

## A Narrative of Migration: Gabrielle Alioth's *Die Erfindung von Liebe und Tod*

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With her fifth novel, *Die Erfindung von Liebe und Tod* (The Invention of Love and Death),<sup>1</sup> the Swiss writer Gabrielle Alioth intensifies her “technique of concealment and disguise”<sup>2</sup> beyond that reached in *Die stumme Reiterin* (The Silent Rider),<sup>3</sup> and continues to address questions about the polysemy of truth and the constitution of identity in a world of migrants.<sup>4</sup> Instead of intertextuality with texts such as the pre-courtly multiculturalist *Legend of Duke Ernst*,<sup>5</sup> *The Invention* refers to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. And rather than setting the plot in late-medieval Europe, Alioth has *Invention* take place in present-day North America; yet, she reaches back into the colonial past as well. The text challenges readers to explore *Invention*, that is, the performance and fruit of fantasy, in conjunction with themes of loss and displacement. I will investigate the topics of migration and creation in tandem with the novel's narrative structure, drawing on a concept developed by Gérard Genette in *Narrative Discourse*.<sup>6</sup> I will show how Alioth employs a variety of tactics to disturb and unsettle the reader, and in particular a specific narrative strategy, metalepsis, as a metaphor for displacement. For those dispossessed of a sense of physical or spiritual home, there is no shelter except in fictional production (outside time and space).

<sup>1</sup> I will not take into account the author's children's novels. Gabrielle Alioth, *Die Erfindung von Liebe und Tod* (München: Nagel und Kimche, 2003) will henceforth be called *The Invention*. Subsequent references to this edition are cited parenthetically in the text and are my own translations.

<sup>2</sup> Silke R. Falkner, “Sinnkonstitution durch Wahrheitsvielfalt: Gabrielle Alioths polyphoner Roman *Die stumme Reiterin*,” *Seminar* 38.4 (2002): 364.

<sup>3</sup> Alioth, *Die stumme Reiterin* (Zürich: Nagel und Kimche, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> See Albrecht Classen, “Gabrielle Alioth: Mittelalterliche Stoffe und Themen im modernen literarischen Diskurs,” *Medieval Voices in the 21st Century*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000); Falkner, “Sinnkonstitution,” and Falkner, “Alchemistische Schriften als Ordnungsprinzip der Identitätsfindung: Gabrielle Alioths *Die stumme Reiterin*,” *Glossen* 15 (2002): <<http://www.dickinson.edu/glossen/heft15/falkner.html>>.

<sup>5</sup> Hans-Friedrich Rosenfeld, ed., *Herzog Ernst D.* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991). See also Hans Szklener and Hans-Joachim Behr, “Herzog Ernst,” *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, vol. 3, ed. Kurt Ruh et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981) 1170–91.

<sup>6</sup> Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* [1972], trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980). For discussion of the hidden incest-trauma in this novel, see Silke R. Falkner and Cornelia Burian, “Apple Blossoms in Contaminated Paradise: Trauma and Creation in Gabrielle Alioth's *Die Erfindung von Liebe und Tod*,” *Glossen* 24 (2006): <<http://www.dickinson.edu/glossen/heft24/alioth.html>>.

With respect to Alioth's first novel, *Der Narr* (The Fool), Anne Fuchs cautioned that the text creates an "anxiety" in the reader because the plot "dissolves into a composition of ... reflections, memories, foreshadowings, speculations, rumors and suppositions."<sup>7</sup> Even more unsettling, in *Invention* Alioth develops a number of plots concurrently, and although they inhabit various narrative levels, they overlap, intersect, and affect one another, generating discomfort and a sense of loss of orientation for readers. The entire text is transmitted via immediate speech by a narrator whose use of the first-person pronoun designates her as a character in at least one of the stories she relates.

This narrator, a European author on a reading tour, travels to eighteen different cities. She meets with a number of people, delivers excerpts from *The Silent Rider* to various audiences, and engages in discussions; she also visits exhibitions. Her personal history (childhood, youth, and married life) is told via flashbacks amid events occurring during her tour. After stops in Madison, Toronto (14), Montreal (24), Ottawa (27), Quebec City (28), Wolfville (33), Halifax (38), St. John's (45), Regina (56), and Vancouver (71), she rests in an unnamed Californian location near San Francisco (77). She then travels to Berkeley (79), Los Angeles (84), Three Rivers (92), Monrovia (96), Santa Monica (99), Tucson (104), and Houston (110). From Texas, she returns to Toronto, transfers to St. John's, and drives to Ferryland, Newfoundland, where she remains in order to engage in a romantic relationship with a fictional character (Duncan) she creates. She abandons her husband in Ireland to be "the lover of the man [she] invented" in Newfoundland (109). Predictably, the very down-to-earth Philipp is "aghast" when his wife explains her motivation for leaving him (82). This first plot line exposes the major themes: displacement or migration and fictional creation. This tallies well with Alioth's corpus, which in *The Silent Rider* contains a medieval scribe and in all her novels travel and quest.

An author's reading tour and the development of plot(s) evoke Günter Grass's second venture into postmodernity, *Headbirths, Or The Germans Are Dying Out* (1980), and Walter Kempowski's *Letzte Griefe* (2003).<sup>8</sup> In Kempowski's novel, the main character, Alexander Sowtschick, dies in New York at the end of his

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<sup>7</sup> See Alioth, *Der Narr* (Zürich: Nagel und Kimche, 1990). Anne Fuchs, "Die zerschlagene Laute—Narrentum ohne Komik: Zu Gabrielle Alioths Roman *Der Narr*," *Literaturkritik und erzählerische Praxis: Deutschsprachige Erzähler der Gegenwart*, ed. Herbert Herzmann (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1995) 77.

<sup>8</sup> There are further literary instances of this scenario in German-language literature, frequently autobiographical. One of the more recent is the Russian-German author Wladimir Kaminer with *Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch* (München: Goldmann: 2003). André Kaminski, in *Schalom allerseits: Tagebuch einer Deutschlandreise* (Frankfurt/M: Insel, 1987), also addressed the experiences of an author on a reading tour (the Swiss Jew Kaminski himself traveling to 102 German cities and towns). Within his text, Kaminski contemplates writing and publishing the account of his tour (11, 13–14, 195), but unlike in Alioth's, Grass's, and Kempowski's works, the narrator does not work with several narrative levels. He does employ, like Alioth, some other techniques that (geographically and temporally) confuse readers, such as having the Weser river flow through Hamburg (70), and G. E. Lessing write *Minna von Barnhelm* while working as a librarian in Wolfenbüttel. Both Kaminski and Kaminer, unlike Alioth, Grass, and Kempowski, set their reading tours in a German-speaking environment.

American reading tour.<sup>9</sup> Sowtschick, already notorious from Kempowski's *Dog Days*,<sup>10</sup> is, like Alioth's narrator, a writer whom readers cannot trust, a man who falsifies his diary for future generations of researchers. In *Dog Days*, Sowtschick fashions the fictional author Fingerling, and Fingerling's novel sequentially features a female poet. Aside from the focus on writing processes and unreliable narrators, the similarity between Alioth's and Kempowski's fictional authors also includes their violent fantasies. Grass's narrator, like Alioth's, reflects on the natal delivery of characters from the head of the Zeusian writer (*Invention* 101). However, Grass's *Headbirths* clearly differentiates between the narrator's life (on a reading tour in Asia) and a plot developed by this narrator-author (a northern German teacher couple on their travels, and their quest for offspring). Alioth, on the other hand, intermingles the threads so extensively that one can hardly distinguish them from one another and thus sort them either into narrator-experiences, or inventions of the narrator. In contrast to Grass and Kempowski, then, Alioth destroys the boundaries between the levels of action and fictional mediation, that is, the level of narrated events and the level of narration, the technique Genette coined "metalepsis."<sup>11</sup>

The second plot thread in *Invention* exploits a criminal event: A woman is murdered in her hotel bed, and the identity of both victim and perpetrator is unknown. The homicide occurs at the very locale where the narrator spends the first night of her tour, and it initially appears to take place at the same narrative level as the narrator's experiences. She curiously attempts to determine the cause of the fatality and the identity of her next-door neighbor from those around her and the press, but finds out little. Readers quickly realize that she knows far more about the murder than she possibly could. While scrutinizing display cases in the Insectarium de Montréal, for instance, and long before an unnatural cause of death is mentioned by anyone else, she notes "the dead woman in the bed-and-breakfast, her body under the slipped crochet cover, the hand turned toward the outside, the head with the wound" (24). She also provides scenic information (to the reader, not the police) about "blood splashes on the pillow, on the slipped crochet cover, the face" and knows that when "[t]he murderer stepped into the room, the bed stood left of the door. The muzzle touched right over her ear" (70). Readers may deduce that the narrator herself committed the crime, an explanation substantiated when the imagery turns from the victim to the perpetrator: "The hand that fired the shot must have been covered with tiny specks of blood" (70), the narrator tells us, and, when she packs her suitcase, readers are led to think of the murder weapon when her "fingers touch ... the smooth metal underneath soft textiles" (72). She even admits to "see [herself] beside the bed with

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<sup>9</sup> Walter Kempowski, *Letzte GrüÙe* (München: Knaus, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Kempowski, *Hundstage* (München: Knaus, 1988); *Dog Days* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Genette 236.

the slipped, blood-splattered crochet blanket" (72). The person beside the bed must be the murderer; thus, the narrator must have committed the homicide.

During the night of the murder, before she hears the sound from next door, the narrator remarks: "I pull the crochet cover over the duvet. The steps in front of the door have become silent. My feet are so cold, as if I had walked shoeless through the hallway" (9). On first reading, the subjunctive creates the impression of a mere simile. Another reference to the shooting night uses the subjunctive: In Quebec, the narrator remembers "the steps I heard during the night in the bed-and-breakfast: their creaking on the stairs, the pausing in front of my door before they moved on. I could have gotten up and peeked into the hallway, I could have observed how the woman disappeared in the room next door. The noise penetrated the walls so effortlessly. Or had it been closer?" (28–29). Only in conjunction with information disclosed later on are these two quotes redolent of the possibility that the narrator did indeed walk through the hallway and observe the woman enter her room. The noise must have been closer than a shot perceived through a wall, that is, heard from within the victim's room. Finally, the narrator imparts a precise depiction of the injury, "the hole above the ear of the dead woman in the bed-and-breakfast. It is not large; the edge is a bit raised. The muzzle of the pistol has left a dark ring-shaped impression around it, by it the triangle of the front sight pointing, like the needle of a compass, North-West. On her hair, a reddish gleam" (84). Nobody but the killer and investigators would be privy to this information. Moreover, she admits holding the weapon: "I feel the smooth, immaculate metal of the pistol in my hand. The shot had torn off the right side of the face" (87), and states: "I feel the warmth of the pistol in my hand. I had thought the shot would be louder" (105). There are also indicators that she obtains the weapon by theft from a bookstore owner's "slightly ajar desk drawer" (168).

If the narrator were indeed the murderer, the murder plot would have to be set on the same narrative level on which she exists. Yet, the identity of the dead woman speaks against this, as the text raises the suspicion that the woman killed is the narrator herself. While the police know neither the victim's identity nor that of the murderer, and assume that the "truth" will never surface (70), readers receive information that advances speculation about narrator and victim being one and the same. This includes a similarity of facial appearance and age (cf. 42, 64–65), the narrator's nervous perspiration at recognizing the resemblance (42), and her ultimate pronouncement: "For a moment, I see the face with the bullet wound on my pillow" (155).

Clearly, no person can be both perpetrator and victim, unless the shooting is a suicide or an accident. Yet, the police find no weapon and the narrator observes herself "beside" the victim's bed (72). Hence, the murder plot must exist on a different narrative level from that of the narrator. A visualization the narrator performs in the future tense in Ferryland substantiates this: "I run my hand over

the cool metal butt; I close my fingers around the handle.... The hand will be covered with specs of blood like small birthmarks.... It will sound like the lid of a suitcase closing—only louder, and the front sight will leave a tiny triangle by the ring-shaped impression above my ear” (191). Consequently, as suggested by the title *Invention of ... Death*, the crime plot turns out to be a product of the narrator’s imagination.

The third plot line is greatly linked to two texts frequently referred to or cited. One of them is concerned with the history of the English crown (67–69) and consists of a set of photocopies that Jack, Professor of German in Regina, faxes to the narrator while a storm keeps her grounded in Newfoundland (61, 62). It is from these pages that readers learn about the historical figure George Calvert, later Lord Baltimore, secretary of state for King James I (63). The mold-stained pages, entitled “The rule of James I, James I and the New World, James I: Facts and History” (73), do not derive from a factually published book. Although historically correct, the information is amalgamated from various sources.

In Toronto, she also receives a bundle of pages, “The History of Newfoundland,” from an acquaintance named George, who, contrary to Jack, is a character created by the narrator’s imagination whose personal interactions with that same narrator, then, are instances of metalepsis (14–15, 97). These pages are, like Jack’s fictitious text, full of mold stains (16), and by way of parallel are set up to be invented, a suspicion nourished by George’s problematic narrative level. “The History of Newfoundland” appears to be a chapter torn from a book printed in London in 1741, and the narrator imagines it to be the unsold remnants of an auction (16). The identification of the source is complicated by means of a language matter: Unlike Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*, which she cites in English because she reads an English translation (99), she cites George’s text in German, although an English original provided the source. For, contrary to Jack’s text, there is indeed a 1741 historical publication of which “The History of Newfoundland” is a chapter. It is John Oldmixon’s two-part tome *The British Empire in America*.<sup>12</sup>

As do Jack’s photocopies, George’s book chapter provides data for the narrator’s development of a locale for her romantic affair. George Calvert, Lord Baltimore (1580–1632), who after his employment as secretary of state returned to Ireland and reconverted to Catholicism, founded the confessionally tolerant colony Avalon in Newfoundland. It did not prosper and Baltimore asked the Crown for land further south in milder climate. After his death, the new terrain (which later became Maryland) was passed to his son, Cecilius Calvert. Given the failure of Avalon, which, unlike other New World settlements, was built in stone,

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<sup>12</sup>*The British Empire in America: Containing the History of the Discovery, Settlement, Progress and State of the British Colonies on the Continent and Islands of America ... Corrected and Amended* (London: Brotherton, 1741).

readers are wont to conclude that, ultimately, it is impossible for those who are geographically, culturally, and religiously displaced to find a home. Yet, for a brief period this colony offers shelter to the love affair between the narrator and her creation. The site that protects one from homelessness is located outside the limitations of time and space, in “invention”: the process and fruit of imagination. The locale for this invention is not by coincidence Avalon, medieval site of Utopia.<sup>13</sup>

In the course of the novel, the narrator spends substantial time at the factual excavation site of the historic seventeenth-century Avalon at Ferryland (73, 126, 131). From one of her print sources, she quotes: “In 1628, Lord Baltimore left the Old World together with his family, his entourage, a priest, a physician.” The narrator names this physician Duncan. He joins the colony because his Catholicism prevented a career in England, although he had studied in Padua with the Renaissance anatomist Fabricius ab Aquapendente (1537–1619) and had been friends with the discoverer of blood circulation, William Harvey (1578–1657) (cf. 98, 161). When “Duncan awakes with a start,” the character comes to life on the voyage to Newfoundland, the first step toward independence from his creator, whom he will eventually leave (99). While to the settlers, Newfoundland looks very different than expected, “there is no going back” for them (112). Duncan hopes to “be what he is, unmolested by the past” (109). In the colony, the physician initiates a romantic affair with Megan, a woman he had known before, and who is now the companion of the Protestant pastor Nicholas (119, 124–26).

“[O]rigin and religion should not be of importance” in Avalon, but just as Duncan’s, Megan’s background counts (109). Based on her past, she has no option to remain in her homeland. Dispossessed by circumstances beyond her control, she follows Nicolas into the New World, where she continues to feel alienated by the community. Nicolas presents himself as her husband; yet, their relationship appears based on convenience and lacks emotional depth. Their shallow bond parallels the loveless liaison between the narrator and Philipp, whom she married due to chance and convention (17–18). Megan also possesses the narrator’s facial features, and the latter experiences what the former faces. When Megan, for example, carries out work in the colony, the narrator senses the movements in her own body: “I feel my back bending when [Megan] lowers the bucket into the rain-barrel and pulls it out again” (138). Alioth’s narrator merges, that is, establishes a sense of fusion with both Megan and the murder victim; she overlaps “the features of the dead woman, of Megan, [her] own” (108). She undergoes Megan’s dreams and sexual longings (180), her despair and pain (182, 184). To further the romantic affair with her creation Duncan, she establishes in Megan a desire for him and a memory of a shared moment in their past (119).

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<sup>13</sup> See Wilhelm Heizmann, “Hvanndalir—Glæisvellir—Avalon: Traditionswanderungen im Norden und Nordwesten Europas,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 23 (1998): 86–88.

When a poor harvest, pirate attacks, and the harsh climate prompt Baltimore to abandon the colony, Duncan, too, departs while Megan remains in Newfoundland (190–91). At this point, Duncan experiences full independence from his creator, and when Megan loses Duncan, the narrator loses him as well. Indicating her resulting displacement in both a geographic and historic sense, she avows that she “will not exist in any other place, ever” (184). Dislodgement is also expressed elsewhere, for instance, the deportation of Acadians (36–38). Observations about more current events include exiles from Hitler-Fascism in the United States and the mass disappearance of women in Vancouver in the last two decades (72–73), all linked to the narrator’s breathless journey from city to city. What’s more, her own history includes migration from Switzerland to Ireland, and she presumably will spend her future at the Ferryland excavation site. Without a location to call home, she lacks the fundamental place vital for a sense of identity in a transnational world, given that personal and collective identities rely on a familiarity of structures. Megan, likewise, has no “home” to return to, and the colony does not become a home. Parallel to the narrator, she simply loses all sense of home (7, 132).

For the narrator, the loss of home is related to a loss of social ties, exemplified by her husband. She claims that they were never very close (23); nevertheless, their distance increases, most notably symbolized by a failure to establish telephone connections (28). Once, she wakes up at two-thirty in the morning: “Each time, the ringing is longer.... How will Philipp’s voice sound after all this time? When I pick up the receiver and state my name, the line is dead. An electric shock, a kiss, a spell—I studied Duncan’s round chin, slightly too big, his lower lip that he pushed over the upper lip in his sleep, his closed eyelids” (65). As this passage indicates, the couple’s estrangement goes hand in hand with making real Duncan.

The narrator herself damages the connection to her husband’s world by changing her name and appearance, and purposely leaving her luggage behind at least twice (75, 78, 111, 114, 116, 124). She eventually loses “the ring with Philipp’s coat of arms” (78, cf. 14), and reflects on her own physical transformation by questioning whether she could still recognize herself. Eventually, this escape liberates her, just as the Avalon settlers had been able to free themselves. In Ferryland, she moves into a bed-and-breakfast and observes with relief: “This is how it must feel to be released from jail after many years” (129). The homelessness and the destruction of the narrator’s former identity thus appear to be both a loss and an opportunity.

The homelessness allows for the potential romantic relationship with the “invented” Duncan. The narrator exploits numerous opportunities throughout the novel to share with the reader the creative process of shaping her fictional character Duncan; her travel baggage includes notes about his conception (41, 73, 78). At the outset, the depiction of Duncan is focused on physical appearance,

such as his “hands” (9), “always scrubbed” (23), his “thick head of hair, gone grey” (14, 23). She cannot stop thinking about him, as his “face is always waiting at the edge of [her] thoughts” (33), and she discloses her fondness for Duncan’s looks (64). Out of the physical features grows a personal history, and based on one of the historical letters written to Lord Baltimore quoted in Jack’s text, she eventually makes Duncan a medical doctor (80).

Duncan grows to be so genuine that the narrator begins to think of him as alive, existing the way she does, on the same narrative level (15), and thus can compare him to her husband, who “had never been that close” despite the twenty-eight years the couple had spent together (42). Subsequent to a Parzival-esque search of forty days (following Easter Mass in Monrovia), Duncan comes to life (99). Ultimately, he comes to reside outside the narrator’s imagination, comprising a size and posture she didn’t devise (54), and she can touch him (60). Looking at her “the very first time,” he causes her physical excitement, “shivers running over [her] body” (69). She also fears losing him to a different world due to her creative potency (59, 103).

Not only Duncan as a person, but also the narrator’s imagined physical sensations become authentic (70, 71). She experiences Duncan’s physical presence as a lover, “the warmth of Duncan’s body on [her] skin” (79), and while she admits that she “had invented him,” she insists that the physical sensations related to him are “real” (82), and her feeling toward him is “love” (89). Not only does the narrator fall for Duncan, but he also falls for her. In constructing the figure Duncan, the narrator ensures a past that engenders an unfulfilled desire (99, 101), which in turn leads to frequent longings: “The face of the woman with the light hair always waits at the edge of Duncan’s thoughts” (113). But the process of creating him finally allows Duncan to acquire autonomy from the narrator. “Every word I wrote about Duncan removed him from me. He could not exist without changing; [he] could not survive without leaving me” (102). Losing control over him, the narrator focuses her creative energy on herself. Rhetorically she asks: “If the invented could not come true, at least I could invent the truth. Why should the writer not become the one written about?” (114). Because Duncan already “had a life, a wife, and two children, [and h]is presence was located in the past” (108), the narrator meets him in his environment, the Newfoundland settlement. By taking on a different persona, Megan, she can carry out a romantic affair with him.

The invented world infiltrates the world of invention; in Genettean terms, the disturbing device called *metalepsis*. The author transgresses the “sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, [and] the world of which one tells,”<sup>14</sup> which “produces an effect of strangeness,”<sup>15</sup> or *Entfremdung*. This

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<sup>14</sup> Genette 236.

<sup>15</sup> Genette 235.



narrative strategy reflects the novel's main topic: migration. As transnationality crosses and overcomes boundaries, so does metalepsis. One result of migration—strangeness vis-à-vis both place of origin and place of arrival—parallels the result of metalepsis. In *Invention*, both narrator and reader experience multiple boundary crossings, and demarcation is unattainable: between fiction and reality, past and present, and the personal delimitations of characters. Hence, the narrative strategy becomes a metaphor of the content. With the narrator being the woman killed in the hotel room as well as her murderer, there are no boundaries between the invented and the real, and nothing prevents fictional characters from developing a life of their own, from turning up in other fiction or even in fictional "reality." Alioth's purposeful contamination of one narrative level by another is a powerful metaphor for migration, as it unsettles readers in a way that corresponds to the instability engendered by a loss of familiar structures. This metaphorical use of metalepsis may be considered analogous to George Tabori's deployment of a combination of different media as a technique "of enacting transnationality."<sup>16</sup>

Two episodes of *Star Trek: Voyager* provide relevant examples of metalepsis in a popcultural context. They also take up the theme of a romantic encounter between individuals from two cultures and historical periods. In *Fair Haven*,<sup>17</sup> Captain Katherine Janeway falls in love with Michael Sullivan, pub keep in a holographic nineteenth-century Irish village created to provide entertainment for the crew of the spaceship *Voyager*. In order to engage in a romantic affair with this man, Janeway adjusts his physical, intellectual, and social features to her needs (yielding him taller, more cultured, and single). In the episode *Spirit Folk*,<sup>18</sup> the holographic characters develop abilities beyond those expected of them. They gain self-awareness and revolt against the *Voyager* crew, comparable to Alioth's Duncan, who becomes an ordinary man, "comes alive" and "leaves" the narrator who created him (188).

Attempting to overcome permanently the homelessness she experiences, the narrator seeks to profit from past science. The plot set in early-modern Newfoundland incorporates the Welsh Edward Wynne, governor of Avalon (1621–1625). In Alioth's novel, Wynne embodies an alchemist's knowledge that could bring about an ancient harmony—the opposite of the experienced displacement (170–71, 183–84). Yet, Wynne cannot help Megan to be permanently united with Duncan (183). He leaves Avalon never to return (184). Alchemy as a science of the past and natural science as the modus operandi of the future are critical themes. Just like previous religious doctrines of salvation, the new science will fail. While Wynne and his "ways" vanish, Duncan personifies the transformation

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<sup>16</sup> As argued by Birgit Tautz in "The Effects of Transformations: The Case of George Tabori's *Mothers Courage*," *Seminar* 41.1 (2005): 20–21, 33.

<sup>17</sup> *Star Trek: Voyager* 6:11, director Allan Kroeker, first aired 12 January 2000.

<sup>18</sup> *Star Trek: Voyager* 6:17, director David Livingston, first aired 23 February 2000.

from the old to the new science. He thus advances the split between man and nature (119).

This physician, it appears, used to live in the world of Alioth's earlier novel *The Silent Rider* as an alchemist: "He had survived the fire [in the laboratory] but it had changed him—he was disenchanting, disappointed, robbed of the delusion" (83). Now it is the new science that absorbs Duncan; he belongs to the group of men who forward scientific development and attempt to overcome nature by dissecting bodies and considering "arteries and joints ... parts of a machine" (89, 91, 171–72), a sentiment the narrator questions. Duncan has become part of the problem of alienation experienced by the narrator. She questions whether science can provide answers. At the Ontario Science Centre in Toronto, she notes with disbelief that the visiting students "will believe that one can understand and explain life. And truth" (22). Her narrations, however, both in form and content, question exactly those concepts and establish an alternative world in fiction to shelter those who have been displaced.

The alienation resulting from the birth of science parallels the estrangement of the sign from the signified. "One century after Baltimore's era, the terms began to free themselves from the objects," Alioth's narrator comments. She feels spiritually and physically alienated because of this division between signified and sign, between things and words (106). Like scientific development, both fact-based writing and modern developments of language engender estrangement.<sup>19</sup> Philipp, for instance, a man who embodies principles of order, reality, and truth, who believes in maps and facts, writes letters that appear to contain lies (112);<sup>20</sup> reports by the initial explorers and settlers of Newfoundland are untrustworthy (111, 123). The narrator loses faith in and becomes alienated from not only language, but also factual geography, as expressed in her surprise when a teaching assistant can call a place "home" with ease—while she, the narrator, cannot (7). She moves back and forth between Ireland and Switzerland, a circumstance that allows her to distance herself from both cultures. The clash between these two very different worlds generates a tension that optimizes artistic production; hence, transnationality is an opportunity. Yet, there is no place left to call home, and this homelessness is particularly noticeable when the narrator travels from city to city during her reading tour in the United States and Canada. Similarly, her invented character Megan feels displaced in the colony in which she settles. Social, confessional, geographic, and even historical displacement leads to the loss of an entire framework of familiar structures, producing homelessness. Fictional creation appears to be the only sanctuary, yet *invention* is not all-powerful either, as Baltimore's Avalon, the only place she can join her lover, ultimately fails as a colony.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. 22, 23, 28, 35, 70, 111, 123.

<sup>20</sup> There are many instances, cf. 23, 26, 30–33, 45, 64, 65, 69.

The sense of displacement and alienation resulting from migratory processes reflects not only in the topics of science and textual production, but also in the narrative techniques employed in this novel. Besides the explicated metalepsis, there is more to unsettle readers: the withholding of relevant information, and the providing of answers to questions not posed (95). Furthermore, several marginal characters confer hints to facilitate the deciphering of meaning (93). The most important narrative procedure, though, besides metalepsis, is the confusion of secure points of reference relating to categories of time and space. The narrator blurs these to such an extent that the very structures classically experienced as fixed are lost. In the case of Duncan, the narrator tells readers that she invented him after writing *The Silent Rider*, yet the character appears already involved in the events of that novel such as the explosion in an alchemist's laboratory (60, 83, 182). Megan not only lived four hundred years ago (65), but also works in a present-day hotel bar (59–60, 89) and appears at an airport (62). Given their various physical manifestations, they embody the transgression of limits of time and place, limits removed from the narrator herself as well.

A symbol of the violation of temporal limits is a shaggy black dog that materializes in Megan's colony (119, 184, 182), as well as in present-day Newfoundland at the excavation site (170). Parallel to that, while at the novel's beginning present and past tenses permit differentiation between the narrative time (the current life of the narrator: an author on her reading tour) and the narrated time (here the past life of the narrator), the boundaries between the narrative threads are eventually lifted. Thus, there are multiple instances where tense no longer allows orientation. Narrated time and narrative time are made indistinct, for instance, in the Newfoundland setting. Here the plot thread of Megan and Nicholas searching for a water supply blends with the narrator creating her fictional text in a present-day setting: "Tomorrow, two men will begin digging [the well] instead of taking their boats out to fish, and Baltimore will pay them ... I hear the bulldozers at dawn, without thinking anything of it. By the time I get up, they are busy loading debris onto trucks" (169). This disruption of temporal lines corresponds to the disruption of geographical boundaries, exemplified in the uncertainty of the locale of the murder. The ambiguous geography is again linked to a time confusion, as the information is provided in the future tense, rather than in the past (191). There is no time progression. The disruption of temporal structures is not only a technique but also a topic, as time and temporal confusion are discussed by characters (20, 32, 75–76, 183). Also, both Megan and the narrator experience as "strange" the shell of a common whelk; this snail metaphorizes time running backwards, as the threads of its shell "run backwards" (75, 76, 183). While it may seem that time is reversed in many parts of the novel (the narrator, for example, appears to steal the murder weapon long after the crime has been committed), there are also instances where it progresses forward, such as the narrator's travel between Los Angeles and Monrovia.

The confusion of principles of time and place begins on page one. Uncertainty about the origin of the narrator when she is landing in the U.S. at the beginning of her tour puts into question her past as well as her current experiences. Geographical confusion proceeds with the narrator's travel. The very first city (Madison, Wisconsin) is never named; we only find out that "[t]he city is located between four lakes" (6). Given the precise acknowledgment of other locales on her reading tour, the information gap regarding Madison is conspicuous, especially in conjunction with paradoxical flight statistics. This stop on the narrator's reading tour is also the location of the murder, and she undermines the geographical setting of the crime by misleading readers: She claims that the Canadian police are searching for the murderer (84), and maintains she is looking for information by scanning the news of "provinces" in Canadian newspapers, thereby leading the reader to believe the homicide took place outside the U.S. (16). Thus, the loss of borders and the resulting homelessness are thematized, finding their metaphorical equivalent in the crossing of boundaries between narrative levels.

Once external texts become the basis for driving certain plot threads, location and geography gain even more presence. Although the narrator begins reading and quoting from "The History of Newfoundland" with a precise date and physical position—"this large island was discovered in 1497" (16) and "lies between 46 and 50 degrees of Northern latitude" (19)—it soon becomes apparent that this novel is less interested in geographical fixedness than in discussion of travel and change. The island is said to be found "in the course ships usually hold as they return from the West Indies" (19).

The novel's organization into chapters entitled "East," "North," "West," and "South" feigns to provide a well-charted map on which the locales of the plot may be found. The titles are evidently a reference to Alioth's *Silent Rider*, where chapter headings refer to the Aristotelian "four elements of the earth."<sup>21</sup> Given that the headings underline the central structural and thematic employment of alchemy, the parallel construction in *The Invention* suggests the importance of geography in this novel. However, of central significance is not the geographical commitment but rather the loss thereof thematized as well as produced in readers. Madison, located west of Lake Michigan and south of Lake Superior, hardly qualifies for "East," as the title of the first chapter would suggest. The same can be said for Newfoundland, the central location of the final chapter, "South."

After metaleptic border-crossing, and the disorder of time and geography, one last device unsettling readers is the utterly unreliable and deceptive narrator. She readily admits that her "skill in feigning things often benefits" her, that she employs this talent recklessly (20), and that she has "lied" since childhood (21).

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<sup>21</sup> Alioth, *Rider* 149.

Even without this confession, readers would identify the narrator as untrustworthy, and thereby lose a sense of stability of the fictitious world.<sup>22</sup> The narrator's affirmation—because it is so questionable to trust the words of a self-described liar—is one of the many instances that indicates Alioth's awareness of the narrative strategies she develops.

Because the narrative voice belongs to an author on a reading tour, in her mind busily inventing new characters, Alioth makes textual production itself a theme in *Invention*. While describing Duncan, for example, the narrator claims to have constructed "lists of names because he could not remain alone with his serious face, his shiny instruments" (71). Twice, she tells strangers she meets in airplanes about her profession (13, 77). In Berkeley, literature professors discuss narrative method and construction (79). In Santa Monica, the narrator reads and quotes from an English copy of Marcel Proust's *A la recherche*, purchased in Quebec City (99). She also discovers something well known (having read Proust in the original when in Lausanne) in a different environment (North America), an object comfortable and familiar, yet strange by multiple refractions. Proust's novel thus is an appropriate allegory for both the alienation experienced in a transnational situation and the dislodgement of readers of *Invention*. Significantly, though, *A la recherche* is precisely the novel Genette employs to conduct his renowned examination of *Narrative Discourse* to elucidate metalepsis. In addition to this allusion, the use of narrative device becomes a theme in the novel, whereby Alioth provides a potential interpretative tool to readers. Twice, readers are told that even before her journey to North America, the narrator's husband scolded her for not recognizing "any longer what is factual and what is invented" (8, 114).

Alioth links fictional creation to the ultimate quest for the grail: The historical Baltimore named his colony Avalon after the sacred Celtic Island of Apples. According to lore, the wounded King Arthur was taken to this mystic place. Alioth also hints at Wolfram von Eschenbach's Arthurian epic *Parzival* (c. 1210) (without naming it) by aligning her narrator's search with significant traditional Christian days of penitence and resurrection. The narrator notices a group of Christians with grey crosses on their foreheads in Toronto, remarking "[i]t must be Ash Wednesday" (20), and she later attends Easter mass in Monrovia, California, where she realizes that forty days have passed (98). This recalls Wolfram's hero Parzival, who on Good Friday encounters the grey knight Kahênis on a pilgrimage, and learns about the long duration of his search for the grail. Parzival then spends the period until just after Easter with his uncle, the hermit Trevrizent, who reconciles him with God and frees him from doubt—prerequisites for his ascent to being the new grail king.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, Alioth's narrator receives imperative information, from an "old man" (96). Similar to Parzival, she

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Genette 26.

<sup>23</sup> Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999) 446,10ff and 448,7.

is originally convinced that she will not find what she is looking for in this site (94), but spends an evening at the Three Rivers, California, home of the novelist and screenplay writer Curt Siodmak (93–96). While Alioth does not identify him, his famous *Wolf Man* is named, his science fiction novel *Donovan's Brain* is alluded to, and the place of residence and the name of his wife (Henrietta) are de facto correct. Siodmak, whose life story—and this is significant—includes permanent exile, plays the role of first mentioning Pygmalion, the legendary figure of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and he is thus the first to utter the name of the classical artist eminent for his relationship with his creation (95).

To be sure, already before Siodmak brings up Pygmalion, instances of foreshadowing bring to mind Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Most eloquently, this takes place in the novel's very beginning. Shortly before landing, the narrator watches a film onboard her airplane: "On the screen ahead of me, a woman turns into a seal" (5). This allusion to the (not-named) John Sayles movie *The Secret of Roan Inish* (1995) refers to the "silkie" or "selchie" who, in Norse and Celtic tradition, lives as a female or male human on land but as a seal in the sea. Not only are seal folk capable of such considerable transformation—and the image thus prefigures metamorphoses in this novel—but Scottish folklore documents silkies' ability to prophesize, a detail that amplifies the foreshadowing technique.

When Siodmak mentions "Pygmalion," the narrator remembers "the red volume with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*" (95). Ovid's Pygmalion fashioned an ivory statue of what he considered an unsurpassed woman, and subsequently fell in love with her. During the Venus festival, he asked the goddess to grant him a wife in the image of his ivory creation and she obliged by fulfilling his innermost wish, turning the ivory into flesh and blood.<sup>24</sup> Thinking about the possibility of an "invented" character coming to life, the narrator hopes the same will happen to Duncan: "I imagine how the scar on Duncan's chest curves under my fingers" (95–96).

The novel offers glimpses of additional tales of displacement and loss, frequently related to factual historical happenings. Other than reading to various audiences during her journey, the narrator also engages in discussions about writing and local historical issues. In the Canadian Prairies, she visits a Hutterite colony (68–69). On the East Coast, she addresses the expulsion of the Acadians (36–38) and the 1917 Halifax explosion. Another historical mention, epitomizing geographical displacement, is the destiny of the Italian navigator Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot), who attempted to find a new route to the Far East and discovered Newfoundland for the English Crown in 1497 (29, 32, 60). Contemporary news coverage and rumors generate part of the novel, such as the "disappear-

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<sup>24</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 1976/77) X: 243–97.

ance" of "over thirty women ... in East Vancouver" (72–73).<sup>25</sup> Reaching back furthest into the past, in Los Angeles, the narrator visits the exhibition "Pharaohs of the Sun" (84–88). This exhibition, indeed, took place in Los Angeles from 19 March to 4 June 2000, an element that prompts speculation about the dates of the narrator's tour. She must have visited Three Rivers before 2 September 2000 (for that is when Siodmak died), leaving at least two months of unaccounted time between Los Angeles and Three Rivers. But more than helping to date the narrator's tour, the history of Akhenaten and Nefertiti also alludes to displacement. Akhenaten reigned a short seventeen years from 1353 to 1336 B.C., during the so-called Amarna period. Abandoning Thebes and Memphis, he founded the city that later became known as Amarna, and he revolutionized Egyptian culture by enforcing monotheism. After his death, though, the new city was deserted, and the former polytheistic religion reinstated under the rule of Tutankhamen.

Another short-lived religious attempt related is that of the Jesuit mission of San Xavier del Bac near Tucson, Arizona, originally founded by the Tyrolean Eusebio Francisco Kino in 1692. The narrator visits the church, also known by the name "The White Dove of the Desert," later constructed in honor of Kino (107). The building in "the brown desert ... with the towers and domes of another world" and the mission's founder who "wanted to go to China but came to New Spain" both reflect displacement, intensified by the shell of St. James in which the altar rests (107). The narrator mentions neither the missionary's name nor his origin, nor the name of the mission. However, readers aware of Father Kino's background or Saint Francis Xavier (who died in China) will recognize this but-tress of the transnational theme, literally and metaphorically propped up by the scallop shell, time-honored symbol of pilgrimage and travel to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain. The mission subject shares the theme of exile with the other less thoroughly explored subplots (e.g., Siodmak's escape from Hitler-Fascism and the demise of "children and mothers" in Vancouver—most of whom were disenfranchised vagrants), and inevitably connected to this theme are loss, exile, and homelessness, travel, change, and (more or less futile) attempts of creating something new.

The narrative techniques Alioth employs in this novel unsettle the reader and thus provide a compelling metaphor for migration and alienation. Texts and/or their authors are not named when their products are alluded to or quoted; other texts do not exist as publications. Alioth not only recurrently withholds the identity of authors but also of other historical figures, and of at least one city. She obscures geographical information and progression of time. Her

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<sup>25</sup> It is accurate that over fifty women—mostly drug addicts, prostitutes, drifters—vanished from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DES), called "Low Track," between 1983 and 2001. At the presumed time of the narrator's Vancouver visit (summer 2000), an investigation was underway; however, only in February 2002 did police arrest the 53-year-old pig farmer Robert William Pickton of Port Coquitlam, just outside Vancouver. He was charged with first-degree murder of twenty-six women, and as of the date of this article, a trial is taking place.

narrator is thoroughly unreliable, and, most significantly, she mars the boundaries between narrative levels. While these techniques reflect and signify the topics of migration and alienation, they also transport the theme of the relationship between an artist—in this case, an author of fiction—and her creation. The narrator asks: “Didn’t others, too, succeed in awakening the imagined to life, for a moment at least, sheltered by the dark of the night?” when she hopes to be able to bring to life Duncan, and to create a place for their romantic encounter (70). However, Avalon has no future, Duncan will leave Megan, and neither she nor the narrator will have children (188). The novel leaves readers to ponder the boundaries of reality and fiction, identity and construct, past and the present. In a world of physical, emotional, and intellectual migrants compelled to negotiate realities and navigate cultures—Alioth’s first-person narrator and her character Megan being two of many—valid interpersonal relationships can only exist on a short-term basis and in imaginary spaces. Doctrines, rooms, and colonies of salvation, be they scientific or religious, provide a mere transitory shelter from homelessness.