



Vol 11, Issue 1
December 2018
Complete Articles
Contents

Peer-reviewed articles

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Jameel Alghaberi | The Concepts of Home and Statelessness in Palestinian Diaspora Fiction: Reflections in Randa Jarrar's <i>A Map of Home</i> |
| Adnan Mahmutović | To Issue a Firefly's Glow: Wormhole Geographies and Positionality in Mohsin Hamid's <i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist</i> |
| Iakovos Menelaou | The Cultural Wealth of Cyprus and the Role of Nature in Seferis' <i>Logbook III</i> |
| Mike Piero | Dialogical Numbers: Counting Humankind Pain in J.M. Coetzee's <i>Elizabeth Costello</i> |
| Lekha Roy and Rano Ringo | Liminality and Otherness: Exploring Transcultural Space in Rita Dove's <i>The Yellow House on the Corner</i> |
| Daneshwar Sharma | Fiji MAA: A Book of a Thousand Readings |
| Levi Thompson | A Transnational Approach to 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī's 'Umar Khayyām |

Bibliomemoir

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| Robyn Walton | On Pacification and Perspective: The International Referents of an Australian Artwork and a Novel |
|--------------|---|

Interview

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Lili Zhang | 'Including China' in Postcolonial Studies: An Interview with Bill Ashcroft |
|------------|--|

Complete articles.
Transnational Literature Vol. 11 no. 1, December 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

The Concepts of Home and Statelessness in Palestinian Diaspora Fiction: Reflections in Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* Jameel Alghaberi

Abstract

The present paper examines the conceptualisation of home and statelessness in Palestinian diasporic narratives. Though the term 'Palestinian diaspora' is frequently debated and preference is given to terms such as 'exile' and 'refugee', the paper aims to reflect upon the correlation between 'historic Palestine' and the new conceptions of home that continue to evolve in contemporary Palestinian diaspora fiction. New generations of Palestinian exiles and diasporas find it difficult to imagine 'historic Palestine' as none have been physically there. Their sense of home/Palestine grows only as a collective narrative passed on from one generation to the next. Thus, the paper attempts to reveal what home means to such a category with reference to Randa Jarrar's novel *A Map of Home*. The paper also discusses the locations and dislocations of Palestinians and their journeys across borders.

Keywords: Home, Statelessness, Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, Exodus, Right to Return.

Introduction

The birth of Israel in 1948 signalled the end of the Jewish diaspora, but it simultaneously marked the beginning of the Palestinian dispersion. This dispersion rendered Palestinians displaced in their homeland and refugees in the other countries of the region. However, migration from Palestine is not new but older than the dispersion caused by the wars that led to the creation of the Israeli State. What is largely known about Palestinians is that they are exiles and refugees, but less is known about those Palestinians who voluntarily emigrated to Latin America during the Ottoman rule. Helena Schulz and Juliane Hammer observe that Palestinian migration began in the late eighteenth century, at that time primarily constituted by Christians and primarily oriented towards the 'new world'.¹ Today Palestinian diaspora is more complex, including voluntary and forced, and it is one among the widespread diasporas in the world. As a concept, it is indeed older than the exodus that resulted after the creation of Israel.

Today Palestinian nationalists intentionally attempt to dismiss the use of 'Palestinian diaspora' as they have certain fears regarding the existence and future of Palestine as an entity. It is an attempt to keep the rightful claim to statehood and the dream of an independent state alive. For them, 'diaspora' means accepting and celebrating a new diasporic home that may challenge the very existence of Palestinian national identity. Generally, the use of the term 'Palestinian diaspora' is thought to weaken the Palestinian national cause. Those writers who advocate such statements feel satisfied with the use of terms like 'exile' and 'refugee' and they think that such terms entail more elements of force and attachment to the homeland. Sari Hanfi, for example, argued that Palestinians abroad do not constitute a diaspora, proposing that they can be described

¹ Helena Schulz and Juliane Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland* (London: Routledge, 2003) 2.

'The Concepts of Home and Statelessness in Palestinian Diaspora Fiction: Reflections in Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home*.' Jameel Alghaberi.

Transnational Literature Vol. 11 no. 1, December 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

as ‘partially diasporised people’ or ‘population in transit’.² The conscious use of the terms ‘exile’ and ‘refugee’ implies that the Palestinian’s journey was not voluntary but imposed and as such they would strive to maintain the fixity of the nation as a frame of reference and a national cause. In practical terms, the Palestinian diaspora has become a reality, and what is important for the Palestinian case today is to build bridges rather than walls. Having another citizenship does not necessarily mean betrayal to the homeland. It rather roots the dispersed and shelters the stateless Palestinians and provides them with state protection that they all lack.

Palestinian diasporic and exilic writing is vibrant and highly acclaimed. Writers like Naomi Shihab Nye, Susan Abulhawa, Randa Abdel-Fattah, Ramsey Nasr, Randa Jarrar and Diamela Eltit all write in different nationalities and employ certain varied forms of aesthetics. These writers and many others have been enriching the libraries of diaspora and world literatures for more than three decades. Their literary output occupies a sizable portion in the genre of victim diasporas, narrating the personal and the collective trauma of people who have been subjugated for decades. It is filled with anguish and despair, yet it communicates a voice of resilience. In the words of Nadia Sirhan, the very act of narrating gives credence and existence to the displaced and dispossessed Palestinians.³ Memoirs, short stories, and novels that continue to emerge from different diaspora societies undoubtedly give the Palestinian political question a soul and spirit; substance that the political rhetoric lacks. Asmaa Naguib in this regard observes that the Palestinian novelists have assumed the task of remembering and narrating the entire collective experience to save the story of Palestine from oblivion.⁴ This has been the crux of most Palestinian diaspora writing since the beginning of al-Nakba.⁵

Aim and Methodology

The paper aims to discuss and critically reflect on the concepts of home and statelessness in Palestinian diaspora with reference to the novel *A Map of Home*. In connection with the right to return, the aim is also to examine the use of the terms ‘Palestinian diaspora’, ‘exile’ and ‘refugee’ in the Palestinian discourse. The methodology used in this study is a mix of various modes of readings. The study is based on a variety of resources, including Randa Jarrar’s novel *A Map of Home* as a primary resource and essays and memoirs by Palestinian scholars and critics as secondary resources. Extensive use has been made of exile and diaspora literature and critical articles relevant to the Palestinian diaspora. The work of Edward Said, Randa Jarrar, Ihab Saloul, as examples, embody the rich oeuvre of texts conceptualising the Palestinian issue. The psychology of particular characters in certain diasporic contexts is analysed in this paper, while postcolonial frameworks are invoked in addressing the Palestinian-Israeli territorial issue. Narratology as an interpretation model is also used in deciphering the core of the Palestinian narratives.

² Sari Hanafi, ‘Rethinking the Palestinians Abroad as a Diaspora: The Relationships between the Diaspora and the Palestinian Territories,’ *International Social Science Review* 4.2 (2003) 174.

³ Nadia Sirhan, *Folk Stories and Personal Narratives in Palestinian Spoken Arabic: A Cultural and Linguistic Study* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 70.

⁴ Asmaa Naguib, *Representations of ‘Home’ from the Setting of ‘Exile’: Novels by Arab Migrant Writers*, Doctoral thesis (Exeter: The University of Exeter, 2011) 56.

⁵ ‘al-Nakba’ or ‘Nakba’ is an Arabic word which can be translated into English as ‘catastrophe’ or ‘disaster’. It is used in the Palestinian political discourse to designate the condition that followed the creation of Israel.

Borderlines in *A Map of Home*

Randa Jarrar is a Palestinian American writer whose debut novel *A Map of Home* won the Hopwood Award and the Arab-American Book Award. She herself won several prizes: the 2004 Million Writers Award for best short story online, the 2008 Chamberlain Prize, the 2010 Beirut 39 (Best 39 writers of Arab origin under 40), and the 2017 American Book Award. Her award-winning novel recounts the story of a Palestinian family, Waheed Ammar, his wife, Fairuza, and their two children, Nidali and Gamal, and follows their lives and experiences as exiles in Kuwait, Egypt, and finally as diaspora settling in the United States. It exhibits two different views of home –that of Waheed Ammar, and that of his daughter Nidali. Waheed's view of home is romantic, idealist, nostalgic, while his daughter is pragmatic in perceiving and constructing the idea of home. As a father, Waheed's primary goal is to inculcate the history of Palestine into the mind of his daughter. His attempt is to create memory and history in the hope that Palestinian roots will live on in the next generation. Nidali in this regard says,

I was a child; I had no memories about where I belonged. We were a family with a short history then; my parents were making my memories. It must be strange to be a parent, to be like a filmmaker who is always on, always rolling one memory or another for your child.⁶

A Map of Home is a bildungsroman story in which the protagonist, Nidali, is struggling towards attaining agency. In this respect, the novel can be read from a feminist perspective as Nidali symbolises resistance against the dogmatic beliefs and perceptions of women in the Middle East. Nidali's father in the novel is also depicted as an oppressive patriarch, treating Nidali and her mother in an aggressive manner in most cases. Many may view Nidali's reactions to her situation from a purely feminist perspective, but as an individual of Palestinian origin it is equally important to understand Waheed Ammar, Nidali's father, from a psychological point of view. There is no doubt that Waheed, like many Palestinians of post-Nakba⁷ and post-1967 war,⁸ is traumatised. This trauma might be the reason for his behaviour towards his daughter in particular. In the novel, he is aggressive yet caring, badly-tempered yet loving. His relationship with his daughter is complicated not due to a sort of psychic complex but out of fear of losing his daughter like he has lost his home. From the beginning, he wants Nidali to be a boy and immediately after her birth he gives her a masculine name. This cannot completely indicate that he is against women; it rather reflects his anxiety about the very existence of his homeland. What can easily be inferred is that he wants a boy, a man to fight for the cause of Palestine. He himself failed to return to Palestine, and thus his ultimate hope is to raise a child who would accomplish what he could not. Waheed is unconsciously displacing his anguish and psychological trauma to his small family. Yet his daughter resists this and pursues her own

⁶ Randa Jarrar. *A Map of Home* (New York: Other Press, 2008) 287. All subsequent references to, and citations of, the novel will appear in parentheses within the body of this article.

⁷ In the Palestinian historical, political and narrative discourses, post-Nakba refers to the period that followed the creation of Israel. It is mostly remembered in negative terms as it marks the dispersal of Palestinians.

⁸ War of 1967, or Third Arab Israeli War, was fought between Israel and three Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, and Syria) in which Arabs were defeated. It was another Nakba for Palestinians as large numbers were displaced.

course of life. More importantly, he is concerned about grounding his children as he tirelessly narrates to his daughter the history of Palestine.

The title of the novel *A Map of Home* automatically opens the discussion about the map of Palestine which is continually reshaped and redrawn. For the sake of the establishment of a Jewish State, Zionism, since its emergence as a political movement in the region, has sought repeatedly to eradicate Palestine from the map of the world and to deny it as both a political entity and a basis of national identification. Consequently, the characterisation of Waheed in Jarrar's *A Map of Home* is a form of Palestinian counter-narrative. Jarrar here also attempts to show the tediousness of the search for home in multiple places of displacement. The novel as a whole is a depiction of the quest that a Palestinian growing up in diaspora undertakes to seek traces of home and frames of reference. It also manifests how the Palestinian narrative is passed from one generation to the next, problematising post-Nakba memory and the inheritance of its consequences.

The names of the characters in the novel have been carefully chosen. Nidali, the name of the protagonist, bears greater significance as it supports the title and creates a resonance in the Palestinian mentality. 'Nidali' means in Arabic 'my struggle'. Life under Israel's brutal force is one of a constant struggle for Palestinians. As an Egyptian, Waheed's wife does not like such a name. She is not preoccupied with the Palestinian historical struggle, and thus she protests, "I am not forecasting this girl's future and calling her 'my struggle'! She will be my treasure, my life, my tune" (8). Though Nidali goes through different experiences in Kuwait, Egypt and Texas, the name she carries does not signify only her individual suffering. It is towards the end of the novel we realise that it is her father's constant struggle as a Palestinian who attempts to represent the ideal Palestinian exile, anxious about raising his children with much attachment to their Palestinian culture and history. The name 'Gamal', which is given to Nidali's younger brother, has significance, too. It is the name of the deceased leader of Egypt, Gamal Abdunnasser, who waged war against Israel in 1967 and who is also considered as the father of the pan-Arab national movements. Moreover, Nasser is highly revered as he, after Nakba, welcomed Palestinians to Egypt and refused to designate them as refugees but as brothers. Palestinians owe him a great debt and gratitude as he ordered Egyptian authorities to treat Palestinians on par with Egyptians. By naming his son after such a great leader, Waheed Ammar attempts to revive the nationalist spirit that led to the independence of many pan-Arab countries.

The concept of home in Jarrar's novel is fluid and permeable. Nidali, born in the United States, raised in Kuwait, grew up in Egypt, and finally settled in Texas, holds a totally different view of home; it is a view that is contrary to the common articulations of home in Palestinian diaspora. To her, home is where one is safe and comfortable as she has never been anchored to a certain place. She moves back and forth without that particular sense of rootedness to a place. In Kuwait, she feels at home and makes friendships, yet the Gulf War of 1991 disrupts all ties, and the whole family is obliged to flee to Egypt. Also, in Egypt Nidali has friends as her mother is Egyptian, but this is cut short by her family's return to the United States. This kind of movement results in her uncrystallised concept of home which can be attributed to a sort of hybridity that characterises later generations of diaspora. Said explained that Palestinians are hybrid migrants in, but not of, any situation in which they find themselves, considering it the deepest continuity

of their lives as a nation in exile and constantly on the move.⁹ It seems that going to multiple places means constructing new multiple homes to Nidali. Such a positive view reflects nothing but the willingness and the true desire of a Palestinian to have a home. 'Journey' is a metaphor in the Palestinian literature, and we obviously observe it through the locations and dislocations of Nidali's family. To be a Palestinian is to go through an ongoing struggle against the history of injustice and to try to assert roots and identity. In an attempt to redraw the map of home and in the midst of such constant movements, Waheed is anxious to teach his daughter the history, culture, and, more importantly, ways to draw the map of historic Palestine. Initially, Nidali responds positively to her father's lessons, but she eventually develops her own sense of home and constructs her own version of Palestine's map:

Baba told me to go get a blue book from the bookshelf, "Palestine is My Country" in big white letters on its side. Baba flipped to a page with the real map of Palestine on it and made me trace the map and draw it over and over again. He called it the map of home. (68)

It is, therefore, interesting to look back at the father's map of home and the daughter's modified map of home. Waheed's map is that of 'historic Palestine', which has now been overtaken by Israeli settlements. As a dispersed Palestinian, Waheed still recalls every single aspect of his native place: the olive trees, memories of the villages and neighbourhoods where he spent his childhood. Consequently, he thinks that it is his duty to transmit such a collection of memories to his daughter, attempting to keep the flame of Palestine alive in the new generations. However, the father's map which might be the map of Palestine before 1948 or 1967 is no longer applicable. It has been dissolved, appearing today fragmented and bubbled with the Israeli settlements. Under the forcible Israeli schemes to incorporate more land to their emerging state, Palestine based on the UN resolution of 1948 practically does not exist today. With the western world turning a blind eye to the Palestinian-Israeli issue, Israel continually deducts land from the 1946 Palestinian territory, extreme extraction which leads to more suffering for the Palestinians on their own land.

After some years, Nidali is challenged with testing her acquired memory of Palestine and its map. She tries to draw the map of Palestine and shows it to her father. He likes it but when she asks him whether the map is right, he replies with a pragmatic response reflecting the continuous erosion of the Palestinian territory. She asks him, "Is it right?" He replies, "Who knows?" (193). Nidali remains unconvinced with his response and demands more explanation. Waheed responds with frustration and anguish, voicing confusion about his identity and a deep despair for his lost homeland: "That map is from a certain year. The maps that came earlier looked different. And the ones that came after, even more different. I mean ... there is no telling. There is no telling where home starts and where home ends" (193).

Nidali's map of home, once imposed by her father, is not actual. She has no memories of Palestine and only receives the narrative of Palestine through her father. Her map is thus an imaginary one. However, this does not mean that Jarrar has no intentions of advocating the

⁹ Edward Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986) 164.

Palestinian national cause. It is really difficult here to draw a demarcation between the personal and the political. And in this case, it is essential to mention that many writers have never lived in Palestine but they do demonstrate their Palestinian identity more powerfully in their literary and non-literary writings. Unlike other Palestinians of diaspora, Jarrar has no personal memories of Palestine. Like her protagonist, she experiences Palestine only through collective narrative that is passed from one generation to the next. Nonetheless, by presenting the difficulty of locating home, she protests against the continual erasure of the Palestinian territory.

To Nidali, home does not hold much geographical space as it is specifically psychic and imaginary. Examining her stance further, Nidali's constant crossing of borders, and her family's ethnic and historical background, has affected and shaped her perception of home. One can have home in multiple places, and this endows the person with the plurality of vision and ability to exist and nourish between cultural borderlines. This is the principle that Nidali follows, whether she lives in Kuwait, Egypt or the United States.

Helena Schulz and Juliane Hammer note that the connections between land and the people are described using metaphors relating to what grows and to what the land gives.¹⁰ Dispersed after the war of 1967, Waheed Ammar carries his Palestinian homeland in his soul. Nidali recounts his dictations in these lines:

Baba said that moving was part of being Palestinian. "Our people carry the homeland in their souls", he would tell me [...] This was my bed-time story when I was three, four [...] You can go wherever you want, but you will always have it in your heart (9).

It is thus apparent that Waheed idealises Palestine. This is reflected in his concern and attitude towards his daughter and the fear of losing Palestine as an idea. By literally dictating history to her, he urges Nidali to comprehend the historical background of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Nonetheless, Nidali's conception of home does not correlate with her father's idea of historic Palestine. Even his dictated history and the map that he attempted tirelessly to instil in her mind did not curtail her from constructing her own vision of home. In later stages, we identify that Palestine is not a home for her, yet she advocates the Palestinian national cause. Moving across places and cultures cultivated in her a sense of cosmopolitanism. She pronounces, 'Mama is an Egyptian, her mother was Greek, my father is Palestinian. I was Egyptian and Palestinian. I was Greek and American' (8). In brief, Nidali's actual home is where she feels comfortable, and Palestine is merely a cause that follows her as a Palestinian by origin.

To trace the evolution of Nidali is to closely examine her life and interactions at the different destinations she happened to be in for defined periods of time. The evolution she underwent is both psychological and perceptual. Once war erupts in Kuwait in 1990, the whole family leaves Kuwait for Iraq, and then to Egypt, fleeing war. Even after the end of war, Palestinians were not welcomed any more as their leader in Palestine supported Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. Because of this they could not return to Kuwait. They were no longer wanted there. Nidali bitterly laments it by saying, 'Kuwaitis decided collectively to punish all Palestinians. My father's work permit had been revoked indefinitely' (192). In Egypt,

¹⁰ Schulz and Hammer 99.

Nidali and her mother all feel at home since they have roots there. However, the matter is different for the father, Waheed. He is unsettled, uncomfortable, and thus he begins thinking about moving to the United States. He succeeds in getting a job there, and after a few months the whole family follows him. Amid all this constant journeying, Nidali seems to be weary. She ponders, 'I cannot move to America [...] I did not want to move again, to work at feeling at home again, to lose that home again, then have to start all over again' (207).

In the United States, there begins a new chapter in the life of Ammar's family. They again start by searching for a home, and Waheed Ammar would usually reply, "'how can I when I have never had one?'" (200). Nevertheless, Nidali and her mother are more serious in approaching their life there. Though at the beginning, she seems scared and unsure if she could transition fluidly again in the land of her birth, Nidali is more likely to rapidly assimilate and openly embrace the culture of the new host society. More importantly, she is confused again: 'I was missing a hundred different things from home, and the sad part was I was starting to forget what they were and where home really was' (221). The first thing she encounters in the American society is the 'half of one thing' and 'half another'. By being Palestinian of Egyptian background, she thinks that she is special and unique, not realising the fact that the 'half one thing and half another' is the defining feature of the American society. Nidali notes this discovery when she recounts her introductory conversation with her neighbours:

When our white neighbours came to visit, I told their daughters [...] I was half-Egyptian, half-Palestinian. "We are half-German, half-Irish" they said, not batting an eye. It turned out everyone here was half one thing, half another. I thought this would make me feel at home but instead I was sad that I was no longer special. (218-19)

The sort of in-betweenness that Nidali sticks to is very much reflected in her responses to the question, "'where is home?'" In her first days at school in the United States, Nidali is asked by one of the girls, "'where is home?'" Her reply is simply "'Far away. You wouldn't understand'" (224), and on the girl's insistence, she says, "'Egypt and Kuwait'" (224). She here acknowledges her hybridity and she also indicates the lack of home. Nidali later develops her own concept of home and, along with her mother, starts seeking a better life apart from the conflicting dichotomies of 'home' and 'abroad', 'here' and 'there'.

Once they are in the United States, Nidali and her mother differ markedly from the way Waheed sees the new world around them. He is less concerned about socialising with others, nor does he allow Nidali to build relationships in such a new land. His slogan has usually been only 'to take the best of America', money and education, as it is not their country. He repeatedly tries to confine his daughter, thwarting her attempts to direct her own course of life. However, Nidali and her mother are more realistic and feel interested in rooting themselves again and not merely to gain money and education. Their plan is to put an end to the endless journey that a Palestinian is destined to take and to settle down and build their real home, not Waheed's imagined one.

Waheed again tries in the United States to control his daughter, but she turns more rebellious and chooses her own path. Upset by family arguments and her father's restriction on her freedom, she decides to run away from his house. Her father usually pronounces angrily, 'We are here to be educated and make money, not friends' (229). Nidali wants to make friends and lead a normal life, a life that is not based on her father's mantra: study and get the best of

7

'The Concepts of Home and Statelessness in Palestinian Diaspora Fiction: Reflections in Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home*.' Jameel Alghaberi.

Transnational Literature Vol. 11 no. 1, December 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

America. She and her mother are in the United States for life, not for struggle and alienation. This is the path they both chose despite the opposition from the father's side. Making their objective clear, Nidali states, 'Mama was here for friends, for life. I sat and watched her, jealous of how easily she seemed to root herself here. Me, I felt splintered, like the end of a snapped off tree branch' (231).

Nidali defines her own approach more clearly. She does not want to be different, singled out and profiled. Her aim is to live in the present and leave the past behind. She runs away twice, first to escape her oppressive father's norms and regulations, and second to study in New York, far away from home, despite her father's opposition. He wants her to study in the university nearby, but she rejects this and thus runs away. Once she hears about her mother's longing for her and the sickness inflicted upon her, she returns and she again defends her choice in front of her father: "'Baba, I don't want to be different. I know I am different, I know it, but I don't want to feel like an outsider'" (288).

It is at this stage that the whole family begins to accept Nidali and respect her choice. She is finally enrolled in the college she likes, and her father lets her go. Her evolution is not only at the personality level, but it is also part of defining her own identity. The endless search for home has come to an end and has become to her futile and tiring. She is proud of being partially Palestinian, partially Egyptian, and partially American. Kuwait is part of her memory even though she does not have blood relationships there. By crossing multiple borders, Nidali nurtures a hybrid sense of home. The inter-generational post-Nakba memory defines part of who she is, but it cannot help in relating to the 'historic Palestine' that her father covets.

Between 'Diaspora' and 'Refugee' Status

Many Palestinian critical thinkers use the concept of 'diaspora' with caution for the simple reason that it promises no return to the historic homeland, Palestine. Since the 1948 'al-Nakba', or catastrophe, which marks the beginning of Palestinian exodus, many Palestinians are still refugees in a number of countries all over the world. The lack of state protection is the defining characteristic of such Palestinian refugees today. The exile and refugee status literally means that one is stateless, and hence statelessness is a major factor in exposing Palestinians to extreme poverty and marginalisation. It also renders them invisible not only to the governments of the host countries but also to the international community. Despite all this, some scholars, for example, Kodmani-Darwish and Julie Peteet prefer a 'refugee status' rather than a 'diasporic' one, thinking that such a position would push Palestinians to fight for return. Julie Peteet in this regard notes that assigning Palestinians diasporic status could risk diluting concerns with policy and long-term, equitable solutions, and the political dimension, as she suggests, needs a careful reading of the concept, in particular its flexibility and thus widespread currency.¹¹

Despite the systematic attempts to erase Palestine from the map of the world, it still exists in the hearts of its people wherever they might be. Ihab Saloul demonstrates how 'al-Nakba' emerged in Palestinian culture as a concept that signifies an unbridgeable break between the past and the present, and that romanticises the Palestinians' loss of the homeland as a loss of

¹¹ Bassma Kodmani-Darwish, *La Diaspora Palestinienne* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997); Julie Peteet, 'Problematizing A Palestinian Diaspora,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39.4 (2007) 636.

paradise.¹² Palestinian diaspora literature abounds with vivid images and romantic descriptions of home, sometimes as a betrayed and abandoned mother, and some other times as an unreachable mistress. More importantly, it is resistive and counter-narrative in nature. The Zionist dominant narrative – ‘a land without a people for a people without a land’ – has been promoted in claims of a Jewish historical presence in Palestine, ignoring the long history of Arab Palestinians that stretches for thousands of years. What is worrying even today is the rejection of the Palestinian historical roots with brutal military force. This attitude of negating the other has led to counterclaims and counter-narratives from the Palestinian side.

If we examine the nature of ‘diaspora’ it will be easy for us to realise that the fear of Palestinian nationalists towards the use of this concept is justified. Home for diaspora is not realised but imagined, and this would inevitably worsen the Palestinian national cause. To other members of the Palestinian diaspora, the homeland in concrete terms long ago lost its ultimate significance and remains but a symbol to gather around in the land of exile.¹³ Because of the prolonged conflict, many Palestinian diasporas are today well integrated into the host societies to the point that even a return seems of less importance. Moreover, ‘territory’ and ‘land’ may for diasporas be more metaphorical and symbolic than ‘real’.¹⁴ Members of Palestinian diasporas might repeatedly undergo a feeling of homesickness, but they will continue to form life experiences in a homeless condition or create new multiple homes in new settings. This signifies the possibility of creating unbounded identities that are plural and hybrid. And today, with the help of technology, diasporas create new and other forms of social connections and interactions that are not anchored to a particular territory. In her analysis, Anat Ben-David concludes that the Palestinian diaspora network is no longer defined around ‘Palestine as a place of origin, but is instead constructed around Palestine as a point of reference; its organisation is less around a network of familial, social and transactional ties ... and more around global advocacy networks that transcend their immediate social networks’.¹⁵ Accordingly, Palestinian diasporas have the capability of creating their new forms of identifications and in this they demonstrate that the homeland is not really necessary in order to maintain a sense of belonging.

In the Palestinian case, creating stories of transgenerational memory and of familial connection is a technique to maintain and preserve roots. Post-Nakba memory is restructured again and again as a means to understand and accommodate the realities and complexities of Palestine and its history. It, however, depends on generational distance and deep familial connections. As it has been demonstrated, the existence of Palestinian memory under the constant threat of a dominant Zionist narrative with political and military force to silence it led to the burgeoning of Palestinian counter-narratives. Since the early days of the conflict, the Zionists have relied on two main things: (1) that the older generations of Palestine will perish and their memories fade away ;(2) that the new youth will forget their historical links and ancestral roots.

¹² Ihab Saloul, *Catastrophe and Exile in the Modern Palestinian Imagination: Telling Memories*. (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) 15.

¹³ Saloul 3.

¹⁴ Schulz and Hammer 10.

¹⁵ Anat Ben-David, ‘The Palestinian Diaspora on the Web: Between De-Territorialization and Re-Territorialization’ *Social Science Information*, 51.4(2012) 34.

This proved unsuccessful as the post-Nakba generations of Palestine continue to today to inherit the past effects of memory of the catastrophe through narratives passed from one generation to the other. Randa Jarrar in her novel, for instance, addresses the issues of memory and the inheritance of exile. Though she does not stress it, Jarrar demonstrates how post-Nakba memory functions within families via parent-child relationships.

Edward Said has been one of the first Palestinians to advocate for the cause of Palestine. His work constituted a large corpus about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but it does not receive adequate attention in the western canon. Said compellingly argued for a reassessment of the injustices on both sides of the divide between Israelis and Palestinians.¹⁶ He initiated a 'writing back' to dismantle the western master-narratives that shape the commonly held perceptions about Arab Palestinians. He had used all possible opportunities and places to put the aspirations of the Palestinian people to the international community.¹⁷ He was clearly the voice of Palestine in the West, campaigning against the politics of dispossession.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a territorial one as both sides have been part of what is called 'historic Palestine'. Yet there have been devious schemes from the Israeli side to grab more land, and worse than all this, to delegitimise the rights of the other side – Palestinians. The land and the landscape have consequently been changed completely due to the devastating blow and unlawful destruction of villages in the Palestinian territories. All this is done with the intention to erase any memory of actual Palestinian homeland and also to bar any attempt for refugees to return. Special Israeli laws have also been designed to confiscate the land of Palestinians since 1948, and today settlements remain one of the thorniest issues in the continuous displacement of Palestinians in the West bank and Gaza.¹⁸ The international diplomatic efforts that have been exerted so far about the right to return deal merely with resettling Palestinian refugees somewhere else, not Palestine. Return of Palestinians is seen as an existential threat to Israel due to the fears of any demographic changes, and hence return deals are mostly aborted. Edward Said repeatedly exposed the Israeli intentions. He thought that the inadmissible existence of the Palestinian people whose history, actuality and aspirations, as possessed of a coherent narrative direction pointed towards self-determination, were the object of this violence and that Israel's war was designed to reduce Palestinian existence as much as possible.¹⁹ Indeed, barring the Palestinians from returning to their homes displays merely one aspect of the Israeli policy.

Palestinian diaspora literature deals mostly with the issue of Palestine as an identity. There is also abounding narrative of border-crossings and the quest for home. *A Map of Home* is a text in which characters and geography are intertwined. Because of Jarrar's personal history, her characters move across time and space. This is also the case with most Palestinian narratives that abound, according to Schulz and Hammer, with descriptions of an identity that is out of place, without centre and on a constant journey.²⁰ To be a Palestinian is not only to fight against the injustices of history but also to be on the move. Like many other Palestinian narratives, Jarrar's novel is full of stories that recount what actually happens at different kinds of borders,

¹⁶ Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said* (London: Routledge, 2001) 118.

¹⁷ Li Yi, 'Edward Said's Thoughts and Nationalism,' *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 5.3 (2011) 111.

¹⁸ Schulz and Hammer 72.

¹⁹ Edward Said, 'Permission to Narrate,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13.3 (1984) 29.

²⁰ Schulz and Hammer 85.

crossings and checkpoints. The journey is portrayed as endless.²¹ The stateless status of Palestinian refugees leaves them to struggle with the trauma of lacking a valid passport. Waheed, Nidali's father could not get a Palestinian passport, nor did anyone recognise Palestine as a state. He was given a Jordanian passport only as a travel document and not as a proof of identity. Amid all of this, the Palestinians still persist steadfastly, waiting and hoping for the future to arrive, for return to be achieved.

It is through the depiction of Waheed Ammar that Randa Jarrar in her novel gives us glimpses of the Palestinians of post 1967. The ideal image of the Palestinian was the peasant who stayed put on his land and refused to leave.²² Parameters, however, changed, and the focus shifted to those diasporised Palestinians who preserve their culture and nourish a sense of home in the upcoming generations. Jarrar in her novel depicts Waheed not as an ideal type of Palestinian diaspora veteran but of a victimised one who is anxious and troubled by the uprootedness he underwent. For Waheed's generation of Palestinians, Palestine is very much glorified and highly romanticised. It is remembered and represented in many cases as a place of bloom and celestial beauty, and the Palestinian landscape is described with a sense of passion and affection. It is the same for those dispersed as stateless refugees in neighbouring countries. The refugee camp, whatever condition it may have, is for Palestinians a site for confinement, marginality and exclusion. Therefore, they imagine home as a heavenly place where torments and agonies never exist.

Randa Jarrar in her novel not only unravels the mounting concerns and fears surrounding Palestinians either as diasporas or refugees, she also highlights the maxims and principles that all Palestinians try to impart to their children who grow up in diaspora. Apart from identity issues, education for Palestinian diasporas and refugees is considered as a way to recover their lost homeland. They believe that Palestine has been lost because Palestinian peasants were ignorant and uneducated, and it was therefore knowledge that would ultimately defeat Israel.²³ This is very much reflected in the novel where Waheed pressures his daughter into getting a better education: 'To be free, you must be educated. So you must do excellent work, always' (24). This is what he attempts to pass to her. He also finds it as a sort of compensation for the loss of home: "I lost my home [...] and gained an education [...] which later became my home" (106). Waheed and his family resort to education as a means of survival. Education for them is not merely an avenue to improve their living conditions, but it also serves as a tactic to counter the Israeli claims. It is seen as a form of resistance against the attempts to erase their identity. Waheed communicates this to Nidali by encouraging her to be a professor: "A big professor of literature! Write poetry like I used to do. Write poetry and teach in English. Show those bastards the greatness of our literature" (65). Another significant element that is used by Palestinian diaspora writers to represent the connection between people and the land is trees. Palestinians, according to Laleh Khalili, commemorate a broad range of events, objects and persons, including olive trees, stone houses built in old villages, oranges, keys and embroidered dresses as they are overwhelmingly associated with prelapsarian village life in Palestine, and were invoked as signifiers of Palestinianness once the nationalist movement re-emerged in the mid-

²¹ Schulz and Hammer 88

²² Schulz and Hammer 103.

²³ Schulz and Hammer 131.

1960s.²⁴ The use of trees as metaphors to show the connections between the land and its people is prominent in the Palestinian nationalist discourse. The olive tree in particular is of great significance, symbolising both ‘roots’ and Palestinian identity beside its function as a form of production. It is used as a basic ingredient of subsistence since it is grown there in large quantities. By its ability to withstand harsh climates, the olive tree has become a defining feature of Palestine and its people. In addition, olive trees may become very old and they need very little to grow, and thus give meaning to the Palestinian discourse and the ancient unflinching connection to the land. In *A Map of Home*, Waheed idealises the olive tree and its oil. He keeps it beside him to always remind him of his homeland. Jarrar also chooses to depict him this way since the tree is often used as a symbol of rootedness, of historic Palestine; a representation of belonging to the land.

In summary, the argument about whether to use ‘diaspora’ or ‘exile’ leads only to further disagreements. Both concepts involve a sort of movement and migrancy, and hence ‘home’ is pursued with varied degrees of difficulty. However, with the rise of nationalism in nation-states, the Palestinian individual is left stateless and therefore an ‘exile’ or ‘refugee’. Randa Jarrar in her novel does not chronicle the history of Palestine but highlights the suffering of a Palestinian family due to dislocations and multiple border-crossings. After endless journeying, her main character, Nidali, makes her decision to settle down and create a diasporic home. The right to return is fundamental to the core of the Palestinian issue, and it can be achieved through diplomatic channels, not alienation and the multiple dislocations of Palestinians.

Conclusion

The paper reviews the concepts of ‘home’ and ‘statelessness’ in the Palestinian discourse, and it also presents a critical view of the dialectic between ‘diasporic’ and ‘exile’. In addressing the concepts of home and statelessness in Palestinian diaspora, Randa Jarrar in her novel *A Map of Home* is more pragmatic. Home for her is in multiple places, yet she recognises the Palestinian national cause and the rightful claim to establish their own state. Unlike previous Palestinian American writers, Jarrar rejects polarisation and questions the romanticisation of homeland. She also calls for plural, hybrid and fluid conceptions of home. Jarrar’s characterisation of Nidali as a protagonist reflects much about herself and her views about the continuous journeying and endless quest for home. By moulding her novel in a bildungsroman form, Jarrar invites us to trace the evolution of the protagonist and her journey through a series of identifications and realisations of what home is. The novel portrays the life of the Palestinian individual, dispersed from home, obliged to cross borders with different travel documents, and destined to carry the weight of homeland in their heart wherever their residence may be. It also shows the way Palestinian diasporas strive to cultivate memories of home and create historical roots. The novel is written for a western readership to convey the Palestinian diaspora’s continuous search for home. As a transnational text, there is an inherent message for re-rooting and regrowth of Palestinians wherever they might be even if such a process of sprouting is challenged. In the face of the grand narrative that is skewed in favour of Israel, it is observed that the Palestinian narrative definitely lacks centrality. The connection between Palestinian refugees and diasporas

²⁴ Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 7.

and the Palestinian territories has to be natural and primordial. Rather than functioning as translators of Arabic culture to the American audience, Palestinian diaspora writers are also supposed to furnish the whole world with narrative evidence since the one who writes his story inherits the land of that particular story.

Jameel Ahmed Alghaberi is a teaching assistant and member of the English Department at Thamar University, Republic of Yemen. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. on Diaspora literature in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at Saurashtra University, India. His major research interests include diaspora literature, postcolonial theory, Anglophone literature, transnational literature, cultural studies and translation studies.

Works Cited

- Ashcroft, Bill and Pal Ahluwalia. *Edward Said*. (London: Routledge, 2001).
- Ben-David, Anat. 'The Palestinian Diaspora on the Web: Between De-Territorialization and Re-Territorialization.' *Social Science Information* 51.4 (2012).
- Hanafi, Sari. 'Rethinking the Palestinians Abroad as a Diaspora: The Relationships between the Diaspora and the Palestinian Territories.' *International Social Science Review* 4.2 (2003) 157–82.
- Jarrar, Randa. *A Map of Home*. New York: Other Press, 2008.
- Khalili, Laleh. *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007.
- Kodmani-Darwish, Bassma. *La Diaspora Palestinienne*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997.
- Naguib, Asmaa. *Representations of 'Home' from the Setting of 'Exile': Novels by Arab Migrant Writers*. Doctoral thesis. Exeter: The University of Exeter, 2011.
- Peteet, Julie. 'Problematizing A Palestinian Diaspora.' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39.4(2007) 627-646. doi:10.1017/S0020743807071115.
- Said, Edward. *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*. New York: Pantheons Books, 1986.
- . 'Permission to Narrate.' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13.3 (1984) 27-48.
- Saloul, Ihab. *Catastrophe and Exile in the Modern Palestinian Imagination: Telling Memories*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Schulz, Helena and Julianne Hammer. *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Sirhan, Nadia. *Folk Stories and Personal Narratives in Palestinian Spoken Arabic: A Cultural and Linguistic Study*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Yi, Li. 'Edward Said's Thoughts and Nationalism.' *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 5.3 (2011) 105-120.

To Issue a Firefly's Glow
Wormhole Geographies and Positionality in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*
Adnan Mahmutović

Abstract

Hamid's novelistic project is a creative examination of the relationship between the micro movements of individuals and the macro processes of globalisation. The micro movements of individual human agents are related to their political being-in-the-world and their geographical location. Using Sheppard's notion of 'wormhole travel', I examine how geographical location affects political agency. In particular, I employ the notion of 'positionality' to say something meaningful about the way location and connectivity of cities, global conglomerates and populations affect the ability to develop individual political agency in a globalised world. Hamid's novel questions the popular notion that globalisation is an external factor, which affects everything from the way we conceive of planetary geography to national and global economies and social action as such. I argue that political agency in this novel involves an increase in ideologically-informed will to affect one's life as a citizen, or, to use Hamid's own metaphor, to an ability to create 'a firefly's glow bright enough to transcend the boundaries of continents and civilizations'.

I understand Hamid's novelistic project as a creative examination of the relationship between the micro movements of individuals and the macro processes of globalisation. While the novel may not provide all the answers, it seems to show its value as a discourse that allows global populations to ask the important question about the character and possible impact of their political being-in-the-world. As a conclusion to his story, Changez, the narrator and protagonist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, gives a bold statement to his American interlocutor: 'I had, in my own manner, issued a firefly's glow bright enough to transcend the boundaries of continents and civilizations.'¹ The complex ambiguity of the firefly metaphor, which reflects the overall ambiguity in the entire narrative, forces the reader to decide whether Changez can be trusted. More specifically, the one essential choice is whether to interpret this *glow* as inspiration to struggle for global social justice or as a call for terrorism, which no doubt also transcends geographical and political boundaries. To begin with, I choose to interpret Changez's words in terms of his emigration from Pakistan to the US and his global business travel.

Political agency has no doubt been a recurrent topic in research on Hamid's novel, especially in relation to post-9/11 global politics and fundamentalism.² Political agency in this

¹ Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (London: Penguin Books, 2007) 207. All subsequent references to, and citations of, the novel will appear in parentheses within the body of this article.

² One could practically quote most researchers: Esterino, Elia, Hartnell, Hawley, Kiran, Mehnaz, Morey, Munos, Neelam, Moore-Gilbert, Perner, Roy, Scanlan, Singh, Waterman, Wolff, Wilson, and others.

novel seems to involve an increase in ideologically-informed will (or desire) to affect one's life as a citizen. What is missing in Hamid scholarship, due to the fact that the novel is still read largely in terms of variegated postcolonial theories, is a deeper look at the way Hamid shows the effects of globalisation and geography on individual and communal agency. I will argue that Hamid's novel questions the popular notion that globalisation is an external factor, something out there, which affects everything from the way we conceive of planetary geography to national and global economies and social action as such. I will examine how different forms of travel shape Changez as a political agent and corroborate his claim that a singular political initiative, though seemingly as negligible as the glow of a firefly, has the potential to affect global political landscapes. While this seems obvious if we read the glow as the fire of terrorism, it requires more effort to show positive political impact in other spheres of social engagement such as education (Changez as teacher).

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez travels a great deal, first as a migrant and then as an employee of Underwood Samson, an American company with a global reach. This global reach has generally been read as symbolic of the global corporate power of the US. Changez's instantaneous relocations between America, Greece, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Chile resemble travel from popular James Bond movies, which Hamid mentions and which feature obligatory jumps between London, as the core geographical position, and exotic, commodified peripheries.³ By relying upon a simplistic notion of a homogenous global space, Bond movies advertise the idea of a borderless world that is big enough for travel to be exciting and small enough for travel to be possible and fast, which is the effect of the supposedly easy flow of capital.⁴

Changez is very much aware of this type of movement. When arriving in the Philippines on his 'first Underwood Samson assignment', he says, 'I was, in my own eyes, a veritable James Bond' (72-73). In the way it depicts global travel, Hamid's novel dramatises what looks like the warping of space, which allows individuals and goods to travel between faraway places *as if* they are being transported instantaneously through some form of a wormhole. Of course, Hamid does not make travel truly instantaneous, but the cuts and jumps in the narrative initially support the idea that capital increases the pliability of global space. It is important to point out that as a literary novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* also connects itself to the genre of science fiction (scifi), in which wormhole travel is often a matter of course. Hamid frequently prefers scifi and fantasy tropes over the more typical magical realism in postcolonial fiction. In other words, when we focus on the idea of travel as a form of reality in this story, we also get a sense of the future, or at least premonitions of the awful future in which such global movements may result: an increase in terrorism, world wars, global warming, and so on.

³ At this point I want to mention that Hamid has continued engaging with the space-warping travel in his latest novel *Exit West*, which had not been published at the time I wrote the article. Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West*. London: Penguin Books, 2018.

⁴ If there is anything that Mira Nair's cinematISATION of the novel has done right, it is her reproduction of the sense of the speed of relocation, that is, Changez's movement between distant global locations. This could, of course, be chalked up to the film medium as such, as well as the Hollywood-type thriller genre, but in my view the quick jumps between places around the globe are very much in line with the particularly cinematic narrative flow of the novel.

As the story develops, Changez seems to question the supposedly smooth travel of capital in a world where globalisation seems to have annihilated space (Harvey).⁵ Instead of speaking about annihilation of space, at this point I want to draw attention to the importance of location, geographical positions, and the reshaping of space through wormhole-like travel, all of which Hamid uses to show the dynamic between individual agency and that of global corporations.

Global movement is central to the narrative from the very beginning when Changez establishes that he is positioned in Lahore and that his interlocutor has travelled a long way to meet him there. The first paragraph plants the idea that the narrator, being a bearded terrorist, is a potential enemy of America, and that the guest is possibly an American agent come to deal with this enemy. The way the two men are positioned in relation to one another, though in that moment they occupy the same space, resembles the positionality of two distant countries with strong political relations. Such narrative play with geographical location and political positioning is consistent throughout the novel. Almost immediately, Changez tells the American how he left Pakistan to chase his American dream in New York. Within the space of a few pages, a connection between two distant locations, Lahore and New York, is created through the travel of the two men. When Changez informs the American that he went to the US as a young man, he also creates a sense of history between the two places. Changez's travelling, which establishes a connection between an American metropolis and a large Pakistani city, appears to be as quick as the delivery of this information. What will be most important for my argument in the latter part of this essay is the way Hamid already here gives a sense that New York is a more desirable/elevated partner in this transnational relationship.

In fact, Changez's move to America needs no explanation. It is a matter of course. Moving in the opposite direction, the reluctant return needs to be justified and this justification is what constitutes Changez's story. The connectivity and the desirability of New York is effectively portrayed on one of the covers, which features a man watching New York from an oriental-looking (star?) gate⁶ as if the two points in space were brought together and the distance is both great and negligible. A focus on the sense of warping of global space and fast travel, which I will call 'wormhole travel', using the geographer Eric Sheppard's metaphor (explained in more detail below), can help us see Hamid's discourse in a different light.⁷

Wormhole travel is thematised from an early scene in the novel when Changez has to demonstrate his skills in order to get a coveted job at Underwood Samson. His future boss, Jim, asks him to evaluate a fictional company: 'The company is simple. It has only one service line: instantaneous travel. You step into its terminal in New York, and you immediately reappear in its terminal in London. Like a transporter on Star Trek' (13-14). The purpose of this mock-

⁵ Following David Harvey's argument about time-space compression inherent in capitalist accumulation, Smethurst argues that the driving force of capitalism has set a goal, which is 'to overcome distance continually through speed, eroding spatial boundaries ... an attempt to "annihilate space through time"'. Paul Smethurst, *The Postmodern Chronotope: Reading Space and Time in Contemporary Fiction* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000) 89.

⁶ In the Hollywood movie *Stargate*, and the subsequent series, an oriental-looking machine called *stargate* produces wormholes between distant locations around the universe.

⁷ Eric Sheppard. 'The Spaces and Times of Globalization: Place, Scale, Networks, and Positionality,' *Economic Geography* 78.3 (July 2002) 307-30.

evaluation is not only to show Changez's potential to be a global agent of capitalism but to make him, and by implication the reader, start questioning whether one would/should risk this type of fast travel in order to maximise one's time/productivity. This doubt follows Changez on all his future business trips, during which he will constantly be disassembled and reassembled. In the beginning, he will not mind it at all, but eventually he will begin to notice how his post-travel reconstitution will always yield a slightly different self. In other words, this early moment is the seed to Changez's changing political agency, and his future resistance to corporate fundamentalism and economic globalisation. This resistance will begin with his outright refusal to work for a global capitalist enterprise, and then engage in the teaching of Pakistani youth at a university about the need to invent ways of resistance to global capitalism and American dominance. As a terrorist of sorts, and as such a wormhole traveller par excellence, his initial corporate mobility prepares him well for a different kind of, and perhaps more destructive, mobility. Terrorism, he will come to show, uses the already pliable spaces of capitalism to show its *glow*.

The pliable spaces of capitalism become apparent to him already in the beginning, during his Princeton years, when he joins his classmates on a trip to Greece: 'We assembled in Athens, having arrived on different flights ... and then we headed off with the group to the port city of Piraeus' (19). Of course, the characters did not travel between the three locations instantaneously, but the suggested ease and speed of their travel gives a sense of such futuristic travel. This type of movement, suggested through narrative jumps, shows not only that people would pay for it, but also that they are not properly considering the risks. These risks, it seems, are less about a person's physical health and more about things such as moral compass and ideology. Changez is annoyed by '[t]he ease with which they parted with money' and 'were in a *position* to conduct themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class' (23-24, emphasis added). This kind of behaviour, which is very much connected to the fast travel between strategically important locations, indicates the seemingly unimpeded flow of the capital. Later, when Changez starts working for Underwood Samson, he comes to terms with being positioned in this way: 'I could, if I desired, take my colleagues out for an after-work drink – an activity classified as 'new hire cultivation' – and with impunity spend in an hour more than my father earned in a day' (42). The access to capital creates a sense that the space itself can be folded and the characters simply move in no time between distant geographical locations. This is why Changez can say to the American, 'You have not been to Rhodes? You must go' (26). The implication is of course that the American has the means and time to do it. Later, he asks, 'Have you been to the East, sir? You have! Truly, you are well-traveled for an American – for a person of any country, for that matter' (73). The second remark shows the implied irony in the first. Changez brings attention to the fact that, despite an ever-increasing travel, most people have neither the means nor the leisure time to travel around the globe the way Changez himself has: 'Underwood Samson had the potential to transform my life ... making my concerns about money and status things of the distant past' (16).

A narrative such as Hamid's, which critically examines globalisation by playing with the notion of global space and logistical and geographical realism, works under the assumption that readers have some sense of both globalisation and global space. While this space may be understood differently in different discourses, for this analysis I rely on the notion of global

space as explained by geographers like Sheppard and Henry Wai-chung Yeung.⁸ For Sheppard, '[s]pace/time is a contingent outcome of societal and biophysical processes that create places and positionality. As with all dialectical processes, concrete places and spaces emerge whose persistence makes them seem immutable or natural.'⁹ In addition, Yeung uses Lefebvre's notion of global space as 'the social foundation of a transformed everyday life open to myriad possibilities' to highlight 'the ease in which particular material processes and social practices can be constituted or reconstituted in relation to different configurations of geographic scales.'¹⁰ For my reading of Hamid's novel, it is important to understand that geographic scales are 'contested through social struggles and political means', and how 'social actors who drive economic globalization ... "constitute scale through their social praxis"'.¹¹ For instance, in the novel the workings of Underwood Samson show that certain processes, such as the flow of capital, allow for greater global movement, greater scalar 'switchability'. In contrast, individual and even communal political engagement is far more restricted, especially if it stands in the way of the flow of capital.¹²

Sheppard's wormhole metaphor highlights the very quality of connection between people, places, corporations, states, and so on. In order to understand what Hamid is trying to show by dramatising wormhole-like travel, we can compare it to Sheppard's example of James Cook's nineteen-month voyage to Hawaii in the late 1770s. For Cook, modern travel by plane would appear as instantaneous as the beaming of a person à la Star Trek, or moving through a stargate. The point is not only the increase of the speed of travel, but the *kind of connectivity* that arises by the effective reduction of both travel-time and the experience of travel. Changez's first trip to Greece is not between any point-specific places but rather locations that have a high rate of connectivity. The point is not the actual distance, but access to wormhole travel. Thus, a flight from New York to Athens, is practically instantaneous in comparison to travel from the Swedish village, Mullsjö, and the village of Khewa in Afghanistan.

Changez's local movement, though related to global networks and scalar 'switchability', cannot be fully understood without a consideration of what Sheppard calls complex *positionalities* that connect people and places together. The notion of *positionality* captures what Sheppard calls the 'the shifting, asymmetric, and path-dependent ways in which the futures of places depend on their interdependence with other places' (308). The same logic applies to individual agents and companies which occupy certain geographical locations. Since positionality 'can be ascribed to agents at scales ranging from the body to the world region', even members within 'the same household typically are positioned differently with respect to

⁸ Henry Wai-chung Yeung. 'The Limits to Globalization Theory: A Geographic Perspective on Global Economic,' *Economic Geography* 78.3 (July 2002) 285-305.

⁹ Sheppard 319. See also Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Soja.

¹⁰ Yeung 290, 291. For a detailed explanation of the scalar theory, see Sheppard (313-17). Also see Brenner (1998, 1999 and 2001) and Amin (1997 and 2001).

¹¹ Yeung 291.

¹² To use Yeung's words again, it can be argued that Underwood Samson is very much dependent on the way 'globalization discourses mobilise *spatial metaphors* to legitimise and justify the intrusive nature of globalization' (292). An example of such a spatial metaphor is the 'borderless world' (293), which I mentioned earlier in relation to Bond movies.

one another' so that 'a working-class husband living in the north of England may experience privileged positionality as a result of his gender and nationality but marginalised positionality because of his class and regional location' (322). The emphasis on positionality as a resistance strategy within the global economy is crucial in understanding Changez's case because 'positionality involves power relations, both in the sense that some positions tend to be more influential than others and in the sense that emphasizing the situated nature of all knowledge challenges the power of those who claim objectivity' (313).

Positionality not only shows that local conditions are 'the key to holding down the global', but they are also 'central to building the transnational activist alliances that are necessary to match the transnational reach of globalization'. For Sheppard, this is because 'alliances cannot simply rely just on scale jumping, but require positional acts of identifying specific groups in particular places with whom common ground can be found' (326). Positionality 'stresses that the conditions of possibility in a place do not depend primarily on local initiative or on embedded relationships splayed across scales, but just as much on direct interactions with distant places' (319). Therefore, he argues, positionality also 'highlights the unequal power relations that stem from such asymmetries' (319). This was quite obvious from my earlier note on Changez's movement to New York, a global metropolis, which needed no justification, whereas his move back to Lahore required an entire narrative as justification.

As a short detour, at this point I want to highlight that the notion of 'intersectionality', which is most common in diverse feminist analyses, might overlap with positionality in that we are speaking about characters defined by complex relationships between class, gender, race, job, religion, and so on. This is partly correct. Indeed, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1994) introduced the metaphor of intersectionality to explain how different forms of oppression mix and affect individuals.¹³ Following Crenshaw, a great many built upon or tweaked this notion for the purposes of their disciplines or to achieve a more accurate description of the issues they were dealing with. As Rita Kaur Dhamoon shows, besides Deborah K. King's famous 'multiple jeopardy'¹⁴ and Sherene Razack's 'interlocking', 'scholars have used such terms as multiple consciousness (Matsuda 1992; King 1988), and multiplicity (Wing 1990-1991), multiplex epistemologies (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006, 187), translocational positionality (Anthias 2001), multi-dimensionality (Hutchinson 2001), interconnectivities (Valdes 1995), and synthesis (Ehrenreich 2002)'.¹⁵

Positionality works better for Hamid's novel because it draws particular attention to geographical location and globalisation. It applies to places as well as human agents, and the way a place affects the positionality of the agent. Also, while intersectionality implies that the

¹³ Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,' *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989. 139-67.

—. 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour,' *The Public Nature of Private Violence*. Eds. M. A. Fineman and R. Mykitiul (New York: Routledge, 1994). 93-120.

¹⁴ Deborah K. King, 'Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology,' *Signs* 14.1 (1988). 42-72.

¹⁵ Rita Kaur Dhamoon, 'Considerations on Mainstreaming Intersectionality,' *Political Research Quarterly*, 64.1 (March 2011). 232.

individual is mainly suffering consequences of various kinds of oppression, Hamid's character is not some poor subaltern who finally has a chance to speak. A focus on positionality shows a complexity of his situation so that he can be the oppressed in terms of race and politics but the oppressor in terms of class.

The importance of shifts in positionality is directly connected to the way Hamid depicts wormhole movement, which, to use Sheppard's words, qualitatively increases 'the connectivity between the two places' (307). For Sheppard, it goes without saying that wormholes are unevenly developed 'because the economic, political, and cultural forces that create and reinforce presence-at-a-distance are highly geographically selective' (324). The wormhole metaphor draws attention to the way the positionality of places and people is not defined and measured 'by the physical distance separating them, but by the intensity and nature of their interconnectedness' (324). While 'proximity in geographic space is generally thought to be symmetric, positionality is often an asymmetric relationship: core agents exert more influence over peripherally positioned agents' locations than vice versa' (323). This is why in Hamid's narrative faraway places seem to have a wormhole between them, while on a local scale people in close proximity seem to be light years apart. For instance, when Changez meets Juan-Bautista, to begin with, their positionality as social agents is completely different although they occupy the same locations. Later on, when Juan-Bautista lectures Changez on being a corporate janissary, their positionality is closer. Similarly, Changez and his lover Erica's positionalities keep changing throughout the narrative. At certain extreme points, as in the act of lovemaking when they are as close physically as two objects can possibly be, they could not be farther apart. Not only that, since her positionality is elevated in relation to his, Changez needs to pretend to have the kind of positionality her dead lover used to have in order to be intimate with her. Despite this, romance remains, at least in Changez's imagination, a connective tissue and an effective antidote to the stargates of destruction of his global reality. The affective connectivity Changez hangs onto even when separated from Erica (and America) is a sort of fiction which allows him to do more positive types of wormhole travel; that is, not entirely spoiled by the overwhelming concerns with global capitalism. The sense of fictionality infused into his dramatic monologue to the American seems to reinforce the notion of storytelling, and, by implication, literature such as this particular novel as the medium for wormhole travel, a medium for creation of connectivity.

In Hamid's novel positionality, as level of connectivity, is part and parcel of the processes of globalisation. What is more, although we can, for instance, argue that a whole city such as New York has a particular positionality on a global scale, it is not as simple as to say that people occupying the same geographic location of New York hold the same positionality. We can see this from the difference between Underwood Samson and Pak-Punjab Deli within the space of New York. Pak-Punjab Deli, although it belongs to the space of a metropolis, does not, quite symbolically, accept American Express. In each instance, when examining positionality, we need to consider the intensity and quality of connections between localities and agents. As Sheppard explains, while 'positionality can be mapped by depicting the relationships between different agents, in different places, and at different scales', (323) living in the same place does not imply a similar positionality. Indeed, a term such as 'British colonialism neglects the fact that the colonial project was implemented in elite male spaces of southern England ... the

playing fields of Eton; the classrooms of Oxford and Cambridge; and the parliamentary spaces, boardrooms, and gentlemen's clubs of London' (322). As someone who can be seen as a postcolonial subject, whose team is shaping things the way male elites once shaped the colonial project, Changez seems painfully aware of the way positionality works.

It is interesting that Hamid stresses movement between cities and regions rather than countries, thus emphasising their connectedness within the global economy and avoiding nationalism. This is crucial for Changez's firefly-glow type of resistance mentioned in the beginning, which, in accordance with Arif Dirlik's argument, arises from place-based politics.¹⁶ It is because of the negative experiences of inequality that are reproduced and developed due to different connectivity between places that such resistance can be effectuated. In contrast to the way Changez's boss and his company see the world as being purely shaped by economy, this serves to show that social and physical spaces always offer resistance. The Pak-Punjab Deli that does not take credit cards in the middle of New York is a case in point. Then we have the Anarkali market, which is both influenced by globalisation, here symbolised by the omnipresence of Coca-Cola, and resists it by being out of sync with the global economy. This market too, though not untouched by globalisation processes, produces a firefly's glow that resists, reworks and survives globalisation.

Besides the global-local dynamics of markets, the novel contrasts global travel with the movement within cities, which is never instantaneous. Wormholes seem to only connect larger, more distant, strategic locations. In contrast, it takes time to take the elevator to a penthouse. When Erica and Changez take 'a taxi down to Chelsea', he says, 'I could hear our driver chatting on his mobile in Punjabi and knew from his accent that he was Pakistani. Normally I would have said hello, but on that particular night I did not' (63-64). His refusal to acknowledge the familiarity with the driver suggests they do not have the same positionality as defined by money and status. Then, after some time in a gallery, where Changez 'was being ushered into an insider's world – the chic heart of this city – to which he would otherwise have had no access' (64), they go 'to a small music venue on the Lower East Side, a French restaurant in the meat-packing district, a loft party in TriBeCa' (66). Then, before he goes to the Philippines, they have 'a picnic lunch in Central Park' (67). The park itself is assumed to be a familiar place for Changez's American interlocutor, and therefore not described as such.¹⁷ This fact, just as the earlier example of Changez's migration to New York, highlights the elevated global positionality of this metropolis. Instead of describing Central Park, Changez tells Erica about Lahore and picnics 'in the foothills of the Himalayas' (67). Such descriptions slow down the passage of time and create a different sense of local space in contrast to international travel. Going to a gallery within the same city appears to take much longer than flying to the Philippines: "'I've got a project coming up,'" Jim went on. "Music business. Philippines. Want to be on it?" "I certainly do," I said' (51). Next, he finds himself in a hotel room in Manila (69). The same is true during his trip to Chile, but then this trip takes place after Changez's change in

¹⁶ Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Potentially, though I have no space to elaborate on it here, one could compare Hamid's novel to other works that deal with this type of travel that reveal something about geography and city infrastructure. Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* comes to mind.

positionality and he is very conscious of the way his position within the capitalist company is supposed to make him feel like he was engaged in futuristic travel: 'We again flew in the relative comfort of first class, but I was no longer excited by the luxuries of our cabin ... I turned down our flight attendant's many offers of champagne' (158). The flight seems to take longer because Changez again keeps witnessing inequalities.

While all scenes that depict local travel and encounters with people seem to show change in Changez's positionality, the same is true of wormhole travel, which causes profound changes in the agent. It is in Manila that he realises he ought to share 'a sort of Third World sensibility' (76) with one Filipino driver but that he is more similar to his colleagues: 'I felt enormously powerful on these outings, knowing my team was shaping the future' (76). Frequent wormhole travel is taking its toll. Changez's struggle to cope with the processes of globalisation is also due to the fact that he did not have much sense of it before he became a corporate janissary. He did not expect that making it big in the US meant being an agent of economic globalisation. To become American came to mean not being in America, but to travel around the globe. Also, people who live in America must necessarily be global, and this is highly contradictory and paradoxical.

The uneven and unequal positionality across different scales is constantly highlighted through comparisons between geographic locations and characters, which highlight significant differences in terms of distribution of both economic and cultural capital:

Come, relinquish your foreigner's sense of being watched. ... Soon they will shut to traffic the gates at either end of this market, transforming Old Anarkali into a pedestrian-only piazza. ... here, where we sit, and in the even older districts that lie between us and the River Ravi – the congested, mazelike heart of this city – Lahore is more democratically urban. ... Like Manhattan? Yes, precisely! And that was one of the reasons why for me moving to New York felt – so unexpectedly – like coming home. But there were other reasons as well: the fact that Urdu was spoken by taxicab drivers; the presence, only two blocks from my East Village apartment, of a samosa- and channa-serving establishment called the Pak-Punjab Deli; the coincidence of crossing Fifth Avenue during a parade and hearing, from loudspeakers mounted on the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Association float, a song to which I had danced at my cousin's wedding. (36-37)

Changez desperately wants to evoke a sense of similar positionality of Lahore and New York,¹⁸ but references to cultural capital that tie the two places reveal a major difference in the unequal distribution of wealth and power:

¹⁸ According to Michael J. Greig, some familiarity is essential for the very act of communication, especially between globally distant social agents: 'The likelihood of two agents interacting is equal to their level of cultural similarity.' Michael J. Greig, 'The End of Geography?: Globalization, Communications, and Culture in the International System,' *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46.2 (April 2002) 226.

Certainly, much of my early excitement about New York was wrapped up in my excitement about Underwood Samson. ... Their offices were perched on the forty-first and forty-second floors of a building in midtown – higher than any two structures here in Lahore would be if they were stacked one atop the other – and while I had previously flown in airplanes and visited the Himalayas, nothing had prepared me for the drama, the power of the view from their lobby. This, I realized, was another world from Pakistan; supporting my feet were the achievements of the most technologically advanced civilization our species had ever known. ... Often, during my stay in your country, such comparisons ... made me resentful. Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians. Now our cities were largely unplanned, unsanitary affairs, and America had universities with individual endowments greater than our national budget for education. To be reminded of this vast disparity was, for me, to be ashamed. (37-38)

This passage reveals Changez's stance towards the way the world has changed through globalisation, elevating the positionality of one place and lessening another. The reference to the fact that Lahore had a central position is related to 'archaic globalisation' (MacGillivray),¹⁹ which was partly shaped by Muslim conquest. Observe the turn in this section where Changez relates his conversation with his future boss, Jim:

I said I was from Lahore, the second largest city of Pakistan, ancient capital of the Punjab, home to nearly as many people as New York, layered like a sedimentary plain with the accreted history of invaders from the Aryans to the Mongols to the British. He merely nodded. Then he said, "And are you on financial aid?" (8)

What Jim knows, and Changez is spending all his energy trying to hide, is that the positionality cannot be changed through nostalgia for a glorious past (11-12). The position of Princeton, as one of the specific places that metonymise the global social and cultural capital of America, is established when Changez tells the American that carefully selected

international students were sourced from around the globe ... given visas and scholarships, complete financial aid, mind you, and invited into the ranks of the meritocracy. In return, we were expected to contribute our talents to your society, the society we were joining. (4)

Changez would quickly become 'a young New Yorker with the city at [his] feet' (51).²⁰

¹⁹ Alex MacGillivray, *A Brief History of Globalization* (London: Robinson, 2006).

²⁰ It is interesting how cultural capital is for him supposed to go hand in hand with the flow of capital. This is why he is bothered by the artificially aged buildings of Princeton, which initially 'inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible' (3).

However, changes were imminent: 'My world would be transformed, just as this market around us has been' (51). Changez is now in Lahore, whose positionality is not even close to New York. This is why he keeps making comparisons between Lahore and New York, to increase a sense of familiarity, and thus also a false sense of co-positionality of the two places:

It is remarkable how *theatrical* manmade light can be once sunlight has begun to fade, how it can affect us emotionally, even now, at the start of the twenty-first century, in cities as large and bright as this one. Think of the expressive beauty of the Empire State Building, illuminated green for St. Patrick's Day, or pale blue on the evening of Frank Sinatra's death. Surely, New York by night must be one of the greatest sights in the world. (54-55)

Despite similarities, one cannot disregard the unequal positionalities of the two cities. The differences in positionality between places are further emphasised when Changez describes Manila:

Since you have been to the East, you do not need me to explain how prodigious are the changes taking place in that part of the globe. I expected to find a city like Lahore – or perhaps Karachi; what I found instead was a place of skyscrapers and superhighways. Yes, Manila had its slums ... like a poorer version of the 1950s America depicted in such films as *Grease*. But Manila's glittering skyline and walled enclaves for the ultra-rich were unlike anything I had seen in Pakistan.

I tried not to dwell on the comparison; it was one thing to accept that New York was more wealthy than Lahore, but quite another to swallow the fact that Manila was as well. ... Perhaps it was for this reason that I did something in Manila I had never done before: I attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an *American*. The Filipinos we worked with seemed to look up to my American colleagues, accepting them almost instinctively as members of the officer class of global business – and I wanted my share of that respect as well. (73-74)

Changez's vista in Manila undercuts the myth that globalisation creates a borderless world. As Sheppard explains, since wormholes have 'a structural effect of the long historical geography of globalisation, reflective of how globalisation processes reshape space/time', their existence has 'highly asymmetric consequences for the places that are connected because of the properties of positionality developed earlier'. In fact, '[w]ormholes linking positionally advantaged with disadvantaged agents may well reinforce preexisting inequities' (Sheppard 324). This is why a direct connection (wormhole) between New York and Lahore further elevates New York's positionality and pushes Lahore's down. It is therefore essential for the narrative that the attacks of 9/11 happen while Changez is in Manila because this will reveal that there is more than capital that affects travel. Also, one of the principal responses to 9/11 by the US military was to double down on attacks against Muslim fundamentalists in the southern Philippines. Indeed, 9/11 is emblematic of a crisis that is required, as Smethurst points out, to affect the warping of

11

'To Issue a Firefly's Glow: Wormhole Geographies and Positionality in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.' Adnan Mahmutović.

Transnational Literature Vol. 11 no. 1, December 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

space through globalisation processes. Starting with the attacks on the World Trade Centre, global space and positionality of people begin to change. Changez tells the American, 'I stared as one – and then the other – of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then I *smiled*' (83). It is practically as if the space bends so that the images of 9/11 become immediately accessible in Manila as in most places around the globe. Furthermore, most New Yorkers saw the destruction of the Twin Towers on the news at the same time as did people in Manila, Pakistan, Greece and so on. Watching New York from Manila is like seeing it through a wormhole, and although no physical travel is undertaken, this intensification of connectivity causes similar disassembling and reassembling of the political agent: 'But at that moment, my thoughts were not with the *victims* of the attack ... no, I was caught up in the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees' (83). Changez's transformation in terms of positionality is extreme and involves political agency. Shortly before 9/11, he was an American agent in Manila with the right to ride on the waves of capital. Now he is a strong political agent who has started to resent his earlier James Bond persona.

Such a change in positionality has happened, not only in terms of his ideological stance, but also due to the fact that he 'looks like a Muslim'. Travel becomes difficult. Changez is selected at airports, 'escorted by armed guards', separated from his team, 'made to strip down', and put into the queue for foreigners, rather than American citizens (85). Then there are other global changes, such as war-threats in Asia and consequent withdrawal of multinational corporations (201). Reshaping of the global space, while it generally allows more freedom of movement for members of the capitalist company, effectively kills the myth of a borderless world.²¹ Now borders are drawn in spaces where there never were any borders, and connectivity between places, peoples, and corporations changes. Changez's darker face becomes a border of sorts. Even the cosmopolitan space of New York becomes a space that proclaims '*We are America ... the mightiest civilization the world has ever known; you have slighted us; beware our wrath*' (90, emphasis in original). While he can witness firsthand how New York is changing, he can also follow how other places around the globe are being repositioned. Jim explains to Changez how shifts in the world economy, 'from manufacturing to services' (109), are making some places dwindle and others grow because people 'try to resist change', but instead of seizing power by 'becoming change' (110-11), Changez says, 'I was uncomfortable with the idea that the place I came from was condemned to atrophy' (111). Then he says, 'I did, however, tell myself that I had overreacted, that there was nothing I could do, and that all these world events were playing out on a stage of no relevance to my personal life' (114).

While Jim's characterisation of change might seem to identify something like globalisation as an entity, Changez's transformations show a number of different processes taking place at the same time on different scales, global and local. As a singular agent within a global company he has contributed to the changing of spaces, cultures and economies. The simple fact of his first-class travel to evaluate a company in Chile is shaping the world:

²¹ Changez notes 'those rare cases of abuse that regrettably did transpire were unlikely ever to affect me because such things invariably happened, in America as in all countries, to the hapless poor, not to Princeton graduates earning eighty thousand dollars a year' (107-8)

I too had traveled far that January, but the home of Neruda did not feel as removed from Lahore as it actually was; geographically, of course, it was perhaps as remote a place as could be found on the planet, but in spirit it seemed only an imaginary caravan ride away from my city, or a sail by night down the Ravi and Indus. (167)

This is a good example of how, as Sheppard argues, ‘places come to share a common positionality in the space of discourse’ (322). In the novel, the fact that ‘Valparaiso’s former aspirations to grandeur’ reminded Changez of Lahore (163) makes him closer to spaces which ‘function geographically and architecturally as a link between the ancient and contemporary parts of our city’ (193). It is true that most elements of Hamid’s novel carry a strong symbolic significance, most obvious cases being Underwood Samson (the US), Erica (America), Changez (Genghis Khan), and so on. It is no coincidence that New York is the centre stage (and not Washington), being both a global city with immense effects on the global economy and culture, a cosmopolitan place in an increasingly conservative country, a city that is both American and un-American, both representing what America is (constitutionally) and what it is not (politically). And the same is true for Pakistan. The cultural equivalent of New York is Lahore, not Karachi.²²

Although the amount of detail about places other than Lahore and New York is sparse, the constant drawing of attention to specific localities is essential to the narrative. Since, as Sheppard explains, ‘essential productive activity in any capitalist space-economy is ensuring that commodities are delivered to spatially separated markets, to recoup investments, in the shortest time possible’, we can see why certain technologies ‘shape space/time and thereby positionality, making some places economically closer by reducing transaction costs between them’ (319). This seems to apply to both exchange of goods and services, which is why, for instance, modern global cities tend to be hubs of global services even though one would expect them to be able to be geographically situated anywhere in the world. Some places are simply more connected than others, which is clear in the novel from the greater ease of travel from the US to Athens than to Valparaiso, the latter involving more complex routes and transportation. Thus, the quality of connections between New York and Manila increases the privileged positionality of those places in contrast to Valparaiso. Both Lahore and Manila are far from New York, but in Changez’s view Manila is much closer positionally to New York. Changez’s agency consists largely of his constant attempts, to use Sheppard’s words, ‘to increase the positionality of resisters of globalization relative to that of its proponents’ (326). If the cases of wormhole-like international travel seem to confirm the world-views of corporate powers, cases which produce a sense of the absolute control of space through or by means of capital, the overwhelming focus on localities produces the opposite effect. It shows that social and physical spaces are not that easily shaped,

²² In the novel, Changez watches 9/11 from Manila and learns that he is a corporate janissary from a Chilean book-publisher in Pablo Neruda’s hometown. In contrast, in Nair’s film, he does that in Istanbul and his transformation takes place in a mosque. By choosing Istanbul, Nair positions Pakistan and Turkey along more stereotyped political and religious lines, which reintroduces the infamous clashes of civilisations. However, I do not want to dismiss Nair’s film completely because cinema is a wormhole medium in its own right, telescoping the literary narrative into the public sphere, certainly not without compromise.

which is what Changez becomes more aware of after 9/11. This is why positionality is an essential component in the analysis of the way this book deals with globalisation and political agency.

Finally, let us look at the way Changez's move back to Lahore sheds light on his (changing) positionality. Description is interspersed throughout the story, as if there were a constant need to interrupt the narrative flow to tell the American how this relation to particular places is tied to his new political agency:

I had returned to Pakistan, but my inhabitation of your country had not entirely ceased. I remained emotionally entwined with Erica, and I brought something of her with me to Lahore – or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I lost something of myself to her that I was unable to relocate in the city of my birth. (195)

In Lahore, he feels 'the Americanness of [his] own gaze,' which reveals the shabbiness of his old home: 'I was saddened to find it in such a state – no, more than saddened, I was shamed. *This* was where I came from, this was my provenance, and it smacked of lowliness' (140-41). While readers may be led to think he has come to re-occupy his old position, the truth is he did not really appreciate his home in the same way before he went to the US. It is those global travels, as well as his stay in the US, that convinced him that 'it is not always possible to restore one's boundaries after they have been blurred and made permeable by a relationship: try as we might, we cannot reconstitute ourselves as the autonomous beings we previously imagined ourselves to be' (197).

Changez's transformation as a political agent, that is, someone who begins to believe he has, and can come to realise, a certain ideology, makes him assume a different positionality that is directly related to his wormhole travel as 'a servant of the American empire' (173). Changez's firm belief 'that finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power' now pushes him 'to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination' (177). This does not mean that America = globalisation, but rather that America's positionality in globalisation produces certain inequalities Changez is not ready to accept. It is true that there are many factors contributing to Changez's transformation, including 9/11, his harassment in the US by Islamophobes, and his growing recognition of the effects of his corporate work on the lives of workers around the world. These issues have been widely analysed in Hamid scholarship. The problem is that, generally, the types of analyses we find follow the most common patterns of analysis applied to postcolonial writers like Hamid; as I mentioned earlier, Hamid does not quite fit the profile, especially given his way of employing sci-fi tropes such as space-time. This is why I want to emphasise geographical location and social agents' positionality with respect to their geographical locations. If Jim instructed him to become change, Changez's new positionality in Lahore entails a resistance through a will to effect change, not just embrace it as if globalisation was something entirely independent of his agency. As mentioned earlier in this essay, similar to Yeung's analyses of globalisation, Hamid's novel questions the popularised notion that globalisation is an external factor, which affects everything from the way we conceive of planetary geography to national and global economies and social action as such.

Like Yeung, Hamid identifies two things that are underrepresented in globalisation discourses: locality and social agency. Since for Yeung, globalisation is as much internal to 'localities as the localities are integral in the development and evolution of globalization processes' (293), we need to bring more 'attention to *social actors* who are not only constructing globalization in their various capacities, but experiencing significant transformations in their own everyday social lives' (302, emphasis in original). Furthermore, for Yeung, 'we have to pay attention to economic globalization as a living experience, which entails both transformations of social practices and resistance from social actors' (302). I find that such views correspond to the way Hamid dramatises Changez's notion of transcending continents and civilisations, which I have referred to as changes in positionality. The micro movements of Changez as an agent (a firefly's glow) are shown to have caused traction in global and local spaces. As a single agent with a firefly's glow, he seems insignificant, and yet his actions seem big enough to warrant a visit by the American.²³ This presumed CIA agent, perhaps suspecting Changez of instigating terrorism, sees this firefly's glow, however small, as potentially devastating for the global policies he represents in the novel.

In Hamid's world, inequalities are more than obvious, but the point is that the flow of capital that has made wormholes possible (and is in turn maintained by them) cannot be divorced from transformations of positionality of people and spaces. It has been crucial in my analysis to adopt the notion of positionality and not to rely on typical discourses on transformations of identity, politics, and capital, because the latter tend to be discussed as if geographical position is not important. Positionality entails the complex way of occupying both a space in a particular geographical location and different social spaces. While no metaphors, in particular those taken from a completely other discipline, should be taken as fixed analytical frameworks, I found that the metaphor of wormhole-like travel, being part and parcel of the novel itself, added an important dimension to positionality: that of relative distance/closeness. The image of a folding of space-time effectively suggests an intensity and quality of connection between places and people, which for instance began when New York and London were connected through the intercontinental telegraph and became much closer than places within their nearer proximity. As Sheppard has it, the attention to positionality makes 'a difference in how we think about globalization and in strategies for altering its trajectory' (325). The idea is, again, that globalisation is not something out there with an ontological status of a thing that is then put in relation to everything else. Rather, it is a series of processes affected by a great number of factors, including singular political agents, which Hamid so powerfully dramatises. Changez's politics are integral to globalisation processes. They are a direct result of his wormhole travel around the globe and not an isolated study of some ancient scripture. The very fact that the American has sought out Changez shows that Changez is affecting those global processes that have created him. In some way the American (agent) is trying to perform a corrective. In the end, even a firefly's glow, no matter how local, might cause a certain reshuffling of positionality of political agents around the world.

²³ Changez sees himself as a simple teacher who fosters critical thinking, but, given that one of his students committed a crime, he is seen as a public agitator who pushes young people into terrorism.

I have argued that the firefly's glow is a metaphor for social agency, however insignificant it may seem, in a globalised world shaped by wormhole travel. The question is still, what kind of potential is there in this glow? The novel is vague on this point. Readers' desire to really know who Changez is – what he stands for, whether or not he is devious in his appeal to social values – in relation to the novel's ambiguity, shows that a potential for change can easily be both good and bad. The firefly's glow can be a desire for global social justice and freedom, but it is more easily interpreted as the fire of terrorism and war on/of terror conducted by both national and supranational agents. The glow could be that of the burning steel at Ground Zero, the flash of the WTC impact, which Changez watches on TV and might be said to inspire whatever glow he is planning to emanate himself. The rush of the planes towards the towers may be the ultimate vehicle of wormhole readjustment, the Third World beaming itself devastatingly into the heart of western civilisation. While I have been deliberately pushing for a more positive interpretation of the firefly's glow, which I deem necessary in a world where the Hollywood-like sensationalism of terrorism and devastating responses from nation states tend to dominate everyday lives and global politics, my endnote will be more depressing. Despite the overtly romanticised types of social engagement, Hamid's novel seems to insist that we acknowledge that terror itself is a form of wormhole travel. Or it is, at least, made possible by wormhole travel of political montage that has global impact. Terror is a radical form of re-positioning that can indeed start from the individual glow and set the entire world into motion.

Adnan Mahmutović is a lecturer and writer-in-residence at the Department of English, Stockholm University, where he is managing the first MA in Transnational Creative Writing. His academic work includes Ways of Being Free (Rodopi 2012), Visions of the Future in Comics (McFarland 2016), The Craft of Editing (Routledge 2018). His creative work includes Thinner than a Hair (Cinnamon Press 2010) and How to Fare Well and Stay Fair (Salt Publishing 2012).

Works Cited

- Amin, Ash. 'Placing globalization.' *Theory, Culture and Society* 14 (1997): 123-37.
- . 'Globalization: Geographical Aspects.' In *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Eds. N.J. Smelser and P.B. Baltes. Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 2001. 6271-277.
- Brenner, Neil. 'Global Cities, Glocal States: Global City Formation and State Territorial Restructuring in Contemporary Europe.' *Review of International Political Economy* 5 (1998): 1-37.
- . 'Beyond State-Centrism? Space, Territoriality, and Geographical Scale in Globalization studies.' *Theory and Society* 28 (1999): 39-78.
- . 'The Limits to Scale? Methodological Reflections on Scalar Structuration.' *Progress in Human Geography* 25 (2001): 591-614.

- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.' *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989. 139-67.
- . 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour.' *The Public Nature of Private Violence*. Eds. M.A. Fineman and R. Mykitiul. New York: Routledge, 1994. 93-120.
- DeLillo, Don. *Cosmopolis*. London: Picador, 2011.
- Dhamoon, Rita Kaur. 'Considerations on Mainstreaming Intersectionality.' *Political Research Quarterly* 64.1 (March 2011): 230-43.
- Dirlik, Arif. *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998.
- Greig J. Michael. 'The End of Geography?: Globalization, Communications, and Culture in the International System.' *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46.2 (April 2002): 225-243.
- Hamid, Mohsin. *Exit West*. London: Penguin Books, 2018.
- . *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. London: Penguin Books, 2007.
- Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell. 1991.
- King, Deborah K. 'Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology.' *Signs* 14.1 (1988): 42-72.
- MacGillivray, Alex. *A Brief History of Globalization*. London: Robinson, 2006.
- Sheppard, Eric. 'The Spaces and Times of Globalization: Place, Scale, Networks, and Positionality.' *Economic Geography* 78.3 (July 2002): 307-30.
- Smethurst, Paul. *The Postmodern Chronotope: Reading Space and Time in Contemporary Fiction*. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000.
- Soja, Edward. *Postmodern Geographies*. London: Verso, 2011.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Yeung, Henry Wai-chung. 'The Limits to Globalization Theory: A Geographic Perspective on Global Economic.' *Economic Geography* 78.3 (July 2002): 285-305.

The Cultural Wealth of Cyprus and the Role of Nature in Seferis's *Logbook III*

Iakovos Menelaou

Abstract

In George Seferis's (1900-71) *Logbook III*, the place names are a recurrent phenomenon, especially in the titles of poems. As discussed in this paper, beyond the titles and other elements that denote Cyprus, Seferis refers to the island's cultural wealth and history in other ways. We examine how his description of natural elements like worms, leaves, trees and birds, and cultural heritage in general, suggests strong symbolism and even resists occupation and invasion. They react and rebel together to the threat of invaders and function as protectors of Cyprus's national identity and reminders of the island's Greek cultural character.

Keywords: Modern Greek poetry, Cyprus, culture, history, nature.

Introduction: The Title of the Collection

Logbook III includes the poems that Seferis wrote for Cyprus when the island was still a British colony. This is a crucial period of Cyprus's modern history, with the first action of the Ethniki Organosis Kypriou Agoniston (EOKA) (1955) and Makarios's exile (1956).¹ Although the poet initially titled the collection *Kolokes* and then *Cyprus Where It Was Decreed ...*, he settled on *Logbook III*. As Katerina Krikos-Davis notes, Seferis changed the initial title *Kolokes* because it would be difficult for the Athenian readers to understand. They would have been puzzled by this dialect word, which was not well-known in the Greek capital. But still, even discovering the meaning, they would consider it an 'unpoetic' choice.² Commenting on the title of the collection, Thanasis Agathou writes that while it circulated with the title *Cyprus Where It Was Decreed ...* in 1955, the poet changed it to *Logbook III* in 1962. In Cyprus, the poet saw the Greek drama and the fate of Hellenism. Cyprus was a school of language and Greek civilisation.³

According to Avi Sharon, *Logbook III* is a collection inspired by the poet's regular visits⁴ to Cyprus and is dedicated to the island and its people. Seferis writes that, in the island, he experienced 'the revelation of a Hellenic world'. The second title, *Cyprus Where It Was Decreed*

¹ Φώτης Δημητρακόπουλος, *Σεφέρης, Κύπρος, Επιστολογραφικά και Άλλα* (Athens, 2000) 107.

² Katerina Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes: A Study of George Seferis' Logbook III (1953-1955)* (Amsterdam, 1994) vii.

³ Thanasis Agathou. See Θανάση Αγαθού, '...Κύπρον ου μ' εθέσπισεν... το Ποιητικό Τοπίο του Σεφέρη στη Μεγάλη Οθόνη,' *Μανδραγόρας*, Τεύχος 51 (2015) 126-31. On the change of the title to *Logbook III*, see also Kostiou and Letsios who wrote about this second edition of the poems (Κατερίνα Κωστίου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης: Ημερολόγιο Κατασπρώματος Γ,' *Κονδυλοφόρος* (2/2002) 247-263 and Βασίλης Λέτσιος, 'Στοχασμοί του Σεφέρη για το Ημερολόγιο Κατασπρώματος Γ,' *Dictio* 5 (2012) 105-19).

⁴ Demetrakopoulos mentions that the poet visited Cyprus with his wife three times: November-December 1953, September-October 1954 and September 1955 (Φ. Α. Δημητρακόπουλος, *Για τον Σεφέρη και για την Κύπρο* (Athens, 1992) 105). However, Georgis asserts that we are inclined to believe so only because these are Seferis's three longest visits, but that, in actual fact, he visited Cyprus six times (Γιώργος Γεωργής, *Ο Σεφέρης Περί των Κατά την Χώραν Κύπρον Σκαιών* (Athens, 1991) 174-77).

..., alludes to Euripides' Helen, in which Teucer, after his brother Ajax's suicide, announced the mandate to establish a second Salamis on the island to reinvent his former island home. As Sharon asserts, Seferis found in Cyprus a truer and richer Hellenism, more authentic than the rest of mainland Greece. The poet always sought for inspiration in the great monuments of classical antiquity and ancient tradition.⁵

Nevertheless, Seferis's decision to also change the second title is not without importance, especially if we bear in mind that the phrase 'Cyprus where it was decreed ...' is included at the beginning of the collection, under the title.⁶ One could say that Seferis made this decision after thoughtful process. 'Logbook' constitutes the common title for two of his previous collections: *Logbook I* published in 1940 and *Logbook II* published in 1944. *Logbook I* was written during the years 1937-40, leading up to the Second World War. It was the era of the authoritarian regime of General Ioannis Metaxas. As Polina Tambakaki notes, 'The Last Day', a poem with historical context, was not included in the collection because of Metaxas's absolutism.⁷ *Logbook II* revolves around the Second World War and the German occupation of Greece during these years. Interestingly, the poet's biographer, Roderick Beaton, writes that in April 1944 and when the poet was working on *Logbook II*, he suffered from insomnia.⁸ Apparently, under this title, Seferis included the poems he wrote for two critical periods of Greece and Hellenism. David Mason explains that in his poetry Seferis deals with themes of exile, historical fragmentation and questions about identity, and this is expressed in a personal way.⁹ Indeed, the Cypriot poems show Seferis's personal agony for the island and its future, while at the same time, the poems embody all the cultural wealth of Cyprus as evidence of the island's Greek character. Consequently, the choice of the title was of vital importance for the poet, as he wanted to show that the Cypriot poems are the next stage of his earlier responses to Greek history and indeed part of Greek history.

Henry Gifford writes that *Logbook II* was written just before the end of his exile, while *Logbook III* was a dedication to the people of Cyprus for whom he had strong feelings. The poet explains that the Asia Minor disaster was the event that affected him strongly, as his country and people suffered after that. To him, Hellenism meant humanism and the survival of Hellenism was inseparable from the survival of civilisation. As Gifford also declares, *Thrush* and *Logbook III* constitute the final stage of his poetry and they deal with the war and the difficulties over Cyprus.¹⁰

Kostas Prousis asserts that *Logbook I* revolves around the expectation of the war, as Greece had yet to be involved. He sees the agony of expectation permeating the poems of the collection. In *Logbook II* we see the years of the war, the poet's exile and the places of his exile. Finally, the last logbook with the Cypriot poems shows that Seferis saw a strong Greek character in the island, a place full of symbols that inspired him to write patriotic poems.¹¹

⁵ Avi Sharon, 'From Asine to Engomi,' *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 20.2 (2012) 49-58. Salamis is an ancient Greek city-state near Famagusta in Cyprus.

⁶ Γιώργος Σεφέρης, *Ποιήματα* (Athens, 1994) 231. See also Τάκης Λαγάκος, *Ο Σεφέρης και η Κύπρος* (Athens, 1984) 40-41.

⁷ Polina Tambakaki, 'A Modern Poet Reads Ancient War Texts: Politics, Life and Death in George Seferis' 'The Last Day,'" *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 32.2 (2008) 218-36.

⁸ See Roderick Beaton on the years 1943-44 in *George Seferis, Waiting for the Angel: A Biography* (London: Yale UP, 2003).

⁹ David Mason, 'Reading Greece,' *The Hudson Review* 55.3 (2002) 431-41.

¹⁰ Henry Gifford, 'George Seferis During the War,' *Grand Street* 5.2 (1986) 175-86. See also Κωστίου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης,' 247-63.

¹¹ Κώστας Προυσής, 'Ο Ποιητής Γιώργος Σεφέρης,' *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* (Athens, 2004) 171-97.

According to David Ricks, in *Logbooks* the poet engages with current events, while his appointment at the diplomatic service as ambassador coincided with the efforts to resolve the future of the island.¹² Seamus Heaney claims that in some of his poems Seferis speaks about the war and the way his country is affected by the disasters and the new vendettas of a civil war.¹³ Katerina Kostiou also declares that the repeated title, *Logbook*, embodies all the travels of Seferis's heroes.¹⁴ In any case, we could assume that Seferis's *Logbooks* deal with certain events of Modern Greek history.

Seferis's Hellenism and Love for Cyprus

For Seferis, Cyprus was the revelation of a new world that he could only imagine before. Since the 1930s he had sought a new national identity beyond geographical zones. He looked at the Second World War and the Civil War.¹⁵ As Anthony Dracopoulos declares, Seferis's geographical landscape is the Greek world with certain references from the ancient Greek world particularly, while there is 'the other' which is Europe.¹⁶ Cyprus could be seen as a new Greece that Seferis began to discover. In a letter to his sister Ioanna, Seferis wrote not only about his love for Cyprus and the Cypriot people, but also about the fact that he saw in the island elements of the Greek tradition that he could not see in other parts of Greece:

I've fallen in love with this place. Maybe because I've found there things still living, that have been lost in that other Greece ... perhaps because I feel that this people has need of all our love and all our support.¹⁷

Chrysanthi argues that Seferis's Cypriot poems show characteristics of remarkable poetry, while his words 'in Cyprus every stone says a tale' from his personal notes show that he really loved Cyprus.¹⁸

Moreover, as John Rexine writes, while his poetry was influenced to a great extent by modern, historical and literary events, Seferis was well aware of the literary and cultural past. Seferis was principally a Greek poet who knew the Greek classics very well. He studied Aeschylus, Homer and Sophocles, and his philosophy of life was in accordance with his classical heritage. Several of the ideas expressed in his poetry allude to classical authors and meanings of order, peace and justice.¹⁹ In addition, Seferis wrote many essays, among them a major essay on the sixteenth-century poem *Erotocritos*.²⁰ Seferis also admired Makryannis; although an illiterate,

¹² David Ricks, 'Seferis's Three Secret Poems,' *Harvard Review* 30 (2006) 66-69.

¹³ Seamus Heaney, 'Homage to Seferis,' *Harvard Review* 20 (2001) 33-38.

¹⁴ Κωστήιου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης,' 248-249.

¹⁵ Λέτσιος, 'Στοχασμοί του Σεφέρη,' 107-108.

¹⁶ Anthony Dracopoulos, 'Identity and Difference: Hellenism in the Works of G. Seferis and C.P. Cavafy,' *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)* 11 (2015) 114-130.

¹⁷ Beaton, *George Seferis* 310.

¹⁸ Φώτης Δημητρακόπουλος (ed.) *Γιώργος Σεφέρης-Κύπρος Χρυσάνθης και οι Γάτες τ' Αη Νικόλα* (Athens, 1995) 52-53. My translation.

¹⁹ John E. Rexine, 'The Diaries of George Seferis as a Revelation of His Art,' *World Literature Today* 61.2, The Diary as Art (1987) 220-23.

²⁰ Avi Sharon, 'Touching Words: Finding Tradition through Translation among Seferis, Eliot, and Keats,' *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 11.3 (2004) 47-82.

he produced a notable memoir.²¹ According to the poet's words, Makryannis is the most important prose writer in Modern Greek literature.²²

For Bibhu Padhi, Seferis is one of those poets who did not use any meaningless abstractions, while his poems embody enriched images of history and personal myth. He frequently alludes to 'the details of the Greek landscape', as he does with Cyprus. What makes Seferis a 'national poet' is his love of and intimacy with humanity in general which features in his poetry.²³ Padhi also explains that in his poems Seferis depicts the sun of Greece and the Aegean, while his rhythm suggests a Mediterranean wave. The sea colours the lyric and symbolic landscape of his poetry, while the memories of his native Greece are a common theme.²⁴ Thus, Seferis's Hellenism permeates the whole of his poetic corpus and *Logbook III* is such an expression of Hellenism. Seferis claims that Greek cultural heritage is boundless, and anyone could take a lesson of great value. A Greek folk song could enlighten even Homer and Aeschylus, and this is something unique.²⁵

According to Rexine, when Seferis was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1963, he saw it not as a prize for himself but rather as a tribute to Greece. Seferis is a representative poet of Greece, as the Greek tradition appears in several of his poems. Moreover, the tragedy of humanity is a common theme in his poetry,²⁶ and this is the case in *Logbook III* and Cyprus. Besides, Seferis is Greek in experience, choice of theme and sense of history. His poetry teaches us the wisdom of an ancient tradition and how to be human.²⁷

Edmund Keeley declares that Seferis is one of those poets of the mid-thirties and the end of the Second World War who saw the violence and misfortune in their country. It is then that Seferis expressed his mature poetic voice by echoing contemporary states in combination with the Homeric tradition. In his poetry, he shows the current historical moment through certain images of his tradition, like in the poem 'Helen'. So, Greek history, mythology and landscape are basic themes of his poetic oeuvre.²⁸

The Cypriot Thematology of the Poems

Krikos-Davis separates the poems of *Logbook III* into three categories according to their theme. There are ancient Greek themes: 'In the Goddess Name I Summon You ...', 'Helen', 'Pentheus' and 'Euripides the Athenian'; Medieval themes: 'Agianapa II', 'Neophytos Enkleistos Speaks', 'The Demon of Fornication' and 'Three Mules'; and themes on contemporary Cyprus: 'Agianapa I', 'Details on Cyprus', 'In the Kyrenia District', 'Salamis of Cyprus' and 'Engomi'.²⁹

Logbook III is characterised by the deep nostalgia of Greece, while certain poems, like 'Memory I', are 'full of Cyprus'.³⁰ In a number of poems the title clearly denotes Cyprus, as we

²¹ Gifford, 'George Seferis During the War' 179.

²² George Seferis, 'Makryannis,' *On the Greek Style*, Trans. Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos. Intro. Rex Warner (Evia: Harvey, 2000) 23-65.

²³ Bibhu Padhi, 'Carvings of a Humble Art: The Poetry of George Seferis,' *Interpretations*, 13.1 (1981) 73-79.

²⁴ Padhi, 'Carvings of a Humble Art' 76-77.

²⁵ George Seferis, 'Theophilos,' *On the Greek Style*, Trans. Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos. Intro. Rex Warner (Evia: Harvey, 2000) 1-11.

²⁶ John E. Rexine, 'Seferis,' *Books Abroad* 41.1 (1967) 37-38.

²⁷ Rodis Roufos, 'George Seferis,' *Transition* 12 (1964) 31-32.

²⁸ Edmund Keeley, 'Four Greek Poets,' *Chicago Review* 14.1 (1960) 77-88.

²⁹ Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes*. See also Γιώργος Σεφέρης-Κύπρος *Χρυσάνθης*, 60.

³⁰ Kostas Taktsis, 'My Short Life With Seferis,' *Grand Street* 5.2 (1986) 187-200.

see several Cypriot place names: 'Agianapa I', 'Agianapa II', 'Details on Cyprus', 'In the Kyrenia District', 'Salamina of Cyprus' and 'Engomi', while the resort Platres appears four times in the poem 'Helen'.³¹ Certain poems of the collection clearly identify a setting when highlighting history and mythology, while Seferis makes use of legendary or historical sources.³²

Kostiou writes that *Logbook III* signifies a return to light and this is a result of the poet's Cypriot experience. An example of this theme of light can be found in the poem 'Agianapa I'.³³ Takis Lagakos sees a similar climate focusing on 'Agianapa I' and 'In the Kyrenia District', in which the autumn sun of Cyprus is the prevalent topic.³⁴ In addition, 'Agianapa I' could be seen as Seferis's attempt to speak through tradition. The image from the poem recalls the blood-offering of Odysseus in the eleventh book of *The Odyssey*.³⁵ In Seferis's words, Cyprus is the place where miracles still happen and, as Kostiou asserts, the poems of the collection give answers to the central problem of *nostos* (return to the homeland) we see in his previous poetry and of course in *The Odyssey*.³⁶

The *Chronicle of Machairas* is the obvious source for two of the poems in the collection: 'Three Mules' and 'The Demon of Fornication'.³⁷ Krikos-Davis writes that, according to G.P. Savidis, the latter is a Shakespearian poem at the height of Seferis's poetic art, as he applies his experience and vision. Krikos-Davis also asserts that, while 'The Demon of Fornication' reminds us of the poetic elements of another important Modern Greek poet, Cavafy, Seferis uses a similar linguistic idiom to that of the chronicle. 'Three Mules' is also inspired by the Cypriot narrative.³⁸ Besides, there is evidence in the poet's correspondence with Chrysanthi that he did, indeed, study the chronicle.³⁹

Focusing on the poem 'Engomi',⁴⁰ Sharon declares that, as with 'The King of Asine',⁴¹ from *Logbook I*, we have a Mycenaean site but two different responses to them. While in 'Asine' the reader sees the Homeric element, in 'Engomi' we see the poet's revelation through the extensive quotation from the apocryphal gospel of James: after settling Mary in a cave in Bethlehem, Joseph goes to find a midwife, but finally he has a vision of the world in freeze-frame.⁴²

³¹ Chrysanthi gives a full list with all the Cypriot place names and names in the collection. Γιώργος Σεφέρης-Κύπρος Χρυσάνθης, 56.

³² Edmund Keeley, 'Seferis and the "Mythical Method,"' *Comparative Literature Studies* 6.2 (1969) 109-25.

³³ Κωστήιου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης,' 248-49.

³⁴ Λαγάκος, *Ο Σεφέρης και η Κύπρος*, 42. The poem on Kyrenia, according to Charalambidou, gives the clear scenography of a traditional village in Kyrenia's outskirts (Νάτια Χαραλαμπίδου, 'Κύπρος και Σεφέρης: «Στα περίχωρα της Κερύνειας», *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* (Athens, 2004) 263-321).

³⁵ Sharon, 'Touching Words' 65-66.

³⁶ Κωστήιου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης' 254.

³⁷ See the poems in Σεφέρης, *Ποιήματα*, 247, 256 and in English translation in George Seferis, *Complete Poems*, Trans. and Eds. and Intro. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2013) 182, 185.

³⁸ Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 84, 89.

³⁹ In a letter on 18 April 1954 by Chrysanthi to Seferis (Γιώργος Σεφέρης-Κύπρος Χρυσάνθης 34).

⁴⁰ Seferis, *Complete Poems* 194.

⁴¹ Seferis, *Complete Poems* 134.

⁴² Sharon, 'From Asine to Engomi' 55. It is also interesting to note that as Argyros writes, 'The King of Asine' was written two years after the poet visited the ruins of the fortress of Asine near the village of Toros, 'while the body of the poem is an extended reflection on the ontological status of this artefact' (Alexander Argyros, 'The Hollow King: a Heideggerian Approach to George Seferis's "The King of Asini,"' *Boundary 2* 15.1/2 (1986-1987) 305-321).

This Protevangelium of James became one of the most important and popular of the unofficial doctrines in Orthodoxy, and Seferis considered it a 'demotic' gospel and part of another Hellenism he began to explore. Generally in his poetry, Seferis attempted to keep human memory and recover the living voice of the stone relics, and this is what the poet does in 'Engomi'. Consequently, the poem could be seen as an *engkomion* (praise) of a fragile and vital tradition. As Sharon also writes, it was during his visit to the Bronze Age site of Engomi that the poet had this epiphany of his Cypriot experience.⁴³

Heaney asserts that 'Engomi' is a mysterious poem in between the actuality of life and the vision of the Apocrypha. The poem is relevant to another poem set in Cyprus: 'Helen',⁴⁴ which is an expression of suffering and devastations of war.⁴⁵ Focusing on 'Helen', Maronitis sees the strong shade of Euripides, which permeates the whole collection, while Teucer is a Seferis persona.⁴⁶ Another poem with a similar setting is 'Euripides the Athenian',⁴⁷ which embodies much more than a selection of facts or events from the Euripidean world. The poem is enriched by the poet's Cypriot experience⁴⁸ and revolves around the political conditions in Cyprus in 1954-55.⁴⁹

'Helen' and 'Salamis in Cyprus'⁵⁰ are the obvious sources for Mikelidis's short film, 'Κύπρον ου μ' εθέσπισεν'. Agathou analyses how certain meanings of the poems are reflected in Mikelidis's film. 'Salamis in Cyprus' is depicted through a strong imagery of Hellenism, as the film shows relics of a previous civilisation and the foundations of the Byzantine Church of Saint Epiphanius. We can also see the images of a *kouros*, the colours of the sea and the focus on wheels, which is a lively image implying the attempts by the British to keep the island under control. The depiction of 'Helen' starts with a part from Euripides' tragedy and then images of a young couple, concentration camps and other scenes. In any case, this is a rather cinematographic interpretation of the poems and, as Agathou writes, it does not reflect the actual content of the poems. Nevertheless, Mikelidis's documentary film shows the Cypriot tragedy clearly, as Cyprus becomes a symbol of suffering. In that way, Seferis's poems gain a new dimension through Mikelidis's film and material.⁵¹

A reading of the two poems can show that Agathou's commentary on Mikelidis's representations is reasonable, as Seferis primarily wants to comment on the events in Cyprus during the British occupation. In 'Salamis in Cyprus' we can see that when the poet writes 'earth has no handles for them to shoulder her and carry her off',⁵² he comments on the obvious fact that a country cannot be moved from its natural place, and Cyprus's natural place cannot be somewhere else, far from the Mediterranean Sea. Even if the British 'gather tools' to change this state, according to the poem, it seems that the nature and character of Cyprus remains unchanged. In

⁴³ Sharon, 'From Asine to Engomi' 55-56.

⁴⁴ Seferis, *Complete Poems* 177.

⁴⁵ Heaney, 'Homage to Seferis' 36-38.

⁴⁶ Δ. Ν. Μαρωνίτης, 'Μύθος και Ιστορία στο Ημερολόγιο Καταστροφώματος Γ,' *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* (Athens, 2004) 153-169.

⁴⁷ Seferis, *Complete Poems* 193.

⁴⁸ George P. Savidis, 'The Tragic Vision of Seferis' *Grand Street* 5.2 (1986) 153-74.

⁴⁹ Κωστήου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης' 254.

⁵⁰ Seferis, *Complete Poems* 190.

⁵¹ Αγαθού, '...Κύπρον ου μ' εθέσπισεν...' 126-28.

⁵² For all the quotations of the poems, I use the translation from George Seferis, *Complete Poems*, Trans. and Eds. and Intro. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (London, 2013).

‘Helen’, the repetition of ‘the nightingales won’t let you sleep in Platres’ is not just a refrain. Seferis intends to show nature’s complaint and unease with the current state. The birds of the poem are the voice of protest against the invaders. As Kranidiotis writes in his letter to Seferis, this is a strong poem full of love, truth and freedom.⁵³

The invader is not the British in the poem ‘Agianapa II’,⁵⁴ but Reynald de Châtillon. The reader sees the date ‘Spring 1156’: this is when the French adventurer, who is made Prince of Antioch through marriage, invaded the island and caused widespread calamity to crops, houses, herds, monasteries and churches, while women were raped and many people died. Those who survived went to the coast and were set free only after they had agreed to buy back their cattle and ransom themselves. The Duke of Cyprus, John Comnenus, his lieutenant, Michael Branas, and other prominent people were carried off by the departing invaders as hostages until their ransom amounts were paid.⁵⁵ In that way, the poet takes us back to another critical period for Cyprus with a different invader: the poet invites the reader to become part of the events of 1156. With the indication of the actual year (1156), the poet gives a clear setting and invites the reader to become part of the events. It could also be seen as an attempt by the poet to show how history repeats itself and how, before British occupation, Cyprus survived Reynald’s calamities.

The phrase ‘under the ageing sycamore’ appears three times: in the first, third and sixth stanzas. The old sycamore tree is a specific tree at the Venetian monastery in Agianapa; Seferis kept a photo of this tree in his diary depicting his wife (Maro) and Louizos (a friend) next to this tree.⁵⁶ The fact that the old sycamore tree of the poem is the one that the poet saw during his visit to the Venetian monastery is also mentioned by Krikos-Davis, who suggests that the repeated references to the old sycamore tree unmistakably imply that the setting of the poem is the ruins of the sixteenth-century monastery standing at the west entrance.⁵⁷ One could say that the Venetian monastery stands as a distinct specimen of Western civilisation, threatening the Greek Orthodox character of the island. Nevertheless, it is also an indication of the diversity one sees in Cyprus.

In the second stanza, the poet welcomes the ‘breath of the soul’ by saying, ‘do come in, do drink in your fill of our desire.’ This is the *pothos* (desire) of the poetic ego and the Cypriot people for freedom, and the people’s call for this freedom. Yet, by saying ‘this is no Palm Sunday wind no wind of the Resurrection but a wind of fire, a wind of smoke, a wind of joyless life’, the poet means the attacks in Cyprus by its invaders in 1156 and the battles that followed. This is not the wind the poet and the Cypriots expected, but a hostile wind that caused disasters. George Georgis also connects the old sycamore tree of the poem – which suggests strong imagery – with Seferis’s notes, while he explains that the wind in the poem is a symbol for the date ‘Spring 1156’ and the attacks on the island.⁵⁸

We see, again, strong symbolism in the last two lines of the poem, something that has also been noted by previous critics: ‘reeking of florins everywhere, and bartered us for gold’. According to Kostiou, in Seferis’s poetry money and commercial actions in general constitute

⁵³ Δημητράκοπουλος, *Σεφέρης, Κύπρος, Επιστολογραφικά και Άλλα* 204.

⁵⁴ Seferis, *Complete Poems* 267.

⁵⁵ Information given by Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 68-69.

⁵⁶ Γιώργος Σεφέρης, *Μέρες Στ’*: 20 Απρίλη 1951 – 4 Αυγούστου 1956, ed. Παναγιώτης Μέρμυγκας (Athens, 1986) 102.

⁵⁷ Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 64.

⁵⁸ Γεωργής, *Ο Σεφέρης Περί των Κατά την Χώραν Κύπρον Σκαιών* 51-52.

symbols of death, betrayal and opportunism.⁵⁹ In these lines, the poet shows such a commercial action through the sale of Cyprus by its invaders.

Krikos-Davis informs us that in 1191, Richard the Lionheart defeated Isaac Ducas Comnenus and became master of the island. After a short-lived rule, he sold Cyprus to the Orders of the Templars for 100,000 gold dinars, of which he received 40,000. Later, Cyprus passed into the possession of Guy de Lusignan. The Knights Templar held the island for about a year. Their tyrannical ways and exploitation led to a rebellion in Nicosia. They then proceeded to massacre and destroy villages. After such a catastrophe, the country was no longer of interest to them, and they asked Richard to cancel the sale. Finally, 'Guy de Lusignan reimbursed them for the 40,000 dinars, assumed responsibility for the 60,000 still owed, and took possession of the island.'⁶⁰ The events of the years 1191-92 are implied in the poem and, together with the year 1156 (after the title), create a strong historical background.⁶¹

Finally, an interesting point is Seferis's choice to return to strict verse. As Kostiou says, this return to metre suggests a rather ironic contradiction between the light style of a song and the tragic moments of the time.⁶² Moreover, the poet sets the phrase 'verses for music' under the title and the date 'Spring 1156', indicating that the poem is written in song form. Krikos-Davis mentions that 'Agianapa II' echoes the tradition of folk songs, while at the same time she refers to Savidis's opinion that the poem has certain analogies with Maniot and Akritic songs.⁶³

The poem 'Details on Cyprus'⁶⁴ shows Seferis's relation with tradition.⁶⁵ Similarly to the previous poem, Seferis gives certain information under the title: this time we have a dedication to the Cypriot artist Diamantis, with whom Seferis maintained correspondence until the end of his life.⁶⁶ In addition, we know from the poet's personal notes that he met the Cypriot artist during his visits to Cyprus, at least on six occasions: on 6 and 27 November 1953, on 19 September 1954, on 3 and 17 October 1954 and finally, on 27 August 1955.⁶⁷

Some words in the poem reveal Seferis's Cypriot experience. For example, a local craft uses dried *koloka* (gourd) to make receptacles, while *alakatin* (well-wheel) is also accompanied by the common Greek word for the well-wheel. By using these idiomatic words from the Cypriot idiom, Seferis introduces the reader to Cypriot art and traditional life. It is interesting to note that Seferis kept photos of *kolokes* decorated with scenes from the Greek revolution of 1821 in his notes about Cyprus.⁶⁸ Commenting on the poem, Sharon observes that the poet puts together different snapshots of Cyprus's folk character. Such an example is the well-wheel. The word *alakatin* belongs to both the local dialect and ancient Greek too.⁶⁹ Rexine also notes Seferis's love for the Greek language in general;⁷⁰ we could assume that he was not indifferent to the dialect of

⁵⁹ Κωστίου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης' 257.

⁶⁰ Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 70.

⁶¹ Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 70-71.

⁶² Κωστίου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης' 255.

⁶³ Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 64-65.

⁶⁴ Seferis, *Complete Poems* 175.

⁶⁵ Κωστίου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης' 253-254.

⁶⁶ Beaton, *George Seferis* 310.

⁶⁷ Σεφέρης, *Μέρες Στ'* 94, 97, 137, 148, 156, 181.

⁶⁸ Σεφέρης, *Μέρες Στ'* 150-151.

⁶⁹ Sharon, 'From Asine to Engomi' 54.

⁷⁰ , exine, 'The Diaries of George Seferis' 222.

Cyprus. Lagakos also notes that Seferis spoke with local people and saw that certain Homeric words survived in the Cypriot idiom.⁷¹

Moreover, at the beginning of the poem, there is a reference to a church of Saint Mamas: ‘the little owl was always there perched on the doorway to St Máma’. As Krikos-Davis notes, there are several churches in Cyprus dedicated to Saint Mamas. Nevertheless, the poet refers to a specific church located in the village of Dali, near Nicosia. Her argument is based on the poet’s reference to the wooden handle of the church’s door which is decorated with an owl. Such a surmise is correct, as there is a very detailed description of the handle by the poet.⁷²

Another useful piece of information appears in the next lines: ‘angels unwound the heavens and a stone figure with arched eyebrows stared idly from a corner of the roof’. Again, Seferis’s photographic material helps to enlighten the poem, as this reference to the stone figure alludes to a kind of decoration with faces on the outside wall of Saint Marinas’s church, in Pera Chorio.⁷³ Georgis also connects the poem with the two churches as two realistic depictions of memory; thus the lines of poem are ‘photographic’ and connect to the poet’s notes.⁷⁴

In the second half of the poem, the reader sees a strong symbolism: ‘and at the bottom, almost hidden, the sleepless worm’. The sleepless worm could be seen as a symbol of the permanent desire for freedom: although hidden and weak at the moment, it will grow stronger and one day will be ready for revolution. The worm is a reminder of the national identity and is the seed of rebellion. The symbolism of the poem is reinforced in the following lines, in which we see the ‘wooden *alakatin*’ to be ‘half in the earth and half in the water’. This is a rather vivid description that the reader can almost see. The wooden well-wheel emerges from the land of the island as an ancient relic to reveal the living tradition of Cyprus. The question, ‘why did you try to wake it?’ sounds like a warning by the poet to the invaders who will soon face the consequences, as the *alakatin* now moaned.

Also, the poet refers to ‘that cry, brought forth from the wood’s ancient nerves’, suggesting that even objects have a voice in this island. This is a voice of reaction calling for fight and justice. The ancient nerves of the wood denote that this wood is not just any wood: it is the ancient Greek tradition that still lives in Cyprus. This is the voice of the country that recalls the ‘Greekness’ of the Cypriot culture. Interestingly, Dracopoulos declares that Europe and the West constitute a threat for the Greek identity in Seferis’s poetry,⁷⁵ while Lagakos also explained this cry of the wood as the voice of the Cypriot land. This is a *de profundis* heroic voice which suggests a national consciousness and patriotism.⁷⁶

Indeed, Seferis asserted that European civilisation is an offspring of Hellenism and its values. Nevertheless, while European Hellenism was created, the ‘Greek Hellenism’ has not been created and has not yet discovered its tradition. What is needed is many great works, and many

⁷¹ Λαγάκος, *Ο Σεφέρης και η Κύπρος* 43. Again, Chrysanthi gives a full list with all the Cypriot words that Seferis uses in the Cypriot poems (*Γιώργος Σεφέρης-Κύπρος Χρυσάνθης*, 56).

⁷² Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 116.

⁷³ Σεφέρης, *Μέρες Στ’* 114.

⁷⁴ Γεωργής, *Ο Σεφέρης Περί των Κατά την Χώραν Κύπρον Σκαιών* 73-74.

⁷⁵ Dracopoulos, ‘Identity and Difference’ 119-20.

⁷⁶ Λαγάκος, *Ο Σεφέρης και η Κύπρος* 49.

great humans have to work and struggle to achieve this. Seferis believed that when Greece gained a strong intellectual character, Hellenism would show its real face.⁷⁷

The glory of an ancient Hellenism prevails in the poem 'In the Goddess's Name I Summon You ...'⁷⁸ which has been characterised as an internal monologue.⁷⁹ As Krikos-Davis notes, the poem refers to an ancient custom recorded by Herodotus. According to this custom, every Babylonian woman should prostitute herself once with a stranger, in honour of the goddess Mylitta, whom Herodotus identifies with the Cypriot goddess Aphrodite. The offer depended on each individual, and after intercourse women paid their respects to the goddess. However, the most interesting part of the story is Herodotus's declaration that an identical custom appeared in Cyprus.⁸⁰ As Georgis writes, apart from the fact that Seferis read Herodotus's writing on Cyprus, the poem was written after Seferis's visit to the temple of Aphrodite; the part from Herodotus's text and the poet's comments in his diary constitute the basis of the poem.⁸¹

Further elements showing Cyprus's cultural identity appear in the following lines. In the first stanza we read, 'oil on limbs, maybe a rancid smell as on the chapel's oil-press here, as on the rough pores of the unturning stone'. Here we see the description of a small church with an oil-press. As Krikos-Davis states, this style of church is widespread in the whole island and mainly in villages.⁸²

In the second stanza the poet writes, 'and statuettes offering small breasts with their fingers'. In these lines, Seferis speaks about figurines which represent women offering their breasts, holding them in their hands. In his diary Seferis kept a photo of such a figurine. Consequently, we could identify the local Cypriot art, with the figurine of the poem.⁸³ G.P. Savidis identifies this kind of Cypriot idol as the goddess Aphrodite, dating to 700-500 B.C.⁸⁴

The threat of invasion appears in the third stanza of the poem in which the poet presents nature terrified by the foreigner's presence: 'the leaves shuddered when the stranger stopped'. The leaves, as do other natural elements in the other poems, react to 'the other' who is the invader. Again, nature constitutes the voice of reaction and protest, while the relics, the churches and the cultural wealth of the island in general, denote its Greek character. Even if the invaders treat the island as an object of commerce (similarly to 'Agianapa II'), nature resists invasion and any change to the island's cultural character.

Conclusion

The genuine symbolism of Seferis's poetry is a significant contribution to Modern Greek literature, while his deep insight into human suffering gave Modern Greek literature further recognition.⁸⁵ Seferis is an important poet of Modern Greek literature who also has a prominent position in European literature. According to George Thaniel, Seferis is 'not simply an established

⁷⁷ George Seferis, 'Dialogue on Poetry: What is Meant by Hellenism?' *On the Greek Style*, Trans. Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos. Intro. Rex Warner (Evia: Harvey, 2000) 73-97.

⁷⁸ Seferis, *Complete Poems* 176.

⁷⁹ Κωστίου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης' 254.

⁸⁰ Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 35.

⁸¹ Γεωργής, *Ο Σεφέρης Περί των Κατά την Χώραν Κύπρον Σκαιών* 38-39.

⁸² Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 38.

⁸³ Σεφέρης, *Μέρες Στ'* 96.

⁸⁴ Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 37.

⁸⁵ Rexine, 'Seferis' 38.

Greek poet, as recognized by his Nobel Prize for literature in 1963, but a fully integrated member of the Western intellectual community'.⁸⁶ His poetry is well-known and became influential in Greece and the rest of the world.⁸⁷

In his poetry, we see the wealth and richness of Greek culture, as these are themes manifested in his poems. *Logbook III* is not any different. It is a poetic collection that revolves around the drama of his country, since Cyprus was seen by the poet as an extension of Greece. Cyprus is another Greece where someone can still find these values that the rest of Greece did not keep; and, to a certain extent, one could say that some of the poems in the collection are at the limits of propaganda. In a letter to Katsimpalis, the poet writes of the possibility of Cyprus becoming officially part of Greece. Also, in the same letter, Seferis explains that this poetic collection is also a voice of love to his English friends for the tragedy taking place in Cyprus.⁸⁸ Seferis's visits to Cyprus and the Cypriot poems could be characterised as an expression of patriotism.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, we should note that Seferis saw the junta's actions (1967-74) and predicted its negative consequences for the island. He also saw Grivas's and EOKA II's actions (1971-74) for union not only with scepticism, but as the prelude for a following disaster. Georgis also assumes that the poet intended to come to Cyprus and support Makarios's attempts against Grivas, EOKA II and Turkey, but he fell ill and subsequently died (1971).⁹⁰ Even in his correspondence with friends, one can see that Seferis knew the natural difficulties for a union of Cyprus with Greece.⁹¹

In fact, Seferis said that the Cyprus dispute or issue was a political matter for which everyone was allowed to have his personal beliefs. But his Cypriot poems have nothing to do with that. In contrast, the poems revolve around Cyprus, its glorious culture and the drama of people living on the island.⁹² Chrysanthi referred to internal and external 'Cypriot elements' in the collection. Place names and names constitute the external elements, while the history, myth and narrative are the internal Cypriot elements.⁹³ These elements compose the 'Greekness' of the island and could be seen as indication that Seferis saw and described Cyprus as an island with a strong Greek character. In conclusion, Seferis gives a wide range of information in order to show the cultural wealth of Cyprus and its Greek character. *Logbook III* embodies not only references to Cyprus's history, but it is also a successful portrayal of the island's cultural heritage and 'Greekness'.

⁸⁶ George Thaniel, 'George Seferis' "Thrush" and the Poetry of Ezra Pound,' *Comparative Literature Studies* 11.4 (Dec. 1974) 326-336.

⁸⁷ Rex Warner, 'Introduction' in Seferis' *On the Greek Style* v-x.

⁸⁸ Λέτσιος, 'Στοχασμοί του Σεφέρη' 112-113.

⁸⁹ Λαγάκος, *Ο Σεφέρης και η Κύπρος* 47-48.

⁹⁰ Γεωργής, *Ο Σεφέρης Περί των Κατά την Χώραν Κύπρον Σκαιών* 182-192. As Pieris also writes, Seferis and Makarios had correspondence (Μιχάλης Πιερής, 'Συμβολή στο Θέμα της Κυπριακής Εμπειρίας του Γιώργου Σεφέρη,' *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* (Athens, 2004) 65-102).

⁹¹ See the letter to Alekos on 8.2.54 (Δημητρακόπουλος, *Σεφέρης, Κύπρος, Επιστολογραφικά και Άλλα*, 147-148). Besides, Seferis's text on 28 March 1969 was a public reaction against the dictatorship; see Σάββας Παύλου, 'Η Δήλωση του Σεφέρη Εναντίον της Δικτατορίας,' *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* (Athens, 2004) 199-262.

⁹² Δημητρακόπουλος, *Για τον Σεφέρη και για την Κύπρο* 62.

⁹³ Γιώργος Σεφέρης-Κύπρος Χρυσάνθης 56.

Iakovos Menelaou is a published poet. He holds a BA in Medieval and Modern Greek Philology (University of Ioannina, Greece), an MA in Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies (Queen's University, Belfast) and an MTh in Orthodox Theology (University of Wales, Trinity Saint David). He is currently a PhD candidate at King's College London (Department of Classics).

Works Cited

- Argyros, Alexander. 'The Hollow King: a Heideggerian Approach to George Seferis's "The King of Asini."' *Boundary 2*, 15.1/2 (1986-87) 305-21.
- Beaton, Roderick. *George Seferis: Waiting for the Angel: A Biography* (London: Yale UP, 2003).
- Dracopoulos, Anthony. 'Identity and Difference: Hellenism in the Works of G. Seferis and C.P. Cavafy.' *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)* 11 (2015) 114-30.
- Gifford, Henry. 'George Seferis During the War.' *Grand Street* 5.2 (1986) 175-86.
- Heaney, Seamus. 'Homage to Seferis.' *Harvard Review* 20 (2001) 33-38.
- Keeley, Edmund. 'Four Greek Poets.' *Chicago Review* 14.1 (1960) 77-88.
- . 'Seferis and the "Mythical Method."' *Comparative Literature Studies* 6.2 (1969) 109-25.
- Krikos-Davis, Katerina. *Kolokes: A Study of George Seferis: Logbook III (1953-1955)* (Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1994).
- Mason, David. 'Reading Greece.' *The Hudson Review* 55.3 (2002) 431-41.
- Padhi, Bibhu. 'Carvings of a Humble Art: The Poetry of George Seferis.' *Interpretations* 13.1 (1981) 73-79.
- Roufos, Rodis. 'George Seferis.' *Transition* 12 (1964) 31-32.
- Rexine, John E. 'Seferis.' *Books Abroad* 41.1 (1967) 37-38.
- . 'The Diaries of George Seferis as a Revelation of His Art.' *World Literature Today* 61.2, The Diary as Art (1987) 220-223.
- Ricks, David. 'Seferis's Three Secret Poems.' *Harvard Review* 30 (2006) 66-69.
- Savidis, George P. 'The Tragic Vision of Seferis.' *Grand Street* 5.2 (1986) 153-74.
- Seferis, George. *Complete Poems*. Trans. and Eds. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2013).
- . 'Theophilos.' *On the Greek Style*. Trans. Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos. Intro. Rex Warner. (Evia: Harvey, 2000) 1-11.
- . 'Makryannis.' *On the Greek Style*, Trans. Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos. Intro. Rex Warner (Evia: Harvey, 2000) 23-65.
- . 'Dialogue on Poetry: What is Meant by Hellenism?' *On the Greek Style*, Trans. Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos. Intro. Rex Warner (Evia: Harvey, 2000) 73-97.
- Sharon, Avi. 'Touching Words: Finding Tradition through Translation among Seferis, Eliot, and Keats.' *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 11.3 (2004) 47-82.
- . 'From Asine to Engomi.' *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, 20.2 (2012) 49-58.
- Thaniel, George. 'George Seferis' "Thrush" and the Poetry of Ezra Pound.' *Comparative Literature Studies* 11.4 (Dec. 1974) 326-336.
- Tambakaki, Polina. 'A Modern Poet Reads Ancient War Texts: Politics, Life and Death in George Seferis' "The Last Day."' *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 32.2 (2008) 218-236.

- Αγαθού, Θ., '...Κύπρον ου μ' εθέσπισεν... το Ποιητικό Τοπίο του Σεφέρη στη Μεγάλη Οθόνη.' *Μανδραγόρας*, Τεύχος 51 (2015) 126-131.
- Γεωργής, Γ., *Ο Σεφέρης Περί των Κατά την Χώραν Κύπρον Σκαιών* (Athens: Σμίλη, 1991).
- Δημητρακόπουλος, Φ. Α., *Για τον Σεφέρη και για την Κύπρο* (Athens: Επικαιρότητα, 1992).
- Δημητρακόπουλος, Φ., (ed.) *Γιώργος Σεφέρης-Κύπρος Χρυσάνθης και οι Γάτες τ' Αη Νικόλα* (Athens: Καστανιώτη, 1995).
- Δημητρακόπουλος, Φ., *Σεφέρης, Κύπρος, Επιστολογραφικά και Άλλα* (Athens: Καστανιώτη, 2000).
- Κωστίου, Κ., 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης: Ημερολόγιο Καταστρώματος Γ.' *Κονδυλοφόρος* (2/2002) 247-263.
- Λαγάκος, Τ., *Ο Σεφέρης και η Κύπρος* (Athens: Ίκαρος, 1984).
- Λέτσιος, Β., 'Στοχασμοί του Σεφέρη για το Ημερολόγιο Καταστρώματος Γ.' *Dictio* 5 (2012) 105-119.
- Μαρωνίτης, Δ. Ν., 'Μύθος και Ιστορία στο Ημερολόγιο Καταστρώματος Γ.' *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* (Athens: MIET, 2004) 153-169.
- Πιερής, Μ., 'Συμβολή στο Θέμα της Κυπριακής Εμπειρίας του Γιώργου Σεφέρη.' *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* (Athens: MIET, 2004) 65-102.
- Προυσής, Κ., 'Ο Ποιητής Γιώργος Σεφέρης.' *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* (Athens: MIET, 2004) 171-197.
- Παύλου, Σ., 'Η Δήλωση του Σεφέρη Εναντίον της Δικτατορίας.' *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* (Athens: MIET, 2004) 199-262.
- Σεφέρης, Γ., *Μέρες: Στ': 20 Απρίλη 1951 – 4 Αυγούστου 1956* (Athens: Ίκαρος, 1986).
- Σεφέρης, Γ., *Ποιήματα* (Athens: Ίκαρος, 1994).
- Χαραλαμπίδου, Ν., 'Κύπρος και Σεφέρης: «Στα περίχωρα της Κερύνειας».' *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* (Athens: MIET, 2004) 263-321.

Dialogical Numbers: Counting Humanimal Pain in J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* Mike Piero

Abstract

This essay argues that J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* stages numerical sequences strategically, dialogically, and parodically in order to call attention to the ideological weight involved in counting. Focusing on how one counts – and accounts for – human and nonhuman animal pain, I contend that the repetition of numbers in the novel works to subvert the neoliberal faith put in numbers, quantification, and data. Without succumbing to some religious-mystical numerology, this reading attempts to expose the fiction involved in the act of counting and the need to pay more attention to numerical discourse in literary fiction. In tracking these numbers throughout the novel, I draw upon the polyphonic features of the text, particularly to understand the relation of law to justice as mediated by numbers. The number three that is repeated throughout the novel invokes religious, political, and ethical traditions that work to interrogate and disrupt ubiquitous dualistic conceptions of reality. Ultimately, the essay articulates the value of counting as it relates to humanimal pain, to writing the narratively unthinkable, and to the possibility of living a good life amidst unspeakable suffering.

'Everything will be counted: not a word, not a movement
of the soul, not a half thought will be in vain.'
– Fyodor Dostoevsky, 'At Tikhon's'¹

Counting consciously or unconsciously engenders an ideological claim, and therein lies the difficulty of trying to track numbers contained within a novel, as one might track an animal's traces and movements. The very act of counting, fraught with politics so conveniently easy to overlook or ignore, can further contribute to numbers and data becoming fetishised objects. And still, *we count*, and some write about their counting. Yet narratology has been generally suspicious (and rightly so) of what for now we might call numerological approaches to narrative, especially literary narratives. Without contributing to the sea of scholarship that uses numbers as mere symbols, and without calling for a return to a religious-mystical numerological hermeneutic, this essay attempts to account for the dialogism proffered by numbers in J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*.² The marshalling of numbers in the novel parodies and subtly exposes ideologies wrapped up in the act of counting, particularly through hybrid constructions of discourse. Politico-ethical discourse in the novel is staged against this backdrop of tracking numbers in *Elizabeth Costello*, in the sense of tracing numbers, which themselves execute the

¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, 'At Tikhon's,' *Demons*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Knopf, 1994) 712.

² J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (New York: Penguin, 2004). All subsequent references to, and citations of, the novel will appear in parentheses within the body of this article.

force of a route that can be tracked, as one might track a postal package. In particular, the reoccurrence of the numeral 3, and the attention it calls to the author's resistance to ideological pairing, is no small matter.³ Coetzee's self-reflexive parody of numerology and the fraught temptation of following fetishised numbers throughout chapters that are titled 'lessons', dialogical engagements more accurately conceived as 'arguings' than arguments,⁴ open up new avenues for what Elizabeth Costello calls 'the sympathetic imagination' (EC 80). Reoccurring numbers within the novel also register the humanity involved in counting, including what Elizabeth Costello might have called the potential for 'evil' in counting in ways similar to the dangers inherent to writing. Given the well-established and ever-growing cultural faith in and business-bureaucratic demand for numbers, measurement, data and quantification, the matter of counting – whether one counts animals, people, money, pain, et cetera – inevitably involves an 'accounting', a fiction spun under the guise of 'objectivity', once the privileged domain of an absolute Other, or God, if you will. Ultimately, this essay argues that more critical attention should be paid to numbers and counting in Coetzee's fiction, even looking back to the work before his recent *Jesus* novels.⁵ Coetzee's numbers become a way to track humanimal pain with an eye toward human and nonhuman animal justice.

Elizabeth Costello follows the titular Elizabeth Costello, an Australian author whose fiction is held in high esteem by an informed readership. The novel tracks Costello across various travels, speaking engagements, and meditations on living a writerly life. From the first pages of *Elizabeth Costello* – a novel divided into nine sections, eight of them titled 'lessons' followed by a postscript that presents itself as the ninth 'lesson' – the text impresses the reader with the numerical factor of three. Costello is 66 years old, author of nine novels, two books of poems, one book on bird life, and a number of uncounted news or magazine articles merely referred to as a 'body of journalism' (EC 1).⁶ Her most famous work – an early but critically acclaimed work that haunts her throughout the book – is her fourth novel, *The House on Eccles Street*, published in 1969. Her adult son, John Bernard, who assists his mother on the occasion of her visit with practical concerns of transportation and the occasional rescue from tedious questions by interviewers and literary groupies, admits to refusing to read her books until he had

³ The reader may note occasional deviations from standardised numerical formatting given the essay's preoccupation with numbers' dialogical relationship to words.

⁴ Derek Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004) 198.

⁵ For the most recent treatments of numerical and mathematical figures in *The Childhood of Jesus*, see *J.M. Coetzee's The Childhood of Jesus: The Ethics of Ideas & Things*, ed. Jennifer Rutherford and Anthony Uhlmann (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), particularly Baylee Brits's chapter, 'The Name of the Number: Transfinite Mathematics in *The Childhood of Jesus*' 129-148.

⁶ In the early drafts of 'What is Realism?' later to become the first chapter in *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee plays with dates and ages across eight dated and two undated drafts. While the dates of Costello's birth fluctuate, her age changes from 70 in the handwritten draft dated 28 June 1995 to 68 in a revision nearly six months later. The play with Costello's age as 68 continues in the seventh draft dated 12 March 1996, describing her as '68, going on 69'. Ultimately, Costello's age comes to be 66 going on 67. Playing with numbers is also found in Coetzee's manuscripts pertaining to how many novels Costello had written. Originally, Costello was the author of fourteen novels in the first draft, which would have been exactly double the number of novels Coetzee had published by the time of writing in 1995. In the second draft of *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee changes this to nine novels, effectively removing that doubling. Coetzee attends to numbers in this novel in a way not unlike Samuel Beckett tending the leaves of the tree in *Waiting for Godot* between Act I and II. J.M. Coetzee, 'What is Realism?' Containers 30 and 38.1. *The J.M. Coetzee Papers*. Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX.

grown up, at the age of 33 (EC 5).⁷ In the first lesson on ‘Realism’, the narrator skips – ‘We skip’, a metanarrative move that occurs a total of seven times throughout the chapter, followed by three similar ‘gaps’ in the narrative, reminding readers of their complicity in the meaning-making act of reading.⁸ Admittedly, these numbers I have just counted mean nothing by themselves. One could attempt to tease out some structural unity of the numbers within the narrative, but such an activity would be futile, as Coetzee is nothing less than a master at anticipating and preemptively disrupting allegorical and symbolic formulae for interpreting his work (thus exposing the lack of imaginative thinking found in many methodologically sound ‘applications’ of various theories). Counting what appear to be benign numbers offers new opportunities for reading, imagination and sympathy though, as Brian Macaskill articulates:

Surely it is the case that we (humans) can agree on the rules of calculation without forgetting that the mechanisms and results of such calculation are not going to be value-free, that the values thus engendered will be related, and not exiguously so, to the moral domain we inhabit as humanimals; indeed, that counting – like some kinds of language, literature, philosophy, and music – might even open up ethical possibilities of empathetic cognition, possibilities that can be articulated in language of some sort, and that can so be shared and even acted upon.⁹

The weight of these innocent-seeming numbers in the first lesson can only become meaningful when put in dialogue with numbers that are repeated throughout the novel. Even more crucially in the heteroglossia present throughout, numbers reproduce and employ social and political agency as they assist people in negotiating meaning. Ultimately, Coetzee’s reproduction of a pseudo-numerology effects a parodic disavowal of numerology in its typical failure to self-reflexively account for its own ideological assumptions involved in the act of counting.

The first ‘We skip’ – in addition to calling into question the problems of realism – also skips ahead to Costello’s arrival in Williamstown, Pennsylvania and her hotel, which she describes as ‘a surprisingly large building for a small city, a tall hexagon, all dark marble outside and crystal and mirrors inside’ (EC 2). Another invocation of three figures in its doubling, implied in the hexagonal space of the building: the presence of threes works to disrupt the

⁷ See later comments in this essay on the politico-religious resonances of ‘33’ in the novel, a number itself doubled in Costello’s age, which received substantial revision throughout Coetzee’s drafts. The entire novel – as a metonym now for Coetzee’s oeuvre, his body of work – operates as a *hoc est enim corpus meum* that, for Jean-Luc Nancy, always expels that which we desire and is always sacrificed. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham UP, 2008) 5. Like another John – the ‘fictionalised’ John Coetzee of *Summertime* – Costello survives through and in her writing, the ‘limited immortality’ of all secret authors. J.M. Coetzee, *Summertime* (New York: Viking, 2009) 7.

⁸ See Derek Attridge’s epilogue ‘A Writer’s Life: Elizabeth Costello’ for more on the connection between these announced gaps as they relate to Coetzee’s testing of the tradition of realism and the resulting implications for the pursuit of ideas (Attridge 201). Additionally, the gaps work as a metanarrative gesture to the reader regarding the impossibility of representing fictional or historical worlds without gaps and omissions that effect a requisite incompleteness. See Lubomír Doležel, ‘Fictional and Historical Narrative: Meeting the Postmodernist Challenge,’ *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis* ed. David Herman (Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 1999) 258.

⁹ Brian Macaskill, ‘Fugal Musemathematics Track One, Point One: J.M. Coetzee, Ethics, and Joycean Counterpoint,’ *Word and Text: A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 4.1 (2014) 165.

constructed preoccupation with pairing in the novel, similar to the roles of doubling and the disruption of binary oppositions elsewhere in Coetzee's fiction (or in Samuel Beckett's work, Coetzee's literary forebear). Other fraught pairings include Coetzee/Costello, literature/philosophy, humans/animals, abattoirs/death camps, clean/unclean, good/evil, and so on. *Elizabeth Costello* contains within it a second book – *The Lives of Animals* (1999) – the published product of two Tanner Lectures (1997-98) given by J.M. Coetzee at Princeton University framed by a scholarly introduction and critical reflections. This latter book itself is composed of a pair of sections: 'The Philosophers and the Animals' and 'The Poets and the Animals', which constitute the third and fourth lessons of *Elizabeth Costello*, with a few changes.¹⁰ The presence, privilege, and repetition of threes (as well as sixes and nines that distil into threes) call critical attention to the artificiality of rigid, fraught pairings and their hierarchical power relations, already well-documented in the writings of Jacques Derrida and Claude Lévi-Strauss, among others. Through doublings and dichotomies, Coetzee guides the reader to count her way through Elizabeth Costello's lessons, as if her lessons are lessons on counting. This 3-6-9 repetition causes the careful reader to count as she reads about slaughtered animals, and humanity, and genocide, and evil. The very act of counting as presented to the reader repeatedly throughout the novel is wrapped up with the pain, difficulty, and absurdity of life known in and across moments in time, past and future always joined together in the fleeting present.¹¹ The argument here is not that we should count, or should count in a particular way, but that *Elizabeth Costello* calls attention to how we count unconsciously, unknowingly. The narrative reminds the reader of its own thirdness, its own alterity. The ways of counting presented in the novel – not necessarily Coetzee's ways of counting – are themselves mirrored by the numbers, like the number 69 as an inversely-aligned pair repeated throughout the novel. 'Reason' itself becomes a site of conflict for Costello in her scepticism of the anthropocentrism of human reason when put in opposition to animal rationality.

We count, as I wrote in the opening paragraph, and our counting with others also involves a politics of pronouns: whom exactly does the plural pronoun include? Whom does it exclude? Following Coetzee's 'we skip', Elizabeth Costello expresses concerns over the first

¹⁰ Nearly all of these 'lessons' were published independently before being joined together in the book *Elizabeth Costello*. For more on some of the orthographic changes in the text between *The Lives of Animals* (1999) and *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), see Brian Macaskill, 'Fugal Musemathematics Track Two: Leopold Bloom's Fugal Fart and J.M. Coetzee's Contrapuntally Gendered Practice of Meegevoel,' *Word and Text: A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 5.1 (2015) 235. A list of editorial changes from *The Lives of Animals* to *Elizabeth Costello* dated 19 March 2003 is also available in *The J.M. Coetzee Papers*, which includes, incidentally, a change from parakeets in *Lives* to cockatoos in *Elizabeth Costello*. J.M. Coetzee, 'Elizabeth Costello,' March 2003, Container 38.7, *The J.M. Coetzee Papers* (Austin, TX: Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin).

¹¹ One can trace noteworthy numerical sequences repeated in *Elizabeth Costello* by counting lessons, years, humanimal victims of evil, sides of buildings, publications, Daniel Defoe's hats and shoes, religions of the Book, the floors of Costello's hotel, knitting needles, time, the people who order fish at the Appleton dinner, deaths, Aristotelian divisions (of gods, beasts, and men), the tears of old folks, currency, the ontology of frogs, and ultimately the judges to whom Costello must account for her beliefs. The above list documents Coetzee's depiction of counting as an everyday, humanimal act that is as ubiquitous as it is largely invisible and overlooked, which makes it a dangerous vehicle for ideology. The lessons in 'The Humanities in Africa' included eight lessons until draft 4b, which began a draft of the ninth section; similarly, the 'eight lessons' of the novel's subtitle – a subtitle omitted in some editions of the book – is supplemented with a postscript that could be considered the ninth lesson. J.M. Coetzee, 'The Humanities in Africa,' Draft 4b, 2000-2002, Container 29.5-10, *The J.M. Coetzee Papers* (Austin, TX: Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin).

person plural pronoun early in the novel. In the second lesson on 'The Novel in Africa', a talk delivered by her African ex-lover, Emmanuel Egudu, has turned his own writing into a career of entertainment, in her estimation, by exploiting 'postcolonial' performance to non-Africans of the African exotic. Considering Egudu's discourse on the novel in Africa, Costello ruminates, 'We, we, we, she thinks. *We Africans*. It is not *our* way. She has never liked *we* in its exclusive form' (40-41). The use of *we* demands a generalisation that Costello refuses on the grounds of its presumption to speak for all Africans, or for all of Africa, but her objection lies more in the knowledge that Egudu knows this and still he insists on performing this exclusive (and exclusively binary) generalisation for his own profit: by 'propping up the mystique of the African as the last repository of primal human energies', he 'has a stake in exoticizing himself' (53). She knows this from reading his writing, from listening to his talks across a series of many years, and from 'when she was young, or nearly young, when she spent *three* nights in a row with Emmanuel Egudu, also young then' (58, emphasis added). This repetition of 'we' speaks polyphonically of the royal *we*, a patronising *we*, the dictatorial *we*, and even Coetzee's own authorial *we*, the last of which speaks not only for the author but for the reader as well. The 'we' becomes a doubled, hybrid construction of a common utterance that signifies beyond polysemy, beyond postcolonial complexity, and beyond the novel itself. Combined with the numbers presented throughout the novel, the repetition of 'we skip' positions two epistemological 'languages' of meaning centripetally: numbers and words. *We count*. Who is this 'we'? Perhaps I mean humans, and how humans count, to the exclusion of animals, to the exclusion of animal counting and grouping. Perhaps this 'we' means the author along with the reader, whose shared consciousness through the act of reading becomes the 'just-between-us', as Jean-Luc Nancy calls it, 'of our manifestation, our becoming, our desire', a 'we' who are exposed to the determinism all around us, exposed as neither subject nor object alone.¹² To be sure, this matter of counting – even the counting implied in pronouns – is tied to our nonhuman animal counterparts, whether they count by our system, by their own method, or not at all.¹³

The novel foregrounds and parodies numbers that are most usually associated with having religious significance: three as the number of a triune God; seven as the sum of three (God) and four (human and the other three creaturely orders); the hotel room on the unlucky thirteenth floor; and 33 as the putative age when Jesus was crucified. In the latter instance, John Bernard, as previously mentioned, began reading his mother's novels at the age of 33. In 'The Lives of Animals: The Philosophers and the Animals', Costello points out that the Indian

¹² Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative* trans. Jason Smith and Steven Miller (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2002) 78.

¹³ Recent studies claim to have discovered the ability of some animals to count, something more than mere repetition or response to intense conditioning. Elizabeth Brannon of Duke University has observed that rhesus monkeys possess the capacity to match the number of sounds to the number of shapes they see. She has also found that the monkeys can effectively do subtraction well beyond the rate of mere chance. According to an article by Michael Tennesen, Brannon believes that animals 'do not have a linguistic sense of numbers – they aren't counting "one, two three"' in their heads ... [but] she believes that ability [of summing sets of numbers] is innate'. Is the ability to distinguish between groups of numbers, sets of large and small, counting? Is there such a thing as counting outside of a logico-mathematical *system* of numbers? Perhaps it requires another word. The question of whether or not nonhuman animals can count, therefore, is not so simple. Counting, for the purposes of this essay, constitutes a human system that only (most) humans can enter into fully, that is, with all of its ideological weight and value. Michael Tennesen, 'More Animals Seem to Have Ability to Count,' *Scientific American* (September 2009) 15 April 2016.

mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan, who, in Costello's words, was 'captured' and brought to Cambridge, died at the age of 33 (*EC* 68). Replete with biblically-inflected numbers, *Elizabeth Costello* resists and refuses any attempt to draw out a symbolic meaning from these numbers, and yet includes them: two instances of major life events (Bernard's and Ramanujan's) – a matter of degree of course – that invoke a third man, Jesus, who was also allegedly captured (and crucified) at 33. The colonial 'capturing' (Ramanujan) and the literary capturing (John Bernard) are tied together with the politico-religious capture of Jesus; therefore, a priori, the colonial project is tied not only to the ideological power of narrative as a means of indoctrination, resistance, and everything in between, but also to counting, numbers, and measurement as similar modes of inventing history.¹⁴ And the narrative continually points the reader to the possible intersection of the human and the divine: Bernard, after a night of coital pleasure with one of his mother's fan-interviewers (in room 1307 of the hotel), speculates that her interest in him is due to bafflement 'by the mystery of the divine in the human. You know there is something special about my mother – that is what draws you to her – yet when you meet her she turns out to be just an ordinary old woman' (*EC* 28).

The room number is not insignificant: in his handwritten revisions dated 11 December 1995, Coetzee replaces 'They make love' with a description of the space of the activity, all mediated by relations of room numbers – his room, her room, and his mother's room.¹⁵ The numbers become the site of contact, and a narrative mechanism that parallels the 'we skip' that features in the novel (and elsewhere, in various forms, in Coetzee's fiction). In another moment, Costello, when pressed by academics at the dinner following her lecture at Appleton, suggests that her vegetarianism 'comes out of a desire to save my soul' (*EC* 89). A third example of this imbricated discourse on the 'coming together' of divine and human (into a third category) appears in the debate between Costello and her sister – given two names, Blanche, and her new name, Sister Bridget – on the depiction of Christ and the crucifix in Africa. The implications that such an image might connote give hope and a sense of community in suffering as Bridget sees it, whereas Costello imagines a different model of *caritas* after some reflection, emerging not out of agony but instead out of a hospitality of beauty, what she considers to be a more genuine act of humanity (150). Even the copulation between gods and humans comes into play in Lesson 7 on 'Eros' when Costello speculates about the fantasies of the gods who imagine and at times indulge in sex with mortals, persons who 'live the more urgently, feel [the more] intensely', to the point that the gods

¹⁴ To suggest the interpenetration of narrative and history is not to equate the two simplistically. Given the imbrication of narrative and history as discourse – thinking of Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, Fredric Jameson, and Hayden White (White 146-47) – I would recommend Doležel's lucid engagement with the problem of discourse analysis and 'the Holocaust Test.' Possible worlds theory offers a way out of the potential snare of the 'postmodernist' emphasis on the freeplay of language and the impossibility of linguistic access to the Real; however, to be sure, one must be careful not to conflate contingency with mere relativism, nor confuse the weight of testimony, memorial, and the witness with an arhetorical pursuit of objectivity, which too often serves as a self-legitimising goal. The difficulty of representing the unrepresentable in the work of writing is a thread that runs not only through Costello's 'lessons' but throughout Coetzee's oeuvre as well. Doležel 251-253.

¹⁵ J.M. Coetzee, 'What is Realism?' draft one, revision one. 1995. Containers 30 and 38.1. *The J.M. Coetzee Papers*. Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX.

wish they had that inimitable little quiver [of *la petite mort*] in their own erotic repertoire, to spice up their couplings with each other. But the price is one they are not prepared to pay. Death, annihilation: what if there is no resurrection, they wonder misgivingly? (189)

Perhaps the gods mirror back to humans an erotic urge to transgress the boundary that separates two things, or two beings in this case.

Such speculation about the thoughts of the gods is the necessary counterpart to Costello's reflection on *caritas*. If Adorno is correct in describing 'the life of philosophy [as] reflection and speculation', then our present era and the privilege it affords to the ostensible 'objectivity' of data leads to an 'administrative structure of analysis, [by which thought] forgets to be thought'.¹⁶ This way of slower thinking and reading recalls Heidegger's lectures on thinking as being underway, self-legitimising, and a way of life.¹⁷ Nietzsche's remarks on slow reading as a life-affirming activity come to mind as well.¹⁸ Costello's speculative-reflective engagement enables her sympathetic imagination, which at bottom is the work of the writer, or, perhaps more accurately, the ontological becoming of the author who writes the work of art, who labours, in Costello's own words, as a 'secretary of the invisible, one of many secretaries over the ages' (*EC* 199). Such writing involves the writer, whose moment of writing becomes an ontological instant of *being-with*, a personally impersonal activity.¹⁹ By the time she crafts this statement, Costello describes her so-called secretarial work of speaking as a mouthpiece for others as an effort in thinking herself into the life of another animal.²⁰ The most polemical pairing of the novel is that between slaughtered animals and slaughtered Jews. Beginning with a brief historical discussion (always too brief) of Treblinka and the heinous atrocities of the Third Reich, Costello moves the discussion to animals by way of the language used to describe the denunciation of the camps; phrases like "'They went like sheep to the slaughter.'" "They died like animals." [and] "The Nazi butchers killed them"' (*EC* 64). This fragile comparison is taken to the extreme quickly by her insistence on a failure in the moral imagination of those who wilfully ignore the widespread suffering of animals in production facilities; wielded for her own purposes, her statements could be seen as at least indecent, if not obscene:

¹⁶ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005) 68-69.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004).

¹⁸ See Brian Macaskill, 'Translating and Transforming J.M. Coetzee's *Slow Man* from Novel to Opera: An Ambling, Doubling, and Tripling Pursuit of the Opera's Cinematographic Beginning,' *Mise-en-scène: The Journal of Film & Visual Narration* 1.2 (2017) 3.

¹⁹ I have written elsewhere about the imbrication of Coetzee's impersonal aesthetic and personal autobiography as it relates to the work of writing, isolation and personality, all involving an 'isolation' that should be thought of as occurring in an *instant* of being more so than a *state* of being. See Mike Piero, 'Coetzee, Blanchot, and the Work of Writing: The Impersonality of Childhood,' *MediaTropes*, Special Issue, J.M. Coetzee: Contrapuntal Mediations, ed. Brian Macaskill 4.2 (2014) 79-97. I borrow 'being-with' from Jean-Luc Nancy, who writes about the singular plural origin of being as taking place in an instant, an ontological theory that undergirds this present essay. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2000).

²⁰ As a challenge to rigid methodologies and the primacy of the Western analytical philosophical tradition – that is, the foundation of 'human reason' itself – Wittgenstein offers this charming statement: 'It's only by thinking even more crazily than philosophers do that you can solve their problems.' Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 75.

Let me say it openly: we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them. (65)

Immediately following this paragraph, Costello solidifies her position by addressing possible objections, eventually calling for people to be ‘philosophical rather than polemical’ (66), a paradigm that the reader is left to explore regarding Costello’s own rhetorical allegiances. The passage above, incidentally, echoes a similar moment in *Age of Iron* when Mrs. Curren – Elizabeth Costello’s fictional predecessor – articulates her experience killing animals with the following: ‘A universe of labor, a universe of counting: like sitting in front of a clock all day, killing the seconds as they emerged, counting one’s life away.’²¹ While numbers have become a more recent interest in scholarship on Coetzee’s fiction – with a few earlier notable exceptions – the allusive genealogy between colonialism, numbers and narrative can be seen throughout his literary corpus.²²

Some members of the audience, however, choose to engage Costello in moral objection to the polemics of her ‘philosophical’ argument; after all, she is not a philosopher, but someone who admittedly has ‘written stories about made-up people’ (*EC* 66), namely, Abraham Stern, whose first name of course alludes to the Judeo-Christian-Islamic forefather. Here, again, we have a three – the three religions of the Book. This third voice, third opinion, disrupts her pair of lectures. Stern, in his letter to Costello explaining his absence from her dinner as a refusal (there are twelve seats, one of which remains empty), identifies the apparent logical fallacy in her argument: ‘The Jews died like cattle, therefore cattle die like Jews, you say. That is a trick with words which I will not accept. ... The inversion insults the memory of the dead’ (94). For this reason, he refuses to break bread with Costello at the dinner following her lecture. Incidentally, the reader only knows the contents of the letter because John reads the letter in its entirety; Costello reads it first, but ‘she reads it quickly, then with a sigh passes it over to him’ (*EC* 93).

This is not to insist that certain comparisons should not ever be made, for even a comparison between the victims of the Shoah – too many to count, for how can one count, and register, and mourn for millions? – and slaughterhouse animals can be responsibly handled. It takes both a careful hand and a willingness to look past a discourse of law to the possibility of humanimal justice. Jacques Derrida adroitly navigates these difficult waters in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, writing that ‘one should neither abuse the figure of genocide [in discourse on

²¹ J.M. Coetzee, *Age of Iron* (New York: Penguin, 1990) 44.

²² Perhaps the earliest critical attention paid to numbers comes by way of Brian Macaskill who writes in his influential essay, ‘Charting J.M. Coetzee’s Middle Voice’, of the importance of numerical sequencing in Coetzee’s second novel, *In the Heart of the Country*, a book divided into 266 numbered sections. This technique describes how Coetzee ‘foregrounds the discontinuity of Magda’s being’. He connects Coetzee’s practice of writing in the linguistic ‘middle voice’ to the metonymy of the novel’s numbered sections:

Thus “lost in the being of [her] being” (35), Magda seeks a median place from which to articulate herself, and the numbered entries in which she seeks to record this articulation come in turn to constitute Coetzee’s act of “doing-writing” in the middle voice: a means, no less, of enumerating (for Coetzee) equally complex negotiations facing the writer in that time and place of contemporary South Africa.

Brian Macaskill, ‘Charting J.M. Coetzee’s Middle Voice,’ *Contemporary Literature* 35.3 (1994) 458-59, 465.

abattoirs] nor too quickly consider it explained away.’²³ The rest of Derrida’s paragraph, too long to reproduce in its entirety here, examines this comparison, including by means of a startling hypothetical situation: ‘(let’s say Nazi) doctors and geneticists had decided to organize the overproduction and overgeneration of Jews, gypsies, and homosexuals by means of artificial insemination’ in order to produce a steady supply of people

destined in always increasing numbers for that same hell, that of the imposition of genetic experimentation, or extermination by gas or by fire. In the same abattoirs. I don’t wish to abuse the ease with which one can overload with pathos the self-evidences I am drawing attention to here ... Instead of thrusting these images in your faces or awakening them in your memory, something that would be both too easy and endless, let me simply say a word about this “pathos.”²⁴

Derrida goes on to question the role of such sympathy and pity, which he then relates to how Jeremy Bentham changed our ontological relation to the animal Other.²⁵ The following passage, as another hybrid construction of dialogical utterances, shows how Elizabeth Costello’s questions take on the ‘scent’ of Jacques Derrida in particular, and some of the more informed post-structuralist discourse in general:

* * *

Costello

‘The question to ask should not be:
Do we have something in common –
reason, self-consciousness, a soul –
with other animals?’ (EC 79)

Derrida

‘The question is not to know whether the animal can think, reason, or speak, etc., something we still pretend to be asking ourselves.’²⁶

* * *

The better question, which Costello, as though paraphrasing Derrida, reiterates throughout her lectures, would be: ‘Can they suffer?’ As Derrida suggests, ‘being able to suffer is no longer a power; it is a possibility without power, a possibility of the impossible.’²⁷ The possibility of the

²³ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (New York: Fordham UP, 2008) 26.

²⁴ Derrida, *Animal* 26.

²⁵ Taking to task the majority of Western philosophy and theory, ‘from Aristotle to Descartes, from Descartes, especially, to Heidegger, Levinas, and Lacan’, Derrida positions human relation to ‘the animal’ Other in terms of Bentham’s critical question: “‘Can they suffer?’” asks Bentham, simply yet so profoundly.’ By locating the question outside of a comparison of humanimal to nonhuman animal ‘reason’, Derrida locates a possibility of animal *justice* rooted in compassion through the undeniability of suffering. This justice diverges from a discourse of ‘animal rights’ owed to the animal that comes to resemble ‘the human’ on the grounds of a shared human rationality, or of ‘rights’ that require the violence inherent in law to enforce. Derrida, *Animal* 27.

²⁶ Derrida, *Animal* 27.

²⁷ Derrida, *Animal* 28. This hybrid construction of discourse that calls back to Derrida is repeated most recently in Coetzee’s *The Schooldays of Jesus* in a conversation between David and Simón on animal suffering. Simón – who is often wrong, incidentally, though well-meaning and full of love for the boy – argues that ‘Animals don’t feel

impossible is the impossible possibility that people can herd other people onto trains to be gassed, burned to ash, annihilated – all inadequate words given the atrocities that leave no ‘true witness’, only survivors who bear the burden of a vocation to ‘bear witness to a missing testimony’ of those exterminated, in Giorgio Agamben’s words.²⁸ It is the impossible possibility of dropping an atomic bomb upon not one but two cities to burn, deform, and incinerate life there, the effects of which persist to this day. It is the impossible possibility of an earthquake and subsequent tsunami wreaking unimaginable devastation in the very same country – to human animals, nonhuman animals, flora, economies, and more – brought about by a nuclear power plant that should already have been decommissioned. For Jean-Luc Nancy, speaking about the catastrophe of Fukushima, ‘challenges the capacities of calculation whereas, at the same time, what we plan or project remains within the order of calculation, even if it is out of our reach’.²⁹ A networked technological connectedness makes large numbers – previously unthinkable – possible, and along with them, catastrophes more far-reaching and devastating.³⁰

The lives of nonhuman animals – and the far-reaching catastrophe of their treatment under the jurisdiction of industrial factory farming, its related industries of production, and all those complicit in the resulting consumption (myself included) – are tied to how *we count* in ways that *Elizabeth Costello* ever so subtly calls the reader’s attention to by nudging them to count along as they read the unthinkable. In Coetzee’s fiction, humans have been positioned as those who count. In the three religions of the Book, man counted for God as seen most acutely in the ‘Book of Numbers’, since God ‘created all things by number, weight, and measure’.³¹ This quantification and the keeping of numbers secured God’s power as both the keeper of numbers and the creator of the categories of measurement, which today is always negotiated as a social technology of control.³² I. Bernard Cohen points out in *The Triumph of Numbers* that 70,000 people were killed for King David’s counting mistake in the census.³³ Cohen and Porter independently recall that the latter half of the eighteenth century saw a forceful and largely secular interest in census data issuing from the realisation that the newly ‘liberated’ nation-states were dealing no longer just with people but with populations. Science and technology – the

anything when they are slaughtered. They don’t have feelings in the way that we do.’ J.M. Coetzee, *The Schooldays of Jesus* (London: Harvill Secker, 2016) 76.

With Señor Arroyo corroborating the justification of the enterprise of abattoirs on the familiar grounds of animals lacking human reason, David – as so often he, David, also does in *Childhood* – asks the more important question: ‘But does it hurt?’ J.M. Coetzee, *The Childhood of Jesus* (London: Harvill Secker, 2013) 76.

²⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2002) 34.

²⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Catastrophes* trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham UP, 2015) 27.

³⁰ Nancy, *After Fukushima* 28.

³¹ Solomon 11:20.

³² Theodore M. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995) 77.

Additionally, Jean-Luc Nancy addresses *Hoc est enim corpus meum* by linking it to ‘our *Om mani padme* [sic] ... , our *Allah ill’allah*, our *Schema* [Shema] *Israel*’ to illustrate the primacy of *this* body, this thing of the unknowable Other presented so one can touch and know. This connection of the Christian ‘This is my body’ to its Islamic and Jewish counterparts – among similar cultural assurances, such as in Buddhism – is crucial to recognise, however, for the purposes of the present analysis, my interest lies primarily in the Christian instances of God as keeper of numbers. Nancy, *Corpus* 3.

³³ I. Bernard Cohen, *The Triumph of Numbers: How Counting Shaped Modern Life* (New York: Norton, 2005) 30.

former being characterised by ‘explosions’ in breakthrough discoveries, the latter by gradual development and advancement³⁴ – act as the primary agents in this move toward reclaiming measurement, numbers, and data from God. Reterritorialising counting and data as human activity, the emphasis on empirical, measurable data rises to methodological fame under the guise that quantification will eliminate ‘subjective’ contaminants and produce a universal, utopian knowledge. David Attwell confirms that Coetzee’s early interest in his doctoral work at The University of Texas at Austin in stylostistics, given his interests in Beckett and mathematics, quickly dissipated, and ‘by the time he wrote *Dusklands*, the positivism of stylostistics had even come to seem related to the mythology of the technocrats who ran the military-industrial complex’.³⁵ This obsession with quantification must be recognised as ‘simultaneously a means of planning and of prediction’ sustained not by its objective observations, methods, and collection of data – for these methods themselves have been exposed to be constructed, gendered and manipulated – but rather by the subjective creativity of this quantitative technology: ‘the creative power of statistics’.³⁶ People themselves are made governable by the *loss* of information that quantification engenders since to measure and collect data requires the elimination of any element that cannot itself be measured.³⁷ What is lost, in other words, is the third space of *play* – the give, the movement, the ambiguity – between 0 and 1, with which measurement, algorithmic logic, and artificial neural networks have such trouble. The social stratification of numerical discourse has increased ever since, made possible on an even larger scale as ‘we’ become more technologically (and, therefore, economically) connected. For Nancy, Fukushima is exemplary of how communication becomes contaminated:

An earthquake and the tsunami it caused become a technological catastrophe, which itself becomes a social, economic, political, and finally philosophical earthquake ... There are no more natural catastrophes: There is only a civilizational catastrophe that expands every time.³⁸

Technology has become ‘not an assembly of functioning means [but] the mode of our existence’.³⁹ In this position, which makes us neither subject nor object, we struggle to live and make decisions outside the omnipresent deterministic forces that generally govern our daily lives as singularly plural beings. Perhaps we resemble our nonhumanimal counterparts more than we often like to think.

In the eighth lesson titled ‘At the Gate’, the sequence of number-lessons comes to fruition when Costello finds herself a petitioner in a Kafkaesque purgatory wherein a statement of belief is required of her before she can proceed through the gate. In the course of making three revised statements of belief – which the other petitioners refer to as confessions (*EC* 212) – Costello negotiates her application by producing a statement in which she confesses to having only provisional beliefs, followed by a revised statement in which she claims to be a secretary of the invisible before a committee of nine judges. Finally, her third amended statement speaks to a

³⁴ Juri M. Lotman, *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture* (Tallinn: TLU P, 2013) 88.

³⁵ David Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face-to-Face with Time* (New York: Viking, 2015) 37.

³⁶ Porter 37, 43, 76.

³⁷ Porter 45, 29.

³⁸ Nancy, *After Fukushima* 34.

³⁹ Nancy, *After Fukushima* 36.

belief in frogs, particularly the tens of thousands of frogs that would emerge after the ‘torrential rains that swelled the rivers with the carcasses of drowned animals’ had eased along the Dulgannon River in Victoria to rejoice in the mud (216): ‘I believe in those little frogs ... They exist whether or not I tell you about them, whether or not I believe in them ... it is because of their indifference to me that I believe in them’ (217). Polyphonically resonant with the legal discourse of the courtroom through a hybrid construction of its heteroglossia, the narrative clearly states that Costello has issued two statements, which she proffered in person before the committees.⁴⁰ This accounting of statements, however, does not count the first written statement she provided, which was later revised. The uncertainty engendered by the difference between internal narrative accounting and how the external reader might otherwise count calls further attention to the difficulties inherent in the act of counting. To what degree can one distinguish the second statement, which is clearly a revision, from the first? To what degree does it matter, given that the voices of the law – both the judges and the gatekeeper – claim it to be two statements, not three? As in Kafka’s ‘Before the Law’, – which has received thorough critical attention already as it concerns *Elizabeth Costello* – ‘even before moral conscience as such, [the law] forces an answer, it calls for responsibility and guarding’.⁴¹ I count three statements.

Like nonfictional authors, Costello thinks (and even sometimes counts) herself into the position of an other: ‘*I am an other*’, Costello testifies, after sympathetically imagining herself into the lives of the little frogs (EC 221). Measuring leads to a distancing from nature, and measurement by numbering not only operates as a social technology of control over human animals – their thoughts, bodies, (non)identities and agency, insofar as these elements of cognition can be distinguished – but also over nonhuman animals to which humans have historically been placed in opposition.⁴² In the early years of biological standardisation within the pharmaceutical industry, a ‘cat-unit’ was used as the unit of measurement that would test ‘each harvest of leaves by determining the minimal fatal dose per kilogram of cat’, along with many other kinds of animal-units. In an effort to measure the effects of chemicals with a high natural variability, researchers conceived of ‘the animal’ as standard itself: all cats are the same; all will react in the same fashion.⁴³ The research eventually bore out that variability among ‘the same animal’ was too great for such standardisation to work, even when ‘scientists worked to defeat the variability of nature by breeding well-standardized laboratory animals’.⁴⁴

The frog unit, in particular, highlighted the problems of this reductive thinking about the animal other that reduced plurality to singularity under the banner of scientific measurement:

Already the ‘frog unit’ had fallen into disrepute because frogs tolerated the drug differently in summer and winter, and because they were often killed by its effect on their nerves rather than their heart. By 1931 there were more than seven hundred papers on the quantitative testing of digitalis, involving a variety of animals.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel,’ *The Dialogical Imagination* ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 304.

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, ‘Before the Law,’ *Acts of Literature* ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992) 206.

⁴² Porter 23.

⁴³ Porter 30.

⁴⁴ Porter 30-31.

⁴⁵ Porter 30.

Costello's belief in frogs is a belief in individuality, wherein the 'force of I', of which Adorno writes, addresses 'the strength of the individual not to entrust himself to what blindly sweeps down upon him, likewise not to blindly make himself resemble it'. And, on the other hand, the realisation that '[w]ithin this individual it [the force of 'I'] represents reality, the 'not-I', just as well as it represents the individual himself.'⁴⁶ Preserving the force of I without erasing the singular plural origin of being is crucial to the disruption of totalitarianism. Whether by the industrial pharma-measurements of cat-units, by an immaterial economy built on 'measuring' individuals out of the equation, or even by means of the totalising character of Fredric Jameson's imagined 'ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved Utopian or classless society', the narrative force of I depends on a given moment of negation.⁴⁷ Likewise, the preservation of life lived in-between-us as singularly plural beings occurs in a world driven by statistical logic in which 'everybody must behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance with his previously determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type,' according to Adorno and Horkheimer.⁴⁸ Even as individuals increasingly take on the role of producers of mass media and other informational capital engendered by the internal collapse of concepts like work and play into themselves, Adorno's warnings of widespread deterministic forces that seek to control behaviour is crucial to any social justice project.

Belief in plurality is central to the discourse on animals, but also to the potential of a world in which justice becomes (more) possible for all living beings based on a model of justice governed by a rule of divergence, not convergence. Jean-François Lyotard writes in *Just Gaming* that justice today is a matter of plurality, including a plurality of language games, in which 'every one of us belongs to several minorities, and what is very important, none of them prevails'.⁴⁹ And even then, Lyotard adds the caveat that 'one should be on one's guard, I think, against the totalitarian character of an idea of justice, even a pluralistic one'.⁵⁰ Yet simply to describe difference is never enough, since the law of genre is wrapped up in such difference insofar as we are speaking of the difference of belonging. To clarify, with regard to difference, I refer to 'a taking part without being part of, without having membership in a set'.⁵¹ This participation without belonging is precisely Costello's problem at the gate: she participates in many minorities; she participates in beliefs without colonising them as her own, without belonging to any of them; and her statements speak to being's origin as always already being singular plural.⁵² 'One' is never as simple as one, never *solely* individual. For the law, a 'justice' that cannot be measured is unacceptable and impermissible. Much like the problems of testing pharmaceuticals on animals for measurement, a 'justice' that cannot be standardised is irreconcilable with the structures of sovereign state power as they currently exist, and, more crucially, are also irreconcilable to the ever-expanding technological networks that mediate

⁴⁶ Theodor Adorno, 'Gloss on Personality,' *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia UP, 1998) 165.

⁴⁷ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981) 291.

⁴⁸ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,' *Dialectic of Enlightenment* trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 2002) 123.

⁴⁹ Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming* trans. Wlad Godzich (Minnesota: U of Minnesota P, 1985) 95.

⁵⁰ Lyotard and Thébaud 96.

⁵¹ Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre,' *Acts of Literature* ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992) 227.

⁵² Nancy, *Being* 30.

social existence. In the end, as Giorgio Agamben proclaims, ‘Law is solely directed toward judgment, independent of truth and justice.’⁵³ For Lyotard, any idea of justice based on fixed criteria cannot be counted as justice. Justice is always a matter of dialectical engagement and never *epistémè*, since ‘dialectics allows the judge to judge case by case’, and thus account for the complexity and nuances of each situation.⁵⁴ Justice as enforced by law is impossible given the inherent violence necessary in initially establishing the law and the maintenance-violence involved in the enforcing of such law; indeed, each court case is assigned its own number, blind by law and tracked, regardless of suffering, regardless of the impossibility of justice emerging.

For Derrida, ‘Deconstruction is justice.’⁵⁵ Enforced law is always socially and politically constructed by powers of legitimation, and justice is undeconstructable. Deconstruction itself (not as a ‘method’, incidentally) ‘takes place in the interval that separates the indeconstructability of justice from the deconstructability of *droit* (authority, legitimacy and so on)’.⁵⁶ Writing of Blanchot’s *The Madness of the Day*, Derrida writes, ‘The narrative ‘I’ frightens the Law.’⁵⁷ Costello’s ‘I’ also frightens the law, the committee, and the gatekeepers insofar as her answers at the gate ‘deconstruct’ the law. Her responses also perform the plurality inherent to the number one, the thirdness (and fourth-ness, and so on) that always accompanies and disrupts the binary coupledness signalled by the numeral two. Though the novel calls attention to Costello’s suffering and the seeming indifference of her judges, the suffering at the gate by demand of law showcases the threat to power that Costello’s numerical-narrative statements engender.

Costello’s encounters at the gate draw close attention to the force of law, especially of law housed within bureaucracy, in which the gatekeeper also is the keeper of records (*EC* 223). With the fall of God as the keeper of numbers, one can see why Dostoevsky – whose work Coetzee frequently engages throughout his oeuvre – would write in *The Brothers Karamazov* that if God is dead, then everything is permitted; and yet, for Lacan its reversal rings true: ‘for we analysts know full well that if God doesn’t exist, then nothing at all is permitted any longer’.⁵⁸ The moral accounting involved in our being-with becomes an offshoot of the loss of the self’s subjecthood. Adorno contends – along with many others – that the very self has been rendered non-existent in the face of unprecedented levels of domination and mediated existence.

⁵³ Agamben 18.

⁵⁴ Lyotard and Thébaud 27.

⁵⁵ Jacques Derrida, ‘Force of Law: The “Mystical Foundation of Authority,”’ *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992) 15.

⁵⁶ Derrida, ‘Force’ 15.

⁵⁷ Derrida, ‘Before’ 206.

⁵⁸ Slavoj Žižek, following Lacan, reveals how the atheist revelry in claiming that ‘God is dead’ under the guise of a tolerant, hedonistic pursuit of pleasure itself reinscribes the prohibitions of God unconsciously: ‘what is repressed are not illicit desires or pleasures, but prohibitions themselves’. Costello shows little sign of such repression, despite her sacrilegious disregard for belief: she appears not only as a figure of postmodern existential thought or even as a figure of *différance*, but more crucially, she is positioned as a confessor who confesses that which is not ostensibly permitted. And while she might bear some of the marks that Žižek might associate with the ‘modern atheist’ – such as her vegetarianism – she accounts for herself on her own terms, as a matter of obligation and not as a matter of catharsis. Considering Costello’s discussion with her sister about the form and meaning of the crucifix as it was being ‘shared’ (sold) in Africa, and the openness that Žižek describes as living in the aftermath of the Event (of Christ’s death on the cross, an empty Master-Signifier [39]), Costello’s confession could be read as that very openness ‘of drawing out the consequences – of what? Precisely of the new space opened up by the event’. Slavoj Žižek and Boris Gunjević, *God in Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse* (New York: Seven Stories P, 2012) 28, 40.

What we are permitted to do has been inextricably linked to some dubious notion of compulsory, hedonistic happiness that is conflated with freedom; on the contrary, writes Adorno,

It is part of the mechanism of domination to forbid recognition of the suffering it produces, and there is a straight line of development between the gospel of happiness and the construction of camps of extermination so far off in Poland that each of our own countrymen can convince himself that he cannot hear the screams of pain.⁵⁹

For Adorno, humans have become absolute social objects – an interpellation with which ‘psychology has collaborated’, even going as far to say that ‘psychology provided society with weapons for ensuring that this was and is the case’.⁶⁰ Costello’s statement of belief in frogs, whether the little frogs believe in her or not, illustrates the reflexivity of belief itself; as Žižek writes, ‘it is never the case of simply believing – one has to believe in belief itself’.⁶¹ And such a belief, which she tries to refuse, also refuses the illusion of her own self, her own supposed position as an independent subject. The moral accounting one tries to effect in daily living – a necessary series of acts, it seems to me – does not free one from the wider accounting imposed by others from the outside, whoever or whatever those interloping forces might be.

Objectified life is seen most clearly in Costello’s confessional act, a speech act that recalls Stavrogin’s confessional encounter with Father Tikhon in Dostoevsky’s ‘At Tikhon’s’ from *The Possessed* (or *Demons*), which involves the superego’s thirst for enjoyment, in this case ‘the grip of desire for martyrdom and self-sacrifice’,⁶² the masochistic and cathartic pleasure of shame, humiliation, and ridicule.⁶³ As a psychoanalyst might do, Tikhon identifies the repressed desires lurking under the guise of confession and self-forgiveness; he also assures Stavrogin of God’s accounting: ‘Everything will be counted: not a word, not a movement of the soul, not a half thought will be in vain.’⁶⁴ This is quite a different accounting than in *Elizabeth Costello*, to be sure, but while ‘At the Gate’ resembles and engages Kafka most immediately, there are hints of Dostoevsky here as well: in a world in which God is said to be dead, there is still a longing, in many moments, for there to be *some* kind of accounting or reckoning of one’s – or perhaps, more accurately, others’ – actions, especially in a world in which data, measurement and statistics like ‘to boast’ that ‘their science [has] averaged away everything contingent, accidental, inexplicable, or personal, and left only large-scale regularities’.⁶⁵ For Coetzee’s Señor C from *Diary of a Bad Year*, in a ‘strong opinion’ on probability, ‘Probabilistic propositions constitute a little world unto themselves’, a world that has little to no bearing on individuals.⁶⁶ And still, the desire for an individual accounting of our actions lingers, consciously or unconsciously. Stavrogin and Costello, as disparate as they may be, share this common trait. They both aspire to be extra-ordinary in their confessions, and both receive responses that indicate their ordinary character. For Costello, the answer given in the final line of

⁵⁹ Adorno, *Minima* 63.

⁶⁰ Adorno, *Minima* 63.

⁶¹ Žižek and Gunjević 189.

⁶² Dostoevsky 712.

⁶³ Dostoevsky 692.

⁶⁴ Dostoevsky 712.

⁶⁵ Porter 86.

⁶⁶ J.M. Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year* (New York: Penguin, 2008) 101.

the chapter-lesson, when she asks the gatekeeper whether he sees many people in her situation, is silencing: “All the time,” he says. “We see people like you all the time” (*EC* 225). The tone of this ending is that of an existential fading, reminiscent of Adorno, once again, who writes that ‘anything that is not reified, cannot be counted and measured, ceases to exist.’⁶⁷

In *The Good Story: Exchanges on Truth, Fiction and Psychotherapy*, Coetzee writes in conversation with psychotherapist Arabella Kurtz about belief in a cosmic accounting of justice,

As you see, the question of the secret, remembered or forgotten, continues to gnaw at me. I would like to believe that the universe is just, that there is some or other eye that sees all, that transgressions of the Law do not ultimately go unpunished. But a voice keeps asking: Is that really so? Is everyday life not bursting with examples of people who have forgotten what it is not convenient for them to remember, and prosper nonetheless?⁶⁸

Such an accounting – accounting for one’s past-in-present actions and beliefs – is fundamentally a matter of narrative, of translation, even through the dialogical interplay of alphabetic and numeric figures. Without creating a ‘moral double entry notebook’,⁶⁹ or succumbing to the largely neoliberal force of quantitative reasoning and living, a reading that takes into account the dialogic stylisation of numbers becomes one of the ways to account for – and, therefore, to remember – humanimal pain. Like Costello, authors – including Coetzee – suffer as they think themselves into the painful lives of others. To write the impossible possibility of unthinkable suffering exacts a cost and imposes a burden. The suffering occasioned by the work of writing and summoned by a sympathetic imagination leads to an understanding that ‘we cannot do anything at all about the appalling ways human beings treat other human beings or animals without rethinking and renewing our norms, presuppositions, platitudes, and morals with regard to life and what is living’.⁷⁰ *We count*, and such dialogical counting is always an act of accounting, always constituent with our narrative lives. As Wittgenstein reminds us, counting is tied to ‘a way of living’.⁷¹ Even (and especially) Coetzee’s Dostoevsky in *The Master of Petersburg* registers the pain of losing a son, Pavel, in this way: ‘On the cold fingers folded to his chest he counts the days again. Ten. This is what it feels like after ten days.’⁷² We count many things in life, though we count and mourn only one humanimal death at a time. Beyond that singular counting of death, the dialogical numbers with which we live bear witness to the

⁶⁷ Adorno, *Minima* 47.

⁶⁸ J.M. Coetzee and Arabella Kurtz, *The Good Story: Exchanges on Truth, Fiction and Psychotherapy* (London: Harvill Secker, 2015) 34.

⁶⁹ In B.S. Johnson’s novel, *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry*, Malry’s double entry notebook effects a workaround to the question of a cosmic accounting that bothers Coetzee. Johnson and Coetzee both share a similar indebtedness to literary modernism in general, and to Beckett in particular. Christie’s mother says, in her last words to her son, ‘We fondly believe that there is going to be a reckoning, a day upon which all injustices are evened out ... But we are wrong: learn, then, that there is not going to be any day of reckoning, except possibly by accident ... But we shall all die untidily, when we did not properly expect it, in a mess, most things unresolved, unreckoned, reflecting that it is all chaos.’ B.S. Johnson, *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry* (New York: New Directions Books, 1973) 30.

⁷⁰ Kalpana Rahita Seshadri, *HumAnimal: Race, Law, Language* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2012) 11.

⁷¹ See Macaskill, ‘Fugal Musemathematics Track One’ 165.

⁷² J.M. Coetzee, *The Master of Petersburg* (New York: Viking, 1994) 17.

narratively unthinkable. They, too, remind us that counting plays a crucial part in the stories and experiences we labour to remember, to keep alive, even as *we skip* around along the way.⁷³

Mike Piero is an Associate Professor of English and Honors Program Coordinator at Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland, Ohio and a Ph.D. Candidate in English at Old Dominion University. His research interests include (post)modernist literature, critical theory, cultural studies, and game studies.

Works Cited

- Adorno, Theodor. 'Gloss on Personality.' *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*. 1969. Trans Henry W. Pickford. New York: Columbia UP, 1998. 161-65.
- . *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. 1951. Trans. E.F.N. Jephcott. London: Verso, 2005.
- Adorno, Theodor W. and Max Horkheimer. 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.' *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. John Cumming. New York: Continuum, 2002. 120-67.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York: Zone Books, 2002.
- Attridge, Derek. *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004.
- Attwell, David. *J.M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face-to-Face with Time*. New York: Viking, 2015.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 'Discourse in the Novel.' *The Dialogical Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981. 259-422.
- Brits, Baylee. 'The Name of the Number: Transfinite Mathematics in *The Childhood of Jesus*.' *J.M. Coetzee's The Childhood of Jesus: The Ethics of Ideas & Things*. Ed. Jennifer Rutherford and Anthony Uhlmann. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. 129-148.
- Coetzee, J.M. *Age of Iron*. New York: Penguin, 1990.
- . *The Childhood of Jesus*. London: Harvill Secker, 2013.
- . *Diary of a Bad Year*. 2007. New York: Penguin, 2008.
- . *Elizabeth Costello*. 2003. New York: Penguin, 2004.
- . 'Elizabeth Costello.' Drafts and Editorial Notes. March 2003. Container 38.7. *The J.M. Coetzee Papers*. Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX.
- . 'The Humanities in Africa.' Drafts 2-4b. 2000-2002. Container 29.5-10. *The J.M. Coetzee Papers*. Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX.
- . *The Lives of Animals*. Ed. Amy Gutmann. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999.
- . *The Master of Petersburg*. New York: Viking, 1994.
- . *The Schooldays of Jesus*. London: Harvill Secker, 2016.
- . *Summertime*. New York: Viking, 2009.

⁷³ I am enormously grateful to Brian Macaskill for his generous feedback on drafts of this essay in addition to years of life-affirming discussions about J.M. Coetzee's writings. Special thanks go to the staff at the Harry Ransom Center at The University of Texas at Austin for their helpfulness and hospitality.

- . 'What is Realism?' Drafts 1-8. 1995-1996. Container 30 and 38.1. *The J.M. Coetzee Papers*. Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX.
- Coetzee, J.M. and Arabella Kurtz. *The Good Story: Exchanges on Truth, Fiction and Psychotherapy*. London: Harvill Secker, 2015.
- Cohen, I. Bernard. *The Triumph of Numbers: How Counting Shaped Modern Life*. New York: Norton, 2005.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Trans. David Wills. Ed. Marie-Louise Mallet. New York: Fordham UP, 2008.
- . 'Before the Law.' *Acts of Literature*. Ed. Derek Attridge. New York: Routledge, 1992. 181-220.
- . 'Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority.' ' *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. Ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson. New York: Routledge, 1992. 3-67.
- . 'The Law of Genre.' *Acts of Literature*. Ed. Derek Attridge. New York: Routledge, 1992. 221-252.
- Doležel, Lubomír. 'Fictional and Historical Narrative: Meeting the Postmodernist Challenge.' *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*. Ed. David Herman. Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 1999. 247-273.
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor. 'At Tikhon's.' *Demons*. Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Knopf, 1994. 681-714.
- . *The Brothers Karamazov*. Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. 12th ed. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.
- Heidegger, Martin. *What is Called Thinking?* Trans. J. Glenn Gray. New York: Harper Perennial, 2004.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981.
- Johnson, B.S. *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*. New York: New Directions Books, 1973.
- Lotman, Juri M. *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture*. Tallinn: TLU P, 2013.
- Lytard, Jean-François and Jean-Loup Thébaud. *Just Gaming*. Trans. Wlad Godzich. Minnesota: U of Minnesota P, 1985.
- Macaskill, Brian. 'Charting J. M. Coetzee's Middle Voice.' *Contemporary Literature* 35.3 (1994) 441-475.
- . 'Fugal Musemathematics Track One, Point One: J.M. Coetzee, Ethics, and Joycean Counterpoint.' *Word and Text: A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 4.1 (2014): 158-175.
- . 'Fugal Musemathematics Track Two: Leopold Bloom's Fugal Fart and J.M. Coetzee's Contrapuntally Gendered Practice of Meegevoel.' *Word and Text: A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 5.1 (2015): 235-258.
- . 'Translating and Transforming J.M. Coetzee's *Slow Man* from Novel to Opera: An Ambling, Doubling, and Tripling Pursuit of the Opera's Cinematographic Beginning.' *Mise-en-scène: The Journal of Film & Visual Narration* 1.2 (2017): 1-21.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Catastrophes*. Trans. Charlotte Mandell. New York: Fordham UP, 2015.
- . *Being Singular Plural*. Trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2000.

- . *Corpus*. Trans. Richard A. Rand. New York: Fordham UP, 2008.
- . *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*. Trans. Jason Smith and Steven Miller. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2002.
- Piero, Mike. 'Coetzee, Blanchot, and the Work of Writing: The Impersonality of Childhood.' *MediaTropes*, Special Issue, J.M. Coetzee: Contrapuntal Mediations, ed. Brian Macaskill, 4.2 (2014) 79-97.
- Porter, Theodore M. *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995.
- Rutherford, Jennifer and Anthony Uhlmann, ed. *J. M. Coetzee's The Childhood of Jesus: The Ethics of Ideas and Things*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.
- Seshadri, Kalpana Rahita. *HumAnimal: Race, Law, Language*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2012.
- Tennesen, Michael. 'More Animals Seem to Have Ability to Count.' *ScientificAmerican.com* September 2009. 15 April 2016.
- White, Hayden. *The Content and the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1987.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Culture and Value*. Trans. Peter Winch. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980.
- Žižek, Slavoj and Boris Gunjević. *God in Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse*. New York: Seven Stories P, 2012.

Liminality and Otherness: Exploring Transcultural Space in Rita Dove's *The Yellow House on the Corner*

Lekha Roy and Rano Ringo

Indian Institute of Technology, Ropar

Abstract

This paper studies postcolonial responses to prescriptive racial affiliations in contemporary America, tracing the transition of 'race' from a biological to a sociocultural concept, and the related rejection of modernist binaries in African American writing after the 1970s. In particular, African American writer, Rita Dove's first collection of poems, *The Yellow House on the Corner*,² published in 1980, deconstructs race as a dynamic construct encoded in linguistic and cultural signifiers that turned ethnocentrism into a hegemonic tool rejected by poets writing towards the end of the twentieth century. Positing that Dove's travels through Europe provide for a cultural and linguistic sensibility that is liminal in its repudiation of cultural absolutism, the paper argues that her writing foreshadows Hollinger's 'postethnic' decentring of race through formulating non-prescriptive affiliations that transcend the colour line. Foregrounding history as a personal, transcultural space where frames of memory are juxtaposed to reveal the constructed nature of racially informed identities and affiliations, the poems create what Steffen terms 'artistic enspacement', exhibiting a post-black sensibility that revisits race, memory and history as racialised psycho-spatial domains, and celebrating the fluid nature of identity construction as a journey that must deconstruct race through a transatlantic crossing-over into the domain of the white to reclaim its share in history.

This paper studies postcolonial responses to prescriptive racial affiliations in contemporary America, especially the responses to the transition of 'race' from a biological to a sociocultural concept, as well as the related rejection of modernist binaries in African American writing after the 1970s.¹ In particular, African American writer, Rita Dove's first collection of poems, *The Yellow House on the Corner*² published in 1980, deconstructs race as a dynamic construct encoded in linguistic and cultural signifiers that turned ethnocentrism into a hegemonic tool rejected by poets writing towards the end of the twentieth century. Dove is conscious of structural modes of representation that build on modernist binaries, having transcended the protocols of Black nationalist writing in place when she began writing and countered the representation of history as a racialised domain in collective memory. Her poems counter the linearity of historical frames through metaphor and imagery, initiating a crossing-over into the psycho-spatial domain of the Other to explore objectification and identity in a transatlantic journey that is both real and metaphorical.

¹ Rita Dove, *The Yellow House* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon UP, 1980). Henceforth to be referred as *YHC*.

W.E.B. Du Bois, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, talked of race as a ‘social construct’, saying that ‘the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line’.² African American writing traditionally exhibited traits of Du Boisian ‘double consciousness’, ‘two warring souls in one dark body’,³ where the linearity of the gaze subscribed to the traditional notion of trapping imagery within the binaries of black/white, us/them, centre/margin, looking out from the white centre, as it were, at the fringes. In the 1990s, both Paul Gilroy and David A. Hollinger realised that this dichotomous framing of the past prevented inter-racial connections being formed, with identities having to adhere to prescriptive ethno-racial labels. While Gilroy rejected ‘absolutist conceptions of cultural difference allied to a culturalist understanding of “race” and ethnicity’, stressing ‘ties of affiliation and affect which articulated the discontinuous histories of black settlers in the new world’,⁴ Hollinger suggested postethnicity as a way to accept the realities of a multicultural society made more complex by the legacy of slavery and miscegenation, and posited that the term ‘identity’, which was static, implying what he called ‘fixity and givenness’, be replaced by voluntary ‘affiliations’,⁵ which would take into account both the legacy of the past as well as the postmodern fluidity of existence in the present. Both critics stressed the need to rethink modernity in terms of hybridity of culture and ethnicity.

A rejection of modernist binaries and a formulation of postethnic affiliations demanded a process of the recognition of gaps between fixed notions of truth and the historicity of modes of representation. Positing that Dove’s travels through Europe provide for a cultural and linguistic sensibility that is liminal in its repudiation of cultural absolutism, this study argues that her writing foreshadows a postethnic decentring of race through formulating non-prescriptive affiliations that transcend the colour line. Foregrounding history as a personal, transcultural space where frames of memory are juxtaposed to reveal the constructed nature of racially informed identities and affiliations, the poems create what Therese Steffen terms ‘artistic enspacement’.⁶ They exhibit a post-black sensibility that revisits race, memory and history as racialised psycho-spatial domains, and celebrate the fluid nature of identity construction as a journey that must deconstruct race through a transatlantic crossing-over into the domain of the white to reclaim its share in history. Dove’s own experiences in and of Europe have lent her work a metaphoric inclusiveness that causes Jerzy Kamionowski to term her a ‘cultural mulatto’,⁷ yet they remain grounded in black aesthetics enough for Helen Vendler to state that, ‘Dove shows blackness as an ever-present, unsheddable first skin of consciousness’.⁸ Using history, myth and language, Dove bridges the two in her poems to effect a transatlantic crossing.

Growing up in a period characterised by the struggle for civil rights, Dove had as early examples the intense poems of Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Langston Hughes. Subsequently, the

² W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1994) 9.

³ W.E.B. Du Bois, ‘Strivings of the Negro People,’ *The Atlantic Monthly* 80.478 (1897) 194-98.

⁴ Paul Gilroy, ‘The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity,’ *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1993) 15-16.

⁵ David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America* (New York: Basic Books, 1995) 7.

⁶ Therese Steffen, *Crossing Colour: Transcultural Space and Place in Rita Dove’s Poetry, Fiction and Drama* (Oxford UP, 2001) 28.

⁷ Jerzy Kamionowski, ‘Homeward Dove: Nomadism, “World”-Travelling, and Rita Dove’s Homecoming,’ *Crossroads. A Journal of English Studies* 3 (2013) 12.

⁸ Helen Vendler, ‘Rita Dove: Identity Markers’ *Callaloo* 17.2 (1994) 395.

post-Civil Rights era saw an intense upsurge of pride in all things African. History subscribed to ethnocentric domains, placing the trauma of slavery and post-Emancipation discrimination at the centre of a teleological narrative. Poetry reflected the times, with poets like Gwendolyn Brooks and Nikki Giovanni engaging with the socioaesthetic awareness of the age. However, this emphasis on an ethnocentric identity only succeeded in a double marginalisation, paradoxically defining African Americans as outsiders to American history and culture. In 1972, Ishmael Reed wrote of this existence on the fringes, of being forever aware of a Du Boisian ‘double consciousness’:

i am outside of
history. i wish
i had some peanuts, it
looks hungry there in
its cage.

i am inside of
history. its
hungrier than i
thot.⁹

The 1960s and 1970s relied on ethnocentrism as an essential tool for survival. However, with second-generation African Americans who had not experienced firsthand the trauma of slavery, yet had seen the debilitating effects of segregation, identity was not marked by only the call to roots. Existing in a liminal space that still carried traces of the past, the need to separate from the white normative was complicated by an unconscious appropriation of white ideals, including a negation of miscegenation, both historical and cultural. Born of the idea that racial identity must adhere to the binary of pure/impure, it turned African American ethnocentrism into a hegemonic subscription to white ideals. The celebration of Blackness turned black identity into a closed domain wherein the celebration of difference – of ‘ancient, dusky rivers’¹⁰ (Hughes 1921) – reconnects the black man to the land from which he was taken into slavery, without a trace of historicity. Hughes stresses this by saying, ‘Each human being must live within his time, with and for his people, and within the boundaries of his country.’¹¹ In stressing an ethnicity that traced its roots back to Africa, ethnocentrism not only gave credence to the concept of a homogeneous black identity that negated any trace of a white past, but also denied miscegenation to be a legacy of white practices. Consequently, it ‘hermetically sealed off’¹² black identity into a distant and imaginary past and made the black body the locus of its legacy. Arguing that double consciousness occurs when the white origins of African American identity

⁹ Ishmael Reed, ‘Dualism: in ralph ellison’s invisible man,’ *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* ed. Gates and McKay (1972) 2292.

¹⁰ Hughes, Langston, ‘The Negro Speaks of Rivers,’ *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, Eds. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel. (Vintage, 1995) 23.

¹¹ Hughes qtd. in Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes – Vol II: 1941-1967: I Dream A World* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 2002) 385.

¹² Gilroy 2.

‘Liminality and Otherness: Exploring Transcultural Space in Rita Dove’s *The Yellow House on the Corner*.’
Lekha Roy and Rano Ringo.

Transnational Literature Vol. 11 no. 1, December 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

are repressed to stress ethnocentrism, Dove repudiates the Black nationalist protocols in place when she began writing.

Thus, stating that the emphasis on Blackness only legitimises the white normative through recognition of ethno-racial blocs and the one-drop rule, Dove seeks to counter the racialisation of memory in her poetry. Following Langston Hughes and James Baldwin, she demonstrates the realisation of history as a closed domain in her transatlantic travels. In an interview, she says, 'Serious travel can heighten the awareness a writer needs to see many sides of a story'.¹³ In Europe, Dove faces for the first time the significance of black skin as a colour code, as she is both objectified as the racial Other and made representative of all who had been enslaved. For the first time, she realises how her relatively prosperous position in American society has shielded her from being exposed to a systemic hierarchy coded into skin colour; at the same time, she gains insight into history as a domain of images aimed at accentuating difference. Europe makes her aware of the reality of double consciousness in a Eurocentric narrative and the fallacy of ethnocentrism as a comprehensive identity marker in a postethnic world. Her poetry exhibits a realisation that African Americans, in claiming a closed ethnocentric identity, had alienated themselves further from the centre. Following this, the poems revisit sites in history, repudiating black cultural nationalism in favour of the individual perspective.

In her first collection of poems, *The Yellow House on the Corner*, Dove experiments with a theory of racial positioning that is in a liminal space, strongly connected to its roots yet inclusive in its rejection of binaries. The poems express the need to assert identity as black-white, positing the untenable nature of modernist binaries in a postmodern world. The collection is divided into five sections, each a juxtaposition of the past and the present, each tracing race as it moves from the sphere of the overt to the symbolic, exploring what it means to be African American in the contemporary world. History and the legacy of slavery occupy central place in the memory in each visitation.

The first section in the collection initiates a transatlantic crossing-over as Dove borrows from Japanese and European myths. The first poem in this section, titled 'This Life',¹⁴ portrays awareness of objectification and of being 'black'. As she travels through Germany, Dove becomes increasingly aware of her own alienation as her identity becomes circumscribed by the colour of her skin, making her the representative of the suffering of slaves – 'the object of cultural stereotyping'.¹⁵ The poem juxtaposes myth and reality in a frame where the two converge to expose memory as constructed through imagery. The traveller who says, 'the possibilities/ are golden tresses in a nutshell' (5-6) soon comes face to face with reality, saying of herself, 'I a stranger/ in this desert, nursing the tough skins of figs' (17-19). Righelato says of Dove, 'As a writer she turns her own estrangement to account.'¹⁶ White and black converge to portray the unchanging nature of existence for the African American – 'Our lives will be the same' (14). Exploring these as cultural motifs, the poem traces the complex nature of the transatlantic crossing that defies labelling; portrayed as remaining on the surface, the connection

¹³ Earl G. Ingersoll, ed. *Conversations with Rita Dove* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi (2003) 77.

¹⁴ *YHC* 8

¹⁵ Pat Righelato, *Understanding Rita Dove* (South Carolina: U of South Carolina P (2006) 7.

¹⁶ Righelato 8.

is superficial – ‘he had/ your face’ (13-14). The post-racial, just like the embodiment that cages African American identity in the colour of the skin, is but skin deep.

This awareness of the racialised nature of double consciousness leads Dove to explore the constructed nature of difference. The poems that follow this realisation deconstruct both European and African American history to expose trauma as a common area for both. In these poems, history functions as a symbolic spatio-temporal domain wherein trauma is neither black nor white, but a series of images. The images that inform memory at this point are deconstructed as traumatic on both sides of the Atlantic. The next poem in the collection, titled ‘The Bird Frau’,¹⁷ is a metaphoric conjoining of man and nature to emphasise the debilitating image of war as endless trauma:

She moved about the yard like an old rag bird.
Still at war, she rose at dawn, watching out
for Rudi, come home on crutches,
the thin legs balancing his atom of life. (20-23)

These images cannot be escaped even after effecting a crossing-over, both literal and metaphorical. The image of the old lady ‘still at war’ emphasises the perpetual images of war that live on in her memory and make peace delusory, as Righelato observes: ‘her wildness marks her as ideologically still at war yet as having regressed to an asocial existence’.¹⁸ She exists in a trans-temporal zone where the past and present are indistinguishable. Righelato terms ‘the ambiguity of tenses’ a ‘poignant’ exercise in blurring the borders between imagination and reality.¹⁹

In exploring images of war, trauma as black and white is shown to be the result of associated codes that inform learned behaviour. In an earlier study, Roy and Ringo assert, ‘In the case of characteristics attributed to race, sensory stimuli function in the form of visual and linguistic codes that inform learned behaviour.’²⁰ The characters in Dove’s poems deliberate the dynamics of colour and its associated images in the memory by their racial ambiguity. By invoking historical trauma as universal, the poems deconstruct racialised frames of memory on the basis of what Gilroy terms the ‘central Manichean dynamic – black and white’. This ‘typically construct[s] the nation as a homogeneous object and invoke[s] ethnicity a second time in the hermeneutic procedures deployed to make sense of its distinctive cultural content’.²¹ In her exploration of this ‘cultural insiderism’²² that informs official history, Dove deconstructs images that subscribe to the hermeneutics of disjointed racialised frames to show historical trauma as common on both sides of the colour line.

¹⁷ YHC 9

¹⁸ Righelato 9.

¹⁹ Righelato 9.

²⁰ Lekha Roy and Rano Ringo, ‘Interrogating Racialized Perceptions in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child*’, *Dialog* 29 (Spring 2016) 66.

²¹ Gilroy 1-3.

²² Gilroy 3.

The question of colour and its role in informing the identity of images is examined in Dove's next poem. 'Small Town'²³ builds on the unseen gaze that makes visible only 'the woman, indistinct, in the doorway' (3), while 'the man in the chestnut tree/ who wields the binoculars' (4-5) leaves the person inside the house without an identity. 'Someone is sitting in the red house./ There is no way of telling who it is' (1-2), says Dove, and the hegemonising nature of the gaze is stated in a clear demarcation of power: 'The man,/ whose form appears clearly among the leaves,/ is not looking at her/ so much as she at him' (14-17). The vantage point on the threshold is portrayed by the indistinct form of the woman in the doorway, and whether her presence serves to hide the person within or to give credence to the gaze without is a question that remains unanswered. The identity of both is masked, but its gendered form points to the possibility of the artist's form converging with that of the character in the poem.

Even as she deconstructs identity, Dove delves into the semiotics of historical configurations. The poem, ironically titled 'Sightseeing',²⁴ explores trauma as symbolised in myths, tracing its epistemic and linguistic origins to images in the memory. In visiting a church destroyed after the Allies bombed it, Dove talks about the impossibility of viewing history devoid of symbols. The temporal distancing of the present from the past lends the past symbolic meaning. She says,

Let's look
At the facts. Forget they are children of angels
and they become childish monsters.
Remember, and an arm gracefully upraised
is raised not in anger but a mockery of gesture. (23-27)

Inferring that history itself is a symbolic reconstruction that provides an escape from 'the vulgarity of life in exemplary size' (28-29), Dove then attempts to deconstruct the myths that prevent an objective view of the past. Her transatlantic travels have established history as racialised frames of signifiers that build on binaries. Having established trauma as a common space defining both African American and European memory, Dove shifts the focus to political leaders who dominate the frame of African American history. The next poem in the collection, titled 'Upon Meeting Don L. Lee in a Dream',²⁵ portrays the mythical Civil Rights leader as a figure whose stature is diminished as the myth surrounding him disintegrates. Her description of Lee is anything but reverent:

I can see caviar
Imbedded like buckshot between his teeth.
His hair falls out in clumps of burned-out wire.
The music grows like branches in the wind. (13-16)

²³ YHC 12

²⁴ YHC 14

²⁵ YHC 16

The poem not only deconstructs the myths that sustained the Civil Rights movement, but also seems to indicate the need to question the relevance of the ideals that sustained both the movement and black identity at the time. Righelato terms this ‘a significant artistic positioning for Dove as a young poet coming up against the established black ideology. In this early poem, Dove is separating herself from the exclusive celebration of blackness’.²⁶ The section then ends with two poems that exemplify contemporary poverty as a legacy of slavery for African Americans. The poems deconstruct the delusionary nature of the black man’s rights:

We six pile in, the engine churning ink:
We ride into the night.
Past factories, past graveyards
And the broken eyes of windows, we ride
Into the gray-green nigger night.

... In the nigger night, thick with the smell of cabbages,
Nothing can catch us.
Laughter spills like gin from glasses,
And “yeah” we whisper, “yeah”
We croon, “yeah.” (‘Nigger Song: An Odyssey’ 11-15)²⁷

Once the myth about the prominent Civil Rights leader and the legacy of the movement for African Americans has been dismantled, Dove analyses memory as a domain of select images that gain the force of truth over time. The next section in the collection examines memory as a closed domain conforming to racialised perspectives that filter all experience in the present. The first poem in the section, titled ‘Five Elephants’,²⁸ talks of the selective nature of the images that construct memory:

Five umbrellas, five
Willows, five bridges and their shadows!
They lift their trunks, hooking the sky
I would rush into, split

pod of quartz and lemon. I could say
they are five memories, but
that would be unfair.
Rather pebbles seeking refuge in the heart.
They move past me. I turn and follow,
and for hours we meet no one else. (7-16)

²⁶ Righelato 13.

²⁷ YHC 18

²⁸ YHC 20

Dove asserts that memory limits the experiential transcending of barriers. The metaphorical trunks of elephants ‘hooking the sky’ (9) permeate her sense that her African American identity is limited by the sociocultural normative. In an interview with Earl Ingersoll she observes, ‘times have changed, accelerated by great movers like Martin Luther King; and we have gone beyond the image of the cross and the metaphors of heavenly redemption.’²⁹ In the process, the constructed nature of identity formation is poignantly expressed through the image of a ‘split pod of quartz and lemon’, delineating the process by which a colourless gem is transformed into a coloured stone. This constructed identity then lodges in the heart the images that prevent its escape. In adopting the white man’s religion, the black man looked for redemption from suffering, but the cultural force of the images it carried made it a potent tool for hegemony: ‘In their despair they found metaphors for their suffering, and metaphors for transcending suffering, for spiritual survival, in the tales from the very book their oppressors cherished for the opposite reasons.’³⁰ As ‘pebbles in the heart’, they lead to more suffering, wherein ‘each funeral parlour/ is more elaborate than the last’ (‘Teach Us to Number Our Days’ 1-2).³¹

The poem, ‘Geometry’,³² sets the writer free of such constrictions. In a meticulous and exact description of the mathematics of comprehension, Dove contends that the mere realisation of the presence of systemically structured norms that inform images that in turn construe memory as distinct frames opens up a transcultural space that is heterotopic in nature. She says,

I prove a theorem and the house expands:
the windows jerk free to hover near the ceiling,
the ceiling floats away with a sigh.

As the walls clear themselves of everything
but transparency, the scent of carnations
leaves with them. I am out in the open ... (1-7)

What is noticeable is that Dove’s characters do not break free of the old mould; rather, the mould itself expands, metamorphosing, as it were, to include the changing contours of reality. Winant says that the acceptance of race as ‘a central signifier’ legitimises binaries that build on difference. He says,

Race generates an “inside” and an “outside” of society, and mediates the unclear border between these zones; all social space, from the territory of the intrapsychic to that of the U.S. “national character” is fair game for racial dilemmas, doubts, fears, and desires.³³

²⁹ Ingersoll 78.

³⁰ Ingersoll 78.

³¹ *YHC* 17

³² *YHC* 21

³³ Howard Winant, *Racial Conditions: Politics, Theory, Comparisons* (U of Minnesota P, 2002) 30.

Thus, a decentring of race would necessitate a dismantling of the images that make up memory, a process that would need the dimensions of the mind itself to expand to incorporate the inside-outside, the black-white. The concluding lines of the poem 'Geometry' corroborate this by a metaphoric unstructuring of the ceiling to effect a change in perspectives; in the poem, these are symbolised by 'windows' which then turn into winged butterflies:

I am out in the open

and above the windows have hinged into butterflies,
sunlight glinting where they've intersected.

They are going to some point true and unproven. (6-9)

The fact that the windows do not transform themselves but expand to free the speaker emphasises the central argument about memory freeing itself of racialised filters that wall in perception. The liminal nature of the space created frees the journey of utopian expectations, the destination 'true' yet 'unproven'.

A change in perception would need a realisation of the historicity of images that influence it. Hollinger, in proposing postethnicity as a way to build affiliations across the colour line, talks of the growing acceptance of historicity, that is, 'the contingent, temporally, and socially situated character of our beliefs and values, of our institutions and practices'.³⁴ Dove's poems act as the praxis to Hollinger's theory, examining closely the myths and beliefs that live on as larger-than-life truths in the memory, preventing emotional distancing. In *YHC*, she posits travelling as a way towards this distancing. As 'the ceiling floats away' in the memory, Dove revisits slavery and historical trauma without racialised filters. Each poem in this section deals with individual lives affected by slavery. The use of colloquialism in 'Belinda's Petition'³⁵ combined with an emphasis on historical authenticity in 'The Transport of Slaves from Maryland to Mississippi'³⁶ brings to the fore individual consciousnesses buried in the metanarrative of disjunctive frames of collective memory. Vendler talks of Dove's 'willingness to make her readers uneasy', yet ascribes to her poetry a 'wish to achieve historical linguistic probability'.³⁷ In terming her poetry 'relatively unsuccessful historical excursions in a lyric time-machine',³⁸ however, she misses the pattern that does not aim for historical accuracy or lyrical perfection, but uses both to light up memory built through images that are perspectival. In the space opened up by the ceiling having floated away, the contemporary reader revisits individual lives traumatised by slavery. Freed of the racialised filters that enclose the narrative in racialised domains, history is deconstructed as a narrative perpetuated by imagery.

The deconstruction of the historical metanarrative in the third section posits independence as a myth. It traces the life of a slave, and the drudgery is contrasted with the freedom in which the white master and mistress luxuriate: 'and as the fields unfold to whiteness,/ and they spill like bees among the fat flowers,/ I weep. It is not yet daylight' ('The House Slave',

³⁴ Hollinger 60.

³⁵ *YHC* 32

³⁶ *YHC* 37

³⁷ Vendler 66.

³⁸ Vendler 66.

13-15).³⁹ Later, in the poem 'The Transport of Slaves from Maryland to Mississippi',⁴⁰ Dove traces the struggle for Emancipation, and the brutality that marked the period, critiquing nineteenth-century Reason for its justification of slavery. In the poem 'The Slave's Critique of Practical Reason',⁴¹ the slave ponders his reasons for running away, and ironically finds none:

Ain't got a reason
to run away –
leastways, not one
would save my life.
So I scoop speculation
into a hopsack. (1-6)

In critiquing Reason, Dove revisits the original Black aesthetic that concluded with Henson's (un)reasoning: 'I had never dreamed of running away. I had a sentiment of honor on the subject' (166).⁴² Dove's use of black colloquial language along with a word like 'speculation', denoting the black man as a thinking individual, deconstructs the hegemonising nature of Whiteness that reduces the black man to naught but 'the Owl/ of the Broken Spirit' (18-19). Righelato observes, 'This is also a historicist enterprise, an active shaping of the poet's own modern consciousness to find through these ghostly predecessors a viable contemporary African American identity'.⁴³

However, in a reconstitution of memory in the transcultural space created by an abandoning of racialised filters, the solipsistic nature of Whiteness cannot sustain itself for long. Dove posits that Whiteness is itself dependent on the Other for its existence, and once the slave is free of the master, the master will dissolve in his own isolated world. The poem titled 'The Snow King'⁴⁴ talks of 'white spaces' (4) in 'a far far land' (1) where 'lime filled spaces' (9) are empty, bereft of 'the night as soft as antelope's eyes' (7). It is a world of destruction, where the white psyche of the perpetrator of violence 'cracked ... a slow fire, a garnet' (10). In an image resonating of the burning fires of Hell, the poem reaffirms Toni Morrison's assertion of the 'Africanism' that permeates white experience – even as the violence inflicted on the slave destroyed the white man's heart, it gave him his pure identity.⁴⁵ It is a Hegelian resolution of the fallacy of the civilising notion of slavery.

Dove's final aim in this journey is to define the power of linguistic forces where racialised formulations extend beyond the epistemic domain in which they were realised. Morrison says, 'Literature redistributes and mutates in figurative language the social conventions

³⁹ YHC 33

⁴⁰ YHC 37

⁴¹ YHC 43

⁴² Josiah Henson, 'Truth Stranger than Fiction.' *Early Negro American Writers*, Ed. Benjamin Brawly (New York: Dover, 1970) 166.

⁴³ Righelato 23.

⁴⁴ YHC 13

⁴⁵ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993) 65.

of Africanism'.⁴⁶ The final poem in Dove's collection speaks of language as a metaphorical journey that constructs reality as it progresses:

Sometimes
a word is found so right it trembles
at the slightest explanation.
You start out with one thing, end
up with another, and nothing's
like it used to be, not even the future. (17-22)

Thus, the poem and the collection end on a note of postmodern uncertainty. While offering the possibility of linguistic accuracy, it nevertheless stresses the constructed nature of narratives, and its ineffectual rendering of the past, or its reading of the future. The idea of the *trace* is negated, compounding meaning in the absence of a teleological sequence. The individual must forge his way through this linguistic (im)probability of a rendering of identity in a postethnic world.

In the quest for meaning, the collection stresses the recurring motif of the traveller, which dominates the symbolic setting free of the self from prescriptive domains of identity construction. The poems stress the quest for a new collective memory, forged through a revisiting of both black and white history, for the roots extend as much back into Europe as Africa. The journey to sites of trauma in the memory reformulates the relationship between the semantics of race and its associated images. This reformulation succeeds in breaking the link between racial identity and the historical associations that inform these images. However, the journey is liminal; Dove in no way posits the admission of the Other into this newly constructed transracial domain to be complete.

Post-Blackness stresses the liminal; Hollinger's theory of postethnicity presupposes an awareness of the structural networks that function to construct memory. As a 'fin-de-siècle artist on the threshold of a new millennium',⁴⁷ Dove initiates a journey into the psycho-spatial domain to admit the Other into this area, thus creating space for a dialogue wherein frames of memory can be juxtaposed. In the process, the forces that go into the making of these frames are analysed as constructs filtering experience. Most importantly, in foregrounding the individual, Dove gives force to Hollinger's contention that postethnicity must allow for a voluntary, individual crossing-over across boundaries of race. The process of facilitating this crossing-over must first revisit trauma and deconstruct the forces that constitute imagery as racialised. Dove follows Morrison and Walker in advocating a revisiting of traumatic wounds, but she goes further to suggest that the systemic structuring of these wounds supports systemic exploitation of slaves in the past and hinders healing in the present. She also stresses a need to counter modernist binaries that foster difference at the intrapsychic and social levels. Her first collection of poems initiates a journey that is liminal in this repudiation, existing at the threshold of a restructuring of racial identification with the past that her next collection formulates.

⁴⁶ Morrison 66.

⁴⁷ Steffen 20.

Dr Lekha Roy is a Director's Fellow at the Indian Institute of Technology, Ropar. Her areas of interest include African American writing, postcolonial and diaspora studies, gender studies, cultural studies and literary theory.

Dr Rano Ringo is an Assistant Professor of English at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Ropar. She has work experience of more than eleven years, eight of them being at her current place of work.

Works Cited

- Dove, Rita. *The Yellow House on the Corner*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon UP, 1989.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. 'Strivings of the Negro People.' *The Atlantic Monthly* 80.478 (1897) 194-98.
- . *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1994.
- Gilroy, Paul. 'The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity.' *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1993.
- Henson, Josiah. 'Truth Stranger than Fiction.' *Early Negro American Writers*. Ed. Benjamin Brawly. New York: Dover, 1970. 166-67.
- Hollinger, David A. *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*. New York: Basic Books, 1995.
- Hughes, Langston. 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers.' *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. Eds. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel. Vintage, 1995.
- Ingersoll, Earl G. ed. *Conversations with Rita Dove*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2003.
- Kamionowski, Jerzy. 'Homeward Dove: Nomadism, "World"-Travelling, and Rita Dove's Homecoming(s).' *Crossroads. A Journal of English Studies* 3 (2013) 12-21.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- Rampersad, Arnold. *The Life of Langston Hughes – Volume II: 1941-1967: I Dream a World*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford UP, 2002.
- Reed, Ishmael. 'Dualism: in ralph ellison's invisible man.' 1972. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. 2nd ed. Eds. Henry Louis Gates and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004. 2292.
- Righelato, Pat. *Understanding Rita Dove*. South Carolina: U of South Carolina P, 2006.
- Roy, Lekha and Rano Ringo. 'Interrogating Racialized Perceptions in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child*.' *Dialog* 29 (Spring 2016) 65-78.
- Steffen, Therese. *Crossing Color: Transcultural Space and Place in Rita Dove's Poetry, Fiction, and Drama*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Vendler, Helen. 'Rita Dove: Identity Markers.' *Callaloo* 17.2 (1994) 381-398.
- Winant, Howard. *Racial Conditions: Politics, Theory, Comparisons*. U of Minnesota P, 2002.

'Liminality and Otherness: Exploring Transcultural Space in Rita Dove's *The Yellow House on the Corner*.'
Lekha Roy and Rano Ringo.

Transnational Literature Vol. 11 no. 1, December 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Subramani's *Fiji Maa: A Book of a Thousand Readings* Daneshwar Sharma

Abstract

The spread of English is like the spread of the plague of insomnia in Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. At first it is convenient; English (and insomnia) frees one to work more and improve connections, but soon one realises that they are losing memories of their past and unable to have dreams of their future. Living in a present with no ties to the past and no hopes of a future, one becomes an alien, speaking an alien language. To counter this erosion of memories, one has to write, label common household objects and describe their function in black and white. Márquez's character does so, and so does Subramani in his upcoming book, *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand*. Subramani recreates the world of Girmitiyaas and their descendants; a world lost long, long ago is made alive in front of the reader's eyes with the power of his magical words. Reading this book will be like starting a journey back towards the grandparents' village. This book, yet to be published, encapsulates the history of a time which will never return. The descendants of Girmitiyaas have migrated to far off places and have lost all ties to their collective memory. *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* will remind them what they were before the 'plague' of the foreign tongue. This paper proposes that Subramani's upcoming novel should not only be supported and celebrated by the present generation but also be gifted to the coming generations by the present generation. The paper highlights the literary resurrection of a bygone culture in Subramani's novel which makes it a book of a thousand readings, ritualistic reading for the people of today and for the people to come. *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* is about digging up the long lost Girit memory. Additionally, the paper analyses the dialects and local varieties of Hindi, especially the Fiji Hindi spoken in the northern part of the Fiji Islands which is used in the novel.

Keywords: Girit, Diaspora, Collective Memory, Language Archive, Fiji Hindi, Subramani

Subramani's *Fiji Maa: A Book of a Thousand Readings*

Years from now when Fiji Hindi ceases to be a living tongue, when patois English or an Indo-Fijian language supplants it, scholars will look back at Subramani's creative output in the Fiji Hindi demotic, Indian plantation culture's singular subaltern language, as the great archive of the language and its people.¹

There are a thousand ways to read *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand*,² Subramani's upcoming novel written in Fiji Hindi. This will be Subramani's second novel in Fiji Hindi after *Dauka*

¹ Vijay Mishra, Endorsement of *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* (Subramani, Manuscript 2018).

² Subramani, *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* (forthcoming 2018).

Puraan.³ *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* has been in gestation for more than a decade and Subramani has exhausted all of his personal memories and literary acumen to meander through the lifetime of the protagonist Vedmati. The novel follows Vedmati from her early childhood, schooling and married life in a rural Labasa village to her widowed old age in urban Suva. Like a cat, Vedmati has more than one life to live. As she recounts her story, sitting by a bank on the busy streets of Suva city as a beggar, she is called Fiji Maa by Joy (another character). Subsequently, the readers get to know her names during the different stages of her life. She has been called Ved, Vedmati, Mohaniya, Lekhraaji, Goat girl, Sanka Devi and there is a story associated with each name. These narrations of her life story are scattered with histories of a no-longer-existing rural life and its people. The novel can be explored using various themes, including women's emancipation, subaltern history, the global extension of Mother India, lost rural life of the remote islands, Indian culture in a foreign land and the trauma of forced migration. This article analyses the novel as a rich linguistic archive.

Fiji Hindi has journeyed from being a necessary tool of communication to becoming the tool of literary creation. Between 1879 and 1916, about sixty-thousand Indians were brought to the Fiji Islands by the then British colonial government in India and Fiji. These people were brought as indentured labours to work in plantations of sugarcane, copra and cotton. As these Indians were from various parts of the diverse Indian subcontinent, they needed a common tongue to communicate. Gradually, the caste system dissipated among Fiji Indians⁴ and Fiji Hindi emerged as the mother tongue.⁵ Scholars termed Fiji Hindi as a unique linguistic entity of Fiji Indians, developed by mixing various varieties of Hindi, with borrowed English and the native Fijian language iTaukei.^{6 7} The varieties of Hindi like the Awadhi and Western Bhojpur along with the Hindustani had maximum influence in supplying the Fiji Hindi with linguistic attributes.⁸ However the uniqueness and distinguishing factor of the Fiji Hindi from the Standard Hindi and all its Indian varieties lies in the situational factor (indenture and plantations) and linguistic interaction with the native Fijian language iTaukei and English.⁹ The uniqueness and distinction of Fiji Hindi was being noticed as early as 1929 when W.J. Hands wrote that 'A form of Hindustani, hardly recognised by the newcomer from India, is becoming the common language of Hindu and Tamil alike.'¹⁰ The efforts to do research work and document Fiji Hindi started with Moag's basic course on Fiji Hindi at the Australian National University in 1977.¹¹

³ Subramani, *Dauka Puraan* (New Delhi, India: Star Publications, 2001).

⁴ Chandra Jayawardena, 'The Disintegration of Caste in Fijian Indian Rural Society,' Eds. L.R. Hiatt and C. Jayawardena, *Anthropology in Oceania: Essays Presented to Ian Hogbin* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971).

⁵ Jeff Siegel, 'Indian Languages in Fiji: Past, Present and Future,' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 21.sup001 (1998) 181-214.

⁶ Rodney F. Moag, *Fiji Hindi: A Basic Course and Reference Grammar* (Canberra: Australian National U P/Suva, Fiji: Extension Services, U of the South Pacific, 1977).

⁷ Jeff Siegel, 'Fiji Hindustani,' *Working Papers in Linguistics, University of Hawaii* 7.3 (1975) 127-30.

⁸ Jeff Siegel, *Language Contact in a Plantation Environment*. Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language. 1987 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009).

⁹ Margaret Kamla Kumar, 'Diglossia and its Practice in Multilingual Fiji,' *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 4.3 (2001) 181-96.

¹⁰ Jeff Siegel, 'Indian Languages in Fiji: Past, Present and Future,' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 21.sup001 (1998) 149.

¹¹ Moag, *Fiji Hindi*.

Siegel wrote two books on the linguistic features of Fiji Hindi in 1977 and 1987 (*Say It in Fiji Hindi*¹² and *Language Contact in a Plantation Environment: A Sociolinguistic History of Fiji*).¹³

However, despite the research and scholarly work done in Fiji Hindi, it remained a preliterate vernacular.¹⁴ The education and formal work is still done in Standard Hindi, despite the fact that Fiji Hindi, not the Standard Hindi, is used outside the classroom. Although there was a time when Fiji Hindi was discarded as a slang, as a newspaper article proclaimed that 'There is no such language as Fiji Hindi',¹⁵ now Fiji Hindi has more acceptance in fourth and fifth generation Indians in Fiji. Fiji Hindi has become a sign of national identity.¹⁶ The literary creation in Fiji Hindi was done using English alphabet by Raymond Pillay (*Adhuraa Sapna*),¹⁷ and *Daukaa Puraan*¹⁸ was the first literary work to use Fiji Hindi in Devanagari script. The reaction to Subramani's *Daukaa Puraan* is the epitome of the Fiji Indian community's reaction towards Fiji Hindi. In the same journal issue of *Fijian Studies, a Journal of Contemporary Fiji* (1.1), one reviewer terms the use of Fiji Hindi as 'a collection of slang and vulgarity'¹⁹ and another reviewer hails the novel as a commendable feat in Fiji Hindi.²⁰ The place of Fiji Hindi in the Indo-Fijian community is changing as more and more people are using Fiji Hindi (in Devanagari script) for literary creation. Recently a short story collection written in Fiji Hindi Devanagari script was published.²¹ As Fiji Hindi is getting recognised as a language of literary creation, the publication of the second novel by Subramani *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* would be another milestone in the journey of Fiji Hindi.

There are a thousand stories of a language's struggle to survive, to exist. The way one talks over dinner with friends or family, the way one tells bedtime stories to their children is different from the way the Queen speaks. If one loses this distinct, familial way of speech, one loses something very personal: the culture associated with the language. James Kelman, the 1994 Booker Prize winner, said in his acceptance speech, 'My culture and my language have a right to exist.'²² Just because his novel, *How Late it was, How Late*, was written in working class Scottish dialect, one of the judges, Rabbi Julia Neuberger, avowed, 'Frankly, it's crap.'²³ Another critic, Simon Jenkins, declared the award to Kelman's book an act of 'literary vandalism'.²⁴ The novel was awarded for its experiments

¹² Jeff Siegel, *Say it in Fiji Hindi* (Sydney: Pacific Publications, 1977).

¹³ Siegel, *Language Contact* (1987, re-issue 2009).

¹⁴ Nikhat Shameem and John Read, 'Administering a Performance Test in Fiji Hindi,' *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics. Supplement Series* 13.1 (1996) 80-104.

¹⁵ Hazrat Adam, Letter to editor, *Fiji Sun* (26 March 1988).

¹⁶ Kumar, 'Diglossia.'

¹⁷ Raymond C. Pillai, 'Adhura Sapna (A Shattered Dream),' *Language Transplanted: The Development of Overseas Hindi*. Eds. Richard K. Barz and Jeff Siegel (Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988) 221-55.

¹⁸ Subramani, *Dauka Puraan*.

¹⁹ Rameshwar Prasad, 'Review of the Book Dauka Puraan,' *Fijian Studies, A Journal of Contemporary Fiji* 1.1 (2003) 216.

²⁰ Som Prakash, 'The Linguistic Wheel Coming Full Circle: A Review of Dauka Puraan.' *Fijian Studies, A Journal of Contemporary Fiji* 1.1 (2003) 209-14.

²¹ Praveen Chandra, Ed., *Koi Kissa Batav: Fiji Hindi Me Kuch Kahani (Tell a Tale: Some Stories in Fiji Hindi)* (Brisbane, Australia: Carindale Publishing, 2018).

²² Lesley Mcdowell, 'James Kelman: Look Back in Anger,' *Independent*, 20 May 2004. Accessed 15 Feb 2017. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/james-kelman-look-back-in-anger-61351.html>>.

²³ Mcdowell, 'James Kelman.'

²⁴ Mcdowell, 'James Kelman.'

with vernacular speech and internal monologue,²⁵ but this natural vernacular sounded 'monotonous, unpunctuated, and foulmouthed' to other critics. Kelman's use of Lowland Scots and Glaswegian dialect, different from 'received pronunciation' or 'educated speech', was derided by elite critics. The elite declared Kelman 'an illiterate savage'.²⁶ Sir Kingsley Amis in his book, *The King's English*, calls it 'the last and least of the big fuck-novels'.²⁷ The rant about Kelman's work is similar to the kind of treatment Subramani received from the purists when he wrote his first novel in Fiji Hindi. *Dauka Puraan* has been called a tragic mistake as it tries to elevate slang as a language.²⁸ On the other hand, Brij Lal called the publication of the novel in Fiji Hindi 'an important event in the literary and cultural history of the Indo-Fijian community in particular, and of Fiji in general'.²⁹ What the purists miss is the motive of the writers of dialects and vernaculars. Writers like Kelman and Subramani want to preserve a way of life; they want to keep a record of the fast eroding or already eroded ethos of a people in their own language. Kelman writes about 'the class into which he was born in 1946: about bus conductors, street sweepers, night-shift workers, the unemployed, small-time criminals, men waiting for scrawny unemployment checks and hopeless job interviews'.³⁰

Similarly, Subramani's choice of language also stems from the kind of people he portrays, people 'of unremarkable social pedigree, unpretentious, certainly not among the movers and shakers of society'.³¹ Subramani's decision to use the Fijian variety of Hindi is guided by his desire to portray life within the subaltern section of Fijian society.

If Kelman and Subramani are the contemporary examples of this attitude towards subaltern languages and dialects, Mark Twain is the classical example of this purist and elite crusade. Now there are Mark Twain Centennial celebrations all over the world and books written on his literary genius and use of dialects, but there was a time when his books were banned from libraries. The Concord (Mass.) Public Library, just after the publication of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1885, banned the book, saying that 'with a series of experiences not elevating, the whole book being more suited to the slums than to intelligent, respectable people'.³² In his introduction to *The Annotated Huckleberry Finn*, Michael Patrick Hearn writes that Twain 'could be uninhibitedly vulgar'.³³ However, much later, the world realised that it was Twain's use of dialect which enabled the readers to experience the novel as a living literature. This use of dialect made Ernest Hemingway proclaim that all modern American literature comes from this one book, *Huckleberry Finn*.³⁴

²⁵ James Wood, 'Away Thinking About Things: James Kelman's Fighting Words,' *The New Yorker*, 25 Aug. 2014. Accessed 15 Feb 2017. <<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/08/25/away-thinking-things>>.

²⁶ Wood, 'Away Thinking About Things.'

²⁷ Wood, 'Away Thinking About Things.'

²⁸ Prasad 216.

²⁹ Brij V. Lal, 'Dauka Puraan (Review),' *The Contemporary Pacific* 15.1 (2003) 226.

³⁰ Wood, 'Away Thinking About Things.'

³¹ Lal 227.

³² Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (Oxford UP: New York, 1993) 115.

³³ Michael Patrick Hearn in Mark Twain, *The Annotated Huckleberry Finn: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Tom Sawyer's Comrade)*. Ed. Michael Patrick Hearn. Annotated edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001) 9.

³⁴ Ernest Hemingway, *Hills of Africa*. Scribner classics ed. (New York, NY: Scribner, 1935) 22.

What Philip Larkin³⁵ has said about the preservation role of the arts in general could be applied to the writers of dialect and the vernacular. Accordingly, the decision to use a dialect or to write in the vernacular arises from the natural human instinct to preserve what is dear, to safeguard what might disappear in the future. Subramani is guided by this human instinct. Most of the writers of dialect and the vernacular are waging a war against memory loss and extinction. Dialect is the language used by the people of a specific area, class, district or any other group of people.³⁶ Upon this dialect, this personal, contextualised use of language, when a language in its purest form is forced, it acts like the plague of insomnia in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez (1991). At first the lingua franca is convenient. The plague of insomnia frees up the night time to work more. The enforced Master's language connects globally; it replaces specific, personal and contextual with the universal. But soon one realises what the plague takes back from one hand when it gives in another. The victims of the plague of insomnia have a lot of time to work but they start forgetting their past. They lose the sense of time and things. The victims, without the memories of the past, sink into a kind of idiocy. Márquez has described this state as:

... when the sick person became used to his state of vigil, the recollection of his childhood began to be erased from his memory, then the name and notion of things, and finally the identity of people and even the awareness of his own being, until he sank into a kind of idiocy that had no past.³⁷

The lack of sleep is similar to the lack of one's own language. With the loss of attachment with the language, one also loses all the conversations one has had in that language, and all the dreams one has seen in that language. With fading memories of the past and no hope for the future, one's present becomes a long, boring day which has no end. As the characters in Márquez's novel start forgetting the names and uses of things, they start creating a primitive encyclopedia with entries about each and every thing. They paste labels on everything: 'table, chair, clock, door, wall, bed, pan'.³⁸ However, soon they realise that the signs have to be more explicit. To hold fast to the reality that was slipping away, one character hangs a sign on the neck of the cow that reads, 'This is the cow. She must be milked every morning so that she will produce milk, and the milk must be boiled in order to be mixed with coffee to make coffee and milk.'³⁹

Subramani is also trying to find remedies for this erosion of memories because of the lack of a language. When the purists thrust a very formal Hindi in his throat, trying to choke the voices in his head, he writes, he labels things in his own dialect, lest he forgets. Otherwise the generation to come would forget what a cow is, the meaning of the word 'आजी' (grandmother), and all the memories associated with it:

³⁵ Philip Larkin, *Letters to Monica* (New York: Faber & Faber, 2011).

³⁶ 'Dialect,' *literarydevices.net*, 15 Feb. 2017. <<https://literarydevices.net/dialect/>>.

³⁷ Gabriel Garcia Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991) 45.

³⁸ Marquez 48.

³⁹ Marquez 48.

आजी चिडिया बिलकुल नई आय दे अंगना में। अमरुद के डंडा से खेदा करी। कुवां के लगे कांटा वाला झाड़ी में बबली चिडिया चहचहाहट मचाय जइसे आजी के गरिआय। कभी कभी चिडिया सबेरे सबेरे मूंड खाय लगे जइसे आजी उठे। आजी गरिआई कचपचिया सुरु कर दिहिस आपन राग।⁴⁰

The grandmother does not let the sparrow roam around on the veranda. Whenever the bird would try to venture into the veranda, she would use guava tree's stick to hit the sparrow. The bird would fly to the thorny bush by the well and make a horrendous cry from there as if it is scolding the grandmother. Sometimes the sparrow would start chirping angrily as soon as the grandmother would get up in the morning. The grandmother would also give a fittingly angry reply to the sparrow. The entire morning would be spent in this verbal dual between the grandmother and the sparrow.

*Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand*⁴¹ is also a precious collection of the peculiarities of the people of a long-gone era, so that in the future, it shall become a document of immense historical and sociological importance as the rituals, practices and customs of the rural society would be found only here. There was a strange belief associated with breech birth in the Indian and Indo-Fijian communities that a back pain or stomach ache can be cured if the patient gets a kick from somebody who has had a breech birth. The following passage from Subramani's novel captures the nuances of such a belief:

सब जगहा पीठी देखाय लिया ओझा देखावा पीर बाबा के देखावा पीरा सारा जाते न। बोला चली तियागी के लडकी से लात मरवाय लेई लडकिया उल्टा पइदा भई है। कोई के कमर पिराय नस चढ जाय नाडा बइठारे के रहे अइहें लात मरवाय। हम खुसी खुसी ढेकी पे बइठ के चलाई लात। लात खाय वाले पीछे घूम के नई तकिहें सीधे घरे लउटिहें। दूसर रोज संदेसी आय के बताई दुखिया कि केतना अराम मिला बहुत आसिरबाद दिहिन लडकी के।⁴²

The back pain would not be cured after visits to Hindu and Muslim healers. Somebody suggested to get a kick on the back from Tyagi's daughter as she was born in breech position.

⁴⁰ Subramani, *Fiji Maa* 179.

⁴¹ Subramani, *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* (forthcoming 2018).

⁴² Subramani, *Fiji Maa* 182.

Anybody who has nerve pain or back pain would come to me for getting a kick. I would also give a kick to them happily. The persona after getting the kick would not turn back and look at me; they are supposed to head back home after getting the kick. Next day, the messenger would come and inform us about the relief the person got after the kick and how they were blessing me for the relief.

In Fiji there has been a 'dramatic decline in the growth rate of the Indian component of the population after 1966'.⁴³ (27) Even the Fiji Bureau of Statistics calls it 'the exodus of Indians from the rural sector of Labasa Tikina'.⁴⁴ The sugar cane farming and the culture and lifestyle associated with it have been on the verge of extinction. Internal migration, that is, from rural to urban within Fiji, and external migration to the USA, the UK, Australia, New Zealand and other first world countries, have shaken the community's roots. Subramani's novel is an effort to save something for the coming generations. The former Labasa boy Brij Lal highlights the importance of the past in the context of Girit history in Fiji: 'Perception of the future is always fortified by knowledge of the past.'⁴⁵ As time will pass these urges to have knowledge of the past will become stronger and stronger. For now, Lal says that 'the quest often remains unrealised'⁴⁶ due to lack of information and relevant literature. *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* is a storehouse of answers for anybody looking for a sense of the long-gone era. Snippets of the village life of the northern part of the Fiji Islands can be found in the novel. One such passage is quoted below:

हम लोग के घर से स्कूल आधा घंटा के रस्ता है। गन्ना के माथा से होई के पहाड के दांती पकडे के पडे। रस्ता के किनारे गन्ना कट्टइया लोग एक पलिया घर बनाय के रहें। टोला से आगे लकड़ी वाला पुल है। बडा नइबी पेड के छाई में नीचे पानी करिया से लगे। डर लगे पानी ताको। पुल पे गोड रखते देहीं कांपे लगे। पटरा दूर दूर पे है। जब बरखा होय पुल पे पानी चढे लगे तो बस घरे बइठो। स्कूल पुल से दस मिनिट के दूरी पे है। बाप बोले पहिले स्कूल फूस के रहा। लडकन उंगरी से बालू में लिखत रहिन। मास्टर इंडिया वाला साधू। सुन के हंसी लगे साधू मास्टर सम्स अउर इंगलिस पढाय अउर लिखो उंगरी से बालू में अब तो टीन लकड़ी के स्कूल होई गय। स्कूल के आगे पीछे चिक्कन से मट्टी पटान अउर जगहा जगहा बडा फूल के पेड। जब लाल अउर पियर फूल फुलाय

⁴³ 2007 Fiji Census of Population and Housing Analytical (Suva, Fiji: Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

⁴⁴ 2007 Fiji Census of Population and Housing Analytical 36.

⁴⁵ Brij V. Lal, 'Slavery Theory Goes Out of Indenture Definition,' *Indian News Link* (14 May 2014a). <<http://www.indiannewslink.co.nz/slavery-theory-goes-out-of-indenture-definition/>>.

⁴⁶ Brij V. Lal, 'Fijians Remember Giritiyas with Reverence,' *Indian News Link* (15 May 2014b). <<http://www.indiannewslink.co.nz/fijians-remember-giritiyas-with-reverence/>>.

जमीन पे गिरा रहे स्कूल पहुंचते दिल खुसी कर दे। जनाय गांव नई कोई अउर जगहा है।⁴⁷

Our school is at half-an-hour's time from our home. After crossing the sugarcane farm, one has to tackle the hill's treacherous way. The sugarcane cutters live by the road in shanties. Further to the shanties of the sugarcane cutters is a wooden bridge. Under the big Naibi (Tahitian chestnut or Polynesian chestnut) tree's shade, the water would seem darkened. To look at the water would be frightening. The entire body would start shaking the moment one would step on the bridge. The wooden planks on the bridge are at considerable distance. During heavy rains, the bridge would disappear in water and we would stay at home. The school is at a distance of time minutes walkway from the bridge. Our father told us that earlier the school was made of grass. At that time one had to write in the sand using their finger. During our father's schooling days, the teacher was a monk from India. We laugh whenever our father tells us about the teacher from India teaching sums and English by writing in the sand with fingers. Now the school is made of tin-shade and wooden planks. The grounds at the front and back of the school are levelled and numerous, large trees of flowers are planted around the school. In the morning when we would reach the school, it would be a very pleasant sight of flowers laying on the grounds around the school. It seemed as if we have reached a new village.

Further, the styles of fictional naturalism like Plato and Aristotle's theory of mimesis and Dryden's *Dryden: An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* also govern this choice of language.⁴⁸ The kind of characters and settings Subramani has in his novel would sound very unnatural and odd if they are written in the Queen's English or Standard Hindi. However, in order to join the winning band of the Queen's English, more and more critics and creative artists are abandoning this naturalism of language. The film *Slumdog Millionaire*⁴⁹ is a perfect example of the unnatural use of language. In the film, beggars and other such uneducated persons speak immaculate English in perfect British accents. Despite this incongruity, the film won eight Oscars including the Best Picture, Best Director and Best Screenplay. But all these awards did not stop critics from pointing out the 'profoundly dehumanizing view of the poor' in the film⁵⁰. One aspect of this dehumanisation is the use of English in conversations between people who could not have used English in their humanised life. Smitha Radhakrishnan says that the film is full of slip-ups 'of which the most glaring was the language. ... it is highly implausible that they would come out of that experience speaking perfect British English'.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Subramani, *Fiji Maa* 191-92.

⁴⁸ See John Dryden, *Dryden: An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. (New York: BiblioLife, 2009); Gerald F. Else, *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry* (Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1986).

⁴⁹ *Slumdog Millionaire*, dir. Danny Boyle, prod. Christian Colson, Fox Searchlight Pictures, Celador Films, Film4, 2008. English.

⁵⁰ Mitu Sengupta, 'Slumdog Millionaire's Dehumanizing View of India's Poor,' *Weekend Edition* (20 Feb. 2009).

⁵¹ Smitha Radhakrishnan, 'Slumdog Sincerity,' *UCLA International Institute*, 28 Nov. 2008. Accessed 19 Dec. 2018. <<http://international.ucla.edu/institute/article/101268>>.

However, in the world of written words, there has been an inclination towards using language according to the region, social class and background of the character. In fact, in a number of books, the special use of vernacular and dialects render the text's worth. James Joyce's *Ulysses*⁵² is celebrated for its use of phonetic spellings, Irish idioms and literal translations from Gaelic into English. The Irish dialect has been celebrated in numerous books. Rodney Edwards wrote his book *Sure, Why Would Ye Not?: Two Oul Fellas Put the World to Rights*⁵³ about the Irish community and lifestyle in Irish dialect. For him the native tongue and dialect is part of its rich culture and diverse heritage. It has to be written in the Irish dialect as the book is written to the Irish people about growing up, about the family life and Irish country ways.⁵⁴ The distinct Southern culture has been reflected in many books written in Southern dialect including Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding* and William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* are some more examples of the use of Southern dialect.⁵⁵ If Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*⁵⁶ was written without the subtle touches of the Southern uneducated white community's way of speaking, and if Harper Lee had used pure, Queen's English, the novel might not have become a classic.

Similarly, the contextualised and local form of English in the literature produced in South Asia, Africa and the Caribbean are dialects of English in their own right. The writers who live far away from the land of Queen's English approximate the English language according to their context and usage. Creole in these countries is often a mix of modified English and local languages. The approximation is done by modifying the rhythmic pattern, being playful with the words and spellings, fusing words, coining new words by transliteration. In this way, as Mitul Trivedi suggests, 'contextualization of English language in art makes the language more exotic to its context-based usages'.⁵⁷ (2) New literary terms have been coined for this linguistic phenomenon. The newly invented language, with heavy influence of the vernacular and local dialect, has been called acculturation/appropriation/nativisation/domestication of Standard English. Salman Rushdie in his book *Midnight's Children* calls it chutnification of English. Rushdie does this with the perspective that, 'The language like much else in the newly independent societies, needs to be decolonised, to be remade in other images.'⁵⁸ This ingenious use of English language won *Midnight's Children* the prestigious Booker Prize and the best all-time prize winners in 1993 and 2008 to celebrate the Booker Prize 25th and 40th anniversaries. The culture has a recognisable impact on the creative use and experiments with the language in the literary texts. The author has a liberty to customise the language lexically, syntactically, semantically and stylistically to present their culture, the time, age, class (and so on) in their text. In fact, in the post-colonial era, literary authors have been acknowledged and acclaimed for their

⁵² James Joyce and Sam Slote, *Ulysses* (Richmond: Alma Classics, 2012).

⁵³ Rodney Edwards, *Sure, Why Would Ye Not?: Two Oul Fellas Put the World to Rights* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2015). See Rodney Edwards, 'A Quare Spake: A Celebration of Irish Rural Dialect, So It Is,' *Irish Times* (26 Oct. 2015). <<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/a-quare-spake-a-celebration-of-irish-rural-dialect-so-it-is-1.2406276>>.

⁵⁴ Edwards, 'A Quare Spake.'

⁵⁵ Eudora Welty, *Delta Wedding* (New York: Mariner Books, 1979); William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Penguin Random House LLC, 1966).

⁵⁶ Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2002).

⁵⁷ Mitul Trivedi, 'Critical Reflections on South Asian English: A Literary Perspective,' *New Academia: An International Journal of English Language Literature and Literary Theory* 2.4 (2013) 2.

⁵⁸ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Vintage Books, 2010).

experimentation with the Standard English language according to their contextualised worldview.

However, if a writer like Subramani tries to do the same kind of experimentation with Standard Hindi for the representation of his contextualised worldview, his experimentation is not accepted. Writers like Rushdie are praised for experimentation in English language as he ‘has liberated Indian English ... from its false Puritanism, its fake gentility’.⁵⁹ (160). Agnes Scott Langeland claims that Rushdie’s impure English ‘helps to establish a wider ethnocentric base for the English language by creating a magical and humorous Indian blend of English’.⁶⁰ *Midnight’s Children* (2010) might not have been as successful if it was written in standard Queen’s English. The use of dialect and vernacular is guided by the writer’s desire to bring the text closer to the people about whom the writer is writing. Because of this primary logic languages have dialects, and because of this desire writers like Tulsidas choose Eastern Hindi or Awadhi instead of Sanskrit or Standard Hindi when they retell a story. Dialects and vernaculars are used to give the standard, formal language a personal touch. The 2001 Census of the Government of India records at least 50 dialects of Hindi. Prominent among them are Awadhi, Bagheli, Bhojpuri, Bundeli, Haryanavi, Kanaui and Khari Boli.⁶¹ All these dialects share the Devanagari script. These dialects are named, generally, after the region in which they are spoken and yet all these dialects use the lexical, semantic and syntactical features of Standard Hindi.

The beauty of *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* lies in the fact that Subramani dexterously captures the nuances of the dialect spoken in the northern part of the Fiji Islands. As Rushdie has widened the ethnocentric base for English by inventing a magical and humorous Indian blend of English, as Tulsidas has brought the Ramayaan narrative closer to the common people by using the people’s dialect instead of the Vedic Sanskrit or literary Hindi, so has Subramani done the same and more for Hindi by reproducing the dialect of the northern Fiji Islands. In the process of recording the dialect, Subramani has shown that dialects ‘develop alongside standard varieties, not apart from them’.⁶² He uses the script and basic lexical, syntactic and semantic rules of Standard Hindi while writing his novel in Fiji Hindi. Varieties and dialects of language have been defined not as bastardisation of the standard language but as variations upon the basic plan of the language.⁶³ In the extracts quoted below from Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Tulsidas’s *Śrī Rāmacaritamānasa* and Subramani’s *Fiji Maa*, the use of Standard English and Standard Hindi is visible, which shows that the variations of the language are respecting, following and celebrating the standard, formal language but in a personal, contextualised way:

I stay, my sirs. Here I know names of birds and plants. Ho yes. I am Deshmukh by name; vendor of notions by trade. I sell many so-fine thing. You want? Medicine for constipation, damn good, ho yes. I have. Watch you want, glowing in the dark? I also

⁵⁹ Rustom Bharucha, ‘Rushdie’s Whale,’ *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, Ed. M.D. Fletcher (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994) 160.

⁶⁰ Agnes Scott Langeland, ‘Rushdie’s Language,’ *English Today* 12.1 (1996) 21.

⁶¹ *Census 2001, Statement 5* (India: Government of India, 2001).

⁶² John McWhorter, *Spreading the Word: Language and Dialect in America* (USA: Heinemann, 2000) 7.

⁶³ McWhorter ix.

have. And book ho yes, and joke trick, truly. I was famous in Dacca before. Ho yes, most truly. No shoot.⁶⁴

जड चेतन गुन दोषमय बिस्व कीन्ह करतार ।

संत हंस गुन गहहिं पय परिहरि बारि बिकार ।।

jaRa cetana guna doṣamaya bisva kīnha karatāra,
saṁta haṁsa guna gahahī paya parihari bāri bikāra.⁶⁵ (11).

God has created the universe consisting of animate and inanimate beings as partaking of both good and evil; swans in the form of saints imbibe the milk of goodness rejecting water in the form of evil.

जानत हवु हम अधिकारी के हिया अंगनवा में बइठु अधिकारी हम्मे भित्तर बुलाइस । एक बक्सा के रकम मसीन धरानु बोले ऐके सुनो । चाभी अंइठिसु ससुरा बक्सा बताय लगा कउन कहाँ मरु आज के मौसम का है कब घाट पे जहाज लगी । हम तो सुन के चकडिआय गवा । हद होई गयु बक्सा सारा सब खबर बाटे । अधिकारी समझाइस यही के बोले रेडियो । हम तो सोचा बक्सवा के भित्तर कोई लुका बइठा है । अधिकारी खूब हंसिस बात हमार सुन के । वालिसतार के कमाल तो देख लियु पता नई अउर का का होय वाला है । साइत एक टेम आई चाभी अंइठो खाना टेबल पे ।⁶⁶

Do you know, I was sitting in veranda at Adhikari and he called me inside. He asked me to listen to a box like machine. He turned some nob in the box and it started to tell who died where, what would be today's weather and when would the ship dock at the port. I got confused after listening to the box. It was too much, now the box would spread the news. Adhikari told me that the machine was called a radio. I suspected somebody was hiding inside the box. Adhikari laughed a lot when I told him about my suspicions. I have seen the wonders of telegraphy. What new inventions are going to happen, nobody knows. Maybe one day one will twist a nob and food would be served at the table.

Even a casual reading of the extracts shows how the writers are inventing off-shoots of formal, standard versions of the language (English and Hindi) for their special literary and linguistic needs. Tulsidas retold the tale of Ramanayana written in Sanskrit in a more live and conversational language Awadhi; Rushdie used every possibility to bring the local colours in his

⁶⁴ Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 372.

⁶⁵ Tulsidas, *Rāmacaritamānasa* (Gorakhpur, UP, India: Gita Press) 11.

⁶⁶ Subramani, *Fiji Maa* 496-97.

narrative through an inventive use of language; and Subramani's *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* is also written in Fiji Hindi, the language of the novel's characters and primary readers, of whom many are living in Fiji.

On this relationship among languages and their varieties, especially for Hindi, Mrinal Pande writes that 'like the Ganga River, Hindi language too picks up local colour and character as its several tributaries flow, branching out into streams, constantly evolving as they assimilate local dialects – Urdu, Farsi and even English – into their own flow'.⁶⁷ The evolving dialects of Hindi showcase the democratic nature of the language. Unlike Sanskrit, 'a stereotyped literary language which has not been allowed by grammarians to grow and multiply and bring forth children',⁶⁸ Hindi has a vast family tree with branches spreading in all corners of India and the globe through diasporic writing. The Standard Hindi would always be promoted in the formal usage and practice. However, as local varieties of Standard Hindi flourished in India, producing texts and a rich oral literature, Fiji Hindi should also be accepted and encouraged alongside the Standard Hindi for its cultural, social and literary value.

However, as local varieties of Standard Hindi have flourished in India, producing texts like *Padmavat* and *Śrī Rāmacaritamānasa* and a rich oral literature, Fiji Hindi should also be accepted and encouraged alongside the Standard Hindi for its cultural, social and literary value. The culture has a recognisable impact on the creative use and experiments with the language in the literary texts. The author has a liberty to customise the language lexically, syntactically, semantically and stylistically to present their culture, the time, age, class (and so on) in their text. In fact, in the post-colonial era, the literary authors have been acknowledged and acclaimed for their experimentation with the Standard English language according to their contextualised worldview. If in English, experimentation, contextualisation and localisation are accepted and appreciated, why not in Hindi?

Daneshwar Sharma is working with Jaipuria Institute of Management, Jaipur, India as Associate Professor in Business Communication. He had worked as an Assistant Professor in the College of Humanities and Education, Fiji National University, Fiji Islands for three years. He has 11 years of teaching experience in India and Fiji. He is the author and editor of books and research articles in English and recently contributed to the short story collection in Fiji Hindi, *Koi Kissa Batav: Fiji Hindi Me Kuch Kahani* (Tell a Tale: Some Stories in Fiji Hindi).

Works Cited

2007 *Fiji Census of Population and Housing Analytical*. Suva, Fiji: Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2012.

Adam, Hazrat. Letter to editor, *Fiji Sun* 26 March 1988.

⁶⁷ Mrinal Pande, 'Dear "Purists", Hindi Is Not Being Diluted, It Is Just Evolving,' *The Quint*, 26 Sept. 2016. Accessed 20 Jan 2017. <<https://www.thequint.com/opinion/2016/09/26/dynamic-and-democratic-dear-purists-let-the-hindi-language-grow-literature-pakhwada-divas-english>>.

⁶⁸ Pande.

Subramani's *Fiji Maa: A Book of a Thousand Readings*. Daneshwar Sharma. *Transnational Literature* Vol. 11 no. 1, December 2018. <http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

- Bharucha, Rustom. 'Rushdie's Whale.' *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*. Ed. M.D. Fletcher. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994. 159-71.
- Slumdog Millionaire*. dir. Danny Boyle, prod. Christian Colson. Fox Searchlight Pictures, Celador Films, Film4, 2008. English.
- Census 2001, Statement 5*. India: Government of India, 2001. Accessed 20 Dec. 2018. <http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/Census_Data_Online/Language/Statement5.aspx>.
- Chandra, Praveen, Ed. *Koi Kissa Batav: Fiji Hindi Me Kuch Kahani (Tell a Tale: Some Stories in Fiji Hindi)*. Brisbane, Australia: Carindale Publishing, 2018.
- 'Dialect.' *literarydevices.net*. Accessed 15 Feb. 2017. <<https://literarydevices.net/dialect/>>.
- Dryden, John. *Dryden: An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. New York: BiblioLife, 2009.
- Edwards, Rodney. 'A Quare Spake: A Celebration of Irish Rural Dialect, So It Is.' *Irish Times*. 26 Oct. 2015. Accessed 15 Jan. 2017. <<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/a-quare-spake-a-celebration-of-irish-rural-dialect-so-it-is-1.2406276>>.
- . *Sure, Why Would Ye Not?: Two Oul Fellas Put the World to Rights*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2015.
- Else, Gerald F. *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry*. Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1986.
- Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Penguin Random House LLC, 1966.
- Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *Green Hills of Africa*. Scribner classics ed. New York, NY: Scribner, 1935.
- Jayawardena, Chandra. 'The Disintegration of Caste in Fijian Indian Rural Society.' *Anthropology in Oceania: Essays Presented to Ian Hogbin*. Eds. L.R. Hiatt and C. Jayawardena. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971.
- Joyce, James, and Sam Slote. *Ulysses*. 1922. Richmond: Alma Classics, 2012.
- Kelman, James. *How Late It Was, How Late*. New York, NY: Delta Trade Paperbacks, 1996.
- Kumar, Margaret Kamla. 'Diglossia and its Practice in Multilingual Fiji.' *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 4.3 (2001). 181-96.
- Lal, Brij V. 'Dauka Puraan (Review).' *The Contemporary Pacific* 15.1 (2003) 226-29.
- . 'Slavery Theory Goes Out of Indenture Definition.' *Indian News Link*. 14 May 2014a. <<http://www.indiannewslink.co.nz/slavery-theory-goes-out-of-indenture-definition/>>.
- . 'Fijians Remember Girmityas with Reverence.' *Indian News Link*. 15 May 2014b. Accessed 15 Feb 2017. <<http://www.indiannewslink.co.nz/fijians-remember-girmityas-with-reverence/>>.
- Langeland, Agnes Scott. 'Rushdie's Language.' *English Today* 12.1 (1996) 16-22.
- Larkin, Philip. *Letters to Monica*. New York: Faber & Faber, 2011.
- Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2002.
- Márquez, Gabriel García. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991.
- McDowell, Lesley. 'James Kelman: Look Back in Anger.' *Independent*. 20 May 2004. Accessed 15 Feb. 2017. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/james-kelman-look-back-in-anger-61351.html>>.
- McWhorter, John. *Spreading the Word: Language and Dialect in America*. USA: Heinemann, 2000.
- Moag, Rodney F. *Fiji Hindi: A Basic Course and Reference Grammar*. Canberra: Australian National U P/Suva, Fiji: Extension Services, U of the South Pacific, 1977.

- Pande, Mrinal. "Dear 'Purists,' Hindi Is Not Being Diluted, It Is Just Evolving.' *The Quint*. 26 Sept. 2016. Accessed 20 Jan. 2017 <<https://www.thequint.com/opinion/2016/09/26/dynamic-and-democratic-dear-purists-let-the-hindi-language-grow-literature-pakhwada-divas-english>>.
- Pillai, Raymond C. 'Adhura Sapna (A Shattered Dream).' *Language Transplanted: The Development of Overseas Hindi*. Eds. Richard K. Barz and Jeff Siegel. Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988. 221-55.
- Prakash, Som. 'The Linguistic Wheel Coming Full Circle: A Review of Dauka Puraan.' *Fijian Studies: A Journal of Contemporary Fiji* 1.1 (2003) 209-14.
- Prasad, Rameshwar. 'Review of the Book Dauka Puraan.' *Fijian Studies: A Journal of Contemporary Fiji* 1.1 (2003) 215-16.
- Radhakrishnan, Smitha. 'Slumdog Sincerity.' *UCLA International Institute*. 28 Nov. 2008. Accessed 19 Dec. 2018. <<http://international.ucla.edu/institute/article/101268>>.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. London: Vintage Books, 2010.
- Sengupta, Mitu. 'Slumdog Millionaire's Dehumanizing View of India's Poor.' *Counterpunch*. 20 Feb. 2009. Accessed 20 Dec. 2018. <<https://www.counterpunch.org/2009/02/20/slumdog-millionaire-s-dehumanizing-view-of-india-s-poor/>>.
- Shameem, Nikhat, and John Read. 'Administering a Performance Test in Fiji Hindi.' *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*. Supplement Series 13.1 (1996) 80-104.
- Siegel, Jeff. 'Fiji Hindustani.' *Working Papers in Linguistics, University of Hawaii* 7.3 (1975) 127-30.
- . *Say it in Fiji Hindi*. Sydney: Pacific Publications, 1977.
- . 'The Development of Fiji Hindustani.' *Language Transplanted: Development of Overseas Hindi*. Eds. Richard K. Barz and Jeff Siegel. Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988. 121-49.
- . 'Indian Languages in Fiji: Past, Present and Future.' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 21.sup001 (1998). 181-214.
- . *Language Contact in a Plantation Environment*. Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language. 1987. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009.
- Subramani. *Dauka Puraan*. New Delhi, India: Star Publications, 2001.
- . *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand*. (forthcoming 2018).
- Trivedi, Mitul. 'Critical Reflections on South Asian English: A Literary Perspective.' *New Academia: An International Journal of English Language Literature and Literary Theory* 2.4 (2013) 1-7.
- Tulsidas. *Rāmacaritamānasa*. Gorakhpur, UP, India: Gita Press.
- Twain, Mark. *The Annotated Huckleberry Finn: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Tom Sawyer's Comrade)*. Ed. Michael Patrick Hearn. Annotated edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.
- Welty, Eudora. *Delta Wedding*. New York: Mariner Books, 1979.
- Wood, James. 'Away Thinking About Things: James Kelman's Fighting Words.' *The New Yorker*. 25 Aug. 2014. Accessed 15 Feb. 2017 <<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/08/25/away-thinking-things>>.

A Transnational Approach to ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī’s ‘Umar Khayyām Levi Thompson, University of Colorado Boulder

Abstract

Transnational analysis has become an essential part of approaches to modernist literature in the academy, but scholars of Arabic literature have yet to embrace its possibilities. This article presents the benefits transnational literary inquiry holds for analysing Arabic literature as a significant instance of postcolonial literature, taking as a case study the Iraqi poet ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī’s references to the Persian ‘Umar Khayyām. Through my consideration of contemporary readings of Khayyām from Iran, I re-orient Arabist understandings of this poet’s function in Bayātī’s work. Moving beyond arguments centred within a nationalist paradigm of understanding, I employ a transnational mode of analysis to provide an alternative reading of Khayyām’s presence in Bayātī’s poetry and the dramatic work *A Trial in Nishapur*. The article seriously considers the modern Iranian reception of Khayyām, which presents him as a rationalist and skeptic rather than a Sufi mystic. I therefore offer a new way of understanding Bayātī’s use of Khayyām as a poetic mask that attends to Bayātī’s significant engagements with Iranian culture and Persian literature. Finally, I draw on this case study to argue that we must begin accounting for the transnational connections that have defined modern Near Eastern literatures like Arabic and Persian.

Modern Arabic literature is by its very nature transnational. Colonial and postcolonial national projects have made transnational movements of forms and themes from one inevitably yet necessarily imagined community¹ to another essential to the development of Arabic poetry and prose. Even in the nationally-specific context of Palestinian resistance literature, we find Maḥmūd Darwīsh (d. 2008) ruminating on the loss of far-flung – geographically and historically – al-Andalus as he considers his own nostalgia for the Palestine of his childhood during his years of exile. Still, the transnational approach has yet to find many practitioners in the field of modern Arabic literature.² In the hopes of provoking future study within the field, in this article I explain how a transnational approach is not only enlightening but also indispensable to our appreciation of Iraqi poet ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī’s (d. 1999) work by focusing on the transnational

¹ The phrase ‘imagined community’ here refers to Benedict Anderson’s pioneering work *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 2006 [1983]), in which he investigates how the idea of the nation develops out of shared social imaginaries. By saying ‘inevitably yet necessarily imagined community’, I mean to acknowledge the fiction of the nation-state and highlight its necessity within the decolonial and postcolonial struggles of colonised peoples. In these contexts, the nation-state is a necessary fiction.

² A stand-out study is Kamran Rastegar’s *Literary Modernity between the Middle East and Europe: Textual transactions in nineteenth-century Arabic, English, and Persian literatures*, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures, ed. James E. Montgomery et al. (New York: Routledge, 2007).

movements that shape his poetry. Using a limited case that crosses both national and linguistic borders (Iraq to Iran; Arabic to Persian), I contend that we must begin accounting for not just the broadly shared cultural and religious influences that have shaped Near Eastern literature but more importantly for the transnational interconnections that continue to mould Arabic literature during the age of the nation-state. We must start paying attention to them if we are to understand where modern Arabic literature has come from and where it will go.

The Transnational Approach and Modernist Poetry in Iraq

The transnational approach to literary criticism began in the 1990s and became part of the scholarly conversation about world literature in the 2000s. A landmark text in transnational literary studies for those of us studying what are commonly referred to as ‘minor’ literatures, such as Arabic, is 2005’s *Minor Transnationalism*. In it, editors Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih make an important distinction between ‘transnationalism-from-above’ and ‘transnationalism-from-below’ that guides my analysis. The first category results from the globalisation of capital; it is homogenising, totalising, and determined by the market. Contrarily, “transnationalism-from-below” as Sarah J. Mahler calls it, is ‘the sum of the counterhegemonic operations of the nonelite who refuse assimilation to one given nation-state’.³ By looking to the transnational movement of people (for example, the profound effect Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb’s [d. 1964] sojourns in Iran with the Iranian Communists had on his political and poetic development) as well as poetic forms and themes, we can better comprehend literary modernism in the Near East⁴ as a shared project of resistance to Western colonialism and neocolonialism. We must also, however, account for the indelible mark of Western colonialism on the transnational movements of modernism.

Iraqi modernist poetry offers a prominent example of the role transnational exchange plays because of its geographical proximity to Iran and the Persian modernist movement, with which it shares particular formal and thematic features laying beyond the reaches of Western poetic influence. These include but are not limited to: making the poetic foot (*tafīlah* in Arabic; *rukṇ* in Persian) the formal base of the poetic line (*bayt*); doing away with the monorhyme standard of the premodern *qaṣīdah* (ode); and returning to the Near Eastern mythic tradition (both Islamic and pre-Islamic) for thematic material – a technique they share with Western modernists. In what follows, I examine ‘Umar Khayyām’s presence in Bayātī’s poetic project to provide an example of how the transnational incorporation of figures from premodern Near Eastern culture was a defining part of Arabic modernism during the 1960s. In my rereading of Bayātī’s Khayyām in light of the movement of the latter’s myth from the Persian tradition to the West and back to the East, I show that we can come to a fuller understanding of Khayyām’s presence in Bayātī’s work by thinking transnationally, from both above and below.

Of the modern Iraqi poets, Bayātī is the most obvious candidate for this type of transnational study. After the publication of his breakthrough collection *Abārīq muhashshamah* (*Broken Pitchers*) in 1954, he was forced to leave Iraq in 1955 because of his involvement with the Iraqi Communist Party.⁵ For much of his life after that, he travelled and lived abroad,

³ Sarah J. Mahler qtd. in Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih. Eds., ‘Introduction: Thinking through the Minor, Transnationally,’ *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005) 6.

⁴ For my purposes here, I will be referring to the geographical area including Iraq and Iran as the Near East.

⁵ For instance, he was editor of the popular Iraqi leftist cultural journal *Al-Thaqāfah al-jadīdah* (*The New Culture*).

moving among the continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe and taking up residence in Cairo, Moscow, and Madrid. His itinerant life has prompted a flurry of academic interest in his work, including a special issue of the *Journal of Arabic Literature* edited by Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych entitled *Perhaps a Poet is Born, or Dies*.⁶ In the Arab world, Bayātī counted among his friends and acquaintances writers and poets such as Sayyāb (who became a decidedly vicious enemy of his later on), Luwīs ‘Awaḍ (d. 1990), Ṣāliḥ Jawdat (d. 1976), Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (d. 1987), Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī (d. 1992), Khalīl Ḥawī (d. 1982), and even Najīb Maḥfūz (d. 2006). He also befriended writers from outside the Arab world like Rafael Alberti (d. 1999), Robert Lowell (d. 1977), Gabriel García Márquez (d. 2014), and Nāzım Hikmet (d. 1963), whose funeral he attended as a pallbearer.⁷ After the end of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958, he was appointed as a cultural attaché and spent much of his time in Moscow from 1959-64 before moving to Cairo, where he lived from 1964-71. Years later, he would move to Madrid, which was his base from 1979-89. In the last year of his life, he finally visited the country whose culture had so inspired his poetry throughout his career, travelling to Iran only a few months before his 1999 death in Damascus, Syria.⁸

He may have become enthralled with Iranian culture and literature through his early readings of Arabic translations of Khayyām (d. 1131), Nūr al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492), Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), and Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (d. 1221), as he relates in his autobiography.⁹ Or perhaps it was a youthful infatuation with one of his classmates (the daughter of the Iranian cultural attaché in Baghdad)¹⁰ at the Baghdad Teachers College that led him to engage, for the entire length of his poetic career, with Iran in his poetry. Readers flipping through his *dīwān* (collected poems) will sense a distinct Persian presence both in the masks the poet puts on and the cities in which he sets many of his poems. Khayyām first appears as a character in 1957’s *Ash ‘ār fī al-manfā* (*Poems in Exile*) in the poem ‘*al-Rajul alladhī kāna yughannī*’ (‘The Man Who Was Singing’). Later poems with Persian-influenced themes or persons include ‘*al-Majūsī*’ (‘The Magus’)¹¹ and ‘*Hakādhā qāla Zarādusht*’ (‘Thus Spake Zarathustra’)¹² from *al-Kitābah ‘alā al-ṭīn* (*Writing on Clay*, 1970); the collection titled *Qamar Shīrāz* (*Shiraz’s Moon*, 1975), which includes a poem by the same name;¹³ ‘*Maqāṭi ‘min*

⁶ *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 32.2 (2001).

⁷ ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī, *Yanābī‘ al-shams: al-sīrah al-shi‘riyyah*, 1st ed (Dimashq: Dār al-Farqad li-l-Ṭabā‘ah wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 1999) 97.

⁸ Nāṣir Muḥsinīniyā and Sīpīdah Akhavān Māsūlah, ‘*Bāztāb-i farhang va adab-i Īrān dar shi‘r-i ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī*,’ *Kāvishnāmah-i adabiyyāt-i taṭbīqī (muṭāla‘āt-i taṭbīqī-i ‘arabī – fārsī)*, Dānishkadah-i Adabiyyāt va ‘Ulūm-i Insānī, Dānishgāh-i Rāzī Kirmānshāh, 3.12 (1392; 2014) 97.

⁹ Bayātī, *Yanābī‘ al-shams*, 27.

¹⁰ ‘A secret Bayātī kept for over fifty years, Furūzandah: the spark of lost love,’ Qāsim al-Buraysīm wrote in the pages of *Al-Ra‘ī*. Quoted in ‘Abd al-Riḍā ‘Alī, *Alladhī akalat al-qawāfi lisānahu wa-ākharūn: shakhṣiyyāt wa-mawāqif fī al-shi‘r wa-l-naqd wa-l-kitābah* (Bayrūt: al-Mu‘assasah al-‘Arabiyyah li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2009) 58. Bayātī dedicated his final poem, *Bukā‘iyyah ilā Ḥāfiẓ al-Shīrāzī* (1st ed. [Bayrūt: Dār al-Kunūz al-Adabiyyah, 1999]) to Furūzandah, finally exposing his secret. See also Muḥsinīniyā and Māsūlah, ‘*Bāztāb*’ 101-102.

¹¹ ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī, *al-A‘māl al-shi‘riyyah*, Vol. 2 (Bayrūt: al-Mu‘assasah al-‘Arabiyyah li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1995) 203-204. See Bassam K. Frangieh’s translation, Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati, *Love, Death and Exile: Poems Translated from the Arabic* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP, 1990) 35-37.

¹² Bayātī, *al-A‘māl al-shi‘riyyah*, Vol. 2 205-206. The reference to Friedrich Nietzsche (d. 1900) is also noteworthy.

¹³ *Qamar Shīrāz*, Bayātī, *al-A‘māl al-shi‘riyyah*, Vol. 2 359-392; Frangieh’s translation is *Love, Death and Exile* 209-217. I give city names in their usual English spellings except in citations of works originally in Arabic or Persian.

'*adhābāt Farīd al-Dīn al- 'Aṭṭār*' ('Selections from the Passions of Farīd al-Dīn al- 'Aṭṭār') in *Mamlakat al-sunbulah (Kingdom of Grain, 1979)*;¹⁴ and one of his final poems, '*Bukā'īyyah ilā Ḥāfiẓ al-Shīrāzī*' ('A Lament for Ḥāfiẓ al-Shīrāzī,' 1998). Persian cities other than Shiraz also appear in his poetry: Isfahan, Nishapur and Tehran.¹⁵ He drew much poetic inspiration from the Persian tradition, though his journeys did not physically take him to Iran until the very end of his life. But many years before then he travelled to Iran with his long study of Persian culture through books, particularly Persian philosophy and poetry that had been translated into Arabic.

I consider Bayātī's work the product of transnationalism rather than internationalism because we can directly connect it to his continual affiliation with movements that developed not out of the international community of nations that took shape during the mid-twentieth century but instead along with unofficial, transnational trends: existentialism, Sufism, poetic modernism, and (in Bayātī's case, unorthodox) Marxism.¹⁶ All of these were mediated by his readings of Arab and Persian cultural heritage (*al-turāth* in the Arabic tradition). While his exile may have been the result of changing internal and external politics in Iraq, the poetry he produced within it was transnational in its negotiations of places, times and philosophies. It reached beyond the bounds of the Iraqi national context despite his sometime involvement in the Iraqi government's cultural program (for example, during his time as cultural attaché and professor in Moscow).¹⁷ His own presentations of his literary horizons were wide-ranging, and we might take as an example the epigraphs at the beginning of his 1968 autobiography, which includes quotes from the Persian mystic and philosopher al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191), Boris Pasternak (d. 1960), Anton Chekhov (d. 1904) and Rūmī. Elsewhere in the book, he quotes from the Chilean painter Roberto Matta (d. 2002), Fidel Castro (d. 2016), Alfred de Musset (d. 1857), Marcelle Auclair (d. 1983), Bertolt Brecht (d. 1956), Molière (d. 1673), Rabindranath Tagore (d. 1941), Rainer Maria Rilke (d. 1926) and Constantine Cavafy (d. 1933) – and that is only if we limit ourselves to chapter epigraphs.¹⁸ Particularly prominent within his reserve of cultural inspirations is the tradition of Persian philosophy and mysticism. He combined this tradition with his understanding of European existentialism, thus bringing together Western influences (transnationalism-from-above) with specifically Eastern cultural and intellectual traditions (transnationalism-from-below). Herein lies the core of Bayātī's transnational poetics.

Whence Bayātī's 'Umar Khayyām?

Of the many instances of transnationalism in Bayātī's life and poetry, his use of Persian rationalist and skeptic 'Umar Khayyām as a poetic mask offers the clearest example of how a

¹⁴ Bayātī, *al-A 'māl al-shi 'riyyah*, Vol. 2 405-408; Frangieh's translation is *Love, Death and Exile* 249-255.

¹⁵ 'Your eyes are Isfahan ('*aynāk Isfahān*') Bayātī writes in 'To Hind,' a poem to his wife. Bayātī, *al-A 'māl al-shi 'riyyah*, Vol. 2 55-56. Nishapur figures prominently in Bayātī's work, most obviously in his 1962 play *Muḥākamah fī Nīsābūr* (Tūnis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li-l-Nashr, 1973). 'At the gates of Tehran, we saw him ...' is the opening line to '*al-Rajul alladhī kāna yughannī*,' *al-A 'māl al-shi 'riyyah*, Vol. 1 280.

¹⁶ Bayātī explains his ideology as follows: 'From the ideological side, I am a progressive (*taqaddumī*) – without being a Marxist – and a Muslim Arab. Ideology does not impose its own terms.' *Yanābī 'al-shams* 11. Still, critics have long noted that 'Al-Bayātī is regarded as the foremost representative of the socialist realist school in modern Arabic poetry.' *Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry*, ed. and trans. Mounah A. Khouri and Hamid Algar (Berkeley: U of California P, 1974) 241.

¹⁷ For a career timeline in Bayātī's own hand, see the letter appended to Khalil Shukrallah Rizk's 'The Poetry of 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati: Thematic and Stylistic Study,' diss. (Indiana University, 1981) 292-98.

¹⁸ Bayātī, *Tajribatī al-shi 'riyyah* 7, 11, 29, 49, 67, 85, 87, 103, and 105.

transnational approach is not just useful but necessary for our understanding of literary modernism in Arabic. Before beginning my analysis of Khayyām's place in Bayātī's *oeuvre*, a few introductory comments are in order. First of all, despite his popularity in both the West and the East and the numerous studies devoted to his life and work, Khayyām, the author of the famous *Rubā' iyyāt* (quatrains usually rhyming AABA), has long had a mythical status, and the poems ascribed to him are likely an amalgamation of the works of numerous authors.¹⁹ Khayyām's popularity skyrocketed in Europe after Edward FitzGerald's (d. 1883) translations of his quatrains, which appeared over the course of the latter half of the nineteenth century. The fame of these translations and subsequent ones in many languages other than English eventually renewed (created from scratch?) memories of the poet in Iran, as de Blois notes:

“Khayyām” exerted a tremendous influence on such major figures of 20th-century Persian literature as Ṣādiq Hidāyat (d. 1951) and his name continues to be invoked with passion in the ideological debates that have so shaken the country in the last hundred years.²⁰

To put aside the question of Khayyām's existence, it is clear from both FitzGerald's and the later Iranian critics' understandings of the poet that he was more a skeptic than he was a Sufi. Khayyām's skepticism about religion made his *rubā' īs* especially attractive to Hidāyat. He explains that Khayyām's French translator J.B. Nicolas (d. 1875) initially put forward the idea that Khayyām was a Sufi poet.²¹ In contrast to this interpretation, Hidāyat paints a portrait of Khayyām as a materialist philosopher (*'yak faylasūf-i māddī'*) who was ‘from the days of his youth until the moment of material death a pessimist and a skeptic (or at least appeared to be so in his *Rubā' iyyāt*).’²² Nevertheless, some of Hidāyat's ideas about Khayyām may also have been the result of over-interpreting or emphasising certain elements of the *Rubā' iyyāt* that were in line with his own prejudices and beliefs; Hidāyat was famously intolerant of Islam and a Persian chauvinist, and an irreligious, rationalistic Khayyām fit his model for the ideal modern Iranian intellectual.²³ Bayātī's understanding of Khayyām grew out of a transnational movement of interest in the poet throughout both the East and the West during the first half of the twentieth

¹⁹ It is beyond the scope of this article to thoroughly discuss the long history of scholarship on Khayyām. This observation is based on François de Blois, *Persian Literature: A Bio-Bibliographical Survey, Volume V: Poetry of the Pre-Mongol Period*, 2nd ed. (London: RoutledgeCurzon in association with The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 2004) 299-318; see especially pages 304-305.

²⁰ de Blois, 306. Ṣādiq Hidāyat's sustained fascination with Khayyām's *Rubā' iyyāt* was spurred on by European interest in the poet and has played a central part in how Khayyām is understood in Iran today. Afshin Molavi, *The Soul of Iran: A Nation's Struggle for Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002) 111.

²¹ Ṣādiq Hidāyat, *Tarānah-hā-yi Khayyām: bā shish majlis-i taṣvīr az Darvīsh Naqqāsh* ([Tihrah?]: Intishārāt-i Māh, [1982?; originally published in 1934]) 11.

²² Hidāyat, *Tarānah-hā-yi Khayyām* 18-19.

²³ Lloyd Ridgeon, *Sufi Castigator: Ahmad Kasravi and the Iranian mystical tradition*, Routledge Sufi Series, ed. Ian Richard Netton (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006) 25-26. For more on Hidāyat's hostility to Islam and the Arabs, see Iraj Parsinejad, *A History of Literary Criticism in Iran 1866-1951: Literary Criticism in the Works of Enlightened Thinkers of Iran – Akhundzadeh, Kermani, Malkom, Talebof, Maraghe'i, Kasravi, and Hedayat* (Bethesda, MD: Ibex Publishers, 2002) 201-210. Hidāyat published his first collection of Khayyām's poems in 1923, which has been reprinted more recently. See Ṣādiq Hidāyat, *Rubā' iyyāt-i Ḥakīm 'Umar Khayyām* (Uppsala: Intishārāt-i Afsānah, 1376 [1997]).

century. Bayātī's readings of Khayyām show that he was deeply familiar with Khayyām's reception in the West and how well-regarded his quatrains were in Europe and the United States. However, we must also consider the possibility that he knew about Khayyām the skeptic and incorporated elements of this Persian-inspired Khayyām into his poetry, thus reappropriating him from the context of his Western reception and resituating him in the East – a move we can productively understand as an instance of positive globalisation emerging from an East-East exchange occurring under the rubric of transnationalism-from-below.

Reading Khayyām Transnationally

This brings us to a fundamental misunderstanding among Arabist critics about Bayātī's invocation of Khayyām – a misreading we can correct by working transnationally. For example, in Aida Azouqa's analysis of the title poem of 1966's *Alladhī ya 'tī wa-lā ya 'tī* (*He Who Comes and Does Not Come*), she presents Khayyām as a Sufi mystic. Her interpretation draws on 'Azīz al-Sayyid Jāsim's *Al-Iltizām wa-l-taṣawwuf fī shi'r 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī* (*Commitment and Sufism in the Poetry of 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī*) when she claims, '[T]he pursuit of al-Bayyātī's [*sic*] masks of a female figure, the way Omar Khayyam, for example, pursues Aisha in *Al-Ladhī Ya 'tī*, stands for the Sufi transmutation of earthly love into the love of the Divine.'²⁴ Azouqa presents Bayātī's Khayyām as a mystic searching for union with the Divine and uninterested in the *dunyā* (the base and lowly world we live in). Overall, she argues that the Khayyām mask helps Bayātī expose the *dunyā*'s illusoriness and imagine the ultimate victory of justice over oppression.²⁵

But Khayyām was not a Sufi, at least not in the modern Iranian interpretations of the poet that we find mirrored in Bayātī's reception of his work. The *rubā 'iyyāt* attributed to Khayyām present instead the views of a skeptic and a man of science. Consider, for instance, one of his most famous quatrains:

Alas! The book of youth has come to a close,
Life's fresh spring has turned into December snows.
That bird of joy whose name was youth
Alas! I do not know whence it came or goes.²⁶

²⁴ Aida Azouqa, 'Al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats as Mythmakers: A Comparative Study,' *Journal of Arabic Literature* 30.3 (1999) 260. She cites *al-Iltizām wa-l-taṣawwuf* (Baghdād: Dār al-Shu'ūn al-Thaqāfiyyah al-Āmmah, 1990) 200-201.

²⁵ In addition to 'Al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats as Mythmakers,' this reading is found in Aida Azouqa, 'Defamiliarization in the Poetry of 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī and T.S. Eliot: A Comparative Study,' *Journal of Arabic Literature* 32.2 (2001) 167-211, and Saadi A. Simawe similarly considers Khayyām to be a Sufi in 'The Lives of the Sufi Masters in 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī's Poetry,' *Journal of Arabic Literature* 32.2 (2001) 119-141.

²⁶ This is traditionally referred to as *Rubā 'ī 63*. For the Persian text on which I have depended and another translation, see *The Rubā 'iyyāt of 'Umar Khayyām*, with an introduction by trans. Parichehr Kasra, UNESCO Collection of Representative Works Persian Series, no. 21, ed. Ehsan Yar-Shater (Delmar, NY: Scholar's Facsimiles & Reprints, Inc., 1975) 63. Exemplifying the unstable redactions of Khayyām's *rubā 'iyyāt*, Hidāyat's version of this poem has a different third line that does not mention the bird of youth. *Tarānah-hā*, 79. I have consulted the translations included in *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam: English, French, German, Italian, and Danish Translations Comparatively Arranged in Accordance with the Text of Edward FitzGerald's Version with Further Selections, Notes, Biographies, Bibliographies, and Other Material*, ed. Nathan Haskell Dole, Vol. I (Boston: L. C. Page and Company, 1898) 186. The poem is also available online at Ganjoor: <http://ganjoor.net/khayyam/robaee/sh63/>.

The speaker's reflection on the fleeting nature of a lifetime and the mournful tone ('Alas!') show us a poet focused on the possibilities that lie within the world of the *dunyā*, not the everlasting afterlife that awaits the Sufi: eternal unity with the Divine. A Sufi would not mourn the passing of youth, but a rationalist philosopher who questions the mere existence of the hereafter would. This rationalist Khayyām provided Bayātī a secular figure with which he could explore the existential dilemmas facing the transnationally-focused Iraqi intellectual (at least in terms of Communist affinities) as an exclusionary vision of Iraqi citizenship was emerging with the gradual consolidation of the Iraqi nation-state under the Baath.

We can thus work transnationally to better understand Bayātī's invocations of the Persian poet. By bringing the modern Iranian conception of Khayyām into our considerations, we can make a stronger case for Bayātī's engagements with the poet as a materialist philosopher – as Hidāyat and the Iranian critics who came after him believed Khayyām to be – than as a Sufi. We might even begin with the poem I cited above, which Bayātī alludes to at the end of *He Who Comes and Does Not Come*. Other than the play *A Trial in Nishapur* – treated at more length below – this collection includes Bayātī's most sustained reflections on Khayyām. As we come to the end of Khayyām's story in *He Who Comes*, we find these lines,

I called out for you, O Lord, from the bottom of the ladder
My skin flaking off in the dark,
my hair went gray, the bird of youth
slipping into the fog.²⁷

Bayātī here adopts an uncommon turn of phrase from Khayyām's poetry, 'the bird of youth'. The allusion to Khayyām's *rubā'ī* is of prime importance because it indicates that Bayātī was aware of Khayyām's reception as a skeptic and atheist in the wider Near East at the time. For Bayātī, as we find with Hidāyat in the Iranian case, Khayyām's association with mystical Islam did not allow for a full investigation of his worldly philosophy. We might even read Bayātī and Hidāyat's interpretation of Khayyām as a key link between modernist poetry and secularism in the transnational network of literary exchange that was operating in the Near East at the time.

This materialist reading fits Bayātī's Marxist leanings and accounts for contemporary understandings of Khayyām's character in Iran. We likewise find at the end of the collection nine new *rubā'īs* Bayātī writes in the rationalist Khayyām's voice. The poems oscillate between hope for the future (summed up in the coming of a saviour) and continued pessimism about the possibility for change. For example, the first goes,

The Messiah sold his blood to the Donkey King,
the revolutionaries were defeated,
the world was drowned in the mire,
and the clown masks fell into muds of shame.²⁸

²⁷ Bayātī, *al-A 'māl al-shi 'riyyah*, Vol. 2 81.

²⁸ Bayātī, *al-A 'māl al-shi 'riyyah*, Vol. 2 95.

Bayātī puts on the skeptical Khayyām mask once again in these lines not to make appeals to the Divine but instead to reflect on the absurdity of struggling against reality, thus continuing the ambivalence that permeates *He Who Comes and Does Not Come*. In the sixth *rubāʿī*, the speaker's existential angst bursts out in a complaint:

We must choose
to grab the wind and pass over the voids,
to find the meaning behind the absurdity of life,
for life in this closed cycle is suicide.²⁹

The eighth and ninth continue to play on the overall ambivalence of the collection. The eighth asks,

We return, or we don't – who knows?
to our mother the earth, who carries an embryo of the hope [we] seek inside her
This sadness goes deeper, and the promises,
The moth of existence hovers around our fire.³⁰

After a cavalier dismissal of the idea of rebirth, this *rubāʿī* ends with the popular Sufi image of the moth and the flame. However, the moth here does not become one with the flame but 'hovers' around it, thus suspending the traditional final immolation and mystical annihilation in the Divine.³¹ The eighth *rubāʿī* is ambivalent about possible union with the Divine, and the ninth (and final) *rubāʿī* continues in the same manner, questioning a potential path to a better future by mentioning it only after the word *laʿalla* (perhaps; maybe).

The dead-alive, with nothing to live on or place to go
blows into the ashes
Perhaps (*laʿalla*) Nishapur
will, like a snake, shed the robe of her sadness and break the chains.³²

²⁹ Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2 96.

³⁰ Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2 96-97.

³¹ Annemarie Schimmel explains the origin of the motif when she discusses the Sufi mystic al-Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Hallāj (d. 922):

Hallāj describes the fate of the moth that approaches the flame and eventually gets burned in it, thus realizing the Reality of Realities. He does not want the light or the heat but casts himself into the flame, never to return and never to give any information about the Reality, for he has reached perfection. Whoever has read Persian poetry knows that the poets choose this story of the moth and the candle as one of their favorite allegories to express the fate of the true lover.

Mystical Dimensions of Islam (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1978) 70. See also Mahmoud Omidshah and J. T. P. de Bruijn, 'Candle,' *Encyclopædia Iranica*, IV/7, 748-751; <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/candle-pers>: '[W]hen the candle represents the beloved, then the lover is the moth (*parvāna*), which cannot resist the light and is drawn into the flame and consumed.'

³² Bayātī, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyyah*, Vol. 2 97.

The Iranian city of Nishapur, Khayyām's supposed hometown,³³ also provides the setting for Bayātī's 1962 play, *A Trial in Nishapur*.³⁴ This play offers yet another instance in which Bayātī plays on Khayyām's mythical status to offer a critique of political authority, tradition, and ungenerous readers of literature. Again, Bayātī incorporates a *rubā'ī* to make his point.

The play centres on Khayyām's experience at court, where the ruling class of Nishapur is considering whether or not the poet is guilty of committing *kufṛ*, that is, of blaspheming God. During the trial, we learn that it is the University Professor (*ustādh jāmi'ah*) who has brought the *kufṛ* claim against him. The Professor cites a *rubā'ī* as evidence of Khayyām's crime:

O You for whom we call out
we seek pardon
Tell me, where can You find pardon?³⁵

The Professor prefaces his quotation of the poem by telling the court,

Khayyām has, every now and then, written *rubā'īyyāt* collected in no single book but recited everywhere. The Sufis, in particular, know them and sinners repeat them, challenging the Qur'ān and the teachings of Islam. In my position as a humble servant of knowledge, I have collected many of these *rubā'īyyāt*, written in different scripts across Persia but all composed by Khayyām.³⁶

The Professor's testimony brings up a number of questions about the provenance of the *rubā'īyyāt*, for they appear to already be a part of popular culture in the fictional world of the play. The Professor, not Khayyām, claims that the poet is involved with the Sufis. (Elsewhere, the play describes him as a man of science but not as a Sufi.) The Professor's admission that the verses he has collected are 'written in different scripts' across the entire Persian-speaking land does less to support his claim that they are 'all composed by Khayyām' than it does to refute it.³⁷ That is, the Professor has confused cultural reception and recension of the quatrains with whatever philosophical positions Khayyām may actually have had. In the end, once his accuser recites the lines, Khayyām 'looks at the University Professor in astonishment and opens his mouth for the first time: "I didn't write this *rubā'īyyah*."' ³⁸ Bayātī thus plays on Khayyām's mythical status throughout the play as he does in the collection *He Who Comes and Does Not*

³³ de Blois 299-300.

³⁴ Without moving beyond the title, we are already reminded of Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1925; originally written 1914-1915), an early example of existentialist fiction that heralded the later work of Jean-Paul Sartre (d. 1980) and Albert Camus (d. 1960).

³⁵ Bayātī, *Muḥākamah* 41. It is worth nothing that the line breaks only result in three lines rather than the usual four and there does not seem to be any regular meter, which we would normally expect to find. This should not be surprising, as the Professor may have made up the verse himself in order to ascribe it to Khayyām and accuse him of *kufṛ*, thereby betraying his lack of literary critical ability and ignorance of even basic poetic standards.

³⁶ Bayātī, *Muḥākamah* 40-41.

³⁷ Bayātī, *Muḥākamah* 41. The Khayyām in Bayātī's play here reminds us of the Khayyām mythos found in Persian literary history, as de Blois observes: 'It is clear that by the 15th century at the latest the name of the famous philosopher and scientist had become a collective pseudonym for authors of *rubā'īyyāt*, especially those of hedonistic, fatalistic and more or less overtly anti-Islamic content ...' de Blois 305.

³⁸ Bayātī, *Muḥākamah* 41-42.

Come, using a mythos that formed over time in Iran, was ‘discovered’ again in Europe, and made its way back to the Near East following FitzGerald’s translations. Indeed, Bayātī also draws heavily on the American Harold Lamb’s narration of Khayyām’s story in *Omar Khayyam: A Life*.³⁹ Thus, Bayātī’s Khayyām is not only the product of Bayātī’s readings of Persian literature, but also a result of his engagement with Western recensions of Khayyām – a fundamentally transnational figure in any case.

The above scene at court portrays Khayyām as an outsider, a nonelite forced into conflict with a state-sponsored view of Islam enforced by the local leaders of Nishapur. Beyond the University Professor, these also include the Chief Judge (*kabīr al-quḍāh*), the Head of the Religious Community (*raḡul al-millāh*), and even the theologian Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), who admonishes Khayyām: ‘I have heard how you have gone outside the teachings of Nizām al-Mulk – may God rest his soul – and how you practiced magic in Isfahan the way unbelievers do.’⁴⁰

Forced out of Nishapur by political and religious hardliners in the play, Khayyām joins a caravan heading for Aleppo in the employ of a merchant. Along the way, the spirit of the founder of the Assassins (*al-Ḥashshāshīn*) – a group of Ismā‘īlī rebels who opposed the Sunni Saljuqs⁴¹ – al-Ḥasan al-Ṣabbāḥ (d. 1124), appears to Khayyām and asks him to join him in his sectarian rebellion. Ṣabbāḥ declares, ‘I have granted you the opportunity to be born again and here you are refusing it!’⁴²

Khayyām declines to join the Assassins, despite their rebellion against the Sunni elites who forced Khayyām into exile from Nishapur, because his conception of revolution is total, unrelated to sectarian division and, more importantly, founded in the refusal of violence. He compares Ṣabbāḥ’s feeding hashish to his men to steal them for their assassination missions to the Chief Judge’s use of something yet more dangerous: endless talk of Paradise and Hell to pacify the people of Nishapur.⁴³

Khayyām then explains his own stance on revolution:

We must wait. The revolutionary doesn’t risk his own head or others’ for nothing. Revolution requires preparation, mobilisation, and biding one’s time, waiting for the critical moment to strike. If I were to be born again, I would give myself over to it.⁴⁴

³⁹ Harold Lamb, *Omar Khayyam: A Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1934). See Issa J. Boullata, ‘The Masks of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī,’ *Journal of Arabic Literature* 32.2 (2001) 107.

⁴⁰ Bayātī, *Muḥākamah* 42. Ghazālī is well-known for his *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, in which he argues against the influence of Farābī’s and also Ibn Sīnā’s thought in Islamic philosophy. He studied and taught in the newly-instituted *madrasahs* (schools) founded by the Saljuq grand-vizier Nizām al-Mulk (d. 1092). For more on him, see Frank Griffel, ‘Al-Ghazali,’ *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2016), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/al-ghazali/>.

⁴¹ For a detailed study of the group, see Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizārī Ismā‘īlīs Against the Islamic World* (Philadelphia: The U of Pennsylvania P, 2005). For a brief discussion of the political, religious, and historical context in Iran at the time, see *The Rubā‘iyāt of ‘Umar Khayyām* (1975) xi-xxxvii.

⁴² Bayātī, *Muḥākamah* 75.

⁴³ Bayātī, *Muḥākamah* 78.

⁴⁴ Bayātī, *Muḥākamah* 79.

Şabbāḥ protests that if the circumstances are not right for revolt, one ought to draw first blood to spur on change, to which Khayyām replies,

The starlight of true revolution shines behind a thousand doors of long anticipation, but it will one day appear. People will mention how Khayyām died a soldier in a losing battle during the first fights for freedom [and] for the sake of humanity's victory in its final campaign.⁴⁵

Immediately after saying this, Khayyām collapses from exhaustion, dead. His companions mention how he had been delusional, speaking to himself, before the merchant proclaims to them all, 'God forgive us our sins! I didn't pay him his due. When I reach Aleppo, I'll give what he was owed to the poor.'⁴⁶

At the end of the play, we find a clear example of the existentialist as well as Marxist ideas behind the philosophical framework for Bayātī's use of the Khayyām persona. Although he dies poor and broken, 'a soldier in a losing battle', Khayyām gives in neither to the prescribed orthodoxy of the elite class in Nishapur nor to the anarchic bloodshed Şabbāḥ invites him to join in. Instead, he keeps faith in his vision of a coming revolution, notwithstanding the fact that he knows he will not participate in it himself. On the road to Aleppo, he is like Sisyphus pushing his stone, and it is up to the audience to imagine him happy⁴⁷ in the knowledge that he never compromised on his beliefs as he dies in the dirt.

Bayātī's conception of the poet in his later poetry thus reflects the existential dilemmas he introduced in his early work. He uses the Khayyām mask to explore the existential anxieties his speaker faces while attempting to come to terms with modernity. He deals not only with the changes to premodern poetry that came in the wake of the modernist movement but also with the conflicting projects of Iraqi nationalism on the cusp of its total transformation into Baathism (in 1968) and Communism, which he found himself struggling to negotiate after his multiple exiles from Iraq and sometime residency in Moscow. It is thus my assertion here that his poetry is best served by a reading that goes beyond the bounds of the national and into the transnational movements of ideas and political affiliations that he participated in.

Conclusion

After the early 1960s, Bayātī's poetic influences became increasingly transnational as his poetic vistas widened to include not only figures from the Arab past but also the gods of ancient Mesopotamia, Western writers, and Persian poets and philosophers. Of all of these, his sustained interest in the Persian literary tradition stands out because of the overall number of poems and entire collections he devoted to the thought and works of Persians such as Khayyām, al-Ḥallāj, al-Suhrawardī, Rūmī and 'Aṭṭār. His last collection, *Nuṣūṣ sharqiyyah (Eastern Texts)*, published the year he died, offers a final example of transnationalism and the poetic inspiration he drew from the Persian tradition. Among other poems dedicated to the blind Arab poet Abū al-'Alā' al-

⁴⁵ Bayātī, *Muḥākamah* 80.

⁴⁶ Bayātī, *Muḥākamah* 79-81.

⁴⁷ In his famous rejection of nihilism, Camus wrote, '*La lutte elle-même vers les sommets suffit à remplir un cœur d'homme. Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux.*' Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe: Essai sur l'absurde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942) 166.

Ma‘arrī (d. 1057), Damascus, and Baghdad, this last collection includes the long poem ‘A Lament to Ḥāfiẓ al-Shīrāzī’ as well as the title poem, ‘Eastern Texts’. In it, the old poet’s memories of the past bubble up in fifty short vignettes he completed at the end of November, 1998. Among these, he remembers witnessing the 1953 coup in Iran and its aftermath while living in Egypt. He recalls,

The day the mob killed Fāṭimī in Tehran⁴⁸
I was playing chess with Sayyid Makkāwī.⁴⁹

Elsewhere he remembers,

The Shah,
following the coup against Mosaddegh,
returned to Tehran with an Iraqi air escort
and the agents of imperialism.
As for me,
I went home
after giving
the barman my last dime.⁵⁰

He intersperses imagined scenes among these seemingly genuine memories to create a map of his poetic development and inspiration, which transcended his own tradition and depended on his interaction with Persian cultural heritage and history in particular as well as the well-attested influence of European modernism on his work. In the case of the coup treated in the above lines, Bayātī admits to the poet’s inability to influence society and his concomitant complicity in the role the Iraqi monarchy had in bringing the Shah back to power against the will of the Iranian people.

There remains much transnational work to be done in the study of modern Arabic literature, both on its interactions with local literary traditions (Persian, Kurdish, Turkish, Urdu, Hebrew) and others beyond the region. Here, I present Bayātī’s incorporation of ‘Umar Khayyām into his poetry as an exemplary instance of the transnational movement of mythic poetic themes in Arabic and Persian modernism. Behind the Khayyām mask, the speaker of *He Who Comes and Does Not Come* becomes an existential hero ruminating on the myths of death and rebirth that lie at the heart of Arabic modernist poetry. By reading this Khayyām as a rationalist and skeptic – which Bayātī’s engagement of the modern Iranian critical tradition requires of us – we can consider Bayātī’s work in terms of transnational modernist exchanges and move beyond interpretations restricted by national paradigms. As the nation-state continues to wither away under the pressures of globalisation and international trade, seeking out these transnational links in our readings of Arabic modernism will offer effective modes of

⁴⁸ Ḥusayn Fāṭimī, Mohammad Mosaddegh’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, was executed by firing squad on 10 November 1954.

⁴⁹ ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī, *Nuṣūṣ sharqiyyah* (Dimashq: al-Madā, 1999) 63. Makkāwī (d. 1997) was a famous Egyptian radio personality, composer and singer.

⁵⁰ Bayātī, *Nuṣūṣ sharqiyyah* 64.

transnational, transcultural resistance to Western cultural hegemony and other unwelcome intrusions of capital.

Levi Thompson is Assistant Professor of Arabic in the Department of Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Colorado Boulder. He teaches courses on the cultures of the modern Middle East, translates poetry from Arabic and Persian, and researches the development of modernist poetry outside the West.

Works Cited

- ‘Alī, ‘Abd al-Riḍā. *Alladhī akalat al-qawāfi lisānahu wa-ākharūn: shakhṣiyyāt wa-mawāqif fī al-shi‘r wa-l-naqd wa-l-kitābah*. Bayrūt: al-Mu‘assasah al-‘Arabiyyah li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2009.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 1983. Revised ed. New York: Verso, 2006.
- Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry*. Ed. and Trans. Mounah A. Khouri and Hamid Algar. Berkeley: U of California P, 1974.
- Azouqa, Aida O. ‘Al-Bayyātī and W.B. Yeats as Mythmakers: A Comparative Study.’ *Journal of Arabic Literature* 30.3 (1999). 258-290.
- . ‘Defamiliarization in the Poetry of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī and T.S. Eliot: A Comparative Study.’ *Journal of Arabic Literature* 32.2 (2001): 167-211.
- Bayātī, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Al-. *Al-A‘māl al-shi‘riyyah*. 2 Vols. Bayrūt: al-Mu‘assasah al-‘Arabiyyah li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1995.
- . *Bukā‘iyyah ilā Ḥāfiẓ al-Shīrāzī*. 1st ed. Bayrūt: Dār al-Kunūz al-Adabiyyah, 1999.
- . *Muḥākamah fī Nisābūr*. Tūnis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li-l-Nashr, 1973.
- . *Nuṣūṣ sharqiyyah*. Dimashq: al-Madā, 1999.
- . *Tajribatī al-shi‘riyyah*. 1st ed. Bayrūt: Manshūrāt Nizār al-Qabbānī, 1968.
- . *Yanābī‘ al-shams: al-sīrah al-shi‘riyyah*. 1st ed. Dimashq: Dār al-Farqad li-l-Ṭabā‘ah wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 1999.
- Bayati, Abdul Wahab Al-. *Love, Death and Exile: Poems Translated from the Arabic*. Trans. Bassam K. Frangieh. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP, 1990.
- Blois, François de. *Persian Literature: A Bio-Bibliographical Survey, Volume V: Poetry of the Pre-Mongol Period*. 2nd ed. London: RoutledgeCurzon in association with The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 2004.
- Boullata, Issa J. ‘The Masks of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī.’ *Journal of Arabic Literature* 32.2 (2001): 107-118.
- Camus, Albert. *Le Mythe de Sisyphe: Essai sur l’absurde*. Paris: Gallimard, 1942.
- Griffel, Frank. ‘Al-Ghazali.’ *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 2016. 9 September 2018. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/al-ghazali/>.
- Hidāyat, Ṣādiq. *Rubā‘iyyāt-i Ḥakīm ‘Umar Khayyām*. Uppsala: Intishārāt-i Afsānah, 1376 [1997; 1923].
- . *Tarānah’hā-yi Khayyām: bā shish majlis-i taṣvīr az Darvīsh Naqqāsh*. [Tihārān?]: Intishārāt-i Māh, [1982?; 1934].

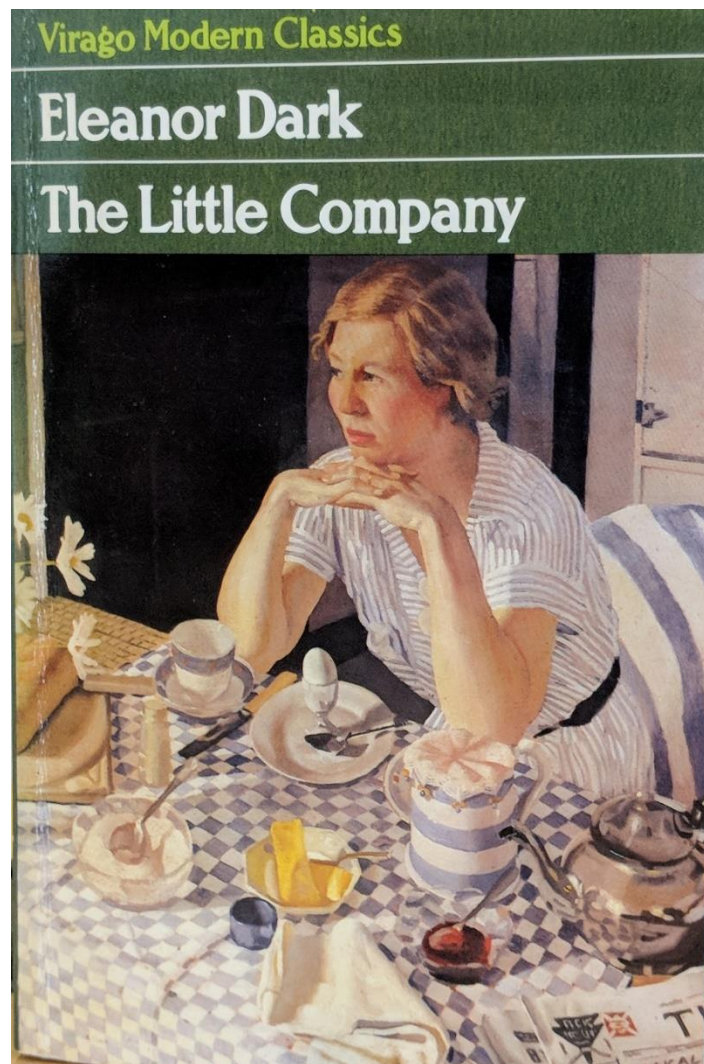
- Hodgson, Marshall G.S. *The Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizārī Ismā'īlīs Against the Islamic World*. Philadelphia: The U of Pennsylvania P, 2005 [1955].
- Jāsim, 'Azīz al-Sayyid. *Al-Iltizām wa-l-taṣawwuf fī shi'r 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī*. 1st ed. Baghdād: Dār al-Shu'ūn al-Thaqāfiyyah al-'Āmmah, Āfāq 'Arabiyyah, 1990.
- Khayyām, 'Umar. *The Rubā'iyāt of 'Umar Khayyām*. Translated with an introduction by Parichehr Kasra. UNESCO Collection of Representative Works Persian Series, no. 21. Ed. Ehsan Yar-Shater. Delmar, NY: Scholar's Facsimiles & Reprints, Inc., 1975.
- . *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam: English, French, German, Italian, and Danish Translations Comparatively Arranged in Accordance with the Text of Edward FitzGerald's Version with Further Selections, Notes, Biographies, Bibliographies, and Other Material*. Ed. Nathan Haskell Dole. Vol. I Boston: L. C. Page and Company, 1898.
- Lamb, Harold. *Omar Khayyam: A Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1934.
- Lionnet, Françoise and Shu-mei Shih. Eds. 'Introduction: Thinking through the Minor, Transnationally.' *Minor Transnationalism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005. 1-26.
- Molavi, Afshin. *The Soul of Iran: A Nation's Struggle for Freedom*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002.
- Muḥsinī'niyā, Nāṣir and Sipīdah Akhavān Māsūlah. 'Bāztāb-i farhang va adab-i Īrān dar shi'r-i 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī.' *Kāvish-nāmah-i adabiyyāt-i taṭbīqī (muṭāla'āt-i taṭbīqī-i 'arabī —fārsī)*. Dānishkadah-i Adabiyyāt va 'Ulūm-i Insānī, Dānishgāh-i Rāzī Kirmānshāh, 3.12 (Zamistān [Winter], 1392; 2014): 95-119.
- Omidshah, Mahmoud and J. T. P. de Bruijn. 'Candle.' *Encyclopædia Iranica*. IV/7 748-751. 9 September 2018. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/candle-pers>.
- Parsinejad, Iraj. *A History of Literary Criticism in Iran 1866-1951: Literary Criticism in the Works of Enlightened Thinkers of Iran—Akhundzadeh, Kermani, Malkom, Talebof, Maraghe'i, Kasravi, and Hedayat*. Bethesda, MD: Ibex Publishers, 2002.
- Rastegar, Kamran. *Literary Modernity between the Middle East and Europe: Textual transactions in nineteenth-century Arabic, English, and Persian literatures*. Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures. Ed. James E. Montgomery, Roger Allen, and Philip F. Kennedy. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Ridgeon, Lloyd. *Sufi Castigator: Ahmad Kasravi and the Iranian mystical tradition*. Routledge Sufi Series. Ed. Ian Richard Netton. London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006.
- Rizk, Khalil Shukrallah. 'The Poetry of 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī: Thematic and Stylistic Study.' Diss. Indiana University, 1981.
- Rubā'ī shumārah-i 63*. Ganjoor. 9 September 2018. <http://ganjoor.net/khayyam/robaee/sh63/>.
- Schimmel, Annemarie. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1978.
- Simawe, Saadi A. 'The Lives of the Sufi Masters in 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī's Poetry.' *Journal of Arabic Literature* 32.2 (2001): 119-141.



**On Pacification
The International and Domestic Referents of an Australian Artwork
Robyn Walton**

Abstract

This is a piece of creative non-fiction merging art commentary, literary analysis, and a personal account of the writer's research. Changes across time in the writer's understanding of an Australian painting – *Breakfast Piece* (1936) by Herbert Badham – are examined, with the writer's slowness to comprehend the painting's overt allusion to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (Abyssinia) highlighted. The writer's discovery that *Breakfast Piece* was reproduced on the covers of a 1985 edition of Eleanor Dark's 1945 novel *The Little Company* and a 1991 edition of Elizabeth Harrower's 1966 novel *The Watch Tower* provokes an analysis of these authors' treatment of international geopolitical affairs and local gender relations.



Herbert Badham, *Breakfast Piece* (1936) on cover of Eleanor Dark, *The Little Company* (Virago Press, 1985).
Reproduced with copyright permission from Virago/Little Brown.

‘... *Breakfast Piece* is an amalgamation of objects amongst which the artist has situated his wife.’¹

I began visiting Herbert Badham’s 1936 painting *Breakfast Piece* in the Art Gallery of New South Wales during the 1980s when I lived in Sydney. At that time the quality I most appreciated in the artwork was its tranquillity. A harmonious arrangement of pastel blue-greys and whites spiked with yellow. A palely sunlit domestic interior, à la Vermeer. A woman in repose at her kitchen table.

¹ Art Gallery of New South Wales website, www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/6381/.

The items arrayed as a still life on that table constituted the makings and accoutrements of a leisurely meal, breakfast deconstructed. Being fond of bric-a-brac, I liked these ‘period details’ while failing to fully understand they were modish or only slightly dated in 1936. Admiring the gleam on what looked to be a venerable silver teapot, I did not recognise the electroplated Perfect model of 1927 from the Robur Tea Company. The blue-striped Cornish jug looked quaint; I did not know Cornishware had come into production in 1926. The pressed-glass vase: that was a Depression-era product.

As for the woman sitting with fingers interlocked under her chin, she had to be older than I was. Her fair arms must have rounded out as she matured. (Actually, I was into my 30s and so was she.) Her house frock of fresh blue and white striped cotton was the comfortable equivalent of a man’s business shirt. The woman’s expression sometimes concerned me, however. She appeared not merely placid but wistful.

I saw, yet did not see, the vertically folded newspaper covering the table’s front corner, downstage left. Its headlines were only half-visible and inexplicably blurred, the letters oblique. In the top line was a word I took to be a Middle Eastern or North African place name. The second line began with a distinct word: ‘WAR’. So, I figured, the woman’s husband – for she wore a wedding ring – was away overseas, at risk. I accepted the genre character of the scene, the artist’s conjunction of quiet benignity with uneasy thoughts.

Deciding to move away from Sydney in the 1990s, I exchanged a Pacific coastline for one subject to Southern Ocean winds. I took with me the catalogue from a Badham retrospective mounted in Wollongong in spring 1987; a reproduction of *Breakfast Piece* was included.² Stepping into my new house at night after flying down from rickety Sydney, I found its rooms serene and chilly. It had been built in 1936, I discovered; that was a kind-of coincidence.

The place name in Badham’s headline I remembered as ‘BENGHAZI’. That was incorrect, yet occasional leafing through my catalogue and return visits to the NSW gallery failed to dislodge the erroneous word in my brain. As I had only the haziest knowledge of Benghazi, I could not explain to myself why I ‘saw’ that word. Nor could I explain why I continued recalling *Breakfast Piece* while not always being able to remember the name of its painter.

*

Early in 2011, protests in Libya against the authoritarian rule of Colonel Gaddafi precipitated a revolutionary civil war which continued for most of that year. Along with many Australians, I skim-read accounts and sometimes looked away from awful sights on screens. Media outlets understood our need for lighter details: the playboy son enrolled at the London School of Economics was one. Benghazi, Libya’s second largest city, featured in early 2012 when attacks on two American facilities by Islamic extremists left the US Ambassador to Libya dead. As Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton incurred blame: there had been insufficient security, her detractors claimed (and still do). This was Benghazi then, a fought-over place oil-moneyed since the 1960s.

² Christine Dixon, ‘Catalogue essay,’ *Herbert Badham 1899-1961, An Exhibition Organised by the Wollongong City Gallery* (Wollongong: Wollongong City Gallery, 1987) 9.

My brain failed to marry such *Realpolitik* with what I misremembered from *Breakfast Piece*. I didn't think about Badham's work when I read a fantastically vile 1909 novel, *Mafarka the Futurist*, set in a North African region that was probably the future nation of Libya.³ The Egyptian-born Italian founder of Futurism, Filippo Marinetti, wrote gleefully about the exploitation and massacre of black-skinned sub-Saharan mercenaries and workers in the colonised food-bowl. Black bodies were liquidised. Marinetti's tale climaxed with the creation of a new man, mechanised and proto-fascistic, who could soar through the sky.

Nor was I prompted to revisit the newspaper detail of Badham's painting in 2012 after watching a conference presentation that treated the 'Arab Spring' occupation of Cairo's Tahrir Square, and subsequent occupations of public squares around the world, in utopian and aesthetic terms.

Belatedly, what did register with me, however, was the discovery that my own father, Frank, had fought in Libya as well as Egypt as a New Zealand serviceman. Since childhood I had known my Dad was in Egypt in the Second World War, and that he had been in tanks. A little research and I learned he had been in Libya too. The demarcation line across the desert had been drawn as recently as 1934.

My father had withheld from my brother and me knowledge of what he and his compatriots, *pakeha* and Maori, endured while on active service. We saw only a few small photos of Frank and other men (lean, tanned, bare chested, grinning) in Cairo on leave: in front of a pyramid, in a horse-drawn cart. My father did not brag or deplore or even speak of what happened in war, just as my Australian grandfather who had been mustard-gassed in the First World War was silent on existence in the trenches until, dying and delirious, he raved about rats and mud. Dad kept his medals and a thick book, the official history of his Division's exploits, tucked away in his lowboy. Suffering PTSD, he harangued our mother after drinking.

The Libyan region, I learned, had been invaded and occupied by Italy in 1911, when Europe's great powers were still colonising. Local resistance coupled with Ottoman and German use of the region during the Great War forced an Italian withdrawal. However, there was a re-conquest in the early 1920s, with a sustained war of pacification lasting through the 1920s and 1930s.⁴ In 1940, with the Second World War underway, Italian troops assembled in Libya went on the offensive, crossing the border into the nominally independent but British-inflected Egypt. New Zealanders entered the conflict in 1941 and for the next year were fighting chiefly in western Egypt, with several forays into sectors of Libya.

Transported next to southern Italy, my dad's group of New Zealanders fought their way north. The horrors of the battle of Monte Cassino were not mentioned when we children handled a couple of small photos of the Italian family with whom our father had been billeted after the Allies' 'liberation' of Rome. A girl with brushed black hair, her torso filling out her best white dress. As an adult, I once stood on russet gravel at the base of the rocky mount at Cassino, attempting to imagine attacking that stronghold from inside an armoured tank. I couldn't do it. Not far from that spot I bought a pair of shoes with wedge heels and gold-coloured straps. They came in a black cardboard box which I kept for years as a private, absurd memento.

³ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist: an African Novel (1909)*, trans. Carol Diethe and Steve Cox (London: Middlesex University Press, 1997).

⁴ One concise source of information which I read later is John Gooch's article 'Re-conquest and Suppression: Fascist Italy's Pacification of Libya and Ethiopia, 1922-39,' *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28.6 (2005) 1005-32.

Questions about cultural domination and appropriation – twin tools of pacification – began to hover around my mental image of *Breakfast Piece*. In 1936 Badham had chosen to include this foreign word I remembered as BENGHAZI. Had he been alluding to the increasing likelihood that a second Great War would break out between Europe's most powerful nations? Or, in his mind, were all those potential combatants and civilians too far away to be more than greyscale letters at the edge of his chequered pastel cloth, there where the precariously placed still-life objects were at risk of falling to the floor if the cloth underneath them was twitched?

*

Growing familiarity with art practice equipped me to recognise *Breakfast Piece* as an exercise in perspective. Observe the diagonals, the source of the lighting, the sitter viewed from the right and slightly from above. Badham specialised in teaching perspective at the National Art School in its extraordinary premises, the old Darlinghurst Gaol. I'm guessing it was the breakthrough success of *Breakfast Piece*, purchased by the Art Gallery of New South Wales when it was first exhibited in the spring of 1936, that helped him gain the teaching position.

The sitter for *Breakfast Piece* was Herbert Badham's wife, Enid, née Wilson, depicted as she was at the time of painting in 1936. She could not have been grieving for a husband absent in a war because her man was there with her. Badham had seen brief military service when he joined the Royal Australian Navy as a teenager, late in the First World War, but had not seen action overseas. As we lack a biography of Badham, I don't know what impacts, positive or negative, that war service experience had on him or, by extension, those who lived with him.

Enid and Herbert had married in 1927 and in his *On the Roof*, a year later, Badham had shown his bride sociably lunching with visiting family members, her golf clubs in the foreground.⁵ Water views, a stylish red coffee pot (a wedding present): how we live, so gaily, in Sydney. The couple's daughter, affectionately known as Chebby, was born in December 1928 in Clairvaux private hospital, and the family continued to live in the apartment in Vacluse as Herbert's career emerged.

In his *Self Portrait – Man with a Glove* of 1939, Badham would depict himself as a conscientiously flamboyant Artist: cravat, lips clamped on a pipe, right hand extending forward as he pulled on a leather glove.⁶ The allusion was to Van Eyck's portraits in which gloves signalled authority and civility. Where Van Eyck used a dark Baroque background, Badham deployed the objects of a domestic interior, including a painting in his characteristic style showing a woman posed in a sitting room, gaze averted. When I looked again at *Breakfast Piece* after considering the self-portrait, I was conscious of the unseen painter requiring command in that Vacluse room.

Researching the life of the English painter-author Wyndham Lewis, I discovered that in 1919-20 he had created a similar self-portrait, now lost.⁷ Lewis was a combative and psychologically damaged war veteran inclined to look to totalitarian solutions. He was impressed by Mussolini's 1922 March on Rome following the collapse of the Fascists'

⁵ Catalogue 6, 21.

⁶ Catalogue 12-13, 23.

⁷ *Self-Portrait with Chair and Table*. A photograph of the painting is reproduced in Walter Michel, *Wyndham Lewis: Paintings and Drawings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) plate 66.

Pacification Pact with the socialists. Lewis drew his wife, nicknamed Froanna, yet in daily life she remained near invisible, even to visitors to the succession of London flats the couple occupied.

It would be misleading to push comparisons between Badham and Lewis. However, the observable similarities in the way these men expressed and represented themselves and others encouraged my suspicion that *Breakfast Piece* had never been simply an experiment in perspective or an appreciation of a loved one's peaceful mood. Enid had been directed to sit behind the objects Herbert had arrayed so impractically. Her boiled egg: balanced, untapped. A cigarette packet lying open: her morning smoke not yet enjoyed?

Badham depicted his wife's blue eyes as averted from her painter, her gaze directed toward the sunlight. It was possible to feel myself an intruder on a forced and discomfiting set-up. Tranquillity manufactured is tranquillity diffused.

*

Those blue eyes averted from the painter were also averted from the newspaper. If Enid had already read it, had its frontpage news dispirited her? Sitting at my computer screen in my house in Melbourne, I saw that the headline began with 'MAKALLE', not 'BENGHAZI'. I had misremembered for decades.

The Australian National Library's Trove supplied what Badham obscured – a cascade of page one headlines and subheads, some lines bold or italicised or both:

THE SUN, Sydney, Thursday February 13, 1936

MAKALLE CENTRE OF ANOTHER BATTLE

WAR ON AGAIN

Italians' Counter-attack

AKSUM OUTPOSTS

Withdrawal Story

OIL SANCTIONS' MOVES

Eventually the report began, with battlefield news:

Indicative of the increased activity now being shown in Abyssinia is a report that the Italians have begun an extensive counter attack in the Makalle sector ...

Resistance fighters had achieved the odd success, and had taken the opportunity to put on the aggressors' clothing and weaponry:

[Rasse Youm] ... has started his own Caporetto brigade with equipment from the slain Italian Caporetto brigade, fitting them out in khaki shorts, boots and puttees, but not using the black shirts.

Lower down was an update on the League of Nations' consideration of instituting an embargo on member nations transporting oil to Italy.

Reading more widely, I learned Italy had invaded independent Ethiopia (then commonly named Abyssinia, alternate spelling Abissinia) in October 1935. This incursion marked the beginning of the Second Italo-Abyssinian War. On their first attempt at conquest, in 1895-96, the Italians had failed.

That many of us have never heard of that 1935-36 struggle, or have forgotten hearing of it, does not mean it was minor news at the time. For months, I found, Australia's morning and afternoon dailies relayed European reports of the back and forth moves of the unequal conflict. We still hear and read allusions to the Spanish Civil War of that decade, yet a fascist conquest in the Horn of Africa now goes unmentioned.

You may wonder which major powers jumped in to actively defend the Abyssinians. None did. Indeed, France and Britain, leaders of the League of Nations, made a pact to offer Italy two-thirds of Abyssinia in exchange for concessions. Many Africans in the worldwide diaspora volunteered to travel to fight in support of the Ethiopians' resistance but were blocked by their own governments. Some Italian women in Australia donated their wedding rings to an international appeal for finances to help Italy battle on despite League sanctions. Brisbane's Catholic Archbishop, a defender of his state's considerable Italian population, said that if the Italians conquered Abyssinia they would 'use their civilising power to civilise the people'.

Late in December '35, Italy began using chemical weapons on the Abyssinians. Aircraft dropped canisters of poison gas. A Red Cross field hospital was bombed. By May '36, after Badham had finished his *Breakfast Piece*, the Italians were ready to perform a triumphal long-march to the capital. For their March of the Iron Will they mobilised a column of cars, trucks, tanks, artillery carriers, motorcycles and horse trucks, a spectacle of mechanised power. It was only heavy rain which prevented the final stretch, the leaders' entry into Addis, being carried out on horseback in full panoply.

While Ethiopia was declared conquered in 1936, this diverse nation was not entirely pacified. In February 1937, an assassination attempt was met with a violent crackdown by the occupying forces. Thousands of Ethiopians were massacred or imprisoned.⁸

Occasionally in Sydney during the 1980s I had met Ethiopian-Australians at the home of an Aussie couple who had lived in Ethiopia and whose daughter, my age, had been born there. The couple had gone to Africa in the 1950s with the Sudan Inland Mission, a Protestant organisation which had been particularly influential prior to the Italian invasion. As evangelicals, they had no truck with Catholicism or Ethiopia's long-established Orthodox faith, nor with the country's pagans and Jews. In that Sydney household, I heard of Ethiopia as a beautiful country, the Switzerland of Africa, and saw an old photo of the matriarch as a young missionary worker on horseback in the highlands. If Mek'ele was mentioned I failed to associate the sound of the word with the old spelling of the place name, Makalle, that I had seen (but failed to register) in the Badham painting.

The Derg Marxist coup of the '70s which had precipitated the flight of many citizens and foreigners from Ethiopia was scarcely alluded to at that dining table – much as Badham had positioned words at the edge of the eating surface. It was to be kept in perspective as part of missionaries', and humanity's, larger existential drama of mighty battles and displacements. I

⁸ For a recent, detailed account see Ian Campbell, *The Addis Ababa Massacre: Italy's National Shame* (London: C. Hurst & Co Publishers, 2017). For more on Mussolini's rule and empire, see various books by R.J.B. Bosworth, most notably *Mussolini* (new edition) (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

did not hear mention by my fellow guests, the Australian Ethiopians, of the annual remembrance of the February 1937 atrocities; perhaps this was out of deference to our conservative white hosts. There was no Bob Marley in the air either, no discussion of Rastafari beliefs about Haile Selassie as *Jah* and Ethiopia as Zion.

My peer, the daughter, did not care to be associated with her birthplace, Ethiopia, and preferred to live away from her Sydney family. Missionary kids and other so-called Third Culture kids commonly report feelings of not belonging anywhere as they mature into adulthood. Resenting the expectation of exemplary behaviour placed on them as children, they may pretend to adhere to rigorous codes while slyly doing differently. Tired of tea poured from a proselytising teapot, this daughter went for the forbidden cigarettes.

In the years after those meals, I encountered several Westerners' books about Ethiopia. They were notably solipsistic. Evelyn Waugh's efforts seemed to share some kinship with that immature daughter's mix of reluctant acknowledgement and derision of both expats' and locals' behaviours. After two short stints as a correspondent, he produced first a non-fiction volume he titled *Waugh in Abyssinia* and then his satirical novel *Scoop*.⁹ Samuel Johnson used Abyssinia as his setting for his 1759 philosophical romance – short title *Rasselas*, working title 'The Choice of Life' – about a junior prince confined to a palace in a happy valley.¹⁰ Johnson's young man escaped to Egypt to trial other ways of living, his experiments ending with the probability he would return to his homeland. Was happiness attainable, enquired Johnson, whose mother had lately died back in provincial Lichfield; what constituted the well-lived life?

So, what did Badham mean to convey when he included those blurred headlines speaking of 'MAKALLE' and 'AKSUM'? Picasso in his 1937 *Guernica* went for explicit images, most memorably of dismemberment, to point to the brutality of the aerial bombing of a Basque town. By contrast, Badham's reticence in his 1936 painting must seem feeble. But it is an alternate model of how to reference and provoke thought about battles and sufferings. Old-fashioned, unsubtle, but he did try, as cartoonists do with their labels.

At least, I think he tried. There are other Badham paintings in which a marginal sign or notice, partially obscured, depicts words. It is one of Badham's tics as the wry Artist Observer of contemporary Sydney. Another is to draw himself at the sidelines of a crowd as a pipe-smoking, owl-eyed Observer. Sometimes the meaning of the words matters, and humour is generated by the conjunction of a peeling notice with heedless passengers, pedestrians, diners. But at other times the viewer may wonder whether the words, and the objects on which they are printed – placards, tin signs, newspapers -- are meaningful to the artist only as graphic shapes and vectors in his composition.

The afternoon newspaper folded on the leading corner of the Badhams' breakfast table shows the left upper quadrant of its front page. The half-visible words of the newspaper banner, headlines and subheadings are there, indeed, but so are symmetrical shapes in an advertisement. Trove shows me the full picture. There are two advertisements occupying the upper part of the farthest left column, one positioned above the other, and both are for bottled products suitable for illustrating in a narrow column. Pick Me Up sauce is at the top. A more expensive bottle –

⁹ Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh in Abissinia* (London: Longmans, Green, 1936); *Scoop: a novel about journalists* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1938).

¹⁰ Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia: A Tale*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927).

filled with Hennessy cognac – is shown in larger scale below it. For the newspaper's editor, pragmatic considerations of commerce and layout trumped any thought that putting bottles of tasty sauce and alcohol beside news of warfare might signal a lack of due seriousness and decorum.

*

That Badham may not have intended to elicit thought about the colonising war in Ethiopia is possible. And it's even more possible that he did not intend to prompt thoughts about the selfhood and autonomy of the woman sitting for him.

How did Enid feel about repeatedly sitting for extended periods for exercises in perspective? Was she posing under sufferance? Her feelings and thoughts seem flattened behind an impassive face. In the painting chamber Enid had to allow the freedoms of an independent being to be taken from her in the interests of her husband's patternmaking. The inelegant modern-day description of her facial expression would be 'resting bitch face'.

Two mature, married men to whom I showed the image expressed curiosity about how Badham was feeling and sympathy for his possible troubles. Perhaps the painter felt lonely and under-appreciated when his wife looked away, seemingly indifferent to his enterprise? Did he feel insecure, they wondered, because she was failing to attend to him at a deep level? If she was quite strong and reflective, even purposeful, was she consciously closing out her husband?

One name for the use of a body situated at the centre of a carefully contrived exercise in composition and perspective is 'objectification'. And that is pretty much what the AGNSW in its online characterisation of the painting both does and ascribes to Badham: '*Breakfast Piece* is an amalgamation of objects amongst which the artist has situated his wife.' It was not until a couple of years ago that I discovered this anonymous online description. Had I read it earlier, then presumably I would have noted the adjacent sentence referring to how the newspaper headline announcing Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia is a counterpoint to the 'tranquil morning mood'.¹¹

The word I would choose for conveying my suspicions about Badham's treatment of his wife is 'pacification'. It would be a relief to be proved wrong. I merely speculate. If we give credence to the notion of Enid keeping her thoughts to herself and withholding the appreciative attention her husband regarded as his due, then we can also imagine the human object metaphorically situating her painter. The painting becomes an object lesson in subversion and passive-aggression, its tenor increasingly distant from tranquillity.

Deborah Beck, archivist and historian, interviewed the Badhams' daughter, Chebby, in 2017. By then a very old woman, Chebby recalled, seemingly with more indulgent bemusement than rancour, her impatience to get away and go off with her friends when she was a girl and her father had requested her to stay still in some posture or location while he drew her.¹²

In the slim file of Badham records at the AGNSW I found correspondence from 1985. Virago Press had requested permission to reproduce *Breakfast Piece* on the front cover of a

¹¹ Art Gallery of New South Wales website, www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/6381/. If the statement that the headline announces an invasion is to be taken literally, it is incorrect, since Mussolini's troops had invaded in the previous year.

¹² Private conversation with Deborah Beck, National Art School, Sydney, 17 May 2017.

reissue of a 1945 Eleanor Dark novel, *The Little Company*. Chebby had written back on behalf of her mother, then aged 85, telling Virago Enid was pleased with the plan and ‘delighted with the compliment paid to my father’s painting’. ‘Incidentally’, Chebby added, ‘she was amused at the idea of becoming a cover girl’.¹³ Such a nicely tongue-in-cheek remark. Although I note, now, there is no mention of either mother or daughter having read or planning to read Dark’s book.

This begs the question: have I read it? The answer is yes, but only recently with appreciative attention. I remember being introduced to Carmen Callil, the Australian-born founder of Virago, when she was briefly in Sydney in 1986 or 1987. Doubtless Callil’s visit had some component of promotion of the reissued Australian classics with the artworks on their covers. It’s possible, then, that I saw the Dark reissue at that time, noticing its cover and flipping through the opening pages, and I seem to have a residual memory of one character, the protagonist’s daughter, who like me was working in Sydney.

When finally I decided to read *The Little Company* ‘properly’ and to investigate its background, I learned it addressed Australian society and gender relations in the 1930s and the war years of the early 1940s. Notionally at least Virago’s choice of the Badham painting was apt. Unable to find an available library copy of the 1985 reissue, I turned to the 2012 ebook.¹⁴ Almost immediately I saw the second sentence of the novel: ‘From the Sunday paper, fallen on the grass beside Gilbert Massey’s deck-chair, bold black headlines announced: A.I.F. NOT IN BENGHAZI RETREAT.’¹⁵

So, there it was. More than likely my wrong-headed association of *Breakfast Piece* with Benghazi originated in the mid to late 1980s when I handled a copy of the Dark reissue, seeing the Badham painting close to the capitalised word BENGHAZI.

Dark’s storyline begins in April 1941. In February the Allies, Australians included, had captured Benghazi from the Italians. Churchill had then called a halt to a further advance west, saying troops needed to be withdrawn to defend Greece. And in early April, with Allied forces withdrawing, Benghazi was captured by Axis. Dark’s headline is a modification of a *Sun* headline from Sunday 6 April: ‘No A.I.F. Troops in Bengazi [*sic*] Skirmishes.’¹⁶

Gilbert, an author, is presented with sympathetic insight by Dark, while his wife Phyllis is scorned for her uninquisitive conservatism. Telling the couple’s story in flashbacks, Dark describes how by the ‘increasingly uneasy’ years of the mid-30s Phyllis was ‘resentfully conscious’ that child-bearing and rearing and zealous housekeeping had sapped her physical appeal: ‘By 1935 she had already begun to look bulky and to move slowly; the bright colouring, which had been her chief claim to prettiness, had faded from her cheeks and eyes.’ And what Phyllis had understood as Gilbert’s financial anxiety during the Depression years had to be acknowledged as ‘something much more – an anxiety about the world in general, a nagging dissatisfaction, a mounting anger, a sombre obsession’.¹⁷

There is much polemical dialogue in Dark’s novel. By contrast, the silence of the Badham painting could seem a relief from contestation and credos, until one reflects on how

¹³ This letter from Chebby Badham to Virago (1985) is contained in the AGNSW Archives in *Papers of Herbert Badham* (MS1997.7).

¹⁴ Eleanor Dark, *The Little Company* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2012).

¹⁵ Dark 9.

¹⁶ Ian Fitchett, ‘No A.I.F. Troops in Bengazi Skirmishes,’ Cairo, Saturday. *The Sun* (Sydney), Sun 6 April 1941, 1.

¹⁷ Dark 76.

much is going unsaid in that Vaucluse scene and how much, perhaps, there has been silencing or self-censorship.

For all their wordiness, Dark's politicised characters are not as productive as they would wish. Since the release of his 1937 book *Thunder Brewing*, her Gilbert has not published. Rather, he has read intensively, newspapers especially, 'watching the headlines, and, even more narrowly, the obscure little paragraphs; reading not only the lines of print, but between them; sorting facts and relating them, sifting evidence, accumulating and discarding, toiling laboriously like an ant to add his grain of comprehension to the world's sum.' He has been 'awake only in his mind' while functioning in the contemporary world 'like a sleepwalker'.¹⁸ The metaphor of sleepwalking was popular in both socio-political and psychologically oriented literary writing of the 1930s and early 1940s. Patrick White, for one, used it in his *The Living and the Dead* (1941), another novel about the conflicts and dilemmas leading up to the Second World War. (White focuses on Londoners' responses to the Spanish Civil War.)¹⁹

At the end of 1942 Dark's Gilbert is still 'poring with miserly concentration over remembered scraps of news. ... ROMMEL NOW IN TRIPOLI AREA. RUSSIA LAUNCHES FOURTH MAJOR OFFENSIVE.'²⁰ For a person close to any such wartime action, it cannot be understood as trivial or fragmentary. Yet from the distance and perspective of Australia, it may be classed as one piece in a large, kaleidoscopic picture; and, in the creative work of the visual artist or author, the words referring to it may rest at the edge of a tabletop or sit crammed on a page undistinguished from other headlines. Dark's Gilbert is overtaken by an urgent desire to 'get on with his task of recording and interpreting' some part of 'this enormous world-story'.²¹

Along the way to this ending, Gilbert's reveries about the recent past gloss the key conflicts of the 1930s, including the war in Abyssinia. His fellow Australians' indifference and absence of foresight incenses him:

Hadn't he seen the vast majority of his country's seven million inhabitants moving through life in the bewitchment of a familiar routine, stepping from today's problems to tomorrow's, declining to meet those of next week halfway? They knew there was fighting going on in China – but, cripes, when wasn't there fighting going on in China? They knew that Mussolini was dropping bombs on Abyssinian natives – but when haven't natives got it in the neck? They disapproved in theory; this Musso, they thought vaguely, was beginning to throw his weight around too much.²²

Two pages later, Gilbert is channelling the thoughts of his radical sister, Marty, and Communist brother: '[Y]ou can't have nations just walking in and grabbing other nations. Look at Austria. Look at Abyssinia. Maybe they were just a bunch of savages, but all the same ...'. He fumes that the League of Nations failed to go to Abyssinia's aid despite its covenant pledging

¹⁸ Dark 318.

¹⁹ For a more extensive discussion of this see Robyn Walton, 'Utopianism in Patrick White's *The Living and the Dead*,' *Cercles* no. 26, 2012. White's novel was first published in 1941, by Viking in New York.

²⁰ Dark 318.

²¹ Dark 318.

²² Dark 125-26.

that, if a member nation were attacked, all the others had to go to its help. ‘Abyssinia was a member, and so were we. ... Why?’²³

Gilbert directs some of his rage at his wife. Why hadn’t she cared, back in 1934 and after, when the conflicts that were the precursors of the Second World War were in the news? He mimics Phyllis’s past efforts to downplay conflicts and keep her thoughts serene:

“Oh – China!” That was not our business. Then, “Oh, Abyssinia ... well ...!” Then Spain. “But, Gilbert, that’s a civil war.” ... Then Czechoslovakia and Munich. “But he’s trying to keep the peace, Gilbert!”²⁴

In her resistance to her husband’s provocations and lectures, Phyllis could be seen to be practising self-pacification. There are glimpses, however, of her anger. Gilbert recalls how ‘[s]he looked at him with hatred’. He explains (or rationalises) this to himself: it was ‘not, he knew, a personal hatred of himself, but woman’s hatred of man’s mysterious, mischievous, destructive activities’.²⁵ A piece of polemical writing by Gilbert’s sister is introduced to say the words Phyllis cannot and may not want to formulate. Marty claims men rationalise their ‘criminal muddling’ and blame the women ‘who have poured themselves out with misguided, sacrificial recklessness ... women who have stunted their brains, lost their alertness, narrowed their vision, and all but renounced their very humanity to make good his senseless orgies of self-destruction ...’²⁶

Noting that Australian scholar Drusilla Modjeska had contributed an introduction to the Virago reissue of *The Little Company* and knowing she had written on art as well as literature and women’s issues, I took myself to the Rare Books room of my state library to discover her insights. Taking the paperback from its plastic sleeve, I was delighted to see the colours of the reproduced painting were undimmed. The image had been cropped, however, causing Enid and the table of objects to fill the space. The folded newspaper was still there in part, the letters MAK all that remained visible of MAKALLE.

Modjeska proved to have nothing to say about the cover art. She may not have even known of the choice when she wrote. What she had to say about the novel was couched in terms of developing understandings. As with my experience of looking at the Badham painting on and off over decades, she had visited and revisited Dark’s fiction. This was her second essay on *The Little Company*, and as she was then (in 1985) approaching the age that Dark had been when she wrote the book, she felt better able to ‘appreciate the thinking and rethinking of a woman in the middle of her life’.²⁷

Earlier, Modjeska said, she had argued that *The Little Company* was ‘a retreat from feminism under the pressure of broader political issues raised by depression and war’. She had seen Phyllis as an expression of Dark’s exasperation with women who ‘make conventional values their own, [who] become guardians of conservative and often misogynist ideologies’.²⁸ I

²³ Dark 127.

²⁴ Dark 131.

²⁵ Dark, 131.

²⁶ Dark, 131

²⁷ Drusilla Modjeska. ‘Introduction to Eleanor Dark,’ *The Little Company* (London: Virago, 1985) ix.

²⁸ Modjeska, xiv-xv.

noded in recognition as I read. Those closing words of the sentence tallied with how I have been inclined to regard my mother, also named Phyllis.

Modjeska continued: 'I am now not so sure.' Another way of looking at Dark's representation of Phyllis 'is as a powerful indictment of social conditions that result in such maiming of the female self'.²⁹ Blame may be shifted then from some individuals to social conditioning. Should I agree, since with increasing age and perspective I have learned to concede due allowance for upbringing, privations and hurt when I think ruefully or indignantly about my mother's severity and co-dependence? The blame that Dark's Marty directs at men en masse for dutiful women's diminished wellbeing sits between Modjeska's alternatives of blaming these women and broadly indicting institutional and social limiting of women.

*

At the stage I was noticing similarities between Badham's painting and Dark's novel, a woman from the book group I belong to read my draft essay. My description of the painting reminded her of the themes of an Australian novel we'd read a couple of years earlier, Elizabeth Harrower's *The Watch Tower*. I agreed, while thinking: 'Oh no, too much!' I couldn't further complicate the tale of my evolving appreciation of *Breakfast Piece* by mentioning Harrower's novel. It had not been published until 1966, and most of its action took place after the 1930s.

Two weeks later, two Canberra friends – a conservator and an archivist-author – were staying with me. Sitting after breakfast at my table, a repurposed trestle work bench, we were discussing our recent reading, writing and art viewing when the conservator said, 'There's an edition of *The Watch Tower* with that Badham painting on the cover.' As best he could visualise the image on the cover, it was a detail; the checked tablecloth was what you saw. My friends promised to post me their copy as soon as they reached home.

One week later, I held the book, a 1991 Imprint edition published by the venerable Angus & Robertson company, by then owned by the international HarperCollins. There Enid sat at her kitchen table. The image had been cropped only to the same extent as the one on the Dark cover. But, situated within broad white margins, it looked diminished and washed-out. Again, I did not know who had chosen this painting to complement a novel by an Australian woman. And had I not known how brilliantly insightful and searing this Harrower novel is, I might not have opened the pale cover to begin re-reading.

When war is declared in September 1939, eleven-year-old Clare Vaizey asks with a child's acuity: 'What are they doing it for?' Her narcissistic mother responds: 'You can read. There's the paper. Find out.'³⁰ On Saturdays, seated on the 'cushiony red seats in the lilac-scented disinfected dark' of the cinema, Clare and her elder sister, Laura, glimpse the expansion of the war: 'the bombed cities of Europe ... the deserts of the Middle East ... the northern jungles'.³¹ They feel 'inadequacy, hollowness and frustration'.³² Later, a Dutch post-war immigrant will be invited into the sisters' household, but these newsreel allusions indicate the limits of Harrower's representation of the horrors brought about by war. Her topic is domestic

²⁹ Modjeska, xv.

³⁰ Elizabeth Harrower, *The Watch Tower* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1991) 21.

³¹ Harrower 23.

³² Harrower 24.

abuse, specifically the pacification of Laura and Clare and the sporadic resistance put up by Clare. Warfare is not only the backdrop but, in her narrative, a parallel engagement.

With her father having died early, her mother determined to leave Australia, and her hopes of a tertiary education thwarted, Laura is at a loss to know how to adequately support herself on a factory wage and help Clare finish secondary school. Enter a provider in the form of her employer, businessman Felix Shaw. Despite knowing this complex man's erratic behaviour from daily observation and having heard him boast of admiring Hitler and the Gestapo, self-sacrificing Laura marries Felix. She and Clare move into his substantial Neutral Bay house, where the mental cruelty enjoyed by this dark-haired Bluebeard character is soon apparent. The sisters become psychological prisoners. Felix's belittling tirades, threats, heavy drinking, and outbursts of violence serve to terrorise them into not daring to leave, while his occasional shows of charm and gift-giving manipulate Laura into forbearance. His is classic controlling behaviour. Laura is intimidated into first, silent submission and second, siding with and enabling his viciousness.

The kitchen table, not unlike that of the Badhams although more upmarket, becomes emblematic of Laura's captivity, and Clare's. In one episode, Laura briefly escapes by going into the city on a Saturday afternoon. While ineffectually searching the newspaper for accommodation and a job, she sees her existence with Felix in perspective, realising that little by little she has resigned away her selfhood 'from a desire for peace at any price'.³³ Her will too paralysed for her to act in her own interests, Laura returns to the house, where Felix and Clare are eating at the kitchen table. She and Clare exchange 'bleached' glances.³⁴

On another occasion, the sisters sit polishing silverware in 'the pleasant lemon-and-white kitchen smelling of silver polish and bananas and pears, full of Saturday afternoon quiet'.³⁵ In this superficially tranquil setting, Laura has been echoing Felix's arguments against paying taxes to fund social services, with Clare taking the contrary view. Laura not only defends Felix but has internalised his domineering attitudes. She tells Clare to clean faster and stop being 'argumentative and moody'. To Clare's eyes, her expression is as 'defiant and venomous as Felix's was when he made some such controlling remark'. Clare rails against her sister's fearful refusal to be true to her real nature. Living in this household, she declares, is 'like living in an asylum. The air even seems demented'.³⁶

A haggard figure in the pleasingly appointed kitchen, Clare pleads for Laura's agreement that she be allowed to go away. Laura replies with an instruction to fetch a tea-towel, following it up with the ultimate threat: 'If you go, don't ever come back or try to get in touch with me for any reason, because I won't be here'.³⁷ This veiled acknowledgement of suicidal ideation is halted by the sounds of Felix's return from the hotel he co-owns. Urgently, shame-facedly, the women clear the table. Felix enters, 'out for a little blood sport'.³⁸

As Jennifer Osborn notes in her review essay on *The Watch Tower*, when Clare finally frees herself it is without Laura's help. Women and girls subjugated by or cognisant of domestic

³³ Harrower 109.

³⁴ Harrower 110.

³⁵ Harrower 122.

³⁶ Harrower 121-22.

³⁷ Harrower 122.

³⁸ Harrower 123.

abuse do not necessarily show solidarity.³⁹ Joan London, in her introduction to the 2012 edition of *The Watch Tower*, recounts not only how the novel impacted strongly on her when she read it in 1970 but how its contents stayed in the back of her mind, especially ‘the sense of darkness in sunlight’.⁴⁰

Both these observations are pertinent when I study the face of the woman in *Paint and Morning Tea*, the painting that Badham made in 1937, a year after *Breakfast Piece*.⁴¹ The sitter, so I understand, is a family member. She is shown seated holding uplifted a cup and saucer and gazing toward the light source while in the foreground her painter, Badham, sits at his easel. The combination of her expression of hauteur and her smart dress sense suggests she is a more worldly-wise woman than Enid and, the viewer guesses, not as subdued. She looks ready to head back out into the Sydney sunlight as soon as practicable. The sitter’s red hat and matching lipstick are not only counterparts of the hat and lip colouring in William Frater’s 1937 portrait of Lina Bryans, *The Red Hat*.⁴² Both the Badham and Frater paintings possibly reference the red hat and warm-toned lips of Vermeer’s *Girl with the Red Hat* (1665–1666).⁴³

*

Scrutinising *Breakfast Piece* again I noticed, as if for the first time, the huge black stripe through the left half of the background. Behind the objects and woman, a door stands open. An inclusion warding off claustrophobia, a cultural critic might remark. The door is rendered in solid black. Fernand Leger’s influence, yes. The black is repeated as stripes in the doorframe and in Enid’s belt, while a blue-striped fabric covers her chairback. As a charcoal shadow, the black reappears behind the sunlit newspaper. Technical device and artistic homage, certainly. A representation of the darkness which may stand behind tranquillity, that too.

Or, perhaps, a pipe is just a pipe, and the creation of the black slab was a practical ploy born out of the artist’s cash-strapped circumstances. For the Badhams were poor then by Western standards and Herbert was given to re-using even flimsy sheets of card. With the guidance of a conservator, I have studied x-rays of two Badham paintings, *Paint and Morning Tea* and *The Night Bus* (c. 1943).⁴⁴ It is evident that when necessary Badham worked with whatever was pre-existing. If a dark shape was too intransigent to obliterate, he incorporated it into his new composition, making it into a new object. In this way, for instance, a dark area in the lower right corner of a 1935 street scene became a dark box of artist’s equipment in the 1937 painting.

I have not seen x-rays of *Breakfast Piece* so cannot tell whether the black door is a reworking of some stubborn pre-existing slab of darkness on the board. Nor can I say whether

³⁹ Jennifer Osborn, ‘Review Essay: *The Watch Tower* by Elizabeth Harrower,’ *Transnational Literature* 9.2 (May 2017) <http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>.

⁴⁰ Joan London, ‘The Only Russian in Sydney: Introduction to Elizabeth Harrower,’ *The Watch Tower* (Melbourne: Text Classics, 2012).

⁴¹ Herbert Badham’s *Paint and Morning Tea* is in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), Melbourne.

⁴² William Frater’s *The Red Hat* is also in the collection of the NGV.
<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/5605>

⁴³ Johannes Vermeer’s painting is in the collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.60.html

⁴⁴ NGV, 18 January 2017. Assistance given by Raye Collins.

the folded newspaper in the lower right corner covers anything other than a section of the breakfast cloth and tabletop.

Where the Badhams' tabletop is exposed, a finely checked, textured covering like mosaic is visible. It is dully yellow-olive, while the table's edge and legs appear to be white-painted wood. I can remember this kind of decorative, wipeable table surfacing from my childhood, when every bit of furniture we had was second- or third-hand. The material stuck to the tabletop was a variety of embossed oilcloth or linoleum. Where this material was wearing or damaged at the edges, a child's fingers could prise small pieces away. It had a dense, claggy black underside.

It is possible to liken such darkness to the horrors of war, the fate of the Abyssinians hilled and pacified by Mussolini's colonisation being one example. But whether I can justly assert there was darkness underlying the Badhams' relationship must remain an open question for now.

Robyn Walton is an Honorary Associate in the Department of Creative Arts and English at La Trobe University, Melbourne. Her PhD on the topic of Utopia and Colonisation was obtained at La Trobe University and her earlier degrees at the University of Sydney. She has taught at University of Technology Sydney and La Trobe University, has published short fictions, and is a literary critic.

Works Cited

- Bosworth, R.J.B. *Mussolini*. London: Bloomsbury, 2010.
- Campbell, Ian. *The Addis Ababa Massacre: Italy's National Shame*. (London: C. Hurst & Co Publishers, 2017).
- Dixon, Christine. 'Catalogue essay,' *Herbert Badham 1899-1961: An Exhibition Organised by the Wollongong City Gallery*. Wollongong: Wollongong City Gallery, 1987.
- Dark, Eleanor. *The Little Company*. 1945. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2012.
- Fitchett, Ian. 'No A.I.F. Troops in Bengazi Skirmishes.' *The Sun*. Sydney, 6 April 1941, 1.
- Gooch, John. 'Re-conquest and Suppression: Fascist Italy's Pacification of Libya and Ethiopia, 1922-39.' *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28.6 (2005) 1005-1032.
- Harrower, Elizabeth. *The Watch Tower*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1991.
- 'Herbert Badham, *Breakfast Piece*'. Art Gallery of New South Wales, www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/6381. Accessed 18 Sept 2018.
- Johnson, Samuel. *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia: A Tale*. Ed. R. W. Chapman. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927.
- London, Joan. 'The Only Russian in Sydney: Introduction to Elizabeth Harrower,' *The Watch Tower*. Melbourne: Text Classics, 2012.
- 'Makalle Centre of Another Battle.' *The Sun*. Sydney, 13 Feb 1936.
- Modjeska, Drusilla. 'Introduction to Dark, Eleanor.' *The Little Company*. London: Virago, 1975.
- Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso. *Mafarka the Futurist: An African Novel*. 1909. Trans. Carol Diethe and Steve Cox. London: Middlesex UP, 1997.
- Michel, Walter. *Wyndham Lewis: Paintings and Drawings*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1971.
- Osborn, Jennifer. 'Review Essay: *The Watch Tower* by Elizabeth Harrower.' *Transnational Literature* 9.2 (May 2017). <http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>.

Walton, Robyn. 'Utopianism in Patrick White's *The Living and the Dead*.' *Cercles* 26 (Dec. 2012).

Waugh, Evelyn. *Scoop: A Novel about Journalists*. London: Chapman & Hall, 1938.

Waugh, Evelyn. *Waugh in Abissinia*. London: Longmans, Green, 1936.

White, Patrick. *The Living and the Dead*. New York: Viking, 1941.

‘Including China’ in Postcolonial Literary Studies:

An Interview with Bill Ashcroft

Lili Zhang, Nantong University

Abstract

Bill Ashcroft is a renowned critic and theorist, a founding exponent of postcolonial theory and co-author of *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), the first text to examine systematically a field that is now referred to as ‘postcolonial studies’. He is author and co-author of 16 books and over 160 chapters and papers including *Edward Said* (2001), *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (2002), *Caliban’s Voice: The Transformation of English in Postcolonial Literatures* (2008), *Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures* (2016). He is on the editorial boards for various journals, such as *Textual Practice*, *New Literatures Review*, *JASAL*, *Postcolonial Text*, to name just a few. The interviewer met Professor Ashcroft at the 16th International Conference of Australian Studies in China (21-23 June 2018, Beijing) and they had a preliminary discussion on the issues concerned in this paper; they agreed to complete a formal dialogue via e-mail. In this interview, Bill Ashcroft clarifies his area of study in postcolonial literatures; he relates world literature with postcolonial literatures and analyses the problem in the interdisciplinary study of world literature; finally, he discusses why and how to include China in postcolonial literary studies.

Keywords: postcolonial literary studies, Bill Ashcroft, world literature, cosmopolitanism, transculturation

I. Postcolonial Literary Studies

Zhang: Professor Ashcroft, thank you for joining me in this discussion on ‘Postcolonialism and China’. As I know, you spent three years at the University of Hong Kong and got a distinguished researcher award there. So firstly, would you please share with us your expatriate experience and your impression of China and Chinese intellectuals?

Ashcroft: I spent three years as Chair Professor at the University of Hong Kong and many of the Chinese scholars I interacted with were from various regions: China itself, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, as well as Hong Kong. Apart from their industry and facility with English literature the thing I noticed most was their appreciation of the complexities and subtleties of language.

1

‘Including China in Postcolonial Literary Studies: An Interview with Bill Ashcroft.’ Lili Zhang.
Transnational Literature Vol. 11 no. 1, December 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Writers in these places use forms of English such as ‘Singlish’ and ‘Chinglish’ which was of great interest to me because it directly reflected the postcolonial processes of appropriation and abrogation. Since then I have been familiar with the work of Chinese scholars on Australian studies, such as Wang Labao, Peng Qinglong and Cheng Hong, and I have been impressed with the ways in which they have come to grips with the cultural differences between Australia and China. In addition to this I have been very impressed with the range of interests in Australian literary culture shown by Chinese scholars.

Zhang: Edward Said has been regarded as an initiator of postcolonial theory; I note that you also have one book on Said. Would you comment briefly on Said’s legacy to Australian literary studies?

Ashcroft: There is a persistent myth that Edward Said initiated postcolonial studies, when in fact he only ever used the term once. Said is better credited with initiating colonial discourse theory which was an antecedent of postcolonial studies, which, in *The Empire Writes Back* is a theorisation of the various literatures written in English by formerly colonised peoples (previously called Commonwealth Literature). It was only then that Bhabha and Spivak took on the term. Of course, Said’s work in *Orientalism* on the representation of Europe’s others is foundational, as is Frantz Fanon’s, and in particular Said’s work is important for his emphasis on the link between culture and imperialism and for his theory of worldliness. Although I have written a book on Said I had not read his work when *The Empire Writes Back*¹ was written so he had no specific influence on the development of postcolonial studies.

When it comes to Said’s influence on Australian studies I can say there is very little of specific influence but postcolonial studies in general has had a marked impact on Australian literary studies. Settler colonies demonstrate in clearer form what is true of all postcolonial societies: that the colonised can be the colonisers, the marginalised can be the marginalisers, that imperial power circulates and produces rather than simply confines. When we understand that ‘being colonised’ does not indicate a coherent and predictable state of being but a wide range of cultural, political relationships, we are better able to see the network of strategies that constitute the ‘condition’ of postcoloniality. Settler colonies develop strategies of resistance and transformation that are similar in *process* to those of other colonised societies while being very different in content. The struggle between filiation and affiliation; the struggle to represent self and thus obtain cultural agency; the inheritance of forms of subject formation such as nationalism and ethnicity; the ambivalent and contested representation of place: all these experiences outline spaces of contestation shared by all colonies.

An important and controversial subject in Australian studies is that of Indigeneity. Settler colonies, being both colonisers (of Aboriginal people) and colonised (by Britain) are a particularly ambivalent colonial phenomenon. Of course, Aboriginal people remain colonised,

¹ *The Empire Writes Back* was first published in 1989, almost at the same time as Said’s *Orientalism*. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

but postcolonial doesn't mean 'after colonialism' it means 'after invasion' and is a way of reading rather than a chronological or ontological term. Aboriginal writers employ the same language and narrative strategies as other colonised people. Postcolonial analysis remains relevant in a wider sense as classical imperialism continues the function of economic dominance through global capitalism.

Zhang: As you said, 'We live "after" colonialism but never without it ... and there is more than one "postcolonial condition".'² Does that mean critical position is a 'becoming' instead of a 'being'? From your list of publications, one can find a route from an opposing 'writing back' to a negotiating 'transformation' and then to a promising 'utopianism'. Can you summarise these phases of your research and your critical position?

Ashcroft: Yes of course – all critics need to develop their ideas, but I must say that my various positions have been underpinned from the beginning by a belief in the agency of the colonial subject. I can't say that I have ever identified the postcolonial with simple anti-colonial opposition but have always advanced the colonial subject as instrumental rather than abject. The striking thing about colonial experience is that after colonisation, postcolonial societies did very often develop in ways that revealed a remarkable capacity for change and adaptation. A common view of colonisation, which represents it as an unmitigated cultural disaster, disregards the often quite extraordinary ways in which colonised societies engaged and utilised imperial culture for their own purposes. I have always been concerned with how these colonised peoples responded to the political and cultural dominance of Europe. Many critics have argued that colonialism destroyed Indigenous cultures, but this assumes that culture is static, and underestimates the resilience and adaptability of colonial societies. On the contrary, colonised cultures have often been so resilient and transformative that they have changed the character of imperial culture itself. This 'transcultural' effect has not been seamless or unvaried, but it forces us to reassess the stereotyped view of colonised peoples' victimhood and lack of agency.

A natural consequence of this belief in the capacity of colonised peoples to transform the technologies used to suppress them has been an examination of the vision of the future that compelled such transformation. Utopianism has a long history and in the twentieth century has been driven by a combination of Marxism and science fiction. While anti-colonial utopias in colonial thinking and writing focused on the prospect of an independent nation, the postcolonial vision of utopia is rather the persistent belief in a transformed future. In Ruth Levitas's description, this is 'the desire for a better way of living expressed in the description of a different kind of society that makes possible that alternative way of life'.³ Postcolonial literatures were underpinned by a hope that runs counter to the usual accounts of moral and social oppression that motivated colonial resistance. Indeed, political resistance could not have continued without such a belief in a radically transformed future. Postcolonial utopianism arises from an

² Bill Ashcroft, 'Threshold Theology,' *Colonial Contexts and Postcolonial Theologies: Storyweaving in the Asia-Pacific* ed. Mark Brett and Jione Havea (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 3-20.

³ Ruth Levitas, 'The Future of Thinking about the Future,' in Eds. J. Bird, B. Curtis, T. Putnam, G. Robertson and L. Tickner *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995) 257.

unrecognised but powerful reality: that successful resistance is transformative, and transformation rests on the belief in an achievable future. Writers from colonised cultures continue to have a vision of hope for the future.

Zhang: In 2015, Australian critic Arianna Dagnino published a monologue on transcultural writers and novels, in which she argues that ‘the specific developments in the transcultural paradigm expand its range of action and analysis by transcending the binaries of dominant versus subordinate, mainstream versus minoritarian/marginalised, and coloniser versus colonised cultures overemphasised by the interpretations of transculturation proposed within a postcolonial paradigm.’⁴ Do you think it a challenge to postcolonial studies?

Ashcroft: Dagnino has not read much postcolonial analysis I am afraid. She has certainly not read my work. The transcultural, transformative perspective has always been an integral feature of postcolonial studies. Many people use a confected idea of postcolonial studies to push a different agenda, but the transcultural has its roots in postcolonial theory. What disturbs me is that the original meaning of transcultural has come to be replaced by something more like ‘cross-cultural’. The transitive and transformative nature of transculturality are its most important features, it is not simply cross-cultural.

Zhang: I see, your understanding of ‘transcultural paradigm’ is included in postcolonial studies. Like Deleuze and Guattari, you are a ‘generator’ of theoretical terms, but sometimes the similarities in terms are so confusing to us beginners. ‘Postcolonialism’ is already problematic with multiple implications, you have initiated two other terms ‘postnational’ and ‘transnation’. In what way is ‘postnational discourse’ different from ‘postcolonial discourse’ and ‘transnational discourse’?

Ashcroft: ‘Postnational’ is not a chronological term. A better way to circumnavigate the arguments surrounding the postnational is to see postnationalism, like postcolonialism, as not *after* nationalism, just as postcolonialism is not *after* colonialism, but within its archive, engaging with it, contesting and transforming it. The postnational perspective exists within nations.

The postnational coincides with my theory of the transnation, which will be my next book. It is not that the nation doesn’t exist, nor that it no longer has a claim on our lives. Many argue that the nation is still of pre-eminent importance in conveying citizenship, human rights and economic justice. We can see immediately that this is not universal but nevertheless the nation has a claim on all citizens. The postnational describes the position of subjects who circulate around the structures of the state. This is the condition of the transnation. Transnation is the fluid, migrating *outside* of the state that begins *within* the nation. It is a way of talking about subjects in their ordinary lives, subjects who live in between the categories by which subjectivity is normally constituted. The transnation represents a constant realignment and contingent associations that transcend any political affiliation. While the potential for resistance against the

⁴ Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2015) 158.

state is present in all nations, the transnation hinges on a much more subtle form of dissidence that occurs in the flow of people's ordinary lives.

Zhang: As citizens of a settler colony and an immigrant nation, Australians tend to take a cosmopolitan identity. However, the cosmopolitan identity seems contradictory to a 'sense of belonging'. An Australian sense of belonging seems more complicated than other nations. Will you please illustrate your understanding of an Australian 'sense of belonging'?

Ashcroft: This is a very big topic and one on which I am focused at the moment. the question of belonging in Australia seems to exist squarely in the conflicted space between Aboriginal and newcomer, both settler and migrant. But what is belonging? Above all, what is it to belong in a migrant nation such as Australia? Is it not also intermittent, a fluid production, a concept haunted by history? Who belongs, and belongs to what? My theory is that belonging is something people *do*. This can be deeply affected by the gaze of others, but to briefly sum up my position, belonging doesn't just happen, nor does it occur because the state offers us citizenship – it is a complex act, but it is performative.

II. World Literature

Zhang: The study of world literature is an interdisciplinary project which attracts interests from linguists, literary critics and cultural theorists. Their analyses has their own characteristics. How would you distinguish your focus of study (Australian postcolonial studies) in relation to these similar disciplines?

Ashcroft: The strategies of transformation and circulation that I regard as central to postcolonial studies provide postcolonial scholars with a useful set of strategies to deal with globalisation. The question then is, 'What use is globalisation theory to postcolonial studies?' One way of testing this is to consider the growing global phenomenon of World Literature. Ironically, while the cultural turn in globalisation studies was driven by the dissatisfaction with dependency theory and centre periphery models, such a model – in Wallerstein's World System – has re-emerged as a theoretical basis for world literature. Unfortunately, Wallerstein's World System Theory rests on an outmoded geometric view of centre and periphery. As a model, it shows the reliance of the rich nations on the poverty of the poor, but this condition is rhizomatic rather than geometric. Whether we agree with Goethe that 'poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times,' the idea of a literature transcending national limits is one that leans inexorably towards the Eurocentric myths of greatness and universality. The privileged place accorded by Goethe to European literatures has led directly to an almost parodic Eurocentrism in theories such as Pascale Casanova's, in which the Paris-centric structure of world literature rehearses one of the more outmoded aspects of imperial geometry.

With David Damrosch we can take world literature 'to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, ... a work only has an effective life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original

culture.’⁵

Given this, my contention is that postcolonial literatures are a prime example of ‘world literature’. By appropriating and transforming the language of colonial domination, postcolonial writers were able to take control of their own representation and circulate it in the form of literary works throughout a world of English speakers. I would see this as at least the first way in which Australian literature may be read in a world context through its shared response to, and transformation of the various dominating discourses of imperial control. By interpolating already existing modes of production and circulation these writers made use of the economic network of imperial relations to enter the world, so to speak. And by entering the world in this way postcolonial criticism became a distinct form of proximate reading in which proximity was provided by the shared reality of colonial domination.

What made this ‘world literature’ and not just an extension of English literature was its institutional exclusion from the English literary canon, an exclusion that allowed it to ignore any continuous *filiative* relationship with the texts of English literature in favour of its social, cultural and political *affiliations*. In many respects this was immensely liberating, for though provincial writers may be ‘cut off’, they are freed from the bonds of an inherited tradition.

Zhang: The interdisciplinary nature in world literature leads to a problem in theory application. For instance, both postcolonial studies and semiotics can be regarded as a way of reading in transcultural literary analysis. However, a semiotic approach might be regarded as outmoded structuralism; while a postcolonial approach might also be accused of as lack of textual analysis. The disparity between theoretical framework and textual analysis has been a common problem for beginners. But how do we get out of this predicament in theory and practice?

Ashcroft: Well, you have raised several issues here. The question, ‘why apply a theory?’ rests on whether the point of the essay is the theory or the text, that is, whether you are using the text to demonstrate the theory or vice versa. Unfortunately, it is more often the case that a scholar advancing a theory is more interested in the theory than the text. This is a delicate balance and it doesn’t matter if the author is clear about the aims of the analysis. The question we must ask in using a theory to read a text is, ‘does it provide a deeper understanding of what the text is saying? Does it provide a useful context for reading?’ I would agree that semiotics is transcultural, but I am not sure that semiotics is always the best way to apprehend a literary text.

When I lecture on theory I usually apply it to a text to see how the theory works. But when publishing books and articles I am concerned to expose the ways in which a literary text reveals the social, political and cultural complexities of its culture of origin. This, in a sense, is the purpose of postcolonial analysis. The more implicit the theory becomes in a reading the better.

Zhang: It is generally accepted that postcolonial perspective aims at difference and world literature is targeted for cultural affinity. The contradiction makes it inappropriate to take a postcolonial perspective in the study of world literature. Do you agree with that? How can we

⁵ David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003) 4.

apply postcolonial theory in the study of world literature?

Ashcroft: I think this might be over generalising both world literature and postcolonial studies. But certainly, we could say postcolonial studies is concerned with questions of cultural difference and how these are addressed by writers – even when using a dominant language to reveal them. World literature on the other hand might be more interested in diversity. The problem with world literature of course is the question ‘which world’ and for many critics the world is still seen in imperial terms, as centre and margin. I am not sure that we need to apply postcolonial analysis to world literature unless it is of the literature of formerly and presently colonised people. But having said that, we must remain aware that the economic motivation that drove the imperial invasion and conquest of the world still exists today. Neoliberal capitalism is the latest iteration of imperialism and postcolonial analysis is developing its tools to address this. This, in effect, would be the way in which postcolonial analysis could be applied to world literature, by showing the ways in which all are subject to global capitalist imperialism. So in this sense postcolonialism and world literature meet at the point at which they both interrogate the imperial spread of neoliberal capitalism.

III. ‘Including China’

Zhang: Postcolonial studies has been controversial in China. Some critics hold that postcolonial theory is not relevant to the China situation and there is no need to include China in postcolonial studies. In your 2013 paper ‘Including China’,⁶ you show us an example of how to include China in postcolonial studies, but your argument might not be inviting among Chinese readers. As a Chinese studying Australian literature, a better way might be to look at the Australian representation of China. Now have you got better ideas?

Ashcroft: To determine whether Australian or any other writing is postcolonial, we must ask why we might use such a framework and see that postcolonial is not an ontological category but a way of reading. How then, do we perform a postcolonial reading of China. On one hand, China has regarded itself at least since the Opium wars as being victimised and colonised by the West. Several regions of China, most notably Shanghai (along with over 80 other Treaty Ports) were colonised by European powers, which goes a long way to explaining the attitude of Chinese ruling elites to the West. This attitude of victimhood has been inculcated in many Chinese subjects. Yet it is clear that since the middle of the Twentieth Century, China, regardless of the political complexion of its rulership, has exerted what amounts to imperial control over the many regions and ethnic groups over which it has hegemony. It is an incremental empire with the ambition of becoming a global empire. So there are different ways of including China, different ways of doing a postcolonial reading.

No doubt this won’t be attractive to our readers but I would say my sense of China’s imperial pretensions has grown stronger since that article was published. But this still leaves the

⁶ Bill Ashcroft, ‘Including China: Bei Dao, Resistance and the Imperial State’, *Textual Practice*, 27. 3 (2013) 357-377.

question of how China should be included. The situation is very different from British colonialism where writers who were forced to learn English took the language and turned it into a tool of self-representation to a world audience of English speakers. Is that happening in China? I think state control of both language and publishing makes that unlikely. The forms of postcolonial resistance in writing are going to be much more subtle, such as we see in the poetry of Bei Dao.

The representation of China in Australian literature is a well-rehearsed topic and is supported by the writing of Chinese migrants in Australia. Certainly, this may be amenable to a postcolonial reading although it fits better in the field of diasporic literature. But I would like to see Chinese postcolonial scholars analysing the work in Putonghua of ethnic minorities. If such writing doesn't exist, then it is up to postcolonial scholars to ask why. Apart from that, of course there are great opportunities for Chinese scholars to provide a postcolonial analysis of Anglophone writing.

Zhang: I can see your point here. Of course, we have such writings in Putonghua by ethnic minorities. It will be interesting to have a postcolonial analysis, but I am not sure if the censorship is tolerant enough to publish such papers. What's more, the task is on the Chinese department or the department of social sciences, not the school of foreign languages. So you might not be able to read what you expected from us Australian literary scholars. Well, let's divert our attention to the future. If 'utopia' is to provide a vision, what is your vision of Sino-Australian relations and the future of postcolonial studies in China?

Ashcroft: I think you may be right about the difficulties surrounding the appropriation of Putonghua, however the growing interest in postcolonial studies in China is most interesting. At the moment this is limited, I believe, to scholars in English literatures. The emergence of a widespread postcolonial literature – a world literature – has provided a rich source for Chinese analysts. However, there are a number ways in which Chinese postcolonial studies might proceed: an investigation of China as a proto-imperial power; associated with this, an investigation of language transformation by writers from ethnic minorities in China; an investigation of the work of Chinese diasporic writers, whether in English or other languages; a continuation of Chinese scholarship in Anglophone postcolonial studies; and an analysis of Chinese literature as a world literature. A postcolonial perspective on this last form of scholarship would raise some interesting and innovative work. I have no doubt that Chinese scholars are on the verge of a major development in this field.

I believe in the future of postcolonial studies in China and, considering the quality of Chinese scholars and the fact that this is already happening, it may be a goal that is well on the way to being achieved. I would like to see, for instance, a Chinese analysis of Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis Trilogy* which is set in the British Empire driven relationship between India and China. The historical relationship between China and the British Empire is complex and intriguing and is represented to some extent in literature. But we should remember that postcolonial studies is not limited to literature even though it was given birth in literary studies. My vision of Sino-Australian relations is that artists and writers should show the way to politicians and represent

8

'Including China in Postcolonial Literary Studies: An Interview with Bill Ashcroft.' Lili Zhang.
Transnational Literature Vol. 11 no. 1, December 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

hope for a united future.

Zhang: To conclude this interview, would you please say a few words to young scholars in postcolonial studies?

Ashcroft: For those interested in postcolonial studies I would say that a major feature of the field has been its ability to analyse a vast array of cultural developments: race and racism; expressions of anti-colonial nationalism; the paradoxical dissolution of the idea of nation along with the continuous persistence of national concerns; the question of language and appropriation; of the transformation of literary genres; the question of ethnicity and its relation to the state; the growing mobility of formerly colonised populations. Despite breathless claims about the end of postcolonialism, the field has not only flourished but has embraced its critics, channelling even their objections into the broad collective agenda of the creative cultural engagement with imperialism in all its forms.

Postcolonial studies now extends far beyond the original moment of colonisation. The field has come to represent a dizzyingly broad network of cohabiting intellectual pursuits, circulating around the general idea of an ongoing engagement with imperial power in its various historical forms. Clearly, the power dynamic of that originating moment and the forms of transformation it generated are still relevant to the range of areas of study in the field today. Postcolonial analysis has always intersected the study of race, gender, class, but these intersections have generated an ever-increasing range of specific interests, overlapping and cohabiting within the field.

Zhang: Thank you very much for sharing with us your ideas. This interview gives me much illumination and I am sure it is not just for me but for global postcolonial readers. Thanks again for your time and patience.

Works Cited

Ashcroft, Bill. 'Threshold Theology.' *Colonial Contexts and Postcolonial Theologies: Storyweaving in the Asia-Pacific*. Eds. Mark Brett and Jione Havea. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 3-20.

-----'. 'Critical Utopias.' *Textual Practice* 21.3 (2007) 411-31.

-----'. 'Including China: Bei Dao, Resistance and the Imperial State.' *Textual Practice* 27.3 (2013) 357-77.

Dagnino, Arianna. *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2015.

Damrosch, David. *What is World Literature?* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2003.

Levitas, Ruth. 'The Future of Thinking about the Future.' Eds. J. Bird, B. Curtis, T. Putnam, G. Robertson and L. Tickner. *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*. London/New

York: Routledge, 1995. 257-266.

Lili Zhang (tewaterlilyz@163.com) is a PhD candidate on 20th century Australian literature at Soochow University and lecturer at Nantong University. Her research interests include Australian transnational writings, comparative literature and translation studies. Her recent publications include: 'Cultural Misreading and Literary Variation: From Six Chapters of a Floating Life to The Red Thread' (2018); 'Transcultural Writing in Avenue of Eternal Peace (2016)' (Co-author with Professor Wang Labao); 'Ouyang Yu's Bilingual Writing and Bilateral Reception' (2015). This paper is a periodic fruit out of her recent research projects: 'A Study of Transcultural Narratives by Nicholas Jose', a Youth Program for Humanities and Social Sciences (18YJC752048) sponsored by China Ministry of Education; 'Cultural Representation in Australian Postwar Fiction' (2017SJB1222) funded by Jiangsu Province Office of Education.