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Tous Azimuts 4

**The Culture Mangle
Conflict and Violence
in Language and Culture**

Proceedings of a conference held at the
University of Glasgow, May 2007

Edited by Eilidh Macdonald and James R. Simpson

University of Glasgow

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Mangle 3. [figurative] Now chiefly: to render (words) almost unrecognizable by mispronunciation, or to spoil by gross blundering or falsification (a quotation, the text of an author). Formerly often (now rarely): to mutilate, deprive of essential parts, subject to cruel injury. (Oxford English Dictionary)

Conflict (where there are two or more views) is inevitable in the workplace. It is how it is managed that determines the likelihood of a positive or negative outcome. ('Managing Conflict', University of Glasgow Staff Development Service prospectus)

We should learn to step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of [...] directly visible 'subjective' violence, violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent. [...] Subjective violence is just the most visible portion of a triumvirate that includes two objective kinds of violence. First there is a 'symbolic' violence embodied in language and its forms, what Heidegger would call our house of being'. [...] Second, there is what I call 'systemic violence', or the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems. (Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Big Ideas (London: Profile, 2008), p. 1)

Introduction: Culture Mangling

EILIDH MACDONALD AND JAMES SIMPSON

If the choice of terms in our title seems odd, then it is perhaps useful to begin with some account of their meaning, the tracing of which forms a curious peregrination through and between cultures and languages. A ‘mangle’ can be the ruin of previous form, cut, hacked and disfigured (see OED). We speak of a mangled imitation, especially in language. Yet at the same time, the mangle is the thing that, through the laborious application of crushing and distorting weight and pressure, removes irregularity of form and condenses together to produce the smoothness of line and tidiness of form and identity associated with finely pressed linen. This appearance of unity can be deceptive, however, especially in the field of cultural studies, a discipline famously not one, but rather, as David Forgacs and Robert Lumley term it, a ‘cluster’ [...] which has come to include ‘literature, social history, media studies, human geography, cultural anthropology and the sociology of deviance’.¹ However, although seemingly comprehensive in its intellectual scope, such a perspective does not invariably resonate in the culture under study: as Forgacs and Lumley also point out, ‘in Italy the term *studi culturali* is not used except as a rendering of the English term which has entered Italian academic debate by a side door through translations or discussions of some influential British work on popular music, social rituals and subcultures’.² In short, if the field of cultural studies is the product of a disciplinary mangle, then its reception in other (geographical) terrains can seem to partake of a similarly arbitrary

¹ David Forgacs and Robert Lumley, ‘Introduction: Approaches to Culture in Italy’, in *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. by Forgacs and Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 1.

² Forgacs and Lumley, pp. 1–2.

operation in which this tattered *bricolage* is further traduced into the appearance of a cohesive warp and weft. A similar Babel-Fish game can be played with regard to our title. In that sense, the idea of *a mangle* here seems to have more in common with the French term for it, *une essoreuse*, the etymology of which ties it back to a drying machine or any device that exposes what is damp or heavy to the air, *essorer*. This term is first attested in the twelfth century where it not only has the sense of exposing to the air to dry but also either ‘to take wing’ or ‘to launch’ of a bird, particularly birds of prey – (*Essorez fu ses esperviers, / Qu’a une alöete ot failli*’, Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligés*, ll. 6440–41). The flight of Chrétien’s hawk takes as both cue and target the emblematic ‘lark ascending’ of courtly love lyric. From here it comes into Middle English as *to soar*, as in Pandarus’s disingenuous denial that he has grounds for vaunting hope in his enterprise of seduction (‘I have no cause, I wote wele, *to sore*, as doth an hawk’, Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, I, l. 670). Clearly, in a convenient coincidence, *essorer* is related to the noun, *un essor*, the rise, spread or taking wing of cultures and movements, among which one might cite *l’essor des études culturelles...* Thus an apparently leaden and soggy-bottomed conceit can take flight in unexpected ways when brought into a cross-cultural context, revealing pressing connections where perspectives had previously seemed earthbound in their own particular corners.

The product of its own ‘culture mangle’, this volume brings together a series of essays which started their lives as presentations at a graduate conference in the University of Glasgow sponsored by and organised under the aegis of an AHRC-sponsored research training network in Modern Language Studies. Although they range widely, covering different cultures, periods, media and genres from across the field, we were struck by the shared themes and preoccupations that underpinned them. In a sense, all of the essays here deal with tidiness and messiness of form and genre, history and reception. Listening to those papers on that day, it seemed to us that such a mangle might just ‘wing it’.

Conflict and violence appear as two subjects very much connected and yet, at the same time, often carefully divided. A

host of studies have been devoted to illuminating the distinctions and relations between the various terms involved in the field: violence, conflict, aggression.³ Yet they are at the same time often linked in titles and calls for papers or other submissions. While violence is a subject of particular social and ethical urgency, conflict in particular seems the one most likely to engage us. After all, conflict is officially part of the working lives of academics and graduate students. Approaches in various fields – not least policy documents relating to university working conditions – are careful to distinguish ‘violence’ from ‘conflict’. Thus, while the former is exceptional to the normal order, the latter, as our own lords and masters are concerned to make clear, is an inevitable part of working in a publicly funded Higher Education sector where balancing resources and demands is often difficult and very rarely a ground for anything approaching entire consensus. Such a position reminds us however of the inescapability of violence and the simultaneous occlusion of what Žižek refers to as its ‘symbolic’, and perhaps more crucially, ‘systemic’ dimensions (see above). What Žižek does not suggest is that there is no connection between subjective and objective instances of violence, but that rather the relations may be more oblique than we had perhaps thought – hence the ‘sideways reflections’ of his subtitle. That the ‘subjective’ dimension of violence stands in some kind of relation – whether mimetic, causal or, indeed, displaced – to its ‘objective’ domestications such as ‘conflict’ seems a particular instantiation of a more general and inevitable debt owed by culture to its founding violences, a thesis most prominently developed by Jacques Derrida.⁴ In that regard, while conflict appears distinct from violence, it is at the same time dependent on it in the manner of some sort of supplement as a guarantor of its authenticity and reality, as supplying the energy of its ‘SOS’. In Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr Strangelove* (1964), the embattled President Muffley, on the

³ See Bernard Beck, ‘Talking Violence Blues’, in *Violence*, ed. by George Estey and Doris Hunter (Waltham, MA and Toronto, 1971), pp. 5–14 and, in the same volume, Harold I. Lief, ‘Contemporary Forms of Violence’, at pp. 15–30.

⁴ On which see notably Christopher Johnson, *System and Writing in the Philosophy of Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

brink of unwittingly starting a nuclear war, pleads with his fractious generals ‘Gentlemen, you can’t fight in here! This is the War Room!’, inadvertently exposing the repressed violent supplement to the decorous officialdom of conflict management. ‘Conflict’ extends not merely to the subjective instances of academic endeavour, but also is apparent in the tensions between different areas and approaches, the war for the cultural and symbolic capital that derives from marking out a privileged standpoint, a monopoly on the intellectual or moral high ground in a given subject area. The complexities of these relations and histories are the subject of the essays contained in this book.

‘Forward and Forget Nothing’: Conflicts Haunting the Curriculum

Remember not that we were freed: remember that we fought.

If postunification debates about the German past were neither historically unprecedented nor unique in comparison to other European nations, then how should one characterize the history of German memory? Is it a story of a uniquely ‘unmasterable past’ with regard to the history of Nazism, the Holocaust and the war? Or is it a story of one nation’s recurrent and consistent engagement with history?⁵

It is often said that, with the exception of its Galician ‘Celtic fringe’, Spain has no tradition of ghost stories. Such a view depends on what one means by ‘ghosts’. I should like here to draw on Derrida’s historico-materialist reading of ghosts in *Specters of Marx* [...] in order to argue that the whole of modern Spanish culture – its study and its practice – can be read as one big ghost story.⁶

⁵ Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870–1990*, Weimar and Now: German Cultural Criticism, 24 (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2000), p. 6.

⁶ Jo Labanyi, ‘Introduction: Engaging with Ghosts; or, Theorising Culture in Modern Spain’, in *Constructing Identity in Contemporary Spain: Theoretical Debates and Cultural Practice*, ed. by Labanyi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 1–14, p. 1.

The different fields within modern languages at some level derive their distinctive textures from contingent pulls and flows not merely of the national histories and cultures to which they refer, but also from the re-thinkings of key questions emerging through encounters with other subjects fields and through the changes in the disciplinary environment in which research and teaching take place. The various disciplines in the field of Modern Language Studies have their own distinct stories to tell about violence and conflict, indeed often multiple and fractured stories that seem little amenable to resolution or synthesis. Obviously, these are bound up with the specific national histories that underpin the separate language areas, emphasis moving in relation or tension with the visions of national identity emanating from increasingly embattled and fragmented national centres. The question of cultural memory here is paradigmatic of more general disciplinary problems, the specificities of national situations both a source of distinction and providing perspectives to reflect on core issues.⁷ In this context, the questions of responsibility and denial attendant on colonial history have become a central problem. In part this stems from the glaringly self-evident ethical and political urgency of such examination (especially in a context in which globalisation offers new and perhaps more insidiously occluded forms of colonial exploitation). However, there is also another more general sense in which the task of ‘narrating the nation’, to use Homi Bhabha’s title-phrase, becomes perhaps the most immediately pressing version of the wider problem of ‘telling it all’, of producing a totalising history of the culture as subject of study.⁸

In this context, the shifts and tensions in the various nation-based cultural historiographies have their own story to tell. France’s principal narratives spring from the Revolution, the Terror and then from the equally problematic questions of the tension between narratives of resistance, collaboration and deportation in the Second World War through to the disavowed

⁷ See, for example, Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁸ Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).

and occluded violences of Indochina and the Algerian War.⁹ Indeed, the place (or non-place) of colonial engagements in French collective memory has been a particularly productive, if fraught, area of discussion with massive implications for the wider study of French postwar culture. As Kristin Ross's highly influential *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* highlights, the smooth, distinctly unmangled forms of French consumer modernity appear as an attempt to forget the mess associated with France's highly tarnished record in its withdrawal from colonial power in North Africa.¹⁰ A recent chapter in this debate is then the place of France's colonial past in the national history and collective identity, and especially attempts to produce an 'official' school history that pays 'proper' attention to the place of that history in the Republic's *mission civilisatrice*. As commentators have emphasised, one of the central tensions here is that France's image of itself as resisting nation, the focus of a historiography of memory, is one of the myths that stands in sharpest tension with the rather murkier history of the colonial engagement and which teases most uncomfortably with the unfinished business of exploring France's complex role in the war and the question of collaboration. This is exemplified in new curriculum staples as Didier Daeninckx's detective novel, *Meurtres pour mémoire* (1984), in which the murder of an academic investigating the role of the French administration in the deportation of Jews during the Occupation is hidden in the chaos of the Paris riots of 1962, or more generally in works by Georges Perec such as *Les Choses* (1965), *La Disparition* (1969) or *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* (1975). One key problem highlighted with regard to Daeninckx's novel is that it runs the risk of reducing the Algerian war to a subsection of a 'bigger' question for French identity, and so addresses the question of outside involvement only for the national history to then turn back in on itself. Yet this is precisely the problem of violence: the more it is displaced, the more it returns in a spectral form, all the more pervasive and

⁹ See among others Jim House and Alan MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonisation and the Reordering of French Culture*, October (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 1996).

insidious for its apparent lack of solidity. Thus Michael Haneke's film *Caché* (2005) presents the seeming banality of modern urban life haunted from an impossible point of view by the question of the Franco-Algerian conflict.¹¹ The paradox here is then that the greatest violence leaving no trace, but rather appears as a silent reorganisation and sanitisation of pre-existing material.

Such preoccupations with memory and history appear as part of the *lingua franca* of contemporary European cultural studies. As various studies have made clear, Germany's tale is one of the legacy of the Second World War, the separation of East and West and then the uneasy reconciliation of the post-*Wende* period with its own revisiting of the various closets of not merely the war and the Holocaust but also the archives of the Stasi (*Das Leben der Anderen*) and more generally the question of incorporating the memory of Socialism into a conception of Germany after reunification (*Goodbye Lenin* or Daniela Dahn's novel *Westwärts und nicht vergessen*).¹² As Rudy Koshar comments, the slogan adopted by some demonstrators in the last days of the GDR, 'Forward but forgetting nothing' (taken from Bertolt Brecht's 'Song of Solidarity', written for the film *Kuhle Wampe*) was a source of pain and conflict.¹³ However, denial and forgetting are not limited to former 'colonial superpowers', as Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller comment:

The collapse of Italian colonialism in the context of wider military and political defeat, and the fact that Italian colonies did not undergo any real process of decolonisation, had long-term repercussions for how

¹¹ On *Caché*, see notably Max Silverman, 'The Empire Strikes Back', *Screen*, 48.2 (2007), 245–49. In that sense, Haneke's films frame the study of visual and libidinal dis-ease in the form of anti-national epics, whether the Austria of *The Piano Teacher* (2001) or his more recent examination of exclusion and disavowal, *The White Ribbon* (2009). In this context, one of the critical 'master texts' examining what one might term the history the rot at the heart of the national thing is of course Eric L. Santner, *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹² See, among others, John McCarthy and others (eds), *The Many Faces of Germany* (2004). Also Koshar and Alon Confino, *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹³ Koshar, p. 1.

Italian colonial history has been written and remembered. Presumably as a result of such anticlimactic ending to Italy's half-century of colonial rule, the end of Italian imperialism occasioned little public reflection. Instead, political elites and colonial circles generated a culture of 'myths, suppressions and denials' that managed the image of the still-desired lost object – Italy's empire – by suppressing knowledge of Italian atrocities and fostering strains of popular memory that perpetrated images of Italian colonisers as benign.¹⁴

No simpler picture of Italy itself emerges in the *Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, Zygmunt Baranski's introduction paying deference to the overwhelming complexity of the subject, and indeed advocating that the reader react against any temptation to be seduced by the volume's compartmentalisation by approaching it in an 'open and flexible manner': 'in particular, they should consider the ways in which chapters can usefully interact', a move which positions the ideal reader as a 'critical friend' of Italian Studies.¹⁵ In Hispanic Studies, one of the central focuses is the dominance of Franco in the post-war period, Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) seems tailor-made to exemplify Jo Labanyi's description (cited above) of modern Spanish culture as 'one big ghost story', serving as a convenient illustration of how the unfinished business of the Spanish Civil War lingered on after the end of the seemingly larger global struggle against Nazi Germany.¹⁶ Del Toro's old gods – not just *el fauno* himself but also the nightmarish child-devouring Saturn,

¹⁴ Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, 'Introduction' in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. by Ben-Ghiat and Fuller, Italian and American Studies (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 2. The reference is to Angelo del Boca, 'Myths, Suppressions and Denials', in *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Literature from Post-Unification to the Present*, ed. by A. Palumbo (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 17–36.

¹⁵ Zygmunt Baranski, 'Introducing Modern Italian Culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, ed. by Baranski and Rachel J. West, Cambridge Companions to Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,), pp. 1–15, p. 2.

¹⁶ The political and social underpinnings of Spanish 'modernity' are the central focus of collections such as Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi (eds), *Spanish Cultural Studies – An Introduction: The Struggle for Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) or Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas (eds), *Contemporary Spanish Cultural Studies* (London: Arnold, 2000).

along with the ironically recuperated anti-Trinity of the dying daughter's final vision – speak of a complex heteroglossic archive resisting attempts to impose a narrowly paternalist vision of national identity. Indeed, this vision finds other fertile grounds in visions of pre-Reconquista Spain, as is apparent from the essays contained in Stacy Beckwith's *Charting Memory: Recalling Medieval Spain*, a volume which sketches a rich ghostly counter-history, mapping the traces of Jewish and Arabic cultures in the relation of modern Spain to its medieval other.¹⁷ But then again, Hispanic Studies is also centrally bound up with the question of the conquest of the Americas, a source of further hauntings, not to mention livelier contestations. As a distant mirror, it is argued that the 'war' between the 'ancients' – focused on the Golden Age – and the 'moderns' – focused on gender theory, cinema and postcolonialism – that split departments on both sides of the Atlantic often along generational fault-lines.¹⁸ In the context of East European and Slavonic Studies we have seen a history of a discipline continuing to manufacture more history than it can readily consume at home. In this context, the conflict between different versions of the past becomes particularly clear. Dovile Budryte's study of the independent Baltic states underlines the difficulties inherent to reconciling individual and 'collective' memories of the Soviet era and '[making] the transition from collective victimhood to a de-politicized commemoration, [...] an attribute of a mature, tolerant political community'.¹⁹ The solution, Budryte suggests, must involve a balance of discursive power between the official 'guardians of memory' and the memoirs and

¹⁷ Stacy N. Beckwith (ed.), *Charting Memory: Recalling Medieval Spain*, Hispanic Issues, 21 (New York and London: Garland, 2000).

¹⁸ For an autobiographical account of the emergent discipline of Chicana/o studies in US Hispanic studies departments, see Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, 'Reflections on Thirty Years of Critical Practice in Chicana/o Cultural Studies', in *A Companion to Latina/o Studies*, ed. by Juan Flores and Renato Rosaldo, Blackwell Companions in Cultural Studies (Oxford and Malden MA: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 397–405.

¹⁹ Dovile Budryte, *Taming Nationalism? Political Community Building in the Post-Soviet Baltic States* (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2005), p. 179.

family histories popularly preferred – especially by the young – as sources of information about the Stalinist deportations.²⁰

More often than not, these different tendencies and impulses can find themselves diametrically in tension as different national perspectives and agendas on what is politically, socially or culturally urgent – conservative assertions of unity as opposed to greater accommodation of diversity; the embrace of or resistance to ‘globalisation’ – impinge on one another in the manner of shifting gravitational fields centring on changing master narratives. This tension is in part a product of a degree of latency in the dialogue between observer and object in which the question of the relation between university curricula in the United Kingdom and the United States and the evolving histories of national identity in a global area has often been far from direct. This sprang in part from a sense that curricula were out of step with the ‘modern nation’ and the problems facing it, although increasingly the distance from the object is critical. If in French studies the traditional conception of the timeless pantheon scarcely seemed to reflect the complexities and changes of postwar France, then recent approaches, chiefly springing from within postcolonial studies seem no more interested in offering back a servile reflection of the image of a modern France unified and whole and keen to advertise its attempts to come to terms with its history or taking at face value recent reiterations of the ideals of Republican Universalism.²¹ ‘Remember not that we were freed; remember that we fought’ has been appropriated as a rallying cry in recent re-evaluations of the involvement of European cultures in the slavery trade and for the attempts of various bodies to memorialise that implication and the guilt associated with it. The cultures in question profit then in the past from the actual labour and in the present from the symbolic capital accruing to them as they mythologise themselves as generous and enlightened emancipators, making the industry of commemoration also one of

²⁰ Budryte, pp. 188–92.

²¹ On which see Marie-Pierre le Hir and Dana Strand (eds), *French Cultural Studies: Criticism at the Crossroads* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

domestication, the attempt to hold a decorous state funeral for such live issues as racism, deportation or the Terror proving more likely to waken ghosts than allay them.²² More widely still, this in turn sparks an energising resistance from not merely those areas of French studies specifically engaged with those immediate questions but also other areas where Republican paternalism is perceived as a ‘colonial’ position, any reassertion of which is to be contested with regard to questions of regionality, internal order and gender. To write about syphilis and prostitution in the nineteenth-century novel is still to cock a snook at Nicolas Sarkozy’s Napoleonic stylings, not to mention his now infamous sneer at the utility of Early Modern literary studies.²³

If all of these different areas have seen their own versions of the conflict over the subject matter of their fields, then to some extent, that history is part of an evolving higher education sector in the United Kingdom, from expansion in the Sixties and early Seventies to the broadening of scope that was in large part driven by the distinctive intellectual agendas emerging from the then new polytechnics. In addition to the challenge to the canon provided by social and cinema studies, all of these areas have seen their versions of the ‘theory war’, with attempts to incorporate the challenge of avant-garde inspired postwar thought into the programme, and indeed to reflect the contribution French thought has made to debate internationally.²⁴ This process has continued over the past two decades, in which conceptions of a curriculum centring on a traditional canon of literary and intellectual classics

²² On funeral processions as part of the Republic theatre state and as performances of collective identity and memorialisation see Avner Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics and Memory in Modern France, 1789–1996* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Of course a key figure here in recent times has been the Haitian revolutionary, Toussaint Louverture, on whom see especially Charles Forsdick, ‘Haiti and Departmentalization: The Spectral Presence of Toussaint Louverture’, *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 11:3 (2008), 327–44.

²³ On French fiction in the nineteenth century as a reflection on questions of sexuality and policing in France see in particular Jean E. Pedersen, ‘Nana and the Nation: French Cultural Studies and Interdisciplinary Work’, in *French Cultural Studies*, ed. by le Hir and Strand, pp. 29–48.

²⁴ See Max Silverman, *Facing Postmodernity: Contemporary French Thought on Culture and Society* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999).

have been decisively challenged by the emergent discipline of ‘cultural studies’.²⁵ The conflicts then continue as departments try to square the circle of fitting this more than quart of enriched and amplified conceptions of culture and cultural history along with vastly expanded geographical domains into the increasingly cramped pint-pot of a university curriculum.

Russian Ark: ‘My European’ in the Culture Mangle

The Guardian: Tell us a secret.

Slavoj Žižek: Communism will win.²⁶

If a sense of constraint has been seen as one of the forces that has most hampered and mangled our understandings of cultural studies, the pressures brought to bear on the conception of university curricula can at the same time draw on a vast diversity of culture mangles, serving as allegories of these disciplinary concerns and conflicts. A case in point is Aleksander Sokurov’s *Russian Ark* (2002), in which a Russian narrator suddenly finds himself in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg in the company of a French diplomat, Custine (played by Sergey Dreiden), who claims to have found himself inexplicably transported there and no less astonished to find how well he speaks Russian.²⁷ As in one of its cinematic models, *L’Année dernière à Marienbad*, the museum is transformed into a temporal and historical labyrinth, a screen for the confused dreams of the newly dead. However, its exploration of the relation between identity, dream and loss also has clear parallels with one of Sokurov’s major influences in Russian

²⁵ See for example Frank Trommler, ‘Is Literature Still Central to German Studies?’, *German Quarterly*, 80:1 (2007), 97–105.

²⁶ Slavoj Žižek, Interview by Rosanna Greenstreet, *The Guardian*, 9 August 2008.

²⁷ For brief but illuminating account of and comment on Sokurov’s labyrinthine narrative, see William Johnson, *Film Quarterly*, 57:2 (2003), pp. 48–51.

cinema, Andrei Tarkovsky.²⁸ Although cast emphatically as a single point of view (indeed, the film consists of a single continuous steadicam shot, the longest of its kind in cinema history), its narrative and the interaction of the characters emphasises bewilderment, fracture and dissonance. The museum itself is not neutral terrain: rather, as the film's present moment lurches backwards and forwards through history, the space of the Hermitage gradually resumes its function as part of the winter palace complex of the Russian royal family, with access increasingly controlled by hostile, albeit extravagantly costumed, court officials and military personnel. However, in a giddy dance reaching back from the present as far as Peter the Great (1672–1725) and Catherine the Great (1729–1796), then to sweep forward to the great ball of 1913, the central characters remain disoriented and uncertain as to what version of that space they are occupying at any given point.²⁹ In that sense, the central feature of *Russian Ark*, the camera's restless movement among the paintings, objects and interlocutors in the Hermitage museum, speaks of what Stephanie Sandler sees as a preoccupying anxiety revealed through the dialogue between motion and fixity reveals about the terrifying void at the heart of subjectivity, an anxiety notably explored in films such as Tarkovsky's *Solaris*.³⁰ Similarly, while the diplomat is quite happy for the most to walk in the company of the Russian narrator, like some sort of secondary character in

²⁸ On this, see in particular Stephanie Sandler, 'The Absent Father, the Stillness of Film: Tarkovsky, Sokurov and Loss', in *Tarkovsky*, ed. by Nathan Dunne (London: Black Dog, 2008), pp. 126–47.

²⁹ Indeed, as Johnson point out, the same characters reappear in different scenes and thus in different periods: 'Curiously, the eighteenth-century guests who enter the Hermitage at the beginning of the film include several who reappear at the 1913 ball and also in a smaller group about halfway through the film, in each case too prominently to be explained by a random shuffling of more than 1,000 actors and extras. It's possible that Sokurov is pointing to the static condition of Russian society under the rule of the tsars. Or he may simply be following his assertion that "there is no past or future in history, just as there no past or future in art, only the present".' (Johnson, p. 49).

³⁰ Sandler's principle reference here is Joan Copjec, although the theme of the subject as either void or night is also extensively explored in Žižek's work, often in relation to Deleuzian treatments of the cinematic image (on which see notably *Organs Without Bodies*, pp. 60–74).

Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, he also manifests an obdurate independence and, in conformity to national stereotype, at one point disappears to follow an attractive woman into a side-gallery. Finally, at one point he refuses definitively to accompany the narrator any further. Why would I bother being *your* European?

It is at this point that the film can be seen as a complex reflection on the ambivalences and conflicts that underpin the process through which Russian cultural and historical identity has been shaped by dialogue with other cultures. Although centred on a certain unity of perspective and voice that is emphatically, poetically Russian in its language and heritage, at the same time the desire to show this heritage to another returns obsessively. Indeed, not merely national identity itself, but also cultural exchange appear as objects of nostalgia. As the narrator travels on, he finds himself speaking longingly both of and to the figure he refers to as 'my European', a designation that, in locating Custine as a 'lost father' places in question any settled, monological construction of Russian cultural paternity or patrimony. Through this relation the film asks questions of the nature of Russian culture, history and identity. Obviously, the overall setting of the film speaks of Russia as waking up and finding itself 'living after' a particular moment that it now only can recover as a mixture of museum archive of artefacts that seem mostly inspired by or brought from elsewhere (the Second Empire vases the diplomat comments on in the early part of the film – themselves the pretext for an excursus on French and Russian perspectives on Napoleon – are a particular example) is an allegory of an uncertain post-Soviet present. Moreover, the film's central relationship highlights the question of borrowing and imitation, the 'colonialism' of social mores that shaped Russia's French-influenced court society, and with it the whole question of the nature and identity of Russian history as either native or internationalist, doomed to find itself unable to settle into the easy sleep of a single consciousness. Indeed, the narrator's recurring phrase 'eternal people!' seems profoundly in conflict with the nightmarish, amnesiac style of the film's narration, asking precisely in what 'eternity' the dream of community and nation can be said to exist. Crucially, the

withdrawal of the French diplomat can be read precisely as an assertion of singular identity, as the withdrawal back into the self of a foreign element that finds its own identity unacceptably and traumatically troubled by the *bateau ivre* drift of the central narrative.³¹ Through the persona of the diplomat, the French are implicitly given to see something of what it is to be ‘European’ from another nation’s point of view and, seemingly, to decide that they don’t like it.

In this regard, *Russian Ark* bears comparison with other documents that explore and foreground the conflicts, tensions and dissonances between pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial time, a case in point being the engraving of Amerigo Vespucci’s encounter with the indigenous population of America produced by Jan van der Straet, Theodor Galle and Philippe Galle in the 1580s.³² Although the drawing ostensibly shows the arrival of the master conqueror bearing sword, astrolabe and pennant – artefacts that have been termed variously by Michel de Certeau ‘the weapons of European meaning’ and by Anne McClintock ‘the fetish instruments of imperial mastery’ – commentary on the engraving has drawn out its more subversive and questioning aspects.³³ Crucially, Amerigo seems far less assured in his stance than the female native, and indeed seems to quail at what Michelle Warren describes as the danger of ‘sexual and bodily dismemberment’, at cannibalism’s ‘corporeal confusion of differences’.³⁴ In similar wise, the film stages an arrival of a

³¹ On which, see Roland Barthes, ‘Nautilus et bateau ivre’, in *Mythologies*, Points (Paris: Seuil, 1957), pp. 80–82. The interesting point here is that the narrator appears in a sense as a version of Captain Nemo who is both comfortable in the ‘enfermement chéri’ (Barthes, p. 82) of museum history and, towards the end, looking beyond it to a dissolution of identity and history reminiscent of Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* (1979). The question therefore remains as to whether the Frenchman, ostensibly more impatient of the libidinal attachments framed in the space, actually leaves.

³² Our discussion here also draws on Michelle R. Warren’s reading in *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100–1300*, Medieval Cultures, 22 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 248–51.

³³ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. by Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. xxv; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 26.

³⁴ Warren, p. 249.

coloniser in a terrain that is and is not already his, and indeed which he ultimately refuses presumably because its own narrative, set in a place in which French cultural and political power has been so evidently and voraciously cannibalised and assimilated, threatens to devour his own sense of identity and difference. Indeed the question of eternity's devouring maw looms large in both documents: Theodor Galle's rubric to the initial drawing 'Americen Americus retexit et semel vocavit inde semper excitam' ('Amerigo repeats "America" and, once he spoke, henceforth was [it / she] always ready.') highlights the desire of both coloniser and colonised. His naming of America inaugurates an eternity ('inde semper') in which the desire of the woman as the embodiment of the land is the major driver. In the same way, the 'eternal people' of *Russian Ark* find themselves absorbed by a desiring narration that speaks more troublingly still. The French diplomat's astonishment that he is able to speak Russian so well is but the first sign that his subjective self-mastery is under threat.³⁵ And yet precisely at the same time the film is able to open a space in order to avert a crisis of cultural desire and identity, albeit at the price of loss and nostalgia. The cinematic intertexts are here illuminating: what *Russian Ark* seems to both explore and refuse is the possibility of a fusion that manifests itself in threateningly incestuous form in *Marienbad*.³⁶ Certainly, the constant presence of the mellifluously voiced narrator, endlessly pressing the other characters with both anxious instruction and cooing entreaty, appears as a masculine version of the use of Doris Day's disembodied voice singing 'Che sara sara' in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, a scene that has been read by Michel Chion and Slavoj Žižek as giving cinematic form to the spectre of a threateningly

³⁵ An obvious comparison here is the scene from Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) in which the central character's revenant wife, looking at herself in the mirror, reasons that she must be a figment of his imagination, unable as she is to remember what she has been doing when he is not present.

³⁶ On *Marienbad* as an incestuously masochistic narrative, see Keith Reader, 'Another Deleuzian Resnais: *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* as conflict between sadism and masochism', *Studies in French Cinema*, 8:2 (2008), 149–58.

incestuous desire.³⁷ By contrast, in *Russian Ark*, the presence of the narrator's voice is constantly countered and interrupted by sudden shifts in the acoustic field and environment as the visitors move from one room to another, the surrounding ambience changing dramatically as they move from small room to great hall, from wooden to marble floor, from their close-whispered conclave to the more distant but more sharply interrogatory shouts of other figures. One reading here is then to reverse the gaze in the manner of Žižek's rereading of Freud's account of the 'fort-da' game: the point may not be for the child to come to terms with the absence of the mother, but rather for him to assert his subject status and open the space of desire in the face of the mother's overwhelming presence.³⁸ Accordingly, an alternative reading of the close of the film would see it as casting the coloniser aside as the Russian narrator looks out through the door of the palace to an unimaginable beyond. In that sense, the film both reveals and conceals, affirms and undermines any seemingly univocal assertions of identity and subjectivity, centre or margin, coloniser or colonised. Yet, this should not be seen as any sort of benign resolution: one of the principal models for the central conceit of Sokurov's film is Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and at that level, we are left uncertain as to what we have seen or indeed what lies beyond is heaven, purgatory or indeed hell. Nonetheless, the film's emphasis on identity and area, on difference, fracture and alienation, on the singularity of performance in relation to its putative models, all of these have challenged our conceptions of identity, whether gendered, historical or cultural, in the field of modern languages. Different communities inhabit not merely different places but different 'timespaces' (as Miguel Lopéz has argued with regard to Chicano poetry), sometimes, as Dipesh Chakrabarty puts it, 'several centuries at once'.³⁹ One element

³⁷ See Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan In and Out of Hollywood* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 118–19.

³⁸ On which, see Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, *Short Circuits* (Cambridge MA and London: MIT, 2003), pp. 55–61

³⁹ On timespaces see Miguel R. Lopéz, *Chicano Timespace* (College Station: Texas A and M University Press, 2001). Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial*

conspicuously sidelined in perhaps one of the more significant violences the film does to history is Communism, referred to laughingly merely as an ‘unfortunate episode’. This moment positions the Communist period rather ambiguously in terms of the dream narrative, ostensibly excluded from it, but at the same time hovering as the violent event that hangs over everything, especially the final dispersal of the guests from the 1913 ball, a scene pregnant with the suggestion that, for Tsarist Russia, the party is over. Thus, as the missing other of the Hermitage dream, it appears as a sort of repressed element, an event that is either then identifiable with the surrounding sea of eternity or refuses to encompass it. This uncertainty in terms of the structure of the film seems to reflect an ambivalence in Sokurov’s own views: while not opposed to Communism, his emphasis on aesthetics and love of nineteenth century art and literature set him at odds with the authorities – apparently *malgré lui*.⁴⁰ But does this imply Communism wakes Russia from the baroque delusions of the imperial dream or does Sokurov present it as a simplistically mangling slice through the multi-layered complexities of historical processes and national identity? As Slavoj Žižek comments somewhere, reality is for those who cannot bear to live in the dream.

Thought and Historical Difference (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 49. See also Jeffrey Cohen, ‘Introduction: Midcolonial’, in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. by Cohen, The New Middle Ages (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), pp. 1–17.

⁴⁰ As Johnson comments: ‘It’s not easy to assess Sokurov’s political views, but he has said of his early experience as a filmmaker: “The problems the government film institutions had with me – they had no political grounds. Because I had no questions about the political system, I had, let’s say, less or no interest.... I was always driven by visual aesthetics, aesthetics which connected to the spirituality of man, and set certain morals.... On the one hand, the films that I made were forbidden to be shown publicly [under the Soviet system], on the other, my new ideas were always approved”.’ (Johnson, p. 50).

Overview of Chapters

The essays that make up this volume cover a diverse range of subjects from the Middle Ages to contemporary cinema, from Europe to the New World, as well as a range of genres and discourses. However, looking across them reveals a network of shared themes and preoccupations.

For one, all the essays have some focus on the construction and contestation of models of national and communal identity, as well as anxieties about the purity and preservation of cultural artefacts and patrimony. In that sense, a central focus of the essays is the extent to which form or genre becomes a site of sensitivity, or in which, *mutatis mutandis*, the formal framing of a particular subject matter might itself stand as cultural provocation. Thus, in Baker's study of the cultural context of early Mexican bandit fictions, the novel is appropriated as a frame in which to explore the complexity of border troubles and boundary pressures, as well as to validate *mestizaje* or miscegenation. By contrast, Simpson's essay explores Arthurian narratives as both national romance and national B-movie, locating apparent impulses towards cultural bastardisation in the suturing and mangling practices of the medieval texts on which modern adaptations draw. A similar concern informs Serravalle de Sá's treatment of Brazilian horror film, where the profanation of social and religious values is politicised and given energy by the material constraints impinging on the process of production. All the chapters stand in an intriguing relation to Peacock's study of the place of Molière's plays in the national canon. In that regard, the hero of the culture mangle is perhaps the UK's own dark angel of history, Dr Who, the question being here one of imagining the comments and reactions of Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, Geoffrey Hill, Milan Kundera, José Mojica Marins and, indeed, Chrétien de Troyes could one bring them together for breakfast – in Paris, of course – to discuss their reactions to the issues raised in reviews of productions of *L'Ecole des femmes*.

'In Paris, of course'...: inevitably, the location and language of conflict and violence are central preoccupations here. Reid's piece,

although focused on Gide and his perception of Hitler, reminds us of a long-standing connection between violence and cultivation notably expressed in Burgundy's discourse on the garden of France in Shakespeare's *Henry V* (V. 2). In kindred manner, Baker, Macdonald, Simpson and Whiteley all explore relations between exile, identity and outlawry, examining the extent to which that violence is 'off the map', in the sense of being disavowed in the context of national narrative. Reflections on the uneasy place of torture and brutality in national mythologies and histories can be seen in Serravalle de Sá's work on Brazilian horror film, Simpson's examination of scarring and massacre of the innocents in Arthurian fiction, or Whiteley's study of the formation of medieval and modern military identities. In Serravalle de Sá and Pollard's work, we see a concern with artists who refuse to see artistic production as a quasi-pastoral or bucolic site for the easy disavowal of 'real-life' conflict and take it as subject matter for both avant-garde and populist artistic production. In a larger frame, Palladino and Švéda show the stresses and strains underlying Kundera's attempt to cultivate the garden of Central Europe in an essay that just happened to first appear in French. The appropriative nature of acts of remembrance and preservation are explored in Palladino and Švéda's appraisal of Milan Kundera in the context of political nationalism, as they also are in Peacock's assessment of Molière's place in France's cultural heritage. However, all of the authors and works studied here seem to fight on at least two cultural fronts. In that regard, in Serravalle de Sá's account, Mojica seems as ready to do violence to Hollywood convention as to Brazilian sensibilities, while Pollard and Simpson both deal with material looking back to the politicised oratory and poetics of Virgil's Rome.

Genre and generic characteristics are another recurrent theme as the various studies show different forms asserting their place in different cultural and historical contexts, as they narrate, compose or perform collective or individual identity. An example here is the concern with drama and the conflicted genesis of cults in both Macdonald and Peacock's studies, which explore the question of staging, whether in the form of the performative dimensions of

hagiographical narrative or the role of production in transforming interpretative community. In this regard, Alexis and Zé do Caixão are revealed as mutually illuminating uncanny doubles, the latter appearing as an 'ethical hero' in the mode of Don Giovanni even as he casts light on the trouble and indeed fundamentally provocative 'monstrosity' of sainthood's mission to produce the coming community. Likewise, Pollard's concern with lyric expression echoes with the focus on the distinction between the Aristotelian categories of *epos* and *melos* that underpins Sveda and Palladino's account of central Europe's 'war cry'. The concern in both essays with authorial status has clear connections to Peacock's treatment of Molière and his afterlives. However, Pollard's essay opens a key space in the collection for the place of poetry, all the essays raising in their own ways the question of the function of poetic language in imagining histories and speaking with communities.

These, and many other, cross-cultural and cross-generic resonances and parallels will come to light as the authors turn their attention to the material caught in the folds and creases of 'mangled culture.' Time to turn the handle...

Bandits in Mexican Literature

PASCALE BAKER

This paper examines the representation of bandits in Mexican literature from the nineteenth century, the so called ‘Golden Age’ of Mexican banditry.¹ I will also touch briefly on other representations, such as bandit ballads or *corridos*, along with nineteenth-century travellers’ tales, exploring how these interact with literary depictions.

The nineteenth-century historical romance was didactic and sought to provide an answer to Mexico’s bandit problems by encouraging its readers to be law-abiding, industrious and patriotic. It tended to provide strategies for the nation to rid itself of the epidemic of banditry, often by reflecting on the mistakes of the past. Bandits in the nineteenth-century Mexican novel inevitably therefore had to reform or die, to fit the conventions of the genre which demanded a neat ending, where order was restored. Nineteenth-century Mexican novelists also sought in these novels to reject the dictum so popular among nineteenth-century European travellers, and hitherto resisted by Mexican novelists, that Mexico was and remained ‘a nation of bandits’.²

Before embarking upon a discussion of bandit novels it is useful to outline the historical milieu which produced them. Nineteenth-century post-independence Mexico, in disarray after years of fighting, was facing an ever increasing wave of banditry. This chimes with Eric Hobsbawm’s much-discussed assessment that manifestations of lawlessness such as banditry increase in times of economic, social and political change, notably during civil war.³

¹ P. J. Vanderwood, ‘Nineteenth-Century Mexico’s Profiteering Bandits’, in *Bandidos, The Varieties of Latin American Banditry*, ed. by R.W. Slatta (New York: Greenwood, 1987), pp. 11–31, here at p. 18.

² C. Frazer, *Bandit Nation, A History of Outlaws and Cultural Struggle in Mexico, 1810–1920* (Lincoln NA and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), p. 56.

³ E. H. Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p. 17.

Critics such as Chris Frazer and Paul Vanderwood have developed Hobsbawm's argument further, by stating that banditry and guerrilla warfare coalesced during the Mexican wars of independence, and that it was often impossible to distinguish between the two. But after the wars bandits did not stop being bandits. Frazer comments that:

In the 1820s the rates of vagrancy and petty crime continued to rise, and so did banditry [...] For many, banditry was a way of life to which they had become accustomed during the war. Some bandit gangs had been auxiliaries to insurgent or royalist forces, and they continued to ply their trade after the war. Other bands were newcomers, demobilised soldiers or non-combatants who had been dislocated by the conflict.⁴

Vanderwood adds that, after the Mexican independence wars, some bandits became retainers for local *caudillos* and terrorised merchants and *hacendados* into cooperating with them, even gaining control of some trade routes.⁵ In an unstable political situation and without a formal police force, bandits were able to prosper. International conflicts such as the Mexican-American War (1846–1848), and internal conflicts such as the War of Reform (1858–1861) and the War of the French Intervention (1862–1867), between Mexican liberals and conservatives, conspired to keep the country in a state of turmoil during the nineteenth century, meaning that banditry was a constant and very real threat. It is well known that the liberals courted bandits to fight on their side during the War of the French Intervention.⁶ When the liberals finally gained control of the country, in 1867, President Benito Juárez was forced to negotiate with his former brigand allies and recruited many of them into the new national police force, known as the *rurales*. He also overhauled Mexico's

⁴ Frazer, p. 29.

⁵ Vanderwood, p. 15 and p. 18

⁶ Frazer, p. 50; Vanderwood, p. 16, and also D. Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 223–24.

obsolete penal code and introduced more severe punishments for convicted bandits.⁷

Porfirio Díaz's long period in power from 1876–1911 saw an increase in repressive measures against banditry and its suppression. Díaz was concerned to remedy negative North American and European views about Mexico being a country of bandits, and he was keen to encourage foreign investment.⁸ For this, he had to persuade foreigners that he was a Europe-friendly, stabilising influence on Mexico. The most famous slogan which accompanied his reign in power, 'orden y progreso' (order and progress) emphasises Díaz's civilising mission as a nation-builder. Meanwhile, another slogan, 'pan o palo' (bread or the club) highlights his willingness to reward those who supported his regime, whilst threatening those who did not, such as bandits.⁹

For nineteenth-century Mexican novelists, banditry was growing problem and one which they wanted to tackle in literature. But the proliferation of bandit novels in the period did not arise simply to describe and resolve this national disorder, or to focus on individual bandits. Rather, it arose out of a broader need to understand and define the recently independent and still evolving nation-state of Mexico. As Chris Frazer writes:

Bandits were so commonplace at a time when the Mexican nation-state and even *lo mexicanidad* [a sense of Mexican national identity] were being forged. Bandit narratives were part of a larger effort to grasp, interpret, give meaning to, and shape the reality of postcolonial Mexico.¹⁰

In this context, the bandit was appropriated as a literary device through which to debate the future of the nation. The authors of such novels, often politicians and diplomats in the cases of Manuel Payno and Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, felt that it was their duty

⁷ Frazer, p. 52.

⁸ Frazer, p. 56; W. Fowler, *Latin America 1800–2000: Modern History for Modern Languages*. Oxford: Hodder Arnold, 2002), p. 72.

⁹ Fowler, p. 72.

¹⁰ Frazer, p. 7.

to create a national literature which would embed a sense of responsible citizenship. As one critic has noted, the Mexican historical romance, the novel style of choice for nineteenth-century Mexican authors, 'was severely righteous' and served to moralise as much as to entertain.¹¹ In nearly all such novels, the author came to 'bury the bandit'.¹² The stance of these writers was that outlawry must be eradicated if Mexico was to become a stable, prosperous, and above all 'modern' nation. Attaining so-called 'modernity' was particularly important in an era when the *civilización* versus *barbarie* debate was raging.

Foreign travellers to Mexico in the nineteenth century, particularly from the Anglo-Saxon world, often attributed what they perceived as Mexico's inherent barbarism to racial *mestizaje* or miscegenation. The description of Mexicans as a 'priest-ridden, mongrel, ignorant, dwarfed and semi-savage population' from the *New York Tribune* in 1860 is typical of Anglo-Saxon sentiment of the era.¹³ Such views were informed by ingrained racial prejudice, coloured by a sense of the authors' European/ North American superiority.¹⁴ In fact, evidence suggests that most foreign travellers to the country in the nineteenth century did not fall prey to the depredations of bandits.¹⁵ Rather, these travellers were intrigued by the possibility of meeting bandits, as 'they wanted stories to tell on arrival'.¹⁶

Nineteenth-century Mexican novelists sought in their work to counteract the view that banditry was an ineradicable Mexican defect which could simply be ascribed to race mixture. Their

¹¹ J. Lloyd Read, *The Mexican Historical Novel 1826–1910*, unpublished doctoral dissertation (New York: Instituto de las Españas en los Estados Unidos, 1939), p. 57.

¹² Frazer, p. 98.

¹³ Frazer, p.62.

¹⁴ Some examples of nineteenth-century foreign travellers to visit Mexico, who wrote and published about their time there were: U.S Congressman, Joel Poinsett in 1823; British scientist and soldier, Mark Beaufoy who travelled in Mexico in 1825–1826; and Fanny Calderón de la Barca, the wife of the Spanish envoy to Mexico, Don Ángel Calderón de la Barca. Señora Calderón de la Barca published her account of their residency in Mexico in the early 1840s (see Fraser, pp. 61–65).

¹⁵ Frazer, p. 77.

¹⁶ Vanderwood, p. 11.

bandit novels tended to provide routes of redemption for the bandit and for Mexico, and often featured *mestizo* heroes, as in the case of three of the major works to be analysed: *Astucia* (1865) by Luis Gonzaga Inclán, Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's *El Zarco* (1888) and Manuel Payno's *Los Bandidos de Río Frío* (first published in serial form between 1888 and 1891).¹⁷ These novelists did not deny the seriousness of the problem of banditry in Mexico, but they ascribed its persistence to factors unconnected with racial degeneracy. These included the failings of the corrupt Spanish colonial regime, and the betrayal of independence by incompetent postcolonial regimes, both of which allowed banditry and disorder to flourish. By the late nineteenth century, novels such as *El Zarco* and *Los Bandidos de Río Frío* were referring to banditry as a phenomenon of the past and can be read as attempts to shore up support for the Porfirian regime and to reveal the extent to which Mexico had progressed along the road to civilisation and good government.¹⁸ This seems all the more likely when we discover that the authors of these novels, Manuel Payno and Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, both serving members of the Díaz government, were also 'key figures in organising Mexico's participation at the 1889 Paris Exposition'.¹⁹ This was a world fair and the ideal event for the writers to promote Díaz's new, enlightened Mexico on an international stage. However, towards the end of the Porfirian era, when discontent with the regime was growing, a shift can be perceived in the literary portrayal of the bandit. In the repressive atmosphere of the Porfiriato, it is perhaps unsurprising that the novel, *Chucho el Roto, o la nobleza de un bandido mexicano* (circa 1900), was published anonymously.²⁰ The text establishes support for the titular bandit, Chucho, whilst critiquing the inequalities of the Porfirian regime, which drove people like the noble Chucho into banditry.

¹⁷ For edition, see M. Payno, *Los Bandidos de Río Frío* (México D.F: Editorial Porrúa, 1964).

¹⁸ Frazer, p. 124.

¹⁹ Frazer, p. 60.

²⁰ For edition, see *Chucho el roto, o la nobleza de un bandido mexicano* (México D.F: Editora Nacional, 1969).

Returning to the early nineteenth-century we see that the first notable literary portrayal of the bandit occurs in the first published Spanish American novel, *El Periquillo sarniento* (1816), by a liberal *criollo*, José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi.²¹ The publication and distribution of novels in Latin America was officially prohibited by the Spanish colonial authorities, though in practice some fiction was smuggled in from abroad.²² In the fervour of the Mexican independence conflicts, Lizardi was able to circumvent this rule. *El Periquillo sarniento* stands as an indictment of such censorship and of the general corruption and injustice of the entire colonial system. In the novel, the protagonist, Pedro Sarmiento, a *criollo*, is ill-served by his education and indulged by his parents. He becomes ‘flojo, vicioso y desperdiciado’ and flits from profession to profession, including the priesthood and the civil service, before sinking into banditry (p. 229). This enables the novelist to describe and critique the institutions of the colonial establishment such as the Church, the judiciary and the government. Lizardi, like many other *criollos*, resented the way in which colonial New Spain privileged peninsular Spaniards, allowing only these members of society access to the highest ecclesiastical and government positions.²³ Thus, in the novel, when his picaresque protagonist, Pedro, enters the bandit den at Río Frío, the outlaw society, where honour and loyalty to the brotherhood is valued above all else, is contrasted favourably with the corrupt dealings of ‘respectable’ society. Pedro, scornfully mocked as ‘el periquillo sarniento’ (the itching parrot), eventually realises the error of his ways and converts from an outlaw into a hardworking citizen. The didacticism of the novel is made clear from the outset, as Pedro explains his motive for writing the tale: to encourage his children to resist the temptations of their corrupting society and follow a lawful path. He says, ‘mi deseo es instruiros y alejaros de los escollos donde tantas veces se

²¹ For edition, see J.J. Fernández de Lizardi, *El Periquillo Sarniento*, 2 vols (México D.F: Universidad Autónoma de México, 1982).

²² Williamson, p. 149.

²³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn (London: Verso, 1991), p. 58.

estrelló mi juventud, y a cuyo mismo peligro os quedáis expuestos' (p. 43). In Lizardi's analysis, banditry is symptomatic of a 'broader colonial malaise', which can only be overcome with the overthrow of that system and the re-education of its citizens.²⁴

The next bandit novel of note was *Astucia* (1865) by Luis Gonzaga Inclán, subtitled, *El Jefe de los hermanos de la hoja ó los charros contrabandistas de la Rama*. Inclán was a *mestizo* who belonged to the middle-class ranching community. Again, using the genre of the historical romance, he employs the figure of the bandit to indict the governments of General Antonio López de Santa Anna, who ruled Mexico intermittently between 1833 and 1855. The novel is set in rural Michoacán sometime mid-century, and finds the hopes of independence thwarted by a government that has scant regard for country dwellers. The government has levied taxes on crops and has a monopoly on tobacco. Enter the heroic Astucia and his merry band of contraband *charros* / cowboys. These men appear as Robin Hoods writ large, a brotherhood of gentlemen who right wrongs inflicted both by corrupt government officials and by government-sanctioned police bandits. It is the government and the police who are presented as the real villains, while our heroes merely resist exploitation rather than rob and pillage.²⁵ Popular justice is their guiding principle and their rallying cry is 'one for all and all for one', a motto immediately reminiscent of Alexandre Dumas's *The Three Musketeers* (1844).²⁶ Inclán was no doubt, like other Mexican novelists of the era, somewhat influenced by European romantic novels, but he and other novelists were keen to adapt that genre to the Spanish American context.²⁷ Hence, *Astucia* incorporates vivid *costumbrista* sketches of rural life which romanticise the Michoacán countryside and its inhabitants. However, Américo Paredes finds that *Astucia* contains as many parallels with the

²⁴ Frazer, p. 106.

²⁵ Frazer, pp. 110–11.

²⁶ A. Paredes, 'Luis Inclán: First of the Cowboy Writers', *American Quarterly*, 12:1 (1960), 55–70, p. 63.

²⁷ Lloyd Read, p. ix.

cowboy romances of the American West, in its detailed portrayal of ranch life, as it does with the European historical romance.²⁸ Inclán's version of *mexicanidad* in *Astucia* is rural and localised, and the focus is on the *mestizo* as the ideal embodiment of the nation rather than the *criollo* of *El Periquillo sarniento*. Despite continued European prejudice towards *mestizaje*, the latter half of the nineteenth century was a period in which Mexico started to take pride in her indigenous and *mestizo* past, constructing a nationalist rhetoric around it, to which bandit novels like *Astucia* contributed.²⁹ The novel ends with Astucia, the *mestizo* saviour of the narrative, becoming the governor of Michocán and overthrowing the corrupt government and its bandit cohorts who had so terrorised the countryside. Order is restored, the 'real' bandits are defeated and the country people need no longer resort to contraband to survive.

President Santa Anna, that 'obliging veteran of disasters', is again indicted for running a bandit government and a bandit nation in *Los Bandidos de Río Frío* (first published in monthly instalments between 1888 and 1891).³⁰ Like Inclán, the author, Manuel Payno, employs the *costumbrista* technique to add local colour to his sketches of Mexican life. The Mexico he portrays at the start of the narrative is definitively a bandit nation where corruption and outlawry have penetrated every level of society from the top down. The novel focuses on a scandalous true story from the Santa Anna era. In 1839, Colonel Juan Yáñez, Santa Anna's chief military aide, was uncovered as the leader of a country-wide criminal network, which implicated many prominent figures from the elite and extended into all sectors of society. After a public outcry, Yáñez and the other ringleaders were sentenced to death, but from that moment on, Santa Anna's government would be tainted by the stain of corruption, and the novel indicts his administration for creating conditions where men like Yáñez could prosper. However, Payno is somewhat less damning in his

²⁸ Paredes, p. 67.

²⁹ See Lloyd Read, p. x and Fraser, p. 90.

³⁰ E. Williamson, *The Penguin History of Latin America* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 264.

treatment of bandits than Ignacio Manuel Altamirano would be in *El Zarco*. While the Mexico of *Los Bandidos de Río Frío* is a bandit nation, Payno, a liberal *criollo*, is concerned to provide a more balanced assessment of the situation, displaying some sympathy for the poorest sectors of society. In *Los Bandidos de Río Frío*, such people have been driven into banditry by poverty and desperation, and have been exploited by men such as Yáñez, who use their political power for personal enrichment rather than for the benefit of society.³¹ To highlight the distinction between bandits of circumstance, who are basically good, and purely evil outlaws, Payno offers us two prototypical characters: Evaristo Lecuona, the bandit chief of Río Frío, and his counterpoint, Juan Robreño, a *mestizo* who fits the Robin Hood mould. Lecuona is the bad bandit, cruel and venal, who serves Relumbrón, a fictional representation of Colonel Yáñez in the novel. Evaristo Lecuona displays a kind of debased masculinity in his behaviour, especially towards women. This was often associated with Mexican bandits by Anglo-Saxon observers.³² Lecuona murders his sweetheart and later his wife with impunity, and we are told ‘no podía tener sino todo negro en su alma’. Interestingly, Lecuona is challenged by a woman, Cecilia, a successful market trader whom he plans to marry, for her wealth, before murdering her too. When Evaristo secretly enters her room, Cecilia responds angrily, one of the only characters to dare to denounce the bandit in this way. She exclaims:

“Atrevido, indecente, fuera de aquí! ¿Con qué motivo se viene a meter hasta mi recámara? Hoy mismo lo voy a denunciar al Prefecto como ladrón y como un arrastrado ¡Fuera!” (p. 264).

Cecilia then forcibly ejects the bandit from the premises, with the aid of her two loyal indigenous maids, Las dos Marías. That one of the most lively and colourful characters in the novel should be a woman, was indeed unusual for the period, when women in

³¹ Foster, p. 125.

³² Frazer, p. 58.

bandit novels usually played bit-part supporting roles to the men.³³ However, Evaristo's noble bandit counterpoint is a man, Juan Robreño. Juan, whose true name is Pedro Cataño is a *mestizo*. He assumes a new identity and becomes a fugitive after falling foul of a wealthy *criollo*, whose daughter is in love with him. Relumbrón, the fictional Yáñez, blackmails Juan and recruits him as a bandit leader of the Plateados, the infamous bandits of Morelos, who in reality rampaged through the region up until the time of Porfirio Díaz. However, Juan is the quintessential noble bandit, who robs the rich to give to the poor, rather than to serve the evil designs of Relumbrón. At the end of the novel, Relumbrón's criminal network is exposed, the villains are executed and Juan is able to leave the bandit life to be reunited with his long-lost love and their son. Chris Frazer describes this ending as a triumph for the 'passing of the old and bankrupt social order' of the Santa Anna era and a defence of the superior Porfirian state.³⁴ However, *Los Bandidos de Río Frío* can also be read as a triumph of the *mestizo* hero and the *mestizo* nation of Mexico. At the end of the narrative, the country is seen to arrive at civilisation in line with the nationalist rhetoric of the era, and in contravention of the Eurocentric discourse of prejudice against *mestizaje*.

A similar triumphalist national rhetoric, which promotes racial *mestizaje*, can be observed in another bandit novel of the era, *El Zarco, Episodio de la vida mexicana en 1861-1863* by Ignacio Manuel Altamirano. This novel was written in 1888, but only published in 1901.³⁵ *El Zarco* is set in Morelos in 1861, at the point when Juárez and the liberals were attempting to maintain control of Mexico. It recounts the government's struggle to overcome the Plateados, the Morelian bandits, who had previously supported Juárez in his battle against the conservatives. The Plateados were so named because of their silver encrusted charro outfits and cut a dashing spectacle, but Altamirano resists the

³³ Frazer, p. 127.

³⁴ Frazer, p. 129.

³⁵ Frazer, p. 118. For edition, see I. M. Altamirano, *El Zarco: Episodio de la vida mexicana en 1861-1863* (Buenos Aires: Espasa Calpe, 1943).

temptation to glamorise bandits in this novel. On the contrary, *El Zarco* is an indictment of banditry in all its incarnations and a rallying cry for Mexicans to support good government and to be progressive, virtuous and hardworking in their attitudes. Altamirano, more than any other novelist of the era sought to inculcate notions of responsible *mexicanidad* into his readers. He came from a humble indigenous background, but had worked his way up the social and political hierarchy to become a leading member of Mexico's liberal *literati*. As well as becoming a Professor of Law and Philosophy, Altamirano founded various political and literary journals, the most notable of which was *El Renacimiento*, founded in 1869.³⁶ Through this journal and other literary works, Altamirano hoped to accomplish a national regeneration, believing that education and learning, which had served him so well, were the key to creating patriotic, industrious and civilised Mexicans. His political and literary ambitions merged when he became a member of the Díaz government, and Chris Fraser believes that the novel 'confirms the supposedly "progressive" nature of the Porfiriato by criticising the failures of earlier regimes'.³⁷ However, in its inversion of traditionally acceptable racial norms through the pairing of a creole female heroine with an indigenous male hero, the novel appears to contradict the Europeanised, whitened version of Mexico that the Porfiriato sought to promote.

In the novel, notions of good and evil are constructed along racial lines, with the chief villain and bandit a *criollo* and the heroes an indigenous Indian and a *mestizo*. El Zarco, the blond, blue-eyed bandit of the title, and his Plateado cohorts operate with impunity in an atmosphere of official corruption, terrorising the law-abiding citizens. As Altamirano writes:

Los bandidos reinaban en paz, pero, en cambio, las tropas del gobierno, en caso de matar, mataban a los hombres de bien, lo cual era muy fácil y no corrían peligro por ello, estando el país de tal manera

³⁶ Lloyd Read, p. 148.

³⁷ Frazer, p. 123.

revuelto y las nociones de orden y moralidad de tal modo trastornadas. (p. 78).

However, the naive Manuela, the daughter of a middle-class creole family, is seduced by the dashing outlaw and runs away with him. She rejects her other suitor, the honest and noble blacksmith, Nicolás, for being an ‘¡Indio horrible!’ (p. 23). However, Manuela lives to regret her decision based on external appearances, as el Zarco is revealed to be a dastardly rogue, with no redeeming qualities. Meantime, Nicolás, protesting official corruption, is imprisoned and a *mestizo* rancher, Martín Chagollan Sánchez takes up the cause of fighting the bandits by appealing to President Juárez, no less, for help. Juárez grants him weapons and supports his appeal. Compared to el Zarco, Sánchez is supposed to be the embodiment of law-abiding, admirable masculinity. He is described as ‘el representante del pueblo honrado y desamparado, una especie de juez Lynch, rústico y feroz también e implacable’ (p. 141). Sánchez defeats the bandits and el Zarco is duly killed. Manuela dies from shock at the sight, in one of many melodramatic episodes of the novel. Nicolás marries her sister, Pilar, the embodiment of female virtue, and order is restored.

As Doris Sommer comments, in *El Zarco*, Altamirano, in the tradition of the Spanish American romance, collapses the distinctions between ‘ethical politics and erotic passion, between epic nationalism and intimate sensibility’.³⁸ In Altamirano’s novelistic vision of Mexican banditry, personal love relationships and nation-building were, necessarily, closely connected. However, the most striking feature of *El Zarco* is its inversion of standardised racial norms, with the heroic pairing of an indigenous male and a creole female. Here, Altamirano appears to be affirming the ‘positive value of racial mixture’, whilst warning against the all-white pairing of Manuela and el Zarco, which results in banditry and barbarism.³⁹ This concept not only opposed Eurocentric discourse on the subject, which tended to link

³⁸ Sommer, p. 21.

³⁹ Frazer, p. 120.

barbarism with racial *mestizaje*, but also opposed President Díaz's own racial recasting of Mexico as a European influenced society. Doris Sommer therefore views the novel as a criticism of Mexico's 'prostitution to foreign influences and exploiters' under Díaz, with *el Zarco* representing the exploitative European and even, tracing history further back, the rampaging *conquistador*.⁴⁰ Amy Robinson also views *El Zarco* as a challenge to the Porfiriato's 'official legitimacy'. This is because the good citizens of Morelos have to take matters into their own hands to tackle the bandits, as the corrupt establishment does not protect them.⁴¹ However, the problem with this theory is that *El Zarco* was set in the Juárez era, not during the Porfiriato, when large-scale banditry had largely been brought under control. Furthermore, in *El Zarco*, President Juárez, is seen to actively support the anti-bandit brigade, and their crusade against the bandits receives official government backing, direct from the Mexican president himself. It would appear that, rather than critiquing the government which he himself served, Altamirano was seeking to provide an alternative racial model for Mexico, albeit a model which in reality, late nineteenth-century Mexico, characterised by vast social and racial inequalities, was far from achieving.

Chris Frazer also believes that *El Zarco* was written partly to counteract the positive portrayals of bandits in peasant *corridos*.⁴² *Corridos* were ballads which were widely circulated amongst the lower classes, and which often centred on bandits' exploits, real or imagined. The bandit was most often celebrated in these *corridos*, as was the case with the real-life bandit, Salomé Placencia, on whom the fictional bandit, *el Zarco*, is said to have been based.⁴³ The popular legend of Salomé Placencia, lauded as a Robin Hood hero in *corridos*, is securely debunked in *El Zarco*. However, with illiteracy standing at an estimated eighty percent in Porfirian

⁴⁰ Sommer, p. 226.

⁴¹ A. Robinson, 'Imagining Latin American Bandits: The Literary Construction of Late Nineteenth-Century Criminality', unpublished paper delivered at March 2003 meeting of Latin American Studies Association, Dallas, Texas, p. 15.

⁴² Frazer, pp. 146–47.

⁴³ See Sommer, p. 228; Robinson, p. 10.

Mexico, it is unlikely that Altamirano's anti-bandit narrative would have reached many of its intended lower-class audience.⁴⁴ It was the *corrido* which remained the de facto method for learning about bandits for many of the lower classes, while the novel was the preserve of the middle and upper classes.

One nineteenth-century bandit who was able to successfully make the crossover from being a lower-class hero to a middle-class one, was Chucho el Roto. *Chucho el Roto, o la nobleza de un bandido mexicano* was published anonymously around 1900, though the exploits of the outlaw had already been reported favourably in various Mexico City newspapers in the 1880s, when Chucho, real-name Jesús Arriaga, was active as a bandit.⁴⁵ Chucho was a poor *mestizo* cabinet-maker, who, legend has it, fell victim to class and race prejudice when he fell in love with a girl from a wealthy *criollo* family. According to myth, Chucho was persecuted by society and was forced to become a fugitive. He acquired the name *Roto* because of his manner of affecting wealth with the proceeds of banditry. Dubbed 'el bandido generoso' because of his habit of supposedly never using violence during his robberies, Chucho, soon passed into legend as a genuine Robin Hood.⁴⁶ Though the facts of his life are at best sketchy, it is believed that Chucho was born around 1858 and escaped prison on various occasions, before being apprehended for good in 1884. He died in the impenetrable fortress-like prison of San Juan de Ulúa in Veracruz in 1885.⁴⁷ In the novel, Chucho dies in prison, though not before being reunited with his beloved daughter. Some of Chucho's dying words in the novel are, 'hiya mía [...] Sé buena, sé caritativa, sé honrada como yo lo he sido [...] Yo luché por todos los desheredados de la fortuna [...] Ten compasión para los

⁴⁴ Frazer, p. 118.

⁴⁵ See Vanderwood, pp. 19–20. The newspapers were *El Correo de Lunes* which named Chucho as a 'civilised bandit' and wanted to nominate him for Congress in 1884, and *El Monitor Republicano* which defended Chucho against some of the crimes for which he stood accused in June 1884 (Vanderwood, p. 20).

⁴⁶ Costancio Bernaldo de Quirós, *El Bandolerismo en España y en México* (Mexico: Juridica Mexicana, 1959), p. 343.

⁴⁷ Bernaldo de Quirós, p. 356; Vanderwood, p. 20.

que sufren' (p. 160). Chucho dies counselling his daughter to uphold his moral values of protecting the poor and disadvantaged, even though he has had to resort to banditry to achieve this. Like other nineteenth-century literary bandits, Chucho dies at the end of the narrative, but unlike most of them, he does not really repent. So why was Chucho el Roto celebrated in literature in a way that most other literary bandits were not, surely a risky proposition in the anti-bandit atmosphere of the Porfiriato? Amy Robinson and Chris Frazer believe that public dissatisfaction with the Porfirian regime was growing, and, by the beginning of the twentieth century, this disenchantment had spread from the lower-classes to the middle-classes, who were aware of the injustices of the regime and frustrated by their own inabilities to advance to the higher echelons of power and influence.⁴⁸ This discontent eventually fostered rebellions which initiated the Mexican Revolution of 1910. These finally unseated Díaz and led to a decade of civil war.

Chucho el Roto stands apart from the other bandit narratives of that era in its celebration of the brigand. However, the Mexican nineteenth-century bandit novels viewed collectively are significant, as they stand as contestatory narratives of nation-building. They were Mexico's 'foundational fictions', that is fictions which aimed to establish how the recently independent Mexican nation should view itself and to provide strategies for the future.⁴⁹ As the nineteenth century progressed, the bandit novel racially recast the Mexican hero as a *mestizo* rather than a *criollo*. Nonetheless, whatever his race, the Mexican bandit invariably had to reform or die, both for the good of the nation and to finally dispel foreigners' image of Mexico as a nation of bandits.

⁴⁸ Frazer, p. 184; Robinson, p. 24.

⁴⁹ Sommer, p. 227.

Resetting the Bones: Body and Community in version L of the Old French *Vie de Saint Alexis*

EILIDH MACDONALD

Broken bones, torn flesh, spilt entrails and copious amount of gore are all found in abundance and across a variety of genres in Old French literature, from accounts of war to the passions of the saints. Indeed, the frequency and intensity of these representations of physical brutality may appear to confirm the view of the Middle Ages as a period obsessed with extreme and mindless violence; though as recent studies, most notably that of Carolyn Dinshaw, have observed, the uses of violence in medieval texts and society are more calculating, purposeful and deliberate than this might suggest.¹ Rather than focusing on direct physical violence done to the bodies of martyrs, however, this paper is concerned with potential violence arising from the relationship between the early ascetic saint Alexis and the community from which he emerges and into which he is subsequently re-assimilated.² The image of fractured bones being realigned is, I would argue, entirely appropriate to the evolution of social relations implied in the life of Saint Alexis; it suggests the ‘correction’, according to the expectation of the genre, of the skeleton of the social body as vital to preserving the ordered existence of the organism. The survival of community in spite of traumatic loss or damage may be represented the bones of a living creature, since they are capable of fusing after being broken. Above all, the image of the city as a

¹ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities Pre- and Postmodern*. (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 1999). See also Richard W. Kaeuper, ‘Chivalry and the “Civilizing Process”’, in *Violence in Medieval Society*, ed. by Kaeuper (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), pp. 21–35.

² All quotations in French are taken from *La Vie de saint Alexis*, ed. by Maurizio Perugi, *Textes Littéraires Français* (Geneva: Droz, 2000); English translations are my own.

body calls to the forefront the physical being of the saint in both life and death, following which bodily suffering is replaced by spiritual perfection. This paper will examine the extent to which the saint may be read as embodying a transition between different types of communities, and considers the nature of the metaphorical break and the means by which it is healed. I will argue that it is possible to read the *Vie de Saint Alexis* as an exploration of how to accommodate and promote religious devotion within civic life while eliminating the threat of heresy.³

The *Vie de Saint Alexis*' early date of composition (mid-eleventh century) would appear to place it in the period of 'epic' literature. However, the representation of community and public life emerging from *Alexis* is marked by both pagan antique and medieval romance motifs and themes.⁴ The concern of the saint's father to secure his line and inheritance is an early indication that anxiety over filiation is to be an important theme, while his prayers for the intervention of God establish devotion as a means to a secular end.⁵ Alexis, the only son of Eufemien, a Christian Roman nobleman, runs away from his wife and family on his wedding night in order to live a life of poverty and pious devotion in Edessa. After seventeen years there Alexis returns to both Rome and the family home incognito, having shunned public recognition of him as a holy man by an image of the Virgin. He spends the last seventeen years of his life in anonymous penury, living – and eventually dying – under the stairs of the home, mocked and

³ In adopting this approach I am not taking issue with critics who discuss the tensions and contradictions of the text; these studies focus primarily on the figure of Alexis and his personal theology, particularly as it relates to marriage, and as such I do not believe that my study of the saint's body in its social context contradicts them. See Sarah Kay, *Courtly Contradictions: The Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century*, *Figurae: Reading Medieval Cultures* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 72–76, pp. 105–108 and Neil Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches 1000-1300* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 91–99.

⁴ Cartlidge, pp. 89–91. On issues of genre in hagiography more generally, see Alison Goddard Elliott, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1987).

⁵ On the significance of genealogical concerns in medieval literature see R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

abused by his father's servants. In his final moments, he writes a letter revealing his true identity. At the same time, another icon tells the people of Rome to seek 'l'ume Deu' (the man of God, l. 297) in Eufemien's house, and, fearing the imminent destruction of the city, they besiege Alexis's father, who has just discovered that the pauper is dead. The letter is only released from Alexis's hands when it is taken by the pope, and on reading it in public there is a mass outpouring of both grief and joy. Many miracles occur around the saint's body, and he is buried with full ceremony.

It may be tempting to read Alexis's trajectory as a circular journey, at the end of which he returns to his home city and is – albeit after his death – publicly acclaimed for the favour shown him by God. However, this return is markedly different from the return in disguise and eventual social redemption seen later with romance figures such as Chrétien's Yvain.⁶ There is no notion of disgrace in Alexis' departure as there is in Yvain's, nor is there any sense in which he would willingly return; it is God's will rather than his own which brings Alexis back to Rome. He has utterly renounced all symbols and relationships which would determine his place in the environment he has left behind. In particular, he rejects the honours embodied in and passed on from his father – nobility, wealth, status derived from proximity to the emperor – by choosing the religious life over the civic. When he parts from his wife, telling her of the frailty of mortal life and the need for salvation through God, he gives her a ring and his sword belt. This gesture symbolizes his absencing himself from the world of public and private obligation, and through it he leaves himself, in terms of the social networks which previously defined him, naked and isolated. The renunciation of property is taken further in his redistribution of the alms he receives in Edessa; prior to his being declared a saint, he is already a transmitter of favour. Emma Campbell regards this gesture as a form of continuous renunciation which '[performs] simultaneously as a gift and as a refusal of human exchange', a 'triangulation of gift relations'

⁶ The typology of romance does, however, become more prominent in later versions of the Alexis legend in French and English, notably in their more conciliatory representations of Alexis' relationships with his wife and parents.

through which the saint may please God.⁷ This refusal of exchange is potentially one of the most troubling aspects of this text, as it places divinity beyond the realm of what may be bought, sold or traded. In other words, the ascetic's total disengagement from economic activity is antithetical to urban life. In a more positive light it may be read as an example of the posthumous benefits earned by the poor through patient endurance of hardship, and in that respect Alexis' renunciation of the considerable wealth and power to which he was entitled by birth only amplifies his exceptional piety.⁸ Nevertheless, the spectre of a destabilized social order arises from the clamour of the people of Rome around the body of the saint. The search for the 'holy man', prompted by the voice of God heard throughout the city – 'Vint une voiz treis feiz en la cité / Hors del sacrarie' (ll. 292–93) – triggers fears of an imminent attack on Rome:

A l'altre feiz lur dist altra summunse,
 Que l'ume Deu quergent ki est an Rome,
 Si lui depreient que la cité ne fundet
 Ne ne perissent la gent ki enz fregudent :
 Ki l'un oïd, remainent en grant dute.

Sainz Innocenz ert idunc apostolie,
 A lui repairent e li rice e li povre,
 Si li requerent conseil d'icele cose
 Qu'il unt oït, ki mult les desconfortet:
 Ne guardent l'ure que terre nes encloë. (ll. 296–305)

At the same time they ['ses fedeilz', his faithful] are given another command, to seek out the man of God in Rome; they prayed to him to save the city and the people in it. All who heard it were struck with fear. Saint Innocent was pope at that time, and rich and poor alike

⁷ See Emma Campbell, *Medieval Saints' Lives: The Gift, Kinship and Community in Old French Hagiography* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 30–31. 'It is the saint's fidelity to this paradoxical logic that ultimately enables him to establish a posthumous relationship with his family in which, rather than being a recipient of the gift, he offers them the gift of salvation.' (p. 31).

⁸ On which see Kay, pp. 72–76, pp. 105–108. For a general survey of the sanctity of poverty, see also Paul Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, *Figurae: Reading Medieval Cultures* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

went to seek his counsel on what they have heard, which had greatly disturbed them. They thought the earth would swallow them at any moment.

Noting in the previous quotation that while the voice comes from the ‘sacrarie’ (sanctuary), it is heard everywhere, it is clear that the location of the populace outside the official places of worship draws an internal distinction between sacred and secular spaces within the city. The experience of anxiety, shared across different social classes, would appear to underline the message of the potential for universal acceptance into the Christian church. The fear of death and destruction may also reinforce the notion of Alexis as Christ-like, since, as Jesus’ death makes possible eternal life, so Alexis will both save the city and become a permanent reminder of the legacy of the resurrection. As is typical in hagiographic writing, the final lines of the poem are a call for the audience to seek the saint’s intercession with God on their behalf (‘Si li preiuns que de toz mals nos tolget’ l. 622). However, their immediate recourse to a religious figure whose authority is legitimized by his public office makes plain the hierarchy to which the citizens defer; when the pauper under Eufemien’s stair is finally identified as the man of God, his written testament can only be removed from his hands by the pope: ‘Li apostolie tent sa main a la cartre, / Sainz Alexis la süe li alascet, / Lui le consent ki de Rome ert pape’ (ll. 371–73: ‘The pope reaches out his hand for the letter, Saint Alexis lets it fall from his own hand, he surrenders it to the one who is pope of Rome.’). In spite of Alexis’ own renunciation of wealth and office, the circumstances surrounding his recognition as a saint seem to reclaim him for the elite class to which his parents belong.⁹ He may embody a radical mendicant piety, but his rejection of the social norms of his biological family does not entirely undermine the structure through which Eufemien

⁹ Paul Strohm identifies a similar strategy in his study of coronation as legible practice: ‘Analysis of coronation, not as an abstract pattern but as a practice unfolding in time, reveals the orchestration of these and other legitimizing effects, and also highlights those moments when the process breaks down, when the gears and wheels of the ritual’s smooth euphemizations are revealed for all to see.’ (*Theory and the Premodern Text*, Medieval Cultures (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 38).

– who is, after all, a Christian, living and exercising power in a Christian empire – defines himself. The complaint in the opening lines of the poem that the virtues of the age of the Old Testament have not been maintained into the present implies a call for renewal rather than revolution. Through close attention to the treatment of the body of the saint we will now assess the methods and motivations for the incorporation of this radical element back into the mainstream of orthodox practice.

The tension between the old and (supposedly) new communities reaches its climax in the scenes where Alexis' body is carried through the streets of Rome. Given that the group of 'feidelz' comprises both rich and poor, and also since their widely held belief is that the discovery of Alexis has averted a catastrophe, it is unsurprising that the people of the city should turn out *en masse* when the holy body is brought out into the street. Their adoration of the saint is only intensified by intervention of the nobles who attempt to buy them off:

Trestuz li prenent ki pourent avenir,
Cantant enportent le cors saint Alexis
E ço li preient que d'els aiet mercit;
N'estot somondre icels ki l'unt oït,
Tuit i acorent, nes li enfant petit.

Si s'en commourent tota la gent de Rome,
Plus tost i vint ki plus tost i pout curre,
Par mi les rues an venent si granz turbes,
Ne reis ne quons n'i poet faire entrarote
Ne le saint cors ne pourent passer ultra.

Entr'els an prenent cil seinor a parler:
'Granz est la presse, nus n'i poduns passer,
Pur cest saint cors que Deus nus ad donét
Liez est li poples ki tant l'a desirré,
Tuit i acorent, nuls ne s'en volt turner.'

Cil an repondent ki l'ampirie bailissent:
'Mercit seniurs, nus an querreuns mecine,
De noz aveirs feruns granz departies,
La main menude ki l'almosne desiret,

S'ils nus funt presse, ui an ermes delivres.'

De lur tresors prenent l'or e l'argent,
 Sil funt jeter devant la povre gent,
 Par iço quident aver discumbrement:
 Ed els que valt? Cil n'en rovent niënt,
 A cel saint hume trestut est lur talent.

Ad une voiz criënt la gent menude:
 'De cest avoir certes nen avum cure,
 Si grant ledece nus est apareüde
 D'icest saint cors, n'avum soin d'altre mune,
 Car par cestui averum nus bone aiude.' (ll. 506–35)

Everyone who was able took him up, singing as they carried the body of Saint Alexis, and praying for his mercy on them; there was no need to call out those who heard them, for all ran out to him, even little children. Then all the people of Rome rushed out as fast as their legs would carry them. The crowds in the streets were so large that no king or lord could find a way through them, nor could the holy body pass through. These lords began to talk among themselves: 'The crowd is so great that we cannot pass through it. The people are so happy God has given us this holy body that they have all come out. None of them wants to miss it.' The imperial governors replied: 'Forgive us, our lords, we are trying to put things right. We will give away our possessions to the simple folk looking for alms if they crowd us, and then we will be free to move.' They took gold and silver from their funds and threw them in front of the poor people, thinking this would clear their way. But what does this achieve? They did not want the money – all they wanted was this holy man. With one voice the crowd cried: 'We have no wish for this treasure, for such great joy has been revealed to us in this holy body that we have no care for any other thing, and we will have good succour through it.'

This gesture on the part of the lords of the city is a self-interested economic strategy masquerading as a gift. In an optimistic light, throwing their money to the poor might be interpreted as an imitation of the saint's redistribution of his alms, a view supported by the reference to 'l'almosne' (l. 524). However, if we compare this with the triangulated model of gift-giving proposed by Campbell, the rationale of the nobles is clearly different to that of Alexis. Where the saint continually gives away

his money and possessions for the glory of God and eternal reward after death, the lords give away their wealth in the expectation of immediate benefit. In this sense, and in spite of their being Christian and desiring proximity to a Christian saint, they may be analogous to the pagans of the martyr lives who are uniformly baffled at the notion of rewards for faithful worship deferred to the afterlife.¹⁰ Their attempts to move Alexis' body away from the streets where its progress has been halted can be read as a desire to privatize the veneration of the saint by bringing him to an interior space which, by virtue of its being enclosed, is easier to police.¹¹ For the 'povre gent' Alexis is a means to aid and comfort; this reverses the sequence of transmission in Alexis' almsgiving, since by indirectly honouring God through their charity to his servant they are also to be the recipients of God's favour in the form of miracles performed at the saint's tomb. These contrasting models of gift relations draw a distinction between the direct and the mediated relationships between the saint and, respectively, the general public and the nobility. The narrator's implied criticism of the nobles and championing of the 'povre gent' in this scene seems to enact the shift from a social order organized around inherited wealth and status to one in which all participants in the cult of Alexis are, theoretically at least, equal. The death – and Life – of Alexis has, it would appear, 'broken the bone' of the previous order by breaking off Eufemien's aristocratic dynasty and transforming his family's conception of eternal survival from one

¹⁰ In this parallel, we may see the work of containment here as comparable to Slavoj Žižek's description of pagan cosmology: 'The very core of pagan Wisdom lies in its insight into this cosmic balance of hierarchically ordered Principles – more precisely, into the eternal circuit of the cosmic catastrophe (derailment) and the restoration of Order through just punishment.' (Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute, or Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?*, Wo Es War (London and New York: Verso, 2008), p. 110). In this respect, the truly revolutionary nature of Christianity (involving total rejection of the notion of this 'cosmic balance') has not been fully realized by the Christians in *Alexis*: 'Christianity asserts as the highest act precisely what pagan wisdom condemns as the source of Evil: the gesture of separation, of drawing the line, of clinging to an element that disturbs the balance of All.' (Žižek, p. 112).

¹¹ As has previously been seen in ll. 292–93, the voice of God is heard coming from a specific sanctified place, implying the connection between builders of institutions and the deity honoured through such materialist acts of faith.

based in the continuous production of heirs who will assume their father's place (ensuring in effect that there will always be a father) to one in which paternal power attributed to God renders all believers sons, equal in their potential access to the riches of heaven.¹²

In examining the treatment of Alexis' body, however, I believe that we may conclude that the revitalization of Christian worship desired by the narrator is more conservative than this. Technically, as the poet insists in the epilogue, the saint's intercessory power is available to all through prayer, which appears democratic enough. But in spite of the popular devotion to Alexis demonstrated in the lines above, it is clear that the official machinery of the Church is the determining factor in directing the form of the cult and containing the threat of revolutionary violence.¹³ As I have argued above, the singling out of the pope as the first recipient of Alexis' letter privileges institutional hierarchy. It is not enough for the letter to be given to any Christian, even if he is the saint's father. Similarly, the reaction of the nobles to the prodigious miracles occurring around Alexis' body betrays the desire for official control of it:

Cil dui seniur ki l'empirie guvernement,

¹² Alain Badiou's study of the role of Saint Paul in the early church characterizes the revolutionary nature of Christ's life on earth, which is comparable to the potential outcome of the discovery of Alexis: 'For Paul, the emergence of the instance of the son is essentially tied to the conviction that "Christian discourse" is absolutely new. The formula according to which God sent us his Son signifies primarily an intervention within History, one through which it is, as Nietzsche will put it, "broken in two," rather than governed by a transcendent reckoning in conformity with the laws of an epoch. The sending (birth) of the son names this rupture. That it is the son, not the father, who is exemplary, enjoins us not to put our trust any longer in any discourse laying claim to the form of mastery.' (*Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. by Ray Brassier, *Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 42–43).

¹³ We might even identify a mirroring of the eleventh and twelfth centuries' increasingly standardized procedures for canonization in this part of the poem. While the production of a *vita* and evidence of miracles had already been required for centuries (though with varying degrees of rigour) in appeals for canonization, the later Middle Ages sees an ever greater reliance on papal authorization of saint's cults. In *Alexis* we see a speeded-up version of this process, and although the pope does not officially approve Alexis' sanctity in the text, his involvement in the process of revelation heavily implies the rapid completion of the process. Here, see André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. by Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 22–32.

Quant il i veient les vertuz si apertes,
 Il le receivent, sil portent e sil servent:
 Alques par pri, e le plus par podeste,
 Vunt en avant, si derumpent la presse.

Sainz Boniface, cui l'um martir apelet,
 Aveit an Rome une eglise mult bele,
 Iloec an portent danz Alexis a certes,
 Aaptement le posent a la terre:
 Felix le liu u sun saint cors herberget.

Le gent de Rome ki tant l'unt desirré
 Seat jurz le tenent sor terre a podestét;
 Grant est la presse, ne l'estuet demander:
 De tute parz si l'unt avirunét,
 C'est avis unches hom n'i poet habiter. (ll. 561–75)

When two of the imperial governors saw such impressive miracles they took him up and pledged themselves to him. By pleading, but mostly by force, they pushed their way forward through the crowd. There was a very beautiful church in Rome dedicated to the martyr Saint Boniface, and they swiftly carried lord Alexis there, gently placing him on the ground. Happy is the place where his holy body lies. The people of Rome, who so dearly wished to be near him, forcibly ensured that his body remained there for seven days. The crowd was enormous, it goes without saying. They had surrounded it so completely that it's plain no man could approach it.

Again, we see the tension between the ruling class and the wider population forming an almost impenetrably dense mass around the source of miracles; having failed to reassert their dominance through bribery and pleading, the governors are compelled to use force to achieve their ends. The transportation of Alexis' body, still directed by imperial officials, sees it being brought to a church which already has an association with a saint. This has the effect of further legitimizing Alexis' saintliness, first of all by bringing him to rest in a consecrated space, and second, through the implied incorporation into a community of saints. It is worth noting at this point that in the period between his return to Rome and his death Alexis continues to participate in the life of the church: 'En sainte eglise converset volenters, / Cascune feste se fait acomunier, /

Sainte escripture ço ert ses conseillers’ (‘He spent much time in the holy church, he took communion on every holiday, holy scripture was his guide.’ ll. 256–68). If the martyr represents the dramatic break from previous religious tradition, the ascetic sits alongside him as a reminder of the need to maintain the new faith. Nevertheless, Alexis’ nascent cult must not be allowed to flourish in spaces outwith the control of the church, and the throng of believers, who bring the process of institutionalizing the saint to a halt, cannot be tolerated for long. We might surmise that one of the principal reasons for this need to break up the crowd is that the life of the metropolis, so recently threatened by destruction through an act of God, is once again at risk from the cessation of economically productive activity. The stasis of the crowd is a harbinger of the stagnation of urban life. This is a narrative in which the identification and preservation of the ‘correct’ forms of civic and religious life is of paramount importance.

The ongoing conflict between the public’s desire for physical closeness to the body and the church officials’ adherence to form and legitimization reaches a climax in the account of Alexis’ funeral:

Al sedme jurn fu faite la herberge
 A cel saint cors, a la gemme celeste;
 En sus s’en traient, si alascet la presse,
 Voillent o nun sil laissent metra an terre:
 Ço peiset els, mais altre ne puet estra.

Ad ancensers, ad oriés candelabres
 Clers revestuz an albes ed an capes
 Metent le cors enz un sarqueu de marbre:
 Alquant i cantent, li pluisur jetent lairmes,
 Ja le lur voil de lui ne desevrassent.

D’or e de gemmes fut li sarqueus parez
 Pur cel saint cors qu’il i deivent poser:
 Metent l’en terre par vive poestét,
 Pluret li seigles de Rome la cité,
 Ne fu nuls om kis puisset akeser.

Or n'estot dire del pedra e de la medra
 E de la spuse, cum il s'en doloserent,
 Quer tuit en unt lor voiz si atempredes
 Que tuit le plainstrent e tuit le regreteirent:
 Cel jurn i out cent mil lairmes pluredes.

Desure terre nel pourent mais tenir,
 Voilent o non, sil laissent enfodir,
 Prenent congét al cors saint Alexis:
 'E! sire, pere, de nos aies mercit,
 Al tun seignur nos seies boens plaidiz.' (ll. 576–600)

On the seventh day the home for this holy body, this heavenly jewel, was ready. They lifted [the body] up, and the crowd let it go, whether they wished it or not it will be placed in the earth. It saddened them, but it cannot be any other way. With censers and golden candelabra, and dressed in white ceremonial robes and cloaks, clerics placed the body in a marble coffin. Some sang, most wept, they wished never to be parted from him. The coffin where they must put this holy body was decorated with gold and jewels. It took great effort to put it in the ground, the people of the city of Rome wept, there was no comforting them. Now there is no need to tell of the sorrow of his father, mother and wife, for they had a single voice in weeping and mourning him: that day, a hundred thousand tears were shed. They could no longer keep him above the ground, and willingly or otherwise they let him be buried, they take their leave of the body of Saint Alexis: 'Ah! Lord, father, have mercy on us, and speak well to your lord on our behalf.'

This tearful moment of severance recalls the earlier scene where the people of Rome are driven to find Alexis in order to save their city in the insistent dread of burial ('Ne guardent l'ure que terre nes encloe', l. 305). While the previous scene marks the beginning of the public sanctification of Alexis, the burial of his body seals this process, effectively restoring normality to the life of the city. The removal of this miraculous body from public view, against the wishes of the people, is a means for bringing both the saint and his followers under control, and the call to the saint which accompanies their departure from the scene institutes a more appropriate (i.e. conducive to civic life) form of worship. In the treatment of his body following his death, the saint's original journey into obscurity has been reversed. The lavish decoration of

his tomb and elaborate funeral ceremony have, in a sense, restored to him the material wealth he rejected in life, and in so doing they justify the powers and privileges of those who lead the ceremony. Donald Maddox reads the account of Alexis' burial as 'tangible evidence to buttress the people's faith in the saint's new intercessory role'; I would go further than this, and suggest that, viewed in the context of the preceding scenes of popular devotional frenzy, it not only supports but prescribes the image of Alexis as an intercessor to be reached through prayer rather than physical contact.¹⁴ In his comparison of the L-version with the shorter A-version, Maddox suggests that while the latter privileges the textual basis of the cult (i.e. Alexis' testimonial letter), the former privileges the corporeal relic, but this, I believe, downplays the extent to which the relic is brought under ecclesiastical control. There are no further references or allusions to miracles once the body has been brought into the church, and the physical barriers put in place by the coffin and burial of the body bring this charismatic cult form to an early and much resented close. The characterization of the holy body as 'gemme celeste' (l. 576) is matched by the adornment of the coffin, making the saint synonymous with containment and barriers, and simultaneously acting as conduit and shield between the mortal and the eternal. The spectacle of the funeral, traumatic as it appears to be to those who witness it, enacts a burial of the impulse to total abandonment of worldly matters.

If this reading is valid, then the representation of the community of faith in the final stanzas must also be reassessed. Alexis' family's loss of the means for biological reproduction is compensated with the gift of eternal life, but though their grief is shared with the other Christians at the burial (ll. 591–95) they appear to leave the scene on their own:

Vait s'en li pople, e le pere e la medra
E la pulcela unches ne desevrerent,

¹⁴ Donald L. Maddox, 'Pilgrimage Narrative and Meaning in Manuscripts L and A of the *Vie de saint Alexis*', *Romance Philology*, 27:2 (1973), 143–57, p. 156.

Ansemble furent, jusqu'a Deu s'en ralerent:
 Lur cumpainie fut bone ed honorethe,
 Par cel saint cors sunt lur anames salvedes. (ll. 601–05)

The people went away, and the father and mother and maiden were never separated, they remained together until they returned to God: their company was good and honoured, through this holy body their souls were saved.

The family with whom the narrative began are finally inseparable, and their salvation through their devotion to the saint means that their newly devout 'cumpainie', though denied any means of reproduction, is assured of a place in heaven. This would appear to be the ultimate comment on the social structure implied by the saint's retreat from the world, as they are now joined by shared faith as much as they were previously connected through their shared loss. Nevertheless, we might infer a division between the 'pople', characterized as being in motion, and the family, who appear to be static and whose only movement in this stanza is their journey towards God. Following their week-long vigil around Alexis' body as it lay in the church, the people of Rome once again become mobile, and leave the newly enshrined saint behind them. In spite of the unflattering portraits of the governors who offer bribes and use force to gain access to the holy body, the final image of patrician Rome is Eufemien and his family, who have finally grasped the significance of their gift from God. While they do not experience anything like the miraculous cures of those afflicted with blindness, paralysis, leprosy or other complaints (ll. 551–55), the prize for their faith in the saint is eternal life; they embody the transfer of reward from this life to the next, bringing them closer to the saint and to God than any of the unfortunates healed in the street. What this seems to imply is a two-tier model of devotional engagement within the Christian community. The named representatives of the social stratum Alexis left behind in his decoupling from the world are finally able to share in his view of this life as transient and insignificant, but the populace, awestruck by the miracles and disappointed by their limited access to the saint, can only conceive of Alexis' powers to speak for

them. Ultimately, the certainty of salvation attached to the ascetic life is not available to all, since, while ascetic saints like Alexis have their uses in the practice of faith, the complete dissociation from social networks implied in imitation of this form of devotion is incompatible with secular urban life. The relationship between the believer and the divine must be mediated in order to mirror the relationship between this life and the next.

In conclusion, the *Vie de Saint Alexis* seems to advocate a renewal of the virtues of the 'tens ancienour', but its depiction of the society coalescing around the body of the saint suggests something more complex and potentially troubling. The author-narrator affirms a form of community with his readers in his acknowledgement of the ubiquity of sin ('De nos pechez sumes si ancumbrez, / La dreite vide nus funt tresoblier, / Par cest saint home doïssum ralumer.' 'We are so weighed down with our sins that they make us forget the righteous life, through this holy man we should have our eyes reopened.' ll. 618–20), and the common experiences of fallibility and remembrance bind all those who call upon the saint in the shared hope of peace and joy in this life and everlasting glory in the next (ll. 623–24). As I have attempted to demonstrate, however, we can discern clear divisions between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' in the episodes of this Life which are concerned with the treatment of the saint's body following his death. The resistance of the people to the interment of the body of the saint accentuates the distinction between the lay and official cults; where those who have experienced miraculous cures crave physical contact with Alexis' bodily remains, the arbiters of political and religious conduct insist upon a more distant relationship characterized by prayer and deferral of reward. Having reminded the Christians of Rome that their aspirations should be directed towards the afterlife, the closing of the ceremony once again places a barrier between them and their connection to the divine. The unflattering portrayal of the nobles in the crowd scene might in isolation be taken as evidence of the elevated spiritual status of the abject, but in the return to Alexis' family in the aftermath of the funeral we see a continuing endorsement of the special piety of the governing class. While the

period of open display of the body of the saint and the accompanying thaumaturgical spectacle performs a vital role in re-establishing the link between the people and God, this 'fracture' must not be allowed to break the skin and become a festering heretical wound, threatening the structure of the social body.

Central Europe's 'War-Cry'

MARIANGELA PALLADINO AND JOSEF ŠVÉDA

As Europe gradually enlarges its boundaries, debates regarding the historical, cultural and political dimensions of accession policies become all the more frequent and urgent. However, such contemporary concerns are elaborated in a context where the Eastern borders of Europe have always been blurred, an issue that has not been resolved by recent enlargements to the East. Thus, the notion of 'Europe' seems to acquire greater urgency in the context of current territorial negotiations. This paper explores aspects of the old quarrel about European borders, both geographical and cultural, through a reading of Milan Kundera's enduringly influential and provocative 1984 essay, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe'.¹

'The iron curtain is gone', as Larry Wolff reminds us, and yet its shadow persists, its effects still reverberating in European consciousness.² The dissection demarcated by the Yalta conference epitomizes a longstanding metaphorical division between Eastern and Western Europe. Before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a powerful and persuasive idea of two Europes has existed and still persists. Western discursive formations and modes of representation produced the idea of 'Eastern Europe', a set of mythical concepts that has inevitably forged perceptions of East and what is doomed to be 'Eastern'. The West has fabricated a mythical East, an Orientalist imaginary, as Edward Saïd puts it,

¹ Milan Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe', in *From Stalinism to Pluralism: A Documentary History of Eastern Europe Since 1945*, ed. by Gale Stokes, rev. edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 217–24. The essay originally appeared in French under the title 'L'Occident kidnappé ou la tragédie de l'Europe centrale', *Le Débat*, 27 (November 1983), pp. 1–22.

² Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 3.

whose tropes organise its experience of ‘other’ cultures.³ As Žižek observes, this ‘is an exemplary case of ‘Balkanism’, functioning in a similar way to Edward Saïd’s “Orientalism”: the Balkans as the timeless space on to which the West projects its phantasmic content’.⁴ This essentialist and mythical construction of Eastern culture is also explored by Richard Esbenshade who comments as follows:

In the West there is a temptation to view history and memory in Eastern Europe as ‘out of control’, with tribal passions, blood feuds, and ‘primitive’ ethnic strife ‘threatening stability in Europe’.⁵

However, such presentations of the East as a source of atavistic violence are doubled in comic mode by the likes of Sacha Baron Cohen’s caricature, Borat, a popular archetype of the Eastern man, an epitome of the constructed traits often attributed to Eastern Europeans.⁶ Esbenshade and Žižek’s comments are thus symptomatic of Regrettably, such perspectives are maintained and validated in academic, scholars institutionalizing the notion of ‘East’ from discursive construct to an all-pervasive, inescapable concept.

Challenges to such misconceptions of the ‘Eastern’ end of the ‘old continent’ have appeared in waves, albeit sometimes from questionable sources, after all, it was Nazi Germany who sought to affirm the position of *Mittleuropa*, although the affirmation of ‘centrality’ rather than oriental marginality has also featured in the discourses of figures such as Milan Hodza and Edward Benes. However, the question seems fated to recur as exemplified by Kundera’s denunciation of the labelling, ‘Eastern Europe’. Drawing on a polemical tradition, his essay ‘The Tragedy of

³ Edward W. Saïd, *Orientalism*. (London: Penguin, 1995).

⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, Wo Es War (London: Verso, 1997), p. 62.

⁵ Richard S. Esbenshade, ‘Remembering to Forget: Memory, History, National Identity in Postwar East-Central Europe’, in *Representations*, 49, *Special Issue: Identifying Histories: Eastern Europe Before and After 1989*, 72–96, here at p. 72.

⁶ *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, dir. Sacha Baron Cohen (2006).

Central Europe' addresses the problematic position of the countries of the former Eastern Bloc as perceived and labelled by the West.

This paper explores the context and strategies of Kundera's response, seeking in particular to investigate its effectiveness as a counter-discourse. Drawing on Roland Barthes's work on mythologies, on earlier and more recent studies on Central Europe, as well as on current explorations of identity construction, this study aims to deconstruct aspects of Kundera's claim and highlight some of its crucial fallacies. In 'The Tragedy of Central Europe' Kundera claims that various countries identified as 'Eastern' (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary) are an undeniable part of the West and of Western culture and history. His evocation of the term 'Central Europe' thus seeks to remove them from what he argues to be an unjust 'Eastern' connotation. Kundera here draws on existing concepts of Central Europe which evolved in Czech contexts in the nineteenth century, ideas principally initiated by Josef Palacký and then T. G. Masaryk.⁷ Formulated in political and geographical terms, this initial conception of Central Europe was borrowed, re-appropriated and revisited over time in light of new and diverse paradigms and agendas. Thus, Central Europe has come to signify an amalgam of different connotations, from mythical to geopolitical. Kundera's championing of this cause is apparent elsewhere in an interview with Philip Roth in 1980, where Kundera made similar claims regarding the Westernness of Central Europe:

Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, just like Austria, have never been part of Eastern Europe. From the very beginning they have taken part in the great adventure of Western civilization, with its Gothic, its

⁷ As Taku Shinohara comments, 'from Palacký's famous letter to Masaryk's *Nova Europa* (New Europe), Central Europe has always been a region with a unique plurality where small nations could be guaranteed equal rights to exist and develop their own identity. [...] So, Central European discourse appeared to give emerging nations a framework of existence and even legitimize their existence.' ('Central European Discourses from Historical Perspective', in *The Emerging New Regional Order in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Tadayuki Hayashi (Sapporo: Slavic Research Centre, Hokkaido University, 1997), pp. 29–46, here at pp. 31–33).

Renaissance, its Reformation – a movement which has its cradle precisely in this region.⁸

Kundera refers to cultural movements which typify Western Europe such as the Renaissance, the Lutheran Reformation and the Gothic, insisting on the idea that the Eastern countries in question also embraced and developed such trends, thus being a legitimate part of the West. What he calls ‘Central Europe’, ‘an uncertain zone of small nations between Russia and Germany’, is thus not merely a part of but indeed a source of Western culture.⁹ As he comments in an interview elsewhere:

It was here, in Central Europe, that modern culture found its greatest impulse: psychoanalysis, structuralism, dodecaphony, Bartók’s music, Kafka’s and Musil’s new aesthetics of the novel. The post-war annexation of Central Europe (or at least its major part) by Russian civilization caused Western culture to lose its vital centre of gravity.¹⁰

Kundera’s analysis convincingly shapes his argument by mentioning Kafka, a pillar of Western literature. Indeed, Kafka represents an exquisite example to synthesize the complexity and fallacy of labelling: as a German, a Bohemian and a Jew, he is often associated with German literature and rarely with the realm of the Eastern cultural context. Kundera supports and propels his argument by referencing Kafka, Musil, Freudian psychoanalysis and structuralism, all crucial elements in ‘Western’ European cultural consciousness. He reiterates this concept in an interview as follows:

My country is not capitalist, nor I think it wants to become so again. And yet, it is an old Western European country and it wishes to retain

⁸ Ladislav Matejka, ‘Milan Kundera’s Central Europe’ in *Cross Currents. A Yearbook of Central European Culture*, 9 (1990), 27–134, p. 131.

⁹ Kundera, p. 221.

¹⁰ Matejka, p. 131. For a more recent examination of the broader context of East-West definitions of which this discourse is a part, see of course Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (London: Pimlico, 1997).

this identity. The West constitutes a common history, a common culture.¹¹

Yet, rather than challenging labels and essentialist notions, Kundera's discourse pushes the boundary of 'Eastern' Europe further 'East'. Drawing upon Masaryk and Palacký, he claims that 'Eastern Europe is Russia, with its quite specific history anchored in the Byzantine world'.¹² Kundera's study redefines the borders of Europe by adopting the same set of discursive practices through which the West structured the imagined East politically, socially, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and artistically. Of course, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe' omits to address the hegemonic discursive formations epitomized politically, metaphorically (and geographically) by the Iron Curtain. By positing itself between two distinct labels, 'East' and 'West', the formula 'Central Europe', acknowledges these discursive formations and functions according to similar structures.

Saïd's *Orientalism* sheds light on the construction of hegemonic discourses as pervasive modes of representation of 'otherness': the 'Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences'.¹³ Saïd's discourse conceptualizes in complex terms the relations between 'us' and 'them', self and other. The East is defined as 'other' over centuries in Western colonialism: an interminable series of literary, ethnographic, anthropological, scientific discourses that have shaped the non-European, or the non-Western as 'other'. Indeed, as Romanova Todorova argues, in the phenomenon of Central Europeanism, Russia 'was becoming Central Europe's constituting other': 'everyone has had one's own Orient, pertaining to space and time, most often of both'.¹⁴ As Michal Buchowski points out,

¹¹ Alain Finkielkraut, 'Milan Kundera Interview', trans. by Susan Huston, *Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture*, 20 (1982), 15–29, p. 18.

¹² Matejka, p. 131.

¹³ Saïd, p. 1.

¹⁴ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 12 and p. 147.

in the ‘Cold War period from a Western perspective the Iron Curtain set a clear-cut division into “us” and “them”, which was reduced in fact to geography; [...] the civilized “us” and the exotic, often “uncivilized” others’.¹⁵

Interestingly, Kundera himself reminds us of Joseph Conrad who was always irritated by the label ‘Slavic soul’ that people loved to slap on him and his books because of his Polish origins. Indeed, Kundera comments that ‘nothing could be more alien to what is called in the literary world the Slavic spirit than the Polish temperament with its chivalric devotion to moral constraints and its exaggerated respect for individual rights’.¹⁶ Kundera here appears determined to resist essentialist, romantic constructions of the Slav as a label and a categorization that might be applied to his vision of Central Europe. Such a deconstruction of the myth of Slav-ness seems of course entirely laudable, although it comes at the price of reifying ‘Polish spirit’. However, although Kundera’s strategy appears ostensibly as an attempt to offer a counter-discourse to the West, it ironically serves to affirm Western hegemonic discourses. Thus, while deconstructing the notion of a ‘Slavic soul’, he inadvertently imposes similar constructions by justifying Russian Eastern-ness through appeal to the ‘mystery’ of the Russian soul.

It can be argued that Kundera’s mystery of the Russian soul is a key flaw in his discourse: although he re-adopts the term ‘Central Europe’, he fails to deconstruct the attendant notions of East and West that serve to buttress it. Thus, as Timothy Ash comments, ‘we are to understand that what was truly “Central European” was always Western, rational, humanistic, democratic, sceptical and tolerant. The rest was “Eastern European”, Russian, or possibly German’.¹⁷ As Ash highlights, while ‘The Tragedy of Central Europe’ re-figures the post-Yalta order, it operates according to a similarly reductive dichotomy. Kundera pushes cultural and

¹⁵ Michal Buchowski, ‘The Specter of Orientalism in Europe: From Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother’, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 79:3 (2006), 463–82, p. 478.

¹⁶ Kundera, p. 219.

¹⁷ Timothy Ash, ‘Does Central Europe Exist?’, in *In Search of Central Europe*, ed. by George Schöpflin and Nancy Wood (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), p. 195.

geographical boundaries of the East to Russia and insists on the Westernness of 'Central Europe'. His attack on the myth of the 'East' and on the Orientalist view of what he terms 'Central Europe' is undermined when he adopts a similarly 'essentialist' and Orientalist perspective with regard to Russia. As Matejka remarks:

[Kundera] uncovered in [Dostoevsky] the personification of a strange, non-European mentality which lacks the Western balance between rationality and sentiment. 'In this other balance (or imbalance)' – Kundera insists – 'we find the famous mystery of the Russian soul (its profundity as well as its brutality)'.¹⁸

Here Kundera articulates a rather 'othering' discourse on Russia, drawing a line between two distinct, opposite realms and basing his analysis on a mythical appeal. Indeed, myth – what Roland Barthes defines as a 'mode of signification' – seems to lie at the root of Kundera's discourse where Western discursive formations find self definition in imposing sentimentality and irrationality on the neighbouring Eastern countries. Thus, the myth of the 'Russian Soul' that buttresses Kundera's (ostensible) counter-discourse, functions to reinforce the myth of the rational, balanced, (Western) Europe.

Kundera's use of Russia as a key other reincarnates Western power relations. His argument regarding 'Central Europe' as a vital part of the West develops as follows:

In effect, totalitarian Russian civilization is the radical negation of the modern West, the West created four centuries ago at the dawn of the modern era: the era founded on the authority of the thinking, doubting individual, and on an artistic creation that expressed his uniqueness. The Russian invasion has thrown Czechoslovakia into a 'postcultural' era and left it defenceless and naked before the Russian army and the omnipresent state television.¹⁹

¹⁸ Matejka, p. 132.

¹⁹ Kundera, p. 222.

The numerous hostages to fortune in Kundera's comments here will serve as the focus of this study as we seek to identify the modes of signification inscribed in such discourse.

A celebration of the West, and a portrayal of both East and West in mythical terms, Kundera's comments also evoke a previously absent and equally problematic vision of the West. His praise of the 'modern West' and insistence on its cultural authority and legitimacy epitomizes dominant modes of representation. However, leaving the geographical dimension of such geopolitical constructions aside for a moment, the notion of modernity itself raises numerous questions, Bruno Latour likewise reminding us that 'we have never been modern'.²⁰ Although associated with science, rationality and progress in Kundera's extract, such positive and empowering connotations of 'Modernity' gloss over the underpinning power relations, significations and oppositions the term implies.

Kundera develops his arguments about the place of modernity by incorporating notions of cultural authority. His evocation of the modern West 'created four centuries ago at the dawn of the modern era' restates myths based on established (dominant) cultural traditions. Indeed, in Kundera's terms, the modern era is 'founded on the authority of the thinking, doubting individual'; yet this celebration of the Cartesian cogito persists in positing reason on a higher level and fails to acknowledge the totalizing nature of its discourse. Indeed, Kundera's 'othering' of Russia has attracted some comment, the 'absurd exclusion of Russia from Europe', as Ash has it, serving as means to glorify a West in relation to which and 'Central Europe' can be located.²¹

Kundera's intervention on the map is realized through a set of arguments grounded on mythical perceptions of both East and West. His recurrent referral to Western cultural tradition finds its climax in a crucial appeal to Enlightenment as a synthesis of the cultural authority of the West. Kundera's remapping finds

²⁰ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans by Catherine Porter. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

²¹ Ash, p. 195.

legitimacy in the 'Central European' contribution to cultural movement such as the Renaissance, Reformation and the formation of the 'modern' era. The Enlightenment with its focus on the 'thinking and doubting individual' seems for Kundera automatically associated with Western cultural authority. Hence, his cultural cartography is based on reverential conceptions of Western cultural traditions. It is in the Enlightenment, the dawn of modernity, that Wolff identifies the birth of a crucial cultural, geographical and discursive division between East and West. In 'inventing Eastern Europe' Wolff traces the birth and the formation of the polarization of Europe between two conceptual and cultural creations.

It was Western Europe that invented Eastern Europe as its complementary other half in the eighteenth-century, the age of Enlightenment. It was also the Enlightenment, with its intellectual centres in Western Europe, that cultivated and appropriated to itself the new notion of 'civilization,' an eighteenth-century neologism, and civilization discovered its complement, within the same continent, in shadowed lands of backwardness, even barbarism. Such was the invention of Eastern Europe.²²

Here Wolff challenges Kundera's celebration of Western cultural traditions and his re-figuration of the cultural map of Europe. The Enlightenment established a 'developmental division of the continent': it 'had to invent the Western Europe and Eastern Europe together as complementary concepts defining each other by opposition and adjacency'.²³

What Kundera praises as the dawn of modernity, a tradition based on critical thinking, is its affirmation of a binary conceptual system: the division between the 'civilized us' and the 'barbaric other'. The 'invention' of Eastern Europe implies a process of exclusion from whatever is deemed Western (geographically, culturally and politically). Thus, the discursive map drawn by the Enlightenment excludes what Kundera calls 'Central Europe'. The

²² Wolff, p. 4.

²³ Wolff, p. 6 and p. 5.

‘Enlightened’ conceptualization of Europe, rather than acknowledging central European countries as its ‘vital centre of gravity’, discursively polarizes Europe. As Wolff has it, ‘Eastern Europe was located not at the antipode of civilization, not down in the depths of barbarism, but rather on the developmental scale that measured the distance between civilization and barbarism’.²⁴

The dominant Western discourse produced structural boundaries both on the map and conceptually. A peculiar yet neatly illustrative example outlined by Wolff is Mozart’s correspondence with a friend while travelling to and from Bohemia. As Saïd suggests, travel narrative is a mode of signification, a contribution to the stream of structuring discourses. Here, Mozart’s letters synthesize the mythical and ‘othering’ notion of the East. Fascinated by the city of Prague and swept up by what he sees as its exoticism, Mozart offers a celebratory and yet alienated account of his visit to the city. As Wolff points out, Mozart represents the ‘imaginative eighteenth century traveller to Eastern Europe [...] not at home in Slavic Bohemia’.²⁵ Although Prague is to be found north of Vienna and ‘slightly to the West’, Wolff notes:

[For Mozart] as for us in the twentieth century, it was a voyage into Eastern Europe nevertheless, into Slavic Bohemia. He marked the border crossing in the Mozartian mode, by adopting new identities for himself, his family, and his friends, expressed in pseudo-Oriental nonsense names: ‘I am Punkitititi. My wife is Schabla Pumfa. Hofer is Rozka Pumpa. Stadler is Notschibikitschibi.’ The curtain between Vienna and Prague went up on this frivolous operatic comedy long before it descended in its iron incarnation.²⁶

This extract presents an extravagant, yet crucial example of an ‘Enlightened’ representation of Eastern Europe flavoured by alienation, exoticism, imagination and fantasy. Such Orientalist views of Bohemia highlight the existence of structural and conceptual divisions long before the Yalta conference.

²⁴ Wolff, p. 13.

²⁵ Wolff, p. 107.

²⁶ Wolff, p. 8.

As Wolff comments, 'the idea of Eastern Europe is much older than the Cold War'.²⁷ However, Kundera's essay fails to acknowledge that such a division was established long before the iron curtain. By claiming that the countries of Central Europe 'have vanished from the map of the West' he seems to suggest that they were once part of it, included in constructions such as the Holy Roman Empire.²⁸ Interestingly though, he remarks that these countries have never been 'entirely integrated into the consciousness of Europe, they have remained the least known and the most fragile part of the West'. It could be argued, that this reference to the liminality of 'Central Europe' implies a tacit and inevitable acknowledgement of certain established structural boundaries endemic to the conceptualization of Europe, a *longue durée* figured by earlier oppositions such as those between Christian and non-Christian, between Catholic and Orthodox.

Kundera's mode of re-mapping Europe shows striking similarities with the cartographic upheaval associated with descent of the Iron Curtain. Churchill's speech, given in 1946, dramatically shaped the destiny of the European continent. By drawing an Iron Curtain from Stettin to Trieste, he reaffirms what Wolff calls 'a crucial structural boundary in the mind and on the map'.²⁹ Churchill's geographical determinism intervenes on the map of Europe to politically sanctify a pre-existing structural and conceptual order. Granted that such polarization happened long before the Cold War and was a product of the West itself, it is interesting to examine the rhetoric of power evident in Churchill's Fulton, Missouri. Here, both the polarization of Europe and the modes to realize it are a product of the Enlightenment. The geopolitical resolutions of the Yalta conference represent a significant cultural re-mapping. Removing Greece from the Soviet sphere, Churchill insists on a Renaissance and Enlightenment view of Greek 'immortal glories' as a crucial part of Western cultural heritage. There could be no mention of Byzantium, the Orthodox

²⁷ Wolff, p. 3.

²⁸ Wolff, pp. 218–19

²⁹ Wolff, p. 1.

sphere or the *translatio imperii* that bound Greece to Russia. His discourse operates according to politics of exclusion dictated by the vested interests of an established structural order in what appears as a conceptual rather than a geographical map: the 'East-West' is part of a mythical province not always able to map the entire terrain, as can be seen from the 'neither fish nor fowl' position of Austria, an 'Eastern Kingdom' in name only. As Todorova puts it, 'it is not symbolic geography that creates politics, but rather the reverse'.³⁰ Greece, perceived as the cradle of Western culture, could not possibly be placed on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain, under the aegis of Soviet power.

Kundera's discourse is realized according to similar paradigms: his argument for the cultural authority of the West dangerously shifts to politics as directly and fundamentally related to culture. Such a shift represents a fertile ground for reflection. Claiming that 'totalitarian Russian civilization is the radical negation of the modern West', Kundera associates Russia with oppressive and despotic politics and the West with culture, this perhaps unsurprisingly given Kundera's own journey from Stalinism to Reform Communism. Such a chiasmic construction creates two divergent discursive entities, Russia and the West standing for totalitarianism and culture respectively. Yet this claim overlooks the West's own history as a producer of totalitarian regimes and as an oppressor. In his rose-tinted panegyric of the West, there is no question of the latter's responsibility for the Holocaust or its role in other earlier pogroms and massacres: only Russia – Kundera's East, and the negation of all forms of enlightened culture – having a demonic side. Likewise, in terms of cultural and intellectual history, Kundera's account clearly neglects key interventions and questionings in Western traditions of thought. Postmodernism identifies the Enlightenment as the origin of the project of modernity, what Adorno and Horkheimer describe as an inevitable 'reversion of enlightened civilization to barbarism in reality'.³¹

³⁰ Todorova, p. 160.

³¹ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* trans. by John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), p. xix.

Indeed 'the dialectic of enlightenment is objectively culminating in madness', it is in itself a 'negation of modernity', rather than its embodiment.³²

Kundera fails to acknowledge the West as the producer and origin of hegemonic political structures (including Marxism, Nazism and nationalism), of their related cultural creations and of the ideological self-promotion that supported them. Van Dijk articulates such a dynamic as follows:

Positive self-representation and negative other-presentation seems to be a fundamental property of ideologies. Associated with such polarized representations about Us and Them, are representations of social arrangements, that is, the kinds of things we find better (equality, a clean environment, a free market). At this very abstract level these social arrangements are specifications of more general values.³³

The overall discourse of 'The Tragedy of Central Europe' seems to be infused with propaganda. According to Roland Barthes, myths are the dominant ideologies of our time: signification produces ideologies. Kundera's thus uses claims about identity to support his mythology and its ideological underpinnings. He justifies the idea of 'Central Europe' for its 'Westernness'. He claims that Central European countries wish 'to preserve their identity – or, to put it another way, to preserve their Westernness'.³⁴ Kundera further develops this concept by referring to Czechoslovakia (at the time) as follows: 'My country is [...] an old Western European country and it wishes to retain this identity'.³⁵ However, since his essay originally appeared in French, the question of whether he meant *národ* ('country') or *vlast* ('nation'), whether what was most important was location, language, ethnicity or some other concern, is a nuance lost in translation. These passages thus hint at the mythical import of a

³² Adorno and Horkheimer, p. 169.

³³ T. Van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. (London: Sage, 1998), p. 69.

³⁴ Kundera, p. 218.

³⁵ Kundera, p. 18.

discourse in which identity is a key concept, a ‘constituting element of myth’, the product of construction and artifice.³⁶ In this regard, George Schöpflin comments on Central European identity as follows:

Evidently, all identities are to an extent constructed, but an entirely invented Identity, one without any kind of roots at all, incapable of eliciting resonance from those whom it is supposed to define and serving no positive function, will hardly be a great success.³⁷

Schöpflin reminds us that identity in itself is an ‘invented’ idea; though while refuting Kundera’s creation of ‘Central Europeanness’, he insists on the absence of any ‘real’ foundation. Yet what seems to be an attack on the mythical tones of Kundera’s discourse, Schöpflin’s evocation of potentially more successful and authentic models of identity formation ultimately falls into a similar myth of its own. Against this and as part of more radical deconstructions of identity, one might cite Zygmunt Bauman’s comments:

[A] war-cry of individuals, or of the communities that wish to be imagined by them. [...] a war-cry used in *defensive* war; an individual against the assault of a group, a smaller and weaker (and for this reason threatened) group against a bigger and more resourceful (and for that reason threatening) totality [...] a simultaneous struggle against dissolution and fragmentation; an intention to devour and at the same time a stout refusal to be eaten.³⁸

Bauman conceives identity per se as a problematic term, since it necessarily entails a quest for affirmation of individuals who find themselves inadequate, yet the term retains a value in its local ‘tactical’ deployments as a rallying-call in struggles against larger, strategic, hegemonic tendencies.

³⁶ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, 1993: 121.

³⁷ George Schöpflin and Nancy Wood, *In Search of Central Europe* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), p. 18.

³⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), pp. 76–77.

Bauman's comments bring us back to Kundera. For all the problems inherent in his account, it is this quest for identity – for a Western identity – that provides the driving force in his discourse. It is the fear of dissolution from the European map that compels him to devour his neighbour. Indeed, in this dialectic of power, Russia is portrayed as the 'other', a threat to the integrity of Central European Westernness. As Robert Pynsent observes, 'new myths or new variants of old myths may always be created'.³⁹ Kundera's evocation of the myth of Russia is part of his need to reprise and forge for himself the myth of Eastern Europe. Subtracting 'Central' European countries from the map of the East, he stamps his own iteration of a geography of alterity certainly not of his original coining, but which he feels it necessary to affirm. This is not without its problems, of course. In evoking a politics of exclusion, Kundera embraces Western deterministic structures: the blindness to historical and ideological baggage inherent in his glorification of the Enlightenment and celebration of cultural authority inevitably compromises his arguments. Yet, at the same time, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe' stems out of a refusal to be eaten, it is a mythopoietic 'war-cry'.

³⁹ Robert B. Pynsent, *Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality* (Budapest, London and New York: Central European University Press, 1994), p. 44.

Molière and his Manglers: The Cultural Politics of *le patrimoine théâtral*?

NOËL PEACOCK

The title of this article highlights a controversy surrounding Molière's plays which has existed from their first performances until today. The *mangle*, originally conceived as a laundry appliance, operated by hand crank and more recently electronically, was used to express excess water from linen and clothing. In its figurative usage, the term has pejorative connotations, denoting not merely 'flattening', but also the distortion beyond recognition of the object placed beneath its rollers. This distortion can lead to the creation of an entirely different object, and in itself make a contribution. The metaphorical rollers between which Molière's work have been placed are multifarious. However, the ones which we shall examine are those of reviewers and producers whose comments are informed by, or set against, a cultural benchmark, the *patrimoine théâtral*, the theatrical heritage transmitted from one generation to the next. The term *patrimoine* goes back to the medieval latin 'patrimonium', with the dual root of 'pater' and 'monere' (what belongs to the father), and has come to mean inheritance or legacy. While examples of uses of the term in connection with religious or feudal rights are prevalent in most dictionaries, the Littré lists a generic application from La Bruyère, VII, 'Moins appliqués à dissiper ou à grosser leur patrimoine qu'à le maintenir, ils [nos ancêtres] le laissaient entier à leurs héritiers'. The term may therefore be considered to denote the cultural legacy inherited from past generations, preserved for the benefit of future generations.

Our hybrid approach will draw particularly on the German reception-oriented theories of *Rezeptionsgeschichte* (history of reception) and *Rezeptionsästhetik* (aesthetics of reception),

theories which have been applied mainly to the aesthetic of effect and reader-response in literature rather than to the broader canvas of reception including audiences and theatre reviewers. The method is particularly appropriate, given not only the participation by spectators in some of the performances (some of the best seats were on the stage itself, a practice which continued until 1759) but also in view of Molière's incorporating into his text some of their adverse comments.

While the term *patrimoine* was not used specifically with regard to drama in the seventeenth century, the equivalent notion may be seen in the form of theatrical *patres* handing down to successive generations of dramatists their guide to good practice, with quasi-pontifical censure of any deviations. The guidelines were drawn up specifically for tragedy with the Greek philosopher Aristotle enjoying a privileged status. These *patres* were not necessarily members of the Académie, set up by Richelieu in 1635 as arbiters of good taste and custodians of good usage in language, but more frequently ambitious rival dramatists and journalists seeking to make a name for themselves. From 1658, Molière himself had the protection of the King's brother and later the King. Yet, these conservative critics provided a hostile backcloth against which Molière's early plays were composed. In fact, Molière's first acclaimed full-length play, *L'Ecole des femmes* (1662), provoked a *Guerre comique*, which was almost as significant as the *Querelle du Cid*, a heated polemic in 1636 over the challenge launched by Pierre Corneille regarding the prevailing norms of dramatic practice. The custodians of the comic tradition, comprising mainly jealous dramatists and rival actors from the Hôtel de Bourgogne, castigated Molière for plagiarism, immorality, and for his failure to respect the rules of dramaturgy. Molière's play spawned a corpus of pamphlets and theatrical *ripostes*. Donneau de Visé, in pages from his *Nouvelles Nouvelles*, criticised the play as 'un

monstre' with 'une infinité de fautes'.¹ In his *Zélinde*, de Visé sought to stir up all whom he thought Molière had lampooned in his *Ecole*, women, nobility, rival actors and dramatists, critics and religious people, whose characters, he alleged, had been inadequately transcribed.² Molière had prudentially in December 1662 dedicated the play to Madame, Henriette d'Angleterre, wife of the King's brother. Molière's *deffense et illustration*, however, took the form of a theatrical entertainment, *La Critique de L'Ecole des femmes* (1663), in which he announced a new form of comedy, which, even if it departed from the rules of predecessors, conformed to the greatest rule of all comedy, that of pleasing its audience. These verbal scuffles were taken further by Edme Boursault, who took up a suggestion in de Visé's *Zélinde* of an apologetical parody of *La Critique*, in which the roles of defenders and opponents were reversed.³ Molière's answer to Boursault, in the form of another one-act play, *L'Impromptu de Versailles* (1663), was a counter-attack on the actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, in particular, on the acting styles of Montfleury, Mlle Beauchasteau, Beauchasteau, Hauteroche and Villiers. The attack is personalised with Molière and other members of his company appearing no longer under the mask of a theatrical *persona* but under their own names. Other pamphlets which sustained the conflict included Charles Robinet's mock encomium of Molière's defence and a restatement of the fundamental guidelines underpinning successful comic art in previous generations:

Je pourrais ajouter que cette *Ecole* est non seulement contre toutes les règles du dramatique, mais contre celles du comique [...] au lieu que

¹ Donneau de Visé, *Nouvelles Nouvelles* (Paris: Bienfaict, 1663), reproduced in *Molière, Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Georges Couton (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), I, p. 1021. We would like to record our gratitude to the Comédie-Française and to the staff of its library, particularly the then head conservateur, Monsieur Joël Huthwhol, for access to invaluable archival material.

² Donneau de Visé, *Zélinde, ou la véritable Critique de l'Ecole des femmes et la Critique de la Critique* (Paris: de Luyne, 1663).

³ Edme Boursault, *Le Portrait du peintre ou la Contre-Critique de l'Ecole des femmes* (Paris: Charles de Sercy, 1663).

la comédie doit finir par quelque chose de gai, celle-ci finit par le désespoir d'un amant qui se retire avec un ouf!⁴

Though Molière's theatricalised defence of his aesthetic effectively ended the *Querelle*,⁵ the animosity on the part of the Hôtel de Bourgogne persisted. In fact, it was revived as late as 1670 in a scurrilous four-act play by Le Boulanger de Chalussay (*Elomire hypocondre ou les médecins vengés*), which contained a separate text called *Le Divorce comique*, inserted between the fourth and fifth acts. The author accuses Molière of an incestuous marriage with Armande Béjart, of revolt within his troupe, and imputes Molière's career as a dramatist and actor to previous failure in legal and commercial enterprises. However, from the literary standpoint, Molière's success with Parisian audiences deterred further detractors. Moreover, de Visé, whose *Zélinde* created enmity between himself and Molière, wrote approvingly of *Le Misanthrope* in 1666, and even imitated Molière's comic techniques, and Robinet turned parody on its head, after succeeding Loret as 'gazetier', eulogising each new play and writing a moving epitaph on the dramatist's death.⁶

The battle against *L'Ecole des femmes* was waged on literary territory as Molière sought to challenge the established values and principles of the prevailing *patrimoine*. While there were charges of obscenity levelled at Arnolphe's discourse and at some of Agnès's naïve responses, Molière's *Tartuffe* and *Dom Juan* attracted an even more violent response from the moral and religious establishment. The 'mangling' here forced Molière to rewrite and excise parts of the play which had proved too subversive. The cultural patrimony was inseparable from its moral and religious origins. The five-year interdiction of *Tartuffe* from 1664 to 1669 was due to moral censorship from *dévots* with influence at the highest levels of Court, government, and

⁴ Charles Robinet, *Panegyrique de L'Ecole des femmes, ou conversation sur les œuvres de Mr de Molière* (Paris: Charles de Sercy, 1664).

⁵ See Abby Zanger, 'Acting as Counteracting in Molière's *The Impromptu of Versailles*', *Theatre Journal*, 38 (1986), 180–95.

⁶ See Jean-Pierre Collinet, *Lectures de Molière* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1974), p. 28.

ecclesiastical authorities. Already, in April 1664, members of a secret, militant religious group, the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement, were manoeuvring at Court to suppress the play. The Compagnie included Molière's former patron, the Prince de Conti, the Archbishop of Paris, Hardouin de Beaumont de Péréfixe, Vincent de Paul, and Guillaume de Lamoignon, the Premier Président du Parlement, with among its sympathisers, the Queen Mother, Anne of Austria. Less than a week after the first performance on 12 May 1664, *Tartuffe* was banned by the King, following lobbying from the powerful triumvirate of the Queen Mother, Péréfixe and Lamoignon. The play provoked some of the most vitriolic comments in the history of French theatre, with Molière pilloried as a demon and a libertine who should be burned at the stake in anticipation of his future infernal torment:

Un homme ou plutôt un démon vêtu de chair et habillé en homme, et le plus signalé impie et libertin qui fut jamais dans les siècles passés [...] Il méritoit par cet attentat sacrilège [*Tartuffe*] et impie un dernier supplice exemplaire et public, et le feu même avant-coureur de celui de l'enfer.⁷

Molière's initial defence, which emphasised the corrective function of comedy in a *Placet au Roi*, no doubt an expedient rather an expression of his professional and aesthetic practice, did not stem the opposition. Furthermore, his *Dom Juan ou le Festin de Pierre*, which, first performed on 15 February 1665, was rapidly composed to fill the gap left by the banning of *Tartuffe*, unleashed new opprobrium from Molière's critics who considered the play an offence to religion and to the King. Molière was ordered to delete a number of lines including the entire *scène du Pauvre*, which were thought to undermine the faith of believers and to be a mockery of the fundamental tenets of the Christian religion. The play was removed from Molière's repertory after only fifteen performances, and reappeared only in an edulcorated version undertaken by Thomas Corneille in 1677. Molière's text

⁷ Pierre Roullé, *Le Roi glorieux au monde ou Louis XIV le plus glorieux de tous les rois du monde*, Molière, *Œuvres complètes*, I, p. 1143.

was not published until 1682, eleven years after his death in the *Œuvres complètes*, and even then, in a version which seems, from the publication of an Amsterdam edition in 1683, to be unreliable. Molière did not reply to the attacks on *Dom Juan*, no doubt in an attempt to revive his *Tartuffe*. However, his rewritten version in 1667, entitled *L'Imposteur* failed to lift the interdiction, despite Molière's intercession with the King, who had named Molière's company 'Troupe du Roi' in 1665. During Louis's absence Lamoignon banned the play, and Péréfixe pronounced an *Ordonnance* forbidding all in his diocese, under pain of excommunication, to perform, read, or attend readings of the play. Molière's defence in 1667 was undertaken in the *Lettre sur la comédie de L'Imposteur*, a work published anonymously but which has since been thought to have been written by La Mothe Le Vayer in collaboration with Molière.⁸ Hostility was sustained until, through the good offices of the King, the play was performed on 6 February 1669. Even after the King's intervention the critical voice of ecclesiastics could not be silenced. The decree excommunicating actors was not rescinded before Molière's death, resulting in Molière's widow having to get special permission from the King for a sanctified burial, and, even then, one which was held at night without the customary ceremony. The rigorist religious climate in the latter part of the seventeenth century had singled out the theatre for special condemnation.⁹ The political establishment, buttressed by the Church, recognised the disruptive power of the theatre.

In addition to the rival dramatists and literary theoreticians and the cabalistic *dévots* a third, largely unrecognised, cohort of manglers formed part of the cultural *patres*. During his lifetime

⁸ See the edition by Robert McBride, *Lettre sur la comédie de l'Imposteur* (Durham: Durham Modern Language Studies, 1994), which is part of a trilogy of studies on *Tartuffe: Molière, 'L'Imposteur' de 1667, prédecesseur du 'Tartuffe'* (Durham: Durham Modern Language Studies, 1999); *Molière et son premier Tartuffe: genèse et évolution d'une pièce à scandale* (Durham: Durham Modern Language Studies, 2005).

⁹ See, for example, the treatise by Molière's former protector (Prince de Conti, *Traité de la comédie selon la tradition de l'Eglise* (Paris: Louis Billaine, 1666), who having brought together the writings against the theatre of the Church Fathers, was particularly censorious with regard to *Dom Juan*.

Molière had many altercations with his publishers, whose main imperative was commercial and not aesthetic.¹⁰ He experienced the difficulty of being an independent author in the face of the publishing cartel. Molière's unfulfilled aspiration to publish his complete works contributed to the cooling of his relations with the King and with the Court, particularly after Lully had been granted a monopoly in musical entertainment in 1672. After Molière's death, editorial licence bordered on 'mangling'. A particular illustration is the first pirated edition of *Le Malade imaginaire*, published by Daniel Elzevir at Amsterdam in 1674. Even the names of the major characters are inaccurate: Argan is transcribed as Orgon, Purgon as Turbon, Béralde as Oronte. La Grange and Vivot in 1682 indicated that their version had removed the errors from previous editions in which 'des scènes entières avaient été faussement ajoutées et supposées'.¹¹ It would appear that the edition of *Le Malade* had been compiled by someone who had committed to memory what he had seen several times on stage. A more insidious theory, advanced in the *Au lecteur* of editions published in Amsterdam in 1683 and in Brussels in 1694, posits deliberate falsification of the text by a friend of the doctors whom Molière had caricatured:

Ces vénérables Messieurs [de la Faculté], voyant leur art aboli et devenu infructueux par leur ignorance, et leurs momeries tournées en dérision, et que leur science n'était devenue que pure chimère, eurent recours à sa Majesté pour en empêcher l'impression, pour qu'elle ne parût en public et principalement en France...: c'est ce qui fit qu'un de leurs amis en mit une au jour ce même titre, n'y ayant ni rime ni raison....¹²

While there is insufficient evidence to support this polemic, it illustrates that the mangling of the text was not confined to Molière's declared enemies.

¹⁰ See C. E. J. Caldicott, *La Carrière de Molière entre protecteurs et éditeurs*, Faux Titre, 140 (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998).

¹¹ See Caldicott.

¹² Notice to *Le Malade imaginaire* in the Grands Ecrivains de la France series (Paris: Hachette, 1925), IX, p. 253.

So far, we have seen the complex nature of the politics of the cultural patrimony in Molière's day. On the one hand, there is an attempt by three groups with significant influence on the cultural life of Paris to prohibit or reshape Molière's plays. At the same time by virtue of the social success attained through the command performances at Versailles and in other royal palaces and the acclaim of Parisian audiences, Molière himself had become during his lifetime part of that cultural patrimony. With the founding of the *Comédie-Française* in August 1680, seven years after Molière's death, when the King brought together in the same theatrical space the actors from the Guénégaud theatre (which included Molière's troupe) and those of the rival company the Hôtel de Bourgogne, Molière's plays became part of the cultural heritage which future generations would preserve. The *Comédie-Française* is frequently called anachronistically 'La Maison de Molière' on account of the frequency with which he has featured since 1680. The ranking of numbers of performances of works by all dramatists from the theatre's foundation in 1680 until 31 December 1997 given below in the appendix are overwhelming testimony to his monopoly of the repertory:¹³

Molière's pre-eminence from the outset, which may have been due to some extent to the administrative input of his widow and of his faithful friend and actor, La Grange, was sustained until 1750. In 1710, for example, twenty of his plays and one hundred and twenty-six performances are recorded.¹⁴ However, the cult of Molière is forged largely in the nineteenth century and particularly in the *Ecole républicaine* from 1870, which raised Molière to the status of national icon, renaming streets after him, erecting statues, selling various memorabilia. The major edition of his *Œuvres complètes*, undertaken by Eugène Despois and Paul Mesnard, and the launch in 1879 of *Le Moliériste* gave academic support to the new mythology.

¹³ This list of plays attracting more than 230 performances has been taken from Salomé Broussky, *La Comédie-Française* (Paris: Le Cavalier bleu, 2001), p. 80.

¹⁴ See André Blanc, *Histoire de la Comédie-Française* (Paris: Perrin, 2007), p. 163.

Molière's popularity at the Comédie-Française has come at a price which the dramatist himself might not have wished to pay. The state control of the theatre, which gives a subsidy of two-thirds of the cost of productions, has restricted directorial and actorly inventiveness, at times censoring some of Molière's lines. The political control was most evident during the Revolution, leading to significant textual mangling, particularly of anything evocative of the *Ancien Régime*. Under the conservative leadership of citizen René Molé, references in *Le Misanthrope* to monarchy were replaced with lexis denoting a more impersonal governance. For instance, Philinte's 'Et je crois qu'à la Cour de même qu'à la ville' (I. 1) was recast as '[...] *au dehors* de même qu'à la ville', while Alceste's 'Si le Roi m'avait donné' (I. 2) became 'Si *l'on me voulait donner*'. 'Honneur' was replaced by 'humeur' and 'Paris' by 'l'Etat'. In *Tartuffe*, 'un prince ennemi de la fraude' was recontextualised as 'Ils sont passés, ces jours d'injustice et de fraude', and 'le Roi' under the new régime was transfigured as a new democratic authority called 'la Loi'.¹⁵

State control of both the actors and the running of the theatre as well as the appointment of administrateurs have also been thought to be constricting. In 1968, Jack Lang, who went on to be Minister of Culture and Minister of Education, highlighted the theatrical stasis, which threatened to turn one of the world's most celebrated theatres into a museum:

Aussi longtemps que l'Etat persistera à choisir comme administrateur un sociétaire, un ambassadeur ou un responsable de l'administration des Arts et Lettres le théâtre restera un vieux musée qu'il est devenu. Seul un metteur en scène de grande valeur aura l'autorité et la capacité pour modifier radicalement les mœurs et les traditions qui paralysent tout effort de transformations [...].¹⁶

The famous dictum 'ton Comédie-Française', evocative of a 'patrimoine poussiéreux', has been consistently levelled at the

¹⁵ See Maurice Descotes, *Les Grands Rôles du théâtre de Molière* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), pp. 10–11.

¹⁶ Cited by Broussky, p. 73.

theatre's adoption until recently of period costume and seeming lack of creativity in comparison with interpretations of Molière in other Parisian theatres. While each age had its particular interpretations, the Comédie-Française has been accused of stifling enterprise in its establishing a house style, including scenography and acting. The sets were constructed after frontispieces from early print editions of the plays in the belief that these represented the nearest the theatre could get to seventeenth-century performances. Sets would be used for more than one play. Sometimes this was not a question of fidelity but an opportunity to display the munificence of the national theatre in the form of ornate stage sets. Moreover, the reliability of the frontispieces has of late been questioned; not only did engravings betray artistic licence but these were also designed to captivate the reader's attention. One of the most notorious illustration of this unreliability is the one from Racine's *Andromaque* in which Andromaque's son, Astyanax, who never appears on stage, is seen in the arms of Phoenix (the engraver recognising that the child was the key to the dynastic problem, and to the complexities in the plot).¹⁷ Actorly styles were also handed down from generation to generation, as is indicated in several editions.¹⁸

Yet within these traditions there was a great diversity of style, from the archicomic readings up until the mid-eighteenth century to the darker interpretations, culminating in the Romantics weeping over the plight of Arnolphe or Alceste. The major divide in the 'ton Comédie-Française' derives from the 1960s, following

¹⁷ For a study of Molière's frontispieces see: Christian Delmas, 'Sur un décor de *Dom Juan* (II. 5)', Roger Herzl, 'The Décor of Molière's Stage: the Testimony of Brissart and Chauveau', *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 93 (1978), 925–54; G. Donald Jackson, 'Les Frontispices des éditions de Molière parues au XVII^e siècle: stéréotypes et expressivité', *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*, 14, 26 (1987), 37–59; Françoise Siguret, 'L'Image ou l'imposture: analyse d'une gravure illustrant *Le Tartuffe*', *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, 36 (1984), 362–70; Abby E. Zanger, 'Betwixt and Between Print and Performance: A New Approach to Studying Molière's Body at/of Work', *French 'Classical' Theatre Today: Teaching, Research, Performance*, ed. by Philip Tomlinson (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 117–38; Michael Hawcroft, 'Seventeenth-Century French Theatre and its Illustrations: Five Types of Discontinuity', *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 24 (2002), 87–105.

¹⁸ See the examples listed by Descotes, p. 9 and *passim*.

Maurice Escande's appointment as administrator (1960–1970) and his policy to open the theatre to new actors and new directors from outside, a policy continued by Pierre Dux (1970) and Jacques Toja (1978–1983), which reached its apogee in the appointments of Jean-Pierre Vincent (1983–1986), Antoine Vitez (1988–1990) and Jacques Lassalle (1990–1993). There is not scope to consider the history of *Dom Juan* and *Tartuffe* on the stage of the Théâtre National. However, examination of the reception of four twentieth-century productions of *L'Ecole des femmes* will indicate the extent to which the polemic was sustained beyond Molière's times.

The *Querelle* provoked by *L'Ecole des femmes* following its first performances was revived in 1924 by a production at the Théâtre Edouard VII, with Lucien Guitry as Arnolphe, whose previous productions of *Tartuffe* and *Le Misanthrope* had been in marked contrast to the interpretations of the Comédie-Française. The debate generated by Guitry's challenge to the National Theatre has escaped the attention of scholars, perhaps on account of the inaccessibility of material in newspaper reviews of the period.¹⁹ Guitry's *Ecole des femmes*, much acclaimed by audiences, departed from the traditional comic portrayal of Arnolphe, which productions at the Comédie-Française had based on early reception, not least on Loret's unambiguous description of the comic tone set by the performance on 6 January 1663:

On joua L'Ecole des Femmes
 Qui fit rire leurs Majestés
 Jusqu'à s'en tenir les côtés;
 Pièce aucunement instructive,
 Et tout à fait récréative [...]²⁰

Guitry's dark interpretation, which turned the play into a high drama in which Arnolphe invited as much sympathy as laughter, was no doubt influenced by his performance of *Alceste*, based on his reading of autobiographical comments regarding Molière's

¹⁹ Apart from a brief discussion of Guitry's portrayal of Arnolphe by Descotes, pp. 33–35.

²⁰ Letter of January 13.

suffering in his relationship with Armande. The intertext with *Alceste*, while interesting, would provide an anachronistic reading given that the reputed problems in the marriage dated from 1664 and not from the honeymoon days of 1662. Guitry's reading might well have passed without significant comment. However, a vitriolic debate was unleashed by a prefatory 'causerie' on 2 October 1924 by André Antoine, whose naturalistic production of *L'Ecole des femmes* at the Odéon in 1908 had come under attack from the *sociétaires*. Antoine condemned the Maison de Molière for its servile adherence to outdated traditions, the lack of time spent in rehearsal, its failure to move with the times and with the spirit of modernisation, its lack of expenditure on Molière productions, in comparison with the lavish sums spent on more modern plays, and its fixation with regard to the unities, particularly that of place:

Comment peut-on encore jouer *L'Ecole des femmes* dans un décor unique, alors que le texte de Molière y contredit. Voici un homme qui séquestre Agnès, et, au troisième acte, quand il a à l'entretenir de choses importantes, il ne trouve pas mieux que de la faire descendre dans la rue!²¹

In eulogising Guitry's innovative approach Antoine undermined his *plaidoyer* against the Théâtre National: Guitry himself employed a single set; Antoine's claim regarding Guitry's superiority over Molière himself was specious, or at best, paradoxical: 'Aussi, M. Antoine n'a peut-être pas été si paradoxal en affirmant que Molière n'avait pas dû jouer Arnolphe aussi bien que Lucien Guitry'.²²

Antoine's invective received much support. Nozière attacked the cultural patrimony of the Maison de Molière, whose weakness he considered emerged paradoxically from its strength. At one level, its talismanic contribution was notable:

²¹ Cited in *L'Homme libre*, 5 October 1924.

²² Lucien Besnard, *Le Quotidien*, 7 October 1924.

Il est vrai que les artistes de la Comédie-Française possède le talisman: la tradition. En vivant dans l'atmosphère de la Maison, en contemplant les images du passé, en applaudissant leurs aînés, les jeunes peuvent et doivent acquérir certaines qualités qui sont nécessaires à l'interprétation de rôles classiques. Ainsi, sans effort, se transmet de génération en génération un flambeau qui fut allumé à un feu mystérieux et qui, sans doute, est depuis longtemps éteint. Il serait absurde de tenir en mépris certains documents que possède la Maison.²³

At another level, however, adherence to tradition was thought to stifle effort and originality:

Ainsi, nous sommes amenés à estimer que le respect de la tradition est un indice de paresse et que tout effort original doit briser la chaîne de souvenirs.²⁴

The strength of Guitry's production was its modern appeal, which, for Nozière, was more reflective of Molière than the self-reproductivity of the Comédie-Française:

N'est-il plus simple, plus pieux, d'étudier un chef d'œuvre classique comme s'il avait été écrit hier, de chercher à bien comprendre la pensée de l'auteur, d'imaginer une mise en scène qui dégage le sens de la pièce? [...] [M. Lucien Guitry] a offert un Arnolphe que nous ne saurions oublier et qui me paraît bien être l'Arnolphe de Molière.²⁵

Antoine and Guitry found wide support from leading critics and writers, even to the point of their condoning Antoine's bellicose language:

M. Antoine, avec l'ardeur sincère et généreux qu'on lui sait, a fait en quelques mots le procès de la tradition [...] Les idées qu'il défend semblent presque toujours excellentes. Il pousse l'animation jusqu'à se montrer violent [...] Il molesta dans son discours la Comédie-Française. Il lui fit reproche de son inertie, et de son manque

²³ Nozière, *L'Avenir*, 5 October 1924.

²⁴ Nozière.

²⁵ Nozière.

d'entreprise [...] 'Guerre à la routine!' tel est son cri de ralliement. On ne peut qu'y applaudir.²⁶

André Antoine a célébré l'événement en faisant précéder cette prise de possession de *L'Ecole des femmes* par une conférence, disons une causerie à bâtons rompus. Ces bâtons, oui, il les a quelque peu rompus sur le dos de la Comédie-Française; il a allégué qu'on y 'expédiait le répertoire' et, que sauf à l'occasion du tricentenaire de Molière, on y mettait à mal le patron de la Maison. Laissons à Antoine la responsabilité du procès qu'il vient d'intenter à la Comédie-Française. Que certaines pièces classiques aient besoin de rajeunissement dans la mise en scène ou le décor, personne ne le contestera [...].²⁷

[Les acteurs de Paris] sauront du moins comment il faut le [Molière] jouer. Lucien Guitry le leur a fait voir, et la Comédie-Française peut en prendre de la graine. Quelle admirable leçon!²⁸

Reviewers sitting on the critical fence nevertheless betrayed sympathy for the substance of Antoine's outburst, if not its formulation:

M. Antoine [...] est parti en guerre, avec sa vigueur et sa franchise habituelles, contre la Comédie-Française et la façon dont elle 'sabote' les œuvres du 'patron' [...] Nous n'avons pas à prendre parti. M. Antoine a raison de protester contre l'abondance de certaines 'traditions' qui encombrant et alourdissent inutilement le texte [...].²⁹

M. Antoine a montré une certaine rudesse envers la Comédie-Française [...] Si le reproche est parfois juste en ce qui regarde ces dernières années, la sévérité semble excessive quand on se reporte au passé.³⁰

Other reviewers recognised in Guitry's interpretation a new authentic tradition, reflective even of Molière's performance of the text:

²⁶ Pierre Brisson, *Les Annales*, 12 October 1924.

²⁷ Louis Schneider, *Le Gaulois*, 3 October 1924.

²⁸ Lucien Descaves, *L'Intransigeant*, 3 October 1924.

²⁹ Etienne Rey, *Opinion*, 10 October 1924.

³⁰ A.de Bersaucourt, *Le Figaro*, 25 October 1924.

M. Lucien Guitry joue Arnolphe d'une façon qu'après l'avoir vu l'on n'admet pas que ce rôle pût être joué autrement.³¹

Il faut admirer et même avec gratitude, cette interprétation de Guitry, également chair et pensée, et qui plonge au plus profond de l'humain [...] C'est la perfection d'un art depuis longtemps souverain.³²

Il me semble que Guitry est revenu à la véritable tradition de Molière. Et puis ça m'est égal, après tout, car son Arnolphe est merveilleux.³³

The backlash from the Comédie-Française and its supporters was immediate. Some gave a facile challenge in reasserting, without particular evidence, the supremacy of the Comédie-Française:

Certes, la tradition qui n'est pas du tout le maintien de l'exécution scénique d'un ouvrage, mais le pieux respect de la pensée créatrice, la tradition, qui n'a rien de commun avec la routine, ne redoute pas plus les coups de pied de M. Lucien Guitry que les diatribes de M. Antoine. L'un et l'autre seront depuis longtemps oubliées que la Comédie-Française, toujours vivante, toujours jeune, conservera sur ses planches une interprétation des classiques où l'esprit autant que le texte des auteurs anciens resplendira d'une éternelle jeunesse.³⁴

Quoi qu'en ait dit M. Antoine en une causerie avant la représentation, la tradition a du bon...après l'intéressante expérience d'hier, nous retournerons avec plaisir entendre *L'Ecole des femmes*... à la Comédie-Française.³⁵

The actress, Béatrix Dussane, defended the Comédie-Française's special relationship with Molière as one which had evolved from the deferential respect shown to a parent (in response to Gaston de Pawlowski portrayal of their Molière as a 'parent pauvre') to the liberty of friendship:

³¹ André Bleau, *Echo de Paris*, cited in *Bonsoir*, 4 October 1924.

³² Georges Pioch, *Ere Nouvelle*, cited in *Bonsoir*, *ibid.*

³³ Pierre Veber, *Le Petit Journal*, cited in *Bonsoir*, *ibid.*

³⁴ Emile Mas, *Le Petit Bleu*, 2 October 1924.

³⁵ Madeline, *L'Eclair*, 2 October 1924.

Pendant des années on a reproché à la Comédie sa pompe, sa lenteur, le respect excessif qu'elle apportait, disait-on, à ses interprétations. Nous avons réagi. Nous avons essayé d'aborder les grands chefs d'œuvres comiques avec plus de liberté, de traiter Molière non en pontife mais en ami.³⁶

The major *riposte*, however, came in the form of a hastily revived matinee on Sunday 13 October of the *Comédie-Française*'s production of the play, with scenery dating back to its 1914 production. All the critics and reviewers were issued a special invitation to a performance, which, not unsurprisingly, was acclaimed with ten curtain calls at the end and rounds of applause throughout. The vendetta provoked by Guitry's challenge to the Maison's proprietorial claim to the Molière legacy was sustained in Emile Mas's vituperative hyperboles:

Quelle magnifique journée! J'ai assisté à bien des manifestations à la Comédie-Française depuis quarante ans; j'en vis rarement d'aussi vibrantes! [...] Il fallait venger la Comédie des calomnies que le plus haineux de ses ennemis avait osé perfidement formuler contre elle, à voix haute, sur les planches d'un autre théâtre!³⁷

Gabriel Boissy, who had earlier dismissed Guitry as one of the 'francs-tireurs du théâtre', ascribed the attacks of detractors of the Comédie-Française, in his review, entitled with unconscious irony, 'La 'représentation exceptionnelle' de *L'Ecole des femmes*', to a lack of familiarity and prejudice:

Cette matinée-réponse de la Comédie-Française a été ce qu'elle devait être, ce que nous savions, quand nous la demandions, qu'elle serait: brillante, péremptoire et surprenante pour nombre de ceux qui daubent sur la Maison parce qu'ils la connaissent mal. On en voyait même qui, si impressionnés qu'ils fussent, s'efforçaient sans succès de découvrir la petite bête.³⁸

³⁶ Une lettre de Mme Dussane sur l'esthétique molièresque, *Comoedia*, 4 October 1924.

³⁷ Emile Mas, *Le Petit Bleu*, 14 October 1924.

³⁸ Gabriel Boissy, *Comoedia*, 13 October 1924.

While the theatrical enterprise was legitimised as a defence of Molière's status as a comic dramatist, the true rationale deceived none of the reviewers:

C'était comme un plaidoyer *pro domo* (*pro domo Molieri*), et il était, convenons-en, parfaitement légitime.³⁹

Moreover, the defenders of the Comédie-Française's orthodoxy were seemingly unaware of the tradition introduced in the theatre in the nineteenth century, initially by Provost in 1839 and subsequently by Got, which gave a more melancholic, even morose depiction of Arnolphe.⁴⁰

This second *Querelle de L'Ecole des femmes* had engaged Parisian literary circles. Even before the matinee performance, the event was seen as a potentially defining moment in the production of 'classical' works:

Grosse affaire. On se bat autour de *L'Ecole des femmes*. Magnifique époque celle qui permet à Antoine et à Lucien de riposter en présentant l'objet du litige [...] L'angle sous lequel il convient de regarder et admirer les chefs d'œuvres classiques peut changer.⁴¹

Hostilities were continued in the *counter-ripostes* by Guitry's son:

Je respecte toutes les opinions [...] Mais quand elles sont dictées par l'incompétence et le parti pris, quand elles ont pour guide la mauvaise foi ou la méchanceté, quand elles ont pour mobile l'intérêt ou la vengeance, elles m'inspirent du mépris, parfois de la colère – et souvent du dégoût. Trente représentations consécutives de *L'Ecole des femmes* sur un théâtre du Boulevard. Je mets au défi la Maison de Molière, elle-même, d'en pouvoir faire autant⁴²

The exchange continued with Lucien Guitry's ironic praise of the Comédie-Française's restoral of the play to its central axis, and his

³⁹ E. Sée, *Bonsoir*, October 1924.

⁴⁰ See Descotes, pp. 28–31.

⁴¹ Paul Lombard, *La Renaissance politique, littéraire, artistique*, 11 October 1924.

⁴² Sacha Guitry, *Candide*, 30 October 1924.

dismissal of tradition as an actorly accretion, perpetuated by the theatrically indolent:

Il paraît, d'après certains dires, dont l'imprimeur a fait des écrits, que j'ai désaxé la pièce; ça n'a aucune importance puisque, à l'instigation de ces mêmes personnes, une matinée purificatrice et qui fut triomphale, a eu lieu douze jours plus tard dans la Basilique même, et que *L'Ecole des femmes*, désormais réaxée, connaîtra sans doute de nouveau et bientôt des destinées éclatantes [...] Les traditions, c'est ce que les acteurs, individuellement et sans y être priés, ajoutent à leur rôle [...] Ces traditions, chose curieuse, ne sont vérifiées par personne [...] Quant à la tradition, je vais vous dire tout ce que j'en pense en deux mots: c'est la déesse des paresseux.⁴³

The crux of the debate, the question of authoriality, was theorised in a penetrating reply to defenders of tradition by a civil servant, Jacques Arnavon, who had previously supported Antoine's naturalistic reading of the play, and whose later publications would have significant influence on exegesis, both for producers and for Moliéristes. The author's intellectual copyright, for Arnavon, should not survive him. The intentionalist fallacy was largely unquestioned in 1924, as Arnavon indicated:

Se conformer, pour l'interprétation, aux intentions de l'auteur, tant qu'il est vivant, ou tant que son souvenir personnel est encore présent dans les mémoires, rien de plus naturel et de plus légitime; mais dès qu'une œuvre, que le génie a marquée, sort, par sa durée, non seulement du cadre d'une vie humaine, mais même de cette forme particulière du souvenir qu'on pourrait appeler visuelle ou sensible, elle échappe, par la force des choses, à celui qui l'a créée.⁴⁴

The real manglers, for Arnavon, are therefore not those who depart from traditional interpretations but those who try to recreate the original staging:

Vouloir reconstituer l'*Alceste* de 1666 ou le *Tartuffe* de 1669, c'est d'abord rapetisser et presque mutiler ces merveilles, car on arrive à les dépouiller de tout ce que les âges successifs ont incarné en eux. Un

⁴³ *Candide*, 26 November 1924.

⁴⁴ *Comoedia*, 12 October 1924.

papillon aux ailes brillantes ne saurait rentrer dans la triste chrysalide d'où il est sorti [...] L'œuvre dépasse, et souvent même, éclipse l'auteur.⁴⁵

Long before Barthes and Foucault, Arnavon emphasised responsibility to the work and not to the author. In this regard, Arnavon seeks to encourage respect for a new tradition, not the material reproduction of stage business and modes of interpretation, but an indefinable, intense spiritual communion with the work and its beauty. Decrying any notion of definitive interpretation ('les personnages de Molière sont en perpetual devenir'), Arnavon advocated what Barthes would later identify as the authentic audience response in 'le plaisir du texte', deploying Molière's theoretical justification against those who would claim to be his cultural heirs and the legitimate interpreters of his work:

Molière dit dans la *Critique* (sc. VII): 'Ne consultons dans une comédie que l'effet qu'elle fait sur nous'. Il a cent fois raison. Tous les débats du monde, y compris celui-ci, ne sont rien à côté d'un grand suffrage public, si celui-ci est vaste, durable, sans réplique.⁴⁶

In the more recent, post '68 culture, the paradoxical position of the Maison was perhaps best captured by Guy Dumur in 1972:

En ce qui me concerne, à chaque spectacle de la Comédie-Française, je me sens déchiré entre mon attirance pour ce passé et le regret de ne pas voir cette admirable machine au service d'un art neuf.⁴⁷

However, Jean-Paul Roussillon's revisting of Guitry's dark interpretation of *L'Ecole des femmes* in 1973 provoked appreciation of what earlier defenders of the traditions of the Maison would have condemned as 'mangling'. Roussillon's *L'Avare* had already provoked outrage in 1969 ('C'est Molière

⁴⁵ *Comoedia*.

⁴⁶ *Comoedia*.

⁴⁷ *Comédie-Française*, 10 (June 1972), p. 21.

qu'on assassine').⁴⁸ However, when reprised in 1989, it was regarded as a model of its kind ('cette représentation est la perfection même, celle d'un acteur, d'une troupe et d'une mise en scène').⁴⁹ Roussillon's *George Dandin* in 1970 was generally well received, though it has to be said that Roger Planchon's iconoclastic production in 1968 at Villeurbanne had already prepared the ground. The changed perception of the Maison is reflected in Jean-Jacques Gautier's defence of the dark revisionism which four years earlier he had deplored. The attack on *L'Avare* made by a future member of the Académie Française could have checked Roussillon's innovative approach and seen the Maison revert to its traditional interpretations:

M. Jean-Paul Roussillon, responsable de ce massacre, de cet assassinat, fait le plus grand tort à l'ouvrage, en donne l'idée la plus fautive qui soit et gâche avec volupté le talent reconnu d'acteurs de qualité [...] On ne devrait pas, dans cette Maison, laisser faire n'importe quoi par le premier sociétaire venu.⁵⁰

Ironically, this upholder of the Maison's traditionalism became, with regard to Roussillon's *L'Ecole des femmes* in 1973, the defender of its theatrical experimentation, in his pre-emptive strike to ward off the kind of attacks he had four years previously levelled at Roussillon's *L'Avare*:

Ne croyez pas les gens qui dénigrent le spectacle. Ou plaignez-les. C'est d'abord qu'ils ne s'y connaîtront point en théâtre [...] les mécontents n'aiment sûrement pas Molière autant que nous, car, comme dit l'autre 'ce n'est pas pour me vanter' mais, de ce texte archiconnu, j'ai oui, grâce à l'actuelle interprétation, des passages que je n'avais point jusqu'alors vraiment entendus.⁵¹

The major innovation was the dual interpretation of the play with two actors on alternate nights playing Arnolphe and Horace. In

⁴⁸ Jean Dutourd, *France-Soir*, 24 September 1969.

⁴⁹ Pierre Marcabru, *Le Figaro*, 19 June 1989.

⁵⁰ Jean-Jacques Gautier, *Le Figaro*, 24 September 1969.

⁵¹ *Le Figaro*, 14 May 1973.

rehearsal the two actors playing Arnolphe saw in each other's performance, as in a theatrical mirror, their alter ego, an effect created for audiences who attended on consecutive evenings. Michel Aumont played Arnolphe as a sadistic, demoniacal figure, a despotic exploiter of women, a character Roussillon compared to Hitler:

J'imagine assez bien Hitler commençant à dire: 'Il ne faut plus de Juifs; il faut les tuer!' Autour de lui, les gens ont d'abord dit 'non' et puis petit à petit...c'est arrivé. Arnolphe a dit: 'J'ai éduqué une petite fille pour la rendre idiote...je vous invite à souper, vous allez voir ce que cela donne!' On a dit, également, d'abord 'non'. Mais supposez que l'expérience dure un mois, un an, et qu'elle réussisse. Dans toute la ville, on l'imiterait, et il y aurait une autre ville, et le monde entier. C'est en ce sens que la pièce est monstrueuse. Parce que, pour beaucoup d'hommes, la femme est un objet.⁵²

Pierre Dux's portrayal, in marked contrast to his entirely comic interpretation in his production some ten years previously, captured pathos in the role, particularly in the humiliating end to which his animalistic passion for Agnès reduces him; Arnolphe's loss of dignity is symbolised sartorially by the progressive divesting of costume culminating in his appearance at the end, wigless and 'en chemise'. The doubling of Arnolphe is matched by the dual mirror held up to him by the doubling of Horace: Aumont is confronted by Raymond Aquaviva's romantic, naïve *étourdi*, while Dux faces the more libertine Michel Duchaussoy, whose leather jacket clashes with the period costume of the rest of the cast.

The addition to Molière's cast of three old men patrolling at the beginning and in between each act drew attention to the street setting and to the culture of neighbours spying on one another. The symbolic décor of a circular fortress, enclosed by a low wall, a mini-bastille comprising three towers, set against a background of trees full of buds, created a carceral atmosphere as dark as anything depicted by Guitry. The revolving stage, which allowed an interior and exterior perspective, went beyond Antoine's

⁵² 'Un entretien avec Jean-Paul Roussillon', *L'Education*, 9 June 1973.

naturalistic invention. There was some adverse comment, such as Philippe Sénart's stricture of 'forteresse rébarbative', Pierre Marcabru's failure to perceive the symbolism ('On dirait que l'on a planté la prison de la Santé au milieu de la scène de la Comédie-Française'), and Raymonde Temkine's begrudging admission that the production was saved by the acting of the seventeen-year-old Isabelle Adjani in the role of Agnès.⁵³ However, in the main, reviews hailed the Comédie-Française's departure from the 'règles vétustes' as one of the best renderings of the play since Louis Jouvet's iconic production in 1936.⁵⁴

Roussillon's psychoanalytical approach, which reflected Charles Mauron's oedipal rereading of Molière, was further developed by László Marton at the Helsinki National Theatre in 1976.⁵⁵ The décor, designed by Miklos Ferrer, gave the impression of a concentration camp, with heavy black palings enclosing Agnès's house, which looked like a large black revolving fortress. The contrast between Ferrer's set and Chauveau's early engraving in 1663 shows the scenographical distance travelled in three hundred years. Arnolphe's paranoid obsession with cuckoldry is choreographed not with three old men as in the Roussillon production but with extras clad in body suits simulating engagement in a sex orgy. The *coups de bâton* Arnolphe threatens in Molière's text are replaced by flagellation, both of the servants and of himself. The *bâton*, symbol of the *barbon*, is replaced by a whip, which becomes at the end an instrument of suicide, a noose with which Arnolphe can hang himself. The dramatisation of Arnolphe's internal conflict, caught between voyeurism and demonic fantasising, between frenetic sexuality and emotional insecurity, is a far cry from the traditional beatific closure of most of the Comédie-Française productions and indeed from Jouvet's comic apotheosis heralded by the introduction of Indians, brought back by Enrique and Oronte from the Americas. While the

⁵³ Sénart in *Revue des deux mondes*, October 1973, 174–78 (p. 174); Marcabru in *France-Soir*, 12 May 1973; Temkine in *Europe*, 533–34 (September–October 1973), 215–16.

⁵⁴ Guy Verdoot, *La Nouvelle République du Centre Ouest*, 18 May 1973.

⁵⁵ *La Psychocritique du genre comique* (Paris: Corti, 1954).

performances in Finland, Romania, and later in the United States, attracted little French criticism, a review in a leading French journal was indicative of a changed cultural patrimony: ‘une performance et [...] un spectacle efficaces, modernes et qui n’ont rien de gratuit’.⁵⁶

However, such is the modish nature of the cultural patrimony that the backlash against productions informed by new theoretical perspectives is evident in the uneven reception given to the last production of *L’Ecole des femmes* at the Théâtre National by Eric Vigner in 1999, steeped in Lacanian probing into the depths of Arnolphe’s psyche. Vigner considered this psychoanalytical reading of the play a matrix for our understanding of the entire corpus:

Les textes de Lacan autour de *L’Ecole* comptent parmi les plus beaux que j’ai pu lire. Il raconte que *L’Ecole* est le manifeste de la comédie classique, le sommet de la pyramide.⁵⁷

Violent headlines, such as Tesson’s ‘C’est Molière qu’on assassine’, or Costaz’s ‘une *Ecole des femmes* catastrophique’, signalled a reaction against the postmodern.⁵⁸ Dismissals such as Ferney’s ‘est-il nécessaire de se référer à Lacan pour savoir que “l’amour est un ressort essentiellement comique?”’ anticipated a return to the traditional interpretations.⁵⁹ Notably here, Jacques Lassalle’s version in 2002 at the Athénée mythologised the Jovet production, not least in its re-use of the same sets created for Jovet by Christian Bérard in the same theatre nearly seventy years previously.

⁵⁶ Gérard Denis Farcy, ‘La “Scène” d’Arnolphe et la mise en scène de *L’Ecole des femmes*’, *Revue d’histoire du théâtre*, 29 (1977), 53–56 (p. 56).

⁵⁷ ‘*L’Ecole des femmes* est une matrice’, Entretien avec Eric Vigner (propos recueillis par Pierre Notte), *La Terrasse*, October 1999.

⁵⁸ Philippe Tesson, *Figaro magazine*, 23 October 1999; Gilles Costaz, *Politis*, 25 November 1999.

⁵⁹ Frédéric Ferney, *Le Figaro*, 30 September 1999.

We have seen then how Molière, and, in particular, his *Ecole des femmes*, have been put through the ‘mangle’ of the cultural *patres* of his time, and subsequently of theatrical producers and, indeed, custodians of his heritage. Molière established his career as a dramatist and an actor by subverting existing cultural and religious traditions, as well as challenging the commercially-driven distortions of his publishers. Yet, after his death, Molière became himself the object of an unwritten cultural preservation order limiting the scope of theatrical inventiveness of which he himself would almost certainly have disapproved. As we have seen, what one generation regarded as his cultural heritage has been rejected by the next generation, then subsequently revived by a succeeding one. *L’Ecole des femmes* has not been subjected to the kind of ‘mangling’ that has been meted out to other plays, particularly to some of the farces and to *Dom Juan*, in which the boundary between the ‘materiality’ of the text and the ‘textuality’ of performance is very fluid.⁶⁰ Most of the controversy with regard to *L’Ecole des femmes* has surrounded generic issues, particularly the extent to which the play may be considered tragic. However, the fact that those defenders of the Maison’s claim to be the authentic interpreter’s of the play failed to recognise in 1924 that they were arguing against a tradition established in nineteenth-century productions at the Comédie-Française itself, betrayed an ignorance of historical perspective and a proprietorial attitude to the dramatist’s work. Furthermore, the ‘flattening’ effect of many productions may paradoxically render the Maison culpable of acts of ‘mangling’ which it has been the first to condemn when perpetrated by other theatres. The would-be ‘manglers’ of *L’Ecole des femmes*, Guitry, Roussillon, and Vigner, have, in fact, been conservative in their respect of the text. Martons’s ‘mangling’, which arguably might be said to have created a new play, fell largely beyond the critical gaze of any French cultural custodianship. The jury is still out, then, on whether those who

⁶⁰ The so-called ‘mangling’ is particularly evident in translations which can be adaptations of the play in which Molière’s authorship is more spectral than visible. See our ‘La Textualisation de la mise en scène et la place de l’auteur: mort barthésienne et / ou spectre derridien?’, ed. by Gabriel Conesa and Jean Emelina (Domens: Pézenas, 2007), pp. 36–51.

have adapted the play to the changing times may be more guilty of mangling than the countless number of directors who have merely passed on, in a so-called fidelity to the author, a tradition which may not have actually emanated from Molière himself.

Appendix: Ranking of Authors by Number of Performances at the Comédie-Française (to 1997)

Molière	31844	François Coppée	623
Racine	9291	Sophocle	605
Corneille	7032	Crébillon	600
Musset	6665	Georges de Porto-Riche	592
Marivaux	5945	Henry Bataille	571
Dancourt	5659	Giraudoux	553
Regnard	5372	Paul Géraldy	551
Voltaire	3945	Tristan Bernard	531
Émile Augier	3304	Victorien Sardou	519
Eugène Scribe	3081	Paul Scarron	506
Beaumarchais	3023	Pirandello	483
Victor Hugo	3012	François Mauriac	473
Alexandre Dumas fils	2121	George Sand	436
Labiche	1983	Houdar de La Motte	429
Shakespeare	1853	Phillippe Quinault	429
Alexandre Dumas père	1575	Paul Claudel	424
Feydeau	1562	Octave Mirbeau	391
Alexandre Duval	1400	Jean Sarment	365
Courteline	1320	Fabre d'Églantine	365
Lesage	1290	Charles Collé	361
Casimir Delavigne	1229	Pigault-Lebrun	335
Octave Feuillet	1162	Auguste Vacquerie	330
Flers and Caillavet	1161	Jules Romains	329
Théodore de Banville	1125	Favart	313
Meilhac and Halévy	1046	Monvel	309
Montherlant	1036	Sacha Guitry	293
Edmond Rostand	1035	Édouard Bourdet	289
Henri Lavedan	972	Alfred de Vigny	277
Montfleury	941	Prosper Mérimée	275
Henry Becque	914	Chamfort	266
Jules Renard	870	Dorat	261
Goldoni	806	Rotrou	253
Sedaine	770	Diderot	248
Euripides	721	Charles Vildrac	242
Erckmann-Chatrian	675	Anton Tchekhov	237

The Tongue's Atrocities: Civil Violence, Lyricism and Geoffrey Hill

NATALIE POLLARD

There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.¹

Ezra Pound wrote that the modern poet 'must live by craft and violence [...] Those artists, so called, whose work does not show this strife, are uninteresting'.² Pound's assertion was a crafted rejoinder to the thesis that poetry is set apart, private reflection, a realm elevated above social conflict and strife. Setting himself in opposition to those for whom the lyric mode offers 'a world in itself independent, complete, autonomous',³ Pound might be seen as anticipating later critics, who accused lyricism of promulgating a mere impression of self-sufficiency, of indulging in false reassurances that smoothed over deep cultural rifts, 'even at the risk of depoliticising and dehistoricising the text'.⁴ The notion of lyricism as isolated autonomy, however, was and is persistent. Its proponents argue that its 'world in itself' enables reader and poet productively to dwell upon, and to balance differences. Poetry is said to achieve a verbal 'reconciliation of opposites',⁵ a diminution of troublesome tensions. Pound is not suggesting lyric poems are

¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), pp. 243–55, p. 248.

² Pound, 'The New Sculpture', in *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Lea Baechler, A. Walton Litz and James Longenbach, 11 vols (New York and London: Garland, 1991), I, pp. 221–22, p. 222; originally in *The Egoist*, 1:4 (16 February 1914), pp. 67–68.

³ A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1909), p. 5.

⁴ Paul de Man, 'The Dead-End of Formalist Criticism', *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, ed. by Wlad Godzich, rev. edn, Theory and History of Literature Series, 7 (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1983), pp. 229–45, at p. 245.

⁵ See I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, 4th edn (London: Kegan Paul, 1930), p. 252.

incapable of beneficial action, but he thinks they should achieve social good through indicating their involvement in the conflicted public sphere, not retreating from it to a safe, speculative distance, or lapsing into poised elegance. His proposal to ‘live by craft and violence’ is moved by a high-minded purpose: his poetics proposes to keep its finger on the public pulse, to respond to, and justly reflect upon, civil strife.

Pound’s choice of the word ‘uninteresting’, however, raises questions about the appropriateness of his incitement to action. Indeed, questions of this kind have been posed by the contemporary British poet and critic, Geoffrey Hill, whose lyrics are the subject of this article. In his 1983 essay on Pound and J.L. Austin, ‘Our Word is Our Bond’,⁶ Hill finds himself bound to offer a trenchant critique of Poundian delusions of worldly power, and cautions his audience to be wary of being swayed too readily by persuasive poetical oratory. One should guard against “‘signing on the dotted line” for the rulers of the darkness of this world’ (p. 168), as Hill puts it, writing of Pound’s failed ‘struggle not to sign’ (p. 164) in his adherence to fascism. That adherence clearly colours a phrase such as ‘live by craft and violence’. Hill’s criticism also colours Pound’s aesthetic impulse to ‘show strife’, which comes to look as though it should depend upon a principle higher than the poet’s desire to secure his audience’s attention, or his wish to be considered relevant or irrelevant, interesting or uninteresting to Pound’s own exacting tastes. *Interest* is a word that works against Pound’s assertion of poetry’s right to operate in the public space, indicating its potential self-interest in so doing. Such lyricism is in danger of aestheticising conflict by presenting it as public spectacle, and also of a vain wish to persuade others of the centrality of its craft. Pound’s quotation implies that the modern poem is out to construct for itself a self-justifying ground of value. His pronouncement raises the question of whether lyric language operates as a means of resolving conflict, or of perpetuating it to justify its own aesthetic delight.

⁶ See *Agenda* 31:1 (1983), repr. in *The Lords of Limit: Essays on Literature and Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). Citations are from Hill, *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. by Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 146–69.

'Not that it is not possible to have a poetry which consciously seeks to promote cultural and political change and yet can still manage to operate with the fullest artistic integrity',⁷ Seamus Heaney has more recently asserted. Heaney's justification emphasises poetry's capacity for integrity, even while it has that virtue carefully hedged about with grammatical qualifications. Heaney derives his argument from the work of the American poet Wallace Stevens, particularly from his essay, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words'. There Stevens argued, in lyricism's defence, that the poet offers only a temporary isolation from a conflicted shared world, and that he does so precisely in order to promulgate his audience's better responses to it: 'his function is to make his imagination theirs [...] his role, in short, is to help people to live their lives'.⁸ By these lights, withdrawal into an inner, lyric sphere need not be seen as an evasion of violent externality. It takes place precisely so that the poet and his readers re-enter dissonant quotidian life with improved understanding of the intricacies of conflict. Nor is Stevens's lyric world a fantasy of perfect autonomy: '[the poet] creates the world to which we turn incessantly and without knowing it [...] without which we are unable to conceive it' (p. 31). Lyric and public spheres are held to work upon one another, so that lyricism is derived from and also a fundamental constituent of our understandings of a changing public world. Lastly, this lyricism is a force that is neither inactive nor calm, even in Poundian terms: 'It is a violence within that protects us from a violence without [...] the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality' (p. 36).

Stevens's sense of poetry as a remote social operation, dealing subjectively with conflicted civil action, sets up a helpful counterpoint to Pound's view of poetic language, and addresses some of the objections that arise to it. One might, however, ask whether there are other ways to respond to charges against lyricism without appealing to an inner, private sphere. Does the

⁷ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures* (London: Faber, 1995), p. 6.

⁸ Wallace Stevens, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words' in *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (London: Faber, 1960), p. 29; essay originally in *The Language of Poetry*, ed. by Allen Tate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942).

self-interest at play in a socially-minded poetics necessarily invalidate its capacity for public engagement? Can lyrics address violence and strife without freezing them into images of terrible beauty? Is a poet's scrutiny of his civil function another form of detachment, more erudite navel-gazing?

For Christopher Ricks, the lyrics of Geoffrey Hill address precisely these issues:

A poem by Geoffrey Hill speaks of 'the tongue's atrocities' ('History as Poetry') compacting or colluding the atrocities of which the tongue must speak, with the atrocities which – unless it is graced with unusually creative vigilance – it is all too likely to commit when it speaks of atrocities.⁹

Ricks's classic lecture on 'Geoffrey Hill and "The Tongue's Atrocities"' (1978), with which this article shares part of its title, proposed that Hill's poems – in particular 'September Song' (1968) and 'History as Poetry' (1968) – insist upon a poet's need for continual 'vigilance' in guarding against his own verbal 'collusions' with atrocity.¹⁰ Ricks's lecture focuses on the relation, in what we would now call Hill's early poetry, between a culture's impulse to remain silent in the face of atrocity, in 'recognition of the morally, spiritually and politically unspeakable' (p. 301), and its struggle to find a language that can articulate its violent predicament justly.¹¹

Hill's critics, following Ricks's 1978 lecture, have often pointed out Hill's attentiveness to the fraught role of language in

⁹ Ricks, 'Geoffrey Hill and "The Tongue's Atrocities"', W. D. Thomas Memorial Lecture, (Swansea: University College of Swansea, 1978) repr. in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 30 June 1978 and then in *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp.285–318, at p. 285.

¹⁰ Both in *King Log* (1968) in *Collected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 67.

¹¹ Hill has published eight volumes since the date of Ricks's lecture (1978), as well as the 1984 poem 'Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres', in *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy* (London: André Deutsch, 1983), *Canaan* (London: Penguin, 1996), *The Triumph of Love* (New York: Mariner, 1998), *Speech! Speech!* (New York: Counterpoint, 2000), *The Orchards of Syon* (New York: Counterpoint, 2002), *Scenes From Comus* (London: Penguin, 2005), *Without Title* (London: Penguin, 2006) and *A Treatise of Civil Power* (Penguin, 2007).

representing violent acts. Finding dissonance in his use of 'in the English language' itself, Vincent Sherry writes that Hill's flags up the 'anarchic aspect of language [...] abrasive measures, ineloquent pitch, abrupt difficulty confronting us [...] bring the violence of history directly into language'.¹² Writing of the pre-1987 work, Sherry argues that Hill ingeniously ensures that 'his "tongue's atrocities" match history's', avoiding the impression that the lyric space can be a private aesthetic realm immune from the historical violence it describes.¹³ For Henry Hart, not dissimilarly, verbal violence is explored, not shirked, by Hill, whose poems occupy a space not of set-apart lyricism, but of politically-attentive engagement 'in which "poetic" rhetoric incites atrocities and atrocious dictators silence poets'.¹⁴

This essay takes the issue of violence in Hill's poetry in a somewhat different direction, at a later period in Hill's work.¹⁵ Firstly, it focuses those volumes post-*Canaan* (1996) which have repeatedly demonstrated the poet's fragmented, fractious style, and particularly dwells on conflict in the 2007 volume, *A Treatise of Civil Power*. Secondly, it argues that for Hill, violence is less something that the poet labours to 'bring into language' (Sherry, p. 28), or which he can triumph in making 'match' historical accounts of conflict. Rather, verbal violence, in such work, is treated as unavoidable, endemic: 'past / reason and measure' (*Canaan*) 'childish / anger at the injustice of it/ [...] the seductive / pleasure of strange mouthings' (*Speech! Speech!*).¹⁶ As Hill's late work often makes clear, violence cannot be effectively 'guarded

¹² Vincent Sherry, *The Uncommon Tongue: The Poetry and Criticism of Geoffrey Hill* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1987), p. 28.

¹³ Sherry, p. 29.

¹⁴ *The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. 116.

¹⁵ See more recent critical discussion of violence in Hill, and the link between conflict in Hill's early and late work, in Tom Paulin, 'Rhetoric and Violence in Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns* and the Speeches of Enoch Powell', *The Cambridge Quarterly* 29:1 (2000), pp. 1–15; W. von Koppenfels, 'A *Sad and Angry Consolation*: Violence, Mourning and Memory in the Late Poetry of Ted Hughes and Geoffrey Hill', *European Studies: A Journal of European Culture, History and Politics*, 16:1 (2001), 227–49; Stephen James, 'Geoffrey Hill and the Rhetoric of Violence', *Essays in Criticism* 53:1 (2003), 33–53.

¹⁶ See respectively, Hill, 'Cycle', in *Canaan*, p. 38 and *Speech! Speech!*, p. 42.

against' (Ricks, p. 285), or, strictly speaking 'incited' (Hart, p. 116), since it is something that, for Hill, is a crucial – and crucially fraught – aspect of our being able to formulate meaning at all: 'a monster / of exact foresight' (*Speech!*, 43, p. 22), 'a part / of our conformable mystery, this / twinship of loathing and true commonweal' (*Speech!*, 95 p. 48). As Hill himself insists, dissonance is uncomfortably central to our understandings of, and relations with, others, whether as historians, politicians, citizens, workers, readers, writers, or lovers: 'Language not revealing to the elect / only' (*Without Title*, 2006),¹⁷ 'I'm speaking brutally; the answer holds' (*Without Title*, p. 53). On this view, violence is not something secondary to language that can be 'brought into' it, or made to reflect 'real' historical violence. Nor is verbal violence possible entirely to avoid. But this is also not quite as negative as it may initially appear, for it is also in conflict that action becomes intelligible. As we will see, civil action and violence are not at opposite poles. Linguistic violations are part of our means of debating the fraught relations between civil negotiations and the lyric sphere.

In his 2005 volume, *Scenes from Comus*, Hill writes:

Our duty is to find
consonance in the disparities
[...]
how to rise
to ceremonies of speech; when, why, to address
intrusive suffering.¹⁸

Hill's lines raise, in lyric form, the question of art's duty and function, the why and when of its exploration of intrusive suffering. Refusing to retreat from public involvement, the poem indicates lyricism's involvement in, and its ability to judge responses to, the disparities that cause suffering. The lyric holds itself bound, with others, to address civil matters. It is neither a

¹⁷ Hill, *Without Title*, p. 26.

¹⁸ Hill, 'A Description of the Antimasque', in *Scenes from Comus* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 57.

mere whim, nor a crowd-pleasing tactic, but 'our duty' to find consonance, to speak, to address suffering. Poetry, Hill argues, is a ceremony, an organised event designed to address a public, to speak justly to its concerns. Simultaneously, however, the lines do not disguise their complicity in the acts of suffering they present. Hinting that its ceremonial nature might betray, not resolve, the concerns it wishes to redress, the poem questions the very duty it promotes: 'how?' 'when?' 'why?'. Hill's lyric is aware that the artwork which sets out to 'find consonance' in opposition runs the risk of elevating itself into a spectacle of suffering. Such lyricism addresses the question of whether it is perpetrating, by presenting for aesthetic purposes, the very disparities it sets out to appease.

When W.H. Auden wrote that 'poetry makes nothing happen',¹⁹ and Philip Sidney that the poet never lies because he 'nothing affirms',²⁰ they emphasised lyricism's removal from a public world of change and action, stressing poetry as a sphere of words rather than deeds. Hill's view of poetry as a public act of duty, a response to disparity that is itself implicated in linguistic violence, and perhaps even furthering it, comes in contrast to such assertions. For Hill, as for Pound, poetic language is not elevated from change and political struggle, but is part of the public world of violent negotiations. Hill's lines, however, also emphasise that lyric language is neither innocent nor untainted by the conflict it addresses, but a tool wielded in it, for particular ends. Reinforcing both the ordinariness of our daily uses of language, and its perilously pliable nature on the many tongues that speak it, Hill observes, in *Treatise* (2007):

How certainly words are at one with *all*
corruptible things.²¹

¹⁹ W. H. Auden, 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats', in *Collected Poems* (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 197

²⁰ Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. by R. W. Maslen, rev. edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 103.

²¹ Hill, 'On Reading Milton and the English Revolution', p. 5.

If language is one of the many mere things of the world, not elevated above them, it is also ‘corruptible’, besmirched. Words can be used to express conflict and suffering, but they also can be used to create and sustain them, to perform real violations of others. When Hill writes that ‘a simulacrum | of living speech strikes the aggrieved ear’ (*Treatise* p. 5), he paints language as peculiarly physical, a pitiless act of aggression, brutalising the ear that receives it. Of course, this violence can also be read more benignly as simply metaphorical. To ‘strike’ is to make an impact on one’s interlocutors. But if Hill’s lines suggest that listeners are merely passive, innocently impressed by the poem’s ‘living speech’, they also imply that hearers portraying themselves as passive recipients may do so for advantage. Listening is active engagement. In acts of grievous mishearing ears perform interpretive violence upon speakers, and upon language itself: interlocutors that already consider themselves aggrieved distort others’ words, reducing all they hear to ‘a simulacrum | of living speech’. The implied anthropomorphism of language as living suggests that speech is mortal, vulnerable as we are to inept listening and brutal reception. Listeners and audiences, just like speakers, are engaged in interpretive acts, capable of performing brutalities upon language.

For Hill, then, the lyric mode is a space in which subtle forms of intellectual violence are carried out. Although the poem is a ceremony, honed, precise, mindful of its public, ceremonies themselves can work as a polite cover for roguish interpretative manoeuvres. It is often when Hill’s speakers attempt to lay bare these linguistic dangers directly that the lines can be seen vying for advantage:

The style seems to be made
with those like us, stranded and crying out
as brittle things in Virgil and Dante
that when you snag them flock the air with blood.²²

²² Hill, ‘Parallel Lives’, in *Treatise*, p. 8.

The lines suggest that word and person are brittle things, easily fragmented; 'snag' indicating accidental infliction. The anguish of 'crying out', 'flock the air with blood' is caused by the lightest, unintentional touch, hinting that violence is not necessarily vindictive, and might better be seen as an understandable consequence of interaction, not an abusive offence. Meanwhile, the lines link 'style', the form of verbal expression we expect to associate with reserved, erudite design, with spontaneous cries of isolation and violence, penetration and pain. Style is humbled, 'made | with those like us', as innocent and everyday as that inclusive pronoun. It is style's quotidian nature that signifies language's potential to suffer as we do, 'stranded and crying out'. And yet, to cry out in a Classical voice, 'as brittle things in Virgil and Dante' is not to make an unthinking or spontaneous gesture of pain. The lines' elaborate criss-crossings of aesthetic design and accidental violation, unintentional and deliberate contact are a carefully crafted effect, and far from innocently or casually made. Such semantic poise works against the poem's proclamation of brokenness and violation, so that one begins to re-consider the motivation behind its claim of ordinary suffering, and to ask what might be at stake in such lyrical attempts to align itself with 'those like us'.

'Mankind's [...] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order', wrote Walter Benjamin.²³ Is Hill's poem guilty of taking pleasure in its aesthetisation of destruction, of making a mere spectacle out of social conflict? Hill's concept of 'style' – so close to stylised, stylish – may well be a distraction from the 'blood' and 'cry', an indication that these have been transformed, obscenely, into inert aesthetic entertainment. The lines slide into iambic pentameter, into allusions to Virgil and Dante. Perhaps the poem is, after all, an erudite escape into the passivity of contemplation, reluctant to address the reality and immediacy of brutal acts. Though the lyric makes a verbal gesture of social

²³ Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, pp. 210–42, here at p. 235.

struggle, it may do so to distract readers from its unwillingness to accomplish material change. Perhaps its art fosters the audience's illusion of public mobilisation for conservative ends: one is to feel change takes place aesthetically, so as to prevent one from changing socially. The poem's allusiveness surreptitiously refers its audience away from the violence it describes, leading us into an abstract intertextual web. Opening with an allusion, '*The Quiete of Mynde* was a tough home assignment', the lyric's first words refer readers to a text by the Greek philosopher and biographer, Plutarch, and then further, to the intricacies of Thomas Wyatt's 1527 translation of it: 'Quiet mind, | in Wyatt's English, is far from slumber | or waking lassitude'.²⁴ Hill's lyric delights in its elaborate referential game: a 2007 homage to a 1527 translation of a first-century original. Meanwhile, Hill's title echoes Plutarch's more well-known work, *Parallel Lives*, a series of biographies of famous Greek and Roman figures. Hill, one might argue, demands the reader's engagement with a broad span of literary history, rather than with the implications of his own poem's lyric violence. On the other hand, as we will come to see, his poems themselves probe how far art can repudiate the lyric perspective of I.A. Richards's 'reconciliation of opposites', in their refusal to turn away from the urgency of conflict, or into poised elegance, reference and allusion.

In the *Life of Alexander / Life of Julius Caesar*, Plutarch observed that 'a small thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of a character than battles where thousands die'. Wyatt, too, translating *The Quiete of Mynde* in the sixteenth-century, concerned himself with language's revealing power, its capacity to persuade, to change minds. For Wyatt, this verbal skill was far from straightforwardly praiseworthy. In contrast to many of his humanist contemporaries, Wyatt held that language was a corrupt invention, and remained suspicious that the more eloquent the rhetoric, the greater the danger of one falsely luring and betraying one's listeners. To Wyatt's mind, the notion that a

²⁴ Thomas Wyatt, 'The Quiete of Mynde', in *Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, ed. by Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thompson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969), p.440-63.

'phrase or jest' displays character more effectively than real action, than 'battles where thousands die', would have suggested words' ability to warp and manipulate lived experience. Hill's texture of allusions, grounded in the specificities of Wyatt's contribution to the argument about how to wield appropriate public and poetical language, brings to mind language's operation in the political sphere, its power on the tongues of rhetoricians and its capacity to deceive the body politic, through abuse of that power. The figure of Wyatt also leads Hill's poem back into a debate about true and false representation, issues at stake in the translation of others' works, and also, given Plutarch's status as a biographer, their lives.

Such scrupulous attentiveness to the history of words and intricate probing of their associations is comparable to what Pound termed *logopoeia*: language's 'habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word'.²⁵ Hill's verbal scrutiny neither refers one away from violence, nor distracts from one's recognition of the poem's potential to wield words responsibly. Rather, it demands that we attend to the power of speech in the context of civil action, and the function of art in such contexts. It is an unrelenting examination of violence. The poem indicates that modern misgivings about stylish academicism and aestheticism, and a suspicion of oratory as smooth-tongued manipulation have their roots in Renaissance humanism's concerns about language as public deception, a trajectory of thought that itself can be traced back to classical philosophy, particularly Plato's own arguments against sophistic language, its capacity for flattery and falsity, in his dialogues.²⁶ It is against that negative Platonic thesis of language that Petrarch's *Quiete of Mynde* argued, and it is also from here that familiar contemporary arguments about verbal

²⁵ Ezra Pound, 'How to Read', in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. by T.S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 25. The essay originally appeared in the *New York Herald Tribune*, 20 January 1929.

²⁶ See Plato, *Gorgias*, especially Socrates's comments on oratory as 'flattery', and his comparison of it to 'cosmetics' and 'sophistry' (see *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997)).

treachery, deceit and violation, wittingly or unwittingly, have taken their lead.²⁷

If Hill's sources scoured the language for signs that rhetoric might devalue truth, his own poetry calls for critical scrutiny of the notion that style is a superficial smoothness concealing a hermeneutic violence. In so doing, Hill pays close attention to the uses and abuses of power that words can effect, when mouthed by public speakers. 'Some | tyrants make great patrons' (p. 47), he reminds, in 'On Reading *Crowds and Power*' (*Treatise*, 2007), Hill's own recent public, published lyric address to the Nobel Prize winning author Elias Canetti, who wrote *Crowds and Power*.²⁸ In a waspish response to Canetti, whose text examines how crowds of citizens are swayed by the oratory of leaders, Hill writes: 'Tread lightly | with personal dignity and public image' (p. 47). For Hill, Canetti's concerns about an elite's propensity for 'crowd manipulation' are at once fair (crowds can be swayed), and flawed: 'you [should] pay respect | to the intelligence of the citizen'. Publicising one's concern that the public is manipulated by leaders is a disrespectful gesture, Hill implies, for it dangerously undermines public faith in the discernment of the body politic, and belittles the judgement of 'the common man' in the guise of protecting him. Canetti's text propagates a subtle form of intellectual violence that strips power from the very citizens it proclaims to defend and is at risk of making a surreptitiously anti-democratic move:

But think on: that which is difficult
preserves democracy; you pay respect
to the intelligence of the citizen.
Basics are not condescension. Some
tyrants make great patrons. Let us observe
this and proceed [...]
Safeguard the image of the common man. (p. 47)

²⁷ Michael Billig makes this point lucidly in *Arguing and Thinking* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 62.

²⁸ Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. by Carol Stewart (London: Victor Gollancz, 1962), p. 396.

I have been arguing that, in Hill's poetics, violence is not separate from daily experience. Violence arises often through commonplace, routine activities; a part of everyday life, rather than an exception to it. Simultaneously, 'basics are not condescension': in witnessing the elaborate network of Hill's references and allusions, his anchorage of violence in specificities of name, place and published work, and his participation in the conflicted particularities of historical events, we should note that violence is neither random, unsophisticated action, nor a descent into unstructured mob rule. When Hill comments that 'I accept now, we make history; it's not some | abysmal power',²⁹ he indicates the inclusivity of that making, of a culture's participation in historical understandings. Power is not simply inflicted from on high. But Hill's pronouncement also implies citizens' responsibility for the understandings they forge. Their power to act binds them to their creations. His *Treatise* often asserts both the power of the common man, and the public body's capacity for intelligent communal action: 'Letters to the editor can show wisdom' (p. 30), he observes. Later he insists upon the citizen's potential to act in a spirit of justice and fellowship, 'the equivalent | communion of the just commoner'.³⁰ Meanwhile, in 'Coda' (*Treatise*, p. 50), the complex, stylised art of poesy is likened to the working man's physical labour, the 'art' of puddling: 'Puddling's a way of life | and deadly in its kind, but more an art | than is some hammered threnos' (p. 50). On first reading, the comparison between these labours flags up the injustices of class-conflict. Hill, it seems, aligns himself with another, politically charged, 'image of the common man', taking on a proud neo-Marxism when he writes:

this is our last call, difficult coda [...]
 withdrawing a Welsh iron-puddler's portion, his
 penny a week insurance cum burial fund,
 cashing in pain itself, stark induration,
 something saved for, brought home, stuck on the mantel (p. 49)

²⁹ Hill, 'A Précis or Memorandum of Civil Power', in *Treatise*, p. 29.

³⁰ Hill, 'On Reading Burke on *Empire, Liberty, and Reform*', in *Treatise*, p. 18.

The suspicion becomes stronger when, two stanzas later, Hill makes a move that lays bare his real relation:

I add – on oath (as prudent as you get) –
the Welsh puddler’s my great-grandfather’

This, surely, aligns Hill with the hard labours of ‘the common man’, against the violent injustices perpetrated by a powerful elect. Yet if the lines are a laying bare of the author’s working class origins, and of the impulse proudly to make them public, they also mark out the highly guarded nature of that declaration. Hill’s statement remains hedged about with the gravity of law, oath, and committal: ‘on oath (as prudent as you get)’, as if fearing the consequences of his lyric declaration. Such hesitation in the double parentheses emphasises the making of an agonised pledge that resists sudden sentiment, a product of grave thought. ‘Our word is our bond’, Hill has written, in the essay of that title, on Austinian and Poundian illocutionary acts, in which Austin’s emphasis upon ‘ordinary language’ is bound to ‘treacherous’ verbal difficulty: ‘the complex and recalcitrant nature of things’, the hard graft of speaking plainly, and the need to acknowledge: ‘the innumerable and unforeseeable demands of the world upon language’ (p. 151).³¹ If we consider that, for Hill, poetry is a kind of promise, an oath one is held to, we might understand better the shrewd ambivalence of his former quotation, its ‘stark induration’. When Hill writes of the labouring figure ‘cashing in pain itself’, he invests the likened arts of poetry and puddling with greater ambivalence than mere proud alignment would indicate. Impoverished craftsmen, like lyricists, may be paid only in suffering for their labours, but also, both possess the power to cash in on suffering, calculatedly over-emphasising economic exploitation as a way to gain power through sympathy, to bend empathetic ears to their cause. Hill’s oath, the poem hints, is not

³¹ Hill, ‘Our Word Is Our Bond’, p. 168.

innocent of such design, whatever declarations of humility, and of plain-speaking commonality it makes.

On the one hand, what is emphasised in each of these examples from the *Treatise* is the ordinariness, the unglamorous nature of daily activity, *and* that such activity, even when it may be self-interested, must negotiate with and anticipate the counter-interests of others. This involves intelligent, organised thought with complex, shared motivations and goals: 'we make history; it's not some | abysmal power'. Exploitation, manipulation and violence are neither random savagery, nor exceptional, minority actions, but the underside of daily life, the embattled by-products of social involvement. These are often presented as a testament to the admirable complexity of our capacity to think coherently with others, to participate and even thrive as part of an organised system, despite conflict and physical discord. On the other hand, Hill's lyrics seem to retain righteous anger at the unthinking systematisation of cruelty and the crude conformity which mass participation can engender:

The strident high
civic trumpeting
of misrule. It is
what we stand for.³²

These lines express bitter dismay at 'standing for' this kind of civil society, a sarcastic criticism of the proud trumpeting and public endorsing of misrule and conflict. But their speaker remains divided, full of contradictory, ambivalent impulses. Does the rawness of his rage render him inconsistent, or is this ambivalence a sign of his careful deliberation over opposed perspectives? Although the lyric protests the civic misrule that offers citizens no alternative except 'standing for it', the lines persuasively decry the very display of civic power they complain they must passively assent to. Likewise, in arguing that the strident proclamation of high purpose conceals a quiet abuse of authority that stifles dissent, the speaker elegantly manages to expose his own

³² Hill, 'Respublica', in *Canaan*, p. 29.

resistance. That well-judged final line, ‘what *we* stand for’ is highly measured, pronominally indicating the speaker’s participation as a member of the duped public body, but it also deliberately avoids any sense of its own consent to the trumpeting powers. The speaker is able to withhold approval in the very act of ‘standing for it’. The lines are both an eloquent act of verbal resistance, and a resigned act of enforced engagement that manages to remain at the very minimum level of participation commanded by those rousing civic trumpets.

Hill’s lyric resentment at the systematised violence of civil society, and at a culture’s capacity to deceive and to enforce participation, might put one in mind of the writings of social philosophers such as Franz Fanon or Herbert Marcuse, who also wrote against society’s systematised misrule. Condemning ‘the institutionalised violence of the existing system’,³³ Marcuse also weighed up the possibility of engaging in tactics of resistance and, in his case, retaliation. Hill would not go as far as recommending ‘the violence of resistance, which is necessarily illegal in relation to positive law’, but he, like Marcuse, observes and deflates the concept of misrule as a state of absolute disorder. A ‘civic trumpeting | of misrule’ involves the organised participation of a community in a public ceremony, the blowing of trumpets by guards or army, national pride, the maintenance of structure and civil spectacle beneath the semblance of carnivalesque disorder. Misrule is not the absence of rule, it is rule gone awry, perhaps deliberately played with or exploited. Ceremony and misrule turn out not to be opposing categories, since both involve engagement with the organised structures of language, society, nationhood. ‘Standing for’ misrule might mean gritting our teeth and bearing it, but it also involves an ovation, a public display of support, as well as, even more strongly, ‘standing up for it’, a rallying cry. Hill is highly resistant to those brutalities unthinkingly carried out by smooth-running institutionalised structures, for these are

³³ Herbert Marcuse, ‘The Problem of Violence and the Radical Opposition’, in *Five Lectures: Psychoanalysis, Politics and Utopia*, trans. by Jeremy Shapiro and Shierry M. Weber (London: Allen Lane, 1970), pp. 83–108, p. 90. First published in *Psychoanalyse und Politik*, lecture delivered at the Free University of West Berlin, July 1967.

capable of running calculated and highly organised systems of exploitation, whilst concealing their violations even from themselves. But this is also an indication that the language of misrule is a highly structured response, sustained in public ceremonies, and in rhetorical strategies, and that civil violence, either in poems or out of them, is far from random, mindless brutality.

On this issue, Slavoj Žižek's recent book on violence is helpful and timely. He too argues against what he sees as 'the predominant ideological approach to the topic of violence which understands it as 'spontaneous'' or stupid.³⁴ For Žižek, words are a manifestation of the sophistication of human understandings: violence takes place within organised systems, and language does not passively resolve differences, but makes it possible for us to think them. But that very sophistication creates rather than resolves conflict: language makes available the concepts over which we are embattled. For Žižek, it is language itself, in its 'clever' symbolisation of things that is originally violent. Words are the means by which daily realities become charged with meanings that bring us into opposition. He writes:

Verbal violence is not a secondary distortion, but the ultimate resort of every specifically human violence [...] When workers protest their exploitation, they do not protest a simple reality, but an experience of their real predicament made meaningful through language. Reality in itself, in its stupid existence, is never intolerable: it is language, its symbolisation, which makes it such (p. 57).

For Žižek, as for Hill, one needs to contemplate violence and barbarism in a manner that is alert to the complexity of their founding; one needs to appreciate them as phenomena reliant upon highly structured civil language, attending closely and intelligently to the erudition which 'sustains and justifies their acts'. It is interesting, then, to note on the one hand the frequency of non-highbrow references in Žižek's texts, his determined anti-academicism and accessible, contemporary, reference points, and

³⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile, 2008), p. 53.

his insistence upon the erudition of common action on the other.³⁵ Civil negotiation, social conflict, and our understandings of one another, are dependent upon everyday dealings in language. Hill's lyrics similarly make the case that it is not just political discourse, but literature, music, artworks, film and sculpture, public ceremonies, that are the means by which a people makes sense of and negotiates its own significance. In the work of both, the provision of an artistic space for considering linguistic power-play is an acknowledgement of social responsibility. Art is not an indulgent fantasy of escape into an inert aesthetic realm, but the ground over which civil power is tested out, shaped, created. We should be careful not to violate the richness of human endeavour, our civil intelligence in both senses, in our attempt to make sense of violence.

At times, however, Žižek's work is in danger of leading, or misleading us, in that direction. In calling language 'a violent medium of raw confrontation' (p. 51), his rhetoric can be caught working against the argument he espouses. Although the statement reinforces his thesis that the naïve view of language as simple reconciliation is wrong, in positing language as a spontaneous 'rawness' of violence it sits uneasily alongside his pronouncement that violence is complex, civil activity. Negotiation, of course, does not have to be restrained, and friendly, to be honed and precise, as both Žižek's and Hill's intricately argued polemical assassinations of artworks and philosophy, and their embattled historico-textual astuteness repeatedly make clear. Like Žižek's, Hill's work struggles to sustain its tribute to the changeable meanings we continually construct, even when our words seem to have gone awry: 'Partiality, | error, relative absolutes | pitching things into shape (*Comus*, p. 65), 'I prophesy; | misguided, misconceiving, misinspired' (*Treatise*, p. 6). Such writing holds competing tensions in place, working as both an admission of failure, misunderstanding, brokenness, and as a testament to the continued power of prophesy and witness: 'For some cause or

³⁵ See Terry Eagleton, 'Slavoj Žižek', in *Figures of Dissent: Critical Essays on Fish, Spivak, Žižek and Others* (London: Verso, 2003), pp.196–206, here at pp. 202–03.

other the block stands [...] | material witness to a state of things' (*Comus*, p. 65).

'One usually thinks of war, strife and violence as forces emerging from chaos. Violence is seen as 'meaningless', the violent act merely serving [...] as a pointer indicating states of dysfunction and anomaly in society'.³⁶ Arguing that violence is intelligent and verbal, rather than randomly, brutishly physical, Hill's poetics examines the civil structures that shape conflicted quotidian life. Using language, for Hill, involves being sensitive to existing expectations built around shared articulations, desiring not to shut down, but to generate new, surprising replies; to work with others' hostilities. But this sensitivity is imperilled by the thought that language is a medium that generates conflict, that words are conflict's origin. One may move directly from the naïve view that language is a tool for reconciliation to the view that language is the sole source of violence, manipulation, that words carve up and categorise an originally innocent non-conflicted world. If language embattles us, if 'words and images are part of the political problem',³⁷ it might be tempting to think harmony is achieved by transcending words, by negating the need for question and response, answer and reply. However, in reaching that conclusion one violates the intelligent, linguistic structuring of civil society itself, the understandings of a culture, and the daily lives of readers, workers, citizens, poets, historians. Hill's work, I have argued, implies that a non-violent, non-linguistic world is neither possible nor desirable, and promotes instead a resilient critical engagement with our changeably perpetrated violences of

³⁶ Göran Aijmer, 'The Idiom of Violence in Imagery and Discourse', in *Meanings of Violence: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Göran Aijmer and Jon Abbink (Oxford: Berg, 2000), pp. 1–22, p. 1.

³⁷ Edna Longley, *The Bloodaxe Book of Twentieth-Century Poetry from Britain and Ireland* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe, 2000), p. 20.

word and deed; a determined attempt to pay heed to our own insufficiencies and susceptibilities in the public institution of language.

André Gide's Savage Gardens

VICTORIA REID

This contribution seeks to uncover violence in that apparently most peaceable of spaces, the garden. The life-writing of André Gide on nature and gardens (autobiography, diary, fiction as a projection of the author's phantasies) provides the matter. The time is the first half of the twentieth century, specifically the high-points of geopolitical violence marked by the World Wars; phantasmatic violence, chronologically more diffuse, will also feature.

A number of issues I shall develop in relation to Gide are presented succinctly in Raymond Radiguet's short first-person narrative, *Le Diable au Corps* (1923). François, aged 14 at the outset of World War 1, delights in the 'quatre ans de grandes vacances' (four years of holidays) the war affords him,¹ during which he conducts an intense love affair with Marthe, whose husband is at the Front. Marthe is a mother-figure in as much as she is older, the object of François's mother's jealousy and her name is suggestive of the maternal. The lovers have sex in cornfields and in the garden of Marthe's childhood, which François tends lovingly, indicating an identification between the woman and the garden.² This bucolic idyll on the banks of the Marne ends with the Armistice: the husband returns, the protagonist is guilt-ridden and the woman dies, having given birth to a boy, also called François. There is no mention of violence at the Front; instead violence manifests itself through the adulterous relationship, in biting, oedipal jealousy and a representation of pregnancy as a site of damage:

¹ Raymond Radiguet, *Le Diable au corps*, 1923 (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 45.

² 'Je ressentais le même orgueil d'homme [...] à étancher la soif de la terre, des fleurs suppliantes, qu'à satisfaire le désir d'une femme' (148, I felt the same manly pride quenching the thirst of the earth and the begging flowers as satisfying a woman's desire).

Dans mon délire, je la mordais aux endroits où sa peau était nue [...]. J'aurais voulu pouvoir y marquer mes initiales. Ma sauvagerie d'enfant retrouvait le vieux sens des tatouages. [...] J'aurais voulu pouvoir embrasser ses seins. (p. 86)

In my madness, I would bite her where her skin was exposed. I would have liked to have marked my initials on her. My childish savagery discovered the ancient meaning of tattooing. I would have liked to have been able to kiss her breasts.

A toute autre époque, souhaiter la mort de son mari, c'eût été chimère enfantine, mais ce vœu devenait presque aussi criminel que si j'eusse tué. [...] J'espérais qu[e la guerre] servirait ma haine comme un anonyme commet le crime à notre place. (p. 96)

At any other time, to wish for her husband's death would have been but a childish chimera, but this wish became almost as criminal as though I had actually killed him. I longed for the war to serve my hatred, for an anonymous person to commit the crime for us.

Je voulais profiter de Marthe avant que l'abîmât sa maternité. (p. 147)

I wanted to take advantage of Marthe before she became damaged by pregnancy.

D'avoir abîmée la grâce de Marthe, de voir son ventre saillir, je me considérais comme un vandale. (p. 153)

Having damaged Marthe's grace, seeing her belly swell, I thought of myself as a vandal.

Je croyais la grossesse de Marthe ridicule, et je marchais les yeux baissés. (p. 165)

I considered Marthe's pregnancy to be ridiculous and I walked with my head bowed.

In this work, an idyllic pastoral escape from war is charted, and the older woman is identified with the garden and the maternal. The male protagonist initially desires to mark the female's body

by biting her, but as his guilt increases, her body is increasingly viewed as monstrously marked and damaged. The protagonist's wish for the death of the Marthe's husband (the œdipal father) takes on dimensions of geopolitics, patriotism and public morality by dint of that man's life being in grave danger at the Front. Thus phantasmatic conflict inflects the protagonist's perception of the real war.³

My psychoanalytical exploration draws on Melanie Klein's *The Psychoanalysis of Children* (1932), a work which returns repeatedly to the subject's often violent relation with the mother imago. For Klein, infants in their first year traverse the paranoid-schizoid position, which contains an oral-sadistic stage: 'the pleasure the infant gets from biting' is connected to 'clearly marked destructive cravings which aim at the annihilation of the object'.⁴ The object in question is the mother imago (a phantasmatic object based in the first instance on the real mother) or her part-objects (primarily the 'good' and the 'bad' breast, modelled respectively on the bounteous breast that gives milk and that the withheld breast that doesn't), which are conceived by the infant in the image of his/her own emotions, so they can be good (generous, loving) or bad (covetous, envious, greedy, sadistic, hateful). During this paranoid-schizoid position, part-objects are perceived in the most Manichaeic of terms. Through introjection, identification and projection, the part-objects elicit in the infant reciprocal positive and negative emotions. For example, the infant, aware of its dependence on the phantasmatic breast, will fear its being withheld and counter with 'sadistic phantasies' (p. 128), which, Klein argues 'find their culmination in cannibalism' (p. 69). We glimpse this in the Radiguet quotation above in which

³ Ziolo defines psychohistory broadly as the psychoanalytically-based study of the sources of human motivation in history (Michael Paul Ziolo, 'Psychohistory: Emergence, Theory, Applications' [unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Liverpool, 2004]). The key text by Freud on this is: 'Civilization and Its Discontents', 1930, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey and others, 24 vols (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953–74), XXI (1961), pp. 59–145.

⁴ Klein, *The Psychoanalysis of Children*, 1932, in *The Writings of Melanie Klein*, 1975, 1984, 4 vols (London: Vintage 1997), II, 130. For more on oral-sadistic tendencies, see pp. 62–67, p. 80, pp. 134–35.

François describes his biting of Marthe as an adolescent manifestation of his infantile savagery. Klein's paranoid-schizoid position is followed by the depressive position, during which the subject gradually stops splitting his / her part-objects into good and bad and comes to recognise the mother imago as an integrated whole complex object. The position is 'depressive' because the subject comes to understand that he / she has in phantasy previously inflicted harm on the mother imago (a fundamentally loved whole object) and guilt ensues. In the Radiguet text, Marthe's 'damaged' body inspires shame and guilt in François, mapping onto the mechanisms Klein describes in the depressive position.

I would like to suggest that in Gide's work the garden may at times be identified with the mother imago and its part objects. Gardens full of flowers and fruit may signify the 'good' breast while gardens that are barren signify the 'bad' breast. Gardens that are indelibly vandalised, or that contain tombstones or ruins, may stand as the damaged mother imago perceived during the depressive position.⁵ My intention is both to trace that phantasmatic battle in Gide's gardens more broadly and to see how it operates in real war contexts.

Gide's Gardens

Gardens feature large in Gide's *œuvre*, domestic gardens of large villas, public gardens in cities and botanical gardens in North Africa and Europe. The *Journal* and the travel-writing charts actual gardens he nurtured (notably Cuverville, Gide's Normandy château), visited (botanical gardens and public parks) and to which he contributed (in the Congo, Gide collects beetles to donate to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris and brings back back from Senegal an iguana for the same institution). Maurice Denis relates receiving a

⁵ During the depressive position, the mother imago may be perceived as lost or 'killed'. See Robert Hinshelwood, *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* (London: Free Association, 1991), p. 138.

lesson in horticulture from Gide in 1904.⁶ In his critical essays and other work on aesthetics, gardening and plant imagery is used extensively, most notably in Gide's 'A Propos des "Déracinés" de Maurice Barrès' (1891), in which he valorises un-rooted artists over established ones. In search of literary inspiration, the writer character in the *sotie Paludes* (1895) spends hours contemplating varieties of pondweed in the Jardin des Plantes.⁷ Famously, he describes his characters as buds on the tree of his own being which rather than prune he allows to flourish.⁸ He also compares the work-in-progress novel *Les Faux-Monneyeurs* (1925) to a developing plant.⁹

Like Radiguet, Gide taps into the cultural tradition of allying female characters to flowers and gardens.¹⁰ In the fiction where heterosexual desire is preponderant, females are linked to gardens by name, characters in *La Porte étroite* (1909) and *Isabelle* (1911) including Flora Ashburton (flowers and ash trees), Tante Plantier (plant), Madame Palissier (*palisser* = to trellis), Lucile Bucolin (bucolic), Alissa (*lys* = lily) and Olympe Verdure (vegetation / green foliage). In *La Porte étroite*, the pure Alissa wastes away once she leaves her garden at Fongueusemare for a religious

⁶ Maurice Denis, 'Écrit au retour d'un séjour à Cuverville', in Denis, *Journal*, 2 vols (Paris: La Colombe, 1957–59), I, pp. 222–23.

⁷ On Gide and gardening more broadly, see Roger Bastide, 'André Gide jardinier' in *Anatomie d'André Gide* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972), ch. 1; Daniel Moutote, *Les Images végétales dans l'œuvre d'André Gide* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1970); and Mic Chamblas-Ploton (author) and Jean-Baptiste Leroux (photographer), *Les Jardins d'André Gide* (Paris: Chêne, Hachette, 1998).

⁸ André Gide, 'Letter to Scheffer', in Gide, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Louis Martin-Chauffier, 15 vols (Paris: NRF, 1932–39), IV, pp. 616–17 and Gide, *Journal 1887–1925*, ed. by Eric Marty (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 17 June 1902 (henceforth *Journal I*).

⁹ André Gide, *Romans et récits. Œuvres lyriques et dramatiques*, ed. by Pierre Masson, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), II, p. 549.

¹⁰ Female characters are traditionally compared to gardens and vegetation. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, or example, Proserpine is gathering flowers into the folds of her gown when Pluto bares her off to Hades, Daphne is transformed into a laurel tree and Phaethon's sisters into poplars. Vaginas and flowers are likewise conflated in the erotic French fabliau, 'La Demoiselle qui ne pouvait entendre parler de foutre'. In Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia's uncle, on finding his niece with her arms cut off, mourns 'her two branches, those sweet ornaments' and 'those lily-hands [...] like aspen leaves' (Act II, scene 4, l. 18 and ll. 44–45), imagery Richard Griffin in his film version makes visual by having branches forced into Lavinia's arm stumps (*Titus Andronicus*, dir. Richard Griffin (2000))

retreat. In *La Tentative amoureuse* (1893), once the lovers have consummated their relation, the desired but inaccessible enchanted garden morphs into a rotting abandoned one. In *Isabelle*, the end of the heroine's desirability is marked by the felling of the garden's trees; Pierre Masson has suggested that this tree-felling be viewed as a retaliatory response by Gide to his real mother's decision to have the trees of their château at La Roque felled when Gide's father died, an event Gide later charts in autobiography.¹¹

John Phillips details how Klein's paranoid-schizoid position uses the language of warfare:

Projection and introjection involve phantastic offensives whereby the object and the ego can each be entered, occupied, controlled, repulsed or withdrawn in a continuing struggle to define and maintain boundaries. Strictly speaking, violence in its primary and originating state is, for Klein, a way of describing an excess of force *which invades or devours*. Violence can thus be defined as a forceful entry into the field of the other, the extension of one field into that of another, or the consumption of an object by another. (my emphasis)¹²

We can see this warfare play out in Gide's gardens. First, in line with the oral-sadistic phase, there are repeated references to chewing (*mâcher*) and biting (*mordre*). In *Les Nourritures terrestres* (1897), in which the speaker lists the most beautiful gardens he has ever seen (*Romans I*, pp. 374–77), speaker and his friend sit upon an ancient tombstone in Montpellier's botanical gardens and chew rose petals (p. 376); in a copse of lemon trees in Malta and 'dans les cruelles Latomies' in Syracuse, they bite into ripe lemons. The joyous sensuous pederastic relation may be read as the celebration of a triumph over the adversarial mother imago, symbolised by the tombstone and the 'cruel' latomies, dark holes dug out by slaves.

The mother imago is marked out as a hostile adversary in Gide's documenting of his sister-in-law's still-birth, which he witnessed

¹¹ Pierre Masson, 'Isabelle, ou l'adieu au paradis', *Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide*, 18, 86–87 (April 1990), 349–60, at p. 357.

¹² John Phillips, 'The Fissure of Authority: Violence and the Acquisition of Knowledge' in L. Stonebridge and J. Phillips (eds), *Reading Melanie Klein* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 162–63 (my emphasis).

in 1903. To Paul Valéry he wrote on 9 July that the baby had died prior to the doctor's intervention anyway, 'tué par les vains efforts de la mère' (killed by the vain efforts of the mother).¹³ This resonates with Jean-Marie Jadin's view that for Gide, 'la mère est mortifière' (the mother is deadly).¹⁴ In the *Journal* in 1949, Gide revisits that same episode and recalls having requested that the gardener's wife dispose of the dead baby. Had he been alone and able to respond to his first impulse, he claims, he would have thrown 'cela' (that thing) (rectified as 'ces chairs innocentes' [that innocent flesh]) onto the compost heap beside the afterbirth.¹⁵ In Marc Allégret's documentary *Avec André Gide* (1951), Gide is filmed portentously reading aloud an excerpt of the correspondence between himself and Paul Valéry from January 1891: 'La terre était maternelle et me faisait songer...' (The earth was mother-like and made me dream...)¹⁶ The published correspondence shows Valéry to have written this phrase Gide cherishes sixty years on, and its decadent context collocates the maternal with death – Death's friends smooth down tombstones, a beautiful winter's day fades out, maternal earth gives rise to reveries of ditches filled with souls.¹⁷

The gardens in Gide's *L'Immoraliste* (1902) present on the whole a depressed phase in the phantasmatic conflict. The disabling torpor of the first-person narrator, Michel, suggests that he is contemplating the battlefield once the battle has ceased, and the mother imago killed (= a crippling depressive position). He cannot grasp how he ever found the wherewithal to pull himself away from El Kantara, the Algerian oasis where he has had his wife, Marceline, buried (*Romans I*, p. 690). Early on in the tale, protagonist-Michel is well in the gardens of Biskra, Algeria, where, accompanied by local boys, he convalesces from

¹³ André Gide, *Correspondence avec Paul Valéry, 1890–1942*, ed. by Peter Fawcett (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), p. 634.

¹⁴ Jean-Marie Jadin, *André Gide et sa Perversion* (Paris: Arcanes, 1995), p. 124.

¹⁵ Gide, *Journal 1926–1950*, ed. by Martine Sagaert (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), pp. 1073–74 (future references will be to *Journal II*).

¹⁶ *Avec André Gide*, dir. Marc Allégret. Les Films de Jeudi. 1951, 35.00–35.42.

¹⁷ *Correspondence Gide-Valéry*, p. 49.

tuberculosis; and in the gardens of his Normandy manor, La Morinière, where he is drawn towards his gamekeeper's sons, poaches on his own land and voyeuristically seeks out people having sex. But the menacing mother imago appears in connection to Marceline: her nostrils, evoked twice as dark menacing holes, threaten to pull Michel in (p. 675; pp. 687–89); when she miscarries, Michel sees before him only a gaping empty hole into which he is liable to plummet (p. 659). Michel buries his devoutly Catholic wife in unhallowed ground in the gardens of El Kantara because, he claims, the hideous French cemetery at Touggourt is 'à moitié dévoré par les sables' (p. 689, half devoured by the sands).¹⁸ Michel's fear of a hostile mother imago is suggested first by the word 'dévoré', which fits with the lexis of Klein's oral-sadistic phase; and second by the perception of sand as menacing – elsewhere in Gide's *œuvre* sand can be read as a marker for the hostile mother imago.¹⁹ El Kantara, the site of the neglected wife's burial in the 1902 fiction, is used as an Edenic setting for pederastic joy in Gide's 1926 autobiography: there, the twenty-five-year-old André strolls under palm trees hand-in-hand with his guide Athman, with whose brother, Sadek, he has just had sex.²⁰ The ambivalence of this garden, which shelters pederastic joy but harbours also guilt (for the dead neglected wife in *L'Immoraliste*; in Kleinian terms the damaged or dead mother imago), is reinforced by reference to a quotation Gide concocts from Lessing and Goethe in an essay of 1900: 'Nul ne se promène impunément sous les palmes' (nobody wanders under palm trees without punishment).²¹ This sentiment concords with that of Michel's comment at the end of *L'Immoraliste*: 'Parfois j'ai peur que ce que j'ai supprimé ne se venge' (*Romans I*, p. 690, 'Sometimes I fear

¹⁸ The *Journal* entry of 7 April 1896 recording Gide's own visit to Touggourt has sand slowly invading (*envahit*) the 'misérable' cemetery (*Journal I*, 228). Compare this with Phillip's 'an excess of force which invades or devours' cited above.

¹⁹ See my *André Gide and Curiosity* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 76–77 and p. 124.

²⁰ Gide, *Souvenirs et Voyages*, ed. by Pierre Masson (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), p. 319.

²¹ Gide, 'De L'Influence en littérature', 1900 in *Essais critiques*, ed. by Pierre Masson (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 406 and note on p. 1105.

that what I repressed/murdered will avenge itself").²² A note of foreboding suggests that a battle might recommence.

Gide's War-Time Gardens

The characteristics of the hostile mother imago in Gide we have seen are devouring or invading sand (Touggourt cemetery) and cruel dark holes (the stone quarries of Syracuse, Valéry's ditches, Marceline's terrifying nostrils, the existential black hole perceived by Michel in response to Marceline's miscarriage). In the semi-autobiography, *Les Cahiers d'André Walter* (1891), two consecutive dream sequences feature sand and holes:

C'était affreux: je voyais toutes ses dents, entre ses lèvres écartées par des fossettes ridicules. – J'ai voulu la repousser, mais je l'ai trouée avec ma main tendue; tout son corps était plein de sable. (*Romans I*, p. 109)

It was horrific: I saw all her teeth, between her lips spread open by ridiculous dimples [*literally*: little ditches / graves]. I wanted to push her away, but I punctured her with my stretched out hand; her whole body was full of sand. [...]

Elle m'est apparue, très belle [...]. Et j'avais peur de voir; je voulais détourner les yeux, mais malgré moi, je regardais.

She appeared to me, very beautiful. And I was scared to look; I wanted to avert my eyes, but despite myself, I looked.

Sous la robe, il n'y avait rien; c'était noir, noir comme un trou; je sanglotais de désespoir. (p. 110)

Under the dress, there was nothing; it was black, black as a hole; I sobbed with despair.

²² The object of Michel's repression (or murder) could be his homosexuality or indeed his wife. On which, see Naomi Segal, "Parfois j'ai peur que ce que j'ai supprimé ne se venge": Gide and Women', *Paragraph*, 8 (Oct. 1986), 62–74.

The hostile mother imago and the *vagina dentata* would seem to be conflated in Gide's imaginary. Gide himself was horrified by the female genitals, as he told Léon Pierre-Quint.²³ On 31 July 1914, two days before the outset of World War One Gide, Gide pronounces with dread: 'L'on s'apprête à entrer dans un long tunnel plein de sang et d'ombre' (*Journal I*, p. 821: We are preparing to enter a long tunnel full of blood and darkness). Gide's use of *vagina dentata* imagery here to describe the Great War bespeaks a crossover from the phantasmatic battlefield to the real one.

Gide was excused from military service in World War One on health grounds, having nearly died from tuberculosis in 1894, and by World War Two, he was too old for active service. During war-time, in body at least, Gide uses gardens as a refuge from violence. On a break from his refugee work in October 1915, he returned to his Normandy home to bask in the contemplation of plants and animals; he wants, he states, to know nothing other than what is natural (*Journal I*, p. 894). During World War Two, the recently widowed Gide was always outside the Occupied Zone, mainly living in the villas of friends in Nice and its environs (September 1939–May 1942) and as a guest of acquaintances in Tunisia and Algeria (May 1942–May 1945); several of these homes had fine gardens to recommend them, and Gide would frequent public parks in the cities of Nice, Tunis or Algiers.²⁴ On 6 May 1940, on a visit to his friend Aline Mayrisch's home La Messuguière in Cabris, Gide extolls the grace and beauty of the countryside in the good weather, and remarks that the shadow of war seems but a figment of the imagination. He recalls nostalgically six months prior, when he was a long-term guest of Mayrisch:

Ce long temps a coulé pour moi d'un cours si égal, en dépit des événements monstrueux qui font entrer ce temps dans l'histoire, qu'il

²³ Léon Pierre-Quint, *André Gide: L'Homme, sa vie, son œuvre* (Paris: Stock, 1952), pp. 457–58.

²⁴ Examples from the *Journal* of Gide's regular contemplation of plants and animals in the first year of the Second War are 21 May 1940, 25 May 1940, 3 July 1940 and 10 July 1940 (*Journal II*, pp. 695–96, p. 696, p. 706 and p. 711).

me semble que je pourrais coudre directement mai à octobre, tant ces six mois de félicité calme auprès d'amis parfaits forment un tout à part et à l'abri de la tourmente. (p. 690)²⁵

That long period for me ran such a tranquil course, despite the monstrous happenings that made the time part of history, that it seems to me I could bind together May to October seamlessly, such was the calm happiness of these six months amongst perfect friends, which created a unity removed and sheltered from the torments.

The excerpt's tone corresponds to what Van Tuyl identifies in other diary excerpts as Gide's at times 'shocking insouciance' (cf. Radiguet's representation of World War One as, for many young boys, one long holiday).²⁶ Referring to the *Journal* entry of 13 May 1940, Van Tuyl observes:

Thus, just two days after Gide mentions the 'dismaying news' of Germany's invasion of the Low Countries, we find an entry describing familiar Gidian pleasures: having hoisted a group of children into a cherry tree so they could rob it of its fruit, Gide watched them play for more than an hour, and reflected that his greatest pleasure always came in the company of young children. Then with a tinge or irony, Gide comments that France is experiencing the same glorious weather it had enjoyed during the summer of 1914: 'How, despite the hideous horror of the war, can one help feeling joyful this morning?' he asks.²⁷

But, of course, as we may gauge from the presentation of gardens in Gide's fictional writing already discussed, the insouciant pleasure the subject enjoys in gardens can only be

²⁵ The friends comprised: Aline Mayrisch; Catherine Gide (Gide's daughter); Elisabeth van Rhysselberghe / Herbart (Catherine's mother); Maria Van Rhysselberghe (Elisabeth's mother and Gide's close friend); and Pierre Herbart (Elisabeth's husband). Gide may also have been visited by his English translator and friend, Dorothy Bussy (linked to the Bloomsbury Group), and her painter husband Simon, whose home in Nice Gide stayed at subsequently. The Van Rhysselberghe–Herbart group lived at the nearby Les Audides, a working farm run by Elisabeth; the Bussys, in Nice.

²⁶ Jocelyn Van Tuyl, *André Gide and the Second World War: A Novelist's Occupation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 28.

²⁷ Van Tuyl [p. xxx]. Gide's reference in this 1940 entry to 1914 must be to 14 August 1914, when, in the *Journal*, he celebrates the weather, claims to be unable to shut out thoughts extraneous to the War, and observes that the work he is undertaking with refugees has only the semblance of usefulness (*Journal I*, p. 836).

temporary; the hostile mother imago still lurks in the gardens, waiting to inflict punishment. (Recall Gide's dictum, 'Nul ne se promène impunément sous les palmes'). On 21 May 1940, after extolling in the *Journal* the countryside around Vence, he tells the 'incurablement léger peuple de France' (incurably flippant people of France) that they will pay dearly today for their lack of application, their insouciance, their complacent tranquillity (*Journal II*, p. 696). He is no doubt also rounding on himself. A closer identification with the guilty is suggested by Gide's use of the first person plural pronoun in the *Journal* entry of 19 July 1940:

Jours splendides de plein été, où je me redis sans cesse qu'il ne tiendrait qu'à l'homme qu'elle soit si belle, cette triste terre où nous nous entre-dévorons! (p. 717)

Such splendid days of high summer, in which I keep reminding myself that it is completely up to humankind to make beautiful this sad land where we are devouring one another.

This mutual devouring resonates with Freud's image in 'Civilization and its Discontents' of '*Homo homini lupus* [man is a wolf to man],²⁸ and with Klein's oral-sadistic phase.

The Great Gardener of Europe

And I find Hitler in my heart
From the corpses flowers grow.²⁹

Gide's vision of wartime gardens – or rather his use of gardening imagery – becomes particularly chilling in one particular excerpt of the *Journal*. On 12 January 1941, Gide describes Adolf Hitler as 'le grand jardinier de l'Europe' (the great gardener of Europe).

²⁸ Freud, 'Civilization and Its Discontents', p. 111.

²⁹ (Anthony Hegarty, 'Hitler in my Heart', in *Anthony and the Johnsons*, 1998).

³⁰ This image can be linked to the violence elsewhere present in Gide's gardens, sometimes acknowledged but mostly disavowed, through the notion of the voice as part-object. Jacques Lacan expands on Klein's list of part-objects harboured in the mother imago to include also the voice.³¹ Slavoj Žižek takes this up to show how human beings' identities are threatened when they come to be inhabited by foreign voices, as in Hitchcock's *Psycho*, where Norman Bates is 'a son dominated by the mother's voice.'³² In the 1941 *Journal* entry, Gide resolves to let Hitler's voice, described as the voice of hell, surge up in his own through an imaginary dialogue.³³ This is one enactment of a project put forward in Gide's 'Identification du Démon' of 1927, in which the interviewee plans a 'Conversation avec le diable' because the devil inhabits his game and he considers transitory belief in the devil to bring him lucid understanding of the inexplicable, dark features of his life (*Romans II*, p. 568). Some days, indeed, he feels within himself 'un tel envahissement du mal' (such an invasion of evil) that it seems the Prince of Darkness is already establishing Hell within him (p. 568).

The mainstay of the 1941 diary entry presents Gide's unsettling identification with Hitler, as he underscores commonalities in their thought. Through gardening imagery, Gide parallels the author's hubris of creation to the Nazi's eugenic project of racial engineering.³⁴ He rhetorically questions himself:

³⁰ The diary entry as a whole Van Tuyl reads as essentially presenting Gide's anti-nationalist thinking, although she does remark that 'the alternating condemnation and identification [of/with Hitler in the passage] tend to obscure the continuity of Gide's political values' (Van Tuyl, pp. 32–33).

³¹ Jacques Lacan, 'Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir dans l'inconscient freudien', 1960, in *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 793–827, here at p. 817.

³² Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 119.

³³ Gide, *Journal II*, 12 January 1941, pp. 747–48.

³⁴ For Segal, Gide's fantasies of gender eugenics expressed through the language of horticulture have illogical, tendentious aspects (Naomi Segal, *André Gide: Pederasty and Pedagogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 206–09). When Roger Bastide makes a political interpretation of Gide's experimental pruning, he links it to Gide's Communism rather than to Fascist eugenic projects (Roger Bastide, *Anatomie d'André Gide* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972), p. 32). For Gide's anti-Semitism, see

N'as-tu pas, du temps que tu t'occupais de jardinage, compris que le seul moyen de préserver, protéger, sauvegarder l'exquis, le meilleur, c'était de supprimer le moins bon? Tu sais bien que cela ne va pas sans apparence de cruauté, mais que cette cruauté c'est prudence...' (*Journal II*, pp. 747–48)

Did you not understand, when you were spending time gardening, that the sole way to preserve, protect and safeguard the exquisite, the better, was to kill the less good? You know only too well that that does not happen without an appearance of cruelty, but that that cruelty is prudence...'

Gide in 1902 had already compared his own enterprise as an experimental writer to that of the gardener who cuts and atrophies certain buds in order that others might flourish in the name of classical beauty (*op. cit.*), and he will go on to use the metaphor of grafting for Nazi persecutions on 24 January 1941 (*Journal II*, 750). Particularly chilling is the harmony of voices at the outset of the diary entry of 12 January:

Pourquoi et contre quoi protesterais-tu? N'as-tu pas dit toi-même: [...] Ne considérais-tu pas [...] Ne méprisais-tu pas [...]? N'as-tu pas même écrit, [...]? [...] N'as-tu pas, du temps que tu t'occupais de jardinage, compris que le seul moyen de préserver, protéger, sauvegarder l'exquis, le meilleur, c'était de supprimer le moins bon?

Why and against what would you protest? Didn't you yourself say [...]? Did you yourself not consider [...] Did you not disdain [...]? Did not you yourself write [...]? Did you not, when you were spending time gardening, understand that the sole way to preserve, protect and safeguard the exquisite, the better, was to kill the less good?

Gide's questions here suggest identification with and introjection of Hitler's thought, resulting in an at least momentary convergence

Jeffrey Mehlman, *Legacies of Anti-Semitism in France* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 64–82. Pierre Lachasse attempts without much success to negotiate, explicate and moderate Gide's anti-Semitic expression in the *Journal* (specifically *Journal I*, 24 January 1914, pp. 762–64) through contextualization and an appendix of a short article by Gide on Blum when he became leader of the Front populaire (*André Gide – Léon Blum, Correspondance (1890–1951)*, ed. by Pierre Lachasse (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2008), p. 12 and pp. 165–68).

of opinion on how the desirable and the undesirable should be understood. Some measure of his seduction by Nazi thought is conveyed when the self-declared 'rational' Gide admits to better understanding in his own voice Hitler's voice than the heartfelt voice of protest against Hitler to which it gives way.³⁵

This new voice marks the speaker's projection or expulsion of Hitler's voice from his own:

Que parles-tu de *meilleur*? Le travail entrepris par celui qui se veut grand jardinier de l'Europe, ce travail n'est pas tant surhumain qu'inhumain.³⁶

Why talk of *better*? The work undertaken by he who considers himself the great gardener of Europe, that work isn't so much superhuman as inhuman.

The garden is presented here as a site of hubristic inhuman experimentation on humans rather than a refuge. Hitler's ambition is described by Gide in terms recalling the hostile mother imago's threat of destruction:

Sans doute, s'il le menait à bout, ne resterait-il sur la terre non plus une voix pour gémir, qu'une oreille pour consentir encore à l'entendre. [...] Et [si le grand rêve d'Hitler] échoue (car il est trop surhumain pour réussir), qu'en restera-t-il sur la terre en fin de compte, que deuil et que dévastation?

Doubtless, were he to carry it through to its logical conclusion, there would no longer be even a voice on earth to cry out in anguish nor an ear to hearken it. [...] And if Hitler's great dream fails (since it is too superhuman to succeed), what will remain on earth in the end, other than mourning and devastation?

³⁵ Van Tuyl observes that Gide could espouse the views of the last person with whom he talked (Van Tuyl, 28), while E. M. Forster wrote in 1919 that Gide 'cannot keep long to the paths of other men, nor indeed to his own. He is always veering' (Forster, 'Kill Your Eagle!', in *The Prince's Tale and Other Uncollected Writings*, ed. by N. Furbank (London: Andre Deutsch, 1998), pp. x-x, here at p. 22).

³⁶ For a consideration of Gide's more 'inhuman' aspects, see Reid, pp. 214-19.

In reaction to the voice of Hitler Gide invoked in himself, Gide conjures up a hypothetical unheard scream, which gives a measure of the pitch of his rejection of the hellish voice. This absent yet present scream is similar to two silent screams described in Žižek's discussion of the voice as part object. Those are in the scene in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) at the steps of Odessa when the mother looks on impotently as her son is gunned down by soldiers, and the painting 'The Scream' (1893) by Edvard Munch (discussed also by Lacan). In the first example the camera in a tracking shot 'approaches the mother [...] and almost enters the black hole of her open mouth'; the scene's 'entire effect is [...] based on the fact that we do not hear her scream.'³⁷ The black hole is both the existential hole of grief and the *vagina dentata* about to consume the son (the real perpetrators being the soldiers, the phantasmatic one, the hostile mother imago). The ear in the Gide quotation, absent from the scene but present through language links to the anamorphic ear in Munch's 'The Scream': the homunculus in that painting has no ears, yet the ears 'return in the Real of the anamorphic stain', the energy of the unsounded scream finding an outlet instead in visual form (materialised sound vibrations), visible in the ear-like shape of the body's "'unnatural" serpentine windings', the distortion of the coast and the water, and the spiral lines (pp. 116–17). In Gide's passage, Hitler's voice (the hostile part-object) and the Gidian self heeding it (an identifying, introjecting subject) vie with the unheard scream (a benign, threatened part-object) and the Gidian self (introjecting subject) heeding that – after a delay, that is. The imagery of gardening and gardens shows the conflict and its imagined aftermath to spill over into the environment (just as the scream in Munch's painting is absorbed in the coast and water). In the preceding citation from Gide's 12 January 1941 diary entry, the phrase 'sur la terre' (on [the] earth/land) appears twice, and an apocalyptic land of mourning and devastation is suggested, recalling: the mother-like earth/land (*terre*) of Valéry's letter where tombstones are tended to and ditches harbour souls; the rotting abandoned gardens in *La*

³⁷ Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!*, p. 117.

Tentative amoureuse and *Isabelle*; the tombstone in *Les Nourritures*, the compost heap in Cuverville where Gide would for a moment have liked to have disposed of the miscarriage and the unhallowed oasis in El Kantara where Marceline is buried. Apparent Edens have come undone and are shown to contain hidden corpses.

As a coda, I should like to return to the El Kantara oasis, which appeared earlier in *L'Immoraliste* as Marceline's burial site and in *Si le grain* as a pederastic paradise for André. The oasis appears again in Gide's diary writing right at the close of World War Two. Between 1 and 16 April 1945, Gide, accompanied by Maria Van Rysselberghe, went on a motorcar tour to the south of Algeria, taking in El Kantara, El Oued, Touggourt, Biskra and Constantine. Of El Kantara, Gide notes in the *Journal*: 'arrêt d'une heure pour initier Mme Théo aux charmes de l'oasis, et aucune, par la suite, ne put nous paraître aussi belle' (*Journal II*, p. 1015, one hour stop to introduce Mme Théo to the charms of the oasis; no other we saw after struck us as so beautiful). The tone of charm and beauty is a quieter echo of the paradisiacal El Kantara of the autobiography, and distant from the menacing El Kantara of *L'Immoraliste*, where Marceline is buried.³⁸

Gide's subsequent diary and travel-writing makes no mention of the violence that was to ravage the Northern Constantine region less than a month after the motorcar tour, and shortly after his definitive departure from Algeria to Paris on 6 May 1945. On 8 May (VE Day), one hundred white French were murdered in Sétif by Algerian nationalists, and from 8 May to 26 June, reprisals by the authorities and individual French colonisers in the northern Constantine towns of Sétif, Constantine and Guelma killed between 20,000 and 30,000 Algerians.³⁹ The omission of events

³⁸ 'Quelque chose en ma volonté s'est brisé, je ne sais même où j'ai trouvé la force de m'éloigner d'El Kantara. Parfois j'ai peur que ce que j'ai supprimé ne se venge' (*Romans I*, p. 690).

³⁹ See Jean-Louis Planche, *Sétif 1945: Histoire d'un massacre annoncé* (Paris: Perrin, 2006). I would like to thank Jim House and Charles Forsdick for directing me to the literature on the Sétif massacre. Rachid Bouchareb's film, *Hors-la-loi*, to be released in France in September 2010, presents this neglected episode.

from Gide's writing may be due to their heavy censorship in France. In exploitation of the patriotic fervour following Nazi defeat, Algerian nationalists held responsible for the killing of the white French were branded Nazi sympathisers. A communiqué by the Government-General (Socialist / Parti Communiste Algérien) of Algeria of 9 May represented them as 'des éléments troubles, d'inspiration hitlérienne' (troublesome elements, inspired by Hitler), a description that laid the ground for a clamp-down by the authorities.⁴⁰ These events were of course lost to memory and only one book dealing with them was published during Gide's lifetime.⁴¹ In his œuvre, Gide's mostly Romantic representations of the region remain unsullied by violence. However, it is not inconceivable that Gide, who had been visiting and writing about the region since the 1890s, may have been in a position to pick up on a climate of heightened tension toward the end of his stay, as demonstrations began the week preceding 8 May 1945.⁴²

⁴⁰ Reported in *Le Monde* on 10 May and reproduced in Maurice Rajsfus, *1953: un 14 juillet sanglant* (Paris: Agnes Vienot, 2003), pp. 29–35, here at p. 30. *L'Humanité* has the perpetrators guilty of a Fascist attack, using titles such as: 'A Sétif, attentat fasciste le jour de la victoire' (11 May 1945) and 'En Algérie, état de siège et Cours martiales. Le fascisme organise ouvertement la guerre civile' (19 May 1945). See Alain Ruscio, *La Question coloniale dans l'Humanité, 1904–2004* (Paris: La Dispute, 2005), pp. 495–96.

⁴¹ Namely Eugène Vallet, *Un drame algérien, la vérité sur les émeutes de Mai 1945* (1948), plate 11.

⁴² Email correspondence with Jim House of 19 January 2009. Further, readers of Gide's *Retour de l'URSS* and *Retouches à mon "Retour de l'URSS* of 1936 and 1937 will know that Gide has a keen eye to identify dissenting politics when he wants to.



Serravalle de Sá, figs 1a–c



Serravalle de Sá, figs 2a–c



Serravalle de Sá, figs 3a–f

State of Horror: The Films of José Mojica Marins and Brazilian Dictatorship

DANIEL SERRAVALLE DE SÁ

The inevitability and irrepressibility of the aggression represented in horror films has often led the genre to be regarded as a paradigmatic space for the investigation of social violence. Film critics working in a historical framework have examined how particular types of film allow comments on a host of socio-cultural and political issues. In the case of horror films, this approach has been used by a number of scholars who associate, for example, the American Depression era with the rise of classic 1930s horror and its legendary monsters, or the way American 1950s horror cinema offered a critique of scientific rationality and Fordist society, or how the Vietnam war is connected with the emergence of films which display a fascination with gore and mutilation (and make-up techniques).¹

The present article seeks to look at theoretical and thematic features in the horror film production of Brazilian director José Mojica Marins, stressing the correlation of these films with state-sanctioned forms of violence. The analysis will examine three films which present the horror character Zé do Caixão (in English, Coffin Joe): *À meia-noite levarei sua alma* (*At Midnight I will Take your Soul*, 1964), *Esta noite encarnarei no teu cadáver* (*This Night I will Possess your Corpse*, 1967) and *Ritual da besta* (*Awakening of the Beast*, 1970).² What I will suggest is that the

¹ See for example, Carlos Clarens, *Horror Movies: An Illustrated Survey* (London: Panther, 1971), p. 62; Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); David Skal, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror* (London: Plexus, 1993), pp. 307–33.

² In this study I use the English titles from the Something Weird VHS subtitled releases in the early 1990s. According to André Barcinski the character's English name 'Coffin Joe' is his and label owner Mike Vraney's translation. See André Barcinski and Ivan Finotti, *Maldito, a vida e o cinema de José Mojica Marins, o Zé do Caixão* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 1998), p. 376.

escalating display of onscreen violence in the films can be read as an astute and subversive commentary on the brutality of the political and social situation in which they were made, namely the Brazilian military dictatorship which seized power in 1964. These horror films seem to resort to a displacement of ideas as a way of bringing to light concerns that could not be readily approached otherwise or, rather, could be more effectively discussed if transported into a world of fantasy. Although perceptive critics like Salvyano Cavalcanti de Paiva and Tati de Moraes, writing at the time of the release of the films, recognised in Mojica's films allusions to the military regime at the time of their release, such explorations have been rather brief and the issues need to be readdressed more thoroughly.³

The historical method of reading the 'state-of-the-nation' (so to speak) from the evidence of films has been challenged by post-structural approaches.⁴ In spite of theoretical caveats, however, it seems possible to glean some insight from works of art into the issues that were important at any given moment in a nation's history.⁵ Indeed, it is clearly no less problematic to claim that a work of art is unrelated to its historical timeframe and the social context of its production. As Douglas Kellner writes, 'films take the raw material of social history and of social discourses and process them into products which are themselves historical events

³ Salvyano Cavalcanti de Paiva, 'À meia-noite levarei sua alma', review in *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, 7 June 1966; Tati de Moraes, 'Levarei sua alma', review in *Última Hora*, Rio de Janeiro, 11 June 1966.

⁴ See for example: Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993) or Marvin Zuckerman, 'Sensation Seeking and the Taste for Vicarious Horror', in *Horror Films: Current Research on Audience Preferences and Reactions*, ed. by J. B. Weaver and R. Tamborini (Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996), pp. 147–60.

⁵ See for example: Michel Walsh, 'Jameson and "Global Aesthetics"', in *Post-Theory, Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. by D. Bordwell and N. Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), pp. 481–500; Vance Kepley Jr., 'Whose Apparatus? Problems of Film Exhibition and History', in *Post-Theory, Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. by D. Bordwell and N. Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), pp. 533–52; and David Bordwell, 'Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory', in *Post-Theory, Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. by D. Bordwell and N. Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), pp. 3–36.

and social forces'.⁶ Kellner seems to be implicitly acknowledging the generation of subtexts by means of 'processes' of metaphorical substitutions. Such liaisons between real and fictional often find expression in the rhetorical form of allegory.

Film scholar Ismail Xavier discusses some characteristics of historical allegory in film which help to explain why it has been a privileged mode of interpretation at particular historical moments.⁷ He notes that 'recognizing an allegorical dimension in a text requires the ability to perceive homologies, and national allegories require the understanding of private lives as representative of public destinies' (p. 335). Xavier goes on to argue that allegorical expression is especially prevalent in times of political repression and serves as a means of offering 'disguised comment on the present' (p. 354). On a more textual level, the critic says that the identification of national allegories requires correspondence between specific circumstances both in the text and the historical context. Such connections are often created through the use of an individual (a character) who stands for a larger social class or political group. Xavier affirms that allegorical discourse is comprehended within a framework of intention-utterance-interpretation (p. 346). In other words, what can be understood here is that after the director's 'encoding' and the viewer's 'decoding', to use Stuart Hall's seminal expressions, there is what can be designated as an allegorical reading strategy, based on the viewer's capacity to detect the collective in the work of art.⁸ Obviously not all films, or horror films, are allegorical, but that is not to say that they are otherwise without an historical aspect. The Brazilian *coup d'état* and subsequent dictatorship, which lasted 21 years, has deeply affected national film-making both in terms of production and themes. Such latent political dimensions of the story-telling process have led film scholars Randal Johnson and

⁶ Douglas Kellner, 'Hollywood Film and Society', in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, ed. by J. Hill and P.C. Gibson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 354–64, here at p. 355.

⁷ Ismail Xavier, 'Historical Allegory', in *A Companion to Film Theory*, ed. by T. Miller and R. Stam (Malden: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 333–62.

⁸ Stuart Hall, 'The Television Discourse – Encoding and Decoding', in *Media Series*, SP, 7, University of Birmingham, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1973.

Robert Stam to declare that ‘Brazilian film-makers have never enjoyed the luxury of regarding themselves as “apolitical”.’⁹ The political history of the country manifested in allegories has already been celebrated in relation to *Cinema Novo* and the ‘aesthetic of hunger’.¹⁰ These critically recognised films in fact share many characteristics with Mojica’s marginal horror, and were produced in similar circumstances. Made at the same time, using the same historical material, the Zé do Caixão films seem to contain all the necessary ingredients for a productive an allegorical reading.

Zé do Caixão: A Gothic Villain in the Tropics?

Zé do Caixão makes his first appearance in November 1964, in the film *At Midnight I will Take your Soul*. The character is played by Mojica himself, who is also the writer, director and producer of the film. Zé do Caixão is the cruel undertaker of a nameless village in the backlands of Brazil who terrorizes its citizens with extreme violent behaviour. Sporting nails like talons and in his distinctive costume of top hat, black suit and billowing black cape, his appearance is entirely out of keeping with his place and time. The director’s appropriation of a costume typically associated both with Expressionist cinema and classic Hollywood horror films argues for a visual association between Zé do Caixão and some iconic international horror characters, suggesting a dynamic of cross-cultural horror exchange. However, for all his outlandish attire, the Brazilian character remains firmly linked to local traditions and national struggles (such as religious credulity, hunger, and poverty) by means of elements in the *mise-en-scène*. Zé does not believe in Heaven or Hell: for him the essence of life lies in the ‘immortality of the blood’. Therefore his goal is to find

⁹ Randal Johnson and Robert Stam (eds), *Brazilian Cinema* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 56.

¹⁰ Ismail Xavier, *Allegories of Underdevelopment: Aesthetics and Politics in Modern Brazilian Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

the ‘perfect woman’, someone with a similar mindset, to bear him a child and continue his lineage.

Having murdered his former wife, whom he considered unsuited to the task of giving him children, he becomes sexually fixated on his best friend’s spouse, who becomes the repository of his thirst for perfection. After brutally killing his friend by drowning him, Zé proceeds to beat and rape his fiancée. The girl hangs herself, but not before she casts a curse on Zé do Caixão, vowing to return from the dead and take his soul away. In the course of the film Zé gouges out a man’s eyes and amputates an adversary’s fingers using a broken bottle. The rampage continues as he lashes one opponent with a whip and savagely thrusts a crown of thorns into another man’s face. The film climaxes on All Souls’ Day with Zé being chased by a procession of ghosts. Fleeing across a very atmospheric graveyard set-piece, he takes refuge in a crypt where he has to face the decomposing, maggot-infested bodies of the couple he killed, a sight that drives him out of his mind and leaves him in a death-like state.

For a horror film, *At Midnight* is very down-to-earth, the supernatural dimension only emerging in the final sequences as a confirmation of the spiritual values Zé do Caixão has despised and profaned. The ‘uncanny’ element as a source of fear is but a fleeting aspect in the film, as we will see. In contrast, the crimes Zé commits in his belief that everything is possible in a lawless universe were of unprecedented violence for Brazilian audiences in the 1960s. The connection between such shocking violence and the political atmosphere is plain to see. Although the ousting of President João Goulart happened in the same year as the film was released, the military junta had been planning their *coup* for years as part of the ‘anti-left’ Vargas conspiracy.¹¹ Indeed, Thomas Skidmore traces the origins of the *coup* back to an earlier presidential period, ‘given the many parallels between the fall of Vargas in 1954 and the overthrow of Goulart a decade later’.¹² The

¹¹ Paulo Evaristo Arns, *Brasil Nunca Mais*, 31st edn (Rio: Vozes, 2000).

¹² Thomas Skidmore, *The Politics of Military Rule in Brazil 1964–1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 5.

Brazilian political sphere had been marked by internal struggle and was under an authoritarian regime long before the *coup*. When the takeover actually took place, intimidation and torture were used by the military as a means to consolidate their authoritarian state. Zé do Caixão's ruthlessness echoes precisely the nature of the military takeover in April 1964.¹³ Just as the village inhabitants fail to stand up to Zé's overpowering force, the Brazilian legislature and constitutionally-elected government could not resist the force of arms. The film-maker gives form to Brazilian anxieties and produces a cinematic representation of an overbearing power imposing itself by violent means.

At the time, state-sanctioned violence had not yet reached its worst levels, which would later culminate in the widespread disappearance, persecution and forced exile of many Brazilians. However, even during those initial stages of repression, federal government agencies were already deciding whether movies should be released in their entirety, censored or banned altogether.¹⁴ Thus political violence enters the sphere of cinema through the determining material conditions of censorship and distribution. State censors not only prohibited news about dissent and social conflict and suppressed any information relating to abduction and torture by government agents, but also stifled even indirect protests in the arts. *At Midnight* escaped the SCDP (Serviço de Censura de Diversões Públicas) board with only a few cuts, such as the scene of a woman being burned alive, which can still be seen in the backdrop of the opening credits. Accused of thematising political issues on screen, Mojica could have defended himself by saying that topics such as violence, torture and tyrannical forces are constitutive of the horror genre. But as these films address issues related to the Brazilian social context, in the

¹³ Retrospective evidence of the link between these films and the dictatorship is hard to find. The control of the dictatorship in itself accounts for a general absence of records in the period, making audience and reception studies particularly difficult to carry out in Brazil, although the articles by de Paiva and de Moraes also suggest such a connection.

¹⁴ Beatriz Kushnir, *Cães de Guarda: jornalistas e censores, do AI-5 à Constituição de 1988* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2004); Archdiocese of São Paulo, *Torture in Brazil: A Shocking Report of the Pervasive Use of Torture by Brazilian Military Governments, 1964–1979*, ed. by Joan Dassin, trans. by Jaime Wright (New York: Vintage, 1986).

broad realm of horror films, it is curious to note how Mojica's representation of social political struggle finds a particular expression in the gothic mode – that is to say, a discourse encompassing national, social, and human degeneration, as well as madness and violent behaviour, often associated with climates of socio-political unrest and artistic suppression.¹⁵ Although it is possible to choose Brazilian films to serve as comparators, this cross-cultural reading of the Brazilian character can provide a fresh reading of Mojica's best known films and supply a new perspective on *Zé do Caixão*, as the expression of a Brazilian gothic villain.¹⁶

At Midnight displays a level of graphic violence that is analogous to iconic films which emerged in the 1960s. Watershed films like *Psycho* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), *Blood Feast* and *2000 Maniacs* (dir. Hershell Gordon Lewis, 1963 and 1964), for example, are said to have modernised the face of horror by moving away from the parsimony of the classic supernatural repertoire and introducing gory violence and serial killers to the horror genre.¹⁷ Comparatively, in terms of its graphic representation of brutality, *At Midnight* surpasses the onscreen violence portrayed in most American horror films produced at the same period. *Zé's* bestiality

¹⁵ Direct connections between the gothic mode and the socio-political sphere have been extensively discussed. See for example: Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 5; David Punter, 'Terror', in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature* (New York: New York University, 1998), p. 235; Victor Sage, *The Gothick Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 13; and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (London: Blackwell, 2004).

¹⁶ The use of the word 'gothic' to describe films from this period is still a controversial issue among scholars. Peter Hutchings, for example, denies the influence of the gothic novels over these films claiming 'gothic' is essentially an eighteenth-century literary form. See: Peter Hutchings. *The Horror Film* (Harlow: Longman, 2004). That said, some nineteenth-century novels such as *Frankenstein*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Dracula*, and so forth clearly have explicitly gothic aspects and have exerted considerable influence on a cinematic vocabulary and compositional style of classic films. For a highly illuminating exploration of the nature of gothic films, see Heidi Kaye, 'Gothic Films', in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. by D. Punter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 180–92.

¹⁷ Arguably, *Psycho* can be thought of as the film which modernised the horror genre, away from classic horror motifs (which tended to invest in psychological terror and represented violence with reluctance), and introduced the prototype serial killer, the troubled Norman Bates. *Psycho* made way for the ascension of a sub-genre within horror film – the splatter-movie or slasher-mover – in which gory scenes of violence predominate.

clearly ranks him among the nastiest villains of his generation. The explicit sex and violence characteristic of his films differs from the 'mind's eye' evocative shock effect preferred by most North-American horror directors. Zé's list of offences includes beating, torturing, kidnapping, mutilating, raping and killing people. In visual terms, the horror experience provided by Zé do Caixão's crimes is arguably more explicit and overwhelmingly violent than the horror experience observed in many of the other iconic serial killer films of the time. However, the ambience of *At Midnight* and the character's costume resemble the films of Fritz Lang and the early gothic horror films produced by Universal Studios in the 1930s. In this sense, Zé is a transitional figure, functioning like the 1960s cinematic sociopaths but with the demeanour of a gothic villain. This contextual mangling can be noted in the way Mojica makes use of lighting schemes and props to create a distinctively shadowy *mise-en-scène*. Shot in black-and-white stock and lit for monochrome, the film's Expressionist period look is further reinforced by the use of non-realistic sets, and symbolic and representational objects, such as plaster skulls, polystyrene rocks and painted sceneries. *At Midnight* revisits the ghostly visual tension of classic cinema but also reinvents the style by making innovative use of camera angles. For example, in the symbolically charged scene where Zé eats lamb on Good Friday, the camera-work shows a highly creative sense of composition: as Zé devours his blasphemous meal, a Catholic procession marches by his window. The shot encompasses the two different frames of action, showing one frame within the other.

Another crucial gothic element in the film is Zé do Caixão's Victorian iconography. At first sight the character's pompous garments seem to exceed the demands of a film set in an isolated Brazilian country town. However, as Sarah Street explains, film's costumes are frequently employed to generate an aggrandisement of the body, and here they become a vital element in the composition of the character.¹⁸ Rather than conforming to

¹⁸ Sarah Street. *Costume and Cinema: Dress Codes in Popular Film* (London: Wallflower, 2001), pp. 85–101.

historical accuracy or social verisimilitude, Mojica's intention seems to be the creation of a cinematic spectacle. The costume encompasses an attempt to align Zé do Caixão with gothic characters from classic horror movies. The stated reference to such an iconographical repertoire would cue the audience about the film's type and place it undoubtedly within the boundaries of the horror genre. Tierney suggests that Zé do Caixão's look takes its inspiration from 'Universal's horror cycle (particularly *Dracula*, Tod Browning, 1931) and *Nosferatu* (F.W. Murnau, 1922)'.¹⁹ These cinematic references and others, such as Rupert Julian's *Phantom of the Opera* (1925) and James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), are acknowledged by the film-maker in many interviews. However, his admiration is reserved, more precisely, for the actor's performance.²⁰ In terms of appearance, Zé do Caixão resembles more the figure of Mr Hyde, especially in the 1920s silent version played by John Barrymore.²¹ Barrymore's Hyde is not exactly a monster or vampire but a human character whose sardonic behaviour is considered strange but acceptable, until he attacks a person. In a similar way, Zé appears as a social misfit who rejects accepted norms of culture and creed.

Further links between Zé do Caixão and the gothic tradition can be seen in the question of progeny and blood-line, a pivotal theme in numerous gothic narratives.²² Moreover, through his fascination with voodoo, mysticism and superstition, the figure of Zé offers a provocative critique of Catholic culture. Figures of the Catholic imagination, such as the Inquisition, witchcraft, the devil, and the saving power of the cross and holy water are themes widely explored by the gothic repertoire. Donato Totaro draws attention

¹⁹ Dolores Tierney. 'José Mojica Marins and the Cultural Politics of Marginality in Third World Film Criticism', in *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 13:1 (2004), 63–78, p. 67.

²⁰ Horácio Higuchi, 'José Mojica Marins: The Madness in his Method', in *Monster! International*, 3 (1993), [page refs xxx], p. 6.

²¹ This source is not acknowledged by Mojica, but similarities include: the Victorian cape and top hat; the grotesque hands-like-claws; and the character's sardonic behaviour, for example.

²² See Botting, *Gothic*; Punter, 'Terror', and Sage, *The Gothick Novel*.

to Mojica's social critique, highlighting 'Zé's flagrant anti-Catholicism', without going into further details.²³ However, on closer inspection, it is not only the Catholic tradition that Zé do Caixão attacks. Throughout the film, the character also dismisses Afro-Brazilian religions and spiritual séances, which are represented by a gypsy clairvoyant in the film. Most of all, Zé is an iconoclast who despises all forms of religion and promises of an after-life, claiming that the continuation of life lies in the blood. Such a focus on the plurality of religious beliefs indicates the extent to which Mojica is in touch with Brazil's multi-cultural population composed of different ethnic groups and creeds. He exposes and dismisses what he sees as the most superstitious side of Brazilian culture which manifests itself in the form of religious beliefs. The twist lies in his ability to expose the link between the dogmatic aspects of these beliefs and issues of submissiveness. In part, Zé do Caixão can be seen as a rebel who fights against what he considers widespread ignorance. He combats self-inflicted religious restraints which he seems to consider a problem of the Brazilian character. He also fights against the local *coronel* (landowner) and the corrupt police. Eric Hobsbawn examined Brazilian *cangaceiros* (outlaws) as bringers of freedom against state power and heroes by public opinion, albeit ambiguous ones.²⁴ Hobsbawn views the tradition of social banditry as portraying not simple criminals, but champions of social justice, as resistance fighters or avengers. In this sense, Zé could be understood as a humanist, as he advocates a more anthropocentric attitude towards life. The problem is that the village inhabitants do not regard Zé do Caixão as a 'social rebel' against the structures which bind the peasant societies. He is seen as an uncompromising figure, driven purely individualistic motives. Although in the fictional dimension Zé do Caixão is regarded as an evil character, it does not mean his actions were considered social crimes by the film viewers. On the

²³ Donato Totaro, 'À Meia-Noite Levarei Sua Alma (At Midnight I'll Take your Soul, 1963)', in *South American Cinema: A Critical Filmography, 1915-1994*, ed. by P. Rist and T. Barnard (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 1998), pp. 137-39, at p. 138.

²⁴ Hobsbawn, p. 64.

contrary, the character's public success and popularity suggests tremendous audience identification.

Paradoxically as it might appear, Zé do Caixão can also be read as the mean face of the Establishment, an agent of the structures of power. A symbol of this domineering, all-pervasive presence, he imposes his will on ordinary people. By exposing Brazilian apathy in the face of injustice and by mocking national beliefs, the director provokes his audience. When it comes to Brazilian reality, Zé do Caixão's style of horror is more disturbing than any Dracula, Mummy or Frankenstein monster could ever be, Hollywood creations that, as Vinícius de Moraes points out, are considered somewhat outlandish in Brazil, having little connection with national reality.²⁵ Projecting the horrendous on to the 'other', as a way of displacing national anxieties in time and space, was – and still is – a cliché in Hollywood cinema.²⁶ Mojica does not resort to devices such as ancient curses, or to exotic or foreign threats in order to create horror (unlike, say, Lewis's *Blood Feast*, which is about an Egyptian murderer), and it is this intimate reflection of a national reality that makes his films more effectively horrifying. Thus, in the case of *At Midnight*, entirely set within a Brazilian dimension and in its present time, the audience can readily link film to context and easily comprehend its metaphorical potential. In other words, the homologies between the fictional world and ongoing conflicts – and the way the character subdues and stands in for social groups in a fast-changing Brazil – form the basis of an accessible allegorical dimension in the film.

Zé do Caixão in the Margins of Global Culture

In 1967 Mojica released *This Night I'll Possess your Corpse*, a follow-up to the first Zé do Caixão feature. A few elements from the earlier film are put into play again, namely Zé's obsession with

²⁵ Vinícius de Moraes, 'Sangue de Pantera' [1943], in *O Cinema de Meus Olhos*, ed. by C.A. Calil (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1991), pp. 242–46, here at p. 243.

²⁶ Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears*, pp. 303–04.

having a son by the ‘superior woman’, the female intellectually superior to what Zé regards the mediocrity of the Brazilian people. There are, however, significant deviations from the first film. This time round, Zé’s performance again resembles that of an Expressionist character in a dramatic black-and-white world, but his obsession is now far more exaggerated. There is also an attempt to expand Zé’s reach as a horror film villain. In order to reinforce horror conventions (and thus to engage more emphatically with Hollywood horror cinema), Mojica brings in a new narrative and cultural apparatus.

This Night explores conventional horror topoi: the mad-scientist’s laboratory with its operating table, flashing lights and hi-tech sounds; the horribly deformed and vicious side-kick; and even a torch-wielding village mob which chases Zé do Caixão through the forest and pushes him to death in a swamp (only for him to return in the sequel). The presence of such topoi, which can be typically seen in many Universal horror movies, and the increase in the number of set-pieces are due to the larger budget at Mojica’s disposal for the making of this film. Arguably, the tour de force here is a colour interlude in which Zé do Caixão has a nightmare vision midway through the film, in which he is dragged into a grave by a bizarre creature and ends up in Hell. Filmed in bleeding colours, the sequence leaps out vividly from the previous black and white footage. Zé do Caixão finds himself in a Dantesque Hell where the damned are cursed to eternity locked into the walls of icy caverns.²⁷

Despite the introduction of some elements from classic horror films, *This Night* is not composed entirely of borrowings. Obviously, from a technical point of view, Mojica could never make Zé do Caixão comparable to the monsters of the Hollywood industry. The marks of economic limitations are inscribed in the film’s excessively grainy images and occasional grating sounds, for example. What makes Zé do Caixão different from the

²⁷ In the *Divine Comedy*, the ninth circle or the centre of Hell is a frozen lake reserved for those who committed the ultimate sin: treachery. Deep Hell is subdivided in four sectors reserved for 1) traitors to their kindred 2) traitors to their city, country or political party 3) traitors to their guests 4) traitors to their lords and benefactors.

Hollywood tradition is not only its place at the margins of the Hollywood industry, but also the aspects which give the character a local identity and show his dialogue with his Brazilian audience. *This Night* makes a parodic use of Hollywood horror, accentuating and distorting elements of its nature, an off-key reproduction offering both a humorous outlook on the Brazilian inability to emulate Hollywood glossy films, and a way of capitalising on their success.²⁸ Mojica proposes a conceptualised cinema in which the precariousness of production values speaks analogously of poverty and the difficulties of making films in Brazil.²⁹

Intentionally marginal, Mojica's methods of film-making involve a more experimental cinematic language than the customary modes used by the 1960s Hollywood film industry. As a consequence some memorable horror scenes emerge from this cinema of experimentation. Though the use of terrifying animals is a well-established horror film *topos*, Mojica makes unprecedented use of spiders and snakes indigenous to Brazil. Unlike the obvious piece of glass that protected Sean Connery from a tarantula in *Dr No* (dir. Terence Young, 1962), in Mojica's hands, not only spiders but an overwhelming quantity of other creepy-crawlies are made to interact with the actors. Thus, while in Hollywood these animals read as 'exotic' (such as the armadillos seen in the vampire's Transylvanian castle in Browning's *Dracula*), for a Brazilian spectatorship the effect is significantly different. Such deadly creatures remind the audience of the torture mechanisms employed by the dictatorship. They provoke a very recognisable fear in the native audience and function as elements which can bridge back to the socio-political realm. Their use in *This Night*

²⁸ In 1973, while discussing the historical evolution of Brazilian cinema, film critic Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes states Brazilian "creative incapacity for copying". See: Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, 'Cinema: A Trajectory within Underdevelopment', in *Brazilian Cinema*, ed. by R. Johnson and R. Stam (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 244–56, here at p. 244.

²⁹ Glauber Rocha, regarded as one of the best Brazilian directors of all time and leader of the *Cinema Novo* movement, was a fan of Mojica's *Zé do Caixão*. Rocha saw many similarities between his 'aesthetics of hunger' and Mojica's films. See: André Barcinski and Ivan Finotti, *Maldito*, pp. 155–56.

can be paralleled to the extra-diegetic context as a reference to the climate of persecution and torture then reigning in Brazil.

In real life, the dictatorship was banning artistic and journalistic production. The military motto at the time was ‘Brazil: love it or leave it’. This political repression culminated in December 1968, when the military President Costa e Silva signed the AI-5 (Institutional Act 5) overriding the Congress. What happened then was a ‘*coup* within the *coup*’ which granted additional power to even more reactionary sectors of the army. Among the Act’s draconian measures was suspension of the right of *habeas corpus* for anyone charged with crimes against national security. Torture now occurred under presidential decree, carried out by a number of security agencies such as, DOPS/DEOPS, OBAN and the notorious DOI-CODI (‘DOI’ is a word-play in Portuguese for ‘this hurts’). The book *Torture in Brazil* collected statements of victims who had, for example, been placed in a cubicle with ‘a boa constrictor to keep company’ (p. 21), and of others who had a substance thrown in their faces that they ‘took to be some kind of acid’ (p. 22).³⁰ It is not fortuitous that the modes of torture Zé imposes on his victims are identical to the atrocities practiced by the military police during interrogation. Taken from *This Night*, the stills reproduced above re-enact such military tortures: girls prostrate in a gloomy dungeon with a snake implores succour from Zé (figs 1a-c), and Zé burning the face of a girl with a chemical product (figs 2a-c).

Mojica’s use of creatures and poisons is a reference to government-sponsored methods of police repression built up during the 60s and still routine even in the 80s. The similarity between the violent scenarios goes on. Among other techniques in used by the military reported were beating and rape (assaulters using their bodies or objects to penetrate the victim), torture using insects and animals, strangling, and drowning.³¹ Again, Mojica’s

³⁰ Archdiocese of São Paulo, *Torture in Brazil*, pp. 16-25.

³¹ Amnesty International, *Torture in the Eighties*, Martin Robertson (Bath: Pitman, 1984), pp. 62–77 and pp. 148–50.

echo of such torture techniques can be seen in the stills above (figs 3a-3f).

Mojica daringly represents torture scenes which due to press censorship were kept from the public eyes, but which nonetheless inhabited the imagination of most Brazilians. In an echo of his time, Mojica restages the many and varied bestialities knowingly practiced in the 'horror houses' of the military government. For such boldness he had to overcome serious obstacles in order to see *This Night* released. His original cut, showing Zé do Caixão screaming 'I don't believe in God' as he dies, had to be changed into a 'more positive' message.³² The film was subjected to cuts in several scenes although not banned altogether. Despite the film's moralistic finale, the images in shown throughout the narrative are not less potent because they are explained away at the end. The conciliatory ending cannot erase the impact of the images.

From Sadistic Undertaker to Denizen of Nightmares and Hallucinations

Ritual of the Sadists (1970) a.k.a. *Awakening of the Beast* (1985) is perhaps Mojica's greatest film in terms of character development. Due to its anti-religious discourse, drug-taking imagery and general debauchery, *Ritual of the Sadists* was permanently banned by government censors. To this day, the film has never had a legitimate theatrical release. Prohibited for fifteen years, it had to be renamed *Awakening of the Beast* in order to be released in video in 1985, not uncoincidentally the year the dictatorship officially ended.

Despite such hindrances, Zé do Caixão was becoming increasingly popular and, in 1970, was attracting coverage in a range of media. This period also marks the beginning of the partnership between Mojica and Rubens Francisco Luchetti, a prolific pulp fiction writer and long-lasting collaborator. In this

³² André Barcinski and Ivan Finotti, *Maldito*, pp. 164–70.

partnership, Lucchetti wrote literary stories and non-technical scripts which Mojica interpreted and adapted to the screen with very different results. Together they produced a variety of material including films, TV programmes, radio sketches and comic books in which the character Zé do Caixão appeared as a host and occasional commentator on the action of the stories.³³ The blasphemous Zé had become a multi-media sensation and his fame spread across the country, sparking a huge amount of controversy among the government, the public and journalists.

In previous films, Zé do Caixão had been portrayed as an evil villain but still depicted as human. This time around he is presented as an entity capable of transcending the physical dimension and disturbing people's dreams. Capitalising on the character's popular success, Mojica here seeks to elevate Zé's status as Brazilian bogey-man by making him the very subject-matter of people's fears. The attempt seems to have paid off as in Brazil, even those who have never watched a Zé do Caixão film will have heard something about the character. In a twist of self-referentiality, *Awakening* also shows Mojica as a character, the film-maker briefly brought into a scene to explain that Zé do Caixão is merely a character invented by him. Mojica and Lucchetti make use of self-parody in various scenes, also interpolating the film footage with clippings from Zé's TV appearances and showing people reading Zé do Caixão comic books.

Awakening opens with a series of non-linear vignettes that display sexual perversion and drug use in 1970s Brazilian society. The vignettes include a disturbingly long close-up of a needle entering a vein, a girl who is penetrated to death with a staff by a guy dressed as Moses, and an upper-class lady who enjoys caressing the belly of a pony while watching her daughter having sex with the butler. After the vignettes, a jump-cut reveals that action is happening at a roundtable discussion, on the set of a TV show. The viewers realise that the scenes were actually examples

³³ Zé do Caixão comics were drawn by illustrator Nico Rosso using an elaborate mixed-media technique which blended ink drawings and photographs.

taken from a psychiatric thesis about the effect of drugs on people's mind. Ultimately, to prove his hypothesis to his colleagues, the doctor explains how he convinced four volunteers to undergo LSD experimentation. His methodology involved taking the voluntaries to a variety of evocative environments – a wild night-club, an avant-garde theatre performance and a screening of a Zé do Caixão film. It is agreed the film made the most impression on the subjects and then the LSD injection is administered. To illustrate the 'trip', Mojica again changes the film stock from black-and-white to colour. The subsequent hallucinations are brought to life via psychedelic cinematography and cacophonous sound effects. Each subject is transported to their personal nightmare where they either encounter Zé do Caixão as a partner in bizarre acts or else become his victim. The scenes are frantic, the editing style disjunctive, and the film stocks used by director of photography Giorgio Attili deliberately mismatched. Mojica brings into being horror creatures drawing upon a number of filmic styles, a variety of music and even print-based texts. However, at this point, the psychiatrist reveals the LSD was a placebo. Thus, the drug is presented not as the evil in itself, but as a catalyst capable of awakening the dark side inside every person (though they did not need it).³⁴

In this respect, *Awakening* satirises contemporary theories about media-effect, in particular the supposed influence of horror on the human psyche, while offering Mojica's critiques of the country's political situation, the state of film-making in Brazil and the moral hypocrisy he saw as prevalent in Brazilian society. Arguably, the pinnacle of this cultural and political appraisal is when the character Mojica says furiously:

Making a film in Brazil is like making a spaceship and sending it to the Moon. We have no resources to make movies, and the filmmaker must create a character. He must attack on all medias. He has to buy

³⁴ For further reference about the context of psychedelic-influenced productions of the post-1968 era (many of which have allegorical and analogical import at this turning point for modernity) see, for example: James Petersen, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-garde Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994) or the mini-documentary *Psychedelic Film Effects* (2003) dir. Allen Daviau.

imported film stock, film stock! To recreate what's already been created! And show the audiences what they want to see! Otherwise, it's hopeless: the theatres will close! Reviewers will sell bananas and filmmakers will eat the peels!³⁵

This monologue is illustrative of the complexity of these low-budget films. However, wherever the focus of analysis is placed (intra- or extra-textually) these films speak from a space of socio-political resistance, something clearly felt by the censors who refused to allow the film to be released. *Awakening* is hard to categorise: it does not have the usual supernatural horror and, although Zé do Caixão symbolises evil in the film, it is rather a film with Zé do Caixão in it, as opposed to a Zé do Caixão film in the strict sense. The second title *Awakening of the Beast* seems more appropriate than *Ritual of the Sadists*, given that the people who supposedly took the drug awakened their beast within.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the films of José Mojica Marins drawing attention to how the escalating representation of onscreen violence in the films parallels an intensification of social repression in real life. Drawing on Xavier's definition of allegory, I suggested that issues which could not be openly addressed at the time (such as torture and violence) were transported to the fictional dimension of the horror film, where they could be justified as merely generic convention, an argument that was not always sufficient to prevent the censoring of Mojica's films. The blatant images of violence and torture restaged in his films speak for the film-maker's opposition to the military rule. At the same time, Zé do Caixão can be located in the broad realm of the international horror film, as an example of a Brazilian gothic villain. In that sense, Zé represents a 'mangled' antagonist who exists between classic gothic villains and modern serial killers. This mangling can also be understood in

³⁵ *Awakening of the Beast*, dir. José Mojica Marins, in *Coleção Zé do Caixão*, vol. 5 (Cinemagia, 2001) [On DVD].

terms of Mojica's reflections on the difficulties of making films in Brazil, forcing directors such as Mojica into a *bricolage* that encompasses various aspects, from the creative use of props and material to the re-signification of horror film topoi. When his art thinks global, it is always with a view to acting local. Thus, in spite of Mojica's appropriation of the language and conventions of Hollywood, his films show an approach to horror which highlights aspects of Brazilian culture. His critique of Brazilian cultural values focuses in particular on what a submissiveness stemming from national religious beliefs.

Although Mojica's films are multi-faceted cultural items and can be read on different levels, in essence, the issue of 'power' is a constant presence, part of a concern with forces that threaten individuals, groups and social life in general. His *Zé do Caixão* is both rebel and torturer, exposing the workings of power and repression and developing in response to social changes. Though technically modest, Mojica's films are strangely entrancing. They are full of images involving scenes of sadism, gore, nudity and but in a surrealism going far beyond expected horror clichés. The contrast between rudimentary sets and props and the boldness of some shots argues for an effective low-budget film packed with memorable displays of originality, ability behind the camera and bravura in performance. All in all, Mojica's films epitomise works of horror which linger in the viewers' mind, forcing anyone who watches them to re-evaluate what should be considered cutting-edge in 60s and 70s horror films.



Simpson, fig. 1: *Vertigo*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (1958)



Simpson, fig. 2: *The Last Legion*, dir. Doug Lefler (2006)



Simpson, fig. 3: *The Last Legion*

Arthur's (Scots) Scars: *The Last Legion*

JAMES R. SIMPSON

‘Constantyn, my cosyn, he sall the corown bere,
Alls becomys hym of kynde, ȝife Criste will hym thole; [...]
And sythen merke manly to Mordrede children,
That they bee sleyghely slayne and slongen in watyrs;
Latt no wykkyde wede waxe, no wrythe one this erthe.
I warne fore thy wirchipe, wirke alls I bydde.’
(*The Alliterative Morte Arthure*, ll. 4316–23)

‘My kinsman, Constantine, shall wear the crown,
In keeping with his kinship, if Christ will allow it. [...]
And then sternly mark that Mordred's children
Be secretly slain and slung into the seas:
Let no wicked weed in this world take root and thrive.
I warn you, by your worth, work as I bid.’¹

At the end of the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* the dying king calls for the murder of Mordred's offspring, a final patriarchal punishment to draw the curtain on the Old Age that ends with him. Thus, in a motif that first appears in Malory – and in a reputational parallel to the seemingly mortal wound he bears away from the shores of this world – the once and future king finishes his career problematically, if explicably, assimilated to the tyrant-murderer Herod, kinsman of other unhallowed mythical figures such as Saturn or Medea. The poem thereby seeks to close its history with the most sombre chord that might be teased out from the interweaving and often conflicting heteroglossia of sources that gives us ‘the most contested of all Britons’.² At least potentially

¹ Valerie Krishna (trans.), in *The Romance of Arthur: An Anthology of Medieval Texts in Translation*, ed. by James J. Wilhelm (New York: Garland, 1994).

² Michelle R. Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100–1300*, *Medieval Cultures*, 22 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. xi. On history and necessity in medieval Arthurian literary traditions, see especially M. Victoria Guerin, *The Fall of Kings and Princes: Structure and Destruction*

‘beyond the pale’ – an expression originally designating that other Hadrian’s Wall, the picket barrier separating English colonial territory in Ireland from a hostile ‘barbarian’ beyond – Arthur’s monstrous necessity leaves the king revealed as troublingly akin to the figures he has devoted his reign to destroying and excluding. Leaving the reader with a version of Trollope’s ‘can you forgive him?’, the moment seems designed to put a definitive end to any innocence of Arthurian legend and to underscore the ‘state of exception’ fundamental to kingship.³ In this respect, the alliterative text’s conclusion offers a neatly summative instance of the ‘boundary pressures’ Michelle Warren sees exemplified in medieval accounts of a king whose sword, Excalibur, is emblematically central to the often murderous work of division and definition elaborated in medieval accounts of early Britain.⁴ In this, accounts of the end of Arthur’s reign take their place alongside other traditions that look towards the end (or beginning) of the nation, Arthurian polity and its legacies appearing as a vision of a ‘coming community’ whose glory extends beyond the annihilation of mere mortal bodies. Here the compensatory structure of the messianic logic evident in Arthur’s promised future return appears in striking clarity: the darker the end, the more glorious the resurrection. This view extends from the physical to the moral dimension: Arthur here offers the spectacle of an ‘ethical suicide’, taking on himself responsibility for the apparently unthinkable deed that would otherwise be the

in *Arthurian Tragedy*, *Figurae: Reading Medieval Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

³ On the ambiguous character of the giant-killing king in medieval literature and thought, see notably Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages*, *Medieval Cultures*, 17 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). The long-standing tradition of the king’s ‘exception’ from the symbolic order is articulated in political tracts such as John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* (on which, see Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957)) has had considerable afterlife in anthropology and cultural theory, from René Girard (*Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1979)) to Žižek’s treatments.

⁴ Warren, pp. xi–xii.

unfinished business hanging over future generations.⁵ To mangle the old phrase, 'The king is [un]dead. Long live the king.'⁶

Where this tale ends reflects back to where other treatments, whether purportedly 'authentic' or revisionist, seek to begin. Doug Lefler's film *The Last Legion* (2007), based on the novel by Valerio Massimo Manfredi, offers a dramatic vision of the last days of the Roman Empire.⁷ On the eve of his coronation, Romulus Augustus (Thomas Sangster), last descendant of Julius Caesar, sees his parents murdered by the savage Goth warlord Wulfila (Kevin McKidd), vassal of the usurping Odoacer (Peter Mullan). Spared only to be exiled on Capri, Romulus is rescued by a crack team of legionaries, led by the virtuous general Aurelius (Colin Firth) and a mysterious 'agent' of the Byzantine court (Aishwarya Rai). During the rescue, the boy's tutor, Ambrosinus (Ben Kingsley), none other than Merlin in disguise, directs him to the secret location of a sword forged in Britain during the time of Caesar for the hand of 'he who is destined to rule', the weapon then brought to Rome and hidden. Eventually the boy emperor and his friends make their way to Britain where, after a climactic battle at one of the forts of Hadrian's Wall in which Wulfila is finally killed by Romulus, they settle in the land, Caesar's last scion going on to beget Uther Pendragon, whom we see in the closing scene conversing in the ruined ring of the fort's walls with Merlin about the subsequent deeds of Romulus and Aurelius. Implicitly, we know how the circle will be made complete, the threatened boy begetting the child-murdering man.

My particular focus here is how the film's pairing of weapon and potential victim sheds a distinctively Arthurian light on the cultural logics underpinning varieties of violence and their

⁵ Thus Arthur's act appears as the (apparently benign) double of moments such as Heinrich Himmler's 1943 justification of the murder of Jewish women and children, on which see Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on 11 September and Related Dates* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 30–32.

⁶ On the 'undead' dimension of the father and the king, see notably Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, October (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 20–34.

⁷ *The Last Legion: A Novel*, trans. by Christine Feddersen-Manfredi (London: Pan Macmillan, 2003).

possible textual or visual translations and renderings. Not least among these is that of how the act of putting innocents to the sword – whether as crime or apparent historical necessity – marks the edges of cultures and histories. In this it slices – distinctively, if troublingly – through a Gordian knot of questions of masculinity and agency, of located subaltern grapplings with the legacy of Rome’s cult of *virtus* and its oppositional relations to contraries either wild or feminised, from northern barbarians to the will of Juno.⁸ Moreover, in formal parallel to the threats of violence against the innocence of children and communities that pervade both versions, the film likewise hacks energetically at the body of Manfredi’s novel. Even as Wulfila lays waste to nations, Lefler shortens Romulus’s imprisonment on Capri and excises entirely the novel’s account of the group’s crossing of Europe, for example. However, Lefler’s adaptation here appears as a mix of cut-and-paste butchery and a more carefully targeted surgery involving more complex and thoughtful re-organisations and resturings. In the midst of this, Lefler’s *Excalibur* appears as a brilliantly polished, multifaceted object standing out as against its narrative backdrop, focalising and reflecting themes running through the director’s visual translation of Manfredi’s novel. Through this plays various roles, not least that – in a neat gesture beyond the film’s certificate rating – the sword’s narrative association with the threat to the young Romulus points to the child-murder that is the film’s unthinkable fantasy underpinning.

In that regard, we find ourselves faced with a fundamental question. From the early days of Christianity to the Anglo-Norman *Voyage of St Brendan* to Kazantzakis’s *The Last Temptation of Christ*, there have been innumerable engagements with the question of whether Judas remains forever beyond the pale, but what about Herod?⁹ In *The Children of Men*, directed by Alfonso

⁸ On which, see in particular Sarah Spence, *Rhetorics of Reason and Desire: Virgil, Augustine, and the Troubadours* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988)

⁹ As Žižek comments on the film version of Kazantzakis’s novel, ‘the final rehabilitation of Judas as the real tragic hero of this story: he was the one whose love for Christ was the greatest, and it was for this reason that Christ considered him strong enough to fulfil the horrible mission of betraying him, thus assuring the accomplishment of Christ’s destiny

Cuarón (2007), the British government's rage to kill the last child born in the barren land marks the symbolic end of the nation, implicitly evoking a typological pairing of Herod and Arthur.¹⁰ Likewise, in the magical Britain of *Harry Potter* many things can be changed and counterbalanced – even Severus Snape's apparently treacherous killing of Albus Dumbledore by the worst of the 'unforgiveable' curses, *Aveda Kedavra* – but not Voldemort's project of child-murder. Here, as made clear in Harry's naming of his sons after his two teachers, Jesus and Judas are ultimately brothers. More thorny would be any suggestion of a parallel between Jesus and Herod, though some attempt to square the circle. In *Star Wars III: The Revenge of the Sith*, dir. Lucas (2005), the traumatic destruction of the Jedi seals the transformation of Anakin Skywalker into Darth Vader, an act culminating in his (off-stage) massacre of the infant trainees, known as 'younglings', the echo of the carol 'Lullaye Lullay' underscoring the typological connection. Of course, the *Zelig*-style insertion of the young Anakin-Vader (Hayden Christensen) in place of his older self (played by Sebastian Shaw) into the spectral Jedi pantheon at the end of the 2004 re-release of Lucas's *Star Wars VI: Return of the Jedi* serves as a sign not merely of his redemption but indeed the fulfilment of a messianic mission to 'bring balance to the Force'. This 'happy ending' parallels the 1997 insertion of joyful citizens toppling statues of the defeated evil emperor, a triumph of liberal galactic democracy echoing

(the Crucifixion). The tragedy of Judas was that in the name of his dedication to the Cause, he was prepared to risk not only his life but even his "second life", his posthumous good name: he knows very well that he will enter history as the one who betrayed our Saviour, and he is prepared to endure even that for the fulfilment of God's mission. Jesus used Judas as a means to attain his goal, knowing very well that his own suffering would be transformed into a model imitated by millions (*imitatio Christi*), while Judas' sacrifice is a pure loss without any narcissistic benefit. Perhaps he is a little like the faithful victims of the Stalinist monster trials who confessed their guilt, proclaimed themselves miserable scum, knowing that by so doing they were accomplishing the last and highest service to the Cause of the Revolution.' (*The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Phronesis (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 128, note 1).

¹⁰ On Cuarón, see notably Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Big Ideas (London: Profile, 2008), pp. 20–30.

then-contemporary proclamations of the ‘End of History’.¹¹ In our geopolitically cynical times, is a director famously lambasted by his own actors for his inability to write screen dialogue someone audiences trust to point to the audacity of hope in the brutal workings of providence?¹² In any event, if the question goes begging here, it seems such interrogations of the limits of reconciliation with regard to past ‘duty’ have challenged more thoughtful directors: similarly ambiguous in this regard is *Gran Torino* (2008), Clint Eastwood’s elegiac reflection on the impasses facing contemporary white American masculinity. Here Eastwood touches briefly but uncomfortably on the origin of his central character’s alienation in the fact that he may have not merely obeyed questionable orders during the Korean War, but indeed committed unthinkable atrocities *voluntarily*. Yet, much to the astonishment and perplexity of the priest hearing his final confession – who, by this stage, is fully aware of this dimension – the old man makes no mention of any such acts, a silence that stands in exact parallel to Arthur’s order.¹³

As the contemporary fascination with war memorabilia, not least that associated with Nazi Germany, makes clear, objects associated with atrocity resonate with a singular and troubling aura. In recent film, visions of traumatically central objects are not merely key to narrative themes, but also to their cinematic art, the outline of the weapon intruding into fantasy space with a singular

¹¹ A debate principally centered, of course, around Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992) and Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: l’état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993).

¹² As Harrison Ford allegedly commented to Lucas, ‘George, you can type this shit, but you can’t speak it.’

¹³ This reflection on what men can and will say, on the cultural trouble associated with ‘colourful vernacular’ is part of a wider exploration of ambivalence in Eastwood’s account. Thus the imprint of training, history and time produce the body of the old man as object of pity, uncertainty and derision. Yet, at the same time, his language offers an archaeology of former conflicts. Accordingly, the film’s narrative explores the problematic domestication of inter-communal tensions and affections, with his young Hmong neighbour, Thao, initiated into the baffling rituals, permissions and protocols of a receding world of a masculine sociability characterized by (apparently joking) racial slurs, a profane verbal ‘work of giants’ whose puzzling ruins lie about him.

acuity quite different from the inchoate forms of such classic instances of punitive superego irruption as the attack of the birds in Hitchcock's adaptation of the Daphne du Maurier story.¹⁴ In that respect, the sword carries with it an obscene and ancient precision apparent in Joss Whedon's *Serenity* (2005), the neutral, 'true believer' cruelty of whose nemesis figure (played by Chitwell Eijofor), a mixture of special agent and government *illuminatus*, cites either Roman concepts of 'honour' as his paralysed victims fall (in)voluntarily onto the blade he thoughtfully provides or *The Art of War* as he massacres children.¹⁵ Thus, if Hitchcock's birds bear testimony to a vision of superego manifesting in the frenzy of maternal incestuous rage, the operative's weapon stands for the cold precision of idea and conviction.

But of course, sharply delineated as swords and their edged kin might be, they also create irregularity and confusion not only in the ragged writing of the wounds and scars they inflict, but also by the contrastive cut they form in the visual fields that surround them, by their fascinating and troubling concentration of the aesthetics of line and faceted surface. In that regard, one might also compare Lefler's production with Peter Jackson's 2009 adaptation of Alice Sebold's novel, *The Lovely Bones*. Through its complex and disturbing intertextual dialogue with Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), Jackson's film reads in part as an allusive and disturbing history of cinema's charting of the limits of representation, locating an end of cultural and communal innocence in a radiantly colour-saturated 1970s.¹⁶ Central here to Jackson's portrait – as revealed in the victim's otherworld vision

¹⁴ On *The Birds* in this regard, see notably Žižek's comments in *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* dir. Sophie Fiennes (2006).

¹⁵ In that respect, Whedon's film appears as an instance of the perverse afterlife of Stoicism. As I have argued elsewhere (*Troubling Arthurian Histories*, pp. 365–73), perceptions of the reperformance of 'Roman' values as misreading can be seen in theological critiques such as those articulated by Augustine in *City of God* and underlying medieval romance.

¹⁶ The parallel is made all the more explicit by the obvious differences between this fantasy space, clearly modeled on the motel bathroom in Hitchcock's film and the décor of the murderer's actual bathroom, which we see shortly after.

of the aftermath of her rape and murder – is the contrapuntal association of two pieces of evidence: the cut-throat razor and the gore and mud on the floor of the killer’s bathroom. Here, following on from Francis Ford Coppola’s vision of the toilet vomiting blood in *The Conversation* (1974), Jackson’s film positions itself as a colour outdoing of Hitchcock’s primal murder scene.¹⁷ The cold precision marked in the fateful razor’s pristinely reflective handle and blade both contrasts and is associated with the Jackson Pollock spoor of gore, mud and excrement that is the other obscene trace of the crime’s libidinal underpinning.¹⁸ However, as important a precursor as the black-and-white *Psycho* clearly is to cinematic treatments of trauma, I will suggest that, in the case of *The Last Legion*’s use of such objects, we might also

¹⁷ Perhaps the key reference here is Hitchcock’s own evocation of the absolute limits of (un)imaginable depravity and evil, in his appearance in the trailer for the film: ‘Oh, they’ve cleaned it up. You should have seen it... So much blood. Horrible!’. Of course, the dialogue Jackson thereby establishes with Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* also positions his film in relation to other interlocutors such as Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Conversation* (1974). For Žižek’s exploration of the relations between Coppola and Hitchcock here see *The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema*. However, another point of reference here could well be Gus van Sant’s 1998 shot-for-shot colour remake of Hitchcock’s original, critically derided as ‘redundant’ but which attests to a fascination with bringing Hitchcock’s visual language to the colour screen.

¹⁸ Unlike Sebold’s novel (*The Lovely Bones* (London: Picador, 2002)), in which the murder implement is a bread-knife, Jackson positions the razor both in the the victim’s visions of the aftermath of the crime and as a McGuffin object in the ‘real-world’ strand. Thus, Jackson’s imagining of Suzie Salmon’s otherworld vision of her murderer washing himself after the crime effects a range of neat shifts and transpositions, not least the inversion whereby it is the victim who surprises the killer, a reversal pointing to the story’s long game of Philomena-style revenge. Jackson’s white-tiled bathroom is covered in a mire of mud, blood and possibly other effluvia. Jackson thereby constructs a nightmarish scene of excremental obscenity that encodes Sebold’s evocation of the killer’s sadistic violation and polluting destruction of his victim: ‘I felt like a sea in which he stood and pissed and shat’ (p. 10). Indeed, the razor becomes a minimal metonymic cipher for the welter of blood. Its reflective metal handle and blade standing out from the filth, the razor is central to an engagement that travels to the boundaries of the representable and conceivable. The positioning of the implement intercut with close-ups of the languid gestures of the murderer as he washes himself in the bath forces viewers – both internal and external – into an uncomfortable insight into the details of the murder. Through this, Jackson hints that, instead of the iconic gesture of Norman Bates’s frenzied stabbing, the climax of this unthinkable scene – which it implies the perpetrator continues to savour in fantasy – was that the victim’s throat was cut in a gesture whose apparent neatness and understatement is precisely counterpointed by the explosion of mire and gore that is both evidence and a translation of the murderer’s anal-sadistic fantasy.

look to Hitchcock's slightly earlier colour masterpiece, *Vertigo* (1958) for another parable of how violence shapes the subjective field. Here, the mirror facets and cracks of the famous scene of Scotty spying on Madeleine-Judy in the florist's shop offer another perspective on Excalibur's role in Lefler's visual rendering of the scarred and mackled face of Arthurian history.

If this introduction seems somewhat pell-mell in its accumulation of references, I would, however, locate as source of licence not some act of curricular barbarism such as introducing modern cinema into medieval literature courses, but rather French Arthurian tradition. In the most bizarre of historical and cultural cut-and-pastes, the thirteenth-century prose romance, the *Roman de Perceforest*, turns history back-to-front and inside-out: the assassination of Julius Caesar is instigated by the Queen of Scotland, the knives used to kill the emperor forged from the Roman spear that killed her son.¹⁹ Surely, in circumstances where the romance afterlife of *virtus* reads viral rather than virile, no act of creative (or critical) barbarism should be denied. Cry havoc and let the games begin.

A Brief History of Romance Scars

'Romance' as the genre is referred to grows out of the work of rendering a cultural shift from Rome and the Mediterranean to the North, a shift paralleled by one from Latin into the vernacular.²⁰ The strains and conflicts that are narrated, their brutal physical mangling encoded in linguistic and generic forms. In Robert Wace's *Roman de Brut*, translated and adapted from Geoffrey, the ebb and flow of history has a dramatic effect on the populations,

¹⁹ In this connection, see especially Sylvia Huot, 'Cultural Conflict as Anamorphosis: Conceptual Spaces and Visual Fields in the *Roman de Perceforest*', *Romance Studies*, 22:3 (2004), 185–95.

²⁰ On which see notably Suzanne Conklin Akbari, 'From Due East to True North: Orientalism and Orientation', in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. by Cohen, The New Middle Ages (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), pp. 19–34.

such as the Trojans find in the ruined and deserted kingdom of Leogice:

Home ne feme n'i troverent;
 Tut unt trové le païs guast
 Ke n'i aveit ki gaainast.
 Utlage l'orent tut guasté,
 Chacied la gent, l'aveir porté.
 Tute esteit la terre guastine. [...]
 Guaste unt trové une cité
 E un temple d'antiquité. (ll. 622–34)

They didn't find man or woman there, they found the whole country laid waste because there was no one to gain from it. Pirates had completely wasted it, chased away the people, carried off the goods. The land was completely wasted. [...] they found a wasted city and a temple of antiquity.²¹

As Warren comments, 'with four different forms of *guast*, this landscape bears the marks of conquest as a scar'.²² Yet, at the same time, the *Brut* emphasises the ambiguities of this process: *gaainer* in Wace's text signifies ambiguously both 'to conquer' and 'to cultivate'. The 'wounds' resulting from conflicts over land are still distinct from the depredations of mere pirates (l. 625), obscene doppelgangers of the noble, ethical conqueror. Accordingly, through conquest – as a historically mandated, 'objective' violence – the land is made fertile and inhabitable. The idea that there is some overarching if obscure sense to the progression of history, some concern with legitimate custodianship, is what rescues Wace's narrative from futile, brutal tragedy if not from ethical ambiguity.

Yet in the tradition associated with Geoffrey, the relation to forces on the other side of the wall seems consistently one of ambivalence. Tales of Arthur and his deeds, as Jeffrey Cohen has shown, present the race of giants as a primary embodiment of atavistically barbaric forces, creatures repeatedly punished,

²¹ For edition and translation, see Wace's *Roman de Brut*: *A History of the British (Text and Translation)*, ed. and trans. by Judith Weiss, Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies, rev. edn (Exeter: University of Exeter 2002).

²² Warren, p. 144.

rejected and occluded in castratory acts of decapitation, reflecting an ongoing work of energies acting on the flesh and fabric of the human life-world.²³ Like the land, British history is also marked by potentially disfiguring presences: for Warren, Wace's history is a warts-and-all account which 'justifies force and chronicles the laudable achievement of territorial expansion', seemingly happy to praise the problematic trait of *engin*, a tricky craftiness that borders on treachery in some presentations.²⁴ The historical stakes here are not inconsiderable: the quality is of course associated elsewhere with Ulyssean Greeks rather than the honorable Trojans whose lineal or spiritual 'descendants' are the main actors in the narrative of *translatio imperii*.²⁵

In terms of the narrative of political legitimacy of kingdoms following after Rome, the evocation of earlier wounds plays a key role. Thus, the assassination of Julius Caesar is emblematic of the fate of Rome itself, part of a long-standing debate about how reason and passions shaped or marred imperial designs and destiny. A crucial distinction is whether Caesar is seen to exhibit control of himself in his final moments.²⁶ Thus Suetonius has

²³ See reference above.

²⁴ Warren, pp. 146–47.

²⁵ First articulated at the court of Charlemagne and given dynamic afterlife in twelfth-century adaptations and continuations of Virgil's *Aeneid*, the notions of *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii* – the transfers of power and intellectual prestige from the ancient Mediterranean to a Northern European 'modernity' – constitute one of the most influential medieval visions of historical and cultural change.

²⁶ On which, see G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. by H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), particularly p. 89 (on Caesar). An interesting account of the place of Hegel's arguments in nineteenth-century historiography and medieval studies can be found in Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, rev. edn (London: Verso, 1997). See also especially Peter Haidu, *The Subject of Violence: the Song of Roland and the Birth of the State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993). On the cunning of reason, see especially G. H. R. Parkinson, 'Hegel, Marx and the Cunning of Reason', *Philosophy*, 64 (1989), 287–302. Needless to say, Slavoj Žižek returns frequently to Hegel's concept, most notably for my purposes here in *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, *Radical Thinkers*, 36, rev. edn (New York and London: Verso, 2008), especially pp. 69–71 and pp. 167–71, although see also the reading elaborated in *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, *Short Circuits* (Cambridge MA and London: MIT, 2003), pp. 13–30. Looking later still, Žižek devotes interesting comment in this regard to Bertolt Brecht's play, *The Affairs of Mr Julius*

Caesar adjusting his clothing so as to fall more decorously, while in Plutarch he lies ‘twitching from multiple wounds’, reduced to a bloody, mindless lump seemingly driven by a life persisting beyond the death of reason. These vignettes encapsulate diametrically opposed lessons on Caesar’s life and will, the debate about his reputation and motivation continuing through the Middle Ages.²⁷ As Geoffrey has it, the demand sent to Arthur by the ‘procurator of the Republic’, Lucius Hiberius, calls in the name of the Senate for the renewal of tribute to Rome, a practice inaugurated by Caesar himself.²⁸ Interestingly the Legate’s justification of his authority hybridises Republican and Imperial rhetorics, a Frankenstein political logic that smacks of specious opportunism. Arthur’s response disputes the legitimacy of such claims: ‘Nothing that is acquired by force and violence can ever be held legally by anyone.’²⁹ Conveniently, although Arthur’s assertion appears questionable in light of his own record, he still appears as less of a monster than Rome.

In this context, questions of language and translation are central to ideas about historical change and identity, with barbarian inflections marking the mangling of and debts to past cultures. The wider context is how those scars act as the tokens of engagements with and fantasy investments in forces ‘from the other side of the wall’ and how that opposition is mobilised in treatments of historical agency. However, those scars also obtrude ‘this side of the wall’, that is to say in civilised milieux such as the court, the very place that seems to exclude the sort of physical and rhetorical

Caesar (see *For They Know Not What They Do*, pp. 102–03), with Caesar cast, seemingly barbarously reduced to a creature of Brecht’s times, engaged in stock-market speculation and agitating the *Lumpenproletariat*.

²⁷ On the problem of universality in Hegel in this regard, see Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, pp. 32–34.

²⁸ For translation see *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. by Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1966), here at pp. 230–31. For edition see *Historia Regum Britannie: Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Ms. 568*, ed. by Neil Wright, *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth, 1* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1985).

²⁹ *History of the Kings of Britain*, p. 232.

mangling deplored in Quintilian's comparison of a flawed prologue to a scarred face.³⁰

Interestingly, such antique images take on a heightened significance in the literary traditions, a key witness here being the first surviving Arthurian romance, Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide*, generally dated to the 1170's and which I have discussed extensively elsewhere.³¹ Affecting a suavity and integrity of conception lacking in those disfigured versions hawked by the lowly *jongleurs* derided in the poem's prologue (ll. 20–22), *Erec* also foregrounds the edgy manglings of classical and post-classical sources, Latin and vernacular. Yet, though it opens with a celebration of the wealth and aura of Arthurian court life, of the charismatic power of the fair face it presents to the aristocratic world, Chrétien's tale cuts swiftly to a scene of mutilation and humiliation:

Erec boute le nain ensus.
 Li nains fu fel, nuns nou fu plus
 De la corgiee grant colee
 Li a parmi le col donee.
 Le col et la face a vergie
 Erec dou coup de la corgie
 De chief en chief perent les roies
 Que li ont fait les corroies.
 Il sot bien que dou nain ferir
 Ne poroit il mie joïr,

³⁰ 'There is no place in speech where confusion of memory or loss of fluency is more shaming: a faulty proemium is like a badly scarred face, and it is a bad pilot indeed who runs his ship aground while leaving harbour.' (Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, book 4, chapter 1, 61). For edition and translation see Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, ed. and trans. by Donald A. Russell, 5 vols, Loeb Classical Library, 124–27 and 494 (Cambridge MA and London: Heinemann, 2001).

³¹ For edition, see Jean-Marie Fritz (ed. and trans.), *Chrétien de Troyes, 'Erec et Enide': édition critique d'après le manuscrit B. N. fr. 1376*, Lettres Gothiques (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1992) reprinted in *Chrétien de Troyes: Romans*, La Pochothèque (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1994). Translations are after William W. Kibler and Carleton W. Carroll (trans.), *Chrétien de Troyes, Arthurian Romances* (London: Penguin, 1991). I would particularly like to thank Caroline McAvoy and Gary McCaw for their rendering of ll. 217–30. My arguments here draw on – but hopefully amplify – aspects of my recent study, *Troubling Arthurian Histories: Court Culture, Performance and Scandal in Chrétien de Troyes's 'Erec et Enide'*, *Medieval and Early Modern French Studies*, 5 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007).

Car le chevalier vit armé
 Mout felon et demesuré
 Et crient qu'assez tost l'ocirroit
 Se devant li son nain feroit. (*Erec et Enide*, ll. 217–30)

'Erec gave the dwarf a shove. The dwarf was as evil as could be. With the whip he struck Erec a great blow on the neck, Erec's face and neck were striped by the blow; the welts raised by the strands of the whip appeared from one end to the other. Erec knew full well that he could not have the satisfaction of striking the dwarf; for he saw the armoured knight was ruthless and arrogant, and he feared that he would very quickly kill him if he struck the dwarf in his presence.'
 (trans. by Carroll)

Here, embarrassingly, only some 200 lines after his stage entrance, the central feature of the beauty for which he is so much praised initially is ruined. Erec laments his marred beauty, a prominent feature of Chrétien's initial description of him (ll. 81–104) and embodiment of the seeming distinction of his early years at court. As Erec himself comments, the dwarf's attack leaves his face ruined, left 'in pieces' ('Tot m'a le vis *depecié*', l. 236) – much as in the same way that Arthur's body is to be shattered in the later prose text, *La Mort le roi Artu*:

'Of all the circle you can see you have been the most powerful king there ever was. But such is earthly pride that no one is seated so high that he can avoid having to fall from power in the world.' Then she took him and pushed him to the ground so roughly that King Arthur felt that he had broken all his bones in the fall and had lost the use of his body and limbs.³²

Yet, once inflicted, Erec's injury and any resulting scars are curiously effaced, never to be explicitly mentioned again. The mixture of registers so constitutive of romance is then written into his face, seemingly as an originary point of view which is both the model for future manglings and the point of view from which they observed. Like Arthur's destroyed body in the dream vision, the mangling of his face looks at the world from outside history.

³² *La Mort le roi Artu*, trans. by Cable § 176.

A kindred mangling characterises the Anglo-Italian production *The Last Legion*, which reads both as a product of opportunistic demographic tailoring and, at the same time, perhaps something more, a question about the warp and weft, the cut and paste of national histories. What Lefler's film demonstrates is that Arthurian romance's constellations of form and trauma reimprint themselves in later chapters of the tradition, translating and rewriting old conflicts in new tongues and guises, often positioning nations as internally divided between 'Roman' and 'barbarian' re-performance. In this regard, the classicised cast of vernacular romance reflections on the traumatic obscenity of historical process appears highlighted in the seemingly gratuitous excess of the barbarian atrocities in Manfredi's novel. Their obscene 'ultra-violence' seems designed to reiterate that the Goths are no mere domesticated or castrated puppets whose worst crime otherwise is to speak 'rough, guttural Latin'.³³ Key here is the sack of Orestes' residence:

Even the musicians who had been delighting the guests with their melodies were dead now and lay with their eyes wide open still holding their instruments. The women had been raped repeatedly as their fathers and husbands were forced to look on, before their own throats were slit like lambs at the slaughter.³⁴

The musical instruments and the dead musicians are the key here, aftermath and afterimage echoing in the most grotesquely orchestrated counterpoint of calculated cruelty and bestial obscenity. This scene not merely writes its script onto bodies, but even overwrites in gratuitously repeated actions, in the logically redundant but symbolically eloquent torment of onlookers about to die. In Manfredi's tale, barbarian cruelty runs wild in borrowed Roman finery, mocking Rome's attempt to harness and domesticate such forces. However, such violence also appears as an allegory of history itself, of the obscene gentrification inherent in any evocation of necessity in the idea that some innocent – even

³³ Manfredi, p. 6.

³⁴ Hegel, p. 17.

a child – be *fae the malky*, to use a Scots expression possibly derived from the rhyming substitution razor-‘Malcolm Frazer’.

Stitch that: Wulfila’s Scar in Translation

Erec shoved the dwarf. The wee man wiz a pure bawbag, by the way. Wi’his whip he wannered him in the coupon, scoring his neb an’neck wi’ stripes. The chibmarks stood out wan fae another. Erec kent he widnae get any jollies banjoin’ the wee shite cos’ o’ the big wide-o in the heavy gear who wiz well tooled-up and looked like a total rocket an’aw. Erec wiz feart he wiz fae the malky if he skelped the wee man’s jaw in front of him. (trans. by McAvoy and McCaw)

In such a context, it is interesting to reflect on the ways in which translators and adaptors might decide to ‘get medieval’ on the surface, structure and language of Arthurian tales. Of any in Chrétien’s romance, the passage cited earlier and re-rendered above is perhaps the one most ripe for (modern) vernacular disfiguration, as it is precisely here that the fair order of Arthurian court business is disrupted by the arrival of Yder and his party – among them the walking grotesque that is the dwarf. The failure or refusal of these outsiders to recognise the decorum and order of a palace that is not theirs leads to Erec’s humiliation. From the emphasis on collective regard and beauty that had underpinned earlier scenes, the carefully woven univocity, however unstable, of Arthurian court life is thus replaced by the snarl and sting of humiliations that shape the rest of the text. Erec is beaten by an inferior in front of what might be a prospective partner (Guinevere’s maiden), seemingly the only other unattached royal scion at court. Witnesses look on at the scene seemingly either in horrified impotence (the Queen) or callous indifference (Yder). However, the scene’s viciousness is also tinged with humour: adding insult to injury, the beating itself is preceded by an ‘oh no you won’t’ / ‘oh yes I will’ dialogue between Erec and the dwarf (ll. 210–16), as the former tries to push past the latter to remonstrate with the knight. In that respect, although seemingly ludic or parodic, the rendering into Glaswegian gang-speak also

articulates a parallax view inherent in the process of translation and indeed *translatio*: folding one age and one set of discourses into others, it is both travesty and faithful rendering, both joke and serious.³⁵

In a similar way, the injury Wulfila – unwitting barbarian double and descendant of the courtly Erec – bears is central to Lefler and Manfredi's accounts of fate and history, the mark itself an object of textual mangling and resuturing. In the novel, it is the mark of a sword-cut from Aurelius during an early attempt to rescue Romulus.³⁶ In the film, by contrast, the wound is inflicted rather later: during the rescue of Romulus from Capri, Aurelius intervenes to block Wulfila's pursuit of Romulus and his party through the palace complex. In what reads literally as a moment of combative staircase wit, Aurelius mashes the Goth's face onto his own axe, caught embedded in the banister rail, McKidd's character 'face-butting' his own weapon in a comic variation on the move known as a *Glasgow kiss*. Differences here between film and book may perhaps speak of something more than the practical problem of persuading some unfortunate stuntman to take a blow to the face with a sword. The mix of no-holds-barred *chibbing* and comic pratfall raises questions about the gravity and centrality of both moment and character. Quite unlike Manfredi's account, Wulfila's vulgar scarring here echoes other scenes of humiliation, notably an earlier mutilation inflicted by Odoacer, who cuts off his finger for daring to question his decision to spare Romulus (in deference to Ambrosinus's deftly duplicitous warning against making a martyr of the boy). This insult-to-injury compounding seeds the suggestion that the barbarian's destiny is to play second fiddle in a world less willing to take his doom-laden tread seriously than in Manfredi's novel.³⁷

³⁵ Much as this essay in a way can also read in part as both homage to (and, in some regards, parody of) Eric Auerbach's reflections on Ulysses's scar in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 3–23.

³⁶ *The Last Legion*, p. 29.

³⁷ In that sense, Lefler's Wulfila finds an unexpected wolfen cousin under the skin in the form of the eponymous anti-hero / buffoon of the medieval Latin mock-epic, *Ysengrimus*

Such variations are woven into a more general pattern of contrasts and reversals in which novel and film explore differing and complementary possibilities. In Lefler's adaptation, Wulfila's subsequent arrival at Vortgyn's court (as opposed to Vortigern in the novel) clearly troubles the pretender's sense of himself as not merely rightful claimant but, indeed, subject of prophecies regarding the future kingship of Britain. However, where in the film the pair recognise their common cause and unite, Manfredi's Wulfila not only kills Vortigern, but, taking his scalp as a disguise, supplants and impersonates him, from which follow rumours that the aged tyrant has made a pact with the devil and returned to lay waste to the nation.³⁸ Such textures and choices speak of the differences between the effects of noble, Roman sword and vulgar, barbarian axe, between the distinctive languages in which different weapons carve their writing into the flesh and fabric of history. The contestatory accounts of Wulfila and his scar thus not only emblematised differences between novel and film, but also highlight the uncertainty and difficulty inherent in the domesticating translation of subjective barbaric violence into the objective forces of history.

(for edition, see Jill Mann (ed. and trans.), *'Ysengrimus': Text with Translation, Commentary, and Introduction*, *Mittellateinische Studien und Texte* 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1997)). Ysengrimus's progress through the narrative is one of frustration (he never succeeds in defeating or outwitting his would-be prey of any species), mutilation (he loses skin, feet and ears in the process) and eventual destruction as he is torn to pieces and devoured by the sow Salaura and her litter, a demise accompanied by extravagant mock laments from various characters. As one of the sow's horde comments, 'my mind is numbed by a fearful tragedy, which the poet Vergil himself could hardly master' (book VII, ll. 489–90). The comparison is not gratuitous: the *Ysengrimus's* grandiloquence is explicitly the comic flip-side of medieval reuse of the rhetoric and models of Latin historiography – especially scenes of lament or portent – prominent in more serious tone in the work of authors such as Geoffrey, and fundamental to medieval conceptions of Arthurian narrative as a 'tragedy of fate'.

³⁸ Manfredi, p. 389–94.

(Re)Casting Cultural Memory

Klaus the goldfish: Finally, a new body. Ooh, I want to be six-two, blond, blue eyes... And scars... I want my face to tell a story.³⁹

If weapons have their own particular associations, much the same can be said about casting's capacity to create its own genealogies and ranges of association. Here memory operates rather differently as a trope between text and film. In this, Firth's Aurelius appears as a man both with and without a history, promoted (and reduced) to a generically war-weary and cynical veteran general. To achieve this, Lefler's screenplay eliminates the traumatically repressed 'back story' Manfredi gives Aurelius as the legionary who in his youth unwittingly betrayed the city of Aquileia to Wulfila's barbarian horde. (This change also abolishes the connection Manfredi creates between Aurelius and Livia Prisca, the novel's Roman-Amazon female lead, who makes her first appearance at that point, rescuing and caring for the wounded soldier she is improbably fated to meet again.⁴⁰) Thus, in Manfredi's account, Wulfila's physical scar is the externalised double of Aurelius's psychological one: the Goth claims to remember the Roman; the Roman cannot bear to remember the Goth.⁴¹ The novel thus appeals to a private world of the imagination, where it is perhaps better placed to explore the complex relations between trauma and memory, mapping how violence writes in the mind as well as on the body.

³⁹ *American Dad*, season 1, episode 19 ('Finances with Wolves'), dir. Albert Calleros (2006).

⁴⁰ In addition, Lefler also eliminates the opening last stand of the *Nova Invicta* Legion, mentioned only in passing in the film as Aurelius's previous posting. In so doing, Lefler eliminates the double dose of 'survivor guilt' Manfredi loads onto Aurelius.

⁴¹ In compensation, Lefler's adaptation supplies the antagonistic link between Vortgyn (as opposed to Vortigern in the novel) and Ambrosinus. In that sense, the repressions underpinning the vendetta between Aurelius and Wulfila in Manfredi's novel are replaced in the film by the back-story of pre-existing conflict between Ambrosinus and Vortgyn emblematised in the injuries they had inflicted on each other during an earlier struggle on holy ground for the possession of a sacred amulet. Instead of having Wulfila murder and supplant the tyrant, Lefler leaves the tyrant to Ambrosinus in recognition of the uncanny bond they share in the unfolding narrative.

If Manfredi's novel hinges on repression and recognition, the visual logic of Lefler's film has its characters carry associations written on their faces in a manner more intertextual than Wulfila's scar. In this, though Lefler's adaptation results in an entirely different back-story from his source, his reworking here is also a continuation of Manfredi's own double naming that begins with the narratorial explanation that his hero is known both as Aurelius and, more formally, Aurelianus.⁴² Thus, though pasts are eliminated, Lefler's characters also remain freighted with overlaid and multiple histories, chief here being Ben Kingsley's Ambrosinus-Merlin, supported by the cast of thousands that is the lost 'last Legion' of the title, revealed as having settled in the north of Britain and taken Celtic names.

Though derived from Manfredi's text, Lefler's doubling and mangling of names also has a distinctively cinematic dimension, with casting and visual allusion mobilising type and cliché to act as a noisily 'silent partner' in the film's nods and homages. Thus, while Kingsley appears as a druidic echo of Gandalf from Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001–2003), his fateful burn mark also explicitly recalls the first Indiana Jones film, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981). Likewise, the pairing of Sangster and Firth – previously cast alongside one another in two earlier films, *Love Actually*, dir. Richard Curtis (2003) and *Nanny McPhee*, dir. Kirk Jones (2006) – constitutes a twin-pronged demographic attack that parallels their screen relationship as older and younger brothers in arms. At the same time, Firth also reprises his role as iconic romantic lead playing against Mira, whose Indian version of *ninjitsu* training nods as much to *Mission Impossible* or James Bond as it does to medieval motifs of the Saracen princess. Meanwhile, Romulus / Uther appears as a sort of Harry Potter of the fading Roman empire, his wide-eyed innocence central to the film's revisioning of Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000), bringing a disarming and arguably disingenuous candour to its post-Empire,

⁴² See Manfredi, p. 47.

multiculturalist exploration of history and responsibility.⁴³ For their part, McKidd and Mullan are cast effectively – if perhaps rather unimaginatively – as Wulfila and Odoacer in roles that draw on their previous histories. Thus, although perhaps better known from Danny Doyle's *Trainspotting*, McKidd also played gang-leader Malky Johnson in Gillies Mackinnon's *Small Faces* (1996). Similarly, Mullan appeared in Ken Loach's *My Name is Joe* (1998). In their own ways, both of these films explore the mix of brutality and touchily ordered hierarchy that characterise the 'court mentality' coding of gang culture. Through this, Lefler colours Manfredi's picture of Rome's attempts to domesticate the barbarian hordes through compromise and acculturation with stereotypically edgy, if possibly pantomime accents and echoes of local feud. However, the strange attraction between Scottish identity and Scots language or accent as cipher for the 'barbarian North' and the Eternal City can then be seen in McKidd's casting in the BBC series, *Rome* (2006–2007).

These confluences of different family trees supplement, counterpoint and cut across the explicit cross-cultural associations of Lefler's production in which the producer, Dino de Laurentiis – regally described in the title of his own biopic as *The Last Movie Mogul* (dir. Adrian Sibley (2001)) – plays an interesting cultural role. In that sense, one of the film's underlying questions is that of how national and genre cinemas fit together in a broader tradition of romance appropriation: who owns 'sword and sandal'? In such ultimately ludic, B-movie circumstances, the most tempting answer perhaps comes from Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* (2007) with Orlando Bloom's Harfleur-with-a-bad-conscience speech from the walls of Jerusalem: 'All have claim! None have claim!'

⁴³ A key cipher here is the African Juba (Djimon Hounsou), Maximus's companion-in-arms and sole survivor of the gladiatorial band of brothers at the end of Scott's film. Scott's strategies are varied in this regard: in *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), the central character's father's exotic companions, a German and a Saracen, are both killed in the same engagement in which he himself is mortally wounded. In this regard as in many others, these films form a triangle with his *Robin Hood* (2010), which has no equivalent to Morgan Freeman's role as Robin's companion in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (dir. Kevin Reynolds (1991)). By contrast, Lefler follows Manfredi in 'sacrificing' the black legionary, Batiatus (Nonzo Anozie).

This gives a potential context to Firth's own rallying call from the battlements, a speech perhaps puzzlingly presented in context as somewhat forced, as a self-consciously theatrical cliché.

Scots and... Scotty: Roman(cing) *Vertigo*

From a crack in the door, Romulus could see the tragedy unfolding. [...] he saw his father challenging that beastly giant with the courage of his despair: Orestes was wounded and fell to his knees, yet he rose again, and fought bravely until his energies abandoned him and he finally dropped, run through.⁴⁴

Odoacer (reflecting Romulus's face back at him in the polished surface of his dagger): 'Is it for you that so many people have died? Such an innocent face...' (*The Last Legion*)

If Firth's Aurelius seems slightly embarrassed in his rallying of the troops, then part of the narrative logic here is that he deputising for Romulus and that the speech is itself an echo of earlier seemingly fruitless attempts to persuade the Roman settlers to support them. However, another aspect is that the speech has no apparent object: hopelessly outnumbered, the band's last stand against Wulfila's barbarian hordes is clearly a joke. To use a phrase, this is for nobody and for nothing. Of course, what redeems the moment is that the absent addressees, the eponymous 'Last Legion', are about to march into view over the hill. The question of the former Mr Darcy's attempt to (rhetorically) seduce an audience not there brings us to a related question: was there ever a screen presence less barbaric than James Stewart? Yet, this charmingly phlegmatic actor is not only witness to parallel histories in Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) but also peers from what Žižek presents as the fantasy netherworld that is the florist's back corridor in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (fig. 1 above). Here Stewart appears caught in a Sartrean moment of voyeurism foreshadowing the embarrassment of his later mumbled confession in response to

⁴⁴ Manfredi, p. 16.

Judy's appalled commentary on a relationship where she only serves as dressed-up substitute for another woman. It is of course at this point that Hitchcock – de-lighting elsewhere in visual euphemism to the point of parody, notably in the comically extended 'fireworks' scene in *To Catch a Thief* (1955) – perhaps stops short of a more shocking conclusion. After all, the romantic hallowing of the consummation arguably serves as not merely a disguise for, but indeed a subjectively disingenuous disavowal of the clearly perverse, masturbatory dimension of Stewart's fascination. Strange as this may seem, here one might highlight the curious kinship between this and other scenes of embarrassing persistence, notably his confused and dogged defence of collective and communal values in both Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), where Stewart can no more explain the nature of mortgages or filibuster true democracy into being than in *Vertigo* he can articulate the conflicted basis of his own desire.

Although ostensibly less adult a tale, in *The Last Legion*, where the unspoken fantasy dimension is child murder, the simple things are perhaps complicated in their own way. Physical scarrings are doubled by other fractures in the film's visual field, key among these Excalibur itself. Written into its surface as a mark of the object's resonance and wonder, its singular aura, the sword's overpolished finish appears a more deliberate disruption in light of Lefler's play with mirrorings and *chiaroscuro* effects elsewhere, such as in Wulfila's portentous arrival at Vortgyn's court (fig. 2 above). In that regard, an unexpected similarity emerges between the shot in which Wulfila picks up Excalibur in the final battle at Hadrian's Wall (fig. 3 above) and the moment in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* in which Scotty spies on Madeleine in the florist's.⁴⁵ The pieces are falling into place: here is the weapon, there is the boy. Scotty's look emerges from a point collusively dissimulated by the contestatory presence of other linearities and perspectives, a multiplicity emphasised by the detailing in both

⁴⁵ This scene is notably the object of comment in various works by Žižek, a notable recent instance being his extended reading in *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 151–68.

wooden panelling and mirrors. While Wulfila's contemplation of Excalibur lacks the quasi-lyric saturation manifest in Hitchcock's tale of perverse fascination, this is perhaps a difference of degree rather than of kind. Lefler aligns elements that, though endowed with their own fateful gravity, are not the entire puzzle. Like Hitchcock's Scotty, McKidd's Goth appears as the puppet of forces in which his efforts to assert his own centrality receives a confusing, almost mocking response from history's hall of broken mirrors. In their own complementary ways, both texts read as romances.⁴⁶

A 'McGuffin' object in both novel and film, the resplendent Excalibur – along with other weapons such as Odoacer's dagger – reflect the divided historical frames and perspectives, the marks of their agency written in the solid matter of flesh that surrounds them. Their role in visual organisation makes them reduced but noble cousins of the brown panelling that forms the 'off-stage' / back-room area of *Vertigo's* florist's shop. Indeed, its own visual aspect multiplies its cutting edges through the relief into which the blade's highly polished finish throws its profiling. In this manner, *The Last Legion* enacts a suggestive visual vocabulary in which events acquire significance from both their completion of patterns dictated by the past and the future. The sword's edge gives us history cut and pulling apart at the seams or collapsing and folding together. The sword does not merely cause wounds, rather it is itself a wound in history, a cut in its fabric, positioned by its very form at the centre of a 'parallax view', functioning as a (grail-like) sublime object to 'signify border struggles'.⁴⁷

In that sense, all of human history seems to be here: whereas in the novel, the sword is the instrument of conventionally noble Wagnerian fatality through its relation to Wulfila's scar, in the film the pristine lines of the sword become paired with the more lumpenly ragged axe and its wound, an idiotic relation made all

⁴⁶ In that regard, however, the closer parallel with *Vertigo* would either be one of the comedy Gauvain romances, such as *Le Chevalier à l'épée* or *L'Atre périlleux*, both of which offer derisive visions of Gauvain's attempts to live up to the model of romance hero for which he is the prototype.

⁴⁷ Warren, p. 176.

the more paradoxical in that, as we have seen, it is not so much the axe that creates the wound, but rather the contrary. Such an inversion of agency could be read, did space allow, as a neat summation of long-standing debates running from antiquity about the place of Rome and Romans in reflections about historical process. Emblematic here is the attempt to unravel whether Caesar was master of himself and his actions or simply acting in accordance with his legendarily shameful appetites, a discussion continued in Hegel's praise of him as 'man of practice' as agent of necessity and beyond.⁴⁸ In that regard, the central question is that of the nature of historical agency, the identity of Caesar as either quintessential Roman or 'barbarian within', drawing on the representations of the tribes beyond the Empire's boundaries to be found in both Caesar's own writings and those of Tacitus.

As part of this, one perhaps illuminating mirroring of Lefler's vision is expressed in another casting of McKidd, this time as the honest soldier and politician, Lucius Vorenus, in the BBC series, *Rome*. Here Lucius' implication in increasingly complex intrigues and conflicts of loyalty characteristic of this *Mr Smith Goes to Rome* vision of the eternal city as Islington positions him as simultaneously the bewildered subject and duped puppet of historical forces. Likewise, his dogged *honestas* increasingly manifests itself in violence, one key effect of this will be to see his beloved (wife) fall to her death, Judy-Madeleine and Niobe emerging in retrospect as sisters under the skin. Just as Hitchcock's detective takes his place in a reflection on the role of Scots and the Scottish diaspora in the multicultural weave of American postwar modernity, so McKidd appears as a figure of that which remains foreign and undomesticatable at the heart of

⁴⁸ In addition to the references above, see also Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France*, rev. edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), where she argues that Hegel's view of history can be read in more comic than tragic mode: 'There is little time for grief in the *Phenomenology* because renewal is always so close at hand. What seems like tragic blindness turns out to be more the comic myopia of Mr Magoo whose automobile careening through the neighbour's chicken coop always seems to land on four wheels. Like such miraculously resilient characters of the Saturday morning cartoon, Hegel's protagonists always reassemble themselves, prepare a new scene, enter the stage armed with a new set of ontological insights – and fail again' (p. 21).

‘British’ identity, the role of Scotland as England’s bad conscience that resumes classical traditions of civic opposition and externality (played out in moments such as Caesar recrossing the Rubicon or Antigone in her opposition to Creon) as the distinctive texture of an ethical dis-ease at the heart of the nation. At the same time, McKidd’s Wulfila, Lucius’s barbarian doppelganger, ultimately finds himself caught in a world which mirrors, mocks and uses him in its own way.

Conclusions

Swords are beautiful, with an austere perfection of line and proportion – surely the very essence of beauty.⁴⁹

New Orleans is among the cities most heavily marked by the internal wall within the US that separates the affluent from the ghettoised blacks. And it is about the other side of the wall that we fantasise: more and more they live in another world, in a blank zone that offers itself as a screen for the projection of our fears, anxieties and secret desires. *The ‘subject supposed to loot and rape’ is on the other side of the wall.*⁵⁰

What can a boy or a sword embody? In a sense, both have an ‘innocence’ of form, although that of the weapon lies in its sinister ‘austere perfection’, as Ewart Oakshott puts it.⁵¹ Although a scar may be the imprint of such a weapon, its ragged edge often traces a less clean account of the nature of violence. From the interstitial spaces of its cuts, Lefler’s film interrogates the divide between different kinds of violence. The Goth invasion of Rome appears as a response to that foundational to Roman identity, ambition and political structures.

⁴⁹ Ewart Oakshott, *The Sword in the Age of Chivalry*, rev. edn (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1994), p. 12.

⁵⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Big Ideas (London: Profile, 2008), pp. 87–88, original emphasis.

⁵¹ I am grateful to Lucy Whiteley for this point.

What Lefler's film illuminates in its blend of vernacular adaptative practices that includes both Arthurian romance and modern cinema history, is the manner in which scarring speaks histories, in which faces tell stories of glory or shame. As *The Last Legion* reminds us, more often than not, such trauma manifests itself through invisibility and silence, echoing Kristin Ross's examination of French postwar consumerism, the central paradox here being that the smooth forms of modernity read as scar tissues produced by amnesiac silencings and erasures.⁵² Yet scars also speak in the language of exclusions. Thus, in Žižek's comments on the conflicts and inequalities highlighted by the flooding of New Orleans in 2006, the scar is both the invisible yet apparent 'dividing wall' of unspoken prejudices underpinning white America's fantasies of its black population as barbaric looters and rapists, a fear-filled ambivalence of sufficient power to generate a *Crucible*-style outpouring of hysterical delusion, characterised by wildfire reporting of incidents later revealed as devoid of any factual basis whatsoever.⁵³

Lefler's ending continues this play with the themes and preoccupations of Arthurian tradition. If, as Warren highlights, the *Roman de Brut* emphasises the damage done by depopulation and loss of settled cultivation, then the setting for Ambrosinus-Merlin's final tale of Arthur's father is not without significance. Although still intact (unlike the elegiac evocation of the 'work of giants' ('enta geweorc') in the Old English fragment known as *Ruin*), here the Hadrian's Wall fortifications appear a bleached skeleton in a curiously empty landscape. Is the king's isolation here reflective of the temporal break that divides him from the visions of community dominating the main body of the film? Or are we looking at something rather more akin to Arthur's

⁵² 'Modernisation promises a perfect reconciliation of past and future in an endless present, a world where all sedimentation of social experience has been levelled or smoothed away, [...] the stains of contradiction washed out in a superhuman hygienic effort, by new levels of abundance and equitable distribution.' (Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonisation and the Reordering of French Culture*, October (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 1996), p. 11).

⁵³ Žižek, *Violence*, pp. 83–85.

allegorical dream vision of his own future fall, a space beyond mortal ken that is the location of a moment of cinematic ‘ruinous thinking’? By means of the (editorial) cut both film and novel make in history, their narrative is able to bring together two individuals who never met: the boy Uther-Romulus (the future father-adulterer) and the boy Arthur, whose unmarred face seemingly announces a more innocent vision of Arthurian polity than Erec’s. The boy is thus far removed from Malory’s vision of Arthur as a Herodian child murderer, and yet at the same time tied to it through the motif of reversal associated with forces such as Fortune’s wheel, prominently associated with Arthur in *La Mort le roi Artu*: the trauma with which he was threatened is one that he will ultimately act out.

Thus, just as Arthurian history writes the silently objective violence of historical forces in figures such as Erec’s scarred face, Lefler’s film also passes over – whether for sake of brevity or certificate rating – another dimension also of interest. Crucially, what it elides or mangles is what Geoffrey of Monmouth tells us of the common fate of Uther and his ‘brother in arms’, Aurelius Ambrosius, last surviving son of the emperor Constantine and king of England before Uther: both are poisoned by traitors.⁵⁴ By contrast, in a happy ending, Manfredi’s Aurelius leaves Britain with Livia and returns to Italy (p. 421), carried to the ‘island’ that will be Venice as Arthur will be taken to that of Avalon.⁵⁵ Thus Manfredi abridges to save his characters from another, potentially even more insidious narrative of individuals of good will as martyrs to the pervasive toxicity of unseen workings.

This brings me back to the extract from Chrétien’s text and its two translations given at points above. Does the age of romance read either idiomatically ‘Roman’ in its performative translation (*translatio*) of ancient values, or alienly barbaric in the violence done through what seems its subjective, provincial manglings of

⁵⁴ See *History of the Kings of Britain*, pp. 200–01 and p. 211.

⁵⁵ Manfredi’s postface makes it plain that his Aurelius is to be identified with Geoffrey’s character (see p. 424). His decision here appears as a mangling of its own, albeit with a suggestion of a happy ending as Aurelius is granted the gift of being taken away to the ‘island’, not that of Avalon in this instance, but Venice.

both language and history?⁵⁶ Or is its modernity always at some level silently and allusively dependent on a barbarian violence passed over in a silence that somehow finds a way to call attention to itself? What the Glaswegian slang rendering of Erec's mangling captures – this perhaps more readily than some ostensibly more 'faithful' translation – is partly something of the 'cultural cringe' of literate clerical audiences at medieval courts and partly something of romance's idiomatically expressive stitching of the permanent problem of translating between an 'objective' violence of history and the fundamental barbarism of 'subjective' action. Yet what these Arthurian bookends also remind us is that views of history also find themselves caught between the obscenities of the serious and the tragic on the one hand and the seeming indecencies of comedy on the other. Between past and future, too: Uther-Romulus's renunciation of both weapon and ambition to reclaim the lost empire, marks a shift of literary genre that can be expressed in terms of the Virgilian wheel (*rota / cursus Virgilii*).⁵⁷ In effect, through its staging of a transformatory embrace of the land in Britain as a break with the centrality of Rome, the film positions Uther's gesture of renunciation as a (temporary) turn towards a pastoral mode akin to that of the *Eclogues*.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ On which, in addition to Chakrabarty, see among others Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 81–101; Marcus Bull, *Thinking Medieval: An Introduction to the Study of the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

⁵⁷ 'The generic and discursive divisions and oppositions associated with the idea of the "Virgilian Wheel" (*rota / cursus Virgilii*), [...] was encapsulated in an short prologue added in Renaissance editions of the *Aeneid*. [...] Virgil starts off writing the pastoral poem and ends with the epic. He begins his career with "shepherd's slender pipe (the pastoral *Eclogues*), proceeds to the "farmlands" (the didactic *Georgics*), and finally arrives at the "sterner stuff of Mars" (the epic *Aeneid*).' ('Virgil', in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. by A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 717).

⁵⁸ This film then takes its place with another more recent vision of Britain's medieval past in the form of Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood* (2010). Scott presents us with a vision of a renewal of England through a communitarian remobilisation of the North in reaction to the tyrannically absolutist John. Here the faithless king's refusal to honour the bargain struck with him in order to save the kingdom and his decision to outlaw and thereby repress Robin as the major agent in the saving of the realm is what forces Robin out into the green wood, where he, Marion and the merry men are envisioned as living as medieval Kibbutzim.

Accordingly, multiply divided in its vision of the late Roman and medieval pasts, Lefler's exploration the unexpected cinematic descendants of the continually pertinent *rex quondam et futurus*.

A Touch Too Much? Violent Abuse in Medieval Epic and the American ‘War on Terror’

LUCY C. WHITELEY

In the early hours of 8 November 2002, in what has become a grotesquely iconic image, Private Lynndie England smiled and gave a ‘thumbs up’ to the camera as she posed pointing at a naked, hooded prisoner. It is just one of a long sequence of photos taken at the Baghdad Correctional Facility, also known as Abu Ghraib. In others, prisoners are piled on top of each other, menaced with dogs, forced to masturbate or to simulate oral sex. Some have electrodes attached to their genitals; some are handcuffed in stress positions to metal bed-frames; all are humiliated. The photos were exposed to the world by American news programme, *60 Minutes II*, on 23 April 2003. The show included a satellite interview with Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt, spokesman for the American military in Iraq, who quickly denounced the ‘rogue’ soldiers:

The first thing I’d say is we’re appalled as well. These are our fellow soldiers. These are the people we work with every day, and they represent us. [...] if we can’t hold ourselves up as an example of how to treat people with dignity and respect [...] We can’t ask that other nations do that to our soldiers as well.¹

Later in the interview he reiterated that the abuses at Abu Ghraib were not reflective of the army as an institution, but were the work of disappointing individuals:

¹ <<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/04/27/60II/main614063.shtml>> [accessed 21 November 2007].

The Army is a values-based organization. – he says – We live by our values. Some of our soldiers every day die by our values, and these acts that you see in these pictures may reflect the actions of individuals, but by God, it doesn't reflect my army.²

Yet, such a disavowal of responsibility sits uneasily with the accounts of those involved. Sergeant Davis, who was court-martialled in relation to the abuses told investigators from the Red Cross that 'it appeared Military Intelligence personnel approved of the abuse'. And Staff Sergeant Chip Frederick, also accused, spoke of the confusion over what was permissible in terms of procedure:

We had no support, no training whatsoever. And I kept asking my chain of command for certain things...like rules and regulations. And it just wasn't happening.³

With this in mind, can we really assign full responsibility for the acts – the atrocities – of Abu Ghraib to a few so-called 'bad apples'? Can their actions simply be extricated from the ideological system within which they were committed, so as to justify the claim that they 'do not reflect' the American military institution? Moreover, what does the inhumane treatment of Iraqi detainees in the twenty-first century have to do with a medieval poem?

This essay will focus on Vivien, the eponymous hero of the *La Chevalerie Vivien* an epic poem of the *chanson de geste* genre written around 1200. In particular, it will tackle an episode in which he blinds, maims and mutilates five hundred pagans, and sends them in a boat to Desramé, their pagan king. He expresses no shame or remorse for these victims and, rather, the unabashed, provocative theatricality of the act suggests the sort of naïve pride captured in the expression of Lynddie England and her colleagues. Like the abuses of Abu Ghraib, this act is committed by a military

² <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/04/27/60II/main614063_page3.shtml> [accessed 21 November 2007].

³ <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/04/27/60II/main614063_page2.shtml> [accessed 21 November 2007].

subject who seems to believe he is acting legitimately, and who has apparently little notion of the real horror of the situation.

In a further parallel, both Vivien and England act in cultural environments in which discursive constructions suspend the essential humanity of the other/victim. The enemy that Vivien carves up is rhetorically dehumanised in the *chansons de geste*, within a dichotomising framework that produces ‘them’ (devious, threatening and demonic pagans) as moral negative of ‘us’ (Frankish, Christian warriors). In the rhetoric of the American War on Terror, ‘terrorists’ (usually found in caves in or around the ‘Axis of Evil’) are pitted against the upstanding community of the American/Western world.⁴ The violent excesses are thus unmistakably linked to community – as well as individual – identity.

And finally, just as Private England and her associates were court-martialled and disciplined, so Vivien is punished in the most radical way possible.⁵ For in my reading, his gruesome death cannot be viewed independently of his persistent and excessive violence. Both Vivien and England, by their over-zealous identification with their military profession, show up the cruelty and tyranny of their institutional authority – and that, I suggest, is why they are so rigorously punished.

⁴ Richard Jackson, ‘The Discursive Construction of Torture in the War on Terror: Narratives of Danger and Evil’ in *Warrior’s Dishonour: Barbarity, Morality and Torture in Modern Warfare*, ed. by George Kassimeris (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 141–68, here at p. 165.

⁵ Six suspects faced prosecution in Iraq: Staff Sergeant Ivan L. Frederick, Specialist Charles A. Graner, Sergeant Javal Davis, Specialist Megan Ambuhl, Specialist Sabrina Harman and Private Jeremy Sivits. Private Lynddie England had been reassigned to Fort Bragg, after becoming pregnant with Graner’s child, and was charged later. Seymour M. Hersh., *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 2004), p. 23; Mark Danner, *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib and the War on Terror* (London: Granta, 2004), p. 9.

Military Ideology and Warrior Identity

From a very early age, boys like Vivien who were born into medieval aristocratic families, were subject to intensive training and education centring around the warrior function. Everything that they were taught was articulated within – and given meaning by – the cultural paradigm of chivalry. Maurice Keen explains that:

The martial value system set a very high price on physical strength, good horsemanship, and dexterity with weapons, and on impetuous ferocity in battle. This value system was what we call the code of chivalry, and these military virtues were the defining feature of its cult of honour.⁶

However, critics – both medieval and modern – have attested to the problematic nature of this martial education and its emphasis on ‘impetuous ferocity’.⁷ Many young knights, left without inheritance, joined roving groups of mercenaries, or raiders; those who did inherit property sustained their social dominance by the forced extraction of labour from peasants and subordinates; worse still, the warrior function itself was (and still is) predicated on the ability to kill and maim other human beings.⁸ Everything that is good or valuable in the *chansons de geste* (and in medieval society) is linked to this ability; there is a direct correlation

⁶ Maurice Keen, ‘Introduction’, in *Medieval Warfare*, ed. by Keen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1–12, here at p. 4.

⁷ For a general overview see Richard Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). He notes that ‘knighthood was nourished on aggressive impulses, [...] it existed to use its shining armour and sharp-edged weaponry in acts of showy and bloody violence’, (p. 2).

⁸ Georges Duby discusses the way that primogeniture disenfranchised younger sons of noble households in *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Jane Dunnett (Chicago: Polity, 1994), pp. 11–15; Peter Haidu outlines the violence of the *chevauchées* from a lord’s castle – designed to intimidate the peasantry in the name of exploitation in *The Subject of Violence: The ‘Song of Roland’ and the Birth of the State* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 50–54. Pierre Bonnassie uses the term ‘measured terrorism’ to describe the *chevauchées* in *La Catalogne du milieu du Xe à la fin du XIe siècle. Croissance et mutations d’une société* (Toulouse: Association des Publications de l’Université de Toulouse-Le-Mirail, 1975), p. 598.

between the number of men a knight is able to slaughter in battle, and the land, woman and wealth he is likely to win. His reputation and prestige are tied to the same stakes. Prowess is to be praised; to be a good knight is to be good at killing:

Qui la veist conte Aymeri aidier,
 Paiens ocirre au branc forbi d'acier,
 Testes et braz, et piez et poinz tranchier,
 Molt le deust aloser et proisier.

(*Aymeri de Narbonne*, ll. 1173–76)

Whoever saw Count Aymeri there helping to kill pagans with his sword of burnished steel, slicing off heads and arms, feet and hands, much must he praise and esteem him.

Because of the potentially chaotic and disruptive force of these highly trained, proud and ‘irascibly touchy’ warriors, critics have discussed chivalry as a code of honour, or value system, expounded in literature and society in order to tame the wild instincts of the young knights, and to harness their energy as a power for the good.⁹ But that would seem to disengage chivalry from the production of that violent impetuosity. I would like to suggest that a way of thinking around these complexities is to take chivalry as a ‘fantasy’ in the Žižekian sense of the word. Slavoj Žižek, in his book *The Plague of Fantasies*, explains fantasy thus:

The standard notion of the way fantasy works within ideology is that of a fantasy-scenario which obfuscates the true horror of a situation: instead of a full rendering of the antagonisms which traverse our society, we indulge in the notion of society as an organic Whole, kept together by the forces of solidarity and co-operation.¹⁰

Understood in this way, chivalry operates within the poems as a fantasy-scenario that masks the truly traumatic nature of the

⁹ ‘Irascibly touchy’ is a term used by Haidu, p. 84. On chivalry as value system, see Kaueper, who nevertheless highlights its deeply complex and ambivalent nature noting that, understood in this way, chivalry was at once praised as a pillar of civilisation, and ‘feared as a dark and sinister force’, (p. 29).

¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York and London: Verso, 1997), p. 6.

warrior vocation, sets aside its problematics, and allows an illusion of social harmony to flourish. The celebrations, weddings and feasting that inevitably follow victory in battle in the poems illustrate this process. According to this (chivalric) fantasy, war brings social order and community.¹¹ Yet, as Žižek takes pains to make clear, the relationship between fantasy and the Real (the traumatic repressed content) is not straightforward because it is the fantasy itself that ‘creates what it purports to conceal, its “repressed” point of reference’.¹² Briefly, fantasy is ‘the means whereby the psyche fixes its relation to enjoyment’ – it ‘constitutes our desire, provides its co-ordinates; that is, it literally “teaches us how to desire”’.¹³ Chivalry-as-fantasy thus supports the military ideology of the warrior aristocracy in such a way that it teaches young subjects how to desire, inducing in them a love of swords, horses, military glamour and so on. In the poems, this martial desire is palpable, and the poet lingers over the details of victorious battle, describing the smooth, sweeping curves of the swords, the armour glinting in the sun, the horns sounding, the horses braying. The knights enjoy the fight; they are ‘gent aduree / Et de bataille forment entalente’ (‘hardy people, and fiercely desirous of battle’ *Les Narbonnais*, ll. 7501–02); and they kill prolifically: ‘tant an ocient con lor vient a talent’ (‘they kill as may [of the enemy] as they desire’, *Les Narbonnais*, l. 7515, repeated l. 7585). In this way, chivalry produces the very violent horrors it then dissimulates with its rhetoric of honour and noble glory.

Leaping forward to the twenty-first century, we no longer talk about chivalry, yet we do still talk about behaving honourably, about fighting with honour. As Kimmitt asserted, ‘the Army is a values-based organization’. In order to reproduce these ‘values’ in its recruits, basic training is a brutal and rigorous exercise in

¹¹ *Aymeri de Narbonne* ends with Aymeri’s marriage to Hermengart and a list of their progeny; *Les Narbonnais* ends with the marriage of Boniface to one of Aymeri’s daughters; *Le Siège de Barbastre* ends with Girart’s marriage to the pagan princess Malatrie.

¹² Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, p. 7.

¹³ Sarah Kay, *Žižek: A Critical Introduction*, Key Contemporary Thinkers (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), p. 163; Žižek, *Plague*, p. 7.

identity reconstruction, in which youngsters are ‘conditioned’ – or taken apart and put back together in new way.¹⁴ They are made physically stronger, they learn martial skills, they learn to respond to orders without hesitation, and to admire military prowess and professionalism – all of which echoes the martial requirements outlined by Keen.¹⁵ In addition, just as young knights were trained to show ‘impetuous ferocity in battle’, so soldiers today are given psychological training in aggression, to help over-ride reluctance to kill.¹⁶ Theorists of twentieth-century war psychology also talk about the excitement experienced by soldiers when they come to make these kills. Joanna Bourke (speaking of World Wars I and II) notes that this excitement or enjoyment is the ‘unspeakable’ element of war.¹⁷ It is doubly unspeakable in the modern context; firstly because enjoyment is the disavowed, obscene aspect of military engagement, but also because war has been recast by a skewed media perspective as something in which men die, dissimulating the universal truth that war is about killing.¹⁸ Indeed, if we recall Kimmitt’s words once more, if men die by American military values, they also kill by them too, as is amply evident from the overwhelming military and civilian death toll in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁹ Bourke further contends that killing has ‘an aesthetic poignancy’ because ‘slaughter [can] be likened to an orgasmic, charismatic experience’.²⁰ Dave Grossman likens those

¹⁴ ‘Conditioned’ is a term used by Dave Grossman in his account of training in *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston, New York and London: Back Bay, 1996), p. 17.

¹⁵ See Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (London: Granta, 1999), pp. 60–85.

¹⁶ Renata Salecl, *On Anxiety, Thinking in Action* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 34; Grossman, pp. 13–17. Jackson further suggests that ‘subject to depersonalisation, uniforms, lack of privacy, lack of sleep, disorientation, punishing physical regimes, harsh and often capricious punishments, and violent hazing rituals, soldiers come to accept arbitrary and frequently sadistic violence as normal’, (‘Discursive Construction’, p. 149).

¹⁷ Bourke, p. 2.

¹⁸ Bourke, p. xiii; compare with Grossman, ‘Killing Is What War Is All About’, p. 93.

¹⁹ By September 2008, the estimated total of Iraqi deaths as a result of the American invasion stood at 1,267, 401. (see <<http://antiwar.com/>> [accessed 20 September 2008]).

²⁰ Bourke, pp. 2–3.

who are not experienced in war to virgins; and the preparations made by the uninitiated soldier to the preparations of a young boy nervously anticipating his first sexual encounter.²¹ Grossman, like Bourke, observes that killing involves a feeling of power – and that this can be ‘orgasmic’.²² Making his first kill, the soldier often feels a sense of relief, and a release of nervous tension that is experienced as exhilaration. The young soldier, like the young knight, desires recognition, respect, admiration; he desires the approval of authority figures; the affections of a lover; and all of those hinge on the ability to perform effectively on the battlefield.²³ That is, to kill before he is killed.

Is it really so surprising, then, when a soldier/knight goes too far? When, in an attempt to prove that he is, indeed, a warrior and a man he goes beyond the normative, legitimate level of violence? Chivalric heroism is predicated on a relentless display of superlative strength and bravery; and built in to the training a modern soldier receives is the imperative to go beyond the call of duty, to be better than expected. General George Patton urged troops in World War II to ‘do *more* than is required of you’.²⁴ And in Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket*, which focusses on the Vietnam war, the platoon commander expresses joy that his recruits have grown *beyond* their training – for, as he says, the ‘Marine corps doesn’t want robots, it wants killers’.²⁵ Furthermore, the line between ‘legitimate’ and excessive violence is very difficult to establish: at what point does glorious, chivalric endeavour collapse into ruthless barbarity? In the heat of the *chanson de geste* battle, dismemberment and evisceration are a commonplace, and hyperbolic killing a mark of honour. In *Les Narbonnais*, for example, Guillaume is praised because he kills every pagan he chases, having first cut off their hands, feet and

²¹ Grossman, p. 56. See also Richard Holmes, *Acts of War* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 2003), p. 56.

²² Grossman, pp. 134–37

²³ Holmes suggests that during war ‘sexuality is enhanced’ and that wearing a uniform or shiny armour (!) increases ‘sex appeal’, p. 93.

²⁴ See <<http://www.generalpatton.com/quotes.html>> [accessed 17 September 2008].

²⁵ *Full Metal Jacket*, dir. Stanley Kubrick (1987).

faces (ll. 6991–98). In these battles, those left defeated are shown no mercy ('Cil qui remestrent furent mort a haschie / Car Crestian nes espargnerent mie' ('those who remained were put to torturous death, for the Christians did not spare them at all', *Les Narbonnais*, ll. 7663–65); and those who refuse to convert are tortured ('Cils qui Dieu ne voutt croire fu errant desmenbrez', 'He who did not want to believe in God was soon dismembered', *Le Siège de Barbastre*, l. 7316). Christian knights are sometimes publicly tortured to accelerate the capitulation of a city; and these scenes certainly provoke anguish from those who witness them, but not moral outrage.²⁶ It appears to be a feasible battle strategy employed by Christians and Saracens alike; it is perhaps – to foreshadow the modern parallel – 'standard operating procedure'.

In the current climate, there has been much debate over what is acceptable in times of war. As Tony Judt observes, there are many respectable, thinking people in America today who favour torture 'under the appropriate circumstances and when applied to those who merit it'. He cites the example of Alan Dershowitz of Harvard Law School who writes that 'the simple cost-benefit analysis for employing non-lethal torture [to extract time-sensitive information from a prisoner] seems overwhelming'.²⁷ *The Torture Papers* edited by Greenberg and Dratel, is a collection of memoranda and documentation concerning the technical legality of torture in the context of the war in Iraq.²⁸ What these papers make clear is that the Bush Administration, in the aftermath of 11 September, took a series of decisions on how to conduct the so-called 'War on Terror'. The key was intelligence, and so the White House approached the justice department to establish just how far 'coercive interrogation' could be taken before it was considered

²⁶ Aymeri of Narbonne is stabbed thirty times and brought naked to a burning pyre in *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne* (ll. 1356–1525); and his son Guibert is stripped, beaten and threatened with crucifixion in *Les Narbonnais* (ll. 5017–99).

²⁷ Tony Judt, 'What Have We Learned, If Anything?' in *New York Review of Books*, 55:7 (1 May 2008), 16–20, here at p. 18.

²⁸ Karen J. Greenberg and Joshua L. Dratel (eds), *The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also Danner, whose appendices contain similar information.

‘torture’. Assistant Attorney General Jay S. Bybee advised the president thus:

Physical pain amounting to torture must be equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death.²⁹

Such a conclusion leaves a lot of room for manoeuvre within the confines of coercive interrogation. Indeed, the photos that emerged from Abu Ghraib were analysed by military law teams and criminal investigators and an appalling number of them were deemed to fall within the rubric of ‘standard operating procedure’.³⁰ Soldiers medieval and modern are thus allowed to go so far down the road of violence and pain-infliction that it seems unsurprising – if disturbing – that they are unable to apply the brakes. Moreover, to exacerbate the problem, they are actively encouraged to suspend the humanity of their enemy-victims: both Vivien and those involved in the Abu Ghraib scandal operated within a discursive climate in which community identity is forged through the vanquishing of a rhetorically dehumanised other.

The Discursive Dehumanisation of the Enemy

The War on Terror was declared during the chaos that followed the attacks on the World Trade Centre in September 2001, against a ‘devious and ruthless’ enemy (Bush, 24 November 2001) who had attacked America out of ‘treachery’ (Bush, 21 May 2003).³¹ A state of emergency was announced based on the imminent danger of death, injury, mutilation and property damage that these

²⁹ Memo from Jay S. Bybee (Office of the Assistant Attorney General, US Dept of Justice) to Alberto R Gonzalez (Counsel to the President) August 1 2002. *Re: Standards of Conduct for Interrogation under 18 USC §§ 2340–2340A* (Greenberg, Memo 14, pp. 172–217), p. 172.

³⁰ *Standard Operating Procedure*, dir. by Errol Morris (2008).

³¹ Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 63.

enemies threatened to wreak upon the American people. President Bush categorically denied that the bombing of the Twin Towers was an isolated incident: 'I view [9/11] as part of a strategy by a totalitarian, ideologically-based group of people who've announced their intentions to spread that ideology and attack us again'.³² Of course, acts of terror are to be feared and protected against, but to treat terrorism as something that is almost chosen by innately deceptive opponents is misleading. According to the Bush administration, the Trade Centre attacks were perpetrated by degenerate outlaws who happily kill innocent civilians because they 'hate our freedoms' (Bush, 20 September 2001), 'hate our value system' (Powell, 23 September 2001), and want to destroy 'our way of life'.³³ According to David Bromwich, the single greatest propaganda victory of the Bush administration is 'the belief shared by most Americans that the rise of radical Islam – so-called Islamofascism – has nothing to do with any previous actions by the United States'.³⁴ Furthermore, the abstracting of individual choices and motivations into the blanket term of 'Islamofascism', with which America is at war is, in itself:

A sure sign that we have forgotten *the* lesson of the twentieth century: the ease with which war and fear and dogma can bring us to demonise others, deny them a common humanity or the protection of our laws, and do unspeakable things to them.³⁵

Such demonisation is certainly occurring. The Bush Administration has made a determined effort to construct the enemy as 'inherently dangerous, demonic, and undeserving of even the most minimal levels of human respect'.³⁶ In virtually every post-9/11 speech, President Bush suggested that the war was

³² Speech given at John Hopkins University, 10 April 2006. For source, see <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/04/20060410-1.html>> [accessed 17 September 2008].

³³ Jackson, *Writing the War*, p. 63.

³⁴ David Bromwich, 'Euphemism and American Violence' in *New York Review of Books*, 55.5 (3 April 2008), 28–30, here at p. 30.

³⁵ Judt, p. 20 (original emphasis).

³⁶ Jackson, 'Discursive Construction', p. 150.

a ‘conflict between good and evil’. In his Address to the Nation on 11 September 2001, he stated: ‘Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature’. He later specifically opposed this natural evil to the moral goodness of Americans: ‘Anybody who tries to affect the lives of our good citizens is evil’ (Bush, 4 October 2001). At the same time, the enemy is dehumanised, cast as ‘subhuman savages and animals that needed to be hunted down and smoked out of caves’.³⁷ They live on the ‘hunted margins of mankind (Bush, 20 October 2001), having rejected ‘those values that separate us from animals – compassion, tolerance, mercy’ (Baker, 23 September 2001).³⁸ They are, to summarise several other statements, faceless, inhuman, cancerous, parasitic and savage. Notably, in subsequent interviews with England *et al*, not one of them once mentioned the humanity of those upon whom they had inflicted such pain and humiliation; they all talked solely about ‘getting caught’ and the unfairness of their prosecution.³⁹

The idea of a sustained threat from an ill-defined enemy, lying somewhere ‘out there’ and always likely to be plotting, conniving and waiting for the tiniest shadow of an opportunity, is also to be found in many *chansons de geste*. The enemy is treacherous, deceitful and sly; full of ‘traïson et de grant felonie’ (‘treason and great perfidy’ *La Mort*, l. 1389). They employ spies, dig tunnels, and lurk in caves.⁴⁰ They wait for cities to be undefended before they attack, in contrast to the open, honest, man-to-man combat preferred by the Christian warriors. These poems often begin with the knights relaxing, jousting, feasting, only to be brought news of a pagan army blazing a trail of devastation across the land.⁴¹ Soon

³⁷ Jackson, ‘Discursive Construction’, p. 165.

³⁸ Jackson, *Writing the War*, pp. 73–75.

³⁹ *Standard Operating Procedure*.

⁴⁰ For example, just as Aymeri is told the good news of his sons’ dubbing at Charlemagne’s court, in *Les Narbonnais*, a spy sets off to inform the pagan emir. With his sons away, Aymeri’s city is vulnerable (ll. 3355–65). Two spies leave Narbonne by a tunnel to inform the emir of its vulnerability in *Aymeri de Narbonne* (ll. 3470–74).

⁴¹ See, for example, the opening stages of *Le Siege de Barbastre*, in which the knights are relaxing, eating and jousting when news comes of an invasion.

they are surrounded and have to fight to defend their city, families, wives, religion and way of life:

Par ces .ij. [...]
 Fu deffandue a force et a bandon
 Crestienté entor et environ
 Se cil ne fuserent, de verté le dison,
 Tornée fust tote a perdicion
 Crestienté et la loi que tenon. (ll. 65–70)

By these two [= Aymeri and Charlemagne] [...] was Christianity defended around and about by force and courage. If they had not done so, in truth we can say, that Christianity and the law we uphold would be all turned to perdition.

Attacks from ‘out there’ are specifically cast as attacks on Christian life itself, bringing with them perdition and evil.

In a further parallel with the rhetoric of the war on terror, just as differences in belief, agenda, and intention are buried beneath blanket terms like ‘terrorists’ or ‘Islamofascists’, the enemy in the cycle is also united under the term ‘pagan’. Jeffrey Cohen notes that medieval Christians often represented their enemies as a ‘force united by its single-mindedness’ and that this abstraction glossed over differences in ethnicity, religious belief, and political agenda. For, he notes, these (foreign) heterogeneous cultures were ‘as ethnically various and politically mutable over time as the inhabitants of those lands that the Latin Christians had left behind’.⁴² This diversity is lost by a dichotomising approach to identity, in which the enemy is dehumanised and defaced in order to articulate the moral superiority of the Christian community. Accordingly, the pagans are ‘la geste grifaigne’ (‘the griffin-like people’, *Le Siège de Barbastre*, l. 97) or ‘deable qui d’anfer sont issuz’ (‘devils, spewed forth from Hell’, *Les Narbonnais*, l. 7226), some have horns, blackened skin, red eyes, or gigantic proportions. In a supreme example of religious dichotomisation,

⁴² Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, Medieval Cultures, 35 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 190–91.

one pagan warrior is even called ‘Cristamal’ which roughly translates as ‘Bad Christ’ (*Les Narbonnais*, l. 4049).

Returning to the Žižekian theory outlined above, I suggest that this denigration of the foreigner can be thought of as a collective fantasy. In *Enjoy Your Symptom*, Žižek asserts that a collective fantasy ‘guarantees the consistency of a socio-ideological edifice’, by designating an element that cannot be integrated into the social structure – yet which, precisely as such, constitutes its identity dialectically.⁴³ By transposing onto an outsider the role of foreign body that introduces disintegration and antagonism into the social organisation, the fantasy-image of society as consistent, harmonious whole is rendered possible.⁴⁴ Sarah Kay, in her critical guide to Žižek, clarifies what he means by this in terms of enjoyment. She observes that national feeling arises from common reference to enjoyment (festivals, feasting, weddings, tournaments) and that national tensions arise from the fear that some other group threatens this enjoyment.⁴⁵ Thus marauding pagans disrupt feasting and merry-making, and terrorists are plotting to destroy American family life.⁴⁶ In Žižek’s words, we blame the outsider for the ‘theft of enjoyment’ to conceal the traumatic fact that ‘*we never possessed what was allegedly stolen from us*’.⁴⁷ The fantasy is thus crucial in sustaining the belief in community, in unity, in *being*. I argue that Vivien and England, with their terrible excesses, ‘traverse the fantasy’, break its illusion and so tear away at the symbolic fabric itself. Hence they suffer terrible punishments.

⁴³ Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, rev. edn (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), p. 89.

⁴⁴ Žižek, *Enjoy*, p. 90.

⁴⁵ Kay, p. 138.

⁴⁶ See Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream: What 9/11 Revealed About America* (London: Atlantic, 2007).

⁴⁷ Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 203 (original emphasis); compare this with *Plague*, p. 32.

A Touch Too Much

Žižek explains that the efficacy of fantasy in sustaining the symbolic illusion (and supporting the subject within that illusion) relies on distance:

An ideological edifice can be undermined by a too-literal identification, which is why its successful functioning requires a minimal distance from its explicit rules.⁴⁸

He cites as example the film *Full Metal Jacket*. The first half of the film is devoted to the training of Marines in preparation for deployment to Vietnam. The drill sergeant is cruel and tyrannical, accepting nothing less than unquestioning obedience. He is the perfect expression of military authority. However, this part of the film ends with a soldier who ‘on account of his overidentification with the military ideological machine’, runs amok and kills the drill sergeant and himself.⁴⁹ The character who emerges as a ‘fully constituted military subject’ is the one who manages to retain a cool indifference towards the drill sergeant and the military machine.⁵⁰

Vivien, having grown up surrounded by the values of chivalry, is fired by the enthusiasm to be the best knight in Christendom. When he is dubbed he makes an oath never to cede so much as a step to any Saracen, or indeed any man alive:

‘Je promet, voiant vos Damedé,
Le gloriös, le roi de maiesté,
Voiant Guibor qui m’a nouri soëf,
Et voiant vos et voiant toz ces pers,
Que ne fuirai en tretot mon aé
Por Sarrazin, por Turc, ne por Escler.’ (*Chevalerie*, ll. 14–19)

‘I promise, in the sight of you, God, the glorious, the king of majesty,
and in the sight of Guibourc who nurtured me lovingly, and in the

⁴⁸ Žižek, *Plague*, p. 22.

⁴⁹ Žižek, *Plague*, p. 21.

⁵⁰ Žižek, *Plague*, p. 22.

sight of you [= Guillaume], and in the sight of all these peers, that never in all my days will I flee for a Saracen, for a Turk, or for an infidel.’

Yet, even his uncle Guillaume – a highly-accomplished knight, and voice of military authority at this point – advises against such absolutism, calling instead for a more nuanced and flexible attitude to chivalric duty. He tells Vivien that there is no shame in fleeing if you are outnumbered and your life depends on it. Rather, it is those who put themselves needlessly in danger who deserve opprobrium: ‘Qui soi oblie il est musars provez; / Bone est la fuie dont li cors est sauvez’, ‘He who forgets himself is a proven coward. Fleeing is good when the body is saved by it’ (*Chevalerie*, ll. 32–33). Vivien pays no heed and, anxious to prove himself, sets out on a bloody campaign to win lands, cities, and glory. He and his men, ‘la terre gastent [...] Tüent les fames, ocïent les enfans’ (‘lay waste to [pagan] land, kill the women and murder the children’, ll. 55–56); and there is not a day in which Vivien does not kill and dismember men (‘Ne vost li enfes un sol jor sejourner / De Sarrazins ocirre et decoper (‘the youngster did not want to rest a single day from killing and cutting up Saracens’, ll. 71–72). Then he sends his grotesque, taunting message to Desramé:

Defors Cordres est venue une nef
 Que li envoie Vivïens l’adurez;
 .v.c. paiens tretoz desfigurez,
 Copé lor ot les levres et les nez,
 N’i a un sol qui n’ait les eilz crevez,
 Et les .ii. peiz et les .ii. poinz copez. (ll. 93–98)

A boat arrived at Cordres which Vivien the hardy sends there. There were 500 pagans all disfigured. He had cut off their lips and noses and there was not a single one who did not have his eyes gouged out, and his feet and hands cut off.

Naturally, Desramé goes berserk, and makes an oath of his own: he will not rest until Vivien is dismembered, and utterly destroyed in battle (ll. 56–58). He amasses the biggest army ever seen, marches into the Archant, and brings the Christian warriors to the

brink of total annihilation. Vivien's spectacular death in the midst of this battle is recounted in three separate poems (*La Chevalerie*, *La Chanson de Guillaume*, and *Aliscans*). This is an extract from the version found in *Aliscans*:

Vivien est en milieu de l'Archant
 Et la boele li vet des cors cheant.
 A ses .ii. mains la vet enz reboutent
 Et prist l'enseigne de son espié tranchant,
 Parmi les flans s'en vet bien estraignant,
 Puis se rafiche desor son auferrant. (*Aliscans*, ll. 68–73)

Vivien is in the middle of the Archant, and his bowels are falling out of his body. With his two hands he tries to put them back in; and takes the flag from his sharp lance. Around his thighs he presses it – then he remounts his horse.

The account pays fitting testimony to Vivien's sheer determination to go beyond the call of duty, to go on fighting even though he keeps fainting, and is blinded by pain. And yet it is also, perhaps, a fitting punishment for the havoc he has unleashed. Guillaume tells him in no uncertain terms that his killing and stubborn tenacity have caused his death:

Plus avez morz de Turs et de Persant
 C'onques ne fist nus hom en vostre tans.
 Niés, ce t'a mort c'onques ne fus fuiant
 Ne por paiens sol plein pié reculant. (*Aliscans*, ll. 842–45)

You have killed more Turks and Persians that ever a man did in your time. Nephew, this has killed you, that never did you flee, nor for pagans take even a step back.

Like the soldier in *Full Metal Jacket*, his overidentification with military ideology has led him to run amok and, like that soldier, he will not come out of it alive. If chivalry is the fantasy-scenario that obfuscates the true horror of military ideology, then Vivien's overidentification with it reveals that horror. As Kay explains, what lies 'beyond' ideology can never be accessed, so that there is

no position from which to view ideology objectively. Rather, the ‘beyond’ is:

The moment of negation, the point of primal repression, or the clash of an irreducible antagonism – that is, of the real.⁵¹

Thus by traversing the fantasy, going beyond ideology, Vivien closes distance between Real and symbolic, bringing the repressed horror of the Thing into traumatic proximity with the symbolic – revealing the underpinning obscenity of military ideology and (given that identities are constructed within its confines) suggesting the illusory nature of subjectivity itself. In Žižek’s words, ‘by traversing the fantasy, the subject accepts the void of his non-existence’.⁵² The breaking open of Vivien’s body, and the macabre horror of his evisceration figure the proximity of the Real, for ‘one of the definitions of the Lacanian Real is that it is the flayed body, the palpitation of the raw, skinless red flesh’.⁵³

In my reading, the Abu Ghraib abuses similarly evidenced a too-literal identification with the military code of conduct, and in so doing revealed its cruel, disavowed underpinning. The photographs are not the ‘careless recordings of a few sadistic and psychologically ill individuals’ but rather the structural excess of military ideology.⁵⁴ As Jackson observes, part of the reason why the photos were so shocking to the American public was that ‘while reflecting binaries inherent to the discourse, [they] also severely destabilized them’.⁵⁵ For it is the American ‘heroes’ who are the animals, the savages, the evildoers; and the ‘terrorists’ who look like innocent victims of American Terror. For this reason, its exponents were publicly tried and found guilty – and the whole

⁵¹ Kay, p. 136.

⁵² Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York and London: Verso, 1999), p. 281.

⁵³ Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality* (New York and London: Verso, 1994), p. 118.

⁵⁴ Jackson, ‘Discursive Construction’, p. 166.

⁵⁵ Jackson, ‘Discursive Construction’, p. 166.

episode was ‘re-made as “un-American”’.⁵⁶ The individuals were cast out and shamed in order to protect the military institution and its powerful ideology.

Conclusions

It might seem unusual to place Vivien’s story alongside that of the soldiers of Abu Ghraib. But in making these narratives touch in this way, I hoped to help undermine the mystifying rhetoric that assigns torture, cruelty and savagery to the medieval past, and to justify a re-thinking of the way we understand violence in the present. Carolyn Dinshaw, in the coda to her book, *Getting Medieval*, talks about the way that we make use of the medieval as a place of (modern) abjection, whereby it ‘signals all the abjected Others of this world’.⁵⁷ Yet, as in any process of abjection, the medieval inheres in the modern and the violence that we might like to assign to a dark, forgotten (Middle) age comes back to haunt us in the present, proving the impossibility of absolute categories upon which to found identity: modernity, whiteness, straightness – but also Western-ness, morality, civilisation.⁵⁸ Thus ‘getting medieval’ is a useful tool of social analysis:

Using ideas of the past, creating relations with the past, touching in this way the past in our efforts to build selves and communities now and into the future.⁵⁹

With Presidential elections looming, it is perhaps a good time to think about issues of identity, community and violence. As it stands, America today is the ‘only advanced democracy where public figures glorify and exalt the military’, and Senator

⁵⁶ Jackson, ‘Discursive Construction’, p. 166.

⁵⁷ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Post-Modern* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 189.

⁵⁸ Dinshaw, p. 189.

⁵⁹ Dinshaw, p. 206.

McCain's tour of duty in Vietnam features forcefully in his campaign.⁶⁰ But, as Judt concludes, by constructing American / Western identity against a diabolically evil enemy, we are 'slipping down a slope' towards unspeakable horror. For hand-in-hand with this over-riding dichotomy, go other fundamental distinctions: between the law and exceptional circumstance (in which anything goes); and between citizens and non-citizens (to whom anything can be done).⁶¹ The horrors of the *Chevalerie* and Abu Ghraib show what can happen in this space beyond law, beyond humanity, and it is not pretty. Is it time, perhaps, to 'get medieval' on the War on Terror?

⁶⁰ Judt, p. 18.

⁶¹ Judt, p. 20.

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