



FAU Studien aus der Philosophischen Fakultät 15

**Ina Habermann/Christian Krug (eds.)**

# And Thereby Hangs a Tale A Critical Anatomy of (Popular) Tales



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**Band 15**

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Ina Habermann and Christian Krug (eds.)

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For Doris Feldmann





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## Dedication

There are not many people – and as it is desirable that a story-teller and a story-reader should establish a mutual understanding as soon as possible, I beg it to be noticed that I confine this observation neither to young people nor to little people, but extend it to all conditions of people: little and big, young and old: yet growing up, or already growing down again – there are not, I say, many people who [do not like a good story, beautifully told.]

This, with a small but significant change at the end, is the first sentence of Charles Dickens's Christmas book *The Chimes*, published in 1844. We use it as a peg on which to hang our own tale because it was one of the texts that helped popularize fairy tales in Britain in the 1840s (much later than on the continent). Dickens' *The Chimes*, or John Ruskin's "The King of the Golden River" (1841), were also instrumental in redefining the scope and function of (fairy) tales in the early 1840s (Feldmann/Tetzeli 253, 260), and this volume is interested precisely in such reconfigurations of tales at crucial moments in time.

Doris Feldmann and Kurt Tetzeli von Rosador published a carefully prepared German translation of both texts in 1995, and this is a more specific reason why we chose to open with this quote. *Der König des Goldenen Flusses. Fünf englische Märchen von armen und reichen Leuten* collects stories that use the vehicle of the (fairy) tale for a fictional, imaginative exploration of social injustice that implies, or quite openly expresses, a social critique. In order to ensure that this critique reaches the ears, the minds and the hearts of Dickens's implied readership, the Victorian middle-classes, 'mutual understanding' must instantly be established, as Dickens's narrator emphasizes – an understanding that ideally obtains in the reciprocal communicative relationship between the teller and the reader of a tale. Through the way we have twisted the end of Dickens's sentence, we would emphasize the crucial cultural importance of storytelling, alluding to the notion of *homo narrans*, and Mark Turner's related argument that story and parable provide no less than the organising principle of the human mind, determining the way in which we make sense of the world, and our lives. In *The Chimes*, as elsewhere, Dickens makes heavy use of parenthesis, chopping up sentences in order to create suspense, and using a language that trips over itself in its (carefully crafted) eagerness to convey meaning. Like the Ancient Mariner in Coleridge's eponymous poem, who holds the

wedding guest with his skinny hand and glittering eye, the narrator sits us down “like a three years child” (l. 15) to tell his tale of poverty, injustice and despair, relying on our susceptibility to story.

In the epilogue to their collection, which aims at a wider dissemination of English social tales to German readers, Doris Feldmann and Kurt Tetzel von Rosador detail the forms that socially committed tale-telling took in Victorian England, mapping out a spectrum of the social tale from John Ruskin to Oscar Wilde. The collection was, at the time, part of an informal research project at Westfälische Wilhelms Universität Münster on representations of labour and poverty in Early Modern and Victorian literature. Along with the translation of Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* (1992), her study of the industrial novel (1995), and her work on Victorianism and Victorian popular culture (Feldmann and Krug 2013 & 2016), it shows Doris Feldmann’s central preoccupation with the (material and popular) culture and politics of Victorian Britain, and the role that literature plays in these discourses. This is combined, in Doris Feldmann’s academic universe, with a keen interest in intersectionality, where she traces the interplay between class, gender, and ethnicity, and an interest in theory, as expressed most recently in the German translation of Gayatri Spivak’s *Critique of Post-colonial Reason*. In this project, again, Doris Feldmann was not content to study and apply Spivak’s theoretical reflections, but she insisted they should also be made available to readers of German.

These are only a few of the traces we follow in our academic profiling of Doris Feldmann, aspects of a tale we tell about a life in English studies in Germany. But what, exactly, is the ‘Feldmann touch’? Like Mrs. Brown in Virginia Woolf’s *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, ‘DF’ appears to say ‘Catch me if you can!’ There is plenty of evidence in her list of publications, projects and academic commitments that Doris Feldmann is a team player with a deep sense of responsibility for the ‘little people’, but she can also be elusive, even infuriatingly so, taking her stand on the shifting sands of deconstruction, following the pull of *différance* and refusing to be held captive, and responsible for yesterday’s theoretical commitments.

She has attended to the labouring poor in Victorian Britain, to women (both poor and, in her studies of celebrities such as Joanne K. Rowling, rich and famous), to exploited children and disenfranchised men, and probed the received wisdoms of political economy and the law, without

ever taking refuge in identity politics. If Dickens uses parenthesis to cram his sentences with meaning, Doris Feldmann's game is irony and ellipsis; she can leave a half-sentence hanging in the air until it could either explode, or fade away, or both. And finally, there is the eyebrow, going up...

To mark the occasion of Doris Feldmann's retirement and 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, we have prepared this volume of collected essays that explore the politics of tale-telling across the field of English studies. Contributors include (former) colleagues and (former) PhD students who have accompanied her for part of the way, from her time in Münster to the period, from 1998 to 2021, as Chair of English literature and culture at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg. The scope of the essays also tells the tale of Doris Feldmann's teaching and interests. One can never be sure, of course, but we think, and hope, that 'DF' might like such a *Festschrift*, as long as it is one that puts the concept under erasure.

Ina Habermann (Basel) & Christian Krug (Nuremberg)

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# Introduction

## And Thereby Hangs a (Critical) Tale

*Ina Habermann & Christian Krug*

Dumoise was our Civil Surgeon at Meridki, and we called him ‘Dormouse,’ because he was a round little, sleepy little man. He was a good Doctor and never quarrelled with any one, not even with our Deputy Commissioner who had the manners of a bargee and the tact of a horse. He married a girl as round and as sleepy-looking as himself. She was a Miss Hillardyce, daughter of ‘Squash’ Hillardyce of the Berars, who married his Chief’s daughter by mistake... But that is another story.

Rudyard Kipling, “By Word of Mouth”,  
*Plain Tales from the Hills*<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Tales from Shakespeare

“And thereby hangs a tale”: the well-known phrase obscures the fact that it is difficult to define precisely what a ‘tale’ is – and from where it is supposed to be suspended. When Jeffrey Archer used the phrase as a title to a collection of short stories (2010), it had already acquired some serious cultural capital. Most famously, Shakespeare had used it – four times, as Archer reminds his readers.<sup>2</sup> This is perhaps not surprising given that the verbal image of ‘hanging tales’ provided the potential for very obvious, and very Shakespearean, puns (and the phrase was already proverbial in Early Modern England).<sup>3</sup> Archer, in any case, never one adverse to cashing in on some (cultural) capital, seems to have been keen to exploit this Shakespearean lineage: prefixing his anthology with

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<sup>1</sup> Ed. Andrew Rutherford. Oxford: OUP, 1987, 229.

<sup>2</sup> Archer makes this point in interviews and in his short story “The Undiplomatic Diplomat”: “‘And thereby hangs a tale,’ said the Permanent Secretary. Percy wondered which of four possible Shakespeare plays Sir Nigel was quoting from, but decided this wasn’t the time to enquire.” (182)

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Dent T48. Partridge (in *Shakespeare’s Bawdy*) lists examples for ‘tale’ in the sense of ‘penis’, ‘vulva’ and ‘buttocks’. Jeffrey Archer seems quite fond of the Shakespearean potential for puns afforded by the homophones *tale/tail*; he had already used them in 2007 for his anthology *Cat O’Nine Tales* (but thankfully not in 1988 for yet another collection, *A Twist in the Tale*). His latest collection is entitled *Tell Tale* (2017) – presumably with a nod to Poe.

one of the quotes from Shakespeare, he chose the one cited in the *OED*, which is from *The Taming of the Shrew* (c. 1596):

GRUMIO First, know my horse is tired, my master and mistress fallen out.  
CURTIS How?  
GRUMIO Out of their saddles into the dirt, and thereby hangs a tale.  
CURTIS Let's ha't, good Grumio. (IV.i.47–52)<sup>4</sup>

Truncated like this, the lines set up what promises to be an exciting story (about how after their wedding, Kate and Petruccio are still quarrelling so hard they may have fallen off their horses) – only so that Archer can then swerve away from the text and substitute the beginning of his own tale, the first one in his collection. While Archer thus literally inserts himself into the Shakespearean text, his gesture of teasing with, but withholding the tale seems to be a hallmark of tales. The beginning of Rudyard Kipling's penultimate "Plain Tale from the Hill", quoted above, does precisely the same ("but that is another story") and a few lines later in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Grumio is intent on withholding from Curtis the very story he (and Archer) evoke in the quote. In another twist, Grumio then proceeds to mangle this by telling Curtis precisely what he will withhold from him (ll. 65–72). Shakespeare, tongue-in-cheek, thus highlights the fact that the telling of tales involves questions both of authorial power and of memory ("many things of worthy memory which now shall die in oblivion, and thou return unexperienced to thy grave", ll. 73–5). The power to provide or withhold, but also to digress, to deviate or to produce alternate versions of stories is at the core of our understanding of tales. 'And thereby hangs a tale' can thus be considered as a phatic marker of narrativity itself. As a communicative device, a rhetorical *inquit* formula, it creates a discursive entanglement, putting speaker and listener(s) in touch. The rest is story.

"[And] thereby hangs a tale" occurs several times in Shakespeare, and somewhat surprisingly, Archer did not go with *As You Like It*.<sup>5</sup> While performed three years later, only published in the First Folio and hence not quoted in the *OED*, it does in fact contain the better-known example of the phrase in Shakespeare. The melancholy Jaques talks about how he encountered a "motley fool" in the forest who "railed on" about

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<sup>4</sup> All quotes from Shakespeare are from Arden3.

<sup>5</sup> The phrase actually occurs in five, rather than four, plays. The other examples Archer probably refers to are *Merry Wives* I.iv.138 (publ. 1604) and (potentially with a bawdy pun) *Othello* III.i.8 in 1603 or 4. It can also be found in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (III.iii.41).

Lady Fortune – but did so “in good, set terms” (i.e. well-spoken, both in terms of structure and register, but also in a formulaic fashion):

JAQUES

‘Good morrow, fool,’ quoth I. ‘No, sir,’ quoth he,  
‘Call me not fool till heaven hath sent me fortune.’  
And then he drew a dial from his poke,  
And looking on it with lack-lustre eye,  
Says very wisely, ‘It is ten o’clock.  
Thus we may see,’ quoth he, ‘how the world wags:  
’Tis but an hour ago since it was nine,  
And after one hour more ’twill be eleven;  
And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,  
And then from hour to hour we rot and rot,  
And thereby hangs a tale.’ [...] (II.vii.18–28)

Jaques’ passage comes close to teasing out one of the etymological meanings of ‘tale’ – that they are structured, methodically patterned narratives. (In *Taming of the Shrew*, Grumio does so too when he starts the tale he seeks to withhold from Curtis with “*Imprimis*”, a Latin legal term used in enumerated lists; IV.i.59.) Etymologically speaking, ‘tale’ combines meanings of ‘telling’ with ‘structure’ and ‘order’; according to the *OED*, Old Norse *tala* meant not just ‘talk’/‘speech’ but also ‘number’ (hence, the German ‘Zahl’ is related to ‘tale’). “[M]ention[ing] things in their natural or due order” still informs one of the meanings of ‘tale’: “That which one tells; the relation of a series of events; a narrative” (*OED* 3a.). The first sentence of Charles and Mary Lamb’s “Introduction” to *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807) highlights this aspect of tales as well: “whatever has been added” to Shakespeare’s “beautiful language”, the Lambs explain, merely serves the purpose of giving the tales “the regular form of a connected story”.<sup>6</sup> (The fact that they not only regularize Shakespeare’s narrative but reduce his plays to ‘timeless tales’ that seem to lend themselves to all sorts of further ‘transformations’ is explored by Sabine Schülting in this volume.)

Our trail of the tale has so far followed the use of the word through parts of literary history, tracing some of its intertextual uses, appropriations, and the cultural prestige associated with its authors, and necessarily so, since in literary studies, with the possible exception of the Middle Ages

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<sup>6</sup> Charles and Mary Lamb, *Tales from Shakespeare*, ed. Marina Warner. London: Penguin Classics, 2007, 3.

(Boccaccio, Gower or Chaucer),<sup>7</sup> ‘tale’ does not feature prominently as a critical or generic category. Rather, its meaning is constructed through use – ‘tale’, it seems to us, is mainly a discursive category; its uses need to be explored in depth, and by way of examples, if we are to tease out the heuristic value of the tale in a critical framework.

## 2. Critical T(r)ails

As a critical category, ‘tale’ remains conspicuously underdefined in literary studies. This becomes obvious when we compare it with related lexical items and consider its usage in compounds. Near-synonyms of ‘tale’ have been much more thoroughly conceptualized: ‘story’ in conjunction with ‘plot’ in narratology, ‘short story’, ‘saga’, ‘fable’ and ‘myth’ as distinct genres (and in some cases, modes of experience) – not to mention ‘narrative’ or ‘history’ (all examples taken from the *Oxford The-saurus of English*, 32009). ‘Tale’, on the other hand, seems to have escaped most such conceptualizations – even though, as we have seen, the term’s etymology would lend itself to them. This lack of conceptualization cannot simply be explained by the semantical openness of ‘tale’ – after all, the same would be true for ‘narrative’ and ‘history’, and while there is a ‘narrative theory’ and a ‘science of history’, no prominent ‘tale theory’ exists (yet).

Only when used in a compound, such as ‘fairy tale’ or ‘folk tale’, do ‘tales’ become conceptually more fixed. Not that these terms have fixed meanings, of course (are fairy tales more ‘literary’, folk tales more ‘oral’? Should one term serve as a hypernym that encompasses the other?).<sup>8</sup> The point is rather that considerable work has gone into these (conflict-ing) conceptualizations since the mid-/late eighteenth century – the moment both ‘folk’ and ‘fairy tales’ were invented as modern genres. And while they may have differed in meaning ever since (or not, as the case may be), both genres initially served the same twin purposes: They constructed what they purportedly named (a body of texts believed to be the remnants of some ‘authentic’ cultural heritage in need of pre-

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<sup>7</sup> The “mediaeval tale” has been extensively researched and is sometimes discussed as a precursor to the short story, the genre against which ‘tale’ is most often measured; cf. Viorica Patea (ed.), *Short Story Theories: A Twenty-First-Century Perspective*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Jack Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton UP, 2012, 3.

servation in the process of constructing class or nation)<sup>9</sup> and then prepared it for ‘rational’ analysis. (Jack Zipes thus speaks of ‘modern’ genres such as the fairy tale as “social institutions that have defined cultural artifacts and patterns, divided them rationally into disciplines, and established rules and regulations for their study.”)<sup>10</sup>

A good example of how the invention of a new genre of tales was used productively by authors is the nineteenth-century ‘National Tale’ in Ireland. For Ina Ferris it constitutes a “second-order genre” in that such tales existed mainly in relation to the ‘Irish tour’, an English, masculinist genre which prompted the reaction of mainly female, (Anglo-)Irish authors such as Sydney Owenson (later Lady Morgan, *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale*, 1806) or Maria Edgeworth (*Ennui*, 1809; *The Absentee*, 1812).<sup>11</sup> As a “second-order genre”, Ferris argues, the National Tale depends on reiteration,<sup>12</sup> a repetition that introduces a slight difference, thus opening up a space for criticism. For us, the Irish National Tale exhibits some of the very aspects that drew us to explore ‘tales’ as a critical concept – it is relational (in that it relies on the Irish Tour) without being derivative, imminently social (in that it is in the process of constructing identity positions, including those of gender, nationality, and religion) and, since it relies on the actualizing potential of reiteration, combines a perspective on (narrative) tradition with an insistence on current social and political politics. (Joachim Frenk revisits Irish tales, including the ‘National tale’ and the ‘tall tale’, in his essay on “New Tales of Ireland”.)

There are also ‘cautionary tales’, ‘trickster tales’ and many more. In light of the multitude of generic typologies involving ‘tales’ since the eighteenth century, it seems even more significant that only in very few instances, the term seems to have merited a definition on its own. When this happens (usually in ‘Handbooks’ or ‘Glossaries of Literary Terms’ aiming for comprehensiveness), such definitions focus on the methodical unfolding of a narrative (e.g. as “story of incident” in opposition to “stories of character”),<sup>13</sup> thus keeping with the term’s etymology. In such

<sup>9</sup> John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, ch. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Zipes, xiii.

<sup>11</sup> *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland*. Cambridge: CUP, 2004, cf. 11.

<sup>12</sup> 129, she also uses Bakhtin to make a similar point, 48–9.

<sup>13</sup> “In the **tale**, or “story of incident,” the focus of interest is primarily on the course and outcome of the events, as in Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Gold Bug* (1843) and in other tales of detection, in many of the stories of O. Henry (1862–1910), and in the stock but sometimes

cases, 'tale' usually does not feature as a genre in its own right (in Abrams' *Glossary*, it is merely one mode of the genre of 'short story', the heading under which it is referenced). For Christian Huck, such a stripped-down understanding of 'tale' can still provide the starting point of a productive enquiry, as it focusses our attentions on very basic patterns, such forms of address (see his essay which closes this volume).

'Tale' is often used as a *subsidiary* genre in these publications, so that tales could possibly be labelled *protogenres*. However, this is not the critical trajectory we would like to follow. After all, such attributions run the risk of remaining within a structuralist framework that seeks to establish 'tale' as a distinct generic category simply in order to make tales taxonomically manageable. In fact, even if we consider the other major strands of post-WWII genre theory (next to structural, semiotic and hermeneutical),<sup>14</sup> there may not be much virtue in setting up 'tale' as a genre.<sup>15</sup> Relating tales functionally to existing genre systems and finding virtue in the fact that they somehow 'transgress' these, for example, would simply amount to staying within a modernist, bourgeois aesthetics which values 'transgression' for its own sake.<sup>16</sup> While we also stress that there is an openness and transgressive quality attached to tales (see below), we would not measure this against 'genre'. Rather, it seems to us symptomatic that as a stand-alone term, 'tale' has *not* been used widely as a generic category. If genres provide functional terms for specific societies (as Hans Robert Jauß insists), the fact that societies do

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well-contrived western and adventure stories in popular magazines. "Stories of character" focus instead on the state of mind and motivation, or on the psychological and moral qualities, of the protagonists." (*A Glossary of Literary Terms*, ed. M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham, 2009, 331). In his essay, Christian Huck quotes another glossary with a similar definition, cf. p. 221 of this volume).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Stefan Trappen, *Gattungspoetik: Studien zur Poetik des 16. bis 19. Jahrhunderts*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2001, 1–22.

<sup>15</sup> We would suggest, however, borrowing from semiotic and hermeneutical genre theories an insistence on historicity of what we will refer to as 'tales', and the cultural work that theses narratives do.

<sup>16</sup> Jauß' hermeneutic concept of genre has been criticized accordingly, as has Jacques Derrida's well-known essay "The Law of Genre", which has been chided for "old and simplistic commonplaces, mechanically associating genre with limits and prohibitions, with hierarchies and authority" (Stefano Castelvetti, "A Prologue on Genre", *Sentimental Opera: Questions of Genre in the Age of Bourgeois Drama*. Cambridge: CUP, 2013, 1); "Jauß not only rehearsed the familiar claim that masterworks 'surpass the conventions of their genre', but at his most extreme turned it into a hard and fast rule, whereby a work's artistic value is inversely proportional to its compliance with generic traits" (*ibid.*, 2).

not use certain terms (and conspicuously so, as we have argued) must be significant in itself. The lack of generic theory is in fact one symptom of the transgressive quality that interests us.

This is not to imply that ‘tales’ do not feature prominently in literary studies. They do – but the concept derives its meaning less from its function as the object of theoretical debates than as a discursive category, created through use – for example in quotations (“tales of sound and fury”<sup>17</sup> or, as we have discussed, “thereby hangs a tale”) or in canonical form in literary history – *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Winter’s Tale*, *A Tale of Two Cities* or *The Handmaid’s Tale*, to name works spanning some 600 years. These titles derive not from a distinct generic category that is then further qualified (by “Canterbury”, “Winter”, or “Handmaid”);<sup>18</sup> rather, the canonization and continued use of these titles produce an amorphous understanding of what a *prototypical* tale might be – in terms of a family resemblance (Wittgenstein’s *Familienähnlichkeit*). This is as close to an understanding of tales as a ‘genre’ as we aim to get, since for us, the amorphous element is a productive and revealing aspect of tales which we seek to pursue.

The following working definition draws on such discursive and symptomatic uses to sketch a family resemblance of narratives that we will address as ‘tales’. Some questions of genre also play a part here, since there is a certain ‘semantic crosspollination’ from more established genres, mainly the folk and fairy tale since the late eighteenth and the short story since the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> They impact on a more general understanding of all things ‘tale’ (including narratives that predate

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<sup>17</sup> Macbeth’s musings on life as “a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury / Signifying nothing” (V.v.25–7) is a good example of how in use, ‘tale’ as a term seems to gravitate towards more overtly generic usages. Today, arguably the more prominent reference to Shakespeare’s play is a condensed form of the quote, “Tales of sound and fury” (and corpus linguistics confirms this). That phrase is now frequently, if playfully, used as a compound generic (e.g. Thomas Elsaesser’s 1972 essay on family melodrama as “Tales of Sound and Fury”).

<sup>18</sup> Though there is some debate about the middle-English usage of ‘tale’, e.g. in relation to Chaucer, cf. Piero Boitani, *English Medieval Narrative in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, transl. Joan Krakover Hall. Cambridge: CUP, 1982, chs 5 and 6.

<sup>19</sup> E. A. Poe’s essays and reviews since the mid-1830s, including his reviews of Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales* (1837, 42) in *Graham’s Magazine* (1842), are often taken to mark the critical tradition of the short story as a modern genre, cf. Robert F. Marler, “From Tale to Short Story: The Emergence of a New Genre in the 1850’s” [1974], *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. Charles May. Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1994, 165–81.

these specific genres). The following definition is neither clearly delimited nor fully developed;<sup>20</sup> rather, it attempts to set up ‘tale’ as a heuristic category whose fuzzy logic can be traced in, and tested against, the case studies that make up this volume.

### 3. A Working Definition

What we refer to as a ‘tale’ is, first, in a very general sense a cultural narrative that circulates in a cultural imaginary and provides a narrative framework for the production or circulation of shared meanings. Tales in this sense are eminently *social* (even if they are often believed to transcend the narrow confines of specific societies, see below), and they can serve as a mode of understanding or experience that grants access to the reservoirs of a cultural and collective memory. And like all cultural scripts, they allow for or preclude specific forms of knowledge.

Second, and more specifically, ‘tale’ is a cultural narrative to which some sort of timelessness or universality is ascribed. In this respect, such narratives obscure their ideological function by naturalizing, decontextualizing and depoliticizing meanings – similar to Roland Barthes’ myths of everyday life. Because of their promise of universality, tales become popular and are frequently revisited and reworked – a reiteration that, somewhat paradoxically, means they are consistently actualized to meet the current demands of social groups and societies. (Not surprisingly, one of the concepts frequently associated with tales is *adaptation*, cf. Sabine Schülting’s contribution in this volume.) A similar tension between universal claims and specific uses was a hallmark of late eighteenth-century inventions of the ‘fairy tale’, as well as of ‘popularity’ as such (Ulrike Dencovski deals with this aspect in “‘The Gold Standard’ of Victorian Fairy Tales”). Finally, since tales carry the promise of universality, they seem to allow for intercultural dialogue – and can thus

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<sup>20</sup> This is part design and part necessity – much work would need to be done to conduct a Foucauldian discourse analysis of ‘tale’ as a genre in a discursive (rather than textualist) sense. Jason Mittell has sketched what would be involved in such a project for popular television genres; for our purpose, it would involve considering the uses of ‘tale’ as a cultural practice, a study of the breadth of their “surface enunciations” (such as definition, interpretation, evaluation), an analysis of their discursive formations and clusters and situating them within larger systems of cultural hierarchies and power relations; cf. Jason Mittell, “A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory”, *Cinema Journal* 40/3 (2001), 3–21.



become the source of misunderstandings (Andreas Nehring addresses this aspect of cultural hermeneutics in his essay).

Third, tales often promise to articulate a social or cultural knowledge or truth (hence their proximity to fables and myths, cautionary tales and fairy tales). This in turn raises questions about the unique epistemological potential of tales. The idea of tales promising a ‘truth’ that transcends time and place (but is nevertheless ‘claimed’ by very specific societies) and that may never be completely recoupable – a significance that ultimately defies signification – has informed some current philosophical debates. In his recent collection *The Fire and the Tale* (2014, transl. 2017), Giorgio Agamben argues that tales can never bridge the distance to their mythical ‘fire’ – their barely remembered ‘truth’ or point of origin: “Where there is the tale, the fire is out; where there is the mystery, there cannot be the story”.<sup>21</sup> For Agamben, tales remain in what is literally a ‘precarious’ relationship (i.e. one based on prayer, *praex*) to the ‘fire’ that gives them narrative ‘life’.<sup>22</sup> The metaphor is of course reminiscent of one of the most famous tales in late-nineteenth century British literature, the tale told by Marlow in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899):

But Marlow was not typical [for seamen] (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings

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<sup>21</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Fire and the Tale*. Stanford UP, 2017. The collection opens with an anecdotal tale Agamben considers an allegory of literature: “When the Baal Schem, the founder of Hasidism, had a difficult task before him, he would go to a certain place in the woods, light a fire and meditate in prayer; and what he had set out to perform was done. When a generation later, the Maggid of Meseritz was faced with the same task, he would go to the same place in the woods, and say: ‘We can no longer light a fire, but we can pray.’ And everything happened according to his will. When another generation had passed, Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov was faced with the same task, [and] he would go to the same place in the woods, and say: ‘We can no longer light a fire, nor do we know the secret meditations belonging to the prayers, but we know the place in the woods, and that can be sufficient.’ And sufficient it was. But when another generation had passed and Rabbi Israel of Rishin was called upon to perform the task, he sat down in his golden chair, in his castle, and said: ‘We cannot light the fire, we cannot speak the prayers, we do not know the place, but we can tell the story of all this.’ And, once again, this was sufficient.” (1–2)

<sup>22</sup> “‘Precarious’ refers to what is obtained by means of a prayer (*praex*, a verbal request, as different from *quaestio*, a request that is made with all available means, even violent ones) and is, for this, fragile and adventurous. Literature is itself adventurous and precarious, if it wishes to preserve the right relation with the mystery” (Agamben, 7).

out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.<sup>23</sup>

In J. Hillis Miller's reading, Marlow's tale (told onboard an anchored-down ship, between dusk and darkness, beyond Gravesend but before the open sea) is an apocalyptic parable directed towards revelation, but one whose unveiling is constantly postponed. Its promised meaning is not some 'kernel' contained 'inside' the tale, like in parables or allegories. Rather, the meaning 'envelops' the tale like an aurora, the 'glow' of some fire which can only ever be indirectly observed. Tales such as Marlow's employ a different epistemology to approach what essentially must remain a mystery (and it may not be coincidence that both Agamben and Miller employ religious imagery and terminology to explore this epistemic potential of tales). What interests us is the ways in which tales can be epistemically productive and what alternative epistemologies they allow for (see also Andreas Nehring's essay in this volume).

Fourth, our understanding of 'tale' comprises narratives with a certain openness and transgressive potential. As Tobias Döring argues in his contribution, the sequences and patterns connected with tales (cf. the etymology of the term discussed above) have to be seen in relation to a much more fundamental openness of narratives to produce "alternative versions, i.e. retellings that undo the sequence, loosen the connections and fabricate new ones, so as to start another and a different round of playing" (22) – the reason why narrative serves as a heuristic tool across many social and scientific disciplines. In a more limited sense, this openness is already visible in the mediaeval tale – arguably the first fully conceptualized genre of tales. According to Piero Boitani, the fourteenth century saw the development of the English frame narrative as an organizing principle that exceeded purely doctrinal and abstract principles and established a narrative situation that could accommodate sequences of tales (114).<sup>24</sup> These fourteenth-century frame narratives are relevant to our fashioning of 'tale' because in a sense, they already produce 'decentred' individual tales. They do so both syntagmatically and paradigmatically: They provide each individual tale with an

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<sup>23</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, in: *Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories*. Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood, 1902; quoted by J. Hillis Miller, "Heart of Darkness Revisited" (1983), *Tropes, Parables, and Performatives*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991.

<sup>24</sup> According to Boitani, the "frame itself becomes a narrative device and at the same time an embryonic dramatic element" (ibid.); see also 114–18 & 227ff.

external point of reference with which the tale simultaneously coexists (i.e. “The Knight’s Tale” is always also related to Chaucer’s General Prologue). In addition, frame narratives also offer points of conjunction for tales and allow for an interweaving of stories and an insertion of stories into one other. In modern terminology, they provide the scope for intertextual webs. It is our contention that modern tales are also ‘open’ in this respect. Jürgen Kamm explores this openness in its most radical sense when he considers individual tales in a broad context of cultural production in order to retrace the structures of feeling of social groups in the early 1960s (163–79).

The transgressive potential of tales that interests us is not limited to the porous boundaries between a tale’s ‘inside’ and its ‘outside’ – for which Marlow’s tale provided us with a quintessential example. Nor does it simply involve conflating levels of the narrative situation that are usually kept distinct, such as narrator and narration (as in *Midnight’s Children*, where the narrator and the new Indian state have partially shared identities, cf. Andreas Nehring’s essay).<sup>25</sup> In a much more fundamental sense, a generative potential of tales (and the sheer pleasure or necessity of telling them) keeps transgressing the boundaries of each individual tale, producing digressions and supplements (such as St. John Rivers’ tale at the very end of *Jane Eyre* – according to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the “tangent that escapes the closed circle of the narrative conclusion”).<sup>26</sup>

This brings us to the fifth and final point of our working definition of ‘tales’ as a heuristic category – the fact that these cultural narratives do not exist in textual isolation. As part of cultural repertoires, they have more than just a verbal dimension, being situated and performed (after all, tales involve telling).<sup>27</sup> On board the Nelly, Marlow tells his tale in a liminal space and time, and the darker it gets, the more does his powerful, disembodied voice approximate the fabled voice of Kurtz (who himself presents “very little more than a voice”, 130). Such questions of embodiment and performativity are implicit in ‘tale’, while related categories, such as ‘narrative’ or ‘story’, tend to be more firmly focussed on

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<sup>25</sup> Already in *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer appears as both a pilgrim-narrator and a narrator-reporter; cf. Boitani, 228.

<sup>26</sup> *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 124.

<sup>27</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005.

a textual level. Telling tales involves a communicative situation – and with it, questions of politics and power. Tobias Döring thus speaks of the *politics* of storytelling to suggest “the material interests at work in narrative entanglements” and the need to “capture the specific power that controls them”: “Precisely because stories are so often vested with meaning-making competence, their telling and retelling involve acts of authority which call for careful questioning” (22) – an interrogative gesture that all the essays in this collection share.

#### 4. The Essays

Our collection is concerned with British culture, broadly conceived, and proceeds in roughly chronological order. Part I, ‘Shakespeare Retold’, offers two contributions on rewritings of Shakespeare as the most canonized author in anglophone literature. After outlining debates about storytelling as a fundamental human activity, Tobias Döring focusses on the ‘politics’ of storytelling, arguing that the making and un-making of sense is never disinterested and always framed by discourses of power and control. Döring explores Marina Warner’s engagement with fairy tales as well as her re-writing of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* in *Indigo* (1992), showing how her novel “ingeniously and programmatically goes in search for the loose ends of previous tales, so as to take them up and make them part of a new and larger narrative, with different ends and other endings.” (28) The rewriting of canonical stories thus serves to mobilize preconceived ideas, in this case re-situating them within a post-colonial and feminist political paradigm. Engaging with rewritings of Shakespeare that appear to have a rather more conformist agenda, Sabine Schülting next discusses a series of novels commissioned in recent years by the Hogarth Press, such as Jeanette Winterson’s *The Gap of Time* (based on *The Winter’s Tale*) or Margaret Atwood’s *Hag-Seed* (*The Tempest*). As Schülting argues, the project conceives of Shakespeare’s work as part of a cultural reservoir of timeless tales that can be, and should be, retold for each generation. With few exceptions, such as Atwood’s novel, this mostly leads away from twentieth-century critical concerns that had sought to throw into relief Shakespeare’s historical specificity and critical potential, re-conceptualising Shakespeare’s work as a source of bourgeois studies of character with a claim to psychological ‘authenticity’.

Part II, “Victorian Tales”, addresses literature and culture in the Victorian period – an age of British global dominance that continues to inform British notions of cultural identity. As Andreas Nehring shows in his contribution, the mythical tales of India remain a crucial ingredient of this identity, promoted increasingly in recent times by a renewed interest in religion and spirituality that prompts readers to look to myth through, and beyond, a post-colonial critical paradigm. Nehring takes his cue from Salman Rushdie’s reference, in his novel *Midnight’s Children*, to the Śankara Āchārya, “considered the highest representative of the Ādvaitha-Vedānta school of Hinduism.” (63) One of its central insights, the notion of the unity between the Self and the Absolute, is communicated in the form of a parable, the tale of the roaring tiger. Such somewhat fanciful discourses in turn feed the Western tale of India as a vaguely seen ‘enchanted world’, despite substantial European scholarship about Indian history, culture and language in the nineteenth century, and despite globalized economic and political relations today. Drowning out all other discourses, the tale of Indian spirituality thus becomes an ideological supplement in the capitalist West. Nadine Böhm-Schnitker’s contribution returns to literary history to discuss the ‘telegraphic tale’ – a branch of late-Victorian sensation fiction that responds to significant new developments in media technology. In comparative readings of Ella Cheever Thayer’s novel *Wired Love: A Romance of Dots and Dashes* (1880) and Henry James’s tale “In the Cage” (1908), Böhm-Schnitker traces the impact of new media technology on social relations, as evidenced in particular in transformed tales of love. Leading on from sensation fiction to Gothic horror, Susanne Scholz argues in “A Tale of Two Faces” that while Robert Louis Stevenson’s novel *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* presents a tale exemplifying the notion of a fundamentally bifurcated human nature, split into good and evil, the ‘melodramatic formula’, outlined in the essay with recourse to Rouben Mamoulian’s film version of 1931, in turn transforms the tale into a cultural narrative that normalizes repression in search of the ‘good’, bourgeois subject.

The contributions in part III, “Fairy Tales Revisited”, are linked generically, addressing typical variations of the re-writing of fairy tales. As Ulrike Dencovski states in her contribution, the popularity of fairy tales can at least partly be explained by their idealization of a “pre-industrial, quasi-mythic folk culture”. (109) Focussing on two Victorian ‘popular

tales', Christina Rossetti's narrative poem 'Goblin Market' (written 1859 and first published 1862) and John Ruskin's prose narrative 'The King of the Golden River' (written 1841 and first published 1850), Dencovski argues that, while both tales appear to turn away nostalgically from contemporary industrial and urban culture, they in fact both engage deeply with a Victorian capitalist economy and with the propensity of modern money, in conjunction with debates about the Gold Standard, to promote more abstract forms of value. These tales thus effect an indirect, imaginative negotiation of crucial contemporary issues. In an essay on transnational tales, "Revisiting the Bloody Chamber", Susanne Gruss takes Angela Carter's now canonized feminist retelling of the Bluebeard tale, *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), as her starting point. Carter's work, "densely intertextual and generically hybrid" (125), had a great impact due to its transgressive engagement with gender and sexuality and continues to inform, as Gruss argues, recent retellings of the Bluebeard tale. Gruss proceeds to discuss Helen Oyeyemi's novel *Mr Fox* (2011) and Guillermo del Toro's feature film *Crimson Peak* (2015). Both works update the Bluebeard tale, as well as Carter's version of it, for the twenty-first century, twisting it in transcultural and magical realist directions and saturating it with intertextual resonances. This suggests that the spaciousness and flexibility of the Bluebeard tale, its "seemingly universal recipe" (137) lending itself to infinite variations, goes some way towards explaining its perennial popularity. Karin Heiß then engages with the re-writing of 'Snow White' and 'Beauty and the Beast' in Laurell K. Hamilton's *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series (1993–2018). As the multi-genre series rings the changes on the multiple ways in which to conceive the relationship between sexuality and violence, the "tales become as fragmented, dispersed and inverted as the body parts depicted in the murders of the hard-boiled detective plot" (144), thus highlighting, and giving fantastic shape to the polymorphous quality and waywardness of desire that has always been a central concern of fairy tales.

Part IV, "Narrating (National/Cultural) Identity", finally engages in more depth with the ways in which various art forms use tales to explore and construct collective identity. Taking his cue from Raymond Williams's notion of 'structures of feeling' and Stephen Greenblatt's 'cultural poetics', Jürgen Kamm addresses English discourses of cultural identity in the late 1950s and early '60s, a time of crucial social and cultural change. He focusses on H.E. Bates's optimistic narrative of post-

war England, pointing out how popular Bates's work was in his time, though it has subsequently been neglected. In his novel *Oh! To be in England*, published in the pivotal year 1963, Bates retells the conservative tale of a 'deep', essential England for the post-war period – a time-honoured tale that has recently gained currency again in the context of Brexit. The next essay speaks to the same context, addressing the 2012 opening ceremony of the London Olympics and the release of the James Bond film *Skyfall* as two related events in popular culture that have emerged as crucial to current narratives of Britishness. As Lena Steveker proceeds to show,

the *London 2012 Opening Ceremony* and *Skyfall* are two high-profile examples of British contemporary popular culture that tell tales of empire at a time when the British Empire has long ceased to exist as a political reality. (182)

In "New Tales of Ireland", Joachim Frenk, referring back to Benedict Anderson, conceptualizes nations as imagined communities in need of narratives that have crucially been supplied by folk tales and legends as well as, increasingly, by novels. Focussing on the particularly knotty issue of Irish national identity, Frenk offers comparative readings of Claire Kilroy, *The Devil I Know* (2012), which engages with the economic crisis of 2008 and the end of the 'Celtic Tiger', and Anna Burns's *The Milkman* (2018), which focusses on the violence in Northern Ireland. Resisting the clichés of Irish tale-telling, both novels deconstruct notions of Irish authenticity, offering complex and ironical explorations of contemporary society. They do this, however, while reasserting, not least through intertextual references to James Joyce, the crucial place of literature in Irish negotiations of identity. Attending to tales in popular music, Christian Huck then provides the soundtrack, as it were, to fin-de-millennium social developments. Recalling crucial differences between the traditional folk ballad and pop music, Huck argues that the latter "does not speak to a united audience, but to a singled-out listener; pop is not about the bond of tradition, but the singularity of the act of listening." (218) Huck proceeds to analyse how the band Saint Etienne takes up and adapts the conventions of popular music to make them speak to contemporary structures of feeling, from the 1991 cover version of Neil Young's 1970 "Only Love Can Break Your Heart" to the concept album *Tales from Turnpike House*, released in 2005 – songs where the chorus "opens a closed book towards a post-semantic future where

communication is not transmission but a sharing, an unfolding, a dance, a resonance.” (234)

In this collection we hope to present an instructive spectrum of case studies concerned with the culture and politics of tale-telling. While we consider them representative of contemporary critical engagements with the topic and relevant to an understanding of contemporary British culture, we could have chosen different narratives. We chose these, and thereby hangs a tale.

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## **Part I: Shakespeare Retold**



## En-tale-ments

### Marina Warner's *Indigo* and the Politics of Storytelling

Tobias Döring

The activity of storytelling has long been taken as a human universal. In the 1980s, the American communication scholar Walter R. Fisher coined the term *homo narrans* to describe that human beings are “inherently storytellers” (24); he was drawing on Kenneth Burke and taking up a notion by Alasdair MacIntyre, who called us the “storytelling animal” (216). The idea that humans need, and have always needed, tales – whether self-produced or perpetuated and recycled, invented or retold – has immediate appeal: storytelling may well address a cultural requirement as basic and as necessary for the sustenance of human life as nourishment is for the living body. As Fisher memorably put it, “we experience and comprehend life as a series of ongoing narratives, as conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles, and ends. The various modes of communication – all forms of symbolic action – then may be seen as stories, interpretations of things in sequences.” (ibid.) Thus, stories are the stuff we live by. Why should this be the case?

As for the reasons, there is less agreement. One widespread view is already implied in Fisher's formulations when he speaks of “sequences”, “beginnings, middles”, “ends”, and “characters” – all of which, for students of literature, are familiar terms used to describe narrative features and plot structures. This view suggests that storytelling is an act of ordering, of putting things in place and so constructing a symbolic order by which experienced reality becomes more manageable, plausible, predictable and less contingent, fearsome or bewildering. If the most fundamental act of narrative is to build a sequence, responding to the simple question “and what then?”, the patterns so produced, the connections made and concatenations forged – like beads on a string – are clearly helpful for providing a sense of order and offering orientation where other means or answers fail us. In this sense, Albrecht Koschorke notes in his outline of general narratology, *narrative* has become a cultural universal which has spread from literary and cultural studies into social studies and beyond even into natural science: storytelling, he suggests (330), can be epistemically productive and should therefore be

acknowledged as a necessary practice also in strictly scientific work, a method of synthesizing data and formulating theories. Scientific insights often are, in this way, narratively grounded and enabled. Hence we speak of the “narrative turn” and acknowledge the “ubiquity” of narrative, in Martin Kreiswirth’s terms (378), “its extensive discursive promiscuity and capacity for disciplinary migration”. Which is to say that stories serve to suggest ordered sequence simply everywhere.

On the other hand, Koschorke cautions us against one-sided views. Stories, he says we should bear in mind (11), may not just construct order and produce meaningful connections, they might just as often do the opposite: undo given structures, work towards disconnection and so undermine order or confuse given meanings, thus helping to increase – rather than ban – a pervading sense of contingency. Indeed, the sequences that narratives construct are largely self-sufficient and give neither guarantee nor proof of any order other than their own. Just how they relate to human “life” or to “experience”, to recall Fisher’s terms, therefore remains doubtful and debatable. *Homo narrans* is also always *homo ludens* who finds pleasure in pure play. Not even scientific theories are exempt. Perhaps we may conjecture that the point why *narrative* is such a useful concept across so many disciplines lies precisely in its openness towards alternative versions, i.e. retellings that undo the sequence, loosen the connections and fabricate new ones, so as to start another and a different round of playing. Storytelling might less be about putting beads on a string than, principally, about deciding what in any given case should count as beads and string. By each and every act of telling therefore hangs a tale.

It is this interplay between making and unmaking sense, between deconstructing and constructing order, sequencing, resequencing, spinning, knitting, knotting or eventually disentangling variously different tales and threads, which I refer to as the *politics* of storytelling. The term is meant to suggest the material interests at work in narrative entanglements and capture the specific power that controls them. Precisely because stories are so often vested with meaning-making competence, their telling and retelling involve acts of authority which call for careful questioning. Who tells a story, under what conditions, and to whom? Where is the act of telling located? What does it aim at? How is it motivated, framed and set? And what are its consequence and impact on the actual story and its listeners or readers? Such fundamental

questions, crucial for what I call the politics of storytelling, are now briefly pursued with a look at one pertinent example, Marina Warner's novel *Indigo or Mapping the Waters*.

Published in the Columbian quincentennial 1992, *Indigo* remains to date the most successful, quite possibly also the most significant novel by this prolific author, one of the most wide-ranging and versatile writers in contemporary Britain. Warner, born in 1946, has published fiction, art criticism, cultural history, mythography and other highly acclaimed critical studies, many of which are inspired by a feminist agenda and raise questions about how the present is shaped by the past while this past is never simply given but continues to be actively reshaped by present-day engagements. *Indigo*, her fourth novel, is a family saga, following the destinies of an English family called Everard between the Old World and the New. It is set in two main locations – the Caribbean island of Liamuiga, the indigenous name for St Kitts, and London, the old imperial metropolis – and on two different time levels, the early seventeenth and the later twentieth century, i.e. roughly the periods when the British Empire was established and when it unravelled. In critical discourse, *Indigo* has found a great deal of attention as one of the most interesting recent rewritings of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and, as such, a powerful contribution to a long tradition of critical and creative engagements with this canonical master text whose impact on contemporary culture is undergoing reassessment and redress. Warner's strong focus on Miranda, the only onstage female character in Shakespeare's romance, and her even stronger focus on Sycorax, the other female character crucial for *The Tempest*'s plot and yet entirely absent from the stage, has placed her version into salient gender debates of the play and its feminist rewritings. The novel's women figures – besides Sycorax and Miranda, these include Xanthe (Miranda's younger aunt by a second marriage of her grandfather), Serafine (the old family nanny and factotum), and Ariel (Sycorax's foster child, a female figure in Warner) – have thus received some scholarly attention. Far less attention has been given to what, not just for present purposes, is one of its central features: the novel's frequent scenes and acts of narrative, an open and explicit, indeed self-conscious staging of the politics of storytelling. My contribution, then, aims to suggest that we read *Indigo* more profitably in this particular perspective: as an exercise in, and exploration of, the force of tales.

Right at the opening, this feature is prominently established:

– When he wakes up, the fat man finds he's been tied hand and foot, and something powerful's smelling all around him. The ladies who keep him company, they like to wear strong perfume – cinnamon and coriander and mace, pounded with a little musk oil and a little essence of jasmine too, maybe – but this smell is different –

Serafine dabbed behind her ears and wriggled her long neck on her shoulders, closing her eyes in mock abandon; she had soft, full lids and high eyebrows, so even shut, her eyes expressed a certain rueful humour. Serafine used to tell Miranda alarming stories and Miranda remembered this one, later; she remembered how they were sitting, in the garden of the square where Miranda's grandfather lived, before Xanthe was born, when Miranda was still the only little Everard. (*Indigo*, 3)

As we enter the text, medias in res, we find ourselves in the middle of an intradiegetic storytelling scene, with a human voice rendered in an oral mode, indicated by syntactic markers (like the elisions and the post-positioned pronoun *they*). The second paragraph goes on to frame the tale, introducing the novel's narrative voice, heterodiegetic and omniscient, by describing the figure of the storyteller – Serafine, the first character named in the text – as well as her young listener called Miranda, who functions as the focalizer. As readers we are thus invited, as it were, to join their storytelling session: placed within the cultural dyad of an old female teller and a young female listener, a participant observer witnessing a narrative live act.

Novels frequently feign oral situations. As a middle-class and economically minded genre, epitomized in the purported founding text *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the modern novel is a written enterprise, printed, produced and consumed by individuals and read, most typically, in programmatic isolation (a mode, again, epitomized by Robinson on his so-called solitary island). Yet modern novels often like to pretend otherwise. As memorably shown for instance in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), first printed and serialized in a conservative middle-class magazine and one of the most momentous modern tales, there is a market for modern narratives to stage and sell themselves as oral storytelling sessions. The group of unnamed voyagers on Conrad's Nellie gathered on a sea-bound yawl of unknown destination and listening to Marlow's seaman's yarn while waiting for the turn of the tide: this opening arrangement nostalgically suggests a yearning for such older, oral, pre-modern or archaic acts of storytelling. In this way, modern litera-



ture has often tried to mask its mediality by putting on the mask of word by mouth. As Walter Benjamin famously put it in his 1936 essay “The Storyteller”, “[e]xperience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn.” And he continues, in a telling turn: “And among those who have written down the tales, it is the great ones whose written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers.” (Benjamin, 84). Literature, that is to say, best manages to gain authority when it manages to be as good as speech.

Significantly, in a recent publication Marina Warner has corrected Benjamin’s well-known dictum. In her version, the last quoted sentence reads: “This should be modified to read, ‘whose written version *sounds as if* it differs least from the speech...’” (Warner 2018, 54, emphasis in the original). Her intervention states the obvious: that literature may well try but can never truly hide, or disavow, its given written status. As readers we are always quite aware of the medium we are dealing with and yet we may be willing to suspend our knowledge and enter into the game so proposed: *as if* we were listening to actual speech. It is this game, I suspect, that her novel *Indigo* suggests we play.

Warner’s modifying statement comes from her recent study of the fairy tale tradition – one of her own long-standing and key interests – in which she also modifies Benjamin’s canonical account of storytelling in another respect: unlike Benjamin, for whom the travelling merchant and the seafarer are archetypal storytellers, Warner foregrounds gender issues. In her account, the “many nameless storytellers”, especially but not exclusively of fairy tales, are female. These women are generally imagined as old, lowly, often barren and marginal, sometimes as disreputable because outside the networks of economic production, yet their storytelling practices set up alternative networks of great impact and cultural productivity, sometimes even life-sustaining, which Warner’s study tries to trace. She notes for instance that, according to Plato, old women used to comfort victims bound for the Minotaur’s table by telling them stories and that Apuleius placed his “Tale of Cupid and Psyche” into the mouth of an old bawd: “This is partly a point”, Warner explains (2018, 41), “about social history – people told stories before mass literacy; but it is also about desire: what is loved in stories is often an imagined link to a long, living heritage.” Such links – and such female agents who make, remake and mediate them – are foregrounded and

followed also in *Indigo*, and the links are no less powerful for being all imagined.

As a matter of fact, the novel grew directly out of Warner's scholarly engagement with fairy tales and their tellers, in the late 1980s, when she was researching a major study which eventually came out in 1994, two years after *Indigo* and with the same publisher, entitled *From the Beast to the Blonde*. The main point that initiated and motivated this enormous project – the published book runs to 450 pages – was a “salient aspect of the transmission of fairy tales” which, she says, had previously “not been looked at closely: the female character of the storyteller” (Warner 1994, 16), an aspect, incidentally, she holds directly against Benjamin and his view of the matter: “Benjamin never once imagines that his storytellers might be women, even though he identifies so clearly and so eloquently the connections between routine repetitive work and narrative. [...] He divides storytellers into stay-at-homes and rovers”, but as Warner points out, he “neglects the figure of the spinster, the older woman with her distaff” (Warner 1994, 22). Such neglect is being remedied both in her non-fiction and her novel. While working on *From the Beast to the Blonde*, Warner interrupted the scholarly project for a while and turned to writing fiction; the result was *Indigo*.

Against this background, we may better understand the programmatic nature of the opening cited above. The intradiegetic story told eventually turns out to be a version of the Midas myth, but more important than this particular identification is for us to realize how the author generally fashions the written text of her novel to sound (quoting her Benjamin correction) “as if it differs least from speech”. Serafine has no distaff, but she is representative of just the kind of female storytelling culture Warner explores in her studies of informal knowledge practices (apart from the two fairy tale books cited, we should also mention her 1998 study *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling and Making Mock*). Serafine's storytelling sessions, which recur in the middle and at the end of the novel, are routine and repetitive practices because the tales she recounts do not seem to be of her invention. But their relevance and power lie precisely in retracing the familiar lines of narrative as a strong way to reroute them. Like all mimetic acts, repetition can never be exact and in this manner works towards revision and rewriting. What, then, does Serafine and her activity suggest about Warner's own rewriting practice in this novel?

As readers – or, indeed, imagined listeners – of the novel’s opening, the first hint we receive that we are urged to re-visit the storyworld of Shakespeare’s triumphal and yet troubled play, is of course the name given to the listener and focalizer in the opening scene. Miranda’s memories are said to conjure up the storytelling garden scene we witness, just as her telling name must conjure up whatever memories we hold of Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, specifically of its own engagement with memorial acts. One of the first points we should therefore note about Warner’s opening is the way in which it shows that storytelling functions as an act of binding. It establishes a bond not just between teller and listener, or between author and reader, but also between the present story and a previous one, partly continuing an older and familiar tale, partly also changing, reinventing and remaking it: a cultural connection as well as a contestation.

Indeed, the connection to *The Tempest* thus established quickly turns out to be quite productive. When in the second scene of act one – after the tempestuous opening, a calm scene of extensive storytelling that serves to unfold the play’s backstory – Prospero questions his adolescent daughter what she remembers of her early childhood in Milan, one of the few things she is able to recall from “the dark backward and abyss of time” (I.ii.50) are the “[f]our or five women” who once “tended” her (I.ii.47), among them, quite possibly, a woman who, like Serafine, may have been feeding her on stories. With *Indigo*, this unacknowledged female presence dimly recalled at the margin of the old familiar plot takes centre stage. In this way, the novel’s first two paragraphs do not just open our view onto the diegetic world in which the subsequent narration is set; it also opens a view on the intertextual connections by which this world is textually made, by returning to the diegesis of a previous text, remaking some of its salient features, reversing its perspective and reimagining key figures – all through the threads of storytelling which are so clearly taken up.

These threads can take us even further. Not just Miranda, but also Warner’s Serafine suggests specific intertextual connections that make us recall previous characters on which her figure draws. As we read on and begin to fathom the intricate correspondences by which Warner links the seventeenth-century characters to the twentieth-century characters of her tale, we eventually understand that Serafine on the contemporary level corresponds to Sycorax on the historical: she is the

present-day stakeholder of Caribbean island culture and local knowledge otherwise embodied in the undead Sycorax. Yet this connection only emerges in the course of our reading process, after Sycorax is introduced in chapter 7. What may, however, strike us early on when reading just the opening, is another intertextual link: the elective affinity of Serafine with Christophine, a crucial character in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, i.e. the 1966 rewriting of *Jane Eyre*, to which *Indigo* is obliquely related by virtue of its own rewriting strategy. As indicated not least by their rhyming names, these two Caribbean female figures have certain points in common, such as their age, their social standing, their rootedness in creole culture and their narrative authority: in both novels, they are the first characters to speak and to be named. What may these convergences suggest?

*Indigo*, I argue, is an exploration of such narrative entailments or, more accurately, en-tale-ments: Warner's novel ingeniously and programmatically goes in search for the loose ends of previous tales, so as to take them up and make them part of a new and larger narrative, with different ends and other endings. In this way, it explores what happens when we take seriously the idea, as formulated by Koschorke, that narrative is not just a ubiquitous but also an incalculable cultural force, a force of order and of disorder, of meaning and contingency, of making, remaking and unmaking familiar sense. The figure of Serafine, with the repeated acts of storytelling she presents and performs, is a self-conscious narrative device, *homo narrans* embodied, her three main appearances prominently marking the novel's beginning, middle and ending, i.e. the three main structural points of plot making. She also serves, as I would like to show, to represent the author's own investment in the cultural narratives she takes up and retells herself, without however being fully in control of them: entailments whereby hangs a tale.

The novel's test case for such narrative entanglements is Ariel and her story – a tale of female agency, presented on the seventeenth-century level, which is being reframed, reversed and retold on the twentieth-century level. It is one of the most cutting and bitter ironies the novel confronts us with: how Ariel's act of resistance is turned into one of compliance and becomes part of a colonial romance that subjects the female fighter under a male hero's spell. The case merits retelling and unravelling because it offers us a chance to trace, and critically face, the politics of storytelling in and by Warner's novel.

Ariel, in Warner's version of the early modern Caribbean island, is a young Arawak girl brought by the islanders to live with Sycorax and taken in her care. Over the years, she learns from Sycorax the island's secrets, especially the healing qualities of plants, and so prepares herself eventually to continue her foster mother's life and powers: a classic mother-daughter-dyad. But with the English landfall, as narrated in chapter 11, things take a very different turn. When the colonial adventurers arrive, under Kit Everard's command (Warner's counterpart to Shakespeare's Prospero), they split this female cultural continuum by force, lay fire and wreak havoc on the island, take both women as hostages and make them serve their cause. Sycorax is critically injured and lies dying, while Ariel soon becomes an object of the conqueror's interest and his lust. This is how the narrative recounts her first sexual encounter with Kit:

In spite of her bone-weariness, all of a sudden she was facing him squarely, for she was the same height and if anything, more strongly built. He caught hold of her hand and pushed it between his legs and ground his mouth against hers. The dullness she had felt in her exhaustion became a kind of sickness now, as for the second time that day she once again flew from her own body and split into two. Two Ariels, one outside the other, each watching the other, curious, inert, from the other side of consciousness, in the country where the souls wander. She was curious, about the whey in his mouth and the shaft of his cock under her palm and the paired kernels of his balls; about the possibility of pleasure her mother Sycorax who was dying now beside her had talked of so often. She would kill him later, but for the present, she was thinking of Sycorax, who had instructed her in love, and wondering if it would please her that here she was, filling a man with desire just as Sycorax had always said she should. (*Indigo*, 148f)

In this risky, and potentially controversial passage, we note again how Warner's novel takes up some familiar narrative strands from the cultural history of New World encounters as well as from some of their literary retellings. With the figure of an indigenous woman who gets involved – sexually, socially, linguistically and politically – with one of the European conquerors, turning into his interpreter, informer and mistress, Warner places her Ariel figure into the history of crucial female intermediaries in the New World. This history includes, most famously, La Malinche, in early sixteenth-century Mexico the companion of Hernán Cortés (and incidentally, baptized Marina by the Spaniards), and Pocahontas in the Jamestown colony of the early seventeenth-century, a hostage and companion to John Smith; baptized Rebecca, she

was later married to an English planter who had reached Virginia via the Bermudas, a survivor of the fortunate shipwreck saga told by Strachey and likely used by Shakespeare as an inspiration for *The Tempest*.

With La Malinche and Pocahontas, Warner's Ariel is positioned as a female figure of the third, an agent crossing cultural demarcation lines, a go-between or get-between operating in a contact zone, under uncertain conditions and with dubious loyalties. Historically, and for obvious reasons, such figures used to be regarded with suspicion and often enough with resentment or outright disdain, as traitors and defectors. But in the 1980s their role and functions were being rethought. With rising interest in hybrid formations and the "third space" of transgressive practices, they came to be appreciated also for their positive, although contestable, potential. Specifically, Warner's figure draws on two pertinent colonial discourse studies, Tzvetan Todorov's *The Conquest of America* (1984) and Peter Hulme's *Colonial Encounters* (1986), in which La Malinche and Pocahontas feature as foremost examples of female agency in early modern cultural negotiations between the Old World and the New.

For this reason, it is particularly poignant to observe how Ariel's agency is recounted and reversed in the later acts of storytelling which *Indigo* relates and enacts. To begin with, we should note the split perspective of the rape scene quoted: with "[t]wo Ariels, one outside the other, each watching the other", the narrative highlights the watchful position of critical distance we are encouraged to take, while also suggesting the double view and double act of storytelling that might be necessary to render the scene fully. Throughout the scene, Ariel is the focalizer, and she is not actually portrayed as a victim. Physically she is said to be stronger ("more strongly built") than her rapist and, even more striking, she is said to take a certain interest in the ways she can arouse him, which seems to give her yet another means of power over him. So she forgoes the chance to save the island from the colonizers and kill Kit right away but, "for the present", rather explores – perhaps secretly enjoys – the new physical sensations.

The deferral is crucial. It opens and sustains the in-between space where the narrative goes on to situate the Ariel figure as a cultural border-crosser, intermediary translator and quite possibly a traitor, a figure of the third, as mentioned above, whose loyalties become increasingly unclear. And yet, as readers following her focalization, we are constantly

given assurance that Ariel's resolve be clear and her firm stance against the English violators of indigenous life remain unshaken. The night before the uprising by which the islanders are planning to rout the invaders, she finally determines to act her part and kill her master, even though he is the father of her child; but Kit sets the poisoned dish aside and instead enjoys the sex she offers to distract him (*Indigo*, 184). Afterwards, he wonders what to make of her unusual behaviour and eventually construes her message as a signal to warn him against an imminent attack (*Indigo*, 186f). When the islanders launch their offensive, therefore, the English are prepared and win the day. Ariel's attempt at joining the conspiracy and play her part in the rebellion has badly backfired: instead of eliminating the colonial commander, she has intimated the insurgent plan to him. Her intimacy with the master has unwittingly become her trap.

All these events are situated on the novel's seventeenth-century level, long ago. Yet it is part of the novel's overall design, with the Everard genealogy of corresponding names and destinies, to explore what shaping impact past events have on the present even while the present continues to reshape this past. This is what happens to Ariel's assassination attempt, in the traditional version which the novel presents as retold by Serafine and the entire family:

There is another story with a happy ending they know, not just from Serafine; it's traditional in their family, and in the history books in which the Everards have a mention.

How the first Kit Everard won the love of an islander and how she saved him and his brave band of pioneers.

It's come down through the years, this story. From first-hand sources, authenticated. Serafine knows it; all her family, working on the Everard lands, knew it; they passed it on: (*Indigo*, 224f)

This story, we are told, was first set down in writing by the French missionary Père Labat, who visited the Caribbean island in the later seventeenth century and learned a fascinating bit of local history: how a native woman in her youth "had heard among her people that they planned to fall upon the settlers", so that "out of the great love she bore the founder of the island, Sir Christopher Everard, and on behalf of the lovechild she had borne him, she raised the alarm." (*Indigo*, 225f) In the perpetuated version that has entered the books, Ariel's act of resistance has become newly en-tailed, i.e. narratively captured. Her assassination

attempt is now reframed and contained in a romance plot, complete with “happy ending” and a Christian defence of colonial missions: a providential plot providing full justification for any violation that may have gone before. Thus, Warner’s novel urges us to see that the politics of storytelling, necessarily, serve the hegemonic power. Whatever record the losers of history might have left behind, is appropriated and triumphantly rewritten – one of the “spoils” or “cultural treasures” which, in the famous image from Walter Benjamin’s seventh thesis on the philosophy of history (Benjamin, 256), the victors carry along in their triumphal procession.

Significantly, even Serafine is presented to be part of this colonial procession, retelling and thereby herself consolidating the tales of the victorious English. In this sense, Warner explains in an interview, Serafine “has been incorporated and colonized; she’s an island that has been taken over”. Yet at the same time, the author continues, Serafine stands for her “as the exemplary fiction writer who can be colonized and still speak.” (Zabus, 521) As such, the intradiegetic storyteller seems to prefigure Warner’s own precarious position as a writer taking up, and taking on, the colonial conquest of the Caribbean in which her own family ancestor, Sir Thomas Warner, served as a celebrated pioneer. Elsewhere she has openly declared that, in writing *Indigo*, by setting it partly in the Caribbean and imaginatively telling Caribbean history in some parts from a native point of view, she felt she “was interloping on territory from which accidents of history had morally barred” her (Warner 1993, 199f). And yet, as her novel would suggest, such bars are partly crossed, though not erased, by acts of storytelling and their transformative potential.

For this reason, when rereading *Indigo* in our time, a generation after it was written, we may also find it an instructive exercise and cautionary tale in current debates about “cultural appropriation”: the static and possessive notions of “culture”, “identity” and of “belonging” that prevail in such debates troublingly neglect the complexities of cultural and political entanglement we face today and are powerfully challenged and redressed with Warner’s project. At the same time, *Indigo* may offer a covert yet conspicuous rejoinder to Benjamin, not just to his storyteller essay but also to his seventh thesis. The triumphal procession in which spoils and stories are being perpetuated, Warner’s version insists, is not always fully in step, nor quite so regular, unchanging and repetitive as



to preclude any possibility of change. As argued at the outset with reference to Koschorke, stories may well undo given structures, work towards disconnection and so undermine a given order or confuse dominant meanings. Storytelling, in the very act of repetition, principally introduces difference and so prepares for transformation. The endings of stories, just as the ends of storytelling, cannot be fixed forever, nor easily foretold, but undergo continuous revision with each renewed – and renewing – retelling.

Serafine, we learn, is not just a teller but also always a thoughtful adapter: she may strategically change the tales she passes on, especially their endings, “as story tellers do” (*Indigo*, 224), to suit her audience. With such an emphasis on metamorphosis, another key concern of Warner’s cultural explorations (as in her Clarendon lectures, 2002), the politics of storytelling Serafine performs and presents appear somewhat less grimly deterministic and more hopeful of future prospects. After all, Miranda’s baby daughter fathered by the black actor and one-time Caliban impersonator, who used to curse her but who has become her happy husband, is also called Serafine (*Indigo*, 401): a sign of change and cross-cultural renewal emblematic of the novel’s romance ending. What, then, does *Indigo* suggest for our questions raised at the beginning?

Warner’s novel demonstrates that storytelling matters, and matters to us, even and especially when, as in the case of Ariel, the politics are doubtful. Just as she argues in her recent study, Warner has long been aware of the ways in which fairy tales engender “a profound respect in the genre for what words do in the world” (2018, 31), a respect for the efficacy of verbal acts shared also in her fiction. Words make a difference in and to the world, and stories – including the ones told by novels – bring to bear this difference on the fabric of our social culture. To say “[a]nd thereby hangs a tale”, in the words of Shakespeare’s Jaques (*As You Like It*, II.vii.28), might therefore mainly mean we should acknowledge such inextricable narrative interconnections and their consequences, as traced in Warner’s work.

In rewriting *The Tempest* – revisiting its wondrous island, reconsidering its personnel, partly reversing its perspective and reimagining its absences – *Indigo* treats Shakespeare’s play just like Serafine treats all her tales: as material to work with, partly repeating and perpetuating the inherited familiar version while partly also changing and transforming

it, most notably its ending and beginning. In this sense, *Indigo* is an en-tale-ment of *The Tempest*, just as the novel is in turn en-taled in Warner's fairy tale study *From the Beast to the Blonde*. The changing and specific narratives employed to frame a given story lend it new relevance and meaning and therefore challenge us to make new sense of it.

In fact, this challenge is inscribed in Warner's text. To look once more, in conclusion, at *Indigo*'s opening: Serafine's tales are referred to as "alarming". Evidently, she does not tell soothing stories meant to comfort and lull listeners. On the contrary: the first words she utters mention an awakening, as if to prompt or prod ourselves to wake up and prepare an adequate response. This is why the novel's opening makes us active listeners, drawing us into the circle of the storytelling session: to raise alarm. *Homo narrans*, we thus learn, should always be awake: both aware and cautious of the politics in storytelling, both prepared and alert to deal with ever new en-tale-ments.

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# Tales (not) from Shakespeare

## Shakespeare 'Re-told' for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Sabine Schülting

"This is an 'old tale', a fairy tale," Jeanette Winterson asserts in her authorial comment in the last chapter of *The Gap of Time*, her rewriting of William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. The novel came out in October 2015 as the first in a series of novelizations of Shakespeare's plays, commissioned by the Hogarth Press and launched in time for the quatercentenary of Shakespeare's death in 2016. To date, the series comprises seven novels, including Howard Jacobson's *Shylock Is My Name* (based on *The Merchant of Venice*), Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed* (*The Tempest*), Anne Tyler's *Vinegar Girl* (*The Taming of the Shrew*), Tracy Chevalier's *New Boy* (*Othello*), Edward St. Aubyn's *Dunbar* (*King Lear*), and Jo Nesbø's *Macbeth* (transl. by Don Bartlett). The eighth and last novel – Gillian Flynn's version of *Hamlet* – is scheduled for 2021. The series has been advertised with the slogan "Timeless stories retold"<sup>2</sup> – a tagline that contains the same idea as Winterson's comment, namely that Shakespeare's enduring fascination is based on the well-known stories which have been "retold" ever since, "[f]or more than four hundred years" and "for each new generation."<sup>3</sup> The Hogarth Press project thus marks a considerable deviation from the Shakespeare Studies of the last few decades, which have discussed reworkings of Shakespeare as instances of adaptation and (re-)mediation, postmodern intertextuality, postcolonial rewriting and cultural appropriation. What does this focus on allegedly 'timeless tales' and their 're-telling' imply for notions of authorship, text, and audience? How does it reconceptualize Shakespeare for the early twenty-first century?

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<sup>1</sup> Jeanette Winterson, *The Gap of Time* (2015). London: Vintage, 2016, 288.

<sup>2</sup> Website of the Hogarth Shakespeare Series, <http://hogarthshakespeare.com/about/>, last access 18 February 2019. The slogan is also reprinted on an advert page for the series at the end of the novels.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## 1. Timeless tales retold

Jeanette Winterson's statement refers to the fairy-tale features of *The Winter's Tale*, but it also suggests that Shakespeare's plays have gained a similar status as the 'age-old' folk and fairy tales that form an integral part of the cultural imaginary. Rewritings of such tales do not respond to a single original, as Cristina Bacchilega has argued. She therefore proposes to think "of adaptation not as a practice that involves the exclusive connection between two texts at a time (the 'original' and its 'imitation' [...]), but as a practice that weaves multiple texts with one another, translating them across media and audiences".<sup>4</sup> Such an approach is equally productive for the broad field of Shakespeare adaptations in general, and the Hogarth Shakespeare series in particular, whose authors have apparently been inspired by previous adaptations. Tracy Chevalier's *New Boy* is a case in point: it follows Tim Blake Nelson's 2001 film adaptation *O* in translocating the *Othello*-story to an American (high-)school. The name of Chevalier's protagonist is Osei but like Nelson's Othello he goes by the name of "O", whereas the two Desdemona characters – Daniela and Desi – are called "Dee."<sup>5</sup>

Locating the novelizations in such a web of adaptations and re-interpretations, including "teen films, musicals, science-fiction flicks, Japanese warrior tales, or literary transformations", the Hogarth Shakespeare website suggests that the world's fascination with Shakespeare is based on the compelling nature of his "stories."<sup>6</sup> For the *Guardian* reviewer of Chevalier's *New Boy*, this is a major misunderstanding, which can be traced back to the early nineteenth century:

Charles and Mary Lamb have a lot to answer for. Ever since their *Tales from Shakespeare*, an idea has taken root that his great plays are a kind of animated fiction, blueprints for perfectly formed, compelling stories. On [sic] this reading, our national poet is just a master storyteller who spins archetypal stories [...].<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cristina Bacchilega, *Fairy Tales Transformed: Twenty-First-Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2013, 32, e-book, EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN= 698568&site=ehost-live.

<sup>5</sup> Tracy Chevalier, *New Boy*. London: Vintage, 2017, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Website of the Hogarth Shakespeare Series. <http://hogarthshakespeare.com/>, last access 16 January 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Robert McCrum, "New Boy by Tracy Chevalier – a vexed retelling of *Othello*". *The Guardian*, 14 May 2017.

Arguing that storytelling is a defining feature of humankind, of *homo narrans*, Jack Zipes understands “[f]airy tales” to be indeed archetypal and universal in that they are “informed by a human disposition to action – to transform the world and make it more adaptable to human needs, while we also try to change and make ourselves fit for the world.”<sup>8</sup> The transfer of this notion to the Shakespearean canon has major ideological implications because it ‘naturalizes’ the plays as timeless and universal forms of *narrating*, as fundamental products of mankind’s cognitive and affective engagement with the world. By implication, the plays’ historical, generic, and linguistic specificities as well as the ideological basis and the political impact of their canonization are ignored.

When in the 1970s, feminist writers began to rewrite fairy tales, the genre’s conservative gender ideology was at the centre of their projects. Jeanette Winterson has contributed to this revision, in particular with *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) and *Sexing the Cherry* (1989).<sup>9</sup> In Winterson’s fictional autobiography in *Oranges*, fairy tales function as a form of resistance to heteronormativity because they provide the sexually ‘deviant’ self with alternative life stories.<sup>10</sup> *The Gap of Time* differs from these earlier fairy-tale rewritings. With a bisexual Leo(ntes) who uses surveillance cameras to spy on his wife MiMi (Hermione) and his childhood friend Xeno (Polixenes), gender and sexuality do play an important role in Winterson’s rewrite, particularly when it comes to the graphic nature of Leo’s sexual phantasmagoria. But at the beginning of the twenty-first century, deviations from either heteronormativity or cis identities are no longer a serious problem for any of the characters. *The Gap of Time* features a trans-woman, Lorraine LaTrobe, with whom Clo(wn) falls in love. His father Shep(herd) comments admiringly, “She’s quite a woman.” As an old man coming from the deep South of the United States, he apparently does not see what is fairly obvious for the Londoners:

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<sup>8</sup> Jack Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012, 2.

<sup>9</sup> On postmodern fairy-tale rewritings and remediations since the 1970s, see Bacchilega, *Fairy Tales*. On Jeanette Winterson’s revisions of the fairy tale genre, see Merja Makinen, “Theorizing Fairy-Tale Fiction, Reading Jeanette Winterson”. *Contemporary Fiction and the Fairy Tale*, ed. Stephen Benson. Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 2008, 144–77.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Makinen, “Theorizing”, 164.

"She's trans," said Pauline.

"Trans what?" said Shep.

"Don't worry about it, Dad," said Perdita."<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, in the world of the novel nobody worries about non-heteronormativity, and Shep's harmless ignorance is a mere source of humour for the contemporary streetwise reader. The allegedly timeless story has been updated to chime in with the gender politics of the here and now. This is also true for the story around Xeno and his son Zel (Florizel), where it is the parent rather than the younger generation who is sexually nonconforming (a constellation which would have been inconceivable in the 1970s). Zel, staunchly heterosexual and deeply in love with Perdita, does not seem to be perfectly at ease with his father's homosexuality and comments on his stylish outfit: "You are so gay" (280). However, his main problem is not Xeno's sexual orientation but rather the fact that from early childhood onward, he has felt abandoned by his father. Zel is thus Perdita's double, another lost child growing up without its biological father. Actually, the novel is packed with orphans; in addition to Perdita and Zel, there are the Chinese triplets Holly, Polly, and Molly, who replace Shakespeare's shepherdesses Mopsa and Dorcas. "No one ever found out who had left them in the BabyHatch in Guangzhou," the narrator states. "They'd been adopted by English missionaries." (154)

So was Winterson. In an article written for *The Guardian*, she has emphasized that in her rewrite, she wanted to explore a child's experience of having been given away by its parents – an experience that she, who was adopted by foster parents and raised to become a Pentecostal missionary, shares with her characters: "it wasn't time, or miracles, that drew me to this play [...]. It was something closer, as it always is with stories we love, loving something that speaks to us through our own silence. *The Winter's Tale* has an abandoned baby as its shining centre. As an adopted child, reading to get a reading of myself, foundlings were signs, symbols, symmetries and clues."<sup>12</sup> In a similar vein, Tracy Chevalier has commented on her choice of *Othello*:

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<sup>11</sup> Winterson, *The Gap of Time*, 282.

<sup>12</sup> Jeanette Winterson, "Jeanette Winterson on writing a cover version of Shakespeare". *The Guardian*, 26 September 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/26/jeanette-winterson-rewriting-shakespeare-winter-s-tale>, last access 18 February 2019.



It is a play that is not just about jealousy, not just about bullying, but it's really about being Other. Othello is a stranger in a strange land. I have spent the last thirty-something years being a stranger in a strange land. When I was in my early twenties, I moved from the States to England. I still live here, and when I open my mouth and speak, people still say, 'Are you on holiday?', 'When are you going back?'<sup>13</sup>

After several decades of Postcolonial Shakespeare Studies, Chevalier's insight that *Othello* is more than a domestic tragedy will not come as a big surprise. But it is debatable whether the experience of a white American writer living in today's UK is comparable to that of a black African general living in late-medieval Venice. More relevant to my argument is that both Winterson and Chevalier read Shakespeare's plays for emplotments of their own lives.

It appears that the Hogarth Press has encouraged writers to 're-tell' plays that are closely connected with their own biography or experience as a writer. Norwegian crime fiction writer Jo Nesbø's take on *Macbeth* was probably considered as obvious a choice as Howard Jacobson's pairing with *Merchant*. Ironically, in several interviews, Howard Jacobson has told the humorous story about how he came to write the adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*. When he was asked for his pick, his first choice – *Hamlet* – was rejected. He then named every single Shakespeare play except for one – without success – until it eventually dawned on him what the Hogarth Press had in mind for him, the Jewish writer frequently dealing with Jewish life in the contemporary world.<sup>14</sup> The "series seems to operate on the principle that the ideal person to rewrite a given play must be one who shares an obvious feature with it," Colin Burrow has suggested in his scathing review for *The London Review of Books*. "Winterson is an orphan, so she gets a play about lost children. Jacobson has written a lot about being Jewish, so Shylock is clearly his man. Thus boxed in by their own selling points neither novel can really fly or surprise."<sup>15</sup>

By constructing and underscoring a correlation between an author and a Shakespeare play, the series offers an odd combination: it celebrates

<sup>13</sup> Website of the Hogarth Shakespeare Series.

<sup>14</sup> See e.g. "Howard Jacobson and James Shapiro Discuss Shakespeare and the Jews", 92nd Street Y, New York, 12 May 2016, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8ZsYQSVs3A>, last access 18 February 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Colin Burrow, "Big Rip-Off". *The London Review of Books*, 3 November 2016.

the alleged universality of Shakespeare while, simultaneously, embracing the trend towards ‘authenticity’ that has gained momentum in contemporary literature and culture. For the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, the present is a veritable “Age of Authenticity,” characterized by a wide-spread return of this Romantic notion of individuality: “[T]here arises in Western societies a generalized culture of ‘authenticity’, or expressive individualism, in which people are encouraged to find their own way, discover their own fulfillment, ‘do their own thing’.”<sup>16</sup> In the field of literature, authenticity connotes originality, honesty, and a correlation between the work of art and the artist’s ‘true self’ beyond societal demands and strategic self-fashioning. Michael Rössner and Heidemarie Uhl also speak of a “Renaissance” of authenticity and describe it as a new yearning for the genuine, as a response to its deconstruction in postmodernity and poststructuralism.<sup>17</sup> Paradoxically, then, authenticity promises an escape from the ubiquitous (social-)mediation of the world on which the contemporary display of authenticity so thoroughly depends. For a series of adaptations of the most canonical texts in English literature, the logic of authenticity is not a little ironic. Can adaptations of Shakespeare ever be truly authentic to anything or anyone?

The Hogarth Shakespeare series thus moves away from major concerns of late twentieth-century Shakespeare Studies and adaptations, including postcolonial and feminist critique, the New Historicist interest in the historical specificity and temporal alterity of Shakespearean drama, and the postmodern play with intertextuality and intermediality. Admittedly, in all of the novels there are numerous intertextual references to the Shakespearean canon and to other literary texts, films, songs, and computer games. Many of the novels stress the appeal and the relevance of literature, turning their characters into avid readers for whom literature offers comfort and orientation: Felix Phillips, the Prospero figure in Margaret Atwood’s *Hag-Seed*, needs the consolation of children’s stories and fairy tales when he retreats into his ‘exile’:

*Anne of Green Gables, Peter Pan. Fairy tales: Snow White, Sleeping Beauty. Girls left for dead in glass coffins or four-poster beds, then brought mira-*

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007, 473, 299; see also his earlier *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991, and Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1972.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Rössner and Heidemarie Uhl (eds.), *Renaissance der Authentizität?: Über die neue Sehnsucht nach dem Ursprünglichen*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2012.

culously back to life by the touch of love: that was what he longed for. A reversal of fate.<sup>18</sup>

Whereas literature offers consolation for the characters, the literary allusions and quotes are pleasurable to the knowledgeable reader, but they do not address the same fundamental questions about fictionality that the postmodern self-reflexive novel was concerned with. Instead, the series shifts attention to what literature in general, and Shakespeare in particular, can allegedly do for the modern (Western) individual. This belief in literature's therapeutic function is combined with the claim to explore, via Shakespeare, existential (and allegedly universal) problems: What does it mean and how does it feel today to be an orphan, a stranger, a Jew, a woman, or an old man? Commenting on another of her rewrites, of the myth of Atlas in *Weight* (2005), Winterson has stressed that in "re-telling stories for their own sakes" one can find

permanent truths about human nature. All we can do is keep telling the stories, hoping that someone will hear. Hoping that in the noisy echoing nightmare of endlessly breaking news and celebrity gossip, other voices might be heard, speaking of the life of the mind and the soul's journey.<sup>19</sup>

The "soul's journey"? Literature is here conceptualized as the last sacred space in a secular age of hypermediacy.

## 2. Shakespeare the psychoanalyst

The most appropriate genre for an analysis of "human nature," the series suggests, is neither the "science fiction flic" nor the "Japanese warrior tale" but Literature (with a capital L) – or rather, the modern psychological novel. Douglas Lanier, in an early article on the series, examines its "emphasis on 'literariness'" and the realist novel with its focus on the "intricacies of biography." He recognises a

tendency to flesh out the protagonists' psychologies, providing them with extensive backstories and explicit chains of motivation that make their behavior plausible (and suitably complicated) for the reader well-versed in contemporary psychoanalysis.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Hag-Seed*. London: Vintage, 2016, 39.

<sup>19</sup> Winterson, "Introduction". *Weight*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2005, xiii–xvi, quote: xvi.

<sup>20</sup> Douglas Lanier, "The Hogarth Shakespeare Series: Redeeming Shakespeare's Literariness". *Shakespeare and Millennial Fiction*, ed. Andrew James Hartley. Cambridge: CUP, 2017, 230–50, quotes: 237, 238.

Many of the characters are indeed seriously traumatized or otherwise psychologically damaged and desperately in need of some kind of therapy provided by the Shakespearean plot: Atwood's Felix is mourning the death of his beloved daughter Miranda; in their teens, Winterson's Leo and Xeno used to be lovers until Leo nearly caused Xeno's death; Nesbø's Macbeth – a policeman and leader of a SWAT unit – is a former drug addict who was sexually abused in the orphanage where he grew up; his partner in crime Lady (Lady Macbeth) is haunted by nightmares about her only child whom she killed.

In 2006 Alan Sinfield noted that “the commonsense notion of our culture, among directors, actors, audiences, and readers, is still that the way to the inner meaning of the plays lies through imaginative critical insight into the characters. The individual is envisaged as the source of coherence, meaning, and truth.”<sup>21</sup> In her authorial comment on *The Winter's Tale*, Winterson even suggests that Shakespeare was the first psychoanalyst:

Shakespeare, anticipating Freud, puts the threat where it really is: on the inside.

*The Winter's Tale* was first performed in 1611. It took another three hundred years before the nascent science of psychoanalysis began to understand how the past mortgages the future, or that the past can be redeemed.<sup>22</sup>

Her focus on psychology and the individual corroborates the supposition, noted above, of an “expressive individualism” and thus ignores a century of scholarship that has vehemently rejected psychological readings of Shakespeare's plays. In the 1930s, L. C. Knights would have taken issue with Nesbø's clear answer to the question, “How many children had Lady Macbeth?” Sinfield contends that even if Shakespeare's plays contain “*character effects*,” they “are not organized around character in the modern sense [...]. They effect a sequence of loosely linked glimpses of interiority, not a coherent identity.”<sup>23</sup> By designing full psychograms around these mere glimpses, the writers of the Hogarth Shakespeare series subscribe to the notion of character as developed by the nineteenth-century realist novel, and modified by Freudian psychoanalysis and modernism's concern with the workings of the human mind.

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<sup>21</sup> Alan Sinfield, “From Bradley to Cultural Materialism”. *Shakespeare Studies* 34 (2006), 25–34, quote: 25.

<sup>22</sup> Winterson, *The Gap of Time*, 288.

<sup>23</sup> Sinfield, “From Bradley”, 29, emphasis in the original.

Concurrently, the narrative – in most cases told in the third person with internal focalization – uses the same modes of representing consciousness that characterize the nineteenth and early twentieth-century novel: free indirect discourse, interior monologue, and stream of consciousness. Half-way through Edward St. Aubyn's novel, the Lear-character Dunbar aimlessly wanders through the Lake District, "adrift in a compulsory daydream,"<sup>24</sup> while the narrative traces his thoughts, which are rendered in long passages of free indirect discourse. When he eventually meets the former vicar Simon (the Edgar character), who may have committed suicide after having been outed as a homosexual in Dunbar's popular media, it remains unclear whether Simon is a 'real' character or the product of Dunbar's disturbed mind:

He turned around and peeped over the edge of the boulder, wondering where Simon had gone. The hillside and the valley below were completely empty. He knew that there was something funny about his sense of time, but he was genuinely surprised that Simon had been able to disappear in what seemed like only a few minutes.<sup>25</sup>

Suffering from traumata, hallucinations, psychoses, and melancholia, the modern versions of Shakespeare's characters are in deep trouble. Even though such a focus on character is encouraged or perhaps even required by the genre conventions of the novel, it is surprising that hardly any of the writers takes up the post-structuralist challenge to the idea of coherent subjectivity. Compared to contemporary stage productions, the Hogarth Shakespeare project appears fairly conservative in its reiteration of a humanist idea of selfhood, its modernist exploration of consciousness, and its return to the conventional (or commonsensical) understanding of Shakespearean character.

Howard Jacobson's *Shylock Is My Name* is an exception, despite the fact that it also features a contemporary analogue to Shakespeare's character: Simon Strulovitch, a wealthy Jewish art dealer in contemporary Britain, "with a passion for Shakespeare" and "a daughter going off the rails."<sup>26</sup> But already in the first chapter, Strulovitch meets his *doppelgänger* on whom he has been modelled: Shylock. Shylock's ontological status is never clarified in the text; he is and is not Shakespeare's Shylock; he is more than four hundred years old but neither a ghost nor a

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<sup>24</sup> Edward St. Aubyn, *Dunbar*. London: Hogarth, 2017, 112.

<sup>25</sup> St. Aubyn, *Dunbar*, 142.

<sup>26</sup> Howard Jacobson, *Shylock Is My Name*. London: Hogarth, 2016, 1, 2.

mere figment of Strulovitch's imagination. The two engage in long discussions – on Jewish identity, on their unruly daughters, and on the history and actuality of anti-Semitism, thus serving as a figuration of Jacobson's dialogue with Shakespeare's *Merchant*. Again and again, they return to Shylock's role in the Shakespearean play. What was his real intention? "How merry was [his] bond?" (147) "Had his aim been Antonio's privy parts, or Antonio's heart?" (149)

Jacobson's protagonists are not psychologically round characters but rather literary devices offering variations of the Shakespearean figure: Shylock is a version of the "wandering Jew" (64), who has lived through the centuries since *The Merchant of Venice* was written. His character has not changed, but he is knowledgeable about the past as well as about the contemporary world. Most importantly, his ability to reflect on his role in *The Merchant of Venice* comes from his love for literature that he shares, in intimate dialogues, with his dead wife Leah: they talk about Western literary history from Virgil and Ovid to Dickens, Dostoevsky, and Philip Roth (31, 66). Jacobson's Shylock thus forms part of and reflects on the intertextual web of responses to *Merchant*. Strulovitch, in turn, is a lapsed Jew living in the UK of today, who mirrors himself in Shylock: "he wondered if he cut a similar figure as a father. Obsessed. Wolf-like. Engaged into possessive befuddlement. Was it just as arduous to be loved by him? Was he just as laughable a father in the cruel eyes of Christians?" (53) The twofold reiteration of the figure permits Jacobson to break free from the (anti-Semitic) logic of the original play. Shylock's story serves as a catalyst for the plot around Strulovitch and is eventually repeated by him, but this is a repetition with a difference. Even if Strulovitch also does not succeed in getting his pound of flesh, he neither loses his wealth nor does he have to convert. Eventually, he is even reconciled with his daughter. There is no similar happy-ending in store for Jacobson's Shylock, who reminds Strulovitch that his existence is neither in the "now" nor in the present tense: "I live when I lived." His plot is prescribed by the confines of the Shakespearean play: "the story ends where the story ends. [...] There is no Act Six. For me there wasn't even an Act Five." (70, 56) But within these confines, variation becomes possible. During the trial, Shylock appropriates Portia's words so that it is him who speaks the lines on the "quality of mercy." Confronting Plurabelle, the farcical Portia character, he attacks the Christian logic of the trial in Shakespeare's version:

“Charity is a Jewish concept. So is mercy. You took them from us, that is all. You appropriated them.” (270)

The novel thus sets out less to reimagine than to challenge Shakespeare from a Jewish perspective. Furthermore, it confronts its own readers with their stereotypical notions – their inability to distinguish between a human being and a literary figure, “the individual Jew” and “the collective Jew” (67), when they assume that Strulovitch is (a) ‘Shylock’:

Shylock knew, from the intensity of Strulovitch’s scrutiny, what he was thinking. “No, we aren’t remotely alike,” he said. “Not in appearance nor in manner we have lived our lives. You don’t keep a kosher house, you don’t attend synagogue and I’m prepared to wager you don’t speak a word of Hebrew. So what does it mean to say we are both Jewish?” – “I’m more interested in what it means to *them*. What do they see that unites us?” (105)

Atwood’s *Hag-Seed* does not offer the same kind of reflection on character. The focalization of the narrative lies almost exclusively with Felix, the theatre director who loses his job at the Makeshiweg Festival through the intrigues of his former assistant Tony. The narrative follows his thoughts locked in the past, his anxieties and his despair, and his obsession with the surprisingly real ghost of his daughter Miranda. With his former life in ruins and working as a drama teacher in a prison, he designs his revenge by means of a *Tempest*-production with the prisoners. Although his melancholic introjection of his dead daughter seems to be inspired by Freud’s essay on “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), the novel also challenges the psychoanalytical concept of subjectivity. In fact, it increasingly becomes unclear whether it is Felix who directs *The Tempest* or whether it is instead *The Tempest* that emplots his life. From the beginning, he constructs himself as a kind of Prospero figure. Not only does he intend to play the role of the magician in his own production of the play, but he has also named his daughter after Prospero’s child Miranda. His eventual ‘staging’ of *The Tempest* is two-fold, when the official version filmed for the prison audience is paralleled by the more clandestine production in which his former enemies – who have come to see the screening – inadvertently become actors and perform the roles of Antonio, Alonso and Sebastian. Eventually, not unlike Strulovitch in Jacobson’s novel, Felix has to come to terms with the ghosts of the past and free himself from the confines of the Shakespearean character, although at the end, he is not yet able to throw away

his costume. But “[t]he aura it once held for him is dimming [...]. Soon it will be nothing but a souvenir.”<sup>27</sup>

### 3. The Prose of the World

Except for the concern with anti-Semitism in Jacobson’s *Shylock Is My Name*, most of the novels in the Hogarth Shakespeare series relegate the political to the background. The fictional worlds may be impacted by racism, social inequality, and patriarchy, but there is no real exploration of the workings of power. In Anne Tyler’s *Vinegar Girl*, anti-immigration laws appear merely as a plot-device when the shrew Kate Battista agrees to marry her father’s brilliant Eastern European lab assistant Pyotr (the Petruccio figure), whose work visa is about to expire. But the precarious situation of the immigrant is soon forgotten in the intricacies of the plot. Pyotr is a science nerd whose command of English is limited and whose compliments are not always flattering, but he lacks Petruccio’s cruelty. *Vinegar Girl* was published before the #MeToo debate became viral, but given the misogyny of Shakespeare’s play, it is astonishing how benign modern patriarchy appears. Kate’s main problem is her egoistic father, who believes that her single role in life is to protect his scientific research from the trivialities of the everyday. Surprisingly, the arranged marriage with Pyotr, despite the questionable motivation at its origin, opens up emancipation, happiness, and even professional success for Kate.

Tracy Chevalier’s *Othello* is the eleven-year old Osei, son of a Ghanaian diplomat, and as the only black student he is an exotic outsider at his new school in Washington DC in the 1970s. His fellow students are openly racist and so are the schoolteachers, but the plot concentrates on the small but no less cruel dramas acted out among the children on the playground. However, there is no sustained exploration of the conflicting debates over race at this crucial moment in the history of the US. The text merely adds a pale tinge of historical colour to the story – embodied by Osei’s older sister Sisi, who supports the Black Power movement. She only exists in Osei’s nostalgic childhood memories and, tellingly, never appears in the novel. The political context is evoked through a few catchwords that verge on the stereotypical:

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<sup>27</sup> Atwood, *Hag-Seed*, 283.



They [Sisi's friends] were dressed [...] in dashikis or other tops made of kente cloth, and had big afros. [...] they were American but would have neo-African names they'd taken on like Wakuna, Malaika or Ashanti, and they would sprinkle their conversation with references to Malcom X, Marcus Garvey, the Black Panthers, slogans like Black Power and Black Is Beautiful, and terms he didn't understand like 'white supremacy,' 'pan-Africanism,' and 'internalized racism.'<sup>28</sup>

It seems as if Chevalier had similarly 'sprinkled' her novel with a bit of politics to flesh out the fictional world – as an *effet de réel*. But her young protagonist does not possess the language to comprehend and analyse the racism he encounters. At the end of the novel, he is not much wiser: “How am I ever going to explain this to Sisi? Osei thought. She would know what to say to all these white people. ‘Black is beautiful,’ he murmured. Never had he wanted to believe it more.” (180) Written at the height of the Black Lives Matter movement for a series that claims to offer reinterpretations for the present generation, *New Boy's* historical setting is irritating. Eschewing the conflicts of the present, the novel retreats to a seemingly ‘safer’ historical period and paints an image of black resistance that is made up of Afros, colourful kente cloth, and political jargon.

It is probably inevitable that the task to turn Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies into novels, the bourgeois genre per se, leads to further banalities: Othello is a schoolboy; the modern shrew Kate works at a *kindergarten*; Caliban is transformed into a prisoner; Macbeth into a policeman, King Lear into a leader of an international corporation, and Leontes into a hedge fund manager. The characters are truly recognizable, and the plots replete with “the most banal moments of everyday life”<sup>29</sup> – not unlike the nineteenth-century novel. There are countless scenes of everyday life: Kate is preparing food for her father and sister; Pyotr is complaining of a running nose; Mimi (Emilia), Blanca (Bianca) and Dee (Desdemona) are jumping rope on the school playground; Xeno (Polixenes) is taking the Eurostar to Paris. *New Boy* offers a very mundane version of Othello's fantastic story about the origin of the fatal handkerchief, which has been transformed into an object that is indeed “stubbornly material”, testifying to the “literal-mindedness” and “the

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<sup>28</sup> Chevalier, *New Boy*, 37.

<sup>29</sup> Franco Moretti, *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature*. London: Verso, 2013, 76.

matter-of-factness”<sup>30</sup> that according to Franco Moretti characterizes the early bourgeois novel. The handkerchief has been replaced with an ordinary plastic pencil case, “studded with red knobbly strawberries”,<sup>31</sup> and the role of the ancient Egyptian sorceress at its origin is played by Osei’s elder sister: “‘It belongs to my sister,’ he explained, ‘but she no longer uses it. She is in high school. Tenth grade. They do not use pencil cases. I could not find mine and so I had to bring hers.’” (34–5) Whereas Nesbø’s *Macbeth*, Atwood’s *Hag-Seed*, and St. Aubyn’s *Dunbar* have kept some of the supernatural elements of Shakespeare’s plays and refrained from fully embracing the mundaneness of the world in the style of the realist novel, there is not much magic in the web of *New Boy* or *Vinegar Girl*. The same holds true for *The Gap of Time*, despite its investigation of linear time and linear narrative – through ‘Intermissions’ that arrest the progression of story time or through Xeno’s experimental computer game “The Gap of Time,” in which the player can freeze a particular moment or move around in time.<sup>32</sup>

This form of novelization inevitably affects language and style. Florizel’s passionate lines in *The Winter’s Tale* –

What you do  
Still betters what is done. When you speak, sweet,  
I’d have you do it ever; when you sing,  
I’d have you buy and sell so, so give alms,  
Pray so; and for the ord’ring your affairs,  
To sing them too. When you do dance, I wish you  
A wave o’th’ sea, that you might ever do  
Nothing but that, move that, still so,  
And own no other function. Each your doing,  
So singular in each particular,  
Crowns what you are doing in the present deeds,  
That all your acts are queens. (IV.iv.135–46)

– are rendered into Zel’s two prosaic sentences: “*Just do it forever*, he thought, *do what you do forever. And let me be there.*”<sup>33</sup> Compared to Shakespeare’s play, his lines are even more shortened than his name.

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<sup>30</sup> Moretti, *The Bourgeois*, 61–2.

<sup>31</sup> Chevalier, *New Boy*, 33.

<sup>32</sup> Winterson, *The Gap of Time*, 206.

<sup>33</sup> Winterson, *The Gap of Time*, 172. The quote from *The Winter’s Tale* follows *The Norton Shakespeare*, third edition, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt et al. New York & London: W. W. Norton, 2016.

The language is that of everyday conversation, and the syntax is plain, devoid of the metaphorical exuberance of Florizel's speech. Italics mark his thoughts and offer orientation for the inexperienced reader. Shakespeare's poetry has been turned into the "prose of the world" (Hegel).

#### 4. Escaping from the plays

Hardly any of the Hogarth Shakespeare novels deviate from the basic plotline of their respective Shakespearean plays, and the novels end as they do for Shakespeare's characters, with reconciliation and redemption in the comedies and romances, and death in the tragedies. Also with regard to the cultural background of the authors, the project is surprisingly conservative, particularly since it ignores the globalization of Shakespeare reworkings and adaptations in the past decades. Here, in contrast, all the authors are white and – except for the Norwegian Nesbø – either from the UK or North America.<sup>34</sup> The "today" that the Hogarth project promises to address with its retellings is synonymous with *Western* modernity.

There are a few exceptions, though. Atwood, for instance, imagines some kind of breaking free from the canonical Shakespearean text through the inclusion of dissenting voices. After the *Tempest*-production, the prisoner-actors are asked to give "presentations on the post-play lives of [their] characters."<sup>35</sup> The sequels they come up with are made tongue-in-cheek: Ariel will fight climate change; Antonio and Sebastian prove to be unreformed and kill everybody; Gonzalo returns to the island to build his utopian republic; and Caliban becomes the world-famous leader of the band "Hag-Seeds and the Things of Darkness." (247–62) Compared to the fairly straightforward summary of Shakespeare's play at the end of the novel, ironically (?) entitled "*The Tempest: The Original*," (285–9) the prisoners' narratives are more imaginative and entertaining, and they do indeed respond to the demands and the experience of the here and now. In addition, they anticipate the endless reiteration of Shakespeare rewrites – for every new generation. The prison-project ends with a further reworking of *The Tempest*, a musical version sung by the Caliban performer. It shows some parallels to Kamau Brathwaite's *Caliban*-poem (1973) but replaces the borrowings

<sup>34</sup> See also Lanier, "The Hogarth Shakespeare Series", 234.

<sup>35</sup> Atwood, *Hag-Seed*, 246.

from Trinidadian limbo with the rhythm, the language, and the aggression of black American rap:

Ban-ban, Ca-Caliban,  
Don't need no master, I am not your man!  
So stuff it up your hole, gimme back what you stole,  
Tellin' you it's late, I'm fillin' up with rage,  
I'm getting' all set to go on a ram-page!  
Ain't gonna work for less than minimum wage –  
Live in a shack and piss in a pail,  
You earn yourself money by puttin' me in jail! (271)

“Felix is intrigued: Caliban has escaped the play.” (272) This liberation from the confines set by the Shakespearean play also includes a pushing of the generic and stylistic boundaries of the realist novel. Caliban speaks back, through the practice of signifyin', an African American tradition based on “repetition and revision, or repetition with a signal difference.” It is both an homage to and a transformation of the original text which is sampled. The Caliban-song establishes a dialogue between the Shakespearean original and hip-hop culture, thus “finding a ‘black voice’ in the ‘white text’ of Shakespeare”<sup>36</sup> and its contemporary retelling in the psychological novel. But it is a black man's voice and a (bad?) rap song ventriloquized through the mouth (or, rather, the pen) of a Canadian female writer.

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<sup>36</sup> Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., “‘Big Willie Style’: Staging Hip-Hop Shakespeare and Being Down with the Bard”. *Shakespeare and Youth Culture*, ed. Jennifer Hulbert, Kevin J. Wetmore, and Robert L. York. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, 147–69, quote 148.

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## **Part II: Victorian Tales**





# Midnight's Children and Roaring Tigers

## Religious Tales and Tales of Religion in Victorian India and Beyond

*Andreas Nehring*

It appears that in the twenty-first century, any 'cultural dialogue' between India and Europe is firmly centred around issues of globalization. This focus is usually taken for granted, and the forms such 'cultural dialogue' can take are also rarely questioned. The term implicitly assumes a common space, however vaguely defined, that the continents of India and Europe and its peoples share, and it may also lead to problematic assumptions: after all, only an '*intercultural dialogue*' actually presupposes two or more cultural spaces, to some degree autonomous, between which a dialogue takes place, thus allowing for an actual exchange between cultures.<sup>1</sup> In this essay, I will look at one aspect of a cultural space usually referred to as *religion* (a term also often used without any further reflection of what it denotes).

The first part of my title obviously refers to Salman Rushdie's globally celebrated novel, while the second might still suggest to readers certain conventionalized images of India. It is easy to assume that in our globalizing world there is no room any more for outdated prejudices and stereotypes of India, its people and religions. In an age of global information, migration and mass tourism, overcoming clichés and antiquated images of the Other seems easier than ever. Still, the "roaring tigers" continue to perpetuate colonial stereotypes and images of India as a jungle, as exotic wilderness, which arguably remain prominent because they capture an attractive sense of originality and profoundness. In spite of my suggestive title, however, the actions of the tiger will not be the prime focus here; I will rather focus on the possibility of listening to, and perhaps understanding, a 'roaring' voice, addressing questions of identity and representation within the framework of cultural, intercultural or transcultural hermeneutics. What are we hearing? Whose voices are we listening to? What tales do they tell? How do we perceive

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Wolfgang Welsch, "Transculturality. The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today". *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, ed. Mike Featherstone & Scott Lash. London: Sage, 1999, 194–213.

other, alien cultures? Can the Other speak (to us)? Does she/he have to roar until we listen?

With a growing political influence in the region and beyond, and with economic growth rates European governments can only dream of, there is currently a lot of public interest in India – even if this is only rarely reflected in the media. In tandem, a cultural interest in India has been growing in European countries. Cinemas regularly show Bollywood movies, Europeans listen to Bangra-Music and eat ‘ethnic’ Indian food. Frozen pakoras and samosas are available in grocery stores, and globally-acting home-centres are selling Indian furniture, pillowcases and curtains. Such developments in consumer culture chime with a growing spiritual interest in India, resulting in a renewed search for a type of religiosity often assumed to be of Indian origin. However, in its absorption by the West, Indian religion, especially what is commonly called Hinduism, has itself changed, just like Indian food on its way to our supermarkets. In Europe people tend to eat samosas without the hot chilli-sauce, and instead of listening to the roaring of the tiger, we probably prefer to hear the peaceful snoring of a cat.

In various ways, religion is back on the agenda of Western discourses while the critique of religion informed by Marxist, Freudian and Nietzschean ideas that shaped popular academic concepts for many years seems somewhat outdated. The disenchantment of the world which Max Weber forecast at the beginning of the twentieth century has obviously not taken place (at least not in the way he had assumed). In fact, while the last two centuries have witnessed a decline in religiously informed identities offered by the traditional European churches, religions with an Asian background have gained importance both in Europe and Britain. Their influence is still growing, even if at present this development is concealed behind public debates about fundamentalism, a ‘clash of civilizations’, or a militant Islam – all of which seem to be “coming after us”.<sup>2</sup>

The frequent references to a re-sacralisation of the world, the “Return of the Gods”,<sup>3</sup> should make us wonder about an attendant resurgence of institutionalized religions: Religions come back transformed (if they

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<sup>2</sup> Salman Rushdie, “Coming after Us”. *Free Expression is No Offence*, ed. Lisa Appignanesi. London: Penguin, 2005, 21–6.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, *Die Wiederkehr der Götter*. München 2005.

have ever left Europe at all, as theories of secularisation based on Max Weber would have us believe). They come back in different guise, constantly changing. A desire for Eastern spirituality coincides with a tendency to foreclose other forms of religion considered dangerous to our enlightened, plural and seemingly tolerant societies. What we can recognize is a mobility of spirituality, informed by Eastern religions,<sup>4</sup> whose content, however, can no longer easily be identified as ‘Buddhist’, ‘Hindu’, or any other recognizable tradition. If my premise is correct and religion today is an important component in the forming of cultural identities, we need to ask just how such (religious) identities are formed – specifically in view of the seemingly innumerable possibilities in plural societies. Significantly, far from being applicable only to Western societies, the image of the ‘religious supermarket’ and the “heretical imperative”<sup>5</sup> is also gaining importance in India and other parts of the world. I propose to look at the specific uses of religion in academic and popular discourses since the late eighteenth century: Religions function as *tales* – (inter)cultural scripts that undergo transformations as they circulate between East and West. Embedded in other political and even nationalist narratives, they are variously appropriated by the speakers who tell these tales, all of which are informed by their own specific interests. Some tales have proven more dominant than others, as we will see when we consider the first one, told by Salman Rushdie in *Midnight’s Children*.

### 1. *Midnight’s Children*

Salman Rushdie’s novel *Midnight’s Children* (1981) is an outstanding work of literature that only marginally deals with questions of religion, highlighting a heretical imperative and questions of (inter-)cultural dialogue and identity. The novel won the Booker prize on publication as well as the ‘Booker of Bookers’ in 1993 and is often considered one of the best novels of the later twentieth century. Critics have even hailed it as a substantial contribution to the rise of Postcolonial Studies at the time of its publication, given that the novel deals with questions of identity, colonial history, the uneasy relationship between East and West

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<sup>4</sup> Peter van der Veer, *The Modern Spirit of Asia. The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative. Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*. Norwell: Anchor, 1979.

and national visions of India. *Midnight's Children* was deemed an important contribution to 'Commonwealth Literature' and credited with fostering the intercultural dialogue between British literature and a literature from the 'periphery'. However, this might be a serious misreading of what Salman Rushdie wanted to say. In a critical essay, "'Commonwealth Literature' does not exist",<sup>6</sup> he argues that when applied to literature from the periphery of the English canon, the label marginalizes such contributions: by treating such works as "authentic" expressions from the margins, the label suggests that they possess a cultural specificity conducive to a fruitful intercultural dialogue: "'Authenticity' is the respectable child of old-fashioned exoticism. It demands that sources, forms, style, language and symbol all derive from a supposedly homogeneous and unbroken tradition."<sup>7</sup>

In spite of Rushdie's clear distancing from 'Commonwealth Literature', *Midnight's Children* has been criticized for romanticizing India and reproducing images of an India deeply enmeshed in exotic myths, or as a kind of fairy-tale realm.<sup>8</sup> The novel purports to be the autobiography of a thirty year old man, Saleem Sinai, who works in a pickle factory in Mumbai. The novel is a tale in the literal sense: Saleem tells his story (and musings of the past) to Padma, his partner (a woman who might more appropriately be called his muse). The first-person narrator looks back to the history of his ancestors in Pakistan and India, the anti-colonial resistance and the turmoil at the time of the struggle for independence in India. The novel even begins like a fairy tale: "I was born in the city of Bombay.... Once upon a time". However, Rushdie immediately thwarts any simple generic expectations: "No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date:..."<sup>9</sup> In the novel, fairy tale and history are intertwined; Saleem is "mysteriously handcuffed to history", and as time is running out for him, he has to tell his story faster than Scheherazade. Fairy tale and history: the book is full of historical facts about the periods before and after the Independence of India, and readers are constantly invited to question what is only meant to be narrated by Saleem,

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<sup>6</sup> Salman Rushdie, "'Commonwealth Literature' does not exist". *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and Criticisms 1981-1991*. London: Granta, 1991, 61-70.

<sup>7</sup> Rushdie, "Commonwealth Literature", 67.

<sup>8</sup> Eleanor Byrne, "Salman Rushdie and the Rise of Postcolonial Studies: *Grimus*, *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*". *Salman Rushdie*, ed. Robert Eaglestone & Martin McQuillan. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, 22-33.

<sup>9</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1981, 9.

what has been assertively written by Salman, and what has ‘really’ happened.<sup>10</sup>

As Saleem was born at midnight on 15 August 1947, the day India gained independence, his fate is closely tied to the fate of India. He embodies Indian history, a history that passes through his thoughts and dreams. Like all ‘midnight’s children’, Saleem possesses miraculous powers; he can read other people’s thoughts – even of those who have already passed away. He also remembers the moment of his own birth, a special night where strange things happened. In mysterious ways, the beds of the new-born babies in Dr Narlikar’s nursing home were swapped and Saleem Sinai is in no position to know who he really is. But it is not just this uncertainty about his father and mother which renders Saleem’s identity precarious. He reflects:

In fact, all over the new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents – the children of midnight were also the children of the time: fathered, you understand, by history. It can happen. Especially in a country which is itself a sort of dream. (118)

Identity has become hybrid and has lost any ontological stability: Saleem is neither clearly Muslim nor Hindu, neither fully Indian nor European. According to Saleem, this was different during the days of his grandfather in Kashmir. He recalls: “In those days the radio mast had not been built and the temple of the Sankara Acharya, a little black blister on a khaki hill, still dominated the streets and lake of Srinagar.” (10) Nevertheless, the days of solitary rule of the Śankara Āchārya, which was not overshadowed by the new media technology imported by Western colonial powers, were already numbered in the early twentieth century when Saleem’s grandfather was still alive. The hilltop may not have sported a radio mast yet – but it was also occupied by more than just a Hindu Acharya. Muslims, too, claimed the place for their religion: “The blister of a temple atop Sankara Acharya, which Muslims had taken to calling the Takht-e-Sulaiman, or Seat of Solomon, paid them no attention.” (31) After the death of his grandfather Aadam Aziz, Saleem also regularly climbs the hill. For him it is a mystical place and a constant

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<sup>10</sup> Salman Rushdie discusses this in an article: “‘Errata’: or, unreliable Narration in *Midnight’s Children*” (in *Imaginary Homelands*, 22–5), because he has been accused by various critics for giving incorrect historical dates in his novel, but he refuses to decide whether these mistakes are his or Saleem’s.

reminder of his separateness from India and Pakistan alike, “an aspect of the detachment which came to afflict us all.” (329)

In “Commonwealth Literature’ does not exist”, Rushdie argues:

One of the most absurd aspects of this quest for national authenticity is that – as far as India is concerned, anyway – it is completely fallacious to suppose that there is such a thing as a pure, unalloyed tradition from which to draw. The only people who seriously believe this are religious extremists. The rest of us understand that the very essence of Indian culture is that we possess a mixed tradition, a melange of elements as disparate as ancient Mughal and contemporary Coca-Cola American. To say nothing of Muslim, Buddhist, Jain, Christian, Jewish, British, French, Portuguese, Marxist, Maoist, Trotskyist, Vietnamese, capitalist, and of course Hindu elements. (67)

While religion is not at the forefront of Saleem’s narration, time and again the question of religious identity subtly infiltrates his reflections about his life in independent India. Rushdie later argued that he never considered himself to be a religious writer, but that his experience of the fatwa after the publication of the *Satanic Verses* (1988) had forced him to deal with religious issues:

I never thought of myself as a writer about religion until a religion came after me. Religion was part of my subject, of course; for a novelist from the Indian subcontinent, where the supernatural and the mundane coexist in the streets and are considered as being of the same order of reality, how could it not have been? (Rushdie, “Coming after Us”, 21)

Not only do the supernatural and the mundane coexist – diverse religious traditions do as well and cannot easily be separated from one another. Saleem’s hybridity between East and West extends beyond questions of geography, ethnicity, and ‘culture’. His religious identity cannot be traced back to one ‘authentic’ origin either:

His head was full of all sorts of religions apart from Allah’s (like India’s first Muslims, the mercantile Moplas of Malabar, I had lived in a country whose population of deities rivalled the numbers of its people, so that, in unconscious revolt against the claustrophobic throng of deities, my family had espoused the ethics of business, not faith) [...]. (310)

While the novel constantly refers to Hindu stories and mythical figures, Saleem is also attracted by Jesus and is “escaping from school into the bosom of the Christians’ considerately optional God.” (230) In addition, he is called ‘Buddha’ by his friends and even claims similarities between his own life and that of Gautama: “Like Gautama, the first and true

Buddha, I left my life and comfort and went like a beggar into the world. The date was February 23rd, 1973.” (397)

## 2. Roaring Tigers and Reform Hinduism

The Śankara Āchārya, whose temple Rushdie describes as situated on the hill, dominating the streets of Srinagar, is considered the highest representative of the Ādvaita-Vedānta school of Hinduism. It teaches the non-duality of Atman and Brahman, of Self and Absolute, of all things. In the colonial setting under the British Raj, this school became a key symbol for an ‘authentic’ Hinduism. Because of its popularity in the West, Ādvaita-Vedānta came to be considered the dominant direction of Hinduism, especially through the teachings of two Reform-Hindus, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekanānda. Although living well before midnight of August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947, both (like Saleem) are outstanding examples of an Indian hybrid identity that emerged in Victorian India – not least after Thomas Babington Macaulay, in his contribution to the formation of an educational policy in India (*Minute on Education*, 1835), envisaged creating “a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect”.<sup>11</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna has rightly been called an outstanding figure of the nineteenth century. His aim was to renew Hinduism from within and defend it against rationalist tendencies that had gained momentum in India through the contact with the West. He became famous in Europe through the French biography of Romain Rolland in 1928. Rolland praised Ramakrishna as “the consummation of two-thousand years of spiritual life”.<sup>12</sup> But like Saleem’s, Ramakrishna’s identity was also hybrid and cannot be reduced to a single Hindu tradition. Ramakrishna did not follow the Ādvaita-Vedānta path in a strict sense; he was, more properly speaking, a dualist and saw himself on the borderline of several religions. He identified as a Hindu, Muslim and Christian and considered all three religions as legitimate ways to the Absolute – the connection of Ātman and Brahman:

<sup>11</sup> “Minute by the Hon’ble T. B. Macaulay, dated the 2nd February 1835”. *Selections from Educational Records Part I 1781–1839*, ed. H. Sharp. Bureau of Education, India 1919, 107–17, 116; cf. Elmer H. Cutts, “The Background of Macaulay’s Minute”. *The American Historical Review* 58/4 (1953), 824–53; cf. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge & London: Harvard UP, 1999, 268.

<sup>12</sup> Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna*. Almora 1931, 14.

I have practised all religions – Hinduism, Islam, Christianity – and I have also followed the paths of the different Hindu sects. I have found that it is the same God toward whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths. You must try all beliefs and traverse all the different ways once. Wherever I look, I see men quarrelling in the name of religion – Hindus, Mohammedans, Brahmos, Vaishnavas, and the rest. But they never reflect that He who is called Krishna is also called Siva, and bears the name of the Primal Energy, Jesus, and Allah as well – the same Rama with a thousand names.<sup>13</sup>

Already during his lifetime, and officially ten years after his death, Ramakrishna was venerated as divine avatāra, the incarnation of God, and many of his followers placed pictures of him besides those of Krishna and Rama on their home altars. Many Indians still use the person of Ramakrishna to praise the resurrection of Hinduism from the deathbed of colonialism. His teachings are credited with revealing a new religious dimension that transcends traditional religions and confessions – just like the waves from the radio transmitter in the Kashmir valley transcend the traditional space of influence of the Śankara Āchārya over the streets and lake of Srinagar.

Ramakrishna significantly communicates the central insight of Vedānta in the form of a tale – that of the roaring tiger. On June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1883, around 9 o'clock, Ramakrishna was in the garden of his āshram in Dakshineswar in Bengal with his disciples and told them the following parable:

Once a tigress attacked a flock of goats. As she sprang on her prey, she gave birth to a cub and died. The cub grew up in the company of goats. The goats ate grass and the cub followed their example. They bleated; the cub bleated too. Gradually it grew to be a big tiger. One day another tiger attacked the same flock. It was amazed to see the grass-eating tiger. Running after it, the wild tiger at last seized it, whereupon the grass-eating tiger began to bleat. The wild tiger dragged it to the water and said: 'Look at your face in the water. It is just like mine.' Then the grass-eating tiger saw exactly the same face in the water, the face of a tiger. And with might an insight swelled in him. And he began to roar like a tiger. Then the wild tiger said: 'Now you see there is no difference between you and me. Come along and follow me into the forest.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Swami Nikhilananda, *Sri Ramakrishna. The Face of Silence*. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2005, 229.

<sup>14</sup> Mahendranath Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Vol. 1, transl. Swami Nikhilananda (Sri Ramakrishna Math). Madras 1993, 232f.



This deep-rooted insight of Vedānta, of the unity of Self and Absolute, soon fascinated Western truth-seekers. Under the leadership of Swami Vivekānanda, Ramakrishna's followers founded a new community, the Ramakrishna-Order, with the Belur Math near Kolkata (then Calcutta) as its centre.<sup>15</sup> Swami Vivekānanda is usually considered the first missionary of Hinduism to the West. At the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893, he was a shooting star: A sign of hope on the secular horizon, someone able to bring 'true' Religion from India to the West. In the narrative that develops, India figures as the heartland of religion and spirituality – spinning the tale of a country which itself is, as Salman Rushdie described it, a sort of dream.

### 3. Representing the Dream

The Western reception of Asian spirit and thought is a pleasure for Yoga teachers and a problem for theologians and church-oriented Christians. Christian specialists for Sects and non-Christian religions cautioned against eastern spirituality, especially during the 1970s and '80s (psycho cults, youth religions, sects – the terminology is wide and elaborate). Asian religions, so the argument goes, are filling a gap of spiritual emptiness that makes young, impressionable people dependent and drives them into the clutches of Indian gurus. Even in religious studies, the various processes by which religions are transformed as they travel from East to West, are often critically analysed with an emphasis on the spiritual situation in Europe or the US, and on a Western search for religious plausibility. What is mostly neglected in these studies is that the import of Indian religiosity and the Western reception of Asian spirituality follows a discursive order that corresponds to a colonial order of dominance.

The threatening decay of Western rationality, sometimes conceptualized by Indian critics as a result of 'postmodernism',<sup>16</sup> and the loss of a binding Christian moral order have contributed to an intensified search for different, more reliable roots – similar to the search that guided the Romantic interest in the Orient two centuries ago: the search for the "country which is itself a sort of dream", to quote Rushdie once more.

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<sup>15</sup> Today, the Ramakrishna Mission is spread all over the world; especially in the US, Vedānta Societies are active under various names.

<sup>16</sup> Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward. Postmodernism, Science, and Hindu Nationalism*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006.

While searching for the Other, Europeans have been making use of (narrative) elements provided by the East – usually not, however, to actually address the Other and initiate an intercultural dialogue, but to appropriate and open up new ways of expressing themselves and their own concerns. European representations of India, even when they have been developed with the help of Indian Gurus and Reform-Hindus, have always been those that the West considered useful in self-oriented ways.

Of course, India has not only been a focal point of a European search for origins and, in the Romantic period, of European self-criticism. For centuries, India has been a prime object of colonial desire. According to Hegel, it is India's destiny to be the land of desire and thirst for conquest. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* in the 1820s and early '30s (published 1837),<sup>17</sup> Hegel writes:

India [...] is a phenomenon antique as well as modern; one which has remained stationary and fixed, and has received a most perfect home-sprung development. It has always been the land of imaginative aspiration, and appears to us still as a fairy region, an enchanted world. (156)

The dreaming Indian is therefore all that we call finite and individual; and at the same time, as infinitely universal and unlimited, a something intrinsically divine. (158)

Hegel argues that as an enchanted world, itself unable to act politically, India remains in the initial stages of World history. It is thus denied any synchronism with the West. This paradigm (which actually takes the form of a tale of India as a “fairy region, an enchanted world”) still haunts us today, which is why many Europeans are astonished to see India developing.

#### **4. Intercultural Hermeneutics: Tales of India, Germany and England**

The perception and comprehension of India and its religions is embedded in the wider history of European-Indian encounters. To a large extent, European knowledge of India, its history, its religions and its society, remains the product of the colonial past.<sup>18</sup> During the Victorian era,

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<sup>17</sup> G.W.F Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*. Ontario 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1978; Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*. Cambridge & Oxford: Blackwell, 1990; Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion. Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*. London & New York: Routledge, 1999.

British (as well as German) scholars gathered an enormous amount of information and knowledge about Indian religions, Indian society, Indian history – much more than Hegel had access to in his time. We still rely on the knowledge and images of this “imperial archive”<sup>19</sup> today. After all, language and other means of expression form the very condition of understanding, and both are culturally determined – as are the traditions of knowledge which we inherit and into which we are born. Colonial interests, missionary concerns, but also intra-European political motives have thus shaped information about India, including the popular perceptions, translations and comprehensive studies of Hinduism. Their cultural values and religious concepts continue to inform European views of India and have determined our listening to the roaring of the tiger.

This accounts for the fact that Western perceptions of Indian religions are not necessarily aligned with Indian self-perceptions. For example, if one looks at the encounter of Christians with Hinduism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one can see that this period is characterized by changing theological convictions. Although it has become almost impossible to keep track of the flood of publications dealing with this topic, one discernible trend in changing theological perception patterns is to doubt whether any relevance can still be attributed today to the missionary approaches to the Hinduism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The understanding of other religions in religious studies and the reflection on the process of understanding are obviously important aspects of any cultural encounter (a dialogic process that has to be differentiated, however, from interreligious dialogues initiated to enrich or change one's own faith in encounters with representatives of other religions). As a subject of hermeneutic research, interculturality has become an important part of Cultural Studies in recent years, and even though inter-religiosity and inter-culturality cannot be equated with one another, the problem of an academically informed comprehension of another religion is more intercultural than it is interreligious. The history of the Western perception of Hinduism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reveals that the encounter between Christians and Hindus is not

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*. London: Verso, 1993.

only predetermined by theological convictions, but equally by the images of Hinduism developed in the West.

One prominent aspect in the early Victorian (and German) reception of India is philology, especially the study of Sanskrit and its connection to the Indo-Germanic roots of European languages. But there is a considerable difference between British and German attitudes to India. While India after the 'Great Mutiny' of 1858 became part of the British Empire under Queen Victoria, Germany had no direct relation to the country and its people. Accordingly, the relationship between Germany and India was primarily constituted through texts. The Romantic affinity of German intellectuals to philology further increased this tendency. From the early eighteenth century onwards, a growing number of travel reports from and about India by travellers, missionaries and traders that had been in contact with the East India Company, and of the 'civil servants' of the Company as well, became well-known in Europe; they helped inform the popular tales of India(n religions). On the other hand, classical texts from India, which were translated or published by Englishmen, became known only slowly.

The relatively limited collections of Sanskrit texts that did become available were enthusiastically received by Romantic authors in the second half of the eighteenth century. This is especially true for the German reception of William Jones' translation of *Kalidasa's Śākuntala* (1789) and Charles Wilkins' translation of *Bhagavadgītā* (1785). Goethe wrote: "Will ich den Himmel, die Erde mit einem Namen begreifen, nenn ich, Sakontala, dich, und so ist alles gesagt." The German response to Indian literature took a specific form: It is best understood as the expression of a growing national awareness that prompted Germans to search for their own roots in a foreign land, namely in India. The far-reaching upheavals in eighteenth-century Europe, the loss of commonly binding totalities after the era of Enlightenment and the awakening of national consciousness in Germany (or, as the case may be, the development of a theory of national identity, as opposed to that of Britain/England), have all coincided with the increasing preoccupation of the British East India Company in India and the 'discovery' of a culture many thousand years old – which became known in Germany through texts transmitted to Europe.

The search for a national identity corresponded with inquiries into the origin and development of languages. At the end of the eighteenth

century, Johann Gottfried Herder developed the central thesis that each language is an expression of a national identity and the character of the people who speak it. In Germany, this thesis remained a decisive influence throughout the nineteenth century in shaping the reception of India. It was further amplified by Friedrich Schlegel in that the individual groups of peoples and nations could be differentiated based on their language, which for Schlegel was the significant trait of a common origin of all people who speak this language. Both national unity and ethnic differences are founded accordingly on their roots in the usage of the language. With the discovery of Sanskrit as a language structurally and semantically related to Greek, Latin and German, and by parallel comparison of Greek-Latin culture and religion with the Sanskrit culture by William Jones, it was also possible for Germans to claim a deeper connection to classical antiquity and to India than to France and England – countries and cultures they wanted to distance themselves from with the help of the same language theory. Herein lies an important reason for the intensive reception of India in Germany.

One hope related to this literature in Germany lay in finding a root of culture that was different from those associated with the notion of ‘civilization’ since the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Norbert Elias pointed out in *On the Process of Civilization* that since the closing years of the eighteenth century, the German middle-class set the term ‘culture’ against the notion of ‘civilization’; the latter has been understood in England and France as a category transcending national boundaries, whereas the former particularly focusses on national differences and national identities. Elias explains that the German idea of culture tends to differentiate between spiritual and political-social ‘facts’ and to concede independent existence to both. In the Romantic period, the German understanding of ‘culture’ and the search for its roots in India, were, therefore, also combined with a critique of ‘civilization’, that traced the cause for the disintegration of spiritual and political order in Europe to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The political impotence of the German small states and their inability to possess their own colonies urged Romantic authors to search for spiritual colonies, which they mainly found in India. In 1816 Friedrich Majer, a Romantic Indologist and disciple of Herder’s, wrote to Friedrich Schlegel: “Ich lebe jetzt ganz in Indien.” He never left Germany throughout his life. Which tale of India does he subscribe to?

That of the country where 'unity', 'wholeness' and 'non-duality' can be found? The land of dreams?

With the deciphering of the oldest languages, such as Sanskrit, and the discovery of the 'Wisdom of India', Romantic scholars saw the chance for a second Renaissance. Indian culture attained a significance similar to Greek culture in the sixteenth century. Germans specifically considered themselves to be the Brahmins of Europe and the legitimate inheritors of the Indian tradition. Friedrich Rückert, Orientalist at the University of Erlangen, wrote his famous collection of poems, *Die Weisheit des Brahmanen* ("The Wisdom of the Brahmin"), around 1830.

By defining India on the basis of its antiquity, contemporary developments in India were either ignored or actively condemned as a degeneration of an 'original' purity. Consequently, the Orientalists who devoted themselves to the editing and translation of the "oldest texts of mankind" considered themselves not only as the legitimate inheritors of India but also as the only ones who were in any position to carry out a cultural revival based on the common Aryan roots of the language. While a conflation of language, culture and nation remained politically difficult given the powerlessness of the German small states, connecting Sanskrit language and Aryan race theory did help substantiate further a perceived cultural dominance of the Germans.

One might argue that these historical developments are more or less successfully attended to, that we are hermeneutically more finely attuned and that postcolonial criticism has made us sensible to more pluralistic approaches to reality and fostered a deeper concern for the position of the Other. But my point is that to a large extent, today's reception of Indian religions in the West still follows a Romantic cultural script, '*the tale of ...*'. Furthermore, Western perceptions of Hinduism at the time of colonial rule continue to have an influence on developments in India today. Rushdie's tale of cultural hybridity in *Midnight's Children* represents only one strand in the European-Indian relationship, and not even the dominant one. Nationalist tendencies that try to establish fixed identities by marginalizing or extinguishing the Other are (more) prominent in cultural discourses, both in India and Europe.

One of the central themes the nineteenth-century German Indologists obsessed over was 'origin'. Locating one's origin, they believed, would

provide an access to the real essence of things. This belief was probably the one aspect of Orientalist discourse that had the most enduring effect on postcolonial strategies of claiming identity in India itself – and it is precisely such an origin that Saleem Sinai cannot identify any more. The communalism and religious fundamentalism which can be found in various Hindu reform-groups and ‘revitalisation movements’ in India today might be read as an expression of this (impossible) search for a pure origin of one’s own tradition – the very idea introduced into Indian thinking through the Orientalist discourse on Aryan origins. The so-called Hindutva Movement has readily adopted the mythology of an Aryan origin and used it for its own political interests. It has embraced nationalist and to some extent fascist ideologies in order to emphasise the original purity of India’s Hindu roots, which it seeks to defend against foreign infiltration by Muslims and Christians. From that perspective, it is understandable why Salman Rushdie’s tale of a hybrid founding of a postcolonial Indian identity in *Midnight’s Children* not only provoked Muslims but was rejected by many Hindus as well.

The religious groundings of Indian contemporary politics, and especially the construction of a Hindu identity by means of claiming Aryan origins, are mostly neglected in the West today – or, to put it differently, they cannot be aligned with the West’s Romantic tale of ‘spiritual’ India. We prefer to listen to the Indian gurus and continue to search for the ‘pure’ experience that Ramakrishna promised to us. The West is still in search of religious foundations of life in a world crucially shaped by technology. India today has thus become a quarry again for narratives that we can make use of in our world, so that the reception of Asian spirituality in modern capitalist countries in the West serves as a perfect ideological supplement.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief*. London: Routledge, 2001, 11f.

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# Wire for You, Or: Telegraphic Tales and Articulations of Love

Nadine Böhm-Schnitker

"Tis done! The angry sea consents,  
the nations stand no more apart;  
with clasped hands the continents,  
feel the throbbings of each other's hearts.  
Speed, speed the cable, let it run,  
a loving girdle round the earth,  
till all the nations neath the sun  
shall be as brothers of one hearth.

(cf. Standage, 81)

## 1. Introduction

When the first transatlantic cable was laid, the response was hugely enthusiastic on both sides. What emerged from this technological connection was a vision of a global community where the global becomes domestic, uniting "The Great Family of Man" (Barthes 1998, 100–3) around one hearth. The first telegraph connection between the United Kingdom and the United States in 1858 was celebrated as a veritable re-unification, doing away with the rift into different nations. The *Times* argued that "[s]ince the discovery of Columbus, nothing has been done in any degree comparable to the vast enlargement which has thus been given to the sphere of human activity" and that

[t]he Atlantic is dried up, and we become in reality as well as in wish one country. The Atlantic Telegraph has half undone the Declaration of 1776, and has gone far to make us one again, in spite of ourselves, one people (qtd. in Standage, 82–3).

As Tom Standage summarises, "the construction of a global telegraph network was widely expected, by Briggs and Maverick among others, to result in world peace" (83). What these responses illustrate is the cultural impact of a media technology believed to hold the power of establishing a peaceful, transnational and transcultural world community, thus undoing established politico-historical structures and divisions.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For transculturality see Welsch, 197; for transnationality, see Faist, 3.

This newly imagined community (see Anderson, 6) integrated technological progress into a phantasma of unity (see also Schenkel, 99); the potential uniting force of telegraphy was incorporated into a myth of origin of a transnational community. The ideal of such a community metaphorically took the shape of a unified body whose individual parts were one due to the electric currents running through its ‘nerves’, thus connecting macrocosm and microcosm by forging imaginary connections between individual bodies and a planetary nervous system of wires (see Schenkel, 105). The network of wires – ultimately spanning the world and closely aligned to another network, that of the railway – is seen to correspond to the nervous system of human bodies. In 1880, the American sociologist Lester Frank Ward, for instance, renders this connection very explicit: “[T]he nervous system is analogous to a telegraphic or telephonic system, the fibers representing the wires” (qtd. in Larsen, 377). Physiology and media technology converge.

The literary genre spawned by this connection, the telegraphic tale or novel, can be understood as a medial variation of another genre considered to be “preaching to the nerves” (Mansel, 495) – sensation fiction. Apart from the quasi-physical transmission of sensations (see Goble 2010, 33), telegraphic tales also share (and amplify) other sensational features: (possibly) illicit relationships, challenges to social boundaries (see Larsen, 367) and questions of identity (see Goble 2007, 405). The telegraphic tale finds a technological idiom to encode communicative currents in dots and dashes, thus structuring human discourse in a form dictated by the new technology – a form that may well be capable of encoding subconscious currents (cf. Schenkel, 104). In any case, the Morse code’s rhythmic transmission by a telegraph key or its reception by the so-called sounder fulfils some criteria that Julia Kristeva specified for her ‘semiotic’ mode that conveys the subconscious – the rhythmic, onomatopoeic, unstructured (see 1999, esp. 92–3). The telegraphic style is fragmentary, characterised by much abbreviation, and thus frequently by some ambiguity, intimating that, somehow, it is the machine itself that speaks (cf. Schenkel, 104). Since the telegraph served to convey encoded messages, it was predominantly employed in communications that needed some such form of encoding: discourses of war, and, as highlighted here, of love (cf. Schenkel, 96; also see Standage, 127–44).

What happens to the discourse of love in a time of technical reproduction? First and foremost, telegraphy may serve as a means to solve

Kristeva's central problem of a lover's discourse: "Are not two loves essentially individual, hence incommensurable, and thus don't they condemn the partners to meet only at a point infinitely remote? Unless they commune through a third party: ideal, god, hallowed group..." (Kristeva 1987, 3), or indeed, through ideals mediated by the telegraph:

[T]o speak of love may be, perhaps, a simple condensation of speech that merely arouses, in the one spoken to, metaphorical capabilities – a whole imaginary, uncontrollable, undecidable flood, of which the loved one alone unknowingly possesses the key... what does he understand me to be saying? *Everything?* – as *one* tends to believe in those moments of merging apotheoses, as total as they are unspeakable? or *nothing?* – as *I* think, as *he* may say when the first wound comes and unsettles our vulnerable hall of mirrors... (Kristeva 1987, 3)

Employed for a lover's discourse, the telegraph presents a mediator that helps to bring about 'merging apotheoses' and simultaneously creates a hall of mirrors since it does not offer any images, but fragmentary encodings that spur the imagination all the more. 'Metaphorical capabilities' are required for the 'hall of mirrors' in which lovers imaginatively become as one. And a 'key' is required for the discourse to remain – at least phantasmatically private, exclusively understood by the loved one. The telegraph offers a literal key for such encodings, and it is perhaps no coincidence that encodings in a lover's discourse and by the telegraph share some crucial traits. Due to economic considerations regarding the cost of telegraphic transmissions, telegrams were often strongly abbreviated and thus fragmentary; they were asynchronic because, crucially, the communication occurred during the absence of the communication partner; and they required encoding and mediation through a third party, an operator. Roland Barthes presents *A Lover's Discourse* as 'Fragments' (1978). "These fragments of discourse" are presented in "*figures*" (3), they articulate "absence" (13) and they must rely on "signs" (214). Telegraphy can imaginatively bridge absence, can transmit a lover's discourse and represent it in figures of code. Hence, this technology seems strangely adapted to its content; the medium, as Marshall McLuhan contends, is the message.

The cultural affinity between human physiology, media technology, and the discourse of love finds an apt form in the genre of "wired romances", as Mark Goble calls them:

[T]hese stories display a sometimes uncanny fascination with highly heterogeneous forms of textuality, incorporating not just poems and lyrics but also telegraphs, letters, Morse code, and popular song as materials for their verbal surfaces. [...] Plots, as we might well expect, are driven by confusion of identity that thrive when one is able to know only what may be transmitted telegraphically. [...] A lover does not know what her beloved looks like, and is tricked into a relationship with someone old or unattractive, or is led to believe, by some nefarious interloper, that someone else is actually the person they've been communicating with. [...] Distance does not preclude sex, or at least forms of communication that are freighted with a great deal of erotic suggestion and intimation. (2007, 405)

Ella Cheever Thayer's novel *Wired Love: A Romance of Dots and Dashes* (1880) is a case in point. It opens with a dedication, contains several chapter headings, and ends with a declaration of love, in Morse code. The opening chapter is entitled "Sounds from a Distant 'C'" and subscribed by the Morse code for Bm Xn. It describes the first telegraphic meeting between Nathalie, or Nattie, Rogers and her later husband Clem Stanwood, or 'C'. He "calls" her from a remote office, and what begins by one office, Xn, calling another, Bm, eventually ends in marriage (9). C's call interpellates Nathalie more strongly than the novels she reads and makes her inhabit a subject position of stereotypical femininity. Furthermore, Clem 'salts' her (see 161) – his code transmission is too fast for her, she has to ask him to slow down several times. The nineteen-year-old Nathalie 'is taken by surprise', one may argue, particularly considering the symbolism of her white dress being tarnished by ink, "Superior Black Ink", to be precise, that she knocked over during this telegraphic intercourse (see 14; cf. Goble 2007, 410).<sup>2</sup> From then on, Nathalie communicates with 'C' whenever the line is free and falls in love with him.

The novel, as the title page suggests, retells "'The old, old story,' – in a new, new way", but the innovation remains solely technological. While the wired partners exploit the options of the anonymity telegraphy offers – Nathalie passes herself off as male and Clem as female (23), the coupling as such fulfils the stereotypes of the popular romance. What

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<sup>2</sup> This foreshadowing of intercourse mimics a central scene of Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868), in which the female character Rachel Verinder can only consent in retrospect to the sexual intercourse initiated by the male protagonist Franklin Blake. His stealing the precious Moonstone from her in the middle of the night has been read as a "symbolic defloration" (Lonoff, 210) that initially leaves her traumatised, silences her and traps her in a position of victimised femininity.

the lovers desire is indeed 'the old, old story', boy meets girl, and, for that matter, rich, white boy meets poor, white girl. With identity being medially suspended in the process of telegraphing, there is some potential for innovation in the wired romance to queer and diversify the romance plot, but this is symbolically curtailed by the pre-emption of heterosexual intercourse by 'spilling ink'. Furthermore, 'C' is quite positive that "[t]here is a certain difference in the 'sending,' of a lady and a gentleman" (22–3). Thus, any suspicion on the side of the readers that the intercourse between the two operators might be illicit in any way is dispelled from the outset. Since the very 'touch' of operators is gendered, Clem is quite certain that he partakes in a heterosexual form of communication and Nathalie cannot imagine otherwise. Besides, the possibility of an interracial relationship suggested by the black ink is soon channelled into an entirely white and heteronormative coupling.

According to the conventions of the romance, the actual consummation of this relationship is delayed by some complications caused by mistaken identities, for example when another operator who listened in on the communication between Nathalie and Clem introduces himself as 'C' but falls short of Nathalie's expectations. She must concede that "Imagination is too dangerous a guide for me!" (104). This direct speech throws into relief the fact that telegraphic encodings find some imaginary representation on a mental screen, the code is supplemented by a panorama of cultural stereotypes. Relinquishing all hope to meet her ideal husband after this disillusionment, she consequently misrecognises the actual 'C' when he stares her in the face: When "Nattie suddenly became aware of a pair of merry brown eyes, belonging to a fine-looking gentleman" (117), she can no longer associate him with the sender from Xn. The communication is broken, as their wire was, and their 'recognition' is delayed. But this complication is of course finally overcome, identities are ascertained, and it is, in fact, Clem who is both her ideal husband and the occupant of the office at Xn. He, in turn, can merrily state: "I have found the very little girl I expected!" (173). Since they imagined the stereotype of a romantic couple, both partners get what they 'see' or desire, and are able to fill the respective subject positions. The telegraphic tale thus narrows down the potentiality of possible connections to a very local and domestic one – Clem happens to move into the same house in which Nathalie lives – that is defined by the couple's utter conformity to social norms (see 246). The story

culminates in a marriage proposal made in Morse code. When Clem looks Nathalie in the eye and wires “my little darling, my wife” (256), the wired romance finds closure.<sup>3</sup>

While initially, the telegraph seemed to grant a “vast enlargement [...] of human activity” (the *Times* qtd. in Standage, 83), telegraphic tales try to harness these possibilities by reiterating stereotypes of race, gender and class and by framing the technology through a romance plot. However, they also reflect on the way in which subject positions are fundamentally affected by the new technology. The coupling of Clem and Nathalie depends on them occupying positions at telegraph offices: In the general romantic game of mistaken identities, Clem assures Nathalie that he could not have fallen in love with any other woman, not even Nathalie’s friend Cynthia, who, admittedly, “is handsome, talented, brilliant, fascinating”, because “Cyn was not my little girl at Bm” (253). In *Wired Love*, the central characters must be telegraphic senders and receivers in order to occupy viable subject positions in the romance. The imaginative screen established on the basis of their telegraphic encodings provides the phantasma of love, a ‘merging apotheosis’ through a mediated lover’s discourse. Finally, the novel conceives of the body as a communicative machine that is part of a medial and physiological network – the lovers’ union is pre-empted by wiring them. Articulating a prophetic vision of future technological developments, Cynthia foresees an even stronger cultural enmeshment of media technology, love and subjectivity, with very current overtones (see Poole, 81; 86):

[W]ho knows but some genius will invent something for the especial use of lovers? something, for instance, to carry in their pockets, so when they are far away from each other, and pine for a sound of ‘that beloved voice,’ they will have only to take up this electrical apparatus, put it to their ears and be happy. Ah! blissful lovers of the future! (57).

*Wired Love* thus already imagines love affairs in a wireless age, and the corresponding cultural representations continue to reflect on the interaction between media technology and social relations.

In the further development of telegraphic tales, one can trace the way in which such social effects of the technology move centre stage. As

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Goble uses the international rather than the American Morse system and reads “my little darling, my wire” which allows for an interesting reading, but contradicts the consistent use of the American system for the novel (Goble 2007, 407; see also 410).



“Extensions of Man” (McLuhan), media technologies have the potential to foster the emergence of environments that allow for new imaginative scopes, thereby also transgressing established boundaries within one individual as well as between different social groups (cf. Ludes, 81). Such an articulation is an integral part of Henry James’s tale “In the Cage” (1898), centring on a nameless telegraphist and the “queer extension of her experience” (James, 239).<sup>4</sup>

## **2. “In the Cage” of the Telegraph Office: A Panorama of Imagination**

In his retrospective preface to the tale, Henry James commented on his interest in telegraphy’s impact on human relations and explained that “In the Cage” focussed on

the question of what it might ‘mean,’ wherever the admirable service was installed, for confined and cramped and yet considerably tutored young officials of either sex to be made so free, intellectually, of a range of experience otherwise quite closed to them. (415)

Indeed, the fundamental structure of the tale pits the constrictions of space, behaviour, opportunities etc. of the telegraphic cage against “the girl’s ‘subjective’ adventure – that of her quite definitely winged intelligence” (416), thus extending the girl’s imaginative scope through the telegraph, while materially, she remains very much restricted, ‘in the cage’. While Haley Larsen claims that the nameless telegraphist reveals the fact that female desire “circulates beyond prescribed boundaries” and that “electric desire [...] portends the instability of narrative circuits and of social boundaries” (367), this transgression of boundaries remains decidedly imaginary and never turns into material reality.

Apart from reflecting on the medial extension of our imaginative scopes, James implicitly supplements telegraphy with the content of an older medium, that of the panorama. This may also account for the fact that the characters’ imagination is comparatively old-fashioned and stereotypical. The impoverished telegraphist vicariously participates in a lifestyle foreclosed to her and dreams of a romance with a male representative of the gentry. She evokes

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<sup>4</sup> I use articulation in Stuart Hall’s sense: “Thus, a theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects” (Hall, 233).

a panorama fed with facts and figures, flushed with a torrent of colour and accompanied with wondrous world-music. What it mainly came to at this period was a picture of how London could amuse itself; and that, with the running commentary of a witness so exclusively a witness, turned for the most part to a hardening of the heart. The nose of this observer was brushed by the bouquet, yet she could never really pluck even a daisy. (James, 239)

The focaliser of this third-person narrative remains a witness or consumer of life's upper-class panorama; for the narrator, she represents an observed observer. The focus lies on her consciousness patterned by telegraphy, which is conveyed by syntagmatic concatenations of consciousness and technology in the tale. The telegraphist describes her task as having to "mind the 'sounder'" (229), which may well be taken literally, as supplementing the code with a mind, with an imagination: "She had seen all sorts of things and pieced together all sorts of mysteries" (233) and soon, "she found her divinations work faster and stretch further" (239). However, she herself is already engaged to marry Mr Mudge, a match that seems sensible but definitely lacks the sensational aspects of relationships seemingly characterising the upper echelons of society. Hence, she imagines passionate dramas for other people, her customers Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen. Her cage can thus be understood epistemologically in terms of Plato's cave – like the cave dwellers she is physically restrained and can only see 'shadows of the real' in the guise of her own phantasmatic projections of other people's lives – or psychosemiotically, with the cage representing a medial apparatus that ties an individual's subjectivity to an imaginary screen, a process that re-enacts the Lacanian mirror stage (see Baudry, 45): "Just as the mirror assembles the fragmented body in a sort of imaginary integration of the self, the transcendental self unites the discontinuous fragments of phenomena, of lived experience, into unifying meaning" (Baudry, 45–6). With its cage-cum-panorama, James's tale illustrates subject constitution more generally and emphasises the imaginary's central function.

The narrator grants some access to the telegraphist's own reflections on her role:

It had occurred to her early that in her position – that of a young person spending, in framed and wired confinement, the life of a guinea-pig or a magpie – she should know a great many persons without their recognising the acquaintance (229)

She uses this panoptical position from which she can see every customer without being (consciously) seen herself to exert the power of knowledge, being deprived of any other kind of power. Assuming an illicit affair between Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen that is close to being uncovered, she muses whether “[h]e perhaps didn’t even himself know how scared he was; but *she* knew. They were in danger, they were in danger, Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen: it beat every novel in the shop” (256).

The telegraphic tales the telegraphist pieces together from the lovers’ correspondence exceed the range and scope of plots she has access to, so that the new technology insinuates new narratives, but eventually merely retraces old ones. “In the Cage” highlights moments of mediation as such, be that with regard to processes of consciousness, subject constitution, social relations or media technology. When the telegraphist is able to correct a mistake in one of Lady Bradeen’s telegrams – which duly shocks the lady and makes her reconsider the telegraphist as a person rather than just a professional function – the narrator draws attention to the ways in which the telegraphist’s desire for empowerment represents another layer of mediation:

Our young friend’s perusal of her ladyship’s telegram was literally prolonged by a momentary daze: what swam between her and the words, making her see them as through rippled, shallow, sunshot water, was the great, the perpetual flood of ‘How much *I* know – how much *I* know!’ (259)

While, for her, this bout of narcissism proves thrilling and uplifting, an alternative conception renders it rather mundane and low. Particularly in the context of the Cleveland Street Scandal, “the 1890s brought to prominence the opportunity for blackmail afforded by telegrams” (Poole, 84). This is also a major concern in Trollope’s 1877 story “The Telegraph Girl”:

Now it is a rule that the staff of the department who are engaged in sending and receiving messages, the privacy of which may be of vital importance, should be kept during the hours of work as free as possible from communication with the public. It is not that either the girls or the young men would be prone to tell the words which they had been the means of passing on to their destination, but that it might be worth the while of some sinner to offer great temptation, and that the power of offering it should be lessened as much as possible. (Trollope, 97)

Here, the heroine's refraining from succumbing to any such temptation is another version of virtue rewarded when the tale finally culminates in marriage. In "In the Cage", Captain Everard, during his only private meeting with the telegraphist, correspondingly understands her "'harmless pleasure of knowing'" as a threat of blackmail. "'Yes; that's what has been between us,' he answered much more simply" (271). The tale thus accentuates the dangers lurking in the interstices of communication and reveals that, where communication remains fragmentary, it is supplemented with the imaginary. As the imaginary proves to be modulated by class and gender, it may lead to vast misunderstandings. The communication between the two characters is generally defined by the potentiality of insinuation and allusion. In the process of encoding and decoding, they clearly do not employ the same code. There is a highly charged, almost electric, atmosphere that allows for several currents of communication and several options for interpretation.

The asynchronicity of telegraphy heightens hermeneutic challenges in communication and reproduces many characteristics of a lover's discourse. Roland Barthes defines a lover's discourse by first commenting on the etymology of discourse:

*Dis-cursus* – originally the action of running here and there, comings and goings, measures taken, 'plots and plans': the lover, in fact cannot keep his mind from racing, taking new measures and plotting against himself. (1978, 3)

This describes both the function of telegraphy in discourse and the telegraphist's cognitive disposition. A lover's discourse, as Barthes suggests, can only be captured in fragments, thus complementing the fragmentary style of telegrams. "These fragments of discourse can be called *figures*" (3) which

take shape insofar as we can recognize, in passing discourse, something that has been read, heard, felt. The figure is outlined (like a sign) and memorable (like an image or a tale). A figure is established if at least someone can say: '*That's so true! I recognize that scene of language.*' (4)

This recognition, then, is very close to processes of stereotyping that we see at work in many of the telegraphic tales. The formulaic romance plot offers a formal husk that allows to reveal how the new technology

becomes articulated with other discourses, among them chiefly class, gender and sexuality.<sup>5</sup>

Barthes's 'scene of language' is then also a guiding principle of James's "In the Cage". In his preface, he calls "the action *embodied*" and the plot "conforming to the 'scenic' law"; the tale presents "little constituted dramas, little exhibitions founded on the logic of the 'scene,' the unit of the scene, the general scenic consistency" (James, 416–17), "having for their rule of beauty the principle of the 'conduct,' the organic development, of a scene – the entire succession of values that flower and bear fruit on ground solidly laid for them" (417). Hence, the tale seems to conform both to the figures of a lover's discourse, and, in turn, to the logic of concatenation or articulation of different discourses.

Another central feature of a lover's discourse is the absence of the beloved, which triggers not only the need for means of communication but also the articulation of figures in the sense of Barthesian affective gestures. In James's tale, Captain Everard is constantly travelling, while the telegraphist must remain static in her 'cage'.

He had at times to be away for weeks; he had to lead his life; he had to travel—there were places to which he was constantly wiring for "rooms": all this she granted him, forgave him; in fact, in the long-run, literally blessed and thanked him for. If he had to lead his life, that precisely fostered his leading it so much by telegraph: therefore the benediction was to come in when he could. That was all she asked – that he shouldn't wholly deprive her. (255)

His own communicative requirements hence lead him into her cage and simultaneously provide her with the power of knowledge that she craves. In order to thrive, she requires the network of information and

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<sup>5</sup> In the telegraphic tales under consideration here, sexual orientation is implicitly articulated, too. In Trollope's "The Telegraph Girl", this is underlined by the protagonist's love for her colleague Sophy Wilson, with whom she shares a flat. When Lucy Graham finally marries Sophy's initial love interest, this can be read as the outcome of a triangulation of desire. What is more, Lucy describes herself as occupying a rather masculine subject position: "She must begin life after what seemed to her to be a most unfeminine fashion, – 'just as though she were a young man,' – for it was thus that she described to herself her own position over and over again" (Trollope, 71), which turns her final marriage into a vicarious acting out of her actual desires. Ella Cheever Thayer's *Wired Love* also leaves room for same-sex relations in the initial communication but also in the relationship between Nathalie and Cynthia as well as Clem and Quimby (an old and clumsy friend of Clem's who is also madly in love with Natalie), even though these options are quickly forestalled.

communication; the tale thus illustrates the way in which her subjectivity is harnessed to the medial apparatus and throws into relief our ideological 'wiring'.

Finally, however, the scope of the telegraphist's imagination is painfully curbed when she learns that Captain Everard is forced to marry Lady Bradeen. Then, the cage of her old identity provides some refuge: "[T]o be in the cage had suddenly become her safety, and she was literally afraid of the alternate self who might be waiting outside" (282). The telegraphist's established cage of identity offers her viability now, while her imaginary self – which can only be envisaged in the confines of the romance plot – would imply her utter dissolution. That some social policing is involved in her final decision to hasten the marriage to Mr Mudge is foregrounded by the presence of a policeman, who "paused and watched her" as she ponders her future (302).

Her change of mind is brought about by the insights passed on by Lady Bradeen's new butler, a Mr Drake, who is to be married to the telegraphist's lady friend. Mrs Jordan is only too happy to turn her superior knowledge about Lady Bradeen's private life into the currency of gossip. The telegraphist, in turn, is only too keen to get access to this knowledge. She learns that an intercepted telegram – which she is able to reconstruct from memory for Captain Everard – was part of Lady Bradeen's tactic to force the Captain into marriage, another cage wrought by the manipulation of knowledge. Fittingly, Mr Drake's name serves to conclude the tale, and thus a very old-fashioned access to knowledge, a butler's gossip, provides the turnstile of the tale; the butler himself, however, remains 'invisible', hidden in his professional role. The transcultural and transnational utopia sparked by the introduction of telegraphy remains confined to the interstices of communication, to that which is only potentially articulated through new technologies, while the actual articulations affirm tenacious restrictions of social life that also regulate and narrow down the ideals initially associated with telegraphy. As telegraphy finds its niche in the context of established media, socio-cultural discourses regulate its transnational, 'transdifferent' potential and hold it in check.

Having said this, it should be added that the 'speaking of the machine' also has the potential to provide alternatives. Rudyard Kipling's 1902 short story "Wireless" exploits the options afforded by induction and underlines the potentially limitless number of messages that 'might

come in', but that are received with different interests and differently 'tuned' forms of attention. The story opens with a commentary by the consumptive Mr Shaynor, a close friend of the narrator:

'IT'S A FUNNY THING, this Marconi business, isn't it?' said Mr. Shaynor, coughing heavily. 'Nothing seems to make any difference, by what they tell me – storms, hills, or anything; but if that's true we shall know before morning.'  
(Kipling, 195)

Potentially, that is, wireless communication may connect anything, irrespective of any differences. The nameless first-person narrator leaves his actual interests vague and does not disclose them openly: "For reasons of my own, I was deeply interested in Marconi experiments at their outset in England" (197). With that, he draws attention to the fact that messages keep being misdirected and incomplete, and that many things escape notice through misdirected forms of attention, which is a crucial feature of the messages that the narrator or the wireless may detect.

Due to his interest in the technology, the narrator visits his apothecary friend one night when the chemist's nephew conducts some experiments with wireless telegraphy. The setting is structured along the lines of John Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes" (1820), and Mr Shaynor, after some drugging, becomes a medium for this poem and for Keats (or rather, an induced, desired and imagined 'Keats', see Pafford, 33–5).<sup>6</sup> The tale ironically comments on the apparent immateriality of wireless communication and parallels different kinds of mediality, among them a strong intertextuality that keeps changing the potentiality of meaning in the process of reading (see Pafford 31–3; 35). "Wireless" employs telegraphy – which moves closer to telepathy, a tendency already visible in James's "In the Cage" (see Larsen, 362f.) – to reflect on mediality's capacity to generate meaning through relations of contiguity.

In Kipling's "Wireless", discourses of love, drugs and war are articulated. The young experimenter Mr Cashell overhears "a couple of men-o'-war working Marconi signals off the Isle of Wight. They are trying to talk to

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<sup>6</sup> There are some traits that Shaynor shares with Keats, such as being an apothecary (see Schenkel, 104), suffering from tuberculosis and being in love with someone called Fanny, in Shaynor's case a Fanny Brand instead of a Fanny Brawne. The inductive connection between Shaynor and Keats seems like a medial update on George Eliot's notion of sympathy, which has been explored in the context of sound studies. Kay Young, for instance, explores Hermann von Helmholtz's notion of "sympathetic vibration" in the context of a sound-studies approach to *Middlemarch* (233).

each other. Neither can read the other's messages, but all their messages are being taken in by our receiver here" (216). He compares this failed communication to "a spiritualistic séance" and sums the latter up as "odds and ends of messages coming out of nowhere – a word here and there – no good at all" (217) – but it is a nowhere that can be received by way of induction, allowing the characters to be "eavesdropping across half South England" (216). The potentiality of communication is further extended here, either as a totalitarian dystopia of the loss of privacy where every attempt at communication can be overheard or as a reflection on the potential of communication that need not rely on any carrier medium. The technology of induction becomes the tale's formal guideline. Mr Cashell explains:

'[T]he long and the short of it is that when a current of electricity passes through a wire there's a lot of magnetism present round that wire; and if you put another wire parallel to, and within what we call its magnetic field – why, then the second wire will also become charged with electricity.' (204).

Induction serves as the basis for a parallel montage of the technological reception of signals and the psychic (or drug-induced) reception of Keats. The narrator, mysteriously doubled during the process, observes Mr Shaynor's mediality and later comments:

And all that I now recall of that epoch-making theory are the lofty words: 'If he has read Keats it's the chloric-ether. If he hasn't, it's the identical bacillus, or Hertzian wave of tuberculosis, *plus* Fanny Brand and the professional status which, in conjunction with the main-stream of subconscious thought common to all mankind, has thrown up temporarily an induced Keats'. (210)

This latter option envisages a transhistorical impact based on the theory that like circumstances will produce like effects; history repeating due to induction. Such visions of remote control define the imaginary scope of the turn of the century, but nevertheless retrace 'Romantic' relationships by analogising the present love story between Shaynor and Fanny with the induction of the relation between Keats and his Fanny.



### 3. Outlook

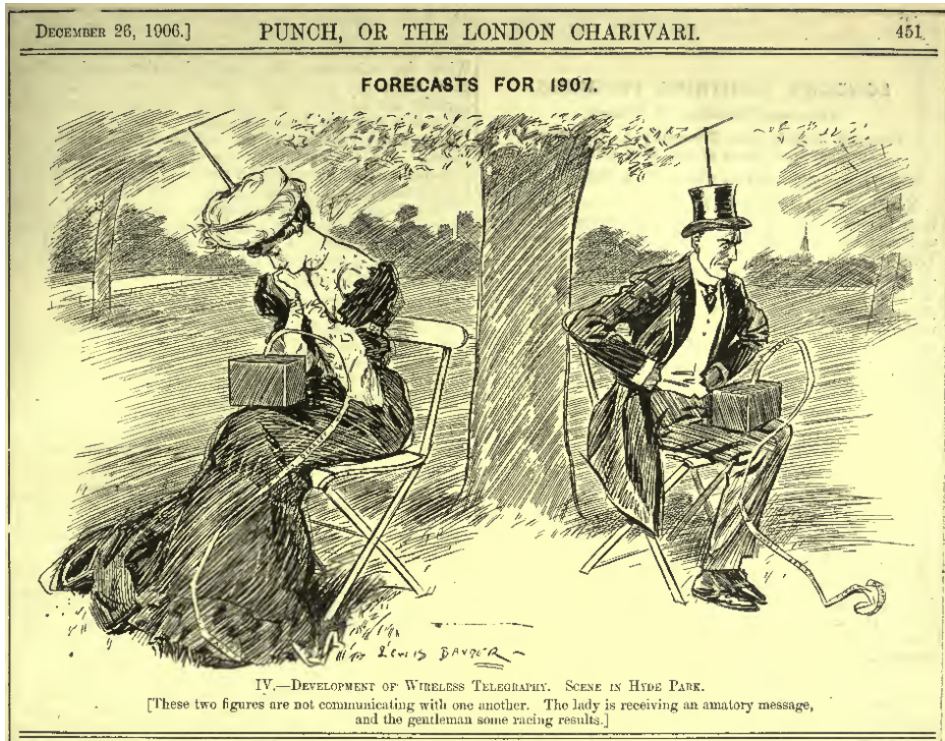


Fig. 1: *Punch* (December 26, 1906), 451

In the December edition of 1906, a *Punch* cartoon sees wireless technology fostering individualisation and asynchronicity that further dissociates communication from the body, however without liberating the body from gendered matrices. The cartoon by Lewis Baumer, entitled “Forecast to 1907”, presents a man and a woman with aerials on their heads, both receiving a message (cf. St George, 95). The subscription reads

IV. – DEVELOPMENT OF WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY. SCENE IN HYDE PARK. [These two figures are not communicating with one another. The lady is receiving an amatory message, and the gentleman some racing results.] (December 26, 1906, 451).

The woman is interested in a lover’s discourse, while the man wants to know how things are in the betting business, that is, whether he has made money or not – his facial expression suggests the latter.

While Thayer's *Wired Love* or Trollope's "The Telegraph Girl" provide social cohesion by way of romance, later visions seem to emphasise difference and individuality. Baumer imagines the way in which media find their own niches of usage and invigorate a sense of solitary individuality that still conforms to gendered stereotypes (racial diversity does not come into view). The envisaged wireless communication in an age of consumer capitalism promotes subjects without any *present* social ties, they become free-floating individuals harnessed to apparatuses that establish a net of asynchronic connections between people, a vital prerequisite for *mobile* consumers. Indeed, our present might be an induced version of such telegraphic tales.

Telegraphic tales already configure subjectivity as mediated and are symptomatic of the requirement to forge global connections. The ties established in this genre, global as they are, are hardly characterised by diversity – despite the fact that initially, the telegraph inspired utopias of transculturality. Rather, they affirm white heteronormativity. Endless potentialities are reduced to mundane actualities that confirm the lasting sameness of stereotypes. Thus, telegraphic tales not only highlight the anxieties evoked by telegraphy but also curb the utopian prospect of a potentially transcultural telegraph culture. Envisioning the utopian, transcultural and transnational possibilities of medial networks that are now at our disposal still remains a task to be accomplished.

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# A Tale of Two Faces

## Melodramatizing Jekyll and Hyde

*Susanne Scholz*

Almost immediately after its publication in 1886, the story of the respectable Dr Jekyll and his sinister alter ego Mr Hyde, and its proclamation of the fundamental duality of the human being became common knowledge. Detached from its original literary form, the notion of the double self seemed to give a local habitation and a name to a perceived (maybe universal) feature of mankind, and some years before Freud published his first treatises on unconscious forces within the human frame, Stevenson's story provided an imaginative pattern for this piece of anthropological wisdom. It thus has all the characteristics of a tale, a somewhat timeless but at the same time infinitely actualisable cultural narrative which articulates a cultural truth, in this case "that man is not truly one, but truly two" (Stevenson, 48). The double-faced doctor became a cultural icon, to be conjured up to the present day to give voice to concerns about forces in man uncontrollable by reason or morality. The 'message' of the tale, however, shifted according to cultural demand. In this chapter, I want to argue that it was the clothing into the melodramatic formula which transformed Stevenson's story into a cultural narrative, and that by this transformation, the moral message of the tale was (somewhat reductively) conceived to be the fight of good versus evil in man. Thomas Elsaesser speaks of the myth-making function of melodrama and generally calls it a "tale of sound and fury", thus attributing a specific cultural agenda to the genre (Elsaesser 1987, 44). That the *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* has a symptomatic affinity to melodrama, although the original story was certainly written with no such intention, is the result of its popular reception in the force field of internal conflicts within Victorian society (and beyond). Peter Brooks has famously argued that "psychoanalysis is a version of melodrama" and that ultimately, "[t]he dynamics of repression and the return of the repressed figure the plot of melodrama" (Brooks, 201). Which story, then, could be more apt to tell the tale of the 'eternal' struggle within the human ego than that of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde?

## **1. The Melodramatic Formula**

The rapid dissemination of the tale of the split personality of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde has certainly been helped by the early dramatization of Stevenson's story by Thomas Russell Sullivan, which in turn served as the basis for a number of film versions (Danahay & Chisholm). In Sullivan's stage version, Jekyll/Hyde was played by the famous actor Richard Mansfield, whose impersonation of evil in the figure of Hyde was so successful that he was suspected, in the autumn of terror of 1888, to be in fact Jack the Ripper (Evans & Skinner, 149).

While the text version of the story conspicuously refuses to picture the face of Mr Hyde, and all readers ever get are the interpretations of others, a film version must provide Mr Hyde with a distinctive visage. This calls for a number of decisions on the director's part: Which culturally available iconography of evil, monstrosity or degeneration will be used as a model, how different from each other will the faces of Jekyll and Hyde be, and finally, which face does Dr Jekyll wear in death?

Without ever reliably describing the facial features of Hyde, Stevenson's text makes a point about the duplex self (and face) that is the default state of every human being. Especially his own memorandum, which concludes the narrative, shows Dr Jekyll confined by the strictures of decorum and his own overblown notions of respectability, all of which force him to present a faultless picture to the world. In his own account of his life he speaks of his "imperious desire to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public." (Stevenson, 48) It is exactly this notion of the immaculate face that must be presented to his fellow men which Jekyll himself sees at the heart of his experiment to spawn a 'lesser self' which is allowed to live his life without an eye on the censoring gaze of respectable society.

Jekyll's obvious awareness of his face as a stage or picture seen by his fellow citizens anticipates ideas elaborated on in philosophical anthropology in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Helmuth Plessner, for instance, claims that the human being is a duplex formation and describes the necessity to project oneself into society after the manner of a picture as the establishing condition of proper personhood (Plessner, 69 et passim). We become subjects by being seen, by being visually acknowledged as fellow subjects, and our socialisation provides us, among other techniques of self-fashioning such as speech, clothing and movement,

with techniques of mimic regulation that help us fulfil society's expectations (in this light, emojis showing emotional states of faces seem a wonderful invention for a social communication that relies on face-fashioning). Homo duplex has an inside and an outside, and successful subjectivity depends on the capacity to conceive of oneself as a surface seen by others. Hans Belting's notion of an "anthropology of images" (Belting 2011 [2001]) provides a translation of this anthropological tenet into aesthetic terms, also drawing on the notion of the self that must be fashioned into a picture in order to be acknowledged as a social person. Belting emphasises that the face frequently functions as a *pars pro toto* for the whole subject and thus bears the burden of social visibility (Belting 2013, 25–44). Face and picture-of-face (or mask) constitute a self-reflexive unity, representing a subject which is characterised by both an awareness of being looked at and the consciousness of being different from what the social observer perceives.<sup>1</sup> Richard Weihe calls this a "prosopic unity", based on the Greek word for face, *prosopon*, which literally describes that which is in front of or opposite the eyes: *pros-opon* (Weihe, 35). Under 'normal' conditions, the two selves, or two faces, remain more or less happily integrated with one another, and the capacity for mimetic regulation brings forth the respective face (or mask) that is required in various social contexts. In the case of Stevenson's Dr Jekyll, however, the pressure created by the demands of Victorian decorum seems to be so powerful that it ultimately disrupts the prosopic unity, and the other face assumes a personhood of his own. So even if the faces of Jekyll and Hyde are not legible by the intradiegetic lookers-on, they are at the core of the narrative.

Film and theatre versions of the tale necessarily bring Mr Hyde's face much closer to their audiences than the text of the novella. While in the literary version, Dr Lanyon is the only person who witnesses Hyde turning into Jekyll, the visualisation of the transformation is at the core

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<sup>1</sup> "Der Mensch kann sich seine eigene Maske aufsetzen, seine eigene Rolle konstruieren. Er verwirklicht sich gerade in dieser Möglichkeit der Verdoppelung durch ein Bild von sich, darin äußert sich sein Personsein. So gesehen ist der Mensch kein Individuum, sondern vielmehr ein *Dividuum*, eine Person die sich teilen (sich re-produzieren) oder falten kann. Durch die Faltung der Person entsteht ein Double, die Konstitution des *Homo duplex*. Der Begriff Homo duplex enthält keine moralische Wertung; er hat nichts mit jener Mythologie gemein, wonach ein echter oder wahrer Charakterkern von einer gesellschaftlichen, trügerischen, falschen Hülle umschlossen ist. Nicht nur der Kern, auch die Hüllen gehören zur Identität einer Person." (Weihe, 14–15)

of both dramatic and filmic performance of the figure. This places the audience in the position of direct witness, while it demands particular efforts of the actor in the theatre, and the use of special effects in the case of film. Richard Mansfield's reports on his own famous performance suggest that it is exactly this joint experience of a tightly packed audience witnessing Dr Jekyll turning onstage into the evil figure of Hyde that created a horror effect which made women in the audience scream and lose consciousness (Wilstach, 148-9). Mansfield, who had commissioned the dramatization himself and who played Jekyll and Hyde to great acclaim, had to defend himself against accusations of sensationalism and repeatedly emphasized the moral stance of his performance. According to his early biographer Paul Wilstach,

[h]e foresaw not only his opportunity to project a powerful performance on the stage, but the ethical effect of the noble moral which underlies this fable of the struggle between good and evil in man and the inevitable control of the good by the evil if experimented with instead of being firmly curbed in the beginning. (143-4)

Thomas Russell Sullivan's dramatization of Stevenson's story was originally staged in Boston on 9 May 1887, and the London première was on 4 August 1888. Stevenson approved of the version (which he could not attend due to failing health), although it significantly changed his original story. Most striking among these alterations is the introduction of two female characters, Dr Jekyll's fiancé Muriel Carew and the barmaid Ivy Pearson, who becomes the focus of Hyde's attentions. Since his fiancé is the daughter of Danvers Carew, Hyde's most prominent victim, the figure of Jekyll is also significantly younger than in the novella, where he is just over fifty. This extension of the cast, together with the emphasis on the moral effect of the tale of the struggle of good versus evil, show the obvious debt of this dramatization to the melodramatic model which is made use of here in order to turn Stevenson's shilling shocker into suitable material for the Victorian stage. While this significantly reduces the complexity of the multi-perspectival narrative, it proves a perfect vehicle to convey the moral message of the tale in no uncertain terms.

Melodrama is one of the mainstays of nineteenth-century dramatic production and certainly the Victorians' favourite genre. Melodrama always has a moral agenda, and it also functions along the lines of a cultural logic. According to David Mayer, melodrama



is a theatrical or literary response to a world where things are seen to go wrong [...]. Melodrama tries to respond with emotional, rather than intellectual, answers to a world where explanations of why there is pain and chaos and discord are flawed or deeply and logically inconsistent [...]. It offers [...] emotional satisfactions and emotionally validates the factual world as [spectators] experienced it. For such spectators it is helpful and reassuring to depict a world which may be explained in comparatively simple terms of good and evil. (148)

The melodramatic model thus contributes to the re-fashioning of Stevenson's eerie shilling shocker into a tale conveying a general moral message and a workable knowledge about the psychical make-up of man. By means of the visual arrangement of the audience living through this (allegedly eternal) conflict together, it also contributes to a moral and emotional mobilisation of the spectators, fashioning them into an affective community.

Both Rouben Mamoulian's film version of 1931 with Fredric March, Miriam Hopkins and Rose Hobart, and Victor Fleming's star cast version of 1941 with Spencer Tracy, Lana Turner and Ingrid Bergman are based on Sullivan's script and thus make use of the melodramatic formula in order to present their version of the tale of the two forces in man. I will here focus on Mamoulian's version, which is by far the most experimental and original of the three. Different from Stevenson's text, where Jekyll is introduced as a respected member of Victorian society ("M.D., D.C.L., LL.D., F.R.S., &c.", Stevenson, 13), the melodrama shows him to be a young aspiring doctor who is still trying to find his place, not only by marrying the daughter of a general and thus forging homosocial bonds with the upper echelons of London society, but also by doing charity work in hospital and of course by pursuing his scientific research. The melodrama thus also introduces a generational dynamics into the narrative. Setting the action in Victorian times projects the strictures of decorum which keep Dr Jekyll from marrying his beloved as soon as he wishes, and the arbitrary paternal authority by which Muriel's father Danvers Carew postpones the wedding, into a past whose labelling as 'Victorian' suggests both sexual prudery and patriarchal despotism. "Carew has become the archetypal disapproving Victorian patriarch, and when Hyde attacks him at the end of the film he can be seen as attacking Victorian patriarchy itself" (Barefoot, 89). Despite the overall reactionary frame, the film thus voices criticism of the social constraints which – already in Stevenson's version – instigate the split-

ting off of the alter ego in the first place. All melodrama versions of the story elaborate on this constellation and thus cast sexual repression (labelled as 'Victorian') as the reason and prime motivation for Jekyll's experiment. As his desire to marry his bride is thwarted by the veto of the patriarch, his energy is turned toward the experiment which will bring forth Mr Hyde. Hyde, thus liberated from decorum, turns his first steps in "freedom" towards the music hall where he encounters Ivy Pearson, a barmaid with a big heart but somewhat loose morals.

The introduction of this second female figure also caters to the conventions of the melodramatic genre. Double plot constructions are typical for comedy and Victorian melodrama, and they introduce a class aspect to the action. Under the conditions of the split personality, this constellation positions Jekyll in two places and thus implicitly makes a point about Victorian double standards.

On the level of film aesthetics, Mamoulian's movie translates characteristic features of melodrama, e.g. the use of tableaux, into the language of film. Tableaux had been "the master-convention of melodrama's visual semiotics" since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. "Tableaux typically mark the end of the acts and sometimes also appear in their middle. Suddenly the dramatic action stops, and the acting bodies freeze into a static pictorial composition" (Williams, 208, cf. also Tönnies, 56). Thomas Elsaesser calls this "narrating by showing" (2002, 81, "Erzählen durch Zeigen"): Interrupting the flow of the action, tableaux provided moments of emotional condensation which mobilised the moral judgement and empathy of the spectators. In the melodramatic film versions of the Jekyll and Hyde-story, they re-appear in the form of close-up shots focussing on the faces of the main protagonists. Close-ups had been a prominent feature of silent film; in the transfer to the film melodramas of the 1930s, they assume an emblematic function, which also highlights the face's function as a *pars pro toto* for the entire human subject. Béla Balázs even speaks of a restoration of humanity, of the "body becoming unmediated spirit, spirit rendered visible, wordless" (9) through the expressions of face and gesture in (silent) film. In this (more philosophical than technical) vein, the close-up for him stands for the anthropological truth the new technology of the moving image was able to visualise.

The technique of close-up as it was used in early film also harked back to pre-cinematic visual practices in popular culture (for instance in freak-shows), where it was used in order to create horror effects. The

early ‘cinema of attractions’ staged grotesque or simply foreign faces as physiognomic landscapes to provoke reactions of wonder, terror or fascination (Kessler 73–5), and in doing so it of course also made an anthropological point about norms of humanity. In the melodramatic uses of the close-up, especially in the Jekyll and Hyde-story, these legacies seem to come together: the visualised faces function as projection screens of the emotional and moral issues of the story, as “allegorical masks” (Coates, 21) carrying quasi-universal meanings. While the ‘good’ visages provide almost poetic visions of wholeness, all the drama condensed into one frame (Balázs, 37), the faces of the villains (Cesare in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* provides a paradigmatic example here, but also Hyde) tap into the old horror aesthetic (Kaes, 156–74). For the spectators to watch, with their own eyes, the transformation of the one into the other, provided the ultimate vision of the duality of good and evil in man. In a deictic gesture of demonstration, the contemplated face could thus articulate an anthropological truth.

## 2. Two faces

The trust in physiognomic legibility is one of the characteristic features of melodrama, but still the reading of faces is not without its ambivalences. Despite its reliance on type, melodrama belabours the same fundamental question as the novel, i.e. “whether outer, visible appearance can be interpreted correctly to reveal inner, psychological or ethical truth” (Williams, 217). Carolyn Williams claims that

[t]he character-types of melodrama are recognizable at first sight and on first hearing, through their names, costumes, gestures, speech, and the music that accompanies them. [...] Melodrama is known for making these forms of recognition seem dependable, but the best English melodramas treat the genre’s supposed faith in visual recognition as a given and then work to complicate or undermine it. [...] The principle of physiognomic legibility is self-consciously acknowledged as a generic convention and is explicitly parodied, even early on. (206–7)

It comes as no surprise, then, that the faces of Jekyll and Hyde play a prominent role in the film narrative, not only as the driving force of the plot and its central moments showing the transformation, but also as an aesthetic vehicle of visually conveying notions of good and evil. The face, framed in mirrors or blown up in close-ups, provides the stage for an anthropological debate which pits individualization against socialisation, human weakness against moral idealism. Close-ups and mirrors,

together with a pronounced focus on the gaze of a social audience, serve as the visual means through which these allegedly universal conflicts are conveyed. In Mamoulian's film, mirrors appear as signatures of the duplex self that is the subject's default state, but which under 'normal' circumstances does not split up. They present an objectification of the internalised social gaze, as we watch Jekyll looking into the mirror, we witness his anticipation of the gaze of his students and fellow doctors. The look into the mirror shows to the subject his or her socially framed, respectable face that is turned toward the world, thus self-reflexively pointing to the necessity for face-fashioning, for mimic regulation or adjusting one's social mask.

Mamoulian's film opens with a first-person-sequence, a device that is very rarely used in film and which produces the effect of "being entrapped in someone else's body, of inhabiting a physical frame but not the soul, of detachment and isolation" (Broderick, 42). The tunnelled view through Jekyll's eyes ends with a gaze into a mirror, providing the viewers with a first glimpse of the protagonist (2:40–3:00). We watch Jekyll looking at himself; his gaze, as it were, is always already framed and produces the picture that the world wants to see of him, surrounded by the props of respectable masculinity and formed by social expectations. In fact, the scene is immediately followed by a lecture given by Jekyll, i.e. a situation in which he clearly stages himself as a scientist aspiring to a position in society. As the film narrative proceeds, mirrors always appear in situations where Jekyll and Hyde split into two separate persons, thus first making visible and then abandoning the integrated formation of homo duplex. Unsurprisingly, then, Jekyll's first transformation into Hyde takes place in front of a mirror in his laboratory. The scene links the techniques of close-up and the deictic use of the mirror and also gestures towards the horror aesthetics of silent film. In the course of this very long scene, we watch Jekyll watching himself change into Hyde (25:35–27:20). The beginning transformation is filmed without cuts, Jekyll's gaze remains on the mirror before it gets blurred by visions of earlier scenes, often in double exposure, which seem to explain the forces at work: Ivy's naked leg alternating with representatives of the establishment demanding that rules of decorum be kept ("it isn't done", 15:48, "positively indecent", 16:02). While his inner 'persona' emerges and acquires a face of his own, a dreamlike sequence envisions

Jekyll's psyche. The visions end when Hyde's face emerges in the mirror, welcoming his new visage with the interjection "free at last!" (27:53)

In the light of the melodramatic framing, which privileges moral certainty over psychological ambivalence, what does the face free of social pressure look like? Hyde's face in Mamoulian's version is rather animalistic: a prognathic mouth, very pronounced mandibles and large teeth, a fleeing forehead, large ears and deep eye sockets make this visage look like it sprung from a Lombrosian handbook of atavism. Mamoulian himself declared that he imagined Hyde as a Neanderthal man: "He is not a monster or animal of another species but primeval man, closest to the earth, the soil. When the first transformation takes place, Jekyll turns into Hyde who is the animal in him. Not the evil but the animal." (qtd in Bloom, 68) Not everybody was happy with Hyde's face, though. Karl Struss, the cinematographer, explained how the transformation was done technically and concluded:

I thought they made a bad mistake; the change from Jekyll to Hyde should have been largely a psychological one, with subtle changes only in the makeup. But they foolishly changed the hair and put false teeth in, and made him look like a monkey. That was terrible. (qtd in Bloom, 68)

The decision to provide Hyde with an "ape-like" (Stevenson, 22) face follows evolutionist readings of Hyde as an atavistic throwback. Linking evolutionary and psychoanalytic readings of the animal in man (after all, the film is from 1931, not 1886), sex takes centre stage. If this is the 'dark side' or 'other face' behind the respected gentleman's mask, the film's interpretation of the 'eternal struggle' clearly sees the control of sexual impulses at the core of the human subject, linking man's hidden animality and deepest desires. Repression here leads to aggression, and so the 'liberated' sexuality of Hyde takes a sadistic turn. The film's coupling of sexuality and evil constitutes a severe semantic reduction of the original text, where sex is never mentioned as motive for the experiment and, according to Stevenson, was never intended to be the centre of Jekyll's 'identity problem' in the first place: "The Hypocrite let out the beast Hyde – who is no more sexual than another, but who is the essence of cruelty and malice, and selfishness and cowardice: and these are the diabolic in man – not this poor wish to have a woman that they make such a cry about." (Stevenson, 86) In the melodramatic rendition of the personality split as a Freudian drama of repression, Hyde emerges as a sexual predator, and consequently, he turns his first steps in freedom

towards the music hall in which Ivy works as a barmaid. In the logic of both the conventional double plot and the split personality, Ivy functions as a freer and more accessible version of Muriel, her 'lower self' as it were, thus again identifying sexual repression and Victorian prudery as the central forces behind the rupture.

While Jekyll struggles to contain his desires (both sexual and scientific), Muriel becomes the focus of his longings and also his saving angel. The film version of the story suggests that the projected marriage with Muriel would have integrated ambition and desire and thus saved Jekyll. In an early scene in Mamoulian's film, the visual symbolisms of social gaze, close-up and mirror are joined in order to represent Jekyll's situation as paradigmatic of the human condition: Jekyll's efforts to lead Muriel away from a party at her father's house and tempt her to a secret tête-à-tête in the garden culminate in close-up shots of their faces. Time and place are suspended while they look into each other's eyes (11:30–13:32), in shot/counter-shot technique we move from her face to his face. In an intensification of the movement, the camera then zooms in to show only the eyes, first hers, then his. The accompanying dialogue may sound like conventional love talk but, in perfect sync with the filming, it assumes a symbolic significance. It starts with Jekyll asking her to "marry me now", claiming that "[my work has] opened a gate into another world". The camera cuts to her face when he claims "the unknown wears your face, looks back at me with your eyes" (13:13–16), the zoom on her eyes is accompanied by "be near me always" while her eyes fill up the pictorial space of the screen. Her face is the world to him, he sees himself in her eyes, and the world stops turning, if only for a short moment. The idyll is eventually disturbed by a delicately coughing servant who, at the instigation of Muriel's father, brings the couple back into the stifling embrace of society (whose controlling gaze is visualised rather unsubtly in the form of an old lady looking through a lorgnon on the left hand side of the frame, 14:40) Although the coordination of text and image follows the demands of continuity editing, the tableau-like mise-en-scène charges the moment with an almost allegorical significance. Mirror and close-up are brought together here: the other's face ideally functions as a mirror of the self, who sees himself in her eyes and through her eyes. However, since the rules of decorum forbid an early marriage and thus the fulfilment of his desire to encounter the un-

known other in the beloved's face, Jekyll will hitherto see the unknown in the form of his own face turned 'other'.

It is thus no coincidence that desire is the agent which transforms Jekyll into Hyde. One of the last of his increasingly uncontrolled transformations happens when he sees Muriel from outside through the windowpanes of her drawing room, enters with the obvious intention of abducting her, and in the ensuing brawl kills her father. Fleeing from the scene to his laboratory, he takes his potion one last time, pursued by his fellow doctor, Lanyon, who is in the know about the transformation. Under the pressure of being trapped, he turns again into Hyde, not least because the ape-like creature is better adapted to flight. He tries to escape monkey-fashion, up the shelves and through the windows and is eventually shot by a police inspector. Since Jekyll is his own enemy, the conflict can only be resolved by his demise. The death scene provides a last close-up, in profile this time, which shows the re-transformation of the soul-less Hyde ("I have no soul", 1.23:24) into the 'good' Dr Jekyll. This melodramatic re-claiming of the hero into the ranks of the good goes against the sense of the literary original, where the butler Poole and Utterson look into "the face of Edward Hyde" and stand in front of "the body of a self-destroyer" (Stevenson, 39). The final re-transformation into Jekyll is necessary, however, to meet melodrama's demand for a restorative ending, promising redemption even to the chief of sinners. All melodramatic versions of the story end with the 'death mask' of Dr Jekyll picturing the restoration of his soul. The fact that he pays for his hubris and pride with his life seems to free Jekyll from the sins he has committed in the shape and with the face of Hyde. Moral responsibility is here subordinated to the grace of a higher agency, whose closure-restoring power is visualized through the redeemed visage of Dr Jekyll.

### **3. Conclusion: And the moral of the tale...**

Melodrama is a moralizing genre. Through its re-framing in the melodramatic formula and the concomitant introduction of a normative perspective, Stevenson's multi-perspectival narrative has gained a moral, but at the expense of semantic ambiguity. At the core of the tale of two faces that Stevenson's story has thus become is still Dr Jekyll's experimentally proven claim "that man is not truly one, but truly two" (Stevenson, 48). However, only in theatrical performance and visual media,

on stage or on film, do the protagonists' faces actually become the signature feature of the two persons that should have remained one. The tale that is envisaged by means of the two faces provides a truth and a warning: in Mansfield's words, this "fable of the struggle between good and evil in man" dramatically demonstrates "the inevitable control of the good by the evil if experimented with instead of being firmly curbed in the beginning." (Wilstach, 143–4) The 1931 melodrama-version thus focuses on self-control as the necessary self-technique to keep evil drives at bay. By linking animality, aggression and sexual desire in its personification of the dark side of the respectable gentleman, it normalises repression and self-discipline as the agents producing a 'good' subject. The massive difference between the faces of Jekyll and Hyde, which here follow a physiognomic logic of the good and evil countenance, and rely on evolutionist models of the undisciplined, animalistic side of the good subject, is thus also an effect of the reception of the story in a climate of cultural anxiety, for which melodrama promises to provide a satisfactory (if simple) solution.

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## **Part III: Fairy Tales Revisited**



# **‘The Gold Standard’ of Victorian Fairy Tales**

## **John Ruskin’s “The King of the Golden River” (1841/1850) and Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” (1859/1862)**

*Ulrike Dencovski*

Early in the nineteenth century, Sir Walter Scott proposed “a story on the origin of popular fiction, and the transmission of popular tales from age to age,” to explain why “such fictions, however wild and childish,” continued to “possess such charms for the populace” (188, note to l. 345).<sup>1</sup> The ‘popular fiction’ Scott refers to centrally includes the fairy tale, and the explanation given for his interest in this literary mode and its continuing ‘popularity’ with a broad readership despite its professed ‘literary inferiority,’ epitomises the ambivalence of nineteenth-century responses to the fairy tale (cf. Hillard, 1). It shows how the fairy tale was closely connected to the emergence of a similarly disputed concept of ‘popular culture’ in the nineteenth century: its association with the nostalgia of an idealised, pre-industrial, quasi-mythic folk culture as (seemingly) opposed to an industrial, urban mass culture on the one hand, and its consideration as ‘the other’ of a (literary) ‘high’ culture on the other hand (cf. *ibid.*, 1–9).<sup>2</sup>

The two fairy tales discussed in this chapter, Christina Rossetti’s narrative poem “Goblin Market” (written 1859 and first published 1862) and John Ruskin’s prose narrative “The King of the Golden River” (written 1841 and first published 1850) can be described as ‘popular tales’ in this kind of sense: The pre-industrial ‘communities’ they describe and their literary indebtedness to fairy legend associate them with a folk culture which allows for a nostalgic escapism from industrialised urban

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<sup>1</sup> Scott makes this comment in a note to Canto Fourth of his narrative poem “The Lady of the Lake” (1810), which marked the pinnacle of his popularity as an author. The Romantics, with their programmatic idealisation of Imagination and childhood consciousness, adopted a key position in the comparatively belated literary institutionalisation of the fairy tale in England, which had its peak around the middle of the nineteenth century (cf. Feldmann & Tetzeli von Rosador, 253–4).

<sup>2</sup> For a historical discussion of the diverse concepts of ‘popular culture’ in the nineteenth century, negotiated through contested discourses on ‘folk’ and/vs. ‘mass culture’, as well as ‘high’ vs. ‘low’ vs. consumer culture, cf. Feldmann & Krug 2016 and forthcoming.

culture,<sup>3</sup> and their literary origins as allegedly accidental children's stories potentially question their literary 'value.'<sup>4</sup> At the same time, their broad reception by Victorian readers, not least indicated by their profitable circulation in the Victorian literary market, indicates their function as cultural capital on the one hand, and as economic capital on the other.<sup>5</sup> Their different critical reception in twentieth- and twenty-first-century academia furthermore shows that canonisation and popularisation do not necessarily contradict each other: Whereas Ruskin's "The King of the Golden River" has a rather 'apocryphal' status compared to his otherwise canonised writings, Rossetti's "Goblin Market," while continuing to be popular(ised),<sup>6</sup> has become one of the most frequently discussed Victorian poems over the past thirty years.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Fairy legends by both Celtic and English authors were repeatedly reprinted, retranslated and retold as children's books or 'cheap' publications throughout the nineteenth century and as such provide important pre-and intertexts for Victorian fairy tales (cf. Hillard, 15). While Ruskin's "King" is more explicitly associated with German folk tales (cf. Rahn, 2), Rossetti's "Goblin Market" draws on her cousin Anna Eliza Bray's early ethnography *Traditions, Legends, Superstitions, and Sketches of Devonshire* (1838), an anthology that reprinted some of Bray's tales, one of which ("A Peep at the Pixies") presumably inspired "Goblin Market's" first title, "A Peep at the Goblins" (cf. Maxwell, 89).

<sup>4</sup> John Ruskin wrote "The King" in 1841 for his distant relative Effie, a thirteen-year-old girl Ruskin would later marry. That his only fictional prose narrative was not published until 1850 suggests his reluctance to 'go public' with the fairy tale (cf. Rahn, 1). This is also implied by the publisher's advertisement of the tale: "The King of the Golden River was written [...] at the request of a very young lady, and solely for her amusement, without any idea of publication" (qtd. in Ruskin Vol. I, 310); Christina Rossetti similarly dismissed "Goblin Market" as a fairy story just to be taken as it came, rather than a parable soliciting deep exegesis (qtd. in Tucker, 117). In Rossetti's case, this 'depreciation' of 'literary value' is importantly connected to the gendered conceptions of authorship and genre in the Victorian period (cf. Easley, 166–8). As Molly Hillard notes, to publish "Goblin Market" as the title poem of her first book collection of poems [...] may have had to do with [...] Rossetti's need to be taken seriously" as an "authorial agent" (165).

<sup>5</sup> The moral didacticism of both fairy tales, as a narrative form consumed as a family entertainment in the nineteenth century, arguably makes them feed into an Arnoldian understanding of 'culture' as a means of 'civilisation' and potential 'cure' for a more and more influential commodity culture, which they were however centrally part of: Both tales circulated successfully and profitably at their time (cf. Coyle, 85; Campbell, 393–4), reflecting fairy tales' integral participation in Victorian print media and its increasingly commodified literary market. (cf. Hillard, 14)

<sup>6</sup> For a publishing history of "Goblin Market," which is importantly also a history of the poem's popularisation as connected to its visual legacy, consider Kooistra, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> No less than 118 critical contributions have been published on Rossetti's narrative poem within the last thirty years, whereas Ruskin's fairy tale received considerably less academic attention (15 contributions over the last fifty years) (see the entries in the *MLA International Bibliography*).

As this article argues, both tales' typical gesture towards a nostalgic turn away from Victorian industrial, commercial, urban, or, more broadly speaking, capitalist culture, is counterpoised by their negotiation of economic questions of their time. These powerful tales, I will show, engage in contemporary cultural concerns of an industrialised nation built on a capitalist economic system, both by serving as its 'other' and by being filled with 'economic reality.'<sup>8</sup> By doing so, they exemplify how the malleable mode of Victorian fairy tales "provided a language through which authors and artists came to understand, represent, and contribute to social and political issues of the day" (Hillard, 7).<sup>9</sup> I will trace the tales' engagements with a Victorian capitalist economy through a consideration of the financial resonances of gold, which features as a central fairy-tale motif in both texts and served an important as well as disputed function in nineteenth-century British economy and its increasingly refined financial system.

For most of the nineteenth century, the British financial system relied on a gold standard – both in the form of gold sovereigns and of bullion as a 'natural' storage of value against which the currency could be measured. Until later in the nineteenth century, when the discovery of new gold fields in California and Australia made other nations switch from a bimetallic to a gold currency, this secured the British economy priority compared to other industrialised nations in terms of the perceived reliability of their economy, and associated gold with progress, civilisation, and the power of the British Empire (cf. Alborn 1998, 252). The short period of time from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, in which the British economy had been off the gold standard,<sup>10</sup> was an

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<sup>8</sup> As Molly Clark Hillard suggests, "Folk narrative was ingrained in Britain's sense of itself as an industrial nation, its longing to view London and Edinburgh as civilized centers surrounded by 'wild and childish' rural regions and Celtic borders" (4), while at the same time being "steeped in the quotidian" (9).

<sup>9</sup> See also Frenk, 14–15. Victorian fairy tales tend to negotiate contemporary social issues by way of reflecting their distance from traditional, or 'unspoiled', conditions – a double perspective which for example becomes manifest in Ruskin's suppressed epilogue to "The King" (which was part of the manuscript but not printed until the tale's publication in Ruskin's collected works) as a narrative frame which includes a 'rationalising' adult perspective on fairy-tale material, albeit with an ironic distance (cf. Feldmann & Tetzeli von Rosador, 254).

<sup>10</sup> The time of the Bank Restriction (1797–1821) during which the Bank of England suspended cash payments and suspended the convertibility of paper money due to the outflow of precious metals (cf. Poovey, 8).

economically both turbulent and prosperous time and hence provided arguments for the importance of its re-installment – as decided in 1816 – while continuously questioning it (cf. Hilton, 126). In the Victorian period, anxieties about the relativity of value and gold's function as a disciplining force in the monetary economy and beyond found expression in the 1844 Bank Charter Act. It installed a rigid gold standard which subordinated bankers' note-issuing powers to the 'natural' check of bullion levels in the Bank of England (cf. Alborn 1998, 263). Furthermore, such anxieties figured in the second half of the nineteenth century through repeated recoinage debates in the face of the potential wearing down of gold sovereigns.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, the increasing acknowledgement of the double function of gold in Britain's monetary economy as simultaneously intrinsic and abstract, and hence *relative*, value can be read as a sign of a 'modern economic imagination' (cf. Alborn 2017, 428–9),<sup>12</sup> reflecting a monetary economy in which token money, whether in the form of coins or paper, gained considerably in importance (cf. Poovey, 2) and would finally take over.<sup>13</sup>

### 1. Liquid Gold: "The King of the Golden River"

Ruskin's fairy tale "The King of the Golden River" in many ways represents 'the other' of Victorian capitalist society: its pastoral setting describes a pre-industrial 'community' in "a secluded and mountainous part of Stiria" (313): The mythic "Treasure Valley" is owned by the three brothers Schwartz, Hans and Gluck, whose wealth is centrally constituted by the agrarian produce gained from this valley: "its crops were so heavy, and its hay so high, and its apples so red, and its grapes so blue, and its wine so rich, and its honey so sweet, that it was a marvel to everyone who beheld it and was commonly called the Treasure Valley"

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<sup>11</sup> "Because gold was a soft metal, it grew lighter as it passed from palm to palm [...] The questions of who should pay for recoinage, and by what means, arose first in the late 1860s and again 1884, before finally being resolved in 1891." (Alborn 1998, 254)

<sup>12</sup> Consider also Desan, 330–77.

<sup>13</sup> While the 'currency school,' which argued for the application of a gold standard, attracted most mainstream economists and temporarily had the upper hand in Britain's monetary policy, the 'free banking' school led by joint-stock bankers kept arguing that competition among banks would be enough to keep credit under control. In the long run, nineteenth-century monetary policy reflected this trend: The 1844 Bank Restriction Act had little influence on new forms of credit that were starting to replace bank notes; the huge influx of gold from California and Australia after 1848 made a mockery of Bank Restriction, and the 1856 Companies Act relieved shareholders of unlimited liability (cf. Alborn 2010, 68–9).



(314.). It is this form of ‘natural’ wealth that the tale idealises and opposes with a capitalist logic of financial profit and growth as represented by the two older brothers Schwartz and Hans, who are tellingly called the “Black Brothers” (315). Their *laissez-faire* capitalism is described as exploitative, uncharitable and avaricious, and importantly epitomised by the “heaps of gold” it brings them:

They killed everything that did not pay for its eating. [...] They worked their servants without any wages till they would not work any more, and then quarrelled with them and turned them out of doors without paying them. [...] They generally contrived to keep their corn by them till it was very dear, and then sell it for twice its value; they had heaps of gold lying about on their floors, yet it was never known that they had given so much as a penny or a crust in charity. (314)

Wealth in its monetary form here symbolises capitalist profit and is identified as a potential root of evil. This is in line with Ruskin’s moralised and pre-modern political economy, which relies on concepts such as intrinsic value and ‘just’ price, and attacks the liberty of *laissez-faire* capitalism with its stress on labour and exchange value.<sup>14</sup> In accordance with that, the two ‘Black Brothers’ lose all the wealth derived from exploiting land and workers through a natural disaster brought about by the West Wind (cf. 322–4) and set out with the last gold which is left them to make money as goldsmiths (cf. 325–6). The vicious ‘Black Brothers’ thus are ‘adequately’ transferred to the overtly capitalist gold trade situated in “the large city”, which, the tale implies, is “a good knave’s trade” that at least for some part seems to rely on forgery (326): As Schwartz suggests to his brother, “we can put a great deal of copper into the gold without anyone’s finding out” (ibid.). Gluck, as the morally virtuous brother (against his elder brothers’ prohibition he is charitable to the West Wind, when he looks for food and shelter, cf. 317–19), is restored to the ‘riches of the land’ of the agrarian idyll of the Treasure Valley: When the Black Brothers’ coppered gold fails to make enough money to cover their excessive drinking, Gluck has to melt their last golden item, his drinking mug, which turns out to have inhabited the enchanted and eponymous “King of the Golden River” (cf. 327–32). The King tells Gluck how the river, which illuminated by the evening sun

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<sup>14</sup> As Nicholas Shrimpton points out, Ruskin’s political economy is centrally indebted to eighteenth-century Physiocratic economics with its claim that all real wealth derives from the land and can be said to have found symbolic expression in “The King of the Golden River” (116).

looks “like a shower of gold” (314), can be turned into ‘real’ gold (cf. 332).<sup>15</sup> Other than his brothers, who, after a fight who is to go first, try their luck with the Golden River right away, Gluck first attempts to avert their insolvency with ‘hard work’: “Gluck went and hired himself to another goldsmith, and he worked so hard and so neatly and so long every day that he soon got enough money together” (340). It is only when the Black Brothers’ lack of charity and fear of God makes their missions fail (in their hands, the drops of holy water to be put in the river turn ‘unholy,’ and the brothers are turned into two black stones, cf. 335–44), that Gluck finally sets out himself (cf. 343–8): Unlike his brothers, he helps the three beings on his way to the river and is rewarded for his charity with ‘the gold of the river.’ Importantly, however, this ‘gold’ comes in the form of a river which newly fertilises the now barren Treasure Valley (cf. 347) and brings about a rich harvest: “his barns became full of corn and his house of treasure. And for him the river had, according to the dwarf’s promise, become a river of gold” (ibid.).

By identifying gold in its monetary form as a root of evil, the fairy tale’s morale establishes a capitalist Victorian economy as its ‘other.’ At the same time, this ‘moral accounting’ has the tale centrally engage with the capitalist logic of monetary economy: gold in its different shapes is installed as a standard against which virtue can be measured. It thus participates in the economic discourse’s conceptualisation of gold as a potentially redemptive substance, which culminated in the nineteenth-century (re-)instalment of the gold standard (cf. Alborn 2017, 428):<sup>16</sup> While Gluck’s reward may finally come as wealth of the land, the gold Gluck goes after to bring this about is the liquid gold of the river: “if that river were really all gold, what a nice thing it would be” (328). It is the risky journey to the ‘golden’ river, rather than his work at the goldsmith’s, which finally leads to Gluck’s happy ending. The way fortune is won, but also how it is lost, calls to mind the quick gains and losses investors experienced in the repeated financial highs and lows throughout the nineteenth century. These often coincided with bank pressures

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<sup>15</sup> The Greek myth of King Midas, who washes off the blessing-turned-curse to be able to turn everything he touches into gold in the river Pactolus (‘the golden river’), arguably serves as an Ancient pretext here: As Joachim Frenk points out, the deathly ‘Midas touch’ is a recurrent motif in Ruskin’s writing (cf. 80).

<sup>16</sup> Already throughout the eighteenth century, classical political economy (Adam Smith and his followers) supported gold’s ideologically central status by inserting gold into a story of progress and civilisation (cf. Hilton, 125–36).

and a consequent demand for convertibility to gold (cf. Poovey, 19–23), which in turn was bound up with discussions about the need and reliability of a gold standard as a potentially disciplining or limiting force (cf. Alborn 1998, 253). The unexpected and sudden blow the three brothers experience by the West Wind literally wipes away their fortune:

The water had gutted the whole first floor; corn, money, almost every movable thing, had been swept away, and there was left only a small white card on the kitchen table. On it, in large, breezy, long-legged letters, were engraved the words: South West Wind, Esquire. (324)

The fact that the West Wind leaves a ‘business card’ further emphasises the economic subtext of the catastrophe: Ruskin’s tale voices Victorian anxieties about the instability of monetary value, which were centrally connected to ‘the worth of gold’. They surfaced in the discussion of the gold standard’s power to regulate an inflationary printing of paper money and speculation, recoinage debates in the face of the regular depreciation of gold sovereigns (cf. Alborn 1998, 253–5), as well as more general fears of ‘home coinage’ and counterfeit money, as arguably reflected by the ‘Black Brothers’ coppered gold.

The tale’s engagement with debates about the stability of monetary value and the gold standard is also suggested by the way Gluck finds his fortune: by going across a high mountain pass after a ‘golden river,’ which may be associated with the mid-century gold discoveries in California and Australia.<sup>17</sup> In both cases the richest gold-beds were discovered in river-beds, the deep ravine formed by the Buckland River in Australia, and the bed of the Sacramento river lying behind the Rocky Mountains in California. Adventurers attracted by the gold rush took a high risk, and many died on their expedition, as do Hans and Schwartz in Ruskin’s tale. When Ruskin’s fairy tale describes “How Little Gluck Set Off on an Expedition to the Golden River, and How He prospered Therein,” it may be said to participate in an economic ideology which established gold as a producer and sign of civilisation and progress (cf. Alborn 1998, 252). While these newly discovered gold fields secured England’s central role in the gold trade, they also threatened the pre-eminence of England’s gold currency (cf. *ibid.*). Gluck’s ‘gold rush’ thus

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<sup>17</sup> Even if the composition of Ruskin’s tale predates these gold discoveries, 1850 readers of the tale may very well have been aware of this economic context. Furthermore, the gold fever had already started some years before the discoveries of these rich gold mines.

both feeds into Victorian anxieties about the supremacy and disciplinary force of gold and implies an economic awareness of the relativity of gold's value in an international financial network.

That Ruskin's fairy tale establishes liquid gold, or the liquefaction of gold, as a central motif (the brothers melt gold for a living, which Hans and Schwartz further turn into alcoholic liquids, the King of the Golden River constantly changes his shape,<sup>18</sup> and Gluck is rewarded through the 'liquid gold' of the river) thus can be read as an engagement with Victorian monetary economy and 'the magic' of modern money. Ruskin's tale on one hand negotiates Victorian anxieties about the instability of monetary value and, on the other hand, can be read as tying in with the 'modern' economic thought of a monetary economy that would rely on more and more abstract and volatile forms of value.<sup>19</sup>

## **2. The Worth of a Silver Penny: "Goblin Market"**

As with Ruskin's "The King of the Golden River," the fairy-tale characteristics of Christina Rossetti's multi-layered narrative poem (its goblins and 'haunted' sites, its generic, rural setting and indistinct temporality) seem to position it as 'the other' of the economic and financial realities

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<sup>18</sup> The King of the Golden River first adopts the form of a mug and then is melted into a dwarf-like figure (cf. 329), which, when it takes leave, evaporates before Gluck's eyes (cf. 332; 347); on the brothers' expeditions to the Golden River he adopts the shape of an old man, a child, a dog, and Hans's ghost (cf. 335–46).

<sup>19</sup> One of the Grimm brothers' folktales, "Hans im Glück", seems to provide a relevant pre-text here: While, as Suzanne Rahn emphasises, Ruskin's fairy tale does not follow the plot of any specific Grimm tale, it employs "a basic folktale pattern and various folktale motifs" (2). Interestingly, the first English translation of the Grimm stories (*German Popular Stories*, 1823), which Ruskin was familiar with and to whose reprint in 1868 he would add an introduction, begins its selection of tales with "Hans im Glück", whose eponymous character shares his name with two brothers of Ruskin's fairy tale – Hans and Gluck (even if in the English translation the story is entitled "Hans in Luck"). Like Ruskin's "King", the Grimm tale centrally deals with the measurability and stability of material and financial value: While Hans's industriousness brings him financial reward – importantly in the form of precious metal (a big lump of gold in the German original) – a series of barter in the end leaves him with nothing, but nonetheless happier for it (cf. 1; 9). Besides the implication that material riches may be a burden and the striving after them avaricious, the tale suggests Hans's lack of negotiating skills and economy. Precious metal is installed as measurer of value, whose final absence ironically distances Hans's 'luck', who is left with seven years' unpaid labour. While this may suggest a criticism of the volatility of (financial) value, it also can be read as an implicit argument for 'modern' forms of (token) money, which promise to provide value stability (as opposed to barter) without being a 'burden'.

of Victorian society. Like Ruskin's fairy tale, and in line with his ideal of economics as *oikonomos* or household management,<sup>20</sup> "Goblin Market" establishes an idealised agrarian and domestic economy in opposition to a potentially corruptive market economy, an opposition which, many critics have noted, is importantly gendered and sexualised.<sup>21</sup> Lizzie and Laura, the poem's female personae, represent a self-contained domestic economy. "[S]weet", "busy" and "[n]eat like bees" (l. 201), fetching honey, milking cows, baking cake, churning butter, whipping cream, feeding their poultry and keeping their house (cf. ll. 203–8), they establish "a busy but cosy scene of production [...] divorced from a sense of the market" (Menke, 118), and apparently antithetical to the "Goblin Market" and its "queer" "merchant men" (l. 94; l. 70). The contact with this market, at least temporarily, corrupts the sisters' household economy as well as their moral and sexual integrity (cf. Holt, 52–4, Helsinger, 907, 928): Laura, who is the first to enter the "Goblin Market", suffers a physical decline (cf. ll. 277–80) and, maybe even more importantly, cannot fulfil her household duties anymore (cf. ll. 293–6).<sup>22</sup> Lizzie, resisting the goblins as well as the demands of their market, suffers the goblins' violence (cf. ll. 397–407), but in doing so is able to restore Laura's health (and by implication innocence) (cf. ll. 538–43) as well as the sisters' 'household economy,' now as mothers and wives (cf. 545–8). Considering this, "Goblin Market" may be read as "a fairy tale [...] about surviving the perils and deceptions of the market through love for a sister and the ethical action that arises from this domestic tie" (Menke, 128).<sup>23</sup> The fact that "Goblin Market" highlights the historical as well as metaphorical connections between the household and the economy at the same time implies that the domestic and market economy (necessarily) intersect. As one of several critics who first situated "Goblin Market" in an

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<sup>20</sup> John Ruskin, among other nineteenth-century writers, emphasises in his economic writing that the source of economics is *oikonomos*. In "Unto This Last" (1860), he claims that "all true economy is 'Law of the house'" (113).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Campbell, 393–410; Helsinger, 903–33; Holt, 51; Maxwell, 84; Menke, 105, 128; Tucker, 120; Lysack, 140; Mendoza, 913; Hillard, 9–10, 159; Coar, 51–4.

<sup>22</sup> As Jill Rappoport notes, the poem gives more space to Laura's changing perspective toward work than it does to her failing body (cf. 92).

<sup>23</sup> The Christian ethics implied by Lizzie's rescue also have been read as responsive to the poem's 'economics' – either as providing a Christian alternative to commodity culture and its 'consumption' of female bodies (cf. Carpenter, 415–34), or as establishing an alternative (non-commercial) economics of giving in the tradition of Anglican sisterhoods (cf. Rappoport, 90–1).

economic context in the 1990s, Richard Menke posits, “[i]f the poem is a fairy tale [...], it is a remarkably political economic one” (128). While the focus of the increasing amount of economic readings in the poem’s rich critical legacy is on its interaction with Victorian commodity exchange and consumer culture,<sup>24</sup> I propose to consider how it speaks to the Victorian monetary economy through the recurrent motif of gold.

Gold (or the lack thereof) appears in its material form, as a precious metal, whose possession seems to determine the distribution of power in the goblin market: Laura’s lack of precious metal (“I have no coin; [...] / I have no copper in my purse, / I have no silver either / And all my gold is on the furze / That shakes in windy weather”, ll. 116–21) makes her pluck her golden lock as suggested by the goblins (cf. ll. 125–6). This brings about her physical and moral decline, symbolised by the loss of the gold of her hair (cf. l. 277), the marker of the sisters’ virtuous domestic ‘community’ before Laura is ‘corrupted’ by her interaction with the goblin market (“Golden head by golden head, / [...] / Like two wands of ivory / Tipped with gold for awful kings”, ll. 184–91). Fittingly, Lizzie’s resistance to the goblin market is described as her standing “white and golden” against the goblin assault (cf. ll. 408). Gold thus also fulfils an important symbolic function in the poem – as an abstract measurer of (moral) value (cf. Mendoza, 913–14).<sup>25</sup> Though gold is not found in a monetary form in “Goblin Market,” the poem can be said to negotiate gold’s paradoxical double identity as a simultaneously concrete and abstract form of value in a monetary economy which relies on a gold standard, both in the form of currency and bullion.

This is what may be at stake in the poem’s second moment of exchange: When she fears Laura’s decline to be lethal, Lizzie is done with her risk management and decides to enter the goblin market for her sister’s sake. Unlike her sister, she brings a silver penny to the market (“Then Lizzie weighed no more / Better and worse; / But put a silver penny in her purse”, ll. 322–4), which she ‘tosses’ the goblins in exchange for their fruit (l. 367). The sisters’ household economy’s interconnection with the capitalist market arguably becoming visible in this moment (as does the poem’s). It is epitomised by the only form of currency the poem

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<sup>24</sup> See footnote 19.

<sup>25</sup> Marx, Mendoza notes in his reading, describes gold’s function as seemingly intrinsic but arbitrary measurer of value as the capitalist fetishising of gold as ‘universal equivalent’ (cf. 924).

features.<sup>26</sup> Lizzie's silver penny, however, is not accepted as a currency by the goblin men (cf. ll. 439). As Victor Mendoza suggests, the 'mystery' of the silver penny's rejection by the goblin men as well as its unknown origin<sup>27</sup> may be explained as a condition of capitalism itself, in which the representativity of monetary form obscures origins and purposes by making everything interchangeable (cf. 928).<sup>28</sup> Considering nineteenth-century monetary economy, the silver penny's rejection further carries meaning regarding the early nineteenth-century depreciation of silver and an accordant distrust in its worth, which importantly led to the instalment of the British gold standard (as both coin and bullion):

an endemic silver shortage rendered gold as the only reliably available coin in the country. Gold, however, was too valuable to be divided into coins that could be used for most transactions, with the result that it took on a double life: tangible bullion and guineas, for international trade and big-ticket domestic purchases, and a unit of account against which token currency and bank notes were measured. (Alborn 2017, 428–9)

This may explain why Lizzie's possession of a silver coin does not seem to make a difference for the goblin merchant men who would prefer 'her gold' over silver or copper coins anyway.<sup>29</sup> However, as the recoinage debates in the second half of the nineteenth century show, gold was not exempt from the fate of potential depreciation – both due to 'wear and tear' as a light metal and because its arbitrary value as a monetary form became obvious through the mid-century gold discoveries (cf. Alborn 2010, 68). This relativity of gold's value as a currency may be said to be reflected in the depreciation and restorage of value of Laura's 'golden hair' (cf. l. 541). Furthermore, the absence of material gold as a currency may be read as a sign of the poem's reflection of the conditions of the Victorian monetary market: the nineteenth-century (re-)implication of the gold standard in the form of gold sovereign and bullion did not mean that gold would circulate as a currency in day-to-day commercial

<sup>26</sup> As Herbert Tucker points out, the penny "expose[s] the goblin traffic for what it is – a market" (126) and, as Victor Mendoza adds, it epitomises Lizzie's role as an agent in this capitalist market (cf. 930, 934; see also Menke, 127–8).

<sup>27</sup> Richard Menke even calls the indeterminacy of origin and purpose of the silver penny "the central mystery of the poem" (127).

<sup>28</sup> Jill Rappoport alternatively reads it as an economic but uncommercial sign of domestic labour and charity in the context of Anglican sisterhoods' maundy money as well as 'fairy money' (cf. 101; 99).

<sup>29</sup> See Rappoport, 100.

transactions, but rather serve as an abstract regulator of value (cf. Alborn 2017, 428–9). In light of this, the poem's two central transactions may be read as a clash of monetary regimes: While Laura and Lizzie represent a more 'modern' economic imagination that takes gold's double identity as both concrete and abstract form of value into account, the conditions of the goblin market take it to be a purely concrete form of value. Even before entering into a transaction with the goblins, Laura seems to be aware that her negotiating position is seriously affected by her lack of movable assets: She lacks any form of exchangeable currency, and 'all her gold' is fixed in the sisters' agrarian produce (ll. 116–21). The plucking of her 'golden lock' hence may also be considered as an offering of a symbolic representative of this gold fixed in her agrarian produce, while the conditions of the goblin market synecdochally take it to be 'the thing itself'. Lizzie, coming equipped with a coin representative of the sisters' fortune (the gold of their agrarian produce as well as the gold of their bodies), can significantly secure both (cf. ll. 533; 541). "Goblin Market" thus may be said to tie in with a 'modern' economic understanding of monetary value as a matter of representativity, in which gold serves as an abstract measurer of value, whose disciplining power was, however, increasingly questioned with the Victorian monetary system's shift from gold to paper (cf. Poovey, 2).

### **3. Conclusion: Fairy Gold and Monetary Economy**

As I have shown, both popular (fairy) tales are centrally structured around the motif and narrative topic of gold. This fairy gold possesses magical powers and typically serves the tales' moral didacticism – as an instigator of illicit desires, or, as a measurer of moral worth. While this implies a Christian morale in line with Ruskin's and Rossetti's 'value systems,' I have argued that the tales' narrative and motivic interests in fairy gold also suggest their engagement in central economic questions of their time: Their negotiation of gold's double identity as simultaneously intrinsic and arbitrary form of value is central to a Victorian monetary economy. This ties in with Victorian anxieties about the depreciation and volatility of value in general, and of gold more specifically. At the same time, the tales reflect on how 'modern' money works. Since they both ultimately insist on a 'gold standard' against which value is measured, their position in Victorian monetary economy can be aligned with the conservative, and often Evangelical, 'currency school' and its more fundamentalist approach to value, which towards the end of the



century would give way to a monetary market increasingly determined by 'free banking' and paper credit (cf. Hilton, 127–34; Alborn 2010, 68–9).

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# Revisiting the Bloody Chamber

## Transnational Bluebeard-Tales in Helen Oyeyemi's *Mr Fox* (2011) and Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak* (2015)

Susanne Gruss

Magic happens on the threshold of the forbidden.

(Tatar, 1)

### 1. Introduction: Bluebeards for the Twenty-First Century

In the forty years since its publication, Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) has not only generated bookshelves of academic scrutiny, but the collection of fairy tale re-visions has become the textual hub of what Stephen Benson has called "the Carter generation" (2) – a group of prominent twentieth-century authors including A. S. Byatt, Margaret Atwood and Salman Rushdie, whose works chime with Carter's in their particular approaches to the fairy tale. The collection's unique combination of tongue-in-cheek second-wave feminism and Carter's distinctive taste for lush sensuality and provocative sexuality has made it "that putative urtext of contemporary tale-telling" (2). In this chapter, I position the collection's title story as a paradigmatic Bluebeard-retelling that recalibrates the tale for the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. "The Bloody Chamber" is densely intertextual and generically hybrid. Published in the same year as Carter's infamous exploration of the depiction of femininity and female sexuality in the works of the Marquis de Sade, *The Sadeian Woman*, it partakes of her interest in pornography and borrows generously from *fin-de-siècle* art and culture as well as from (pulp) gothic romances. The generic self-awareness along with the re-visionary hybridity of this 'new' fairy tale also serve to explain the 'cult' status of "The Bloody Chamber" as a seminal version of the Bluebeard tale, which has since been retold in a great number of further iterations.

I will look at two very different recent rewritings of Bluebeard and his wives in order to highlight the evolving spectrum of transnational Bluebeard-tales, arguing that they take their cue either from Carter's text itself or from postmodern versions of the fairy tale like Carter's. Helen

Oyeyemi's *Mr Fox* (2011) is an intricate novel about a writer and his muse that is interwoven with a variety of tales, many of them variations of Bluebeard (both the canonical Perrault-version and other cultural variants such as the eponymous "Mr. Fox" of Oyeyemi's novel). Oyeyemi follows a feminist agenda that mirrors Carter's, but adds a transnational impetus inflected by postcolonial politics to her specific amalgamation of Bluebeard-variants. While *Mr Fox* is a 'literary' novel, Guillermo del Toro's feature film *Crimson Peak* (2015) is a self-consciously popular variation of Bluebeard, a glossy mix between gothic romance and horror film that capitalises on the audience's generic knowledge and expectations by adding slight twists to an overly familiar tale. Comparable to "The Bloody Chamber" and *Mr Fox*, del Toro's film is overtly intertextual, with visual references to classic gothic and horror films such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), another iteration of the Bluebeard-tale.

While Oyeyemi and del Toro have ostensibly created very different texts – they make use of different media, different production contexts, and address different audiences – *Mr Fox* and *Crimson Peak* share a number of characteristics that I will use to position them as successors of the "Carter generation" in the twenty-first century. Apart from their texts' intertextuality and generic self-awareness, Oyeyemi and del Toro are avowed fairy-tale enthusiasts who combine their predilection for this popular form with their culturally specific knowledge of other folklore traditions (Yoruba culture in the case of the former, Mexican in the case of the latter). Taken together, then, Oyeyemi and del Toro not only add topical transnational appeal to the Bluebeard-tale, but they reshape the tale by highlighting different aspects that critics have ascribed to Bluebeard-tales in the past – entertainment, an exploration of gender structures, and a commentary on the tales' specific socio-cultural contexts.

## 2. Bluebeards and Bloody Chambers

Fairy tales have long been accepted as a centrepiece of both an oral storytelling tradition and modern popular culture. Since the late twentieth century – and thus the time frame Benson marks as that of the "Carter generation" – fairy-tale criticism has been dominated by critics unpicking the ideological baggage of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century

fairy-tale ‘preservers’ like Charles Perrault or the Brothers Grimm<sup>1</sup> and by (predominantly feminist) rewritings by authors like Carter or Margaret Atwood.<sup>2</sup> Among the handful of tales that have proven their longevity via recurrent adaptations and appropriations on the one hand and instant recognisability on the other, Bluebeard and its cultural variants hold a special place. The plot of Bluebeard-tales such as Perrault’s “La Barbe bleue” (in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*, 1697), the Brother Grimm’s “Fitcher’s Bird” and “The Robber Bridegroom” (both in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, 1812–58) or its English equivalent, the folktale “Mr. Fox” (first recorded in Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, 1590) is quickly summarised: A young woman is seduced into marrying a dubious yet wealthy older man. Propelled by her husband’s prohibition and her own curiosity, she finds the mangled remains of her precursors or proof of her husband’s crimes (frequently in a forbidden room) and is rescued by male relatives or, rarely, manages to trick her murderous husband. Significantly, the Bluebeard heroines who save themselves do so by storytelling. In both “The Robber Bridegroom” and “Mr. Fox”, the prospective wife liberates herself by revealing the atrocities of the robber (a cannibal) and Mr. Fox (a serial wife murderer), respectively, to an audience who then punishes the Bluebeard figure. Unlike the countless fairy tales that end with a generic ‘happily ever after’, Bluebeard-tales explore the vicissitudes of married life or the dangers young women face on a ruthless marriage market only interested in the economics of making a good match. Bluebeard was popularised as an instantly recognisable literary stock character by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century stage adaptations (in melodramas and comic pantomimes), popular literature and illustrations as a blue-bearded, often orientalised wife-murderer.<sup>3</sup> Besides, Bluebeard elements are a staple characteristic of many classic gothic romances – Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), especially, has been read through the fairy-tale lens of “Blue-

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Jack Zipes’s Marxist analyses in *Breaking the Magic Spell* (1979) and *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (1991) or Marina Warner’s feminist *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1996), which paved the way for a new era of fairy-tale criticism in the 1990s.

<sup>2</sup> Bluebeard-motifs recur in a variety of texts by the Canadian writer.

<sup>3</sup> Hermansson (2009) covers the popularisation of Bluebeard extensively. See especially chapters 4 (“Bluebeard Takes a Turkish Turn”), 5 (“Cheap Thrills: Bluebeard in Chapbooks and Juveniles”), 6 (“Bluebeard on the Comic Stage”) and 7 (“Bluebeard in Victorian Arts and Letters”).

beard", "Beauty and the Beast" and "Cinderella".<sup>4</sup> While there is no definitive or authoritative version of the Bluebeard-tale, then, the variations are instantly recognisable and tied to each other by themes such as "curiosity, forbidden chambers, punishment, wife murder" (Hermansson, 3) and, I would add, storytelling.

Angela Carter was keenly aware of the broad range of the Bluebeard-spectrum. As translator of Perrault's "La Barbe bleue" (1977),<sup>5</sup> on which "The Bloody Chamber" is most obviously based, and later as editor of the *Virago Book of Fairy Tales* (1990), which includes "Mr. Fox", she was familiar with the variants of the Bluebeard-tale that are most diverse: The (unnamed) heroine of Perrault's "Bluebeard" is inexperienced, punished for her curious transgression with a stain that will mark her forever, and rescued by her brothers; Mary, the prospective wife of "Mr. Fox", is a self-confident and sexually experienced woman who decides to inspect Fox's castle before the wedding because she distrusts his refusal to show her around, and uses her story-telling skills in front of the whole village in order to convict the serial killer.

While "The Bloody Chamber" emulates the plot of Perrault's "Bluebeard" until the ending, when the heroine is saved by her pistol-swaggering mother and gets to enjoy a bourgeois happy ending with her blind (i.e. unable to exert the male gaze) second husband, critics have been quick to ascertain the story's more sustained feminist reworking of the Bluebeard mould.<sup>6</sup> A gothic setting and unusually graphic descriptions of the bodies of the narrator's predecessors (see Carter, 28–9)

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<sup>4</sup> Maria Tatar ties *Jane Eyre* to the gothic romance, "Bluebeard", "Cinderella" and "Beauty and the Beast", arguing that Jane "makes a conscious effort to stop playing Beauty to Rochester's Beast, and she seems, from the start, ill at ease in the role of Bluebeard's wife" (71). Several critics have followed Tatar's lead: Anderson compares *Jane Eyre* to "Bluebeard" and "Cinderella"; Pyrhönen positions *Jane Eyre* as "a major reading" (7) of what she calls "the 'Bluebeard' tale cycle" (4), "Bluebeard", "The Robber Bridegroom" and "Fitcher's Bird"; and Campbell reads the novel as oscillating between "Bluebeard" and "Beauty and the Beast", the two fairy-tale paradigms that Jane has to negotiate.

<sup>5</sup> See Hennard, who explores Carter's translational politics in detail.

<sup>6</sup> A sizeable portion of Carter's initial critics were sceptical of the story's potential as a 'serious' feminist re-visioning. Sarah Gamble notes that early criticism demonstrates how the stories "can genuinely offend and alienate readers" (25). In a more recent reading, Kimberley Lau stresses that the complexity of cultural and theoretical discourses in the collection as a whole precludes simplistic readings and hypothesises that "it may be this very refusal to provide directions [...] that Carter's feminist critics most resent about *The Bloody Chamber*" (40).



are used to stress the imminent danger to the heroine's life (who, as a retrospective first-person focaliser, is simultaneously revealed as a survivor); wide-ranging intertextuality (Charles Baudelaire, Joris-Karl Huysmans and, perhaps inevitably, the Marquis de Sade) as well as a particular cultural location (the Marquis' taste in *fin-de-siècle* art, pornography and early-twentieth-century music, for example), and the tale's clever unhinging of the seemingly patriarchal dynamic of the Marquis' sadistic seduction of his wife and her masochistic subjugation – each of these elements has provided critics with seemingly endless material for critical dissections. I have argued elsewhere that Carter borrows generously from the popular gothic romance (see Gruss, 201–9) and, importantly, taunts her readers with a narrator who is suspiciously self-aware of the generic structures her tale engages with. While the reader is “pulled into the flow of the lush, erotic, rhythmic prose” (Lokke, 8) and easily seduced by the cleverly crafted sensuality of the language,<sup>7</sup> Carter's narrator repeatedly signals her own detachment from this tale via an ironic stance that critics have frequently ignored. As a versatile manipulator of language, the narrator stylises herself as an innocent gothic heroine readers can empathise with – and as the beautiful masochistic victim to a pornographic gaze readers are forced to exert themselves while reading the tale. And yet, occasional sly remarks betray the narrator's knowledge of the generic conventions Carter tweaks for her own narrative purposes: Jean-Yves, the piano tuner, is “blind, of course” (23), and *cannot* subject her to the male/pornographic/patriarchal gaze; when she wants to phone her mother for help “the line, of course, was dead” (30) – a shorthand for the climactic moment of countless gothic novels and horror films in which the heroine is left isolated and has to fend for herself; and after her husband's death she inherits, “of course, enormous wealth” (40). Despite her hasty depiction of various charitable activities – the narrator “felt [she] had a right to retain sufficient funds to start a little music school” – she, her mother and Jean-Yves “do well enough” (40). The bloody chamber has been emptied and sealed (see 40). It thus *remains* a forbidden space which now, symbolically, harbours her husband's crimes as well as the narrator's own, which have been cleverly obfuscated by a triumphant feat of reader disorientation.

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<sup>7</sup> Caroline Webb convincingly analyses the language of the tale, noting that “not only the narrative but the phonetic movement of the story seduces the reader into an engagement with sensuality that it then reveals as deeply disturbing” (199).

### 3. Mr Fox, His Wife and His Muse: Literary Love Triangles in *Mr Fox*

If Carter's preoccupation with the fairy tale in *The Bloody Chamber* and other works has made her the most prominent creator of late twentieth-century fairy-tale rewritings in general and the Bluebeard-tale in particular, then Helen Oyeyemi may be about to take over this baton for post-millennial British literature. The Nigerian-born writer has published two plays, a short story collection and six novels to date. One predominant characteristic of her texts so far is a careful intertwining of Yoruba culture, gothic literature – *Icarus Girl* (2005) and *White Is for Witching* (2009) have been read as examples of the postcolonial gothic<sup>8</sup> – and fairy-tale elements, combined with a postcolonial feminist gist. Like Carter, Oyeyemi knows the fairy-tale canon. Miranda, one of the protagonists of *White Is for Witching*, reads “Grimm’s *Fairy Tales*. Perrault, Andersen, LeFanu, Wilkie Collins, M.T.A. Hoffman [!]” (pos. 2538), *Mr Fox* runs circles around the Bluebeard-tale, *Boy, Snow, Bird* (2014) is a grim retelling of “Snow White”, and *Gingerbread* (2019) is partly inspired by “Hansel and Gretel”. And while Oyeyemi lists Marina Warner, Margaret Atwood, and Anne Sexton as her specific Bluebeard-inspirations (see 2011, 325), I would argue that *Mr Fox* is also an apt appropriation of Carter’s “Bloody Chamber” for the postcolonial politics of the twenty-first century.

I have already highlighted the importance of storytelling in some variants of Bluebeard and in “The Bloody Chamber”, and Oyeyemi’s *Mr Fox* is another case in point. Taking its cue from the English folktale “Mr. Fox” – the only Bluebeard-tale in which the heroine (Lady Mary) chooses her lover voluntarily (see Anderson, 114) – Bluebeard-elements abound in the novel, which wears self-conscious intertextuality and overt literariness on its sleeve. The title references Bluebeard’s folktale predecessor, which reverberates through the novel. The main protago-

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<sup>8</sup> Diana A. Mafe points out that in *Icarus Girl*, “postcolonial and feminist priorities ultimately meet and manifest in the Gothic genre” (23). For *White Is for Witching* see Helen Cousins, who argues that Oyeyemi “embellishes her gothic novel with cultural aspects of her Yoruba heritage, introducing a different field of gothic horrors” (2012, 49), and Illott, who reads it as an example of “postcolonial gothic that is concerned with the former colonial centre” (54). Bianca Tredennick reads *White Is for Witching* as an example of post-modern gothic literature, arguing that it is characterised by “the slippage between the multifaceted monsters in Oyeyemi’s text and the multifaceted monstrosity of Oyeyemi’s text” (169; italics in original).

nists are the misogynist writer St John Fox and his imaginary, but increasingly solid muse Mary Foxe (directly related, she quips, to John Foxe, the author of *The Book of Martyrs*, 1563). Together they embark on a literary competition in which they take turns as storytellers. The first story told by Mary, “be bold, be bold, but not too bold”, takes its title from the warning the folktale’s Lady Mary encounters when she starts investigating her future husband’s mansion. “Mr. Fox”, its literary *doppelgänger*s and echoes are further referenced throughout the text – Mary’s second story is called “fitcher’s bird”, unfolding the story of a fairy-tale obsessed florist (named Miss Foxe) who is courted by a man called Fitcher and has him decapitate her on their last date because she misguidedly hopes for a fairy-tale transformation. The tale, of course (I am tempted to say), adds bleakly: Fitcher “knew that this awkward, whispering creature before him should now transform into a princess [...]. That is not what happened” (Oyeyemi 2011, 80). Much more bluntly than Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber”, “fitcher’s bird” emphasises the mutual complicity of men and women in a patriarchal fairy-tale logic that is based on female submission.

Other Bluebeard-variants are mentioned in passing. Daphne, St John’s third and deeply unhappy wife, hosts a dinner party strongly reminiscent of Atwood’s “Bluebeard’s Egg” (see Oyeyemi 2011, 137–44), and has an extended conversation with her friend Pizarsky, who, she has to assure herself, is “not Bluebeard? Or Reynardine?”, only for him to retort, “Nor Fitcher, no” (267). Pizarsky then recapitulates “Fitcher’s Bird” as well as “Mr. Fox” (“The usual – wooing, seduction, then – the discovery of a chopped-up predecessor. But the heroine, Lady Mary –” 270–1). *Mr Fox* is, ultimately, a meta-text about artistic invention in which echoes of Bluebeard rebound endlessly, driving home Mary Foxe’s feminist point that stories do cultural work by consolidating patriarchal power structures.

Women, in St John’s novels as in the stories closer to the beginning of St John’s and Mary’s storytelling competition, have a tendency to die unsolicited, gruesome deaths, and while he maintains that “[i]t’s all just a lot of games” (5), the muse accuses the writer of being “a serial killer” (4) who “is building a world” (140) that legitimises the ongoing victimisation of women. Mary’s storytelling competition is intended to make St John aware of his authorial misdeeds and reform him into a better writer and, by implication, a better man. While the authorship of the

stories interspersed into the frame narrative (which delineates the story-telling competition and dissects St John's failing marriage to Daphne) is clear at first, both the narrative voices of Mary and St John and the references to the Bluebeard mould, which sets the plot in motion, become less pronounced as the story progresses and eventually fade away by the end of the novel. The stories additionally break the initially clear-cut demarcations between frame narrative and embedded narratives. Pizarsky, for instance, is at first a character in one of Mary's stories, only to be hijacked by St John for a story in which he makes fun of what he perceives as Mary's naïve romanticism ("A blue-eyed poet with some stories, a good line in wry humility and some English as a second language bullshit... is that all it takes to turn you fickle these days?", 72), and he is eventually revealed as Daphne's friend. Several characters in embedded stories bear the names of St John and Mary, confusing reader and protagonists alike. And Mary, the immaterial muse who has to materialise at St John's behest, gains in independence from the writer, who tries in vain to control her: she becomes visible to Daphne (and inspires her to start a writing career of her own) and eventually goes exploring, leaving St John and his estranged wife to their own devices. Moreover, the stories are increasingly wide-ranging, expanding in geographical and cultural scope, "continually drawing the readers' attention to the constructed nature of the texts and the abundance of metafictional frames and alternative perspectives" (Radford, 199).

At the same time, *Mr Fox* is invested in exploring the possibility of love in a patriarchal and postcolonial world that is based, as Claire Louise Radford has convincingly argued, on "a postcolonial feminist ethic of encounter" (194) drawing on different cultural traditions of telling tales. Yoruba culture haunts the protagonist of "like this", who is urged by the ghosts of her Yoruban ancestors to "Tell the stories. Tell them to us. We want to know all the ways you're still like us, and all the ways you've changed." (Oyeyemi 2011, 105). "hide, seek" makes use of an Egyptian setting for a magical realist cross-cultural fairy tale without a happily ever after. And "my daughter the racist" turns to contemporary politics by exploring the possibility of female rebellion in a chauvinistic Muslim society under occupation by foreign soldiers. What these stories share is an increasingly pressing exploration of love and compassion as an encounter with an other who must be accepted in his/her/their otherness.

Love, in *Mr Fox*, is complicated, dangerous, and hurtful. The transcultural couple in “like this” (a Yoruban woman and an Englishman) can only be together in their shared tomb, but their bleak ending bears a spark of hope when “in the darkness they learnt to waltz” (110). A fictional alter ego of Mary Foxe has become so paranoid about men and the power they wield over women that a spectral version of Daphne has to assure her that the St John Fox in “what happens next” is not, in fact, a wife-murdering Bluebeard, but a good man willing to love her (see 199–200).

This quest for accepting the other in order to find love is most clearly spelled out in the final story, “some foxes”, made up of two very loose adaptations of “Little Red Riding Hood” that throw into stark relief the strangeness and wonder of love in the face of the (ultimate) other: it showcases a love between a human girl and a fox lover that becomes possible when both embrace the necessity of communication and develop a shared language and a mutual sexuality based on their difference (see 323), allowing them to share a life. Oyeyemi’s postcolonial investment in the transformative power of story-telling and the acceptance of otherness, which is not contained by a closed plot but defies “a realist construction of moving from ‘not knowing’ to ‘knowing’, from disorder to order” (Radford, 201), also allows me to return to Angela Carter. Like Carter, whose stories of human-animal relationships and transformations are a central part of *The Bloody Chamber* and include variations of “Beauty and the Beast” (“The Courtship of Mr Lyon” and “The Tiger’s Bride”) as well as “Little Red Riding Hood” (“The Werewolf”, “The Company of Wolves” and “Wolf-Alice”), Oyeyemi explores the possibility of a love that must ultimately remain utopian. Her love between fox/man and woman (like Carter’s between wolf/man and woman) is set beyond the constraints of the patriarchal and postcolonial world we still inhabit. If Carter radically deconstructs “the oppressive constraints on thinking and writing [...] sex and desire even as she recuperates the possibility of both” (Lau, 11) for the 1970s, Oyeyemi certainly does the same for the noughties. While both writers’ visions remain, essentially, fictional, their focus on the loving acceptance of otherness provides a hopeful glimpse into the future of Bluebeard’s wives.

#### 4. Visualising Bloody Chambers: Crimson Peak, a Canary, and a Female Bluebeard

Like Oyeyemi, whose postcolonial stance infuses her transnational Bluebeard with Yoruban culture and a magical realist viewpoint that rejects Western conventions of storytelling, Guillermo del Toro has repeatedly been characterised as a transnational filmmaker.<sup>9</sup> The Mexican director, producer and screenwriter has directed both big budget Hollywood blockbusters and Spanish-speaking arthouse productions that tend to be transnational co-productions,<sup>10</sup> creating “his own individual vision somewhere in between geographical spaces, genres, and production models” (Tierney, Shaw & Davies, 2). In his most recent films *Crimson Peak* and the Oscar-winning *The Shape of Water* (2017), del Toro has combined the arguably more intellectual attitude of his Spanish-speaking films with the bigger budget of his US-American productions. He describes *Crimson Peak* “as his first English-language Spanish film, a conjoining of his two cinematic identities – the poetic, dark, fairy-tale sensibilities of his more intimate Spanish-language work with the sweep and scale of his Hollywood movies” (Salisbury, 158). At the same time, del Toro has garnered a standing in fairy-tale studies that clearly mirrors that of Carter for literature. *Pan’s Labyrinth* (2006) in particular, set partly in a dark fairy-tale world which recalls the atrocities of civil war-Spain, “bears comparison to Angela Carter’s treatment of fairy tale conventions and traditions in *The Bloody Chamber*” (Bacchilega & Rieder, 34).<sup>11</sup> Where Carter uses the fairy tale to reflect on twentieth-century gender relations, del Toro employs the film’s fairy-tale elements as “an alternative and sometimes horrific form of representing the (historical) reality” around his main protagonist (Tierney, Shaw & Davies, 175). And like Carter, the fairy tale polymath, del Toro – “modern cinema’s No. 1 genre geek” (Scott, n.p.) – has accumulated a repository of fairy-tale, Gothic and horror knowledge that makes his films deeply intertextual.

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<sup>9</sup> One of the first collections of essays on del Toro’s works is called *The Transnational Fantasies of Guillermo del Toro* (cf. Tierney, Shaw & Davies).

<sup>10</sup> Del Toro’s Hollywood productions include two *Hellboy*-films (2004 & 2008) and *Pacific Rim* (2013). His feature-film debut *Cronos* (1993), *The Devil’s Backbone* (*El espinazo del diablo*, 2001) and *Pan’s Labyrinth* (*El laberinto del Fauno*, 2006) are among his critically acclaimed Spanish-speaking films.

<sup>11</sup> The film has also been linked to magical realism (see Lukasiewicz 2010, 78, who argues that with its “neomagical realism, *Pan’s Labyrinth* represents a powerful and innovative new genre.”).

While *Crimson Peak* was not marketed as a Bluebeard-tale, del Toro's seemingly sleek and conventional gothic horror is another apt update of Bluebeard for the twenty-first century that shows, in conjunction with Oyeyemi's novel, how flexible the tale is. Reviewers quickly picked up on the multi-faceted intertextuality of the film, which tells the story of the ill-fated marriage of innocent American heiress Edith Cushing (Mia Wasikowska) and impoverished English aristocrat Thomas Sharpe (Tom Hiddleston), whose sister (and lover) Lucille (Jessica Chastain) has killed Edith's predecessors and hidden their bodies in the cellar of the family mansion, Allerdale Hall, a literalised bloody chamber from which the red clay the Sharpes' floundering family fortune is built on oozes into the rest of the house. Peter Bradshaw detects "a tablespoon of Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* here, and a bucket of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, as filmed by Hitchcock" (2015, n.p.), implicitly tying *Crimson Peak* to Bluebeard via du Maurier's gothic. Mark Kermode connects it to the Brontës, Poe and Le Fanu (n.p.), and del Toro himself mentions the gothic canon as such as background material (he namedrops Radcliffe, Walpole, Poe, Lewis, Dickens, Austen and du Maurier, among others), characterising *Crimson Peak* as his "own special footnote to these great masters" (in Salisbury, 6). While the plot is quite flimsy – Edith falls in love with and marries gold-digging Thomas, becomes increasingly paranoid and feels threatened by Allerdale Hall, eventually uncovers the Sharpe siblings' murderous backstory, and sets herself (and Thomas's ghost) free when she kills Lucille in the film's climax – the sensuality of the cinematography works as a convincing filmic equivalent of Carter's sensual language, over-determined by literary and filmic allusions. With a lavishly designed Allerdale Hall and visual links to a broad range of horror and gothic classics, "color-coding, shape-coding, texture, and light", in del Toro's words, "become tools of narrative and dramatic weight" (in Salisbury, 7). By casting Wasikowska as Edith, who had starred in Cary Fukunaga's critically acclaimed *Jane Eyre* (2011), the film also recalls Brontë's Bluebeard-tale, a reference that is strengthened by the allusive redness of the past wives' ghosts and the mansion's cellar as a 'red room' that literalises not Edith's, but Lucille's anger. Another visual echo is suggestive of Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992):<sup>12</sup> Gary Oldman's dandy-esque count is reflected in the

<sup>12</sup> Del Toro is deeply steeped in vampire literature and lore. He directed the second *Blade*-instalment (2002), co-wrote the *Strain*-trilogy with Chuck Hogan (2009–11) and co-produced its TV adaptation.

outfits worn by Thomas and, perhaps more obliquely, the wax cylinder recordings of one of Thomas's previous wives call to mind Seward's phonograph recordings. Edith is an aspiring writer at the beginning of the film, who would rather be Mary Shelley (who "died a widow" – an ironic sneak preview into her own future) than Jane Austen when asked about her literary models, and is eventually revealed as the author of *Crimson Peak*.

The film is, then, framed visually as a (gothic) novel, and the revelation of Edith as hero, focaliser *and* the author of a book called *Crimson Peak* bears uncanny resemblance to the narrator-protagonist in Carter's "Bloody Chamber" – only that in this version, the husband is an effeminate man (a toymaker and ineffectual engineer with "the softest hands", 10:48) controlled by his sister – who, once he has fallen for Edith, kills him in cold blood. While Edith leaves Allerdale Hall (which is about to collapse into the red clay on which and from the profits of which it has been built, anyway) and thus does not profit materially from her marriage, her career as a writer is facilitated by her Bluebeard-experience.

*Crimson Peak* is not an exceptionally subtle adaptation of the Bluebeard-tale. As a classic gothic romance with horror elements, it takes advantage of the surface appeal of an elaborate set and costume design, fixated on the depiction of Allerdale Hall as a deteriorating monster whose "walls ooze red clay, and the cellar feels very much like a rotting womb, like the belly of the beast" (del Toro in Salisbury, 80). And yet, the film tweaks the Bluebeard-tale by turning its gender politics upside down: Edith is a headstrong heroine who defies her husband's sexual reticence, challenges Lucille's control over her brother, does not need the unasked-for assistance of her childhood friend Alan McMichael (whom she has to rescue when Lucille attacks him), and eventually manages to kill Lucille, dooming her to an existence as another of the hapless ghosts of Allerdale Hall. Thomas is, as I have already pointed out, a toothless monster – a charming yet weak dandy who is eventually redeemed by his love for Edith, and then quickly stabbed by his psychopathic sister. The monster at the heart of this Bluebeard tale is female, represented by Lucille, who imparts the violence she herself (and Thomas) had to endure at the hands of her own parents. The Bluebeard-tale becomes a multi-generational pattern of domestic abuse that is eventually broken by a woman who defies social norms and conventions.



The artists that follow the “Carter-generation” have, as I have demonstrated, an even more diverse cultural repository of Bluebeard-variations at their disposal. As Casie E. Hermansson has argued, “[i]n the postmodern present, all Bluebeards are simultaneously possible” (2009, 177). The Bluebeards in my article – both self-aware of the literary and filmic tradition they partake of – add new variations to a tale that is easily adaptable to new ways of thinking about gender and story-telling. Bacchilega and Rieder suggest “to think of the fairy tale genre today as a web whose hypertextual links do not refer back to one authority or central tradition” – an “early-twenty-first-century ‘fairy tale web’” (25). Both Oyeyemi and del Toro make productive use of the ‘Bluebeard-tale web’ in adding their own pinches of salt to a seemingly universal recipe. In *Mr. Fox*, St John Fox eventually stops killing his (imaginary) wives, and his and Mary Foxe’s tales trace a new way of articulating love and desire. In *Crimson Peak*, the ‘centre’ of the Bluebeard-tale still seems to hold – Bluebeard and her brother are dead, and our heroine walks into the sunrise... but it is not a Bluebeard-ending tinged by shameful curiosity. Like Carter’s narrator, Edith turns her story into a profitable narrative, and she does so without male assistance.

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# Snow White of the (Un)Dead

## Reading the *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* Series as Tales of Female Desire

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I'm not the princess that needs rescuing from the dragon. I'm the prince and I kill my own monsters.

(*Bullet*, 194)

Fairy tales and other popular literary genres enjoy lively intertextual entanglements. Princess, prince and dragon are stock characters – their interrelations, however, are subject to revision depending on differences of gender, class and sexual orientation. As quoted in the epigraph, popular romantic reworkings of fairy tales in particular often twist female subject positions and turn gendered motifs on their heads, allowing their heroines to overcome obstacles through the use of lethal violence. Fairy tale and popular romance both privilege female forms of storytelling, one in an oral tradition and the other in representing female sexual desire and fulfilment. Consequently, fairy tales, in their function of (re)presenting a nexus of narrative desire and narrated desire (cf. Bacchilega 2008, 13), are intimately connected to popular romance in terms of structure and the use of motifs (cf. Lee, 52–3).<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the amalgamation of both genres does not in general come as a surprise. However, in certain cases the incorporation of fairy tales involves highly intricate, subtle and productive re-formations and representations of motifs, structures and subject positions. One such instance in which elements of fairy tales work to evoke “consider[at]ions [and] questions about gendered power dynamics, sex and violence, the (re)production of desire and the uses of the erotic” (Bacchilega 2008, 14) is Laurell K. Hamilton’s *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* (ABVH) series

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Lee’s article is titled “Guilty Pleasures”, which incidentally correlates with the title of the first *Anita Blake* novel. It stands to reason that this phrase and the implicit indication of forbidden yet desirable pleasures behind it are a prevalent discourse both in writing and reading as well as in the academic meta-discourse about popular (paranormal) romance.

(1993–2018). In this multigenre series,<sup>2</sup> tales form a central pattern of female autodiegetic narration. This circumstance, however, is not apparent at first glance, since the tale motifs are dispersed over several novels in the series, thereby incorporating and narratively enhancing both urban fantasy's focus on violence and paranormal romance's use of the erotic – an element of the series not touched upon in research to date.<sup>3</sup>

For an exploration of the tales' place in negotiating violence and desire, the novels' basic premise has to be laid out briefly. The texts' setting is an alternate version of the US in which vampires, lycanthropes, and other mythical creatures are part of the human world. The first ten books follow a pattern of supernatural crime-solving most often related to the female protagonist's work as an animator/necromancer, a person of supernatural ability who raises the dead. Anita Blake also works as a vampire executioner and, as an expert on supernatural issues, cooperates with the police on cases in which the suspected perpetrator is not human. This plot motor remains present throughout the series, but when a love interest is added, the novels change focus to a concern with the erotic and romantic possibilities of polyamory. The inclusion of (fairy) tale structures and motifs, especially "Snow White" and "Beauty and the Beast", then adds an additional narrative layer to the genres of paranormal romance and urban fantasy. The texts' nuanced modifications to the well-known tales establish narrative suspense and generate readerly desire for knowledge. These changes and their functions will be investigated in this chapter.

For the purposes of this essay, the term 'tale' denotes a narrative pattern or form often concerned with constructions or reproductions of oral storytelling (cf. Zipes 2012, 16). The aspect of orality involves a specific structure of mediation as well, reducing the distance between the text and its addressee. In the *ABVH* series, this quasi-dialogic mediation is

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<sup>2</sup> Holland-Toll identifies horror fiction, detective fiction, fantasy fiction in terms of alternate history as well as romance (cf. 175).

<sup>3</sup> Paranormal romance is primarily concerned with supernatural events and characters, involving representations of the monstrous and positing the difference of human/other as central barrier to the romance plot. Urban fantasy functions similarly with regard to content but tends towards a series format in its publication. The romance plot is correspondingly dispersed over several books, rather than limited to one text, as is mostly the case in paranormal romance (cf. Ndaliansi, 79). Urban fantasy also places more emphasis on gritty plots, mostly along the lines of detective or investigative fiction.

implemented in form of an autodiegetic narrative perspective. Therefore, the tales' mode of presentation in the series is reinforced by the construction of female subjectivity and consequently the narrative foregrounding of "a female *subject* of desire" (Lee 54, emphasis in original). If fairy tales, narratives involving fantastical or supernatural events, are taken as "ideologically variable desire machines" (Bacchilega 1997, 7), it stands to reason that this desire is both part of and motor for the negotiation of sexuality<sup>4</sup> and violence in relation to tale structures and motifs in the texts. Notably, the *ABVH* series presents a special case since it does not entirely reproduce fairy tale structures but instead uses and reframes them in a pastiche form (cf. Jorgensen, 29). This, in turn, represents a form of imitation by repetition of motif fragments and subject positions.

Primarily, however, a tale is a "mode [...] of communication" and functions as an attempt to appease opposing or contrastive desires (Zipes 2012, 16) – although this resolution can, using a psychosemiotic definition of desire, never be fully achieved but only deferred. Two major configurations of desire coincide with two seemingly opposing plot structures and motors in the *ABVH* series – graphic violence with a focus on crime-solving (the primary plot in novels one to ten) and sexuality as realized in erotic romance (the primary plot in novels eleven to twenty-six). The activity of crime-solving structures the texts and provides pleasurable narrative solutions and release of tension in each book, whereas the romance plot is dispersed and thus deferred over the whole series – yet it is here that the most interesting representations regarding popular tales occur. The respective desires in form of struggles for sexual or physical power are negotiated through tale structures and elements. In turn, their negotiation shapes and re-informs the tale as part of a cultural trajectory addressing the connection between sexuality and violence as part of female (reading/readers') desires.

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<sup>4</sup> Sexuality is to be understood not only as sexual orientation(s), but also in the sense of sexual practices and activities, i.e. sexual interactions which are represented as erotically pleasurable (cf. Richardson, Smith & Werndly, 5). Additionally, sexuality is significant in that it constitutes "a site of regulation, [...] as well as a source of considerable angst and entertainment" (ibid., 7).

## **1. Modifying Tales: Representations of Sex and Violence**

Negotiations of sexuality and violence are at the centre of the *ABVH* series. Their representations focus heavily on corporeality: the imagery used to describe the victims of violence, for example, often contains as much detail as the sex scenes, whereas the sex scenes are also often depicted through the vocabulary or metaphors of violence (cf. *Kiss the Dead*, 199). For example, the description of the corpses follows an increasing level of suspense, saving the worst for last, thus creating a climactic effect comparable to the climax building in the sex scenes. Here, violence functions as a system of signification, a form of communication or discourse (cf. Demmers, 8). Its function is similar to the narrative structure of fairy tales, but with a reciprocal effect. Violence changes the communication of the tale while the tale structure changes the transmission force of violence. Violence's "transformative capacity" (ibid.) therefore also impacts the possibilities of constructing or re-telling tales. The latter, then, are central in delineating desire and difference, and in recasting fairy tale subject positions in order to contrast different points of view on violence and sexualities by diverging from the expected fairy-tale structure. In effect, if fairy tales are means of communication, they have signifiatory value. In this case, they primarily signify the production of new nuances of meaning and therefore the processual and deferred character of any definition of (gendered) violence in its relation to sexuality.

In the *ABVH* series, the tales become as fragmented, dispersed and inverted as the body parts depicted in the murders of the hard-boiled detective plot. They follow a pattern of dissemination across several texts, deferring closure of the tale structure and threatening the overarching narrative coherence. In consequence, the narrative as well as its tale structures become corporeal(ized): they turn into bodies to be taken apart and dissected only to be reformed – resurrected – in order to construct but also redistribute meaning. The tale structures become part of the '(un)dead', which are raised from their graves to return as incomplete vessels for projection and seemingly with no sense of self, only to be filled anew with meaning by the will and (narrative) power of the autodiegetic necromancer who retrospectively animates them: Anita Blake. The reader's position is similar, since readers are the ones 'resurrecting', or reconstructing the tales from fragments in the reading process. When applied to both figural interiority and the fragmentation of



the tale structures and motifs, the dissecting method represents an “inward, anatomizing look, a need to penetrate surfaces, to dissect that which apparently holds a fixed position in a composite whole” (Kiss, 252). Since representations of the body are intricately related to constructions of identity and subjectivity, fragmenting anatomy also entails a fragmentation of those constructs (cf. Kiss, 253). Even ideological concepts such as romantic love could be said to conform to this overall fragmentation process by dispersing affective attachment and sexual relations over multiple partners in a polyamorous relationship. The violent fragmentations become expressive of modifications of a (female) desire represented as irrepressibly plural both in its narrative form and in its construction of female subjectivity.

Two of the (fairy) tales reworked in the *ABVH* series are “Snow White” and “Beauty and the Beast.” In order to avoid a purely generic analysis, this essay will assume that these tales are present in the popular imagination, shaped by classic fairy tales (for children) and by more widely distributed medialized versions, such as those produced by Disney (cf. Zipes 2000, xxx). While each version and reworking of a (fairy) tale carries ideological implications, the building blocks of the tales have become narratively recognizable in a way that suggests their ongoing incorporation into the popular imaginary. “[R]ewritings are built on prior texts, and they often rely on the reader’s knowledge of earlier versions in order for their full meaning to be carried across” (Levorato, 193, cit. in Jorgensen, 33). A purely structural interpretation or comparison also fails to incorporate major changes and frames. For example, not all typological elements set out by Aarne and Thompson in their comparative classification of folk narrative tale type “Snow White” (cf. Jones, 58) are present in *ABVH*, but “[w]e can recognize these episodes [...] by the accumulation of motifs that are used to illustrate them in different versions” (ibid., 59).

In “Snow White”, difference, as the provisional basis of the construction and (re)production of meaning as well as hierarchies, is structurally represented as a form of repetition dependent on a mirror-like refraction, whereas in “Beauty and the Beast”, difference is conceptualized as primarily oppositional – as an otherness that incorporates aspects of the

monstrous.<sup>5</sup> Both tales are also characterized by (metaphorical) violence and sexuality. “Snow White” traces the conflict between “angel-woman and [...] monster-woman” (cf. Gilbert & Gubar, 291), which involves attempted murder, whereas “Beauty and the Beast” addresses wider social conflicts pertaining to sexual difference and transgression, including the notion of human-animality as representative of a potential for violence. The latter tale also involves a transformative aspect, both physically and metaphorically, foregrounding ‘love’ as the catalyst of change (cf. Lee, 60). The tales function on several levels in the series, incorporating representational strategies and structural positions of characters as well as plot structures. These elements produce a movement of difference that oscillates between the familiar and the unfamiliar: the tales’ reworking is recognizable and yet fragmented, thus inciting pleasure and desire in the text and its consumption.

If violence is represented as a fragmenting force in relation to the tales, sexuality could potentially present the textual antidote through representations of a joining (of bodies), an element that might be expected to help provide the (happy) ending usually ascribed to both popular romance and fairy tale plot. Yet the romance plot within which the protagonist’s sexuality is framed is dispersed across several texts, and more notably, several secondary characters that are in a polyamorous relationship. The process of fragmentation produces an excess in the representations of both sex and violence that can be read as an expansion beyond prior representational boundaries – boundaries established by generic affiliation to popular paranormal romance and urban fantasy. This excess is what characterizes the tale’s reworking and constitutes its pleasure in the sense of *jouissance* (cf. Fuery, 31–2). A reinterpretation of fragmentation as a (narratively) productive aspect is then enabled by having the tale of Snow White morph into the tale of the Queen from the same story. While the same protagonist is retained for both, Snow White’s awakening to sexuality is not represented as renewed subjugation to a primarily patriarchal system, but as a possibility for exploring alternative desires and practices. The violent monstrosity of “Beauty

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<sup>5</sup> Monstrosity is here defined as an inscription of difference which establishes a reciprocal “relation between fear and desire” (Halberstam, 9) and incorporates elements (subjectively) perceived as “frightening or ugly, abnormal or disgusting” (ibid., 8) in relation to its form and meaning (cf. ibid., 11). Characters marked as monstrous often occupy liminal status (cf. Goetsch, 1) and are etymologically related to moments of revelation (cf. ibid., 9).

and the Beast” is similarly incorporated in Anita Blake as the new Queen of the were-leopards, vampires and were-tigers – the latter incidentally calling her “little queen” (*Skin Trade*, 265). In effect, both tales form points of departure into a narrative realm characterized by voracious female desire, respectively violent and sexual.

## 2. “Snow White”: A Tale of Transformative Desire

Regarding “Snow White”, Anita’s physical description comes close to the tale’s concept of its protagonist’s femininity which is “as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the window frame” (Gilbert & Gubar, 292). Anita is described as having “[p]ale skin, black curly hair, pure brown eyes. [She] was all contrast and strong colors the bright red lipstick matched” (*Burnt Offerings*, 46). The motif of the mirror as a refracting surface appears as well, albeit in a slightly distorted way. Jean-Claude, Anita’s vampire love interest, constitutes her male mirror image in physical description, his hair “black and curly”, his face “like fine porcelain” (*ibid.*, 46), down to matching cross-shaped scars (cf. *Guilty Pleasures*, 32). The mirror is thus still representative of masculinity, but instead of inducing jealousy and entrapment (cf. Gilbert & Gubar, 293), it becomes an empowering element, refracting similarity, the self-in-other instead of fundamental difference.

In this case, however, the subject position of Snow White as a “passively beautiful female character with very limited options” (Bacchilega 1997, 29) intersects with that of the Queen from the same tale. The addition of this element works to reframe the prior tale, to put it in a threshold position and extend it. This takes the tale beyond representing female desire as bound to a quest for romance (cf. Benson, 105), metonymically displacing desire onto a context governed by adult womanhood and female agency. The latter thus comes to be embodied in the Queen without a king (cf. *Flirt*, 146) – or in this case, a Queen with many consorts, an aspect which additionally inverts the oriental(ist) structure of the harem and its power relations. The threshold position is thus transcended and opens into a narrative tale frame which includes a fantasy of omnipotence, allowing for female agency in enacting violence and sex(uality). The Anita-as-Snow-White motif, though, culminates in, but also ends at the moment of sexual awakening, in which her body becomes the primary focus of (sexual) pleasure.

In *ABVH*'s version of "Snow White", the transformative power of violence and sexuality is therefore directed at female transformation in the sense of a development from Snow White to Queen, whereas in the "Beauty and the Beast" structure, violence transforms and inverts the subject positions of Beauty and Beast instead of ending with a permanent change to either human or beast. Thus, instead of a simple volte-face characterizing the motifs in the *ABVH* series, an oscillation is effected: descriptive labels shift from character to character and converge in the protagonist. In terms of female agency regarding sexuality and violence, there is a noticeable development: While in the early books of the *ABVH* series, the antagonists and their minions are often identified through representations of deviant sexualities and sexual desires, it becomes difficult to base character distinctions on this in the later novels, since many former antagonists also become part of the main characters' circle of friends or lovers. This evokes the need for different markers that will code characters as hostile, which is achieved by introducing some who exhibit an even more excessive form of violently motivated sexual interaction, forming an ever-extending spiral of difference.

Moreover, when Anita herself attains forms of sexuality used earlier to mark antagonists (vampire mother figure Belle Morte keeps a harem devoid of love or friendship and is conceptualized as deviant), a re-definition of this desire has to take place. Sexual desire is consequently partly displaced and externalized since it is framed as the result of Anita's acquisition of additional supernatural power – a voracious sexual hunger called *ardeur*, which issues from her connection with the vampire protagonist. In this sense, Anita is absolved of part of her sexual desires, yet this facilitates her exploration of sexuality in general. Being in a position of power, Anita nonetheless becomes likened to an antagonistic vampire 'Queen' figure, indicating her own change in status from unawakened *ingénue* to ruler. The sexual desire expressed in her supernatural hunger also affects and addicts other characters (cf. *Flirt*, 193–4). Therefore, the tales' reworking also comments on possibilities of structuring relations between a Queen and her subjects. The male characters are quite literally 'subject' to female desire; more so since the hunger originated in another Queen, who passes it on to some of her descendants (cf. *Incubus Dreams*, 52). Thus, a female line of voracious desire is constructed, yet without contributing to female bonding.

As the series progresses, Anita's inherited and initially externalized supernatural desire differs more and more from her predecessors', and finally becomes her own entirely – represented as a mixture of romantic attachment and sexual desire (cf. *Bullet*, 174). Therefore, superficially similar desire is shown as different in its direction and instances of actualization. A polyvalent image of female desire is established, positing Anita Blake as a Queen whose power paradoxically lies in reaffirming the connection between female sexual desire and romantic attachment. These references, though, place the protagonist and her desire(s) in-between the positions of fairy tale antagonist and heroine, showing these opposing structural positions as mere extensions of each other.

At the outset of the series, Anita is represented as abstinent and mocked for being perceived as "chaste" (*Burnt Offerings*, 64), and thus un-awakened to the erotic possibilities represented by the generic affiliation with paranormal romance. Her dormant sexuality, read as an absence of female desire, places her in the position of sleeping Snow White. Her 'sleep', unlike that of the tale, however, does not result in a complete erasure of agency. Anita is still able to solve supernatural crimes and fulfil a basic generic premise even without recourse to female sexual or romantic desire. What is more, her dormant sexuality does not restrict her position as autodiegetic narrator. In stark contrast to the classic popular romance, in which sexual and romantic desire are represented as the prime *raison d'être* for female storytelling, the absence of sexual desire does not negatively impact female narrative power. While popular romance narrative most often ends with the achievement of romantic and sexual fulfilment and focusses on the inter-personal, Anita's crime-solving instead impacts her world on a larger scale – saving the city from ruin and danger takes precedence over subjective or romantic attachment.

Once Anita's initial metaphorical 'sleep' of abstinence is interpreted along these lines, this motif from the tale can also be identified in the vampire characters that rest in the 'sleep' of death during the day. However, the protagonists' own supernatural power of necromancy is such that it animates one of her vampire lovers in his sleep (cf. *The Killing Dance*, 162–265, 289) and makes him move (cf. *Incubus Dreams*, 157), a metatextual commentary on narrative perspective as well as on the tale of "Snow White". The story is related through a female autodiegetic narrative perspective, a form of textual mediation that constitutes an overt

narrative position of power, also characterized by subjectivity and limited reliability. All representations are shaped by Anita Blake, whose power on the discursive level is, in this instance, mirrored on the level of story by her ability to animate textual bodies, i.e. the vampires. That the vampire in question is unable to resist or react, compelled to move by grace of the character-cum-narrator Anita Blake, also serves to provide a doubled perspective on female power. In the series, this power is posited as productive of the pleasures of storytelling by exerting power over narrative bodies to use them according to the narrator's will.

Incidentally, this power is enacted across a gendered line, putting the vampires in the position of the inanimate 'corpse' of Snow White, forcing them to await the appearance of a 'prince' to awaken and animate them. With regard to the metatextual commentary on the tale of "Snow White" though, the vampire's awakening is not the inception of a happy ending, but the raising of a spectre – a dead body infused with another's intention. By extension, this spectrality also comes to be applied to "Snow White" as a tale. The tale and its structures appear as a spectral, ghostly appearance in the series, surfacing at odd moments and never entirely in the correct place or order. The series therefore not only raises characters on the level of story but also, on a discursive level, fragments of fairy tales refracted through a female autodiegetic perspective, repurposing the remains to rewrite them as tales of female desire – for (narrative) power. Female Snow White's sleep ends with sexual intercourse, the multiple male vampires' slumber ends with (narrative) subjection and erasure of textual agency. This modifies the tale in that the moment and aftermath of waking and being woken have no positive connotation; instead, the re-use of the motif becomes an undead re-appearance itself, returning, repeated with a difference also in terms of gender, as the female necromancer raises male vampires (cf. *Incubus Dreams*, 510) and thus comes to take the part of the prince in "Snow White" as well.

Anita Blake as Snow White of the (Un)dead not only controls her narrative creations, but also uses them for pleasure, sexualizing the motif of the seven dwarves in a reverse harem structure. Anita shares a living space with her lovers (cf. *Incubus Dreams*, 206–12) and by book fourteen, *Danse Macabre*, she has entered a polyamorous relationship with seven male characters, continuing to add to that number. These male characters are instrumental in saving her life several times, when two symbolic (vampiric) mother figures attack her, attempting to meta-

phorically ‘poison’ her mind by using the otherness inside of her – the *ardeur* (cf. *Narcissus in Chains*, 198) or the recessive lycanthropy she contracts over the course of the series (cf. *Skin Trade*, 228–36). Female (narrative) power and agency is thus not entirely sufficient to rein in antagonistic female voices but is represented as partly dependent on a community of male characters. It is the protagonist’s own power of necromancy, though, a “magic [which] didn’t differentiate between [Belle Morte, a powerful female vampire] and any other corpse” (*Narcissus in Chains*, 199) that relegates the rival female to a static, lifeless object and puts Anita in the subject position of “Snow White’s” Queen.

In effect, the tale of “Snow White” retains elements of its central topic of female rivalry, but the characteristics which mark the protagonist and antagonist are inverted. Anita develops to inhabit a position similar to the Queens’ she must defeat – the only difference of this repetitious mirror image consists in the conceptualization of male-female relationships also in terms of (romantic) love rather than exclusively in terms of power relations. This, however, reproduces the myth (in a Barthesian sense) of romantic love as that which is not entrenched or implicated in power relations and hence curbs the potential transgressive nature of the reverse harem structure. Nevertheless, it evokes an expansive view of female sexual power and desire, even if framed in a bourgeois ideology of ‘love’.

### 3. “Beauty and the Beast” as Inversion of Gendered Desires

In contrast, “Beauty and the Beast” conceptualizes difference as otherness along the oppositions of human/animal-like and female/male, distributing desire between those poles, thus “accommodat[ing] two developmental trajectories” (Tatar, 25). In the *ABVH* series, the subject positions of Beauty and Beast are superficially maintained but inverted along gendered lines.

The first arc of the series marks violent sexualities primarily as transgressive, but also as not limited to a patriarchal structure.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, one of the most prominent textual embodiments of this transgression is a male character: Olaf. He is located on the human side of the human/

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<sup>6</sup> Anita Blake as autodiegetic narrator can also be seen as to some extent reproducing patriarchal structures, since no other female characters of note appear apart from the antagonists who are all cast in the mould of evil step-mother or evil mother-in-law looking to exploit her and her abilities.

other binary. However, instead of representing familiarity he is marked as particularly uncanny due to his sexualisation of excessively violent and criminal acts (cf. *The Harlequin*, 477–8). To achieve this, the graphic crime scene context is linked to a register of intimacy when Olaf “stare[s] down at the remains of [a female murder victim] with enough raw lust in his eyes to burn down the house [...] [with a] look that should have been saved for privacy”, while his “voice [acquires] a soft, almost dreamy quality” when talking about the victim (*Obsidian Butterfly*, 277). The sensory vocabulary and rhetoric of popular romance thus clashes with the object of desire, a dismembered female body, as heterosexual desire is othered in this scene. Olaf’s male (sexual) desire primarily encompasses the literally and literarily fragmented female body as well as the process of performing that fragmentation in violent acts such as rape and murder (cf. *ibid.*, 251). This active shaping and re-forming to create the object of desire equates him metaphorically with male desiring subjects that sub-ject heterosexual partners to their fantasy. Thus, his transgression reveals him as a representative of a violently patriarchal order, establishing him as a foil to the protagonist and a threat of erasure to female desire(s).

His human otherness expressed as violent monstrosity also redefines the violent otherness of Anita Blake when, after a particularly gruesome case, a written account in form of a letter by Olaf is inserted into the narrative. It redefines the text’s events from a different perspective, claiming that Anita is Olaf’s female mirror image, “THE OTHER HALF OF [HIS] SOUL” and that she “WOULD WITHER AND DIE WITHOUT THE VIOLENCE” (*ibid.*, 576–7, emphasis in original). Olaf recasts Anita’s investigative and punitive quest for justice as a superficial excuse for enacting violence for personal pleasure, integrating violence into a possible heterosexual relationship when he states that they “COULD KILL TOGETHER AND CUT THE BODIES UP AND THAT WOULD BE MORE THAN [HE] EVER DREAMED OF SHARING WITH A WOMAN” (*ibid.*, 577).

Subsequently, the views on sexuality and violence are askew – never to be put straight again. The combination of graphic violence in the investigative plot and human perpetrators of violent (sexualized) crime like Olaf thus collapses the division of human/other-as-monstrous in relation to crime. Generally, the division is only superficially fixed from the beginning, since Anita Blake is an animator and thus exhibits other, or



‘monstrous’, qualifies herself (cf. *Burnt Offerings*, 40). However, her necromancy is also related to necrophilia (in her romance with several vampires and evidenced by book titles such as *Kiss the Dead*, 2012). Her sexual awakening and improved knowledge about the (un)dead through her relationship with master vampire Jean-Claude also expands her personal power as a necromancer. In turn, she gains knowledge about herself and her sexual desires, a process which loses her the trust of her police contacts and interferes with another pursuit of knowledge, her crime-solving (cf. *Cerulean Sins*, 301). Access to knowledge is depicted as both stemming from and feeding female desire, not just for Anita, but also for the reader, since desire extends beyond the boundaries of the text, interpellating the audience. Readerly desire is hence firstly directed at graphic violence and fascinating horror, in terms of a Kristevan abject, and secondly at graphic sexuality related to practices represented as transgressive yet desirable, such as polyamory. Framed by the fairy tale motifs, this produces a pleasure in reading and consequently establishes a cross-generic reference to concepts of female conduct, agency and transgression in literature. In this instance, “Beauty and the Beast” is modified once more, as femininity is associated with the violent, animalistic side of the Beast as well as with its threatening sexuality in form of bestiality, another element which finds representation in the *ABVH* series.

In general, the tale of “Beauty and the Beast” projects a transformative power which changes female revulsion to pleasure (cf. Lee, 59) and the male character from monstrous to human, reducing his difference. As such, the tale also functions as “founding myth of sexual difference” (Benson, 105), as the monstrous figure enables the investigation of cultural and social trajectories of desire (cf. Ndalianis, 91). That this exploration is directed at female desire in particular in the *ABVH* series becomes evident through the inversion of tale positions. Where female agency is usually associated with familial duty in the tale (cf. Tatar, 26–8), it gains a slightly different nuance in this case. Here, contact with the ‘beast’ and the monstrous is made in the line of professional duty. In *Circus of the Damned*, for example, Anita’s investigation forces her to venture into the beast’s den (cf. 17) – the novel’s eponymous nightclub, which is run, staffed and inhabited by paranormal characters. Anita’s desire for knowledge leaves her no choice, unless she and the police want to “get one of these [murder victims] a night” (ibid.). Refusing

backup, Anita claims that she is the only investigative personnel the master vampire informant will talk to (cf. *ibid.*) and enters his lair alone. Crime-solving thus has her associate with these characters in spaces defined by otherness, not least recognizable by their titular designation: Guilty Pleasures, Incubus Dreams, The Laughing Corpse.

In terms of difference, “Beauty and the Beast” is additionally offered as a conceptual frame for the romance plot between Anita and Richard, an alpha werewolf and major love interest, but is inverted along the difference human/inhuman as well as differing conceptualizations of violence and desirable sexuality/ies (cf. *Incubus Dreams*, 590–2). Contrary to Ndalianis’ reference to this tale motif in horror/paranormal romance (cf. 88–9) which has the female protagonists remain in the position of Beauty and learn to “accept[...] male sexuality” (88) and beastness, I argue that in this case the subject positions become blurred and then inverted. It is not “women’s longing for beasts” (Warner cit. in Ndalianis, 88) which defines the tale motif in this series, but women metaphorically becoming/transforming into the Beast. This results not just in ‘acceptance’ of the beast but an internalization of it with a subsequent increase in (violent and sexual) female power.

Richard, despite being a werewolf and thus temporarily a literal beast, is represented as too human, not other enough to be able to fit into the paranormal romance plot as a hero. Representative of a crisis in hegemonic masculinity, he is unable to cope with the fact that Anita’s performances of masculinity are more successful than his own. At the outset of their romance plot (cf. *Circus of the Damned*, 272), Richard is marked as the Beast – his character encompasses animalistic traits and he possesses the capacity to transform (cf. *ibid.*, 357). Anita and Richard become engaged while Richard’s wolf form has not been textually represented – his otherness is thus curbed by his humanoid shape. When the transformation is finally shown in *The Killing Dance*, its effect is diametrically opposed to the transformation in “Beauty and the Beast”. Anita, while still the sexually unawakened Snow White, is caught underneath a human changing into wolf form, in a position reminiscent of intercourse, “[her] lower body [...] trapped underneath him” (326) while “[m]uscle formed and shifted, bones broke and reknit [...] [c]lear liquid gushed from his body, pouring over [her] in a near scalding wave” (*ibid.*). She flees the violent change and its symbolic sexuality and instead enters a (sexual) relationship with Jean-Claude, the vampire prop-

tagonist whose otherness is such that it is contained within a human form – even when he becomes a corpse during daylight hours.

The reverse transformation – from human to beast – interrupts the courtship plot between these characters. It is picked up again in the narrative arc concerned more with sexuality than violence, after Anita has been sexually ‘awakened,’ gained the *ardeur* and come into her narrative position as Queen. It is Anita who is now marked as beastly due to her sexual hunger and her increasing propensity for violence. In this respect, the two tales come to intersect with regard to their respective subject positions. Snow White is relegated to the passive transformative power of Beauty, while the Queen simultaneously represents an active Beast. In the story arc characterized primarily by violence/crime then, beastliness is assigned to a male character whose transformation is as abject as it is unacceptable to the protagonist/Beauty. In the sexual/romance arc, however, the characteristics of beastliness are reassigned to Anita Blake. Here, the inversion is also effected by the masculinization of the female protagonist who appears as “monstrous” (*Cerulean Sins*, 172) due to her sexual needs and her violent actions (cf. *Incubus Dreams* 615–16). She is called “monster” (*Cerulean Sins*, 306) by other characters, and the relationship that was rekindled between her and Richard is again aborted, but this time because Richard’s love cannot transform Anita, instead of vice versa, since “he[...] dump[s] [her] because [she is] more at home with the monsters than he [is]” (*Incubus Dreams*, 4–5).

As Snow White Beauty, Anita is unable to confront physical beastliness, while her later position as Queen Beast allows for an exploration of desire – particularly in connection to the opposition of human/other as represented by her were-leopard lovers. Richard as Beauty, then, cannot be relieved of his lycanthropic ‘curse’ – an ironic take on his belief in the transformative power of love as represented in the tale. In this respect, Richard functions as a contrastive character, yet his literal and Anita’s metaphorical beastliness make them similar again. Therefore, monstrosity becomes a mutual characteristic and a signifier of selfhood instead of difference. Supernatural otherness, which is associated with beastliness in the first place, emerges as a state of desirable difference since it allows the female protagonist to succeed both professionally and privately. As a result, the female Beast in *ABVH* is not in need of fundamental transformation. Instead, through the intersection with Snow White’s development into a Queen, this Beast is able to occupy a subject

position which instead invokes a naturalization of 'beastliness' as an element of female power.

#### 4. Violent Verdict: Pleasure as the Return of (Un)Dead Fairy Tale Fragments

The pleasure in consuming this particular combination of tales can then be said to rest in its construction of female desire as an (omni)potent force and in the conceptualization and representation of female violence as not only possible, but as enacting a form of narrative poetic justice which male characters and the system within which they work (e.g. as policemen) cannot provide. The subject positions of Queen and the Beast intersect, and only this combination allows the assertion of female power in the narrative. What is more, not only is violent retribution presented as poetic justice and coded as female, but it is represented as distinct from general and instead closer to arbitrary law (cf. *The Laughing Corpse*, 288–91). This female, i.e. 'queenly' discourse of the law, in which Anita is fashioned as "judge, jury and [...] Executioner" (*Incubus Dreams*, 807), is more violent(ly infringing on the body) and intolerant against transgression than the male, state-based version, since it threatens erasure in case of misdemeanour or threat against authority (cf. *Skin Trade*, 41). Hence, this discourse is characterized by excess and beastliness again. Female rivals in the form of other queens (cf. *Cerulean Sins*, 178–81; *Skin Trade*, 234–41) are fought and conquered as well, having provided a comparative image for the protagonist's use of female power and agency – although, in an interesting development, the first rival queen, Belle Morte, absorbs some of the vampiric übermother's power in order to 'rise' again and become even more powerful (cf. *Bullet*, 122–7). Therefore, the erasure of rival queens is never complete and arises ritually, repetitiously, like a re-telling of a fairy tale. Additionally, Anita acquires some of the other Queen's men, for example in the novel appropriately titled *Skin Trade* (cf. 231). The men are thus conceptualized as objects of exchange or spoils of war, inverting the gendered structure of traffic in (wo)men. The license to female violence in pursuit of desire forms the basis of the series' blurring of gendered lines and allows the protagonist's establishment as a female figure of authority, even though by marking Anita's behaviour as masculine, the basic inscription of gendered difference is maintained nonetheless.

Heavily dependent on tales, the series and its representations of violence and sexuality throw normative social and sexual boundaries as well as the provisional and intersectional construction of identity into sharp relief. Anita Blake as a character becomes an amalgamation of varied and not necessarily coherent desires. Likewise, the fixity and structure of the fairy tales disintegrates over the course of the series. The boundaries of structural positions such as Beauty and Beast become impossible to uphold, taking the beastly from animalistic shapeshifting via exhibitions of violent behaviour to the practice of polyamory. The fragmentary reworking of "Snow White" presents the same character as both Snow White and (later) Queen, extending the narrative to shed light on female positions of power and rivalry, setting Queens against each other. As a conduit of desire connected to the corporeality of violent, violated and sexualized bodies, the fairy tale thus becomes aligned with, and representative of, a plurality of desires. While these are irreconcilable on the surface, they are still ascribed to and inscribed on the multi-significatory and excessive, boundary-dissolving textual 'body' of the tales, and the figural body of the series' female protagonist.

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## **Part IV: Narrating (National/Cultural) Identity**



# A Tale of Changing Times: H. E. Bates' *Oh! To be in England* Cultural Poetics and the Condition of England in 1963

Jürgen Kamm

H(erbert) E(rnest) Bates (1905–74) left very few traces in the literary histories, although he was an extremely prolific author of plays, short stories and novels.<sup>1</sup> In addition, his command of narrative technique was by no means plain and simple but rather in tune with modernist narrative practices. He received a posthumous appraisal by Graham Greene who stated in 1988: “After 60 years of writing and reading I would place H. E. Bates and V. S. Pritchett as the best short-story writers of my time.” (Quoted in Eads, xi) It might be argued that the critical neglect of his writings, especially of his post-war stories and novels, was due to their popular success. In contrast to the authors of the Angry Decade, to use Kenneth Allsop’s term, like John Osborne, Alan Sillitoe, Kingsley Amis and John Braine for whose blaring self-pity he mustered only little sympathy (cf. Vannatta, 92), his works radiate an optimism and enthusiasm about the end of the war, the rising prosperity and the general glory of life in England, as signalled by the title of the novel under review, which was obviously not located in the mainstream of literary criticism (cf. Baldwin, 202).

Bates’ last phase of writing was largely dedicated to the five ‘Larkin novels’. The cycle was opened with *The Darling Buds of May* (1958), taking its title from a line in Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 18”. It was a staggering success with the reading public, selling 40,000 copies in the first two months (cf. Baldwin, 198) and offering sufficient motivation for the author to continue the series with four further novels, *A Breath of French Air* (1959), *When the Green Woods Laugh* (1960), *Oh! To be in England* (1963), and *A Little of What You Fancy* (1970). The plots centre around Sidney (“Pop”) Larkin, his wife (“Ma”) and their seven children. Pop Larkin is a jack of all trades, running a small farm in Kent but also dealing in junk, antiques, and contraband, regularly avoiding the tax officer and

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Eads’ bibliography (1990) of Bates’ writings covers more than 200 pages.

enjoying life with all his senses. In his autobiography, Bates clearly stated that Pop Larkin was an autobiographical projection:

It is not to be denied, moreover, that there is something of myself in Pop Larkin: a passionate Englishman, a lover of nature, of the sounds and sights of the countryside, of colour, flowers and things sensual; a hatred of pomp, pretension and humbug; a lover of children and family life; an occasional breaker of rules, flouter of conventions [...] Pop is in fact an expression of my own philosophy: the need to go with the stream, never to battle against it. (Bates 1972, 152)

As such, the Larkin tales do not offer any profound moral or philosophical discussions (cf. Vannatta, 101) but “H. E. believed that the novels were legitimate social commentary, exaggerated to be sure, but with an element of genuine truth” (Baldwin, 220). In fact, in the Larkin novels Bates manages to capture the major topics circulating in public discourse at the time of composition and to combine them into meaningful, coherent but also ideologically conservative narratives. For this reason his fictional representation of the condition of England is eminently suited to an analysis of the Cultural Poetics and the dominant structures of feeling among the rising middle class in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The term “Cultural Poetics” was coined by the New Historicists who argue that literary and non-literary texts circulate inseparably and that “every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices” (Veese, xi). The circulation of social and political energy relies on the negotiation and exchange of ideas, concepts and notions and their collective interpretation among the members of a given culture by means of the various media of communication available to that respective culture. In “Towards a Poetics of Culture” Stephen Greenblatt observes that

the work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society. In order to achieve the negotiation, artists need to create a currency that is valid for a meaningful, mutually profitable exchange. It is important to emphasize that the process involves not simply appropriation but exchange, since the existence of art always implies a return, a return normally measured in pleasure and interest. (12)

The basic assumptions of such a Cultural Poetics can be linked to Raymond Williams’ concept of the “structures of feeling” which are dominant in a society at a given point in time (Williams 1961, 64–5; 1977, 128–

35). Williams claims that a period's "structures of feeling" can be discovered through a careful analysis of the recorded culture:

In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization. And it is in this respect that the arts of a period, taking these to include characteristic approaches and tones in argument, are of major importance. For here, if anywhere, this characteristic is likely to be expressed [...] (Williams 1961, 63–4)

Since a structure of feeling is a collectively shared experience it seeks to find expression in semantic articulation, which is why works of art in general and literary tales in particular are highly significant and valuable, given their superior semantic charge. In fact, it is often merely from a retrospective point of view that a structure of feeling becomes perceptible when its displacement by new semantic articulations can be observed.

Looking back at the 1960s, the claim is probably indisputable that it was a decade of major changes in all Western societies (cf. Ward; Chalmers). The Civil Rights Movement in the USA and the fight for racial, social, economic and sexual emancipation had a huge impact on American and, in its wake, on European cultures where the protests of a young generation were articulated in anger about the establishment, in the students' revolt and in new juvenile subcultures and their concomitant styles of musical expression. Taking a closer look at the Cultural Poetics of 1963, the general tendency during the decade towards renewal can be defined more precisely. In the field of politics, the most shattering event was certainly the assassination of US President Kennedy in Dallas in November 1963, foreshadowing an increase in violence which came to characterise the decade. In Britain, it seemed that political life was essentially more peaceful and comfortable. The post-war years of austerity were over and a new era of national prosperity had begun. In his address to the Conservative Party Conference in Bedford in July 1957, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan emphasised the rise in the standard of living in Britain by famously declaring: "Let us be frank about it: most of our people have never had it so good" (Macmillan). However, the country's rapprochement to the European Economic Community (EEC) suffered a severe setback in January 1963 as General de Gaulle vetoed Britain's application to membership because of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and in October Macmillan was forced to resign from his office,

partly due to ill health, partly because of the sex scandal surrounding John Profumo, Secretary of State for War, and the model Christine Keeler (cf. Thorpe, 551–81).

The affair was also an indication of a changing attitude towards sexuality and gender roles. In a major trial at the Old Bailey in 1960, when Penguin Books were charged under the Obscene Publications Act 1959 for having illegally published D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the jury returned a verdict of "not guilty" (cf. Rolph), thus paving the way for a more tolerant attitude towards sexuality. In May of 1960, Enovid, the first contraceptive pill, received approval, first in the USA and later in Britain (cf. Junod & Marks 2002, 1, fn. 1) which invested women with more power over birth control and family planning. More interest in femininity and female sensitivity was raised in February 1963 when W. W. Norton published Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* which challenged the notion of female fulfilment through the exclusive roles of mother and housewife. The book rapidly became an international bestseller (cf. Coontz, 145–9), sparking the beginning of second-wave feminism and the renewal of gender roles in Western societies.

The feeling of change was in the air in the early 1960s and it quickly found its way into popular culture. Inspired by the verbal virtuosity of the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, the young US singer-songwriter Robert Zimmermann changed his name to Bob Dylan. In the summer of 1963, he was working on his third studio album which was released by Columbia Records in January of the following year under the title *The Times They are a-Changin'* (cf. Bailie, 33). The title track became the hymn of the Civil Rights Movement, expressing the sentiments of a generation who felt that far-reaching reforms had been long overdue. The impact of Dylan's compositions on popular music is difficult to overrate but, conversely, he was also receptive to artistic stimuli from other performers. Legend has it that while he was touring Colorado in 1964 to promote his new album, he was listening to an announcement by a local radio station which stated that eight of the top 10 hits on their channel were by an English band called The Beatles.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Dylan was immediately and deeply impressed: "They were doing things nobody else was doing," he later remembered. "Their chords were outrageous, just outrageous. You could only do that with other musicians. That was obvious. And it started me thinking about other people. But I just kept it to myself that I really dug them. Everybody else thought they were for the teenyboppers, that they were gonna pass right away. But it was obvious

The steep rise of The Beatles was indicative of the need for a new style of musical expression to suit the structure of feeling of a younger generation. Although the band had begun its career in 1960, it was not until March 1963 that their first album *Please, Please Me* was released (cf. Lewisohn, 350). The album maintained its top chart position for thirty weeks (cf. *ibid.*, 92), and its success tempted William Mann, music critic of *The Times*, to proclaim John Lennon and Paul McCartney as “the outstanding English composers of 1963” (cf. Gould, 187). *Please, Please Me* also marked the beginning of “Beatlemania” as the band repeatedly toured in Britain in 1963 to promote their first album. During this period, they struck up a friendship with another new rock ’n roll band who had adopted the name The Rolling Stones. As a token of their friendship John Lennon and Paul McCartney presented them with their newly completed song “I Wanna Be Your Man” which became The Rolling Stones’ first hit-single in 1963 (cf. Gilliland).

Taking stock of the events which put their stamp on the early 1960s and, more precisely, on the Cultural Poetics of 1963, a number of distinctive fields of public discourse can be discerned, i.e. an improvement in the standard of living and, together with changes in lifestyle, a noticeable transformation of gender roles in conjunction with a new concept of sexuality, the rise of popular culture, particularly new styles of music like skiffle, r & b, rock ’n roll, and new directions in politics in connection with Britain’s relationship to Europe. All of these non-literary changes and movements were appropriated and negotiated in the Larkin novels to major public acclaim.

*Oh! To be in England* opens with a resonant hymn of praise for the English countryside, so typical of the Larkin novels:<sup>3</sup>

As Pop Larkin loaded the last pieces of junk into his newly painted yellow-and-scarlet pick-up all the essence of the fine June morning seemed to pour down like dreamy honey from thick boughs of oak-flower, gold-green against a sky of purest blue, unblemished except for a few floating white doves of cloud. It was a morning when he felt it was good to be alive; you could fairly hear the grass growing. All the air was brilliant with bird song

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to me that they had staying power. In my head The Beatles were it. It seemed to me a definite line had been drawn.” (Quoted in Lowe, 46) Their first meeting took place in New York in 1964 when The Beatles were on their first American tour and the respect between the musicians across the Atlantic was mutual (cf. *ibid.*, 46–7).

<sup>3</sup> All the following page references are to the first edition of the novel published in 1963.

and farther up the road, on a little rise, a field thick with buttercups shone brighter than a bank of sovereigns. (7)

As Martin J. Wiener has convincingly argued in *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850–1980*, the opening passage is a typical example of a late romantic and post-industrial attitude:

An 'English way of life' was defined and widely accepted; it stressed nonindustrial, non-innovative and nonmaterial qualities, best encapsulated in rustic imagery – 'England is the country', in Stanley Baldwin's phrase (by this time already a cliché). (Wiener, 5–6)

In addition, Angus Calder in his analysis of the collective responses to the experience of the "Blitz" coined the intriguing phrase "Deep England" to describe the nostalgic longing for unspoilt, almost heterotopian spaces, largely defined by previous works of art:

There was a Green and Pleasant heartland, 'Deep England', which stretched from Hardy's Wessex to Tennyson's Lincolnshire, from Kipling's Sussex to Elgar's Worcestershire. It excluded, self-evidently, the 'Black Country' of the industrial Midlands and the north with its factories and windswept moors. It included those areas of the Home Counties around London which had not been invaded by suburban development. Parts of Kent, for instance, were 'deeper' than anywhere, but areas of the country closer to London were commuter territory. (Calder, 182)

The yearning for a peaceful, harmonious and invigorating country life, as offered on the Larkins' farm in Kent as the centre of "Deep England", is repeatedly contrasted with the corruption of morals in the cities, especially in London. An anti-urban feeling is articulated on the very first page of the novel, right after the passage quoted above, when Pop Larkin flatly declares, "Never trust blokes from London," Pop said, quite sternly. 'Never trust Londoners. Not at any price.'" (7) It is a sentiment shared by his wife who harps on the same string: "London was no good to anybody. It was good enough to unmoralise you. Give her the country any day." (144)

The last pieces of junk which Pop Larkin loads into his truck are bought off Lady Violet, which indicates that the pre-war social order is significantly shaken up. The items he has purchased at a fair price, Regency footbaths and two suits of armour from the ramshackle bungalow of the impoverished Lady Violet, tell the tale of the decline of the aristocracy. As Lady Violet is quite happy to part with her heirloom in return for a few pounds, Pop responds with empathy to the decay of Britain's former



social elite: "It was like seeing another bit of England go." (12) However, his attempt at aristocratic self-fashioning with the help of the purchased items is satirised by his down-to-earth wife: "Suits of armour, eh? Going baronial and all that. Next thing you know, we'll be having a butler." (18) Beyond the humour of Ma's repartee there is a recurring feeling that there is no gain without losses, that change implies the forfeiture of time-honoured traditions which, in turn, strengthens a conservative outlook on life. This becomes more tangible in a further scene when Pop invites his neighbours on a little outing to the seaside where they stumble into Old Fruity Pears, one of Pop's old cronies and a character from a bygone age. His children's playground, complete with merry-go-round, swing boats and shooting gallery, is regularly deserted since the youngsters seem to have lost all interest in such amusements. When Old Fruity is forced to give up his business, Pop sadly muses that this is "[a]nother little bit of Old England gone" (85). However, he believes that he knows the reason for the decline of fun fairs and similar forms of traditional entertainment: "The telly would have killed 'em all like it killed everything. Pop was getting tired of telly." (95)<sup>4</sup> In order to preserve this little bit of Old England he eventually decides to buy the entire playground for the benefit of his children and grandchildren.

Despite the criticism of television as a new medium which increasingly effaced old ways of life, the Larkins' own impressively sized TV set symbolises, like the two suits of armour, their social aspirations. Their garage is well stocked, containing next to the pick-up an old Rolls-Royce and a somewhat younger Jaguar, and their motorboat is moored on a jetty in a nearby river. The Larkins' niche in Kent is sketched as a small paradise, little short of the land of milk and honey where everything seems to be available in abundance. Pop takes pride in his well-filled drinks cabinet and even more so in his pool bar which the class-conscious Captain Broadbent, the Malvolio of the novel, views with utter disgust and horror:

On the opposite side of the pool was erected a piece of apparatus the like of which Captain Broadbent couldn't ever remember seeing before. It beat the band, he told himself, for sheer vulgarity. He supposed the thing was some sort of portable drink-wagon or bar. The entire affair was made of bamboo, with a roof of palm thatch and designs of coconut and pineapple scratched

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<sup>4</sup> This is a sentiment shared by Archie Rice in John Osborne's *The Entertainer* (1957) who blames television for the decline of Music Hall.

about it in dark poker-work, so that the whole had a marked Polynesian effect. It was set about with glasses of all colours, emerald, vermilion, purple, amber and blue, together with corkscrews, bottle openers as big as horse-shoes and scores of bottles and siphons of different kinds. It looked like something out of some beastly opera, Captain Broadbent thought. (58)

Broadbent, of course, represents the ill-humoured, snobbish and bullying spoilsport who sticks to old social conventions and dismisses the lifestyle of the Larkins as completely unacceptable. Since he is not willing to conform to the norms of his hosts, he deserves a punishment: Pop is not merely proud of his pool bar, he is also very creative in designing new cocktails. His most recent concoction bears the fanciful name "Moon-Rocket" and consists of two parts vodka and three parts rye whiskey. When Broadbent is invited to sample this refreshment, his physical response amounts to a well-deserved penance:

Some twenty seconds later he [Broadbent] found himself going through the alarming experience of supposing that he had been electrocuted somewhere in the pit of his stomach. He choked, fighting vainly to regain both equilibrium and breath.

'It's got somethink, Colonel, hasn't it?' Pop said. 'Drink up! Cheers!' (60)

When the Larkins throw a party, everything is in abundance and only the best will do: "Pop urged Mr Candy to cast his peepers on a vast board laden with cold turkey, duck, chicken, ham, tongue, salmon, green seas of water-cress and salad, scores of bottles and many red-and-snowy dishes of strawberries and cream." (158) Mr Candy is the local vicar, and although Pop is not a religious man, he does have a soft spot for all those who are not quite so well off as he is. However, it seems that the days of the needy have passed. When asked if any of the poor people in the parish might enjoy some of the leftovers, the vicar shrugs his shoulders and insists that "Times had changed." (160) And Pop agrees that times had changed indeed:

He recalled the days when the village shop had little to offer but candles, tea, paraffin, lard and cuts of rough old bacon. Now every Tom, Dick and Harry rolled up for scampi, smoked salmon and fancy larks of that sort. (160)

The Larkins are no exception to this rule and Macmillan's statement that "our people have never had it so good" certainly offers an apt description of the improved standard of living.

Another characteristic of the Larkin family is the marked eccentricity. Since Pop and Ma were never married, their seven children were born

out of wedlock and never christened, simply because the parents never found the time. The sumptuous meal referred to above is prepared for the occasion of the family's mass christening which amounts to a serious challenge for Reverend Candy, partly because of the sheer numbers of the candidates for baptism, partly because of their eccentric names: "Oscar Columbus Septimus Dupont Larkin" (43), their seventh child, and "John Churchill Marlborough Blenheim Charlton" (44), their first grandchild.

The unconventional lifestyle of the members of the Larkin family is based on "a religion of the total enjoyment of all appetites" (Vannatta, 99), including eating and drinking as well as living and loving. Although Pop is truly in love with his wife, he is not averse to flirtations with various women, especially with uninhibited ladies like Angela Snow and Jasmine Brown, with the approval of Ma, who enjoys a little variety herself. The increasing tolerance towards sexuality and the liberation of gender roles from traditional conventions permeates the Larkin tales in all five novels. An excellent case in point is their daughter Primrose, a fourteen-year old girl who looks like twenty: Pop proudly comments on her behaviour: "There was no doubt that people were right when they said girls grew up fast these days." (48) In order to prove his point Primrose, who is a great connoisseur of English poetry, has singled out Reverend Candy as her erotic target because she is a great admirer of John Donne's poems:

All of a sudden Primrose appeared to be holding up her face to be kissed. Mr Candy, recoiling, didn't know whether to resist in outspoken refusal or clerical reprimand, but Primrose saved him the trouble by putting her soft, moist, partly opened lips on his.

Mr Candy felt himself reel in complete astonishment and then become inert, his lips hard and flat. After about half a minute of this Primrose disengaged herself from the unequal struggle and said:

'You don't encourage people very much, do you?' and in the artless innocence of the question it might well have been Ma speaking.

'I don't think it's proper that I should.'

'Proper, why proper? We're all alone, aren't we?'

'Well, even if I thought it proper I don't think your mother would quite approve.'

'No?' The single word, so palpably innocent as to imply almost nothing at all, was followed by a hint of mischief. 'Perhaps you'd rather talk about poetry or something like that?'

Mr Candy didn't particularly want to talk about poetry either and was about to say so when she gave him a lustrous glance of inquiry and said, her voice very soft:

'Do you know John Donne?'

Mr Candy was sorry, but he didn't know a thing about Donne.

'He was a parson like you,' she said. 'You mean you don't know that marvellous, marvellous poem of his that begins "*I wonder by my troth what thou and I did till we loved*"?' (52-3)

Mr Candy's final assessment that "like all the rest of the family, she hadn't the shadow of an inhibition in her whole being" (54) neatly summarises the Larkins' attitude to sexuality which is, like food and drink, a consumable commodity.

While sexual liberation is humorously and lovingly embraced in the novel, the tale strikes a more serious tone with a view to youthful sub-cultures. As mentioned at the outset, the 1950s witnessed the rise of groups like Mods, Rockers, and Teddy Boys who responded to the established social order with anger and, not infrequently, with violence (fictionally captured in Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, published in 1962). In one plotline in the novel the rowdyish confrontation with two troubleshooters is described. In a scene significantly set at the aforementioned children's playground, two Rockers dressed in the typical leather outfit of the period wilfully destroy the equipment on the fairground and, on being challenged for their misconduct, threaten Pop and his friends with razors. Although good-natured Pop always "tried to find some good in everybody, even the worst of stinkers, outsiders and the rest" (33) he is forced to realise that there is a limit to human tolerance. This sensation increases on the morning when they are supposed to give evidence at court when they find that the tyres of their cars have been slashed with razors. At court they are stunned because the two rowdies are simply remanded on bail and completely unimpressed by the court proceedings: "Looked about as arrogant as a pair o' Nazis" (139), Pop comments. However, neighbour Edith, living alone in her little cottage, and also Ma Larkin now feel frightened in their hitherto happy homes: "Though she couldn't bring herself to confess it to Pop, she too was frightened. One day everything in the garden was lovely; the next there was poison in the air." (140) Worse than that they begin to understand that there is no way to protect themselves against such violence:

‘What are we coming to?’ Ma suddenly demanded to know in a positive flame of passion fed by yet another furious swig at the Red Bull. ‘Where in the name of all the saints are we supposed to be? England? I sometimes begin to doubt it.’ (141–2).

When the two troubleshooters show up at the christening party towards the end of the novel, to everybody’s surprise the Reverend Mr Candy, who earlier on had served in a parish in London’s East End, shows his athletic side and beats the two “winkle-pickers” off the premises. Eventually, then, it seems that the Anglican Church can be of substantial service to the parishioners. The Larkins’ secular rather than religious outlook on life is, in fact, by no means exceptional but rather representative of a large section of the post-war population. In *Watching the English* (2005) the sociologist Kate Fox flatly states that the English “are probably the least religious people on Earth” (353), identifying one reason for this somewhat impious attitude in the theological poise of the Anglican Church:

In any case, the Church of England is the least religious church on Earth. It is notoriously woolly-minded, tolerant to a fault and amiably non-prescriptive. [...] the Church of England is so constituted that its members can really believe anything at all, but of course almost none of them do. (354)

This is a fair characterisation of Reverend Candy and an appropriate description of the Larkins’ relationship to religiosity.

In addition to the characters’ spiritual reservations, a highly critical stance on Europe is difficult to overlook. As pointed out in the beginning of this essay, de Gaulle vetoed Britain’s application for membership in the EEC in January of 1963 – an issue that was hotly debated at the time. In the novel, the Brigadier, representing the pre-war order and the traditional animosity with Britain’s nearest continental neighbour, has few flattering words for Europe in general and France in particular. Asked by Pop whether something is bothering him, the Brigadier grumblingly explains: “It’s that damned common market all the time. I frequently feel my blood boil.’ ‘Don’t like it much, eh?’ ‘I call it a damned unholy alliance. Damned unholy, I tell you. Always loathed the French anyway.” (77) This short dialogue sets the scene for the arrival of Mademoiselle Dupont. In *A Breath of French Air*, the Larkins spend their holidays in the Hotel Beau Rivage at St. Pierre le Port in Brittany which is run by Mademoiselle Dupont. After having thoroughly anglicised northern France, they cordially invite her to visit them in England. Since

she has spied the coat of arms on the doors of the old Rolls-Royce, she has firmly come to believe that Pop is a Lord. In *Oh! To be in England*, much of the humour is created through the ensuing cultural misunderstandings and cultural clashes. As her letter arrives in which she accepts the invitation to attend the christening, Pop comments: "She is bewitched – no, perhaps enchanted is the better word – by the thought – no, the desire, the constant desire – to come to England." (22) English superiority is consistently confirmed when Pop and the Brigadier collect the guest at the harbour and gracefully act the parts of charming but dominant males on their own territory while Mademoiselle Dupont is on her own, uncertain and nervous during her first visit to England. In order to break the ice, Pop does the sightseeing while taking her to the Larkins' home, pointing out various places of interest, e.g. "See that hill? Used to be called Caesar's camp. Now turns out it was probably your bloke, William the Conqueror." (102) The reference to the Norman Conquest stimulates a short exchange between the two men about the French national character and its diverse defects:

'Still, the Gallic temperament, I suppose. Odd how very different they are from us, especially when you think how much of their blood really runs in ours.' 'Well, foreign, ain't they?' Pop said, as if this explained, even if it didn't condone, all sins. (105)

Such Francophobia has a long tradition in English culture (cf. Paxman, 24–9) and, in the age of Brexit, the antagonism has forcefully re-emerged: in the 'blame game' about who will eventually be responsible for a no-deal Brexit, the French President appears to be the most likely candidate as memories of de Gaulle's 1963 veto are currently refreshed:

Emmanuel Macron has long been identified as the most hardline EU leader, in contrast to Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, who is willing to give the UK more time. However, it had been assumed the French president would not "do a de Gaulle" – echoing his predecessor's veto of the UK joining the then-EEC in the 1960s – if the UK held a general election, or Final Say referendum. But an ally of Mr Macron warned last week that he feared there was not "a sufficient level of trust" about the UK's intentions towards the EU. (Merrick)

A popular novel like Bates' *Oh! To be in England* serves the purpose of a cultural archaeology since it almost seismographically registers the dominant rumblings in public debates at the time of publication. Not surprisingly, the Larkin novels polarised contemporary reviewers who

either found Bates' description of the condition of England delightful and entertaining or rather philosophically plain and far too sexy (cf. Vannatta 1983, 102). Dean R. Baldwin suggests that Bates' approach to life in the Larkin tales may be likened to Shakespeare's festive comedies where cakes and ale, wine, music and love are triumphant over the cantankerous Malvolios of the world (222).

The Larkin series was turned into a very popular TV comedy production by Yorkshire Television between 1991 and 1993 with David Jason as Pop Larkin, Pam Ferris as Ma Larkin and the young Catherine Zeta-Jones as their eldest daughter Mariette. In 2016 Zeta-Jones had played the part of Rose Winters in the film-remake of *Dad's Army*. Being asked about a remake of the Larkin novels for the big screen she was rather enthusiastic, stating "I'd be playing Ma Larkin, but I'm up for it". (Cf. Telegraph Film) Given the current cultural climate it would not come entirely as a surprise if Bates' tale of the state of the nation and the concomitant celebration of "Deep England" were indeed refashioned.

When Thomas Carlyle introduced the phrase "condition of England question" in *Chartism* (1839) and *Past and Present* (1843) he was deeply concerned about the grave social consequences of the Industrial Revolution and the division of British society into rich and poor (cf. Feldmann & Krug, 83–98). As is well known, Victorian literature witnessed the rise of the social novel, a genre practised by such eminent condition-of-England novelists as Benjamin Disraeli, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Dickens, and Charles Kingsley who tried to draw the attention of their readers to the far-reaching dislocations and to the growing gap between the "Two Nations". Ever since, both the problems, challenges and debates as well as the narrative strategies of responding to the ongoing process of political, social, and economic development have changed, and writers are called upon to experiment with appropriate literary formats to negotiate, interpret and articulate the state of the nation and the related structures of feeling.

In 2012 the novelist Jonathan Coe published an article in *The New Statesman* in which he addressed the question "Why Are We Obsessed With the State-of-the-Nation Novel?" His answer was that the nation has gone through a series of various crises since the nineteenth century and has thus continuously been in dire need of meaningful, if fictional explanations and solutions. While he acknowledged "that state-of-the-nation writing can come in many different forms" (Coe 2012), he further

argued that it is the task of the novelist to address contemporary events and to transform these into coherent and meaningful narratives, since tales are “vital resources in trying to understand what happened” (Coe 2018) – despite the impending danger that thematic topicality may be detrimental to artistic longevity.

The article “Can Fiction Make Sense of the News?”, printed in *The Guardian* in 2018, was the prelude to the publication of Coe’s own condition-of-England novel, entitled *Middle England*, in which he “wanted to convey a strong and specific sense of the texture of English public life in the last eight years”. Although not every reader may possibly agree with Coe’s interpretation of the Brexit as “a messy, unfolding narrative” (Coe 2018), his fictional account of the years between 2010 and 2018 offers a concise summary of the public incidents from the fall of Gordon Brown to the election of Theresa May, portrayed against the background of the private lives of his fictional characters. Even though the novels by Bates and Coe are separated by almost sixty years and the Cultural Poetics of 1963 and 2018 are strikingly different, there is nevertheless a strong cultural continuity evident in both tales, connected as they are by a time-honoured tradition. In 2015, i.e. in the run-up to the Brexit referendum, Benjamin Trotter, one of the characters in *Middle England* and a novelist in his own right, muses about the renaissance of “Deep England” and about the cultural ramifications of the underlying concept:

In particular, after working on this subject for a few months, he became fascinated by the concept of ‘Deep England’, a phrase which he began to encounter more and more often in newspaper articles and academic journals. What was it, exactly? Was it a psychogeographical phenomenon, to do with village greens, the thatched roof of the local pub, the red telephone box and the subtle thwack of cricket ball against willow? Or to understand it fully, did you have to immerse yourself in the writings of Chesterton and Priestley, H. E. Bates and L. T. C. Rolt? Did it help to watch Michael Powell’s *A Canterbury Tale*, or Cavalcanti’s *Went the Day Well*? Was its musical distillation to be found in the work of Elgar, Vaughan Williams or George Butterworth? The paintings of Constable? Or had it been most powerfully expressed, in fact, in allegorical form by J. R. R. Tolkien when he created the Shire and populated its pastoral idyll with doughty, insular hobbits, prone to somnolence and complacency when left to their own devices but fierce when roused, and quite the best – if the seemingly unlikeliest – people to call upon in a crisis? (Coe 2019, 202)



The intertextual reference to H. E. Bates and to other artists tunes in well with the concept of a continuous structure of feeling, traditionally directed towards alternative, heterotopian visions of England as proposed by Martin Wiener's analysis of rustic, non-industrial England in the nineteenth century and Angus Calder's "Deep England" in the twentieth century. Such alternative locations include Sleary's circus in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), the eponymous house *Howards End* in E. M. Forster's novel (1910), and J. B. Priestley's tribute to the natural beauty of the Cotswolds in *English Journey* ("the most English and least spoiled of our countrysides"; 1934, 47). Bates' description of the paradisiac life led by the Larkin family on their farm in Kent finds its place in this strong literary and cultural tradition which explains the popular success of the novel and which is still very much alive. In Coe's novel, Benjamin enjoys life in the sanctuary of his refurbished old water mill near Shrewsbury with spectacular views of the River Severn. As the "messy, unfolding narrative" (Coe 2018) of the Brexit becomes increasingly more unpalatable, the quest for "Deep England" may well gather momentum.

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# Telling Tales of Empire in Contemporary British Popular Culture

Lena Steveker

## 1. British Popular Culture and Stories of Britain in 2012

On 27 July 2012, the London Olympics kicked off with an opening ceremony which generated an estimated audience of one billion people around the world.<sup>1</sup> A few months later, in October 2012, the Bond film *Skyfall* broke box-office records within days of its release,<sup>2</sup> making it the most successful instalment to the Bond film series to date.<sup>3</sup> Consumed by large-scale global audiences, both the opening ceremony and *Skyfall* are products of popular culture engaged in representing Britishness. Following the by now well-established tradition of Olympic opening ceremonies, the London show “communicate[d] narratives about the host nation’s past and present” (Baker 2),<sup>4</sup> thus serving to introduce the UK to both athletes and audiences. Putting it differently, the opening ceremony constructed a tale of Britain’s past, present and future.<sup>5</sup> Directed by Sam Mendes, *Skyfall* is also engaged in representing Britishness. As it imagines British identity in the early twenty-first century, Mendes’s film follows the Bond formula which packages a distinctive Britishness,<sup>6</sup> embodied by James Bond as the “British hero of and for his time” (Korte, 26),<sup>7</sup> for an international market (see Chapman 2003, 97).

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<sup>1</sup> According to the BBC, an estimated television audience of one billion people watched its broadcast of the opening ceremony, in addition to the stadium audience of 62,000 people (see “Media Reaction”).

<sup>2</sup> For the film’s box-office figures see Child 2012[a] and [b] as well as Gant and “Updated.”

<sup>3</sup> According to *Box Office Mojo*, *Skyfall* has so far grossed 1,108,561,013 US-dollars at cinemas worldwide (see “Skyfall”).

<sup>4</sup> As Catherine Baker points out, “the contemporary [Olympic] opening ceremony has consistently, since at least Moscow 1980, served as a vehicle for existing nationalist (and sometimes regional) ideas to be staged in this spectacular global setting” (4).

<sup>5</sup> For the *London 2012 Opening Ceremony* as a story also see Arlene Phillips who claims, in *The Telegraph*, that the show consisted of “lots of story-telling, and that story-telling was in no way lost in a stadium” (Goldsmith et al., n.p.).

<sup>6</sup> See Chapman who argues that “[t]he ideology of national identity which the films themselves embody is British” (2007, 13).

<sup>7</sup> Also see Chapman who identifies James Bond as the “traditional British gentleman-hero” (2003, 97). For a detailed discussion of Bond as representing the British gentleman ideal see Berberich 2011.

Due to the films' economic success and world-wide popularity, James Bond has become a globalized cultural phenomenon,<sup>8</sup> with each new instalment adapting Bond's heroism, and with it his Britishness, to each film's specific historical context. Each film tells a story of national identity as it negotiates British cultural anxieties within the larger context of its particular era's zeitgeist. While critics have discussed the *London 2012 Opening Ceremony* as well as *Skyfall* as negotiating post-colonial Britishness, I will argue in this chapter that the British empire as well as imperial ideology are central to both Boyle's and Mendes's tales of Britain in the twenty-first century. As I will show, the *London 2012 Opening Ceremony* and *Skyfall* are two high-profile examples of British contemporary popular culture that tell tales of empire at a time when the British Empire has long ceased to exist as a political reality.

## **2. Empire Retold: The London 2012 Opening Ceremony**

Representing "ourselves as a nation, where we have come from and where we want to be" (Boyle qtd. in Gibson, n.p.), the *London 2012 Opening Ceremony* relied on a cast that was highly diverse in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity. It included British celebrities as well as thousands of volunteers from across the British society. Furthermore, it heavily drew on British popular culture. Using references to, and snippets from, British pop music, film, comedy, TV series, children's literature and fantasy fiction as narrative elements, the opening ceremony told a tale of Britain which represented the UK as an open, tolerant, and multicultural society. As Catherine Baker observes, the show "could be considered a counter-narrative to that narrative based on the country-side, the military, and the monarchy" (6) which has traditionally dominated public constructions of British national identity (see 6–7). Although the opening ceremony included rural, military and monarchical elements, it did not centre on them. For instance, the Olympic show opened on a scene entitled 'Green and Pleasant Land', but its rural vista, complete with cottages, live farm-stock and maypole dancing, soon gave way, in a sequence called 'Pandemonium', to a panorama of towering chimneys, steam engines and power looms which rose from the ground in a representation of the Industrial Revolution.

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<sup>8</sup> As Chapman points out, the Bond series is "the most successful and enduring series of films in cinema history" (2007, 21).

In the following segment, called ‘Happy and Glorious’, the opening ceremony turned towards the monarchy. A video clip showed Elizabeth II boarding a helicopter at Buckingham Palace and flying across London. The helicopter took her across the Mall, which was decked out in Union Jacks and packed with crowds waving more of the same flags, and across Trafalgar Square, where a group of people sitting on its iconic bronze lions cheered her on. This clip was a celebratory display of the monarchy and also of the UK’s former military power as it put into scene large-scale, flag-waving enthusiasm for the Crown’s most senior representative and, with its images of Trafalgar Square, acknowledged the naval victory that is inscribed into British cultural memory as having consolidated Britain’s status as a global superpower in the nineteenth century. At the same time, however, the clip humorously undercut any sense of national grandeur by linking the queen’s arrival in the stadium to British popular culture, thus not only blurring the line between reality and fiction but also questioning cultural hierarchies. The person escorting Elizabeth II was the actor Daniel Craig whom a royal butler and the monarch herself addressed as “Mr Bond”. Craig-as-Bond then appeared to parachute with the queen from a helicopter hovering above the stadium, their parachutes unfolding into Union Jacks while the Bond motif blasted from the stadium speakers (in a homage to the Bond film *The Spy Who Loved Me*, 1977). Inside the stadium, the camera zoomed in on the royal box as a speaker asked the audience to stand for the queen, who entered the box wearing the same dress as in the clip and as one of the parachutists. Scripting her entrance like a Bond scene, the opening ceremony represented the queen, tongue in cheek, not only as yet another actor in Boyle’s show but also as an icon of popular culture.

Following upon Elizabeth II’s arrival, the raising of the Union Flag was another example of how the opening ceremony reframed elements which have traditionally formed part of the country’s narrative for its own tale of Britain. As representatives of the Royal Navy, Army and Air-force carried the flag in slow procession through the arena, the show shifted its focus from the monarchy to the military, but only for as long as it took the soldiers to reach the flag post. While the flag went up, the Kaos Signing Choir of Deaf and Hearing Children performed the national anthem. Dressed in pyjamas, the choir’s visibly delighted members functioned as a counterpoint to the military display; they provided an utterly un-militaristic context to the flag-raising ceremony, thus

evoking a notion of patriotism based not on military discipline and ritual, but on social solidarity and inclusivity. The children also served as a link to the ceremony's next segment, which continued to foreground the idea of public service (as introduced by the members of the armed forces carrying the flag) by extending it to the NHS. Dressed in nurses' uniforms and doctors' coats, 600 members of the NHS and staff of the Great Ormond Street Hospital wheeled hospital beds into the stadium atop of which sat more children clad in pyjamas. Having danced to Mike Oldfield performing "Tubular Bells", the nurses and doctors put the children to bed; a young girl was seen reading J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904/11) under her bedcovers by the light of a torch; and J. K. Rowling appeared, reading out a short description of Neverland from Barrie's novel. Similar to the early nineteenth-century concept of folklore, which frames oral story-telling as a means of nation building, Rowling's public reading served to suggest a cultural community which included not only the children participating in the show, but also the audiences sitting in the stadium and in front of TV screens.<sup>9</sup> This community was threatened by an invasion of villains from British children's literature: Gigantic representations of Barrie's Captain Hook, Lewis Carroll's Queen of Hearts, Roald Dahl's Child Catcher, and Dodie Smith's Cruella de Vil hovered among the beds, while J. K. Rowling's Voldemort, largest of all, towered above them. Eventually, these threatening figures and their minions were banished by women who floated from the sky dressed as P. L. Travers's Mary Poppins. NHS staff and children alike celebrated their deliverance by another round of revelling before the scene concluded with the children being put to bed again and communal harmony being restored.

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<sup>9</sup> See Doris Feldmann & Christian Krug who read Rowling's performance as follows: "Ein [...] immer noch sehr aktives viktorianisches Residuum lässt sich in Rowlings Auftritt bei der Eröffnungszeremonie für die Olympischen Spiele 2012 in London erkennen. Hier wurde die Autorin als Vorleserin und damit vor allem über ihre Stimme inszeniert. Diese verleiht der Märchenfigur des spätviktorianischen schottischen Autors J.M. Barrie aktuelle britische Autorität: Bei der Figur handelt es sich um Peter Pan, einen Jungen, der niemals erwachsen werden will. Wie beim Folklore-Konzept des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts wird dabei mündliches Erzählen mit Volksmärchen und Volkskultur assoziiert und für eine nationale Vergemeinschaftung eingesetzt; zudem wird diese Art des Erzählens, wie im Viktorianismus, mit weiblicher Autorschaft und insofern mit Kinderliteratur verbunden. Gleichzeitig hebt die Stimme eines männlichen Fernsehkommentators Rowlings karitative Tätigkeiten, speziell ihre Bildungsförderung für jugendliche Leser, hervor." (Feldmann & Krug)



As exemplified by the three segments I have outlined above, the opening ceremony can be read as telling a tale of Britain in which the welfare state took precedence over the military, humour subverted pomposity, and popular culture trumped the monarchy. It is above all due to its many references to British popular culture that the opening ceremony was perceived by the media, both national and international, as representing Britain as a progressive, diverse, and inclusive nation. According to the *Guardian* author Jonathan Freedland, the show celebrated “an ethos of public service and ethnic diversity” (Freedland, n.p.); it presented “Britain both big and small, urban and suburban, young and older” as Sarah Crompton put it in *The Telegraph* (Crompton, n.p.). Commenting on the show in the *Telegraph Blog*, Tim Stanley saw the opening ceremony as characterizing Britain as “a country that [...] has many identities, that is culturally rich” (“Media Reaction”, n.p.). Mary Beard argued, also in *The Telegraph*, that the show contrasted sharply with “the pomp and majesty [of the queen’s Diamond Jubilee]” because it told “the people’s story” as it “play[ed] with the great symbols of Britain in a way that was both ironic and supportive” (Goldsmith et al., n.p.). Several reviewers also commend the opening ceremony for having been devoid of any nostalgia for the empire. Writing for *The New York Times*, Sarah Lyell pronounced that “[w]ith its hilariously quirky Olympic opening ceremony, [...] Britain presented itself to the world [...] as a nation secure in its own post-empire identity” (Lyell, n.p.); and according to Tim Stanley, “empire was never mentioned” (“Media Reaction”, n.p.).

While I agree that the opening ceremony did not negotiate nostalgia for the former British empire, I would claim that its narrative of Britain’s past, present and future centred on imperial ideology. As I will argue in the following, it is through its use of Shakespeare that the show told a tale of empire, a story of Britain which was imbued, in one of its key scenes, with imperial ideology. Entitled ‘Isles of Wonder’, the opening ceremony established Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1610/11) as its main point of reference. Putting it in Boyle’s words, “the whole thing is based on *The Tempest*” (qtd. in Prescott & Sullivan, 52). The play also provides a narrative framework as references to *The Tempest* marked the beginning and the end of the show’s introductory segment, which defined Great Britain as its titular ‘Isles of Wonder’. The opening ceremony kicked off with a brief video clip which took the audience onto a fast-forward trip from the source of the River Thames into the Olympic

Stadium in London. This clip began with an image of the stone that marks the river's head, its digitally altered inscription reading "Isles of Wonder / this stone was placed here to mark the source of the River Thames" (*London 2012*, DVD 1, 0:01:09). The titular phrase framed the show's tale of Britain as being set in a space which is as 'wondrous' as Prospero's island in Shakespeare's play. The process of establishing this setting was concluded at the end of the show's introductory segment when British actor and film director Kenneth Branagh, dressed up as the Victorian engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel, stepped from a horse-drawn omnibus, climbed the representation of Glastonbury Tor that dominated one end of the stadium and recited Caliban's account of his island:

Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,  
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.  
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,  
That if I then had waked after long sleep,  
Will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming  
The clouds methought would open, and show riches  
Ready to drop upon me; that, when waked,  
I cried to dream again.<sup>10</sup>

As Graham Holderness notes, Branagh's performance served "as a preface to the [...] history of the Industrial Revolution" (95) which the opening ceremony offered its audience in its following segment 'Pandemonium'. Having assured the audience that they need not be "afeard", a benignly smiling Branagh-as-Brunel supervised the transformation of the 'green and pleasant land' into a noisy, smoking and bustling steel workshop which set into scene, and indeed celebrated, the technological, social, and political upheavals brought about by the Industrial Revolution. While Branagh's performance can be seen, as Collette Gordon suggests, as "a charm [serving] to dispel anxiety in the face of environmental destruction and rapid social change" (139), I would argue that its main function as a narrative element was to conflate the actual island of Great Britain with the isle invoked in Caliban's lines. The Shakespearean speech completed the imaginary transformation of Britain into a 'wondrous' isle of a magical, dream-like quality which served as the setting for Boyle's tale of Britain. Using *The Tempest* as a framing device

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<sup>10</sup> *The Tempest*, III.ii.135–43; *London 2012*, DVD 1, 0:08:55–0:09:42.

for a national narrative which, as I have argued above, relied heavily on references to popular culture, the opening ceremony once more collapsed cultural hierarchies.

In terms of ideology, “[t]he use of Caliban’s lines has baffled Shakespeareans” as Holderness points out (96). James Shapiro notes that “[i]f you gave those lines some thought, especially in the light of the Empire, it’s an odd choice” (qtd. in Holderness, 96). Erin Sullivan ponders

what kind of symbolic work Shakespeare was doing in these celebrations, which used a speech from Caliban – one of the most politically disenfranchized and dispossessed characters in all of Shakespeare’s plays – to represent the dreams and ambitions of Great Britain, empire and all. (4)

Although both Shapiro and Sullivan refer to the British empire while contemplating the significance of Branagh’s performance, neither of them continues to analyse this conjunction in more detail. Holderness sees the show’s use of Shakespeare, and also of Brunel, as unconnected to imperial discourse, reading Branagh’s performance as a “homogenous and harmonious reconciliation of Shakespeare with industry, science and technology, with global culture and with popular participation” (Holderness, 100). With Brunel’s Shakespearean speech, Holderness argues,

[e]ngineering had entered the realm of poetry. Art and science had become one, as they were in the Renaissance. Shakespeare and Brunel [...] had become one voice, one hand, one mind. And by the combination of their powers of vision and practice, the Olympic Opening Ceremony suggests, they had brought greatness back to Britain. (99)

In contrast to Holderness, for whom “Brunel and Shakespeare were [...] speaking on behalf of an extremely diversified, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Britain” (99), I read the scene in which Branagh’s Brunel delivered Caliban’s lines as a revisionist moment which retold Britain’s past. *The Tempest* is, as David Lindley points out, “not only a colonialist text, but has functioned historically to represent a colonialist ideology” (70). Holderness rejects “a particular critical orthodoxy that identifies Caliban as the oppressed colonial subject and Prospero as the imperial oppressor” (98), and he is right in pointing out that *The Tempest*, “which from its conception has been subjected to wide diversities of interpretation and adaptation” (Holderness, 98), cannot be reduced to a colonialist reading. However, as Lindley puts it, “[t]he argument that the action of the play and the issues it raises are connected to the colonisation

of the Americas has become, in the last forty years or so, the dominant critical perspective upon [*The Tempest*]" (10). The play's "latent themes of imperialism and power" (Lindley, 77) have also been foregrounded on stage. Since Jonathan Miller's 1970 production of the play, it has become something of a commonplace to have a black actor play Caliban who is set up against a white actor playing Prospero. Various high-profile productions represented Caliban "in a manner explicitly intended to recall the shameful history of colonial enslavement" (Lindley, 71).<sup>11</sup> I therefore assume that – in contrast to Shakespeareans, who would be more aware of the play's full, multifaceted critical history – members of a more general public familiar with *The Tempest* will have encountered the play in the theatre and, at the time of the opening ceremony, would have been likely to see the play as being tied to the themes of imperialism and colonialism.<sup>12</sup>

As Paul Brown states, the lines in which Caliban describes his island are of particular relevance to the play's negotiation of these themes. The island of Caliban's dream is a "site beyond colonial appropriation" (Brown, 65). Described by Caliban,

the island is seen as to operate not for the coloniser but for the colonised. [...] For Caliban, music provokes a dream wish for the riches which in reality are denied him by colonial power. There seems to be a quality in the island beyond the requirements of the coloniser's powerful harmonics, a quality existing for itself, which the [colonial] other may use to resist, if only in dream, the repressive quality which hails him as villain [...]. (ibid.)

The *London 2012 Opening Ceremony* co-opted the dream island which represents Caliban's site of resistance into an unabashedly patriotic celebration not only of Britain, but also of British imperialism. Caliban's words were spoken by an actor personifying Isambard Kingdom Brunel, an icon of British engineering and a leading innovator of the steamship technology, which was instrumental in advancing British imperial

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<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, the 2009 British-South-African co-production with John Kani as Caliban which *The Guardian* reviewer Michael Billington saw as being "anchored in an unsentimental recreation of the colonial experience" (Billington, n.p.). Other examples of post-colonial approaches to the play were also staged at the Stratford Festival in 2010 and in Julie Taymor's film adaptation of 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Writing in 2018, John Roe points out that "[i]n the theatre such interests have recently begun to fade, partly because they have been over-worked but perhaps more significantly because actors of varying ethnicity have taken on the play's major roles rather than being restricted to those of Caliban or of Ariel." (n.p.)

power in the Victorian era. The musical score that accompanied this performance was Edward Elgar's *Nimrod* (1899), a piece evoking "British nationalist sentiment" (Holderness, 95). While delivering his lines, Branagh-as-Brunel stood at the foot of a hill representing Glastonbury Tor, with an English oak placed on its top. Glastonbury Tor and the oak are symbols of England, the country that initiated British imperialism and colonial expansion. Within this context, I would argue that the opening ceremony's re-enactment of *The Tempest* appropriated the lines which Shakespeare wrote for a character who, in the last forty years, has come to signify the colonial other. Claiming the words of the colonised for a figure that symbolizes the British empire and Britain's colonial power, this scene not only silenced the voice of the colonial other, but denied the other's very existence.

Boyle's show told a tale of empire as it used Shakespeare's *Tempest* to purge the UK's imperial and colonial past from its narrative of Britain.

### 3. The Empire Strikes Back: *Skyfall* (2012)

*The London 2012 Opening Ceremony* is tied to James Bond not only because of its Bond scene, which I have discussed above, but also because the film *Skyfall* (2012), released a few months after the London Olympics,<sup>13</sup> evokes discourses of empire for its representation of Britishness.<sup>14</sup> In *Skyfall*, Bond fights former fellow agent Raoul Silva, who carries out terror attacks on MI6 because he wants to take revenge on M for having betrayed him to the Chinese secret service during the handover of Hong Kong in 1997. Silva hacks the MI6 top-security computer system and blows up the agency's headquarter in London. Though personally motivated, his revenge takes aim at the whole country's national security: members of the British government come under gunfire; and, in a reference to the 7/7 London bombings, havoc is wreaked in the tube.

With its plot of cyberterrorism, the film is set in the globalised world of the twenty-first century. The spatial strategy of *Skyfall*, however, is

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<sup>13</sup> As Schwanebeck comments, "[t]he Bond producers and the London Olympics Team took the opportunity to create a paratextual relationship with mutual benefits, where either project could serve as an extended promotion for the other [...]. The campaign appears to have been beneficial for both parties: following the Olympic Games, London broke tourism records and *Skyfall* had a record-breaking run at the box-office" (171–2).

<sup>14</sup> My reading of *Skyfall* has developed from a public lecture which I gave, together with Joachim Frenk, in Saarbrücken in November 2013.

more constrained; it is local rather than global, thus differing clearly from its predecessor *Quantum of Solace* (2008), in which Bond moves between the European continent, the British Isles, and South America. By contrast, *Skyfall* is largely set in the UK and constitutes an act of pop-cultural British navel-gazing. The film's showdown is set in the Scottish Highlands, where M is murdered and Bond kills his adversary. What is more, the many scenes which are set in London turn the British capital into the film's second protagonist. Several of London's landmarks and tourist attractions appear on screen as Bond moves through the city by car and on foot. He is chauffeured past the London Eye and the Houses of Parliament; he runs down Whitehall towards the Cenotaph with Westminster Abbey in the background; and in the scene that ushers in the film's ending, he stands on the rooftop of MI6, looking out over London.<sup>15</sup> The rooftop scene is of particular significance for the film's narrative of Britishness as it shows the currently most successful pop-cultural embodiment of British heroism standing in front of the most well-known British icon, the Union Jack, looking out over Whitehall – that part of London which, for centuries, has represented the centre of British political power. This image of Bond looking out over London is part of the film's overall representation of British national identity which, as I will argue in the following, is invested with notions of power and 'greatness' that have their source in Britain's imperial past.

The British empire provides the narrative context for *Skyfall*'s version of the Bondian stock narrative that sees Britain under attack, because Silva's revenge originates in the handover of Hong Kong, the last British colony.<sup>16</sup> However, the British empire not only serves as a theme for the villain's backstory; it also has an ideological function in *Skyfall*'s story of twenty-first-century Britishness. In one of the film's key sequences, Bond is seen sprinting down Whitehall in a desperate, and eventually successful, attempt to prevent Silva from murdering M during her report to a ministerial committee that, contemplating the closure of MI6, investigates her handling of his cyberattacks. Having sketched the threats which Britain faces in the twenty-first century, M concludes her report by quoting the last lines of Alfred Tennyson's poem "Ulysses" (written 1833, publ. 1842):

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<sup>15</sup> For a detailed discussion of London's topography in *Skyfall* see Schwanebeck.

<sup>16</sup> See Hoa who argues that several of the film's locations are "encryption[s] of Hong Kong" (6).

We are not now that strength which in old days  
 Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;  
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.  
 (Tennyson, ll. 66–70, *Skyfall*, 1:36:14–41)

Having M recite these lines while she is (though unknowingly) about to be attacked, the film invites the audience to see both her and, by implication, the UK, whose security and freedom M sees as being safeguarded by the MI6, in analogy to Tennyson's King Ulysses, who acknowledges his diminishing strength in old age, yet emphasises his power and resilience. Similar to the *London 2012 Opening Ceremony*, *Skyfall* collapses cultural hierarchies: the film frames its representation of Britain with lines written by a canonical author of 'high' English literature. This strategy of popularizing 'high' culture ties the film to notions of imperialism. Canonised as (one of) the most eminent poets of the Victorian age, Tennyson is a representative of the era which has been inscribed into British cultural memory as the British empire's 'golden age'. With M quoting "Ulysses" while Bond thwarts Silva's attack, *Skyfall* suggests that British identity in the twenty-first century is the same as it was in the Victorian age. Rather than nostalgically longing for its former imperial power, the film presents contemporary Britain as successfully claiming this power for the present.<sup>17</sup> With this scene, *Skyfall* tells a tale of empire as it contends that although the empire is no longer in existence, the power the UK used to yield in its imperial past still forms a constituent part of Britishness in the early twenty-first century.

In its ideological agenda, this scene is complemented by the film's ending which consists of both the rooftop scene mentioned above and the closing scene, in which Bond reports for duty in the new (male) M's office.<sup>18</sup> Standing on the rooftop of MI6, Bond is handed a bulldog figurine adorned with a Union Jack, left to him by M in her will. The figurine is a reference to Winston Churchill, also known as the 'British bulldog', who is inscribed into British cultural memory for having successfully defended the UK against Nazi Germany during WWII, the British empire's last large-scale military conflict. On the rooftop, Bond

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Hasian as well as Hoa for competing readings of *Skyfall* as "21st-century Anglo-American imperial nostalgia" (Hasian, 1) and "nostalgic fantasy" (Hoa, 10).

<sup>18</sup> See Anderson for a discussion of *Skyfall's* regressive gender politics (79–82).

is thus symbolically handed the insignia of British resilience and imperial power before he then meets the new M in his office.<sup>19</sup> With its heavy wooden desk, wood-panelled wall, leather chairs and ornate lamp shades, this office is reminiscent of the office M occupies in the first Bond film *Dr. No* (1962). On a narrative level, this makes sense because *Skyfall*, together with *Casino Royale* (2006) and *Quantum of Solace* (2008), tells the story of how James Bond develops into 007, thus serving as a prequel to *Dr. No*. At the end of *Skyfall*, Bond is supposed to have arrived, in 2012, where he sets out from in the first film in 1962.

In the context of *Skyfall*'s construction of Britishness, however, M's office is indicative of the film's ideological agenda. *Skyfall* ends with the man who has just saved Britain standing in front of the head of the institution that has turned out to be the only safeguard of the UK's national security. The two men represent a contemporary Britain which the film conceptualizes as a powerful and resilient country. Two elements of the office's interior design indicate that the power Britain yields in the twenty-first century is rooted in its imperial past. Thomas Buttersworth's oil painting *The Battle of Trafalgar* (c. 1805–42)<sup>20</sup> hangs on one of the office walls, and two miniature reproductions of the bronze lions on Trafalgar Square decorate the desk. As in the *London 2012 Opening Ceremony*, these references to the Battle of Trafalgar (1805) evoke the naval power that facilitated the success of the British empire in both economic and military terms. Similar symbols of empire adorn M's office in *Dr. No*, but they serve different ideological functions. In *Dr. No*, M's office "stands in memorial to [...] a superseded empire" (Stock, 216); and M is a "fuddy-duddy Establishment figure" (Stock, 224) juxtaposed to Bond who "encapsulat[es] the then prominent ideological themes of classlessness and modernity" (Bennett & Woollacott, 34–5). While M and his office, in *Dr. No*, represent the past which Bond turns into a better present, *Skyfall* claims that the British empire is the source that provides the UK with the power and resilience it needs to defend itself against the threats it is faced with in the inherently insecure world of the twenty-first century. As it ties twenty-first-century British iden-

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<sup>19</sup> *Skyfall* also refers to WWII when MI6 relocates, after Silva's bombs, to underground tunnels that are "part of Churchill's bunker" (0:27:42).

<sup>20</sup> The painting is held by the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, London; it is listed in the museum's online catalogue under the title *The Battle of Trafalgar, 21 October 1805: Beginning of the Action* (see "The Collections").



tity to notions of nineteenth-century imperialism, Mendes's film can be read as telling a tale of empire in a post-imperial time.

As I have shown, imperialist ideology is central to the representations of Britishness offered by the *London 2012 Opening Ceremony* and *Skyfall*. In a truly imperialist move, the Olympic show tells a tale of contemporary Britain which not only silences the voice of the colonial other, but negates the other's existence. The Bond film conceptualizes British identity, in the twenty-first century, as tapping into nineteenth-century imperial power. My readings of Boyle's show and Mendes's film thus reveal that powerful tales of empire were told in contemporary British popular culture long before they found their way into British political discourse via the Brexit-infused dreams of "Empire 2.0."

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## New Tales of Ireland

### Claire Kilroy's *The Devil I Know* and Anna Burns' *Milkman*

Joachim Frenk

If nations are indeed imagined communities (Benedict Anderson), they thrive by the tales told about them – the meta-narratives that, for better or worse, define how nations are conceptualized and perceived, by others and by themselves. The tradition of tale-telling has played a central part in the establishment of modern Irish literature and culture – albeit as a carefully edited and commented tradition. For example, in 1888, William Butler Yeats published, with Douglas Hyde, the collection *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, following this up in 1893 with *The Celtic Twilight: Men and Women, Dhoul and Faeries*. In the introductory chapter of the latter, titled “A Teller of Tales”, Yeats named his main source:

Many of the tales in this book were told me by one Paddy Flynn, a little bright-eyed old man, who lived in a leaky and one-roomed cabin in the village of Ballisodare, which is, he was wont to say, ‘the most gentle’ – whereby he meant faery – ‘place in the whole of County Sligo.’ [...] The first time I saw him he was cooking mushrooms for himself; the next time he was asleep under a hedge, smiling in his sleep. [...] He was a great teller of tales, and unlike our common romancers, knew how to empty heaven, hell, and purgatory, faeryland and earth, to people his stories. He did not live in a shrunken world, but knew of no less ample circumstance than did Homer himself. (Yeats, 3–6)

Yeats's Paddy is a figure almost too archetypal to be true; he seems to originate from the tales he tells. As Colin Graham argues, “Yeats's ambiguous control over the authenticity of his material [...] in its triple level of authentication (tales, story-tellers, folk-tale collectors)” is carefully constructed “through further authenticating processes (folk tales are themselves authenticated by their tellers, then authenticated and reauthorized by their collectors/editors)” (Graham, 19). At the pivotal moment in the postulation and construction of Irishness, tales were at the core of the signifying battle. The *Celtic Twilight* soon became a

slightly derogatory nickname for the movement Yeats crucially helped to create, the Irish Literary Revival.<sup>1</sup>

Since then, many have imitated Yeats's tale-gathering efforts, albeit not with the same intent. In the early twenty-first century, numerous anthologies of Irish tales are readily available, cashing in on the established chestnut that the Irish are great tellers of tales. Irish writers of the twenty-first century must position themselves within this carefully constructed tradition, and they can choose to play with it, which they do in different ways, especially when they deal with contemporary Irish topics.

The early twenty-first century has seen big Irish (news) stories revisited and textually reshaped, two of which will be discussed in this essay. First, the collapse of the Celtic Tiger, declared dead in October 2008 when the collapse of Lehman Brothers in the USA triggered a global financial crisis that brought to an abrupt end an Irish economic miracle that had begun in the mid-1990s. The Republic had to be supported by international institutions, to the tune of 85 billion euros, most of it from the European Union. Today, the Republic's finances have largely recovered, and the country is widely regarded as an example of a successful European rescue mission and of economic self-help after having received support from the EU.

The second time Ireland, and this time Northern Ireland even more than the Republic, came to dominate international political thought (and it still does at the time of writing), was after the United Kingdom's referendum, on 23 June 2016, to leave the European Union. The referendum's outcome was tied to the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger since, as a consequence of the Brexit vote, the Republic, like Northern Ireland, was threatened with another economic crisis. But the possible consequences for the two political entities on the island of Ireland are even more

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<sup>1</sup> In 1896 Yeats would meet Augusta, Lady Gregory, and the two would, together with Edward Martyn, found the Irish National Theatre in 1899 – which faltered in 1901, but was revived in the Abbey Theatre in 1904, where Irish tales were acted out on stage. We must also note that in his early years, Yeats's pro-Irish stance went along with an anti-English one. Yeats saw his Irish tales, recovered from a glorified past, as an antidote to the English-dominated spirit of the modern age. David Holdeman points out that "Yeats associated England with everything he loathed about the modern world: with imperialism, with vulgar, godless materialism, with urban ugliness and squalor. Ireland, by contrast, appeared an unspoiled, beautiful place where people lived according to age-old traditions and held on to magical, time-honored beliefs." (6–7)

severe than that, harking back to the tragic period of the Troubles, which lasted from 1969 to 1998. The border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland is the only land border of the United Kingdom in the British Isles – a fact that came too late to the attention of the British political establishment, let alone the British public. Safeguarding the peace in Ireland enabled by the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement of 1998 has been defined as paramount to any solution to be found by both the EU and the UK, yet the stability of the peace and avoidance of new Irish troubles seem far from guaranteed. Brexit, one of the most important European political events of the early twenty-first century, has come to hinge on post-Troubles Ireland and on the threat of a return of the Troubles.

The two novels discussed in this essay give factional insights into and tell fascinating tales about these two big Irish stories, the Celtic Tiger years and the Troubles. At first glance, these modern narratives seem to be too overtly political and too close to Irish realities to be considered Irish tales. Yet the two novels bring an array of literary techniques to bear on their material in order to bring the hard, unaccommodating reality closer to the abstractions of the tale tradition. They play with and subvert clichés about Ireland. In doing so, they continue, rewrite and sometimes question their underlying stories, complexifying them by offering an array of interrelated persons, places and interests that is at times as factional as it is fictional. What emerges from these new tales are images of two Irish societies at different times in extreme states of collective mind, of neurotic communities that have undergone lasting traumas, and of two Irelands that can only be understood from the not-too-distant, present past. These new Irish tales, to give them a tentative label, also conjure up older ones, tales of poverty and hunger, delusion and failure, emigration and globalisation, the latter both physically and financially.

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Claire Kilroy's *The Devil I Know* was published in 2012, within living memory of the catastrophic 2008 crash of the Irish economy. The tale's events unfold in 2006 and end in 2016 when the main character tells his sad tale of personal and national ruin. Kilroy's tale about the ruinous end of the Celtic Tiger does not deal in any kind of Celtic twilight, as Stevie Davis contends: "In this carnivalesque allegory of Ireland's property boom, Claire Kilroy presents a satiric danse macabre of brio and

linguistic virtuosity.” (n. p.) The motto preceding the novel places it in the tradition of great Irish tales:

riverrun, past Eve and Adam’s, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs. Sir Tristram, violer d’amores, fr’over the short sea, had passencore re-arrived from North Armorica on this side the scraggy isthmus of Europe Minor to wielderfight his penisolate war.

The quotation is a gesture of reverence and a mark of ambition as it ties the novel to *Finnegans Wake*, perhaps the most ambitious work of modern Irish literature. The narrator later recalls the first part of the quotation: “Do you remember? It used to be written on the tenner back when we still had our own currency.” (*Devil*, 354)<sup>2</sup> Apart from its nod to a great Irish tale, *The Devil I Know* takes at least three direct cues from *Finnegans Wake*: It locates its tale of greed, sin and recklessness on the peninsula of Howth Castle and environs. It takes the name of its main character from the quotation. It derives from *Finnegans Wake* a sense of inevitable circularity – Joyce’s novel begins in mid-sentence and finds, in “recirculation back”, its beginning only in its last sentence. In his review in *The Scotsman* (5 August 2012), Stuart Kelly enlarges on this motif:

‘commodious vicus of recirculation’, part commode, part commodity, part vice, part Caesar’s ‘vici: I have conquered’, part Vico’s eternal return, and all circulating medium; which is language, money and sewerage. In Joyce’s quote, Tristram ‘rearrived from North Amorica’, the place of desire; Kilroy transposes this to the flow of credit crunch finance. (n. p.)

The novel’s narrator sees himself tied to circularity: “A brief note on how that episode ended, if I may. It ended as my episodes all end. As they all must end if I am to keep body and soul together. In ended in the circle.” (*Devil*, 25)

The literal circle Tristram, the narrator/witness, refers to is the circle of chairs in a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. Tristram St Lawrence, the thirteenth Earl of Howth, has been rescued from himself by an invisible Monsieur Deauville who protects him from his alcoholism; the eponymous figure of the novel’s title is also his tempter and the reason of his final, irrevocable fall. One year before, Deauville saved Tristram after he

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<sup>2</sup> All references to the novel (abbreviated as *Devil*) refer to the following edition: Claire Kilroy, *The Devil I Know*. London: Faber & Faber, 2013.



was found lifeless in a Brussels airport hotel.<sup>3</sup> Tristram is a highly capable interpreter at international conferences; in Joycean fashion, he claims that he does “all the major European languages” (5) – but he is merely a momentary translator of others’ words, “unable to recall a word of what has been said once the sessions are called to a close” (6). The multilingual but forgetful Tristram is the perfect mouthpiece of the equally multilingual, mobile and elusive Deauville: “He was more what you’d call a consultant” (6). Supervised by his AA sponsor Deauville, Tristram zigzags across the decentred worlds of politics and global finance.

It is only when his plane has to make an emergency landing in Dublin – the event’s contingency is questionable – that Tristram is forced to face his old demons again: his alcoholism, his family, his ruined reputation, his lack of a stable inner core. As focaliser, Tristram is not holding anything back, he is speaking from the bottom of a ruined existence, ten years after the emergency landing. Tristram is a witness at a Dublin tribunal that seeks to find out about the fraudulent bankruptcy of Castle Holdings, a shell company of which Monsieur Deauville had made the doomed Tristram director, also in order to attract investors for questionable construction projects – a metaphor of Celtic Tiger hubris and crookedness. Tristram’s title and family possessions come in handy for the Deauville devil who seeks to wreak ruin on Ireland, with the willing assistance of many Irish. One of those is Desmond Hickey, a caricature of an Irish constructor and would-be building tycoon during the Celtic Tiger years. Tristram has known Hickey since childhood:

Gick. Gicky Hickey. He looked fiercely into my eyes – we might have been making history. He had dispensed those same intense handshakes even back in the playground. Trying to be everything his unemployed father was not, I suppose, and who could blame him? (14)

Around the trio of the feeble Tristram, the invisible Monsieur Deauville and the greedy and coarse Hickey, this tale of the inflation and bursting

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<sup>3</sup> The novel hints that Tristram, who is as much an allegory as he is a credible, rounded character, is actually dead (“Death warmed up. That’s what they call you behind your back.” *Devil*, 288). In a conversation between Tristram and the St Lawrence’s family servant, Larney, each assumes the other dead: “I don’t know, Larney, what begins and has no end, and what is the ending of all that begins?” ‘Death.’ ‘Death,’ I repeated. His smile hovered in the seething darkness, just his smile, as if his skin were black around it. ‘Yes, death,’ he said. ‘Everyone thinks you’re dead.’” (*Devil*, 29) Tristram may have been in hell from the beginning.

of the Irish real estate bubble unfolds. Hickey is considered a suitable business partner by Deauville; he wants to build an oversized complex of unnecessary buildings in a beauty spot close by the sea. Tristram looks at the wildly overstated advertising posters and concludes: “This development promised another climate.” (120) Deauville, who is never more than a voice and the “*tocka, tocka*” of his keyboard on the phone, uses Tristram, who signs his own payment cheques as the nominal head of the brass-plaques Castle Holdings:

It bought nothing, sold nothing, manufactured nothing, did nothing, and yet, as your piece of paper states there, it returned a profit of €66 million that first year. Huge sums of untaxed money were channelled through it out to the shareholders of its parent companies, which is perfectly legal under Irish tax law, as you know. I did not make the laws. You made the laws. You are the lawmakers and must shoulder the blame. Me? I was merely the conduit. My appointment struck me as appropriate on a mordant level. Who better to direct a shell company than a shell of a human being? (72–3)

Via Castle Holdings, an unsupervised bank legal under Irish law, Deauville gets Tristram to help Hickey finance his hubristic “Claremont” project, the first step being the bribing of a minister to rezone the site with money from nowhere. What can possibly go right?

To secure the investment necessary beyond the acquisition of the site, the trio, which turns into a quartet after the inclusion of another dubious businessman – and pimp – called “the Viking”, has to gain the nod of “the Golden Circle” (137), members of the political and moneyed ‘elites’ of the Republic who approve of the project in the form of a multi-million euro-loan. At a meeting in one of the newly sprung up jade-coloured glass towers of Dublin’s river front, the real plans of the Golden Circle are revealed: Next to the creation of a new, high-price quarter of Dublin and the necessary rerouting of a planned tube line, they intend to continue across the water: “We’re invading London not with armies but with hard currency. [...] And London is just the start” (233). The Golden Circle’s ambitions take leave of reality, and via Tristram, M. Deauville observes and supports the growing mania. The next goal is the acquisition of parts of the (actually existing) investment project The World in Dubai, an artificial archipelago in the shape of a world map:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The state-owned conglomerate behind The World in Dubai was severely affected by the financial crash of 2008, and from 2011 it was reported that the islands were slowly sinking into the sea. But the global recovery has also revived the project, and money is flowing

we purchased the island of Ireland for €28 million, and we're developing it into an Irish-themed resort [...]. To distinguish it from other islands, the Ireland Island will feature a recreation of the Giants' Causeway. And so, going forward. [...] What we're here to do today, gentlemen, is purchase Britain. [...]

McGee didn't have any money left and yet he refused to fold. I recognised the compulsive behaviour of an addict. This wasn't a boardroom. This was a betting shop. [...] 'This, gentlemen, is the real target. We're onto the hard stuff now.'

Shanghai. (236)

There are shades of the satirical all-England theme park in Julian Barnes's *England, England* (1998), but here the focus is on Ireland. The investment projects increase in scale, from the rebuilding of Ireland to its recreation elsewhere to the symbolic reverse-acquisition of the former colonial oppressor to the acquisition of Asian high-rise structures in an ever-accelerating spiral of globalised investments. The investment plans are financed by nothing but debt, by dematerialised, dark capital circling the globe at high speed, routed into digital accounts at the command of invisible agents. This is the business of the devil in the twenty-first century, and the novel keeps him present through a myriad of hints, proverbial phrases and allusions. The Irish investors, in their attempts to play a game completely beyond their means, have their bid for Shanghai's Pudong skyline accepted, but their financial castles in Dubai and Shanghai can only fail. The reckless overconfidence of the Golden Circle is – proudly – underpinned by a toxic masculinity: "McGee was proclaiming they deserved everything the Celtic Tiger had brought them because they had *balls*." (218) The board meeting of the Golden Circle is a core scene of the novel, a satirical vignette of the over-reaching greed and hubris that raged through the Irish *nouveaux* and *vieux riches* in the last years of the Celtic Tiger.

During the board meeting, the wine's tannin blackens the investors' lips, and Tristram smells it "on their blackened breaths, their blackened hearts, their blackened souls. All of them laughing in a medieval display of mettle" (237). The jade-coloured present of glass surfaces in twenty-first-century Dublin is undercut by Ireland's history, most importantly, in this devilish allegory, by Ireland's catholic heritage. Hickey and

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into the Persian Gulf again. "Only in recent years has Dubai managed to escape from the rubble of the economic collapse, which stalled Sheikh Mohammed's master plan and left The World in purgatory." (Weller, n. p.)

Tristram are confronted with it when they go out to inspect the planned new quarter of Dublin. Having lost their way, Hickey exudes the confidence of the conquering developer: “‘The Celtic Tiger didn’t bother venturing this far north,’ I noted. ‘We are the Celtic Tiger,’ said Hickey, ‘We’re here now.’” (248) But this “here” does not register with the usual systems of orientation; there is no GPS signal, and the map they have been given does not correspond to the territory. Tristram and Hickey suddenly find themselves in a kind of primordial Irish countryside, a wild space that is more than just an area waiting to be developed:

‘Do you believe in God?’ [Hickey] asked me some miles down the road. Night had fallen by then. Real dark, country dark.

‘No.’

‘Do you believe in the Devil?’ The quality of his silence made me turn to him. ‘Why, do you?’

His face was lit electronic blue by the screen of the GPS, which indicated that we were still stranded in a void. ‘Yes.’ (251–2)

For all its rolling out of the paraphernalia of the high-technological present, *The Devil I Know* does not shy away from going gothic, gesturing at Irish projections and presences not caught up in the capitalist logic of international ventures and property development. Ephemeral and immaterial as Monsieur Deauville is, on their excursion into the uncharted, untamed Irish countryside, the presence of something deeply troubling manifests itself, causing Hickey to confess to his catholic convictions: “I think you have seen him. I think you just didn’t know it was the Devil. Or that you just didn’t admit it was the Devil. [...] I can feel him. Breathing down the back a me neck.” (253–5) The difference between the coarse and simple Irish Hickey who adheres to an old-fashioned belief and the neurotically global Tristram, who has no time for superstitions, collapses as Tristram realises that alcohol is not the only demon that haunts him: “as soon as Hickey said it, I felt it too. Felt him. Breathing on me.” (256) The Irish devil is still out there, untracked by the new technologies, an entity firmly lodged in the Irish landscape and psyche.

At the end of Tristram’s tale, the devil works his way to ruin everybody. He is with Hickey in the car when Monsieur Deauville calls to let him know of the global financial meltdown that will push Ireland into the abyss:

'He said that a bank has gone under in New York. [...] He said it's not just any bank. It's one of the largest investment banks of the US. [...] He says the money is gone.'

'What money?'

'All of it. All of the money. My money, your money, McGee's money, Castle Holdings' money. The country's money. [...]

'Christ, it's worse than gone,' I realised, thinking out loud. Pennies were dropping like anvils. 'We still have to pay it back.' [...]

All of the money in the world was gone, and already, within a few minutes of it having evaporated, it seemed implausible that there had been so much of it in the first place. (294-5)

The parallel between Tristram's alcoholism and Ireland's addiction to money is maintained all through the text, and it is implied that it is not possible to overcome either addiction. They can only be held in check; a relapse is always possible. When Hickey forces Tristram to drink one gulp of whiskey after the catastrophic news, Tristram loses control. When he wakes up the next morning, he is unable to feel any hate for his business partners or anybody else because he realises that they are all in the same situation: "All of us would pay for it, many times over and for the rest of our lives." (303)

In this gothic Irish tale, the cost is more than merely money. Back home, the old family servant, Larney, who actually died years ago and is thus another incarnation of the devil, tells Tristram that his father has died – "Larney is lying in wait for us all." (*Devil*, 333) Hickey's wife Edel, whom Tristram loves and with whom he has had an affair over the summer, renounces him – the temptress turns out to be a materialist girl after all. The "*tocka, tocka*" of Deauville's keyboard on the phone turns out to be the sound of Larney's hooves as he walks and announces "It's time to give the devil his due." (336) What was home has turned into an uncanny/*unheimlich* gothic family castle replete with Tristram's sins and failures. He is found in a seventeenth-century priest's hole in the castle, his hair having turned white. Released from the courtroom, he revisits the decaying castle one last time. An elderly local historian approaches him and tells him that the last heir of the earldom of Howth will die that night from an overdose in a Brussels airport hotel: "Deauville had come to collect. A debt must be settled." (360) As in many other Irish tales, in the end the devil gets his due. The tale is told, the circle closes, both on Tristram and on the Republic of Ireland. With a new circle, and a new tale, about to begin, one question to be asked

would be whether the inevitability suggested by the novel, in a tale that places responsibility ultimately with the devil, foretells, and perhaps even partly excuses, the next Irish fall into sin.

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While *The Devil I Know*, set in the Republic and published in 2012, reaches forward to 2016, the second novel, published in 2018, goes back in time, to a Northern Ireland whose brutal laws and retributions create the impression of an archaic culture.<sup>5</sup> Anna Burns' *Milkman* takes its readers back to 1979 and to Belfast in the middle of the Troubles. The originality and narrative force of the novel earned it and its author the Man Booker Prize in 2018. The chair of the Booker prize judges, Anthony Kwame Appiah, commented on the language of the novel which he thinks is

simply marvellous; beginning with the distinctive and consistently realised voice of the funny, resilient, astute, plain-spoken, first-person protagonist. From the opening page her words pull us into the daily violence of her world — threats of murder, people killed by state hit squads — while responding to the everyday realities of her life as a young woman, negotiating a way between the demands of family, friends and lovers in an unsettled time. (The Man Booker Prize 2018, n. p.)

*Milkman* has turned out to be a favourite both of the critics and of that half-mythical entity, the general reader; by the 1st of December 2018, it had already sold more than 350.000 copies (see Marshall, n. p.). With the Brexit crisis coming to a head over the Irish border and the spectre of a renewed civil war, the novel seemed almost a calculated product for the time, only that it wasn't. Burns' first novel, *No Bones* (2001), traced the growing up of a girl in Troubles-troubled Belfast, and in some ways, *Milkman* is a continuation. Yet the negotiation of what is normal in (Northern) Ireland constitute a parallel between *Milkman* and the Brexit debate. Fintan O'Toole argues that what is also endangered by the Brexit project is the normality that has come about since the signing of the Belfast Agreement:

If the oppositions we used to live with are gone, we are left with a paradox: the Irish sea has never seemed so narrow or its two sides so alike. Yet Ireland

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<sup>5</sup> Some of Seamus Heaney's poems draw analogies between Ireland during the Troubles and prehistoric societies, e.g. "The Tollund Man" (*Wintering Out*. London: Faber & Faber, 1972, 48): "Out here in Jutland / In the old man-killing parishes / I will feel lost, / Unhappy and at home."

and Britain may be about to become more separate than they have ever been, divided by a European border. (xv)

*Milkman* operates (almost) without proper names. The only ‘name’ the highly idiosyncratic female narrator gives for herself is “middle sister”, describing her position in a catholic family traumatised by the Troubles. She looks back on her eighteen-year-old self who at the time grew up in a catholic part of (unnamed) Belfast. In the choice of her anonymous narrator figure, Burns follows a trend in women’s fiction that Caroline Magennis has observed:

Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, fictional responses by women have focused on both considering the impact of the conflict and also on contesting some of the assumptions of the mechanisms of peace-building. In particular, these novels exhibit scepticism towards grand narratives of memorialisation and seek to recover voices that are not always privileged in discourses of ‘dealing with the past’. (375–6)

In the narrator’s terminology, her part of the city belongs to the “renouncers-of-the-state”, who are in an all-out war against the “defenders-of-the-state”. *Milkman* spells out not only how merciless the conflict between these opposites is, it also shows that the opposites tend to overlap or blur. Consequently, much physical and cognitive effort of both communities must be invested in the maintenance of the antagonism. The everyday policing of the lines dividing the communities is nothing short of neurotic (“Thing was, these were paranoid times”, 27)<sup>6</sup> and results in long lists of “unspoken rules and regulations” (22): “The tea of allegiance. The tea of betrayal.” (25) The most inconspicuous action can be interpreted as a lack of loyalty – “you created a political statement everywhere you went, and with everything you did, even if you didn’t want to.” (ibid.)

*Milkman* presents its readers with a new and identifiable voice that tells her very own tale of the Troubles, yet the novel is also intertextually linked to other Irish texts, some of which are explicitly mentioned. Claire Kilroy identifies some of those:

In its digressive, batty narrative voice, it resembles a novel cited by the narrator: *Tristram Shandy*. It is Beckettian in its ability to trace the logical within the absurd. In its evocation of a community adapting to survive

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<sup>6</sup> All quotations from the novel refer to the following edition: Anna Burns, *Milkman*. London: Faber & Faber, 2018.

within a “totalitarian enclave”, it recalls a work by another Northern Irish writer, one whom the narrator’s neighbours would condemn as being from “the wrong religion”:

Derek Mahon (“*Milkman* by Anna Burns review”, n.p.).

While Kilroy focuses on writers that are both Irish and male to situate the style of *Milkman*, Adrian McKinty, in his review in the *Irish Times*, sees different intertextual links at play, both in terms of nationality and gender:

*Milkman* reads like one of those Russian novels that begins ‘In those days, in our Province, in the town of Z-’ and in its intricate domestic study of a disparate family there are agreeable echoes of Chekov, Tolstoy and Turgenyev. [...] Anna Burns is part of a movement of new and established female Belfast writers who are correcting that impression [that girls are lesser creatures and girls’ stories are lesser stories] along with Lucy Caldwell, Roisín O’Donnell, Jan Carson and others. (n.p.)

While *Milkman* invites speculation about its many intertextual links, there are also direct references to popular culture, such as James Bond films or *Alien*, a film that the narrator has recently seen at the cinema, which places the tale in 1979. For all its intertextual indebtedness, though, the tone and the voice of *Milkman* are all its own, and the novel draws its readers into the experience of the 1970s Troubles, a world in which people worry constantly about minute details of names, practices, products and places but accept the everyday deaths of family members or of neighbours almost with indifference.

From the very first words she speaks, the narrator (who is split between her present and her older self and is the same age as Burns was in 1979), presents us with the violent world of civil war. Her style is closer to the spoken than to the written word: “The day Somebody McSomebody put a gun to my breast and called me a cat and threatened to shoot me was the same day the milkman died. He had been shot by one of the state hit squads and I did not care about the shooting of this man.” (1) For the narrator’s younger self, the milkman, a high-ranking paramilitary, appears out of nowhere. While he uses no physical violence, he exerts psychological pressure via his network of constant surveillance<sup>7</sup> to force

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<sup>7</sup> The milkman’s surveillance of middle sister comes on top of the surveillance of her entire community through British forces – an Orwellian nightmare long before the full onslaught of digital technology: “Everybody’s house, everybody’s movements, everybody’s connections constantly are checked and kept an eye on. With all their monitoring, [...] their



middle sister into a relationship with him, and he knows that even being seen talking to him will cause her problems. He makes clear that resisting his advances would be dangerous not only for herself but also for her family and the boy she calls “maybe-boyfriend” (8 and *passim*).

The novel is the story of middle sister’s attempts to keep herself, in the brutal and often surreal life of civil-war Belfast, where the unwanted advances of the milkman only come on top of everything else, physically and psychologically intact. She has developed idiosyncratic strategies to cope with the challenges of a disturbed society that often defines black as white while it marks even slightly unconventional behaviour – which would elsewhere be considered inconspicuous – as “beyond the pale”. One example is the narrator’s habit of “reading-while-walking”:

Every weekday, rain or shine, gunplay or bombs, stand-off or riots, I preferred to walk home reading my latest book. This would be a nineteenth-century book because I did not like twentieth-century books because I did not like the twentieth century. (5)

While it is no wonder that middle sister does not like the century she is living in, her illogical extension to books from that century testifies to the humour that the novel often finds in the Kafkaesque milieu it describes and in the tale of masculine domination it tells.<sup>8</sup> When the milkman first accosts her, she is, ironically, reading *Ivanhoe* (see 3); Scott’s glorification of medieval chivalry makes for some contrast. Reading-while-walking is not considered normal, and so middle sister is repeatedly admonished, by family and friends, to cease doing it – until she does (see 205–6).

Not only behavioural patterns, but also the possession or lack of material objects can render a person suspicious. This becomes evident when maybe-boyfriend, a car mechanic/fanatic, brings home a part of a

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infiltrating, their intercepting, listening at posts, drawing-up of room lay-outs, of position of furniture, of ornament placement, of wallpaper, of watch lists and geo-profiling, cutting feeds and feeding feeds, and ‘mother goose’ and divination by tea-leaves and [...] helicopters flying over an alienated, cynical, existentially bitter landscape, it’s no wonder everybody has files on them. If someone in a renouncer-run area didn’t have a file on them, that would be a surety there was something dubious about that individual going on.” (206) Surveillance is a mark of normality, its absence indicates deviance – and the need for more surveillance.

<sup>8</sup> Middle sister’s attitude even holds for authors that wrote in both centuries, and she is willing to “read to [her little sisters] even though it was the hideous century of Hardy and not the acceptable century of Hardy” (276).

Blower Bentley, a pre-World-War-II racing car given for free to the boys at the garage he is working at:

‘Beyond redemption,’ said maybe-boyfriend, meaning beyond repair, yet still he was smiling down at it. He said he and the others, after much arguing, dissension, and finally, casting of votes, had decided to disassemble what was left. So they split it up, then they drew lots with maybe-boyfriend ending up with this bit on his carpet, a bit too, that was presently causing him transportations of pure joy.

‘Supercharger,’ he said and I said, ‘Uh-huh,’ and he said, ‘No, you don’t understand, maybe-girlfriend. Few cars were supercharged then so this was advanced technology.’ (19)

Middle sister does not mind the mansplaining of maybe-boyfriend about a functionless part of an old car since his car connoisseurship is also a sign of the times. In Northern Ireland in the late 1970s, a wrecked vintage racing car, even only one of its parts, is a coveted object that makes “for awesome, incredible news” (20) among the group of neighbours who come to admire the car component on maybe-boyfriend’s living room floor.<sup>9</sup> But nothing can escape the Troubles, and it takes only one visitor’s claim to conjure up the entire conflict:

‘It’s all very well, neighbour,’ said this neighbour, ‘having this so-called classic bit and all, and it’s not like I’m trying to be funny or anything but’ – here all breath was held, everyone alert for an attack movement. Then it came – ‘which among you at the garage then, drew the bit with that flag on?’

He’d home in on that flag issue, the flags-and-emblems issue, instinctive and emotional because flags were invented to be instinctive and emotional [...] and he meant that flag from ‘over the water’ [...] It was not a flag welcomed in our community. (21–6)

The neighbour easily weaponises an antiquated car part in the ongoing civil war of signs. Once the supercharger has been charged with the semantic load of the Troubles, it does not matter anymore that “there [is] no flag on it” (28). Having been punched on the nose by one of maybe-

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<sup>9</sup> This get-together about a fifty-year-old racing car does not acknowledge a contemporary development: Since October 1978, construction of the car factory of DeLorean Motor Cars, Ltd. had been going on in Dunmurry, a Western suburb of Belfast. The factory was heavily subsidised by the British government in an attempt to pacify the warring communities and to reduce IRA support in West Belfast. It was only from 1981–2 that the (in)famous DeLorean cars (which would from 1985 be popularised in the *Back to the Future* film franchise) were produced there by workers that came both from protestant and catholic communities. Glenn Patterson’s novel *Gull* (2016) deals with this somewhat bizarre episode of Northern Irish technological and political development.

boyfriend's friends, the accuser withdraws – promising retribution: “Hardly could it be surprising, he shouted, that consequence would follow upon that.” (30) What would be silly talk in other communities is a real threat here. The IRA or any paramilitary group that sees itself as a guardian of the republican cause might kill on hearsay. Nothing is unaffected by the conflict; neither maybe-boyfriend nor anybody else can live a right life in the wrong one. Weeks later, in an argument between the lovers, middle sister offends maybe-boyfriend: “Don’t take your supercharger butcher’s apron [...] out on me.” (285)

The state(let) institutions of Northern Ireland are not trusted by middle sister’s catholic community: The police is not an impartial force but an enemy, and even when seriously ill people do not go to hospital – even the rumour that while in hospital, somebody has been approached by the police and turned into an informer can be lethal. The official institutions have thus been rendered ineffectual through mistrust, and the community has found its own ways of handling everyday illness and crime.

What it cannot handle, however, is ‘normality’. One of the oddities of this community, fictionalised into recognisability, is that it is unable to cope with ‘normal’ murder. When “tablets girl”, a mentally disturbed woman in her late twenties, does not stop poisoning people, she is murdered. That fact alone presents no problem for the community as the catholic paramilitaries had warned tablet girl’s parents that they would kill her if she did not stop poisoning people. The problem arises when it becomes evident she has not been killed by the paramilitaries:

if the renouncers hadn’t killed her, [...] this could only mean an ordinary murder had taken place. Ordinary murders were eerie, unfathomable, the exact murders that didn’t happen here. People had no idea how to gauge them, how to categorise them, how to begin a discussion on them, and that was because only political murders happened in this place. (237)

Since the conventional political context does not apply, no cognitive and communicative patterns or cultural practices exist to deal with the crime. A community confronted with violent death on a daily basis is badly equipped to deal with “ordinary murder” – which usually only happens “there”, across the Irish sea.

The warped categories and weird everyday practices apply equally to the community as a whole and to its members, and the novel parades them

with rhetorical gusto, telling little tales that accumulate into an intricate panorama of Belfast in the late 1970s. There is chef, a closet homosexual and best friend of maybe-boyfriend, a worker who relaxes by teaching an imaginary apprentice how to cook properly; there is the real milkman, like the narrator a person “beyond the pale”, who boldly confronts the paramilitaries and who turns out to be the moral centre of the community; and there is middle sister’s bigoted mother, the widow of a man she never loved who desperately wants to see her daughters married before twenty.

Only after the paramilitary milkman’s death does middle sister come “to understand how [...] I’d been thwarted into a carefully constructed nothingness by that man. Also by the community, by the very mental atmosphere, that minutiae of invasion.” (303) The stifling advances of the milkman are analogous to the community’s unwanted intrusion into the narrator’s life; his acts of psychological terror mirror the repressive regime created and perpetuated by society at large. Any sense of control individuals may gain are hard won and may well turn out to be illusionary. The belated control the narrator exerts through telling her tale is yet one more attempt to come to terms with this oppressive situation.

Ironically and fittingly, in the end the dead milkman is the only main character who is given a proper name – in fact, he has been called by his proper name all along:

Milkman’s name really was Milkman [...] ‘*An unusual name*,’ everyone, with nervous caution, after great deliberation, said. [...] When considered a pseudonym, some codename, ‘the milkman’ had possessed mystique, intrigue, theatrical possibility. Once out of symbolism, however, once into the everyday, the banal, into any old Tom, Dick and Harryness, any respect it had garnered at the cognomen of a high-cadre paramilitary activist was undercut immediately and, just as immediately, fell away. (304–5)

In this novel without names, his name was there from the beginning, but it wasn’t properly read. The semantically distorting Troubles, a civil war of signifiers, refuses to take anything at its surface meaning. When it turns out that milkman was not a code name, the name deflates into commonplaceness. To an extent, Milkman’s death liberates the narrator, who had come to believe that she had to become his mistress; in the greater scheme of provincial brutalities, it changes nothing. In the community’s imagination, Milkman refuses to die so easily. Everybody

is convinced that middle sister was indeed his mistress, and that she now has to climb down from her high position among the renouncers-of-the-state: “So it wasn’t over, this business of me and Milkman. Then again, I knew all along it wouldn’t be over. With these sorts of things you have to take each day, each person, each reprisal, at a time.” (340–1) The tale’s villain is dead, but there is only an incomplete and temporary respite from the conflict; a truly happy ending of middle sister’s tale is not (yet) in sight. While middle sister and others are freed from Milkman’s evil, the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement is still twenty years away. This still applies to the Northern Irish peace process: The conflict has died down, not died, and its echoes have to be taken each day at a time. If the moorings of the Belfast agreement are removed through an exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, the Troubles may well flare up again. *Milkman* is not only a grandiose and enjoyable recreation of the troubled Northern Irish past, it is also a cautionary tale with regard to the Irish future, as Daizy Buchanan speculates: “Perhaps *Milkman* is also a Brexit horror story.” (n. p.)

The two novels analysed offer tales that share some crucial features. Both take a sceptical distance to, and seek to deconstruct, ‘the’ mechanics of Irish authenticity, often media representations, that circulate about their topics. They are wary of easy answers to Irish conundrums or, as Seamus Heaney put it in his 1975 poem “Whatever you say, say nothing”, of those “in search of ‘views / On the Irish thing’” (57). While they know about the established traditions of Irish tale-telling, they insist on their idiosyncratic ways of (re-)presenting the Celtic Tiger and the Troubles, oscillating between the hard facts of everyday life in Ireland and sign systems that call those facts into question. These new tales achieve their aims by detailed observation, (self-)irony, humour and experiments in Anglo-Irish that make for sheer reading pleasure – which is a hallmark of good tales. In doing all this, however, they seem to confirm one more Irish stereotype: the gift of the gab.

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# Tales from Turnpike House

## Pop Music and the Tradition of the Folk Ballad Tale

Christian Huck

The English pop band Saint Etienne arrived on the scene in 1990 with a cover version of Neil Young's "Only Love Can Break Your Heart" (Heavenly, 1990). Young's original 1970 version was played in waltz time and employed acoustic guitars and intricate vocal harmonies to situate it within a folk-music tradition (although both elements were probably alien to 'real' folk);<sup>1</sup> unlike other songs on Young's album *After the Gold Rush* (Reprise, 1970), "Only Love Can Break Your Heart" featured no notable electric guitars like those emblematic of the folk rock that followed Bob Dylan's 'going electric' in the mid-1960s. The lyrics of the song tell the tale of a friend who seems to be losing touch with reality:

I have a friend I've never seen  
He hides his head inside a dream  
Someone should call him  
And see if he can come out  
Try to lose the down that he's found.

However, the lyrics soon depart from folk tradition: "When you were young and on your own, how did it feel to be alone?", Young sings in a thin falsetto. Folk-songs, especially those in the ballad tradition that was taken up by the post-war folk revivalists of the 1950s and '60s, know the "I" of the narrator, the balladeer, the story-teller, telling a tale, but what they do not know is "you". A tale, here, is, "in its simplest meaning, a narrative [...], loosely plotted, told by a narrator, and little concerned with development of character".<sup>2</sup> A good example is the famous ballad of "Barbara Allen", one of the most widely collected folk songs of all time:

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<sup>1</sup> Bob Stanley of Saint Etienne: "What exactly is pop? For me, it includes rock, R&B, soul, hip hop, house, techno, metal and country. If you make records, singles and albums, and if you go on TV or on tour to promote them, you're in the pop business. If you sing a cappella folk songs in a pub in Whitby, you're not." *Yeah Yeah Yeah. The Story of Modern Pop*. London: Faber & Faber, 2013, xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Beckson & Arthur Ganz, *A Reader's Guide to Literary Terms. A Dictionary*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1961 (1960), 221.

In Scotland I was born and reared  
In Scotland I was dwellin'  
And there I courted a fair, pretty maid,  
And her name was Barbara Allen.<sup>3</sup>

The folk-balladeer takes on the role of narrator and spellbinds the audience with his (or her) compelling voice; usually, however, the narrator does not speak to the audience directly.

Pop music, on the other hand, does not speak to a united audience, but to a singled-out listener; pop is not about the bond of tradition, but the singularity of the act of listening. Whereas folk was traditionally “performed face to face in a local community”,<sup>4</sup> pop music is the product of the record (and its industry), designed to be consumed alone, away from the place of production, and it is in this singularly individual act of reception that a pop song has to come to life.<sup>5</sup> As a consequence, a form of address became central to pop lyrics that is only rarely used in other music genres.

In his study of pop lyrics based on top fifty chart hits from the late 1980s, the heyday of pop as a particular genre, linguist and language teacher Tim Murphey has calculated that 86 per cent of all songs contain *unspecified* “you”-referents.<sup>6</sup> Neither does the listener learn about the names of those addressed, nor do specific references to place and time help us deduce who exactly is being spoken to; pop songs, usually, leave it open whether the “you” is a) a mode of narrative self-address, b) refers to a character in the (fictional) world of the song or c) addresses a real-world listener.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence of such un-specificity, the listener is able to relate the song to him- or herself – despite the fact that this is, indeed, highly unlikely: “Although our logic tells that it is not possible

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<sup>3</sup> There are many versions to this song; this one is taken from the Sabine Baring-Gould Manuscript Collection (SBG/1/2/146); <https://www.vwml.org/record/SBG/1/2/146>

<sup>4</sup> Steve Roud, *Folk Song in England*. London: Faber & Faber, 2017, Kindle-Position 291.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Diedrich Diederichsen, “Allein mit der Gesellschaft. Was kommuniziert Pop-Musik?”. *Das Populäre der Gesellschaft. Systemtheorie und Populärkultur*, ed. Christian Huck & Carsten Zorn. Wiesbaden: WV, 2007, 322–34.

<sup>6</sup> Tim Murphey, “The When, Where, and Who of Pop Lyrics: The Listener’s Prerogative”. *Popular Music* 8:2 (1989), 185–93.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Christian Huck, Jens Kiefer & Carsten Schinko, “A ‘Bizarre Love Triangle’: Pop Clips, Figures of Address and the Listening Spectator”. *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Jens Eder et al. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010, 290–317.

that we are being addressed directly, subconsciously (and perhaps illogically) we may receive the messages as directed toward us.”<sup>8</sup>

In a folk song of the ballad tradition such as “Barbara Allen” (performed by Bob Dylan in 1962) or “Bonnie Annie” (recorded by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger in 1960), “Mary Hamilton” (recorded by Joan Baez in 1960) or “Tom Dooley” (made number 1 by The Kingston Trio in 1958), we exactly know who is addressed:

Oh, bow your head, Tom Dooley  
Oh, bow your head and cry  
You have killed poor Laury Foster  
And you know you’re bound to die.

Similarly, ballads like that of “John Henry” employ “you” only when citing a specific conversation: “John Henry said to the captain: ‘Captain, you go to town’”, and “John Henry said to his shaker: ‘Shaker, you better pray’.” And many ballads, such as “Lord Randal”, are told in dialogue only, so that a non-diegetic addressee is out of the question: “O where hae ye been, Lord Randal, my son? O where hae ye been, my handsome young man?”<sup>9</sup> In the ballad, every “you” is firmly situated within the story-world; more often than not, the person addressed even has a proper name – and it’s usually not your name.

The mid-twentieth-century folk revival moved the ballad tradition in the direction of pop, looking for a greater reach and accentuated topicality, and that is reflected in the lyrics, too. Pete Seeger’s 1959 version of the ballad of “John Henry”, for example, added a couple of lines to the end of a text that is otherwise close to the traditional lyrics:

Well, every Monday morning  
When the bluebirds begin to sing  
You can hear John Henry a mile or more  
You can hear John Henry’s hammer ring.

Yes, you! In a similar way, Bob Dylan’s interpolation of “Lord Randal” in “A Hard Rain’s a-Gonna Fall” (1962) also shifts the focus of address: “Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son? And where have you been, my darling young one?” echoes the traditional ballad’s opening lines, but

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<sup>8</sup> Murphey, 186.

<sup>9</sup> The lyrics to the ‘traditional’ versions of the ballads are taken from the influential collection *Folk-Ballads of the English-Speaking Worlds*, edited by Albert B. Friedman and first published in 1956.

the situation can be far less easily contextualised. While in the old version of the ballad (where the performer takes on a persona) it soon transpires that a mother is addressing her son, the situation is less obvious in Dylan's adaptation: neither can we know for sure whether the "I" is that of Dylan, the author, or a fictional narrator, nor, as a consequence, do we know whether the addressed is someone within the story-world, or, indeed, *us*.

Pop songs, as Murphey's analysis shows, "are not usually narratives of precise past events, but rather participants in on-going situations".<sup>10</sup> Pop lyrics tend to be 'undersaturated' in terms of information about time, place, the character's appearance and, most importantly, the referents of personal pronouns: the where, the when and the who all remain unclear. However, while such reduced informational content might seem strange to a *reader*, in some situations "da, da, da" and "I love you" make perfect sense: that is, in a conversation with a friend, for example. Here, both interlocutors know the people talked about, because they are familiar with each other's lives, and deictic references are obvious, too, at least in a typical face-to-face meeting.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the pop song, although based on a mass medium that makes face-to-face meetings both unnecessary and highly unlikely, employs the language of situated conversations. As a popular form of mass-mediated communication, speaking to an unspecified, dispersed audience but using the language of a specific situation of corporeal co-presence, pop songs create a noticeable gap, a void. Consequently, as Murphey argues, they "leave themselves open to [...] completion and appropriation".<sup>12</sup>

Pop "songs contain the language of conversations in a situation", Murphey explains, but

since the context of the song is so loosely constructed, the only situation explicitly available is the extra-musical one of the listener (since the songs mention no time, place or precise names). In other words, the listener would seem to be able to complete the message, or make sense of the song, through using the persons, times and places from their own physical and metaphorical situation. (185)

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<sup>10</sup> Murphey, 192.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Huck, Kiefer & Schinko.

<sup>12</sup> Murphey, 185.

It is this that turns a story about events of the past into a tale of whenever, and wherever. Even though, at first sight, a tale is “barely distinguishable from a short story”, a tale is not the same as a story when we look at its delivery: “If there is a difference, then a tale perhaps suggests something written in the tone of voice of someone speaking.”<sup>13</sup> The tale of a pop song is indeed not *actually* spoken to me, but delivered in the *tone of voice of someone speaking to me*: and in my presence, it becomes a song about the present.

“How does it feel?”, Bob Dylan asked, when he finally broke with the folk tradition,

How does it feel?  
To be on your own,  
With no direction home,  
A complete unknown,  
Like a rolling stone?

Here, the singer’s compelling performance makes it almost impossible not to feel addressed. Rather than opening itself to appropriation, however, this song is a demand:

His conviction, the dead certainty that he has a right to say exactly this, is [...] exhilarating and bone-chilling. [...] His voice tells you this (tells you everything): he is not really talking to her [the female character in the song or the real-life women she might represent; C.H.]— he is talking to *you* (and me, all of us).

That is what rock critic Greil Marcus argues in his magisterial book devoted entirely to Dylan’s song “Like a Rolling Stone” (1965): “the person to whom all this is addressed is no longer merely the girl named by the song. The person is now at once that girl and whoever is listening. The song has put the listener on the spot.”<sup>14</sup> The song no longer just tells the tale of a girl in trouble (as a traditional ballad might have), but declaims the story of a nation gone wrong (as usual, personified by a woman gone wrong). Schooled in blues music’s despair, Dylan teaches his white audience to feel it too.

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<sup>13</sup> J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 3rd ed. London: Penguin, 1992, 954.

<sup>14</sup> Greil Marcus, *Like a Rolling Stone. Bob Dylan at the Crossroads*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2005, 118.

Saint Etienne's 1991 cover version of Neil Young's 1970 "Only Love Can Break Your Heart" eschews all musical traces of folk: there are no guitars to be heard, acoustic or otherwise, no vocal harmonies backing up the forlorn singer. Sparse, distinctly understated female vocals are accompanied by an off-beat piano riff reminiscent of 1980s Italo House music. If Young still had a foot in folk, Saint Etienne confidently step out of this tradition. But the listener is not summoned to awareness, as in Bob Dylan's rock-version of pop and folk, far from it: no one is put on the spot, here. If, in all simplicity, the traditional ballad is all about the story, and the pop song is all about *you* making that story yours, and the rock song all about telling you to listen up, then Saint Etienne's "Only Love Can Break Your Heart" is something else still.

The cover version is dominated by a heavy, downtempo 4/4 breakbeat that is sampled from Soul II Soul's 1989 club hit "Back to Life (However Do You Want Me)". No swaying waltz gently rocks the listener. And even though the lyrics are identical to the original, they are done with in less than the first two minutes; in the remaining two and a half minutes, the lines "I was always thinking" and "games that I was playing" are repeated over and over again, sometimes broken up into single syllables, hardly making any sense at all. More than anything, the song is now dominated by variations of groove. "What I liked about the original", Bob Stanley of Saint Etienne emphasizes, "was that it is very cyclical, repetitive – almost mantra-like."<sup>15</sup> And they sure made the best of this repetitive touch.

Such "were dance records, not story-telling records", Dylan-fan Greil Marcus concludes in the face of such songs: "They swept the listener up and carried the listener along, but they did not implicate the listener; they did not suggest that the song had anything to do with the moral failings of the people listening, or that its story was their story, whether they liked it or not."<sup>16</sup> And Marcus is right: Saint Etienne's "Only Love Can Break Your Heart" is not about implicating the listener, "whether they liked it or not", it is not about forcing the listener to believe the song's "story was their story". But neither does it sweep up and carry along a hapless, passive listener, as suggested by the false opposition Marcus sets up. While the media set-up of the record already shifts the

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<sup>15</sup> Bob Stanley in Ben Thompson, "Only Love Can Break Your Heart". *Lives of the Great Songs*, ed. Tim de Lisle. London: Pavilion, 1994, 103–5, 105.

<sup>16</sup> Marcus, 120.

balance towards the private listener, the forgoing of every narrative sense, the exchange of the semantic for the somatic, opens the song even further towards acts of appropriation. A groove, more than anything, is never complete when it is not danced to, when its procession in time is not translated into a procession in space. The story of a song works toward a separation of the song and its listener, which may only be overcome by a powerful orator like Bob Dylan: You might think it is a story about someone else, but it really is about you! While, in this sense, the semantics of a story could be described as “tendentially mimetic”, that is, doubling the world, turning it into a picture to be observed from a safe, outside vantage point, “the sonorous [is] tendentially methexic (that is, having to do with participation, sharing, or contagion)”, as philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy argues.<sup>17</sup> Musical communication, Nancy adds, “is not transmission, but a sharing”: “An unfolding, a dance, a resonance.”<sup>18</sup> And even though pop songs, quite obviously, are not pure music but do have lyrics, as rock critic Ann Powers concedes, “their words are not only listened to quite inattentively, but usually so oblique or clichéd (or occasionally poetic) that they elide specific meaning.”<sup>19</sup> Their sense unfolds in a dance.

With “Only Love Can Break Your Heart” Saint Etienne’s career started with a statement of almost pure pop, albeit carrying with it the memory of some older story. More than a decade later, *Tales from Turnpike House* (Sanctuary, 2005) leads the band (back) to such stories. The concept album is a rather rare endeavour since its Pink Floyd-heydays of the 1970s (at least outside the more language and story-driven world of hip hop): Lora Findlay’s artwork for the album sleeve (Fig. 1) shows a cross-section of rooms from a London tower block, and the songs of the album follow the fates of some of its tenants from morning to evening. The listener, here, is an observer, peeping in from the outside – a perspective Lora Findlay picks up for her sleeve design:

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<sup>17</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, transl. Charlotte Mandell. New York: Fordham UP, 2007 (2002), 10.

<sup>18</sup> Nancy, 41.

<sup>19</sup> Ann Powers, “I’ll Have to Say I Love You in a Song”. *Stars Don’t Stand Still in the Sky: Music and Myth*, eds. Karen Kelly & Evelyn McDonnell. London: Routledge, 1999, 183–91, 187.



*Fig. 1: Album cover of Tales from Turnpike House (Sanctuary, 2005)*

“Milk Bottle Symphony”, the second song of twelve on the carefully arranged album, introduces some of the characters we might have glimpsed on the cover:

Number nine, Mrs. Doris Brown  
Pulls on her quilted dressing gown  
Shuts the fridge and boils the kettle  
Wipes the table down  
La la la la la  
Just as she pours the tea  
She’s whistling randomly  
A milk bottle symphony.

Only a few doors on, at



Number twelve, there's Amy Chan,  
Writing down a line for the candy man,  
About the time she saw Tom Baker,  
Drinking down at the Hat and Fan.

Right next to her lives Gary Stead, who "Shuffles downstairs with a heavy head, / Scans the paper, takes a pill, And stumbles back to bed". What unites these dispersed lives, is the common tune to which they sing, albeit everyone in their singular ways: "La la la la la la, Didn't get home 'til three, / Singing appallingly, / A milk bottle symphony", Gary echoes the tune of Doris. And finally:

Emily Roe's at thirty-one  
Twenty minutes left to get her homework done  
Leaves her corn flakes on the sofa  
Says goodbye to Mum  
La la la la la  
Jumps on the 43  
Humming unconsciously  
A milk bottle symphony.

Where the concept album is already an anomaly in the mid-2000s single-driven world of private radio, MTV and mp3s, the lyrics of the song violate almost every rule of the modern book of pop song-writing. Not only do we get to know the full names of the fictional characters (Doris Brown, Amy Chan, Gary Stead, Emily Roe), we also find out where they live, and what time it is. Murphey's analysis of chart-toppers had shown that

94 per cent of the songs have no time of enunciation whatsoever and 80 per cent have no place mentioned. And even when the times and places are mentioned, or implied, they are usually vague themselves (night, summer-time, and car, disco). In no song are precise dates or hours given, and in only one was there a named place.<sup>20</sup>

In *Tales from Turnpike House*, quite to the contrary, Tony the milkman precisely drives "his float down Goswell Road at twenty-five to eight". There even is an actual "Turnpike House" in the real-life Goswell Road of London, Clerkenwell (cf. Fig. 2). And like the old folk ballads, this modern kitchen-sink tale tells its story to no one in particular and consequently knows no addressee: there is not a single "you", specified or not, in the "Milk Bottle Symphony".

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<sup>20</sup> Murphey, 187.



*Fig. 2: Photograph of the real Turnpike House*

“Teenage Winter”, the penultimate song on *Tales from Turnpike House*, mirrors “Milk Bottle Symphony” in its “miniaturist approach”<sup>21</sup> to provide small insights into people’s lives. However, the dusk version is much bleaker than its dawn counterpart. The inhabitants of Turnpike House encounter a world that is changing fast, and many find it difficult to adjust:

Amy checks the shopping list  
Pedal bin, washing-up rack, Sandtex  
And she goes to the baker’s to buy a loaf  
Ah, she keeps forgetting it’s changed into the Tropicana tanning salon.

Life around Turnpike House is being transformed as its inhabitants merely look on: “Gary can’t believe the Claremont Road pitch is going

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<sup>21</sup> Ernesto Lechner, “A beat on the future and on the past”, *Los Angeles Times*, Jan 22, 2006; <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jan/22/entertainment/ca-rack.22.1> [12.09.2018]

to be covered in executive housing.” As it came to be known in the mid-2000s, the football ground of Hendon FC in northwest London was being sold to property developers. Gary, however, seems less concerned about the future of the football club, or the housing market, than about the severing of ties to the past: “He talks about the Newcastle game”, a famous draw of the non-league team Hendon FC against the mighty Newcastle United in 1974, and he reminisces about “Boncho’s debut,” the time when former premier league player and Bulgarian international Bontcho Lyubomirov Guentchev joined little Hendon FC, “but Tony [the milkman] can hardly hear him.”

All these references to classic British TV (Tom Baker’s *Dr Who*), non-league association football teams (Hendon FC), traditional British brands (Sandtex) and traditional British places (pub, bakery, football ground) clearly give the songs a touch of nostalgia. The softly, but warmly spoken words of “Teenage Winter”, in a register far below that of the usual voice of singer Sarah Cracknell, are nestled into “the song’s lush guitar, organ and woodwind arrangement”.<sup>22</sup> However, more so than melancholically yearning for some past period, the song is as much concerned with the production of memory as it conjures up memories of a world gone by.

The locus of memory, here, is not the “history books” with which Bob Dylan wrestled in “With God on Your Side” on *The Times They Are a-Changin’* (1964), and the memories concerned are not those of the great wars that Dylan revisits. The locus of memory, here, is the charity shop in which one of the tenants of Turnpike House works: “And in the charity shop, Mrs. Brown sits at the counter, Pricing down some old stock, *The Moon’s a Balloon*, two copies of *Every Loser Wins*, Noel’s *Blobbyland*, deluxe edition”. An autobiography by actor David Niven from 1971, a 1986 record by *EastEnders*-actor Nick Berry, and some paraphernalia from *Noel’s House Party*, a cheesy 1990s Saturday night TV show: surely, that’s not a lot to show for, nothing much worth remembering, one would assume. However, the value of these items cannot be expressed by a price tag, and their place in memory is not defined by their place on a shelf.

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<sup>22</sup> ckriofske, “Saint Etienne, Tales From Turnpike House”, posted 10 June, 2018, *Haunted Jukebox*, <https://hauntedjukebox.com/2018/06/10/saint-etienne-tales-from-turnpike-house/> [Sep 26, 2018]

In the liner notes to the album, Jeremy Deller, a conceptual artist who grew up close to the founding members of Saint Etienne, elaborates on the meaning charity shops and jumble sales had to him and his friends when they were young (in the late 1970s and early 1980s, that is):

Our paths silently crossed on Saturdays in jumble sale queues that stretched from suburbia right into the countryside. My hunting ground was Penge, Beckenham and Bromley, places that are often the punchline of sitcom jokes but on Saturdays they were magical. They were places where a whole new world was opened up to me.<sup>23</sup>

“The greatest venues”, Deller adds, “were the post-war schools that were modern, spacious, and functional. On a sunny day jumbles at these places felt glamorous and futuristic.”<sup>24</sup> These post-war schools, educating a new generation of pupils, were a result of the Education Act of 1944, which led to 2,500 new schools being built by the mid-1950s. Surely, these modern institutions did not have the history of an Eton or Harrow, nor the architecture. But while the history books of the modern schools might still have reiterated the old stories, as Dylan complained, the new places also opened up new alleyways to the past, afforded new practices of engagement:

A good Jumble Sale was like being on a personal archaeological excavation of the recent past (my Tutankhamen moment being either a Moog bought for £2 or a 1966 copy of *A Cellarful of Noise* simply signed ‘Brian’) and to that end served as a parallel education where it became possible to buy books and records at random almost because they were so cheap. (Ibid.)

Here, the canon of traditional learning is substituted for a more democratic form of serendipity: “I’m so glad I bought Ege Bamyasi by Can because I liked the cover”.

One thing is for sure: the jumble sale kids were not looking backwards; they made their present meaningful by digging up their own past – instead of just taking the past of the history books for granted. Most importantly, they wanted a more modern, more open future: indeed, their aim might be described as “to glimpse the outlines of a future in the residual and the outmoded”.<sup>25</sup> As one commentator of the similarly-themed films that Saint Etienne were involved in emphasized,

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<sup>23</sup> Jeremy Deller, *Liner Notes to Tales from Turnpike House*. Sanctuary, 2005, CD.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Burke, “Music, Memory and Modern Life: Saint Etienne’s London”. *Screen* 51/2 (2010), 103–17, 105.

“nostalgia need not be understood merely as the desire to retreat into the past, but rather as a manifestation of utopian longing politically necessary in an era when substantive political change seems more or less impossible”.<sup>26</sup>

However, hands-on rummaging through the past to find a better future seems to have become a thing of the past itself. As Deller explains: “These were heady days well before the internet and just before boot sales distorted the scene. The bootfair was a perfect economic and social allegory for those times: where once you gave stuff away to be sold for charity you now sold it for yourself.” And that was only the beginning. The car parks of the boot sale were soon to be exchanged for the data highways of online selling platforms, as “Teenage Winter” on *Tales from Turnpike House* details, continuing the neoliberal turn of the 1980s:

There’s not much left on the doorstep recently  
 Something to do with eBay, Johnny reckons  
 He’s bidding on it now, for a Subbuteo catalogue, ’81-’82  
 He’ll win it, put it in a drawer, and forget he ever bought it.

This fully commodified past won’t engender no future. Indeed, the story-arch of *Tales from Turnpike House* ends with a “teenage winter coming down”; the teenage enthusiasm and energy to search the past for a glimpse of a better future have run out of steam. “Mums with pushchairs outside Sainsbury’s” are seen with “tears in their eyes”: they’ll have to make do with what the world offers them, even if it offers little to sustain them. The music on the record, however, despite its Beach Boys-harmonies and “retro harpsichord” is driven on by “futuristic beats”.<sup>27</sup> Several songs on the album have been co-produced by Xenomania, an English songwriting and production team, which at the time was famous for its work with girl groups Girls Aloud and Sugababes, for whom they (co-)produced several number one hits. In a way, the involvement of Xenomania could be seen as an insurance against “the ever-present potential for the work of memory to lapse into mere sentimental reminiscence”;<sup>28</sup> it ensures that the past remains a platform for the future, adding the sonorous to the semantic.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Lechner, “A beat on the future and on the past”.

<sup>28</sup> Burke, 105.

One of the songs co-produced by Xenomania, “Lightning Strikes Twice”, differs markedly from those songs in the ballad tradition analysed above; its story is neither told from a third-person perspective nor in dialogue but features a conspicuous first-person narrator. The narrator might well be one of the Turnpike House inhabitants, although this is difficult to determine. Indeed, the unspecified “I” is a known companion to the unspecified “you” in pop music. As Murphey’s analysis of successful chart-toppers indicates, “94 per cent of the songs had unspecified ‘I’ referents.”<sup>29</sup> If it is unclear who is speaking – the singer, a narrator or a figure in the fictional world – it is as uncertain who is being spoken to: a real-life person known to the singer, a figure from the fictional world or someone else altogether. And so, finally, the unspecified “you” returns to the *Tales from Turnpike House*:

Well don’t you know that  
Everyone should have a reason to believe  
So I still believe that  
Lightning could strike twice for me  
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

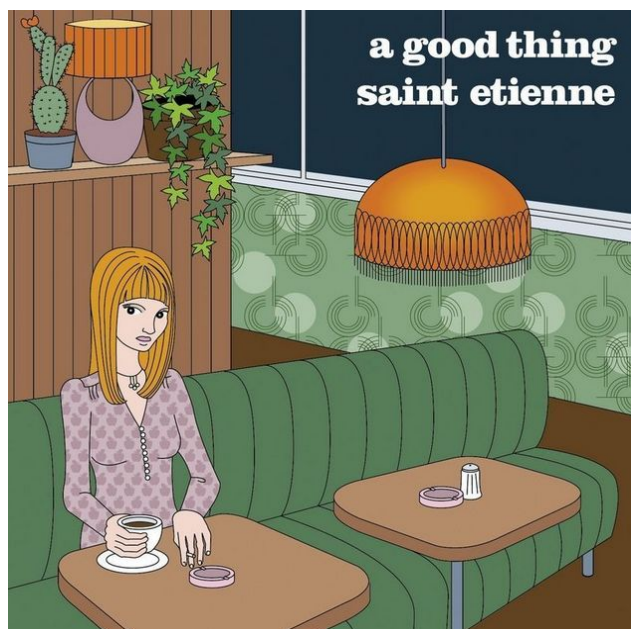


Fig. 3: Single cover for “A Good Thing” (Sanctuary, 2005)

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<sup>29</sup> Murphey, 187.

Pop and folk, unspecified “you” and ballad-tale come to be intricately interwoven on *Tales from Turnpike House*. “A Good Thing”, a straightforward dance pop song placed at the heart of the album and released as its second single, begins in the folk-ballad mode, introducing a character’s actions, look and broodings (mimetically shown on the single cover by Lora Findlay, cf. Fig. 3): “Put on her shoes before she goes, Hazel eyes and auburn hair, How could she tell it’s all for nothing”. At the beginning of the second verse the stomping drum beat of the song is dropped to further emphasize the narrative, accompanied by an acoustic guitar only:

A small café across the street  
 I heard you meet there every week  
 Got your favourite necklace on  
 How could you tell it’s all for nothing.

But precisely when the “How could *she* tell” of the opening verse is turned into the direct address of “How could *you* tell”, the drums return and the song becomes more upbeat again. It is all the more open, now, who is addressed. Is the narrator speaking to the fictional character, as in “I heard you meet there every week”? Or are we listening in to a conversation between two estranged lovers (although it’s all sung in the same voice)?

The following lines temporarily switch back to a more narrative mode, with focalisation moving freely between the characters: “He looked away, pretending not to see her, She tried to say something, but nothing came out right”. The chorus, however, again revels in unspecified instances of “you”:

You know it was a good thing  
 The best thing  
 Last thing you should have left behind  
 Out of nowhere  
 Out there  
 Looking all the way back  
 It’s a good thing  
 The best thing  
 Last thing you should have left behind

The logic of the lyrics would suggest that the “you” in question is the ex-boyfriend who didn’t want to kiss and make up. However, the words sung are the words the left-behind lover *would have loved* to have said

to her ex, only that “nothing came out right”. “One day”, she hopes, “One day it’ll hit him, One day....”. In the presence of the song, though, the words *are* uttered, loud and clearly, with full confidence, and in the right tune: not only do these words come out more than right, they are backed up by a driving beat hard to resist. Whom are they addressing, then, if he who should have heard them in the fictional world never did hear them? *Us*? Have we left behind the best thing, the last thing we should have left behind? (And instead carried all the terrible things from the past with us to the present?) Should we, maybe, be more nostalgic (for a better future)?

Murphey explains the effect of the unspecified “you” on the listener with reference to a familiar situation:

This type of unspecified addressing may be compared to the phenomenon of someone shouting ‘hey you’ on the street and everybody turning to look, thinking perhaps they are being addressed. The chances are small for each of us that we are the one among the many being addressed. We know that, nevertheless we turn. The difference on the street is that we soon realise when we turn to see the direction of the speaker that we are not being called, while with the song there is usually no evidence that we are not being addressed.<sup>30</sup>

There is no suggestion that Murphey is aware that he is telling a tale that is almost identical to one of the central scenes of ideology critique. “There are individuals walking along”, writes Louis Althusser:

Somewhere (usually behind them) the hail rings out: ‘Hey, you there!’ One individual (nine times out of ten it is the right one) turns round, believing/suspecting/knowing that it is for him, i.e. recognizing that ‘it really is he’ who is meant by the hailing.<sup>31</sup>

For Althusser, such addressing is no harmless activity that is cleared up once you turn around:

ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines

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<sup>30</sup> Murphey, 187.

<sup>31</sup> Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)” [1969/70], *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, transl. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971, 127–86, 174–5.



of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!' (174)

For the sake of brevity, we can say that Murphey is a liberal: he thinks it is usually not you who is being hailed, so calm down, it's probably been a mistake, you're not caught red-handed, it's all harmless, just a bit of pop playfulness. Althusser, however, is convinced that they will get us all, that indeed, they had us even before they called, otherwise we would not have turned around in the first place, feeling guilty before doing anything wrong. The sentence on which everything hinges is the last from Murphey's quote: "with the song there is usually no evidence that we are not being addressed".

In a way, the interpretation of that last sentiment determines our critical view of pop music: there is no evidence that we are not being addressed, but is there evidence that we are addressed? Does it mean that no one is excluded from participation as we can all make the song our own (as it is all about *us*), or does it mean that we can never be sure that it is not us who are hailed, that there is no escape (it's all about *you*!)? (Remember: Nancy's *methexis* of the sonorous means "having to do with participation, sharing, or *contagion*"; sound takes you in, whether you want it or not.) Is the pop song thus part of a culture industry that dupes us into buying into an alienated society (as T.W. Adorno argued with regard to Jazz), or is it part of a counter culture that awakens us from our state of alienation (Marcus' Dylan)? Is it telling stories for mere entertainment or blasting out a rallying cry? Are we tricked into accepting a pseudo-individuality that allows us to own the world in the form of consumer goods only (critical theory), or does it allow us to participate in new ways in a mass-mediated society (cultural studies)? Is it selling romantic love as the only thing worth fighting for in a neoliberal world: you can love who you want so what else do you want? Or is it enabling us to care for a world even if it does not care for us?

Songs that top the charts are certainly rich in unspecified "you"s and often poor in narrative specificity (again, the situation looks slightly different when it comes to rap); they have to appeal to many different listeners in many different situations, sometimes only for the sake of selling it to many, individually. However, even the top fifty places in the charts cannot match the endless number of album-tracks and non-chart-topping songs that are continuously churned out and linger in the ever-growing archives. Many of these are much more specific than the

chart toppers, both in respect to their lyrics and their off-kilter sound, although not necessarily filled with such quaint details as the *Tales of Turnpike House*. And even if these songs, individually, are not consumed in the same numbers as the chart toppers, they are part of pop as well, and taken together, they might not even be in the minority.

Pop songs participate in both, the semantic tradition of the folk ballad and the openness of the somatic sound, mimesis and methexis. Genre conventions, echoes of other songs, tales of first cuts (which are always the deepest) tie the pop song to the past, but ever new, artificially created sounds propel it to the future. Even if individual songs revel in nonsensical novelty or tell a story as straight as possible, each pop song always exists in the context of all the other pop songs we ever heard; there is no such thing as a one-off listener of pop. In this context, we always listen for that story that has something to say to us, and we always dance to even the most earnest words, even if very slowly, and in the mind only, to make that song ours. Sometimes, we might be called to the spot, but we can always stop making sense. Often it is the verse that carries the weight of reality, narratives of things gone (love usually), while it is the chorus that opens a closed book towards a post-semantic future where communication is not transmission but a sharing, an unfolding, a dance, a resonance. Pop songs are tales of the future of our past. Even if that seems like a memory now.

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This collection of twelve original essays explores the politics of tale-telling across the field of English Studies. A programmatic introduction uses the fuzzy boundaries of tales to argue that their indeterminacy and polymorphous quality is responsible for the endless attraction, proliferation, and transgressive potential of the 'tale' as a literary form. The case studies address representative developments in British culture, focussing on the tales' potential for cultural critique in literature, film, music and other cultural practices. Four sections cover 'Shakespeare Retold', 'Victorian Tales', 'Fairy Tales Revisited', and 'Narrating (National/Cultural) Identity'. Topics include classic fairy tales and their rewritings; melodramatic, Gothic and fantasy fiction and film; writings about the condition of England and negotiations of Irish identity; discourses of Empire in public spectacles; and every-day life represented in popular music. On each of them hangs a tale.

