calais, northern France, are perhaps the most representative physical realisation.

Refugee camps are conceived as temporary settlements where people who have been forced to flee their homes because of wars, violence and oppression can find shelter and receive assistance. They provide “immediate protection and safety for the world’s most vulnerable people”¹¹ and their establishment allows organisations such as the UN Refugee Agency to “deliver lifesaving aid like food, water and medical attention during an emergency”¹². However, these camps are often far from being truly temporary, and their inhabitants can end up immobilised in these (supposedly) transitory spaces for months, years even. The Calais camp is no exception.

¹⁰ See <http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html> (consulted on 5/04/2018).

¹¹ <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/camps/> (consulted on 5/04/2018).

¹² <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/camps/> (consulted on 5/04/2018).

The progenitor of the “Jungle” was set up in 1999 by the Red Cross in the neighbouring village of Sangatte, in an attempt to assist the many people who arrived in the area (from Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo primarily)¹³ hoping to cross the English Channel and get to the UK – Calais being the closest French town to British soil. It was evacuated in 2002, but within a few months a new makeshift camp emerged in the woods around Calais, the first ‘Jungle’. By the time it was bulldozed in 2009 it had reached a population of about 1000, and between 2014 and 2016 – when it was rebuilt – it became ‘home’ to more than 7000 people, this time primarily from Syria and the Middle East, as well as some African countries such as Eritrea or Somalia¹⁴. For its many residents, the camp became the ultimate place of banishment, “a purgatory between two countries, both of which unwilling to accept them”¹⁵. For the outside world, it became the ultimate political token, a catalyst for fears and frustrations fueled by polarising narratives of invasion, and the sworn enemy of a once prosperous town now faced with its own impoverishment and abandonment, itself geographically, culturally and economically at the margins of the nation state it belongs to. If Calaisians, however, can still aspire to their own legitimate place within the fairy tale of the nation, the people whose lives are confined to a refugee camp cannot: their confinement stigmatises them as a massive population of undesirables (Agier 2002: 337), a surplus of humanity (Barnum 2014), condemned to a state of ‘double locality exclusion’: “They are excluded from the native places they lost through displacement, and they are excluded from the space of the ‘local population’ where the camps or other transit zones are located” (Agier 2012: 278).

The space of refugee camps such as the ‘Jungle’ seems to perfectly embody what Foucault, in his notes to a lecture given in March 1967, describes as ‘heterotopia’, borrowing a term traditionally used in medicine that he opposes to the more famous concept of ‘utopia’. Foucault defines heterotopias as “real places, effective places, places that are written into the institution of society itself, and that are a sort of counter-emplacements, a sort of effectively realised utopia, in which the real emplacements, all the other emplacements that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted; a kind of places that are outside all places, even though they are actually localizable” (Foucault 2008: 16).

He then identifies a series of principles that can be associated with the different realisations of this concept, some of them particularly fitting for a reading of refugee camps as “other spaces”. He begins by discussing “crisis heterotopias”, those spaces inhabited by individuals who are in a state of “crisis” with respect to the society they live in, and whose manifestation of that crisis always takes place “elsewhere”. He quotes traditions such as the “honeymoon trip” involving young women’s deflowering, a practice that had to be carried out in a space separate from the familiar spaces of everyday life. These heterotopias, Fou-

¹³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/37750368/the-history-of-the-calais-jungle-camp-and-how-its-changed-since-1999> (consulted on 4/03/2018).

¹⁴ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/37750368/the-history-of-the-calais-jungle-camp-and-how-its-changed-since-1999> (consulted on 4/03/2018).

¹⁵ <http://www.euronews.com/2016/10/24/purgatory-a-history-of-migrants-in-calais> (consulted on 4/02/2018).

cault believes, are being replaced in today's society "by what we might call heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals are placed whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm. Cases of this are rest homes and psychiatric hospitals [...] and, of course, prisons" (Foucault 2008: 18). It is quite obvious that the refugee camp, too, is designed to contain humanity that deviates from the norm, where by norm we mean the state/nation/territory trinity on which Western society is founded. The migrants' crisis of nonconformity to the Declaration's hendiadys – man *and* citizen – finds its elsewhere in the liminal space of the camp, a place outside the urban tissue of the European nation where this deviation is contained, tamed, controlled. Representing heterotopias of crisis and, even more so, of deviation, camps become off-places – Agier calls them *hors-lieux* in French (Agier 2008: 117) – places "outside", locations on the edges or limits of the normal order of things (Agier 2012: 278).

Foucault continues by observing how "heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable" (Foucault 2008: 21). Generally speaking, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place: "either one is constrained, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else one has to submit to rites and to purifications. One can only enter with a certain permission and after having performed a certain number of gestures" (21). Everyone can access these heterotopic sites but entering them is in fact an illusion: "one believes to have entered and, by the very fact of entering, one is excluded" (21). Camps can be places of detention, but they can also be places of refuge or shelter that people access for security or assistance; however, the very act of entering them marks these people's exclusion from society and underlines their impossibility to find a non-heterotopic site in which to freely exist. In the words of Agier, "those confined outside are people who are 'cast out inside' within the state-space" (Agier 2012: 279). Their social exclusion translates into an exclusion from the traditional categories of time and place in favour of a timeless, placeless existence, where people's lives are reduced to an incessant act of waiting (Agier 2012: 274): "waiting for a job, waiting for a meal, waiting to use the toilet, waiting for water, waiting for medical services, waiting..." (Barnum 2014). As far as the penetrability of the camps is concerned, it is represented primarily by the invasive presence of external authorities emanating from that inaccessible inside that is the outer world. The exterior's penetration of the camp takes the form of the state's judicial and political systems, often expressed through police intervention – police harassment, even – something that camp residents are subjected to on a regular basis.

This tension between heterotopic sites and the exterior introduces us to the last of Foucault's points, where he defines heterotopias by way of contrast to the outer world:

The last trait of heterotopias is that they have, in relation to the rest of space, a function. The latter unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the emplacements in the interior of which human life is enclosed and partitioned, as even more illusory. Perhaps that is the role played for a long time by those famous brothels of which we are now deprived. Or else, on the contrary, creating another space, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is disorderly, ill construed, and sketchy (Foucault 2008: 21).

The refugee camp contains, simplifies and stigmatises everything that life outside the heterotopia is *not*; it demarcates – physically and symbolically – the contours of that otherness in opposition to which a definition of the “self” can be more easily drawn or, in fact, constructed. In other words, heterotopias – other spaces, spaces of otherness and, therefore, spaces for others – are an integral part of the “top” culture’s self-image and public discourse, they are “instrumentally constitutive of the shared imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture” (Stallybrass & White 1986: 5). One cannot exist without the other, one defines – and defies – the constitutive nature of the other. What is socially peripheral – the camp, the marginalised other – despised and reviled in the official discourse of dominant culture and central power (Shields 1991: 5) is in fact symbolically central.

Part 2. *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis*

In October 2015 British cartoonist/graphic novelist Kate Evans – author, among others, of *Red Rosa*, a graphic biography of Rosa Luxemburg (Verso 2015) – travelled to Calais for the first time and spent a few days in the Jungle as a volunteer, collaborating to the building of facilities and distribution of humanitarian aid. She soon felt compelled to return, this time extending her investigative interests and active contribution to the nearby camp of Dunkirk, inhabited primarily by women and children. The result of her experience in the region is *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis*, a graphic reportage that is, as the author herself underlines, overtly partisan – it is not a coincidence, perhaps, that Evans is currently working on a biography of Gramsci – and that deliberately aims at foregrounding stories and perspectives that are typically underrepresented in mainstream discourse. When I interviewed her in her house/studio in Somerset last February, she insisted that I call her work graphic “reportage” rather than “journalism” because of the myth of objectivity attached to the latter, which she firmly rejects: “One simply *cannot* be objective when making a report”, she told me, before adding:

I explicitly write in opposition to mainstream media narrative. I want the medium of comics to engage the reader to the utmost and so I will use every way of enhancing the emotion in my representation of events that is consistent with the facts [...]. I want my books to work upon the reader, I want them to take them somewhere, I want them to make a political point. And I’m actually quite snobby about comics that aren’t really about anything. Since you’ve gone through the effort of writing all that, make it say something!¹⁶

On her very first trip to Calais, she happened to stay in a former lace-making workshop turned rental apartment, where she discovered the town’s centuries-old manufacturing history. Lace constitutes a powerful visual metaphor throughout the book: most panels are framed within intricate lace patterns, the same patterns which from time to time become the black smoke of Russian fighter jets bombing the skies of Syria (the event coincided with the date of her arrival in Calais) or the red strings on which paper cut-outs in the shape of

¹⁶ Interview with the author (25 February 2018).

human bodies are hung out to dry in the work of artist Suzanne Partridge, displayed after the eviction of the Jungle on 10 March 2016 (Evans 2017: 164). Lace is also the first of the many threads we find in the book, which opens with the image of traditional lace workers weaving together what turns out to be white fences:

The first thing we see [...]. White fences stream along the highway. Metres high. Miles long. The smooth steel lacework glistens in the evening sun. Calais. The city was famous for its lace-making. The meticulous toil of women and girls sitting outside to make the most of the daylight. Nimble fingers. Bobbins dancing. Continuously twisting the threads (Evans 2017: 7).

The focus then shifts to the people trapped on the “wrong” side of the fence – “Politicians call them a ‘flood’, but of the millions of people around the world fleeing for their lives this is just a trickle. Maybe five thousand human beings? Nobody knows exactly. Nobody is counting. These people don’t count” (Evans 20017: 8) – and the territory of nonbelonging to which their existence is now confined – “Everywhere there is an air of expectation, of impermanence. People who have been on the move for so long are stuck in limbo, tantalizingly close to their destination, but the wrong side of those cruel fences, still so very far” (8). The beautifully illustrated pages that follow offer a rare insight into daily life in the camp, which allows us to observe the heterotopic features of places such as the Jungle, while at the same time – thanks to the author’s narrative strategies – disrupting some of the assumptions on which their perceived otherness is founded.

First of all, we have seen how the camp’s correspondence to heterotopias of crisis and deviation derives from a disconnection between the notions of man and citizen, which constitutes the deviation from the norm that legitimises the existence of other spaces of this kind. Evans chooses to portray life in the camp in all its complexity and vitality, refusing to subscribe both to the one-sided rhetoric of victimhood (and the pornography of suffering attached to it), and, of course, to the discursive creation of migrants and refugees as a threat, a flood, an invasion. There are, inevitably, moments of tragedy and despair, but they are interspersed with smiles – “There are a lot of smiles which I didn’t expect. Everywhere, little interactions, points of connections, life’s threads crossing” (8) – laughter, dancing, eating, drinking, playing, and art. Some of the most memorable of these moments include games of invisible cricket – “Suddenly a guy will blow an imaginary cricket ball and everyone dives for the save” (33) – improvised meals animated by conversations about yoga (98-102), screenings of Bollywood romantic comedies or action movies – much preferred by the Jungle’s predominantly male population – on the camp’s only TV (65), impromptu art sessions in which Evans paints watercolour portraits of refugees, preserved in plastic pockets for them to keep. Stories and paths criss-cross in the camp like lace work, connecting lives, showing the tapestry of humanity in all its colours. How is the nature of these men different from that of the citizens outside the fence? It is not, Evans clearly shows. Her strategy, aimed at reducing all sense of distance between the readers and the people portrayed, is a simple but effective and widely used narrative ploy.

It reminds, for example, of Joe Sacco’s *Palestine*, where the celebrated author accorded

special attention to the domestic life of Palestinian camp dwellers in general and their hospitality rituals in particular as a strategy of resistance to the camp heterotopia. “Sacco’s resistance to the refugee camp heterotopia in the Palestine narrative is achieved partly through depictions of the domestic and interior life of Palestinians” (Adams 2008: 138), who are “frequently depicted partaking in the ubiquitous tea ritual of hospitality” (138). However, in *Threads*, just like in *Palestine*, the domestic, interior life of people living in a camp (despite the obvious differences between the two realities portrayed) is inescapably subjected to the interference of the outside world, which constantly exposes it in all its vulnerability and provisionality. The fragile space of these much-needed moments of normality is haunted by the memories of the traumatic experiences that forced those people into the camp, which resurface in the stories of loss they share with Evans or the photos of their loved ones they show her. Far from being merely metaphorical, the interference of the outside also means, as we have seen, the arbitrary physical penetration of the heterotopic space by representatives of the impenetrable exterior. Indeed, “the domestic space is invaded by vicarious experiences, just as the transient space of the refugee camp is susceptible to violation by the occupying soldiers or the local militias that rule in the absence of effective civil institutions protecting human rights” (Adams 2008: 139).

In *Threads*, Evans chooses to make police interventions the key moments of crisis of the book, the incidents she depicts with the most striking dramatic force. There is a powerful quadriptyc, for example (Evans 2017: 128), in which she shows a pregnant woman, two terrified children holding onto her legs, being hit by a riot policeman. The woman’s look is fierce, defiant, a detail Evans describes as an attempt to give her back at least some of the agency she has been deprived of¹⁷. This is also the only time we see the eyes of one of these men, otherwise represented as machine-like, faceless beings without any recognisable human traits: I am thinking of the large group of riot policemen supervising the eviction of the Jungle at the end of the book, for example, “rows of them, like robots, like insects” (Evans 2017: 155). The image is followed by that of a group of men standing outside the camp, looking at it burn – the fire is, once again, a cloud of black lace – their lips sewn shut with thread in one last desperate act of protest (158)¹⁸.

Finally, we have discussed how the heterotopic space has a function in relation to the space that remains, which defines itself and cements its identity by contrast to it. The text messages that Evans displays on smartphone screens, representative of the most common arguments against the presence of migrants and refugees in Europe (they are, she told me, comments she received on her blog, or that people made to her directly, etc.), are the threads of conversation the author tries to follow to expose the fears and frustrations anti-migrant political agendas feed on¹⁹. Evans does not counter them directly until the very end of the

¹⁷ Interview with the author (25 February 2018).

¹⁸ The episode refers to the camp demolition begun on 1 March 2016. Iranian migrants were seen stitching their mouths closed to protest against the eviction while the Jungle was being destroyed: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/12181858/Calais-migrants-sew-mouths-shut-in-demolition-protest.html> (consulted on 25/02/2018).

¹⁹ “This cartoon could not be better propaganda for battlefield veteran Islamic militant males invading

book, where she devotes two pages to reporting facts, comparing and correcting figures. Throughout the comic, however, she mostly chooses to simply let these comments sit next to the images. This exemplifies the power of the genre *Threads* belongs to: the comic book is an extremely accessible medium, but at the same time it requires an active participation on the side of the readers. It invites them to fill in the blank spaces between and beyond each panel, activating connections, bridging silences and distances. Indeed, “comics omit far more information than they include. They’re a series of deliberately chosen visual fragments that don’t represent the time between or the space around other panels. And because they’re cartoons, they omit most of the details of the things they actually do depict in a panel” (Wolk 2007: 133, 4). It is up to the reader to piece the fragments together, to weave the threads of the stories. Reading a comic, in other words, involves “crossing boundaries by the thousand” (Knowles 2016: 382), and a graphic reportage about disconnection, displacement, distances and bridges seems to mimic in its very make up the themes it deals with, thus making it a privileged means of representation of one of the most urgent issues of the contemporary world.

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Northern Europe if Lenin himself produced it. The situation would not exist if the very people breaking laws in Calais did not ruin their homelands with ethnic religious hatred, intolerance, and war. You are importing death” (23).

“These refugees are safe in France where they could claim asylum if they wanted 2 shame they want out benefits 2 much!” (27).

“These cute refugee babies grow into vile adults who want to destroy our country and all that’s in it” (32).

“Oh, you’re volunteering in Calais? That’s, like, the ultimate fashion statement these days...” (54).

“Just try and think what it will be like in the UK if these people get in? Get yourself a job, start paying taxes and see how YOU like it when you have to wait for NHS treatment, or you can’t get your children into a school of your choosing. If you are so hell bent on helping people, why not help the homeless in your country? [...] (72).

“If u think their refugees ur seriously deluded they are economic migrants. How can u tell if the so-called ‘refugees’ at Calais are really asylum seekers? 99% are chancers trying to game the system” (141).

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Ilaria Oddenino holds a PhD in English and Postcolonial Literatures from the University of Turin. Her research interests include postcolonial studies, modernism and migration studies. ilaria.oddenino@unito.it

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Ellen Patat

L'identità femminile – personale, sociale e globale – in *Love in a Headscarf* di Janmohamed e *The Caged Virgin* di Hirsi Ali

Abstract I: Il presente articolo si concentra sulla figura della donna e la sua (tras)formazione identitaria nei racconti autobiografici di Shelina Zahra Janmohamed, *Love in a Headscarf*, e di Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin*. Con un approccio comparatistico, l'obiettivo è capire come le due autrici compiano e percepiscano quelle mediazioni e sintesi caratteristiche delle prime o seconde generazioni d'immigrati. Entrambe, seppur da posizioni diverse, esprimono il consapevole intento di voler contribuire alla rappresentazione della donna musulmana nel dibattito sullo scontro di civiltà attualmente imperversante in Europa. La divergenza dei testi, a livello sia tematico sia formale, e la convergenza d'intenti indicano una pluralità e complementarità di sintesi. Nell'esplorare l'identità nelle sue declinazioni – personale, sociale e globale – si osservano le dinamiche tipiche d'ibridazione culturale che si esplicano in oggetti, soggetti e luoghi sociali.

Abstract II: The present paper concentrates on the female figure and her identity (trans) formation in the autobiographical accounts *Love in a Headscarf* by Shelina Zahra Janmohamed and *The Caged Virgin* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Within a comparative framework, the objective is to understand how the two authors execute and perceive those typical mediations and syntheses of the first or second generation of immigrants. Both, albeit from different positions, express the conscious intention to contribute to the representation of the Muslim woman in the debate on the clash of civilisations currently raging in Europe. The divergence of texts, both on a thematic and formal level, and the convergence of intent indicate a plurality and complementarity of synthesis. In exploring the identity in every single aspect – personal, social and global – the typical dynamics of cultural hybridisation that are expressed in objects, subjects, and social places are observed.

Introduzione

Nella società occidentale la percezione dell'universo femminile è di certo cambiata nel corso del tempo; tra le tante attestazioni visive basti dare un'occhiata, ad esempio, a "The Advertising Archives"¹ per rendersi conto di come dall'inizio del XX secolo a oggi le immagini che

¹ Cfr. http://www.advertisingarchives.co.uk/en/page/show_home_page.html (consulted on 27/02/2018).

rappresentano la donna e il suo ambiente siano mutate: da morigerato angelo del focolare intento a cucinare, a vestirsi nel modo più appropriato, a vivere secondo le regole della *bien-séance* convenzionali ma ineludibili, a soggetto in lotta per l'uguaglianza tra sessi, non di rado ribelle e provocatrice, ma nel contempo anche oggetto sessuale. Innumerevoli guide, veri e propri volumi di comportamento², sono stati redatti per educare le donne del domani; sfruttando citazioni da scritture sacre e mantra di esperti del settore o di guru improvvisati si è cercato in ogni epoca di stabilire i dettami dei comportamenti sociali. Queste regole di condotta, profondamente legate alla diversità culturale e nazionale, sono state sviluppate da ogni civiltà letteraria. Attraverso la pratica del viaggiare, in particolare con azioni migratorie collettive, si è assistito al trasferimento di queste norme e alla loro ibridazione. In soggetti migratori appartenenti a culture distanti tra loro i tentativi di sintesi tra la cultura di appartenenza e quella del nuovo paese hanno contribuito come fattore sostanziale allo shock culturale; inoltre, questi stessi individui, nel ruolo di Altro, sono stati oggetti di numerose speculazioni che hanno spesso portato alla formazione di dilaganti stereotipi. Con piani di presunta integrazione e misure di sicurezza straordinarie, la società occidentale, ormai logorata dalle tendenze eurocentriste, ha osservato con curiosità mista a timore lo svilupparsi e l'evolversi di varie comunità, tra le maggiori quella islamica; particolare attenzione è stata rivolta alle donne velate simbolo dell'Islam (Vanzan 2006: 145) in un clima di crescente preoccupazione paneuropea sull'abbigliamento islamico (Janson 2011: 182).

Nel sistema Europa ormai aperto a flussi migratori importanti, in contesti sempre più multietnici e multiculturali, gruppi d'immigrati hanno creato società nelle società trasferendo nel tempo e nello spazio precetti, tradizioni, culture e stili di vita a esse improntati diventando così portatori di spinte conservatrici, da un lato, e trasformatrici, dall'altro. Comprensibilmente, ogni individuo coinvolto è soggetto a processi di (tras)formazione³ identitaria talvolta risultanti in ciò che si potrebbe definire un'*identità sfaccettata* e, per certi versi, *scissa*, ma all'insegna della *complementarietà*, derivante da forze esterne e interne che causano una percezione frammentaria, incompleta o, in alcuni casi, addirittura doppia dell'io. L'autrice canadese Irshad Manji⁴ sostiene: "In Europa, il tipico musulmano deve affrontare una scelta netta: o mantenere la propria identità come persona di fede ed essere percepito come debole e sottoposto al lavaggio del cervello, o abbandonare la fede ed essere trascinato in una forma di secolarismo che rasenta l'ateismo. Il Nord America sembra offrire ai musulmani l'opportunità di trovare una via di mezzo tra questi estremi" (2003, traduzione mia). Il presente arti-

² Dalle origini, si pensi a Baldassarre Castiglione (1478-1529) e al suo *Il Cortegiano* (1528), in particolare al terzo dialogo su come diventare una signora perfetta; e poi a *The Handbook of Etiquette: Being a Complete Guide to the Usages of Polite Society* (1860) uno dei primi di una serie di guide piuttosto economiche così in voga nel XIX secolo per aiutare le classi medie in espansione, i neoricchi nonché gli immigrati a inserirsi inneggiando a principi come la modestia, l'umiltà, la correttezza e la pulizia. In questa tradizione si inseriscono i volumi di Florence Hartley, *Ladies' Hand Book of Fancy and Ornamental Work* (1859) e *The Ladies' Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness* (1860), parte di una linea discorsiva distintamente femminile e cristiana.

³ Si sceglie l'utilizzo di questo formula poiché si ritiene che il processo di formazione identitaria implichi una trasformazione costante di un'entità di per sé fluida.

⁴ Manji (1969) è nata in Uganda da famiglia di origine indiana del Gurajat e egiziana poi trasferitasi in Canada. È autrice di *The Trouble with Islam Today* (2004).

colo vuole cercare di capire come il soggetto con un background migratorio, in particolare la donna, si adoperi in operazioni di mediazione con la nuova cultura nonostante i suoi legami inscindibili con quella di appartenenza implementata e impartita dall'ambiente familiare.

In questa cornice s'inseriscono le produzioni autobiografiche dell'autrice britannica Shelina Zahra Janmohamed e della scrittrice olandese-americana di origine somala, Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Janmohamed⁵ è emersa sul panorama letterario inglese nel 2009 con *Love in a Headscarf*⁶, un *memoir* del crescere come donna musulmana in Inghilterra; a cui ha fatto seguito nel 2016 *Generation M*, sottotitolato *Young Muslims Changing the World*, che si concentra sulle aspirazioni e il potere collettivo della *Millennial Generation* musulmana che vuole andare oltre i concetti di *halal* a *tayyab*, etico e sano, e le classiche rappresentazioni di oppressione e dipendenza. Hirsi Ali, invece, femminista e attiva politicamente, aveva pubblicato, due anni prima rispetto a LH, una raccolta di saggi, dall'eloquente titolo *The Caged Virgin. A Muslim Woman's Cry for Reason*⁷ (2007), che raccoglie saggi e conferenze (dal 2003 al 2004) e le sue esperienze personali come interprete su una serie di questioni, incluso il ruolo della donna, nell'Islam. Dopo *Infedele*⁸ (2006), nel 2010 esce la sua seconda autobiografia in lingua inglese *Nomad: From Islam to America: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations*.

Il *fil rouge* che lega le autrici è costituito dall'esperienza diretta e dal retaggio culturale che, trasformati in prosa sebbene in soluzioni formali diverse, vengono utilizzati come mezzi di lettura e valutazione del ruolo delle donne. Il consapevole intento di voler contribuire con una nuova prospettiva alla discussione sulla rappresentazione della donna musulmana attribuisce a entrambi i testi un valore aggiunto nel dibattito sullo scontro di civiltà attualmente imperversante in Europa.

Quest'articolo, con un approccio comparatistico e attingendo a varie prospettive critiche, ha come obiettivo quello di rispondere al seguente quesito: se per identità s'intende sia, per ora in termini semplicistici, la "consapevolezza del sé" (Minolli 2006; Shields 2008) sia "i modi in cui gli individui e le collettività si distinguono nelle loro relazioni sociali con gli altri individui e collettività" (Jenkins 1996: 4, traduzione mia), allora quali identità – (1) personale, (2) sociale, (3) globale – emergono dai due testi in esame? La lettura comparata dei due testi permette di esplorare le prospettive di due donne che dall'interno, come membri della comunità islamica, affrontano, seppur con percorsi e posizioni spesso contrastanti, il complesso tema della formazione identitaria. A un breve quadro teorico, seguirà l'analisi dei volumi suddivisa in tre sezioni: Identità personale: la rappresentazione del Sé; Identità sociale: le dinamiche femminili; Identità globale: gli spazi femminili.

Quadro teorico

Quando si parla di flussi migratori, generalmente, ci si riferisce a gruppi di individui che da una zona A compiono uno spostamento verso una zona B diventando così residenti di

⁵ Vive a Londra e collabora con *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The National*, *The Muslim News* e *Emel*. È un'attivista e l'autrice del blog "Spirit21", premiato con il Brass Crescent Award.

⁶ Di seguito indicato come LH.

⁷ Di seguito indicato come CV. Si specifica che il testo è stato pubblicato prima in olandese (2004) e poi tradotto in inglese.

⁸ Anche questo testo è stato tradotto dall'olandese in inglese nel 2007.

questa nuova area. Il concetto di residenza è il punto focale che permette la distinzione tra viaggio e migrazione: mentre il viaggiatore è consapevole che il suo movimento nello spazio è temporaneo, il migrante, che ha come scopo il trasferimento della propria residenza, compie uno spostamento permanente (Kleinschmidt 2003: 17). L'intenzionalità alla base del processo è funzionale per capire come il soggetto migrante si rapporti alla realtà che lo circonda e come, in ultima istanza, la sua identità ne venga influenzata. Il sistema di valori e aspettative tipiche dell'individuo e la sua percezione delle opportunità future vengono, infatti, influenzate da eventi cruciali come, ad esempio, la migrazione⁹ (Espín & Dottolo 2015: 228). Nell'ambito delle scienze e delle politiche sociali, si tende a usare i termini di "prime" o "seconde" generazioni, facendo riferimento al nucleo familiare piuttosto che al singolo individuo, e di generazione 1.5 (1.5G), composta da individui che sono emigrati in una fase precedente o contemporanea alla prima adolescenza. Questa distinzione crea delle classi di analisi che sottendono dinamiche di sviluppo cognitivo e relazionale ben distinte.

A livello intuitivo, quando si parla dell'identità ci si riferisce alle qualità che contribuiscono a distinguere un individuo, qui definito soggetto o attante¹⁰, da altri. In termini psicoanalitici, si parla di senso e consapevolezza di sé come entità distinta dell'essere umano inteso come sistema non lineare e aperto alla complessità (Minolli 2006: 166). In psicologia, infatti, il termine è connesso alla consapevolezza di sé, all'immagine di sé, all'auto-riflessione e all'autostima (Shields 2008: 301). Da ciò, si deduce che i caratteri identitari sono quegli attributi individuali, mai universali, che formano il soggetto e che ne dettano il comportamento all'interno del proprio microcosmo e del macrocosmo società. Gli aspetti che determinano come una persona comprende le proprie relazioni con il mondo, come tali relazioni si sviluppano nello spazio e nel tempo e come una certa persona concepisce le possibilità future sono tutti diramazioni del termine identità (Norton 2000: 5). Lungi dall'essere insiemisti stagni o processi lineari, i concetti di identità e di (tras)formazione identitaria richiedono l'analisi di una serie di variabili. La costituzione del soggetto è, difatti, la risultante di forze modellatrici che sia dall'interno sia dall'esterno plasmano il soggetto stesso. Di conseguenza, le identità risultano essere il complesso prodotto dell'incrocio di categorie d'appartenenza e significato le quali si presentano come multiple proprio perché i concetti di razza, classe e genere, in linea con il paradigma intersezionale¹¹, non possono essere considerati classi d'analisi separate bensì reciprocamente costituite (Wilkins 2012: 173).

L'emergere dell'identità dev'essere, perciò, considerato un processo organico e in continua trasformazione dell'attante nel suo dipanarsi tra le trame imposte e auto-imposte e nel suo negoziare significati. Identità e cultura sono, inoltre, interdipendenti (Phinney & Balde-

⁹ Si esaminino a riguardo gli studi di Stewart and Healy (citati in Espín e Dottolo 2015: 227-229).

¹⁰ Traslando il modello paradigmatico attanziale di Gremais dalla forma narrativa alla realtà – intese come istanze esperienziali diverse per mezzo, ma simili in sostanza – l'attante esiste in relazione agli altri attanti e al suo investimento modale.

¹¹ L'intersezionalità, termine coniato nel 1989 da Kimberlé Crenshaw per spiegare l'oppressione delle donne afro-americane, sostiene che le varie forme di stratificazione sociale, ossia classe, razza, orientamento sessuale, età, disabilità e genere, non esistono separatamente l'una dall'altra, ma sono complessamente intrecciate.

lomar 2011: 163). È proprio nello scambio tra l'Io e l'Altro e l'Alterità che il soggetto si forma. L'identità diventa così l'essere uguali a sé stessi e diversi (Eriksen 2002: 60). In questi scambi o interazioni per la negoziazione dell'identità (Prins, Van Stekelenburg, Polletta, e Kalendermans 2013: 81) – interno / esterno, Io / Altro, Io / Alterità – si delineano le dinamiche necessarie non solo alla comprensione dell'Io come attante, ma anche della società stessa: si ritiene, dunque, necessario capire l'Io e la sua formazione per poter comprendere la società a cui esso appartiene poiché, come osservato in precedenza, le dinamiche di distinzione degli individui così come delle collettività sono fattori determinanti (Jenkins 1996: 4). In sostanza, l'identità può essere considerata una narrativa socialmente costruita, autocosciente e continua nel tempo che le persone eseguono, interpretano e proiettano nel vestire, nei movimenti corporei, nelle azioni e nel linguaggio (Block 2007: 27). È, dunque, logico asserire che questa cosiddetta caratteristica distintiva possa esplicitarsi nella scelta di oggetti, rappresentazioni esteriori, che ne consolidino l'esistenza. In aggiunta, attraverso il linguaggio, l'individuo riesce a essere, in termini meadiani¹², l'oggetto a sé stesso. Pertanto, l'analisi dell'evoluzione multiforme dell'identità – umana, sociale e personale¹³ – si dimostra una chiave di lettura dell'esperienza individuale asserendola a referente esperienziale. Nel linguaggio comune e nella maggior parte degli studi accademici, l'identità “significa sia (a) una categoria sociale, definita da regole e presunti attributi caratteristici o comportamenti previsti, o (b) una caratteristica socialmente distintiva di cui una persona è particolarmente orgogliosa o vede come immutabile ma socialmente consequenziale (o, ovviamente, sia (a) che (b) contemporaneamente)” (Fearon 1999: 36, traduzione mia). In particolare, è possibile estrapolare tre forme identitarie: *sociale*, che stabilisce la posizione dell'individuo nel tessuto sociale; *personale*, che denota quegli aspetti più concreti dell'esperienza individuale fondati sulle interazioni; e, infine, la nozione dell'identità dell'*Ego* che si riferisce a quel senso soggettivo di continuità che è caratteristico della personalità (Côté e Levine 2002: 8). Il presente elaborato esplora la rappresentazione dell'identità nelle sue declinazioni – personale, sociale e globale – in linea con il principio che la considera un'entità fluida, parte integrante di un *continuum*.

Questioni di identità

“Muslim women” sostiene Janmohamed, “come in many shapes, colors, and flavors, and my story is simply the tale of one woman’s experience” (LH 2). Tuttavia, sempre più spesso, la società occidentale tende a creare, soprattutto a causa dell'influenza dei mass media, delle categorizzazioni tutt'altro che flessibili o eterogenee. È risaputo che ciò che non si conosce suscita paura; il distante dal Sé si ammantava di mistero e diventa persino sospetto. Per molti in Occidente, il fondamentalismo religioso islamico appare regressivo, conservatore e distruttivo. Il potere di questi movimenti estremisti si fonda parzialmente sull'assenza di individualità all'interno del gruppo che, in termini psicologici, sembra essere coerente con un resoconto di auto-categorizzazione: l'identità sociale delle persone (come cristiana, protestante, musulmana) diventa saliente, e successivamente canalizza le loro azioni e pensieri (Postmes *et al.* 2006: 215). Questa constatazione sembrerebbe in netto contrasto con l'auto-ce-

¹² Cfr. Mead 1934.

¹³ Cfr. John C. Tuner & Penelope J. Oakes. 1986.

lebrazione dell'Io tipica delle società occidentali e, di conseguenza, l'espressione del soggetto e le sue relazioni sono fondamentali per capirne la formazione.

Mentre Janmohamed, membro della cosiddetta seconda generazione¹⁴ di immigrati – “the intersection of being Muslim, South Asian, and British” (LH 7) – presenta la complessa situazione della donna musulmana apparentemente tormentata da forze contrastanti nel suo tentativo di conciliare modernità e tradizione mantenendo, tuttavia, un approccio positivo, Hirsi Ali, prima generazione di immigrati¹⁵, usa toni fortemente duri e aspri contro una religione che ha rigettato e a cui si è opposta apertamente, dopo il 2002, a rischio della sua stessa vita¹⁶ (CV 3). Non si deve incorrere nell'errore di pensare che Janmohamed sia remissiva o assoggettata, cosa che non traspare nelle pagine del libro; l'autrice, diventando lei stessa referente, cerca di sovvertire la classica immagine stereotipata e diffusa nella società occidentale di una figura femminile soffocata e in balia del potere patriarcale e delle norme sociali. Nel suo LH, si concentra sulla sintesi culturale e la sua identità ibrida. L'autrice britannica non è per ora una nuova Sharazad¹⁷, tuttavia, le sue esperienze e i suoi ricordi confluiscono in una prosa ricca di spunti di ricerca. D'altro canto, Hirsi Ali – “first and foremost Muslim and only then Somali” (CV 2) – più in linea con l'algerina Assia Djebar¹⁸ o la marocchina Fatema Mernissi¹⁹ –, sviluppa una prosa profondamente sentita e imbevuta di rabbia e rancore che dovrebbe diventare una sorta di chiamata a un “Illuminismo” in chiave islamica (CV 13).

Identità personale: la rappresentazione del Sé

La sfera matrimoniale è uno dei punti trattati da entrambi i testi seppur in maniera opposta. Janmohamed, che usa il negozio giuridico come pretesto per riflessioni di più ampio respiro, è sostenitrice del matrimonio combinato. La sua ricerca dell'uomo ideale con l'utilizzo

¹⁴ Qui s'intende “seconda generazione” poiché figlia di genitori – prima generazione – che hanno intrapreso il progetto migrazione alla fine degli anni Sessanta dalla Tanzania in cui, a loro volta, erano cresciuti come terza generazione di emigrati dal Gujarat, stato dell'India nord-occidentale sul mare Arabico. Verso la metà del 1850, la piccola comunità di cui i bisnonni facevano parte si era convertita all'Islam (LH 14).

¹⁵ Cognome originario Magan, sostituito da Ali (nome del nonno), alla richiesta di asilo politico per essere stata costretta ad un matrimonio combinato. Dopo aver vissuto in Somalia, paese in cui è nata, in Etiopia, Kenya e Arabia Saudita, si rifugia nei Paesi Bassi dove viene naturalizzata. Dopo aver rinnegato la fede islamica ed essere impegnata politicamente viene costretta lasciare il paese; vive negli Stati Uniti.

¹⁶ Tensioni seguirono a *Submission*, un cortometraggio olandese in lingua inglese prodotto e diretto da Theo van Gogh, scritto da Hirsi Ali e trasmesso dalla televisione olandese nel 2004. Sul cadavere di Van Gogh, assassinato da un fondamentalista musulmano, furono ritrovate minacce dirette a Hirsi Ali. Il 14° capitolo di CV riporta la trascrizione del cortometraggio.

¹⁷ Cantastorie protagonista della silloge favolistica *La mille e una notte* che “con il solo uso del linguaggio, soggiogò la Cristianità, dai cattolici devoti fino agli ortodossi e ai protestanti” (Mernissi 2000: 49).

¹⁸ Djebar (1936-2015), prima autrice del Maghreb a essere ammessa all'Académie française (2005), con *Les enfants du nouveau monde* (1962), e *Les Alouettes naïves* (1967) denunciava la condizione di reclusione delle donne algerine.

¹⁹ Mernissi (1940-2015), scrittrice femminista marocchina, in opere tradotte anche in italiano – *La terrazza proibita* (1996), *L'Harem e l'Occidente* (2000), *Islam e democrazia* (2002) – ha puntato sulla sensibilizzazione del lettore e la necessità di sviluppare forme di collaborazione.

dei *biodata*²⁰ si trasforma in una buffa epopea dai risvolti talvolta comici. Hirsi Ali, invece, ha rigettato il matrimonio combinato; anzi, è stato proprio questo evento la spinta ad allontanarsi dal nucleo familiare e a rivoluzionare la sua vita. Nell'affrontare la questione dell'unione combinata, improbabile nella moderna cultura europea, emergono non solo le percezioni del Sé delle scrittrici, ma anche i tratti caratterizzanti della loro identità.

La prosa di Janmohamed, nonostante i riferimenti alle Scritture Sacre e alla storia, è a tratti scolastica, talvolta didascalica, alcuni passaggi sembrano estrapolati da un romanzo rosa, altri da un manuale di comportamento e *bon ton*. La scrittrice inglese nel suo resoconto memorialistico presenta a più riprese la storia della sua famiglia:

Our [dell'autrice e di un'amica] parents had arrived as part of the immigrant waves of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. During this period, Britain had been changing socially and culturally, while at the same time the world was becoming more connected and we all started living in a "global village". We were all the first generation of our families and communities to be born and brought up in Britain. That meant we had to navigate our way through the challenges that faced all Asians and all Muslims. Many of those challenges were the same that any second-generation child of immigrants might experience in creating a solid sense of identity that combined both their parents' culture and the culture that they found themselves growing up in (LH 45).

Janmohamed ripropone la sintesi tipica dei soggetti biculturali o transculturali il cui apprendimento culturale e sociale è generato dall'esperienza quotidiana che viene usata come parametro per interpretare la realtà. In bilico tra identità culturali, Janmohamed sottolinea le incertezze disseminate sul suo percorso sul come definirsi o sentirsi:

Only later, as the world became smaller, as people's eyes widened at the complexities of global cultures, and as my confidence in my own faith and culture grew, were my answers delivered with edgy attitude about fusion style, tasty spicy cuisine, and fashionable henna art; and about my faith and the belief that it had something strong to offer (LH 14).

Segnando non solo un cambiamento personale ma sociale e globale, l'autrice non cela la sua stessa (tras)formazione. Sottolinea, tramite l'auto-valutazione, quelle che possono essere categorie universali: "I felt that I had achieved so much: education, independence, career, travel" (LH 82). La realizzazione della donna, prescindendo da schemi culturali o religiosi, sembra essere legata all'istruzione, alla sua indipendenza, alla carriera e alla sua ca-

²⁰ "In order to enter the mating ritual, each candidate had to create a description of themselves, which would then be circulated among prospective families and matchmakers. This was usually done by word of mouth but was on occasion written as a document resembling a CV. It might even include a photograph of the individual. Once e-mail and Internet had arrived, these were even sent electronically to speed up the introduction process, whizzing information about prospective partners around the globe, one love-hungry electron after another. These extremely personal details were then packaged with a description of the protagonist's character and the qualities and features they sought in a partner. The label for this package of information suggested a secret-services-hunting-down-dissidents film title: *Biodata*" (LH 25).

pacità di viaggiare. Il processo cognitivo durante anni essenziali di formazione come quelli adolescenziali – come “British East-African Asian Muslim girl in the bubbling ethnic mix of North London in the context of 1980s Anglo-Saxon monoculture” (LH 13) – si basa su letture quali *Marriage and Morals in Islam* – un volume tra i tanti in voga, che ha l’obiettivo di fornire materiale per la preparazione al matrimonio –, su riviste dal titolo accattivante come “*Why the marriage is the new black*” (LH 23) e, anche, su interessanti conversazioni con giovani imam e racconti di sue coetanee. Inoltre, è influenzato soprattutto dalla posizione della famiglia in materia di legami. La dimensione femminile emerge nei dettagli più classici e triviali: il *leitmotiv* del cibo – come le *samosas*, un tipico antipasto dell’asia centro-meridionale che servite “erano capaci di cambiare il futuro, i destini e le famiglie”²¹ (LH 5, traduzione mia), o i piatti di *halva* –, il vestiario – l’hijab, la *dupatta* – e l’arredamento. Le tradizioni e i rituali vengono esposti con dovizia di particolari: dall’accoglienza dell’ospite alle pratiche di gestione delle relazioni sociali. Intenta a raccontare la ricerca del principe azzurro – del suo John Travolta o Clark Kent – nelle pieghe della normalità, fatta di piccoli gesti e sguardi rubati, l’autrice rivela se stessa:

I wonder if I should stand up and help him with a chair, to fulfill my duties as hostess. Hospitality is a deeply entrenched and essential Islamic value. The British and Asian voices in my head insist I remain still: pulling out chairs is a man’s duty in our culture, they say. The pursuit of marriage trumps hospitality, they advise. Besides, my own voice echoes that it is a universal principle that a woman should leave a man to have pride in his own masculinity and to be sensitive to a woman’s femininity. I empower the man be the Man (LH 7).

Il processo di ibridazione non riguarda solo le due culture, l’inglese e l’asiatica, o l’islam, bensì si fonda anche sul rivendicare la propria femminilità. È la “sua voce”, non quelle prettamente nazionali nella mente, che in modo consapevole sceglie di “dare potere” all’uomo; da attante si mette consapevolmente in relazione alla figura maschile. La cognizione di fare parte di una “nuova” cultura (LH 47) è funzionale nella (tras)formazione identitaria.

Analogamente Hirsi Ali si presenta, con incedere accademico:

My parents brought me up to be a Muslim – a good Muslim. Islam dominated the lives of our family and relations down to the smallest detail. It was our ideology, our political conviction, our moral standard, our law, and our identity. We were first and foremost Muslim and only then Somali. Muslims, as we were taught the meaning of the name, are people who submit themselves to Allah’s will, which is found in the Koran and the Hadith, a collection of sayings ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad. I was taught that Islam sets us apart from the rest of the world, the world of non-Muslims (CV 2).

²¹ “The entire transaction would be sealed with a few glances of the groom at his bride-to-be. She might be so covered up that he could barely see her, or, as she served him his tea, she might have the audacity to raise her eyes to his and glance cheekily at him. It was the same moment, whether from a golden Bollywood film or Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. The serving of the samosas was able to change futures, destinies, and families”.

Questo sembra essere l'Islam opprimente e soffocante, totalizzante e segregante. La leggerezza di spirito che emergeva dalle pagine di Janmohamed, scompare nell'incipit di *The Caged Virgin*, il cui titolo lascia già trapelare la posizione dell'autrice che sottolinea, in modo diametralmente opposto dall'autrice britannica, una sudditanza della donna rispetto all'uomo. Nel sostenere la sua posizione cita Lewis e Pryce-Jones e tre caratteristiche legate alla forma mentis islamica tradizionale: (i) mentalità gerarchico-autoritaria; (ii) identità di gruppo; (iii) mentalità patriarcale e cultura della vergogna. L'autrice, profondamente segnata dall'atteggiamento della famiglia, dai casi affrontati come interprete e dalle sue vicende personali, ripropone una donna umiliata dall'assetto sociale che la vede subalterna, nella costante incertezza del peccato, del suo conseguente senso di vergogna e del timore della punizione.

Soffermandosi sulla sua testimonianza, prosegue:

About twelve years ago, at age twenty-two, I arrived in Western Europe, on the run from an arranged marriage. I soon learned that God and His truth had been humanized here. For Muslims life on earth is merely a transitory stage before the hereafter; but here people are also allowed to invest in their lives as mortals. What is more, hell seems no longer to exist, and God is a god of love rather than a cruel ruler who metes out punishments (CV 2).

La partenza e il distacco volontario dalle sue radici fanno scoprire all'autrice una dimensione spirituale diversa. Hirsi Ali sceglie di non soffermarsi sui cosiddetti *clash* culturali, politici o sociali, bensì si sofferma sulla scoperta di un potere divino benevolo, di cui, tuttavia, parla *anche* Janmohamed. L'arrivo nei Paesi Bassi costituisce, dunque, uno spartiacque nello sviluppo identitario dell'autrice. Janmohamed si rivolge a una religione che percepisce come fonte di arricchimento, di sentimenti e manifestazioni di pienezza mentre Hirsi Ali rifugge da credenze limitanti trovando un senso di libertà nella possibilità di esprimere il suo spirito di critica. Interrogandosi sui fondamenti del suo credo – “the more religious I became, the more I found myself lying and deceiving” (CV 42) – giunge a una triplice conclusione che ritiene fondante per spiegare i motivi per cui “le nazioni musulmane sono in ritardo sull'Occidente e, più recentemente, anche in ritardo rispetto all'Asia” (CV 3): la relazione di un musulmano con Dio è basata sulla paura; l'Islam conosce solo una fonte morale: il Profeta Maometto; l'Islam è fortemente dominato da una moralità sessuale tanto da affermare:

The essence of a woman is reduced to her hymen. Her veil functions as a constant reminder to the outside world of this stifling morality that makes Muslim men the owners of women and obliges them to prevent their mothers, sisters, aunts, sisters-in-law, cousins, nieces, and wives from having sexual contact (CV 3).

La prosa di Hirsi Ali diventa una raccolta enciclopedica di dichiarazioni, studi e ricerche che attestano aspetti prettamente negativi e totalizzanti dell'Islam, sottolineando come l'autrice abbia cercato di allontanarsi drasticamente da quello che è il suo back-

ground di origine che ha dato forma alla sua adolescenza e che ha modellato il suo presente da attivista²².

Se da un lato, l'autrice britannica dimostra una fede incrollabile, non solo nella religione di per sé, ma anche nei principi e nelle tradizioni²³ che governano la sua esistenza e nei valori trasmessi dalla sua famiglia nonostante, o proprio perché, sia cresciuta in un ambiente eterogeneo, dall'altro, l'autrice somalo-olandese cresciuta in una comunità di maggioranza sviluppa un forte livore che altera gli stessi attributi che in precedenza, potenzialmente, avevano il potere di definirla. È, forse, scontato affermare che per entrambe la religione con i suoi riti e l'abbigliamento, in primis il velo (hijab), siano esteriorizzazioni di un'identità ben precisa. La velata Janmohamed²⁴ descrive con gioiosa partecipazione i vari indumenti tradizionali e multicolore che pudicamente coprono il corpo femminile mettendo in risalto la sua "*agentive identity*" (Bhimji 2012: 77). Hirsi Ali conferisce al velo il potere di rendere una donna invisibile; esso diviene "l'epitome dell'oppressione e patriarcato del mondo islamico" (Janson 2011: 183, traduzione mia). L'autrice sembra ricalcare il pensiero dello storico di origini libanesi-cristiane Albert Hourani nel considerare l'atto di scoprire il capo un segno di un progresso di stampo occidentale (Ahmed 2011: 20). Per di più, nella sua *call for action*, Hirsi Ali ribadisce che quei valori che vengono percepiti come tipicamente occidentali, ossia la libertà dell'individuo e l'uguaglianza tra uomo e donna, in realtà, andrebbero implementati e sfruttati per la creazione di istituzioni che li proteggano e promuovano, circoscrivendo la religione nell'ambiente domestico e nelle moschee (CV 29).

Identità sociale: le dinamiche femminili

Se l'identità si considera una narrativa socialmente costruita (Block 2007), è inevitabile che l'attante si confronti e percepisca se stesso attraverso le interazioni che egli compie nel macrocosmo-società. Entrambe le autrici si soffermano su quest'identità, ancora una volta, secondo prospettive contrastanti.

Innanzitutto, risalta la consapevolezza del giudizio: "I was considered 'dark'. Asians are notoriously color-conscious: to be fair is to be beautiful, to be dark is to be ugly. Being pale of skin is a sign of status and a hugely desirable quality in a future daughter-in-law" (LH 13); "Right now the media are still lapping it up: a black woman who criticizes Islam" (CV 38). In secondo luogo, entrambe le scrittrici si devono confrontare con le figure femminili che popolano la loro quotidianità, dal nucleo familiare alle coetanee.

²² "People also say that my negative image of Islam is the product of personal trauma. I am not saying that I had a rosy childhood, but I managed to get through it. It would be selfish to keep my experiences and insights to myself. It wouldn't be feasible. Young Muslim girls in the Netherlands who still have the light in their eyes do not have to go through what I did. We must face the facts and offer to immigrants what they are denied in their own culture: individual dignity. The big obstacle to the integration of immigrants is undeniably Islam" (CV 43).

²³ "But I did not see any paradox in engaging with the traditional process of marriage, of which they [the Buxom Aunties] were a pivotal part. If I wanted a husband, this was how things were done" (LH 7).

²⁴ "When I first made the decision to "wear hijab", I did it simply because it was "the thing to do". I went often to the mosque, I read a lot of Islamic books, I read the Qur'an, I traveled to Muslim countries, I went on the *umra*, the lesser pilgrimage, to Mecca. I was immersed in wanting to live a fully Islamic lifestyle as part of who I was, and I decided that wearing hijab was a fundamental part of that desire" (LH 63).

Le descrizioni delle figure materne, primo termine di confronto, sono in linea con il tono espresso dalle rispettive posizioni. A una madre severa e austera – “My mother is a strict woman with a strong will. She knows how to manipulate her surroundings, and if it doesn’t work, she hits you and starts throwing things about. [...] She was cool, distant, a perfectionist” (CV45) – si contrappone una figura materna amorevole – “She is small, with soft brown skin and smile that can lift me out of even the darkest mood. I look at her lovingly, encouraging her to reveal her secret. She speaks to me in a silent whisper” (LH 6).

Nonostante ambienti e dinamiche familiari decisamente diverse – una famiglia medio-borghese quella di Janmohamed, una politicamente coinvolta, a tratti itinerante quella di Hirsi Ali – entrambe le scrittrici sono state avviate all’educazione scolastica, ritenuta fondamentale. Hirsi Ali riferisce dell’ambiente multiculturale degli anni dell’istruzione in Kenya:

In Kenya I went from my primary school to the Muslim Girls Secondary School. The school was attended by girls from Kenya but also from Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, and India. There were some very bright girls there, who were good at everything, academic subjects as well as sport. In the mornings our names were called out. You had to say “Present”. But after a certain age there seemed to be a growing number of absent girls. No one knew where they had gone. Later we heard that they had been married off (CV 41).

Parlando dello studio, voluto dal padre (poco presente nell’economia familiare e con cui per sei anni non ebbe alcun tipo di rapporto), ma ritenuto non necessario dalla madre (poiché ininfluente per scopi matrimoniali), si evidenziano, anche se parzialmente in CV, quelle forme di aggregazione tipiche degli anni adolescenziali che qui sono, nuovamente, legate a emozioni negative. Janmohamed, invece, in buoni rapporti con entrambi i genitori, narra gli anni di scuola sottolineando “I was a teenage girl with typical adolescent fantasies. Except for the matter of religion” (LH 13).

Le donne di Hirsi Ali sono figure femminili deturpate dalla violenza, come, ad esempio, le rifugiate in un campo al confine tra la Somalia e il Kenya (CV 42), dal corpo violato e dallo spirito annientato, le donne sottoposte all’infibulazione e le donne incontrate durante i suoi incarichi. Le dinamiche relazionali di cui parla si svolgono all’insegna della tensione e della riservatezza; ricche di segreti, silenzi e sguardi che sembrano togliere potere alla parola per conferirla al linguaggio non-verbale. Tuttavia i messaggi subliminali acquistano valore e lasciano ampio spazio all’interpretazione. La linea di Hirsi Ali è coerente e costante, uno standard sorretto con decisione e, talvolta, aggressività; in fondo, la sua è pur sempre una battaglia.

Le figure femminili presentate da Janmohamed si mostrano vivaci, chiacchierone e impiccione e, per alcuni versi, sembrano personaggi usciti dalla Commedia dell’Arte. Costoro, le quali tirano i fili delle relazioni sociali come veri e proprio burattinai, sono le “Buxom Aunties” o “Auntie-Jee” – “‘Auntie’ for respect and ‘Jee’ for further respect” (LH 7):

The Aunties were large and buxom, with strong accents that had a mesmerizing lilt to them, yet their voices grated as they echoed through my head. They were loud and

powerful and rang with the legacy of thousands of years of tradition and heritage.
Who was I to disobey their laws? (LH 6)

Le dinamiche interpersonali vengono abilmente gestite da queste donne, un incrocio tra austere *chaperon* vittoriane e pettegole frequentatrici di hamam. È nelle loro mani esperte che le giovani menti vengono plasmate e indirizzate al futuro: “Cooking and hostessing skills are crucial in Asian culture as a sign of a ‘real’ woman, just as they used to be in Europe, too. *Every woman must be a domestic goddess*” (LH 4); oppure “I have been told repeatedly by the elders and Aunties that I am too confident and clever, and that boys don’t like that. If I am serious about getting married, I will have to hide it” (LH 6).

La nozione di un’identità “multiversal”, avanzata da Janmohamed, offre un riassunto delle sue posizioni:

Looking in front of me at the crowd swirling past, I knew that I was different because I was me, but I was also the same as everyone, because I was a human being. Each of us occupied so many spaces and identities, and that made us multiversal, not identical. If I had once felt lonely with my British Asian Muslim woman multiversal identity, I knew now that there were other people out there who felt the same (LH 92).

Nel campo delle cosmologia, il concetto di “multiverse” designa la molteplicità dei possibili universi; con dimensioni moltiplicate, versatili e strettamente interconnesse, si esacerbano le emozioni, si sviluppano diversi filtri e diverse esperienze emotive. Rimarcando la propria individualità, Janmohamed enfatizza la comunanza, aspetto ponderante nella sua produzione, e riflette sul suo personale sviluppo. Il centro focale è nella continuità; se si percepisce l’identità come entità fluida in grado di essere modificata, ossia come progressione continua, allora ogni cambiamento si propaga in avanti nelle versioni future del soggetto. È, prima di tutto, un’identità umana, poi personale e, infine, sociale e cosmopolita.

Identità globale: gli spazi al femminile

Per le donne musulmane, così come notato da Janmohamed, l’impegno nella comunità religiosa sembra essenziale: “There was one area that was particularly clear though – the Muslim women we knew were still very much connected to their community, their mosques, and their faith. In all these areas they were much more visible than men, and worked hard to keep them together” (LH 45). In fondo, anche le rinomate *matchmakers* sono membri del “Marriage Committee” della locale moschea. Diventa, dunque, significativo esaminare i modi in cui le donne entrano in connessione con gli spazi sacri, poiché possono fornire informazioni non solo sul loro posizionamento religioso, ma anche sui modi in cui tali spazi facilitano la formazione di atteggiamenti e pratiche cosmopolite; ciò consente, inoltre, di capire come e in quale misura le donne possano trasformare questi spazi (Bhimji 2012: 72).

I luoghi di culto, in questo caso, le moschee e le *madāris*, ovvero scuole coraniche che, secondo Hirsi Ali, sono diventate in molti paesi scuole per il fondamentalismo islamico (CV 24), sono, contemporaneamente, luoghi di unione e separazione. Creano, infatti, all’interno della comunità un “noi” e un “loro”. In poche righe, Hirsi Ali accenna a questi centri come

fonte propagandistica di odio e pregiudizi²⁵ nei confronti dell'Altro (CV 25; 95). Più dettagliata è, invece, Janmohamed:

The mosque was a small converted community center. Some mosques were purpose-built, some were in small converted houses, others were old buildings of worship that had been closed down or in disrepair and then rescued and revived as a place of worship, but this time as a mosque. The floor was covered in large rugs, and as in all mosques, you had to remove your shoes in the cloakroom before you entered. The mosque was the center of Islamic community life. Prayers were held there, along with Qur'an classes for children, lessons for adults, and other religious lectures and events. It was the hub of Muslim existence because it was a center of learning and spirituality, but also a place to meet friends and family and fulfill your social needs (LH 17).

Edifici riconvertiti o appositamente costruiti, le moschee sono il fulcro delle attività della comunità in cui le preghiere e le pratiche religiose si mescolano a intrattenimento ed educazione di bambini e adulti; un luogo in cui le divisioni di genere implicano forme di relazione limitanti e univoche che, tuttavia, liberano da altre forme di separazione: "Since there were only women in our section of the mosque, I did not wear my headscarf. My mother would ensure that my hair and lipstick were pristine, so I would look my prettiest" (LH 74). La moschea, diventa come notato da Bhimji (2012: 76), uno degli spazi in cui le donne possono esprimere la propria femminilità. Da una delle sezioni divulgative di Janmohamed emerge il concetto di *ummah*:

It meant being part of a single nation of people who shared a sense of community and togetherness, wherever you were in the world. Even though every individual and society within the *ummah* would have different opinions and cultures, it brought everyone together through unity and belonging. What we shared was a journey toward the Divine, and a desire to make the world a better place. Rooted in the very beginnings of Islam, 1,400 years earlier, it was the first global identity that existed, before the ideas of "globalization" or "global village". Like a large family, every member of the *ummah* was of value, and you felt their happiness and their pain. That is why Muslims always seemed to express themselves so strongly about the experiences and troubles of other Muslims in different parts of the world. Each one was immediate and real, like a family member, no matter their physical location (LH 70).

Quella indicata in questo breve passaggio sembra essere un'identità globale di una specifica comunità; Janmohamed fa, inoltre, un passo avanti:

All the confusions I had faced growing up living a life divided into tangled and disconnected identities all suddenly became clear. I saw the reality of how it could work

²⁵ Per quanto concerne la formazione di pregiudizi, va notato che su questo punto concorda, in certa misura, anche Janmohamed sottolineando: "Across the Muslim world, although Muslims were loath to admit it, racial prejudice was rife [...]" (LH 92).

in front of my eyes: so many different identities occupying the same place, flowing into each other. You could pick each of them out separately, bold and proud of what they were.

That's how we need to live in Britain, I thought to myself as I watched all these different people from around the world walk on the same journey, side by side, working, studying, living, communicating, respecting, whatever our ethnicity, religion, or belief. Seeing the people around us as "other" is not an option (LH 92).

Dalla sfera religiosa trabocca nelle trame della quotidianità un'identità globale, sovrastando l'identità nazionale intesa come quello "spirito di appartenenza a una nazione, caratterizzata da simboli, tradizioni, luoghi sacri, cerimonie, eroi, culture e territorio" (Gibernau citato in Pultar 2014: 305). È l'Altro, quel "loro", che dovrebbe essere integrato in un "noi" globale per raggiungere un senso di comunanza propositiva.

Conclusion

Come si è sostenuto in precedenza l'identità, in quanto entità fluida e basata su percezioni mutevoli, può essere definita come personale, sociale e globale. La scrittrice britannica di origini sud asiatiche Shelina Zahra Janmohamed e l'autrice olandese-americana di origini somale Ayaan Hirsi Ali hanno pubblicato due testi che affrontano l'Islam e la condizione della donna nelle comunità migranti da prospettive diverse. Entrambe incitano all'azione, vogliono dare voce alle donne, seppur in modi ed esiti formali diversi. Si fanno portavoce di due direzioni distinte, ma pur sempre all'insegna della comprensione dell'Altro e mettendo in primo piano i diritti delle donne. In opere parzialmente autobiografiche, presentano un'identità che si potrebbe definire *islamica* nel suo mutare o divenire. Considerati separatamente i due volumi, *Love in a Headscarf* e *The Caged Virgin*, che già dalla scelta dei titoli esplicitano le rispettive posizioni, sembrano parlare di due mondi e di due Islam che non si riconoscono, di (tras)formazioni identitarie che seguono canali diversi e mai convergenti. Janmohamed nella sua autobiografia romanzata, in parte manuale di comportamento per le giovani donne, racconta con accettazione e comprensione della sua formazione all'interno di tradizioni e rituali e della sua ricerca dell'amore non solo in senso romantico ma anche sublime verso la divinità; Hirsi Ali, invece, con intenti più didattici, in linea con la sua figura professionale e artistica, si ribella e giunge a conclusioni diametralmente opposte. L'identità personale (1) sembra così essere la sintesi tra l'identità sociale (2) e le idiosincrasie delle esperienze personali. Mentre per Janmohamed il velo, il cibo, la moschea, le relazioni con la comunità e i suoi membri sono aspetti da abbracciare e accogliere appieno, per Hirsi Ali sono fattori che appartengono a un passato da cui prendere le distanze, da analizzare e, soprattutto, da cui mettere in guardia. L'identità globale (3), distinta dalla nazionale, è percepita in modi diversi: soffocante e opprimente, da un lato, fonte d'ispirazione e potenziale dall'altro.

In spazi di socializzazione privilegiati, come le moschee e le scuole coraniche, le due autrici si soffermano sulle figure femminili e sulle dinamiche sociali che sottendono delicati rapporti relazionali. Il lettore, che spesso non fa parte della comunità islamica e la vede come Altro da sé, si trova a valutare le storie di due donne come testimonianze che possono offrire una visione dall'interno della condizione della donna nell'Islam; la divergenza dei due testi

e la convergenza degli intenti fanno emergere la pluralità di sintesi nella presentazione di realtà complementari. Se da un lato, Hirsi Ali nota la necessità di procedere con la ragione e concentrarsi sull'individualità, Janmohamed propone un percorso che vede l'individualità in comunione con un gruppo in cui questa non si disintegra.

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Ellen Patat, PhD, is presently employed at the Università degli Studi di Milano (Italy) and the University of Insubria (Italy). She taught Travel Literature of English-speaking Countries and ESP at the Università degli Studi di Udine (Italy) and ESP in Montpellier (France). She previously taught EAP and Italian as Foreign Language at Bahçeşehir University (Istanbul – Turkey), Italian as FL and translation at Yeditepe University (Istanbul – Turkey). Following her degree in Foreign Languages and Literatures, she completed her PhD in Multilingualism and Comparative Literatures at the Università degli Studi di Udine (Italy), an MA in Conference Interpreting (EMCI) at Boğaziçi University (Istanbul – Turkey) and a second degree in Italian Language and Culture for Foreigners at Consorzio ICoN. Her main areas of interest are: Modern and contemporary travel literature, EAP and ESP, Italian language teaching, and Translation Studies.

ellenpatat@gmail.com

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Daniela Salusso

Hostile Country, Hospitable Language: Telling Stories to Survive History. Contemporary Attempts in British Literature and Theatre to Reshape the Language of Migration

Abstract I: Migranti, rifugiati, richiedenti asilo: sono tanti termini che si utilizzano per descrivere gli esseri umani che lasciano la propria abitazione, le persone care e la propria identità per costruire una nuova vita nel paese ospite. Tuttavia, per ragioni storiche e culturali, la Gran Bretagna oggi si configura come un ambiente ostile più che ospitale. Verranno analizzati e confrontati tre progetti di interesse: il testo teatrale *Lampedusa* di Anders Lustgarten del 2015, i due volumi del progetto *Refugee Tales* pubblicati da Comma Press nel 2016 e 2017 e l'antologia *A Country of Refuge*, edita da Lucy Popescu e pubblicata nel 2016 come parte del progetto Unbound. Ciò che hanno in comune è la ricerca di una lingua che sia in grado di carpire e restituire la complessità della migrazione dal punto di vista di tutti coloro che ne sono coinvolti: non solo i rifugiati e i richiedenti asilo, ma anche le guardie costiere, gli avvocati, gli interpreti, gli operatori sociali, e molti altri.

Abstract II: Migrants, refugees, asylum seekers: many words to describe human beings who leave behind their homes, their loved ones, and their identities to build a new life in a host country. However, due to historical and cultural issues, nowadays the UK is a hostile environment rather than a hospitable, welcoming one. Three interesting contemporary projects will be analysed and compared: Anders Lustgarten's 2015 play *Lampedusa*, the two volumes of *Refugee Tales* published in 2016 and 2017 by Comma Press and the anthology *A Country of Refuge*, edited by Lucy Popescu and published in 2016 as part of the Unbound project. What they have in common is the search for a language that is able to grasp and convey the complexity of migration from the point of view of all those involved: not only refugees and asylum seekers, but also coastguards, lawyers, interpreters, social workers, and many others.

Migration narrative: from the analysis of storytelling to the analysis of story-writing

Contemporary migrations are often a movement from a hostile home country to a host country that can easily become *host-ile* as well, a word that reminds us of Theresa May's intention in 2012: "the aim is to create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal migration"¹. How is one supposed to find shelter and seek asylum in this scenario? Finding

¹ See: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/apr/17/theresa-mays-hostile-environment-policy-at-heart-of-windrush-scandal> (consulted on 17/04/2018).

or better, re-finding one's place in the world is first of all a matter of understanding one's roots, but also of retelling one's story to recreate one's identity. As the iterative aspect of the verbs suggests and the etymology of the word confirms², migration entails a removal but also a change of perspective, of geography, of culture.

This change of perspective can only occur if we rethink the very language we use to narrate. Labels used to give a certain group an identity may become dangerous when we lack the awareness of the networks of meanings and associations they create. For example, the UN Refugee Agency suggests that we stop using the terms "migrant" and "refugee" interchangeably, since the latter are persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution, whereas the former choose to move for personal reasons and may safely decide to return home. Barry Malone, the online editor of Al Jazeera English, contends that "the umbrella term migrant is no longer fit for purpose when it comes to describing the horror unfolding in the Mediterranean", explaining that "it has evolved from its dictionary definitions into a tool that dehumanises and distances, a blunt pejorative". The word migrant, in his view, "is a word that strips suffering people of voice", whereas "substituting refugee for it is – in the smallest way – an attempt to give some back". Once again, if we look at the etymology of the word, we will find that refuge comes from late 14th century Old French *refuge* "hiding place", from Latin *refugium* "a taking refuge; place to flee back to", from *re-* "back" (see *re-*) + *fugere* "to flee". In this case, the prefix *re-* does not signal a repetition, but something subtler: finding a place you can go back to again and again, a safe harbour, a sanctuary. I will therefore favour the term "refugee", but at the same time, leaving aside the governmentality of migration, I will be referring to the act of migrating simply in its original sense of moving from one place to another.

Reshaping the language of migration is the starting point to restructuring the narrative. On 21 April 2016, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) organized a one-day expert roundtable on the theme "Changing the public narrative on migration: promoting tolerance and confronting xenophobia against migrants", to discuss how the issues of migrants and migration are being framed in the public narrative, and to examine possible collaborative efforts to re-frame the current "toxic narrative on this issue". The guidelines that emerged after a roundtable discussion focused primarily on: "story-telling through the stories, testimonies and images of migrants as well as of people who have not migrated but are impacted by migration [...] in order to build empathy and confront prejudice and discrimination against migrants"³.

In seeking asylum, a refugee asks for the most sacred kind of hospitality, and hospitality starts with listening to one's story. Sociolinguistics has tackled the problem from the point of view of narrative discourse, studying those stories and those accounts to understand "the ways and means through which language, and in particular narrative, displays

² Definition of migration found on the online etymology dictionary: "1610s, of persons, 1640s of animals, from Latin *migrationem* (nominative *migratio*) 'a removal, change of abode, migration', noun of action from past participle stem of *migrare* 'to move from one place to another,' probably originally **migwros*, from PIE *(e)*meigw-* (source of Greek *ameibein* "to change"), which is an extended form of root **mei-* (1) "to change, go, move" or perhaps a separate root".

³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Migration/Pages/Shapingthepublicnarrativeonmigration.aspx> (consulted on 3/09/2018).

its power to voice experiences, to bring about shared understandings of life events, to shape and transform individual and collective realities”, as Anna de Fina explains in her *Identity in Narrative: A Study of Immigrant Discourse* (De Fina 2003: 5). She further points out that narrative “is central to the study of identity and which properties of narrative as a genre make it particularly apt to become the locus of expression, construction and enactment of identity, but also a privileged genre for its analysis” (De Fina 2003: 26). This analysis is based on conversational narratives, whereas my work falls into the research category that De Fina and Tseng described as focusing on “storytelling centred on migrants but told by members of out-groups” (2017: 384). In addition, I will not focus on narrative analysis and narrative interpretation but on narrative writing. The stories analysed here have been written by professional writers; regardless of the fact that some of them are first- or second-generation migrants, their accounts will be treated as literary fiction. The pivotal question thus becomes: how do writers write about migration? How do we make language a hospitable place, waiting for our nations to become such? In particular, I will be analysing three interesting contemporary projects: Anders Lustgarten’s 2015 play *Lampedusa*, the two volumes of *Refugee Tales* published in 2016 and 2017 by Comma Press and the anthology *A Country of Refuge*, edited by Lucy Popescu and published in 2016 as part of the Unbound project. I purposefully chose to include various genres, including a theatrical piece, to address this issue; for the sake of this analysis, Lustgarten’s play will be treated as a literary piece and the specificity of theatre discourse will not be addressed.

Reshaping the Language of Migration

The issue of language is at the core of my research. What language can we use to speak the unspeakable, name the unnameable and tell untold stories? What means do we have to sensitise the public to an issue that is at the same time over-debated and underestimated? The texts analysed reveal a language that is both new and ancient, very physical and rich in images, but also a lyrical language that poeticises the unpoetic. A rewriting of the old with a hope for the future, a sort of mythical method based on intertextuality, hybridity and the shoring of whatever fragments of civilisation remain against the ruins. A language that mixes all styles, from prose to poetry, from critical essay to intimate first-person account, from interviews to pastiches. What the texts chosen have in common is the search for a language that is able to grasp and convey the complexity of migration from the point of view of all those involved: refugees and asylum seekers, coastguards, lawyers, interpreters, etc. Despite all the differences, which would require a more in-depth analysis, three main tendencies can be identified: 1. the use of epic language paired with the rewriting of classics; 2. making language itself the focus of the story; 3. giving voice to the lexicon of suspension. These tendencies clearly demonstrate that the narrative of migration is actually changing by showing, respectively, that roots are common to all humanity, real dialogue is possible only through mutual understanding and the need has emerged to give voice and narrate also subjects which, like suspension, live by definition in a perpetual limbo and are impossible to narrate.

Epic Language and the Rewriting of Classics

Lustgarten's play stages two juxtaposed tales: that of Stefano, an Italian fisherman whose job is to pull drowned bodies of migrants out of the Mediterranean sea and that of Denise, a mixed-race Chinese-British student who is financing her degree course by working for a payday loan company, tending to her sick mother and facing racism and complaints about immigration everywhere she goes. The first lines spoken by Stefano already set the tone: a language that brings together past and present, global and local, epic and mundane.

This is where the world began. This was Caesar's highway. Hannibal's road to glory. These were the trading routes of the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians, the Ottomans and the Byzantines. [...] Our favourite food is bottarga, salted roe: it tastes like being slapped in the face by a wave you didn't see coming. We all come from the sea and back to the sea we will go. The Mediterranean gave birth to the world (Lustgarten 2015: 12).

Stefano starts his speech with a praise for the sea that quickly becomes an elegy. After portraying a picture of death and devastation, in fact, Stefano will change his tone and declare "But the fish are gone. The Med is dead. And my job is to fish out a very different harvest" (Lustgarten 2015: 15). The combination of lyrical and everyday language hints at the fact that migration has always existed, people have always crossed the sea for trade, either in the hope to find better conditions, or simply out of sheer curiosity. Yet, today something has changed: there is "no hope", and pessimism is Italy's "national sport" (Lustgarten 2015: 22). The same pessimism affects Britain as well, as Denise points out:

I'd not heard 'chinky cunt' and 'fucking migrant' in that accent till recently. But lately I get it quite a bit. Middle class people think racism is free speech now. Tip of the iceberg, Farage. Tip of a greasy gin-soaked iceberg of cuntery. The matchless bitterness of the affluent. Summat about the Chinese an' all. We're the last ones it's OK to hate. [...] You can say stuff to the Chinese you wouldn't even say to Muslims. And I'm not even a proper one. Don't fit in anywhere, me (Lustgarten 2015: 25).

Not fitting anywhere: geographically, historically, socially, existentially. The condition of the migrant in short is someone who is equally unfit for life and for death, because what kind of death is it if there is "no-one to mourn for them?" (Lustgarten 2015: 58). Through the use of epic as a narrative point of reference, though, we see the status of these invisible people elevated to that of heroes, whose adventures need to be told for the sake of humanity. The reflection on silent, unseen and unmourned deaths finds its counterpart in the unspoken, unlistened and unbelieved stories of migrants' lives. The project *Refugee Tales* attempts precisely to do this:

We set out to make a language that opens politics/ establishes belongings/ where a person dwells. [...] Because we know too much/ about what goes unsaid/ and what we choose to walk for/ is the possibility of trust/ in language/ to hear the unsaid spoken/and then repeated /made/ unambiguous and loud (Herd 2016: 6-8).

Every summer from 2015, the *Refugee Tales* project walks in solidarity with Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Immigration Detainees. As the project walks, it reclaims the landscape of South East England for the language of welcome, taking Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as a model. Every stop is punctuated by the public telling of two tales: one, the tale of an asylum seeker, former immigration detainee or refugee; the other of a person – for instance a lawyer or interpreter – who works with people seeking asylum in the UK. Placed high on their political agenda is calling for an end to the UK's policy of indefinite detention “to reassert/ the ancient covenant/ that the State/ as it is constituted/ shall not detain indefinitely” (Herd 2017: 4). The broader scope, however, is to make language a hospitable place and therefore “English / To be made sweete again” (Herd 2016: viii), following Edmond Jabès definition of language as a place intrinsically characterised by hospitality (Jabès 1991).

The Chaucerian frame adopted by the *Refugee Tales* project follows the postmodern trend of the rewriting of classics. The first story in particular, then, *The Migrant's Tale* by Dragan Todorovic (Herd 2016: 1-12) juxtaposes the story of Aziz, a Syrian refugee who embarks on a journey across the Mediterranean to reach Italy, and a retelling of Chaucer's *The Man of Law's* tale, where a young woman, Custance, the daughter of the emperor in Rome, is about to marry the Syrian Sultan, but because the emperor had required the Sultan to convert to Christianity, she becomes the object of the Sultan's mother's rage and is set adrift on the sea. The story is then retold in *The Lawyer's Tale* by Stephen Collis, who argues that Custance is the emblem of the migrant, since she is driven by forces she has little control over, and the sea is the symbol of homelessness par excellence as an existential condition: in fact, “the world was born yearning to be a home for all” (Herd 2016: 113).

Similarly, the anthology *Country of Refuge* is comprised of short fiction, poems, memoirs and essays. The project Unbound was funded directly by readers, and the aim is very similar to that of *Refugee Tales*: since most of the stories we read and see on the media are negative or highly standardised or prejudicial, the attempt is to find real identities behind false labels. The collection also presents a few rewritings of classics, the most striking of which is *Metamorphosis 2* by Amanda Craig, where a celebrity wakes up to find herself turned into a giant cockroach, and as the story develops more and more human beings are turned into such animals, giving voice almost literally to the widespread fear of the “contagion” of migrants (Popescu 2016: 41).

Making Language the Focus of the Story

In his brief essay *These Mysterious Strangers: The New Story of the Immigrant*, Hanif Kureishi contends that the migrant has become one of the most debated subjects in Western societies. Despite this, it is not really migrants we are talking about, but our stereotyped idea of them, which the media have turned into a sort of zombie-like figure: “In the current public conversation, this figure [...] is an example of the undead, who will invade, colonise and contaminate [...]. Unlike other monsters, the foreign body of the immigrant is unslayable” (Popescu 2016: 31). Also in *The Lorry Driver's Tale* by Chris Cleave, immigration is seen as a horror film and Calais the scene where the zombies are massing. How and when did migrants become such scary monsters and how do we get rid of this preconception? As the

anthropologist Mondher Kilani points out, today more than ever we need to deconstruct the logic and the foundations of the “invention of the other”. He explains that each culture interprets all things new with old criteria, and it does so by domesticating and neutralising the presence of the other by affirming its own identity and its system of meanings and values even more. Kilani suggests, thus, that culture should no longer be a thing we talk about, but rather a place from where we start our discussion (Kilani 2015: 33). This “place” is above all dialogue. In the texts analysed, there are a few ways in which this dialogue proves difficult if not impossible to achieve. In *Lampedusa*, Lustgarten portrays the worst-case scenario, in which the refugee does not speak the language of the host country at all and is forced to resort to English as a global language, thus starting a process of double translation “Speaks shit Italian, Modibo. I say, why come somewhere you don’t speak the language? He says I didn’t come here, I came to Europe, the language of Europe is English” (Lustgarten 2015: 14). The two anthologies, instead, focus on the link between language and identity: the impossibility to tell one’s story – and even when the story is told, the impossibility to be fully understood or believed – is the impossibility to find one’s identity. The first issue is the lack of words in one’s own language. When a refugee tries to describe his journey across the Mediterranean, he lacks the words to describe the boat he was on: “Arabic has forty words for sand, sixty for sword, seventy for water but none for what the Walker wanted to tell. What was his boat like?” (Herd 2017: 31). What cannot be said about that boat, the horror that defies all explanations, raises questions of believability, tellability and reportability, as Labov contends (Labov 2013: 7, 14). It is not only refugees who lack the words to tell their stories; often incommunicability goes both ways. In another story, *Selfie* by Stephen Kelman, a man is unable to explain to the fellow human being selling selfie sticks why he won’t buy one because he has no need for it, therefore it would not really be an act of kindness, since it would “unman” him. The man obviously feels guilty for not performing an act of charity, but also sees the gap between a true act of kindness and a conscience-clearing, Catholicism-imbued one. However, there are no simple words for this concept. The only way the two men may communicate on a deeper level, the protagonist feels, would be if they could touch each other, but then the rules of social contact make him doubt whether that would be appropriate. The story finishes with what appears to be a problem of translation: “The only reason we can’t be the same is because we lack the words. Our uncommon languages are what keep us hidden from each other. Only words sever us” (Popescu 2016: 58).

The second problem is, in fact, one of translation: one to one equivalence is a rare thing between languages, and even rarer when the languages come from different families and we are dealing with abstract concepts. In *The Interpreter’s Tale* by Carol Watts (Herd 2016: 63-68) an interpreter is frustrated by the gap between the importance of words, which are “the skin of another’s arrival, know the violence of borders” (Herd 2016: 63) and the pressure to translate everything that is said, without embellishments, and “find the words closest to obscenity” (Herd 2016: 63), to give voice to “so many unseen unspoken bodies, as many and more as make it to the sea” (Herd 2016: 67). I believe it is not by coincidence that so many writers break into poetry when concepts become too dense for everyday prose:

Words are tarmac and concrete./ They can be prison houses or their unlocking./ We build cities from them around our freeways./ We walk and occupy them, they feel given to us./ How our words secure us./ We, you, us. I. [...] No punctuation to give this history reasonable measure./ The longest sentence could never span the devastation, tell this story into available maps, translate this indifference (Herd 2016: 67-68).

How can we tell the story into available maps and translate the difference between two languages if we are not aware of the differences between cultures? The third issue is precisely this: some cultural elements cannot be conveyed. One example is the Western obsession with dates and documents. In the story *A Time to Lie*, Noo Saro-Wiwa comments that there is an assumption that certain data sources define and prove a person's identity. But if a refugee has been raised "in a country with fragile public institutions and civil registry apparatus", they might not possess the required documents. For instance, the author explains, African people born in rural areas may not know their precise date of birth: "What are 'July' and 'August', anyway? A span of thirty days, named after a couple of Roman emperors from way back. What do such dates mean to the rural, fifty-something African? Uncle tells me I was born just after the rains started" (Popescu 2016: 129).

These differences create a paradoxical situation in which refugees tell "alternative truths" on their asylum applications because otherwise they would not be believed. Noo Saro-Wiwa quotes Beneduce to examine the case of the occult and witchcraft, explaining that when it comes to ritual abuse, based on animist beliefs, the terror imposed on its victims is real, but "the occult holds no currency in our empirical world", and the perceived dream-like language used by the applicant "challenges the bureaucratic grammar of human rights" (Popescu 2016: 132) *Cloud-Dervish* by Moris Fahri brings up the same subject from another point of view. According to the protagonist, we falsify the tragedy because: "we deny that the exilic state carries a deep sense of divestiture; that for most exiles this sense creates an unconscious anguish which mourns the loss of a heritage that should never have been lost – namely, roots" (Popescu 2016: 48).

Giving Voice to the Lexicon of Suspension

The lines cited above touch two pivotal points: the idea of divestiture and the importance of roots. To "divest" means literally to strip of your own clothes, to remain naked, therefore vulnerable. Noo Saro Wiwa – again quoting Beneduce – points out that in Lingala, the main spoken language in the Republic of Congo, the process of migration is called *kobwaka nzoto*, which literally means "to sacrifice", "to give up one's own body" (Popescu 2016: 131-132). The loss of identity coincides with the loss of one's body, which becomes invisible as an individual entity in the eyes of the Western public. However, the process of disappearance starts much sooner, in the very moment the journey begins. "When they enter the blue desert they disappear" – Stefano notices in *Lampedusa* (Lustgarten 2015: 23), primarily because these people have no contact with the loved ones, they do not know whether they are dead or alive and often they lose track of space and time to the point that they wonder if they themselves are dead or alive. The only way to feel alive again is to search for one's roots, to be found in one's narration of reality, which does not need to be true to facts but to emotions.

The delicate poem, entitled “The Believing of Trees” we find at the end of *The Visitor’s Tale* by Hubert Moore summarises this need beautifully: “There’s no need to finger/ the wounds of the trees/ to believe them./ You can trust/ tell-tale scars, branch-loss,/ uprootedness./ Even their stories/ don’t have to be true/ to be true of them./ Stand in their presence./ Breathe in time with them./ Wait with them” (Herd 2016: 47).

Waiting is also at the centre of the process of dehumanisation and invisibility. On the one hand, in *Lampedusa* we witness the waiting that precedes the arrival in the host country (the journey) and then a completely different kind of waiting, the one Denise experiences, the constant waiting to be recognised as a rightful British citizen, which may have been granted by the state, but is yet to be granted by the fellow citizens. *Refugee Tales* above all, but also *Country of Refuge*, on the other hand, mainly deal with the in-between waiting that happens in detention centres. *The Barrister’s Tale* by Rachel Holmes well describes the Beckettian waiting inherent to the concept of infinite detention: “Indefinitely temporary: temporarily indefinite. Holding people prisoners of language. Prisoners have proper sentences, [...] but our detainees face unlimited days that can only be counted upwards without the end in sight” (Herd 2017: 59).

There is a whole lexicon of suspension: pending deportation, removal, refused bail, as David Herd notices in *The Appellant’s Tale* (Herd 2016: 69-84). In the story, the Kafkaesque motif of bureaucratic nonsense is explored when a former BBC translator from English into Hausa is suddenly arrested with no warning: in order to be released, he is asked to give proof of his former job; to do that, though, he would need a letter that is in his house, but he is not allowed to leave unless the letter proves who he is. People like him live in a limbo, exacerbated by the fact that hearings in the UK asylum system are not courts of record. Basically, they are denied what Hannah Arendt called “space of appearance”⁴. Waiting to be heard, waiting to be seen, waiting to have a role in society again. “Waiting waits for ground waiting erodes all ground waiting loses ground waiting steals all ground [...] waiting eats the soul waiting eats the bones waiting eats the heart waiting eats all hope”, says Caroline Bergvall in *The Voluntary Returner’s Tale* (Herd 2017: 69). When media speak about “destitute asylum seekers”, Josh Cohen observes in his *The Support Worker’s Tale*, it goes “beyond material deprivation, down to the destitution of the whole self. It means being in but not of the world” (Herd 2017: 74), to the point that “you’d wonder if you existed at all, while feeling you exist too much, like there’s no space to accommodate the burden of you” (75). The space to accommodate a human being is first of all the space to accommodate their story. Telling stories binds together the present and the past, and it raises awareness so that issues can be addressed collectively. Old stories need a new frame, and the language must be reshaped to mould a new skin to contain the body of tales that ultimately makes up our heritage. To put it in the words of *The Lover’s Tale* by Kamila Shamsie: “stories allow us to structure our experiences into beginning, middle, end, and decide which parts to skim over, which to go into in detail; stories allow us to put forward our own points of view and interpretations; stories, in short, allow us a measure of control over our memories” (Herd 2017: 14).

⁴ In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt described the space of appearance as a place “where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things, but to make their appearance explicitly” (Arendt 1958: 198-199).

The Reclamation of Language and Identity through the Use of Metaphors

The attempts analysed so far, though, are not enough to render the language a truly hospitable place. As A. L. Kennedy warns us in the story entitled *The Migrants*, “when art fails, there is cruelty, because cruelty in humans is caused by a lack of imagination” (Popescu 2016: 205). In his view, art is seen as a fundamental defence of humanity, in absence of which we are condemned to forget and repeat the same mistakes over and over again, for nothing new can be imagined if the memory of what has been seen and imagined before is gone. New, powerful images are needed to hold together these fragmented stories and give a hope for the future. Cognitive linguistics helps us understand how this need for innovation at the linguistic level corresponds to an equal need at the social level. As Hart (2010: 142) points out, quoting Santa Ana and Wolf and Polzenhagen, metaphors provide the cognitive framework for a certain worldview, and deciding to use one metaphor instead of another has a strategic value, in that it allows writers to reflect their intentions and ideologies. Furthermore, Lakoff and Johnson remind us that “metaphors create realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 156). There is one metaphor in particular that is used consistently throughout these texts: animals as signs of revelation or good omen. In *The Smuggled Person’s Tale* by Jackie Kay, a refugee arrives at the protagonist’s house with “the story in his rucksack”. When she opens the door, he immediately feels welcome, as during his travels he had been in prison, in detention centres, but very rarely had he been invited into people’s houses. Suddenly there is a magical realism twist and the story he was keeping in his bag turns into a bird, a powerful Dickinsonian image⁵:

It was an injured bird. [...] And perhaps because he felt welcome, he could at last take his time. He sat down at the kitchen table still holding the bird. [...] And perhaps because the door was already open, it flew through it [...] and then paused, as if to say, look up here, look at me, here’s your story. And then, astonished, he watched it take to the sky; [...]. For now, he could leave it behind. And so he did. He left with his bag beautifully light after months and years of carrying the weight around with him (Herd 2017: 107).

Similarly, in *The Unaccompanied Minor’s Tale*, Inua Ellam (Herd 2016: 17-24) tells another story of difficult Mediterranean crossing: one day, when the boat has too many holes and is about to sink, dolphins appear, as if they were “water angels”. The Med is not completely dead, then. Hope is to be found in imagination, in those imagined tales that are not a mere consolation to render life a little more tolerable, but the dream of what could be. Even the gloomy tone of *Lampedusa* gives space to hope in the end; over-critical and disillusioned Denise who has just lost her sick mother realises that “the monkey trap experiment is fundamentally an indicator of hope. It speaks to our ability to walk away from delusions, from

⁵ The bird as a symbol of hope is reminiscent of one of Emily Dickinson’s poems that begins: “Hope is the thing with feathers/ That perches in the soul/ And sings the tune without the words/ And never stops – at all” (Dickinson 1951: 314).

traps. To save ourselves from our baser instincts” (Lustgarten 2015: 32), whereas Stefano rejoices when his friend Modibo finally manages to reunite with his beloved wife, who he marries again to celebrate the coming back from the dead after their trip across the sea: “I defy you to see the joy in Modibo and Aminata’s faces and not feel hope. I defy you” (Lustgarten 2015: 34). Perhaps in order to make stories of migration heard, the language itself needs to undergo a change in order to change the imagery it creates: from a language of despair, fear and uncertainty to a language of freedom, imagination and hope.

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Daniela Salusso works at the University of Turin at the Foreign Languages and Literatures Department, as a contract professor of Translation. After completing a PhD in English Literature with a dissertation on Drama Translation, she is working on translation studies, applied linguistics and contemporary British theatre.

daniela.salusso@gmail.com

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Adriano Elia

“Not South”: The Great Migration in Langston Hughes’ “One-Way Ticket”

Abstract I: Nato nel 1902 a Joplin, nel Missouri, Langston Hughes divenne la personalità più significativa del movimento “New Negro”, successivamente chiamato Rinascimento di Harlem. La sua poesia “One-Way Ticket” (1949) rappresenta uno strumento ideale per approfondire il contesto culturale della Grande Migrazione, momento cruciale nel plasmare nuove identità nella comunità afroamericana. “One-Way Ticket” è un notevole esempio di poesia militante, che rappresenta tramite versi semplici ed efficaci la grande voglia di cambiamento della sua generazione. Riconsiderando l’esperienza passata e le conquiste del Rinascimento di Harlem trenta anni dopo, Hughes osservò a posteriori la spinta che aveva portato tantissimi afroamericani a emigrare dal Sud verso città del Nord. Il saggio analizza lo stile minimale di Hughes e la sua manipolazione della forma blues, elementi fondamentali nel trasmettere un nuovo spirito di forza e assertività. Considereremo come la semplicità formale e l’immediatezza di questa poesia condividano con il blues l’obiettivo di lanciare un messaggio politico in grado di generare una trasformazione ideologica all’interno della comunità afroamericana.

Abstract II: Born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902, Langston Hughes became the most significant personality of the New Negro Movement, later called the Harlem Renaissance. His poem “One-Way Ticket” (1949) is an ideal means for delving into the cultural milieu of the Great Migration – a pivotal moment in shaping new identities in the African-American community. It is a remarkable example of militant poetry, epitomising in simple and effective lines the great urge of his generation. Reconsidering the past experience and achievements of the Harlem Renaissance thirty years later, Hughes looked in retrospect at the drive that pushed massive numbers of African Americans to leave the South to move to northern cities. This essay will explore Hughes’ minimal style and manipulation of the blues form as instrumental in conveying a new spirit of strength and assertiveness. We shall see how the poem’s formal simplicity and directness share with the blues the objective of delivering a political message resulting in a communitarian ideological transformation.

One of the largest mass internal movements in history, the Great Migration was a voluntary diaspora, a pivotal moment in shaping new identities in the African-American community. The contradictions of Reconstruction and the controversial mistreatment of the Afri-

can-American soldiers of the 369th Infantry Regiment in the Great War triggered a strong movement for change. Hundreds of thousands of African Americans moved out of the rural Southern United States to the urban North to pursue a dream that was not – as Pauline Melville has put it – “on the other side”, but within the same country¹. Those who formed part of this inner diaspora aimed not only at improving their own socio-economical condition, but at least some aimed also at making another dream come true – the dream of cultivating their own creativity. Many writers, poets and artists gathered in Harlem from all over the States as well as from the Caribbean to find inspiration while fighting and protesting against Jim Crow practices.

Born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902, Langston Hughes became the most significant personality of the New Negro Movement, later called the Harlem Renaissance. His poem “One-Way Ticket” (1949) is an ideal means for delving into the cultural milieu of the Great Migration. It is a remarkable example of militant poetry epitomising in simple and effective lines the great urge of his generation. This essay will explore Hughes’ minimal style and manipulation of the blues form as instrumental in conveying a new spirit of strength and assertiveness. We shall see how the poem’s formal simplicity and directness share with the blues the objective of delivering a political message resulting in a communitarian ideological transformation.

Reconsidering the past experience and achievements of the Harlem Renaissance thirty years later, Hughes looked in retrospect at the drive that pushed massive numbers of African Americans to leave the South to move to northern cities such as Detroit, Chicago and New York. In some ways, the Great Migration may be regarded as an American internal version of Deleuze and Guattari’s well-known global binarism of deterritorialisation/reterritorialisation, whereas the African Americans uprooting from their Southern territory are deterritorialised and simultaneously reterritorialised within the confines of their own nation, in the North of the United States, thus experiencing a complex process of mapping identity onto space. Harlem becomes a new territory, created through deterritorialisation, whereby milieu components are separated and made more autonomous, and reterritorialisation, through which these components achieve fresh meanings². In the case of the Harlem Renaissance, moving North gave many Southern African-American writers, poets and artists a liberating feeling of disconnection and the opportunity of transfiguring such milieu elements as the trauma of segregation into a racial solidarity that fostered creativity for political purposes.

As a matter of fact, the very title, “One-Way Ticket”, exposes an ontological position demanding equal status for blacks. Buying a one-way ticket means being ready to leave the past behind even in a condition of total uncertainty about the future. This discourse suggests a set of principles and a new ideology involving a fearless outlook of self-reliance – discordant with the idea of “shut up and smile” that was so common during the slavery and Reconstruction periods. Words are weapons: once uttered, they can and will generate actions that can result in change. Hughes wrote from experience, and this made his poetry

¹ “We do return and leave and return again, criss-crossing the Atlantic, but whichever side of the Atlantic we are on, the dream is always on the other side” (Melville 1990: 148-149).

² Deleuze & Guattari 1987 [1980]; Mikula 2008: 48.

even more valuable and true to life. His message thus helped in shaping a self-confident identity for the African-American community – a stimulating idea of assertiveness that would be developed with the disparate legacies of the Black Power movement and the later hip hop scene.

To this purpose, similarly to “The Song of the Smoke”, a 1907 poem by W. E. B. Du Bois that could well be used today as the lyric of a hip-hop tune, “One-Way Ticket” gives voice to all those no longer prepared to be patient in the face of injustice and discrimination³. “The Song of the Smoke” functions as a poetic counterpart to a point made at the beginning of *The Souls of Black Folk*, a passage in which Du Bois recollects a childhood incident when a white girl refused his card in an exchange, and later the young Du Bois felt he should stop ignoring the racism he had to endure on the grounds of feeling superior to such a frame of mind. Worth mentioning are also the last words uttered by Ralph Ellison’s unnamed protagonist’s grandfather on his deathbed in the novel *Invisible Man* (1952), when he declared himself a traitor for having refused to fight back against all the harassment he had had to suffer in his lifetime: “Son, after I’m gone I want you to keep up the good fight [...] our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy’s country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction” (Ellison 2001: 16). As meekness is treachery, buying a one-way ticket therefore becomes a mark of determination, a Nat Palmerish call to arms, a Fanonian discourse of backlash put in practice⁴.

a. Hughes’ ‘Simple’ Poetry and the Blues Form

Although to many readers and critics alike Hughes is either one of the most eloquent American poets to have sung about injustice and discrimination or the author of verses of touching lyric beauty beyond issues of race and justice, for other readers, scholars and fellow poets Hughes’ poetry was far too simple and almost unlearned, definitely inadequate to tackle the complexities of modern life (Rampersad & Roessel 1994: 3). Hughes’ work was criticised by black intellectuals also because it portrayed an unattractive view of black life. Indeed, there has been a heated critical debate about whether his poetry was somehow overrated. Countee Cullen, for example, “wondered whether some of Hughes’ poems were poems at all”; James Baldwin noted that his unsuccessful poems “take refuge, finally, in a fake simplicity in order to avoid the very difficult simplicity of experience”; Hughes’ biographer Arnold Rampersad reported that for several critics his poetry was characterised by an intellectual and emotional shallowness⁵.

³ “The Song of the Smoke” is a vehicle for a political statement of affirmation of racial pride, as the following lines demonstrate: “I will be black as blackness can / The blacker the mantle, the mightier the man! / For blackness was ancient ere whiteness began”. See Elia 2017. As Hughes had it in his poem “Harlem”: “Here on the edge of hell / Stands Harlem / Remembering the old lies, / The old kicks in the back, / The old “Be patient” / They told us before”. See Rampersad & Roessel 1994: 363-364.

⁴ Nat Turner (1800-1831) led one of the bloodiest slave revolts in America on August 21, 1831 in Southampton County, Virginia. Turner was eventually hanged. He became an icon of the 1960s Black Power movement. See also Jean Paul Sartre’s “Preface” to the anti-colonial liberationist discourse devised by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

⁵ See Henzy 2011: 915; Ikonne in Bloom ed. 1989: 151-167; Baldwin 1959: 6. For an overview of the criticism on Hughes’ poetry, see <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/langston-hughes> (consulted on 01/09/2018).

It is true that Hughes is no Gerald Manley Hopkins or T. S. Eliot, but this is not necessarily a fault, especially since he never really set out to write complex intertextual poetry. All told, not always is complexity a synonym of quality and simplicity of mediocrity. Hughes' poetry is simple but not simplistic⁶. In the same way that silence is often somehow a way of telling everything, simplicity does not inevitably suggest feelings of superficiality. Hughes' simplicity is instead the simplification of the complex: it does not precede, but follows an articulated analysis, a capacity of evaluation, of criticism, of elaborated logical processes and complex psychological routes⁷.

However, it should also be pointed out that Hughes' *One-Way Ticket* poetry collection occasionally reveals a peculiar stylistic complexity. For example, while describing life in the ghetto, the poem "Summer Evening" foreshadows the experimental form and structure of his next collection, *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951) by showing absurd combinations and unexpected realities reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's "objective correlative"⁸:

Mothers pass,
Sweet watermelon in a baby carriage,
[...] Pimps in gray go by,
Boots polished like a Murray head,
Or in reverse
Madam Walker
On their shoe tips.
I. W. Harper
Stops to listen to gospel songs
From a tent at the corner,
Where the carnival is Christian.

The bizarre juxtapositions – mothers carrying a watermelon in a baby carriage, pimps polishing their shoes with hair grease, a drinker named after the brand of his whiskey listening to Gospel songs from a church meeting in a tent – reveal fantastic realities common to black ghettos and recall the Eliotian "situation[s] and chain[s] of events that shall be the formula of that particular emotion" that Hughes endeavors to evoke in the reader.

Hughes' poetic voice – free, minimal, music-inflected, based on spoken English – displays a deliberate lack of sophistication. Despite its alleged shortcomings, his poetry is a powerful vehicle for new ideas and resonates both thematically and stylistically with the blues, a form that in Ralph Ellison's words constitutes an "autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically"⁹. In his celebrated essay "The Negro Artist and the

⁶ For an analysis of Hughes' "metaphysics of simplicity", see Henzy 2011.

⁷ These reflections on the idea of simplicity have been borrowed from theologian Adriana Zarri's memoir *Un eremo non è un guscio di lumaca*. See Zarri 2011: 143-144.

⁸ Illustrated by Jacob Lawrence, the collection includes sixty-six poems, fifty-six of which are new, divided into ten sections. "One-Way Ticket" belongs to the eighth section titled "Name in Uphill Letters". See Eliot 1919. Patterson 2000 also noticed an affinity between some of Hughes' and T. S. Eliot's poems.

⁹ See Ellison 2002: 66 and Patterson 2000: 661.

Racial Mountain" (1926), Hughes poignantly stressed that he admired the humor, warmth and exuberance of "low-down folks", who became his most representative subject¹⁰. Although he did not belong to these plain black people, he strongly identified with them and recorded authentically their frustrations. As Bloom has remarked, Hughes was a "very complex person, split between a sophisticated consciousness and a fierce determination to create a popular and simplified poetic art" (Bloom 1999: 10).

The stories of the Great Migration were narrated in different guises, such as poems, novels, memoirs, paintings and songs recreating intense feelings of identification. The blues was the ultimate conduit through which tales of racism, hardship and hope for a better life could be told. This characteristic mood can be detected in "Northbound Blues" (1925), one of the earliest recorded songs about the Great Migration by singer and pianist Maggie Jones:

Going North child, where I can be free
Where there's no hardships, like in Tennessee
Going where they don't have Jim Crow laws
Don't have to work there, like in Arkansas.

Hughes was attracted to the blues primarily because it expressed the resilience of that African-American lower class he always identified with, but to which he never really belonged. He enjoyed both the sadness and the humor of the blues, the former because it manifested the "hopeless weariness" of an oppressed people, the latter because – as he put it – "you had to be gay or die"¹¹. A telling example is his poem "Bound No'th Blues" (1926), where he used rhyme, repetition and rhythm to evoke the traditional blues form. Here the final lines – based on repetition to recreate poetically the length of the road – require an imaginative effort on the part of the reader to interpret the lyric as an actual blues vocalist would do¹²:

Goin' down the road, Lawd,
Goin' down the road.
Down the road, Lawd,
Way, way down the road.
Got to find somebody
To help me carry this load.
[...] Road, road, road, O!
Road, road... road... road, road!
Road, road, road, O!
On the no'thern road.
These Mississippi towns ain't
Fit fer a hoppin' toad.

¹⁰ Hughes in Levering Lewis ed. 1994: 91-95; Bloom 1999: 14.

¹¹ Chinitz 1996: 178; Hughes 1986 [1940]: 209.

¹² See Chinitz 1996: 182-183 and "One-Way Ticket: Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series".

b. "One-Way Ticket": Lines "Spoken by a Friend"

As we have seen, Hughes continued to explore the issue of the Great Migration in later poems, notably "One-Way Ticket". While the rhyming pattern is different from the traditional blues AAB stanza characterised by first line, repeat line and response line, there is still a significant affinity between "One-Way Ticket" and his blues poems if one subscribes to Onwuchekwa Jemie's definition of blues composition as "one that, regardless of form, utilises the themes, motifs, language and imagery common to popular blues literature"¹³. In some ways, Hughes' poetic persona uses a simple style – as bluesmen do – to be able to communicate with as many people as possible, in order to deliver his message in a powerful and effective way, almost like the language used in successful mass advertising or in populist literature. To this purpose, as Rampersad and Roessel rightly noted, in order to reach his primary audience (the black masses) Hughes was prepared to write 'down' to and for them (Rampersad & Roessel 1994: 5).

In an early review of the collection *One-Way Ticket*, Creekmore (1949) was correct when he observed that Hughes' lyric, blues and folksong forms have been "stripped almost to bareness [to pursue] an even more direct and forceful method" – "the lines seem spoken by a friend", as Creekmore suggestively pointed out. Another contemporary review by Lewis Chandler highlighted the richness of Hughes' multifaceted contribution, regardless of the simplicity of style: "Chaucerian sly humor and realism, Wordsworthian simplicity, Shakespearian blending of comedy and tragedy, Emersonian individualism and precision, Whitmanesque earthiness and cosmopolitanism [...] reminding us of the dramatic monologues of Browning and Dunbar [...] the puzzling irony of Frost and Emily Dickinson" (Chandler 1949: 190).

Such speculations contradict the idea of blues as an art form that is best experienced in singing and which does not stand up well in written form. One would then agree with Chinitz (1996: 177) that Hughes often succeeded in producing compositions that manage to capture the quality of blues in performance while being effective and successful as poems (Oliver 1983: 8). As in typical blues songs, "One-Way Ticket" gives us an effective account of the sufferings not of an individual, but of a whole people:

I pick up my life
And take it with me
And I put it down in
Chicago, Detroit,
Buffalo, Scranton,
Any place that is
North and East –
And not Dixie.

In the opening stanza, the first-person singular pronouns 'I' and 'me' are not personal, but Whitmanesque, that is, universal and inclusive. The narrator is forced to 'pick up' and 'take' his life elsewhere, anywhere but South, both metaphor for racism and discrim-

¹³ See Chinitz 1996: 177 and Jemie 1976: 44.

ination and its geographical nucleus. Using the medium of an informal talk recalling the style of Robert Frost, although in a different rhythm and linguistic register, Hughes manages to convey the drama and the uncertainties of this one-way northbound journey away from Dixieland, that is, the southern states that joined the Confederacy during the Civil War (Chandler 1949: 190).

The second stanza unveils the possibility of a better future that is geographically located anywhere but South:

I pick up my life
And take it on the train
To Los Angeles, Bakersfield,
Seattle, Oakland, Salt Lake,
Any place that is
North and West –
And not South.

The third stanza illustrates the reasons for leaving – Jim Crow laws, lynching, prejudices, racial abuse. The South therefore becomes a marker of oppression and prevarication. It is described as a dark place where:

I am fed up
With Jim Crow laws,
People who are cruel
And afraid,
Who lynch and run,
Who are scared of me
And me of them.

The practice of discriminating against and segregating black people, even lynching them without legal process, was later effectively described by James Baldwin in *The Fire Next Time* (Baldwin 1963: 66): “The Negro’s past, of rope, fire, torture, castration, infanticide, rape; death and humiliation; fear by day and night, fear as deep as the marrow of the bone; [...] this endless struggle to achieve and reveal and confirm a human authority, yet contains, for all its horror, something very beautiful”. Baldwin’s final note of optimism underlines the possibility of a redemption through art and beauty, that is precisely what Hughes and other poets, writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance were striving to achieve.

The final stanza reinforces the message expressed at the beginning of the poem. The narrator ‘picks up’ the only ‘thing’ left to him, that is, his life, and cannot do anything but take it anywhere but South, away from racism and poverty:

I pick up my life
And take it away
On a one-way ticket –
Gone up North,

Gone out West,
Gone!

Ultimately, buying a one-way ticket may be seen as a metaphorical gesture implying courage and assertiveness, a strong political act against the status quo. On several occasions, Hughes himself bought a one-way ticket, spending months travelling to West Africa and Europe. Therefore, it is significant that Harold Bloom came to the conclusion that Hughes' most important contribution had to be traced back in his entire life as a writer and author more than in a particular work, thus implicitly suggesting that perhaps it is facts (that is, Hughes' life) rather than words (that is, his works) that make a difference (Bloom 1989: 1-3). To back up this point, Bloom made reference to Rampersad's biography to show how Hughes' life was exemplary in his struggle against racial discrimination. Rampersad compared Hughes to Whitman, whose free verses Hughes had certainly been influenced by and with whom he shared the idea that one's life is the most important and authentic poem one could possibly write. As a matter of fact, Hughes' enjoyable autobiographies, *The Big Sea* (1940) and the cleverly titled *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956), confirm this idea, introducing us to a man with an enormous vital strength, always ready to launch himself into new adventures with enthusiasm (just think about his several sea voyages) and readily reacting against the many adversities hindering his journey¹⁴.

c. Shaping identity in the Harlem Renaissance

As Alain Locke, the main promoter of the Harlem Renaissance, aptly pointed out in the 'Foreword' to *The New Negro*, in the 1920s nine-tenths of the literature was about the Negro, and only one-tenth was about him. Locke made a clear distinction between the Old Negro and the New Negro, the former being "a something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be 'kept down,' or 'in his place', [...] harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden", the latter showing instead a renewed self-respect and assertiveness, thus creating a "laboratory of a great race-welding" (Locke 2015: ix, 3, 7). It was in Harlem, then, that New Negroes found their first chances for self-expression and self-determination. Albeit in a different socio-historical context, a similar scenario of social solidarity and sense of belonging would be experienced in London by the post-World War II Windrush generation from the Caribbean. It was there and then that perhaps a West-Indian psyche was first created, because for the first time people like Moses, the Trinidadian protagonist of Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, met other people from Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana and other places of the Caribbean¹⁵. Siding with Du Bois in his diatribe with Booker T. Washington over the role of education for African Americans, Locke claimed that the arts and letters are crucial to "rehabilitating the race in world esteem from that loss of prestige for which the fate and conditions of slavery have so largely been responsible" (Locke 2015: 14-15). There was the

¹⁴ "I Wonder as I Wander" (1933) is also a folk hymn performed as a Christmas carol and written by American singer John Jacob Niles.

¹⁵ *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) is the first novel of the "Moses trilogy", involving *Moses Ascending* (1975) and *Moses Migrating* (1983). See Elia 2009: 318.

need – in Locke’s words – of a “revaluation by white and black alike of the Negro in terms of his artistic endowments and cultural contributions, past and prospective”.

It is widely acknowledged, however, that the Harlem Renaissance was no popular movement, as it was financed by white intellectual and social elites, the “Negrotarians”, as Zora Neale Hurston caustically defined figures like Carl Van Vechten, the author of the controversial novel *Nigger Heaven* (1926), who condescendingly supported the “Niggerati”, to use another ironic coinage to define black intellectuals – a phrase that for a substantial part of the white cultural establishment of that time sounded like an oxymoron. LeRoi Jones dismissed the impact of the Harlem Renaissance by saying that “the ‘Harlem School’ of writers attempted to glorify the lives of the black masses, but only succeeded in making their lives seem *exotic* as literary themes” (Jones 2002: 134, Jones’ italics); Levering Lewis likewise reckoned that the movement was “an elitist response on the part of a tiny group of mostly second-generation, college-educated, and generally affluent Afro-Americans” (Lewis 1989: xvi).

Nevertheless, as Fitts Ward has suggested, by re-appropriating the term ‘nigger’ as “an act of freedom, supplanting white supremacist connotations with notions of communal pride and solidarity”, Hurston’s use of the term “Niggerati”, if ironic, encouraged the construction of an “artistic community whose underlying political motivation was [...] to incite social and political change, and to celebrate the creation of Black art” (Ward 2017: 148-149). As briefly touched on above, the positive re-appropriation of the term ‘nigger’ by the 1960s Black Power movement, the 1970s boom of blaxploitation films to 1990s hip hop with the diffusion of the alternative spelling “nigga” brought about the affirmation of an ever-growing race consciousness. In different ways, Fitts Ward continues, both the “Niggerati” and the “Talented Tenth” – to recall Du Bois’ celebrated expression – had equal aspirations and responsibilities in supporting the cause of blacks, but while the former championed absolute artistic freedom, the latter encouraged a form of art mainly based on political propaganda¹⁶.

Although it was a very small minority who propagated this new ideology of racial assertiveness, it should be noted that poets like Hughes were deeply inspired by the sorrows of ordinary blacks, often resorting to their typical speech patterns and expressions to make their poems more authentic. Ultimately, while it is true that ordinary Negroes knew nothing about the Harlem Renaissance, the movement was still a reflection of the new race pride brought about by the Great Migration. In the 1930s, in response to the Great Depression, Hughes wrote a series of radical poems – notably “Goodbye Christ” (1932) and “Let America Be America Again” (1935) – the former was used by conservative political groups to put pressure on Hughes regarding charges of his holding Communist beliefs, which led the poet to a strategic repudiation of his political poetry on the grounds that “politics can be the graveyard of the poet”. In the post-World War II years Hughes settled in Harlem and returned to older themes – “Negroes, nature and love”, as he put it ironically¹⁷.

¹⁶ For Du Bois, the ‘Talented Tenth’ was an élite of African Americans (about one out of ten) who could have led their community towards the recognition of their rights. As he stated in the essay “Criteria of Negro Art” (1926), “all Art is propaganda and ever must be. [...] I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda”. See Sundquist 1996: 304, 328.

¹⁷ See Rampersad & Roessel 1994: 4. Fitts Ward (2017: 149) signals an intra-racial conflict between the Nig-

Following Du Bois' above-mentioned statement about the importance of an art exclusively aimed at political propaganda, the literary and artistic contribution of the Harlem Renaissance was crucial for the development of a new vision of opportunity, not only in social and economic terms, but also fostering a different self-reliant attitude. This innovative spirit can be epitomised in the ideas of freshness, vitality and critical spirit as they emerge in "Youth" (1925), a poem by Hughes which begins with a description of a bright future set against the past, dark allusions to the old sufferings, and then the present, a dawn, a new "dynamic phase" shaking off old stereotypes (Locke 2015: 4-5)¹⁸:

We have tomorrow
Bright before us
Like a flame.

Yesterday
A night-gone thing,
A sun-down name.

And dawn-today
Broad arch above the road we came.

We march!

d. Conclusion

In his Anthology *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, James Weldon Johnson famously noted that "the status of the Negro in the United States is more a question of national mental attitude toward the race [...] nothing will do more to change that mental attitude and raise his status than a demonstration of intellectual parity by the Negro through his production of literature and art" (Johnson 1922: 7). It is this striving towards reaching not only a socio-economic improvement, but also a heightened cultural dignity that makes the Harlem Renaissance such a crucial movement fostering a spiritual emancipation that goes hand in hand with a civil emancipation.

"One-Way Ticket" is certainly a remarkable example of popular, non-elitist poetry, its simple lines looking like a stripped-down version of blues poems, even more minimal than the already skeletal blues form. As we have seen, Hughes' simplicity of style delivers an important political message conveying a new spirit of strength and assertiveness, in order, as he put it, to "express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame" (Lever-

gerati, who openly supported an art focused on the Black working class, and the "Talented Tenth" of black intellectuals such as Du Bois and Locke, who encouraged a Black art aiming at the high art of white culture, a position dismissed by Hughes in his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" as an "urge within the race toward whiteness [...] to be as little Negro and as much American as possible". See Hughes in Levering 1994: 91.

¹⁸ This poem was entitled "Poem" in the collection *The Weary Blues*. For details about the different versions see Rampersad & Roessel 1994: 624.

ing Lewis ed. 1994: 95). The motivations and emotional impact of the Great Migration are powerfully presented in this poem, that thus ends up being far more complex and ambitious than it appears at first sight. As James Baldwin argued in *A Rap on Race*, “If history were the past, history wouldn’t matter. History is the present, the present. You and I are history” (Baldwin 1971: 66). “One-Way Ticket” is therefore a poem in which the African-American unstable identity that results from the conflation of past and present indicates the inescapable fact that, although one cannot escape one’s origin, it is possible through literature and art to construct a different future demanding equal recognition for blacks.

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Adriano Elia is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Rome “Roma Tre”. His publications include essays on contemporary British fiction, Afrofuturism, W. E. B. Du Bois’ short fiction and poetry and four books – *La Cometa di W. E. B. Du Bois* (2015), *Hanif Kureishi* (2012), *The UK: Learning the Language, Studying the Culture* (co-author, 2005) and *Ut Pictura Poesis: Word-Image Interrelationships and the Word-Painting Technique* (2002).

adriano.elia@uniroma3.it

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Nadia Priotti

From and to Paris: Experiences of Migration in *The Book of Salt*

Abstract I: Il saggio si concentra sulle diverse esperienze di migrazione presentate nel romanzo di Monique Truong *The Book of Salt*, ambientato nella Parigi degli anni Trenta con personaggi provenienti dall'Indocina e dagli Stati Uniti, e ne individua le rispettive motivazioni e opportunità, che necessariamente condizionano il modo di relazionarsi con la città. L'analisi vuole sottolineare come tali aspetti siano spesso legati al sentimento di 'sentirsi a casa', che accomuna ricordi, esperienza presente e scelte relative al proprio futuro.

Abstract II: Focusing on the different experiences of migration presented in Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt*, set in Paris in the 1930s but involving characters coming from Indochina and the United States, the essay tries to identify motives and opportunities, and the consequent way the various characters consider the capital city. This analysis reveals that the reasons for leaving and the way migrants face their dislocation is often related to the idea of 'feeling at home', which connects memory, present experience and choices for the future.

Most of the characters that people *The Book of Salt* are either experiencing or have experienced migration some time in their lives. Mixing real, though fictionalised, characters such as Gertrude Stein or Ho Chi Minh, with purely imagined ones, Truong thoroughly examines various stories of migration, each with its own motive, difficulties and impact on identity. A migrant herself, having left Vietnam when she was only six, the author focuses on this theme with great sensitivity, describing migration not as an event that takes place in a specific time and place but, rather, as an experience that, as many sociologists say, involves "a long-term if not life-long process of negotiating identity" (Benmayor 1994: 8). Furthermore, the choice of setting the story in the 1930s in a cosmopolitan city like Paris allows the writer to convey the idea that migration is not only a critical issue of our times, but a phenomenon that has constantly been present in history. Analysing the different experiences of migration presented in the novel, this essay will try to identify motives and opportunities, and the consequent way the various characters consider the capital city in relation to their concept of 'home'¹.

¹ The concept of home we refer to is not simply a reference to the birthplace but to a sense of belonging and sharing, and is taken from *The Politics of Home*, in which Rosemary Marangoly George observes that "one distinguishing feature of places called home is that they are built on select inclusions. The inclusions are grounded in a learned (or taught) sense of a kinship that is extended to those who are perceived as sharing

The Paris in the 1930s represents a particularly inspiring setting to introduce a variety of characters dissimilar in origin, backgrounds and social status. Even though the novel is not focused on historical facts², its characters reflect an authentic panorama of the city in those years. In interwar Paris, in fact, official data report a presence of nearly three thousand Indochinese, some of whom students and others workers, often employed as cooks (Goebel 2015: 28); generally speaking, the city was “a point of transit for colonial populations” (Boittin 2010: xv) where political as well as cultural issues could be debated with considerable freedom. At the same time, Paris also attracted a number of artists and intellectuals who chose to migrate in order to pursue their own artistic fulfilment, inspired by the modernity of the place and by the new ideas exchanged in the many informal meetings, among which the ones at 27 rue de Fleurus, Gertrude Stein’s Parisian residence. Introducing a variety of experiences³, Truong provides a more complex perspective on the city, at the time considered the centre of modernism, since “the novel forces Stein, Toklas, and ‘Paris Modernism’ out of their well-established, Eurocentric line and traces out their intersections with the colonies on whose labourers the metropolis and its artistic networks depended” (Coffman 2014: 169).

Before analysing the way these characters interact in the city, it should not be forgotten that Paris in *The Book of Salt* is also a point of departure for the French who set off for Indochina. The French colony represents another important setting, juxtaposed to the capital city in a narration that follows Binh’s flow of thoughts and memories. The sacrifice of leaving the mother-country is compensated for by economic and social advantages, since it represents an opportunity to improve one’s own social status, as the French wives described in the novel well know: “they, with their government-clerk husbands, were touring their colony, forgetting who they were, forgetting that they had to cross oceans to move up a class” (Truong 2004: 44). The economic motive appears to be dominant for middle-class French people, encouraged by a mother-country that has provided for a domestic environment in the foreign land where, as Binh narrates, in Saigon it is possible to find “the replicas of their cathedrals, erected in a far-off colony to remind them of the majesty, the piety, of home” (17).

Just as Stein’s house reflects the Parisian allure of those years for intellectuals, the Governor-General’s household is a microcosm where the social relationships are typical of the colonial world. On the one hand the ruling class dispensing orders, with little knowledge of

the same blood, race, class, gender, or religion. [...] Homes are manifest on geographical, psychological and material levels” (Marangoly 1999: 9).

² The novel, however, is based on two characters who actually lived in Paris at the time, namely Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas, and on the experience they narrated in *The Alice B. Toklas cookbook* and Stein’s *Everybody’s Autobiography*. The character of Binh is partly based on the descriptions of the Indochinese personnel the ladies had in Paris. The other important character in the novel is that of the Man on the Bridge, whose identity, at first unspecified, is later revealed as Nguyễn Ái Quốc, the name Ho Chi Minh used in Paris.

³ Apart from Gertrude Stein, example of American intellectual *émigrée*, and Binh, her Indochinese cook, the novel also introduces Lattimore, a mixed-race American Southerner who completes his studies in iridology in Paris and enters Stein’s circle, and the Man on the Bridge. Other stories of migration include the Americans in Paris or the Governor General’s chauffeur, former student of medicine in the capital city before going back to Saigon.

the local culture and highly prejudiced towards it, struggling to maintain their lifestyle in spite of the different setting. [...] "As if in France!" is Madame's motto; she shows no desire to know anything about local customs, so that she fails to understand that the title *anh*, or brother, given to the *sous-chef* is just an honour and not an indication of family relationship. She has no intention of adapting her way of life to the place, except when she has to substitute *crème anglaise* with *sabayon*, as she is too suspicious of 'Indochina's milk'. The domestic staff, instead, is made up of local people, fully aware of their subordinate position, yielding in various degrees to the rules imposed. If Binh's brother submits to the colonial power convinced that he will be rewarded, examples of resistance are mentioned, like the carelessness towards Madame's reproach shown by most servants behind apparent repentance, which anticipates the narrator's defiance in the role of cook and of narrator.

Binh experiences the rigid class and race distinction in the household even more as his relationship with *chef* Blériot becomes more intimate. Not only does the *chef* behave "like a typical colonial official [...] walk[ing] several steps ahead" (Truong 2004: 122) when in the streets of Saigon, but, as Binh remembers, he "insisted that I call him 'Chef' or, worse, 'Monsieur', even when our clothes were on the floor" (248). Binh's initiation to a homosexual relationship is intermingled from the very beginning with the issues of race, class, and colonialism, in which he is only the object of Blériot's pleasure. For the *chef* the affair with a domestic is a different form of exploitation, a way of experiencing transgression in a position of power that does not entail any kind of risk.

In a way transgression appears to be a prevailing motive for migration also among the Americans portrayed at the beginning of the novel and actually described at the moment of going back home, unable to afford life in Paris any longer as a consequence of the Great Depression. As Binh points out, "Americans traveled here in order to indulge in the 'vices' of home. First, they had invaded the bordellos and then it was the cafés" (Truong 2004: 7); what is difficult to accept for the French, though, is not their indulging in the excesses of sex and alcohol, but their hypocrisy, their living beyond their possibilities, leaving bills unpaid, as this qualifies as an unfair use of resources that parallels, however, the one carried out by the French themselves in the colonies.

The sexual sphere is involved even if we focus on the motives that lead the main characters of the novel to Paris, as they are, in one way or another, connected to their queer identity and to the longing to feel at home somewhere, a possibility that seems denied in their homeland. Both Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas seem unable to recognise or develop their sexual identity in the United States, while homosexuality is the reason why Binh loses both his job and home, as his father sends him away when he finds out about it. As Troeung points out with reference to Binh, "unhomeliness is a condition that can precede migration" (Troeung 2010: 123); this condition, however, similarly applies, as far as the sexual sphere is concerned, to the American ladies as well.

The Gertrude Stein of *The Book of Salt* leaves the United States after experiencing a sense of alienation and dissatisfaction in her own country. A student of medicine at a time where the presence of female students was hardly tolerated, Gertrude seems unable to recognise or accept her homosexual inclinations and mistakes her being in love for a disease, apparently

accepting the homophobic stance of her culture (Coffman 2014: 157); she fails the obstetrics exam, thus receiving the contempt of both male and female students. Finally, she finds herself out of place in a country that she considers old, as "Oakland, Allegheny, Cambridge, Baltimore, all the cities that she had slept in, but never quite awoken in, had the nineteenth century written all over them" (Truong 2004: 204). Feeling no longer at home, she sets off for Paris, which can offer the presence of her beloved brother Leo and the new century, where she gradually finds her own dimension sexually and professionally. As soon as she arrives in Paris, Gertrude gets rid of the corsets she used to wear, symbol of the claustrophobic atmosphere she experienced at home, and she struggles to have her identity finally recognised: "'Gertrude Stein'. No longer a diminutive, as female names are doomed to be, but a powerful whopping declaration of her full self, each and every time" (Truong 2004: 207).

Similarly, Miss Toklas has "to travel thousands of miles from home to escape the setting sun" (Truong 2004: 158); having reached the age of thirty she envisions her life as an inevitable decline until she experiences a moment of sexual desire towards a woman. This recognition shakes her identity and finds correspondence with the San Francisco earthquake, an event Alice takes for a sign. Her radical decision to emigrate, rather than being perceived as a journey away from home, is described as a journey to find the very essence of the self: "she thought she was giving in to her instinct to flee, a fear so animal-like that she submitted willingly. Now she remembers it as a homing instinct, a flight toward as opposed to away" (158). The description of the picture, taken one year before leaving the United States, shows her desire to "expose her body to light, a compulsion to wake it" (161).

If the expatriation of the two women shows a desire to feel at home that cannot be fulfilled in their own country, it is nonetheless a meditated, voluntary decision. Binh's journey away from Saigon, on the other hand, emerges as the result of a traumatic experience, of a decision that is not actually taken, but suffered. His sexual behaviour is in fact the cause of the sudden separation from home. Binh's home, however, is described in the novel as a place clearly divided into two distinctive areas, with corresponding different emotions. The part of the house where his father usually entertains his guests while drinking is associated in Binh's memories with episodes of violence and constant humiliations. The 'Old Man', as Xu notices, represents not only the patriarchal authority, but also the colonial culture the father is assimilated into through his cooperation with the Catholic missions (Xu 2008: 139). The kitchen, the only space that his mother can consider her own, is for Binh the real 'home', the place where he receives attention and tenderness, where he listens to his mother's imaginative stories while helping her cook.

Though Binh's memories rarely qualify as nostalgia for a happy past, he admits he "never had a desire to see what was on the other side of the earth" (Truong 2004: 250). By sending him away, his father has deprived him of his home, and the journey to Europe is an escape from his sense of guilt, without any interest for the destination, as Binh's desire when he gets on board is that of annihilation: "I needed a ship that would go out to sea because there the water is deep, deeper than the hemmed-in rivers that I could easily reach by foot. I wanted the deepest water because I wanted to slip into it and allow the moon's reflection to swallow me whole. 'I never meant to go this far', I said to Bafio. What I meant was that when I boarded the Niobe I had no intention of reaching shore" (250).

The fact that Bìn̄h would never have conceived of leaving home as, despite everything, it represented for him something precious, is clear when he reports the basket weaver's story which Bafio tells him on the *Niobe*. The story of a young basket-weaver leaving his village to try, without succeeding, his fortune somewhere else does not entirely convince Bìn̄h. The motive of pure adventure put forward by the weaver, 'just to see', does not appear good enough to leave one's hometown, and Bìn̄h thus suspects this story could be more similar to his, caused by a sudden traumatic event that also prevents him from going back: "I can imagine the weaver's desire, all right, the geography of it reasonably extending to the next village and over and, maybe, one or two after that. But to take one's body and willingly set it upon the open sea, this for me is not an act brought about by desire but a consequence of it, maybe" (Truong 2004: 57).

Paris does not represent for Bìn̄h a welcoming place as, in spite of greater open-mindedness towards sexuality, he finds rigid hierarchies and prejudices related to race and class (Edwards 2012: 174) already experienced at the Governor-general's house. His yellow skin makes him easily identifiable, so that he is different but, at the same time, unable to arouse any interest beyond superficial curiosity as he is immediately categorised and deprived of other possibilities. This is evident in the interviews Bìn̄h has with his prospective employers, and even more when he walks in the streets of Paris:

Foreigner, *asiatique*, and, this being Mother France, I must be Indochinese. They do not care to discern any further, ignoring the question of whether I hail from Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos. [...] Every day when I walk the streets of this city, I am just that. I am an Indochinese laborer, generalized and indiscriminate, easily spotted and readily identifiable all the same. It is this curious mixture of careless disregard and notoriety that makes me long to take my body into a busy Saigon marketplace and lose it in the crush. There, I tell myself, I was just a man, anonymous, and, at a passing glance, a student, a gardener, a poet, a chef, a prince, a porter, a doctor, a scholar. But in Vietnam, I tell myself, I was above all just a man (Truong 2004: 152).

Bìn̄h's need to belong finds partial fulfilment when he meets other *asiatiques* in Paris, when they, through their apparent ignorance of each other, state their ordinariness and share their common condition of migrants: "It is the recognition that in the darkest streets of the city there is another body like mine, and that it means no harm. [...] To walk by without blinking an eye is to say to each other that we are human, whole, a man or a woman like any other, two lungfuls of air, a heart pumping blood, a stomach hungry for home-cooked food, a body in constant search for the warmth of the sun" (Truong 2004: 141-142). Apart from these brief encounters, Bìn̄h passes unnoticed, except when Lattimore notices him at the market, remembers his appearance and his looking lost; this episode has such great value for Bìn̄h that it almost changes his relationship with the city and he asks himself: "How can I carry my body through the streets of this city in the same way again?" (110).

The elements of race and class difference intertwine in the description of life at 27 rue de Fleurus and show their impact on the lives of the protagonists. Miss Stein and Alice Toklas, being two white affluent *émigrées*, can afford to live in a prosperous area of Paris sur-

rounded by commodities like the telephone and the car. Their social status and condition of expatriated intellectuals allow them to make their house a meeting point where Miss Stein is always the centre of attention and the Mesdames' queerness is accepted. As for Binh, though the position as cook with the Mesdames represents a considerable improvement in his quality of life, his financial condition remains at a level of pure survival, as shown by the fact that he cannot even afford to buy a photograph, already half-paid for by Lattimore.

Moreover, the Mesdames share the white colonial attitude towards their servant, a mixture of exploitation and paternalistic benevolence, and their conversations are not free from openly racist comments⁴, as in the case of the opera singer Robeson or in their curiosity about Lattimore's racial identity. Lattimore, or Sweet Sunday Man as Binh calls him, is in a half-way position between the Mesdames and Binh: his economic situation has allowed him to complete his studies and live comfortably; yet, though he passes for white, his mixed race makes him a marginalised subject just as Binh is. The class and race dynamics that take place in the household thus account for what Coffman describes as Binh's ambivalent attitude – between identification and distancing – towards the Mesdames, sympathetic towards their queerness, but critical of their class privilege and lack of awareness of their foreignness (Coffman 2014: 151).

Binh then feels affinity with his employers, as they both share the condition of sexual exiles, but soon realises that “queer identity does not necessarily produce liberal politics” (Cohler 2008: 27) and that theirs is merely a relationship between employer and domestic, where there is no room for greater intimacy. This becomes clear to him the day after his first night of romance with Sweet Sunday Man. At first apparently forgiven by his Mesdames for being late, he lies to protect his newly born relationship, provoking Miss Toklas' reaction: “My Madame's anger registers on her lips, a controlled tremble, which lets me know that, while I have been permitted to stay within the doors of 27 rue de Fleurus, I have been excommunicated yet again from that perfect circle that is at the center of every home” (Truong 2004: 103). His disappointment explains why in Bilignin, where Binh is the only *asiatique* in town and becomes the target of blatant prejudice, he is almost happy to hear that his Mesdames share with him the condition of outsiders: “What you probably do not know, Gertrude Stein, is that in Bilignin you and Miss Toklas are the only circus act in town. And me, I am the *asiatique*, the sideshow freak. [...] Because of your short-cropped hair and your, well, masculine demeanor, they call you ‘Caesar’. Miss Toklas, they dub ‘Cleopatra’ in an ironic tribute to her looks and her companionship role in your life” (142).

The common condition pointed out by the narrator is not the only one presented in the novel, as Truong also focuses on practical problems and nostalgic thoughts that all migrants share. A case in point is the difficulty of expressing themselves in another language, which regards both Miss Stein and Binh. However, French is not only a foreign language for Binh, but also the language of the coloniser and of all his previous employers and is thus connected with forms of power and violence: “there are some French words that I have picked up quickly, in fact, words that I cannot remember not knowing. As if I had been born with

⁴ Both Monique Truong and scholars point out the presence of similar comments in Toklas and Stein's written production mentioned in note 1.

them in my mouth, as if they were the seeds of a sour fruit that someone else ate and then ungraciously stuffed its remains into my mouth" (Truong 2004: 11-12).

Binh's fluency in French has remained very limited because, as he observes, "the vocabulary of servitude is not built upon my knowledge of foreign words but rather on my ability to swallow them" (Truong 2004: 13); he possesses "cheap, serviceable words to fuel [his] desires" but not "lavish, imprudent ones to feed them" (11), and is often compelled to express what he wants in the negative – e. g. 'a pear [...] not a pear' for 'pineapple'. This rudimentary use of language has consequences on his possibility of integration and, ultimately, on the construction of his self-perception: "A man with a borrowed, ill-fitting tongue, I cannot compete for this city's attention. [...] I am a man whose voice is a harsh whisper in a city that favors a song. No longer able to trust the sound of my own voice, I carry a small speckled mirror that shows me my face, my hands, and assures me that I am still here" (18-19).

Given their poor knowledge of French, Miss Stein and Binh try to build strategies in order to compensate for their shortcomings, mainly by using their own bodies instead of words. She uses the tone of her voice and the warmth of her eyes, while Binh uses mimicry and bases his comprehension on the long-practiced ability "to look for the signals and interpret the signs" (Truong 2014: 117). Despite his poor competence, he in fact surprisingly reveals "discerning attention to the nuances in his employers' language" (Peek 2012: n.d.), like the use of *coup-de-grâce* to refer to a finishing stroke (Truong 2004: 69). On some occasions, instead, he follows his friend Bão's advice to "slip your own meanings into their words" (155), a more defiant way of forcefully entering a discourse to overcome his sense of exclusion: "Language is a house with a host of doors, and I am too often uninvited and without the keys. But when I infiltrate their words, take a stab at their meanings, I create the trapdoors that will allow me in when the night outside is too cold and dark" (155).

Another feeling that the protagonists share in Paris is that of nostalgia, a feeling that, as Monique Truong has often stated in various interviews with reference to the title of her novel⁵, is not necessarily to be condemned as it represents a very human temptation, especially for migrants whose adaptation to a new location may not be so easy. In the novel it is frequently conveyed through food imagery⁶, seen in its cultural relevance. Binh cannot help remembering his mother's stories and the moments spent with her in the kitchen, or the spices and ingredients of his country of origin. Similarly, "on Sundays Madame and Madame are safely settled in their dining room with their memories of their America heaped onto large plates" (Truong 2004: 27). In both cases there is a gap between the past memories of the dishes and those tasted in Paris, as they are adapted by Binh and Miss Toklas with the addition of new ingredients. The process of integration of past and present contexts, apparently so natural in cooking, proves however more difficult in everyday life.

In this regard, Binh and Miss Toklas certainly differ in their dependence on memories, as Binh's are too often mixed with pain and sense of guilt, while the lady is freer and thus

⁵ The presence of salt in the title also refers to the biblical story of Lot's wife who, when leaving Sodom, was tempted to look back at her hometown and was thus transformed into a pillar of salt.

⁶ The relationship between food and memory is a crucial issue in the novel, as pointed out in two different interviews by Daniela Fargione and Tamiko Nimura.

more open to the new. Truong underscores the difference in the invisible 'luggage' the two characters have taken with them when the narrator compares his sensations with those of Miss Toklas on the day of their arrival at Gertrude Stein's house: "As she stood outside the studio waiting for an answer, she heard the sounds of leaves batting against the autumn winds. She thought she was hearing Gertrude Stein's laughter. Many years later, standing outside the same door, I thought I was hearing my father's voice. She had left hers behind. I had unfortunately overpacked" (Truong 2004: 160).

For both Miss Stein and Binh, however, Paris also represents a place where they can express their own creativity and find professional success, one as a writer and intellectual, the other as a cook, two activities whose similarities Monique Truong does not fail to specify in the novel, both requiring imagination and implying an addressee. Daniela Fargione in her essay "What Keeps you Here?" argues that, despite the differences that brought the characters to Paris, the reasons for staying are the same, "the awareness that Paris could offer the right stimuli to transform an innate gift into craft" (Fargione 2013: 141), where the distance from the mother-country represents an advantage. For Gertrude Stein the fact of using French in everyday communication allows her to become "more intimate with the language of her birth", she can "dissect" it and mould it with creativity (Truong 2004: 30). Similarly, the art of cooking gives Binh the chance, elsewhere denied, of expressing himself in a position of advantage that implies a reversal of roles: "I am no longer the mute who begs at this city's steps. Three times a day, I orchestrate, and they sit with slackened jaws, silenced" (19). In his *cuisine* he personalises dishes and combines elements of Vietnamese tradition and of his mother's recipes with French or American ones. Cooking helps him connect past and present, memory and desire. Food also acquires symbolic relevance in the lavish meal Binh has with the Man on the Bridge at a restaurant, where what is on the table and the person sitting next to him both hint at an alternative model to face the condition of migrants:

the transcultural mixture of salt-and-pepper shrimp (Chinese), *haricots verts* (French green beans), watercress (Vietnamese), and apple pie (American) presents a kind of cultural exchange and collaboration that is powerfully oppositional to colonialism. Exiles like Nguyen and Binh understand the implications of travel: the importance of remembrance, the necessity to adapt, and the wealth of worldly ways (Xu 2008: 147).

The Parisian context appears therefore not only as a "space of commodity and labour exchange" (Udomlamun 2015: 74), but as a place that offers a chance to understand and develop one's own potential. This sensation is not dissimilar to the one the author herself experienced in her first visit to Paris, as Fargione has pointed out in the essay already mentioned. In the article "The Season de l'Amour" Truong remembers feeling "a gradual easing into [her] own body" and thinking she was finally 'somewhere'. Gertrude Stein needed Paris to make her 'genius' appear, after which she can decide to go 'home' to receive the due recognition as an artist. As for Binh, again Paris is more than a working opportunity if we consider that he, a man 'unused to choices', faces two decisions, one related to the buying of a photograph and the other about where to go after the Mesdames' departure. Both of them go towards the Man on the Bridge, the compatriot with whom he had spent only

one evening, but with whom he had shared thoughts, memories, feelings, enjoyment. The reader is not explicitly told what Binh will do. His state of 'unhomeliness', both in Paris and in Vietnam, cause of pain and suffering, represents a form of freedom to explore all possibilities, to find a 'home' in the in-between spaces he can find on his way, and to offer the readers, from that perspective, other versions of reality; "Binh resists the allure of a stable home(land) and, in the process, creates a decentered subjectivity that powerfully critiques the contradictions and exclusions necessary to absolute belonging" (Edwards 2012: 181).

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Nadia Priotti obtained her PhD at the University of Turin with a thesis on espionage literature (*'I Spy with my Little Eye': British Espionage Literature from Le Queux to Greene*). She is interested in cultural studies and in novels or films belonging to the espionage and detection genres. Her publications include "Overturning Stereotypes: Ambler's Vision of Italy and Italians" (2014), "Double Agents, Multiple Motives: Joseph Conrad's Spies" (2015), "Repetition and Variation in Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps*" (2016) and "Eric Ambler and the Trick of Boundaries" (2018).

npriotti@unito.it

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Paola Carmagnani

Passages to India: Santha Rama Rau's Adaptation of E. M. Forster's Novel for the Stage

Abstract I: Questo saggio presenta un'analisi critica dell'adattamento teatrale di *A Passage to India* ad opera di Santha Rama Rau, una figura largamente ignorata dalla critica postcoloniale. Attraverso un'analisi dello specifico contesto storico e culturale in cui si situa l'adattamento e un *close reading* del testo in relazione con il romanzo si tratta di far emergere i molteplici "passaggi in India" che lo informano. Il passaggio dal romanzo al teatro è infatti il veicolo intermediale di un passaggio simbolico, all'interno del quale la visione implicitamente eurocentrica del testo di partenza non viene cancellata, ma piuttosto interpretata e ri-creata all'interno di un processo dialogico.

Abstract II: The essay offers a critical analysis of Santha Rama Rau's theatrical adaptation of E. M. Forster's novel, largely ignored by postcolonial criticism. Situating Rau's text within its specific historical and cultural context and examining it through a close reading which has not been attempted before, the essay aims to reveal the multiple "passages to India" that shape it. The intermedial passage from novel to theatre is in fact as well a symbolic passage, where the novel's implicitly Eurocentric vision is by no means erased, but rather interpreted and re-created within a dialogic process.

Published in 1924, *A Passage to India* belongs to that category of colonial texts that "are willing to examine the specific individual and cultural differences between Europeans and natives and to reflect on the efficacy of European values, assumptions, and habits in contrast to those of the indigenous cultures" (JanMohamed 1985: 19). Within the more specific context of the British construction of India, Forster's novel distances itself from the earlier orientalist discourse by positing India-British relations "as an exchange in which British and Indians reciprocally construct one another, each subject position existing within the context of the other, dependent on the recognition of the other" (Lowe 1991: 112). At an emotive level however, the novel is structured by an imaginary identification where the Other functions as an image of the imperialist self, revealing the latter's self-alienation: "conceived in the 'symbolic' realm of intersubjectivity, heterogeneity and particularity", Forster's text is also, at the same time, "seduced by the specularity of 'imaginary' Otherness" (JanMohamed 1985: 19-20). This ambivalent relation of the novel to the stances of colonial narratives made it a privileged locus of the India-British dialogues, of which Rama Rau's adaptation is an integral part.

A Passage to India “was part of my childhood, my education, my view of both India and England”, wrote Santha Rama Rau in 1962, on the occasion of the Broadway premiere of her adaptation of Forster’s novel. Born into India’s elite in 1923, Rama Rau was partly educated in England, travelled widely around the world and, since the 1940s until her death in 2009, lived in the United States, where through her articles, novels and travel books she became a popular expert on India. She recalls sending her script to Forster, “out of the blue and very tentatively” (Burton 2007: 77), and being nervous because she knew he had always refused any film or theatrical adaptation of his novels. Unexpectedly though, he accepted the idea of a stage production of her script and the play was first produced at the Oxford’s Playhouse on January 19, 1960. After a local tour it moved to the West End and then on to Broadway.

Rama Rau’s play must be situated in the context of the first wave of Indian commentary of Forster’s novel emerging during the 1950s and 1960s, after independence and after it became acceptable for a certain number of Indian intellectuals to enter a field dominated by Anglo-American critics. Lisa Lowe has highlighted a general tendency on the part of these first Indian critics to perpetuate the Anglo-American terms of the debate, separating the literary and textual features of the novel from its social and historical issues, steering away “from explicit discussion of the cultural and political imperialism through which the British occupied and managed India for nearly 150 years” (Lowe 1991: 128). Assimilated to this mainly depoliticised context, Rama Rau’s figure and work have been largely forgotten in the following wake of postcolonial criticism. The only extensive critical study on her work is Antoinette Burton’s *The Postcolonial Careers of Santha Rama Rau* (2007), in which she situates Rama Rau’s adaptation of Forster’s novel within the American interpretation of the British Raj during the Cold War, mainly in connection with David Lean’s film adaptation (1984), which was partly based on Rama Rau’s script. Although assessing the highly conflictive relationship between the writer and the movie director and Rama Rau’s strong objections to Lean’s interpretation of Forster’s text, Burton states that “Rama Rau not only helped to make *A Passage to India* a vehicle for interpreting India to the West but was also instrumental in setting the Raj nostalgia machine in motion in Britain and America, at least in its visual and cinematic incarnation” (Burton 2007: 77). Without attempting any textual reading of the play, Burton concludes that Rama Rau’s position consists in a “depoliticizing” endorsement of “Forster’s utopian liberalism”: “(she) shared [...] his conviction [...] that it was personal relationships between like-minded cosmopolitans (such as himself and Rama Rau) that had the power to transcend the vagaries of colonialism. This was Forster’s political vision, and it was – or came to be – Rama Rau’s as well” (Burton 2007: 99).

In Forster’s novel however, personal relationships ultimately prove to be utterly useless in transcending the colonial power structure and Rama Rau herself, cited by Burton, seems to have fully grasped the tentative nature of Forster’s humanism. “Are friendship, cooperation, life, love, the brotherhood of man impossible until the first steps to political freedom are achieved? Are good intentions enough?” (Burton 2007: 99): for Rama Rau this was Forster’s basic question, which her play further problematises. Through a close reading of the play, which has not been attempted before, I will thus examine the process of transculturation elaborated by Rama Rau’s adaptation, questioning the extent and modalities of her

so called “depoliticizing” approach to Forster’s novel. At the same time, I will try to assess the specific intermedial issues created by passing from a long, complex and multilayered narrative into a short theatrical text.

As the novel, the play is set in the imaginary city of Chandrapore against the backdrop of the British Raj and the Indian independence movement in the 1920s. Its three acts mirror the three parts of the novel, condensing the events of parts one and two and including some key elements from the novel’s last part. Act one transposes the main nucleus of the novel’s first part, the tea party, where the narrative threads that will lead to the central episode narrated in part two – the catastrophe of the Marabar caves – are established. The curtains open on Mr. Fielding’s house on the grounds of the Government College at Chandrapore, where he has invited some guests. The first to arrive is Dr. Aziz, a young and cultivated Muslim physician who works at the British hospital in Chandrapore and is meeting Mr. Fielding for the first time. Both Fielding and Aziz are liminal figures in the colonial context and their friendship will offer the main symbolic feature of what Nirad C. Chaudhuri, a prominent Indian critic writing a few years before Rau and radically displacing the depoliticised approach of both Anglo-American and Indian criticism, described as Forster’s “humanitarian consciousness”: a “determination to understand power as an individual rather than a structural affair” (Chaudhuri 1954: 328). Although refusing the Eurocentric colonial assumptions, Fielding has indeed no political opinions on the legitimacy of British rule in India and his distaste for the colonial discourse is rather founded on a humanist vision: “The world, he believed, is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of goodwill plus culture and intelligence” (Forster 2005: 57). Aziz on the other hand, although resenting the racism and prejudices of the English rulers, admires the coloniser’s culture and is happy and flattered by Fielding’s invitation. Despite goodwill, culture and intelligence, the colonial power structure that Fielding and Aziz’s personal relationship should be able to overcome implicitly shapes indeed the novel’s discourse. As pointed out by Lowe, throughout the novel “there are many moments when the narrative perspective shifts to include the points of view of both the English and the Indian characters”, challenging “the customary relation of British narrator and Indian object of description”; however, “the narrative perspective at times returns to a position outside the drama, a position culturally coded as British and distinctly non-Indian” (Lowe 1991: 114). This is particularly the case of Aziz’s descriptions, where the narrator generalises his emotionality as a racial and ethnic trait. Moreover, despite the fluctuations in narrative perspective, the orientalist posture inherited from a previous tradition also permeates Aziz’s own voice, expressing a clumsy eagerness to please his new English friend. Chaudhuri dismissed this representation of Aziz as servile, simple and hot-headed (Chaudhuri 1954: 119) and these traits, combined with Fielding’s tranquil unawareness of his own symbolic position of power, are directly challenged by Rama Rau’s adaptation.

Although replicating the novel’s dialogue, the opening of act one integrates within Aziz’s original buffoonery an ironic take on the colonial cleavage. “The fact is”, says Aziz, “I have been wanting to meet you for a long time. But where is one to meet in a wretched hole like Chandrapore. (*With a touch of irony*) Where will the poor Indian doctor run across the

Exalted European Principal of the Government College?" (Rama Rau 1960: I, 11). Later on, when Fielding asks Aziz if he has a spare collar stud, the novel has him answer: "'Yes, yes, one minute'. 'Not if you're wearing it yourself'. 'No, no, one in my pocket'. Stepping aside, so that his outline might vanish, he wrenched off his collar, and pulled out of his shirt the back stud [...]. 'Here it is', he cried" (Forster 2005: 59). In the play, the same situation instead gives rise to a conflict:

FIELDING (*after a pause*) But nobody carries a spare collar stud in his pocket.
 AZIZ I, always! In case of emergency.
 FIELDING Nonsense.
 AZIZ *stares at the stud in his hand, dismayed. He puts it in his pocket, touchily.*
 AZIZ Indians are famous for talking nonsense, doubtless you know that.
 FIELDING All I meant is that I don't want to deprive you...
 AZIZ (*sarcastically*) No depriving, rest assured. It should be the highest of honors for me.
 FIELDING (*matching his sarcasm, clearly irritated*) Look, Dr. Aziz, keep your stud. I can easily send for a new one.
 AZIZ By all means! Yes, yes, by all means! Send your servant to the bazaar – get your new collar stud – an unsoiled collar stud – that is what Indians are for, isn't it?
 FIELDING What are you talking about?
 AZIZ (*even more excited*) Only an Englishman is friend enough to do a favor. I am wrong to offer. I see that.
 FIELDING (*after a long pause*) Dr. Aziz, please forgive me. [...] I am delighted and grateful to wear your collar stud (I, 12-13).

Aziz's former irony has turned into sarcasm, and the conflict inherent in the colonial power structure is here immediately brought back within the individual relationship, freeing Aziz from his own orientalist caricature and forcing Fielding to an awareness that he never possesses in the novel.

In the novel, Aziz's ability to handle the coloniser's language is meant to counterbalance his almost caricatural compliance. Surprised at finding Fielding's room so untidy, Aziz exclaims: "Everything ranged coldly on shelves was what I thought"; "I hae ma doots," replies Fielding in a heavy Scottish accent; "What's the last sentence, please?", asks Aziz, "Will you teach me some new words and so improve my English?" (Forster 2005: 59-60). Aziz's naive eagerness to improve his English, however, implicitly transforms the novel's discourse into a patronising reinstatement of colonial power. Within the explicitly conflictual situation which was rephrased in the play, the gap between Aziz's English and metropolitan English is instead underscored, signalling the text's awareness of the function of language as a medium of the colonial power. "Anything is wrong?" (I, 12) asks Aziz when Fielding stumps on his collar-stud, while in the novel the same line runs as "Anything wrong?": Zia Mohyeddin, the actor who played Aziz in the Broadway production, said that this was indeed one of his favourite lines in the play, "because it tells so much about the type of pre-Independence Muslim that Dr. Aziz is" (Burton 2007: 85).

Intertwined with the narrative thread of Aziz and Fielding's relationship, the novel

develops additional layers of meaning which problematise its symbolic value. Adela Quested, an English girl on her “passage to India” and informally engaged to Ronny Heaslop, the District Magistrate of Chandrapore, is the catastrophe’s main agent, accusing Aziz of having sexually assaulted her in the Marabar caves. Like Fielding, she doesn’t fit the colonial categories but her way of escaping them is immediately and ironically denounced in both the novel and the play as naive: “She’s a Kensington intellectual”, says Fielding to Aziz, “(very gently mocking) She tells me she wants to know the *real* India. [...] She was saying the other night at the Club that she was tired of seeing picturesque Indians pass before her as a frieze, that now she wanted to meet some of them” (I, 17).

As in the novel, act one underscores Adela’s unattractiveness from Aziz’s point of view. In the play, however, Aziz is transformed into an ambivalent object of Adela’s desire, openly sexualising their relationship and thus offering a clearer background to Adela’s following delusion in the caves.

AZIZ A hammam is a bath... but oh, Miss Quested, it is a beautiful luxurious bath. Imagine yourself a princess, Miss Quested, your black hair flowing down to your waist, polished and shining like the wing of a bird, face is round like the moon, breasts like pomegranates. You are surrounded by your handmaidens who rub your skin with sandalwood oil, and perfume the water of the hammam with musk, and then scatter over it rose petals for beauty. Somewhere in the garden a bul-bul is singing. Oh, there is no sweeter sound than the bul-bul. You step out of your veils and into the water, and –

FIELDING *clears his throat noisily, half-smiling at the weird contrast between the straight-backed, unvoluptuous figure of MISS QUESTED and AZIZ’s description.* [...]

AZIZ (*he takes the pot over to her and as he pours says*) Pretend that this is sherbet you are drinking... the drink of those beautiful, voluptuous princesses...

MISS QUESTED, *uncomfortable and alarmed by AZIZ’s extravagance, looks up at him as he speaks, bending over her. Her hand trembles and the tea spills over her dress and the sofa. She jumps up, the cup shatters* (I, 24-25).

After conjuring up these sensual images in Adela’s imagination, the play proceeds to elaborate through Aziz’s speech a conventionally orientalist juxtaposition of East and West, which is then confronted with a different set of categories, shaping Ronny’s colonial discourse: “The thing I’ve learned out here”, says Ronny to Adela, “ – and you will too – is that we are better for them than they are for each other. Peace, security, good administration, justice...we’ve brought them all those” (I, 36). Within this clash of defining categories, Adela’s attempt to find a syncretic solution in “understanding” and being “useful” is bound to fail: “...please try not to be so emotional about it all” (I, 37) exclaims Ronny, assigning her to the same imaginary realm that in Aziz’s discourse defined the Eastern culture. In the utter collapse of all defining categories, Adela loses her hold on her own identity and openly expresses her doubts about their marriage – “*Emotional?* [...] Ronny, we must have a thorough talk. [...] I think we should... well, consider a bit more before we get married” (I, 37). Their following reconciliation significantly marks Adela’s need to recover her true self, escaping a “muddleheadedness” that is “really not like me” (I, 37).

The imaginary East-West polarisation emphasised by the play is, however, not as simple as it may seem: Adela's conflicting attitude is indeed marked by a claim to self-determination and emancipation from the traditional patriarchal categories, transversally running through her relationships with both Aziz and Ronny and intersecting the defining categories of East and West. "Why be useful, Miss Quested? Just love India", says Aziz. Adela's uneasy reaction to Aziz's involuntary seduction is followed by an attempt to affirm her will as an active part of the society that she is meant to integrate: "In England I'm used to lead an active life...so different from the kind of life the English wives lead out here". "Miss Quested", Aziz insists, "I tell you what. Think with your heart for this time, not with your head" (I, 31). In Adela's answer, Aziz's polarisation between East and West turns into a conflict between an old patriarchal order and the new aspirations of Western liberal women: "What's the point of having a brain if one doesn't use it? I intend to use mine to understand what I can do about India and then to put that knowledge to some good. [...] Dr. Aziz, I'm sorry. I don't mean to criticise – but I can't agree with the Oriental idea of women [...] that we mustn't use our minds. That we should be just wives and mothers" (I, 31). Adela's claim to self-determination is clearly stated at the end of the tea party, when she remains alone with the two Indian guests. The play has her lighting a cigarette, "to the scarcely concealed astonishment of the Indians" and offering an additional cause to Ronny's shocked reaction: "I don't like to see an English girl left smoking cigarettes with two Indians", he says. "This particular English girl stayed here, as she smokes, by her own wish", she answers (I, 34).

Rau's feminist discourse manifestly doesn't challenge the main issues of colonialism's intersection with patriarchy, that will be brought to light two decades later by postcolonial feminism. On the contrary, in order to represent the white woman's position within the structure of patriarchal power the play uses Aziz's "Oriental idea of women", further accentuating Forster's orientalist perspective. Adela is thus assigned to an inherently ambivalent position, as belonging both to the dominant colonialist society and to the "subaltern" group of western women who struggle to make their voice heard: "I can see that men might not wish to relinquish their privileges", says Adela commenting on Aziz's idea that women mustn't use their minds and "should be just wives and mothers"; "The English have many privileges in India", replies Aziz (I, 32). In this respect, it seems particularly significant how the category of emotions is used both by Aziz and Ronny, underscoring the distance that separates Eastern culture from Adela's Western identity in the first case, and dismissing her point of view as a female lack of rational judgement in the second. In both cases, the aim of the masculine discourse is to silence her.

Much has been said about "the enigmatic presence of absence in the caves at the centre of the novel" (Barratt 1993: 127). In chapter sixteen, the central chapter of the central section of the novel, we see Aziz and Adela starting off together, away from the rest of the expedition party. The narrator follows Aziz, going into a cave by himself in order to recover his balance after Adela's insensitive questioning about his dead wife: we see him lighting a cigarette and then going out and vainly searching for Adela. The guide informs him that she has disappeared into another cave and he finally spots her at the bottom of the hill. What happened to Adela in the cave remains a disquieting blank space at the very core of the nov-

el, but the reader knows for sure that Aziz hasn't followed her and therefore has not assaulted her as she will pretend later on. In fact, the blank space of the presumed sexual assault is not meant to make the reader doubt of Aziz's innocence, but is rather the culminating point of a larger narrative construction, where the caves are depicted from the onset in terms of an essence that will not reveal itself in language, lying beyond the utterance of characters and similarly reduced to negative comparison in the narrator's voice (Barratt 1993: 128-129). It is this modernist struggle with language that provokes in the reader a powerful "impression of muddle", a growing "sense of inexplicable mystery" (Hoepper Moran 1988: 596). Forster's modernist narrative however, cannot be easily translated into actions and gestures on the stage, and in order to transpose its effects on the spectator Rau's adaptation must resort to other means. Within the form of Forster's novel, the blank space of the caves' episode is a manifest break from the rules of traditional narrative, all the more remarkable in an author with so omniscient and controlling a narrative voice. Within the theatrical codes instead, hiding violent events from the spectator's view is a well-established practice, dating back to the classical canons of tragic theatre. Thus, in order to convey the novel's sense of unsettling mystery, Rau builds her scene around an empty stage, emphasising the expressive power of the novel's blank space.

Before the mystery of Adela's presumed assault, the novel had shown Adela, Aziz and Mrs. Moore, Ronny's elderly mother, entering a first cave. Crammed in the crowd, Mrs. Moore loses sight of her companions in the dark: "(she) couldn't breathe, and some vile naked thing struck her face and settled on her mouth like a pad. She tried to regain the entrance tunnel, but an influx of villagers swept her back. She hit her head. For an instant she went mad, hitting and gasping like a fanatic. For not only did the crush and stench alarm her; there was also a terrifying echo" (Forster 2005: 137). In the play, Mrs. Moore's experience in the cave is transformed into a first blank space: "(Aziz) *chivvies the whole group into the caves and follows them in. The stage is empty for a moment, and faintly a booming echo is heard, nothing comprehensible, but faintly ominous. It is repeated and swells and becomes confused*" (II 1, 51). Then, the spectator sees Mrs. Moore coming out of the cave, shaken and ill, and going to her chair. The same mechanism is repeated just after Aziz and Adela start off together. We don't see them separating, we don't see Aziz going into a cave by himself, and we obviously don't see what happens to Adela. Instead, the spectator is left with Mrs. Moore, who remains on the stage leaning back in her deck-chair and closing her eyes: "*The lights dim for a few seconds to indicate the passage of time, and the booming echo is heard again. [...] When the lights go up again, MRS. MOORE is in the same position [...]. She stirs and sits up abruptly*". "What happened? What was that? Did something happen?" asks Mrs. Moore, "[...] A dream [...] yes, a dream" (II 1, 54). Apparently knowing more than the spectator, Mrs. Moore's speech further emphasises the mystery of the episode, punctuating like a sort of oracle the fragmented reconstruction of the facts attempted by Fielding: "So nothing happened [...]"; "Of course something happened, Mr. Fielding" (II 1, 60). The spectator however, has no clue of what happened, and here the lingering and unsettling feeling of mystery also includes Aziz's role in the accident, postponing the proof of his innocence until Adela's testimony in act three.

Both in the novel and in the play Mrs. Moore is a key character. The title of the novel's first part – "Mosque" – refers in fact to her first encounter with Aziz, a crucial episode preceding the tea party, which the play evokes in act one:

AZIZ Mrs. Moore, do you remember our mosque?

MOORE Of course

AZIZ Do you remember how we saw the moon caught in the tank of water? Trembling and bigger than the real moon? Do you remember?

MOORE I will never forget it (I, 24).

In the mosque Mrs. Moore and Aziz had been bound by a deep sense of spiritual belonging, removing every cultural and political barrier: "That makes no difference", says Mrs. Moore in the novel, "God is here" (Forster 2005: 17). Afterwards, the novel will evoke again this spiritual epiphany through Mrs. Moore's compelling vision of the moon suddenly appearing on the Ganges' waters (2005: 28); an image translated in the play as the moon caught in a tank of water as recalled by Aziz.

If at the beginning of the novel Mrs. Moore's spiritual bond to Aziz heralds the syncretism of Fielding and Aziz's friendship, the catastrophe brought on by the caves' episode destroys it. In both Adela's and Mrs. Moore's experiences, India becomes indeed an imaginary projection of their troubled selves, conveyed through the recurring image of a "muddle" which the play evokes from act one. Adela calls her own inner confusion a "muddleness", from which she tries to escape by reconciling herself with Ronny and deceptively recovering her "real" self. As for Mrs. Moore, at the caves she will indeed experience the transformation of the spiritual mystery perceived in the mosque into a hopeless chaos: "India knows the troubles of the whole world [...] but offers no solutions", she says, "It jumbles everything together, the ridiculous and the august [...] like life" (II 1, 46). In scene two of the second act, set in the late afternoon of the same day at the English Club, the play has Mrs. Moore telling of her own experience of the caves, resuming different passages from the novel. The play symbolically places her in "a chair separated from the rest" of the Anglo-Indian community, where she remains until the end of the act, "a disapproving, compelling figure": "She says very little, but nobody can ignore her or her occasional movements of irritations or weariness" (II 2, 67).

MRS. MOORE (*in a monotone*) "Boum" – or something like that. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies. "Boum" is the sound as far as I can express it, or "bou-oum", or "ou-boum" ... utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce "Boum". [...] It was both frightening and disagreeable. [...] It undermined one's hold on life. It said, "Pathos, piety, courage... they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value". If one had spoken vileness in that place or quoted poetry, the comment would have been the same – "ou-boum". If one had spoken with the tongues of angels and pleaded for all the unhappiness and misunderstanding in the world, past, present, to come, for all the misery men must undergo whatever their opinion and position, and however

much they dodge or bluff [...] it would amount to the same. That echo is India, after all. The end of all our pathetic dreams [...]. Boum [...]. Nothing [...] good or bad [...] love and hate and terror... all one. [...] everything I have ever believed in turns out to be meaningless [...]. I wish only to be left in peace to live out my days knowing what I now know (II 2, 68, 74).

This “frightening” and “faintly ominous” echo, that the spectator has heard resounding through an empty stage in the previous scene, joins with the symbolic image of the muddle, bringing it to its tragic conclusion. Mrs. Moore’s vision, writes F. C. Crews, is indeed “an antivision, a realization that to see through the world of superficial appearances is to be left with nothing at all” (Crews 2015: 157).

In the novel though, the despairing void of Mrs. Moore’s “antivision” is somehow redeemed by a proper vision, opening the third part of the narrative: “Some hundreds of miles westward of the Marabar hills, and two years later in time, Professor Narayan Godbole stands in the presence of God” (Forster 2005: 269). Professor Godbole, Fielding’s Hindu assistant, is here among a crowd assembled in a holy ceremony and he starts singing with his students’ choir, the music evoking “inner images” while the singers’ expressions become “fatuous and languid”:

They loved all men, the whole universe, and scraps of their past, tiny splinters of detail, emerged for a moment into the universal warmth. Thus Godbole, though she was not important to him, remembered an old woman he had met in Chandrapore days. Chance brought her into his mind while it was in this heated state, he did not select her, she happened to occur among the throng of soliciting images, a tiny splinter, and he impelled her by his spiritual force to that place where completeness can be found. Completeness, not reconstruction [...]. Professor Godbole had once more developed the life of his spirit. He had, with increasing vividness, again seen Mrs. Moore, and round her faintly clinging forms of trouble. He was a Brahman, she Christian, but it made no difference, it made no difference whether she was a trick of his memory or a telepathic appeal. It was his duty, as it was his desire, to place himself in the position of God and to love her, and to place himself in her position and to say to God, ‘Come, come, come’ (Forster 2005: 271-272; 275-276).

“God is here”, Mrs. Moore had said in the mosque and now, in a Hindu temple, professor Godbole “stands in the presence of God”, invoking on her behalf a vision where the caves’ meaningless chaos is transformed into a redeeming spiritual communion with the whole universe. The three parts of the novel – “Mosque”, “Caves” and “Temple” – are indeed the symbolic steps of a spiritual quest which, although rooted in Hindu mysticism, concerns every human being. Rama Rau’s adaptation cuts out the third part of Forster’s text, but doesn’t surrender the spiritual redemption offered by the novel to the tragic human predicament. To this end, the play amplifies Professor Godbole’s role in act one. At the tea party, he is asked by the other guests to describe the Marabar Caves. As in the novel, he foregoes the pleasure of such a description, but here he offers instead the suggestion of a spiritual path capable of transforming the “muddle” into a vision of universal “completeness”:

AZIZ Then they *are* deservedly famous? Yes?

GODBOLE Oh yes, famous with reason. And terrible...with reason.

QUESTED Terrible? But how can a cave be terrible? Especially when there is nothing there.

GODBOLE Miss Quested, pardon me, there is everything there. For in nothing there is all. [...] Ah, if it were a question of emptiness, then, indeed, the caves would be empty and nobody would go there. Why would they become famous, in such a case? In our religion, in Hinduism, you see, everything has two or many faces. In the terror there is also calm and comfort. The Creator is also the destroyer (I, 28).

“Well, there must be *something* to see”, says Adela impatiently. “There is enlightenment or obscurity. Nothing to see except with the inner eye”, replies Godbole (I, 29). Adela doesn’t understand because, as Mrs. Moore says, “She only believes the evidence of her eyes” (I, 29). In act two, commenting on Adela’s incapacity to come to terms with her inner vision, Mrs. Moore significantly evokes Godbole’s warning: “The Professor told us...warned us... that there was nothing to see at the caves except with the inner eye. [...] Is she so special that she cannot come to terms? [...] With India. With herself” (II 2, 82). Incapable of sustaining what her inner eye had shown her in the caves, Adela looks away and imagines instead a contingent, intelligible event: Aziz’s sexual assault. Mrs Moore, on the contrary, doesn’t turn away from what she has seen, but Godbole’s vision of completeness is beyond her reach and all she sees is meaningless chaos – “Boum [...]. Nothing [...] good or bad [...] love and hate and terror [...] all one [...]” (II 2, 84).

Love is the key notion around which the play weaves together the “muddle” of self-alienation and the redeeming “completeness” evoked by Professor Godbole in the third part of the novel. “Love in the heat. Marriage in the hills”, Mrs. Moore exclaims after the catastrophe, “Such a fuss! Marriage, marriage. The human race would have become a single person centuries ago if marriage were any use. But it is only an excuse because you are all too frightened to love. Of *love*. So you get married and talk a lot of rubbish about love... love in a church, love in a cave, as if there is the slightest difference” (II 2, 83). Backlit through that contemptuous description of worldly love appears a deeper notion of love, absolutely alien to the daily rituals and worries of life. This theme also shapes the play’s elaboration of the key scene of Adela’s testimony at the trial, in act three. “You went alone into one of those caves?” asks Mr. McBryde in the novel; “That is quite correct”, answers Adela.

“And the prisoner followed you”. [...] “May I have half a minute before I reply to that, Mr. McBryde?” [...] Her vision was of several caves. She saw herself in one, and she was also outside it, watching its entrance, for Aziz to pass in. She failed to locate him. It was the doubt that had often visited her, but solid and attractive, like the hills. “I am not” – speech was more difficult than vision. “I am not quite sure” (Forster 2005: 215).

In the play, the novel’s elliptic jump from vision to speech is elaborated through a broken recollection: “I discovered... I discovered... inside me... The discovery was such a

shock... I felt like a mountaineer whose rope had broken. (*Appealingly*) Not to love the man one's going to marry! Love... Yes I was thinking... about India... about love... (*in a suddenly shocked voice*) Oh... I remember... I remember now..." (III, 103). Adela's concern about her own personal feelings is thus explicitly denounced as the catastrophe's cause: "she has started the machine; it must run to its end", affirmed Mrs. Moore at the Marabar caves. To this line paraphrased from the novel the play significantly adds: "The machine to kill love" (II 1, 60), underscoring again the existence of a spiritual love – that kind of communion experienced by Mrs. Moore and Aziz in the mosque – which has been "killed" by Adela's selfish, worldly notion of love.

In act three, the play immediately states the irremediable fracture brought on by the caves' episode through a stage marked by the official symbols of the colonial power. The curtains open onto a tropical court-room; hanging on the wall above the magistrate's chair is a Union Jack and below it a large tinted photograph of King George V and Queen Mary in their durbar robes. Despite Fielding's unyielding support of Aziz before and throughout the trial, Adela's admission of her mistake and Aziz's release "without one stain on his character" (III, 104), good will and affection are not enough anymore.

As in the novel, Aziz and Fielding's falling out in the trial's aftermath is caused by their difference of opinion regarding the compensation which Adela is sentenced to pay. "Now is the time for congratulations and celebration", says Fielding in the play, "You are the one in a strong position. [...] You have won a great victory" (III, 108-109). The compensation should symbolically mark Aziz's "strong position", but Fielding only sees the individual, human side of the question: "Miss Quested is an honest girl, in spite of the trouble she has caused. Do let her off lightly. She must pay your costs, that's only fair, but don't treat her like a conquered enemy" (III, 109). Aziz however, now clearly sees his position within the collective structure of the unyielding colonial power: "let Miss Quested off paying", he says

so that the English may say, Here is a native who has actually behaved like a gentleman; if it was not for his black face we would almost allow him to join our club. (*suddenly changing his tone to bitterness*) The approval of your compatriots no longer interests me, I have become anti-British, and ought to have done so sooner. It would have saved me numerous troubles (III, 109).

As in the novel, it is the reminding of his bond to Mrs. Moore that finally makes Aziz yield to Fielding's request: "Do it for my sake, then. Or if not mine, then Mrs. Moore's". The effect of Aziz's recollection of Mrs. Moore on his concession leads to the obvious question: "And me? Are we no longer friends?" asks Fielding. "You belong with Miss Quested," answers Aziz, "You cannot be with us at the same time. [...] We do not understand each other. We are on different sides, and until there is no question of sides, we cannot be friends" (III, 111).

"Completeness, not reconstruction", says Professor Godbole in the novel. In the play's final act, Rama Rau clearly chose to underscore the impossible reconstruction over spiritual completeness. "We shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea", says Aziz mockingly on the final page of the novel, while horse riding with Fielding in the mountains,

[...] and then' – he rode against him furiously – “and then”, he concluded, half kissing him, “you and I shall be friends”. “Why can't we be friends now?” said the other, holding him affectionately, “It's what I want. It's what you want”. But the horses didn't want it – they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which the riders must pass single-file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest-House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, “No, not yet”, and the sky said, “No, not there” (Forster 2005: 306).

“Forster's India”, Said wrote, “is so affectionately personal and so remorselessly metaphysical that his view of Indians as a nation contending for sovereignty with Britain is not politically very serious, or even respectful” (Said 1993: 246). When the failure of personal relationships is finally acknowledged, the conflict inherent in the colonial power structure is indeed projected by the novel into a superior cosmic dimension, which ultimately absorbs and annihilates it.

In the play instead, the answer to Fielding's question – “Are we no longer friends? [...] Why not Aziz... why...” – doesn't come from an indifferent nature, but from Aziz and Fielding themselves, both recognising the structural conflict that separates them:

AZIZ We are on different sides and until there is no question of sides, we cannot be friends.

FIELDING Why should we be ruled by such things... colour, or politics... It is India that forces this on us.

AZIZ You see, in the end even you say that. It is India [...]. Yes, probably India will be blamed for all the guilts, and perhaps it is to blame. India is a large country, it can absorb all those guilts and a great deal as well. It can certainly absorb our friendship and make nothing of it.

FIELDING One day, when things are different...

AZIZ One day (III, 111-112).

The imaginary nature of India as a metaphor for the inner self is ironically revealed in Aziz's final speech. Embracing everything, India absorbs indeed all the projections of the imperialist self as well as the individual and collective guilt of colonialism: finally unmasked, the metaphor is thus deprived of its function of transcending and dissolving the political conflict. “You belong with Miss Quested”, said Aziz to Fielding, “You cannot be with us at the same time”. Now, Aziz exits the stage through one door and Fielding exits the other way, through the very door previously taken by Adela, visually reinstating the impossible reconstruction. It is a tragic and very earthly ending, in which the only reference to Forster's indifferent nature is the “very young and extraordinary beautiful” Indian man operating the *punkah*, whom the spectator has seen since the beginning of the act, sitting among the symbols of colonial power, and who continues “to twitch his foot, staring without expression over the empty court room” (III, 87, 112).

In 1975 Vasant A. Shahane edited a volume of essays by Indian critics on Forster's novel, explaining in his introduction that the primary justification for the collection was “to

project an Indian critic's image of Forster's *A Passage to India* after about fifty years of its impact on the country and the English-speaking world. What is basically important in this approach is the Indianness of the native point of view, its process of evaluation and its validity" (Shahane 1975: xiii). I believe that Rau's reading of Forster's novel must be culturally inscribed within this critical notion of 'Indianness', a signifier used by colonial narratives as a means of excluding and subordinating the Indian subject and transformed by Shahane into an oppositional category, defining the heterogeneity and specificity of Indian responses, aimed to "the establishment of writing positions that alter and revise the relationship between the binary poles of British writing subject and Indian object" (Lowe 1991: 123). Ironically distancing itself from the novel's implicit Eurocentric assumptions and working through its folds in order to transform and further elaborate its issues, Rau's text is indeed a response to the ruling British perspective. As an adaptation however, Rau's play is not only a critical response implied by and directed to Forster's novel, but also the locus of a dialogic process where Forster's complex and multilayered vision of colonial India is appropriated, interpreted and re-created through the perception, sensibility and talent of a cosmopolitan Indian woman in an early postcolonial context: a 'palimpsest' where both visions are inscribed in an ongoing dialogue.

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Paola Carmagnani teaches Comparative Literature at the University of Turin, Italy. She has been associate professor at the University of French Polynesia in Tahiti. Her main fields of research are the European and North-American novel, adaptation and postcolonial studies. She is the author of a monograph, *Luoghi di tenebra: il romanzo e lo spazio coloniale* (2012). Among her recent publications: *La construction identitaire en Polynésie Française: chronotopes de l'insularité* (2015); "Do you have an imagination?" *The Turn of the Screw di fronte alla macchina da presa di Jack Clayton* (2015); *Lord of the Flies: William Golding's Realism and Peter Brook's "Cinematic Reality"* (2016); *La wonderbox di Henry James. Architettura del testo, architetture nel testo* (2018). She is working on a volume on the coming-of-age story.

paola.carmagnani@unito.it

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Giuseppe De Riso

Memory and Negotiations of Identity in *Train to Pakistan*

Abstract I: L'articolo si concentra sul romanzo *Train to Pakistan* di Khushwant Singh per analizzare le negoziazioni identitarie tra gruppi etnico-religiosi differenti durante gli anni della Partition tra India e Pakistan, avvenuta nell'agosto 1947. Più in dettaglio, l'articolo proverà a dimostrare l'impatto, nell'economia delle relazioni sociali e delle pratiche violente descritte nel romanzo, delle "voci" che circolavano incontrollate lungo e attraverso gli allora ancora incerti confini che separavano le due nazioni nascenti.

Abstract II: This article focuses on Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* to analyse the negotiations of identity among different ethnic communities at the time of the Partition between India and Pakistan which occurred in August 1947. In particular, this paper will try to show the impact, in the economy of social relationships and violence in Singh's novel, of uncertainties put forward through the circulation of 'rumours' along and across the then still uncertain borders dividing the two budding nations.

This article intends to discuss Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) as an opportunity to investigate the renegotiations of identity which occurred at the time of the Indian Partition in 1947. In particular, the following reflection will try to read Singh's novel to understand how enmity and an extreme degree of group violence become possible among people who had decades or even centuries of peaceful coexistence, people who were previously social intimates. The Partition of India represented a watershed moment in the history of the nation, one characterised by an extreme degree of mass violence between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. It came after the previous Partition of Bengal of 1905, in the wake of the claims of political autonomy from Great Britain which had started spreading throughout the subcontinent with renewed strength since.

Central to this reflection will be Urvashi Butalia's (2015) observation that Partition, as an event which imposed previously non-existing borders between different communities living together, is better understood as a phenomenon based on a tension between remembering and forgetting. Even though for Pakistanis Partition represented the gaining of an identity as a nation, Butalia points out that neither did it come out of the blue, nor can it be limited to just a political resolution. On the contrary, it was the result of a tension between past, present and future whereby a complex interplay of memories interacted in a nuanced and layered process, "depending on the particular circumstances of the moment of remem-

bering" (Butalia 2015: 2). Butalia highlights a double perspective where conflicting interests were fought. For each of the communities involved by Partition, there were those for whom remembering their past was vital to walk towards the opportunity offered by the future. From this perspective, remembering is a way to keep alive a past that stretches its arm into the present and, as such, into the future of a given community's children. To others, however, the past was something best to be forgotten. In this view, forgetting becomes a way to cancel a history whose erasure allows a community to truly move forward. Remembering and forgetting seemed thus to converge both in erasing the future and setting up the stage for it. They could be one and the same, or two incompatible opposites. The duplicity in the way acts of remembering and forgetting were lived also allowed each of the two main cultures involved by Partition to see itself as oppressor or oppressed at the same time, depending on the perceived feeling that the birth of their respective nations represented an act privation or gaining for their own identity or culture.

The present essay indeed takes up Urvashi Butalia's suggestion to consider Partition as an event best understood as a battlefield of conflicting memories, paying special attention not just to one specific point of view, that is the acts of remembering and forgetting of one specific community. As an exemplary novel describing the brutality of violence arising between different ethnic groups living side by side, *Train to Pakistan* seems to be exceptionally useful in this sense. Singh does not focus on communities which were fierce enemies, but on groups which had actually been on good terms with each other for centuries. This article intends to focus on Singh's literary references to the effects of 'rumours' on the workings of collective memory. In fact, at the time of Partition countless rumours of acts of violence perpetrated by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs to each other circulated uncontrollably through the population, spreading sentiments of fear which created a peculiar short-circuit in the relationship between past events and the future which legitimised violence in the present. In fact, what Singh describes in his novel is the deterioration of relationships which went from long-lasting brotherhood to suspicion, and then rapidly drifted to violence and the right to take the other's life. If, in the words of Stephen Cairns, Edward Said revealed the Orient "to be a representational chimera, a fantastical image projected from the Occident" (Cairns 2007: 52), here it will be discussed how similar subjective formations can pertain to a close other, for example somebody one spends time with in everyday relationships. Drawing on Butalia, Singh's references to rumour prove to be a potent literary instrument to investigate how the ways of remembering change the filters through which cultural memories are passed on.

Mano Majra, the fictional hamlet in which *Train to Pakistan* is set, is a tiny village situated on the Indian border, half a mile away from the river Sutlej, with about seventy families of mainly Sikh and Muslim religions and only one Hindu family, Lala Ram Lal's. The first section of the novel, "Dacoity", highlights the calmness and peaceful life of the village. Mano Majra is described as a peaceful hamlet which had not yet been consumed by the flames of communal hatred ignited by Partition, which were already spreading throughout the subcontinent. Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus had all been living peacefully together for centuries. The late coming of violence was possible because life there was characterised by

indifference towards independence, even though it was the most important political event of the time. Villagers even ignored the fact that the British had left the region and that the country itself was being divided in two. In this respect, *Mano Majra* (which originally gave the title to the novel)¹ seems almost to reflect Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's notion of "unity in diversity" (Manavar 2001) that he considered an essential trait of Indian culture. What mattered, to the villagers, was solidarity among them, the defence of mutual trust, and being faithful to their roots: "For them truth, honour, financial integrity were 'all right', but these were placed lower down the scale of values than being true to one's salt, to one's friend and fellow villagers" (Singh 2016: 54)².

The story is occasioned by the murder, in August 1947, of the Hindu moneylender Lala Ram Lal, who is executed in his home by a group of dacoits, or bandits, led by Malli. On their flight, the killers drop some bangles in the courtyard of Juggut Singh, one of the villagers also known as Jugga, who is thus arrested for murder and "dacoity" (or banditry). This incident is a prelude to the violence and horror to follow, foreshadowing the imminent disaster. The police mishandling of the case combines with the anxiety, generated by the rumours of the gruesome killings, of the people moving in search of security all around the village, such that the Sikhs of *Mano Majra* start to suspect and fear the Muslims with whom they had never had any problems before. The apparent suddenness of this process is a main point in the novel. Singh relates the mass migrations of the hundreds of thousands of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs whom Partition had made foreigners in their own homes, the ones in which they had lived for generations. Almost instantly, new power and land negotiations transformed long-time friends into potential enemies and the familiar lands in the Northern Frontier into a dangerous territory for them. Singh's reference to rumours of reported violence right at the beginning of *Train to Pakistan* represents not only a historical clue that is useful in providing the reader with a context, but also shows his deep understanding of the fact that the announcement of Partition itself had been a spark potent enough to cause a dark imagination to be ignited. When rumours about such a proposal started to circulate uncontrolled among people throughout the continent, previous stories and prejudices about rivalling ethnic groups, and whose effects had already been felt during of the partition of Bengal while remaining latent in the decades following it, were suddenly reactivated to strike an imaginary in which potential enemies could be literally created overnight even in those places where different communities lived in harmony and brotherhood.

In *Train to Pakistan*, it is Singh's ability to describe the complex functioning of the uncertainty generated by rumours that makes the novel a very meaningful document to grasp the progressive disintegration of mutual trust among Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, their otherwise incomprehensibly meteoric lapse into selfishness and cruelty. From a literary point of view, it is my contention that this conclusion has a foundational role in the economy of Singh's novel in its entirety, one which points directly to the link identified by Arjun Appadurai between "indeterminacy and brutality in the negotiations over the ethnic body" (Ap-

¹ As reported in Surendran 2000: 74.

² The version of the book from which all the quotes presented in this chapter are taken is the electronic one available on Google Play. Full bibliographical references are listed in the bibliographical section.

padurai 1998: 910). Rumour create a special circumstance of uncertainty capable, to use Arjun Appadurai's terminology in "Dead Certainty", of rapidly precipitating the ethnic body into frameworks of identity and categories which supported and legitimated communal violence (Appadurai 1998). The novel's main point of interest for the present reflection consists precisely in its ability to describe how the seeds of fundamentalist communalism and violent reprisal, tacitly encouraged by government forces, unsettled the peace and collective harmony in the village.

As Singh cares to point out right at the beginning of narration, the only certain fact of rumours about episodes of violence, circulating uncontrollably among people, was that both Hindus and Muslims killed, establishing a vicious circle where rumours about suffered violence were used as justification to place the blame on the enemy and legitimate the use of force as a logical reaction. The influence of rumours ignited and sustained communal violence during each and every aspect of its unfolding for its unrecognised talent for victimisation. Singh foregrounds the fact that the rapid deterioration of bonds between Sikhs and Muslims was determined by the psychological pressure of rumours describing unverified episodes of violence and physical abuses, never once specifically reported by Singh himself or through narration, that gradually increase intolerance and a desire for private or collective revenge within the members of one community towards the other. For example, in reminding the reader of the riots that plagued Calcutta at the time, Singh makes it so that the reader is disturbed by an aspect only obliquely hinted by the author: the fact that they ignited on the simple suggestion of a division between India and Pakistan. Mistrust was often, as was the case in Mano Majra, not on specific episodes or occurrences of violence, but on generic rumours about it, whose uncertainty made it all the more menacing and terrifying, capable of turning a known friend into a potential enemy:

Rumours of atrocities committed by Sikhs on Muslims in Patiala, Ambala and Kapurthala began to spread. They had heard of gentlewomen having their veils taken off, being stripped and marched down crowded streets to be raped in the market place. Many had eluded their would-be ravishers by killing themselves. They had heard of mosques being desecrated by the slaughter of pigs on the premises, and of copies of the holy Koran being torn up by infidels (Singh 2016: 102).

Singh's bitter acknowledgment consists only of the realisation that brutality sprung indiscriminately from both sides: "Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped" (1). Singh's reference to rumour intercepts its presence in Indian social imaginary in a historical frame which, for the sake of this argument, we will limit to the ninety years that led to India's independence from Britain. In fact, already since the Sepoy³ rebellion in 1857, and the Par-

³ The term 'Sepoy' was used to indicate the native troops of the British army in India. The East India Company had started recruiting among natives since 1667, while the British government started training Indians to fight with their weapons and strategies.

tition of Bengal in 1905, the subcontinent had been plagued by the circulation of rumours. In the case of the Sepoy revolt, the Hindu and Muslim soldiers in the British army rebelled when a voice spread throughout India that the British were surreptitiously trying to convert Hindus and Muslims to Christianity with the introduction of the Enfield rifle which, to be loaded, required the biting of greased cartridges that the soldiers suspected were covered with fat either from the cow or pig. A sacred animal for Hindus, the former, and an unclean one for Muslims the latter, this rumour nurtured a resentment that was so strong as to sustain violent uprisings which lasted for about two years. About half a century after that, the haunting spectre of rumours which the British had failed to acknowledge fuelled the Partition of Bengal. Indeed, rumours aimed at increasing malcontent towards the British, and Europeans in general, as exploiters of the country circulated uncontrollably with the complicity of the elite classes, who made no effort to confute any of them hoping that the masses of uneducated and superstitious people would be slowly burning with hatred towards the British (Fraser 1979: 11).

As Urvashi Butalia's (2015) noted, at the time of Partition different powers used all means necessary in order for certain stories to resurface or be suppressed to serve their own ends. For example, the so-called "Head Scare" rumour was diffused by a Bengali pamphlet distributed in Calcutta stating that a sacrifice in human heads was required for the construction of a bridge near Howrah. Any person found walking in the streets after 9 p. m. would be sequestered and beheaded. Absurd as it may seem to some, the rumour was potent enough to keep workers at the mills near Howrah clear of the illusory dangers of the streets and in the perceived safety of their homes. At the same time, other baseless rumours, accepted by some local newspapers, spread the panic by maintaining that Russians were preparing to invade India, or that Bengali boys were being mysteriously kidnapped to be sent to Mauritius, the tea gardens in Assam or other places (this latter rumour was also known as the "Kidnapping Scare"). Rumour is the *fil rouge* connecting all the main conflicts which shaped the identitarian and cultural landscape in the subcontinent at least from the Sepoy Revolt, reaching its climax with the Partition of 1947.

The fundamental power of rumour has been described by Veena Das who, drawing on Jacques Lacan, maintains that rumour can achieve such a powerful "persuasiveness" because of its unverifiability: "its lack of signature, the impossibility of its being tethered to an individual agent" (Das 1998: 125) makes it all the more easier to be accepted by a single individual as well as an entire group of people as genuine truth. In the case of the Partition of 1947 it proved especially effective in creating a "fantasmagoria of shadows" (125) which could give each religious community a strong and deeply felt impression of being an "endangered collectivity" (125). It is important to highlight that the pivotal character of this indeterminacy is temporal first and foremost. Anonymity and unverifiability made rumour one of the most efficacious ways to spread and give strength to acts of retaliation by justifying destructive actions as a rightful reaction to a previous history of violence suffered at the hands of a rival community, a precedent which was always and necessarily outside the realm of verifiability and, consequently, in a condition of chronological unrecoverability. The past is displaced and projected into a state of synchronic presence, to form a temporal circuit of blame based on a fundamental paradox which legitimised each community to

perpetrate violence against the other precisely in the strength of the impossibility to state with absolute certainty who had struck first. Brutality could thus proceed in an infinite loop made possible by references to an always preceding, chronologically unrecoverable event of violence which resonated at the same time inside and outside of history, both participating in the processes of cause and effect among historical events, and alien to them. This condition has been once again discussed by Butalia in her addressing the question of 'distance' with regard to the ways in which history is handed down to us. The path leading to the past, she maintains, is characterised by an onion-like structure for which there is no true end to it. Memories have no definite boundaries between them, no clear shapes, limits, contours separating them: such that "the more you search, the more there is that opens up" (Butalia 2015: 3).

Simultaneously, the reactivation of an undeterminable past in the present produces the disjunction and backward movement of the prospect of a future threat. Brian Massumi has discussed the working of perceived danger as "what comes next" (2002: 26) and, as such, it has no definite location, limit, reach, scope or magnitude. Threat's essence, for Massumi, consists in the uncertainty of its "potential next" (2010: 76) being worse than one could cope with, of spawning other threats following the one feared in the immediate future. Threat is from the future in that it generates a surplus of danger that cannot be consumed (that is, which one cannot put an end to) that "runs forward back to the future" (Massumi 2010: 73), self-renewing itself. The power of rumour thrives on this recursive temporal movement for each involved religious or ethnic group in order to produce a twofold process of victimisation. The diffusion of an unverifiable past story of violence calls, of course, for vengeance to settle the score with the rival community. At the same time, violence is also required to prevent future threats which may derive from an unaddressed wrongdoing. Such threats are all the more "real" as they are virtually endured for being founded on the potential of the story contained in the original rumour.

The affective dimension that has arisen by rumours of atrocities makes it so that the less localisable in time and space of the threat, the more powerful is the feeling of fear it originates: "Fear is the anticipatory reality in the present of a threatening future. It is the felt reality of the non-existent, loomingly present as the affective fact of the matter" (73). The distortion brought about by rumour bends and twists historical continuity between past and future, so that with the ethnic conflicts arisen by rumours what was at stake was not just the defence of a community's past, but the holding up of its future as well. One has to keep in mind the idea, first put forward by Stuart Hall (Bell 1999), and later picked up by Appadurai, that the identitarian category commonly referred to 'ethnic' is not only something deriving from a marked past, but above all a "project", the projection of a community towards a future: "Remembering Partition means recalling the dark side of Independence, a moment of loss, a moment when the country was divided and that which was lost was immeasurable – for it was not only homelands, and families, and material things but much more that could not be articulated, sometimes not even named" (Butalia 2015: 2). Ethnic and religious violence is spearheaded in the interaction between vengeance and appeasement, colouring it with a double quality which makes it at the same time both an act of revenge

ensuing from previous violence, and pre-emptive of future violence, or, as Appadurai aptly synthesised, “let me kill you before you kill me” (Appadurai 1998: 922).

Of course, when framed in such terms, it becomes apparent that this kind of process only ends up adding fuel for new violence. Implicit in the threat contained in rumours is what the body “might” actually perform. As a self-fulfilling prophecy, the linguistic threat of rumour thrives on its fundamental incompleteness to establish and affirm that future in which it would be performed. In this sense, Judith Butler notes, rumour as threat “is still an act, a speech act, one that not only announces the act to come, but registers a certain force in language, a force that both presages and inaugurates a subsequent force” (Butler 1997: 9). That is, in announcing an act to come, it also presages or forecasts a subsequent force of pre-emption, in the attempt to crush the very chance of expectation. Again in Butler’s words, the threat of violence: “initiates a temporality in which one expects the destruction of expectation and, hence, cannot expect it at all” (9). Appadurai laconically summarises this crucial point by observing that:

[...] uncertainty about identification and violence can lead to actions, reactions, complexities, and anticipations that multiply the pre-existing uncertainty about labels. Together, these forms of uncertainty call for the worst kind of certainty: dead certainty (Appadurai 1998: 922-923).

In the period of Partition, stories of different massacres and killings of innocent Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus began to circulate uncontrolled, setting in motion a deadly process which called for indiscriminate vengeance. Such rivalries gave occasion to innumerable episodes of violence and conflict especially in the northern part of British India. Sikhs and Hindus were directed towards the east, where people of the same religion were predominant, crossing on their voyage the Muslims going in the opposite direction for the same reason. They all hoped to find shelter, as well as the protection and security which Partition had taken away from them.

It must not be forgotten that the Partition and the creation of two independent nations was basically a sudden process; only seven years passed from the proposal of an autonomous state for the Muslims of the subcontinent and the creation of Pakistan (Pandey 2004: 2). Actually, Pakistan was born a day before India, at midnight on 14 August 1947. The nation whose birth had been decided as a consequence of the proposed birth of India, actually came into the world first. In a sort of paradoxical timeshift, it seemed that it was India coming out of the ‘dream’ of Pakistan, not the contrary, as many within the Indian political elites predicated. As a consequence, suddenly millions of people could not be certain of their new home. Of course, incredible confusion ensued since millions of people found themselves overnight on the wrong side of the still blurry border between India and Pakistan, giving rise to what Sumir Sarkar has defined the biggest mass migration in less than nine months.

Sir Cyril Radcliffe drew the lines of the border in the arch of three months on the map of India, splitting the regions of Bengal and Punjab in two nations: India was thus flanked by East and West Pakistan. The boundaries between the two states were made known only two days *after* the proclamation of independence (Pandey 2004: 2). Consequently, the na-

tion-states as political entities came into being before the citizens could be aware of the new territorial frontiers surrounding them. India and Pakistan were born before they had a land where citizens could actually live. On 15th August India and Pakistan were, for almost anyone living in them, borderless countries, they coexisted as twins in a common womb: a pure zone of virtuality. For just one day, they were one and the same.

In the two days after 15 August 1947, in which the two nations overlapped, an imaginary zone of pure potential was created, one in which any Muslim, Hindu or Sikh could potentially be a citizen or a refugee. In the months following Partition, at least 16 million people had to leave their homes as refugees to reach zones where either their co-religionists were the majority, or to emigrate to the U. S. and the U. K. in hope of finding protection. In the process of relocation, people did not know where exactly they were now, if they were in India or Pakistan. For the same reason, they were not sure where they had to go anymore, which directions they had to take. Partition was a disorienting, confusing, bewildering event in which people were losing their bearings.

Similarly, during the Partition of 1947, manipulated rumours were made to cut across ethnic lines to turn each community into the target of unjust or cowardly executed violence, thus nurturing sentiments of victimisation and revenge. Different strands of rumour combined to create a sense of vulnerability through the setting up of an imaginary world in which the whole social order was seen as precarious, about to collapse, corrupted by a massive conspiracy on the part of an oppressive community. This was valid even though it may have been the supposedly offending community, the one on which violence was actually unleashed. In fact, according to Veena Das, one of the characteristics of the relationship between fear and communal violence was the reversal of roles for which the one fearing also considers itself as a victim, even if it may be no less oppressive or aggressive.

Singh deftly plays with his characters in how they rely on rumours and the creation of stereotypes to decode each other and prevent or survive dangerous situations. As previously anticipated, the first section of the novel does not directly deal with Partition, to focus instead on the theft and the consequent superficial action of the police in handling the case. Confronting the sub-inspector on the state of the village, among Hukum Chand's (the local magistrate) first preoccupations is the presence of "bad characters" (19) in the village. Jugga is the only one mentioned by the sub-inspector. He was the son of the dacoit Alam Singh, hanged two years before after having been convicted of dacoity with murder. Juggut Singh's name had thus been registered with number 10 and labelled as a 'bad character' (Surendran 2000: 80). So, when Jugga is arrested for the murder of Lala Ram Lal, the apprehension is motivated only in part by the bangles that the true culprits had thrown in Jugga's courtyard. After all, both his father and grandfather had previously been hung for dacoity. Little did it matter that they had never robbed the residents of their own village. Nor that Jugga did not allow Muslims to be ill-treated due to his being in interreligious love with Nooran, whom he, after being released from police custody, learnt had left for the refugee camp while being pregnant of him.

Continuing their dialogue on the situation in Mano Majra, the sub-inspector tells Hukum Chand that the village had somehow managed to escape violence. Chand, a Hindu,

reveals then his bias by going on to comment on the state and reasons for the anomalous peace in Mano Majra. He notes that whereas Muslims behave in a vindictive way around the part of Amritsar, killing “man for man, woman for woman, child for child” (17), Hindus do not participate to the stabbing game, even though they are not scared to fight and do not back out of confrontation when necessary. Instead, Sikhs in Mano Majra “have lost their manliness” (17) because they live in peaceful coexistence with Muslims, “as if nothing had happened” (17). He suspects that they allow this for the money they get from Muslims in their village.

This insistence on the construction of stereotypes and prejudices, as noted by Gyanendra Pandey (2013), plays on the historical workings of rumours during Partition. For example, at the time Sikhs were described by Muslims as not worthy of being treated as human beings, since they were imagined to be creatures of madness and demonic possession, lacking any kind of human subjectivity (Das 1998: 125). Conversely, Hindus and Sikhs were united by an all-around hatred of all Muslims. Such hatred came from stereotypes cemented by drawing on stories of their past to construct a common enemy against whom actively organise with violent actions (Pandey 2004). The creation or reinforcing of stereotypes made it so that historic prejudices received a new lease of life. The way fear inspired by rumour appeals to stereotype to hijack the past points to a relatively recent problem in Cultural Studies, one concerning memory, and especially the relationship between remembering and forgetting. Veena Das, for example, has discussed how the Sikhs, always known to be friends of Hinduism, were made to pass as instruments of Islam. In the economy of forgetting, Appadurai notes, when the labels of everyday life become uncertain, unstable, indeterminate and socially volatile, people and communities give shape to tailored pasts to beget a clash of temporalities. Instrumental erasures and removals conveniently mobilise history to make “violent action [...] become one means of satisfying one’s sense of one’s categorical self” (Appadurai 1998: 922). Merits of the feared ethnic community are temporarily forgotten or distorted in an act of remembering which draws on past stories only to construct an enemy threatening to erase one’s own future. In *Train to Pakistan*, the retroactive force of stereotypes (founded on the mingling between generic rumours and facts) lethally wrests open the unfinished stories of the past to have trust torn apart by resentment and hate in the present.

One of Singh’s literary achievements with *Train to Pakistan* appears to be his registering of the invisible workings through which, historically, rumours proved to be sufficiently potent to put different communities one against the other through victimisation and role reversal. In the novel, most of the Sikhs confess to be angered at the rumours of the violence their coreligionists had had to endure at the hand of Muslims in Pakistan, while the Muslims are shocked by the Sikh uprisings in the surrounding villages. Eventually they decide to leave the village for Pakistan. The Sikhs, however, cannot bear the thought of their leaving unscathed and plan to stretch a rope across the bridge under which the train would pass, so as to kill the Muslims sitting on its roof. The extreme sacrifice of Jugga, who manages to cut the rope at the cost of his own life, succeeds in protecting his beloved Nooran, the daughter of a Muslim weaver, and save the lives of those on the train too. Singh chooses to make love,

not political resolution, the only possible way out of the hatred ignited by Partition. It is the passion of a bandit, the 'dacoit' Jugga, the 'bad character' which ultimately saves the lives of hundreds in Mano Majra, not the work of the 'main' character Iqbal, who had been sent to Mano Majra specifically to control the situation, not even the police. While the novel is mainly a tale of 'male' conflicts and interests, thus not offering too much of a purchase to consider the gendered aspects of Partition or the lives of women, Singh's decision to solve what may at first appear a 'public' matter through a 'private' relationship between a man and a woman, highlights the deep imbrication of public and private which Jill Didur (2007) denounced in the power relations active in the nationalistic, religious and ultimately patriarchal discourses which regulated the violence erupted during Partition.

Singh's primary concern is the fact that in the social production and circulation of hate, the reversal of the images of perpetrator and victim is frequent, depending upon the perspective from which the memories of traumatic events and of everyday violence are seen and re-lived (Das 1998). Rumours are exceptionally effective in allowing such a reversal, due to the impossibility of placing the blame on somebody; or, in other terms, for their power to create the conditions for each community to feel entitled to place the blame on the other. To Singh, this duplicity is the real cause which turned any ethnic group into a victim and executioner at the same time, with the consequent obliteration of longstanding solidarities. Singh makes visible the tremendous effect of Partition on the people of Mano Majra, adversely affecting communal relationships among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. He registers how the tensions which underlie apparently peaceful social practices and interactions, the bureaucratic patterns and political agendas all interacted in the transition which transformed India from a colony into a nation, a shift that was both urgent and dangerous.

Through rumour, Singh helps the reader understand how rural India, which was not generally plagued by communal violence, ended up being swallowed up in a swirling climate of violence. The Partition brought with it rumours which were potent instruments for the creation of insecurity. In fact, when Banta Singh, the Lambardar of the village, questions the actual benefits of Independence for the people, he laments the lack of security and protection which independence had meant for the weak: "But what will we get out of it? Educated people like you, Babu Sahib, will get the jobs the English had. Will we get more lands or more buffaloes?" (48). Freedom means little to the villagers if it brings death and mass destruction to the common man, instead of economic security granted by more land and more farm animals. Adding that: "The only ones who enjoy freedom are thieves, robbers and cut throats", he goes on to conclude that nothing is going to change for the poor: "we were slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians or the Pakistanis [...] We were better off under the British. At least there was security" (48-49).

The uncertainty which the Lambardar refers to reverberates on different levels. For example, the change of frontiers and the consequent flows of mass migration and dislocation posed the problem of the number of people moving or settling in a certain area. Or, in clearer terms, the question of who could be trusted, of how many potential enemies were moving around a certain place and might be possibly preparing to bring about a violent action against a given community.

This situation in the novel is represented through the unsettling character of Iqbal. A so-

cial worker belonging to the district of Jhelum, with long experience abroad, Iqbal had been sent to Mano Majra by the Communist party to somehow contain the bloodshed of Partition. In fact, the village was a place of strategic importance due to its closeness to a bridge. Singh strives to create an aura of scepticism around Iqbal, insisting on the feelings of suspicion which Iqbal's appearance and good behaviour had arisen in the people of Mano Majra since his arrival by train. But the main source of distrust and anxiety in his fellow villagers was Iqbal's own name, since it was one of the few shared among the three communities living there. He could literally belong to any community, which made it impossible, somehow paradoxically, for anyone to trust him. He could not be placed with certainty in any reassuring grid; framed neither as friend, nor foe. A difficult situation for everybody around him which is, eventually, exploited by police forces to cover up their shallow course of action for having hurriedly arrested him as a suspect for the murder of Lala Ram Lal. In fact, he is forced to show his sex to prove his religious affiliation. Iqbal's circumcision is used as an inescapable body mark, the visible "proof" that would allow the police to make Iqbal's arrest justifiable, or at least plausible, on the basis that he was probably (not certainly) a Muslim.

When the arrival in the village of the "ghost train" brings into the city 1,500 corpses of Sikhs (who were killed by Muslims in their voyage to sought-after salvation), Singh concentrates even more on those processes through which everyday life gets transformed. Soon the villagers cannot contain their anger towards the Muslims in the village. Mutual suspicion becomes the order of the day, slowly eroding the original feelings of brotherhood. Rumours that similar things had happened and were happening in other places, too, make events precipitate. The uncertainty nurtured by rumours allowed latent distrust and scepticism to resurface and corrupt even solid relationships. Ultimately, the Sikhs chose to punish the innocent Muslims of their village for the uncertainty their presence had brought to their lives by taking part in the ambush of the train leading them to Lahore. Fears activated by the combined action of rumours and uncertainty allowed for the voluntary turning of longtime friends into potential enemies deserving of payment for the actions generally attributed to their ethnic group, but which they had never committed.

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Giuseppe De Riso is researcher in English Literature at the University of Naples "L'Orientale", where he also completed his PhD in Cultural and Postcolonial Studies of the Anglophone World with the dissertation "The Body Expanded: Agency, Representation and Affect in Tridimensional Videogames". He is also editorial assistant and webmaster for *Anglistica AION*, an interdisciplinary journal of the Department of Literary, Linguistic, and Comparative Studies of the University of Naples "L'Orientale". He published two books: *Affect and the Performative Dimension of Fear in the Indian English Novel: Tumults of the Imagination* (Cambridge Scholars 2018), and *Affective Maps and Bio-mediated Bodies in Tridimensional Videogames of the Anglophone World* (Tangram Edizioni Scientifiche 2013). He also published on post-colonial literature and digital media: "Bodily Remediations in Geetanjali Shree's *The Empty Space*", "Of Smoke and Mirrors: Tribal Women in Postcolonial India" and "Gaming Gender: Virtual Embodiment as a Synaesthetic Experience".

gderiso76@gmail.com

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Pier Paolo Piciucco

The Enigma of Identity: A Reading of *Anil's Ghost* by Michael Ondaatje

Abstract I: La finalità di questo saggio critico è quella di indagare sulla natura mista, postcoloniale, multiculturale e transnazionale così come affiora nel romanzo *Anil's Ghost* di Michael Ondaatje, con particolare attenzione alla protagonista Anil Tissera. Il mio lavoro prende forma in due fasi distinte: inizialmente discute le caratteristiche e la contraddittorietà di questa forma emergente di identità prendendo a prestito gli strumenti della critica postcoloniale e dei *diaspora studies*, con l'intenzione di analizzare come l'identità di Anil subisce modifiche nel corso del suo itinerario dallo Sri Lanka all'Inghilterra prima e agli Stati Uniti poi. Su un piano ideologico questo trasloco la sposta dalla periferia verso il centro del mondo postcoloniale. Nella seconda parte del saggio, analizzerò invece il modo in cui Anil si trova a scendere a patti con le proprie conflittualità interiori a seguito della sua esperienza da espatriata: in questa fase della mia ricerca farò riferimento anche ad *Unclaimed Experience* di Caruth, un testo chiave nell'orbita dei *trauma studies*, per dimostrare come gli effetti di esperienze traumatiche passate possano generare disorientamento e alienazione in un emigrato. Il dilemma si fa palese nel caso del ritorno a casa di un espatriato, proprio come avviene ad Anil Tissera in *Anil's Ghost*.

Abstract II: In this paper I aim at analysing the composite, postcolonial, multicultural and transnational nature of identity emerging in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*, most prominently in the protagonist Anil Tissera. My work progresses through two distinct stages: in the first part I discuss the quality and inner contradictoriness of this developing form of identity using the tools of postcolonial criticism and *diaspora studies*, basically focusing my attention on the ways in which Anil's identity undergoes modifications that may also appear ambiguous during her journey from Sri Lanka to England first and US later. Ideologically, that passage brings her from the periphery to the centre of the postcolonial world. In the second part of this paper I intend to shift my attention on how Anil needs to come to terms with the conflicting issues at the very roots of her identity formation as an expatriate: in this section of my work I will also employ Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience*, a fundamental text in trauma studies, in order to explain how the effects of past traumatic experiences are mainly responsible for disorientation and alienation in a diasporic subject. This dilemma becomes particularly manifest in the case of an exile's homecoming, such as Anil Tissera in *Anil's Ghost*.

Exile, nomadism and alienation shape a considerable part of contemporary literature generating distinct paradigms of identity. Anil Tissera, the protagonist in *Anil's Ghost* by Michael Ondaatje, was born in Sri Lanka, moved to London and then to the US. Ondaatje himself, born in Sri Lanka, emigrated to England and then to Canada, has over the years reflected on these themes through his diasporic characters. In this paper I intend to discuss the many ways in which he tackles various notions of identity from the perspectives of the diaspora, postcolonial and trauma studies, adopting the tools of diaspora and postcolonial studies in the first part of my work.

From the beginning of the novel, the narrating voice drives the reader's attention to issues of the diaspora as we follow Anil arriving at Colombo International Airport. At 33, she is making her return home after "fifteen years" in the West, in London first and in Arizona later. Her initial contact with her motherland is with a "young official", offering her "no help" with her suitcases. A concise exchange is established between them in which we soon learn that Anil now only speaks "a little" Sinhalese and, jet-lagged, she wishes to drink some "toddy" and have a "head massage" (Ondaatje 2000: 9). The official mocks her, commenting: "First thing after fifteen years. The return of the prodigal" (Ondaatje 2000: 10). This brief introduction to the story gains a profound significance, since characters and events in the novel often transcend their literal meaning and are invested with a metaphorical, and sometimes metonymical significance that informs all the major themes in the literary work. Specifically, the encounter between Anil and the unnamed official describes not only the meeting between these two characters, but also the welcoming tribute that Sri Lanka pays to the returning heroine of the story.

Having immediately flung the readers into the heart of the story, the narration soon proceeds providing details about the conflicting forces that make up her identity. Working for a human rights organisation from Geneva, she has been entrusted to write a report of the present situation in the island in collaboration with the local archaeologist Sarath Diyasena, with the aim of testifying to the constant violations of human rights during the fratricide civil war in the early 90s.

In this dramatic scenario, the mystifying nature of the protagonist's identity soon materialises. Anil was not in fact her original name, because she was convinced that she had two "inappropriate" (Ondaatje 2000: 67) names and in her early teens she had conducted an uncompromising battle in her family to have them changed. The story goes that instead she preferred her brother's second name, and eventually managed to erode everybody's capacity to resist her from achieving her goal. The terms of the bargain between the siblings are clear: "She gave her brother one hundred saved rupees, a pen set he had been eyeing for some time, a tin of fifty Gold Leaf cigarettes she had found, and a sexual favour he had demanded in the last hours of the impasse" (Ondaatje 2000: 68). As well as acting as a proof of the protagonist's stubbornness, this passage is clearly indicative of the ways in which Anil circumscribes the boundaries of her own personal identity. It appears to be an act of intentional appropriation, a resolution that crosses the established limits of gender divisions and a challenge to an ethical transgression. When she ponders her epochal decision, Anil meditates that "Everything about the name pleased her, its slim, stripped-down quality, its fem-

inine air, even though it was considered a male name. Twenty years later she felt the same about it" (Ondaatje 2000: 68). Härting correctly stresses that Anil's choice reveals "a certain androgynous quality of her character" (Härting 2003: 52), but at the same time her meaningful assessment also marks the emancipatory terrain of conquest that she determines to occupy. In her maturity, and especially after her divorce, Anil fully experiences the possibilities of bisexuality becoming in the US the lover of a married man but also the sweetheart of an American female forensic scientist, always showing a strong – at times even violent – emotional feedback and a peculiar purpose in the shaping of her love affairs. While it is true that she is "chronically unlucky in love" (Davis 2009: 17), it is equally true that this tract seems to be the general norm of Ondaatje's protagonists, rather than a weak point in her character. I agree with Burton when she maintains that "Anil is in effect a 'modern woman', with all the gender ambiguity that entails" (Burton 2003: 41). It is worth noticing here that also Cook approaches a similar conclusion, employing in her case the modes of analysis of subaltern studies: in her opinion, Anil "claims a syncretic gender construction that assumes both male and female traits" (Cook 2005: 10).

Careless of the perspective employed, this preliminary approach toward an analysis of Anil's identity seems to be clearly deconstructing assumed forms of fixity and permanence in favour of dynamic and transitory models of identity formation. Deprived of a gender association, she is also the typical example of a diasporic subject establishing one's individuality beyond the conventional bonds with a nation. Born in Sri Lanka, married in England, living in the US but identified also as "the woman from Geneva" (Ondaatje 2000: 71) because of her involvement with an unspecified Centre for Human Rights in Switzerland, Anil's identity seems to be an irresolvable riddle in the plot for all those straining to classify her according to a national identity. Throughout the pages of the novel, Anil's sense of displacement surfaces unmistakably and the following passage may be crucial in revealing how this indicator of identity is assessed: "In her years abroad, during her European and North American education, Anil had courted foreignness, was at ease whether on the Bakerloo line or the highways around Santa Fe. She felt completed abroad" (Ondaatje 2000: 54). Her transnational and hybrid status soon becomes evident in the story, bringing as its immediate consequence an equally evident lack of rootedness. When asked about her background by her American lover Cullis, for instance, she becomes curiously evasive and answers: "'I live here', she said. 'In the West'" (Ondaatje 2000: 36).

An analysis of the way in which home and houses operate in the story already provides enough evidence of the radical process of rootlessness at work. With the focus on the protagonist, the narrator stresses that "In the five or six houses of her adult life, her rule and habit was always to live below her means. She had never bought a house and kept her rented apartments sparse" (Ondaatje 2000: 67), demonstrating the clear intention to avoid any risk of settling permanently in a place. Nor should one hasten to conclude that she is unhappy about the places she has chosen to live in. Her implicit choice, in fact, seems to drive her towards an itinerant model of life, establishing as few relationships as possible either with the place or with the people she happens to meet. All her dwellings in the plot seem to confirm that a pattern favouring precariousness and transitoriness prevails: the hotel in

Bandarawela and the *walawwa* in Ekneligoda are surely part of this design. A brief discussion apart is necessary about the quarters on board the Oronsay, an ex-liner berthed in Colombo harbour, used by Anil and Sarath as their laboratory: a doubt remains that the grand ship has a twin purpose for Anil in the plot, being used as a lodging, as well as a workplace. Otherwise, we have no indication whatsoever as to where Anil finds herself in Colombo. In particular, the old colonial house in Ekneligoda and the Oronsay lab share a peculiar and inherent temporary quality since that these are not regular dwellings at present, but may be employed as such, provided that the dwellers are ready to accept compromises and adjust themselves to improvised situations. The implied belief is that these places were not a regular lodging shortly before and may as well stop being used as such in the (near) future.

Plots unravelling in extemporaneous habitations offer a generous contribution to the creation of an archetypal set of characters entirely voted to an erratic existence. Nor, for this same reason, can we say that Anil is the only nomad in the plot, because she seems to be living among her peers, rather than like one on her own. Palipana, to begin with, seems to be the quintessential exile in Ondaatje's fiction, characterised by a blend of isolation, asceticism and (self-imposed) remoteness. Physically retired from civilisation and the material world, he now lives in a forest monastery "in the remnants of a 'leaf hall', with little that was permanent around him" (Ondaatje 2000: 84). Moreover, Gamini, a doctor often busy in the first aid emergency ward, shares with the others the losses and the wants of the homeless. Broken-hearted and drained by the violence of the conflict, he wanders aimlessly when he returns home after some time only to discover that in the meanwhile his place has been occupied. In a state of depression, he finds himself unable to react to a challenging situation and remains passive: the narrating voice tells us that "Two months after his wife left him, Gamini collapsed from exhaustion, and the administration ordered a leave. He had nowhere to go, his home abandoned" (Ondaatje 2000: 215).

The narrator, therefore, privileges descriptions of the world in which identities are shaped by movement and travelling, thus subverting traditional notions. As far as Anil is concerned, readers may recall that there is a significant passage in which she uses the word 'home'. "*Honey, I'm home*" (Ondaatje 2000: 19) is not a cheerful greeting to her companion as soon as she arrives home, but a somewhat cynical greeting used when she approaches a corpse she is going to work on. Furthermore, it can hardly go unnoticed that this controversial form of black humour is emphasised by the narrator by the use of a repetition.

Consequently, emotional estrangement to places and roots works as a major element of connotation of her identity and creates the appropriate conditions to design her as an exemplary case of a transnational subject. A brief inventory of how Anil is classed according to critical analysis reveals that this rootlessness does not constitute a minor challenge. Bolland avoids complications when he identifies her as "a Sri Lankan who has returned to her home country after an education and career in the West", (Bolland 2004: 103) whereas Burrows stresses that she is a "Westernized outsider" (Burrows 2008: 167). Burton chooses to voice the inherent contradictoriness of her identity and maintains that "Anil Tissera is a western-trained forensic scientist who has made a career of using her professional training in the service of political justice in war-torn places like Guatemala. She is also a Sri Lankan

national who has spent most of her adult life away from the island" (Burton 2003: 40). Cook declares that Anil seems to have been sketched out as "the antithesis of Gayatri Spivak's 'subaltern woman'" reaching the conclusion that she possesses a "transnational nature" (Cook 2005: 7), whereas Mowat stresses that "Anil is therefore immediately representative of the 'in-between' location of postcolonial consciousness, with insight into both east and west, and yet fully exemplary of neither" (Mowat 2013: 29).

Synchretism and contradictoriness are therefore strictly related when Anil's identity is in question. Nevertheless, her momentous return to her homeland after a long absence further contributes to rocking the boat. Obviously, her initial itinerary from Sri Lanka to Arizona via London should also be viewed in terms of a passage from a colonised to a coloniser's position, a journey that starts her "'dis-located' position" (Cook 2005: 7). Anil's return to her homeland boosts the dislocating element in her personality and generates havoc in her mind. In *Anil's Ghost* the gap between the place of the coloniser and that of the colonised becomes visible in terms of the East-West divide, haunting Anil no less than the ghost in the title. It is for this reason, therefore, that I will also further my research referring to trauma studies, as well as to postcolonial and diaspora studies. In other words, my intention is to highlight how profoundly diasporas impact on the predicament and dilemmas of immigrants. Trauma has in fact a considerable effect on the ways in which one remembers (or forgets) events, on the ways in which one reacts (or remains passive) in front of obstacles, and on the ways in which one narrates (or remains silent about) one's stories: the twin plot in *Anil's Ghost*, both on a personal and on a metaphorical level, articulates on such premises.

All diasporas produce in the minds of involved subjects multiple perspectives that may seem to be contradictory, ambivalent, antagonistic if not downright incongruous. Nor can one expect them to offer a straightforward picture if their effect is dislocation and if, as Tsuda has correctly pinpointed, diasporas "are now characterized by a tension between centrifugal and centripetal migratory forces" (Tsuda 2013: 172). With all her remarkable contradictions, Anil possesses a capacity to create a bullet-proof jacket against any emotional attachment to her homeland, generating her distinctive rootlessness. When dealing with the universal condition encountered in diaspora fiction, Quayson correctly pinpoints that "all foundational narratives of exile involve destruction of the place called home" (Quayson 2013: 152). Anil's constant resistance to become emotionally involved with her motherland should be read in that specific framework and her obstinate, repeated rejection of her past image as a successful swimmer epitomises a cancellation of her home.

Anil's unconcern in relation to rootedness may also be explained as a consequence to her changed living conditions and as a form of adaptation to new practical needs in a completely different place. Additionally, one cannot simply overlook that such radical changes in diasporic subjects invariably involve displacement and disruption and therefore should also be analysed as traumatic events. Hence, Anil's typical search for foreignness is not only a matter-of-fact response to everyday necessities, but also a defence strategy to avoid the pain caused by the inevitable process of eradication. Specifically, in diasporic subjects estrangement also works as an anaesthetic alleviating the pain caused by the ousting from one's origins.

If *Anil's Ghost* clearly shows what Quayson has aptly labelled 'home destruction', it

is also significantly full of elements relating eradication to traumatic responses. In terms of chronological development, the narrator emphasises that, as soon as her journey away from Sri Lanka starts, Anil is left disoriented, she almost immediately loses her inner strength and is almost unrecognisable in her newly-acquired submissive status.

In her first month in London she'd been constantly confused by the geography around her. (What she kept noticing about Guy's Hospital was the number of doors!) She missed two classes in her first week, unable to find the lecture room. So for a while she began arriving early each morning and waited on the front steps for Dr. Endicott, following him through the swing doors, stairways, grey-and-pink corridors, to the unmarked classroom. (She once followed him and startled him and others in the men's bathroom) (Ondaatje 2000: 141-42).

Not even the narrator's irony, graciously describing Anil at a complete loss and following her teacher up to the men's bathroom, can erase the sense of drama occurring to the protagonist in the brief episode. However, resourceful and determined, she manages to react to her inner feeling of displacement by falling in love with a young Sri Lankan. Convinced of being in love with him, Anil is however also projecting onto him her need for her homeland. Under these premises, their quickly arranged marriage soon crumbles because, if attracted and fascinated by him as "a many-armed seducer", "funny" and a "fervent lover" (Ondaatje 2000: 142), in her unconscious he becomes essential in creating the missing link to her native island. It is interesting to stress in fact that, in the very first description of him, he is associated with an outlandish image of her own country: "It seemed to her he had turned up from Sri Lanka in bangles and on stilts" (Ondaatje 2000: 142). Consequently, shortly afterwards the narrator relates the disappointment over her abortive marriage with her almost abrupt decision to stop speaking Sinhalese. In this sense, it hardly escapes one that Anil suddenly remains an orphan after leaving her country and this event further supports her view of her homeland in terms of an irreparable sense of loss. This is followed by the concise dialogue between her and Sarath, which shows her typical reaction to a great pain by forcing herself to remain silent:

'My parents died in a car crash after I left Sri Lanka. I never got a chance to see them again'.

'I know. I heard your father was a good doctor'.

'I should have been a doctor, but I swerved off into forensics. Didn't want to be him at that time in my life, I guess. Then *I didn't want* to come back here after my parents died' (Ondaatje 2000: 47, italics mine).

In this perspective, once we find her back in Colombo airport fifteen years after her departure, we remain tempted to explain her inability to speak Sinhalese not in terms of an ordinary forgetfulness, but as a clear act of removal.

Under these circumstances, we can only form an idea of how upsetting the return for Anil might be. If memory of her homeland may be thought of as a scar that has never

healed, flying back to Colombo is the equivalent of rubbing salt into the wound. When dealing with diaspora communities, Safran has argued that they all share the myth of return, synthetically described as “the desire to return to that homeland” (Safran 1991: 87), when the proper conditions for it become manifest. As for Anil Tissera, this dream to go back to her roots may seem to be almost evanescent. Of course, the socio-political situation in Sri Lanka can hardly be said to be an alluring invitation. This need becomes neatly visible in only two situations: the first is the meeting with her Tamil ayah Lalitha, while the second occurs when Sarath and Anil have a heated exchange on her role in her homeland soon after she has saved Ananda from committing suicide. In a brief but animated discussion, she shouts at Sarath: “I decided to come back. I wanted to come back” (Ondaatje 2000: 200). Once more, the repetition has the purpose of reinforcing a statement that should achieve the effect of astonishing the reader, showing a completely different face of the protagonist. Of course, this surprising statement stresses that a silent need in relation to her homeland still remains unanswered. While demonstrating to keep the situation at bay for most of the time, once and again un-suppressed emotional bouts suddenly explode in the protagonist’s mind, only to be rapidly sedated. Conflicting and ambiguous reactions therefore emerge in Anil as opposing forces respectively corresponding to an emotional want contrasted by a rational need to contain it. Cook shows insight when she claims that “The language of transnationalism, which Ondaatje speaks through Anil, incorporates the contradictions and paradoxes that are displayed in human and cultural diversity” (Cook 2005: 7).

However, the conflicting relationship between Anil and her homeland does not only emphasise a problematic stance on the part of the protagonist: if on the one hand Anil’s feelings towards her homeland appear to be shaky, on the other, Sri Lanka’s welcome for “the prodigal” (Ondaatje 2000: 10) cannot be considered less unforgiving. *Anil’s Ghost* has already demonstrated to be a tale carefully designed to offer an X-ray film of a migrant’s consciousness in accordance with a number of theories, and here is a further example of its validity. While coping with the predicament of expatriates in the act of making their return to their homeland, Tsuda soon focuses his attention on an “ethnic rejection and social exclusion” (Tsuda 2013: 178) that they remain victims of, because they are regarded as “foreigners and strangers” (Tsuda 2013: 177).

I have already argued that Anil’s arrival at Colombo airport offers a cogent view of how the country remains cold to her. As a government representative, the officer in charge of picking her up at the airport has a mildly hostile attitude because it is no secret that her arrival in the country will produce official documentation on the state of being of Sri Lanka, considered to be an intrusion into local business. Even so, it is not only the officer who shows an unfriendly attitude to her at her return, because at one time or another many other local characters unmask various forms of antagonism and distrust toward her. In Anil’s case the exclusion that expatriates generally experience upon returning to their homeland is widened by her having relocated herself in the West and having crossed the ideological rift that separates the coloniser from the colonised. While nobody ever dares to blame her for having crossed the border separating that imaginary line of power, her constant identification in terms of a Westerner also contains elements of distrust or derision for what is regarded as

a betrayal. The first to voice this mistrust is Dr. Pereira who, judging her by her appearance at their first meeting makes this (unnecessary) comment: "Your dress is Western, I see", which appears to be a clear act of accusation, so that Anil deems it proper to justify herself: "It's a habit" (Ondaatje 2000: 26), she claims on the defensive. One may easily understand this provocation: after all, Dr. Pereira and Anil limit their conversation to a formal register of speech also because he has clear government connections. The point, however, is that almost everyone in Sri Lanka occasionally demonstrates to her their suspicion for having turned Westerner, and the plot includes a number of similar cases. Chitra Abeysekera, the young trainee who offers Anil her scientific expertise in her cause, has a friendly attitude to her: in addition, Chitra also shows gratitude to Anil for receiving help with the editing of her CV. However, her stance becomes critical when it comes to evaluating Anil's decision to leave Sri Lanka, not because she discredits emigration as such, but because Anil made the mistake of choosing the West as her destination. This is an interesting exchange between Chitra and Anil, originated by the protagonist's concern whether Chitra would be able to carry on her research in a structure that is very restrictive.

'Tell me what you like about the West'.

'Oh – what do I like? Most of all I think I like that I can do things on my own terms.

Nothing is anonymous here, is it. I miss my privacy'.

Chitra looked totally uninterested in this Western virtue (Ondaatje 2000: 72).

Once more, the slightly ironic tone adopted by the narrator is instrumental in deflating the drama contained in the message, because what is at stake here is a rejection, even if expressed in a mild form. This is, however, the general atmosphere surrounding Anil at her return, and there seems to be no way out for her. The more so, in view of the fact that not even the people who offer her an unconditioned welcome, those who seem to be ready to share an emotional response, remain indifferent to her switching from the East to the West. Gamini, to start with, successfully establishes an emotional connection with Anil: despite their apparent differences, they share a number of affinities in particular because of their traumatic experiences. After dealing with their empathic consonance, Brians perceptively highlights that Gamini "and the similarly rootless Anil would be drawn to each other" (Brians 2003: 190). Even so, there is a situation in which Anil recollects being witness of a dialogue between Gamini and his brother Sarath when "they spoke of how much they loved their country. In spite of everything. No Westerner would understand the love they had for the place. 'But I could never leave here', Gamini had whispered" (Ondaatje 2000: 285). The final sharp comment, although apparently noncommittal, seems clearly directed at her.

Evidently, Burrows is right when she argues that "Anil is an outsider in her own country" (Burrows 2008: 171) and this is not only the result of Anil's sense of foreignness, but also a direct consequence of a more or less direct veto imposed on her by her ex-compatriots. In a sense, the example offered by Sarath in relation to her acceptance in terms of an Other may seem particularly appropriate to my point. Carefully constructed so as to appear as Anil's opposite, he wisely constructs a collaborative and reliable relationship with her. However, their mutual trust is not something that is taken for granted from the very beginning: it is

earned little by little as episodes prove that they each deserve it. Their teamwork provides extraordinary results in giving a name to a nameless victim not only because they have successfully joined forces on an intellectual level, but also because they have shared emotions, experiences and perspectives so convincingly that in the end, to save her and her work, Sarath sacrifices his life and becomes the ghost of the novel's title. Despite all this, he too feels the breach that makes her a stranger at home. The narrator convincingly shows that all through the plot he seems to be hesitating to accept her as an ordinary Sri Lankan, and in the course of a heated discussion his position comes to the surface. He and Anil are arguing here about their possible future plans and she accuses him of submissiveness to his government superiors. What follows is his reaction:

You don't understand how bad things were. Whatever the government is possibly doing now, it was worse when there was real chaos. You were not here for that – the law abandoned by everyone, save a few good lawyers. Terror everywhere, from all sides. We wouldn't have survived with *your rules of Westminster then* (Ondaatje 2000: 153-154, italics mine).

Not even Sarath, therefore, the person who most noticeably demonstrates his sense of solidarity toward her and who tends to display a protective attitude for her at various moments in the plot, seems inclined to digest her betrayal for having abandoned the island to live in the West. Sarath's attraction-repulsion towards Anil and her social exclusion are indeed cornerstones of the novel, so that one may argue that they become the two detonators activating the crucial spark in the most dramatic scene in an already dramatic story. Back from Ekneligoda she discovers that Sailor, the skeleton she is working on with Sarath to demonstrate the Government's active involvement in crimes, has disappeared. She is required then to give a speech about the results of their investigation at the Armoury Auditorium and, alone on the stage, she seems to keep her anger at bay for some time. The passage however illustrates in detail that she suddenly loses her control and levels a passionate accusation at the local authorities who pack the room. Not only are her sharp words crucial here, but also Sarath's reception of them:

Sarath in the back row, unseen by her, listened to her quiet explanations, her sure-footedness, her absolute calm and refusal to be emotional or angry. It was a lawyer's argument and, more important, a citizen's evidence; she was no longer just a foreign authority. Then he heard her say, 'I think you murdered hundreds of us'. *Hundreds of us*. Sarath thought to himself. Fifteen years away and she is finally *us* (Ondaatje 2000: 271-272).

This is the incrimination that less than 24 hours later he will pay for with his life, but it is most meaningful that on hearing these words Sarath does not object to them because uttered at the wrong time or in front of the wrong audience. Paradoxically, he seems to disavow this accusation because the speaker wrongly considers herself a compatriot. Two brief observations are needed at this stage: the first is that Anil's foreignness results from both the

protagonist's decision to erase 'home' from her mind and from her marginalisation in Sri Lankan society. The second is that silence, her ordinary method for coming to terms with her anguish, now and again collapses and at that time bouts of unsuppressed rage become suddenly manifest.

Anil's story out of, and then back in her country reveal evident symptoms of trauma. The twin journey, away from and back into the homeland, expose a significant net of connections that inevitably shape her mind and create her rootlessness. One may even imagine that her (apparently) instinctive foreignness becomes a sort of a painkiller enabling her to soothe the pain caused by her loss of origins. This damage, however, instead of being appropriately cured, returns like a nightmarish echo on her journey back, when social rejection amplifies the harm received fifteen years before: in other words, her return provides the confirmation that a connection with her motherland is gone and lost. It may be suitable, then, to relate the two forms of traumatic experience placed on two distinct time levels and analyse their possible interconnectedness.

In her seminal work *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), Caruth has widely discussed the weight of the unconscious repetition in traumatic experiences. In the first place, the American researcher claims that trauma should be associated with reiteration, because "in its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (1996: 11). In her explanation for the ways in which unresolved forms of trauma reappear in time, she has directly drawn from Freud, analysing the important story of two lovers, Tancred and Clorinda, found in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*. Briefly, this story is about the impossible love of Tancred for the beautiful Clorinda who, for a singular twist of fate, appears in her armour in front of him on the battlefield: unidentified by the soldier-lover, she is killed in duel by Tancred himself. A little time later, tortured by his sense of guilt, Tancred slashes a tree with his sword while crossing a magical forest: surprisingly, Clorinda's voice is heard imprisoned in the tree and complaining with him about killing her for the second time. In a very linear way, Caruth writes about the relatedness between the tragic episode creating a trauma left unresolved in the Crusader and the reiteration of the shock in time:

Just as Tancred does not hear the voice of Clorinda until the second wounding, so trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on (Caruth 1996: 4).

Similarly, Anil, after abandoning her homeland, was forced to silence her torment caused by the loss of her origins. From her viewpoint, this whole process is analogous to a form of censorship clearly endured in terms of a violent act of repression, that on a figurative level, is equivalent to the elimination of an identity. Consequently, I claim that in her journey away from her homeland, Anil was compelled to suppress her inner self in connection with her place of origin, in order to soothe her pain.

On her return home, these forms of suffering have been all but resolved and, when

overtly exasperated for the widespread boycott she remains a victim of, she imagines being able to control all provocations and remain silent. She is wrong, however, because her inner pride operates unnoticed, upsetting her well-laid plans. When directly addressing the government authorities during the fatal speech in the auditorium, Anil unconsciously starts working on a re-assessment of her identity to match her inner needs. Specifically, she is enacting a switch of identity similar to that already endorsed in her early teens, when she determined to adopt her brother's second name. One should not underestimate that her rebellious nature also involves in this context a certain element of provocation that, when she was a little girl, "had caused anger and frustration within the household" (Ondaatje 2000: 67). At that time for the sake of everyone's peace, her family had surrendered to her will, and had adjusted to her choice. Needless to say, at the time she is talking in front of a full theatre, one cannot expect her spectators to be similarly tolerant. After her speech in the auditorium, Sarath seems very concerned about her and, as soon as he has prevailed over her stubbornness, manages to convince her to hurriedly leave the country the day after. Meanwhile, he shows his total faithfulness to their cause by enabling her to find Sailor and her tape recorder. These are his last resolutions because the next thing we know about him is that he has been assassinated.

My intention at this juncture is to create an imaginary connection between this violent death, which takes place towards the end of the plot, and the trauma which occurred to Anil some fifteen years before, when she was forced to drastically sever the umbilical cord tying her to her motherland and, in a way, to kill a part of herself. Both traumas are the consequence of a strong decision on her part and both of them appear to be a passionate response to an issue in relation to her (national) identity. Their possible inter-relatedness would also be in keeping with Caruth's theory about a reiterated shock, with Anil's initial suppression of her attachment to her homeland intended as the first trauma and Sarath's assassination as "the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder" (Caruth 1996: 11). Far from arguing that Anil intentionally creates the premises for Sarath to find himself trapped in a fatal situation, I maintain rather that it is her unconscious, driven by her previous unassimilated trauma, to design the plan for Sarath's tragic end. After her speech in the theatre, any reader might expect a knockback of one kind or another. Sad as it is, her unwilling implications in Sarath's death also justify her sense of guilt for his loss and ultimately explain why he becomes her ghost. By making a comparison between Anil's silenced self and Sarath, one can explain their relatedness in being both functional links between Anil and her homeland, a link that the rules of diaspora have powerfully shattered and that Anil, very much despite herself, felt impelled to suppress. With *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje provides an explanation to Tsuda's contention that "diasporic homecomings are often quite ambivalent, if not negative, experiences" (Tsuda 2013: 177), stretching the boundaries of ambivalence up to the very limit.

Anil's Ghost offers an outstanding behavioural example of the maelstrom of conflicting forces at drive in a postcolonial, transnational, diasporic, bisexual subject frantically trying to draw the contours of her own identity. While this seems to be a constant in the whole literary output of Michael Ondaatje rather than a characteristic of *Anil's Ghost* only, it proves successful here in problematising the issue in the context of an immigrant coping with the return to her place of birth.

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Pier Paolo Piciuccio is lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages in the University of Turin, where he regularly teaches courses on English Literature. Over the years, he has focused his attention mainly on postcolonial and postmodern literature. His monograph, *The Two Souls* (2004), is a theory on Black South African Theatre about the negotiations which gave rise to a totally marginalised form of art under the Apartheid regime. He has also edited 7 books on Indian literature – notably among them, *A Companion to Indian Fiction in English* (2004), a panoramic study on the major Indian English novelists – and is the author of about 40 essays.

pierpaolo.piciuccio@libero.it

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Fabiana Savorgnan Cergneu di Brazzà

Le sirene in Tomasi di Lampedusa e le possibili fonti

Abstract I: Il contributo, un viaggio nella classicità letteraria, si propone di verificare se esista un rapporto tra il racconto *Lighea* (1961), di Tomasi di Lampedusa e le fonti classiche tradizionali (Aristotele, Omero, Ovidio, Virgilio). Oltre a questo aspetto, si cerca di stabilire un possibile aggancio con la rielaborazione originale di esse fatta dal Boccaccio nelle *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium*. La sirena, qui considerata come rappresentazione identitaria del mondo classico, sarà esaminata nelle suggestive rappresentazioni degli autori, tenendo in debito conto anche delle sue diverse interpretazioni, vista nei suoi aspetti suadenti e dolci, ma anche in quelli brutali e feroci.

Abstract II: This contribution, a journey through literary classics, aims at verifying if there is a relationship between the short story *Lighea* (1961), by Tomasi di Lampedusa and traditional classical sources (Aristoteles, Homer, Ovid, Virgil). Besides, we will also try to establish a possible interdependence with Boccaccio's original reworking of them in the *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium*. The siren, here seen as a representation of identity in the classical world, will be examined in the suggestive depiction of these authors, taking also into account various interpretations: her persuasive and sweet aspects as well as her brutal and ferocious sides.

“Sono Lighea, sono figlia di Calliope. Non credere alle favole inventate su di noi: non uccidiamo nessuno, amiamo soltanto” (Lampedusa 2012: 119): con queste parole la sirena si presenta al protagonista del racconto intitolato *Lighea*, di Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa. Scritto nel 1956-1957 negli ultimi anni della vita dell'autore ed uscito postumo, in origine, per scelta di Tomasi, aveva come titolo *La sirena*, poi modificato dalla moglie in *Lighea* (Lampedusa 2012: 95-126).

La narrazione ripercorre uno dei miti più frequentati dalla letteratura non solo italiana, suscitando l'interesse di diversi studiosi, che hanno indagato sulle fonti alle quali avrebbe attinto Tomasi per sviluppare la figura della sua sirena. Una recente interpretazione di Augusto Guida (2014: 19-35), connessa con la parte delle *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium* del Boccaccio dedicata alla nascita delle Sirene (VII, XX) (Boccaccio 1998: 752-757), ha costituito l'occasione per indagare ulteriormente sui possibili documenti cui avrebbe attinto l'autore. L'ultima parte del citato saggio di Guida ci può indirizzare per capire le fonti che Tomasi poteva avere presente.

Si dice generalmente che Tomasi di Lampedusa si sia ispirato a *Ligeia* di Edgar Allan Poe, un racconto *horror* che narra la storia di un uomo rimasto vedovo, e perseguitato dal ricordo della moglie Ligeia. Per disperazione, si dà all'oppio e rivede la moglie sotto forma di sirena.

Al di là di questo riferimento, ci soffermiamo sul racconto di Tomasi; il protagonista è un grecista provetto, Rosario La Ciura, innamorato della grecità e della sua Sicilia, greco negli studi e nello spirito (simbolo di ciò è la sua biblioteca selezionata e il suo individualismo ispirato dalle letture delle opere di Nietzsche), che rasenta un atteggiamento di vita quasi "panico" (Bettini & Spina 2007; Mancini 2005), che è identificabile, nel nostro caso, nella cultura classica.

La vicenda si svolge attraverso delle coordinate spazio-temporali definite: protagonisti sono la mitica Sicilia, patria degli dei e degli eroi e due personaggi che si incontrano in un caffè di Torino: il protagonista, Rosario La Ciura, di estrazione borghese, docente universitario, amante della cultura classica, incontra un giovane redattore, Paolo Corbera, discendente da una famiglia aristocratica siciliana. Il rapporto tra loro si definisce nel passaggio da una latente ostilità a una situazione di cordialità che ha per sfondo l'evocazione della Sicilia e dei suoi miti. Il loro rapporto assume un risvolto iniziatico. La Ciura è un elitario e apprezza coloro i quali sono capaci di piaceri sovrumani, vive nel mito e considera l'amore esclusivo e rapportato al sapere. È quasi un semidio, si immedesima con l'arte classica, è un vero umanista, sembra ironico verso la cultura libresca, conosce la perfezione e la segue. Lo si nota anche negli oggetti che arredano la sua casa, alcuni simbolo del suo amore per il viaggio e della sua ansia di conoscenza: "Sul caminetto anfore e crateri antichi: Odisseo legato all'albero della nave, le Sirene che dall'alto della rupe si sfracellavano sugli scogli in espiazione di aver lasciato sfuggire la preda" (Lampedusa 2012: 109). Gli incontri tra i due divengono pretesto per La Ciura per raccontare un amore vissuto quando aveva ancora ventiquattro anni con una giovane sirena di soli sedici, incontrata nell'estate del 1887 nel mare di Augusta, luogo in cui si era ritirato per prepararsi ad un concorso universitario.

Il mito della sirena e l'incontro con Ligheia avviene all'insegna di un inizio del rapporto che è estatico: essa si presenta subito come bestia e immortale; ha i denti aguzzi e bianchi come i cani, gli occhi verdi:

Mi voltai e la vidi: il volto liscio di una sedicenne emergeva dal mare, due piccole mani stringevano il fasciame. Quell'adolescente sorrideva, una leggera piega scostava le labbra pallide e lasciava intravedere i dentini aguzzi e bianchi, come quelli dei cani [...]. Dai disordinati capelli color di sole l'acqua del mare colava sugli occhi verdi apertissimi, sui lineamenti d'infantile purezza. [...] come chiunque altro volli credere di aver incontrato una bagnante e, muovendomi con precauzione, mi portai all'altezza di lei, mi curvai, le tesi le mani per farla salire. Ma essa, con stupefacente vigoria, emerse diritta dall'acqua sino alla cintola, mi cinse il collo con le braccia, mi avvolse in un profumo mai sentito, si lasciò scivolare nella barca: sotto l'inguine, sotto i glutei il suo corpo era quello di un pesce, rivestito di minutissime squame madreperlacee e azzurre, e terminava in una coda biforcuta che batteva lenta il fondo della barca. Era una Sirena (Lampedusa 2012: 118-119).

Mangia “roba viva”, divora i pesci, sembra una “belvetta crudele” (Lampedusa 2012: 124), ha le “dita insanguinate:

Essa non mangiava che roba viva: spesso la vedevo, emergere dal mare, il torso delicato luccicante al sole, mentre straziava coi denti un pesce argentato che fremeva ancora; il sangue le rigava il mento e dopo qualche morso il merluzzo o l'orata maciullata venivano ributtate dietro le sue spalle e, maculandola di rosso, affondavano nell'acqua mentre essa infantilmente gridava nettandosi i denti con la lingua (Lampedusa 2012: 121).

La sirena rappresenta quel mondo a cui è legato La Ciura, infatti essa racchiude in sé elementi della classicità, individuabili anche nel fatto che parla in greco:

Parlava greco e stentavo molto a capirla. “Ti sentivo parlare da solo in una lingua simile alla mia; mi piaci, prendimi [...]; sono immortale perché tutte le morti confluiscono in me da quella del merluzzo di dianzi a quella di Zeus, in me radunate ridiventano vita non più individuale e determinata ma pànica e quindi libera (Lampedusa 2012: 119).

A ben guardare la descrizione della sirena contiene tutti gli elementi della tradizione; essa incarna in sé e rappresenta quel mondo classico che attraversa i tempi della cultura dell'uomo: è metà donna e metà animale, divora gli animali, ha gli occhi verdi come l'acqua, essendo creatura marina, ha la voce melodiosa. La tradizione, infatti, attribuiva alle sirene la capacità di sedurre i naviganti con la bellezza e la soavità del canto, così da farli naufragare e annegare o essere divorati. Il termine “sirena”, infatti, significa “trazione”, da *seiron* (“attrarre a sé”) (Corti 1989).

Sappiamo che nell'antichità, a seconda delle fonti considerate, da Omero ad Aristotele, essa veniva rappresentata in modi diversi: in forma di giovane donna nella parte superiore del corpo e di uccello in quella inferiore, addirittura con le zampe di gallina, o, a partire dal XII secolo, di pesce nella parte inferiore. Occorre sottolineare che se l'origine delle sirene è controversa, meno dubbi esistono sul luogo dove esse trascorrevano il tempo, che doveva trovarsi dirimpetto ad Amalfi. Sicuramente il mare e l'acqua era il loro elemento, visto che è proprio il mare ad accogliere i naviganti ardimentosi di affrontare l'ignoto. La sete di conoscenza è l'appiglio sicuro, la trappola mortale che preparano per chi si avvicina ai loro siti.

La Lighea di Tomasi riunisce diversi degli elementi i quali fanno presupporre che l'immagine sia scaturita nella mente dello scrittore dall'aver visionato diverse fonti tratte anche e soprattutto dal Boccaccio. Se prendiamo il nome “Lighea” ci accorgiamo che Tomasi doveva avere delle letture raffinatissime, perché il nome lo poteva derivare o da fonti greche come il *De mirabilibus auscultationibus* di Aristotele (103) o da Ovidio, *Metamorfosi* (V, 551-563), o dall'*Eneide* di Virgilio (5, 864-865), o, appunto, dove era disponibile in maniera più diretta nelle *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium* del Boccaccio (libri VII, XX), un repertorio della metà del 1300 il quale rappresenta l'elaborazione più fantasiosa della mitologia greca.

Questi testi dovevano essere presenti a Tomasi, anche se ciò costituisce un'ipotesi, che

troverebbe maggior fondamento se si sapesse che nella biblioteca di Tomasi di Lampedusa era conservata una edizione delle *Genealogie* postillata: per esempio, si può pensare che Tomasi conoscesse le *Genealogie* del Boccaccio, perché La Ciura, in cui si identifica lo stesso Tomasi di Lampedusa, e Boccaccio, condividono la concezione di Evemero (IV secolo a. C.), secondo la quale il mito e gli dei hanno origine nella realtà storica. Afferma La Ciura, infatti: “Quando si frequentano notte giorno dee e semidee come facevo io in quei tempi [...]” (Lampedusa 2012: 115). Questa concezione è stata riportata in vita in modo quasi sistematico dal Boccaccio delle *Genealogie*. Basterebbe questo parallelo per dare una ragione alla nostra riflessione letteraria su Tomasi e le *Genealogie*. Quest’opera è un passaggio obbligato per certi aspetti. Tomasi di Lampedusa poteva attingere la storia delle Sirene dalla sua sterminata e raffinata cultura greca, in particolare da Omero che parla delle sirene (erano due) e racconta che morirono per il dolore di non aver saputo attrarre Ulisse. Nell’*Odissea*, canto XII, ripercorre il momento in cui Ulisse narra ai Feaci il pericolo corso con le Sirene.

Omero viene ripreso dallo stesso Boccaccio, che vede “Ulisse legato all’albero della nave per non cadere in balia del canto delle Sirene” (Boccaccio 1998: libro XIV 9, 7). E proprio la cultura sterminata di Tomasi porta a pensare che non potesse ignorare una fonte come quella del Boccaccio. Quest’ultimo, a sua volta, aveva presenti gran parte delle fonti considerate da La Ciura, anche se per le fonti greche principali si appoggiava alle traduzioni di Leonzio Pilato, autore greco di Salonicco che era stato in Calabria a insegnare greco, chiamato dal Boccaccio, il quale lo scriveva in modo approssimativo.

Un’altra fonte che probabilmente costituisce un punto di riferimento per Tomasi di Lampedusa è Ovidio, che nelle *Metamorfosi* (V: 551-563) descrive le sirene in riferimento al rapimento di Proserpina; le sirene, incaricate dalla dea madre di salvarla, poiché non ci riuscirono, per vendetta furono trasformate in esseri con piume e zampe d’uccelli e il volto di donna. Un oracolo le aveva avvertite del fatto che sarebbero vissute fino a quando un marinaio fosse riuscito a resistere al loro canto. Così, quando Ulisse riuscì a superarle, esse morirono in mare; da qui la tradizione secondo la quale esse ricoprivano il ruolo di accompagnatrici dei morti.

Altre fonti che si possono considerare sono Licofrone, poeta del III secolo, per il quale le sirene erano tre e si chiamavano Partenope, Leucosia e Ligeia. Il numero però variava, secondo alcuni erano tre o quattro (Leonzio: Aglaosi, Telciepi, Pisinoe e Ligia; figlie di Achelao e della musa Tersicore), per Plinio addirittura cinque; una è Ligia o Lighea o Iligi (Boccaccio lo aveva appreso da Leonzio Pilato). Esiodo ne individuava ben quattro (*Teogonia*: 349). È quindi difficile stabilire precisamente se Tomasi di Lampedusa avesse presente solo una o più fonti di quelle citate.

Un aspetto fondamentale da considerare è la correlazione stabilita da Tomasi tra la sirena e la morte. La Ciura troverà la morte proprio in mare, completando anche la sua trasformazione superomistica e divenendo tutt’uno con la sirena e con il mondo della classicità che essa rappresenta (Nicosia 2003: 605-624).

Anche Aristotele, nel *De mirabilibus auscultationibus* (v. 103) (Vanotti 1997: 47), riferisce delle isole delle sirene (il promontorio del Peloro in Sicilia), in cui si dice che esse abitino nello spazio marino il quale si trova di fronte allo stesso promontorio che separa i due golfi

in cui sono collocate la città di Cuma da una parte e quella di Posidonia dall'altra; lì, secondo Aristotele, c'è anche un tempio dedicato alle Sirene; secondo lui sono tre: Partenope, Leucosia e Ligeia (Vanotti 1997: 47). Ligeia si chiama così perché indica il cerchio, colei che circuisce (*quod est circulus, seu girum*). Infatti si racconta che addormenta i naviganti, affonda le loro navi e li divora (in Tomasi la sirena ha i denti aguzzi): "Nella parte estrema d'Italia, dove il Peloro, diviso dall'Appennino, offre il passaggio dal mare Tirreno all'Adriatico, sono situate le isole delle Sirene, e vi sta un tempio ad esse consacrato, nel quale sono molto onorate dagli indigeni con sacrifici. E poiché sono tre, non sconverrà ricordarne i nomi. Una di esse si chiama Partenopea, la seconda Leucosia, la terza Ligia" (Vanotti 1997: 47).

Tra le fonti Boccaccio cita anche l'*Eneide* di Virgilio, cui aveva attinto tramite Servio (Libro V: 864-865). Nel Libro VII, 20, delle *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium* (Branca 1998: 754-757), Boccaccio parla diffusamente di queste figlie di Achelao e di Calliope. Acheloo era un fiume, figlio di Oceano e della Terra, il quale, secondo la tradizione, divenne il padre delle Sirene. Ciò è attestato anche in Boccaccio nel libro XIX. Boccaccio quindi considera molte fonti, fra cui Servio, Virgilio, ma anche Fulgenzio, Plinio, Aristotele, Palefato, Leonzio, Isaia. Queste fonti nella visione di Boccaccio hanno lo scopo di documentazione della storia delle Sirene secondo il mito antico. Di qui egli muove l'intento etico ed ermeneutico di trasfigurazione cristiana, tipicamente medievale, del mito pagano. Le Sirene sono donne immorali le quali corrompono l'uomo con la seduzione e il piacere. Intento che si ritrova nella visione di La Ciura. Il mare di Sicilia da cui era venuta la giovane sirena con i denti aguzzi e bianchi, anche se all'apparenza rappresenta l'unità di mito e di vita autentica, alla fine porterà La Ciura alla perdizione.

Boccaccio elabora, racconta le fonti e ne dà l'interpretazione: chi sono queste sirene? Sono Muse belle e seducenti che portano alla seduzione. In Tomasi la sirena ha la coda biforcuta, in questo segue la descrizione di Aristotele ripresa da Boccaccio. Esse cantano delle melodie e hanno sede in Sicilia e a Capri. In Boccaccio Ligia ha ugualmente il significato di raggio, mette l'uomo in prigione il quale cade nelle spire della libidine.

Nella fonte cristiana è esempio del male: in Isaia, citato da Boccaccio, si dice che le sirene e i demoni danzeranno in Babilonia, da cui il detto "finire in pesce" (Boccaccio 1998: libro XX 757). Orazio sostiene che sono donne bellissime fino all'ombelico (punto della concupiscenza).

Probabilmente, quindi, il nome Lighea deriva dal Boccaccio, e pur essendo certamente un'interpretazione, sicuramente nessuno degli autori anteriori a Tomasi cita le sirene con questo nome.

Nel Libro XIV delle *Genealogie*, inoltre, nel capitolo nove intitolato *Appare utile piuttosto che dannoso comporre favole*, egli fa chiaro riferimento al mito delle sirene, quando le reputa delle favole: "Perciocché i poeti epici, sebbene appaia che scrivano una storia, come Virgilio quando descrive Enea agitato dalla tempesta, e Omero quando rappresenta Ulisse legato all'albero della nave per non essere attratto dal canto delle Sirene, hanno ben altro intento, sotto il velo della lettera, da quello che mostrano". Nel Libro XIV, XVI, nel capitolo intitolato *I lettori dei poeti sono condotti al bene*, Boccaccio difende l'uso della parola dei poeti contro i detrattori della pratica del poetare e mette in guardia da coloro i quali li disprezzano, chiamando in causa Ulisse: "Arrossiscano dunque i miseri e mutino in meglio il loro sciocco

consiglio e osservino Ulisse, uomo pagano, che non i canti di versi muti, ma quelli melliflui delle Sirene disprezzò, come nocivi, e passò oltre". Sottolinea, Boccaccio, la forza della parola e il suo utilizzo anche a fini salvifici; in tal senso cita l'esempio dei Giudei che accusarono Cristo di essere un "seduttore" proprio perché utilizzò la parola e la capacità di eloquio per attrarre a sé i popoli: "E per dire qualcosa circa la forza del vocabolo, che come detestabile rinfacciano ai poeti, avrebbero dovuto vedere che non sempre deve essere preso in cattivo senso, sebbene lo stesso vocabolo sia stato gettato dai Giudei in faccia a Cristo, nostro Salvatore, quando ignominiosamente lo chiamarono 'seduttore'".

Tutto ciò entra in Tomasi, ma questo indica la sua sicilianità; Tomasi eredita la tradizione greca dei miti, la Sicilia di Tomasi è quella mitica e magica, terra di semidei e di eroi. Se Boccaccio elabora il mito in chiave morale ed etica, Tomasi lo fa in una visione pagana.

Il racconto di Tomasi di Lampedusa ha un finale tragico. La Ciura, a distanza di anni da quell'esperienza d'amore vissuta con la sirena, mentre da Genova naviga verso Napoli, cade dalla nave Rex e muore in mare. Era diretto a Coimbra, in Portogallo, dove il Rettore di quella Università lo aveva invitato a presiedere il Congresso dei grecisti. Eppure il richiamo della voce suadente e dolce di Lighea, che rappresenta per La Ciura la classicità e quel mondo nel quale si identifica, non cessa di rincorrerlo anche lì, dopo tanti anni; Lighea costituisce "il miraggio femminile che nel *Gattopardo* il Principe di Salina vede prima di morire, è la stessa, sola creatura immortale, la Morte, che ride dei nostri amplessi, come di qualsiasi altro tentativo di allontanarla da noi" (Molesini 1983: 314).

A ben vedere, idealmente, La Ciura finisce da semidio: si ricongiunge con la Sirena la quale non può morire; essa è colei che da giovane gli aveva rivelato la bellezza del mare dal quale nascevano la più parte dei miti classici. In La Ciura mito e realtà si identificano; in Boccaccio la riscrittura e la reinterpretazione ermeneutica in chiave cristiana del mito servono alla rinascita interiore dell'autore, che dopo gli anni Cinquanta si stava dedicando alla revisione del *Decameron* e alle opere latine erudite sotto il magistero del Petrarca. Partenope, una delle Sirene, certamente gli ricordava gli anni allegri trascorsi a Napoli, durante i quali il Boccaccio era "altr'uom" da quel che era al tempo delle *Genealogie*.

Tutto ciò conferma di quanto il mito della sirena abbia costituito e continui ad essere uno dei miti più frequentati e ripresi da più autori e nel lungo periodo della storia della letteratura italiana. Anche Shakespeare parla delle "lacrime di sirene" nel Sonetto 119 e fa riferimento alle ninfe sottomarine nella *Tempesta* (1611) (Douglas 1911). Le sirene assumono anche altre caratteristiche: in Tomasi di Lampedusa cantano, in Kafka, ne *Il silenzio delle sirene*, non parlano, appaiono e scompaiono a loro piacimento.

Ci si può chiedere come mai Tomasi di Lampedusa abbia scelto per protagonista un accademico, lui che in tutto appare antiletterario, anticlassicista e antiaccademico. Forse agisce in lui il fascino delle civiltà le quali si sono avvicinate in Sicilia. La civiltà greca, la più antica, venuta prima di quella araba, sveva o spagnola, e probabilmente la più incisiva. Tomasi era evidentemente affascinato da quel mondo attraverso le sue letture, che come abbiamo visto, avevano compreso anche Boccaccio. Certamente questa delineata è un'ipotesi, ma testimonia di quanto il mito delle sirene abbia suscitato la fantasia e l'immaginazione di autori antichi e moderni e che ancora oggi continua ad esercitare la sua attrazione; basti pensare, in

chiave moderna, alla serie televisiva *Sirene*, dedicata a queste creature di un mondo mitico e lontano ma sempre attuale. Ricordo anche altri film che ebbero come protagoniste le sirene: *Splash. Una sirena a Manhattan* del 1984, (Premio Oscar 1985), oppure *Mermaids* del 2003 o *Fishtales* del 2007.

Un viaggio, quello delle sirene, che attraversa tutta la letteratura e non solo, durante il quale molti scrittori sono rimasti imprigionati nelle loro reti, come è accaduto a Tomasi.

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Fabiana Savorgnan Cergneu di Brazzà insegna Letteratura italiana presso il Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature, comunicazione, formazione e società dell'Università di Udine. Le sue ricerche riguardano in particolare l'età del Settecento e Ottocento. Nell'ambito della letteratura popolare ha editato il carteggio tra il filologo Michele Barbi e Renata Steccati (Firenze: Olschki 2009). Si interessa alla scrittura di donne (Udine: Gaspari 2011; Venezia: Marsilio 2013). Nell'ambito settecentesco ha studiato la figura di Melchiorre Cesarotti, Antonio Conti, Pietro Verri, recuperando documenti inediti, fra cui una lettera di Montesquieu. Ha condotto approfondite ricerche nel campo della letteratura di viaggio e delle esplorazioni. fabiana.dibrazza@uniud.it



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Maria Camilla Di Tullio

Traditional Hindu Elements in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

Abstract I: Il seguente articolo offre un'interpretazione indologica del romanzo *The Inheritance of Loss* ad opera di Kiran Desai, analizzando atteggiamenti e dinamiche che risultano ancora più significativi se filtrati attraverso l'etica induista. Alcuni tra i principi induisti più evidenti che si celano nella storia sono il peccato del *samudrayana* connesso al viaggio oltreoceano; la disattenzione nei confronti del proprio *dharma*, causa questa della sventura di alcuni personaggi; l'equilibrio esistenziale degli opposti; il monte mitologico Meru simbolizzato dal monte Kanchenjunga; il velo di Maya suggerito dalla costante presenza della nebbia.

Abstract II: This paper offers an Indological interpretation of Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* analysing behaviours and dynamics that are even more meaningful in the light of Hindu ethics. Among the Hindu principles lurking behind the story, the most evident are the sin of *samudrayana* connected to the ocean voyage; the overlooking of *dharma* leading to the misfortune of some of the characters; the existential balance between opposites; the mythological Mount Meru represented by Mount Kanchenjunga; finally, the veil of Maya suggested by the constant presence of mist.

Literary criticism has hitherto focused mainly on the political and post-colonial issues crowding into Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, meanwhile highlighting the cosmopolitan context experienced by the author herself. Shands (2009), for example, considers *The Inheritance of Loss* to be a novel which goes beyond the postcolonial exploration of chaos and despair identifying a "hyperfabula" that is both local and universal – both optimistic and pessimistic; this balance of gains and losses reflects the possibility of serenity and survival through cruel and tragic events, although the centripetal attractions of home and the centrifugal flights of diaspora offer only temporary reliefs. As Thakur (2010) pointed out, Desai's novel presents a juxtaposition of two phenomena, the Gorkhas' movement in West Bengal and the experience of nomadic immigrants in New York. The characters and communities face with their history, inheritance, manner, mind, movement and culture, and the theme which characterises all the events is the phobia of loss – the loss of a dog, the loss of love, the loss of identity. Moreover, Thakur highlights the cultural slavery which affects the judge, who pretends to be a colonial master becoming a kind of "foreigner in his own country" (Desai 2006: 29)¹, the desertion of his life and humiliation of the cook being symbols of

¹ Kiran Desai (2006). All quotations are from this edition.

attempts of re-colonisation in postcolonial India. Most critics, however, concentrate on the issues that make *The Inheritance of Loss* a postcolonial novel. While Balanescu (2010) asserts that the displacement puts individuals psychologically, culturally and geographically in a position of exteriority and exile, Concilio (2010) defines Desai's writing as a 'global novel', a genre that connects the local to the global: in her opinion, the book is about a community made of single individuals with no detectable hero. She points out other postcolonial topics of the novel such as political bilingualism – the use of English characterising the middle-class Bengalis – and diaspora as a process which causes critical material conditions and dispossession. On the other hand, Jay (2010) focuses his attention on the relationship between globalization and nationalism through the story of the illegal migrant Biju, and Rizvi (2014) asserts that characters behave the way they do because they are affected by globalization, which is a cause of hardships in both the USA and India.

Thus, questions of identity, culture clash and spatio-temporal disorientation seem to be the most striking themes traceable in this work of fiction; and yet, *The Inheritance of Loss* can also be interpreted from an Indological perspective, showing how it is not only a diasporic novel dealing with the fictitious events of some characters, but also a novel which reflects the ancestral culture of its author's motherland in the form of religious beliefs and practices as well as a kind of habit and lifestyle. It is here that Hinduism surfaces through myths and legends rooted in writers and readers' deepest culture as such stories have been heard time and again since childhood. In this respect, the following analysis is consistent with the post-secular debate entailing the "deconstruction of the received opposition between the secular and the religious" (Ratti 2013: 23): in the postcolonial and diasporic era reason and faith combine, no longer representing a rejection of, or substitution for, each other. As Ratti argues, secularism declines because of political, ethnic and religious turmoil and fiction "becomes an experimental space, one where writers do not simply represent the turbulence and dilemmas of historical events, but actually structure them, or are informed by them, demonstrating the ethical potentials of imaginative fictional space" (2013: 4). Desai's diasporic novel is thus an example of how the post-secular dialogue between the secular and religious informs the writer's consciousness and, consequently, how it can be structured and represented.

Kiran Desai published *The Inheritance of Loss* in 2006, seven years after the release of her first book *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* – seven years during which she had been trying to define her own life². As she stated in an interview, "I don't think I can separate my existence from my writing anymore"³, that is why she went back to Kalimpong, to make sure that memory, reality and imagination were still consistent. Kiran Desai was born on September 3, 1971 in New Delhi and lived there until she was fourteen, when she left India to move first to England and then permanently to the US. For this reason, she can be counted among those writers belonging to the first-generation migrants, cosmopolitan in their hearts and minds, who have moved west, but are still anchored to homeland traditions through the memories, tales and habits of their parents. When Desai first thought of writing a novel about the hard

² Smriti, Daniel. 2007.

³ Smriti, Daniel. 2007.

experience of migrants in New York, she realised that she had to return to India to enrich her tale with first-hand materials; but once there, she became aware that what she was seeing now was so different from her cherished memories that she decided to set her story back in the 1980s – the years when she left her mother country. Thus, most Indian elements in *The Inheritance of Loss* originate in personal recollections, creating a vivid as well as realistic work of fiction. For Kiran Desai, Indianness is a habitus and she chooses to make the most of it:

I realise that I see everything through the lens of being Indian. It's not something that has gone away – it's something that has become stronger. As I've got older, I have realised that I can't really write without that perspective⁴.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that her novel abounds in Hindu lore woven into the narrative texture, making room for Indian characteristics that have been hitherto neglected by scholars. However, these motives should not be taken literally as traditional adherence to Hinduism, but rather as adaptation of some tenets of traditional Hinduism to a cosmopolitan world picture. The most obvious example regards the misfortune into which the migrants of the novel fall on leaving their motherland, connected to the motive of *samudrayana*. This is a typical Hindu taboo forbidding the ocean voyage as an outright sin capable of contaminating the moral integrity of the individuals. In the *Baudhayana Sutra* (Book II. 1.2.2), one of the *Dharma Sastras*, we read that taking voyages by sea is an offence that causes the loss of caste, and atoning for this sin is possible only through a harsh penance. This ban is certainly associated with the geographical boundaries of India, because leaving the holy soil implies the desertion of daily ritual worships and, even worse, pollution through the influence of foreign religions and cultures.

In *The Inheritance of Loss* the sin of *samudrayana* lurks behind young Biju's and Judge Jemubhai's attitudes to migration, which make them both undergo a deep crisis that, in turn, undermines their identity. After leaving Bengal apparently without regret or second thought, they both seem to 'lose their caste' upon their arrival in the new world: here they are treated as though they were untouchables, with Western people literally trying to flee from them avoiding any physical contact. Moreover, both Biju and Jemubhai neglect their Hindu daily rituals, further evidencing the pollution by voyage. However, unlike the judge, Biju is conscious of this transformation as well as of the irrational alienation to which he falls victim. Sick and tired of the abuses and of the racism that make his life unbearable and almost unliveable, Biju resolves to spend all the little money he earned in New York on a plane fare in order to escape from the Western world, which was seriously endangering his identity. His reintegration into the Indian culture exacts a heavy penance: soon after his landing in India, he is robbed by a gang of thieves of all items that still connect him to America – money, objects and even thoughts. Eventually he is abandoned half-naked in the forest, where he stoically accepts the physical and moral sufferings as a penance: he thinks back to the humiliating treatments endured in New York and replaces the resentment with the happiness of being Indian again.

⁴ Barton 2006.

On the contrary, Jemubhai accepts his social inferiority as a steady truth, and the racist abuse suffered in England only makes him hate any instance of Indianness, himself included. The reader gradually learns about his migration through his memories:

He had first left home at the age of twenty, with a black tin trunk [...] on which white letters read "Mr. J. P. Patel, *SS Strathnaver*". The year was 1939. The town he had left was his ancestral home of Piphit. From there he had journeyed to the Bombay dock and then sailed to Liverpool, and from Liverpool he had gone to Cambridge.

Many years had passed, and yet the day returned to him vividly, cruelly (42).

The last two adverbs anticipate the negative outcome of his British experience which started on a platform labelled 'Indians Only' (43). Accompanied by his father, he caught the train to Bombay, the rail vehicles making his world trivial insomuch as "he felt a piercing fear, not for his future, but for his past, for the *foolish faith* with which he had lived in Piphit" (43, my italics). From now on, he would reject everything dealing with India, especially with her culture, as humiliating and embarrassing: for example, he refused to throw the coconut as a good omen and, on the ship to Liverpool, he tossed the lunch prepared by his mother into the sea – an inappropriate gesture of her, meaning "undignified love, Indian love, stinking, anaesthetic love" (45). The sin of *samudrayana* has irreparably polluted him, the foreign world has totally corrupted his mind and, after the journey, Jemubhai looks upon himself with the racist eyes of the British, taking particular care and pride in looking English and erasing any sign of his own culture: he even comes to detest his once beloved wife because she is so different from the Western stereotypes – so Indian. Yet, Jemubhai is unaware of this pollution, as the following passage implies:

A journey once begun, has no end. The memory of his ocean trip shone between the words. Below and beyond, the monsters of his unconscious prowled, awaiting the time when they would rise and be proven real and he wondered if he'd dreamt of the drowning power of the sea before his first sight of it (118).

While reviewing some notions for the ICS competitive examination, the unconscious prevails on him suggesting that he had already known about his fate before he even disembarked in England. The journey he started on that ship would never end, something menacing sneaked into his soul – something that "would rise and be proven real" (118). Most probably, these 'monsters' refer to the pollution caused by *samudrayana*, a 'drowning power' quite impossible to resist which spares no one, as even the experience of Uncle Potty confirms – a decent man coming from wealth and a respectable family, departed to Oxford only for study purposes and come back as a drunk slacker. Hinduism bans the consumption of alcohol because it pollutes consciousness making the practice of meditation difficult; and, sure enough, Uncle Potty is far from being meditative in the Hindu way.

The political and mental chaos at the centre of *The Inheritance of Loss* could be linked to the desire of some characters to improve their social condition, overlooking their own

dharma. According to Hindu doctrine, *dharma* is not the only universal law which regulates everyone's life, but also the law of cause and effect – *karma* – and the specific function for each *varna*, caste; in other words, all individuals have a duty towards their profession and a precise role in society, and thus the community's health depends on how well the people belonging to the four *varnas* are performing their duties. Indian society has always been characterised by a strict distinction between social classes, but the British rule produced an overlap of Indian castes and Western social classes, proving a particular encounter of East and West. Hindu culture believes that social position is congenital and depends only on the good or bad actions performed in previous lives; thus, the faithful accept their status without objection or resistance, respecting this sacred hierarchy. On the other hand, Western classes allow social mobility because they are based on affluence and lifestyle; therefore, in theory even the poorest man has the possibility to improve his status. That is why some of the Indian characters in the novel are so fascinated by the open and promising Western society which, conversely to the caste system, allows social mobility without considering it a breach of the cosmic order. It is no accident that Indians who make this experience abroad come from the lower castes, as they have nothing to lose contrary to the higher classes like the Brahmins, who would lose their *varna* if they crossed the ocean.

The novel explores this theme making the characters' status explicit through accounts of their life and the contact between different castes. It is the case of Jemubhai and the cook, who appear in the first pages in the roles of master and servant, a vision that does not drift beyond reality. But the reader is gradually made aware of their specific class with flashbacks; so, though his great abode and exaggerated overconfidence, "Jemubhai Popatlal Patel had, in fact, been born to a family of the peasant caste" (63) who tried everything so their only son could study and have more opportunities in his life. His father – a poor man that trained people to become false witnesses – invested all the money he could on his education, neglecting his daughters. Of course, this behaviour is typical of low-class people who dream of a better life that, during the British Empire, was represented by the possibility of becoming English-like. Such a goal is achievable only through money; so, Jemubhai's father arranged a marriage between his son and Nimi, the daughter of the greatest supplier of the British army who succeeded in increasing his family's profit by offering prostitutes to English soldiers. Such an idea let him make so much money that "he began to acquire little fancies and foibles, to cultivate certain eccentricities that, just as he plotted, reiterated the security of his wealth and reinforced his honour all over again" (97). However, he reached the peak of his success only when "he, nothing but a tin shack shopkeeper by origin, but richer than all the Brahmins in town, hired a Brahmin cook" (97): Western materialism provided different standards of purity, no longer based on caste but on wealth and proximity to European figures, obscuring Indian traditions. Thus, Jemubhai and Nimi's father react towards the close caste system taking advantage of Western impact; they start feeling superior to all castes, even the highest, getting pleasure overpowering them. For example, this satisfaction is visible in the following passage about the judge: "the tight calendar had calmed him, as did the constant exertion of authority. How he relished his power over the classes that had kept his family pinned under their heels for centuries – like the stenographer, for example, who was a Brahmin" (68). Jemubhai rules over a Brahmin and Nimi's father did the same

employing a Brahmin cook: they gain false purity thanks to money, prestige and, surely enough, globalization.

The awareness of the apparently insuperable distance between high and low classes is underlined by the spinster Noni who, feeling disappointed about the judge's cook intimacy with Sai, thought that

it was important to draw the lines properly between classes or it harmed everyone on both sides of the great divide. Servants got all sorts of ideas, and then when they realized the world wasn't going to give them and their children what it gave to others, they got angry and resentful (74).

Probably for this reason, poor people going to the new world never quite achieve their goals but for paying dearly as victims of prejudice, and they are even forced to work as servants – their belonging to the lowest class cannot be changed, even abroad. In the specific case of Biju and Jemubhai, both of them expatriate because they long to make money and, consequently, to improve their lives. But they soon realise how wrong and groundless their expectations were – Biju leaving the USA and seeking refuge in the same simplicity and poverty from which he had previously run away, the latter shutting himself in an inner world with no way out, despising his own kind.

On the other hand, young Gyan suffers the contamination without leaving his home and his loved ones, thus offering an example of reverse migration in which India is no more the point of departure but the final goal. Being a Nepali migrant settled in the Darjeeling district, Gyan endeavours to improve his social condition within the Indian borders by learning a perfect English and adopting Western manners. Still the fate seems equally malevolent toward him; his decision to join the separatist Gorkhaland movement brings about only negative effects, such as the death of dozens of people and the exploitation of Bengali natives.

And yet there is a character in *The Inheritance of Loss* who persists in obeying his specific *dharma* and is not compromising to seek a better life for himself. I am referring to the nameless cook, the faithful servant of the judge Jemubhai, whose dharmic duty is to serve his masters. As Lipner remarks, Hindus tend “to be referred to by names designating family [...], clan [...], caste/sub-caste/hereditary social statum [...], village or occupation, depending on context” (1994: 22), and it is not by chance that the cook is the only character never being called by his name – at least until the penultimate page of the novel, when the readers finally acquaint themselves with his appellation, Lal, probably symbolising the end of the interior journey towards the self-awareness made by almost every man and woman in the story. Thanks to his humbleness and dedication, the cook is certainly the most coherent and conscious Hindu figure among the others. When his master charges him with the loss of the dog Mutt, he takes all the blame on himself and he feels so exposed that he starts confessing to the judge all the sins committed against his own *dharma*:

Sahib. I drink. I'm a bad man. Beat me. [...] I've been drinking I ate the same rice as you not the servant's rice but the Dehradun rice I ate the meat and lied I ate out of the

same pot I stole liquor from the army I made *chhang* I did the accounts differently for years I have cheated you in the accounts each and every day my money was dirty it was false sometimes I kicked Mutt I didn't take her for walks just sat by the side of the road smoked a *bidi* and came home I'm a bad man I watched out for nobody and nothing but myself – *Beat me* (327).

Among his sins, the very first he mentions are alcohol consumption and eating the same food of his master; this is very bizarre, since the judge is not interested in his servant's moral transgression as he is devoid of Hindu faith. In an analysis of Keśavdās' *Vijñānagītā*, Cavaliere pointed out that:

[...] food, which is symbolically considered as the cause of binding to the *samsara*, becomes the instrument to train one's moral strength. If the appeasement of one's own appetites, and metaphorically the fulfilment of one's own desires, is ruled only through the stomach it becomes deleterious. On the contrary, if it is filtered through judgement, it is sublimated into a practice (*sadhana*) that releases the self from its own desires and achieves the highest bliss (2016: 226).

Thus, the cook needs to confess everything in order to reduce the weight of his faults, regardless of Jemubhai's attitude; it is about his own salvation and, maybe, he is convinced that everything is being ruined due to his misbehaviour, consciously taking a universal blame. In order to not destroy his own moral integrity, he does not adapt to foreign cultures and opposes any external interference upon his interests – he has no name and represents a category of people focused on achieving their own goals in the struggle for *moksha*, the liberation from the *samsara* cycle rather than achieving success in the eyes of the world. Symbolically, the novel ends with a heavy rain, a sort of purifying downpour capable of erasing the characters' sins. This is a clear reference to the universal symbolism of water which is shared also by Hinduism, as the *Atharva Veda Samihita* state saying "from any evil we have done, act of impurity or sin, let waters purge me and from all that comes from Agni breaker-up" (Griffith 1895-1896: Book XII: 40).

Another Hindu principle that offers a particular perspective of Kiran Desai's narrative is the existential balance – the universe existing thanks to the perennial balance between opposites, which alternate to make the world go on without collapsing. More particularly, the love story between Sai and Gyan may dramatise the Hindu archetype of all the oppositions – the relationship between Shiva and Devi. In order to actuate the world, the divine couple continuously needs to separate and conciliate, thus avoiding the excessive increase of such a power capable of destroying the entire universe. Similarly, Sai and Gyan's relation is unstable, it goes through an initial approach and the subsequent estrangement. At the beginning of the affair their love is uncontrollable, occupying their minds and hearts; yet, despite the noble sentiment, this condition has negative effects as it distracts attention from 'mundane' duties. Therefore, Gyan leaves her beloved to join the Gorkhas in order to give a historical and social dignity to his Nepalese ancestors. While discussing with the rioters for the first time, he feels "a moment of shame remembering his tea parties with Sai on the

veranda [...] and even worse, the small warm space they inhabited together" (168), as this distracted him from the common cause – like Shiva, Gyan separates himself from Sai to help the world. During the disunion, however, political turmoil becomes more and more dangerous, plundering properties and killing innocent people; the situation is collapsing and it is no coincidence that Gyan longs for a reconciliation with Sai. Symbolically, during his absence the latter meditates upon the love for her companion, like a perfect Parvati, the only difference being the outcome: while the girl concludes that her life and interests are too different from Gyan's, the divine counterpart's meditation is focused on gathering as *tapas* (spiritual purity achieved through penance) as possible in order to appropriately meet her lover again. However, towards the end of the story, Gyan seems prepared to make every effort to please Sai, hoping for reconciliation. The novel leaves the door open to every possible development, appeasement included.

It is also worth considering the Hindu symbolism behind the appearance/disappearance of Mount Kanchenjunga in the novel. This mountain can be easily connected to Mount Meru, the mythical abode of god Brahma, who is actually the personification of the supreme *Brahman* – the cosmic unity and supreme force of the universe, not an anthropomorphic god in fact. Between Mount Meru and the secular mountains there is a relationship that is at once symbolic and hierarchical, since the latter are reflections of the Cosmic Mountain on earth. Therefore, Mount Kanchenjunga is one of the representations of the mythological mass, too: its five peaks, for example, could symbolise the five divine forms through which the cosmic unity Brahma reveals itself, namely Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, Surya and Ganesha. Furthermore, the analogy between the two mountains is even more evident if we compare the description of Mount Meru in the *Mahabharata* with the portrayal of Mount Kanchenjunga in *The Inheritance of Loss*. In the *Mahabharata* we read: "[the] globular mountain called Meru [is] made of gold. Effulgent as the morning sun, it is like fire without smoke" (Ganguli 1883-1896, Book VI: 331). Similarly, the following words are taken from the very last page of Desai's novel: "The five peaks of Kanchenjunga turned golden with the kind of luminous light that made you feel, if briefly, that truth was apparent" (331).

These two passages seem to refer to the same mountain, so golden because enlightened by the sun. Yet, throughout the novel Mount Kanchenjunga is always referred to as surrounded by clouds and fog, its clear view being quite impossible for the characters. The *Mahabharata* teaches that the mountain is "the abode of persons who have achieved the merit of righteousness" (Ganguli 1883-1896, Book VI: 14), and since almost all the characters of the novel feel guilty for their own sins, they cannot relish the view of the mount. Only at the end of the narrative events all the five peaks of Kanchenjunga succeed in peeping out from the clouds, glowing in all their splendour and becoming a suitable background for the reconciliation between the cook and his son Biju – as well as they and their Indianness. Undoubtedly the boy's choice of coming back home and embracing his Hindu identity again has led him to a renewed moral integrity.

The constant presence of the mist in *The Inheritance of Loss* suggests a connection to yet another typical Hindu element. The mist, in fact, could be the novelistic equivalent for the Veil of Maya, that is the illusion which prevents mortals from facing the truth. All the

characters of the novel believe that they own the truth but actually they are incapable of discerning right from wrong: not only the Veil of Maya physically obscures their sight but also spiritually obnubilates their moral rectitude, confusing them with false principles.

The previous paragraphs deal more or less with a common theme, that is, the unity of opposites. This idea expresses the dualistic nature of the universe which includes both the consciousness and the matter, thus implying the soul is the absolute reality, indivisible and eternal – the *Brahman*. In order to see the truth behind appearances, human beings have to control and overcome their mind which is capable of deluding the consciousness and make one believe that the visible world is the only possible reality – the veil of Maya will disappear thanks to an intellectual process made up of deep meditations capable of transcending the tangible part of the individual, mind included.

Desai's migration to the USA can be compared to that of her characters, her novel about Bengal thus being a sort of homecoming. Like Biju, she accepts her origins, including Hindu ethics and symbols in her story – after all, writing a novel responding only to Western standards would have been an act of treason like the ones she decries. What we know for sure is that these cultural themes are treated by the author with exceptional spontaneity, becoming a basic and integral part of the development of the story: she merges Indian and Western traditions seamlessly, resulting in a harmonious fusion consistent with the 7-year process of maturation she underwent while writing her novel. Accordingly, this novel especially depicts people born in India who come in contact with Western culture and appear incapable of – sometimes willingly – forgetting or hiding their roots: however hard they try, their Indianness is always evident because it comes out through each garment worn, each word pronounced, each action performed, each mental association. Consequently, *The Inheritance of Loss* could be defined as a meditative novel which makes visible how people turn their immaterial thoughts into material actions, that is how the personal store of ethos, culture and tradition cannot be buried in so far it comes out subconsciously at any time. In other words, Desai's novel – as other diasporic and postcolonial novels – “thematize[s] the challenge of how the ‘west’ can understand the ‘east’” (Ratti 2013: 4) following the post-secular theory: this is not about a return to religion, but a recovery of the ‘visceral’ and the ‘ancestral’ that overcomes the rationalistic and enlightened view brought and supported by the West.

The heritage of Hindu values is something innate and personal: each individual decides whether to repudiate its own origins or become world citizens without hiding its ancestral background. Feuerbach once said that a man is what he eats; in this case a man is rather what he writes and the *The Inheritance of Loss* is an original and compelling demonstration.

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Maria Camilla Di Tullio is a secondary school teacher and an independent researcher.
m.camilla.ditullio@gmail.com

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Mattia Mantellato

Rooting Identities: Derek Walcott's Connection(s) with the Caribbean Environment

Abstract I: Questo articolo intende dimostrare come i concetti di rappresentazione identitaria e di narrazione ecologica s'intersechino e si condizionino nella definizione dei personaggi e delle storie che ruotano attorno al capolavoro dell'autore caraibico Derek Walcott, ovvero il suo *Omeros*. A partire dall'utilizzo di un campo di studi innovativo come l'ecologia letteraria, l'articolo prende in esame l'importanza dell'ambiente naturale, e in particolar modo animistico, all'interno del poema. I protagonisti walcottiani, persi in un lembo di mondo che non sentono loro, rintracciano le proprie radici identitarie grazie all'aiuto della natura, del mondo animale e vegetale. Dopo aver esaminato il plurimo contesto relazionale entro il quale l'autore opera, l'articolo analizza due episodi emblematici del poema per dimostrare come la cultura caraibica riscopra e interpreti i significati e i simboli del proprio ibridismo culturale attraverso l'aiuto dell'ambiente circostante, una "natura" che non dimentica e ha il potere di lenire le ferite di un passato travagliato.

Abstract II: This article aims to demonstrate how the notions of 'identity representation' and 'ecological narrative' complement each other in defining both the characters and stories that Caribbean writer Derek Walcott sketches in his well-known epic *Omeros*. In tune with the theories that have shaped "literary ecology", this study displays the symbolic role the natural and animistic world plays in the poem. Walcottian protagonists are lost in an "edge of the world" they perceive as 'hostile'. By presenting the hybrid cultural background that characterises the West Indian "space", this article addresses two emblematic episodes of Walcottian *Omeros* and focuses on the uncovering of truths the Caribbean land has concealed from human understanding. It is only through reconciliation with "nature" that once-colonised peoples are capable of accepting their colonial legacy and finally setting down "roots" in a place they can call "home".

1.1. Introduction: Caribbean Hybrid Society and its Relation with the Environment

Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott is a prolific writer from St. Lucia, a tiny island located in the heart of the Caribbean Sea and mostly inhabited by ethnically divided groups of peoples and communities. Even though the region was firstly 'discovered' by Spanish explorers, it rapidly became the privileged stage of recurrent disputes between the imperialistic powers of England and France, which wanted to take control of its strategic military position. As

Treves recounts in his West-Indian historical chronicles, St. Lucia “was held [seven times] by the English, and seven times by the French” (Treves 1928: 109), before it eventually became part of the British empire in 1814. European settlers transported black labour slaves from Africa to the islands and forced them to live and work in the sugar-cane plantations established all over the Caribbean colonies. As a consequence of this historical legacy, today’s St. Lucians are mostly individuals coming from different ethnical and social-cultural backgrounds and share the same feature of being confined in a sort of “hybrid” and continuously shifting “representation of identity”¹. As John Thieme aptly points out, the Caribbean archipelago is the land where an interesting and overwhelming “cultural cross-pollination” takes place (Thieme 1999: 1). This aspect has been underlined not only within the domain of postcolonial literary critique but also in other areas of the humanities because the formation and the perpetuation of a heterogeneous community implies the settlement and the ‘rooting’ of that same community in a shared and communal space and area.

In the light of this perspective, many critics have explored how Walcott’s poetical endeavour tries to attain a compromise bringing together different forms of identifications while engaging with the crucial questions affecting plural and various cultural groups, such as the different approaches to the burden of a colonial past or, more interestingly, the assimilation of languages formerly imposed as national and inclusive modes of communication.

Although the sketching of the contours of a “Caribbean identity” has proven one of the most urgent tasks critics and scholars had to investigate in the aftermath of Caribbean literary success, in recent years the attention has shifted towards other meaningful peculiarities of the ‘Caribbean singularity’. In particular, scholars have focused on the intimate relation Caribbean writers have with the Caribbean land. This is not only because most writers and poets are aware of the fact that the ‘New World’ landscape is an unavoidable subject to draw from but also because, in the domain of critical theory, *environmental discourse* has gained major attention as it encompasses multiple historical and literary concerns and addresses issues relating to the future of human destiny and survival.

In this sense, Caribbean authors have proven creative in promoting a parallelism between the prerogatives of “defying identity” with the issues regarding the relation between human(s) and the natural environment. Finding themselves in an uncontaminated and unknown territory, the Europeans, the transported Africans and the Asian indentured labourers² brought to the West Indies their plural and various traditions capturing immediately the dissonance existing between their former natural heritage and the Antillean land. Migrating to a new territory meant also coming face to face with a new landscape and an un-familiar flora and fauna. The general perception of the first colonisers was that of an alienating and

¹ In the introduction to *Pensiero Caraibico*, by Andrea Gazzoni (2016), the author examines the multifarious and different perceptions Caribbean societies and individuals have with regard to their indeterminable and ever-shifting “identity”.

² Indentured labour was a system of bond labour instituted after the abolition of slavery. Workers were recruited for sugar, cotton and tea plantations in British colonies in Africa, West Indies and South East Asia. From 1834 to the end of World War I, Britain transported about 2 million Indian indentured workers to its colonies. See: <http://www.striking-women.org/module/map-major-south-asian-migration-flows/indentured-labour-south-asia-1834-1917> (consulted on 26/04/2018).

estranging region difficult to “dominate” and relate to. As an example of this attitude I want to recall the negative connotation of the title the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss gave to his collection of exotic adventures in the primordial territories of central America during the 1950s: *Tristes Tropiques*, the “Sad Tropics”. Derek Walcott confutes this viewpoint directly in his collection of essays *What the Twilight Says* when he argues:

The Caribbean is looked at with elegiac pathos, a prolonged sadness to which Lévi-Strauss has supplied an epigraph: *Tristes Tropiques*. Their *tristesse* derives from an attitude to the Caribbean dusk, to rain, to uncontrollable vegetation [...]. The mood is understandable, the melancholy as contagious as fever of a sunset, like the gold fronds of diseased coconut palms, but there is something alien and ultimately wrong in the way such a sadness, even a morbidity, is described by English, French, or some of our exiled writers. It relates to a misunderstanding of the light and the people on whom the light falls (Walcott 1998: 76).

In this passage Walcott agrees on the immediate impression the colonisers derived from the sight of the Caribbean landscape, that of a “melancholic land” governed by “uncontrollable vegetation”, but he wisely denounces the incapacity of the observers to understand its “light” and thus the “true meaning” of those territories. In a profound reasoning, the poet is challenging the western canonical environmental interpretation, suggesting the need to interpret and decode the inner and implicit symbols that same place conceals from human eyes through a different awareness and strategy. In *Caribbean Discourses*, Édouard Glissant, one of the most acute observers of Caribbean society and the first to define its intricate agglomerate of communities as *creolised*, shares the same thinking as Walcott when he points out that in the West-Indies:

The relationship with the land, one that is even more threatened because the community is alienated from that land, becomes so fundamental in this discourse that landscape in the work [of Caribbean writers] stops being merely decorative or supportive and emerges as a full character. Describing the landscape is not enough. The individual, the community, the land are inextricable in the process of creating history. Landscape is a character in this process. Its deepest meanings need to be understood (Glissant 1999: 105-106).

1.2. Wounded identities in Walcott’s *Omeros*

The intrinsic connection Derek Walcott establishes with the Caribbean environment is easily recognisable in his mostly celebrated masterpiece, his epic *Omeros*. In the work, the relation the main characters entertain with the natural environment is extremely elaborate and symbolic. The poem recounts the stories of a multiple spectrum of identities dealing essentially with the issue of finding “their own roots”.

Achille³ and Hector are two black fishermen vying for the love of the beautiful waitress

³ In *Omeros* (1990) Walcott depicts the adventures and lives of several characters that recall the heroes of Homer’s *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. The re-writing of western classical literature is a well-known praxis in the domain

Helen. They both come from African descendants and need to come to terms not only with their own *aboriginal* origins but also with the destiny the island has chosen for them. From the beginning of the poem, in fact, the landscape ‘sends’ signals to their troubled questioning of life, inciting them to take the way of the blue sea. In the following section of the article I will analyse the beginning of the poem, where Walcott depicts a highly symbolic ritual the Caribbean seamen carry out in order to establish an indissoluble relationship with the land, i.e. the act of felling the trees so to “transform” them into canoes. This simple act takes on a significant meaning because in doing so the sailors seal off a reciprocal pact with nature, while turning away from it could lead to regretful consequences. This happens particularly to the character of Hector when he decides to abandon sea-life in order to “gain more money” and ends up accepting a job as a taxi driver, working for the exploitative and environmentally damaging industry of tourism. In this way the character corrupts not only his soul but also the intimate connection he had created with the land and so, towards the end of the epic, he perishes in a car accident.

Another important character Walcott decided to include in his work is the ambivalent figure of the crippled Philoctete. In direct contrast to his classical counterpart though, the Walcottian protagonist is not a marginalised figure, isolated from the society that surrounds him, but embodies the true essence of that same community and world. Philoctete is an outcast suffering from a symbolic “wound” he received from a “rusted anchor”. The bruise epitomises the agonies and injustices Caribbean people had to endure under colonial oppression and subjugation. It is only through the help of Ma Kilman, an enigmatic and eccentric obeah priestess⁴, that Philoctete will be able to cure his sore and finally be able to rejoice in the festivities of the island. Getting rid of the wound signifies for the character the freeing of himself from the burden of collective and historical pain affecting the “identity” of his fellow compatriots. As I will go on to present in the second passage I have chosen to analyse in this article, the most interesting event in Philoctete’s story concerns the rather peculiar quest Ma Kilman has to undertake to find the healing ingredients for his cure. The tenant of the symbolic “No Pain Café” will have to recover her instinctual and natural memory in order to read the “language of nature”, the only bearer of the truth, capable of helping the recovery of West-Indian integrity and wholeness. As Jahan Ramazani has rightly pointed out in one of his articles on Walcottian *Omeros*:

of post-colonial literature. For Caribbean writers, this exemplifies their “freedom” from canonical forms of expression while, at the same time, providing a possible alternative for the same subject or story. In *Omeros*, for instance, the characters cannot be identified as “heroes” but rather as “common people” of the region: sailors, workers, waitresses, retirees and so on. This would partly explain the reason why the character of “Achilles” becomes simply “Achille” in the Walcottian epic poem, thus responding to an ideal of the *creolization* of the text. The same concept applies to the title of the poem: *Omeros* stands for “Homer” but also for the symbols the observer finds in the Caribbean setting and landscape (*O* the sea’s invocation, *mer* mother and sea, *os* grey bone and sibilant surf, as Walcott explains in his verses).

⁴ In *Omeros* the character of Ma Kilman adopts the role of the wise woman, the “healer” of the community. She is the owner of the “No Pain Café” and it is not a coincidence that she keeps helping the “wounded” protagonists of the poem, such as Philoctete, Seven Seas and Major Plunkett. Ma Kilman embodies a West-Indian obeah priestess as her persona and practices are not linked to a single religion but rather to “a system of beliefs rooted in Creole notions of spirituality, which acknowledges the existence and power of the supernatural world”, as Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert aptly assert in their introduction (2003: 136).

[Philoctete's scar is] a mysteriously unhealed wound that reflects the condition of the land and indeed of the entire region. Like the Fisher King in T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, Philoctete is a synecdochic figure for a general loss, injury, and impotence that must be healed for the (is)lands to be set in order. Like many vegetation deities, Philoctete requires the ministrations of a female counterpart to be healed: the obeah woman or sibyl Ma Kilman (Ramazani 1997: 410).

These two examples clearly show how Caribbean writing and the work of Derek Walcott in particular are closely embedded within a literary discourse that pays significant attention to the issues concerning the natural and the environmental awareness and its desirable preservation. Therefore, when looking for a coherent theoretical framework for the analysis of these two episodes, my choice naturally fell on the analytical features and stylistic tools provided within the field of 'ecolinguistics'. Specifically, I believe that Walcottian verses are compelling illustrations of what Arran Stibbe defines as "beneficial discourses", i.e. "discourses that convey ideologies which can actively encourage people to protect the systems that support life" (Stibbe 2015: 30). In his comprehensive study dealing with stories that promote critical attentiveness towards the protection of biological and bioethical diversity, Stibbe highlights important contributions coming from the study of other distinctive scholars from this research area, as in the following extract:

Traditional and indigenous cultures around the world provide a source for searching for beneficial discourses: after all, there are cultures which have survived for thousands of years without destroying the ecosystems that they depend on for their survival (Chawla 2001: 115).

Aboriginal communities did not believe in the human possession of the land and most of the groups thought that the natural elements and symbols were representative of a powerful and transcendental spiritual force.

Within the field of cultural studies, another important scholar who emphasises the human endeavour in re-establishing a connection with the natural world is the Jewish-American anthropologist and social activist Riane Eisler⁵. In one of her works entitled *The Power of Partnership* (Eisler: 2002), she has focused on seven complementary ways through which humanity could attain a transformative (r)evolution in order to reject the violent un-ethical dominator paradigm it is accustomed to perpetrate not only in relation with the other(s) but also within itself and towards the non-human world. According to Eisler, the power of communal and beneficial feeling of *partnership* will lead our societies to find a new ethical value, respectful of difference(s), peaceful and sustainable, a voice that could 'echo' the link sustaining the ecological network of life.

⁵ Riane Eisler is a cultural historian, system scientist, educator and author whose work on cultural transformation has inspired scholars and social activists all around the world. Eisler's 1987 bestseller *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* was published in 23 foreign languages. She is the President of the Center for Partnership Studies, dedicated to research and education on the *partnership model*. See: <http://www.rianeeisler.com>, <https://centerforpartnership.org> and http://all.uniud.it/?page_id=60 (consulted on 01/09/2018).

While western dominator cultural paradigms have tended to consider 'nature' either as a "locus amoenus" or, worse, as an element to be exploited in favour of economic progress, postcolonial cultures and writers have tried to promote a different, protective attitude towards the space they live in, as they recognise not only its life-sustaining significance but also its invaluable importance as a reassuring place for "transplanted" and culturally diverse individuals.

It is interesting to note, in fact, how in western literary criticism the different approach undertaken by these new *liminal literatures*⁶ has been recognised as an "ecocritic of the Global South", meaning in particular "the tendency to interpret the role of ecology in the light of a convergence between the history of humanity and that of the environment, attenuating in this way reciprocal conflicts" (Scaffai 2017: 69-70, my translation).

2.1. The Awakening of Nature and the Beginning of the Epic

This section explores the opening scene of the Walcottian epic *Omeros*, not only because it strikingly represents the first imaginative drawing of the Caribbean setting, but also because it exemplifies the meaningful features decipherable from Walcottian ideological writing, being in particular the representation of a drifting and unstable conception of 'identity':

This is how, one sunrise, we cut down them canoes.
Philoctete smiles for the tourists, who try taking
his soul with their cameras. Once wind bring the news

to the *laurier-cannelles*, their leaves start shaking
the minute the axe of sunlight hit the cedars,
because they could see the axes in our own eyes.

Wind lift the ferns. They sound like the sea that feed us
fishermen all our life, and the ferns nodded "Yes,
the trees have to die" [...] (Walcott 2008: 12).

Even if the act of 'cutting the trees' is here represented as a sacred ritual foregrounding its urgent and practical need for human survival, in these very first lines the reader is struck by the anthropomorphised and sensible 'consciousness' of the vegetation. In most of Walcottian writings the natural environment has the capacity of feeling, expressing and remembering much more acutely than the humans. Trees are the oldest inhabitants of the region; they were there before the arrival of the aboriginal tribes, they have witnessed disputes, wars and bloodshed and thus they represent the true custodians of the land. They are strongly linked with that 'particular space', that edge of the world in which people have been 'transplanted' and forced to migrate to.

Significant also is Walcott's choice to begin his epic with the rising of the day. This is, in fact, the moment of the "ordinary" (i.e. daily life) the poet prefers while working and com-

⁶ See for instance: Bhabha 1990, Britton 1999, McLeod 2010, Vasta et al. 2011 and Walcott 1998.

posing. As he pointed out in several interviews, the awakening of living nature corresponds to that rare moment, that surprising and inexplicable *awe*, through which humans are able to experience a profound connection with the world they inhabit. As Barnard Don recalls, in “his Nobel Prize acceptance address, *The Antilles*, [Walcott] said”:

There is a force of exultation, a celebration of luck, when a writer finds himself a witness to the early morning of a culture that is defying itself, branch by branch, leaf by leaf, in that self-defying dawn, which is why, especially at the edge of the sea, it is good to make a ritual of sunrise. Then the noun, the ‘Antilles’ ripples like brightening water, and the sound of leaves, palm fronds and birds are the sound of fresh dialect, the native tongue (Walcott quoted in Barnard 2014: 82).

Moreover, as we can discern from the beginning of his epic, Walcott does not abandon the common language of his people (i.e. the French Creole) to define and name the natural elements of his story. While the wind brings the news – of the cutting – to other plants, the poet records the *laurier-cannelles*⁷ frightening reaction. This is one of many specific West-Indian plants Walcott does not neglect to describe and talk about throughout his entire literary production. As subjective and independent actors, the natural elements have the right to say what they think and even take irreversible choices: “Yes, the trees have to die”.

In presenting the setting of his epic Walcott also promptly introduces one of the key figures of his mythical story, the ‘wounded Philoctete’, while he is having a conversation with some tourists:

For some extra silver, under a sea-almond,
he [Philoctete] shows them a scar made by a rusted anchor,
rolling down one trouser-leg up with the rising moan

of a conch. It has puckered like the corolla
of a sea-urchin. He does not explain its cure.
“It have some things” – he smiles – “worth more than a dollar”.

He has left it to a garrulous waterfall
to pour out his secret down La Sorcière, since
the tall laurels fell, for the ground-dove’s mating call

to pass on its note to the blue, tacit mountains
whose talkative brooks, carrying it to the sea,
turn into idle pools where the clear minnows shoot

⁷ In the open-access database of the University of the West-Indies, the reader can find the various and colourful names Caribbean people attribute to the *laurier-cannelles*: *bois doux isabelle*, *bois doux noir*, *bois negresse*, *Isabel sweetwood*, *laurier fer*, *laurier petite feuille*, *laurier riviere*, *loyé* while its scientific and technical name records it under the label of *Ocotea cernua*. See: <http://ecflora.cavehill.uwi.edu/plantsearch.php> (consulted on 15/05/2018).

and an egret stalks the reeds with one rusted cry
 as it stabs and stabs the mud with one lifting foot.
 Then silence is sawn in half by a dragonfly

as eels sign their names along the clear bottom-sand,
 when the sunrise brightens the river's memory
 and waves of huge ferns are nodding to the sea's sound.

[...] an iguana hears the axes, clouding each lens

over its lost name, when the hunched island was called
 "Iounalao", "Where the iguana is found" [...] (Walcott 2008: 12-14).

Philoctete's psychological mark is described through an evocative metaphorical language that bonds it together with images coming from the Caribbean Sea: the wound looks like the "corolla / of a sea-urchin". The symbolic imagery continues in the recalling of different aquatic elements: the "garrulous waterfall", the "talkative brooks" and the "idle pools". These ever-flowing elements are not simple natural phenomena but they epitomise the motifs for Caribbean collective redemption: Philoctete, and all the community he stands for, will be finally freed from their curse after having accepted their 'true identity' and after being re-baptised through a cleansing bath. Another interesting and meaningful interpretation of this passage has been given by Barnard when he argues that these watery metaphors:

[...] are more than metaphor. They also recall the West African/Caribbean spirits of nature, particularly Mami Wata or Maman Dlo, the female spirit who hides in a waterfall and protects the rivers and forests against the abuse of men. She is seen as both the cause of and only cure for sickness (Barnard 2014: 83).

The island's landscape, as much as the animal world living on it, are direct witnesses of Caribbean human agonies. Through its animistic cries and movements, the environment is able to replicate the painful *amnesia* that has prevented the immediate healing of the people. The land reflects the problems of the human world: the iguana has forgotten its primordial aboriginal name while the egret tries to walk through an intricate and muddy area which prevents it from feeling stable and balanced.

A sense of precariousness pervades the entire scene: the flight of a light-weighted dragonfly breaks the dormant tranquillity of the forest. Everything contributes to the replication of the never-ending fluctuation and unsteadiness of the "Caribbean reality". The animal and the human worlds are tightly associated in the impermanence of their precarious existences while, at the same time, they are linked in the fight for establishing roots and determining their inevitable presence.

2.2. Healing identities through the sacred power of nature

The second passage of the epic I have decided to analyse relates to the moment in which the obeah priestess Ma Kilman leaves for a quest through the Caribbean forest in order to find the curative ingredients for Philoctete's wound. This occurs towards the end of the epic when any hope of recovery seems lost. Following the path marked by the Antillean ants, the obeah priestess finally uncovers the curative root or herb: an African sea-swift had carried its seed centuries ago while crossing the ocean. It is through a symbolical and holistic re-connection with the natural world that the priestess accomplishes her spiritual task:

The wild, wire-haired, and generously featured
apothecary of the caverned prophetess
began. Ma Kilman unpinned the black, red-berried

straw-hat with its false beads, lifted the press
of the henna wig, made of horsehair, from the mark
on her forehead [...]

[...]. Her hair sprung free as the moss. Ants scurried
through the wiry curls, barring, then passing each other

the same message with scribbling fingers and forehead
touching forehead. Ma Kilman bent hers forward,
and as her lips moved the ants, her mossed skull heard

the ants talking the language of her great-grandmother,
the gossip of a distant market, and she understood,
the way we follow our thoughts without any language,

why the ants sent her this message to come to the wood
where the wound of the flower, its gangrene, its rage
festering for centuries, reeked with corrupted blood,

seeped the pustular drops instead of sunlit dew
into the skull, the brain of the earth, in the mind
ashamed of its flesh [...] (Walcott 2008: 412-414).

In order to recover the powerful union connecting humanity to the environment, Ma Kilman has to undress and take off her fake ornaments. The ceremony could be read as a meaningful dropping of constructed values of 'being', a sort of 'decolonisation' of the body⁸:

⁸ Ma Kilman is aware of the fact that she has lost the power to discern and fully comprehend the knowledge and wisdom of her ancestors. Like most of the characters in St. Lucia, the obeah priestess is living a 'divided existence': she attends Catholic mass and dresses in a western-like manner (she wears ornaments and clothes typical of a West-Indian woman such as wigs and stockings) but she does not ignore the fact that she belongs to another primordial and different culture. In this sense, Ma Kilman is imbued with the spiritual values of

the priestess needs to retrieve her primordial and uncorrupted 'form' to become 'part of the land'. The animal world finally recognises her as an enlightening source of knowledge and as a prophetess of the truth. The ants are not afraid to run over her, they feel her ancestral power and so they decide to unveil the secret lingering over the herb. The flower has been bleeding "for centuries", wounded in its animistic living lymph. It has experienced the "corruption" and the transformation of the land and shared the destiny of transported African people. The flower has "seeped [...] pustular drops instead of sunlit dew".

The relation connecting the human and the natural world is here clearly and emphatically displayed: the flower and the communities transplanted to this "edge of the world" are intrinsically interfacing. The 'humanised' land is symbolically "ashamed of its flesh" as much as its living inhabitants. As Walcott points out in much of his critique:

History is there, in Antillean geography, in the vegetation itself. The sea sighs with the drowned from the Middle Passage, the butchery of its aborigines, Carib and Aruac and Taino, bleeds in the scarlet of the immortelle, and even the actions of surf on sand cannot erase the African memory (Walcott 1998: 81).

Having discerned the causes preventing Philoctete's recovery from the unhealed wound, the obeah priestess Ma Kilman calls on the power of nature to help her remember the atrocities of Caribbean history. It is only through redemption that her community will be able to unchain itself from the burden of European tormented subjugation. Although he has always professed the need for a "collective amnesia" in regard to colonial atrocities and their harmful consequences, Walcott is here disclosing his psychologically repressed feelings and agonies:

[...] She [Ma Kilman] rubbed dirt in her hair, she prayed
in the language of the ants and her grandmother, to lift

the sore from its roots in Philoctete's rotting shin,
from the flower on his shin-blade, puckering inwards;
she scraped the earth with her nails, and the sun

put the clouds to its ears as her screech reeled backwards
to its beginning, from the black original cave
of the sibyl's mouth, her howl made the emerald lizard

lift one clawed leg, remembering the sound.
Philoctete shook himself up from the bed of his grave,
and felt the pain draining, as surf-flower sink through sand (Walcott 2008: 414).

different beliefs and the taking off of her clothes in this passage might suggest a symbolic 'dropping' of one of her double-sided personalities. The syncretism of this emblematic figure is also highlighted in the following lines, where the ancient gods of the forest are incapable of 'connecting' with her: "[...] so the deities swarmed in the thicket / of the grove, waiting to be known by name; but she [Ma Kilman] / had never learnt them, though their sounds were within her, / subdued in the rivers of her blood" (Walcott 2008: 410-412).

The mystical and redeeming ritual has been accomplished. Through the help and the guidance of 'nature', the Sibyl has initiated the journey for communal and individual recovery. The pain has been drained and transferred from the entrails of Caribbean land to "Philoctete's rotting shin". The union of once allied spiritual entities (the human and the environment) has been recovered and restored.

The ultimate task will be the washing off from Philoctete's shin the "shame" of his people. Having returned from the woods with the needed ingredients, including the seed of the "corrupted" flower, Ma Kilman prepares in an emblematic oval cauldron (that recalls the shape of a woman's womb) the redemptive and healing bath. Philoctete is immersed and, once again, while using a powerful metaphor that connects the prepared concoction to the beneficial washing of the Caribbean Sea, Walcott finally unchains Philoctete (and with him, allegorically, all his community) from the weight of his 'hybrid identity' and from his intricate relationship with the colonial past.

3. Concluding Remarks

The analysis of these two significant episodes shows how Walcottian writing reflects upon the arduous relationship linking Caribbean communities with their 'adopted land'. In the aftermath of their arrival, European colonisers did not only wipe out the aboriginal tribes that originally populated the islands, but they also forced multitudes of ethnically divided groups of peoples to migrate to those remote territories. These aspects had important consequences in the definition of a "Caribbean representational identity" firstly because the transplanted individuals did not know how to "relate" to a dimensional space that differed greatly from their land of origin and secondly because they did not feel that same place as their "home". From the beginning of colonialism, the relationship with the natural environment thus proved troublesome. Moreover, the European imperialistic powers brought immediate change to that same land, breaking and de-constructing its balance and conformity:

There is probably no other region in the world that has been more radically altered in terms of human and botanic migration, transplantation, and settlement than the Caribbean. [...] For this reason, writers have often articulated a *poetic relation with the land* that is consistent with the highest aims of sustainability (DeLoughrey, Gosson & Handley 2005: 1-4).

In this perspective, Walcott's work is a striking example of what critics have been identifying as an "ecocritical and sustainable" type of writing. In his poems the author firmly denounces the damaging exploitation of the Caribbean land foregrounding at the same time not only its uncorrupted and "virginal beauty" but also its possible representational revitalisation:

It has taken me over thirty years, and my race hundreds, to feel the fibres spread from the splayed toes and grip this earth, the arms knot into boles and put out leaves. When that begins, this is the beginning of season, cycle time. The noise my leaves make is my language. In it is tunnelled the roar of seas of a lost ocean. It is a fresh

sound. Let me not be ashamed to write this, because it supports this thesis, that our only true apprehensions are through metaphor, that old botanical names, the old processes cannot work for us. Let's walk (Walcott 2005)⁹.

For Walcott, the Caribbean environment as much as the heterogenous communities living in it share the possibility to 're-shape' and 're-mould' history because they have the power to describe it in a "new light", while stepping aside from a damaging anthropocentric type of discourse. Starting from this challenging viewpoint, Walcott has elaborated an original and renewing "Adamic" dialectic, i.e. a substantial re-naming of the 'Caribbean space' in which he and his community live. Through this highly attentive and cooperative approach, the author has succeeded in opening up the path to a rehabilitative environmental balancing of his territory, while also highlighting the possibility of a communal and favourable reconciliation between the Caribbeans and 'their land'.

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⁹ "Isla Incognita", an essay by Derek Walcott written in 1972, was published for the first time in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture* (DeLoughrey, Gosson & Handley 2005) as the authors point out in their introduction.

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Mattia Mantellato is a dancer, choreographer and performing artist. He graduated at “La Scala Ballet Academy” in Milan (2005). For seven seasons dancer at the National Theater of Prague, he performed in more than 10 countries in Europe, in China (EXPO 2010), at the Biennale of Venice and Mittelfest. He graduated in Languages and Literatures at the University of Udine: Bachelor Degree (2014) and Master Degree (2017). He currently teaches ballet and is a PhD student in Language and Literary Studies at the University of Udine where he adopts an interdisciplinary approach to study the connections between ballet and literature. mattia.mantellato@gmail.com

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Pierpaolo Martino

The Ground Beneath Her Feet: Myth, Migration and Identity in Salman Rushdie

Abstract I: In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) Salman Rushdie indaga temi complessi quali migrazione, mito, identità e celebrità, attraverso una narrazione che con-fonde mitologia antica e cultura pop contemporanea. Più precisamente il romanzo rappresenta da un lato uno spazio in cui i miti classici (uno tra tutti quello di *Orfeo*) migrano verso forme nuove, dando corpo a complesse fisionomie identitarie, dall'altro un narrare della musica e dei musicisti pop in quanto miti contemporanei o meglio metafore contemporanee della migrazione stessa. Mito, migrazione e identità sono dunque le forze discorsive principali del *musical novel* rushdiano, forze attraverso cui è possibile comprendere la fase attuale della globalizzazione.

Abstract II: *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* – Salman Rushdie's 1999 cult novel – stands as a very rich and complex cultural text, which today should be praised for the originality and intelligence of the author's literary invention and for offering a crucial key for the understanding of essential aspects of our present. In the novel the Anglo-Indian writer investigates such complex topics as myth, migration, identity and celebrity, through an extremely rich narrative, which mixes ancient mythology and contemporary pop culture. More specifically the novel represents a space in which ancient myths (namely, the myth of Orpheus) migrate into new forms – shaping complex identities – and at the same time a rich narrative about music and pop musicians as contemporary myths, or better metaphors, of migration. It might be argued that myth, migration and identity represent the main themes and discursive forces of Rushdie's *musical* narrative; these very forces are, in our perspective, essential in order to understand and respond to the present moment of the globalised era.

In the first issue of *Celebrity Studies*, Holmes and Redmond focus on the relationship between stardom and celebrity within the realm of popular culture, making a distinction between the two terms and noting how:

Film studies in particular has historically used the term 'star' [...] to refer to a representational interaction between the on/off-screen persona. In comparison works outside film studies have more often used the term 'celebrity' to indicate a broad category, which defines the contemporary state of being famous. [...] but what generally

unites the work on stardom and celebrity is the agreement that celebrity or fame does not reside in the individual: it is constituted discursively 'by the way in which the individual is represented' (Holmes & Redmond 2010: 4).

The issue of representation is of paramount importance in any discourse *on* and *by* Salman Rushdie. In *The Golden House* (2017), his latest novel, which includes multiple references to films and film stars, Rushdie engages in a complex effort of representation of America's nationwide identity crisis and of its obsession with celebrity; here he offers the reader, as a frame for the story of the ultra-wealthy Nero Golden – which the novel's protagonist René, a would-be film-maker, considers a perfect subject for a "mockumentary" – two powerful portraits of America's last two presidents, Obama ("the benevolent emperor") and Trump, who is interestingly referred to in terms of one of film culture's most disturbing icons, (*Batman's*) the Joker. On the other hand, many discourses *on* Rushdie focus on his celebrity status; English and Frow, indeed, include his name in a list of authors – featuring Martin Amis, Helen Fielding, J. K. Rowling – who have become "celebrity novelists", that is, writers, "whose public personae, whose 'personalities', whose 'real life' stories have become objects of special fascination and intense scrutiny, effectively dominating the reception of their work" (2006: 39).

The very reception of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* has been, as we will see, dominated by Rushdie's public persona. Rushdie's 1999 world novel represents a very interesting cultural text, which, despite the sharp criticism it received after its publication, by reviewers and scholars alike (often based on pointless comparisons with previous novels by Rushdie), should today be praised for the freshness and intelligence of the author's literary invention and for offering a crucial key for the understanding of essential aspects of our present. Here the Anglo-Indian writer investigates such complex topics as myth, migration, identity and media celebrity, through an extremely rich narrative, which mixes ancient mythology and contemporary pop culture.

The author's interest in investigating and representing the relationship between identity and celebrity culture in the novel is strictly related to two events which have deeply marked his life (in the late 1980s) and the life of his beloved Britain (in the period in which the novel was published). The first event is represented by the fatwa against Rushdie himself issued by Khomeini, after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, which if on the one side rendered Rushdie's existence almost impossible, as the writer was compelled to hide himself (and so to lead a secluded life), on the other side made him a global celebrity. The second event is represented by the death of Princess Diana in 1997, that is in the very period in which the writer started working on *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. What Rushdie found particularly interesting was the role played by the media in the whole story, from the responsibilities of the paparazzi to the narrative constructed by both newspapers and television after the Princess' death.

Rushdie responded to these two events with the construction of a narrative in which myth plays a very relevant role. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* moves, indeed, between various mythologies: Greek, Indian, Mexican and the easier, but no less relevant, mythology of pop culture. The novel includes references to the Mexican myth of the invention of music

through the winged serpent Quetzalcoatl, alongside numerous references to Indian mythic figures such as Shiva, Kama and Rati. However, the book is strictly connected with Greek mythology. More specifically *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* stands as a postmodern and post-colonial rewriting of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. The two protagonists – Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara indeed – represent contemporary versions of the Greek god of poetry and music and of his beloved muse Eurydice.

It is worth here to briefly summarise the story developed in Rushdie's longest novel. The story begins in the 1930s in Bombay. The two families, the Camas and Merchants, become friends and Ormus Cama and Umeed Merchant, who, also known as Rai, is the novel's (photographer)/first person narrator (Concilio 2003), grow up in wary proximity. Into their lives, in the 1950s, comes the beautiful Vina Apsara, half-Indian, half-Greek, who was born in America but who was moved, in difficult circumstances, to India. Ormus is an extremely gifted musician and songwriter and Vina is an extraordinary singer, the two meet significantly in a Bombay record shop – their postmodern love emblematically originating “under the sign of music in the age of mechanical reproduction” (Bassi 2003: 107) – and they fall in love immediately, though during their relationship they suffer years of absence, in which, among other things, Rai becomes Vina's lover. In short, in the very process of migration, translation and rewriting which is at the heart of the novel, Orpheus and Eurydice are turned into two contemporary rock stars, whose celebrity status spreads across the world in a complex itinerary of migration which watches the two lovers and their music move from India, to England, to America, where with the band VTO they conquer global fame. Finally, in Mexico Vina dies in an earthquake, making, like Eurydice, an entrance into an underworld from where the novel's postmodern Orpheus, that is Ormus, won't rescue her.

In this sense the novel represents a space in which ancient myths migrate into new forms – shaping complex identities – and at the same time a fascinating narrative about music and pop musicians as contemporary myths, or better metaphors, of migration. It might be argued that myth, migration and identity represent the three main themes and discursive forces of Rushdie's *musical* narrative; these very forces are, in our perspective, essential in order to understand and respond to the present globalised era. Cupitt defines myth as a:

traditional sacred story of anonymous authorship and archetypal or universal significance which is recounted in a certain community and is often linked with a ritual [...] it tells the deeds of superhuman beings such as gods, demigods, heroes, spirits or ghosts [...] it is set outside historical time in primal or eschatological time or in the supernatural world. [...] The work of myth is to explain, to reconcile, to guide action or to legitimate. We can add that myth making is evidently a primal and universal function of the human mind as it seeks a more or less unified vision of the cosmic order, the social order and the meaning of the individual's life (Cupitt 1982: 29).

Cupitt stresses some features which are very relevant for the understanding of ancient and contemporary myths. There is a narrative dimension, which is central for the very life of myth in any age; myths can be narrated in many different forms: in conversation, novel, films, music, visual art. Recounting myths means offering examples, models, which very

often tend towards order and, more or less, stable meanings. In this sense, the term myth has very often been used in the second half of the twentieth century – starting with the publication of Barthes' *Mythologies* – to define all those forms of behaviour, all those practices and objects in which the cultural takes the place of the natural, occasions in which the establishment imposes its restrictive, normative ideology, and that happens, as we will see, also in the field of popular music. Hence the fashion – in cultural studies and discourse analysis – for so called *demythologisation*.

Today, the notion of myth must not, however, be restricted to that of ideology in the sense indicated by Barthes. According to Coupe (1997) it is possible to define myth in relation to three concepts: paradigm, perfection and possibility. We have already referred through Cupitt to the capacity of myths to offer exemplary models, paradigms, and to their tendency to provide models of order, totality, perfection which according to Coupe must in some cases be resisted, especially when perfectionism becomes synonym of totalitarianism.

The notion of possibility offers instead a new way of conceiving myth, one which preserving myth's contribution to human understanding, offers, according to Ricoeur, "a disclosure of unprecedented worlds [...] which transcend the established limits of our *actual* world" (Ricoeur 1991: 490). To explain this idea Coupe makes reference to a Biblical myth, that of the Revelation:

The readers of Revelation exist in a world of eschatological tension: they believe that Jesus has indeed saved them, has fulfilled the promise of the exodus, by virtue of his resurrection; but meanwhile they must wait the signs of the final victory over Satan. They exist between the already and the not yet. Both past promise and future possibility exist in the here and now (Coupe 1997: 78).

If one kind of myth may serve as the paradigm for mythology itself, the Revelation myth – based on permanent possibility – gives mythology the sense of a discourse whose otherness and instability can illuminate and transform our reassuring identities. Mythology becomes a set of stories with which we can establish an intelligent and fruitful dialogue. Here we have Myth not as closure and order, but as disclosure and openness. In this sense, myths work very much like metaphors: both create associations between apparently distant worlds to produce fresh and always shifting meanings.

Focusing on Jung's four archetypes – ego, shadow, anima and self – Coupe indicates as models of attainment of the self (which is the archetype of the fulfillment of potential and the integration of personality) two myths: that of Jesus Christ and that of Orpheus: "in both cases material failure leads to spiritual success. Jesus is crucified as a common criminal, but is then resurrected as the Christ", Orpheus fails to save his beloved from the underworld and is dismembered by angry maenads, yet "he becomes the object of an esoteric religious cult, his music and poetry symbolizing cosmic harmony" (Coupe 1997: 141).

The myth of Orpheus has meant different things in different periods of European history: in the Middle Ages the figure of Orpheus used to stand for the Christ-like figure already mentioned, but he was also considered "a psalmist or a troubadour, courtly lover and singer of pretty lyrics" (Warden 1982: 4). From the Renaissance on, Orpheus became

the incarnation of the power of music (which underlined his connection with science). To the Romantics and in the last century he has been “the eternal seeker beyond the threshold” (Warden 1982: 4). Orpheus’ multiplicity is particularly fascinating but what emerges as his most interesting aspect is his liminality, his capacity to move in-between life and death, culture (art) and nature, reality and imagination, representing, thus, a model, a myth capable of speaking to what Bakhtin called the great time of history.

The author’s choice of the Orpheus myth for his novel is particularly fitting. His male protagonist is a musical demi-God (who like Orpheus can enchant people and nature alike), whose life and music Rushdie constantly associates with the idea of migration. Speaking about the protagonist’s identity and more specifically about the idea of belonging to a place (namely India) and the necessity of leaving your homeland, the narrator observes:

Among the great struggles of man – good/evil, reason/unreason, etc. – there is also this mighty conflict between the fantasy of Home and the fantasy of Away, the dream of roots and the mirage of the journey. And if you are Ormus Cama, if you are Vina Apsara, whose songs could cross all frontiers, even the frontiers of people’s hearts, then perhaps you believed all ground could be skipped over, all frontiers would crumble before the sorcery of the tune (Rushdie 2000: 55).

The tone of the narration seems here almost epic. Ormus’ art is equated with magic; like Orpheus, Ormus (whose name seems to identify the Greek god with music itself: “Or”-“mus”) can, through “the sorcery of the tune”, not only enchant men and nature, but also cross any kind of frontier. In short, the Orpheus myth is rewritten in the context of globalisation, where pop music is one of the few languages which can be understood everywhere.

In a short article entitled “Globalization”, Rushdie criticises the stance held by many, according to which “globalization is a [...] social catastrophe with alarming implications for the survival of true cultural diversity”. In this sense Rushdie, focusing on the notion of cultural identity, asks his readers:

Do cultures exist as separable, pure, defensible entities? Is not melange, adulteration, impurity, pick’n’mix at the heart of the idea of the modern, and hasn’t it been that way for most of this shook-up century? Doesn’t the idea of pure cultures, in urgent need of being kept free from alien contamination, lead us inexorably towards apartheid, towards ethnic cleansing, towards the gas chamber? (Rushdie 2002a: 297).

Rushdie speaks here as a convinced advocate of cultural hybridity, a stance he shares with Homi Bhabha, who, famously, theorised the *third space* as a space in which “we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the other of ourselves” (Bhabha 1994: 39). The two novels Rushdie wrote at the turn of the century – that is *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Fury* – embrace this aesthetics of the impure, seen as the only resource to preserve us from identitarian obsessions which could lead to war, death and self-destruction. Interestingly, *Fury* – published in August 2001 – prophesied the outburst of the rage of ethnic minorities, which is what, as we all know, led to the terrorist attack on The World Trade Center of 9/11.

In Rushdie's work there is always a fascinating and surprising dialogue involving fiction and truth. In this sense, Kenan Malik reports on how during a BBC Radio programme, *Desert Island Discs*, Rushdie noted that politicians "have got very good at inventing fictions which they tell us as the truth. It then becomes the job of the makers of fiction to start telling the real truth", then focusing on Rushdie he adds:

Few makers of fiction have wrestled more with the question of how their work can engage with the truth than Rushdie himself. Not the truth of facts, of course, or of science, but the truth of human experience, and in particular the experience of change and transformation, of dislocation and belongingness (Malik 2013: vii).

In this sense, in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* Rushdie opposes the myth of purity, of a monolithic identity with a musical myth, a positive myth of impurity, change, transformation and constant opening to the other. In so doing Rushdie points to the impurity of rock music, which many wrongly consider as a homogeneous and homogenising language. Paradoxically in the novel we read that rock was born not in America but in India, namely Bombay, we learn that "Ormus dreams of Gayomart, his dead twin who teaches him about music, and he hears popular Western songs in his head 1001 days before they are released in the West" (Sanga 2001: 134). Here, more than trying to reverse the American myth, criticising (indirectly) the way the West appropriates and often steals from non-Western countries, Rushdie is pointing to something subtle, that is to say, to the notion that "the sense of the West has always existed in Bombay" (Sanga 2001: 134). Bombay has always been a space of mixture and contamination; indeed, Rushdie as a young boy would often listen to Western popular songs, aired on the now defunct Radio Ceylon.

At a different level Rushdie's paradoxical claim can be read as a reference to pop's and rock's constitutive impurity: the very birth of rock stands as the meeting between different cultures, that is the blues and soul of Black Americans and the country of White Americans with its debts to English and Irish folk music; it must be added that since the Beatles, pop musicians have always been attracted by Eastern sounds. Today, within the field of pop we often speak about world music, to identify musical experiences born in the East which parody and rewrite the rhythms and sounds of the West and vice versa. According to Rollason (2006) one of the limits of Rushdie's novel resides in the failure to engage with this kind of music, focusing almost exclusively on Western popular music; however, it can be argued that Rushdie's approach is aimed at showing Western Pop's complexity: its musical richness as well as its dialogical, critical relationship with the media and the establishment.

Rushdie's 1999 work can be considered a "pop novel" along with other novels such as Colin MacInnes' *Absolute Beginners* (1959), Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* (1995). Interestingly, Kureishi's text – which also deals with cultural hybridity, staging a complex dialogue between the "two old stories" (the English and the Pakistani) out of which the protagonist Karim Amir is born – celebrates Western pop and in particular glam rock, with a specific focus on David Bowie (Critchley 2016), as "a third space" through which and in which to rethink our identity in terms of dialogue and performance rather than authenticity (Auslander 2006).

Today, pop music is a language practiced both at the level of performance and listening by everybody; it is a language capable of expressing ordinary experiences because it is itself an essential part of everyday life (DeNora 2000). The position of popular music within contemporary culture can be thought of in terms of the opposition between High and Low cultures (Bakhtin 1984), where Low language and culture stand as spaces of resistance to the order of discourse. In truth, popular music represents an extremely conflictual space where different positions, different poetics and ideologies clash. Since its very first days pop manifested a sort of inner contradiction: on the one hand it articulated the oppositional stance embraced by many young people, on the other hand, that articulation had to take place within the establishment which turned *rebel music* into a new form of commodity to be commercialised within the system, together with other commodities such as dresses, scooters, magazines etc. This is what cultural studies theorist Simon During defines as the “tension between music as an authentic, self-driven collective expression [...] against music as [...] industry product” (During 2005: 127-128). Today, part of the contemporary pop scene seems to be hardly interested in developing counter-discourses; much pop music accepts its role of pure entertainment, that is the space dominant discourses want it to fill. On the other hand, there are numerous instances of forms of popular music which position themselves in terms of resistant discourses, both at the level of form and content, whose power is given by the very fact that they act from the very inside of the establishment (as for instance Radiohead). In the novel, for instance, because of the anti-establishment contents of his lyrics, Ormus, in the early 70s is ordered by an immigration judge to leave America within sixty days; what follows is a series of solidarity concerts featuring Dylan, Lennon and Joplin. In this sense, the novel also shows how music can stand as an instrument of dialogue connecting individuals in the contemporary world through its celebration of multiplicity and semiotic instability against Orwellian discourses imposing single meanings.

In the new millennium pop and rock are also synonym of magazines, MTV, internet blogs/pages, all channels which amplify music’s discursive potential. Through the multi-modal dimension of musical communication some pop artists are capable of articulating extremely complex and efficient counter-discourses which can be *read* by millions of people; that’s what happened with U2 especially in the early part of their career; Bono, besides being one of Rushdie’s best friends, is very often considered one of the most politically engaged rock stars in the world, even though, it must be observed, recent studies (Browne 2013) have problematised this very idea.

During an interview released after the publication of the novel, Rushdie declared that “rock is the mythology of our time” (Kadzis 2000: 223). And explained that for him it represented “a language of cultural reference [...] which people all around the world would easily get, just in the same way that people once might have got a range of classical or mythological experience” (Kadzis 2000: 222-223). It must be added that today the term myth is often used in pop culture to indicate “a cultural icon”, a celebrity which is the object of people’s veneration. In this sense, as Rojek observes, contemporary celebrity culture posits itself as a “substitute for religion” (Longhurst 2007: 228). One of the last chapters of the novel is entitled *Vina Divina* and focuses on the reaction of Vina’s fans to her death. The description

recalls very much what followed the death of Lady Diana, Diana being, besides Madonna, one of the models for Vina's character, with people mourning in every corner of the world, and with a number of initiatives, in particular concerts, organised in her honor, for what became a truly global event.

The novel's male protagonist, Ormus – who, interestingly, has been read as a fictional version of Freddy Mercury (Bassi 2003) – reacts to Vina's death writing a song in which he declares to the world his eternal love for her:

All my life, I worshipped her. Her golden voice, her beauty's beat. How she made us feel, how she made me real, and the ground beneath her feet.
 And now I can't be sure of anything, black is white, and cold is heat; for what I worshipped stole my love away, it was the ground beneath her feet. [...]
 Go lightly down your darkened way, go lightly underground, I'll be down there in another day, I won't rest until you're found.
 Let me love you true, let me rescue you, let me lead you where two roads meet. O come back above, where there is only love, and the ground's beneath your feet (Rushdie 2000: 475).

In 2000 U2 wrote a song based on these lyrics. It is interesting to see how Rushdie's words about music and migration have literally migrated from the written page to U2's sonic textures (enriched by Daniel Lanois' splendid production effort); that is, they have finally migrated towards music, more specifically towards the music of one of the most venerated bands in contemporary pop mythology. In his essay entitled "U2", included in *Step Across This Line*, Rushdie reports of how he was literally astonished after first listening to the melody *written* by Bono for his "words" and adds: "one of the novel's principal images is that of the permeable frontier between the world of the imagination and the one we inhabit, and here was an imaginary song crossing that frontier" (Rushdie 2002b: 105).

Albertazzi, in a study in which she investigates the function (and forms) of music in Rushdie's novel, insists on how "songs are more important than singers" and, offering us a final reading key for Rushdie's *rock* novel, adds: "What we are asked to appreciate is the inner potentiality of that music, the power of songs and the fact that they can go on living in our lives and have a meaning for us long after their singers have disappeared and their faces have been forgotten" (Albertazzi 2003: 97).

Interestingly, U2's 'The Ground Beneath Her Feet' was included in the soundtrack of German director Wim Wenders' cult film *The Million Dollar Hotel* (2000) featuring such celebrities as Milla Jovovich and Mel Gibson. We are faced here, once again, with a process of migration in which Rushdie's words, after migrating towards U2's soundscapes, have reached the screen, that is the images and *visions* of one of the most celebrated directors of our age. Wenders also directed the video of U2's song in which, besides footage from the film, we have images of Rushdie's himself portrayed in the very act of writing the song's lyrics. This beautiful confluence of ink, soundwaves and photograms fascinatingly interrogates and expands the multimodal complexity of Rushdie's writing.

In Rushdie's novel and in U2's song the earthquake is, in short, a metaphor for insta-

bility. Singing about liminal spaces dividing different worlds, and confounding contraries, Ormus as a contemporary Orpheus becomes a metaphor for music and for the musicians' potential – thanks to music's semiotic instability, that is "iconicity" (Peirce) – for crossing the boundaries of cultures and of people's minds, necessarily inviting them to rethink their identity in terms of its constitutive otherness. The very act of listening is indeed a dialogic process through which, according to Nancy (2007), we unconsciously open ourselves to the other. Music, and in particular pop music, becomes in this way a positive mythology extending its force beyond perfectionism, a mythology of the *possible*, to uses Coupe's terminology, in which and through which to think and enact one's identity as an identity in constant migration.

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Pierpaolo Martino is Senior Lecturer of English Literature at the University of Bari, Italy. His fields of enquiry include Postcolonial and Cultural Studies, Renaissance Studies and Wilde Studies. He has published on Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, Virginia Woolf, Colin MacInnes, Kamau Brathwaite, Michael Ondaatje, Paul Auster, Hari Kunzru, Hanif Kureishi, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Salman Rushdie, Nick Cave, Morrissey and Radiohead. He is the author of four monographs: *Virginia Woolf: la musica del faro* (2003), *Down in Albion: studi sulla cultura pop inglese* (2007), *Mark the Music. The Language of Music in English Literature from Shakespeare to Salman Rushdie* (2012), *La Filosofia di David Bowie. Wilde, Kemp e la musica come teatro* (2016) and editor of *Exodus: studi sulla letteratura anglo-caraibica* (2009) and *Words and Music. Studi sui rapporti tra letteratura e musica in ambito anglofono* (2015).

pierpaolo.martino@uniba.it

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Miriam Sette

Old Calabria di Norman Douglas come ricerca del senso perduto

Abstract I: Il fulcro della storia in *Old Calabria* è la ricerca della identità personale di un autore, Norman Douglas che, per la sua diversità socialmente disapprovata, ha perduto il senso di appartenenza alla cultura che lo ha formato. Sulle tracce della civiltà della Grecia antica riscopre la sua identità autentica nella storia, tradizione, riti del profondo sud della penisola italiana. Raggiungendo la Sila 'greca', ricca di vestigia del mondo classico, scopre i riti orfici che conciliano la sua natura polimorfa nell'abbraccio della Grande Madre Terra che accoglie tutte le diversità. Il progetto di Douglas di recarsi in Calabria ha allora l'aspetto metaforico della ricerca ideale di un luogo dell'anima, alimentata dalla speranza di ottenervi la realizzazione delle sue pulsioni naturali, ma più ancora è la ricerca di un metaspazio di liberazione sensuale, oltre il mondo della morale vittoriana imprigionata in privilegi, ipocrisie, divieti.

Abstract II: Norman Douglas' *Old Calabria* recounts the author's search for a personal identity, after his failure to meet societal norms has cut him off from his background. In the traces of the civilisation of ancient Greece, Douglas rediscovers his authentic identity in the history, tradition, and rites of the deep south of the Italian peninsula. When he reaches the 'Greek' Sila, rich in vestiges of the classical world, his discovery of Orphic rituals allows him to reconcile the differing elements of his polymorphic nature within the embrace of Great Mother Earth, which welcomes all diversities. Douglas' project in visiting Calabria can thus be read metaphorically as the search for an ideal place of the soul, fueled by the hope of realising his natural impulses; it is also, more widely, a search for a metaspaces of sensual liberation, free from the privilege, hypocrisy, and prohibitions of Victorian morality.

Old Calabria (1915)¹ di Norman Douglas è un resoconto di viaggio portatore del forte senso metaforico della narrativa odepica, per via di quel tono di ricerca dell'identità, attraverso sofferti percorsi di formazione personale, che permeano la narrazione. La sua vita è segnata dalla morte del padre quando è ancora un bambino e dal licenziamento dal servizio diplomatico quando incorre in uno scandalo di libertinaggio sessuale, intrattenendo contemporaneamente rapporti con tre donne. Comincia a viaggiare attraverso l'Italia, sostando spesso

¹ Douglas, 2010. Tutti i riferimenti saranno a questa edizione.

nella sua villa a Napoli, per ricostruirsi un nuovo ambiente, dove le antiche tracce della tolleranza e della vitalità propria della cultura della *Magna Græcia* gli consentono di esprimersi senza reprimere la sua identità proibita. Tenta contemporaneamente di adeguarsi alla vita convenzionale sposando la cugina Elizabeth Fitz-Gibbon, ma ben presto divorzia a causa dell'infedeltà della compagna. Dall'inizio del nuovo secolo trasforma la sua vocazione letteraria in attività principale, attraverso cui ritrovare il senso autentico di se stesso nel mondo creativo e finzionale, rielaborando esperienze di viaggio, antidoto alle dure prove cui il reale lo ha assoggettato. Non a caso il presente saggio si concentra sul diario di viaggio nel Sud dell'Italia. In particolare in Calabria, scoperta attraverso il culto della Grande Madre, il cui abbraccio accogliente lo immette in quella civiltà orfica e tellurica dell'antica Grecia. Qui sente idealmente di appartenere, come grembo dionisiaco primigenio che concilia le contraddizioni del mondo e consente di raggiungere una intima perfezione. Vive viaggiando tra Capri, Firenze e Londra, ma deve ancora fuggire dall'Inghilterra durante la Prima Guerra Mondiale, per evitare l'onta di un processo per molestie sessuali rivolte ad un ragazzo. Alla vigilia della Seconda Guerra Mondiale, lascia anche l'Italia per il Sud della Francia per via di ulteriori scandali. Torna infine ancora in Inghilterra e poi di nuovo a Capri dove muore nel 1952, probabilmente per una overdose.

Letterati con cui Douglas si è confrontato come D. H. Lawrence e Graham Greene, tra altri nomi illustri, hanno inciso sulla sua formazione, perché portatori di istanze comuni. Anche Lawrence viene osteggiato in Inghilterra per la vena erotica delle sue produzioni narrative, che risulta pornografica alla sensibilità puritana inglese e può pubblicare soltanto in Italia presso il tollerante editore Pino Orioli. A sua volta, Graham Greene esprime la sua fantasia in viaggi verso luoghi non convenzionali e dalla cultura arcaica, accoglienti, in atmosfere cariche di mistero, impulsi erotici ritenuti devianti. Non è un caso che l'influenza di Douglas abbia esercitato il suo fascino presso l'*intelligenza* di circoli, come il Bloomsbury Group, che hanno restituito in virtù intellettuale la diversità non accettata dai benpensanti.

La presente lettura critica di *Old Calabria* individua il *focus* del racconto nella ricerca di una identità personale, estraniata per la sua diversità socialmente non accettata, ritrovata nelle antichità di un luogo, di una storia, di una cultura che ancora interpella la nostra contemporaneità, nel rimpianto della sua perdita, perché contiene il rispetto della natura nella molteplicità delle sue differenze, senza le amputazioni della successiva razionalità selettiva. La complessità del mondo fatto di razionale e di dionisiaco, di luce ed ombra, di intelletto e passione, di elaborato e di istintuale è ancora nella visione culturale della antica civiltà della *Magna Græcia*, nel culto della Grande Madre Terra che tutto abbraccia come forza vitale che anima la Natura, conciliando le differenze come distinzioni di una stessa totalità. Questa antica cultura affascina Douglas ed è l'espressione insieme della sua poetica e della sua identità, oltre le contraddizioni della contemporaneità.

Non si sfugge alla sensazione di esser di fronte a un temperamento tendenzialmente ipersensibile, mascherato in superficie da una stabile tonalità emozionale, risultante dalla adesione partecipe alla vita che si svolge nei luoghi visitati dall'autore. Il racconto è una frenetica, cronologicamente dettagliata registrazione, che egli puntualmente compie, di eventi, usi, curiosità e di tutto quanto altro scaturisca dall'incontro tra due culture differenti. La sua

irrequietezza costitutiva si rivela nei continui spostamenti geografici cui egli si sottopone incessantemente, dettando la stessa scelta di una forma letteraria, quella del resoconto di viaggio, che si ascrive alla dinamica del movimento, della esplorazione permanente, della curiosità inesausta. L'itinerario diegetico di *Old Calabria* palesemente drammatizza la resistenza al cambiamento, da parte di una sensibilità estremamente estetizzante e poco incline a riconoscere nei passaggi repentini e nelle brusche variazioni i segni di un qualche progresso umano.

Agli spostamenti spaziali, aventi come direzione il sud del territorio calabrese, con qualche incursione in alcune zone confinanti (da Lucera a Manfredonia, Venosa, Taranto), corrisponde l'addentramento, da parte del narratore autodiegetico, nella dimensione temporale del passato e, parallelamente, l'evasione dalla realtà presente, che si traducono, a livello di scrittura, in un'alternanza tra linguaggio documentaristico-descrittivo, tipico della narrativa di viaggio, e linguaggio immaginario o strutturato secondo la logica della visione poetica. Invero, accanto a diligenti annotazioni riguardanti le novità che egli va scoprendo nelle abitudini di vita delle popolazioni del sud Italia, si ritrovano nelle pagine di *Old Calabria* frequenti fantasmaticizzazioni del passato classico.

Benché il paesaggio italiano gli procuri una sensazione di pace e benessere, tuttavia Douglas non trascura di comprendere nelle sue impressioni di viaggio, da osservatore partecipe quale è, quegli elementi che la sua malcelata natura di aristocratico gli segnala come di disturbo. Non manca, dunque, di lamentare la rozzezza dei lineamenti di alcuni personaggi che ha modo di incontrare, così come la condizione degradata e incolta del paesaggio. Ciononostante, l'attrazione per la Calabria non subisce alcun raffreddamento, dal momento che a mitigare il fastidio per gli aspetti più sordidi della realtà del meridione d'Italia, interviene, prontamente e immancabilmente, la nostalgia umbratile per le vestigia delle antiche civiltà greche e romane. Queste vengono riscoperte sia nella lingua e nei costumi delle minoranze etniche ancora presenti, sia nei toponimi famosi della *Magna Græcia*, sia nella rammemorazione di gesta e virtù di antichi racconti, che trovano conferma nelle iscrizioni e nei resti archeologici di civiltà consuete e proprio per questo capaci di sollecitare la melanconia del ricordo, in uno scrittore che ha mostrato più di un accento di poetica ossianica. Questa intima adesione di un animo melanconico ai segni superstiti di antiche presenze eroiche giustifica il titolo stesso dell'opera che allude alla Calabria antica, alla sua vetustà, alla sua consunzione sullo sfondo di vaghe memorie umbratili di una grandezza sepolta.

Il gusto per l'esplorazione ambientale conduce il viaggiatore alla scoperta di tratti antropologici, storici e tradizionali di popolazioni e culture del territorio. Da un lato, vi è una penetrante immersione in presenze antropiche significative, come quella della comunità albanese, cui si devono importanti insediamenti connessi ad una antica migrazione, che caratterizza un'intera isola etnolinguistica. Si viaggia, altresì, alla scoperta delle più antiche tracce della civiltà della *Magna Græcia*, che caratterizzò di sé tanta parte dell'arte, della civiltà, delle scienze nel meridione della penisola italiana e che ancora, nella prospezione di Douglas, appare come la "Greek Sila" (Douglas 2010: 186), ricca di vestigia del mondo classico nelle sue forme più autentiche anche se ormai nella forma di tracce latenti.

Il progetto di Douglas di recarsi in Calabria sotto tale spinta ha allora sì l'aspetto me-

taforico della ricerca ideale di un luogo dell'anima, alimentata dalla speranza di ottenervi la realizzazione delle sue ambizioni chimeriche, ma più ancora è la ricerca di un metaspazio, inteso non come semplice spazio descrittivo ma come un "luogo in cui lo spirito si oggettiva e l'oggetto si spiritualizza. Si carica di valenze metaforiche e ideali" (Cocco 2003: 12). Metaspazio vale a dire luogo nel quale idee e pensieri si oggettivano, si concretizzano e si connotano fortemente in senso etico-estetico. Siffatta rappresentazione di metaspazio rende possibile una lettura traslata dei paesaggi e, insieme ad essa, una filosofia del *genius loci* o, nelle parole di Diderot una *philosophie locale* (Diderot 1984), cioè un sapere instillato nella natura appropriato al luogo e al tempo. In questo senso, le rovine della Calabria non sono solamente degli elementi paesistici ma autentici simboli, ponendosi come la manifestazione di immagini concettuali, di principi e di verità fondamentali con cui Douglas si confronta. Dopo la parentesi tutt'altro che esaltante nella *molle Tarentum*, le parole di Douglas al primo contatto col paesaggio calabro, sono le seguenti:

The Calabrian uplands are still visible in the gathering twilight; they draw me onwards, away from Taranto. It must be cool up there, among the firs and beeches. And a land, moreover, of multiple memories and interests – this Calabria. A land of great men. In 1737 the learned Aceti was able to enumerate over two thousand celebrated Calabrians – athletes, generals, musicians, centenarians, inventors, martyrs, ten popes, ten kings, as well as some sixty conspicuous women. A land of thinkers. Old Zavarroni, born in 1705, gives us a list of seven hundred Calabrian writers (Douglas 2010: 106).

All'elencazione di uomini illustri appena menzionata, segue una lunga esposizione di attrattive naturalistiche che fa della Calabria una terra ubertosa e popolata di una fauna straordinariamente diversificata, tale da indurre Douglas a chiedersi entusiasticamente: "Who would not visit Calabria?" (Douglas 2010: 107). Ciò nondimeno, perché un inglese dovrebbe innamorarsi della vecchia Calabria? Forse perché si avverte il richiamo di un paesaggio quasi incontaminato, in cui è possibile l'incontro con una telluricità delle origini di cui si sente nostalgia? O forse perché è la terra della *Magna Græcia* con tutte le suggestioni di una cultura classica da cui ancora si attinge fondamento?

La profondità di un'Italia del Sud ha per Douglas un'attrattiva perché è permeata dalla *ingens silva* vichiana, ovvero un mondo brulicante di primitivismo. Non a caso, è riportato l'episodio in cui un villico ingerisce sei chili di grasso di maiale ("a man swallowed six kilograms of the uncooked fat of a freshly slaughtered pig") e un altro due uccelli vivi "with beaks, claws and feathers" (Douglas 2010: 70). *Ingens silva*, ovvero l'intrico della foresta, l'origine sensuale, sensoria e viscerale dell'animalità umana, le condizioni di vita primitiva rozze ed arcaiche, la terra della magia descritta da Ernesto de Martino, ove si manifestano le pratiche rituali più incredibili di superstizione, di scongiuri, di familismo amorale.

In questo stesso luogo, tuttavia, aleggia un'altra dimensione, quella della *Magna Græcia*, permeata della stratificazione di un'eredità della cultura greca classica, trapiantata nell'Italia meridionale. Qui fu importata la religione olimpica degli dèi che nel cielo rappresentavano l'espressione della perfezione delle virtù umane, ad esempio di Venere quale

espressione della bellezza femminile al massimo grado. Si realizzò così un'operazione mitopoietica come proiezione delle virtù umane idealizzate e perfezionate, immaginandole incarnate nel dio che ha il potere di governare il mondo. Tale mitopoiesi è l'espressione delle classi dominanti volta a idealizzare il senso delle virtù che rendevano grande il nobile, il quale aveva nella religione olimpica la legittimazione del suo potere.

Nel mondo greco i poveri, i contadini, i lavoratori, gli schiavi, non potendo identificarsi in Achille, Ulisse e nelle altre figure dell'aristocrazia prevalentemente guerriera cui appartenevano i re dominatori, abbracciavano pertanto non la religione olimpica, ma quella orfica, che traeva origini dal mito di Orfeo, il cantore della Tracia, terra di *ingens silva* lontana dalla Grecia raffinata ed evoluta. Orfeo, secondo il mito, scese negli Inferi per amore, per richiamare in vita Euridice, la sua defunta moglie. La forza di Orfeo era nel suo canto. La sua non era, dunque, la forza dominatrice del re guerriero, ma la forza divinatoria che attraverso la creatività artistica entra in contatto con ciò che non è visibile e conduce la vita al visibile, dalle tenebre alla luce, modificando la triste sorte umana portata alla speranza di un riscatto dalle misere condizioni quotidiane.

Al contrario, l'Olimpo è solare, dominato dal Fato immutabile, qualsiasi sia il destino umano condannato anche alla miseria e alla morte. Gli dèi, come i re eroi, sono governati dal principio del Fato. Non sono essi in grado di alterare la condizione di vita, ma se necessario si sacrificano per essa. Questo è un mondo immutabile perché a dominare sopra tutto sono le Parche, che intrecciano e tagliano i fili della sorte e che dominano sugli uomini come sugli dèi. Tale determinismo religioso incontrava il favore dei ceti dominanti, volti alla conservazione del loro dominio e privilegio. All'opposto, i poveri, i sofferenti che volevano riscattarsi dalla propria condizione si rivolgevano ad una religione in grado di modificare le condizioni esistenti. Reagire al destino olimpico era possibile agli dèi degli Inferi, come mostra il mito di Orfeo che resuscita Euridice.

Se la religione apollinea è la religione solare, un mondo retto da quegli stessi valori e virtù antropomorfe degli aristocratici greci proiettati sugli dèi, quella orfica è invece la religione tellurica dei contadini, dei culti dei baccanali della vite di Bacco che si rifanno ai rituali della civiltà agricola. I contadini conoscono il tempo circolare, le stagioni che ritornano su se stesse, il seme che con l'inverno muore, ma che in primavera rifiorisce, metafora della riviviscenza dal mondo degli Inferi. Di qui, il mito della magia occulta dal valore benefico che, sconfiggendo la morte, fa rinascere dal sottosuolo. Anche il Cristianesimo, a suo modo, è una religione orfica per gli umili e gli ultimi. Cristo fa tornare alla vita Lazzaro e risorge egli stesso dagli Inferi. Nei culti orfici è riservata per i poveri una promessa di vita eterna, secondo il ritmo di un tempo circolare che sconfigge il determinismo naturalistico del Fato. Si delinea una religione della *renovatio*, della rinascita, della speranza, della credenza nell'anima immortale nell'aldilà, per cui, pur vivendo nell'*ingens silva* primitiva, si è alimentati da grande speranza, antidoto alla disperazione.

L'estenuata omosessualità di Douglas, condannata in Inghilterra dalla religione puritana e dalla ipocrisia dei ceti dominanti, è vista come una punizione fatale, equivalente alla necessità di una religione olimpica, bloccata nel vecchiume della morale vittoriana, in un mondo cristallizzato dalla immobilità dei privilegi, costrizioni, autolimitazioni, tabù. Dou-

glas vuole ridestarsi alla nuova vita che gli è promessa dalla religione orfica, incarnata dalla telluricità espressa nella cultura e nel primitivismo del paesaggio dell'antica Calabria greca. La promiscuità della *tellus* del sud è un invito a ricominciare da capo, ad ispirarsi ai riti, ai miti, alle superstizioni, ai venti afrodisiaci di un mondo nuovo, legittimato dalla *sensiblerie* culturale di chi più o meno consapevolmente sceglie di andare nella *Magna Græcia* orfica, sul richiamo della *molle Tarentum*, culla della scuola pitagorica e dove ha allignato la tradizione delle danze dionisiache dei tarantolati. In questo caso, è chiaro che nella Calabria Douglas trova una patria di elezione, dove la rigidezza dei costumi inglesi è alle spalle e sussiste una fluidità che dà la speranza di rinascita, per poter essere altro da sé e ritrovare la propria autenticità così come la trovano, nella propria ebbrezza, i tarantolati studiati da De Martino. Attraverso il morso della tarantola si muore a causa del veleno, ma si guarisce pure, perché i tarantolati ballano, e nella loro magia, simile ai riti del mondo animistico dell'Africa, accedono ad una *trance* da mondo orfico che promette rinascita, come nella Grecia olimpica in cui penetra il mito orfico della tellurica Tracia.

L'orfismo nasce da una trama culturale che investe il pitagorismo insediato nella calabra *Magna Græcia*. Il pitagorismo non è soltanto setta scientifica, ma anche comunità religiosa con un messaggio di vita eterna, perché l'uomo è capace di pensare il numero che è serie infinita ed *eidos*, la forma perenne, erede del platonismo. Dalla forma perenne platonica si deduce l'esistenza dell'anima e dall'esistenza dell'anima scaturisce la persuasione dell'immortalità. Le fatiche, le disgrazie di questa terra possono essere affrontate ed attraversate tutte con la speranza dell'eternità e della salvezza. Orfismo, Pitagorismo e Cristianesimo sono allora veicolo di uno stesso messaggio salvifico, *metanoia*, rigenerazione, dopo la caduta nella caverna delle tenebre. In effetti, Douglas dedica il capitolo IV di *Old Calabria* alla trattazione del culto cavernicolo, diffuso nel meridione d'Italia. Pur se il riferimento è all'Arcangelo Michele il quale, come un raggio di luce, penetra nelle tenebre di un antro, quale guerriero distruttore di forme pagane in nome del Cristianesimo, Douglas è consapevole di quanta eredità in questo culto cristiano giochi l'anima immortale di Demetra, la Grande Madre Terra sotterranea, non Giove Olimpico. È in ragione di ciò che Douglas afferma: "[T]his cave-worship is older than any god or devil. It is the cult of the feminine principle – a relic of that aboriginal obsession of mankind to shelter in some Cloven Rock of Ages, in the sacred womb of Mother Earth who gives us food and receives us after death. Grotto-apparitions, old and new, are but the popular explanations of this dim primordial craving" (Douglas 2010: 37).

L'ispirazione di Douglas è affascinata dal culto del principio femminile della madre terra, perché nella tenebra della caverna si scoprono profondità maggiori che nel culto solare. Questo rituale che rovescia l'orizzonte di senso tra luce e tenebre collega una certa ispirazione di Douglas alle dimensioni del nascente Decadentismo, come scaturigine della ricerca di profondità latenti che sarà, alle origini del Novecento, anche il presupposto del Postmoderno. Se la modernità è la solarità olimpica delle idee di ragione chiare e distinte, a partire da Cartesio fino all'Illuminismo, l'orfismo di *Old Calabria* rappresenta un accesso al Decadentismo, perché, come nel caso paradigmatico delle *Memorie dal sottosuolo* di Dostoevskij, si è oltre le dimensioni della ragione dispiegata e ci si addentra, molto più della

psicanalisi, nel fondo oscuro della coscienza, allorquando Douglas penetra nel senso della terra di cui l'uomo è impastato, perché egli è corpo, anche se nella tensione salvifica all'anima immortale.

Anche dal punto di vista del paesaggio che ammira, Douglas attualizza una riproposizione della scoperta già preromantica dell'ambiente naturale come doppio misterioso, e in secondo luogo, sviluppa la ricerca dei romantici di un dialogo con la natura eletta a interlocutore prediletto. La sua malinconia, allora, è qui da interpretarsi come una connessione con l'insondabile fondo dell'essere, come una segreta affinità con la creazione primordiale di un *Eden* da scoprire. Interiorità e natura si fanno complementari, partecipi l'una e l'altra del silenzioso gravitare dell'anima verso il mistero e della nostalgia di Douglas di evadere dalla dissipazione deludente della sua quotidianità banale, in un mondo di cose ignote con un appello al creativo. In ragione di tale prospettiva esegetica, non è sbagliato affermare che l'esasperata qualità di riflessione e di analisi propria dell'iperestesia di Douglas va intesa come capacità di ricavare dalla semiosfera le sue riposte valenze rivelative (Lotman 1985). Il viaggio è un'esperienza ineludibile perché è la *conditio sine qua non* per ripercorrere la grecità, per assumere la suggestione oracolare o l'agonismo dialettico come chiavi interpretative dell'universo. Gli appunti del soggiorno in terra calabra possono allora esser considerati alla stregua di memorie di viaggio, ma garanti di una verità sull'insondabile dei segni della più antica natura, della più antica storia, della scoperta del sé nascosto nelle vestigia classiche. Di qui, l'assurgere del pensiero poetante a momento privilegiato e quasi luogo geometrico di ogni autentico atto conoscitivo. Significativo quanto afferma:

Once you have reached the latitude of Naples, the word *grazie* (thank you) vanishes from the vocabulary of all save the most cultured. But to conclude therefrom that one is among a thankless race is not altogether the right inference. They have a wholly different conception of the affair. Our septentrional 'thanks' is a complicated product in which gratefulness for things received and for things to come are unconsciously balanced; while their point of view differs in nothing from that of the beau-ideal of Greek courtesy, of Achilles, whose mother procured for him a suit of divine armour from Hephaistos, which he received without a word of acknowledgement either for her or for the god who had been put to some little trouble in the matter. A thing given they regard as a thing found, a hermaion, a happy hit in the lottery of life; the giver is the blind instrument of Fortune. This chill attitude repels us; and our effusive expressions of thankfulness astonish these people and the Orientals.

A further difference is that the actual gift is viewed quite extrinsically, intellectually, either in regard to what it would fetch if bartered or sold, or, if to be kept, as to how far its possession may raise the recipient in the eyes of other men. This is purely Homeric, once more – Homeric or primordial, if you prefer. Odysseus told his kind host Alkinoos, whom he was never to see again, that he would be glad to receive farewell presents from him – to cherish as a friendly memory? No, but 'because they would make him look a finer fellow when he got home'. The idea of a keepsake, of an emotional value attaching to some trifle, is a northern one. Here life is give and take, and lucky he who takes more than he gives; it is what Professor Mahaffy calls the 'ingrained selfishness of the Greek character'. Speaking of all below the upper classes,

I should say that disinterested benevolence is apt to surpass their comprehension, a good-natured person being regarded as weak in the head (Douglas 2010: 136-137).

Nel passaggio citato si vede realizzato il punto centrale della concezione che investe il rapporto con la Vecchia Calabria da parte di Douglas, che da un lato scopre la religione orfica, dall'altro sa apprezzare il senso di quella olimpica. La religione olimpica per Douglas è quella degli eroi come Achille, la cui madre, semidea, si fa fabbricare dal dio Efesto l'armatura, ma Achille non ringrazia perché ciò che accade è governato dal Fato che tutto domina. Moira, la sorte, il destino fatale che sovrasta la vita degli uomini determina ogni vita occasionale, agita la lotteria della vita. Per Douglas, tuttavia, si pone un dilemma: da un lato, la fredda incombenza della sorte degli eroi cui non piace assoggettarsi, dall'altro, il calore della gratitudine di un dono che offre all'umanità sofferente, diversa dagli eroi, la possibilità, oltre ogni destino e occasionalità, di riscattare la propria condizione di vita verso il superamento di dolore e affanni, contrastando con le proprie forze quello che appare sviluppo fatale, verso l'apertura vitale di percorsi molteplici liberatori di obiettivi soggettivi e bisogni oggettivi.

In Calabria, Douglas incontra la religione olimpica di Achille, imperturbabile e a suo modo algida, che asseconda forme di *self-control* inglese, nella considerazione dell'eterna ripetitività di uno schema convenzionale di vita. Egli incontra altresì nella *Magna Græcia* calabra, la religione orfica, la religione del sottosuolo, la religione delle classi marginali e subalterne, le quali, attraverso i loro sforzi, i loro sortilegi, le loro preghiere, ricevono dal divino la tensione a trasformare la sofferente condizione di vita. In occasione del perseguimento di grandi risultati, i fedeli ringraziano calorosamente non la sorte imperturbabile, ma la divinità diretta che li ha aiutati o se stessi che hanno sofferto per poi redimersi. Si è in presenza, allora, di una concezione del rapporto vita / morte, gioia / sofferenza che è il riscatto di una vita subalterna, non da eroi imperturbabili ed eterni, ma da eroi sofferenti e quotidiani che possono mirare all'eternità attraverso il dolore. L'orfismo è, allora, la religione dei ceti subalterni, i quali anche in condizioni tragiche di vita, non perdono la speranza e trovano la forza di rialzarsi nell'accidentato cammino dell'esistenza.

Douglas nella Calabria greca non soltanto scopre, ma abbraccia il culto della terra, del sottosuolo, degli Inferi che possono, come nel caso di Persefone, di Demetra ecc., modificare le condizioni di vita e, attraverso un tempo circolare, il tempo della morte e della rinascita, che è poi il tempo agrario, rinnovare ed eternare le loro vite. L'orfismo è soprattutto la religione dei contadini, piuttosto che dei signori della guerra nel mondo greco. I poveri, *dannati della terra*, avrebbe detto Frantz Fanon, sono quelli che ritengono che così come esiste un tempo circolare eterno, esiste una alternanza tra vita e morte, sofferenza e rinascita. È il tempo ciclico delle stagioni, in cui il seme muore durante il periodo invernale, per poi rinascere in primavera e dare messi in abbondanza in estate e infine assopirsi in autunno. Così nella vita, alla nascita sussegue la gioventù fiorente, la maturità delle grandi gesta e poi la decadenza fino alla morte. Ma questo non fa terminare la vita. La vita si riprende con il tempo circolare che è rappresentato, sulla copertina della prima edizione di *Old Calabria*, come serpente che si annoda su se stesso ad indicare l'eternità del tempo che, attraverso le sue spire e i suoi viluppi, può sempre rinnovarsi.

È palese il richiamo al serpente che si morde la coda quale simbolo dell'eterno ritorno

di Nietzsche (Nietzsche 1976), ovvero la possibilità dionisiaca di rinnovarsi come religione della speranza, delle superstizioni, dei culti arcaici. Religione non della solarità apollinea degli dèi greci che esprimono la perfezione delle gesta e delle virtù degli eroi, bensì delle speranze, delle sofferenze, dell'alternanza di angosce e illusioni, idealità e sconfitte, momenti di crisi e momenti di esaltazione. Religione tipica dei culti misterici, che segnano la fine della razionalità olimpica e attingono alle radici profonde della intimità soggettiva. È questa la radice da cui prenderà corpo la narrazione delle emozioni del Romanticismo e l'espressione immediata della voce dell'interiorità del Decadentismo, così come accadeva rispettivamente nel culto orfico e, in un modo più caotico, nel bacchanale.

Con Douglas si assiste, con *Old Calabria*, opera composta tra il 1907 e il 1911 e pubblicata nel 1915 all'esordio del dramma della Grande Guerra, ad un episodio tipico del clima agitato e decadente di inizio Novecento, pervaso da spossamento della razionalità e di attingimento all'intimità interiore, nella forma propria di un resoconto di viaggio che, percorrendo l'antica Calabria, attua un ritorno alle scaturigini più profonde della natura e della vita, anche alle condizioni più brutali, terribili, ferine, in cui tuttavia sboccia la pienezza della nostalgia dell'anima verso l'idealità del suo perfezionamento immortale e senza limite. Tutto questo è tipico delle religioni del riscatto, della pena e della felicità successiva, ed è ciò cui Douglas aspira. Non desiderando rimanere prigioniero delle convenzioni del mondo cui appartiene e dei condizionamenti che ne derivano, egli anela alla rigenerazione attraverso l'immersione profonda nei culti, nei misteri, nei paesaggi arcaici della vecchia Calabria, le cui radici culturali greche non sono quelle olimpiche, bensì orfiche. Qui la parola 'grazie' deve essere gridata con la forza della fatica che ha superato la sofferenza e ottiene il suo riscatto. L'imperturbabilità dell'eroe, connessa ai suoi privilegi, ai natali divini, alla benevolenza del nume tutelare che per lui fabbrica un'armatura non può addirsi al povero, al debole, all'emarginato. Costui, non possedendo risorse per difendere il proprio corpo dagli attacchi dei dardi di guerra, dei morbi, della sorte, deve costruirsi da sé il riscatto della sua vita e, perciò, il ringraziamento che urla è a se stesso, non alla sorte inalterabile. Per il povero la vita è una provocazione per una realtà modificata che il dio orfico consente, perché da mortale possa attingere all'immortale.

Che il viaggio in Calabria di Douglas possa apparire come una rielaborazione di ricordi ed elucubrazioni personali, molto vicina a tutta una letteratura di viaggio post-illuministica e sentimentale, che per impressionismo descrittivo e ricerca del *genius loci* tende a fondere in maniera inscindibile il concetto di viaggio con quello di esperienza umana, piuttosto che meramente culturale è, dunque, fuor di dubbio. Eppure, le motivazioni del viaggiatore Douglas sono le medesime dei viaggiatori settecenteschi, la cui ispirazione artistica ha ancora quel senso del mitico passato, così vivo in Gibbon sulla strada di Roma², o del magico che

² Edward Gibbon (Putney, Surrey, 1737 - Londra, 1794) partì nel 1763 per un viaggio attraverso l'Europa, alla ricerca di un soggetto per un'opera storica, che presto abbandonò, sulla libertà svizzera. La formazione delle moderne nazioni europee e il dissolversi nel Medioevo del grande impero di Roma ricevono un'ampia trattazione nella sua opera *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, grandioso affresco dell'Europa da Augusto alla caduta di Costantinopoli, che rintraccia talora fino alla lontana Cina le ragioni di sommovimenti di popoli che hanno sconvolto la geografia dell'Europa; o fino all'Arabia, per raccontare sulla scorta della fortuna dell'orientalistica del XVII e del XVIII secolo le vicende dell'impero islamico.

Berkeley visse e vide sotto i suoi occhi in Puglia tra tarantolati e danze dionisiache (Berkeley 1871: 512-597).

L'approccio interpretativo di Douglas della terra calabra va inteso come sinonimo di elevazione spirituale. L'ispirazione tardo-settecentesca è presente nel gusto per le rovine, per la voga delle scenografie autunnali e per quella degli "orridi" da realizzare nei giardini con abeti neri e cipressi, alberi inceneriti dalla folgore, caverne, romitaggi, costruzioni cadenti e finanche sepolcri (Baltrušaitis 1983: 142 e segg.). Trasmettendo conoscenza, è in essi che si cerca la mestizia o in paesaggi che ne rappresentino l'equivalente, per assaporarne con piacere melanconico la stimolazione visiva, come insegna in maniera esemplare quel voluminoso contributo alla letteratura della malinconia che sono i *Night Thoughts* di Edward Young, che deve il suo tributo a *L'Allegra* e il *Penseroso* di Milton³. Non a caso Milton è citato nelle prime battute di *Old Calabria*, precisamente nella sezione dedicata alle impressioni di viaggio di Douglas nel corso della sua visita a Lucera:

Altogether, these public parks, which are now being planted all over south Italy, testify to renascent taste; they and the burial-places are often the only spots where the deafened and light-bedazzled stranger may find a little green content; the content, respectively, of *L'Allegra* and *Il Penseroso*. So the cemetery of Lucera, with its ordered walks drowned in the shade of cypress – roses and gleaming marble monuments in between – is a charming retreat, not only for the dead (Douglas 2010: 17).

Ci si deprime per elevarsi, ci si affligge, anche volontariamente, per accedere alle beatitudini sublimi dell'anima. Come nell'opera di Young, il paesaggio naturalistico della tradizione cede il passo a uno scenario di tenebra, simbolo dell'umor nero e del lutto che sconfortano l'io narrante, ma anche dell'immensità che Douglas, attraverso il dolore e l'avvilimento, crede di scoprire come prerogativa di ciascun essere umano. La maggiore ricchezza consiste nell'acconsentire al negativo che, essendo la condizione dell'esistere, non può non essere superato. D'altra parte il canone estetico di un'opera successiva di Douglas come *South Wind* (1917) introdurrà nelle risonanze del vento del sud il percorso misteriosofico degli orizzonti dell'anima nella natura, dell'eco di antiche nostalgie, nella scoperta del vortice dove l'io si perde e si riscopre nell'ombra da cui si accede alla luce. È quella di Douglas, allora, una sorta di *Philosophic Melancholy* che, sulla linea inaugurata dal *Penseroso* miltoniano, si associa al sacro, alla nobiltà di pensiero e al sentire moralmente elevato: e cioè alla venerazione estatica del divino e all'amore spassionato per gli uomini, pur se più che un'ascesi cristiana, la sua è una riscoperta pagana degli antichi dèi, delle voci primigenie della natura, delle imprese eroiche della classicità, dell'arte arcaica. La fonte ispirativa di Douglas appartiene, allora, al gusto tardo-settecentesco per le antiche rovine e tracce storiche, alla ricerca dell'umanità ori-

³ Milton 1952-1955. Il ritratto della "divinest Melancholy" (v. 12) dipinto dal *Penseroso*, lungi dall'essere soltanto la versione sublimata e contrapposta a quella dell'*Allegra*, è più finemente, la reinterpretazione in senso positivo, trascendente, dei segni nefasti del delirio malinconico. Nell'*Allegra*, la "loathed Melancholy" è l'incarnazione di un'esperienza deprimente di allucinata disperazione. Il Medioevo cristiano aveva contemplato col nome di accidia tale condizione di cupo sconforto e suggerito come rimedio supremo la disciplina del lavoro.

ginaria con più di un accenno ossianico. Tale ispirazione, tuttavia, è sviluppata, in seguito, nella temperie di tendenza e sensibilità di un Romanticismo attraversato da spunti decadenti, nel clima di sentimenti orfici del primo Novecento delle poetiche informali.

In conclusione, pur se a dispiegarsi in *Old Calabria* è la percezione del *caos* che risulta da uno sguardo che erra malinconico (Starobinski 1990), tuttavia, sulla scorta dell'alternanza miltoniana tra allegria e meditazione, Douglas presenta la duplice virtualità che investe i segni, sempre profondamente ambigui, tra il significato occulto malinconico e la rivelazione solare conoscitiva, quando medita sulle grandezze antiche che destano la meraviglia e lo stupore visionario, oltre la caducità umbratile di civiltà perdute.

In nessun luogo, come in Calabria, la sfera della malinconia si mostra dominata dalla regola dei contrari: l'idealizzazione e l'esaltazione nascono dall'avvilimento e lo superano. L'atmosfera che Douglas descrive si rivela allora ad un tempo come la visualizzazione del *melancholic mood* e come il veicolo per ascendere a una realtà superiore. È sì un'atmosfera decadente e crepuscolare, ma esemplificativa di un morire che conduce a vita nuova. Attraverso il motivo della morte-rinascita, è l'immaginario lunare che si afferma come il correlativo simbolico di una pratica poetica che aspira ad essere agente unificante. La malinconia di Douglas si presenta sì come figura a due facce, ma le cui antinomie sono unificabili nel segno di un vivere per la cultura come insistito atto interiore di autenticazione e di riscoperta.

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Miriam Sette is associate professor of English Literature at the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures, "G. d'Annunzio" University of Chieti-Pescara. She has published essays and articles on Daniel Defoe, William Beckford, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, William Butler Yeats, Jean Rhys, Doris Lessing and Norman Douglas. She has translated and edited a collection of unpublished tales from Horace Walpole to Mary Shelley entitled *Amori e Rovine. Racconti gotici dei maestri del genere* (Tracce 2000). She is the author of the volumes: *George Eliot: il corpo della passione. Aspetti della corporeità nella narrativa dell'ultima fase* (Campus 2004); *La narrativa di Doris Lessing. Strategie e metafore per un impegno* (Aracne 2007); *Il fantastico in Robinson Crusoe. Daniel Defoe e la Ragione trasfiguratrice* (Carocci 2010) and *Trittico sulla metamorfosi: Kipling, Wells, Garnett* (Liguori 2015).

m.sette@unich.it

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Paul Carter, Roberta Trapè¹

Archaeologies of Diving: Paul Carter's Engagement with Italy

Abstract I: Il prolifico autore e artista australiano Paul Carter (1951-) ha dato un importante contributo alla riconcettualizzazione delle culture coloniali e delle loro prospettive postcoloniali. Come artista e creatore di luoghi (*placemaker*), il suo lavoro è ampiamente pubblicato e studiato. Tuttavia, l'importante coinvolgimento con l'Italia che sottende alla sua produzione accademica e creativa non è stato estesamente studiato. Questo articolo mira a rettificare questa omissione. Offre infatti una visione d'insieme cronologica sul coinvolgimento di Carter di quarant'anni negli ambiti dell'urbanesimo italiano, dell'arte e della filosofia italiane. Mette in evidenza anche dei temi chiave: un senso del luogo arcipelagico, principi di comunicazione ecoica mimetica, e un'epistemologia migrante radicata nella nozione di 'diventare se stessi in quel luogo', che può essere produttivamente collegata al ritorno 'non finito' di Carter in Italia, un processo di incontro ripetuto che è un equivalente biografico del ricorso storico di Giambattista Vico.

Abstract II: The prolific Australian author and artist, Paul Carter (1951-) has made an important contribution to the reconceptualisation of colonial cultures and their postcolonial prospects. As an artist and place-maker, his work is widely published and studied. However, the important Italian engagement underwriting his scholarly and creative production has not been widely studied. This article attempts to rectify the omission. It offers a chronological overview of Carter's forty-year engagement with situations in Italian urbanism, art and philosophy. It also isolates key themes: archipelagic sense of place, echoic mimetic communicational principles, and a migrant epistemology rooted in the notion of 'self-becoming at that place', which can be productively linked to Carter's unfinished return to Italy, a process of repeated encounter that is a biographical equivalent of Giambattista Vico's historical *ricorso*.

¹ The co-authorship proposed here solves a problem frequently encountered when a theme emerges dialogically: responding to Trapè's enquiries, Carter found himself reflecting in a new way on the present topic. For her part, Trapè recognised with fresh alertness the close relationship between ideation and expression in Carter's writing. The present hybrid text attempts to preserve the 'writing through the other' that lies behind its emergence. In a way, it is another variation on the individuality of Carter's engagement with Italy.

In an earlier article Australian writer Paul Carter's 'migrant poetics' was discussed in the context of his 1994 'anti-novel' *Baroque Memories* (published in Italy as *Memorie barocche*)². At the heart of his 'migrant poetics' is an improvised conversation between themes in Italian culture and their possible transformation in the colonial and potentially postcolonial setting of Australia. However, the foundations of his distinctively polytopic (in both senses) writing practice in an encounter with Italy extend well beyond one work of fiction. In this article, it is argued that key themes in Carter's postcolonial geography, radiophonic art and public space design are clarified when traced back to his abiding fascination with Italian culture. Finally, evidence is provided that the transmission of ideas is not all one way: through his current involvement with events associated with the 50th anniversary of the discovery of the (now famous) Greek-Lucanian tomb painting known as *il tuffatore* outside Paestum (Campania), an importation of interpretative practices is occurring that facilitates the reappraisal of our own peninsular heritage.

A biographical outline of Carter's engagement with Italy was provided in the earlier article. In terms of the evolution of his 'migrant poetics', a provisional classification of Italian-related work includes: first Australian work where the Italian connection is *implicit* in the reappraisal of Australia's colonial formation and postcolonial prospects (*The Road to Botany Bay*, 1987); Australian works where the Italian location is explicit but the migrant position implicit (*On the Still Air*, radiophonic production, 1992; *Outis*, music theatre libretto for Luciano Berio, 1992-1994); Australian works where the Italian location is explicit and the migrant position explicit (*Columbus Echo*, radiophonic proposal for the Acquario di Genova, 1992, and its radiophonic sequel, *The 7448*); first expression of a developed migrant poetics in which Italy/Australia are 'doubles' (*Baroque Memories*, 1994); first Australian work where the Italian connection is *explicit* in the reappraisal of Australia's colonial formation and postcolonial prospects (*The Lie of the Land*, 1996); first work where the migrant dialogue with Italy is assumed as normative (*Repressed Spaces*, 2002)³. While this dialectical road map has the virtue of simplicity, it obscures the recursive nature of Carter's invocation of Italian mentors, scenes and artifacts. Indeed, Giambattista Vico's recursive theory of historical development is invoked by Carter as integral to his 'migrant poetics', the necessity of return twinned with its impossibility representing a typical site of migrant self-division leading (ideally) to a new, provisional 'self-becoming at that place'⁴. Certainly, Carter's preoccupation with the interpretation of *il tuffatore*, originating in his first exposure to the work in the late 1970s, prior to his move to Melbourne, suggests a Vichian approach to intellectual production, one in which successive traverses of the subject lay down the strata of understanding whose material provides the basis of the later archaeological investigation.

In contrast with this temporal archaeology, Carter's conception of spatial history, advanced in his first major publication, *The Road to Botany Bay*, is a phenomenological account of the appearance of things as they appear in the line of flight. The historical data supporting

² Trapè 2018.

³ Carter has recently collected ten radiophonic scripts (including *On the Still Air* and *The 7448*) under the title *Absolute Rhythm*; this collection remains unpublished.

⁴ See notably the discussion of 'the new iconography' in Carter 2008.

this focus are the exploration journals and accompanying maps through which 'Australia', the imperial territory, emerged out of a cobweb of often unfinished or inconclusive journeys. Commenting on Carter's attention to the poetics of colonial landscape representations, Iain Chambers draws attention to a feature of Carter's spatialisation of time also found later in his fictional *Baroque Memories*:

Carter's work presents us less with a stable archaeology [...] than with an undulating series of landscapes in which history is always now. The "lie of the land" [...] evokes the uncertainty of the terrain across which the eye travels and from where the body receives its senses. The terrain is not merely an object or context to be appropriated, but is rather the limited, historical form, in which time and being occur. Carter's detailed excursion into its folds taps the inconclusive baroque logic that overflows the form in multiple directions to reveal the creased, underside of language, time, and a "storied land". In the fold lies the depth, the profundity, that never abandons the surface, the sensuous plane that grounds it all. Further, what is folded into time also unfolds across time: the plane of the senses often provides the potential for explanation (Chambers 2006: 60-61).

As the allusion to Carter's 1996 study of colonial and postcolonial poetics, *The Lie of the Land*, suggests, Chambers regards Carter's 'spatial history' as simultaneously a critique of 'imperial' historiography, a migrant interpretation of novel surroundings and a stylistic strategy: "Such a history is not exhausted by the naming, colonisation and appropriation of the other. It prospects a differentiated, negotiated envelopment by time and tempos that are neither simply unilateral nor necessarily mono-rhythmic" (Chambers 2006: 63). And when Chambers writes, "Here the teleology of the all-seeing gaze is blinded, bent and diverted in the performative poetics of place, where the curvilinear horizons promoted by the earth disturb and dislocate the tabular rationale of the map", he evokes the remarkable chapter in *The Lie of the Land* where Carter compares the circumstances of the emergence of the Venetian art of *macchiare* with the beginnings of the Central Desert Painting Movement (Chambers 2006: 63; Carter 1996: 21-114). Carter finds in similar gestures of marking, provoked at comparable moments of political crisis, a 'curvilinear' sense of time, analogous to Vichian *ricorso* (Carter 1996: 334ff). In this account, time, which is embodied in historical action and history, freed from the fixed coordinates of linear time and space, is mortal or horizontal:

In such a critical disposition, replete with "baroque memories", the language of mimesis gives way to an altogether more ragged narrative that arrives through a rent in occidental sense to insist on another way of telling, another way of being, in which the gesture of the body, the performance of a poetics, the distillation of being in a sound, exceed the conclusive logic of a monument, a book, a map, an archive, a law (Chambers 2006: 63-64).

Carter's cultural analysis seeks to fold time into space, to provide an archaeology of the surface in which heights and depths are also amplified. In this context, it has not hither-

to been remarked how much this conception of narrative space owes to Carter's encounter with Venice. Carter's original purpose in taking up a British Council bursary in Venice in 1978 was to carry out research for a book that was imagined at that time as the completion of an unfinished trilogy commenced by the English aesthete and Italianist, Adrian Stokes. Stokes, he had learnt, intended to complete the suite of books begun with *The Quattro Cento* (sic) and *Stones of Rimini* by writing a treatise on poetics (Stokes 1932; 1934). The immediate impulse for this had been an admiration for the early cantos of Ezra Pound – which, even at this stage, displayed a non-linearist and multifocal historical sensibility, expressed through a remarkable polyrhythmic (and polyvocal) style. As Stokes had renounced this project, so, under the impact of Venice's labyrinthine design and the inexhaustible terrain of exploration it announced, Carter's topic altered. Venice has remained an accompaniment in Carter's creative geography: his forthcoming publication, *Decolonising Governance: Archipelagic Thinking* dwells (in characteristic migrant fashion) on the mimetic relationship between Venice and the Spice Islands (the Moluccas, now Maluku), expressed in shared fantasies of multiplied exchange. Here, though, the point is that the impossibility of complete control, which Carter sees as the redeeming confession of colonial exploration narratives, has its counterpart in the Venetian archipelago, where, as Carter has remarked in his new book, the number of the parts always exceeds what can be counted. Just as the deceptiveness of colonial appearances brings about an ironic reflection on the limitations of Enlightenment reason to classify, subordinate and exploit, so the continuous dissolution of forms in the reflective surface of the canal signifies the inseparability of observer and observed. Carter sees this sensibility played out in Venetian politics: in navigating a path between imperial powers, Paolo Sarpi, according to Carter, "with the image of the sea in mind, imagines motion as grounded in a viscous medium, itself elastic, continuous, curvilinear and, if properly navigated, ultimately supportive" (Carter 1996: 186).

If the Lagoon experience informing Carter's archipelagic Australia has to be deciphered from structural parallels, the impact of Italy's dialectal diversity is easier to discern. The six-part soundscape, *Columbus Echo*, originally commissioned for the new Acquario di Genova (1992), is among other things a decolonisation of Italian dialects: working outwards from medieval Genoese, the script celebrates the diversity of post-Latin Romance dialects contemporary with Columbus' first voyage. The amplification of dialectal differences produces a counter-impulse to improvise a lingua franca – which, in characteristic fashion, Carter derives from the mimetic impulse inherent in any communication across linguistic and cultural difference. So much for the *representandum* – the multilingual Mediterranean of early modern maritime trade and imperial expansion – but no less important in Carter's conception of this scene was the possibility of performing and recording it in Melbourne. Carter has observed in an interview that migrancy involves both multiplication and subtraction. Echoic mimicry – the compositional principle at the base of the *Columbus Echo* script – finds communication in a doubling with difference, in which the lexicon of exchange is both simplified and gesturalised. Represented as the historical function of a go-between language of the kind found in Sabir and other pidgins or proto-creoles, the creative appeal of the script in a transplanted multilingual theatre community was to re-enact (perhaps therapeutically)

the sound-alike confusion of mingled tongues experienced at first on the shores of *their* new world (Australia).

In a forthcoming chapter, Carter has noted that the preparation of the *Columbus Echo* script coincided with the passage of the first comprehensive immigration legislation in Italy; and it is important to realise that the Melbourne recording sessions also arose out of a concrete historical and political moment, the emergence in Australia of the category of non-anglophone 'migrant writer' (Carter forthcoming 2018). Scholars like Sneja Gunew argued that the identification of Australian literature with an Anglo-Celtic tradition not only marginalised Australian writers with non-Anglo European backgrounds (Gunew *et al.* 1992): it prejudiced the reception of experimental non-normative styles of writing arising directly from the peculiar linguistic circumstances in which migrants found themselves. Essays such as "Lines of Communication: meaning in the migrant environment" and "Baroque Identities: migration and mimicry" produced at this time were perceived as contributions to this politico-cultural debate. It is notable, however, that, in contrast with Gunew's poststructuralist theorisation of the poetics of production, Carter's points of reference were largely indigenous. Carter linked the new subaltern voice to a long tradition of Aboriginal colonial subjects 'writing back' (Carter 1994). In linking poetics and politics in this fashion Carter gave a new twist to the familiar *traduttore/traditore* conundrum, a theme that, in the 1990 radio work, *On the Still Air*, becomes explicit.

On the Still Air interweaves four stories of betrayal whose distinguishing peculiarity is that the betrayal occurs in language. Readers familiar with Leonardo Sciascia's book, *The Moro Affair*, will have no difficulty understanding this thesis, which, as Sciascia argues in his critique of the way the Moro communications were *not* read, implicates the reader as much as the writer⁵. In *On the Still Air* a collage of passages derived primarily from the letters themselves, from Andreotti's later memoir and from the premonitory political diagnoses of Pier Paolo Pasolini are woven into two occasions of literary, or, more precisely, poetic betrayal: firstly, Dante's reduction of Guido Cavalcanti's metaphor of *inner* feeling – "aria serena quand apar l'albore / e bianca neve scender senza venti"⁶ – into a purely *external*, visual metaphor in the *Divina Commedia*, where flakes of fire are described as "Piovean di foco dilatate falde, / Come di neve in alpe senza vento"⁷. The new image may be more powerful but fundamentally misrepresents the spirit of the original. It is a failure of responsibility that, *On the Still Air* suggests, is consistent with Dante's role in the expulsion of Cavalcanti from Florence and his subsequent death⁸. Secondly, a comparable betrayal occurs, according to Carter's script, in the relationship between the poets Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot and, ironically, it arises in the context of translating Cavalcanti into English. When, in *Ash Wednesday*, Eliot produced his incomparable rendering of the opening lines of Cavalcanti's *canzone*

⁵ Carter used the recently translated English version: Leonardo Sciascia. 1987. *The Moro Affair and the Mystery of Majorana*. Manchester: Carcanet.

⁶ 'Biltà di donne e di saccente core' Guido Cavalcanti, *Le Rime*, 1902, 109.

⁷ Dante Alighieri, *Commedia, Inferno*, Canto XIV, 29-34. Italo Calvino discusses this ambiguous borrowing in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. London: Random House, 1996, 14-15.

⁸ Carter returns to this distinction in *The Lie of the Land*, 325-328.

“Perch’i’ no spero di tornar giammai”, he managed what Pound (labouring on the English translation of Cavalcanti for twenty-five years) could never achieve: an original, completely modern style (Eliot 1969: 89-99)⁹.

Brought together in this way, these three betrayals could be assumed to occupy a fictional space; however, Carter goes out of his way to provide a concrete *mise-en-scène* for this work, the immediate environs of the Trevi Fountain in Rome. Here what might be called a distinctively migrant perspective enters in, as the fourth story of betrayal concerns two lovers whose mutual failure of trust places a jinx on the fountain: for these lovers, castigated by Pasolini as ‘the consumerist couple’, there is no coming back. But, evidently, this personal banishment mimics the historical and geographical banishment migrants experience when they betray their fatherlands and mother tongues, translating themselves to the ends of the world. Carter is always a circumstantial opportunist, and at the time of composing this work he was struck by the closure of the Trevi Fountain for maintenance, an event that dramatised the artifice involved in sentimental declarations of undying love. In the wake of the water drying up, he detected the echo of something deeper, an admonition to renounce nostalgia and embrace present circumstance: “Dante: The echo was the still air renouncing song. Andreotti: Because there is no going back. No Man: *I am writing his report*. Questa: *Echo*. No Man: *To stop the music freeing*. Questa: *All this was a long time ago*”.

As an avatar of Homer’s *Odysseus*, the self-effacing name *Odysseus* gives himself to deceive Polyphemus, *No Man* appears in Carter’s work in a number of guises. There is his appearance in Luciano Berio’s eponymous music theatre work, on whose libretto Carter worked, and fragments of which were eventually recycled in his later radiophonic production *The Letter S* (2007). But an early, and surprising, heteronymy (to borrow Fernando Pessoa’s distinctive conception of split identity) is the possibly Sicilian Vincenzo Volentieri, a fictional immigrant architect invented to meet Australia’s embarrassing lack of a world class creative genius. Proposed as a suitable candidate for Bicentennial celebration, Carter supplied an overview of the architect’s career, sufficiently circumstantial to persuade many readers that this migrant figure – so disposed to blend with his surroundings that he had disappeared from historical consciousness – might have existed! Amused by the success of this hoax, Carter followed up in 1992 with “Getting In, from the sayings of Vincenzo Volentieri”, a selection of instructions to newly-arrived migrants that, Carter claimed, were transcribed from the architect’s diaries. “Getting In” was published in *The Sound In-Between*, a heterogeneously constructed set of texts intended to exemplify the plural identity of migrant writing. Ironically, this may have meant that Carter’s most intense fictional engagement with the conditions of local migrant cultural production went largely unrecognised: “your dreams are reverse genealogies, tracks leading into it. Until we get in and learn its name, ‘Talk, talk’ must do, I’m afraid” (Carter 1992b: 149-158).

Carter’s engagement with Italian themes in the period 1988 to 1996 is evident. Equally apparent is a turning away from Italy in the subsequent decade. However, it could be argued that this impression of redirected interests is overdrawn. Towards the end of the 1990s Cart-

⁹ “Because I do not hope to turn again...” T. S. Eliot, “Ash Wednesday”, *The Complete Poems and Plays*.

er resumed work on a study of the Diver (*il tuffatore*). In 2001 he proposed an international environmental heritage project called 'Little Venices' – elements of this unrealised proposal surface in *Decolonising Governance*. In 2002, in Padua, he began a short story collection. Yet it is fair to say that, in terms of public outcomes, the yield of these activities during that period was minimal. Carter's creative energies had migrated to the challenge of conceptualising, and designing, public space and, characteristically, in his first major public art commission, *Nearamnew* at Federation Square, Melbourne, he drew a link between the achievement of a just society and the migrant's Vincenzo-like *disponibilità*. From this perspective, the 1998 invitation to be 'writer-in-residence' at Melbourne's yet-to-be-built Federation Square represented an ideal opportunity to reconceptualise the initial conditions of sociability. In migrant fashion, he imagined an exfoliation of space contemporary with his own arrival: "Describe an instant, a timeless moment towards which the project was always tending; a vision that it was necessary to hold in mind, a ground upon which these buildings, these rainswept spaces, these silhouettes of hurrying people stand, but of which they are necessarily unaware" (Carter 2005: 80). Such a ground, he suggested in 'The Migrant's Vision', one of the texts later carved into the surface of Federation Square, could be compared to the continuously exfoliating candid rose of Dante's *Paradiso*, 'unfolding its divisionless petal within petal' (Carter 2005: 84)¹⁰.

This materialisation of time in space can be traced back to Carter's reading of Adrian Stokes' studies in Venetian art and architecture with their focus on the externalisation of the artist's inner world through the encounter with the image in form. The emergence of a stable identity, one able to navigate the vicissitudes of coexistence, involves reconceptualising space as a matrix to be carved. The agoraphobia of isolation is overcome when public space is perceived to have the humanity of marble into which the tracks of encounter are continuously carved, deepened and modified. Obviously, conceived like this, the spatio-temporal manifold of encounter – the form, if you like, of the meeting place – is always emergent, continually, self-transforming. Interestingly, when Carter was commissioned to create a public artwork for the ground plane of Federation Square, Venetian creativity also found *sculptural* expression. The polychromatic cobbles and tiles of Federation Square come from a remote quarry in north-west Australia. The finder of the quarry, Dario di Biasi, an immigrant stonemason from the Veneto, is celebrated in 'The Builder's Vision', and a significant link is made between di Biasi's stone advocacy and John Ruskin's emotional identification with the stones of Venice. But the comparison extends beyond this, as the same Vision also explains the compositional principles of *Nearamnew*'s design in Venetian terms: the 'colourful creation' that emerges from the 'happy chaos' will have the same quality of dapple found in the art of *macchiare*. Commenting on the effect he wanted to achieve, Carter has written, "when people ask me to evoke the feeling of Federation Square, I have thought of the Grand Canal as it must have been in the sixteenth century when the walls of the places were frescoed and the reflected water light mingled with the painted figures and landscapes" (Carter 2005: 92).

Carter transposed Stokes and the associated Venetian milieu to migrant Melbourne,

¹⁰ For full text and reference, see Carter 2005: 84.

exploring the parallels conceptually and artistically. But it is possible that a discursive framework also migrated, found in Carter's characteristic speaking position, his self-dramatisation as a permanent outsider, always operating at the margins of the national clearing. Certainly, his historic personae (Adelaide's founder, William Light, whose Italian connections Carter has also studied or the sculptor Alberto Giacometti, whose models of human meeting haunt Carter's writing) possess an intensity attributable to their hybrid insider/outsider status. Consider, for example, the opening sentence of *The Road to Botany Bay*: "No sign of life on the shore this morning. From the bridge the glass picks out nothing. No wordless mime of figures crouched on their haunches; no Indians, more unaccountably still, pursue their way 'in all appearance entirely unmov'd...'" (Carter 1987: xiii). The 'instant' described in 1998 is essentially a migrant transmutation of this colonial moment. In both cases the lack of recognition and what follows from it – the recognition that others exist outside our reduction and control – is interpreted as hopeful. At the beginning of one history (colonial) there is glimpsed the possibility of other historical narratives, postcolonial in inflection. In this context it is surely striking that Carter's rhetorical trope elaborates on the opening lines of Stokes' *The Quattro Cento*: "No sign of Frederick Hohenstaufen in the railway station at least [...]" (Stokes 1932: 3) – an observation that signals Stokes' intention to write a heterodox history of art.

The reproduction of Henri Cartier-Bresson's famous photograph, Alberto Giacometti in the rue d'Alésia on the front cover of *Repressed Spaces* indicates the importance of this artist in Carter's work. Carter discovers in Giacometti's sculptures and in his conversations, imprint clues to the challenge of living in a new country. For example, Giacometti's description of 'a fissure in reality' associated with a new post-perspectival insight into the relationship between near and far, and therefore between people suspended in space, has analogies with the interruption in time experienced by the migrant. More recently, Carter has explored the relevance of Giacometti's 'breakthrough' moment to an understanding of *il tuffatore*, the Paestum tomb painting discovered in 1968 when a pickaxe broke through the lid of the tomb (Carter 2015). Giacometti also provides a through line to *Meeting Place, the human encounter and the challenge of coexistence* (2013), ensuring that, despite the eleven-year gap between these publications, *Repressed Spaces* and *Meeting Place* are read in dialogue with each other. Once again in *Meeting Place* we find Carter's favoured trope of non-meeting: in this case a man awaits his lover at the central Station in Milan, only, inexplicably, to miss her arrival. The quest that springs from this 'fissure in reality' traverses the city in search of a public Eros that can locate personal loss within a larger economy of encounter, one in which intimacy is twinned with extreme isolation – the *mise-en-scène* Carter also detected in Giacometti's group figurines. The Eros evoked in this quest is Venetian, and in contrasting it with the sensibility governing Florentine culture – "for every Florence there is a Venice, and within Venice there is a shimmering organisation of liquid space where channels and vessels fuse into one reticulated, many-arched, and arching body" (Carter 2013: 114-115) – Carter faithfully reproduces the aesthetic antithesis at the heart of Stokes' *The Quattro Cento*. We can take this one step further: having defined Florence as Venice's antithesis, Stokes had to make exceptions. Among these was Paolo Uccello, whose handling

of perspectival composition brought to “ferment psychological and physical” a “sense of completeness” that was achieved because the artists transformed “time into terms of space” (Stokes 1932: 158). Reproducing Uccello’s *La Caccia in Meeting Place*, Carter perceives in it “the recovery of the middle ground” where a “multitude of crossroads” open up. These sites of “fatal encounter” are preferred to the emotional emptiness focused on the “vanishing point” (Carter 2013: 163).

As already indicated, the turning away from Italian themes in the late 1990s can be overstated. Rather, Carter’s media of expression had changed, with consequences for the manner in which the Italian presence manifested itself. We mentioned the resumption of the study of *il tuffatore*: in 2001, Carter, together with his fellow artist, Ruark Lewis, introduced the outline of this figure into *Relay*, a major public art work for the Sydney 2000 Olympics¹¹. While a specific reference was intended to the story of the site where the artwork was located, the painting had a more genuine relevance. *Relay* attempted to put into poetic language and typographical design the experience of the athlete, the sensation of constant change paradoxically experienced in the instant. In spatialising time, athletes perform a different kind of history, one evoked by Franz Kafka’s aphorism, “the history of mankind is the instant between two strides taken by a traveller” a phrase whose interpretation permeates *Dark Writing*¹². The Diver is the image of a movement form that resists the Zenonian paradox: it cannot be analysed into successive moments. In a curious way, it resists the kind of visualisation associated with photography. In a clear echo of his earlier fascination with the Venetian art of *macchiare*, Carter suggests that at the heart of *photologos* – the kind of Enlightenment reasoning associated with imperial discourses of conquest and enslavement – there exists a blind spot that possesses its own kind of dark writing: “The dark is instead the interest of the phenomenal environment, its tendency to fall to movement forms, but for which stable ideas could not take shape” (Carter 2008: 232). In suggesting that dark writing “underwrites” the “the interests of light” (Carter 2008: 232) Carter is perhaps also alluding to the role a migrant poetics plays in the ‘underworld’ of postcolonial emergence.

We have noted Carter’s geographical *ricorsi* – the way in which sedimented biographical data are repeatedly revisited from different experiential and poetic perspectives. This phenomenon also operates longitudinally across time: the persistence of themes announced in *Repressed Spaces* is an example, another the abiding presence of *il tuffatore*, whose plunge into the void may serve as a metaphor for mastering the turbulence of migration, and whose interpretation remains as open as the enigma of arrival, which, for the migrant, is never completed. In his recent book length essay, *Metabolism: the exhibition of the invisible*, Carter seems to integrate geographical and thematic *ricorsi*. Focusing on the moment in June 1968 when *la tomba del tuffatore* was discovered, he ponders the ethical and aesthetic issues associated with its curation. These, and other Lucanian tomb paintings, were evidently designed for the dark: in what way, then, can exposure to the light (and the public gaze) respect the

¹¹ A post opening modification to the landscape where *Relay* was located created an opportunity to revisit and augment the original design. See Carter 2008: 223-224.

¹² Discussed in Carter 2008: 12.

artist's intent? More generally, what culture of memorialisation evaporates when darkness is stripped away and the image alone survives? Posing these questions from outside the archaeological profession, Carter offers a methodological provocation, one that (in the manner of Nora) differentiates between history and memory. But it is also clear that Carter identifies emotionally with the figure who voluntarily plunges from sight in search of an underwriting whose expression may always be oblique.

Unexpectedly, Carter says, the publication of *Metabolism* has stimulated a new *ricorso*. Its local uptake is evident in the exhibition (current at the time of writing) that Gabriel Zuchtriegel, Director of the Paestum Museum, has curated as part of the 50th anniversary celebrations of *il tuffatore's* discovery. In the catalogue for *L'immagine invisibile: la tomba del tuffatore nel cinquantesimo dalla scoperta*, Zuchtriegel writes: "L'invisibilità – intesa come sottrazione del contenuto sia in senso letterale (realizzazione di un dipinto per l'interno di una tomba), sia in senso metaforico (ambiguità dei segni, che sono ridotti all'essenziale) – è probabilmente l'aspetto che ha fatto sì che la Tomba del Tuffatore sia divenuta una delle opere antiche più rivisitate in assoluto, nonostante sia stata nota solo per 50 anni" (Zuchtriegel 2018: 92). An interesting feature of Carter's meditation is its conclusion in a listing of political events unfolding at the time of the tomb's discovery. As he comments, "these news items are the debris of a larger patterning of human history, in which rise and fall follow one another in an endless cycle" (Carter 2015: 58). Implied here is a Vichian theory of historical time within which *il tuffatore's* return is predictable. From this point of view, the Diver is a new kind of history: if, etymologically, the historian is associated with the eye-witness, then this new historian is concerned with the memory of the dark, that is, with the traces of absence that persist and shadow our daily lives. Clearly, this position suggests migrant nostalgia, a sense of ancestral bereavement redeemed in the act of return. But it also has another inflection: *Metabolism* is notable for its detailed description of the Museum, its interior, its visitors, its tourism venues. It is as if even here Carter wants to invert historical genealogy and deduce the inevitability of the Diver from the phenomena of the everyday. After all, in a certain sense, the history of *il tuffatore* does begin on 3rd June 1968. In this context, it is significant that Carter concludes his essay with a reference to the English writer, George Gissing, who around 1897 visited Crotona, and fell into "a visionary state which, while it lasted, gave me such placid happiness as I have never known in my perfect mind" (Gissing 1986: 82). The lucid dream in which the embarkation of Hannibal for Carthage passes before his eyes in cinematographic detail marks the terminus of Gissing's classical adventure, just as it signified the end of the Carthaginian commander's Roman ambitions. It is a suitable place to conclude these notes: Carter's migrant poetics, and the Italian *ricorsi* that inform it, depend on reliving the moment of severance when 'the fissure in reality' opened up the possibility of returning in a different way.

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Paul Carter is Professor of Design (Urbanism), RMIT University, Melbourne. His forthcoming books are: *Decolonising Governance: archipelagic thinking* (Routledge) and *Amplifications: poetic migration, auditory memory* (Bloomsbury). *Metabolism, the exhibition of the unseen*, his monograph on The Diver was recently launched at the archaeological museums of Naples and Paestum. He is collaborating with the Parco Archeologico di Paestum on a public program inspired by *il tuffatore* which is due to occur in 2019.

paul.carter@rmit.edu.au

Roberta Trapè is an Honorary Fellow of the School of Languages and Linguistics at The University of Melbourne. She has worked on the theme of Australian travel to Italy in contemporary Australian fiction and non-fiction. She has also written on notions of space and movement in contemporary society including the migration experience; on Paul Carter's 'Spatial history'; on 'Red Ways', Carter's four-year engagement with Indigenous and non-indigenous communities in Alice Springs, Central Australia, and on his 'Translations' of Italy in his Italian-influenced work *Baroque Memories* (1994).

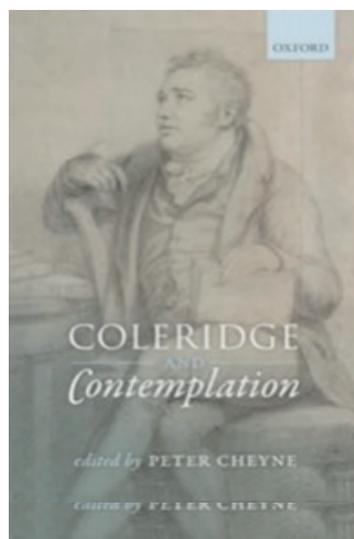
r.trape@unimelb.edu.au

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Antonella Riem

Imagination, Meditation and the Mind: Reflections on *Coleridge and Contemplation*

Peter Cheyne ed. 2017. *Coleridge and Contemplation*. Oxford (UK): Oxford University Press, 332 pp., US\$ 90.00, ISBN 9780198799511



<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/coleridge-and-contemplation-9780198799511?cc=us&lang=en&>

Coleridge and Contemplation, brilliantly edited by Peter Cheyne, with a *Foreword* by Baroness Mary Warnock, is a thorough and comprehensive collection of essays by renowned scholars from different research backgrounds who put together their varied expertise to scrutinise Coleridge's philosophical, poetic, scientific and metaphysical thoughts (in poetry and prose) from a wide range of perspectives, but with a main focus centred on the idea of contemplation/meditation in his *opus*. The book acknowledges Coleridge's original and innovative work and constant and tireless study of the human being, from philosophy to many branches of what was to become 'science', from religion to politics, including Hinduism and the French Revolution, from Classical to musical, medical and physiological studies, including the workings of the psyche, often anticipating later psychology. Indeed, in studying the side-effects of laudanum on his mind and body, as Knight mentions, he was a "careful follower of his symptoms and coiner of the word 'psychosomatic'" (91).

Coleridge and Contemplation is divided into four parts, beginning with an in-depth analysis of Coleridge's "Poetics and Aesthetics" (Part I), with contributions on contemplation,

imagination and meditation, all essential concepts to understand the intensity of his poetry and his constant aspiration to beauty as a form of revelation. Part II faces the multiplicity of Coleridge's intellectual and scholarly pursuits with a view on his approach to "Science, Ethics, and Politics". Part III "Metaphysics" tackles one of the most challenging topics for Coleridge critics, his metaphysical ideas that are then, perhaps, ideally settled, or at least 'regulated' in Part IV, which focuses on "Philosophy and Religion".

As Peter Cheyne fittingly affirms in his Introduction, "Coleridge is a particularly challenging figure because he was a thinker in process, and something of an omnimath, a Renaissance man of the Romantic era. The dynamic quality of his thinking, the 'dark fluxion' pursued but ultimately 'unfixable by thought' (*Poetical Works* I: 1154), and his extensive range of interests make a philosophical yet also multi-disciplinary approach to Coleridge essential" (7). This passage testifies well to Coleridge's remarkable intellectual scope, his habitual anticipatory grasp on a multidisciplinary (as we call it today) opening to knowledge, which is actually a constant search for the secret-sacred Wisdom in all manifestations of the "One Life", also in its human expressions in literature, philosophy, medicine, chemistry, religion and so on. It is a "studio matto e disperatissimo"¹, as Giacomo Leopardi defines this infinite desire for knowledge, in order to reach an "Absolute Unity", as Coleridge calls it, or a "perfect whole":

Till, by a curious art disposed, we find
One perfect whole of all the pieces joined.
(Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, *The Art of Poetry*, I, ll. 177-180).

It is the shared yearning of the Romantics for an answer to their intellectual and metaphysical wonderings across the ocean of Consciousness, contemplated, *Krsna*-like, while floating on the Lotus flower of sacred knowledge.

Because of Coleridge's vast interest in the fruits of the human, seeking mind, *Coleridge and Contemplation* too, gracefully and exhaustively displays the all-embracing scope of the Renaissance humanism of a Romantic mind, to which critics nowadays should attend much more than "publish or perish" pressures allow. This is the first of many assets of this comprehensive book, where the specificity of the concept of contemplation is followed across different areas of interest with determination, scholarly depth and thorough creativity. As Baroness Mary Warnock says in her foreword, "this is a book to be greatly welcomed" and is also "strangely timely" (vii), not only, as she says, because it reminds us of the importance of the relationship humans have with nature, but also, I believe, because it addresses the need of our contemporary globalised and troubled world to refocus on a loving and mutual relationship among humans, with nature, with animate and so-called inanimate things and beings. Coleridge beautifully describes how we need to feel deeply:

O! The One Life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,

¹ Lettera a Pietro Giordani a Milano, Recanati, 2 marzo 1818 in Viani 1849: 76.

Rhythm in all thought and joyance every where –
 Methinks, it should have been impossible
 Not to love all things in a world so fill'd;
 Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air
 Is Music slumbering on her instrument
 ("The Aeolian Harp", ll. 26-33)².

As Nehru says: "The human mind appears to have a passion for finding out some kind of unity in life, in nature, in the universe" and "the search for unity in India, Greece, and elsewhere, yielded positive results and produced a harmony, a balance, and a richness in life"³. In the Romantic mind this passion and aspiration is strong, and in particular in Coleridge's writings there is "a never-appeased longing to recompose the multifarious nuances of existence into what he calls an 'Absolute Unity'"⁴. As he says:

I would make a pilgrimage to the burning sands of Arabia to find the Man who could explain to me there can be *oneness*, there being infinite Perceptions – yet there must be a *oneness*, not an intense Union but an Absolute Unity⁵.

Under the lens of his philosophy and metaphysical thinking, *Coleridge and Contemplation* revolves around Coleridge's synaesthetic interconnections of soul and mind, music and air, inner and outer spaces, found in "The Aeolian Harp" and most of his work.

In Part I, J. C. C. Mays says: "if contemplative suggests a detached or achievable position of calm, there must be a better description of a mind divided. Coleridge was *homo viator*, a wandering man [...]. He was a man who wrote about and communicated energy – vitality – hedged about as he was by human difficulties and frustrations" (32). The gift of a focussed and calm mind, of a metaphysical unity in the face of horizontal multiplicity was a constant pursuit for Coleridge, only momentarily and fugitively achieved, especially in his poetry, so that he had to start all over again (and again). In Hinduism, which Coleridge frequented in his vast readings, the aspiration to Oneness does not negate division or movement and change in human journeying. While Western philosophy tends to think in terms of *aut aut*, reality from an Oriental perspective is seen from a more inclusive *et et* point of view. For example, with the concept of *māyā*, often inaccurately translated as 'illusion', Hinduism speaks of different levels of consciousness and René Guénon, the eminent French orientalist, appropriately defines the word *māyā* as "work of art":

He who produces the manifestation through the means of his 'art' is the Divine Architect, and the world is his 'work of art'; thus thought, the world is no less 'real' than our works of art, which, due to their relative impermanence, are also 'unreal' if

² Coleridge 1983: 101.

³ Nehru 1981: 98-99.

⁴ Riem 2005: 2.

⁵ Coburn 1957: 556.

compared to the art 'abiding' in the artist. Indeed, the main danger one runs when using the word 'illusion' is that we can too easily use it as a synonym for 'unreality', in an absolute sense, that is considering things as illusory, as if they were absolutely nothing, while they are instead only different gradations of reality⁶.

So, in his life and work, Coleridge reached "different gradations" of harmony, contemplative and meditative calm and perceived/imagined in himself diverse forms of 'reality' as in the case of the meditative concluding lines of "Frost at Midnight", where the speaker's initial sense of separation from all 'quiet' life is superseded through memory, meditation and contemplation. Even if the "secret ministry of frost" cannot be completely unveiled and revealed, it can light up the poet's imagination "in a sudden flare of illumination, an unexpected shaft opening to the spiritual and intuitive *sight* of the One, in a vision of Beauty and Truth"⁷. In particular, Nature, being a manifestation of Life, functions as a fundamental element and focus in order to find inspiration; it represented for most of the Romantic poets the restorative energetic field of calmness and inner tranquillity that verged on (or imitated) a meditative state: "the walker will enjoy a sense of convergence or communion with nature and a sense, too, of the world as an integral whole, a unity. [...] For then the meditator is not only on the move but 'on the Way' and 'in the truth'" (David E. Cooper, 45).

Truth, as in Keats' "Ode to the Grecian Urn", needs to be always intimately interlaced with Beauty, and for Coleridge Beauty is distinguished from "the agreeable" that gratifies our senses, while "the beautiful, by contrast, is 'pleasing for its own sake'" (48). James Kirwan's essay on beauty traces Coleridge's philosophical concerns across eighteenth-century aesthetics and Kant, noting how Coleridge prefers the "neo-Platonic idea of beauty as emanating directly from the divine. [...] For, it is only by remaining a matter of pure contemplation that beauty can become revelation" (57), as Coleridge elucidates in his *Notebooks*: "Man knows God only by revelation from God – as we see the Sun by his own Light"⁸. Indeed, "What is mere longing for Kant is for Coleridge the soul recognizing its divine origin"⁹. In the following essay on the 'art of contemplation', a comparison between Coleridge and Dewey, Wheeler demonstrates how the reader is a "fellow labourer" (72) in the imaginative process of poetic creation, and artistic power is "the paradigmatic form of all human mental activity", where "metaphor epitomizes human perception building up a world of nature and mind" (73), thus bringing praise to Coleridge's innovative and important "insight into the imaginative nature of perception and the sensuous nature of imagination" (75). Scruton's essay concludes this part focussing on the fancy/imagination relation and debate and sees imagination as "truth-directed" (79-83) because it involves, also in the reader, "the active participation in forming images, scenes, and narratives, with a view to understanding the world in which we live and our own states of mind and aspirations" (84). Understanding, stemming from the highest faculties of the human soul, means to partake in the creation

⁶ Guénon 1990: 95.

⁷ Riem 2005: 133.

⁸ Coburn 1957: 209.

⁹ Cooper 2018: 2.

of things as images, descending from the *mundus imaginalis*, or 'middle world of images'¹⁰. Speaking of the quality and power of imagination, the *modifying*, and *coadunating* Faculty, Coleridge says: "the Hebrew Poets appear to me to have possessed beyond all others - & next to them the English. In the Hebrew Poets each Thing has a Life of its own, & yet they are all one Life. In God they move & live, & *have* their Being – not *had*, as the cold System of Newtonian Theology represents / but *have*"¹¹.

In part II, Knight's essay focuses on the possibility that chemical philosophy could reconcile "science and Romantic sensibility". Coleridge is an attentive and imaginative language creator, for in a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science he "denounced the use of the term 'philosopher' for all the chemists, mathematicians, physiologists, and other assembled; and William Whewell proposed the term 'scientist' on Coleridge's prompting (like Coleridge, he was a great word-coiner)" (100-101). Aherne proposes an analysis of the "formative and spiritual impact" Coleridge had "upon the Cambridge Apostles and the subsequent development of theology at the university during the nineteenth century" (105), while Oishi treats the connection between contemplation and philanthropy, pinpointing in the end how the "emotional intensity towards contemplation" (135) distances Coleridge from the Kantian system of reason, for Coleridge "kept claiming 'an opening of the inward eye to the glorious vision' of 'I AM THAT I AM' (*Friend* I 519; Perry 199, 128)" (137). This glorious inner vision of Oneness is analysed in detail by Engell (chapter 14) who traces it into the "Originating act of self-affirmation – in religious terms Jehovah's I AM THAT I AM (Exodus 3: 14), in philosophical terms 'the SUM or I AM' (*Biographia* I 272 and n), the *Ich bin weil Ich bin*, as opposed to Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* – is paramount" (Engell, 236). I think it is one of the many clear signs of Coleridge's interest in Eastern philosophies, as it refers to the much more ancient Sanskrit concept of *Ham So, I Am That*, which in Vedic philosophy means identifying oneself with the universe, or ultimate reality, or God. The verse can be found in the *Vajasaneyi Samhita Upanishad* or *Isha Upanishad*, which ends with the line *tejo yat te rūpaṃ kalyāṇatamaṃ tat te paśyāmi yo 'sāv [asau puruṣaḥ] so'ham asmi*, "The light which is thy fairest form, I see it. I am what He is"¹². It is also connected to the very similar expression *Tat Tvam Asi* "Thou art that" (found in the *Chandogya Upanishad* 6.8.7), which implies the Unity of all: the I, *Jivātmā*, is one with *Ātmā*, the Self, as an individual ray of *Paramātmā*, God¹³.

¹⁰ Corbin, Henri, *Corps Spirituel et Terre Céleste*, ch. 2, my translation: "We are thus offered a triple universe: an intelligible universe, a sensible universe and between the two that inter-world that, resorting to Latin, we have learnt to call *mundus imaginalis* [which] does not have anything unreal or 'shadowy' in itself. It has full right to a sui generis reality, and it is what we have completely forgotten in the West, since when the 'battle for the Soul of the World' was lost: once lost the Image is abandoned to all its degradations, to all the licences of an Imagination that has lost its orienting axis, and with this its cognitive function. Thus one can only know the Images derived from the sensible or perceptible through the senses (the so called civilisation of images, the cinema screen). Therefore, no more metaphysical Images nor metaphysics of the Images and of Imagination, for the Imagination principle is that, through the Soul's organ, through its imagining function, the very Universe of Being reveals itself in the 'imaginal' Forms of the *mundus imaginalis*".

¹¹ Griggs 1802: 866.

¹² *The Upanishads* 2018.

¹³ Raphael 1992.

Hamilton's essay on "Coleridge and Conservatism" aptly concludes this part, with a wide-scope analysis of Coleridge's original and evolving ideas on politics, which were disregarded for a long time after Chamber's biography in 1938, which superseded Muirhead's fundamental analysis (1930) of Coleridge as the "most important forerunner of British idealism, a Platonist and transcendentalist whose work was inspired by, but in tension with Kant" (144). This forgetfulness of Coleridge as philosopher continued for such a long time that his philosophical writings remain "little known" and he is not mentioned in "ten volumes of the *Routledge History of Philosophy* (2003)" (145). (Coleridge does, however, receive a full, discursive entry in the *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Hamilton fills in this gap and investigates in depth his specific mode of conservatism, which he defines "contemplative" because of his view of society "not as a machine but as a highly complex organism" (146) and because of his interest in "elitism" rather than "populism" (Coleridge's original distinction, 143), which arises from "the impassioned defence of cultural as opposed to material progress" (158). For this, he can be "loosely described as conservative but neither archaic nor reactionary [...] (Morrow 1990: 4)" (164), being rather a "radical or critical conservative" (164).

Part III, the spinning "metaphysical" centre of the book, opens with Cheyne's remarkable essay dealing with Coleridge as a "two-level theorist, with *higher level, energetic* acts and ideals in the highest understanding, imagination and reason organizing and cohering [*Citi*], at least ideally, *the lower level energetic* desires, associations, and conceptual structuring of sense, fancy, and the lower understanding [*manas* or, at an intermediary level *buddhi*]" (171). In my study *The One Life*, I compared Hindu and Western ideas of the mind, and I find that Cheyne's *higher level* can be connected to the faculty of universal consciousness, *Citi*, ("reason considered objectively, as the universal logos, beyond the human mind", radiating its light in the human soul, *buddhi*, the intellect, an intermediary between *Citi* and *Manas*, the *lower* individual human mind – "reason considered subjectively" (176). It is a threefold, rather than twofold, gradation of understanding that partakes of the tripartite dimension of reality we can find in many *Conversation Poems* and also in the movement from mind, to fancy, to imagination, progressively reaching a *higher* or more perfect form of Unity, that undeniably stresses the importance Coleridge gives to the "dynamic relationship between synthesis and analysis, between combination and division" (175). Struwig, focussing on *Logic* and *Opus Maximum*, in harmony with Cheyne's perspective, draws a difference between Coleridge's ideas of a Kantian transcendental a priori, from a noetic, Platonic one, showing how he "sets out philosophical views that are central to his own system of 'rationalist intuitionism'" (194). Flores explores the impact on Coleridge of the "Christian neo-Platonism that gained strength during the seventeenth century in the Cambridge Platonist school" (212), led by Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688) and Henry More (1614-1687). She studies in detail some poems such as "Effusion XXXV" (later to become "The Aeolian Harp"), "This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison", and "Frost at Midnight", which according to her view "illustrate Coleridge's conviction at that time that the role of the ideal poet is first to discover, and then further to convey in verse, the spirit of nature – plastic nature which is accessible to the poet only through contemplation" (219).

According to Engell, Coleridge's development of neo-Platonic ideas is not in contrast to his study of Kant; he takes Schelling's idea that imagination is "intimately linked to contemplative reason" (224) and it can "incorporate the ideas of reason into the images of sense" (227). Coleridge's analogical thinking and his metaphysical 'Syncretism' allow him to be a "modified Platonist", "something of a pragmatist and a Trinitarian Christian" (13), without incongruities or contradictions. That higher reality and unity he pursues in all fields always bring him to a more comprehensive and non-excluding approach to life.

Part IV opens with McGhee's stimulating "Buddhist response to Coleridge" that reads closely note I 576 in *Marginalia* connecting it to the revised and extended version found at the end of *Biographia Literaria*, where Coleridge describes a state of "inner adoration to the great I AM" (*Biographia* II 247-8, quoted 263). This inner adoration is the means "to know God", which equals the knowledge of "the reality of love", for only those who "love know God" (264). McGhee aptly comments that the phrases he quotes have "points of contact, at least, with Stoicism and with the Buddhist traditions" (263), and I would add to this a more ancient Hindu connection, with a special type of love for God, *Bhakti* in Sanskrit, as Coleridge tellingly expounds describing his son Hartley's contemplative deep love for nature as his "*Brahman* love & awe of Life"¹⁴. The essay then analyses "Fears in Solitude" and "Frost at Midnight", showing how the special quiet and silence created by inner contemplation "seems to be one of the conditions for the formation and then contemplation that awaken 'the soul of man' (*Marginalia* I 576; *Statesman's Manual* 24)" (276). Through this awakening, the vision of God penetrates the soul which becomes "reunited in mystical ecstasy with that radiance which is the source of the very Intellectual Principle"¹⁵. Noriko Naohara presents Coleridge's "spiritual truths", where reason is "an inward Beholding" (278), where through inner vision/contemplation one can relate with a loving God: "Coleridge retained a Christian spirituality; this definition of reason indicates his confidence about the human mind intuiting God as a spiritual substance" (278). The essay then studies the affinity of ideas of language between Coleridge and Augustine, and finds that "in Coleridge's theological thinking, reason is an 'inward Beholding' (*Aids to Reflection* 224) and a spiritual faculty to know the divine Word" (288). Next, Suzanne Webster studies Coleridge's *triple Ichheit* noting: 1) "A, The Spiritual I", connected to "Moral Self-consciousness" and to the "Mind" (298); 2) "(-A), the Animal I", or the "mind of the flesh", "the lowest *active* mental faculty in humans", which was for Coleridge a complicated faculty, being "perilously close to being truly animal in nature" (301); 3) "(B) The human I or I am", "possessing human Understanding" (302). She concludes stressing how even if the *Triple Ichheit* "may contain three distinct parts", it "counterfeits *sameness*, single identity" (304). J. Gerald Janzen focuses on the codas to *Biographia Literaria* and *Opus Maximum* Fragment 2, where Coleridge sees prayer as "pure will", the "energetic core" of contemplation (313). Then Janzen turns to Coleridge's childhood memories of his mother and father, to the "affective core" of his "contemplative reflections" (313) that can, like in many of his poems, bring the "deep devotion of Delight" (317), connected to the "very hunger at the mother's bosom / that very hunger a mode of

¹⁴ Coburn 1957: 959 (4.84).

¹⁵ Werkmeister 1961: 99-123, 111-112.

love (Notebooks 3 §4348)" (318). Once again it is an "Act of Adoration", or *Bhakti*, the deep reverent 'awful' feeling of love for God, which is the great Mother Spider found in a Notebook entry (311), forever spinning the thread of Life. The same analogy can be found in the *Mundaka Upanishad* (1.1.7): "As a spider projects forth and draws back (its threads), as plants grow on earth, as hairs grow on the body, so does the universe emerge from the Imperishable Being".

In conclusion, I agree with what Andrew Cooper says about *Coleridge and Contemplation*: "The volume is of interest to theologians, literary theorists and philosophers in search of a more expansive account of nature in which the human and her capacity to think do not feature as puzzling remainders. Cheyne should be praised for his enormous editing achievement, and for the remarkably high standard of the essays in the volume"¹⁶. I am sure that this excellent book, bound to become a classic in Coleridge's scholarship and criticism, will continue to inspire meditations and contemplations on his work for a long time. As a passionate and contemplative devotee and scholar of Coleridge's intense relations to Hinduism, meditative inner states and Eastern philosophies, I am very grateful for this book's accomplishments, which will bear many fruits.

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¹⁶ Cooper 2018.

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Antonella Riem Natale is Full Professor of English Literature and Language, Pro-Vice Chancellor International, Director of the Department of Languages and Literatures, Communication, Education and Society (DILL), President of ANDA (National Association of Anglistics), and founder in 1998 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*. She has more than one hundred publications, among which: *The One Life: Coleridge and Hinduism* (Rawat 2005), "The Spirit of the Creative Word in Patrick White's *Voss*" in *Patrick White's Centenary. The Legacy of a Prodigal Son* (Bill Ashcroft & Cynthia Vanden Driesen eds. Cambridge Scholars 2014) and *A Gesture of Reconciliation. Partnership Studies in Australian Literature* (Forum 2017). She is working on a volume on the figure of the 'Goddess' in the literatures in English.
antonella.riem@uniud.it

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Serena Guarracino

Forme dell'interregno

Lorenzo Mari. 2018. Forme dell'interregno. Past Imperfect di Nuruddin Farah tra letteratura post-coloniale e world literature. Canterano (RM): Aracne, 195 pp., € 12,00, ISBN 978-88-255-1051-5



<http://www.aracneeditrice.it/index.php/pubblicazione.html?item=9788825510515>

In questa congiuntura storica, dove la retorica dell'“emergenza migranti” sta colonizzando l'immaginario europeo delle relazioni con la sponda sud del Mediterraneo e il continente africano, l'esperienza letteraria può offrire strumenti per raccontare la storia in maniera diversa, e così scardinare i discorsi che sostengono e garantiscono risposte securitarie all'attuale crisi dei rifugiati. È una delle riflessioni sollecitate dalla lettura di *Forme dell'interregno* che, forte di un impianto metodologico saldamente posizionato tra gli studi postcoloniali e la teoria letteraria, offre una lettura della trilogia *Past Imperfect* dell'autore somalo Nuruddin Farah, non come esercizio di interpretazione del testo in funzione di sintomo o documento della crisi, bensì come pratica di critica ai discorsi egemonici sulla Somalia (e non solo) a partire dal testo letterario.

La trilogia, costituita dai romanzi *Links* (2004; trad. it. *Legami* 2005), *Knots* (2007; trad. it. *Nodi* 2008) e *Crossbones* (2011; non ancora tradotto in Italia), racconta infatti la Somalia

durante la guerra civile che imperversa nel paese dal 1991, intrecciando i fili della storia recente con quelli del passato coloniale sotto il dominio italiano e della dittatura di Siad Barre. E se questo può sembrare un luogo apparentemente periferico, rispetto alle assi dei poteri nazionali e transnazionali, l'autore fa notare in apertura quanto, "pur essendo stata tradizionalmente collocata ai margini degli assetti globali, la Somalia può essere collocata al centro di una riflessione che, tra fragilità post-coloniali e ombre neocoloniali [...] può illuminare al meglio il quadro geopolitico mondiale nel suo insieme" (44). E questo non solo per comprendere meglio gli equilibri e i disequilibri del presente, ma anche per volgere lo sguardo, insieme a Farah, a quel "passato imperfetto" sul cui resoconto si svolgono accese battaglie culturali.

La riscrittura della storia per dare forma al presente è spesso esigenza primaria della letteratura postcoloniale, e Farah costituisce una delle voci più potenti e al contempo non allineate di questo ormai consolidato canone letterario. Mari non evita la questione del canone: al contrario, il primo dei due capitoli che aprono il volume dialoga con il dibattito recente su letteratura postcoloniale e *world literature*: quinte critiche di cui il volume dà un'ampia panoramica metodologica, che permette a chi legge sia di ampliare l'orizzonte teorico di riferimento che di inquadrare con precisione l'analisi dei romanzi, che costituisce la seconda parte del volume. Pur trattandosi di un saggio essenzialmente monografico, è infatti evidente il tessuto di quello "scenario più esteso" (178) che l'autore evoca nella conclusione e che si innesta nell'analisi testuale. Uno scenario che include la storicizzazione dell'esperienza letteraria, nonché un approccio materialista alla produzione e ricezione contemporanea, testimoniato dalla presenza di Gramsci da cui il testo mutua uno dei concetti centrali della propria analisi, quello di "interregno", per affrontare a viso aperto il mito del "fallimento della nazione" imputato alle formazioni statali africane emerse dalla decolonizzazione.

Sorprende, per certi versi, la voce originale che l'autore riesce a trovare pur nella testimonianza minuziosa della ricchezza di posizioni nel dibattito contemporaneo; e questo permette a Mari di affrontare alcune delle criticità della produzione di Farah, tra cui la scelta della lingua inglese e le sue posizioni riguardo le politiche di genere. Per quanto riguarda la prima questione, l'inquadramento della trilogia nel contesto della *world literature* e del suo imperante 'anglo-globalismo' si affianca ad una percezione nitida del contesto specifico somalo, e ciò permette di pensare alla scelta linguistica di Farah non necessariamente come una collocazione egemonica, bensì come "un intervento nella temporalità post-coloniale, densa ed eterogenea, a ravvivare dialetticamente il confronto tra una delle lingue coloniali europee e il somalo, non solo in quanto idioma autoctono ma anche perché ideologicamente promosso dal regime di Siad Barre" (43).

Rispetto al secondo punto, pur non negando la difficoltà di associare le personagge di Farah ad una narrativa di *agency* femminista, l'autore mostra anche come la critica al modello nazionale illuminista elaborata in questi romanzi "produca uno scarto rispetto a una visione nazionalista borghese" (28) soprattutto attraverso la narrazione di "contro-famiglie" (33) variamente anti-normative. L'eteronormatività patriarcale diventa quindi uno degli obiettivi principali di quella "operazione decostruttiva" (59) dei discorsi recepiti sia dalla storiografia che dall'antropologia che Mari ritrova in *Past Imperfect*. È proprio nel solco

di questa traccia antagonista e resistente che si snoda l'analisi dei romanzi, a cui è dedicato ognuno uno dei tre capitoli di chiusura. Questa strutturazione rigorosa però non impedisce all'autore, attraverso una trama complessa di citazioni e rimandi, di offrire una lettura complessiva della trilogia e degli intrecci affettivi, i *links* e *knots* che si oppongono, da una parte, alla famiglia nucleare su cui si basa la costruzione nazionale borghese di impianto europeo, e dall'altra, sia alle appartenenze claniche che vengono generalmente (e spesso genericamente) considerate all'origine della guerra civile somala.

Forme dell'interregno permette quindi di avvicinarsi (o di tornare) alla lettura di *Past Imperfect* non solo con un approfondimento storico significativo, ma con strumenti che permettono di registrarne la rilevanza attuale: come nota Mari, "in Italia [...] soltanto una piccolissima quota dei rifugiati somali ha ottenuto il riconoscimento di tale statuto, e quasi sempre sulla base di un'analisi imprecisa del conflitto come esclusivamente basato sullo scontro interclanico" (67). In un momento in cui il sapere umanistico rischia la superfluità davanti sia alla materialità delle merci che all'immaterialità dei capitali, interventi come questo si rivelano profondamente necessari, in grado come sono di mettere la letteratura e il pensiero critico al servizio del mondo.

Serena Guarracino è professore associato di Letteratura inglese presso l'Università dell'Aquila. Si occupa di teatro in inglese e *fiction* postcoloniale anglofona, con preferenza per le metodologie degli studi culturali, degli studi di genere e dei *performance studies*. Di recente, ha pubblicato sul ruolo di scrittrici e scrittori postcoloniali sulla scena pubblica, e sul discorso nazionale e l'esotismo nel teatro britannico. Il suo lavoro più recente è la monografia *La traduzione messa in scena. Due rappresentazioni di Caryl Churchill in Italia* (2017).

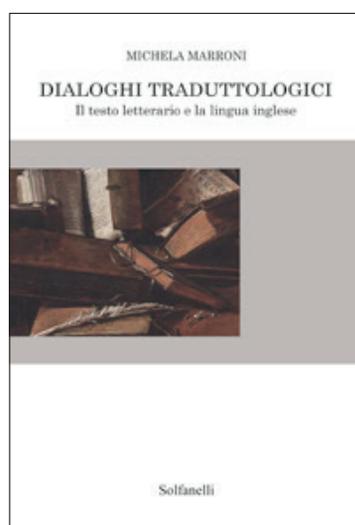
serena.guarracino@univaq.it

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Franca Cavagnoli

Dialoghi traduttologici

Michela Marroni. 2018. *Dialoghi traduttologici. Il testo letterario e la lingua inglese*. Chieti: Solfanelli, 203 pp., € 15, ISBN 978-88-3305-056-0



<http://www.edizionisolfanelli.it/dialoghitraduttologici.htm>

La traduzione letteraria è un luogo scomodo e solitario, dove spesso si ha la sensazione di non arrivare da nessuna parte. Dove la paura che si prova spinge a fuggire. Ma poi si rimane lì, in questo luogo che conserva la memoria dell'origine e, come nel quadro di De Chirico, l'enigma dell'arrivo. È dunque molto opportuno che Michela Marroni nel suo libro citi Maurice Blanchot, secondo cui l'attività traduttiva significa "affrontare un vero e proprio enigma" a causa della differenza fra le lingue. Chi traduce avvicina le due lingue non per annullare la diversità ma per rivelarla e spesso accentuarla: l'enigma sta nella differenza che mai si lascia colmare.

Dialoghi traduttologici raccoglie saggi sulle traduzioni italiane di *Mansfield Park* e del monologo di Molly Bloom, ma anche su Sarah Austin e George Eliot nella loro veste di traduttrici, pubblicati tra il 2013 e il 2015, e debitamente riveduti e corretti per questo volume. I saggi sono preceduti da un esauriente capitolo che già dal titolo, "Sulle traduzioni e sui traduttori", mostra tutta la stima, l'affetto e il debito di riconoscenza che l'autrice ha

nei confronti di George Eliot e del suo illuminante saggio "Translations and Translators", uscito su *Leader* il 20 ottobre 1855. In questo articolato scritto, Marroni ripercorre la genesi e l'evoluzione dei *Translation Studies*, accantonando quanto si credeva in passato, e cioè che la traduzione si potesse considerare una scienza come auspicava Nida, e riconoscendone invece lo statuto di interdisciplina, poiché il concetto di interdisciplinarietà è inscritto in ogni atto traduttivo. La ricchezza del capitolo si vede dagli spunti teorici offerti, che non si limitano al mondo anglofono, ma spaziano da Bruni a Folena a Calvino, da Borges a Blanchot e Berman, da Benjamin a Venuti. L'autrice si sofferma in particolare sui grandi classici e sulla questione della lingua da usare nella loro traduzione, se sia cioè più opportuno storizzarla o attualizzarla, e analizza gli evidenti casi di addomesticamento del testo fonte in più traduzioni italiane di alcuni passi di *Mansfield Park* e dell'*Ulisse* joyciano, confrontandoli con le scelte stranianti operate dalle versioni più recenti, più sensibili alla traduzione come luogo della differenza. La critica mossa da Marroni è puntuale, condivisibile e documentata. L'autrice offre spunti utili per ulteriori approfondimenti sul tema e sottolinea l'impossibilità di giungere a una traduzione definitiva dei classici, a causa del loro eterno oscillare fra i poli della cristallizzazione e della fluidificazione. Mostra pure i limiti di un'analisi meramente linguistica, evidente nel giudizio di Mona Baker sul lavoro di Lawrence Venuti, che non tiene conto degli apporti fondamentali dati agli studi sulla traduzione dal *cultural turn* e dal discorso culturologico e sancisce l'inconciliabilità delle due linee. Come ha saggiamente scritto Susan Bassnett, è giunto ormai il tempo di prendere in considerazione tutte le implicazioni linguistiche, letterarie, culturali, storiche, semiotiche, filosofiche, ideologiche e politiche dell'atto traduttivo.

Particolarmente interessanti sono i due saggi sull'attività traduttiva di Sarah Austin e George Eliot. La prima ha sostanzialmente riscritto *Briefe eines Verstorbenen* del principe Hermann von Pückler-Muskau, perché espunge i passi erotici privando il libro della sua carica iconoclastica e ridisegnando il quadro morale dell'epistolario. Per Austin, la traduzione è chiaramente un atto politico e una scelta di campo. In un certo senso sa che "la borghesia inglese degli anni Trenta è vittoriana ante-litteram" e cerca di andare incontro ai suoi potenziali lettori in un consapevole processo di addomesticamento del testo, sottoponendo le lettere del principe tedesco al vaglio della *pruderie* inglese e confezionando un prodotto che non ne turberà gli animi. George Eliot, invece, nelle sue traduzioni di Feuerbach e del teologo tedesco Strauß manifesta un alto grado di consapevolezza e di meticolosità filologica nello svolgere il suo ruolo di mediatrice culturale: non annulla mai il suo senso critico e non limita l'interpretazione del testo a un fatto unicamente terminologico e morfosintattico. Inoltre è ben cosciente del ruolo di chi traduce e delle responsabilità insite nell'atto traduttivo, e il suo lavoro sull'*Essenza del cristianesimo* le consentirà di "tradurre" la teologia di Feuerbach nel suo universo narrativo, in una continua osmosi fra traduzione e scrittura.

Al termine della lettura di questo libro, dove le voci di personaggi femminili, in inglese e in italiano, si alternano a quelle di due autorevoli traduttrici dell'Ottocento, appare chiaro l'intento dell'autrice, che per sottolineare l'importanza di scambi fruttuosi su una materia tanto magmatica, ha deciso di far dialogare voci tutte al femminile, con la sola eccezione di Joyce, autore peraltro molto amato da femministe storiche quali Jeri Johnson. Il contributo

delle donne è stato fondamentale prima di tutto perché Austin e Eliot hanno offerto un punto di vista altro, e in secondo luogo perché “il loro portato trasgressivo conteneva in sé un valore progressista”, e dunque di cambiamento. Un viaggio periglioso, quello nella traduzione, che mette a dura prova chi lo intraprende, per il quale – come ricorda George Eliot, il cui rigore metodologico non l’ha fatta mai scendere a compromessi – sono necessari pazienza e tempi traduttologici giusti. Ma anche molto coraggio. Nessuno forse l’ha detto meglio di una poetessa tedesca, Sarah Kirsch: “Si alza la nebbia, il tempo cambia. / La luna raccoglie un cerchio di nuvole. / Il ghiaccio sul lago è tutto crepe, / scricchiolano i lastroni. / Vieni, attraversa il lago”.

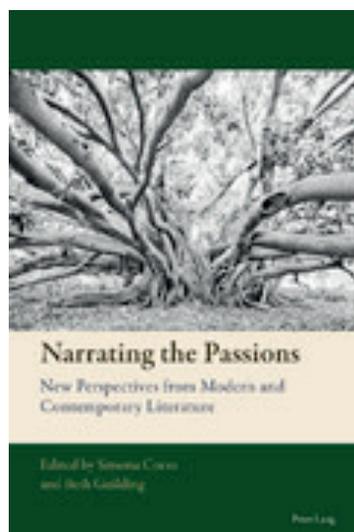
Franca Cavagnoli, scrittrice e traduttrice, ha pubblicato i romanzi *Luminusa* (2015), *Non si è seri a 17 anni* (2007), *Una pioggia bruciante* (2000), e i saggi *La voce del testo* (2011, Premio Lo Straniero) e *La traduzione letteraria anglofona* (2017). Ha tradotto opere di Toni Morrison, J. M. Coetzee, V. S. Naipaul, William S. Burroughs, James Joyce, F. S. Fitzgerald e Mark Twain, e cura per Adelphi l’edizione italiana dell’epistolario di Samuel Beckett. Collabora ad “Alias”, l’inserto domenicale di “il manifesto”, “L’indice dei libri del mese” e “Alfabeta”. Insegna Traduzione e Revisione del testo editoriale al Master in Editoria dell’Università degli Studi di Milano in collaborazione con la Fondazione Mondadori e l’Associazione Italiana Editori. Nel 2014 ha avuto il Premio nazionale della Traduzione del Ministero dei Beni Culturali.
franca.cavagnoli@unimi.it

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Claudia Cao

Narrating the Passions. New Perspectives from Modern and Contemporary Literature

Simona Corso & Beth Guilding eds. 2017. Narrating the Passions. New Perspectives from Modern and Contemporary Literature. Oxford: Peter Lang, pp. XII-252, € 57.95, Format: Paperback, ISBN 978-1-78707-121-6



<https://www.peterlang.com/view/title/62159>

Since ancient times, the passions have been conceived as opposed to reason, to the possibility of lucid understanding and self-control. However, as “mimed languages or expressive acts that process and transmit [...] messages” (Remo Bodei, *Geometria delle passioni. Paura, speranza, felicità: filosofia e uso politico*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1991, 8, my translation), we can consider them accomplices of reason in the process of cognition and understanding of reality.

This is one of the main points of the volume edited by Simona Corso and Beth Guilding, which, through a comparative approach that includes a broad spectrum of theoretical perspectives and case studies, offers a rich overview of the debate around the different passions, their contribution to our comprehension of reality, their literary representation, and their role in authorial poetics.

Originating from the lectures and workshops of the European School for Comparative Studies “Synapsis”, this volume is dedicated to one of its founders, Remo Ceserani, and be-

longs to the New Comparative Criticism series edited by Florian Mussgnug. The volume is divided into fourteen chapters and is introduced by a broad theoretical excursus by Simona Corso. Starting from the Platonic and Aristotelian reflections on the passions to reach the moral philosophers, contemporary philosophy, and psychology, the editor highlights some distinctions between passions and emotions and outlines the prevalence in the modern age of the second term over the first, gradually perceived as obsolete, due in part to the influence of Christian theology.

The contributions deal with some case studies taken from modern and contemporary European literary production, among which it is possible to find points of intersection, especially around the metaliterary approach. A quick scan of the table of contents reveals the richness of nuances conferred to the theme of the passions, among which we find love, parental passions, voyeurism, seduction, gambling, and indignation.

Romantic love is investigated through a wide range of analytical perspectives: Janet Todd's essay focuses on the romance of *Pride and Prejudice*, read as the inauguration of the modern literary tradition, and it highlights the novel's influences on the twentieth-century romance genre. Sophie Corser likewise focuses on romantic love, stressing the link between the theme of passion and metatextual reflection. According to Corser, *Swann in Love* and *A Room with a View* are in fact united by the centrality of motifs such as reading, writing, truth and falsity in human relationships. Metaliterary issues also criss-cross Massimo Fusillo's essay, which deals with the theme of seduction in *Les liaisons dangereuses*. After having inserted it into a wider panorama on the theme – starting from classical mythology and arriving at the novel and the cinema – he emphasises the rhetorical strategies and points of contact with the interpretative act. The author-reader relationship and the reflection on authorial poetry, based on the treatment of the passions, are at the centre of Annalisa Lombardi's essay on the works by Agota Kristof and Herta Müller. The objects of her study are the "specific stylistic procedures [...] employed to contain pathos" (204), their "poetics of dispassion" read in relation to the experience of migration and "linguistic estrangement" (209) and interpreted as a strategy to safeguard the authenticity of emotions, to cope with the impossibility of words to speak the truth.

The link between passion and literary genre adopted by Todd returns as a critical-theoretical basis in Enrica Villari's contribution, which explores the works of Sir Walter Scott and the developing nineteenth-century historical novel with special attention to the centrality of emotions in the cognitive process, as a legacy of the romantic revolution as opposed to the founding principles of modern science. Another sentimental bond is that investigated by Simona Micali in her essay "The Object of Passions", which analyses the relationship between the character of Kemal and the author Pamuk in the work *Museum of Innocence*. In this novel it is possible to find various declinations of love – from impossible love to the triumph of love over adversity – creating a specular relationship between the visitor of the museum and the reader of the novel, between the role of the museum and the feeling of love.

Gianna Zocco's chapter investigates the desire of the other, this time through the motifs of the window and of voyeurism: using Lacan's theory of the gaze, the author raises a number of questions about the real role of the subject and the object in the act of looking,

leading the reader to the conclusion that looking at others is “an important way of approaching incomprehensible, unknown aspects of [one]self” (113).

The parent-child relationship is examined by Dame Gillian Beer after an *excursus* between modern and contemporary writers: she begins by examining the “hidden” feelings behind the typical conception of parental protectiveness, illustrating how such instinctive guardianship can transform into possessiveness and the “passion of repudiation”.

Among the genres and artistic forms addressed there is also the theatre, especially in Laura Caretti’s rich study on *Hamlet* performances. After an introduction on the artistic representation of the passions, the contribution focuses on the change over time in both actors’ and directors’ interpretation of the character of Ophelia, marking a turning point in the discussion between Craig and Stanislavski in 1912, which influenced the representation of Ophelia’s inner life and her emotional participation in the tragedy.

Tchehoff examines an altogether different sort of passion than those centering around the desire for the other: the passion for gambling. Through the combination of Dostoevsky’s *The Gambler* and Matilde Serao’s *The Land of Cockayne*, he highlights the complementary perspectives on the theme and the originality compared to previous novels on the subject. He also remarks on the peripherality shared by the two societies in which these novels are set, which influences the perception of gambling as an emblem of speed and rapid creation and destruction of values and fortunes.

The volume also explores other passions, like indignation, central in Simona Corso’s examination of Philip Roth’s novels: defining this feeling as a catalyst for the “innate and instinctive sense of justice” but also “the quickest road towards violence” (227), the scholar finds in indignation the reflection of a noble and non-servile soul, a sign of a search for meaning that knows no end.

The common thread of childhood unites the works of Danila Cannamela, Beth Guilding, and Amelia Worsley through different shades of meaning and methodological perspectives. In Cannamela’s work, the reflection on authorial poetics returns: Corazzini’s regression into infantile passion is read in light of the nineteenth-century literary heritage to highlight its reworking of tradition. Focusing on the motif of the child’s crying, this essay emphasises the role of the child “as a saboteur of the logical status quo” (174) who “destabilizes the celebratory poetic tradition, introducing a prelogical modernist language” (174). The meaning of childhood, this time understood as “the meaning of life” (177), recurs in Beth Guilding’s study, which ranges from the thought of Barthes to that of Blanchot, Borges, Freud, and Heidegger to explore the voice of the poet understood as the inner voice of the child who cries out from within.

The psychoanalytic perspective is also present in Amelia Worsley’s essay on Winnicott, where she re-evaluates the emotions deriving from the parent-child relationship. In particular, she rejects the reading of loneliness as “inability to connect with others” (196) and enhances the importance of “silence as an important form of communication and a way of creating a relationship that encourages trust, despite at first seeming to encourage distance” (198).

By putting the ancient and modern classics in dialogue with contemporary artistic production, through a wide range of literary forms and genres and within the rich frame of

the philosophical and theoretical debate on passions, *Narrating the Passions* draws attention to stylistic, thematic and narratological aspects of the theme as well as to its function in the economy of the work and in the authorial poetics. It offers important literary perspectives to those who want to deepen and extend the debate on the theme to other literatures and arts, but also to those who are interested in the study of the single authors and in the methodological approaches proposed.

Claudia Cao is an Honorary Fellow in Comparative Literature at the University of Cagliari. During her PhD she worked on rewritings of *Great Expectations*, also publishing the book *Le riscritture di Great Expectations. Sei letture del classico dickensiano* (Mimesis 2016). As a Research Fellow, she took part in the research project "Sisters and sisterhood in literature and other arts", publishing the book *Sorellanze nella narrativa inglese tra le due guerre* (Morellini 2018).

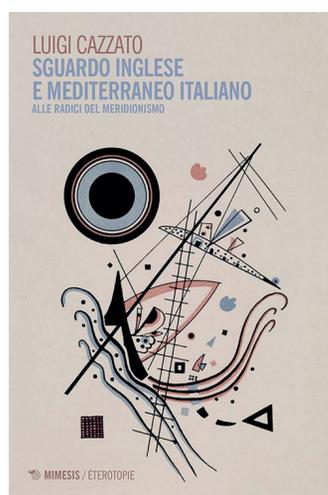
cao.claudiac@gmail.com

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Marta Cariello

Sguardo inglese e Mediterraneo italiano

Luigi Cazzato. 2017. *Sguardo inglese e Mediterraneo italiano. Alle radici del meridionismo*. Milano: Mimesis, 216 pp., € 18,00. ISBN: 978-88-5753-893-8



<http://mimesisedizioni.it/sguardo-inglese-e-mediterraneo-italiano.h>

Sguardo inglese e Mediterraneo italiano. Alle radici del meridionismo è un libro, per molti versi, da lungo tempo atteso. Ciò non solo perché da diversi anni Luigi Cazzato pubblica sui temi del meridionismo e delle relazioni anglo-meridionali, e una sistematizzazione così ampia e approfondita, come è questo volume, risulta più che benvenuta e utile, ma anche perché va a inserirsi in modo urgente e fecondo negli attuali e 'nuovi' studi sul Mediterraneo e sull'Italia postcoloniale. La prospettiva adottata da Cazzato, infatti, pone in articolazione (per usare il termine proposto da Stuart Hall) tra loro una serie di termini e concetti, riuscendo a lavorare criticamente lungo i nodi dell'orientalismo, del meridionismo, del mediterraneismo, per arrivare al meridianismo di Franco Cassano, collocando tutte queste articolazioni sul terreno critico decoloniale della differenza coloniale e della differenza imperiale. È dentro quest'ultima che si sviluppa il discorso meridionista, ossia la costruzione del Sud (Italia/Europa) come inferiore rispetto al Nord, in un processo di alterizzazione che, sottolinea Cazzato, è specifico alla regione storico-geografica del Mediterraneo italiano. L'indagine è condotta tutta attra-

verso lo sguardo egemone per eccellenza: quello inglese (inglese e non in realtà britannico, come è ben spiegato nel libro, dando conto dei rapporti di potere già intrinseci alla Gran Bretagna). Si tratta di un'indagine sul confine, prima di tutto: il confine dove gli inglesi, inebriati e spaventati durante il Gran Tour dalle ben note caratteristiche 'selvagge' del Sud Italia, facevano finire la 'civiltà', o meglio, dove poteva iniziare lo specchio in cui riconoscere la deviazione da sé, il non-io. Il processo di definizione dell'identità inglese/britannica ed europea (nel senso dell'Europa centro-occidentale, come nel dettame di Hegel, d'altra parte) passa, dunque – e questo è il tema forse fondamentale del volume – non solo per l'alterità/alterizzazione delle colonie (dunque nella differenza coloniale), ma anche nell'alterizzazione del Sud dell'Europa, che colonia propriamente detta non è; è l'alterizzazione di un Mediterraneo le cui sponde non iniziano lì dove comincia il mare, ma prima, già sulla terra, a volte già sulle Alpi (come per P. B. Shelley), a volte a Roma, ma soprattutto a Napoli, dove l'Europa "finisce e finisce male", come sintetizzato da Augustin Creuzé de Lesser (77).

Lo "sguardo inglese" è esplorato nel libro a partire dal '700, affondando pertanto nelle radici del meridionismo, come recita il sottotitolo del volume, ma anche nelle radici della stessa modernità occidentale e della 'colonizzazione epistemica' organica alla colonizzazione militare e materiale del 'resto del mondo' da parte dell'Europa. La colonizzazione epistemica riguarda anche, ed è questo un punto fondamentale, le aree di differenza imperiale (come il Mediterraneo italiano), esempio molto interessante, come l'intero libro di Cazzato dimostra, di narrazione oggettivante e colonizzante, e della (correlata e forse indispensabile) auto-colonizzazione epistemica.

I primi due capitoli costituiscono una vera e propria esplorazione teorica nelle definizioni e articolazioni dei concetti chiave già menzionati, dall'orientalismo per arrivare al meridianismo, indagando in profondità le connessioni e le ramificazioni del lavoro secolare del potere coloniale, e portando sul terreno quasi inedito del Mediterraneo italiano il dialogo (che altrove, non in questo volume, si fa spesso scontro) tra gli studi postcoloniali e le teorie decoloniali.

Il terzo e il quarto capitolo spostano, in un certo senso, di più lo sguardo sulla geografia, intesa sempre come geografia del potere, evidentemente in termini gramsciani, così come è Gramsci il riferimento per le definizioni di Meridione e Sud proposte e utilizzate. Così, ci si muove attraverso le mappe come dispositivi e narrazioni, per arrivare alla ricerca dei 'confini interni' alla terraferma, attraverso l'occhio della teleologia occidentale.

Ma, come in una sorta di rito e forse non proprio involontariamente, il lettore è portato nel quinto capitolo attraverso la "particolare specola" del tarantismo (81), per poter accedere alle narrazioni analizzate nei restanti capitoli. Il morso (e il rimorso, poiché De Martino è chiaramente il riferimento principale dell'analisi) della tarantola prepara il terreno (ma certo, prima il corpo) a rapportarsi con la colonizzazione epistemica raccontata nei testi analizzati successivamente. Anche il tarantismo è raccontato da Cazzato attraverso la prospettiva dei viaggiatori e studiosi inglesi, e analizzato pertanto nella sua funzione di elemento spettacolare e profondamente perturbante dell'"identità deficitaria" del Sud. E però il morso della tarantola, non a caso, riguarda il mondo moderno nella sua interezza, come nella citazione di De Martino stesso che parla della parte del nostro pianeta "entrata nel cono d'ombra del suo cattivo passato" (101). O ancora, nella suggestiva sintesi di Cazzato: "In questo

tarantismo metaforico globale, il 'cattivo passato' del Mediterraneo (italiano e non) morde e rimorde da secoli all'interno di quel primato europeo continentale raggiunto a discapito dell'Europa mediterranea" (*ibid.*). Al lettore, dunque, serve il morso rituale per collocare il discorso così specifico del Mediterraneo italiano sotto lo sguardo inglese nel discorso molto più ampio della modernità occidentale. Questa, forse, è l'urgenza più grande a cui *Sguardo inglese, Mediterraneo italiano* risponde: inserire il Mediterraneo, il meridione d'Europa e nello specifico d'Italia, nel discorso più ampio della costituzione e della formazione della modernità europea, tirando fuori queste regioni da analisi filologiche o eccezionaliste, che in realtà confermano la scrittura di una Storia unica e prepotentemente lineare, come sottolinea Iain Chambers nella prefazione al volume.

L'esplorazione porta il lettore, nei quattro capitoli restanti, dal 1700, con Sir William Young Jr., passando per i romantici (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Percy e Mary Shelley, Byron) con le diverse manifestazioni di dispatia, empatia e byronismo dinanzi all'Italia, e arriva fino a tre viaggiatori vittoriani (Dickens, Eliot e Ruskin). Nel mezzo, l'ottavo capitolo è dedicato al Risorgimento visto dagli inglesi: un'analisi particolarmente originale e utile per collocare, di nuovo, il Sud Italia e il Mediterraneo (anche quello non direttamente colonizzato) dentro un discorso più ampio di egemonia e rapporti di potere-sapere alla base della modernità. Così, emerge l'importante riflessione su come la questione nazionale italiana fu condizionata dal discorso meridionista, e di quanto essa fu, forse sorprendentemente, funzionale al dibattito sulla *Britishness*.

Il rapporto che emerge, in questo studio, tra lo sguardo inglese e il Mediterraneo italiano è quello della colonizzazione epistemica, che è anche la necessità, da parte dello sguardo egemone, dell'esistenza del subalterno, che funga, appunto, da specchio deficitario, se vogliamo, o anche, elemento non meno importante, da fonte di mitologie delle origini da esaltare o ripudiare, a seconda del momento storico. La necessità di esperire questa meravigliosa e però misteriosa alterità era sottolineata lapidariamente già da Samuel Johnson: "The grand object of travelling is to see the shores of the Mediterranean" (26). Questa citazione da Johnson non può non far venire in mente il perturbante parallelo con le decine di migliaia di migranti che ogni anno cercano di arrivare su quelle stesse coste mediterranee. Si tratta, però, non di viaggio, bensì di richiesta di sicurezza, sopravvivenza, aspirazione a una vita migliore, politiche di inclusione e soprattutto di esclusione. Da un altro Sud, riscrivendo questo Sud, per trovarvi sempre di più il rifiuto. Questa volta che il Sud diventa il Nord di qualcun altro, i conti non tornano. O forse sì.

Marta Cariello insegna Letteratura Inglese e Studi Culturali presso l'Università della Campania 'Luigi Vanvitelli'. I suoi principali temi di ricerca sono la letteratura postcoloniale e la scrittura femminile araba anglofona. Tra i suoi volumi, *Scrivere la distanza. Uno studio sulle geografie della separazione della scrittura femminile araba anglofona* (2012). È co-fondatrice e co-direttrice della rivista *de genere. Journal of Literary, Postcolonial and Gender Studies*. La sua ricerca è attualmente rivolta al Mediterraneo come spazio critico della Modernità, e alla tematizzazione della nazione nella scrittura femminile postcoloniale.

marta.cariello@unicampania.it

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Giuseppina Botta

La letteratura dal punto di vista degli scrittori

Michele Stanco (a cura di) 2018. La letteratura dal punto di vista degli scrittori. Bologna: Il Mulino, pp. 335, € 27.00, Paperback, ISBN 9788815273574



<https://www.mulino.it/isbn/9788815273574>

The volume *La Letteratura dal Punto di Vista degli Scrittori* (2018) edited by Michele Stanco examines the writers' perspective about literature and it is organised in three parts. Part I, *Saggi e Paratesti*, focuses on the use of the essay as a genre and on other paratextual forms, such as the preface, the author's note, and the epigraph. Despite their synthetic structure, the preface, the author's note and the epigraph, represent an instrument of immediate comparison between the author and the reader, placing them in a dialogic dimension, where the former shows the kernel of his theoretical thought. Costantini, Lops and Martino present in their essays the modality through which Wilkie Collins, Joseph Conrad and T. S. Eliot convey ideas on literature.

Costantini discusses Collins' non-fictional works, in particular the prefaces to some of his novels and some essays. Since 1860 a debate developed in the UK about the aesthetic nature of the sensation novel, judged by its detractors offensive of decency, devoid of aesthetic value, educational purposes, and a substantial plot. Sensation novelists, in their turn, defended themselves by claiming their connection with the lesson of French naturalism.

Collins begins his discussion about the aesthetics of sensation novels in the *Prefaces* to the first and the second edition of his novel *The Woman in White* (1860). He manifests a total rejection of the Victorian omniscient narrator and insists on the possibility of weaving a plot that presents an effective characterisation of the characters, deepened in their psychological complexity. A few years later, Collins will shift its focus on the birth of a completely new readership. In the *Prefaces* to *Armada* (1866) and *Heart and Science* (1883), he identifies two distinct types of readers: "Readers in general", an audience open to the merits of a work, and the "Readers in particular" with difficult tastes and prone to prejudice. His remarkable essay "The Unknown Public" (1858) traces the profile of a category of readers, the penny-novel readers, who read cheap magazines which displayed sensation tales and matching columns of doubtful taste.

The relationship between author and readers is also explored in De Giovanni's essay. In the difficult transition from nineteenth-century Realism to Modernism, Virginia Woolf investigates the ineluctable metamorphosis of the novel in *Modern Fiction* (1919), *Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown* (1924), *Phases of Fiction* (1929) and *Professions for Women* (1931). Woolf traces the profile of the new novelist, who, like a good landlady, must know how to manage both the instances of change and the moments of crisis. For Woolf the new relationship between the writer and the reader must be inclusive and balanced, without the advantage of the emotions on writing, always demanded by the readers. In contemporary times, as Esposito demonstrates in her contribution, the interaction and participation of the public in the creation of a work is particularly significant thanks to the digital platforms, through which some authors share their works. The case of the writer Jasper Fforde is emblematic. Fforde, author of the famous saga dedicated to the literary detective Thursday Next, while not disdaining to publish his works in paper form, uses his own website, edited in first person, for a cooperative and collaborative activity with his audience, which allows his characters to prolong their lives beyond the printed page. Such a strategy identifies alternative ways of survival of literature through time, space, but also through different genres, and legitimises the mechanisms of identification of the readers, who can act on the plot. As Esposito points out, these continuous exchanges of roles between author and reader create a new concept of authorship, which combines the traditional concepts of authority and originality of the writer to the ability to generate commercial and cross-media circulation success of literature.

Collins is not the only one to use the prefaces as a paratext. Lops' essay, in fact, investigates the theoretical contents of the *Prefaces* to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (1897 and 1916) and of the *Author's Note* to *Typhoon and Other Stories* (1903) by Joseph Conrad. In the Preface of 1897, Conrad proposes the definition of the novel as a work of art. In the construction of the work, the author must first use truth, to be understood as expressive sincerity, but also as an instrument to interpret the world. The writer, therefore, must descend into the deepest meanders of his being and shed light on the secrets of human existence. Later on Conrad abandons the preface in favor of the author's note, which shows a confidential, colloquial tone, but is still framed within the critical register. In the *Note* of 1903 he reasserts the importance of sensoriality, and in particular of orality, to provide a more immediate and personal appeal to the plot. This notion of orality is central also in the essay by Ruggiero, which

focuses on the performative poetry of the artist (poet, writer, musician and performer) of Jamaican origin Benjamin Zephaniah. We are on the contemporary British literary scene, and through his performances that combine the language of reggae music with references to political and social issues, Zephaniah creates artistic events “narrated” both through words and gestures. He believes that the *dub* poet is a real griot, the ancient storyteller of the West African tradition, depositary and narrator of the memories of his people. Similarly, the *dub* poet constitutes an example of “incarnated memory”, capable of evoking with the force of the spoken word all the demons tormenting the life of his community.

Going back to the paratexts, as highlighted by Martino in his essay, the privileged instruments through which T. S. Eliot convey his ideas on literature are the epigraphs. The theoretical and cultural apparatus that underlies the education of Eliot allows to frame the epigraphs present in his works as an interpretative act of a condition not only artistic but also social. Fragmentary, segmented, separated by texts, the Eliotian epigraphs reflect the inner chaos of the contemporary man, who has lost his own points of reference and who finds in the use of past literature an anchor of salvation. The epigraphs of the collection *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), of the poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and of *The Waste Land* (1922) trigger a dynamic, multi-voiced relationship between ancient texts and the Eliotian modern text.

The essays by Coronato and Piré focus on more traditional forms of theoretical elaboration, which is an invective against the use of rhymes by John Milton present in the *Paradise Lost* edition of 1668 and the literary biographies by Samuel Johnson. In “The Verse” Milton defines the rhyme a sing-song of words ending in the same sound. He expresses himself in favour of the free verse, believing that poetry mainly originates from a wise use of syllables and accents. Such a freedom sought by Milton in the poetic composition is also to be intended as a need for freedom of interpretation, as it happens in his analysis of the sacred texts using analogy. According to Coronato, this practice allows the poet to search for and find correspondences in a divergent way that is through the variety, a way of investigating the real in search for new meanings.

Literary biography also presents itself as an investigation and a revelation of the private life of famous authors. However, for Johnson, the writing of *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1779-81) has a dual purpose: on the one hand the private life of each author, on the other the possibility of being able to express critical judgments on their works. The *Lives* are not just a report of the facts of an illustrious existence, but also an opportunity to discuss talent, creativity as well as failure. Behind the critical style that distinguishes the tone of the *Lives*, there is a pedagogical intent. The reader, in fact, must be educated but also oriented towards a correct use of reason. Johnson provides sketches of private life that are nothing but moral eruditions in full assonance with the principles of the Enlightenment that claims a harmony between the universal and the most intimate and private aspects of the single life.

Essays in Part II, *Disseminations*, analyse the texts where the creative aspect is interpolated with criticism, in a mixture of literary language and critical metalanguage. As Stanco points out, Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* (1609), with their varied vocabulary which ranges from poetry to painting, contained specific terms that conveyed a metaliterary reflection about

the poetic genre. Fusella's essay remains on the poetic territory and presents the analysis of the ode *Ars Poetica* (1978) by Ivor Armstrong Richards. This composition is divided into four stanzas, each dedicated to a different theme: the development of the human embryo, the progress of poetry, the communication among human beings and the salvation of mankind. *Ars Poetica*, constructed with an urgent rhythm because of a skilful use of the meter, does not aim to provide definitive answers to the questions that each stanza underline. As Fusella notes, the urgency of the poet is not the definition of poetry is, but how it acts, operates, spreads, and proposes itself as a lifeline for the human what. Pepe's essay, while focusing on a poet, moves away from the verses and analyses a prose work by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Hand and Soul* (1850). Rossetti imagines the formation process of an artist, the hypothetical Aretine painter Chiaro di Messer Bello dell'Erma, who in the thirteenth century took his first steps in painting. At the beginning he followed his master's footsteps, but then, dissatisfied with the disastrous results of some of his experiments, he was about to renounce painting altogether. In a moment of epiphany, he realised that his heart constituted the only way to rediscover inspiration and resolve the painful antithesis between beauty and faith. Making use of this imaginary biography of Chiaro, Rossetti succeeds in delineating his own conception of the work of art as a result of an era, but also as an outcome of the creative mechanisms which generated it.

The essays by Continisio and Chialant leave the poetic dimension and analyse respectively the aesthetic theories of Thomas Middleton in *The Witch* (1615) and of George Eliot in *Adam Bede* (1859). Born as a contamination between the tragic and comic genres, tragicomedy, which has its origins in the Latin literature, had some success also in the English literary context, especially with Beaumont and Fletcher. And it is precisely to the latter that Middleton owes his first training. In fact, he wrote four tragicomedies that followed the pattern of the genre. *The Witch* constitutes a reversal of the trend, or an attempt, more than successful, to undermine the cornerstones of the genre. As Continisio points out, in order to be credible, not so much as a playwright, as a critical author with respect to the genre, Middleton employs elements in the Fletcher manner, perfectly recognisable to the public: the typical characters (such as the charitable tyrant, the noble villain, the afflicted girl), the setting, the use of the exotic. However, these cornerstones are demolished with a generalised exasperation that makes each element a caricature of itself. It is not a matter of creating a parody, but of interpreting the crisis of a genre that begins to adapt with difficulty to the palate of the public.

In analysing the aesthetic convictions of George Eliot, contained in the seventeenth chapter of the novel *Adam Bede* (1859), Chialant refers to the widespread practice among Victorian writers to propagate within their creative works their own ideas about literature and the function of the novel. Before devoting an entire chapter of a work to the subject, Eliot had already dealt with this topic in several articles, many of them published in the *Westminster Review*. In the novel, her critical analysis follows three lines: firstly, the narrator's ability to provide a faithful representation of reality. Despite the inevitable distortion of this reflected image, passed through the filters of the mind and of the writing, the author must always relate the truth. Secondly, the narrator must be able to grasp the simplicity of the daily life.

Finally, just as a component of reality, even the ugly, the deformed and the rough must find space in the representation. Such positions, as Chialant points out, originated various criticisms, which on the one hand highlighted some fundamental contradictions in Eliot's analysis, and on the other hand emphasized her attempt at an organic theorization of a genre.

Part III, *Maschere d'autore*, focuses on the phenomenon of the mask as a complex game of stratifications to which the author, hiding behind his own alter ego, recurs to expose his aesthetic theories. As Stanco remarks, pastoral poetry is a fertile ground for the creation of fictitious alter egos. The poet hides behind a shepherd who becomes a spokesman for poetic, political and religious needs. The main mask of Edmund Spenser is the shepherd Colin Clout, a serial character in the poet's work, protagonist of two pastoral compositions, *The Shepherders Calender* (1579) and *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* (1595), and minor character in other works. These two poems represent two different moments in the poet's career and therefore represent two different aspects of poetry. In *The Calender* we have a young poet, still semi-unknown, who is seeking for fame, but who then does not sign his work. In the second composition, however, the poet shows his awareness of his marginal location both geographical and cultural. Colin's mask, therefore, moves on a double plane, between idealism and reality, between hope and discouragement, and demonstrates, as Stanco emphasises, a non-univocal definition of the relationship between the author and the text. On the contrary, the alchemy between author and text is perfectly realised, in the relationship between Lawrence Sterne and his favourite masks Tristram Shandy and Yorick, as Laudando highlights. Where Tristram is clumsy, unhappy, and ridiculous, Yorick is an entertainer and a sharp wit. But their lives at the limit of the tragicomic, combined with digressions, displacements, appeals to the reader, and the metanarratives, are ingredients which express Sterne's attempt to experiment with new possibilities of both narration and representation.

The masks behind the poets Lord Byron and Letitia Elizabeth Landon are interesting for their affinities. In her essay, Baiesi captures the tragic parallelism, which distinguishes both their style and destiny. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-18) and *The Improvisatrice* (1824) are two long poems, through which respectively Byron and Landon present the stories of their heroes through a skilful game of masks and revelations, which concern and involve the authors at various levels. Harold is the typical Baronian hero, tormented by the evil of living due to his biographical vicissitudes, rebellious towards a society in which he does not recognise himself, an outcast who chooses to leave in search of his real self. Byron, however, after the first two parts, puts aside Harold and speaks in the first person. Consequently, it appears as a new character, who has disguised himself as an author. The relationship between reality and fiction then becomes unstable, if not labile and liquid. Landon adopts Byron's theme and adds some aspects related to female poetic fame in a patriarchal society and her complex relationship with the public. However, unlike Byron, Landon never lays her mask, thus reaching multiple modes of representation. In fact, the *Improvisatrice*, known as a contemporary Florentine poet, does not have a proper name. Her great ability allows her to wear, in turn, other masks, of historical or literary characters, through which she amplifies and multiplies her narrative art. Such author masks allow Byron and Landon to continue to cultivate their poetic art in a society that has isolated them and from which they have distanced themselves. Both, in fact, share the tragic fate of death away from home.

Scatasta's essay investigates the possibility of considering Stephen Dedalus as a mask of James Joyce. The character of Dedalus is, so to speak, "serial" in Joyce's work, as he appears in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1904), *Ulysses* (1922) and *Stephen Hero* (1944). In addition, Joyce signed various stories and letters under the name Stephen Daedalus. However, no evidence exists that it is indeed an alter ego, not least because his reflections on art and aesthetics are present both as interpolations of his creative works and in critical writings. This appropriating and then disposing of this identity occasionally and not systematically, for Scatasta is to be attributed to a nostalgic irony, which leads Joyce to look back at the past, to a figure that perhaps has obsessed him throughout his life, the one of the artist, who unveils himself through his work.

The contributions of Martino and Chialant select works very close to each other temporally. The use of the masks in Oscar Wilde and George Gissing connotes as a tool to discuss the nature of art but also its mechanisms of practice and diffusion. Wilde entrusts to four critical essays (including "The Truth of Masks", 1885) his reflection on the role of art, on its artificial, deconstructive and reconstructive nature of life. Sometimes the reflections are rendered in the form of a dialogue between two interlocutors, as if to testify both the urgency and the substance of certain arguments. The presence of masks, however, also conveys that plurality of identity and roles covered by Wilde in his controversial existence. If society is a theatrical space, his masks are a means for a performative activity that enters and leaves the page, which co-exists between fiction and reality. As Chialant points out, the use of masks in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903) constitutes a real filter system, through which Gissing splits into different alter egos. Firstly, we find a narrator of which only the initials are known, G. G., and who is the author of a manuscript found by Henry Ryecroft, a failed writer. Subsequently an editor is added along with a brief profile of Ryecroft. In this Chinese box system there is a constant exchange between the narrative and the narrated self, through an alternation of projections and identifications, which allow Gissing to discuss also some aspects which do not directly concern the compositional field, such as the necessary isolation of the artist, the relationship between authors and cultural industry and the dispersion of great talents after the birth of the metropolis. The same game of mirrors and refractions is also present in the case of the mask adopted by Salman Rushdie in *Joseph Anton. A Memoir* (2012). What fascinates in Ciocca's essay is the multiplicity of functions of this alter ego created by Rushdie in the most difficult years of his life, when, hunted and threatened with death, he was forced to hide. If personal freedom was at risk, creative freedom found in Joseph Anton a lifeline that allowed Rushdie to pursue his authorial career. In a system of overlapping, Joseph Anton is Rushdie because he lives in his place. At the same time, Joseph Anton is not Rushdie because he is still the character of a work and subject, therefore, to the conventions of a literary genre. In this perspective, through Joseph Anton Rushdie manifests his thoughts about the meaning of power, the slavery of limits and the responsibility of narration.

La letteratura dal punto di vista degli scrittori is an extremely varied and dense critical volume, which spans across literary genres and centuries. Each contribution provides an overview of the multiple possibilities of literary interpretation, inviting the reader to consid-

er new perspectives with further interpretation keys, as Fusillo puts it in the “Introduction”, through connection, inference and valorisation of contents.

Giuseppina Botta was Research Fellow at the Department of Humanities, University of Salerno and at the Department of English, University of Reading (UK). She co-translated with Eleonora Rao Margaret Atwood’s collection of poems *The Door* (La porta 2001) and the short story “The Schoolgirl” from *The Whole Family: A Novel by Twelve Authors* (Marsilio 2013). She has published articles and essays on Atwood, Steven Heighton, Carol Ann Duffy and Alice Munro and a monograph on Heighton (ESI 2018). She is currently tenured secondary school English teacher.

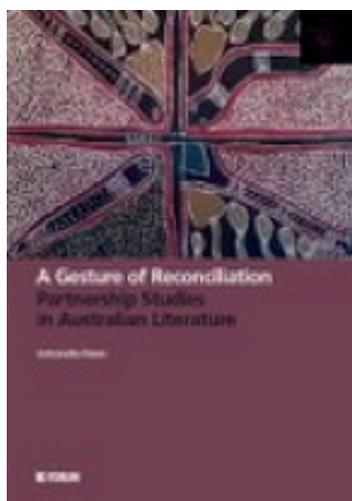
giuseppina.botta@gmail.com

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Paul Kane

Criticism in the Optative Mood: Antonella Riem's *A Gesture of Reconciliation*

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<http://forumeditrice.it/percorsi/lingua-e-letteratura/all/a-gesture-of-reconciliation/a-gesture-of-reconciliation/libro/view>

*Only a transformation in the narratives told
can bring a real change to our world life*
Riem (142).

In her Afterword to Antonella Riem's magisterial *A Gesture of Reconciliation*, Riane Eisler – whose ideas provide much of the theoretical framework for Riem's analyses – calls the book “a paean to the power of the creative word as a path to understanding and transformation” (212). In literary criticism we are used to seeing testaments to “the power of the creative word” (though perhaps less so now than in the past), and there is always the assumption, if not the outright declaration, that this leads to increased understanding. Knowledge and understanding, after all, are the coins of our particular realm. But except for manifestly po-

lemical works, we don't usually regard criticism as a path to *transformation*. And yet that is exactly what motivates Riem's work, and has for over twenty years now, since she founded the Partnership Studies Group in Udine in 1998. As she says in her Introduction, "poetry, narration, music, and all other forms of art have a relevant role, because they influence our world-view and therefore our present and our future, and can even reconfigure our past beliefs and transform our lives" (12). Moreover, "if we consciously choose to focus our attention on peace, beauty, love, harmony, and art, this is what we creatively activate in our lives" (12). Literature, therefore, can help remake our world by changing us.

These are not small claims, nor are they mere platitudes. Riem looks at four Australian novelists, Patrick White, Randolph Stow, Peter Carey, and Blanche d'Alpuget in detail (along with Marcus Clarke, more cursorily) and shows how their work serves to "denounce the dangers of colonial dominator imperialism, while indicating another possibility, a different cultural configuration that can result from what Eisler defines as a partnership paradigm" (15). In other words, these works coincide with Riem's own beliefs and aims and, if read in the way she proposes and demonstrates, can guide the reader along the "path to understanding and transformation". This is not some version of Horace's "delight and instruct"; this is more akin to Nietzsche's philosophizing with a hammer.

The theoretical framework, derived from Eisler and reiterated throughout the study – whereby the cultural paradigm of the *dominator* is exposed and critiqued in contrast to the equalitarian *partnership* model – also draws on Raimon Panikkar's wholistic notions of *inter-in-dependence* and *dialogical dialogue* which are intended to counter the atomistic tendencies of modern *scientific* thought. In Panikkar's view the *creative* word (*Mythos*) is a necessary corrective to the exclusivity of analytical scientism (*Logos*). Riem, accordingly, draws upon myths, archetypes and symbols in her readings of texts, which adds an additional layer of meaning and implication. This is to cast a very wide net, but in her hands – given the depth and breadth of her learning – the haul is impressive.

One might worry that such a formulaic and fully articulated theory could distort the works to fit the template, but far from being a Procrustean bed upon which the authors are stretched, it is remarkable how readily and convincingly their novels fall into place, corroborating the theory. Although all the works examined are well known and have been written about by previous scholars, the light into which Riem casts the novels illumines important features overlooked or underemphasized by others. We come away with a deeper understanding of the books and a clear idea of how instrumental they can be in the process of creating a paradigm shift, in the Kuhnian sense of displacing a dominant model of thought (and behavior). While that may seem to be an epistemological project, the real force of Riem's study is ontological: she is advocating a new mode of being in the world. 'Reconciliation', here, is less a matter of making conflicting views compatible and more like harmonizing books in the financial sense: our accounts with the world are balanced or reconciled and we profit accordingly.

When we turn to the contents of *A Gesture of Reconciliation*, we find it is split into two parts: in the first, chapter one considers Marcus Clarke and chapter two Patrick White and Randolph Stow together, mainly bringing Eisler's theories to bear on the texts; while part

two adds Panikkar's ideas to the mix in offering readings of Carey, Stow, d'Alpuget and White. The books discussed are: Clarke: *For the Term of His Natural Life*; White: *Voss*, *The Aunt's Story*, *Memoirs of Many in One*; Stow: *To the Islands*, *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*, *Tourmaline*; Carey: *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*, *Bliss*; and d'Alpuget's *Turtle Beach*. Both White and Stow get three chapters; Carey two; and d'Alpuget one, and there is a good deal of cross-referencing throughout (though, again, mainly with reference to White and Stow). Riem indicates that David Malouf would have been part of this book were she not writing a separate monograph on him. The overall focus might strike some as narrow, especially as there are many Australian novelists whose work would readily fall under the rubrics Riem establishes (Alex Miller, Alexis Wright, Tim Winton, Michelle de Kretser, Thomas Keneally, Kim Scott, Kate Grenville come to mind, as well as many poets and other writers in other genres). But the advantage of Riem's choice of five authors is the depth of analysis it allows, offering exemplary readings that are both detailed and wide-ranging.

For instance, in comparing Stow's *To the Islands* with White's *Voss* and *The Aunt's Story*, Riem brings out not only interesting instances of similarities (premonitions, telepathy, Aboriginal presences, personal illuminations) but also shows how the designs of the novels correspond to an archetypal model of three stages in psychological individuation: Preparation, Journey, Return. As different comparative patterns emerge, we have a sense of how the imagination is structured by the ancient and elemental desire for transformative experience. But what is most impressive is the texture of Riem's writing, the way she draws out narrative threads from the novels and interweaves them in rich detail. Her focus is clear, sharp and sustained throughout; her expositions careful and cogent; her style limpid and engaging. At the level of literary theory, Riem incorporates feminist, narratological and postcolonial methods of analysis, especially in her forceful critiques of *dominator* values, but she also goes beyond these methods – or perhaps through them – to an all-encompassing vision of partnership in “world change” (142). There's an almost fractal quality to her close readings, whereby the microcosm yields a macrocosmic perspective.

One of the pleasures of reading Riem's work is the way it expands one's understanding of the “canonical” texts she has chosen (or which, she says, have chosen her), defamiliarizing and making them new by placing each in a wider – indeed, a worldwide – context. This is criticism in the optative mood, looking to a future where the “human potential for harmony, beauty and peace” can be realized through the agency of the imagination when it is turned toward re-imagining “our relationships with ourselves and others” (198). In showing this path, and taking us down it, Riem's work is more than a gesture, it is itself transformative.

Paul Kane is an American scholar and poet. He has published twenty books, including six collections of poems (most recently *A Passing Bell*, with White Crane Press), and two in Chinese translation. His work appears in, *The Paris Review*, *The New Republic*, *Poetry*, *The New Criterion*, *Religion & Literature*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Verse*, *Wordsworth Circle*, *Raritan*, *Partisan Review*, and elsewhere. He is the poetry editor of *Antipodes* and serves as Artistic Director of the Mildura Writers Festival and General Editor of the Braziller Series of Australian

Poets. His awards include fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the Bogliasco Foundation, as well as a Fulbright Grant to Australia. He holds a BA, MA and PhD from Yale, an MA from Melbourne University and, in 2013, was awarded an honorary doctorate from La Trobe University. He has taught at Yale University and Monash University and is currently Professor of English at Vassar College, where he also teaches in the Environmental Studies Program. Kane divides his time between homes in Warwick, New York, and Talbot (VIC) Australia.

kane@warwick.net

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John Thieme

The Legacy of Conquest: In Conversation with Sir Wilson Harris

John Thieme Wilson Harris, some readers of your work find it extremely difficult. What would you say to this kind of reader? How would you defend yourself against this charge of unnecessary hermeticism?

Wilson Harris I think the issues which one is engaged in are issues that have to do with a change that I feel is occurring in imaginative fiction and in part I think this relates to the fact that in the Caribbean, for example, and in the South Americas, one is aware of a peculiar kind of void and that void has been created I think by the fact of conquest, which has been exercised for centuries and therefore many cultures have disappeared, have vanished. The problem that arises in this context is basically the sensation one has that though these cultures went underground, they are still alive and their reappearance seems to me essential if one is genuinely to come into some ground of authority, which would make freedom a reality. Now I don't think that freedom is a reality in many areas of the world. I think that something has gone very wrong. One sees the rise of authoritarian states, one is aware of rigged elections, one is aware of many activities in politics which would appear to me to be an extension of conquest – a group comes to power and asserts itself absolutely and wishes to remain in power absolutely.

The issue for the imaginative writer is a complex one, because with the rise of these cultures from the past, it seems to me that an alteration is occurring in our institutions and in our narrative preconceptions. Institutions which seemed absolutely sovereign before can no longer be conceived of as sovereign – one has to see them as partial. When I say partial, I mean that one has to realise that there are certain biases planted in institutions and also that those institutions are part of a greater whole. That greater whole, that greater wholeness, it seems to me will never structuralise itself absolutely. It will always remain in some degree beyond our grasp. I would define it as a sort of unnamable centre or unfathomable wholeness. Nevertheless it is a reality and once one is aware of it as a reality, it seems to me that images and institutions which one would tend to seize upon as an absolute become partial signatures, in that they point to this wholeness, but at the same time they confess to their partiality. In confessing to their partiality, it seems to me the opportunity exists for a deep-seated dialogue between areas of experience which may appear at first sight to be incompatible or to be so polarised from each other they can never enter into any kind of relationship and thus can seem to have no alternative but to fight each other. One is drawn into conflict between these polarised areas, each polarised area assuming itself to be absolutely sovereign and therefore relinquishing nothing, as it were, in favour of the other part.

Now what it seems to me arises here in the case of imaginative fiction – as soon as you sense the images are partial and institutions are partial, you can no longer take them for

granted in the way one may take them for granted in a comedy of manners novel, because what one senses is that behind the brilliant and sophisticated façade of refinement, which let us say a novelist like Jane Austen does so remarkably well within her context – you have the sense that all sorts of behavioural patterns are analysed, are refined, are looked at – but behind that façade there exists a conviction of sovereign structure and this comes out of the fact that she was writing in a society in which there were largely settled values, shared values if you like. There was a middle class, a working class, an upper middle class and so forth and these all had functions and purposes and one could sense a degree of tolerance within that framework, so that it was possible to take certain things for granted and to work within a body of value that most people accepted as homogeneous. Whereas, to return to what I was saying earlier, in the sort of heterogeneous world from which I came, it isn't possible I think to write that kind of novel. I mean, that kind of novel is important, it is very important within a certain perspective of values. But in the sort of situation in which one finds oneself, it seems to me that one can no longer take for granted the notion of an absolute sovereign structure which lies behind the comedy of manners position. Rather we have to begin to conceive of something which I would tend to describe as *comedy of psyche* and by that I mean that when one begins to look at character, one is drawn to a much deeper ground of experience, which would lie in certain kinds of myth perhaps, which would lie in the sensation one has that because images are partial, they have roots which one ceaselessly explores in order to find connections with other partial images that cannot be taken for granted. The paradox which exists in the partial image is that it has to lend itself time and time again to a deep-seated dialogue with other parts of the world that are apparently incompatible areas, but which are not necessarily as incompatible as they seem. The possibility exists that we could discover a changed capacity for community, precisely because community no longer invests in absolutes in the way that it may invest in absolutes if it is conditioned by comedy of manners, where you have a certain code of reason that operates and you analyse behaviour in terms of what is reasonable, what is apparently just. Whereas in comedy of psyche you have to pay much closer attention to all sorts of irrational features which lie under the ground of experience. One has to assume that reason, for example, has its roots in layers of irrationality and unless reason accepts this, it cannot purge itself of hubris, it cannot purge itself of the desire to conquer others, because reason would normally assume such and such an institution is the right institution – it is invested with reason. Since it is invested with reason what appears to be outside of the realm of reason has to be overcome, has to be pushed under, has to be conquered.

The tasks which an imaginative writer faces, who is aware that codes of reason are rooted in irrationality in the way one is torn between the demon and the divine, in the way one is torn between the animal inheritances as well as the mutations which have occurred, which have made us what we are, which have made us psychical – all those areas which lie much deeper than reason are the soil of reason. It is in this sense that an imaginative fiction may have to move into exploring elements that it would not normally explore, if it felt the safety of an order that was absolute.

JT You began by suggesting that this kind of freedom is initially something deeply rooted in the Caribbean and Latin American psyche, but from what you've said subsequently, I begin to wonder if you wouldn't feel that it's equally important for creative writers generally, whatever tradition they come from. Do you feel that that is the case?

WH Tradition obviously varies from culture to culture. I find at the moment that there is a tendency for most cultures to shut themselves off from other cultures, particularly in the sort of world in which we live, in which so many dangerous elements exist. In spite of the fact that we're supposed to live in a world which we can encircle in thirty-six hours perhaps by plane and in spite of the fact that one has communications on a massive scale – radio, television, newspapers – in spite of this, it seems to me that cultures today are very polarised. What one sees between the superpowers illustrates what is happening on a smaller ground, as it were, between cultures. For this reason it may be necessary to redefine what one means by tradition and this is a difficult task. I would think that tradition means the search for cross-cultural connections. By cross-cultural connections I'm suggesting that you do have in an imaginative fiction what one could call the ego – by ego I mean that area of imagination that is conditioned by history, by historical considerations, by *immediate* realistic considerations of self-interests and so on and so forth – and self-preservation. But there is also that deeper, stranger side which one could call the intuitive self, I think and in the intuitive self there is a kind of concentration that seems to come up from very deep-seated memories – I am not sure that the word is memories, but very deep-seated elements of experience that would seem to relate to the fact that existing within oneself are so many non-selves that are strangely alive nevertheless, which act on us through our dreams and through all sorts of peculiar sensations which we have. Now that intuitive self, I would think, can break the shell of the ego and when that happens fiction is rich with resources that relate to other cultures.

To trace that relationship means that the critic as distinct from the imaginative writer has a task to do which depends on his kind of scholarship which may have to move from the strict literary traditions. He may have to have an awareness, for example, of what occurs in areas of painting, or sculpture, or areas of folk practice and so on and so forth and make connections from the novel with other areas of creative activity, so that one senses that the novel is not as isolated as it appears to be within the strict framework to which it apparently belongs. Now this applies also between writers, between novelists. One could find connections between a black American novelist and a particular kind of European novelist, though on the face of it you would think there is absolutely no ground that they hold in common. But the ground they hold in common lies in this deep-seated aspect of the intuitive self, in which one is tapping roots that reveal a certain kind of universality, but it a universality that is complex and cannot be taken for granted. Unfortunately, in the sort of world in which we live this is not easy, because the tendency at the moment is for cultures to continue to divide themselves from each other and to feel so endangered in the face of the world that quite naturally they concentrate on their own patch as it were.

JT Perhaps we could move on to discuss particular aspects of your work. Your early volume of poems, *Eternity to Season*, has been recently republished by New Beacon Books and it's been republished in a rather interesting form – it comes in the form of a revised edition to which the original text is added as an appendix. Does this represent some kind of compromise between yourself and John La Rose, the publisher?

WH John La Rose very much wanted to keep the original text, because he felt that there were readers who were very interested in having the original text, but it was important to revise these poems. When I accepted his offer to have them republished, I felt that it was necessary to revise them. Therefore, in a sense, it is a certain kind of compromise. Looking at it now, I think perhaps it is useful to have it in that way. The poems could have appeared revised as they have been without the early text.

I find that everything I wrote before *Palace of the Peacock*, which comes out of three novels in a sense which were written before – when I say comes out of, I mean that over that period of writing, one suddenly came into a position where the style of *Palace*, the style in which it was written, became true and authentic and that was a crucial phase in imaginative writing as far as I'm concerned, because it meant that a certain kind of threshold had been arrived at, which would lead into the novels that came after – everything that was written before that seemed to me in need of revision and the *Eternity to Season* poems, when I was invited to have them republished, I felt that they needed subtle and careful revision, because they came before that crucial moment that had to do with the writing of *Palace*. But as I say, John La Rose's interest had been in the original edition as it had been printed in 1954.

JT You mentioned *Palace of the Peacock* as the first of your works with which you now feel fully satisfied. Along with two other parts of *The Guyana Quartet*, this has been republished, but the second volume of the *Quartet*, *The Far Journey of Oudin*, has not been republished. Is this by design, or by intention, or does it represent the fact that critics initially gave a less favourable response to this particular part of the *Quartet*?

WH Yes, critics did give a less favourable response to *Oudin*. Within the past few years there has been a new interest in *Oudin*, from letters I receive, articles that are written on it. But at the outset it was a novel that moved much more slowly. Critics attacked it and I think it tended to fall by the wayside, or to sink away. I think there's a misunderstanding about this novel. I was speaking a little earlier about comedy of psyche and the curious thing about *Oudin* is that the comedy of psyche lies in the magical corpse of Oudin. Now this magical corpse myth is a notion which goes back to pre-Columbian times. The magical corpse is the – sort of – hero figure, who falls from the broken bridge. The broken bridge arches – the bridge in fact is a sort of penis – it's a phallic bridge that is supposed to arch from one bank of experience to the other. Then the bridge breaks. The hero may cling to one end of the bridge and become a spectator. He looks at the stream of life. He never immerses himself in it. His lucidity is drawn from his spectatorial powers, the distance that he establishes between himself and the stream, whereas the hero who falls into the stream is immersed once

more in the fabric of creation which has its contradictions and irrationalities. When that figure is pulled out of the stream onto the bank of the river, it seems to be a magical corpse in the sense that it seems to have died, but it also appears to be subtly alive and I often wonder if a myth like that goes right back to some apprehension of the origins of life, when life was so subtle that no one would have guessed it existed at all. These space explorers who go out to detect life on Venus or Mars – extremely difficult. Life may be there, but so subtle that in fact you can't see it. And the magical corpse has this notion.

Oudin dies at the outset of the novel, but the magical side, the magical corpse, suggests that there is a voice of life in it which rebukes Ram, the moneylender, and from that moment the whole novel begins to unravel itself, because one goes back over the thirteen years of his marriage, one retraces one's steps over the ground which these men have followed when they murdered their half-brother. All these figures lend themselves to a peculiar reinterpretation in the light of the magical corpse, because one begins to discover that all these figures are in fact part of a much deeper and stranger wholeness that they had, in a sense, violated in some degree. They had also stultified that wholeness in some degree and they all thought themselves sovereign figures. Ram thought himself the sovereign moneylender, Mohammed thought himself the sovereign ruler of his particular clan or tribe and suddenly – for that very reason – they had violated the ground of the family. Ram violated the whole language which he ruled by fear of money, if you like. But in the light of the magical corpse the whole thing unravels itself and one begins to see that even these men who seem evil begin to reveal that their evil lies not simply in themselves as members of a particular tribe, but in the way in which they became obsessed by conquest, because conquest is the greatest evil I would think, in the way they became obsessed by the conquest of others. When that shell breaks a little, one discovers that the capacity exists for regeneration. It's a difficult regeneration; it's a complex regeneration. But it's a regeneration which has to be traced by looking closely at some kind of essential mystery, which resides in that place. For example, if one takes the figure of Kaiser: Kaiser burns up in the shop – you may remember that. There is a black Kaiser, the schoolteacher, who lives on a hill and in fact Oudin and Beti go to this hill and they meet the black Kaiser there – you may remember that. Well, the black Kaiser resembles the man who was burnt up in the shop. That resemblance is presented in order to suggest that there is some kind of essential psychical mystery, which resides in these characters and is transferred from character to character, from appearance to appearance. At one level that essential mystery seems to have an element of plague in it, of fire, of catastrophe. But by relating these figures together, you sense that they are simply garments worn by their psychical body that seems to have in it – one side of it seems to be scarred or burnt – but the other side has in it a scope for regenerative vision, as it looks back over the pathways that have been taken, as it looks back over a whole episode in the historical imagination and begins to sense that the episode is not as absolute as it appeared. As it looks back over that episode, you have a sense therefore of something being released, of something coming out, of some visionary faculty coming out that helps us to review what has happened and to see it quite differently. In other words even one's remorse is a creation of a certain vision of conscience and therefore a certain vision of community and thus you get

these strange resemblances charted through *The Far Journey of Oudin*, in which on one side of the picture you're aware of something that is corrupt and horrible and dead and on the other side you're aware of a flickering element of light that seems to be coming up out of the magical corpse and that flickering element of light transfers itself to other generations that are to come later and who pick up this burden and are not consumed by it, precisely because this light impulse runs through them beyond their own station in existence and illuminates the future. So there is a real future; there is a real capacity for change.

Oudin charts that kind of thing in a totally different way from how one sees it in, say, *Palace of the Peacock* or one is to see it again in *The Whole Armour* or *The Secret Ladder*. I mean, because one is dealing with a different area of the Guyanas, the coastland area which seems in a sense so flat that you would tend to think nothing could happen there which could have any kind of eminence, that there would be no position on which you could stand which would help you to look much deeper than the terrain, or to look across the terrain and thus the whole style, the faculty of life has to secrete itself and run quite differently from how it runs in *Palace*, where the landscape is different, the theatre, as it were of emotions, of the psyche is different.

JT I'm sure that will represent very helpful clarification for readers who have had difficulty with the novel.

In all your novels, there's a highly original use of language and in particular of imagery and also I think it's fair to say that you expect your reader to become involved in a way that the reader of the traditional novel (what you have elsewhere called 'the novel of persuasion') generally isn't. So, in a sense, your novels are written in terms of a new syntax of the genre. Would you agree with this and, if so, would you care to expand on it?

WH May I say something in this context about metaphor? It does seem to me that metaphor is an area of experience which is coming more and more into focus and this resides I think in the sensation one has – in fact, I would say in the fact that one lives in an asymmetrical cosmos, not a symmetrical cosmos. For that reason, the sensation of metaphor is becoming more and more far-reaching and strangely pertinent. If one may give a swift example: I recall something that happened. I was in a room with a small child and the sun was coming through the window. There was a vase of roses in the middle of the room. The sun struck one rose which was illumined. The child said, 'The sun is a rose' – marvellous spontaneity – I found it quite enchanting. The curious thing about this is that one knows that children are aware of metaphor. They are aware of metaphor, because they come to language through images, through their early experience with the things they see, the things they feel. And one finds this, of course, very much at the heart of savage cultures, that in fact – in savage cultures the beginning does not lie in the Word, as in St. John's Gospel. The beginning lies in the image, in the gesture, in the hieroglyphic painting, in the sculpture, in the mask and, when one comes to metaphor, one has the sense that language may have its roots in the way images broke their moorings to come into psychical consciousness and metaphor is at the heart of this mutation, because this mutation would seem to be an infinite development or

progression, an infinite descent into the world. When one says, for example, the sun is a rose, one is involved, I would suggest, in an unnamable centre of light that exists between the sun and the rose, so that in fact one looks through the sun into that unnamable centre of light and it is as if the sun is a reflection of that light and the rose is also a reflection of that light, as if the rose carries facets of that light and the sun carries facets of that light. What is that light? I mean, one knows of the ancient view, the light that never was on land or sea, the light that never was and yet the light that one is aware of as existing and that is what I mean by the unnamable centre, the unfathomable centre. And therefore the sun becomes an aspect of this and the rose becomes an aspect of this and why in fact this metaphor is revitalised, I would suggest, is because there is no model, there is no symmetrical model that could give us a complete version of the cosmos in which we live. We have all sort of clues and these clues will assemble themselves at times into a satisfactory model, but one has to sense all the time that that model is an approximation and that in some sense one is looking through that model into something that defines it, but which cannot be structuralised. The thing that defines it, which I call the unnamable centre, cannot itself be absolutely structuralised and one approaches it through the various images, the rose and the sun and so on.

The peculiarity of this is that it seems to me to suggest that one lives in a world where change is real. There's a tendency in us to think that the ground of reality is changeless. The ground of reality in an absolutely ultimate sense may be changeless, but it remains for us something which is unnamable, something which cannot be structured and therefore as we move into it through various facets, through various images, as we move into it, we are drawn to sense a capacity for change, real change, change that carries in it an element of pain, of catastrophe, because it is not always easy to move from a safe position into something that may have an element of precariousness in it. And yet, if we do not make that move, the chances are that the safe position which we idolise secretes a catastrophe in it which will erupt, whether we like it or not, and will erupt in such a way that it may very well suffocate us or overwhelm us. On the other hand, if we can enter into a dialogue with that capacity before it erupts, it means that that catastrophe becomes the ground of urgency that moves us to sense the possibilities of change and therefore to enter into a creative capacity that has to do with change, to endure in some sense the pain, but it makes that pain significant and violable, because it helps us into another area, which will possess its own ecstasy and its own values and its beauty. But this is a ceaseless area in which we are involved. There may be times when we can rest on what we have achieved, but we rest on this knowing in fact that it could never sum up all that we would like it to sum up.

Now this brings us back to the position of metaphor. If one lived in a symmetrical cosmos, it is possible to conceive of a model which indeed would be final and then one could say, well, one has achieved all that could be achieved, but since one lives in an asymmetrical cosmos, there is no possibility of escaping from the consequences of change, whether those consequences erupt in a disastrous form or whether we are able to enter into them creatively and to make them into visionary issues that take us through into other areas of comprehension that allow us to deal with the crises and difficulties of the age in which we live, because we live still very close to the scene of conquest, when it was felt that it was possible to make

an invincible resolution of the dangers that confronted a society, a society strong enough to deal with elements that seemed antagonistic. Now when one senses that in the world of science we are aware of this asymmetrical cosmos, this helps us to feel that metaphor is not an ornament, it is not a conceit. Built into it is a sensation that all images witness to a reality that is ceaselessly deeper than the very moorings from which they originally sprang.

JT In your more recent novels, such as *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness*, the pictorial plays an important part. Is this because you want to suggest that experience is a matter of *seeing* and that one can see the same object in radically different ways, different ways which might well be related to the use of metaphor which you've just been speaking of?

WH Yes, well this is a fine illustration of something which it seems to me is important to see. The life of images and the way they mutate is at stake in *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness*, because Da Silva is a painter and each painting is – reveals itself – I mean I'm simplifying for purposes of our discussion – but each painting reveals itself as a lamp which appears to be devoid, which – let me restate that – each painting corresponds with a lamp which carries its hidden genie. There comes a moment when he rubs the painting and the genie of light springs out. So that years could pass before that kind of light springs out. This works in the novel to suggest that the surfaces of our experience are surfaces which are important in that one recognises them as partial. When I say partial here, I mean that in the sort of progression that Da Silva makes through his paintings, he is aware of various signals that affected his life, which were not apparent to him in the moment when they shone. He did not see them, even though they did shine. There comes a moment, however, when he is able to go back over the ground that he has traversed and, as it were, to touch that particular surface of experience in the right place and that light comes up again. He's suddenly aware of the fact that that light was there. It comes up again. There is a light – all sorts of resources of light that exist in a work of the imagination and those resources may not always make themselves apparent. Some time may pass before, in fact, those resources come up again like the genie in the light. So the paintings that Da Silva enters into are ways of suggesting to us that the language we use is never perfectly transparent, but the language can carry within it layers of illumination that mutate and come to the surface and that means that a work of the imagination has a strange life which goes far deeper than the historical decade or framework in which it is set. That's an aspect of it.

The other aspect of these paintings, of course, is that Da Silva is both a spectator and a participant, because he *lives* in his paintings. As he moves in the street, it is a painted street. As he moves in the various areas of his house, he is moving into paintings. Thus what one is suggesting is that there is a degree of blindness in his activities, as in fact occurs in all activity. As one moves on the street, there are many things one does not see, so that the place you move over for ten or twenty years always has some new element in it, something you did not see and it is as if the painting is coming alive in the depths of itself, is coming up. Resources which lie there, which have always lain there are now visualised differently from how you visualised them ten years ago and therefore Da Silva's constantly moving in his

paintings. The entire world in which he lives is a world he paints. Thus he confesses in part to his blindness. He confesses also to a potential illumination that will come up at some stage and in that way one senses that the life of metaphor resides not in an original word, but in an original gesture or painting, an original sensation to do with light on darkness. It is from sources like that that our language has become what it has become. If we fail to understand it, we are going to fall into the trap of breaking our communication into two parts. In one part we will pretend to have a transparent medium of the world, which is a deception. In the other part we are going to fall back more and more on visual images – in magazines, in newspapers, on television; we are going to become subject to the gorgon's head, as it defines itself in television. We see this with children today – they read less. At some degree one has to face this complex challenge of asking ourselves what are the roots of the word. The roots of the word lie in the way images have mutated into language, so that images have a life of their own apart from the coherency of the narrative, which is largely the sort of – Cartesian coherency ('I think, therefore I am'). That is a kind of conceit which resides in the word as absolute, as if the word is absolutely symmetrical, whereas the word has pulled up its life from very dark areas of experience. Unless we confess to that and understand it, it means that language become more and more obsolescent. Even when it seems to be lucid, it becomes simply a tool that journalists use to inspect the world around them, without necessarily looking into the cultures they inspect, without necessarily immersing themselves in the deep-seated dangers as well as potentialities and it is in this sense that the *Da Silva da Silva* novel is written, and its sequel, *The Tree of the Sun*.

JT Alchemical symbolism figures prominently in your work. Do you see your role as a writer as being related to that of the medieval alchemist?

WH Well, alchemy has always seemed to me an enormous tradition. If I may give a quick example from *Palace of the Peacock*, to show how it functions. There is the figure of Vigilance. Vigilance is someone who is very conscious that the crew as it pursues the folk are hunters and the folk are the hunted. As they pursue the folk, there comes a moment when Vigilance is aware that the whole ship of the cosmos has altered and that the crew itself is being hunted, by space, by arrows that seem to come out of the battlements of the cosmos and when he senses this he identifies himself with a wounded animal, a wounded tapir. He identifies himself, because he sees this – it's a sort of dawn, a sort of light, the dawning light which in alchemy is called the *albedo*. He suddenly has an awareness of this. It changes the whole sensation of himself, because he's no longer committed to the hunt in that way, as he was before, and he has a sensation that in seeing this he participates in the hunted creature, even as he looks at the hunted creature, and therefore it is as if the disaster of the hunt is not final. There is an opening, a crack, which brings him out into a new arena, in which he has some conversation with the very animals he hunts and the very folk who seem to fly before him, alien as they are. Now with the other members of the crew, that knowledge does not exist in that form. You may remember that immediately after this episode with Vigilance, you see the members of the crew in the stream and they're fighting each other. They're tormented

by a sensation of danger – one man, I think, kills the other – they’re tormented by all sorts of peculiar elements of darkness if you like. In other ways, they are hunted too, but they do not have the same *albedo* perception of it, so they dramatise it and that is the *nigredo*. The *nigredo* means that one has entered a terrain which one is exploring, but one is blind to the implications of the exploration and what occurs in that stage in the life of a culture is that the culture dramatises its torments. It does not see deeply enough to understand and comprehend what is at stake. It dramatises it as if it is a dark action, as if they’re all masked from each other, so they don’t see each other. Nevertheless they are encountering each other. Now this is a dangerous time, but it is also a time that may be necessary in the life of a culture, because that dramatisation is one way of expressing the kinds of dangers, the kinds of necessities which that culture has to cope with, the kinds of exploration it has to cope with. The other level of it, of course, is the Vigilance level, where he sees it so deeply that he doesn’t need to dramatise it. It becomes a fantastic perception in depth, so he knows what is at stake, as it were, very deeply and his kind of vision is not simply a spectatorial vision. It is a vision in which what is happening in the stream where these people are dramatising this thing, you see, mutates and comes up to him, as if he is in the stream too. So he’s learning from them, but he has a perception which is like the rising sun – this is the *albedo* phase, the dawning light. So there you have the two: the *nigredo*, where you dramatise the thing without the members participating in the drama seeing what they’re doing – it’s like people acting in a play without understanding what the play is all about, but they’re still acting out the parts, whereas there’s another figure who’s in the play, but also seems a little bit outside of the play and he sees the deep, fantastic meaning of the play – and there you have your *nigredo* and *albedo*. Now when it comes to the *cauda pavonis*, which is the stage of the colours of the peacock, one is involved there in the riddle of perfection in the sense that this is supposed to be perfection, but one can never grasp it entirely. So there’s a tendency for the *cauda pavonis* to come back into the *nigredo*, as if you have a continuous circuit of imaginative elements and therefore when you leave the *cauda pavonis*, you go back into the *nigredo*, you come back into the *albedo*. Each time the dramatisation may be deeper and stranger, the illumination – the Vigilance illumination – also alters slightly and becomes deeper and stranger, the *cauda pavonis* element could be enriched, as it goes by. Now in the novel, of course, the *cauda pavonis* element comes up, I think, in the tree of flesh and blood that swirls with the eyes of the peacock when the sun is shattered and seems to recreate itself in the eyes of the peacock, in the stars, on the various leaves – the whole tree that swirls.

So one has those elements: the *nigredo* element, which is the dramatisation, in which the players do not seem to know – the one man looks up and says ‘those are parrots’; the other man looks up and says ‘no, they’re vultures’ and so on; and the Vigilance eye which sees; and the *cauda pavonis*. That circuit of the imagination is a deepening circuit, as well as a circuit that heightens itself and relates to other cultures as well.

JT Currently there have been some dramatic political changes in the Caribbean – I’m thinking of Grenada and Dominica and even in Guyana it looks as if the status quo isn’t as invulnerable as it seemed to be a year or two ago. Would you care to make any comment on these developments?

WH The comment I would make here is that I think the Caribbean is very much in the *nigredo* phase. A dramatisation is occurring – of the disasters, the crises. It is all being dramatised. I don't believe that there is a perception as yet, in the community as a whole, which one could see as the *albedo* phase. I think obviously this is present in potential form, because once the *nigredo* phase exists, the *albedo* phase is potentially there. But in the Caribbean at the moment, the struggles, the whole scene – the Grenada scene, the Dominica scene, what is happening in Guyana, what is happening at another level in Trinidad, Jamaica and so on – one senses a ferment. It's like the ferment of a play, in which the players do not know what the play means. Nevertheless the rich potential is there and I think this is why Caribbean art needs to enter into its complexities. There is the danger that they may subscribe to various newspaper versions which attempt to chronicle their view of the conflict and those may be useful in some degree, but the issues are so much deeper, because when one looks at the Caribbean, looks at the South Americas, one must be aware that there are cultures that have existed in the soil, which have their origins in a mutation of images and that in fact the importance of imaginative fiction in this context is that it has to offer us the sensation of participating in the word at a depth which would allow us to sense these dimensions of ferment without bypassing the complexities and dangers that exist. In other words there's no short cut for territories like that – in my judgement.

JT One final question. I believe you're currently working on a critical study. Would you care to give us a foretaste of what it's about?

WH The critical study – what I'm attempting to do is to take certain examples which are drawn from novels in America and in the Commonwealth and, in one or two instances, in Europe as well and to sense cross-cultural connections between them. That is one phase of it.

And also to sense a cross-culture between imaginative literature and various areas of experience which are non-verbal, to sense how these are working on each other to give us an illumination of relationships that can enrich one's grasp of certain novels, which we may tend to pigeonhole in the wrong way, and certain areas of the imagination, whether folk imagination or non-verbal, which we may also tend to pigeonhole in the wrong way. Tradition secretes a mystery of wholeness that wears many *partial* investitures and masks we tend to consolidate into monoliths.

John Thieme is a Senior Fellow at the University of East Anglia. He previously held various appointments at UEA and Chairs at the University of Hull and London South Bank University. He has also taught at the Universities of Guyana and North London. His books include *Postcolonial Con-Texts: Writing Back to the Canon*, *The Arnold Anthology of Postcolonial Literatures*, *Postcolonial Studies: The Essential Glossary*, *Postcolonial Literary Geographies: Out of Place* and studies of *Derek Walcott*, *V. S. Naipaul* and *R. K. Narayan*. He was Editor of *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* from 1992 to 2011 and is General Editor of the Manchester University Press Contemporary World Writers Series. His creative writing includes *Paco's Atlas and Other Poems*, and the novel, *The Book of Francis Barber: A Legatee's Journal*.

J.Thieme@uea.ac.uk

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Pilar Royo-Grasa

Painting the Australian Landscape with a South-Asian Brush: An Interview with Roanna Gonsalves*

Roanna Gonsalves is an Indian Australian writer based in Sydney, author of the highly-praised short fiction collection *The Permanent Resident* (2016) – also recently published the title *Sunita De Souza Goes to Sydney: And Other Stories* (2018), in which she masterfully fills the contemporary Australian literary landscape with the hardly noticed experiences of Indian immigrant women living in Australia. Gonsalves was born in Mumbai and moved to Sydney in 1998. She has been the recipient of various awards concerning both her academic and writing career: the 2018 NSW Premier’s Literary Award Multicultural Prize, the 2017 Australia Council Literature Board Grant, the 2013 Australian Prime Minister’s Australia Asia Endeavour Postgraduate (Outgoing) Award, and the 2011 Australian Writers Guild Award (with colleagues), Best Script, Community and Youth Theatre. She is co-founder and co-editor of *Southern Crossings*. Her publications in the prestigious journals and magazines *Peril*, *Meanjin*, *Southerly*, *Overland*, and *The Conversation*, together with her participation in multiple writers’ festivals, conferences and teaching of several creative writing workshops in Australian universities and schools, clearly demonstrate Gonsalves’ versatility and social commitment. *The Permanent Resident*, her first published fiction book, positions Gonsalves as a sophisticated story-teller with a special gift to transmit stories of tremendous violence, pain and love through a witty use of the language. In this interview, which took place via an exchange of emails at the end of 2017 and beginning of 2018, Gonsalves discusses *The Permanent Resident* in relation to literature, immigration in Australia, class, gender, religion and whiteness.

Pilar Royo-Grasa Dear Roanna, you are a very socially-committed writer, who has extensively published articles on the existence of race, class and gender barriers within both Australia and India, and the cultural, political and literary ties that unite both countries. In *The Permanent Resident* you compile 16 short stories that show the yearnings and struggles undergone by Indian migrant characters living in Australia. Why did you decide to write on the topic of migration by using the short story genre?

Roanna Gonsalves Firstly, thank you so much for the care you have taken to read my work and for your very insightful questions. I am truly honoured and lucky to have such an astute reader as you, Pilar.

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When writing *The Permanent Resident*, my aim was to play with language to chronicle the lives of those not often represented in Australian literature. I hoped to do three things: to explore the sense of fractured time experienced by outsiders, to push the formal boundaries of the short story form, and to chronicle the 'multicultural real' (Ghassan Hage's term) of contemporary Australia. I am aware of my particular position where race, gender, class and religion intersect in constraining and enabling ways. In this collection I take my scalpel to patriarchy, to the female body, to the Catholic Church, to aspirational Indian immigrants, to white Australia, and most perilously to the fictional narrators of my stories. This book attempts to break new ground by charging the Australian literary landscape with Indian Australian lives. I have tried to make every story formally different from every other story in this book, even as the themes of each story resonate with each other.

I chose to write short stories rather than a novel because each encounter could be treated as a discrete piece of narrative. I wanted to comment on a diverse range of experiences of women who are first generation immigrants to Australia. I was inspired by Claude Monet and his recurrent painterly explorations of French water lilies, Alice Munro and her excavation of the lives of women in rural Canadian towns, R. K. Narayan and his persistent investigations of South Indian village life, I wanted to hold up the Indian Australian woman and examine her from multiple perspectives and planes of physicality, returning to this subject in every story.

Most of the stories are written in the first person because this point of view offered an immediacy and intimacy in relation to character interiority that such content required, because such characters are not encountered in Australian literature often enough.

PRG On the 26th of October 2016, the magazine *Peril* published your enlightening article on the topic who may be an Asian in Australia. In this article, you describe the kind of "gentle awakening" (para. 12) to your Asian identity that you experienced at the Asian Australian Research Network (AASRN) conference that had been held the previous year at Melbourne. As you state, this conference made you aware of the multiple affinities that you share with the other Asian critics, writers and artists who also attended that conference, and whose identity, like yours, had been touched by the process of colonization that your respective countries had undergone. However, at the beginning of the article you also express the concerns you had about being regarded as an intruder in the Asian Australian community of the conference due to your Indian background. As you state "I was not sure what to expect face-to-face at this conference of people who were legit Asians, unlike me whose position as 'Asian' in Australia seemed to be precarious at best. More than likely, I would be an outsider, observing discussions about Asianness in the Australian context: all about China and Indonesia and Vietnam, Japan and Malaysia and Thailand, Taiwan, the Philippines, Korea, and Cambodia. Perhaps there would be thickly drawn borders around what it meant to be Asian in Australia. I would have to mind the gap, although in a different way from that intended by higher-ups of the underground transport service of our former colonisers, potent though the resonances may be, aware, again, of my difference" (para. 11).

Could you please elaborate a little bit on what were the types of “thickly drawn borders” you thought you could come across? How can these be negotiated?

RG In Australia, the term ‘Asian’ often refers to those of East Asian heritage. It can be a term used to reflect the shared histories of colonisation and immigration and racism faced specifically by those of East Asian background. The “yellow peril” is a xenophobic term that was used to refer to Chinese and other East Asian communities. Being from South Asia, or the Indian sub-continent, our positions are slightly different from East Asian communities. We are enabled and constrained in different ways. For example, as a consequence of British colonisation, the English language is the first or second language of many Indians, an enabling privilege not shared by immigrants from mainland China or Vietnam for instance. While most South Asians don’t usually have to bear the brunt of the harmful racial stereotyping brought on by the trope of an “Asian invasion”, we are often considered shifty, cunning, dirty, smelly, untrustworthy etc. The AASRN conference helped me see how we also have similarities, which are actually often the consequence of similar class positions. I suppose, just being open to others, to be willing to listen to others is one way to negotiate any kind of border.

PRG Let me borrow the affirmative question that Suvendrini Perera posed at the AASRN conference that you cite in your article “what if the ground beneath our feet turns out to be the sea?” (para. 15) to introduce my next question. Your short story “The Permanent Resident” opens with a similar use of the metaphor of water. At the beginning of the short story, Rekha, the autodiegetic narrator of the story, states: “In the end it is not the water that gets to me, but my incapacitation in the face of solidity” (Gonsavles 2016a: 265). Rekha is a character whose fear of water stems from a traumatic experience she had during her honeymoon and her subsequent ill-fated marriage relationship. This somehow derives into a kind of self-blame attitude and makes her afraid of anchoring to a similarly disappointing relationship. Water is a recurrent motif throughout the whole collection. Could we say that the title of this short story which also gives the title to the whole collection, *The Permanent Resident*, is quite ironic, as the stories told in the collection make it clear that residency / identity cannot be permanent, it does not always remain the same, but, like the sea to which Perera referred is fluid and full of potential? What are the anchors that refrain us from diving into the water and swim?

RG What an insightful question! Yes, I agree with you, identity is always fluid, contextually-dependent and evolving. And yes, absolutely, I have tried to infuse the collection with a sense of this condition of impermanence, precariousness, transience and ephemerality, in the search for permanence and solidity that immigrants and outsiders must often negotiate. For the characters in my book, they often have to find their anchors within themselves, make them up, construct an anchor on the fly, rely on themselves in a country where they have little history and networks of support. Sometimes they do find anchors, like at the end of “The Dignity of Labour” where it is shared laughter across race lines but with gender

and class solidarities that brings on a renewed sense of self. Sometimes the anchor itself is unstable, like in “Up sky down sky middle water” and “In the beginning was the word”, and “Soccer mum” etc.

PRG According to Ien Ang, diasporic identity is double-edged. “It can be,” Ang argues (2001: 12), “the site of both support and oppression, emancipation and confinement”. Do you agree with Ien Ang’s argument? Would you like to comment on it? How can this double-edged diasporic identity be negotiated from the field of the arts?

RG It depends on each individual, and their context, I think. For refugees incarcerated by the Australian government, there is no question of support. For women duped into arranged marriages to Indian Australian men, only to be abused when they get here, there is little emancipation in diaspora. It is a living hell for them, marooned without supportive networks of family and friends. For some of us who are highly educated, who speak English as a first language, who are culturally Christian, we derive legitimacy and status from these privileges. But for us, race, gender and class entwine in ways that can be exclusionary. Just take Australian literature for example. You just have to look at the bookshops, the literary prizes, to get a sense of who is being legitimised by the gatekeepers. Often it is rich, white men who have deep networks of support here. And I’m only talking about literature. Magnify this ten times for an idea of what it is like in everyday life. I’ve written about my experiences as an international student in India, exploring these complexities, in a radio documentary called *Doosra: The life and times of an Indian student in Australia*.

PRG Turning back to the metaphor of water, I would like you to comment a little bit on the symbolic meaning of the ocean. In your article “Who is an Asian?” you appeal to the two oceans, the Pacific and Indian I assume, as the bond that ties together Australia and its Asian neighbouring countries. These oceans, you argue, are a container of “shared and unshared histories of colonization, our stories of ancient but criss-crossings, [...] the traces we have left of each other and upon each other, present even if undocumented” (2016b: para. 16), and a potential for possibility. Would you say that your writing tries to track those undocumented traces?

RG That’s a lovely and astute reading of my work, thank you. Yes, I didn’t do this consciously in the book, but I am very mindful of the shared histories, both pre-colonial and colonial, both geological and political, and the often concealed “hydro-powered” traces between Australia, India, and Asia more broadly. By this I mean the geological connections between the landmass of Australia and that of Asia, some of which are submerged under water yet no less real to me. I mean the criss-crossings across the Indian Ocean over millennia for curiosity and adventure, for trade, for refuge, for survival. I also mean the means of sustenance provided to us by shared rivers and by our shared oceans. The rain falls, and water vapour rises, without consideration for geo-political borders. Hopefully this awareness has infused the work like salt that is invisible but gives a curry, or an ocean, its taste.

PRG Significantly enough, there is a moment in the short story “In the Beginning Was the Word” in which Australia is described as “a Pacific country pretending to be Atlantic” (Gonsalves 2016a: 159). This wish to hide their Indian identity and fit into Western paradigms is shared by most of your characters. To mention just a few examples, I am thinking of characters such as the couple of Bibiana and Martin, who appear in the short story that I mentioned earlier, or Gloria and Tony, who host the autodiegetic narrator of “Full Face” when she and her husband first arrive in Australia. Both couples try to prove their higher status, difference from other Indian immigrants and integration in the Australian society through the furniture of their house. Yet, as Angie notices when she is invited to Angie and Martin’s house, the “labored showiness” that she adverts in Angie and Martin’s ostentatious decoration “is to be understood and accepted as one understands and accepts one’s teenage embarrassments” (158). Would you like to comment on Angie’s reflection?

RG I was trying to poke fun at the pretentiousness of the narrator here, to take my authorial scalpel to the narrator too, not just to the other middle-class aspirational characters. I wanted to write characters who cannot help but be surrounded by Whiteness (conceptualised as in Ghassan Hage’s ‘White Nation’), surrounded by the dominant hegemonic structures of Whiteness as the norm in Australia. So, it is but natural that they would want to be White themselves, in whatever way they conceive of it.

PRG An argument that is recurrently used to defend the righteousness of the characters’ decision to move to Australia is the country’s Christianity. To mention but one example, in the short story “In the Beginning Was the Word”, Bibi says to Angie, “it’s a Christian country [...]. No Hindus burning churches and raping nuns. The Catholic church is strong” (Gonsalves 2016a, 159). Is Australia becoming a refuge for Christian Indian migrants?

RG I think the situation for any minority in India is quite precarious right now. It has been so for decades but is exacerbated with the current dispensation. I think minorities who feel threatened or stifled whether for economic or intellectual or religious reasons, and have the capital to emigrate, often do so to countries like Australia, New Zealand, Canada. One political thrust of the book was to subvert narrow expectations of what it means to be Indian. So, I deliberately chose to write about a different kind of Indian from the stereotype of the North Indian upper class, upper caste Hindu. There are many ways of being Indian, and I wanted to write about ways of being Indian that provide a different picture from the stereotype.

PRG At the same time, your collection of short stories seems to criticise the shameful history of the Catholic Church in Australia and the double-morality that governs some of your Indian migrant characters. Internal conflicts are established between them, I am thinking, for instance, of the rivalry that exists between the Marian Mangalorean Indian Australian Organisation (MMIAO) and the South Asian Association of Catholics in Australia (SAACA) in “Cutting Corners”. Would you like to comment on the strength that this type of associations

is gaining in Australia? Do Indian migrants carry with them and replay in Australia the conflicts and tensions between different religious, ethnic and cultural groups that already exist in India?

RG Oh yes. As with most immigrant groups, my characters' sense of the homeland is stuck in the time at which they left. So of course, the old conflicts and solidarities are carried here, as happens even with the Anglo-Celtic diasporas here. It's not particular to Indian migrants. The tribe is often a source of conflict but also a source of support. In "Cutting Corners" I was trying to explore the comedic potential of a group of pretentious immigrants getting together while acknowledging that this comedy rests on their intense need to fit in in a society that doesn't think much of them.

PRG Bibi shows a complete lack of empathy and even contempt for refugees' arrival in Australia. Given her migratory background, one may expect her to show a more sympathetic attitude towards them. Would you like to comment on the political and social responses that the current arrival of asylum-seekers in Australia is arising in Australia and the role(s) that literature is playing in it?

RG It's often been observed in Australia that contrary to expectations, many immigrants are against newer immigrants coming in. I experienced this first hand when people I know and love, fellow Indian Australians who are some of the kindest people in the world, had very strong opinions against refugees. It's as if certain immigrants see themselves as exceptional while all other immigrants are the great unwashed that must be kept out at all costs. For Bibi and other characters like her, they are insecure about their own place in Australian society, insecure about their own legitimacy, because of the pervasive Whiteness of Australia. So, in order to feel more secure they must put down or oppress others like them. One way to surmount these issues and to increase empathy is to listen to stories told by others. I think the main reason Australians have been moved to protest strongly against our government's abuse of asylum seekers is that we have heard the stories of asylum seekers in detention, in their own voices, through their own words, published in print and online, through their art, and their films. It is their stories that have moved us as a nation. This is the way literature has worked in relation to the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Australia. Hopefully our collective outrage and ongoing protests at different levels, catalysed by story and by literature, will help effect change for those suffering so terribly because of our government.

PRG What made you feel interested in Australian literature? Did you find any niche in the field of Australian literature or the literature and writing courses that you took when you move from India to study in Australia and that you felt that you could somehow contribute to filling with your writing production?

RG I've always been a reader and a writer, and so was naturally attracted to the literature of the place in which I live. I wanted to chronicle contemporary Australian life, the way I ex-

perienced it. I felt I didn't see people like me present in Australian literature as much as we are present in Australian life. A contemporary exception of course is Michelle De Kretser's work, which has been a source of strength and joy to me. I wanted to contribute to this tradition of writing about contemporary Australian life in all its messy and glorious diversity. I wanted to take what I call a "literary selfie of a country". By this I mean that it is important to have self-representation in literature, so that not just the mainstream but especially the marginalised may speak in their own voice. This would give us a less lop-sided sense of what it means to be part of a country or a nation. There is a long history of the powerful taking the stories of the oppressed and telling their stories for them. You see this when it comes to the stories of indigenous people, refugees and asylum seekers, and other oppressed and marginalised groups. This becomes problematic because of the power imbalance, particularly when there is a colonial relationship involved, when the marginalised are not allowed to speak for themselves, denied access to literary networks and circuits of production and reception. I've written about this in a piece called "See me showing you me" in *Overland*, and "Selfie is not a dirty word" in *The Conversation*.

PRG I'd like to ask you a question related to the increasing attention that Asian Australian writing is gathering in the publishing industry. In her article "'Voice-Niche-Brand': Marketing Asian-Australianness" Merlinda Bobis claims: "this is the perennial difficulty encountered by the migrant writer: how to be understood, how to be understood in one's own tongue? [...] how to be understood here – how to be accepted?" (2008: para 11). As she claims, the term "Asian-Australian" has been turned into a brand by big publishing houses to the extent that writers may be pushed to tune their voices to what the market expects from them. Do you agree with Bobis' critique of the market's attempt to group all Asian-Australian writing into a generic brand? What strategies may be used to avoid one's voice be silenced or, to put it in Bobis' terms, "hijacked" (para. 33), by the market?

RG I feel there are so few Asian Australian writers here and the struggle to get published and then the longer struggle to get noticed, to get programmed at festivals, to get bookshops to consider stocking your book, to hope reviewers will review your book is so gruelling that I am unable to wrap my head around the idea of an 'Asian Australian brand' in the sense of a commodity that is raking in profits. It is so alien to my experience of being a writer. However, I agree with Merlinda Bobis' sense of the tendency to lump all Asian Australian writers into one category as if we're one homogenous lot. I feel my task as a writer is to explore these nuances, of class, ethnicity, religion, age, political attitudes etc within our communities, to add more layers to the complex stories about this complex country called Australia.

PRG Your short stories deal with thorny political questions that put at stake the vision of Australia as a happy multicultural country. Your collection of short stories brings to the fore the violent racist attacks to which migrants are subject in Australia, and some of the anxieties and obstacles that they find in their quests for gaining the approval of their permanent residency. Has any of your writings been rejected on the grounds that the Australian read-

ing public may find it too offensive, as occurs to the piece of writing that your character Lynette reads out in your short story "The Skit"?

RG I have had a lot of writing rejected over the years, but I couldn't provide a definitive reason for the rejections as I wasn't given any. Often you just get the silent treatment. But these particular stories in *The Permanent Resident* were not rejected, except for "The Skit". I submitted "The Skit" to numerous journals including prominent literary journals in Australia. I wasn't given any reason for the rejections. *Mascara Literary Review* was the only literary journal willing to publish "The Skit". In my work I pay homage to great writers from places like India, not only those in the Euro-American canon. So possibly my work is not understood by those who are unaware of Indian writing maybe, I don't know. I'm also interested in characters of immigrant, non-white backgrounds who are at the coalface of Australian life, driving the country, cleaning the toilets of Australia, serving its citizens their exotic food. I'm not writing to fit the stereotype of the Indian immigrant who plays cricket and has a big Bollywood wedding. This also may be a reason for the work not fitting a particular box. That said, I have been humbled and thrilled by the warm and generous reception of the book by reviewers, readers, students, academics at universities who have found the book interesting enough to get their students to read it and write about it, and I am so very grateful for this. It makes all the rejections seem trivial.

PRG Could you please talk a little bit more on the kind of reception that your collection of short stories has had in India and Australia?

RG I've been humbled and thrilled by the reception to the book. It has not yet been a year since its publication, and the book has been reviewed with such generosity and insight and love by so many fine reviewers. It features on several lists of must-read Australian books and has been put on the syllabus of courses in Australian Literature, Postcolonial Literatures, and Creative Writing, at a number of universities in Australia. I've had the joy and honour of interacting with students who have read and written about my work with such perceptiveness. I've been lucky to be invited to participate in numerous writers' and readers' festivals. I feel there is a deep need for such stories about life as an outsider in Australia, and that's why they've been embraced so warmly. I am really grateful for this reception, it's completely unexpected and so all the sweeter and all the more treasured.

In India I was touched by the warm reception at the Goa Arts and Literature Festival, where I was lucky to be invited by Vivek Menezes to launch the book at the inauguration of the festival. I was blown away by the response from the Goan media, the colleges I was invited to speak at, readers, and fellow writers. I felt I was at home and embraced as their own and that is a feeling I will always remember. Goa is my grandmotherland and my grandma would have been so proud to see this happen.

PRG Sanjay, another character of "The Skit", states: "You can't make an Aboriginal character a perpetrator, even if he is only half Aboriginal" (Gonsalves 2016a, 47). Do you agree with

Sanjay's statement? Could this tendency to forbid Indigenous characters to take the role of perpetrators be regarded as another way of depriving them from their humanity? How can this tension between an excessive idealization and the stigmatization that Australian Indigenous peoples have lived and continue to live be navigated?

RG Good question. I don't know how to negotiate that tension. For me it is an ongoing quest to learn more, to try to understand better how we as immigrants are beneficiaries on indigenous dispossession and what we can do to dismantle this. Anne Brewster's work has been quite instructive for me. Writing about Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance*, Brewster notes, "Without wanting to hijack or erase the specificity of cultural recovery for indigenous communities, I'd like to suggest that, in the Australian context, cultural recovery can also function to (re)connect white and other non-indigenous people to the bodily history of colonisation and (re)establish and (re)configure cross-cultural relations with the indigenous owners of this country. Recognising cross-racial kinship – that is, cross-cultural intersubjectivity and intercorporeality – entails a recognition of indigenous prior occupancy and geopolitical autonomy; of indigenous sovereignty. It also entails an acknowledgment of the founding role that indigenous people played as 'pioneers' (159) in the establishment of modern Australia, that is, in the pastoral industry and other industries such as whaling and pearling". (Brewster 2011: 69)

PRG As your stories show, migration implies not only the physical movement from one place to another but also a movement to a lower class layer. Would you like to comment on this movement? What other kinds of movements does migration imply?

RG Migration is always about change and renewal, destruction and creation, in an ongoing cycle. Sometimes it's about moving down the class ladder, sometimes it means moving up. It depends on the specificities of the individual context I think. But it usually involves a state of flux.

PRG The jobs which your characters take seem also to be gendered. Could you comment on the extent that gender issues interact with issues regarding employment?

RG Gender is a huge barrier in our patriarchal society, as we all know. Gender becomes more of a barrier once a woman has children. I wanted to explore this in my work. A flexible workplace is so important when one has to pay the rent and also feed the kids, and I've been lucky to have this over the years. Sometimes this is not possible for most immigrant women. This is a huge and sometimes insurmountable barrier. I wanted to explore this a little in fiction.

PRG Marriage and motherhood are two recurrent themes of your collection. Why did you want to write about these topics?

RG I wanted to write about these topics because they don't often get written about although they are the bedrock of human life. The grand narratives are lauded, but I wanted to illuminate the intimate narratives too, to make the intimate grand in some ways, that was my intention.

PRG Why did you choose Sydney as the Australian city to set your stories? Can you see any difference between Sydney and Melbourne as regards the situation of the Asian community living there? I take it that the Asian community in Melbourne is even bigger, why is this so?

RG I set most of the stories in Sydney because I wanted to understand the relationship between character and place in fiction. I wanted to do this from different points of view of one place. That's why I chose to set most of the stories in Sydney, in a very particular kind of Sydney, grungy, immigrant suburbs, not often written about in literature. I'm not sure why the Asian community is bigger in Melbourne. I'd love to write stories set in Melbourne and other parts of Australia one day.

PRG Would the stories be different if they were set in rural Australia?

RG Australia is a settler colony, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have never ceded sovereignty. It is easier to forget this truth in the bustle of the city where human presence and history is vacuumed into the concrete. Outside of the city, with fewer man-made structures, one comes face-to-face with the power of this ancient land. So, it is harder to forget the people who lived with this land for thousands of years. Their presence is everywhere. My stories are mainly set in urban Australia. Had they been set in a rural setting, the interaction with place and indigenous presence would have to be quite different. The external struggles of the characters would be different. Also, rural Australia is quite unlike urban Australia in its cultural makeup. So there again my characters would have to deal with issues vastly dissimilar to what they currently deal with in their urban environments. There would not be a bashing at a suburban train station, for example, nor an annual Christmas dance of the Christian Indian Association. But the interior conflict would be quite similar I think, only because most of my characters are struggling with the basic human need to be loved, and that need crosses space, time and cultures, and also crosses the rural-urban divide.

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Pilar Royo-Grasa is Lecturer in the Department of English and German Philology of the University of Zaragoza. Her PhD thesis is entitled: "A Study on the Representation of Trauma in Gail Jones' *Black Mirror*, *Sixty Lights* and *Sorry*". She has been a Visiting Scholar at the universities of New South Wales and Northampton, UK. Her main research interests are contemporary Australian fiction, trauma and postcolonial studies and she has published articles in the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, *Journal of the European Association for Studies of Australia* and *Odisea: Revista de Estudios Ingleses*.
prg@unizar.es

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Mahuya Bhaumik

The Journey of a Poet: An Interview of Bibhu Padhi

Bibhu Padhi is one of the leading bi-lingual poets of India in present day. He writes extensively in both English and Oriya languages. He is also a literary critic and translator. Some of his notable collections of poems are *Painting the House* (1999), *Going to the Temple* (2008), the book chapter *Living with Lorenzo* (2003) and *Magic Ritual* (2014) to name a few. His scholarly works include the much-acclaimed *D. H. Lawrence: Modes of Fictional Style* (1989) and *Indian Philosophy and Religion: A Reader's Guide* (1990) co-authored with Minakshi Padhi.

Mahuya Bhaumik Your poetry is a perfect example of the amalgamation of rural landscapes and cityscapes, please comment on this observation.

Bibhu Padhi It has something to do with the place where I was born and brought up. Cuttack is a large village and a small town. When I was young I would bicycle down all the lanes and by lanes of Cuttack to get a flavour of what is called the real Cuttack. Apart from this I have experiences of villages too. I always want to stay in a village for a couple of days in the interiors of Odisha. All of these have influenced my writing.

MB Your poems have been published in such reputed magazines as *Queen's Quarterly*, *Poetry Wales*, *Illustrated Weekly of India*, *Encounter* and many others. What is your reaction to this?

BP There is a funny side too. I submit my poems and wait for the editor's decision very eagerly. However, once the poems are accepted and published in a magazine I suddenly lose interest in the magazine itself. I never go back to the magazine. I think the most beautiful thing about it is the waiting for the editor's decision.

MB How do you look at your journey as a poet from innocence to maturity?

BP I started writing poems when I was in my Master's class. I used to send those to a magazine called *Dialogue India* published by Pritish Nandy, who used to write great poetry himself but has now moved into film production. He always used to write up just one word every time I sent him my poems. The word was 'extra ordinary'. I loved to see my poems in print. However, the poems were, I think, a little too sentimental, a little too romantic and a little too immature. They were all ruckus. I gave up writing poetry for four years.

I used to suffer in those days from migraine and used to take analgesics. One day I took three analgesic tablets on empty stomach. They cut the stomach wall and I vomited about two litres of blood. I was immediately admitted to the hospital where I had to stay for

fifteen days in what was called "The Extra Medical Ward". During my fifteen days of stay, I must have seen as many as twelve deaths. It seemed everyone was dying. I remember clearly two of those deaths – the death of a young boy who died of liver failure and the death of a young man who died of cancer. When I returned home I wrote two poems on these two deaths and sent these to a magazine which was the most prestigious in the country called *Quest*. They published them. It was in 1975. I started writing poetry seriously since that year. Pritish Nandy always used to tell me, "Bibhu why don't you publish your first book? Its high time you did". My first book *Going to the Temple* was published in the 1979. Since then I have published 11 books of poetry. My poems have been published in distinguished magazines and anthologies throughout the English-Speaking world. I cannot say if my poetry is mature. My wife, who has always been the first reader of my poems, says that I've grown a lot since the publication of my first book But I think I cannot now write the poems that I wrote in my first book. They were highly imagistic and concrete. Recently – which is to say for the past three years – I have been experimenting with couplets. I know for sure that couplets cannot be used to convey depth of meaning but they have their own charm as well. I've observed that many European poets have experimented with the couplet form with a lot of success.

MB Which Western literary figures have influenced you?

BP To start with, several European, Latin American as well as American poets have influenced me, for instance, Pablo Neruda, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Octavio Paz, Cesare Pavese, Salvatore Quasimodo, Emily Dickinson, James Merrill Whitman, William Stafford among others. The major themes of my poetry include memory, family, night, the sea, innocence, ancestors.

MB You have often talked of life as celebration. Do you think that both body and mind are integral parts of this celebration?

BP Surely, the mind always wants to celebrate life and there are times when the body fails to cooperate with the mind. I must tell you that I have many poems which are sad and far from any celebration.

MB The use of metaphors in your poetry encompasses a wide range from the personal to the universal. What helped you to choose from such a wide range of metaphors?

BP I have a poem titled "Perhaps" in which I have used metaphors which came from the cosmic sphere – it is one of my own favourites. Most of my metaphors are personal in nature. In a poem like "Happiness", for example, the last line is "a touch of kinship / It feels nice on the skin". My early poems were full of metaphors. My recent poems do not have many metaphors. I do not choose metaphors for their own sake. If a metaphor does not come to me effortlessly I don't use it. Metaphoric language has a dimension of its own

MB How important is the role of memory in your poetry?

BP My work is replete with memories. Nostalgia and a lost world appear in my poetry very often. I think recently almost every poem of mine has been nostalgic. One cannot live without memory. Memory is real; I have a poem called "Letter to my Wife" in which I talk about the slow growth of our children and their slow moving away from us. They have learnt their own language which is so different from ours. It seems it is impossible to live without memory.

MB You have confirmed that certain Indian literary figures have had a palpable influence on you. In what ways have they shaped your personality?

BP Jayanta Mahapatra has read all my poems. During almost my early writing career, he influenced me a great deal. I love Mehrotra's use of imagery and the terseness of his verse. I talked about my experimentations with the couplet. One of the finest Indian poets, R. Parthasarathi, has written many poems in couplets very successfully. Sahid's poetry is very intense and I have been influenced by his intensity.

MB Mythology is an integral part of your poetry. Have you incorporated mythology in your creative process consciously or spontaneously?

BP I think it comes to me spontaneously. I have two poems which are obviously mythological – "The Song for Duryadhana" and "Vishma Waiting for his Death". I have also a poem on a character who is a witness to all that happened in the *Mahabharata* war.

MB What is your view on the present state of Indian Writing in English?

BP The older poets are still writing. There have been quite a few younger poets who have been writing well. Among them are Sudeep Sen, Ravindra Swain, Shanta Acharya, Sambit Panigrahi, Sutapa Chaudhuri, Amanita Sen, Gopi Krishnan Kattoor, T. R. Joy, Pravanjan Mishra, Rabin Ngomngong, Mamang Dai, Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang and Sharmila Roy.

MB Do you think that criticism is an integral part of literary appreciation?

BP Of course I do. Every good poet looks forward to a frank criticism of his work. It is from criticism that the poet learns about his mistakes and limitations. Not many articles have been written on my poetry but those few which have been written have been quite reassuring. Poetry and criticism are two sides of a coin. The poet needs critics just as a critic needs poets. A book review is the first critical work on a poet's book. Hence, they are necessary elements in the growth of a poet.

MB How are your Oriya poems different from the English ones?

BP I think the only difference is that I dictate my Oriya poems to my wife because I have forgotten the Oriya script. Sometimes I take a particular theme and write on it both in Oriya and in English. I suppose my Oriya poems are simpler and more lyrical than my English poems.

MB How do you write a poem?

BP I wait for a poem to come. Perhaps wait for a title. At some other time the first or the last line. The first line stays with me for a week or so and then it asks me to put itself down on the page. Earlier I used to write my poems in long hand, but now I write it on the computer. Right now I have a title for a poem as well as its first two lines. I think, when I sit down to write, the rest of the poem will follow.

MB Have you written anything other than poetry?

BP Yes, I've written a book on D. H. Lawrence and a reference book on Indian Philosophy and Religion. Besides, I have published several articles which have been published in good journals. I have published a novel called *Absences*. These days, however, I am not writing prose.

MB Your poetic style is referred to as "rooted in his (your) soul", will you please elucidate?

BP This is a difficult question. One of my American poet friends, Tess Gallagher, once wrote that poetry is nothing but a process of "soul making" in her preface of my first book, *Going to the Temple*. I think every good poet is inspired by his soul. However, the soul is always related to the body. The body is important too.

Mahuya Bhaumik is associate professor at the Department of English, Derozio Memorial College (Kolkata). She has presented papers in various national and international conferences and seminars and has published in different international journals. Her areas of interest include Indian English Writing, Culture Studies, Diasporic Literature, Film Studies and Dalit Literature. She has recently published in *CLEaR* and *Writers in Conversation*.

mahuarc@yahoo.com