

**ALTERITY STUDIES
AND
WORLD LITERATURE
ISSN 2209-2412**



Edited by AA Wansbrough & Om Prakash Dwivedi

Volume 1: 1

March 2018

Purpose of Intent

The Journal of Alterity Studies and World Literature is an Australian peer-reviewed journal that focuses on identity and otherness in literature, art, film, television, theatre and philosophy. We welcome articles from world literature, postcolonial, queer and feminist subjects and their intersections which provide a way to interpret literary and cultural productions. Alterity was integrated into philosophy by Emmanuel Levinas who gave the term an existential and phenomenological dimension. Identity in relation to limitedness and limitlessness extends beyond philosophy with its implicitly metaphysical categories. Edward Said's analysis on Orientalism reveals that the West's conception of selfhood was founded on the idea of an Other and this selfhood and identity manifests in literature. He views alterity as a part of the literary imaginary that sustains illusory binaries. Judith Butler argues that norms are not normal but rather constructed and performed. Identity is based on activity and open to interpretation and reinterpretation. Binaries used to sustain identity also thereby sustain oppression. Yet such a view is sustained by a binary logic that comes close to Hegel's framing of the master-slave dynamic and dialectic. Indeed, such a framing was adopted by Simone de Beauvoir in her existential feminist analysis of woman as the second sex. The problem of identity and oppression is thereby complex. Postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak has written about the difficulties of framing the subaltern in relation to identity and oppression. Such ideas form the basis of this journal, namely that identity is existential, cultural, complicated and performative. As such, this journal seeks to unearth alterity within a variety of texts, art, films, television and theatre seeking to find the identity of otherness and the otherness of identity. This journal aspires toward similar procedures of suggesting that alterity is always present.

Editors: Aleksandr Andreas Wansbrough and Om Prakash Dwivedi

Review Editor:

Rachel Franks

Associate Editors:

Esterino Adami

Daniela Rogobete

Veena Dwivedi

Delphine Munos

Binayak Roy

Tegan Schetrumpf

Alessandra Consolaro

Kamila Junik

Advisory Board:

Janet Wilson

Tabish Khair

Roderick McGillis

Elisabetta Marino

Pramod K Nayar

Patrick West

Chandani Lokuge

Chris Ringrose

Pavan Malreddy

Preface

Aleksandr Andreas Wansbrough.....iv–viii

Articles

Heads *and* Tails: Apocope, Decollation and Detective Fiction's Inherent Self-Alterity
Alistair Rolls.....1–15

Orientalisms, Re-imaginings and Ambivalences: Representing South Asian Migrants in
Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*
Christian David Zeitz.....16–35

East is East? The sense of place in David Lean's *A Passage to India* (1984)
Julie Michot.....36–48

African Alterity and Metaphoricity in John Slaughter's *Brother in the Bush*.
Nicklas Hållén.....49–66

Review Article

Eugenia: A True Story of Adversity, Tragedy, Crime and Courage (2013) by Mark Tedeschi
AM QC, Simon & Schuster
Rachel Franks.....67–70

Preface

By Aleksandr Andreas Wansbrough (on behalf of the editorial team)

This is the first volume of *Alterity Studies and World Literature*, a journal dedicated to the complexity of the category of ‘other’ entails. Yet given that various discourses exploring alterity including postcolonialism, deconstruction and Queer theory—all with deserved journal publications dedicated to their field—it could be contested that there is nothing other about this journal. Such a criticism may seem to miss the mark as the journal is not wedded to authenticity or absorbed in quests for origination. Rather, distinction and variety constitute a source of sustenance, and this journal affirms the value of seminal research as well as being a vehicle for the expression for young and established researchers alike.

Opposed to simple assimilation, there remains a quandary around investigations of the other. It seems paradoxical that this journal comes out when the discourses and critiques of power from various alterities can behave on occasion been dismissed as old-hat. Terms such as Alterity, Difference or Différence, Subaltern, and Queer have become so part of the academe that their mere mention may be registered as co-opted jargon. The meanings of these words have been so reconfigured, redeployed and revised, in heterogeneous ways, that they may have shed meaning. Jargon has been inscribed into the humanities and social sciences as universities become corporations, and academics become brand-makers, sometimes using a critical lexicon as nothing more than sales-pitches. In such scenarios, key words become buzz words. Critical vocabularies when emptied of critique and transformed into PR branding risk being reduced to nothing more than gestures, less of solidarity and analysis and more of narcissistic academic posturing. Although such pervasiveness may require journals to clarify and reset parameters, the task appears Sisyphean. One such critique is that the study of otherness is now so dominant as to merely reinforce the status quo, ironically supporting assimilation and integrating the logics of identity into academia despite an opposition to enclosed identity. Something of this attack cannot be elided with various notions of alterity being conscripted with the neoliberal turn. Such a turn is characterised by injunctions to ‘think different’ as Apple espoused.

Recently McDonalds’ celebrated International Women’s Day in US, not through material reform but through flipping the M to render it a W. Such a gesture was reported sympathetically, yet it was nothing more than the emptying out of a day of solidarity—consciousness-raising become consciousness-dimming. The socialist connotations of what was at first a socialist and feminist observance has become just another opportunity for branding.

Critics of the humanities sometimes see similar disingenuous efforts as employed in the University. Thankfully, many used the day to highlight various injustices faced by women and mass protests occurred around the world.

If, as a certain Marxist critique goes, capitalism enhances rather than diminishes antagonisms and the superficial embrace of otherness, the threat is that these antagonisms in the economic system are resolved in regressive rather than revolutionary ways or obscured by cultural analysis. A simplified co-option of academic rhetoric on online forums and supposed sites of protest has aided the very atavism of enclosed and stale identities that positions of resistance seek to challenge. Sometimes equated with a postmodern relativism, alterity-related frameworks become perversely other to their intention, transforming from critiques to investigate and break down identity into soundbites that provide and furnish so-called ‘identity politics’ with a problematic lexicon.

This already problematic lexicon can undermine critique as noted by various observers as otherness’ authenticity is a framework directed as much by the right as the left as the recent spate of far-right nationalist movements across the world have come to attest from Rodrigo Duterte to Donald Trump. The latter of which found support among a hybrid, mutagenic alignment of regressives known as the Alt Right who represent their frightening agendas with new-age sensibilities and buzz words. Take Jason Reza Jorjani, whose PhD appropriated Heideggerian and deconstructive terminology and frames his conceptual projects via the hyphenated identity of an Iranian–American while promoting the repellent writings of arch-reactionary Aleksandr Dugin. Even a white supremacist such as Richard Spencer nevertheless received an academic education with a Masters related to cultural theory—raising a question as to what purpose so-called higher learning serves. It would seem that, whereas yesterday’s fascists clothed themselves in the rhetoric of romanticism and authenticity; today’s fascists prefer postmodern vocabularies difference.

If alterity is framed via a postmodern ‘always already’, a searching before modernity’s regiments of power, such investigations may lend credence to openly and proudly regressive tendencies, aided perversely by the fragmented and fragmenting technologies of dissemination as with the regiments of Alt Right trolls. Is it then, as Mark Fisher once speculated, that the right make better postmodernists than the left? Are they more at ease with fragmentation, scepticism, dispersion, inconstancy and inconsistency, plasticity and fluidity, pastiche and polymorphic perversity? The trauma of Fisher’s recent suicide sadly underlines his haunting and hauntological critiques of the problem of dissent.

Extending on Fisher's reasoning, one may postulate that there is a dialectic of relativism in the pluralist inherencies of postmodern scepticism that enables, even resolves in logics of apartheid. Some on the Marxist left are already edging toward this judgment. But it is not a nihilism that the relativist shares with the reincarnate postmodern-savvy quasi fascist, however she or he may profit from it, but rather a belief that cultural norms are threatened by the outside and the fear that traditions fail to adapt when encountering people from other cultures. But it is for this reason that alterity studies is important because it favours an approach that understands that discourses function through an illusory alterity, and thereby recasts the other as within rather than outside every stage of cultural self-cognition (which is not to deny cultural distinctions or differences).

The more compelling but reductive criticisms emerge from the view that alterity studies are premised on the rejection of Marxism. By calling into question Marxism's universality, Vivek Chibber argues that postcolonial discourses weaken solidarity and an understanding of the consistency of capitalism's oppressive global contours. His recent interventions are attempts to overcome what he sees as the postcolonial enfeeblement of the left. His polemic even targets Edward Said's work, a figure who sought to extend human solidarity.

But reductive, 'vulgar' Marxist discourses are themselves in danger of relativism if they ignore that there are clear, evident distinctions between an often base and trivial identity politics on the left that dismantles while replicating normative logics, and a right wing return to nationalism. Such a view is not to reject Chibber's case entirely as he rightly indicts some academic posturing as constructing a strawman Marx. But it is to reaffirm the dialectical and paradoxical over the dismissively polemical.

In the spirit of overcoming caricatures, toppled statues and smouldering effigies, it is worth recalling that Karl Marx himself sought to understand the emergence of capital by a process of estrangement. Marx critiqued normative practices and performed complicated procedures where he described the grotesque wonder at seeing a table transformed into a commodity within a fetishist system of exchange. He thereby sought to both mythologise and de-mythologise, to examine the old philosophical question with a revised post-Kantian bent of 'What is?'. (Tangentially the mention of post-Kantianism invites the clarification that the term is understood here to be an extension of Kant's critical philosophy by affirming the need for fictitious frameworks in order to break and call into question those frameworks, providing both a system and an anti-system. Could one not see Marx's own rejection of the label Marxist as part of this very logic?) And as with the Kantian critical project, discourses must subject themselves to critique. Such a gesture is perhaps most pronounced with Foucault when he

refashioned himself as a sincere rather than merely perverse contributor to Kant's critical project and came to engage with the diversity and complexity of the Enlightenment.

Although citing theorists from European thought may seem Eurocentric, I do so merely to illustrate the divergence within what can be viewed as an all-too singular tradition of thinking, and more boldly, to suggest that critique is a type of interaction. Even within the most Euro-centric discourses, othering is not merely a way to locate and prop-up cohesion—an identity based on the otherness of another identity—but an otherness within all identity. Hegel, one of the more iconic European and Euro-centric philosophers, has become influential for theorists as different and distinct as Fanon and Spivak and was foundational for some strands of Existentialist feminist thought with Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. Otherness and alterity then are not merely subjects for micro politics but can also be interpreted as a harbinger for global emancipation, via what Slavoj Žižek has framed as a negative solidarity.

Alterity bespeaks not only the political but also the existential, accentuating the existential dimension of the political. The old and still contested line that the personal is political can be reframed as the existential is political, as this journal seeks to map the coordinates by which politics seeps and underpins literary discourse. Otherness is thereby a procedure at the core of every act of politics: as alluded to, a great deal of Marx's *Capital* is dedicated to othering the idea of the commodity, and the very act of self-consciousness and resistance presuppose a dynamic of othering, of awareness. Othering can then be both restrictive and regressive and a way to examine the very strangeness of one's own cultural practices. And if ever there is need for deep reflection it is with the resurgence of the far right. But such an engagement need not be limited to notions of praxis that exclude critical thinking. Indeed, the belief that academic articles will need or even can make a direct difference border on delusion or mere self-congratulation. Instead a more modest aim of this journal is to help safeguard the ability to discuss matters of the highest theoretical concerns, subjects such as ontology and literature that go to the very value of valuation.

An emphasis on the value of value underpins all enquiry and approach the very idea of the human. Though discourses encountering alterity vary a great deal, the fact that humanists and posthumanists can converse not only with but through one another may be a source of strength. Edward Said peppered his humanistic engagement with posthuman philosophers such as Foucault and his insistence on the value of diversity, cultural understanding and close-reading. It follows for Said that a seemingly innocuous field like philology was a reserve of vitality in his probing meditation *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. Rethinking the role of humanism, and what the human being is has been a strange, shifting unsettlement, with Judith

Butler returning to what has been described as a sort of mortalist humanism. Derrida, in contrast, comes to question whether human and therefore the idea of the nonhuman is a type of violence that obviates the subjectivity of animals. For Derrida even the term animal is problematic.

Thus disciplines of the other engage in examinations of metaphysics, culture and the very basis for identity and non-identity. Such examinations carry through to Alistair Rolls' ontological investigation of the Detective Novel. His analysis opens up questions of representation as he examines how we think and read the detective story. Too often the detective story has often been limited by a focus on its end. Such tendencies toward teleology are found by Rolls to be cramping, but also the basis for literary subversion. Using analogous twists of fate and chance through a heads or/and tails framing of origins and conclusions, Rolls refocuses on deconstructive which is to say reconstructive efforts within the literary mode from such luminaries as Julia Kristeva.

Christian David Zeitz extends such inversions by drawing attention to the complicated roles of Orientalism and self-Orientalizing as developed in Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*. Zeitz provides a delicate analysis of the negotiation of diasporic identities, drawing attention to themes of hybridity and ambiguity.

The role of place and identity highlights key themes in Julie Michot's analysis of David Lean's *A Passage To India*. Michot provides a courageous interpretation of Lean's film and its insights; courageous in part because Lean's critics hold Lean as a superficial aestheticist and it would be too easy to dismiss his take as mere visual exploitation. Rather Michot reveals the nuances and details of Lean's presentation of place to redirect our attention to this often unjustly overlooked work of cinema.

The motif of travel becomes a recurring one, from literary loops or rather swings in Rolls to the concluding article by Nicklas Hällén. Hällén gracefully demonstrates how John Slaughter's book *Brother in the Bush* is complicit with travel literature's exoticising approach. But Hällén is careful to note that the gaze is not imperialist but rather par of a utopian dream. Hällén detects that Slaughter's claim to transformation entails a tension via his portrayal of Africa as personal allegory. The transformation is, as Hällén comments only detected from the perspective of the old, alienated identity that Slaughter has presented himself through.

I would like also to draw attention to Rachel Franks' excellent and impassioned review of Mark Tedeschi's *Eugenia: A True Story of Adversity, Tragedy, Crime and Courage*. We thank those who have contributed submissions. We are grateful and look forward to future issues of the journal. (On that note, discussions are to be had within the editorial board as to

whether to include short stories and poetry and visual works to broaden the scope and entice readers. We'll keep you updated on the website.) We hope you enjoy our inaugural issue and welcome contributions from all fields related to alterity.

Heads *and* Tails: Apocope, Decollation and Detective Fiction's Inherent Self-Alterity

By Alistair Rolls

Abstract

This article explains and challenges the dominant tendency in detective fiction studies to privilege the end of the story, the detective's great reveal and the presentation of one singular truth. Against this end-orientation is preferred a whole-text approach that gives fresh emphasis to the all too easily forgotten beginnings of so many stories whose detectives have taken all the limelight. Detective fiction will be shown to be a victim of its own success, a genre whose trappings have prevented it from being read as the literary text that it also, and nonetheless, is. A new reading of these beginnings will demonstrate how authors of detective fiction have, consciously or otherwise, used tropes and devices of beheading, in their beginnings, to counteract this tendency for the head to be removed in favour of the tail. The tale is not just a tail, and beheadings restore heads. And detective fiction is more than just the sum of its (grisly) parts.

Keywords

Apocope, decollation, detective fiction, end-orientation, reflexivity, self-alterity; Julia Kristeva, Edgar Allan Poe.

Heads or Tails

Sophie Hannah's works of authorial regeneration, which see Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot born again, solving new crimes, are framed paratextually, that is, by frames at the limen between text and non-text.¹ The self-conscious weaving of Hannah's work into the pre-existing fabric of Christie's oeuvre is metonymic of detective fiction's inherent tendency towards auto-differentiation. I use the term metonymic here pointedly, and for two reasons. First, it is tempting to use other words, such as parodic, to discuss Hannah's reflexive recuperation of Poirot's detectival and textual life, for it is clear that this both is and is not a "Poirot mystery" (this aspect of the work's identity is simultaneously celebrated and glossed over in the words "The Brand New Hercule Poirot Mystery" that adorn the front cover of *Closed Casket*²) and, as a result, wears its reflexivity very much on its sleeve, as well, of course, as between its sleeves. Furthermore, as Françoise Campbell has made clear in her discussion of Michel Houellebecq's novel *La Carte et le territoire*, the line between writing a pastiche of detective fiction and using (detective-fiction) pastiche to expose the essentially parodic elements of detective fiction is thin in the extreme.³

Indeed, so thin is this line that it is worth speculating whether such sub-genres as the metaphysical or analytic detective story⁴ are not themselves exemplary of the broader genre rather than parodic as described by Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney:

A metaphysical detective story is a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective-story conventions – such as narrative closure and the detective’s role as surrogate reader – with the intention, or at least the effect, of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot.⁵

Merivale and Sweeney seek to map detective fiction’s move from modernity into postmodernity, and as such their definition recalls the countering of capitalist culture’s “power to normalize (or ‘doxify’) signs and images” that Linda Hutcheon terms a “process of cultural ‘dedoxification’”⁶ and that Campbell identifies in the mechanics of Houellebecq’s text.⁷ The only problem with such an approach to detective fiction is the (re)normalization, or (re)doxification, that is its necessary corollary. For, albeit inadvertently, the kind of subtle and intelligent readings offered by Merivale and Sweeney et al., or Campbell, produce a new (subtle and intelligent) canon, one that defines itself as other in relation to the cultural, and in this case, detective-fiction, mainstream. Since it is true that Edgar Allan Poe, Jorge Luis Borges and Paul Auster, and Michel Houellebecq for that matter, form part of a literary elite, to read their works subtly and intelligently is potentially all too straightforward: while it demands erudition (as well, of course, as subtlety and intelligence), I should argue that there is something too obvious about such an approach, as though it only enables the reader to engage with what is transparently meaningful about the text, which is to say, what is already available to the reader at the surface level of the original, fictional work. To apply metaphysical (postmodernist, denormalizing) analysis to mainstream works is arguably more challenging and more revealing. In our present framework, it is also to participate in the dedoxification of detective fiction *where it matters most* – at its centre, not on the academic periphery.

That dedoxification produces (re)doxification can be seen in the way that reflexivity is considered a legitimate object of study in the field of metaphysical detective fiction but no more than a light-hearted stylistic effect, or affectation, in the works of, say, Edmund Crispin, where reflexive and ludically strewn literary allusions accompany what Merivale and Sweeney label “the mere machinations of the mystery plot” at every turn. Indeed, it is very much part of the doxa that detective fiction should eschew self-coincidence: detective novels, almost without exception, announce their reality as being somewhere else than in the realm of detective fiction (where “this sort of thing” happens); detective novels are, in other words, always already, and almost by definition, other than what they are.

Academic criticism of the analytic kind has followed suit, preferring to value something in detective fiction, particularly of the so-called analytic kind, other than “the mere machinations of the mystery plot”; in other words, praise for subversion and parody, and the pursuit of more refined ontological and epistemological questions in detective fiction have led to the genre’s translation into the philosophical and the literary. But that is only on the one hand; on the other hand, more sociological studies of the genre have defended its very distance from, notably, the literary. We might think here of the taxonomical work of Ken Gelder, for example, whose focus on these same machinations sees him frame popular genres in opposition to the unmarked canon of literature.⁸ The result is the same in both cases – heads (and we may, or may not, wish to see in this the cerebral, the elite) and tails (here we may, or may not, wish to think of the popular): a hermeneutics of alterity is constructed that divorces detective fiction from the field of literary studies from within which it is critiqued. Such a critical paradox recalls the type of disciplinary binds against which Stephen Greenblatt rails in his manifesto of cultural mobility:

Although in the past twenty years or so many academic disciplines have formally embraced ideas of ‘cultural mobility’, they have for the most part operated with tunnel vision: the times and places in which they see significant mobility occurring remain strictly limited; in all other contexts, they remain focused on fixity.⁹

Thus, detective fiction has been fixed, and this in spite of the critical forces tugging at either end; it has been left beside itself.

The response of literary scholars like Jesper Gulddal has been to seek mobility – albeit of a variety that is more metaphorical than the literal mobilities extolled by Greenblatt et al. – in the mechanics of the detective story itself. Gulddal’s reading of Christie’s *Murder on the Orient Express*, for example, draws on Pierre Bayard’s self-styled detective criticism in order to cast doubt over the authorial, or officially sanctioned, solution via a process of careful – and above all even-handed – reading of the whole text, not simply the lines of inquiry highlighted by the detective.¹⁰ Crucial to Gulddal’s argument is a repatriation of the detective story into the realm of the literary. The genre’s sidelining has led to what he terms “end-orientation”,¹¹ which privileges the ending (typically, the detective’s great reveal) over the rest of the text. Literature, he argues, is spared such bias; detective fiction (both its practitioners and its critics), on the other hand, feeds it.

Apocope

It follows logically that what is end-oriented should also display blindness to its own beginnings. Now, while the beginnings – in the sense of the origins – of modern detective fiction (which almost invariably revolve around Poe's contribution) are something of a *sine qua non* entry into critical analyses of detective novels, the way in which readers (both critics and the public) fail to read these works' opening pages (and here I am thinking of the failure to engage critically with this material, although this also coincides with, and is the critical companion of, the more passive, pleasurable forgetting – of the extraneous – that accompanies the pursuit of the narrative's path to the solution) is less often considered. And it is this widespread critical and popular, active and passive, apocopic reading practice, this beheading of the detective story, that is my interest in this article.

If end-orientation is a generic marker of the detective story, then a beginning-focus may be said to constitute its intentionality, its will to otherness. For what we forget in the pursuit of the solution (be it the authorial one or an alternative), what does not drive the tail, must be the stuff of literature, or the head. An example is Dolly Bantry's dream of the partially dressed vicar's wife, which is occluded by the appearance of the real body of a young woman in her library. In this way, the reality (or logics) of the detective story obliterate the oneiric (or prologics), and a diegetic reversal occurs: the dream, despite its prime position at the head of the tale, is replaced by the body, or tail, of the text. To argue that Christie's *The Body in the Library* is *actually* a tale of lesbian desire and only *virtually* a detective story may seem fanciful, a petulant and unwarranted repolarization of textual material (privileging the head over the tail is rather like putting the cart before the horse);¹² and yet arguably, it is simply an act of literary criticism, which would be unremarkable (just one more Freudian reading) were it not for the doxification of the genre. The biggest problem with such a reading is that it goes against the grain of academic tradition. The most effective way of dedoxifying detective fiction, I should argue, is to see radical otherness not in a recognized postmodern corpus but, rather, in those works that epitomize the genre, in other words in the monoliths in contradistinction to which parodic works are (ostensibly) created. What is needed is a critical praxis that does not oppose heads to tails, but one that understands that detective fiction is predicated on both. In such a scenario, detective fiction does not diverge from or even appeal to literature; instead, it is always already both a movement towards a solution and away from it, along any number of alternative lines of flight. In addition to being foundationally plural in the poststructuralist sense, detective fiction is, importantly, doubly mobile: both towards its

expression as self and, simultaneously, its expression of itself as otherness. This is the self-alterity of our title.

Hannah's *Closed Casket* is exemplary of this mobility, and not only because of its privileged reflexive position as a work of authorial regeneration. Its opening chapter is entitled "A New Will", which describes the key element of the detectival plot; it is also preceded by the plan of the country house, which has become a stereotype of the genre.¹³ This title also speaks to that other will – to otherness; for, despite opening in media res, the story also begins with the liminal hesitation of Michael Gathercole (he is staring at a closed door), and he turns out not to be the protagonist; in fact, the third-person narrator shifts into the first person at the start of the second chapter – "A Surprise Reunion" – when Edward Catchpool, the narrator of Hannah's previous Poirot mystery, *The Monogram Murders*, reveals himself. The reunion is thus of reader and familiar narrator, which signals a new beginning in the form of renewed continuity and thereby works against the principal status of the preceding chapter. This second chapter begins as follows: "Conceal and reveal: how appropriate that those two words should rhyme".¹⁴ Reflexively, this speaks to beginning, to revelation, as well as to reconnection with what has gone before (the previous novel); and at the same time, it also reminds the reader (in words designed to be forgotten) that what has gone immediately before (the previous chapter) must be (at least partially) forgotten for the diegesis to continue in accordance with the familiar rules of the genre. Occluded is Michael Gathercole's importance in the novel, which remains in the background until the end (in an "epilogue", in fact), when he surprises both reader and protagonist by calling out to Catchpool by his first name.¹⁵ This suggestive line is, appropriately, cloaked immediately, and literally, by a device familiar to Christie's readers: the flash of a kimono.¹⁶ Lady Playford's flamboyant arrival on the scene conceals more obviously than it reveals the framing device of Gathercole's liminal hesitation. Where the reference to the "closed casket" had turned out to be a metaphor for the human body in the detectival plot, and had necessarily implied the tension with its opposite (the "open casket", or the body posthumously opened by an autopsy), the allusion to another closed space – the metaphorical closet – is revealed only to be just as swiftly shut down. As in *The Monogram Murders* therefore, a glimpse of Catchpool's hidden homosexuality is used to imply other textual life, or the text's life in otherness.

The use of brazen textuality, and especially the double text of concealment and revelation, features strongly in Australian crime writer Leigh Redhead's debut novel, *Peepshow*.¹⁷ Again, the liminal space of the opening chapter, in this case a self-styled prologue, simultaneously embodies and disembodies the investigation that follows by, on the one hand,

removing its head and, on the other, celebrating it at the head, or very beginning, of the novel. This is achieved by the use of an apocopic manoeuvre that is only revealed (and concealed) when the first chapter plunges the reader into (one part of) the professional identity of the protagonist. The novel is about a stripper-detective called Simone (which *is* to do with her existentialist, feminist namesake) and the diegesis proper begins in no uncertain terms: “I was lying on my back in the peepshow at the Shaft cinema, legs in the air, wearing a peekaboo nightie and no knickers”.¹⁸ The paradox of revelation and concealment is staged, literally, by Simone, whose performance is an exercise in full-frontal partiality. Having entered the peepshow, but also *Peepshow*, via a prologue, we are now both present to events – in media res – and witness to a representation, a primal scene passed through the filter of a fetish always already adopted at the moment when the threshold, or prologue, is crossed: we are staring right into the truth of her genitals, but, even when, on leaving the stage, Simone gives “everyone a flash”, the object itself is not said, the truth not seen. What we have is a flash of where the truth lies, a reference to an absence, ostensibly of underwear, but of course also of a logos that is missing, parallel, disavowed (which is to say, both veiled and symbolized in the Freudian scenario).

The word “stripper” itself is a source of tension: it is what the protagonist both wants and cannot bear to leave behind, as she embarks on a career as a private investigator. It is also a word that is subjected, at the start of the preceding passage, to apocope, for the three-page prologue, which tells of the discovery of a dead body *cum* sea monster by a figure who leaves a night club and goes for a morning swim, called on from the shore by the vision (or siren song) of what he takes for a dolphin, is the tale of “the tripper”, which is to say, a “stripper” (both the word and the professional/textual function) whose head has been cut off. Thus, the novel about a stripper being pulled into the world of investigation is preceded by a prologue that pulls the reader into the investigation; but both texts simultaneously resist this pull, so that the tension between stripper and investigator is maintained and not smoothly synthesized. (Clearly, the tripper’s tale is also the story of the reader’s journey into the text, since we too rush head-long, or perhaps headless-ly, into the investigation.) Reflexively, by staging the end-orientation of the detective story, that is, by presenting a preliminary scene for forgetting that is also the word of the novel simultaneously embodied and disembodied, *Peepshow* becomes the site (the peepshow) of the tension between writing crime and writing literature (or, in other words, *not* writing crime).¹⁹ By apocopically fracturing the body of the text in a liminal space, the will to otherness is positioned both inside and outside, both exiled and referenced. Ultimately, whether or not *Peepshow* is wilfully crafted as a parodic detective story, its staging of end-orientation

embraces end-orientation, and parody, in quite a conventional way, that is, by incorporating detective-fiction conventions.

Decollation

Another detective story that appears to strain against these conventions is Julia Kristeva's *Possessions*;²⁰ indeed, Mark Edmundston notes how the novel entices readers familiar with the genre only to slip gradually away from their reach and into other intellectual domains that are more readily associated with Kristeva than is the detective format.²¹ This tension is announced as early as the novel's covers, although the generic movement is repolarized: the front cover of the original French edition appends the word *roman* to the title, marking the novel (with its image of a headless bronze statue) as a work of literature, whereas the rear-cover blurb opens categorically with the statement "*Possessions* est un roman policier [*Possessions* is a detective story]".²² The cover blurb remains resolutely on the detective plot, ending lightly with the following assessment: "La souffrance s'apaise [alors] en comédie, et le roman policier devient une façon de rire" [the suffering is relieved by comedy, and the detective story becomes a source of laughter]. It is not entirely clear whether this capacity to make the reader laugh is deemed to have been introduced to the genre by Kristeva, or whether she exploits ludic elements that are intrinsic to it (and whether, in this case, she perhaps chooses the detective format in order to articulate her intellectual interests to a broader reading public). For Edmundston, such generic tensions are easily dismissed; Kristeva's work simply explodes the genre and requires its own subgenre, another descriptor to add to Merivale and Sweeney's "metaphysical" and John Irwin's "analytic":

But the author of this book is no direct descendant of Agatha Christie. Julia Kristeva is a well-known Parisian theorist. A psychoanalyst and a student of linguistics, she is a proponent of *sémanalyse*, a discipline that combines semiotics with psychoanalytic thought. She is celebrated in theory circles for books like *Revolution in Poetic Language* and *Black Sun*, a study of melancholy and depression. What we have on our hands is an intellectual detective story. The genre has a distinguished lineage in France, running from Poe (an honorary French writer, thanks to the ministrations of Mallarmé and Baudelaire) through Gide, Alain Robbe-Grillet and, in his famous seminar on Poe's "Purloined Letter," Jacques Lacan.²³

My interest here is how *Possessions* does enough to justify Edmundston's classification as an "intellectual detective story" while nonetheless remaining within the dynamics, the mobility, of the detective format made famous by Christie and founded by Poe (for whom the distinction between detective fiction and intellectual detective fiction would have been meaningless for obvious reasons; indeed, the latter term would, as we shall see in our concluding section, be tautological). Despite the rather provocative tone of his review, it is difficult not to agree with Edmundston that Kristeva's detective story will fail to satisfy aficionados of the genre keen to lose themselves in a good book, or as he puts it, those who "imagine a late night, propped on the bolster, sipping a little lapsang souchong, peeling away the layers of deception until truth shines through and sleep descends".²⁴ Where the review fails to do justice to both *Possessions* and the mechanics of the detective story, however, is in its refusal to accept their natural alignment. For Edmundston, their fates are bound together, but they remain odd bedfellows: "Perhaps there was something about the genre's hokey machinery that, when it was up and running, made her free to roam through the richer spheres of her own speculations. When the plot begins to fade, so does the pursuit of existential mysteries".²⁵

In fact, if we are to believe Edmundston's review, the beginning of Kristeva's novel, which – atypically for a detective story – is more engaging than the ending, revels in the reveal not of the solution, but of the corpse. *The Body in the Library* springs to mind, for the discovery of the body of a woman following a dinner party in her house occupies a substantial place in the first part of the novel, alongside discussions of high culture (especially images of severed heads) and the victim's work as a translator. The focus is resolutely on the body for two reasons: first, because there is no prologue, and thus no liminal space beyond which reality may be confused with phantasy; and second, because the victim has been decapitated. Kristeva's obsession with self-alterity and decapitation – we can add these to Edmundston's list, which comprises "depression, language, the struggles between the sexes, horror, psychoanalysis and motherhood"²⁶) – serves to offset, always already, the tendency of the detective story towards end-orientation: the first part of the (tripartite) novel is entitled "Une décollation" and its opening pages are little more than a litany of synonyms for decollation, including *décapitation* and the adjective *décapité* and various alternatives ("dépourvues de cap [deprived of its top]", "le chef tranché [head severed]", "tête découpée [head cut off]" and "têtes déposées [heads deposited]"), and more adjectives – "acéphale [acephal]", "étêté [headless]", "écimé [tip-pruned]".²⁷ It is the interplay of abstraction and the obsessive focus on the visceral that unsettles the reader, who may, indeed, be forgiven for thinking that Kristeva, who has gone on since to write, inter alia, *Visions capitales: Arts et rituels de la décapitation*

(2013), with its focus on gorgons, fetishism, castration and the maternal vulva as sea monster, has other things than crime on her mind right from the start. And yet, what else are these descriptions for? Instead of merely presenting the corpse initially and then representing it, abstracting it and solving it (away) for the remainder of the text, Kristeva off-sets presentation with representation, and constant re-presentations and reflexive *representation* of detective-story presentation and representation. She is, in other words, writing about a body, the body, the specific body of the victim of her novel and also of the textual body of detective fiction.

The disappointment of *Possessions*'s conclusion is that the triply defiled body is treated as an object of interest purely as a result of its headless-ness: the victim, Gloria Harrison, is first robbed while unconscious by her lover, next stabbed and killed by a serial killer (who remains anonymous for most of the text, just one of any number of serial killers at large), before finally being posthumously decapitated by her son's speech pathologist. (After all, the plurality of the title's possessions suggests a focus on textual plurality, but also the specific plurality of the genre: multiple clues suggest multiple murderers, typically left virtual, here actualized as, quite literally, lines of flight.) It is the author of the third act (her history, her psychology and, ultimately, her redemption) that is the subject of the great reveal, not the murderer.

By appearing to reverse its polarities, Kristeva only intensifies the detective story's will to auto-differentiation, to auto-decollation. In lieu of a text that sacrifices its head to its tail, Kristeva fills her head (and the reader's) with decollation, presenting and representing absence until it swells into a heady, untoppable plenitude; like her attitude to the body, therefore, her novel is a simultaneous presentation and representation of the detective story. As a study of the genre as doxa, there is clearly a sophisticated level of dedoxification at work in *Possessions*. Kristeva takes the genre with her, however; or rather, she explores the genre as self-parody. In this sense, *Possessions* is hyper-literary. It is intellectual; it is literary. But it is not these things at the expense of the genre. If it is all head, it is also a study and performance (and it is important that it be both at the same time) of headless-ness, of beheading.

Heads and Tails

As previously noted, my emphasis here is on the beginnings of detective stories, which are overlooked in favour of a concentration on the investigative process, whose singular meaning is made clear by the all-important ending; but the beginnings of the genre are also bound up with this overvaluation of reasoning and truth-finding. While Poe's status as the father of the

modern detective story is generally nuanced, because of the role played by translation in the popular and critical success of his works, and has been increasingly questioned in recent years,²⁸ his seminal tale “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” is without doubt the Ur-text of the non-self-coinciding genre that is my focus here. For, if Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin is renowned as the foundational armchair detective, the head of those fictional detectives who prefer the exercise of their head over those more physical acts of walking the streets or collecting evidence with which the hardboiled thriller and the police procedural, respectively, have become associated, this constitutes a misreading of the text and demonstrates the way in which academic structures have not only worked against analytical mobility but have also closed down critical reading of the text itself. Poe has, in other words, acquired a monolithic meaning that has concealed the truth, purloining it, as it were, inside itself and replacing inherent truths with one Truth rather than highlighting the natural emergence of detective-fiction self-alterity from an immutable textual body.

In his discussion of the origins and beginnings of detective fiction in France David Platten acknowledges that “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” “foregrounds the workings of the detective’s mind, a mind that in its mastery of the abstract principles of reason and deductive logic is superior to the norm”.²⁹ At face value, there is nothing here to challenge the received wisdom of Dupin as the archetype of abstract reasoning; and yet, Platten has already prefaced this statement with a brief synopsis of the story in which the narrative is described as both “dual” and “backwards”:

The reader accompanies the detective, C. Auguste Dupin, as he first reads the newspaper reports of the crime, then visits the location, before finally summoning to the premises, where the melodramatic denouement is played out, the only person other than himself who knows the truth of the affair. This backwards narrative ratiocination focalized through the character of the detective is the second part of a dual narrative structure, in which the absent narrative of the crime gradually reappears in the pages relating the stages of the investigation, as if it had been written in invisible ink.³⁰

Thus, ratiocination is off-set here, presented, at least to some degree, against the grain. In fact, after an epigraph from Sir Thomas Browne eulogizing conjecture, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” opens with a description of analysis that is difficult to pin down, almost tautological: “The mental features discoursed of as the analytical, are, in themselves, but little susceptible

of analysis”.³¹ Analysis is presented at length in the pages that follow, as though to prove how difficult these features are to define. Examples, perhaps evidence, are necessary, and those that follow, including that which proves the superior acumen required to play draughts as opposed to the more complicated game of chess, seem designed as much to confuse as to enlighten the reader. Certainly, the myth of the armchair detective is built on a discussion of analysis that appears counterintuitive. This is followed by the narrator’s recollection of his encounter with Dupin and the habits into which they quickly fell, which are, above all, a story of inversion: Dupin is “enamored of the Night” (which, though it is rendered abstract with this initial capital letter, he experiences physically on long walks through the Paris streets) and shuts himself away during the day, reading books by candlelight. Showcased here is a reverence for Night akin to religious worship (Night as deity, muse) expressed in prosaic acts, as Dupin is continually present to the lived reality of Paris at night. His preference is clearly for the physical over the abstracted representation that comes with seclusion and, of course, the armchair. And yet, this preference for the one is arguably only expressed because of the overwhelming dominance of the other.

Similarly, even when the story turns to the newspaper articles in which Dupin reads of the events, at one remove and thus objectively, from his armchair, the facts themselves are brutal, visceral:

After a thorough investigation of every portion of the house, without farther discovery, the party made its way into a small paved yard in the rear of the building, where lay the corpse of the old lady, with her throat so entirely cut that, upon an attempt to raise her, the head fell off. The body, as well as the head, was fearfully mutilated – the former so much so as scarcely to retain any semblance of humanity.³²

The story of the murders contains the removal of the figurative head of the household from the body of the house to an external space in which she is literally decapitated. This is therefore a story of decapitation that requires a detective whose acumen is bodily and not simply cerebral. As if further proof is needed, Dupin’s ultimate success is described as a victory over abstract reasoning, which is embodied (or rather it is *not* embodied) by the Prefect of police: “for, in truth, our friend the Prefect is somewhat too cunning to be profound. In his wisdom is no *stamen*. It is all head and no body, like the pictures of the Goddess Laverna, – or, at best, all head and shoulders, like a codfish”.³³

Clearly, Dupin is not unanalytical, as his exploits at one remove in the sequel “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” prove beyond doubt; rather, the point is that head and body are both required for a successful investigation, just as they are for a semblance of humanity. If Poe’s connection to Charles Baudelaire tells us anything, it is precisely this. Famously, the French poet experienced the uncanny sensation when translating Poe’s stories that Poe had had his own (Baudelaire’s) thoughts before he could himself produce them, as though in an act of anticipatory plagiarism.³⁴ Furthermore, if Andrea Goulet is able to declare that “Edgar Allan Poe invented French crime fiction” it is not because Baudelaire was a passive vehicle for the reproduction of his stories in France; instead, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, in Goulet’s analysis, “registers a specific spatial imaginary” that is Parisian, and Baudelaire’s, from the moment of its conception (in America).³⁵ Importantly, it is also a precise match for the textual imaginary of Baudelaire’s new paradoxical poetics as voiced in his volume of “little prose poems” *Petits Poèmes en prose (Le Spleen de Paris)*.

For our purposes here, the crucial element of Baudelaire’s prose poetry lies in its foundational oxymoron (poetry *versus* prose), which carries across into the exiled, parenthetical element that is Paris. Like prose poetry, therefore, Paris, which is never represented in the prose poems themselves, but is instead experienced close-up, from inside, haunts Baudelaire’s texts metonymically, always itself (the real streets that are undeniably Paris) but always impossibly other, divorced from self (at the time of Baron Haussmann’s modernization of the city Paris markedly failed to coincide with the mental representations that Baudelaire and his contemporaries had of it). And like Dupin’s armchair detective, the prose poems are typically misread, synthesized as vaguely poetic prose pieces, or vaguely prosaic poems, whereas in fact they bring these two opposites together, impossibly, under high tension. Furthermore, their structure encourages misreading: they are usually composed of two halves, pivoted around a central turning point, often an adverb of concession – a “however” – that brings out their logical difference. And yet, their two sides are more similar than they first appear, and a half that appears predominantly abstract and reminiscent of verse themes proves to be shot through with banal, prosaic elements, and *vice versa*. What we have is a living paradox, a poetics of double movement, simultaneously, and always already, from the ethereal streetwards and from the streets heavenwards. In other words, the opposition is not of the head *versus* the heart, but of the visceral body by which we are present to the world *versus* the mental representations of the head; or, as Baudelaire says of the prose poems in his dedication to Arsène Houssaye:

Mon cher ami, je vous envoie un petit ouvrage dont on ne pourrait pas dire, sans injustice, qu'il n'a ni queue ni tête, puisque tout, au contraire, y est à la fois tête et queue, alternativement et réciproquement. [My dear friend, I send you a little work of which no one can say, without doing it an injustice, that it has neither head nor tail, since, on the contrary, everything in it is both head and tail, alternately and reciprocally.]³⁶

Laverna, Goddess of thieves, would appear in Baudelaire's prose poems, not as a bust reproduced on paper, but in the flesh, in the street, and whole, the impossibility of the nonetheless actual encounter being stressed by the initial capital of her abstract form (G for Goddess).

Reciprocal analysis, in the form of a prose poetic reading of detective fiction, restores the head to the tail (the beginning to the end) and the body (of the text) to the tail (of the final solution), for to privilege one over the other, to consider the detective story to be limited to its ending, is indeed to do it an injustice. The machinations of the plot and the literariness of supposedly extraneous details are all part of one genre, alternately and reciprocally.

¹ Alistair Rolls and Jesper Gulddal, "Reappropriating Agatha Christie: An Introduction", *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, 34.1 (2016): 5-10 (p. 6).

² Sophie Hannah, *Closed Casket* (London: HarperCollins, 2016). The fact that Hannah's second Poirot mystery is "brand new" is both a reference to the authorial regeneration that sees the detective born again after the death of his creator (1976) and his own death, which was only revealed to the public when his final case, *Curtain*, was published in 1975, and to the unusual feat, on Hannah's part, of sustaining an act of authorial regeneration beyond a one-off novel: *Closed Casket* is her second Poirot novel, the first being *The Monogram Murders* (London: HarperCollins, 2014), which was touted simply as "The New Hercule Poirot Mystery".

³ Françoise Campbell, "Michel Houellebecq, Victim of Pastiche: An Analysis of Pastiche and the 'Policier' in *La Carte et le territoire*", conference paper delivered at Mobilities and Migrations/Les Flux migratoires, the Australian Society for French Studies annual national conference, Adelaide, 8 December 2016.

⁴ The generic descriptors "metaphysical" and "analytic" are used, respectively, in Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney (eds), *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story From Poe to Postmodernism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), and John T. Irwin, *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story* (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

⁵ Merivale and Sweeney, *Detecting Texts*, 2.

⁶ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 2nd edition (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 7.

⁷ Campbell, "Michel Houellebecq", n.p.

⁸ Ken Gelder, *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field* (London: Routledge, 2004), 11.

⁹ Stephen Greenblatt (ed), *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.

¹⁰ Jesper Gulddal, "'Beautiful Shining Order': Detective Authority in Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*", *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, 34.1 (2016): 11-21.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹² For a reading along these lines, see Alistair Rolls, "An Ankle Queerly Turned, Or The Fetishized Bodies in Agatha Christie's *The Body in the Library*", *Textual Practice*, 29.5 (2015): 825-844.

¹³ Hannah, *Closed Casket*, pp. 3-14. The floor plan of the house is on page 2, facing the first page of the chapter. Both are positioned inside the diegesis by the signposting of Part One on the previous page (p. 1). Such phased,

and reflexively staged, liminality does not necessarily preclude apocope, and even multiple, high-visibility heads can also, and generally do, fall over the course of the detective story.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 369.

¹⁶ Again, *Murder on the Orient Express* comes to mind.

¹⁷ Leigh Redhead, *Peepshow* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004).

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁹ Redhead often mentions being torn between crime fiction and what she calls literary fiction, a passion for the latter during her youth (spent in milieus where the former was the reading matter of choice) led, via various occupations, including stripping, to her becoming a practitioner of the former. See, for example, Leigh Redhead, "A Stripping Feminist Private Eye", in Michael Robotham (ed.), *If I Tell You... I'll Have to Kill You: Australia's Leading Crime Writers Reveal Their Secrets* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2013), pp. 151-65. For a more ample reading of *Peepshow* and the apocopic function of the tripper, see Alistair Rolls and Marguerite Johnson, "The Stripper Castrated, Or How Leigh Redhead's *Peepshow* Stages the Art of 'Being Both'", *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, 34. 2 (2016), 104-113.

²⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Possessions* (Paris: Fayard, 1996).

²¹ Mark Edmundston, "Headless Body in Lawless Burg", *The New York Times*, 5 April 1998, available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/04/05/reviews/980405.05edmundt.html> (accessed 5 January 2016).

²² All references to the novel are to the original French editions and translations are the author's own.

²³ Edmundston, "Headless Body", n.p.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ It is difficult to translate these high-register French terms, which are either higher still in register in English (acephal, for example). This is clearly an exercise in discomfiture: the emetic quality of the gory crime scene (we might think of the junior colleagues who so often leave the scene to vomit in crime novels and films) is here reproduced at the level of lexis: as words pour out, the reader may well experience a form of disempowerment, nausea even. The word *décollation* itself may well not be familiar to the French reader, who may read it as a synonym for, or even read it instead as, *décollage* (literally, unsticking), which is the standard word for a take-off, and thus for a beginning.

²⁸ For an excellent reading of Poe's place in the development of French crime fiction, which in fact challenges dominant national taxonomies, see Andrea Goulet, *Legacies of the Rue Morgue: Science, Space and Crime Fiction in France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). For a reevaluation of Poe's role as the pioneer of the modern genre, see Stephen Knight, *Secrets of Crime Fiction Classics: Detecting the Delights of 21 Enduring Stories* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015).

²⁹ David Platten, "Origins and Beginnings: The Emergence of Detective Fiction in France", in Claire Gorrara (ed.), *French Crime Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), pp. 14-35 (p. 20-21).

³⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

³¹ Edgar Allan Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", in *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 1986), pp. 189-224 (p. 189).

³² Ibid., 198.

³³ Ibid., 224.

³⁴ See, for example, Alistair Rolls and Clara Sitbon, "'Traduit de l'américain' from Poe to the Série Noire: Baudelaire's Greatest Hoax?", *Modern and Contemporary France*, 21.1 (2013): 37-53.

³⁵ Goulet, *Legacies of the Rue Morgue*, 3.

³⁶ Charles Baudelaire, *Petits Poèmes en prose (Le Spleen de Paris)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 21. The English translation is by Louise Varèse and is taken from Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen* (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. ix.

Biographical Statement

Alistair Rolls is Associate Professor of French Studies at the University of Newcastle, Australia. He has published in a wide range of areas spanning twentieth-century literature, including French and Anglo-American crime fiction. In the field of crime fiction, he is the author of *Paris and the Fetish: Primal Crime Scenes* (Rodopi, 2014) and, with Deborah Walker, *French and American Noir: Dark Crossings* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). His most

recent books include *Origins and Legacies of Marcel Duhamel's Série Noire* (Brill, 2018), which he co-wrote with Clara Sitbon and Marie-Laure Vuaille-Barcan, *Unbridling the Western Film Auteur: Contemporary, Transnational and Intertextual Explorations* (Peter Lang, 2018), which he edited with Emma Hamilton, and *Translating National Allegories: The Case of Crime Fiction* (Routledge, 2018), which he edited with John West-Sooby and Marie-Laure Vuaille-Barcan.

Orientalisms, Re-imaginings and Ambivalences: Representing South Asian Migrants in Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*

By Christian David Zeitz

Abstract

*The article begins with a clarification of the term South Asian and an overview of the South Asian diaspora and its development. It is outlined how this diaspora has its roots both in colonial and postcolonial migrations and is best described as a worldwide and transnational diaspora. South Asian diasporas were shaped and created by shared histories such as colonialism and 1947 post-independence nation-making. As a result, South Asian diasporic writing often engages former homelands and postcolonial nations, whether in a celebratory or critical fashion. With respect to Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*, Edward Said's theory of Orientalism proves a useful tool to analyze how the novel's two main characters, Navaranjini and Bharat, two Sri Lankan migrants to Australia, are construed in the Euro-Australian imagination. Textbook fantasies of a sexually eccentric Orient and ensuing hypersexual Oriental women persist, but are informed by a concise critique of Orientalism's discursive constructedness. Gooneratne's poetics of characterization is read as invested in Linda Hutcheon's postmodern poetics of contradictoriness: exaggerated forms of Orientalism and self-Orientalism are not only installed but also inverted. South Asian migrants, in *A Change of Skies*, are not untainted by stereotypical thinking, though. Bharat's great-grandfather, Edward, whose journal entries from the 19th century are set against the 20th century plot, self-Orientalizes his Sri Lankan culture as backward and anti-modern. His 5-year stay in Australia, however, brings him back to his Sri Lankan roots and helps him appreciate South Asian cultures and civilizations. Navaranjini thinks of herself as a superior real Asian. In effect, she treasures a contextually empowering strategic essentialism (in the tradition of Gayatri C. Spivak) that puts her own brownness at the top of a beauty hierarchy, rejects Fanonian self-Othering and decentres Western hegemony. Mr. Koyako is a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist who carries his contempt for Tamil and Indian cultures with him to Australia. Gooneratne challenges visions of an ethnically pure Sri Lanka through Bharat's and Navaranjini's Sinhalese-Tamil marriage. This results in a utopian re-imagination of a futuristic peaceful yet multiethnic Sri Lankan nation. Finally, Navaranjini and Bharat's careers in Australia hint at the role hybridity and ambiguity play in negotiating diasporic identities.*

Keywords

Orientalism, South Asian diaspora, Yasmine Gooneratne, migrant identities, postmodern poetics, Sri Lanka, postcolonialism

Introduction

The present article deals with representations of South Asian migrants in Yasmine Gooneratne's first novel *A Change of Skies*, published in 1991. The focus is mostly on the two main characters, Bharat and Navaranjini (they change their names to Barry and Jean after some time in Australia, but for the sake of cohesion and readability, they are referred to by their birth names throughout the paper). Yet, other characters such as Bharat's great-grandfather, Edward, and the couple's fellow Sri Lankan compatriot, Mr. Koyako, are also scrutinized.

The article begins with a clarification of the term *South Asian* and an overview of the South Asian diaspora and its development. It is outlined how this diaspora has its roots both in colonial and postcolonial migrations and is best described as a worldwide and transnational

diaspora. South Asian diasporas were shaped and created by shared histories such as colonialism and 1947 post-independence nation-making. As a result, South Asian diasporic writing often engages former homelands and postcolonial nations, whether in a celebratory or critical fashion. With respect to Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*, Edward Said's theory of Orientalism proves a useful tool to analyze how the novel's two main characters, Navaranjini and Bharat, two Sri Lankan migrants to Australia, are construed in the Euro-Australian imagination. Textbook fantasies of a sexually eccentric Orient and ensuing hypersexual Oriental women persist, but are informed by a concise critique of Orientalism's discursive constructedness. Gooneratne's poetics of characterization is read as invested in Linda Hutcheon's postmodern poetics of contradictoriness: exaggerated forms of Orientalism and self-Orientalism are not only installed but also inverted. South Asian migrants, in *A Change of Skies*, are not untainted by stereotypical thinking, though. Bharat's great-grandfather, Edward, whose journal entries from the 19th century are set against the 20th century plot, self-Orientalizes his Sri Lankan culture as backward and anti-modern. His 5-year stay in Australia, however, brings him back to his Sri Lankan roots and helps him appreciate South Asian cultures and civilizations. Navaranjini thinks of herself as a superior *real* Asian. In effect, she treasures a contextually empowering *strategic essentialism* (in the tradition of Gayatri C. Spivak) that puts her own *brownness* at the top of a beauty hierarchy, rejects Fanonian self-Othering and decentres Western hegemony. Mr. Koyako is a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist who carries his contempt for Tamil and Indian cultures with him to Australia. Gooneratne challenges visions of an ethnically pure Sri Lanka through Bharat's and Navaranjini's Sinhalese-Tamil marriage. This results in a utopian re-*imagination* of a futuristic peaceful yet multiethnic Sri Lankan nation. Finally, Navaranjini and Bharat's careers in Australia hint at the role hybridity and ambiguity play in negotiating diasporic identities.

South Asia and the South Asian Diaspora

South Asian is an umbrella term for various national, religious and ethnic contexts. As a geographical region, South Asia contains a multiplicity of nations, e.g. Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.¹ India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were colonized by the British Empire and made up most of British India. In 1947, the South Asian parts of British India became the Indian Union (today's Republic of India), West- and East-Pakistan (the Western part is today's Islamic Republic of Pakistan, whilst the Eastern part won its independence from Pakistan in 1971 and became Bangladesh). In 1948, Sri Lanka/Ceylon joined.² This so-called *Partition* of British India was conducted along religious lines, as Indian

anti-colonial nationalism was hugely Hindu in outlook, whilst Muslim anti-colonial movements vouched for a Muslim state within/outside British India.³ Ethno-religious conflict, as a result of British colonial favouritism of specific ethnic and religious groups, remains a troubling issue in South Asia: the predominantly Muslim Indian part of Kashmir is shaped by interreligious violence, whilst the Sri Lankan civil war is essentially a conflict between the Sinhalese 'Sri Lankan armed forces' and the Tamil 'separatist Liberation Tigers'.⁴

According to Susan Koshy, the *dispersion* (*diaspora* in Greek) of South Asians around the globe created the South Asian diaspora as 'one of the oldest, largest and most geographically diverse'.⁵ Koshy differentiates between *old diasporas*, i.e. imperial-induced 19th and early 20th century indentured labour migration to British colonies in East Africa or North America, and *new diasporas* marked by mostly 'skilled labour movements to metropolitan destinations after World War II'.⁶ When discussing the South Asian diaspora, the term *neo-diaspora* proves useful, as it resituates the focus of analysis from diaspora envisioned as a continuous reproduction of ethnonational *origins* to the more complex histories of diasporic formation, as well as new and creative practices of identity. South Asian diasporas are often shaped by internal differentiation and possible *re-diasporizations*, as in the case of South Asian Ugandans who, after their forcible expulsion from Uganda, mostly emigrated to the UK or US and did not return to their first generation homelands, the newly established nations India and Pakistan.⁷ Above that, describing the South Asian diaspora as *South Asian*, rather than using a specific national denominator, might also be useful: first, because it indicates how host communities usually relegated South Asian immigrants to a universalized cultural descriptor such as *Indian*, *Hindu* or *Paki*. Second, it stresses the 'common history of colonialism' as a determinant force in creating South Asian diasporas.⁸ Third, as migration before 1947 was substantial, diasporas from the subcontinent existed long before post-independence nation-making in South Asia. Fourth, the Partition did not only lead to migration from South Asia, but also to migration from within: Indian Muslims who migrated to Pakistan formed *muhajir* diasporas reminiscent of the early Islamic *hijra* migration from Mecca to Medina. Similarly, even before 1947, Tamil Indians had come to Sri Lanka to work on tea plantations.⁹

In the diasporic context, the term *South Asian*, although it refers to various ethnicities, nationalities and religious identities, describes a diaspora shaped by interrelated yet always situated processes of colonialization, transnational migration and subsequent homogenization by host societies. Yet, it also hints to 'distinctive histories' of diasporic positioning and 'multi-local rather than territorially circumscribed' South Asian diasporic identities.¹⁰ Koshy

identifies the aforementioned *multi-local* identities with *desi*, a word derived from *desh*, which signifies '[l]ove for regional homelands ... in Indian languages'.¹¹ *Desi* identities are transnational in that they imagine new bonds based on the commonality of South Asian cultures rather than 'the arbitrary borders drawn by colonialism and nationalism on the subcontinent'. In conclusion, the homeland connections of South Asian diaspora can range from nostalgic nationalism to new imaginations of cultural belonging. Self-conscious diasporic positionalities such as *desi* identities indicate how diasporic contexts can engender 'new connotations' for South Asian cultural identities.¹² Traditional and non-traditional homeland connections are also relevant with regard to South Asian writers in the diaspora. As Ananya J. Kabir remarks, such writers, in some way or another, tend to enter into an 'imaginative dialogue with the homeland as nation', which might take the form of a critique, celebration or creative re-imagining.¹³ Gooneratne, for example, as is discussed throughout the article, criticizes Sinhalese nationalism through Mr. Koyako, creatively re-imagines a utopian Sri Lanka through Bharat and Navaranjini's unrealistic, interethnic Sinhalese-Tamil marriage, as observed by Neloufer de Mel.¹⁴ Besides, she invokes hybrid and *desi* South Asian identities through Navaranjini's culinary activities.

The protagonists in Gooneratne's novel *A Change of Skies*, Bharat and Navaranjini Mangala-Davasinha, are Sri Lankans who move to Australia in 1964, as Bharat is offered a five-year visiting professorship at a Sydney-based university. The Sri Lankan diaspora has its roots in the colonial period, when wealthy Tamils and Sinhalese went to England to obtain qualifications and university degrees, as is the case with Bharat who studied at Cambridge. Besides, during the colonial period, the British colonizers brought Indian Tamils to Sri Lanka to work on plantations and also fostered labour migration of Sri Lankan Tamils to Malaysia and Singapore.¹⁵ From the 1970s, Sri Lankans, mostly women from Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslims backgrounds, sought work as maids or nannies in Middle Eastern countries and still hugely contribute to 'the demographic make-up of destination countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE'.¹⁶ The Sri Lankan diaspora in the Middle East is referenced at points in *A Change of Skies*. Edwina, for example, reads about Sri Lankan Gulf War refugees from Kuwait on her flight to Sri Lanka. Above that, Navaranjini faults her mother for having helped a masseuse find work in Kuwait: after all, according to Bharat, the degrading working conditions engendered a new literary genre of the name *Golf Sorrow*.¹⁷ In the wake of the 1983 Sinhalese-Tamil civil war, it was mostly Tamils who fled Sri Lanka as asylum seekers.¹⁸ Therefore, when speaking of the Sri Lankan diaspora, questions of ethnicity play a role and

make a distinction between Tamil and Sinhalese diasporas appear relevant in this specific context.¹⁹

South Asians in the (Euro-Australian) Orientalist Imagination

In *Orientalism*, Edward W. Said defines Orientalism as a colonial discourse of power and binary thinking, whereby *the West* creates *the Orient* as its backward yet desirably exotic-erotic Other. As a result, Western knowledge of the Orient is shaped both by processes of (epistemic and actual-structural) colonization and exoticization/eroticization.²⁰ Although Said's book is mainly a study of Western stereotypes of the Middle East, its wider, imaginative reach encompasses the whole of Asia. Correspondingly, in *A Change of Skies*, Gooneratne engages with some varieties of Orientalizing South Asians. First, she utilizes discourses of Asian sexuality and sensuality to orchestrate both Bharat and Navaranjini as objects of the Australian eroticizing gaze. Second, Maude Crabbe's patronizing Western feminism can be read as Orientalist. However, it is also argued that Navaranjini makes Australian Orientalist thinking work for her own benefit and thereby challenges notions of powerless victims of Orientalism.

In his discussion of Flaubert's writings of the Orient, Said outlines how the French writer poetized an 'association between the Orient and sex' and connected Oriental women with 'luxuriant and seemingly unbounded sexuality'.²¹ In her feminist reconsideration of Orientalism, Meyda Yegenoglu observes that the Orient is usually staged as 'feminine, ... seductive, and dangerous' and as a *female* body that is to be controlled and possessed by the colonial gaze.²² So, essentially, in the Orientalist imagination, the Oriental woman came to stand for Western desires of an inherently sexual female. Soon after their migration to Australia, the Mangala-Davasinhas become friends with their neighbours, the Trevallys. Bruce Trevally's comments about Navaranjini read like textbook examples of Orientalist stereotyping: he sees in her 'the spitting image of a panting in Mo's [his wife's] library book, "A Princess Waiting For Her Absent Lover"' and describes her sari's 'bare midriff' as 'God's gift to a deserving male'.²³ According to Leonie Schmidt-Haberkamp, Bruce's reference to Navaranjini's picturesque qualities correlates with Said's definition of Orientalism as a literary and visual arts discourse.²⁴ Similarly, as Yasmin Jiwani points out, Orientalizing South Asian women usually means rendering them 'exploitable as a spectacle' through referring to markers of exotic difference, as exemplified by Bruce's reception of Navaranjini's exotic-erotic sari.²⁵ Interestingly, Bruce's admiration of the sari causes his wife Maureen to try on South Asian dress styles. The examples discussed above display two workings of Orientalizing South Asians: Bruce subjects Oriental South Asian femininity to his erotic gaze and charges it with

sensual beauty, whilst Maureen undertakes an act of *cultural appropriation* whereby she (mis)uses South Asian cultural signifiers to cater to her husband's Orientalist gaze and enhance her own sensuality.²⁶ Since Gooneratne is a professor of English literature specializing in postcolonial studies, it does not seem far-fetched to claim that she has expert insight into Said's quintessential text of postcolonialism. Thus, the Trevally's textbook *Orientalism* is a parody of Orientalist thinking in line with Diana Fuss's notion of parody as a strategy 'to undo by overdoing'.²⁷ After all, the Trevally's reductive thinking of Asia in terms of sexual stereotypes attests to their narrow-mindedness and ignorance of the diversity of South Asian cultures. *Orientalism* is called into question through the Trevallys's ridiculous, overdone exoticization and sexualization of the Mangala-Davasinhas.

Another instance of undoing Orientalism through overdoing it, results from Navaranjini's display of an illustrated version of the *Kama Sutra* at a university event. She may be ignorant of the negative colonial legacies of Orientalism, but seems well aware of how to make use of the discourse and 'exploits the white sensual image of the East to her advantage', as Chandani Lokugé remarks.²⁸ After all, her idea to exhibit the *Kama Sutra* for prompt cash displays knowledge of Euro-Australian fascination with South Asian sexuality as well as economic, yet self-Orientalizing, cleverness of how to market this sexuality. Lokugé's charges of naivety and self-exoticization against Navarajini appear valid, as she does not actively resist her Orientalization, but rather fosters it.²⁹ Alternatively, it could be argued that she inhabits a position of agency from which she can at least influence her own objectification. Lisa Lau and Cristina Mendes outline how South Asians, especially writers or artists, 'engage in re-Orientalizing practices' as a way of making themselves heard within an Orientalist 'global cultural marketplace' and to self-control stereotypical depictions, to some extent.³⁰ Navaranjini's self-commodification can then be located within a society which Orientalized her even before her arrival in Australia. Strangely enough, however, her self-definition as a South Asian exotic woman defends her from being hurt by Australian sexist-racist stereotyping and she even makes a career as the author of a book about South Asian cuisine, bearing the exoticized title *Something Rich and Strange*.³¹ For Navaranjini, Lau and Mendes's *re-Orientalism* becomes a way of self-identification and turning Orientalist stereotypes into money.

The *Kama Sutra* incident leads Bharat's university colleagues and their wives to think of him as an Oriental 'sex guru'.³² Mike Bream, one of these colleagues, has bedroom problems with his wife, which is why she urges him to ask Bharat, 'a mine of erotic lore', in her view, for help: after all he might divulge 'a few well-tried secrets from the mystic Orient'.³³ The

Breams even go as far as to secretly imitate the Mangala-Davasinhas's double-bed, which actually consists of two separate beds, one being a few inches higher than the other. Unaware of the bed's history as a faulty design, the Breams interpret it as an example of Oriental *sex arts*, since it looks *different* and belongs to foreigners from Asia. According to Meenakshi G. Durham, in popular culture, artifacts representative of South Asian culture are often emptied of their cultural histories and reduced to the status of a 'fetish that supports White female sexuality'.³⁴ Gooneratne parodies this principle: although the Breams fetishize South Asian culture in order to *sex up* their own life, this very fetishization hinges on a lack of cultural knowledge and an overdone Saidian sexualized Othering, whereby a mundane faulty design stands in for 'exotic hypersexuality' simply because it is possessed by externally Orientalized South Asians.³⁵ The Breams's and Orientalist thinking in general are mocked as purely ignorant and inventive: to the reader, the couple's imitation is dismantled as a failed attempt at cultural appropriation, as they do not even appropriate *real* aspects of South Asian culture, but invent it for themselves. Besides, Bharat's supposed hypersexuality is called into question when he starts fantasizing about sex at the sight of his half-nude wife, but decides to leave for work instead, choosing supposed *Western* practicality over what Said terms the imagined "'bizarre jouissance'" of an ever eccentric Orient.³⁶ In sum, Orientalism is undone by overdoing it as a ridiculous discourse based on representations and appropriations gone wrong.

According to Vera Alexander, Gooneratne locates Orientalist stereotypical thinking within the academic circles of Southern Cross University.³⁷ Maud Crabbe's unreflective and patronizing Western feminism represents a form of academic Orientalism. For her, Navaranjini stands in for an 'essentially unliberated' and oppressed South Asian womanhood.³⁸ Although she defines herself as an advocate of equal rights for '[w]omen, abos, gays, kids, koalas, druggies, whales, and now the Asians', Crabbe is quick to essentialize *all* Asian/non-Western women as oppressed and *all* straight men, Western and non-Western, as oppressors.³⁹ Once again, Gooneratne parodies this form of feminism as Orientalism: Crabbe is an exaggerated embodiment of Chandra T. Mohanty's white Western feminist conceptualizing 'the "Third World Woman" as a singular monolithic subject' that is *essentially unliberated* and in need of enlightenment about 'the (implicitly consensual) priority of issues around which apparently *all* women are expected to organize'.⁴⁰ In that way, Crabbe perpetuates a power constellation of a superior, civilizing West and an inferior East in need of saving. Formally, the description of events is focalized from Crabbe's point of view, which also confirms Gayatri C. Spivak's observation that third world women are usually spoken for or about, but rarely to.⁴¹

The first encounter between the two women takes place in the university's library. Crabbe can only see Navaranjini's sari for its revealing and thereby potentially sexualizing midriff, not for its potential status as a self-conscious expression of cultural identity. Although the sari was interpreted as a means of male control of female *cultural* bodies by women in South Asian diasporic contexts, in Navaranjini's case it seems to be a personal choice: her husband's attempts at assimilation, e.g. his wish to change their names to Barry and Jean Mundy, make it hard to believe that he expects his wife to wear traditional dress.⁴² When hearing about Navaranjini's attack on the racist, anti-Asian sociologist Ronald Blackstone, however, Crabbe sees some feminist potential in Navaranjini and invites her to speak to the Women's Group at Southern Cross. Navaranjini disappoints Crabbe, as her views on men and patriarchy are not radical enough. It may be true that she relies on Bharat at first and treats him as a superior in accordance with the traditional role of a 'Hindu *pativrata* (husband worshipper)', as Lokugé puts it.⁴³ Yet, even when Crabbe dismisses her as a passive South Asian woman, Navaranjini does not meet this category's criteria: she has a degree, her upper-class background does not really render her subaltern and she makes intelligent, economic choices, as when she more or less goes behind Crabbe's back and convinces the university to charge a fee for exhibitions at their Open Day event (an idea that yields 10.000 dollars). Gooneratne uses Crabbe as a parodic example of patronizing Western feminism, as described by Mohanty and Spivak, again two postcolonial critics Gooneratne is certainly familiar with. In Crabbe's view, South Asian women are *all* victims of South Asian 'male brutal exploitation'.⁴⁴ This is problematic in so far as she does not bother to speak to and *analyze* the real contexts of Navaranjini's life, but rather presupposes that, as a South Asian woman, due to inherent South Asian patriarchy and subjugation, she must be inherently different from Western women and needs to be saved.⁴⁵ In contrast, Gooneratne does not portray Navaranjini as a perfect model of female empowerment, but rather uses her presence as a textual device to hint to 'a multiplicity of feminisms' as opposed to the idea of but one model of Western hegemonic feminism.⁴⁶ In Neloufer de Mel's analysis, the *staging* of Navaranjini's emancipation from her marital, financial dependence as a career in the gastronomic sector, metaphorically 'cook[s] a snook at a brand of militant feminism', which views the domestic as a platform of patriarchal gender roles.⁴⁷ In sum, Gooneratne unmasks how some representatives of Western feminism, such as Maud Crabbe, represent South Asian femininity by relying on Orientalist stereotypes and without taking into account individual contexts or allowing for different feminisms. Navaranjini challenges one-sided representations of essentially oppressed South Asian femininity by emancipating herself in her own, conventionally *femininely*

connoted way, through a career as a star cook of ethnic food. In Anita Mannur's analysis, the cooking career enables Navaranjini to emancipate herself partly because and not despite of her South Asian migrant identity.⁴⁸

Gooneratne makes use of Orientalist stereotypes in her representation of South Asian migrants. Gooneratne's use of Orientalism could be termed postmodern in Linda Hutcheon's description of postmodernism as 'a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges'.⁴⁹ Gooneratne *installs* Orientalism through some of her Australian characters' stereotypes and simultaneously *subverts* it by ridiculing these very stereotypes as based on parodic, ridiculous oversexualized and overexoticized misrepresentations. Similarly, the paradoxical idea of having Navaranjini resist external Orientalization through an almost assertive self-exoticization is indicative of a postmodern contradiction of *use* (self-exoticization as a beneficiary strategy) and *abuse* (self-exoticization as a consensual consolidation of Australian stereotypes of South Asia).

Self-Orientalism, South Asian Superiority and Sinhalese Nationalism

Gooneratne's postmodern poetics of contradictoriness are reflected in her use of 'postmodern techniques of montage', as Laurenz Volkmann observes: through '[d]ifferent points of view', specifically South Asian and Australian, a sense of de-centralization is achieved.⁵⁰ Stereotypical and binary thinking is not only perpetrated by Westerners, as a discussion of Edward's self-Orientalism, Navaranjini's sense of South Asian superiority and Mr. Koyako's Sinhalese nationalism indicates.

To begin with, Edward's journey is indicative of a metamorphosis from self-Orientalism to a reconsideration of his cultural roots. Edward's adventures in Australia are rendered through excerpts from his journal edited and published as *Lifelines: The Journal of an Asian Grandee in Australia 1882-1887* by his grand-grandson Bharat. He leaves Sri Lanka, then Ceylon, for Australia in order 'to liberate himself from stifling domestic expectations', i.e. his duties as his noble family's eldest son.⁵¹ Edward belongs to a privileged class of Ceylonese which worked administrative tasks for the British colonizers and tried to mimic their *Britishness*. Together with one of his family's former servants, Davith, he is hired on a ship that brings indentured Ceylonese labourers to Australia. To hide Edward's noble heritage, the two of them pretend to be brothers. On the surface, this appears to be a relationship of equals, however, it is actually a 'stereotypical colonizer-colonized relationship': Davith secretly treats Edward as his master and is not forgetful of the latter's original role as a member of the native imperial elite.⁵² Edward looks down on both his fellow Sinhalese and the white settler

Australians, as his British-centred education prompts him to think of himself as a British imperial. He is glad to have acquired the English tongue ‘of the civilized world’ instead of ‘rude, unlettered’ Sinhalese and valorizes his apparently rational Christianity against the ‘heathen superstition[s]’ of Sinhalese Buddhism.⁵³ Here, Edward ‘participates in [his] own Orientalizing’ through thinking in terms of a Christian, civilized West and a backward Orient with a corresponding superstitious Eastern religion, Buddhism (which could easily be replaced by Hinduism or Islam).⁵⁴ Edward’s world view is ‘anglocentric’, which is also reflected in his attitude towards Australians: he sees them as uneducated barbarians, ‘feels himself to be Ovid among the Goths’ who eat non-spiced, almost raw meat and cannot understand why these Goths/Australians see him as just another Asian worker rather than a representative of ‘British cultural superiority’.⁵⁵ When confronted with the death of a group of Ceylonese migrants in Badagini, Western Australia, Edward re-routes his conceptions and feels the need to discover his cultural heritage. Under the supervision of a Buddhist monk, he starts learning Sinhalese, Tamil and other Indian languages and also studies the Buddhist religion and South Asian histories. After returning to Sri Lanka/Ceylon, he becomes a translator and writer of Sinhalese and Tamil cultural texts. In this instance, in the process of his migration, the South Asian migrant transmutes from ‘a Western-educated colonial subject’ and self-Orientalist to a proud scholar ‘of his national culture and of Buddhism’.⁵⁶ Essentially, the South Asian migrant emigrates as a colonial subject defined by the colonizer’s values, only to return to the homeland as a somewhat de-colonized subject pursuing the postcolonial, *counter-discursive* project of retrieving and *rewriting* his pre-colonial culture (see Helen Tiffin for a discussion of postcolonialism and counter-discourse).⁵⁷

Whilst Edward needs to migrate to return to and reconnect with his South Asian cultural roots, Navaranjini is firmly rooted in a proud South Asian identity, before and after her migration to Australia. Her self-understanding hinges on a racialized logic that puts India and Sri Lanka at the centre ‘of the *real* Asian world’ which does not include ‘Far Eastern ... ‘Ching-Chongs’’.⁵⁸ For Navaranjini, *real* Asians are golden brown, whereas, in terms of skin colour, Far Easterners have more in common with pale, white Westerners. As she sees it, according to South Asian tradition and Hindu divine order, there are better and worse skin shades, and she possesses the perfect ‘Natural Tan’, for which even ‘Australian women seem to kill themselves every summer trying to acquire it’.⁵⁹ Bharat’s demur that Navaranjini’s line of argument is indebted to a British-imported racism appears plausible. Yet, her comments could be read as a parodic inversion of ideals of whiteness, as she is not self-conscious of her non-white complexion and decentres Western-centric technologies of racialized-Orientalized Othering.

Contrary to Frantz Fanon's theorization of *black* persons' self-Othering at the discovery of their own skin (colour) as 'corporeal malediction' in the white public imagination, she feels superior in her brown skin and describes white Australian women as desiring to be browner and not vice versa.⁶⁰ This is in stark contrast to her husband, who, as also analyzed by Lokugé, cannot abstain from Fanonian self-Othering: Bharat starts viewing himself as he thinks Australians view him, i.e. as quintessential Asian Other, and desperately tries to blend in through changing the couple's birth names to Barry and Jean Mundy. Whilst for Navaranjini, who never liked her name, the name change does not seem to bear negative connotations, for Barry it does. He goes from *Bharat*, meaning India in most Indian languages and signifying the proud centre of Navaranjini's *real* Asia, to *Barry Mundy*. Resembling *mundus*, meaning world in Latin, the last name implies an ambivalent world citizenship, as Latin is 'a dead language in terms of friendly verbal interaction'.⁶¹ In Sinhalese, however, combining the similar sounding terms *barri* and *mundi*, would translate to *impotent dreg*.⁶² Isabel Alonso-Breto views the name change as an act of integration, as the 'immigrants do not conflate with the cultural environment' of Australia completely.⁶³ This may be true for Navaranjini, who embraces South Asian cooking in Australia, is eager to learn Australian colloquialisms and discovers similarities not differences between Australian and South Asian culture, since 'very deep, a long way down, Australians are true Orientals at heart'.⁶⁴ For Bharat, the name change works as an act of assimilation. First, he sees no other possibility but to assimilate to the Australian mainstream and 'simplify their identities for the benefit of their Australian friends'.⁶⁵ Second, whilst it helps him melt into the mainstream of the new land, it connotatively points to the cultural *impotence* that he himself and the wider mainstream in a multiculturalist Australia, which autonormalizes whiteness, attribute to Sinhalese culture.

Bharat is deeply uprooted by his new *Asian difference* in Australia and opts for assimilation as a counter-strategy. On the other hand, Navaranjini takes pride in her *real* Asianness and non-whiteness and simultaneously adopts Australian slang and social manners. In Bharat's case, Australian essentialist-racist thinking causes him to assess his newly acquired status as visibly different *Asian* as a disadvantage, since 'fine distinctions between one kind of Asian and another' do not exist.⁶⁶ Navaranjini indulges in her very own essentialism to counter Australian anti-Asian racism, which correlates with what Spivak terms 'a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism': in order to work against Australian conceptions of a homogenous Asia, as represented by the fictional Ronald Blackstone's comments about a collective group of Asian migrants, she constructs her own, contextually empowering vision of an essential *real* (South)Asian identity.⁶⁷ This Asian essence is restrictive, as it excludes other geographical

Asians, and homogenizing, as it does not account for in-group differentiation in South Asia. Hence, Navaranjini's South Asian migrant identity remains ambivalent in Hutcheon's postmodern sense. On the one hand, she *uses strategic essentialism* to construct a self-assertive cultural identity that shields her from self-Othering and Australian racism and also helps her balance her old cultural identity with her new environment. Contrariwise, it remains essentialist thinking, positivist yet not positive, which is *abused* to justify South Asian racial superiority. Navaranjini's racism is indicative of Gooneratne's contradictory poetics of *installing* and *subverting*, as it serves an antiracist function. As Yvette Tan suggests, the unusual arbitrariness of putting Far Easterners and Europeans in one category on account of similar skin shades, 'demonstrates how value judgements based on colour can only be arbitrary' as a whole.⁶⁸ Once again, Orientalist essentialisms and their entailing machinations of alterity are worked with only to work against them: Navaranjini's *strategic essentialism*, arguably, holds up a deconstructive mirror to the racially differentiating discursive formations and violations of colonial Orientalism, as it unmasks its arbitrary yet ideologically *strategic* constructedness.

As previously analyzed, Navaranjini creates a proud *real* Asian identity and is willing to embrace Australian customs. Alternatively, Gooneratne also constructs an exclusivist Sinhalese Buddhist 'emigrant nationalist' in the character of Mr. Koyako.⁶⁹ In an early letter to his mother, Bharat describes Mr. Koyako as a proud and religious Sinhalese migrant, who functions as a leader of the Sri Lankan community in Sydney, upholding traditions through dressing himself and his wife in Sri Lankan national costumes and only eating and serving the national cuisine. Koyako scolds Bharat for displaying Keyt paintings in his home, as the Sri Lankan painter is, in his opinion, not ethnically Sinhalese, but a half-Dutch Burgher and Indian-influenced. According to Alonso-Breto, Koyako's attitude reflects a 'Sinhalese "minority complex"', afraid of potential Indo-Tamil hegemony as well as other non-Sinhalese ethnicities, Burghers, and religious groups.⁷⁰ Koyako's fantasies of ethnic purity are gendered. His teenage daughter, Lassana, is advised to stay away from Australian boys and her arranged marriage with a potential Sinhalese husband from Sri Lanka is already in the planning. Here, Lassana is objectified as what Ania Loomba and Ritty A. Lokuse define, in South Asian nationalist contexts, as a female bearer 'of community, honor, shame'.⁷¹ She is expected to preserve the national-ethnic, non-mixed purity of a Sinhalese Sri Lankan nation by avoiding *immodest* relations with Australian boys and waiting on her ethnically approved husband. For Koyako, the Sri Lankan/Sinhalese migrant woman must (literally) carry out the reproductive labour of sustaining Sinhalese culture/biology. Although these scenes are situated before the 1980s civil war, Koyako is staged as 'a parodic version of conservative and bigoted

Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism', which imagines a Tamil-free and Sinhalese-only nation of Sri Lanka, which is, however, in geopolitical terms, a multiethnic nation-state.⁷² Gooneratne makes it clear that Koyako cannot be taken seriously: his full name translates to “Look, mate, at the way this rascal’s lying his head off” and implies, at least to the critical reader of her *Author’s Note*, that his views on Sri Lankan ethnicity are the views of a childish yet dangerous mind.⁷³

Following de Mel, in response, through the interethnic, official Tamil-Sinhalese marriage between Bharat and Navaranjini, Gooneratne writes a ‘composite Sri Lanka’ where socially approved relationships are not entered ‘according to caste, class and ethnicity’.⁷⁴ Gooneratne resists ethnically pure narratives of Sri Lanka and conceptualizes a relationship that even produces Tamil Sinhalese Australian offspring. Once again, whilst in Hutcheon’s sense, Gooneratne *installs* an exclusivist Sinhalese Buddhist version of Sri Lanka, she *subverts* the notion of such a monocultural nation by creating Bharat and Navaranjini’s hopeful, interethnic, mostly diasporic marriage. Gooneratne is aware of the very *real* conditions of the Sri Lankan civil war and situates most of the plot and with it the interethnic relationship (and, as a matter of fact, the interethnic child) in the diaspora. Kabir’s point that South Asian diasporic writers enter into an *imaginative dialogue* with their postcolonial nation-state, a re-*imagination*, is confirmed: Gooneratne writes the Sri Lankan diaspora as ‘an alternative space[s] of longing’ where the interethnic relationship becomes a synecdoche for a utopian, interethnic Sri Lanka not ruptured by Sinhalese or Tamil exclusivist nationalisms.⁷⁵

Forming Diasporic Identities

As Gooneratne’s novel deals with the South Asian/Sri Lankan diaspora in Australia, it is relevant to consider whether a negotiation of South Asian and Australian aspects takes place. Interestingly, the novel’s title, which is taken from a letter by the Latin author Horaz (English: ‘He who crosses the ocean may change the skies above him, but not the colour of his soul’⁷⁶) and implies inner permanence in exile, is ‘ironically inverted’, as Alexander posits.⁷⁷ Bharat and Navaranjini not only change the skies above them, but also change the colour of their souls, to some extent. After all, the new land offers them a possibility ‘to reinvent themselves’, as they can take new, unexpected career paths.⁷⁸ Their final decision to stay in Australia for the better is triggered by a vacation to Sri Lanka. The trip works as “reverse culture shock”, as the couple is taken aback by Sri Lankan formalities, the island’s changed face and the

increasing ethnic unease.⁷⁹ It is discussed how the couple's new professions and *re-inventions* point to 'a hybrid cultural condition'.⁸⁰

To begin with, after some time in Australia (and towards the end of the novel), Navaranjini becomes a famous creator of dishes that draw on (South) Asian and Western styles. Her dish creations are published in her cookery books, among them the notorious *Something Rich and Strange*, and served in a restaurant, *The Asian Sensation*, that she co-owns with Bharat. She even hosts her own TV show and, in the *Queensland Courier*, describes her dishes as a 'wholesome synthesis of East and West'.⁸¹ If, as Stuart Hall theorizes, cultural identity is '[n]ot an essence, but a *positioning*', this is reflected in Navaranjini's cooking: rather than seeing Asian/Eastern and Australian/Western as fixed essences, as she did before, she treats them as positions which she can *synthesize* and re-position at her discretion.⁸² As Laurenz Volkmann observes, Navaranjini's hybridization of different ingredients invokes 'new values ... established in cooking'.⁸³ She might not only invent food that is both Asian and Australian, but re-invent herself as such a mix. In her book *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture*, Mannur considers how food and creative kitchen work help Navaranjini open a space of 'in-betweenness', where she neither denies her cultural background through assimilation nor shields herself against Australian influences.⁸⁴ For her, cooking, which was servants' work in Sri Lanka, becomes a form of education and emancipation, as it is her way of acquiring knowledge about both her Australian cultural environment as well as her South Asian cultural roots.⁸⁵ Furthermore, Mannur views Navaranjini's writing of the cookery book 'as her first public act as an immigrant', which makes her both a typical Asian migrant finding success in gastronomy and a positive model for other (South) Asian migrants: 'Jean becomes ... a guide able to lead her community in their quest ... of authentically reproducing national essences in diasporic contexts', but this very *reproductive* work simultaneously 'write[s] herself into an Australian and a diasporic tradition'.⁸⁶ In this sense, through her gastronomic activities, she creates a *desi* identity which is both South Asian and diasporic-hybridized in outlook, so that homeland traditions and homeland food can be treated as 'travelling cultural forms' neither limited to national spaces nor defensive to intercultural influences.⁸⁷

Navaranjini's gastronomic career runs along stereotypical and gendered lines, though. In Lokugé's view, a food career means settling with 'the immigrant mainstream' where *different* or mixed food becomes a form of otherwise *non-acceptable*, not promoted multiculturalism.⁸⁸ Besides, it is questionable whether her rather 'male chauvinist' husband would have agreed to anything else but a *femininely* connoted career in the kitchen.⁸⁹ Mannur counters these points by emphasizing that, in the end, Navaranjini's cooking guides for

immigrants, contrary to Bharat's long planned *Guide* for immigrants, which never sees the light of day, are actually helpful and constitute 'a tradition of women's writing', uniting her with other migrant women.⁹⁰ Ultimately, she remains ambivalent: she forms an emancipated, proud and financially successful diasporic South Asian identity in Australia, but fits Lokugé's gendered stereotype of the immigrant woman making a career of the domestic. In a similar manner, Bharat changes his life, as he decides to quit his job as a linguistics professor in favour of teaching English to other migrants and Aborigines. Lokugé makes clear how such a change of professions would not be acceptable in Sri Lanka and signify 'a severe career demotion'.⁹¹ Above that, his professional re-orientation could be read as a retreat from 'mainstream Australian professional life' for the sake of helping and declaring solidarity with other migrants in Australia.⁹² According to Koshy, for some South Asian migrants, the idea of 'coolitude' has become empowering, as it 'forwards an identity highlighting cultural mixing and cross-racial alliances among marginalized groups', rather than simply stressing the migrant's homeland ethnicity.⁹³ Helping and uniting with other migrants signals to a 'diaspora identity' instead of 'singular ethno-national identities'.⁹⁴ Thus, both Navaranjini and Bharat form South Asian migrant or diasporic identities, *migrancy* and *diaspora* being the operative words. Although Navaranjini's cooking implies a possibility of South Asian-Australian hybridity, the couple's death in a plane crash 'symbolically suggest[s] the undecidability of their position', a position which is neither fully Sri Lankan anymore nor fully Australian, but rather marked by the diaspora experience.⁹⁵ Gooneratne's staging of the characters as finally ambivalent is not only postmodern, as Laurenz Volkmann infers, but also reminiscent of 'the Buddhist concept of impermanence' so that her strategies of characterization rely on both Western and Eastern philosophy.⁹⁶ Hence, Gooneratne's South Asian migrants inhabit a world de-centred in a postmodern and postcolonial sense.

Conclusion

The present article marks an attempt at identifying the ways in which Gooneratne represents South Asian migrants in her first novel. The first representational mode can be defined as Orientalist, meaning that Orientalist stereotypes are used to describe the reception of South Asians, and probably Asians as a whole, in Australia. These stereotypes are not left unquestioned, but rather parodied through the Euro-Australians' exaggerated and unrealistic presuppositions of South Asian hypersexuality. One of the South Asian characters, Navaranjini, even utilizes such stereotypes to make money off them and exoticizes herself, to

some extent, to assert a self-conscious South Asian identity. Above that, the Brems's imitation of Bharat and Navaranjini's bedroom, whereby they turn a mundane faulty designed bed into a sexual object, dismantles Orientalism's inventive/creative rather than factual basis. Finally, Maud Crabbe's patronizing Western feminism, which constructs Navaranjini as an epitome of an intrinsically oppressed, unliberated South Asian womanhood, is unmasked as a misconstruction of her relatively liberated and empowered situation. Gooneratne's representational Orientalism follows a Hutcheon postmodern logic, for it first *installs* and then *subverts* a stereotypical Orientalist representation of South Asians and thereby implies the ridiculous existence of such stereotypes in the first place. It also displays the contradictoriness of her characters, as Navaranjini, for example, *uses* stereotypes of exotic-erotic South Asianness to empower herself and simultaneously *abuses* a discourse that can also work in a disempowering, dehumanizing manner.

Furthermore, Gooneratne juxtaposes Euro-Australian Orientalist thinking with stereotypical South Asian thinking, namely self-Orientalism, South Asian feelings of superiority and Sinhalese nationalism. Bharat's great-grandson cherishes his British education and deems Britain as the centre of the world. However, the death of hundreds of his compatriots on the Australian coast prompts him to rethink his attitudes and even turns him into a scholar of Sinhalese, Tamil and other Indian languages and cultures. Thus, his migration becomes a first step towards decolonizing himself and discovering his pre-colonial culture. Navaranjini, on the other hand, views herself as a representative *real* Asia, which has India at its centre and is restrictively South Asian in outlook. For her, *real* Asians have golden brown skin, which distinguishes her from Far Easterners whose pale, white skin is said to be more similar to European skin. Although this way of thinking is essentially racist, it could be viewed as a postcolonial act, since, rather than being affected by Fanonian self-othering, she reverses a white skin-brown skin hierarchy by putting brown at the top. At the same time, Navaranjini is open to Australian influences on her life. Conversely, Mr. Koyako, another migrant to Australia, is afraid of any outside influences, be they Australian, Tamil or Indian, on his monocultural *Sinhalese-ness*. For him, living in the diaspora means reproducing the home culture at all costs so that his views on Sri Lanka as Sinhalese and not Tamil or Burger are reproduced too. In response, Gooneratne creates a utopian arranged, interethnic Tamil-Sinhalese marriage between the two main characters and puts into question monocultural concepts of both a Sinhalese and Tamil exclusive Sri Lankan nation.

Eventually, Gooneratne presents her two main South Asian immigrants as diasporic subjects: both Navaranjini and Bharat find fulfilment in jobs enabled by the Australian context.

However, they do not assimilate to the Australian mainstream, position themselves in in-between spaces. Through her creations of hybrid food, Navaranjini asserts a variant of a *desi* identity, as she defines herself through being a part of the South Asian diaspora. Similarly, Bharat's decision to become an English teacher for other migrants links him with these migrants and allows him to create bonds between various diasporic subjects.

Notes

1. Ania Loomba and Ritty A. Lukose, "South Asian Feminisms: Contemporary Interventions," in *South Asian Feminisms*, ed. Ania Loomba and Ritty A. Lukose (Durham: Duke UP, 2012), 1.
2. Michael Mann, „Die Teilung Britisch-Indiens 1947: Blutiger Weg in die Unabhängigkeit [The Partition of British India: Bloody Path to Independence],” *Bpd.de*, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung [German Federal Office of Political Education], <http://www.bpb.de/internationales/asien/indien/44402/die-teilung-britischindiens>.
3. Ibid.
4. Nicholas van Hear, "Sri Lanka's Diasporas," in *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*, ed. Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 237.
5. Susan Koshy, "Introduction," in *Transnational South Asians: The Making of a Neo-Diaspora*, ed. Susan Koshy and R. Radhakrishnan (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 2.
6. Ibid., 6.
7. Ibid., 8.
8. Ibid., 9.
9. Ibid., 9-11.
10. Ibid., 11-13.
11. Ibid., 36.
12. Ibid., 37.
13. Ananya J. Kabir, "Literature of the South Asian Diaspora," in *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*, ed. Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 294.
14. Neloufer de Mel, "Woman as Gendered Subject and Other Discourses in Contemporary Sri Lankan Fiction in English," *Kunapipi* 16, no. 1 (1994), 250.
15. Van Hear, "Diasporas," 236-237.
16. Ibid., 236.
17. Yasmine Gooneratne, *A Change of Skies* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 179.
18. Van Hear, "Diasporas," 237.
19. Ibid., 245.
20. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).
21. Ibid., 187-188.
22. Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1998), 11.
23. Gooneratne, *ACOS*, 100-101.
24. Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp, "Cross-Cultural Experience and Existence in Yasmine Gooneratne's Novel *A Change of Skies*," in *Towards a Transcultural Future: Literature and Society in a "Post"-Colonial World*, ed. Geoffrey V. Davis et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 221.
25. Yasmin Jiwani, "The Erotic, the Exotic and the Dangerous: South Asian Women in Popular Film," *Canadian Woman Studies* 13, no. 1 (1992): 44.
26. Meenakshi G. Durham, "Displaced Persons: Symbols of South Asian Femininity and the Returned Gaze in U.S. Media Culture," *Communication Theory* 11, no.2 (2001): 44.
27. Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 32.
28. Chandani Lokugé, "'We must laugh at one another, or die': Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* and South Asian Migrant Identities," in *Shifting Continents/Colliding Cultures: Diaspora Writing of the Indian Subcontinent*, ed. Ralph J. Crane and Radhika Mohanram (Leiden: Rodopi, 2000), 29.
29. Ibid., 32.

30. Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes, "Introducing Re-Orientalism: A New Manifestation of Orientalism," in *Re-Orientalism and South Asian Identity Politics*, ed. Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 3.
31. Lokugé, "Migrant Identities," 30-32.
32. Schmidt-Haberkamp, "Cross-Cultural Experience," 222.
33. Gooneratne, *ACOS*, 186.
34. Durham, "Displaced Persons," 210.
35. *Ibid.*, 211.
36. Said, *Orientalism*, 103.
37. Vera Alexander, "Cross-Cultural Encounters in Amit Chaudhuri's *Afternoon Raag* and Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*," in *The Politics of English as a World Language: New Horizons in Postcolonial Cultural Studies*, ed. Christian Mair (Leiden: Rodopi, 2003), 381.
38. Gooneratne, *ACOS*, 134.
39. *Ibid.*, 131-133.
40. Chandra T. Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *boundary 2* 12, no. 2/13, no. 1 (1984): 333-334.
41. Gayatri C. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Can the Subaltern Speak: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia UP, 2010), 267.
42. Emma Tarlo, "Dress and the South Asian Diaspora," in *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*, ed. Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 365.
43. Lokugé, "Migrant Identities," 30.
44. Gooneratne, *ACOS*, 133.
45. Mohanty, "Feminist Scholarship," 335.
46. Schmidt-Haberkamp, "Cross-Cultural Experience," 225.
47. De Mel, "Sri Lankan Fiction," 250.
48. Anita Mannur, *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture*, (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2010), 61.
49. Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, (London & New York: Routledge) 1988, 1.
50. Laurenz Volkmann, "Intercultural Competence through Reading Yasmine Gooneratne's Novels," in *English Literatures in International Contexts*, ed. Heinz Antor and Klaus Stierstorfer (Heidelberg: Winter, 2000), 412.
51. Lokugé, "Migrant Identities," 20.
52. *Ibid.*
53. Gooneratne, *ACOS*, 161.
54. Said, *Orientalism*, 325.
55. Lokugé, "Migrant Identities," 20-21.
56. *Ibid.*, 20.
57. Helen Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft (London: Routledge, 1995): 99-101.
58. Gooneratne, *ACOS*, 119.
59. *Ibid.*, 120.
60. Frantz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness," in *'Race', Culture & Difference*, ed. James Donald and Ali Rattansi (London: SAGE Publications, 1992), 225.
61. Lokugé, "Migrant Identities," 24.
62. *Ibid.*, 25.
63. Isabel Alonso-Breto, "'Enormous Cracks, Towering Mountains': The Displacement of Migration as Intimate Violence in Sri Lanka-Australia Migration Narratives," *South Asian Review* 33, no. 3 (2012): 133.
64. Gooneratne, *ACOS*, 117.
65. Alexander, "Cross-Cultural Encounters," 381.
66. Gooneratne, *ACOS*, 118.
67. Gayatri C. Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri C. Spivak (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 15.
68. Yvette Tan, "Looking Different/Re-Thinking Difference: Global Constraints and/or Contradictory Characteristics in Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* and Adib Khan's *Seasonal Adjustments*," in *Literature and Racial Ambiguity*, ed. Teresa Hubel and Neil Brooks (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 242.
69. De Mel, "Sri Lankan Fiction," 250.
70. Alonso-Breto, "Displacement of Migration," 133.
71. Loomba and Lukose, "South Asian Feminisms," 10.
72. Alonso-Breto, "Displacement of Migration," 133.
73. Gooneratne, *ACOS*, 328.

74. De Mel, "Sri Lankan Fiction," 250.
75. Kabir, "South Asian Diaspora," 394.
76. Gooneratne, *ACOS*, 167.
77. Alexander, "Cross-Cultural Encounters," 380.
78. Ibid.
79. Volkmann, "Intercultural Competence," 411.
80. Alonso-Breto, "Displacement of Migration," 135.
81. Gooneratne, *ACOS*, 293.
82. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 226.
83. Volkmann, "Intercultural Competence," 412.
84. Mannur, *Culinary Fictions*, 60.
85. Ibid., 61.
86. Ibid.
87. Koshy, "Introduction," 35.
88. Lokugé, "Migrant Identities," 33.
89. Ibid.
90. Mannur, *Culinary Fictions*, 62.
91. Lokugé, "Migrant Identities," 28.
92. Ibid.
93. Koshy, "Introduction," 37.
94. Ibid.
95. Alonso-Breto, "Displacement of Migration," 134.
96. Volkmann, "Intercultural Competence," 413.

Biographical Statement

Christian David Zeitz (czeit@smail.uni-koeln.de) is a graduate student of English Studies and Media & Cultural Studies at the University of Cologne, Germany. He worked as graduate assistant to Prof. Beate Neumeier's e-journal *gender forum*. His essays on postmodern masculinities in Joss Whedon's *Angel* and film-noir-styled women characters in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* were published in *Watcher Junior: Undergraduate Journal of Whedon Studies* and *gender forum: Internet Journal for Gender Studies*, respectively. Recently, he guest-edited *gender forum*'s special issue on *Contemporary Muslim Women's Voices*. Research interests include postcolonial theory and feminism, sexual exceptionalisms, diaspora literature/film, as well as theories of affect.

East is East? The sense of place in David Lean's *A Passage to India* (1984)

By Julie Michot

Abstract

David Lean's name is immediately associated with Lawrence of Arabia or Doctor Zhivago while his last film, A Passage to India, is not as celebrated outside Britain. Set during the British Raj, its story highlights the misunderstandings between two cultures; interestingly, the Britons are not the only ones to be out of place in the subcontinent, and Indians too may no longer feel at home. Although both communities sometimes try to connect, it seems they are doomed to failure by the natural forces around them – as the emphasis on the landscapes and water element in day or night scenes tends to prove. Through an analysis of the film, its dialogues and the different types of shots used, this case study proposes to explore the representation of space and place in relation to questions of otherness, identity, sexuality and ethnicity – an Indian doctor being tried for attempted rape of an English girl –, but also to the question of soundscapes – the echo, whether actual or in the heroine's head, being a central motif closely linked with forgiveness and the characters' final redemption and sense of belonging.

Keywords

Space, place, David Lean, A Passage to India, British Raj, identity

Introduction

Set in the 1920s in the lead-up to the country's independence, David Lean's *A Passage to India*, adapted from E. M. Forster's eponymous novel, has a documentary aspect: the mixed feelings of Adela Quested, the protagonist, certainly reflect those of many young English girls who had to go and live in the Indian Empire: the first scenes set in Bombay or Chandrapore stage incongruous Indian bands performing 'Tea for Two' or 'God Save the King', but also colonial characters who think it is their right and duty to rule the land, who look down on the natives and refuse to socialise with them or to discover their culture. But Adela has not travelled all the way from England to eat cucumber sandwiches and she is yearning to see 'the real India', which will lead her to understand who she is and where she belongs.

She is captivated by the beauty of the architecture and of the landscapes, and David Lean, who includes many outdoor scenes filmed on location in India, particularly emphasizes water, with shots of the ocean, and imagery of the moon reflected in the Ganges and the monsoon rain. And yet, colourful India soon becomes mysterious India when Adela enters the Marabar Caves: the darkness of the caves can be seen as a metaphor for the inner demons of this girl who is supposed to marry soon – thus, to leap into the unknown – and has reached a crossroads in her life; she is shy and, at the same time, eager to discover physical love... but not necessarily with her fiancé.

This case study proposes to explore the representation of space and place in relation to questions of otherness, identity, sexuality and ethnicity – Dr Aziz being tried for attempted rape of the English girl – but also to the question of soundscapes – the echo, whether actual or

in Adela's head, being a central motif closely linked with forgiveness and the characters' final redemption.

A. British India: one place, two cultures

David Lean's taste for epic, wide-open spaces and breathtaking scenery is well known, and his last film, *A Passage to India*, is in this respect characteristic. The director had visited the country several times; in fact, he used to travel a lot, often changed homes and chose to live in hotels around the world for most of his life – even settling in a caravan in the middle of the desert during the shooting of *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). He declared, 'I sort of travelled in a car and put my clothing in a case and wandered around. It's a wonderful thing, you know, going to strange places'. He admitted he was 'a romantic', so that 'his heart [would] never be at home. [...] He [lived] at a distance, a singular address for the movies' greatest poet of the far horizon'.³⁷ The character of Adela, who is to marry Ronny, an Anglo-Indian, is excited at the idea of travelling to the subcontinent, especially as she has never left England before. David Lean explained:

There are two lots of people that go to India: some get off the plane and want to get the next plane out; others want to stay for six months – and she obviously is one who wanted to stay for six months, and I wanted to catch a bit of that.³⁸

In a certain way, Adela's voyage starts in the P&O office in London where she buys her one-way ticket: her attention is captured by the photographs of a ship, the Taj Mahal and the Marabar Caves hanging from the wall. Interestingly, the girl will not visit the Taj Mahal, India's most famous monument. Moreover, the city she is going to, Chandrapore, is fictitious, and so are the caves and the ruined Hindu temple she will see. This means that taking such a journey is a leap into the unknown, not only for her, but also for the spectator who will find it hard to identify any of the locations.

The clerk, who probably spends his days sitting at his desk filling out forms for others, tells Adela he envies her because she is going to discover 'new horizons'; since she has never left her homeland, the phrase is of particular significance, and the framed pictures we are shown in subjective camera 'represent [...] an unknown filled with promise of [...] adventure, but far from the security of familiar surroundings'.³⁹ In an essay on space and place, Yi-Fu Tuan observes that:

Space lies open; it suggests the future and invites action. On the negative side, space and freedom are a threat. [...] Enclosed and humanised space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm centre of established values. Human beings require both space and place.⁴⁰

Adela, indeed, looks ready to leave her daily routine – place – to cross the oceans and see the wider world – space –, however upsetting it may be.

And yet, though the arrival in Bombay is definitely colourful – in every sense of the word –, the girl, as soon as she reaches Chandrapore, finds herself trapped in some kind of artificial environment and separate territory. As a matter of fact, ‘the colonials are cocooned in their own insulated world’⁴¹ and seem to need place more than space: they have recreated some usual settings, living in their own nicely-kept districts with symmetrical street planning, identical bungalows and red post boxes, which has nothing to do with the way space is organised in a genuine Indian town or city. So, Adela does not really feel uprooted at first; the ‘strange places’ and ‘far horizon’ she expected are absent, and instead of being able to explore an unknown country in an unknown subcontinent, she finds herself confined to small bounded spaces, being invited to the Club, to a game of polo, or having to attend ‘a tiresome musical play’ which she and Mrs Moore, her future mother-in-law, have already seen in London. Thus, aside from the climate, it is almost as if Adela had never left the British Isles.

The young woman does not hesitate to express her wishes and, since she and Mrs Moore really want to meet some Indians, Collector Turton, albeit with little enthusiasm, proposes to organise ‘a Bridge Party’. Not surprisingly, this ambitious event, supposed to bring together East and West, does not meet the two ladies’ expectations, especially because the English, far from playing the game, remain distant on that occasion. Only Fielding, the schoolmaster, appears to be naturally kind towards the Indians, and he promises Adela to organise a tea party at his home with just a few guests, among whom will be Aziz and Godbole, a Brahman.

Communication is easy with Aziz, who is happy and proud to socialise with the English and who even invites Adela and Mrs Moore to his place; however, quickly realising how ashamed he would be if they ever crossed the threshold of his modest house, he changes his plans to propose a picnic at the caves. As to Professor Godbole, he speaks very little and stays apart, not sitting at the table with the others. He does not approve the project of Aziz but fails to explain why. Godbole is ‘obscure and fatalistic, [and this] character [...] represents the inscrutability of the East’.⁴² Indeed, he seems to mistrust the English; and yet, a little while later, he will speak quite freely to Adela and they will casually sit side by side, their feet in the

water tank. This moment of peace will nevertheless be broken by the intrusion of a furious Ronny who will order his fiancée to leave at once, thus putting everybody in their place.

In fact, racial tensions are manifest from the moment the girl and Mrs Moore set foot in Chandrapore. As they are going from the railway station to Ronny's house in a carriage, a couple of revealing incidents occur. Two Indians riding their bicycles, Aziz and his friend, make their first appearance as they are hit by Turton's car. His chauffeur, who was driving too fast, will not bother to stop. Such an attitude illustrates the arrogance and domineering mood of the British as well as their refusal to share public space in a country that is not their own. Adela, who will not witness that scene, is amazed by the hustle and bustle of the town and its marketplace, but suddenly the look on her face changes when she sees Indians carrying a body wrapped in a shroud. Her fiancé, who is no less than the City Magistrate, tells her, 'I'm sorry. We'll soon be out of this'. And indeed, the next shot is a close-up on a signpost that reads 'Trafalgar Rd.', 'Kitchener Ave.' and 'Wellington Rd.'.

What the girl does when she enters Ronny's bungalow for the first time is meaningful: she crosses to the other side of the room, stops on the terrace – as though she needed some breathing space – and looks at the distant Marabar Hills. After such a long and tiring trip, and although she is thousands of miles away from home, Adela still seems to be quite frustrated and unable to stand still. From here onward, she is going to be constantly on the move, whether on her bicycle, on an early morning train or even sitting atop an elephant: getting to India is not an end as such, but just the beginning of a new journey and Adela will 'escape' as often as she can.

B. Exotic landscapes and personal doubts

The first sequences of *A Passage to India*, and in particular the rail journey between Bombay and Chandrapore, suggest that the film will be built on a series of contrasts between open and confined spaces. June Perry Levine observes that:

[...] in a scene in the dining car, with the Englishwomen and the Turtons talking about how Ronny and Adela met in the Lake [District], Lean moves the camera to an out-the-window shot of moonlight on water. The mysterious night is crosscut with Adela and Mrs Moore's wanting to meet Indians socially and being lectured by Mrs Turton: 'East is East... a question of culture'. This editing pattern feels as if an adventurous conflict is being set up: the English inside, India outside [...].⁴³

It is noteworthy that the shot of the moonlight is a tracking sideways assuming Adela's point of view: the girl, who visibly dislikes the Turtons and their conversation, and also realises that Ronny may have changed for the worse, looks through the window. In filming the landscape from her point of view, David Lean shows that she wants to get away – already. There is obviously some irony in the juxtaposition of such shots, the majestic scenery highlighting even more the emptiness of the Anglo-Indians' comments, and Adela's disappointment and loneliness.

Mrs Moore is shocked too by the Turtons' attitude. Though she is not physically fit for long walks in the sun and will not be able to climb to the upper Marabar Caves, she is also longing to see authentic India and meet its people. During the performance of *Cousin Kate* at the Club, she is the one who actually slips away to go to the mosque. The place has neither roof nor windows, is overgrown with vegetation, and thus the emphasis is on nature again; besides, the scene starts with a shot of the moon reflected in the tank where Aziz is making his ablutions. Since he has just been treated rudely by Major Callendar, his wife, a friend of hers and their servant, the deserted place of worship has a symbolic function: '[Aziz] has gone from the hostility of the English world to the comfort of Islam'.⁴⁴

Interestingly, Mrs Moore, who is a Christian and wears a cross, has not gone to the church built by the Anglo-Indians to find God; instead, she chooses to approach a religion that is very different from hers. The passage has a dreamlike dimension with the wind blowing dead leaves, and Aziz is startled by Mrs Moore's appearance, thinking he has seen a ghost; then, realising it is an English lady, he imagines that, like many of her fellow countrywomen, she has not bothered to take off her shoes. And yet, she has, and they start a conversation; the Indian doctor is amazed at her kindness and they discover they have several things in common. Ironically, in just a few minutes, he and Mrs Moore seem to have filled the gap between their two cultures much more than Turton's 'Bridge Party' ever will.

As they look at the Ganges, Aziz explains there can be dead bodies floating past, as well as crocodiles. Mrs Moore cannot help exclaiming, 'What a terrible river'. But, overcome by the splendour of such a view, she promptly adds, 'What a wonderful river'. Alain Silver and James Ursini note that the whole scene implies 'the power of the natural forces', and that 'Mrs Moore's impulsive remarks [...] summarise the conflicting qualities of the environment in which Lean situates his characters'.⁴⁵ Indeed, a moment later, Mrs Moore is back at the Club where no native is allowed except as a servant; she feels very uncomfortable as 'God Save the King' is performed and everybody stands in silence, including the Indian staff.

The director makes a close-up on her face, and she looks back. He then cuts to a long shot of the Ganges which could seem subjective; but the elderly lady is in the middle of a big room and, though she may catch a glimpse of the quiet river, there would be furniture in the foreground were this a point-of-view shot, whereas here, the Ganges fills the frame. A medium long shot follows and shows a crocodile eating a body. This has two denotations. First, yet again, the idea of contrast between two worlds is obvious, and the anthem sounds even more out of place; second, Levine reminds us that in the novel, 'Forster gives Mrs Moore a certain prescience, a connection with the universe', a feature emerging in this particular scene where Lean suggests that 'Mrs Moore is in tune with what happens in the Indian landscape'.⁴⁶

And yet, the elderly lady is frequently disoriented by those exotic surroundings, and she quickly realises that she does not belong in British India. Her doubts, as we will see, are also mystical and metaphysical. But Adela is younger and her experience of the subcontinent will lead her to other kinds of uncertainties. The first major turning point in the story is the bicycle ride in the countryside during which the girl ventures off the beaten track and discovers a number of erotic statues on an ancient temple colonised by vines. The scene is commonly called Adela's 'sexual awakening'⁴⁷ for she is upset by the sculptures as the shot/reverse shot pattern of the passage and Maurice Jarre's music make clear. She suddenly notices dozens of monkeys perched atop the shrine, and they start screaming and chasing her. The young woman is both fascinated and frightened by the incident⁴⁸, as David Lean himself explained⁴⁹.

On the night of her engagement to Ronny, while in bed, she cannot help thinking about the statues: the insertion of shots quite similar to those of the previous scene and the use of the same musical theme are a clever substitute for a voice-over. The only difference is that the sculptures are shown at dusk whereas the girl saw them in broad daylight; thus, it is as though she had not really left that place, or found herself in two places at the same time, which hints at her turmoil. The fact that a storm breaks outside and the wind starts blowing through Adela's open window strengthens such an impression, the roaring thunder being reminiscent of the monkeys. Silver and Ursini point out that, 'as the narrative develops, so does the depth of her conflict, for [...] she will try to balance her needs for personal independence, social enfranchisement through marriage, and sexual fulfilment'.⁵⁰

The episode of the temple buried in the forest, as well as revealing Adela's hidden face and latent sexual desire, shows that, by 'repeatedly cross[ing] frontiers' and 'subvert[ing] [...] spatial conventions'⁵¹, she is taking risks. Maybe Ronny's anger when he finds her sitting by the pool with Godbole and Aziz is not only the consequence of simple racism. 'If [...] Adela is the "independent sort," it is in the context of colonial India in the 1920s, neither a time nor

a place much receptive to women with minds of their own'.⁵² By choosing to follow Aziz on a tour of the Marabar Caves, the English girl will lose her bearings even more, and the impressive hills will act as a point of no return for her, Mrs Moore, but also their Indian guide.

C. In darkest India?

'India forces one to come face to face with oneself. It can be rather disturbing', Mrs Moore tells Adela on the day of her engagement, summarising perfectly the role of space and place in the film, and announcing the fateful excursion to the Marabar Caves. In *A Passage to India*, the landscape and cityscape are definitely 'more than mere inert backdrops'.⁵³ Richard Schickel even considers that 'Lean uses India not just as a colourful and exotic setting but as a decisive force in shaping the story he is telling, almost as a character'.⁵⁴ Indeed, the numerous long shots or extreme long shots of natural sites – whether rivers, steep mountains, valleys, ravines or forests – tend to suggest that the elements are all-powerful, in particular when the main characters are included in those shots, lost in the immense surroundings, looking so insignificant and vulnerable.

The two ladies are equally impressed by their train journey and the elephant ride to reach the caves, high in the mountains. But whereas Adela's enthusiasm appears to be unabated, Mrs Moore collapses as soon as they visit the first cave. The small dark chamber is inherently stressful, especially as too many people enter at the same time. And yet, claustrophobia is not the only cause of such physical and mental distress. Indeed, Aziz, keen to please Mrs Moore, calls her name; the ensuing echo, strange and haunting, is unbearable for the elderly woman who rushes out, though the blazing sun is no less oppressive. She sits down in the shade waiting to recover and we see the moon from her point of view; an extreme close-up of its surface follows, making the craters clearly visible. This shot is supposed to be subjective, but Mrs Moore could not possibly see the lunar ground in such detail⁵⁵; so, the purpose, here again, is to insist on her 'prescience'.

From that moment, the elderly lady is changed forever. What she then says – 'I suppose, like many old people, I sometimes think we are merely passing figures in a godless universe' – is to be contrasted with what she told Aziz in the mosque – 'God is here'. Thus, Mrs Moore is so unnerved by this experience that, as David Lean put it, '[she] loses her faith in there, or her faith is badly shaken'.⁵⁶ While wide-open spaces could be a source of anxiety for her, confinement proves to be even more terrifying. Silver and Ursini argue that 'if what happens at the caves shakes [her] beliefs, it is because they expose her to nature's darker, more secret and unsettling side'.⁵⁷ This means that, by accepting to go into a simple hole in the rock, whose

quality defies comprehension, Mrs Moore is violently confronted with the emptiness of human life.

Adela's vision of the world is to be deeply shaken too. While she is proceeding to the Kawa Dol Caves accompanied only by Aziz and a guide, they stop and she looks down at Chandrapore through binoculars. 'It's almost a mirage', she says. She then starts asking Aziz personal questions about his feelings for his wife. It seems she is wondering whether she should marry Ronny. Confirmation is given later at the trial, when Adela declares, 'Seeing Chandrapore so far away, I realised I didn't love him'. There is thus a direct link between a specific place in a foreign country – the hills – and the fact Adela is keeping a distance. Lean explained, 'You know, it happens to people when they go down to the Mediterranean on holiday – Swedes, Finns, English people – come down to Spain and behave as they wouldn't normally. It's that sort of thing'.⁵⁸

Adela is indeed a rather prudish girl when she lands in India. But now that she is climbing up to the second site with Aziz, she cannot conceal her physical attraction for him, especially when he extends his hand to her. Once they have reached Kawa Dol, Aziz steps away to smoke a cigarette, and Adela decides to walk into one of the caves alone. She strikes a match, which creates an 'explosion of sound' that hits her⁵⁹, and the noises heard from then on become subjective as the girl is overwhelmed by some kind of strong rumbling echo. When Aziz appears at the entrance and calls for her, she blows out the match, stays motionless and does not answer. The resonance suddenly grows intolerable and she starts crying; Lean cuts to water spilling over the tank below where the elephant is bathing. A hysterical Adela finally rushes down the slope while Aziz is left desperately looking for her.

Lean does not show us what exactly happened to the girl; in fact, Adela herself will never really know. And yet, the editing clearly suggests that she has not been assaulted, her repressed sexuality, combined with a feeling of guilt, having led her to imagine the attempted rape.⁶⁰ Of course, the puzzling echo also has a crucial role to play in what seems to be 'a full-blown hallucination'.⁶¹ Interestingly, Aziz is in no way shown penetrating the cave: he only appears in backlighting, seen from Adela's point of view, framed in the rectangular opening – arches being a recurrent motif in the film⁶², notably when the girl ventures to the monkey shrine. Apart from 'the Freudian suggestions' of the shot⁶³, the emphasis here is on liminal space, which implies some inevitable change, whatever Aziz decides to do. After the 'sexual awakening' at the temple, the caves have taken Adela a step further, and the spilling of water could imply that she had her 'first orgasm'.⁶⁴

In the same way as Mrs Moore has to face the idea of her imminent death, Adela is brutally confronted with conflicting emotions at Marabar. The hills and caves bring the two women back to reality and in that sense, the place matches the definition proposed by Evelyn Preuss, according to which ‘the landscape emerges as a metaphor for the liability of the unacknowledged and dissimulated part of ourselves and our world, i.e. that which is invisible, because it is eschewed by our minds or otherwise eludes our perception’.⁶⁵ Ironically, it is in the dark that both characters start opening their eyes, but Mrs Moore will never rid herself of the obsessive echo, which will result in a permanent gloominess.

The elderly lady thus refuses to testify on Aziz’s behalf and leaves India before his trial starts. She is adamant that ‘nothing [she] can say or do will make the least difference’, thereby suggesting that people are not in control of their own fate. Lean almost put the following Hindu proverb into the film:

In very simple terms, we’re like a leaf on a river and we’ve got a very small paddle. We can go this way or that way, but only minutely. We’re on that damn river and we’re going to be taken down it to some destination.⁶⁶

This applies to all characters, and particularly to Mrs Moore. Indeed, she tells Ronny she must ‘get away from all this muddle and fuss into some cave of [her] own, some shelf’, but she will die before reaching home, on a starry night, and will be buried at sea – the ultimate proof of her unfathomable link with the natural world.

A few minutes before she passes away, Mrs Moore, standing alone on the deck of the ship, seems to be at peace. In her last conversation with Ronny about the incident at the caves, she had bitterly told him, ‘You will never understand the nature of that place [...], nor will anyone else in that ridiculous court of yours’. The elderly lady had very little sense of community when she arrived in Chandrapore, preferring to meet Indians, and now that the English and the Indians are turning against each other because of Adela’s accusations, Mrs Moore has to admit that, by coming there, she wandered astray. According to Gene D. Phillips:

The Marabar Caves provide the central metaphor of both the novel and the film: individuals call out to each other and receive nothing but an echo in reply, suggesting the failure of human beings to communicate with each other in a meaningful way.⁶⁷

Such an analysis reflects the misunderstandings between the mother and her son, Adela and Aziz, as well as the cultural and social gap between two races in the context of the British Raj.

The scene in which Adela is taken to the courthouse in the Turtons' car is the exact opposite of that of the Collector's arrival at the beginning of the film: the streets are now crowded with angry demonstrators swarming around the vehicle, breaking one of its windows, forcing the chauffeur to drive slowly. The Indians are thus reappropriating public space; in a way, they are taking power. The girl being the cause of all this chaos, it is obvious that the English courtroom will be the last step of her stay in India. As for Mrs Moore, although she has already left the country, she '[hangs] over the trial', dying in the middle of it⁶⁸; if the characters, unlike the spectators, will learn about it later, the elderly lady's presence is none the less clearly felt in the sequence for the crowd chants her name and it resonates in the courtroom. But this kind of echo, contrary to that of the caves, offers temporary relief to Adela.

When Adela testifies, she goes back, mentally, into the cave, and '[her] flashbacks [...] are an exorcism, or a shock treatment'.⁶⁹ Just after she recants, the rain starts to fall and she looks at it through the glass roof: the rumble of thunder seems to blow away her echo and torments, and this sudden 'deluge [...] provides a "catharsis" of emotions'.⁷⁰ But Adela's ambivalence has led her to be ostracised – not so much by the Indians as by the British community itself. A similar paradox applies to Aziz: though he is free and has become a national hero, he cannot forgive the English and no longer feels at home in Chandrapore. A simple visit to some caves, combined with prejudices and colonial feelings, has blurred the characters' sense of place, making this film, like many others by David Lean, an 'epic [journey] of disillusioned self-discovery'.⁷¹

Conclusion

E. M. Forster borrowed the title of his novel from Walt Whitman who regarded the opening of the Suez Canal as the start of a new era in which the nations would become closer to one another, eventually turning into 'a single global family'.⁷² In that respect, the book is far less optimistic than the poem; but David Lean chose quite a different ending, for the film does not stop immediately after the trial whose outcome, though fairly positive, leaves a bitter taste to the protagonists. Instead, a single dissolve takes the spectator to Kashmir where Aziz has started a new life in a place not directly under British rule, and that he can call his own. Fielding comes to visit him and they are reconciled. He is travelling with his wife, who happens to be Mrs Moore's daughter; thus, in a way, Aziz is allowed to meet the reincarnation of his beloved Mrs Moore, which definitively wipes out past resentments. Aziz also writes a letter to Adela,

in which he forgives her: he now realises that she had got ‘the worst of both worlds’⁷³ and that, thanks to her courage, he is free rather than in prison.

With this epilogue, Lean seems to gather East and West. And yet, the Fieldings leave and Aziz remains alone. As for Adela, who was unstable during most of the narrative, she went back to England long ago and now lives there on a permanent basis. In the last scene, ‘she reads [the letter] by a window, where outside it is raining. This brings the film, which opens with her standing in the rain, looking inside the [travel agent’s] office where she will book [her] passage to India, full circle’.⁷⁴ The young woman no longer yearns for adventure and new horizons; she finds herself in an enclosed space, in familiar surroundings, and seems to belong to no other place. So, it appears that the English should live in England and the Indians, in India. French philosopher Vincent Descombes asks:

Where is the character at home? The question bears less on a geographical territory than a rhetorical territory [...]. The character is at home when he is at ease in the rhetoric of the people with whom he shares life. The sign of being at home is the ability to make oneself understood without too much difficulty, and to follow the reasoning of others without any need for long explanations.⁷⁵

Would a ‘third space’ exist – one ‘in which former dichotomies preventing intercultural friendship and understanding could be erased’, as Elena Oliete-Aldea puts it?⁷⁶ If Aziz will probably never see his English friends again, communication is nevertheless fully restored in the final sequence, and misjudgements have disappeared on both sides. Moreover, the Indian doctor is reconciled with Adela while he is in Asia and she is in Europe; the cross-cutting and voice-over used in the scene transcend not only place but time: Aziz writes his letter to Miss Quested, and she reads it simultaneously. Lean’s ending, far from being a cliché, is more convincing than one in which the two protagonists might have met again in a particular environment. They are now at peace and have found their place; yet, their respective homes are not so much distinct geographical territories as symbolic ones, and this makes Aziz and Adela’s sense of inner and spatial harmony all the stronger.

³⁷ Jay Cocks, ‘Adventures in the Dream Department’, in *David Lean: Interviews*, edited by Steven Organ, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 58-66; here 66.

-
- ³⁸ Harlan Kennedy, 'I'm a Picture Chap', in *David Lean: Interviews*, edited by Steven Organ, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 77-86; here 82.
- ³⁹ Alain Silver and James Ursini, *David Lean and His Films*, (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 1992), 212.
- ⁴⁰ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 54.
- ⁴¹ Gene D. Phillips, *Beyond the Epic: The Life and Films of David Lean*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 428.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 424.
- ⁴³ June Perry Levine, 'Passage to the Odeon: Too Lean', *Literature Film Quarterly* 14 (3) (1986): 139-150; here 148.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.
- ⁴⁵ Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 219; 218.
- ⁴⁶ Levine, 'Passage to the Odeon', 143.
- ⁴⁷ Constantine Santas, *The Epic Films of David Lean*, (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 138.
- ⁴⁸ Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 213.
- ⁴⁹ Kennedy, 'I'm a Picture Chap', 82.
- ⁵⁰ Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 212.
- ⁵¹ Wendy Everett and Axel Goodbody, 'Introduction', in *Revisiting Space: Space and Place in European Cinema*, edited by Wendy Everett and Axel Goodbody, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 9-21; here 15.
- ⁵² Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 217.
- ⁵³ Mikel J. Koven, 'Space and Place in Italian Giallo Cinema: The Ambivalence of Modernity', in *Revisiting Space: Space and Place in European Cinema*, edited by Wendy Everett and Axel Goodbody, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 115-131; here 126.
- ⁵⁴ Richard Schickel, 'A Superb Passage to India', *Time* (31 December 1984), 54.
- ⁵⁵ Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 223.
- ⁵⁶ David Ehrenstein, 'Epic Dialogue', in *David Lean: Interviews*, edited by Steven Organ, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 67-76; here 72.
- ⁵⁷ Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 223.
- ⁵⁸ Kennedy, 'I'm a Picture Chap', 82.
- ⁵⁹ Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 223.
- ⁶⁰ Phillips, *Beyond the Epic*, 430; Santas, *The Epic Films*, 139.
- ⁶¹ Levine, 'Passage to the Odeon', 143.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 142.
- ⁶³ Arthur Lindley, 'Raj as Romance/Raj as Parody: Lean's and Forster's Passages to India', *Literature Film Quarterly* 20 (1) (1992): 61-67; here 66.
- ⁶⁴ Howard Maxford, *David Lean*, (London: B. T. Batsford, 2000), 152.
- ⁶⁵ Evelyn Preuss, 'To See or Not to See? Topographies of Repression in Konrad Wolf's *I Was Nineteen* and *The Naked Man on the Sportsground*', in *Revisiting Space: Space and Place in European Cinema*, edited by Wendy Everett and Axel Goodbody, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 209-240; here 228.
- ⁶⁶ Cocks, 'Adventures in the Dream Department', 64.
- ⁶⁷ Phillips, *Beyond the Epic*, 430.
- ⁶⁸ Kennedy, 'I'm a Picture Chap', 83.
- ⁶⁹ Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 217.
- ⁷⁰ Santas, *The Epic Films*, 144.
- ⁷¹ Cocks, 'Adventures in the Dream Department', 61.
- ⁷² Phillips, *Beyond the Epic*, 405.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 431.
- ⁷⁴ Stephen M. Silverman, *David Lean*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 187.
- ⁷⁵ Vincent Descombes, *Proust: Philosophie du Roman*, (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1987), 179.
- ⁷⁶ Elena Oliete-Aldea, *Hybrid Heritage on Screen: The 'Raj Revival' in the Thatcher Era*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 5.

Biographical Statement

Julie Michot is Senior Lecturer in English at the Université du Littoral (France). She specialises in British history and English-speaking cinema, is the author of academic articles on Charlie Chaplin, the adaptations of Ian Fleming's books, Alfred Hitchcock, Mike Nichols

and Billy Wilder, and co-edited four volumes of conference proceedings on the cinema published by Shaker Verlag. She is co-author of a chapter in a Hitchcock Anthology in *Critical Insights* collection (Douglas A. Cunningham Ed., Grey House Publishing / Salem Press, Nov. 2016), and is currently completing a book on diegetic music in Wilder's films to be published in March 2017 by the University Press of Reims (France).

African Alterity and Metaphoricity in John Slaughter's *Brother in the Bush*.⁷⁷

By Nicklas Hållén

Abstract

*This article studies alterity in John Slaughter's travelogue *Brother in the Bush: An African American's Search for Self in East Africa* (2005). The book chronicles the author's travels in Africa in the wake of a life-altering experience that makes him want to change the way he lives and sees the world. He therefore travels to Africa in order to search for a new self and a view of the world free from the materialist greed, insularity and artificiality of life in the West. However, Slaughter's Africa is, more than an actual geographical space, a well of metaphors and images that he uses to discuss the alienation of middleclass life in the West. These metaphors and images are meaningful primarily from the point of view of the life that he wants to leave behind, and the alterity of Africa therefore adds few 'new' insights and adds little to his process of inner change.*

Keywords

Alterity, otherness, African American literature, Africa, travel literature, travel writing, metaphor, romance

With ideological stakes involved, the problem that all creative writing responds to - how to bring something new into the world, as opposed to repeating fragments of what has already been said – becomes particularly crucial in contemporary Western travel literature about Africa. As an effect of postcolonial critique of Western colonial discourse and instead of the obsession with anthropological alterity, many Western travel writers are now more focused on finding ways to articulate experience and thought that do not reiterate and reinscribe colonial discourse and entrenched prejudices about the continent and its people. Derek Attridge describes this openness to not already articulated and not previously thought ideas as a kind of alterity, which 'beckons or commands from the fringes of [the writer's] mental sphere as [he or she] engages[s] in a creative act'.⁷⁸ It is something that 'in its uniqueness' is heterogeneous to and interrupts sameness.⁷⁹ It is other not because it is separated from the same by being portrayed as belonging to a different culture, in other words, but because it is not a repetition and has not already been written.

This is also true for Western travel writers whose writing is subject-oriented, and whose 'need to travel and record their experiences [stems] from a personal urge to solve some inner conflict'.⁸⁰ John Slaughter's *Brother in the Bush: An African American's Search for Self in East Africa* (2005) is an example of a work of travel literature in which the self rather than the geography it travels through is central.⁸¹ It has been described as 'a memoir of self-exploration' and as such belongs to a long tradition of black American autobiographical writing that has historically acted as a counter-discourse to dominant (white) discourses about the African diaspora that has allowed writers to lay 'claim to the power and authority of self-definition'.⁸²

In 'Pushing Against the Black/White limits of Maps' Tim Youngs points out that 'the re-identification of oneself through movement' has long been a cornerstone in this literature.⁸³ As self-exploratory literature, the creative impulse and openness to the kind of alterity that Attridge discusses is central in this writing, since it is through the coming into being of something new that an individual as well as collective self can come into being.

Slaughter explicitly addresses the need for openness to the new and the need to break away from entrenched ways of being in and understanding the world. He acknowledges the fact that language is a pivotal instrument in this striving towards newness and alterity:

Day after day, we become accustomed to speaking in comfortable clichés, our dialogue numbing, and silence bodes discomfort. Too frequently, we discount anything that interferes with how we see the world. To do otherwise invites fear. Conflict is both unwelcome and dismissed.⁸⁴

While addressing what Slaughter sees as a tendency in American middleclass culture to isolate the self from the world around it, this passage reads as a comment on Slaughter's own literary project – although, as will be discussed momentarily, it is ultimately an inaccurate description of it. The fact that he decides to travel to Africa indicates that he has conquered his fear of new experiences, which sets him apart from his fellow middleclass Americans. The very act of writing about the transformative experience of travel, then, is a way for Slaughter to invite the world to 'interfere' with established and entrenched patterns and beliefs, as well as to distance himself from a culture dominated by a mind-set that he sees as a source of alienation and unhappiness.

Slaughter is a veterinarian turned stockbroker and photographer who after his first travels in Africa start to organise trips for Westerners to the Serengeti.⁸⁵ Since he is not a professional writer and since his book can hardly be counted among the more influential works of African American travel literature, the aim with this article is not to criticise the cultural and ideological work of Slaughter's text, but to study the roles that different forms of alterity play in the particular ideational context of his narrative of personal transformation. This transformation is a response to what Slaughter describes as a 'life-altering experience', which he explains, took place just before noon on a September's day in 1993.⁸⁶ He recounts how he on that day confronted two burglars who have broken into his Baltimore home. In the tumult that ensued, he shot and killed one of them, a black man, while the other escaped.⁸⁷ In the following months and years he is pestered by journalists and is troubled by how the community

responds to the killing of the burglar. He relives the traumatic event in daydreams, has trouble sleeping and becomes less and less satisfied with the life he is leading. He becomes increasingly aware of what he sees as the artificiality, inauthenticity and shallow materialism of urban middleclass life. While he has long been attentive to racist bigotry in the corporate world he is part of, the shooting makes him even more attentive to tactlessness and hostility from people around him and to the structures of racial discrimination. To counter his growing alienation and his increasing discomfort with the state of race relations in the U.S., he travels to East Africa, in search of a more harmonious, existentially authentic way of life. He thus stages a 'return' to Africa, a reversed middle passage, and portrays his encounters with the otherness of Africa as opportunities to both transform and explore his self.

Africa is therefore used as an inverted mirror image of Slaughter's America. It embodies that which America is not. This in itself is of course not something that makes Slaughter's book stand out, but is as several decades of research inspired by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) have shown a common phenomenon in travel literature.⁸⁸ Slaughter's is an exoticising rather than imperial gaze, however, and rather than portraying Africa as backwards and uncivilised, he uses the alterity of Africa to construct a utopian vision of a better life. The kind of alterity that Slaughter focuses on in his writing is subsumed into the same by becoming a tool in a striving towards personal growth. It represents that which the old self lacks and that must become part of the new, existentially authentic self. Ultimately, Slaughter's use of 'Africa' as a counter-point to his 'America' precludes what Attridge refers to as the arrival of the other, the coming into being of something new through the act of writing. Rather than being receptive to alterity and inviting otherness into the text, Slaughter bases his writing on using Africa as a well of metaphors, imagery and allegorical lessons that are meaningful only from the point of view of the old, alienated self. Therefore, there is at the heart of the text a dissonance between the narrative voice, which claims that Slaughter has undergone a transformation, and the self that is represented in the text.

American Alienation and the Alterity of the Self

Brother in the Bush belongs to a history of Western black writing about Africa in which an African past, however distant and abstract, is connected to the present through a history of slavery and racial oppression. In this literature, the black subject's bondage under slavery, and later, exclusion from the institutions and privileges of western modernity are constitutive of a radical form of autonomy that 'follows from being both inside and outside the West', an observation that is key in Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*.⁸⁹ In the introduction to their book

on biography and the black Atlantic, Lisa A. Lindsay and John Sweet point out that while autonomy is at the centre of this literary tradition, so are ‘struggles not to be autonomous’.⁹⁰ Black populations in the West have historically been relatively autonomous in relation to political and cultural western modernity, partly because of the mechanisms of racial oppression and exclusion, and partly as an effect of ‘an independent vitality that is the syncopated pulse of non-European philosophical and aesthetic outlooks’.⁹¹ At the same time, since this ‘autonomy’ has impacted negatively on generations of black Westerners, the history of black populations in the West has been marked by struggles for rights and inclusion – recognition of the black subject’s political, cultural and/or ontological sameness in relation to their white countrymen and -women. In Slaughter’s book, this alterity or autonomy is portrayed as at the same time an effect of visible and invisible racism in the United States and as something that facilitates Slaughter’s search for authenticity.

Slaughter foregrounds the instrumentality of mobility in the willed emergence of a new, transformed self by framing his search for self as a narrative about his trips in East Africa. He exploits the fact that in Western literature of travel, mobility has often been understood as threatening ‘the status quo through the self-reflexive motif of “life as journey”, the physical manifestation of metaphorical growth’.⁹² It is however not a conventional travel narrative, whose narrative structure parallels that of the traveller’s journey from one geographical place to another. Slaughter writes in the book’s preface that his style of writing is ‘conversational’ and ‘unorthodox’ and that it ‘weaves and bounces from present moments to events that happened years before’.⁹³ In passages that describe moments during his different trips to Africa there are few place names, few detailed descriptions of places and landscapes, few clues as to when and where certain events take place.

He thus rejects the realist principle of representing time as a unidirectional continuum through which the central subject moves in order to instead portray a less structured, inner process of development and transformation. The structuring principle in the text is Slaughter’s inner musings about life in the West and his trips in East Africa, what sets these places apart and what qualities and values are truly important in life. He points out that his style of writing ‘reflects a conscious effort to transcribe the kind of interior conversation that we often have when facing life-altering experiences. In writing this book, I’ve tried to open this world to you, the reader, asking and answering questions that have puzzled me for years’.⁹⁴ The central ‘journey’ in the text is thus a metaphorical journey through the proverbial inner landscape.

However, this inner landscape is divided into two rhetorical domains, ‘Africa’ and ‘America’, which are associated with certain values and characteristics and which Slaughter

juxtaposes and compares. As has been mentioned above, the world is kept at a distance in Slaughter's America, which makes it difficult to fully appreciate the good things in life. 'At home, headphones are marked as having noise-canceling capabilities,' he writes.⁹⁵ 'Cars are pitched to consumers as protecting them from the road and the outside world. Gated communities, underground parking, private clubs, all insulate us and provide a sterile sense of security'. Insulated from danger, Americans live 'at a pace that allows little room for new experiences.'⁹⁶ Alterity, in the sense of a transformative newness, is something that American society both commodifies and disavows, according to Slaughter. 'At home, in order to guarantee that we'll experience something "new"', he writes, 'we decide to fly far, far, away. For those who are able to afford safari, the decision to go has to be balanced with other major expenditures: the big mortgage, the big car(s), the private schools. But with new experiences come fear'.⁹⁷ In contrast to the average westerner, he is not afraid of the transformative power of new experiences: fear of the unknown, he writes, is to him 'the worst kind of fear.'⁹⁸ According to the narrator of his text, he therefore invites rather than rejects the newness that he claims have changed him and it is this decision to confront the unknown that has made him a new person.

His determination to face newness and alterity is not another version of the commodified thrills that permeates American culture, Slaughter argues. After the shooting of the burglar, he finds himself in a situation where he is forced to face alterity, that which he has hitherto insulated himself from. When the predictable patterns of everyday life become disrupted, he finds himself in need of new impressions and a more authentic and harmonious way of life, a way of life that breaks off from the mundane obsession with repeatability and safe excitement. Unlike the people around him, he is no longer obsessed with the noise of car chases, crashes and gunfire. 'All this sound and sadness is de rigueur in the city. We demand it. Dramatic television and the evening news dishes [sic] it out and we chew it for nutrition', he writes.⁹⁹ People are entertained by it and enjoy others' misfortune, but never expect anything to happen to them. This, he suggests, was true for himself too until the moment when he 'became a killer', which changed how he feels about his world and his home.¹⁰⁰

This is the America that Slaughter wants to get away from when he travels to Africa. It is a place where the self is not allowed to grow, which leads to alienation. His own alienation in his life in the United States is however not only a reaction to superficiality and materialism, but also to racial tensions, which Slaughter describes as amounting to a 'second civil war'.¹⁰¹ In the United States, Slaughter is subjected to a racist mentality that permeates society and which 'lumps and compartmentalizes' him.¹⁰² The fact that he is black makes white people fear

him and see him as ‘a face on the 11:00 o’clock news’, but ‘at best, this fear is an advantage: at worst, a nuisance’.¹⁰³ He offers a number of anecdotes that illustrate the fact that even though he is intent on living life as he wishes and take as little notice of other people’s racism as possible, he cannot escape the compartmentalising effects of people’s obsession with race. In one such episode, he mistakenly gets into the wrong car at a supermarket parking lot, and panics. He is talking to his girlfriend while putting their grocery bags into the boot of what he believes is their car and then gets in behind the wheel, only to realise that he has made a mistake and that it is the wrong car. ‘I bolted’, he writes.¹⁰⁴ ‘I left her with the cart, our groceries, and someone else’s car. She wouldn’t get shot; *I would*’. His woman friend, a ‘pretty redhead’, would be able to convince the police that she had made a simple mistake, while Slaughter is certain he would be ‘embarrassed, detained, possibly charged,’ if not shot. It is not only the actual physical danger that he finds himself in that makes him panic, however, but also his own feelings and possible reaction to an escalated situation. Should he be detained, he writes, he would ‘wind up with hard feelings: for that store, the people of Western Maryland, and white folks in general.’ He can see the funny side of this story now – at the end he and his friend sit in their car crying from laughter – but the story is at the same time illustrative of the psychological pressure that American racism puts on him and which he travels to Africa to get away from.

Slaughter describes an America in which he has no place, other than at its margins, isolated from social interaction with strangers. The alienation, psychological pressure, racism and materialism that he associates with American culture have the effect of making Slaughter someone who in his own eyes is an Other, a person who does not fit in and cannot see his own reflection in the world around him. To remedy this feeling and to become something else, he makes himself ready to enjoy life and face the new, people he has never met and experiences that he has never had. These people and experience are not to be found in the United States, however, which is why he decides to travels to Africa.

African Alterity as Antidote to American Alienation

Africa is Slaughter’s antidote to the alienation he cannot escape in America. His inner transformation begins during his first ‘tour’ to East Africa in 1998, a trip during which his life changes ‘from the inside out’.¹⁰⁵ ‘This first tour was seminal in beginning the new level of mental questioning that forms the basis for this book’, he writes, ‘inspired by the spiritual nature of traveling along paths that had changed relatively little for hundreds of years’. His trips in Africa also make him less vulnerable to the racial tension that surrounds him in the

West, because in Africa, his blackness is not a sign of otherness but a shibboleth of sameness. 'Africa,' he writes, 'taught me how to side-step flying shit'.¹⁰⁶ He 'left America with the baggage of a black man and returned...a man'.¹⁰⁷

Because Slaughter's Africa is a utopia that embodies all that he claims that America lacks it is key to remedy the alienation that is an inevitable part of American life. As a utopia, Slaughter's 'Africa' is a 'nowhere' in its most abstract manifestation. Citing Michel Foucault, Paul Smethurst points out that because utopias "'afford consolidation", although they have "no real locality"' they are normally not 'found in travel writing'.¹⁰⁸ However, the primary function of Slaughter's Africa is to afford a sense of wholeness to a fractured self. This is only possible because Slaughter offers very little in the form of actual representation of specific places and people. Instead, he writes about things he has learned and observed in Africa, lessons he has been taught on his many trips.

On his trips, he has learned that in Africa, 'when people really care, they accept you. When they really love, they embrace you through any and all misunderstandings'.¹⁰⁹ This is 'the spirit of Africa' and it is there to be appreciated; 'it only demands that you look for it, and embrace it, wherever you call home'. The Africa that he has seen on his journeys, he writes, has proven to him the truth of 'a personal finance tenet' formulated by author and columnist Greg Easterbrook, who claims that contentment has little to do with money once you reach the threshold of 10,000 dollars a year. People 'are happy if they are optimistic, grateful, and forgiving', according to Easterbrook.¹¹⁰ Watching happy African children, 'orphans of genocide', Slaughter appreciates his point: it has made him expand his 'awareness of what is truly important in life'.¹¹¹ However, because Africa has the power to transform the self, it gives rise to a vague sense of danger. It beckons to the spiritually famished American and 'summons emotions without blushing, blinking or apologizing. Rooted in its beauty is a conflicting fear, a primal fear that simultaneously attracts and repulses'.¹¹² It 'whispers to you from well-thumbed copies of *National Geographic* while you wait for the nurse to call your name. It murmurs to you in the comfort of your chair through bestselling books that romanticize the poster child of the Dark Continent', which to Slaughter is rural Kenya, where life is lived as it should be lived.

Slaughter's style of writing is not just introspective and metaphorical rather than mimetic and realist. There is a prominence of metaphor and a focus on the general (concepts such as spirituality and authenticity) rather than the particular (representations of specific events, people and places) in his text, which places *Brother in the Bush* closer to the romance mode of writing than strict realism. He does not strive to represent the psychological change he has gone

through in a style predicated on an ‘aspiration to truthfulness’, but instead draws on a host of metaphors and similes, the perhaps most pivotal of which are rebirth and resurrection.¹¹³ His portrayal of Africa is laced with exoticism, and it is his desire for exotic alterity that powers his inner growth. Slaughter insists throughout the text that life is lived more fully in Africa than it is in the United States and uses metaphors and allegorical stories to do so.¹¹⁴ For example, discussing his love for the East African landscape, he likens the travelling through it with nodding along with a musical beat.

The woodpeckers, dozens of species, knock about in their own groove, a continuous solo, weaving their sound in, out, and about the beat. Striking out in an unmuted trumpet solo is the ring-necked dove, the syncopated “work harder” bird. You can ignore it only for so long before you find yourself nodding to the beat, walking the beat, and stepping to the beat.¹¹⁵

The ‘beat’ in other words is part of nature and allows ‘you’ to become part of it. The rhythm of the East African Savannah reminds him of African American call-and-response music, which he refers to as a ‘communal art form’ through which blackness is expressed.¹¹⁶ ‘This rhythm of the dark nation traveled a long way to get [to the U.S.],’ he writes. In other words, the ‘you’ that cannot avoid ‘stepping to the beat’ does not include the white members of Slaughter’s safari groups, with whom he seldom has much patience. It is a black *you*, which according to Slaughter is attuned to the pulse of the African landscape.

The tropes that Slaughter uses to tell the story of his transformation become meaningful through his use of Africa and the United States as two rhetorical counterpoints. In a chapter titled ‘Be-bop – the Beat of the Bush’, he uses the metaphor of rhythm to discuss ‘the temperament – the energy – of the area’.¹¹⁷ ‘Some people get it. Other’s don’t,’ he begins. ‘There is a rhythm in the bush – a beat’. The United States, however, is a ‘beat-repressed land’ where ‘we feel the collective pulse at times, but sadly it’s too often associated with the mob-like experience: a sports event or a church setting’.¹¹⁸ Though American, Slaughter thinks of himself as more in tune with the beat of the bush. ‘Armed with a mental metronome’, he identifies different people with different animal species, based on the way they behave.¹¹⁹ ‘Is their heartbeat slow and serious – elephant-like? Or is it athletic, predator-like, or nervous, gazelle-like?’

What was I? After my home was invaded, I carried a gun everywhere – for months. Was I being deliberate (elephant-like), or cautious (gazelle-like)? Was I out of tune, or just too fucked up? What did it say about my ability to read the rhythm of my bush? Is there something to being *too* aware, too ready for action, too vigilant – too rhino-like? (original italics)¹²⁰

Here, Slaughter as in many other passages uses a metaphorical imagery taken from his safari trips in East Africa to discuss life in the United States. Very little seems to actually be carried over between the two, however. Though the metaphor could potentially evoke a host of associations, to Slaughter being elephant-like is to be deliberate or serious. To be gazelle-like is not to display any other qualities that might be associated with the gazelle than cautiousness. There is in other words little new that is added to his understanding of how life in the United States other than the imagery itself. The metaphors that he mobilises to discuss life in America rather serve to emphasise opinions and views that seem to originate in his life in the West before his trips. However, by using this metaphorical style of writing, Slaughter collapses ‘distances of time and space’ in order ‘to imagine a simultaneity of experience’.¹²¹ Africa, which to Slaughter represents what America is not and whose primary value is its difference from the United States, is made less different through Slaughter’s use of metaphors that ‘reduce the strangeness and unfamiliarity of a concept or its referent’.¹²² Slaughter’s Africa, whose alterity in one sense makes it the opposite of America, becomes less other through his use of metaphors than it sheds light on the intricate patterns of social life in the West.

The fact that Slaughter draws from his experiences in Africa a vocabulary that lets him portray and discuss American alienation is particularly evident in a chapter about fear and its social consequences. He begins it by pointing out ‘the obvious’, that being black is being an object of fear.

As a black man, in America I give fear a face. My dark skin lumps and compartmentalizes me. At best, this fear is an advantage: at worst, a nuisance. I am the face of the 11.00 o’clock news and the face of athletics, of the mythology of sex and the pathology of crime. I am the exotic and mundane. I am the known and unknown, and as such, wise men have implored me to tread lightly.¹²³

Having thus pointed out how fear perpetuates racism, Slaughter uses an anecdote from one of his trips to show how television both provokes fear and pacifies the viewer. When he arrives

at a lodge where he and his safari group are to spend the night, Slaughter is approached by a man, a white lawyer, who describes how the members his part of the group have spent the day watching a large snake attack and devour a crocodile. The man initially annoys Slaughter, who is not in the mood for a ‘sensationalistic *Ripley’s Believe It or Not* moment’.¹²⁴ His irritation makes him think about the value of patience and the fact that in the West, patience is a rare virtue, because people are too used to be constantly occupied with what matters least. He writes about television and how it acts as a substitute for contemplation and social interaction. ‘Civilians reenact battles, actors shed blood over our emotions, and Madison Avenue applies the salve, selling us products to make us *feel* safe’.¹²⁵ People spend more time discussing the orchestrated mini-dramas of the celebrity world ‘than we spend listening to our families and paying heed to the day-to-day relationships that surround us’, he writes.¹²⁶ On television, the perpetrators of the culture of fear turn tragedies into ‘testaments of survival’, he writes in a passage that seems strangely lacking in self-reflectiveness.¹²⁷

In Africa, however, CNN – ‘the electronic adrenal gland’ – does not dominate life and your emotions are therefore ‘allowed to heal’. There, life happens in front of you, as in the case of the snake and the crocodile. Slaughter recounts the lawyer’s story in full and describes how the snake attacks and kills the crocodile. According to a tour guide, the snake will likely be unable to move from the spot while digesting, which it probably will do for almost a month. When the lawyer stops talking, Slaughter realises how much he has enjoyed the story.

I’d listened to a stranger tell a moving story without a director, sound track, or computer graphics. I didn’t require proof or demand an instant reply [sic]. I only wondered, as he left in search of another willing listener, what this snake would watch if it could use a remote control for that month it was immobile, digesting. Would he watch...Animal planet? Whilst digesting, would he learn to fear others that look like him? And what effect would this have on his future generations? Would he become afraid to come down from the tree?¹²⁸

The cartoon-like image of the snake watching itself on television contrasts sharply with the seriousness with which Slaughter discusses television’s negative effects on social relations. He ties up the discussion about the culture of fear and the obsession with simulacra by imagining the snake as both a white television viewer and a black face on the evening news, and lets the absurdity of this image underscore the difference between the more ‘natural’ and authentic Africa, and the artificiality and disconnectedness of the life in the United States. At

the same time, the passage builds on the assumption that the lawyer's story and Slaughter's reaction to it somehow sheds light on a something that does not exist in his Africa and is exclusively a western problem.

Romance, Metaphor and Mediated Experience

A central contradiction in *Brother in the Bush* is that while metaphor dominates Slaughter's rhetorical style, he often overtly emphasises the need for a way to relate to life and the world that is closer to realist mimesis than the metaphorical referentiality of the romance mode. He associates mediated experience with the West and more direct and concrete ways of understanding the world with East Africa. In the book's introduction, he writes that when he began to travel to Africa, he was 'anxious to compare what [he] thought [he] knew to what's real'.¹²⁹ In the wake of the shooting, he has what he sees as the opposite of the common American reaction to a moment of crisis: instead of distancing himself from others he has a craving to 'meet people and experience life as fully as possible'.¹³⁰ He experiences an 'awakening' of his senses and becomes attentive to the need for an injection of newness in his life.¹³¹ 'Shortly after I came down from the initial burst of adrenaline', he writes, 'my powers of observation and all my senses became acute, animal-like, especially in the first year'. He starts to enjoy sensory experience more intensely than before and therefore invests in quality cookware, port wine, attends performances of classical music, smokes cigars.

However, he portrays this new life in which he is more attentive to the world around him through metaphors and chains of associations that create a distance between the world and the language with which he describes it. In *Romance, Diaspora and Black Atlantic Literature* (2010), Yogita Goyal studies the use of the rhetorical modes of realism and romance in diasporic writing about Africa and defines romance as 'a shift outside of realism into the sphere of the marvelous rather than the mundane, often organized around the motif of a quest into unknown territories (both physical and the uncanny zone of the self)'.¹³² *Brother in the Bush* is on the surface a quest both into the self and into an initially unknown geography, and underscores experiences that contrast to mundane everyday life – sometimes in ways that are distinctly irrealist: Slaughter's use of a metaphor-rich, romance style of writing is particularly striking in a series of strangely contradictory passages in which he discusses a dream he has had. The passages imply that Africa has entered his subconscious as an imagery with a hidden but accessible meaning. Back home in the United States, he finds himself waking up from a dream in which he is 'both bushman and tour leader' and a member of the ethnic group Hadza.¹³³ Some Hadza live in the Serengeti and are hunters-gatherers. As a tour leader,

Slaughter's takes his clients to see and photograph the Hadza, 'men and women, black as midnight', and the reason he gives for this is the instructiveness of their way of life, because they 'live alone without an apparent need to compete, to socialize, to demand acceptance'.¹³⁴ 'The obsession with winning adopted by Western businessmen and Little League coaches alike is not in evidence here,' he writes, and 'this communal society is content to get along, to adjust to shifting winds, rains, and availability of food'.¹³⁵ The contradiction in Slaughter's decision to bring his clients to see the Hadza *because* of their reclusiveness and indifference to the outside world is only made more obvious by Hadza-Slaughter's hostility toward the American Slaughter in his dream. The ultimate irony however is that the qualities and attitudes of the group of hunters that Slaughter and his clients visit are as much a product of his utopian view of Africa as those of the African Slaughter in his dream. He does not base his claim that the Hadza do not compete against each other so much on the ethnographic literature that he quotes as on his own portrayal of them as a people who embody the opposite of the qualities he associates with American capitalism.

In the dream, which he recounts in an expressionistic tale-within-a-tale, he writes, 'I was me and not myself – I was "them"'.¹³⁶ He finds that he can place himself 'in another's shoes and witness [his] own arrival' among the Hadza. He is a member of a group of hunters and wakes up in a 'bent bush shelter' that his beautiful 'woman' built the day before. He is 'the spiritual leader, the medicine man, the painter, a hunter/gatherer of the Hadza tribe', living 'as we've lived for thousands of years'. As opposed to 'the women and older men, too weak to hunt' he has not grown dependant on the charity of Western tourists and goes out to collect honey.¹³⁷ He is just about to shoot an animal that scurries by when he is startled by a noise, loses his concentration and is attacked by the bees that he has previously attempted to smoke to sleep. Soon he realises that the reason for the interruption is the arrival of a group of white strangers. He is annoyed with the '*wazungu*', who show up without appointment and make him a spectacle by expecting him to dance and sing for them. How are they different, he thinks, from the people who 'took [his] brothers away in chains years ago?'¹³⁸ The purpose of this exercise in literary imagination in other words is to imagine how unimpressive the Westerner is to the Hadza hunter, who Slaughter assumes is happy and content with his pastoral life. The arrival of the Westerners among the Hadza make the former group's obsession with the exotic contrast to the authenticity and contentedness of the latter.

However, just before Slaughter wakes up, his Hadza dream-self notices that one in the group of strangers looks different. He 'looks Ethiopian, maybe Somali, but speaks the *wazungu* language'.¹³⁹ This man, of course, is Slaughter himself. Dream-Slaughter has trouble making

sense of the ‘Somali’, who wears a ‘painted cloth’ on his head and is less objectionable than the white visitors.¹⁴⁰ In an article about poet Colleen J. McElroy’s travel writing about Madagascar, Alasdair Pettinger points out that passages like this in which physical resemblances between Africans and black American travellers ‘are not there to remind us of the unqualified hospitality expected of relatives’, but rather to prepare the reader ‘for a drama in which what each wants from the other might not be easily commensurable, and how this incommensurability can be bridged’.¹⁴¹ The encounter between his African self – self-reliant, content, free from materialistic greed – and his reformed American self, who in the eyes of dream-Slaughter is ‘like me, but not like me’ – does not lead to communication between the two sides of the self.¹⁴² However, dream-Slaughter’s recognises something in the ‘curious’ tourist that is more than a common racial heritage and something that connects them on a deeper level: the strange, yet familiar tourist seems relaxed and walks ‘with the confidence of someone who’s been here before’.¹⁴³ There is a gulf of otherness that separates them, Slaughter implies, but there is something that set them both apart from the white tourists, who are pale, fat and weak, smell bad and look sick, but above all are arrogant and bring with them gifts that the Hadza do not need but have begun to covet and therefore cause them to argue among themselves.¹⁴⁴

The dream-passages mix ‘the unexpected and the everyday’ and present the imagined alterity of Hadza-Slaughter as a model for a more harmonious way of life.¹⁴⁵ He relies rhetorically on emphasising perceived differences in terms of how people live their lives and what they value in themselves, while simultaneously assuming that the life of a member of the Hadza is in essence the same as life for a Baltimore stockbroker like himself. He portrays what he sees as a consciousness that is radically different from his own, while also implying that there is a deep racial and psychological connection between himself and the hunters. However, it is precisely at this juncture that Slaughter comes closest to critically examine his own tendency to exoticise Africa. He acknowledges that he, like other Westerners, got his ‘childhood introduction to Africa’ through Edgar Rice Burrough’s Tarzan novels which of course play on the colonial mythology of African barbarism and Western superiority.¹⁴⁶ He therefore, in a brief passage, questions his own attitude to the Hadza and to Africa in general. ‘What was my reason for being in Africa? Was this some kind of grown-up version of playing tree house or an expensive exercise in superiority?’ he asks. However, he resolves this dilemma not by reconsidering his portrayal of the Hadza as exotic and mysterious, but by underscoring the need for all Westerners, including himself, to emulate what he sees as their more wholesome and authentic way of life.

Conclusion

The use of metaphors and images that Slaughter associates with Africa in his portrayal of life in America is predicated on an assumed translatability between Africa and America. However, Slaughter emphasises the alterity of Africa, epitomised by the Hadza, in order to interrogate and criticise what he sees as a materialistic and spiritually impoverished West. As has been argued throughout this text, Slaughter's Africa is a rhetorical construct more than a geography through which the narrator-traveller moves. His journeys in Africa are less central in the text than the narrator's mobility between 'America' and 'Africa' as accumulations of images, metaphors, memories and values. The narrator moves back and forth between images and metaphors associated with 'Africa' and his view of life in America, in order to facilitate a narrative of transformation.

Because the transformation is so closely tied to the values and lessons that Africa has shown and taught him, however, it never really takes place within the text. It is not described as a process of change, but as a string of moments in which Slaughter, contemplating Africa and what it represents to him, realise things about life and how it should be lived. Since his Africa is not so much constituted of places, events and people as rhetorical images and metaphors that are meaningful primarily from the point of view of an alienated and unhappy U.S American, the possibility of fundamental inner change is ultimately projected into a utopian future. His use of metaphor and allegory to understand and portray life in the West through his experiences in Africa ultimately serves to both underscore the anthropological alterity that he sees in Africa and subsume this alterity to sameness.

This effectively precludes the arrival of the 'alterity' that Derek Attridge describes as that which is not previously articulated, but comes into being through the act of creative writing. Newness rarely enters the text, precisely because his metaphors and allegorical style depend on a static distinction between values, ideas and ways of life that he associates with Africa and those that he associates with life in the United States.

The static relation between Africa and America, ultimately serves to cause a disconnect between form and content in his narrative of personal growth and transformation. He portrays his arrival in Africa as the beginning of a 'second lifetime,' in which he is more attentive to his existential needs and less bothered by the expectations and opinions of people around him.¹⁴⁷ However, the rhetorical position that Slaughter takes does not in itself indicate that he has been able to change his outlook on life, distance himself from 'years of colonialist history' and to let go of the attitudes and behaviours in others that used to annoy him.¹⁴⁸ Conversely, the

narrator of his text often comes across as ‘angry and petulant, despite his claim to have been transformed by his experiences and the contrast between American and African culture’, as one of his reviewers puts it.¹⁴⁹ While the text centres on a spiritual rebirth that Slaughter explicitly alludes to throughout the book, there is little indication in the style and tone of the book that this moment has happened.

An example of this contradiction between form and content is a passage where Slaughter discusses the ‘unflattering remarks’ that he receives from his friends for living with a white woman and moving away from his neighbourhood. He writes that he at the same time does not care about, and are troubled by other people’s opinions.

I no longer needed to belong to whatever group others thought was best. I was unwelcome. I was either “not black enough” or “too black” – or maybe I was just becoming different from what others wanted me to be.

After Africa, I felt I had an expanded awareness of what is truly important in life. I decided to opt out of the discussion. *Bullshit stands out, in stark relief, when your pasture is otherwise free of crap.*

But in my inner babble, my growing need to be understood was in contrast to this conflicting emotion that couldn’t care less about what others thought of me. The mind battles within, fighting for yardage in the grey/white game between the ears.¹⁵⁰

This is one of the few moments in which Slaughter acknowledges the contradictions that permeate the text. What troubles him is that the cause of ‘the game between the ears’ is that the image of a desirable life, in his text, is one without contradictions and ambivalence, which inevitably become central in the text when Slaughter’s claims that his experiences in Africa have allowed him to become more harmonious and to ignore the contradictions and alienation of life in the West. More than a text about change and inner transformation, *Brother in the Bush* is a book about this inner ‘battle’ in which the arrival of alterity, in the sense of newness, is blocked by a desire for an objectified and exoticised anthropological alterity that is determined and interpreted from a deeply entrenched point of view.

-
- ⁷⁷ The writing of this article has been made possible by the generous support of the Swedish Research Council (2012-6712).
- ⁷⁸ Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 33.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., 33.
- ⁸⁰ Maria L. L. Ropero, 'Travel Writing and Postcoloniality: Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound*', *Atlantis* 25:1 2003: 51.
- ⁸¹ Vanessa Bush, Review of John Slaughter's *Brother in the Bush*. *Booklist* 101:18 2005: 1031.
- ⁸² Emmanuel S. Nelson, *African American Autobiographers: A Sourcebook* (Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press, 2002), xiv.
- ⁸³ Tim Youngs, 'Pushing Against the Black/White limits of Maps', *English Studies in Africa* 53:2 2010: 78.
- ⁸⁴ Slaughter, *Brother*, 66.
- ⁸⁵ Slaughter, *Brother*, vi.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid.
- ⁸⁷ Slaughter, *Brother*, 7.
- ⁸⁸ I am thinking here primarily of how Said's observation that orientalism has 'less to do with the Orient than it does with "our" world' has been carried over into the study of travel literature, in which places travelled to have often been represented as inverted images of the traveller-narrator's home. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Vintage Books, 1979), 78. See also for example M. G. Aune, 'Early Modern Travel Writing After Orientalism' (review), *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 5:2 2005: 121-122.
- ⁸⁹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 30.
- ⁹⁰ Lisa A. Lindsay and John Wood Sweet, *The Early Modern Americas: Biography and the Black Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 10.
- ⁹¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso), 1993: 58.
- ⁹² Paul Smethurst, 'Introduction' in Paul Smethurst and Julia Kuehn (eds.), *Travel Writing, Form and Empire: The Poetics and Politics of Mobility* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 7.
- ⁹³ Slaughter, *Brother*, vi.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid.
- ⁹⁵ Slaughter, *Brother*, 8. Next quote from same page.
- ⁹⁶ Slaughter, *Brother*, 66.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ⁹⁸ Slaughter, *Brother*, 49.
- ⁹⁹ Slaughter, *Brother*, 3.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
- ¹⁰¹ Slaughter, *Brother*, 26.
- ¹⁰² Slaughter, *Brother*, 65.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁴ Slaughter, *Brother*, 85. Next two quotes from same page.
- ¹⁰⁵ Slaughter, *Brother*, vii. Next quotation from the same page.
- ¹⁰⁶ Slaughter, *Brother*, 82.
- ¹⁰⁷ Slaughter, *Brother*, 81. Ellipsis in original.
- ¹⁰⁸ Smethurst, "Introduction", 7.
- ¹⁰⁹ Slaughter, *Brother*, 62. Next quote from same page.
- ¹¹⁰ Quoted in Slaughter, 63. Quote from Gregg Easterbrook, *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse* (Random House, 2004), 240.
- ¹¹¹ Slaughter, *Brother*, 58.
- ¹¹² Slaughter, *Brother*, 22. Next quote from same page.
- ¹¹³ Randall Knoper, 'American Literary Realism and "Reflexion"', *American Literature* 74:4 2002: 715.
- ¹¹⁴ I will not go into a deep theoretical discussion about metaphors and how they work. However, the kind of metaphors I have in mind here, which Slaughter uses liberally in his writing, are 'unique' and deliberately invented rather than conventional, established or 'conceptual'. They are recognisable and presented as metaphors, in contrast to such lexicalised metaphors that are natural elements in everyday speech, as when we say that we are going *down* South or *up* North. See Graham M.S Damm, *The Tourist as Metaphor of the Social World* (Wallingford: CAB International, 2002), 3.
- ¹¹⁵ Slaughter, *Brother*, 75.
- ¹¹⁶ Slaughter, *Brother*, 76.
- ¹¹⁷ Slaughter, *Brother*, 74.
- ¹¹⁸ Slaughter, *Brother*, 77, 74.
- ¹¹⁹ Slaughter, *Brother*, 75. Next quote from same page.
- ¹²⁰ Ibid.

- ¹²¹ Yogita Goyal, *Romance, Diaspora and Black Atlantic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 9
- ¹²² Graham Damm, *Tourist as Metaphor*, 4. It is worth noting that Damm's discussions of metaphors that reduce the alterity of a referent normally work in the opposite direction from Slaughter's metaphors. Normally, the 'strangeness', as Damm writes, of one concept is reduced by the metaphorical use of a more familiar concept. Slaughter, however, typically uses a less familiar concept to speak of a more familiar concept, but by doing so makes the imagery he takes from his African trips seem less other.
- ¹²³ Slaughter, *Brother*, 65.
- ¹²⁴ Slaughter, *Brother*, 67.
- ¹²⁵ Slaughter, *Brother*, 71.
- ¹²⁶ Slaughter, *Brother*, 72.
- ¹²⁷ Slaughter, *Brother*, 71. Next two quotes from same page.
- ¹²⁸ Slaughter, *Brother*, 73.
- ¹²⁹ Slaughter, *Brother*, vi.
- ¹³⁰ Slaughter, *Brother*, 8.
- ¹³¹ Slaughter, *Brother*, 9. Next quote from same page.
- ¹³² Goyal, *Romance, Diaspora*: 13
- ¹³³ Slaughter, *Brother*, 100.
- ¹³⁴ Slaughter, *Brother*, 103.
- ¹³⁵ Ibid.
- ¹³⁶ Slaughter, *Brother*, 100. Next few quotes from same page.
- ¹³⁷ Slaughter, *Brother*, 101. Next quote from same page.
- ¹³⁸ Slaughter, *Brother*, 101. There is an obvious contradiction in this passage, since the Africans that were led away by whites in chains were West and Central Africans who were shipped across the Atlantic, rather than East Africans who were enslaved by Arab slave traders. Slaughter mentions in a chapter about a trip to Zanzibar, a hub in the Arab controlled slave trade, that he has been 'fortunate thus far on all my trips in Africa. I've avoided slave castles, since most of those that warehoused my ancestors are found in West Africa' (114). Slaughter in other words ignores the fact that East Africans were not to a large extent enslaved by white Europeans to emphasise the otherness between the white tourists and the Hadza and the comparative similarity between the latter and himself (who is described by the dream-self as a 'Somali').
- ¹³⁹ Slaughter, *Brother*, 102.
- ¹⁴⁰ Slaughter, *Brother*, 107.
- ¹⁴¹ Alasdair Pettinger, 'African Americans on Africa: Colleen J. McElroy and the Rhetoric of Kinship', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 7:3 2009: 321-322.
- ¹⁴² Slaughter, *Brother*, 102.
- ¹⁴³ Slaughter, *Brother*, 107.
- ¹⁴⁴ Slaughter, *Brother*, 108.
- ¹⁴⁵ Gillian Beer, *The Romance* (London: Mathuen, 1970): 10
- ¹⁴⁶ Slaughter, *Brother*, 109.
- ¹⁴⁷ Slaughter, *Brother*, 31.
- ¹⁴⁸ Slaughter, *Brother*, 49.
- ¹⁴⁹ Elizabeth Connor, 'Review of J. Slaughter', *Library Journal* 130:9 2005: 137.
- ¹⁵⁰ Slaughter, *Brother*, 58. Original emphasis.

Biographical Statement

Nicklas Hållén is a researcher at Uppsala University and postdoc at Linnaeus Centre for Concurrences in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies, Linnaeus University, Sweden. He did his PhD studies at Umeå University and has been a visiting postdoc at The University of York, UK.

Eugenia: A True Story of Adversity, Tragedy, Crime and Courage (2013)

Mark Tedeschi AM QC

Simon & Schuster, 345 pp., ISBN: 9781922052315, p/bk, AUS\$22.99

Reviewed by Rachel Franks, The University of Sydney

Mark Tedeschi, a Senior Crown Prosecutor, has extended his already impressive suite of talents to include true crime writing. Tedeschi has recently published his third true crime text: *Murder at Myall Creek* (2016), the story of a massacre of Aboriginal Australians in regional New South Wales and the trials that followed. His earlier efforts, in the true crime genre, being *Eugenia: A True Story of Adversity, Tragedy, Crime and Courage* (2013) and *Kidnapped: The Crime that Shocked the Nation* (2015), which follows the dramatic case of the kidnapping, in 1960, of eight-year-old Graeme Thorne.

Tedeschi's first true crime work, *Eugenia*, unpacks one of the most compelling, and complex, criminal trials in New South Wales of the early twentieth century. Eugenia Falleni was just one child, of twenty-two, in a sprawling Italian family:

From a completely misunderstood childhood and adolescence, Eugenia Falleni boldly strode out in adulthood in an attempt to establish what she saw as her true self as a man. Within that identity, constantly fearful of exposure, shame and punishment by an unforgiving community and the law of her time, she sought what almost all of us seek: love, acceptance, security, respect and connection with other human beings. (Tedeschi 2013: xv)

Eugenia's early story is one of relocation. She moved with her family, at the age of just two, to New Zealand in the late 1870s. By the time she was a teenager she was dressing as a boy, to find work in brickyards and in stables. Over time, Eugenia became Eugene. With no literacy skills, long-term employment options were limited and Eugene took to the sea. Two decades after arriving in New Zealand, Eugene found himself serving under an Italian Captain. In conversation, Eugene made a critical mistake: reminiscing about his childhood, in his first language, he used the "feminine *'piccolina'* instead of the masculine *'piccolino'*, [and so] inadvertently said something that no native-born Italian would ever say in error" (Tedeschi 2013: 8). The results were catastrophic. Repeatedly raped, Falleni was put ashore as a young, poverty-stricken, pregnant woman in Newcastle, Australia.

In Australia, Eugenia consolidated her persona of Eugene and became a typical, hardworking man: she became Harry Crawford.

Crawford went on to court Annie Birkett, a widow with a thirteen-year-old son. In early 1913, the pair married. It would not be until 1917 that Birkett would discover the truth. The pair argued and Birkett went missing; her burnt body would be discovered at Lane Cove but would not be identified until many years later. Having not just successfully led the life of a man, but also the life of a married man, for many years; Crawford tried again. He married Elizabeth (Lizzie) Allison in late 1919 (redeploying the dildo that had maintained the deception, initially at least, with his first wife). The following year Crawford would be arrested for the murder of Birkett.

Tedeschi carefully unpacks the case, one that was sensationalised at the time as the "Man-Woman Case" to present a narrative that is part painful biography and part example of the flaws of the criminal justice system in the early decades of twentieth-century Australia. Indeed, the trial is of particular interest to Tedeschi and his intimate knowledge of the law –

including some of the failings of some of those who practise law – shines within the text. Crawford, who always maintained his innocence in the matter of murder, was cruelly caught between an incompetent defence lawyer and a prosecutor who was the most skilled silk of his day.

In addition to covering the trial, Tedeschi also takes readers through the punishment of Eugenia Falleni and her eventual release, as Jean Falleni, in 1931. Eugenia would become known as Jean Ford and go on to be a successful boarding house operator. Tragically, in 1938 – while crossing the road, on the way to the bank – she was hit by a car. She was taken to Sydney Hospital where she fell into a coma and died the next day on 10 June 1938 (Tedeschi 2013: 297).

The life, and death, of Eugenia Falleni / Harry Crawford has also been taken up by Suzanne Falkiner in *Eugenia: A Man*, first published in 1988 and re-issued in 2017. Falkiner, a writer of fiction and non-fiction, approached the life of Eugenia through a framework of careful, archival-based research. She states that her aim was “not to speak for Eugenia, but to try to establish the verifiable facts where possible” (2017: 280).

More recently, Lachlan Philpott brought Eugenia as Harry to convincing life in “The Trouble with Harry”, which premiered in the United States in 2012. A revival, directed by Kate Gaul and starring an extraordinarily talented cast, had a successful season at Sydney’s Seymour Centre in early 2017.

The story of Eugenia / Harry is as compelling as it is distressing. Today, we have more knowledge about the challenges, and the isolation, faced by people who – for a variety of reasons – take on a different persona. Issues of equity and justice, how fluid such concepts can be, are also surfaced across each of the published narratives of Eugenia / Harry, making this story as important today as it was when the case went to trial in 1920.

Contact: PO Box R1224, Royal Exchange, NSW 1225, Australia.

Email: crimefictionwriter@gmail.com

TO POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTORS

Send articles to alteritystudiesandworldlit@gmail.com

In your email's subject line state whether it is an article or a review.

Articles range from 5000–10000 words.

Reviews 750–1500 words.

The articles should be formatted in the Chicago Manual Style 16th edition. Endnotes rather than footnotes preferred. No bibliography required. Abstracts should be approximately 350 words. Up to 8 key words. 100 word biographical statement. UK english preferred.

LAST PAGE