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# **SPECIAL ISSUE**

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# ***REMEMBERING/FORGETTING* Vol. 1**

**Guest Editors:**

Sylvia Borowska-Szerszun,  
Tomasz Sawczuk

# EDITORIAL

To say that the concept of memory has raised much debate in academia over the few last decades is to say nothing. It would be in fact nothing short of a serious intellectual challenge to identify another topic that has gained such critical attention and has attracted so vast a spectrum of scientific disciplines. These, including linguistics, literary theory, cultural theory, philosophy, history, sociology, trauma studies, psychobiology and neuroscience among many others, have addressed in their own respect the multiplicity of workings performed on/by memory, such as the acts of remembering, forgetting, commemorating or confabulating. It thus comes as no surprise that the leading scholars in the field are unanimous in claiming that memory has become a discursive construct. Evolving a long way from the ancient understanding of the term as “a repository of sensible and mental impressions ... complemented by recollection – the process of recovering the content of past thoughts and perceptions” (Nikulin) through the Romantic thought as being constitutive for the contemporary perspectives on consciousness, the self and the discussed concept (Kilbourn, Ty, 5), memory studies have reached a stage whose focus “rests, precisely, not on the ‘past as it really was,’ but on the ‘past as a human construct’” (Erll, 5).

Accordingly, what is now considered an essential prerequisite to gaining a better understanding of this construct is the need of a truly interdisciplinary approach; as it is observed by Kilbourn and Ty, “whatever ‘truth’ of memory we might discern can only be located in the interstices, the interfaces between and among discourses, disciplines, areas and realms of thought, whether scientific, humanist, deconstructive, or other” (5). Further preconditions for a successful insight into the subject matter come with the global character of the subject area, which well reflects the globalized world. Never before have memory studies been more of a collective and transnational effort resulting in the burgeoning number of study centers, journals, book series, and degree programs, all of which engage scholarly perspectives from all around the world (Erll, 2). Thus, investigating into the area of memory is worthwhile and meaningful since “‘memory’ has become a truly transnational phenomenon” (Erll, 4).

If, as further suggested by Erll, “[t]he heterogeneity of the concepts and disciplinary approaches to possibly identical objects of research represents one of the most important challenges of contemporary memory studies” (6), then the papers comprising the present issue of *Crossroads* journal responds to such a critical call with notable success. The authors of the seven articles collected in the volume attest to the phenomenon of memory as being located at the intersections of various disciplines, times and cultures and requiring a wide array of critical approaches. What seems to lie beneath all these various perspectives and approaches might be a perception of memory as “a dynamic, constructive process that reflects the goals and biases of individuals and groups, rather than a static or literal reproduction of past experiences” (Schacter, Welker, 241). It is also in this

broad sense that the authors of the articles in this volume understand the notion of memory. Seen as metaphorical crossroads between remembering and forgetting and relying on the interplay between past, present and future, memory becomes a dynamic (re)construction of individual and collective past that might be subject to the processes of alteration, re-evaluation, invention, fabrication, manipulation, and negation.

The volume opens with **Bożena Kucała's** essay that aims to analyse the representation of houses in selected novels and autobiographical narratives by Penelope Lively. Seen as specific junction of space and time, houses are not only physical locations evocative of the past but also constructs built within the space of memory. In Lively's fiction and non-fiction they function as 'sites of memory', allowing individuals to create and maintain meaningful connections with their past and thus become particularly significant for their identity. However, apart from silently witnessing the experiences of individuals, Kucała argues, houses are also important as sites of collective memory, reflecting social and historical changes.

The concept of a house can be metaphorically extended to encompass the notion of one's homeland whose history, often turbulent, is inseparably intertwined with individual past. Such a connection comes to the fore in the three succeeding articles. **Ewelina Feldman-Kołodziejuk** proposes to read Michael Crummey's *River Thieves* through the prism of 'rescue history', a recently developed concept that is concerned with local, potential, existential and affirmative history whose goal is to rescue the future. Broadly categorized as historical fiction, the novel is set in Newfoundland and based on historical accounts of Captain David Buchan's expedition to Red Indian Lake, whose aim to encourage cooperation and put an end to hostilities between English settlers and Beothuks was never achieved. In her reading of the novel, Feldman-Kołodziejuk argues that Crummey's fiction revisits the chronicled events and restores agency to the marginalized groups, implying that all of us are able to influence history.

Restoring agency to the repressed is also an important theme in the article by **Anna Maria Karczewska**, who demonstrates the ways in which Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* offers insight into Dominican history and creates a voice for victims of political violence and terror. The novel, classified here as a relatively new for Latin American literature genre of *testimonio*, tells the story and describes enduring legacy of the Mirabal sisters, who opposed the regime of Rafael Trujillo and became symbols of popular and feminist resistance, their brutal deaths serving as a catalyst for change. Emphasizing interdependence of personal and collective experiences, Karczewska sees the narrative as a symbolic substitute for the truth and justice that was never granted to the victims in the aftermath of Trujillismo.

**Paweł Kaptur** revisits the history of the Restoration of Charles II Stuart in 1660, examining his treatment of Cromwellians who inspired and executed his father's deposition, in this way violating the irrefutable divine right of kings. The ruler's decision to punish or pardon them for their involvement in the regicide can be metaphorically perceived in terms of 'remembering' and 'forgetting', which are transposed from a personal level onto a wider plane of royal policy. While Charles II showed mercy and oblivion understood as an act of amnesty to those who only sided

with Cromwell and Parliament against his father but did not contribute to his death directly, he did not hesitate to take firm-handed actions in order to prevent further rebellions or plots in the future, and to strengthen the position of the monarchy.

Being perhaps the most obsessively recurring memories, the images of childhood and adolescence play a considerable role in giving shape to one's sense of identity and belonging. As claimed by **Stefan Kubiak**, this seems to be the case for Philip Roth and the bulk of his first-person narrated novels persistently set in his home town. Investigating into Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, *The Plot Against America*, and *American Pastoral*, the author argues that the writer's tireless literary return to the Jewish quarter of Newark, New Jersey, is a repeated endeavor to understand the reality of his homeland community, as well as the means to determine his complex sense of American Jewish identity.

Keeping the Jews of North America within the scope of interest, **Aleksandra Kamińska's** paper is a contribution exploring Bernice Eisenstein's 2006 graphic memoir *I Was A Child of Holocaust Survivors*, a hard-to-categorize, hybrid account of being a second generation survivor. Dwelling on the concept of postmemory as well as trauma studies, Kamińska takes a particular focus on Eisenstein's relationship with her father to demonstrate the ways in which the former portrays and commemorates the latter with the blend of words and images in her work. Eisenstein's idea behind her memoir, as the author argues, was to create a basis for changing the unintelligible traumas of the Holocaust into an understandable and meaningful story.

**Katarzyna Więckowska**, whose paper concludes the volume, delves into a new strain of novel dubbed as Alzheimer's fiction to demonstrate the challenges it poses to the established understanding of memory, identity and narrative. Offering a reading of Lisa Genova's *Still Alice*, Stefan Merrill Block's *The Story of Forgetting*, and Matthew Thomas's *We Are Not Ourselves*, she presents mechanisms which redefine and reconfigure our ways of thinking about the relations between identity, memory, literature and science. Not least significant aspect of Więckowska's article comes with making use of an entirely new critical idiom which arises in face of the writers' growing focus on neurological conditions and whose most immediate critical response gets reflected in the concepts of syndrome literature and neuronovel.

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The articles collected in this issue demonstrate that literature can be seen as a medium in which memory can be 'stored' and through which it can be conveyed, becoming an important tool for the representation of individual experiences, collective past, and national history. Literary texts, therefore, act as specific tools of memory-making, contributing significantly to the ways in which the past is construed. And yet, since every act of remembrance, whether at individual or collective level, is selective, "memories are small islands in a sea of forgetting" (Erlil, 9). Private memoirs, autobiographies, novels, and historical narratives all construe, to a greater or lesser extent, such small narrative islands of memory amidst 'a sea of forgetting.' Even if, or maybe because, these islands

cannot be truly objective or perspective-free, they are worth critical attention as they do perform many functions, including “the imaginative creation of past life-words, the transmission of images of history, the negotiation of competing memories, and the reflection about processes and problems of cultural memory” (Erll,144). Relying on similar processes of selecting, organizing and arranging individual elements to form a coherent narrative, memory, history and literature as well as the intersections between them constituted the central organizing theme of this issue. Representing various critical perspectives, the authors who collaborated in this project engage in a meaningful dialogue, which, we hope, offers a valuable contribution to the field of memory studies.

Sylwia Borowska-Szerszun

Tomasz Sawczuk

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## Houses as sites of memory in Penelope Lively's writings

**Abstract.** This paper will analyse the representation of houses in selected novels and non-fiction by Penelope Lively. Houses feature in her writings as material objects as well as immaterial forms created by the human psyche; they may also be conceptualised as organic beings whose lives mirror the lives of their inhabitants. However, it will be argued that for the characters in Lively's novels houses function primarily as sites of memory. Houses are treated as repositories of the past, both because they hold secure its material remnants and because they have the potential to evoke memories and thus enable people to forge and maintain meaningful connections with the past. The article will also take account of Lively's three autobiographical books, *Oleander*, *Jacaranda: A Childhood Perceived*, *A House Unlocked*, and *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, in which the writer embarks on the project of retrieving memories by exploring, respectively, three houses she used to reside in as "material memoirs" of her own past as well as collective history.

**Keywords:** Penelope Lively, memory, autobiography, the house in fiction, sites of memory.

In their essay on representations of the house in literature and culture, Janet Larson, Francesca Saggini and Anna-Enrichetta Soccio emphasise the inescapable duality inherent in this type of dwelling. On the one hand, it is a material object, a "thing made of bricks and mortar, poured concrete, cinder block, fieldstone, fitted logs or baked mud." Owing to its substantiality, the house secures the inside against the outside, separates the private space from the public space, and offers its inhabitants "a sense of stability against the ravages of time." On the other hand, the space enclosed by the walls of the house also becomes a mental construct, endowed with subjective, personal connotations (1-2). In *Poetics of Space* Gaston Bachelard conceptualised the house as a form created by the human psyche rather than a mere architectural structure: "A house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space" (47). Bachelard claims that the human being "experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thought and dreams" (5). In its latter function – which is the real subject of Bachelard's analysis – the house gives a shape to human life by integrating "thoughts, memories and dreams" (6-7).

This duality of the house as both a material object and a mental construct tends to underlie representations of houses in Penelope Lively's novels and memoirs. Indeed, the opening of one of her latest novels, *Family Album* (2009), revolves around a contrast between these two dimensions. Split into several voices and perspectives, the novel achieves a degree of unity thanks to its setting.

As Lorna Bradbury observes in her review, “the house in *Family Album* has as strong a presence as any of the characters” (Bradbury). Allersmead is the background to the lives of several characters, whose identity may be defined with regard to their physical and mental distance from it. The first episode depicts one of the middle-aged daughters arriving at Allersmead for a family reunion. Whereas her partner sees a mere building, for Gina the sight of the house triggers a powerful influx of memories:

Gina turned the car off the road and into the driveway of Allersmead. At this point she seemed to see her entire life flash by...

Philip, in the passenger seat, saw a substantial Edwardian house, a wide flight of steps up to a front door with stained-glass panels, a weedy sweep of gravel in front. (1)

In a house which has transcended its materiality, objects become reminders of human experiences. In the house depicted in *Family Album*, each room is “branded” and “vibrant with references” to family rituals (15-16). As one of the characters says of Allersmead, “This is a *real* family house and it’s got all the scars” (13).

Indeed, the house in Lively’s writings is not by definition the Bachelardian “space we love” (Bachelard, xxxv). Lively does not idealise houses in her fiction – nor is she prepared to overlook the downsides of her own family life in her memoirs (*Oleander, Jacaranda*, 1994).<sup>1</sup> The walls enclosing the inhabited space may function as a shelter or, conversely, as a trap; the separation of the house from the outside world may lead to alienation; the stability connoted by the house may degenerate into stagnation.

### **The house as a space in time**

Whatever houses connote to their inhabitants in Lively’s fiction or to herself in her autobiographical writings, Lively repeatedly asserts that if “the geometrical space” of a house is transcended as a result of human experience, it is a process which takes place over a period of time. Houses acquire their identity when layers of experience accumulate within their walls; in Lively’s books family dwellings are silent but material witnesses to the progress of individual lives, the succession of generations, and even the march of history. As a fusion of space and time, the houses in her books become manifestations of the Bakhtinian chronotope, in which “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (Bakhtin, 84).

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<sup>1</sup> There is much overlap between Lively’s novels and the ideas expressed in her non-fiction. Kerstin Ebel notes that while reading the autobiographical books *Oleander, Jacaranda* and *A House Unlocked*, “it becomes clear how many of her own memories and experiences and how much of her knowledge of places Lively has used in her fiction – whether consciously or subconsciously” (2). This observation also pertains to her latest autobiographical book, *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*.

The intersection of space and time as the defining quality of the house is exemplified in Lively's account of Bulaq Dakhrur, the house of her childhood in the vicinity of Cairo. Lively was born and spent the first twelve years of her life in the British community in Egypt. Forty years later, she made a return visit to the place. The account of the visit, interspersed with memories of her childhood, is the subject of her first autobiographical book *Oleander, Jacaranda*. The prime destination of the journey is the former family house, but the visit to Egypt also makes her feel like a time traveller (5). After finding the house she is able to indulge in a remembrance of things past. Lively discovers that the building has been converted to a school and that all the former surroundings are gone; therefore, the house becomes all the more precious to her as the sole remainder of the past: "Nothing left but the house, stolidly clinging on. Somehow, this was not sad but curiously exhilarating. I had not expected it to be there at all. And now the building seemed in some odd way to have the dignity of the Sphinx, which looks aloofly out over the degradation all around" (7). But the visitor sees more than the physical building in its present shape – she is aware of its previous existence, inextricably intertwined with her childhood: "And there was also the powerful feeling that on some other plane of existence the Ur-house was still there also, with the eucalyptus avenue and the lawns and the flower beds, and I with it, a ghost-child for ever riding my bike up and down the drive..." (8). Her memories are suffused with nostalgia; the place connects her with her younger self, it offers her security and reassurance (9). The encounter with Bulaq Dakhrur, her personal chronotope, releases such vivid recollections that she is mentally transported back to her childhood and narrates her memories in the present tense. Lively records her astonishment at the clarity of her memories and notes that the moments engraved on her mind are "almost all focused on the house, or the garden" (29). The place becomes the starting point of her journey into the past. In her imagination, Lively recreates in great detail the interior of the house as it was in her early years, methodically moving from room to room and commenting on what the sights connote. One piece of furniture in particular commands her respect as a palpable link between past and present: the old tallboy which now stands in her bedroom in London still furnishes the hall of her imaginary Egyptian house (32).

### **Housing memories**

The capacity to read the references encoded in the space of the house originates in memory. It is human memory which endows houses with an identity and confers upon them the status of being eloquent evidence of the past. Both in her fiction and her non-fiction, Lively never tires of stressing the importance of the past in constituting individual and collective identity. In her other autobiographical narrative, *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* (2013), she asserts that "The mind needs its tether in time, it must know where it is – in the perpetual slide of the present, with the ballast of what has been and the hazard of what is to come" (123). In an interview for *Publishers Weekly* the writer declared:

I am extraordinarily interested in history ... worried about how a lot of people don't realize that history is true, that it has actually happened. . . . Perhaps what I am interested in even more is the operation of

memory in every possible sense, the way in which both people and landscape<sup>2</sup> are composed of memory, the ways in which the physical world is composed of memory. (quoted in Blom, 240)<sup>3</sup>

In Lively's writings, houses, in their virtual dimensions, are also composed of memory, both personal and collective.

In his essay "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*" Pierre Nora argues that "Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects" (9); memory is anchored, "crystallizes and secretes itself" in "sites of memory" (*lieux de mémoire*) (7). Following Maurice Halbwachs, Nora contends that since in the modern post-industrial world we can no longer rely on spontaneous collective memory, we must intentionally create repositories of the past: "Museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders – these are the boundary stones of another age, illusions of eternity" (12). The concept of the house as a site of private, and occasionally also collective memory, underlies Lively's depiction of family dwellings in her novels and autobiographical books. The buildings and the objects they contain testify to the reality of the past and provide the grounding for re-imagining it. However, Lively does not share Nora's account of the genesis of *lieux de mémoire*. The house is not deliberately created to anchor memories; instead, it naturally acquires this function in the course of human habitation.

In *Poetics of Space* Bachelard stresses the role of the house in retaining memories: "thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated" (8). John Locke once defined memory as "the storehouse of our ideas" (193). The metaphor of storing or housing is particularly apt in describing the way Lively conceptualises the house. The writer reiterates her belief that the past leaves its deposits like layers of archaeological artefacts; landscapes, buildings and people are palimpsests ("We are all of us palimpsests; we carry the past around" [Lively 2014, 174]; "we are each of us the accretion of all that we have been" [ibid. 57]). But "storing" may be understood quite literally, too. The houses of man, Bachelard says, are also "the houses of things" (xxxvii). In describing the house in which she now lives, Lively states: "My house has many things, too, besides those books – the accretion of a lifetime" (Lively 2014, 199). As is shown in the opening scene in *Family Album*, quoted at the beginning of this article, houses become storehouses of the past but only those who perceive a particular building as a site of memory can activate the house's potential to display "the shining threads of reference" (cf. Lively 2001, xi). In the last chapter of *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* Lively chooses to discuss six objects stored in

2 Lively is also the author of the book *The Presence of the Past: An Introduction to Landscape History* (1976).

3 Cf. the passage in Lively's novel *The Road to Lichfield* (1977) in which the protagonist reflects on the landscape while driving to Lichfield: "the landscape itself [seemed like] a palimpsest, suggesting another time, another place. Edgehill recalled the Civil War; Tamworth, lurking over to the right, had something Saxon about it, she seemed to remember. Her own past, too, waved a cheery hand from over the horizon, or the other side of the motorway interchange.... Private and public memory, it seemed, were fused on the R.A.C. Route Guide" (1).

her house because they “articulate something of who [she is]” (199). Since they embody references to the past, the objects constitute “a sort of material memoir” (200).<sup>4</sup> Arguing that domestic spaces play a crucial part in (auto)biographies, Kathy Mezei writes: “Interior domestic spaces (furniture, rooms, doors, windows, stairs, drawers – familiar, everyday objects) which have and could be perceived as banal and ordinary, and hence insignificant, are vital to the shaping of our memories, our imagination, and our ‘selves’” (82).

Whereas in *Oleander, Jacaranda* Lively’s recreation of the past is backed up by a mental tour of her imaginary Ur-house, in a later autobiographical book, *A House Unlocked* (2001), she employs a similar mnemonic technique, but in a self-conscious, systematic manner. The house in question is Golsoncott, an Edwardian country house in Somerset, which likewise has personal reverberations for the writer. She remembers it as the home of her maternal grandmother, in which she often stayed after her arrival from Egypt. Following the mode of presentation of her Egyptian house in *Oleander, Jacaranda*, Lively in this instance extends her range of reference, moving away from strictly personal experience towards family history and even further, towards public history. The writer’s professed aim is to give the immediate and the particular a universal resonance (ix). Cressida Connolly describes the book as “a curious and mostly engaging hybrid in which events of the twentieth century are extrapolated from objects in the house” (Connolly).

Lively reiterates her perception that houses constitute embodiments of the past; their interiors and the objects contained in them are tangible relics of what has been. On the other hand, the materiality of things evokes a whole range of mental images from the past. Lively articulates her beliefs very clearly in the Preface to *A House Unlocked*, in which she expounds on her plan to use the house and the objects in it as memory prompts:

the entire place – its furnishings, its functions – seemed like a set of coded allusions to a complex sequence of social change and historical clamour. Objects had proved more tenacious than people – the photograph albums, the baffling contents of the silver cupboard, the children on my grandmother’s sampler of the house – but from each object there spun a shining thread of reference, if you knew how to follow it. (xi)

The house she remembers does not exist anymore, but Lively’s memories of it remain so vibrant that she makes a virtual tour of Golsoncott the structural principle of her book: “In my head, I can still move easily and vividly around it. The furnishings are precise and clear, the sounds and smells are as they ever were. I can walk through the front door into the vestibule, and thence into the hall” (ix).

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<sup>4</sup> In the novel *The Road to Lichfield*, the heroine recalls her past as she sorts out her late father’s house (which used to be her own family house): “In the spare bedroom, where she would sleep, her own past proffered itself in concrete form: a row of her old books on the mantelpiece, a spurned wedding-present vase on the windowsill, a pair of her shoes in the wardrobe” (12).

In his overview of modern theories of memory, Michael Rossington observes that Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* "is indebted explicitly to the exploration of the significance of *loci memoriae*, or 'memory places' in medieval thought in Yates' *The Art of Memory*" (136). Frances A. Yates's well-known study of memory-training techniques from ancient Greece until early modernity, first published in 1966, stressed the crucial importance of memory systems in the pre-print age. The ancient and medieval art of memory used architecture as memory places. According to Yates, Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* offers the best description of the process of memorisation and recollection (18). The first step recommended in this and other ancient guides is to impress on the memory a place, preferably a spacious building; subsequently, the ideas to be remembered are to be placed in the imagination in chosen locations within the building. In order to retrieve these memories, one must revisit the space in one's imagination.

The influence of Yates's book is acknowledged by Lively in the Preface to *A House Unlocked*. By her own admission, Yates's detailed discussion of memory as an art provided her with a methodology for retrieving her own memories:

Frances Yates's fine book ... describes the system whereby the sequence of an oratorical argument was retained by means of the creation of an imaginary mansion, within which the orator moved from room to room, each space serving as a stage in the argument, and the emotive trappings – a statue, an urn, a painting – acting as prompts for specific flights of language.

In the same way, I can move around my memory house and focus upon different objects. The house itself becomes a prompt – a system of reference, as assemblage of coded signs. (x)

The description of the dining room ("The Knife Rests, the Grape Scissors and the Bon-Bon Dish") is an excellent illustration of Lively's method. The room and its objects seem infinitely familiar – with their arrangement, colours, smells and their minor defects. The writer appears to be reincarnated as her younger self: "There is a sense in which I am still there, a lumpen teenager gripped by the roller-coaster emotions of that turbulent period of life" (200).<sup>5</sup>

Thus, adhering to metaphors of space, it may be said that the house in both its physical and imagined form offers a genuine passage back to the living past.

### **The house as a living space**

Whereas in Bachelard's poetics the house operates on the principle of the "psychological integration" of individuals (Bachelard, xxxvi), for Lively the house integrates individual life with history. Kathy Mezei contends that domestic spaces connote far more than the immediate context for ar-

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<sup>5</sup> Ch. 3 of *Poetics of Space* is devoted to the psychological implications of drawers, chests and wardrobes. They may be places for hiding secrets and mysteries, dreams and memories. The casket, for example, in Bachelard's formulation, "contains the things that are *unforgettable*, unforgettable for us, but also unforgettable for those to whom we are going to give our treasures. Here the past, the present and a future are condensed. Thus the casket is memory of what is immemorial" (84).

ticulating the self: “Narrating the home ... offers a convenient and familiar medium for investigating self and subjectivity by means of the intersection of space and time through memory and the histories and generations of the house’s inhabitants and of space” (83). *A House Unlocked* is “elegiac yet resolutely unsentimental” (Kakutani) as the significance of the building is shown to exceed Lively’s personal recollections and even familial memories. The dining room at Golsoncott connotes the family rituals which took place in it but, in a broader context, is also emblematic of the period of country houses, now gone. The objects, having lost their original function, “provide the fringe furnishing of a significant narrative” (Lively 2001, 197). The narrative which the writer spins out of her recollections concerns social change in post-war England – the erosion of social hierarchies, the disappearance of domestic service, the dispossession of the landowning classes and the erosion of the “rock-solid [social] confidence” typified by her grandmother (200). The re-fashioning of the lifestyle of Golsoncott’s owners was a consequence of the deprivations incurred by the Second World War. Their house reflected the change by contracting its habitable space accordingly: “The place adjusted, as buildings do” (208). In the words of Mezei, “because domestic spaces are the product of a society, they express and reinforce its norms, social practices and ideologies” (81); this also means that as social practices evolve, domestic spaces are subject to change and readjustment.

The houses Lively creates in her fiction have the same capacity to respond to the lives that are lived in them. In her novel *Passing On* (1989) the writer draws parallels between the condition of the house and the lives of the middle-aged brother and sister who continue to inhabit it, out of inertia rather than genuine attachment. Greystones is marked by the oppressive personality of their mother; the house is in a state of decay and disrepair, which corresponds to the unfulfilled and dreary existence of Helen and Edward Glover. Helen’s half-hearted efforts at renovating the house are correlated with her unsuccessful and belated attempts at changing her life. Greystones used to be her late mother’s exclusive territory. Now, as Helen slowly begins to shake off her mother’s overpowering influence, the house appears to assist her in the process:

[The mother’s] presence was still loud and strong, but patchily so; there were occasional moments when she was not there at all, when it was possible to walk up the stairs or into the kitchen without expecting to see her. The black holes were becoming grey; Helen could see the substance of the house behind them, as though brick, stone and wood were extinguishing her mother. (46)

In *Family Album*, after a family secret has been revealed, the house “seems to swing a little, and reassemble itself differently” (198). At night, when its inhabitants go to sleep, Allersmead subsides to rest as well (8).

Indeed, houses seem to be vicariously animated by human presence. Allersmead is represented as an organic structure with its own life span. It “rose from the mud of a late Victorian building site,” “has experienced” about 43,000 days since then, “has known over a century of breakfasts,” “has weathered” the disappearance of domestic service and the arrival of modern household ap-

pliances, “has seen birth and death and a great deal of sex,” “has accommodated itself to new habits and practices” (29-30). Allersmead is an example of a house which, as Bachelard said, “starts to live humanly” (48). In a parallel with the break-up of the family, the house begins to disintegrate and is eventually put up for sale.

While it lives, Allersmead stores memories, becoming a “silent witness”: the house “hears everything” and “knows all that has been said, all that has been done” (77). The identity of a family house may “transcend geometrical space” to such an extent that the physical dimension of the building becomes inessential. The house may change its mode of being to a “mansion in the mind” (Lively 2001, ix), constructed out of people’s memories. From Lively’s perspective, her grandmother’s house has undergone this particular process, as the writer explains in the Preface to *A House Unlocked*. Such an experience is shared by Gina, the main character in *Family Album*. As she revisits Allersmead to prepare it for its sale, memories and associations flood it, obscuring the actual building:

... the smells take her to a more intimate Allersmead, to the Allersmead-in-the-head, to a raft of private moments that come swimming up from the long darkness of the years, the strange assortment of glimpses that are known as memory. All of these are tacked to Allersmead; in all of them Allersmead is the backdrop ... (256)

Thus, the house in Lively’s writings may become a site of memory in a double sense: a physical location evocative of the past, or a construct erected within the space of memory.

### **Conclusion: “the open shelf”**

The representation of the house in *Family Album* echoes Lively’s observation made in *A House Unlocked* that “Every house tells a story” (220). In both her fiction and her autobiographies the writer insists on the public aspect of these stories, in addition to their obvious personal significance. Joanna Briscoe comments that *Family Album* reads like “an anthropological study of the English middle classes from the 1970s to the present” (Briscoe). Lively’s portrayal of her grandmother’s Edwardian mansion in *A House Unlocked* is driven by a similar intention to make the particular emblematic of historical processes: “the house becomes a secret mirror of the times, arbitrary and selective, reflecting shafts of light from unexpected directions” (Lively 2001, 220). The writer recalls the house again in *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, stressing her expanding perspective – the house and its contents have become “signifiers for the century” (109).

In all her writing, Lively repeatedly asserts the interconnectedness of private and public pasts. In the chapter on memory included in *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* she distinguishes between individual and collective memory, comparing the former to “our own locked cupboard” and the latter to “the open shelf available for all” (136). In accordance with these domestic metaphors, it might be said that what the writer tries to do, especially in her autobiographical books, is to unlock the cupboard and transfer its contents to the open shelf. In this way, a site of personal memory may be mapped onto the larger territory of the collective past.

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# Michael Crummey's *River Thieves* in the light of rescue history

**Abstract.** Born and raised in Newfoundland and Labrador, Michael Crummey uses his inside knowledge to describe the region's peculiarities in vivid detail. All four of his novels are set in Newfoundland and weave a story of its inhabitants throughout different moments in the island's history. Though Crummey's prose is broadly characterized as historical fiction, his novels differ from their traditional counterparts. This article aims to invite a reading of Crummey's works through the prism of rescue history, a concept recently introduced by a Polish scholar, Ewa Domańska. Rescue history, drawing on frontier and post-colonial studies among others, is preoccupied with local, potential, existential and affirmative history whose goal is to rescue the future. Although the concept of rescue history encompasses a variety of disciplines and activities, this article will focus on the literary realization of the notion of rescue history in Crummey's debut novel *River Thieves*, published in 2002. Based on historical accounts of Captain David Buchan's expedition to Red Indian Lake, whose aim was to encourage trade and put an end to hostilities between English settlers and Beothuks, the novel encourages a compassionate revisiting of the chronicled events. Weaving an intricate web of human relations and dependencies, Crummey manages to restore agency to those who are situated on the periphery either due to gender, status or origin, thus reminding the reader that we are all capable of changing the course of history.

**Keywords:** rescue history, affirmative history, Beothuks, Demasduit, First Nations.

Born and raised in Newfoundland and Labrador, Michael Crummey celebrates the region's distinctness. All his novels are set in Newfoundland and weave stories of its inhabitants throughout different moments in the island's history. Spinning narratives that hark back to the beginning of the nineteenth century as well as encompass present-day events, Crummey shows Newfoundland's transformation from British colony to Canadian province. Though more than six decades have passed since Newfoundland's union with Canada, the vast majority of the island's inhabitants have retained their distinct sense of identity and declare themselves first as Newfoundlanders, then as Canadians. The sense of belonging primarily to the land rather than a country permeates the writer's oeuvre.

Crummey's characters seem to be deeply rooted in their locality, which is also mirrored in their language. Recurrent inscriptions from the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* manifest that the local variety of English developed a plethora of idiomatic phrases unknown to other native speak-

ers of English. An *old hag* to mean “a nightmare,” *to have the face of a robber’s horse* denoting “a brazen attitude,” or *dwall*, signifying “a state between sleeping and waking,” are only a few examples of linguistic distinctions between Canadians and Newfoundlanders. Though central to heroes’ lives, Newfoundland is, nevertheless, situated on the Canadian periphery. Therefore, there are a number of literary approaches that may be applied in analyzing and interpreting Crummey’s novels, such as regional studies, border studies, postcolonial studies or ecocriticism, to mention but a few.

The aim of this article, however, is to invite a reading of Crummey’s debut novel, *River Thieves*, through the prism of rescue history, a concept developed by a Polish scholar, Ewa Domańska, which is an amalgam of different, already existing methodologies. The project of rescue history is a conglomerate of seemingly diverse theories such as the theory and history of historiography, ecocide and genocide studies, posthumanities or ecological humanities. Drawing upon each of them, rescue history aims to achieve its main goal, that is to rescue the future. Methodologically, rescue history is preoccupied with local, potential, existential, ecological and affirmative history (Domańska, 26) that may aid to build a better future for both human and non-human inhabitants of our planet.

Based on historical accounts of Captain David Buchan’s expedition to Red Indian Lake, whose aim was to encourage trade and put an end to hostilities between English settlers and Beothuks, the novel encourages a compassionate revisiting of the chronicled events. In one of the interviews for the *Calgary Herald*, Crummey acknowledges his obsession with history in the following terms:

One of my obsessions as a writer is how does where we come from make us who we are. . . . How does our past shape our present. There are some readers out there who say things like ‘Why are you obsessed with what is happening the past [sic], why don’t you write about what is happening today?’ For me, I feel like you cannot write about what is happening today without writing about what has happened in the past. Those things are inseparable. Somehow that has become how I write. Those scenes start in the present and without any break they move into the past and then back to the present and sometimes there are three or four different levels within a single scene. I feel that is absolutely true of *how we are in the world*. (Crummey 2014)

Three elements of Crummey’s confession that deserve special attention and that will be further analyzed are as follows: the belief that now is the continuity of the past, the multi-dimensional aspect of some of the scenes in the novel that reconfigure depending on the focalizer, and the notion of “being in the world,” which draws significantly on ecocriticism and geopoetics.

The first element, that is, the belief that now is the continuity of the past, is demonstrated through intergenerational transmission. Encountering the ancestors of important or historical figures offers a metaphorical handshake across time; it becomes the meeting point between the present and the past. Apparently, the memory of the events that constitute the subject matter of the discussed novel is still a strong presence in the life of Newfoundlanders.

When I wrote *River Thieves*, which is about events that took place two hundred years ago, but it concerns a particular family, the Peytons, I could not believe how many Peytons I ran into after that book came out. I got to meet a Mr. Edgar Bear. He was 93, and his grandmother knew John Peyton Jr. So I was sitting next to this man, if I held his hand, he held his grandmother's hand, she was holding John Peyton Jr.'s hand. And that was an amazing moment--just to see how close all of that is to the present still. That is not something that doesn't exist anymore, it's very present to people in Newfoundland. (Crummey 2012)

Crummey's observation that the past and the present are inseparable, however, resonates with rescue history, yet in a different respect, namely, that through studying the past we can rescue the future. The modern world is built upon past victories to the same extent that it is shaped by past failures, wrong choices and missed opportunities. Consequently, the shape of the future depends on the present moment and decisions yet to be made, of which the pivotal concern is the acknowledgment of other narratives excluded from the official history. Rescue history encourages researchers to unearth those elements from history that have been suppressed, ignored, forbidden or misrepresented in official narratives (Domańska, 13), with a special focus placed on locality. In this sense, it rests upon Foucault's concept of counterhistory.

In Roman-style history, the function of memory was essentially to ensure that nothing was forgotten—or in other words, to preserve the law and perpetually to enhance the luster of power for so long as it endured. The new history that now emerges, in contrast, has to disinter something that has been hidden, and which has been hidden not only because it has been neglected, but because it has been carefully, deliberately, and wickedly misrepresented. Basically, what the new history is trying to show is that power, the mighty, the kings, and the laws have concealed the fact that they were born of the contingency and injustice of battles. (Foucault, 72)

The extinction of Red Indians as a result of settlers' expansion in Newfoundland is undeniably one of the most ignominious events in the island's history, which, unsurprisingly, has come to function as a source of national trauma but, peculiarly, also laid a foundation stone for the emergence of the national identity of Newfoundlanders. Cynthia Sugars explicates it in the following terms,

The extermination of the Beothuk Indians in Newfoundland has for a long time figured as a kind of formative event in Newfoundland and Canadian culture, a foundational trauma contributing to a constitutive and irreversible absence in official versions of invader-settler history. In effect, the Beothuk trauma, as experienced by the Beothuk themselves, is appropriated as a national trauma, or, should I say, Canadian nationalist discourse represents this tragedy *as though it were* a transferable trauma in order to conjure the event as a constitutive beginning for national self-definition. (150)

Therefore, writing about the lost tribe of Red Indians without appropriating their trauma is a nearly impossible task for someone who is a descendant of British settlers. Yet, Michael Crummey

seems to have successfully avoided the trap of presenting the Beothuk as the object of “both Canadian postcolonial guilt (over past atrocities) and postcolonial desire (for origins/authenticity)” (Sugars, 152). The aim of *River Thieves* is not to revindicate but to express the notion of loss as well as offer a deeper understanding of the circumstances that led to the dramatic events described in the novel and the ultimate extinction of the Beothuk tribe.

As the first settlers searched for places convenient for fishing and hunting they subsequently drove the Red Indians<sup>6</sup> inland towards Red Indian Lake. Though such an arrangement seemed initially to serve as a basis for a peaceful side-by-side existence with the incidents of friendly exchange of goods, it soon converted into a bloody war over the territory and animals between the Red Indians and some of the most affluent settlers that lived off fishing and hunting. Through the introduction of a wide array of characters, Crummey manages to portray settlers as a heterogeneous group, composed of individuals that differ in their viewpoints, attitudes, values, and conduct, the case of the Peytons being the most vivid example. Peyton Senior has a reputation for being a hardened enemy of Red Indians and has allegedly killed one with the use of a trap-bed. Peyton Junior, on the other hand, embraces governor Duckworth’s mission to “protect the Indians” and “to establish a formal relationship” (Crummey 2003, 20). Unlike his father, young Peyton sees a possibility of peaceful co-existence between settlers and the Red Indians.

Making Peyton Junior a main focalizer in *River Thieves*, Crummey shifts the focal point from conflicts and bloodshed to cooperation, coexistence, neighbourhood, or friendship. By accommodating Mary, the captured Beothuk woman, at his house and treating her like a guest with the utmost respect, Peyton Junior sets a new paradigm for relations between settlers and indigenous people. The relationship that young Peyton forges with the native woman balances or perhaps even redeems the haunting recollection he has of a captive little Indian girl exhibited to the public for a penny by one of his father’s old friends. Needless to say, though Mary is a respected guest at Peytons’ house, she also remains a captive that is expected to act as an intermediary between her people and settlers once she learns to speak English. However, the fact that emphasizes the shift towards peaceful coexistence between the two hostile groups is that Mary is no longer seen as a savage or exotic Other but a prospective partner in mediation. The potentiality of friendly coexistence between settlers and First Nations is additionally strengthened by a marital union between Reilly and his Mi’kmaq wife, Annie Boss. In this respect, *River Thieves* shows “the originary moment when what *could have been* was separated from what *is*” (Chafe, 93).

Mary never fully learns English (whether by will or not is unclear). She speaks in a “relentlessly present tense” (305), and will be remembered as always already perched at the moment of extinction. This fact, more than others, will come to haunt her captors. Mary, and the Beothuk more generally, embody

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<sup>6</sup> In the following article the name Red Indians is used interchangeably with the Beothuks to denote a particular tribe of First Nations of Newfoundland. The English name of the tribe derives from the Beothuk tradition of covering their bodies with the red ochre and is in no way a derogatory term.

this in-between moment, when going back was impossible and going forward, as before, was equally impossible. In this way, the Beothuk represent the end of an era, for Beothuk and settlers both. A nostalgia for originary nostalgia. A perpetual penultimate. (Sugars, 161)

*River Thieves* is like a piece of amber in which Demasduit, the Beothuk name of Mary, is preserved for prosperity; a silent witness, revealing nothing of her own people but testifying to their eradication. Though her capture constitutes the backbone of the novel, Mary is in no way a central character in the story. To make her the protagonist, Crummey would be forced to step into her shoes, which would lead to the re-appropriation of Mary's story and her subsequent re-colonization against which bell hooks warns in the following terms:

Often this speech about the "Other" annihilates, erases: "No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I rewrite myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk." (151-152)

Although the presence of Mary as well as her people is crucial to the story, Crummey manages to avoid the pitfalls bell hooks described. Narrating the events from the perspective of the settlers, Peyton Senior, his adult son and their housemaid Cassie Jure, not only does the author avoid a secondary colonization of the Beothuk, but he also calls the objectivity of the narrative into question. The understanding and the inevitable interpretation of the events in the novel differ greatly between the three aforementioned characters. As the plot unwinds, it becomes evident that what the characters see may be deceptive, for one's vision of the world is always enmeshed in one's subjective life experience and presuppositions. The fallibility of the narrative, and history in a broader understanding, is additionally reinforced by the fact that, as Chafe observes, from the moment of the capture of Mary at Red Indian Lake "the novel reads like an investigation (Crummey actually lifts excerpts from official letters and inquiries), and the only certainty seems to be that no one is as he or she seems" (104).

Rescue history is also understood as existential history that contemplates the meanders of the human condition. It is a story about people who are full of contradictions and who live in the grey zones of everyday dilemmas, both cognitive and moral ones (Domańska, 18). The characters of *River Thieves* are full-bloodied people, fraught with vices but also possessing redeeming qualities. Entangled in their often traumatic past, they all strive for a better future in Newfoundland, though in different ways and at different costs. One of the least likable characters, Peyton Senior, is a tough, unemotional man that seems to care about nothing but his son and estate. Yet, he is the one to rescue an Irish ex-convict, Reilly, as well as Cassie. Both these seemingly inadvertent decisions, which stemmed more from Peyton's moral judgment than mercy, will affect his and their lives irrevocably. Having Reilly kill one of the Red Indians in order to save old Peyton's life

during the second expedition to Red Indian Lake, Crummey highlights the intricacy of interhuman relations and restores agency to each of the characters. Little did Peyton Senior suspect that by offering to remove the T-shaped iron brand off the hand of an underage Irish thief and providing him with a job at his estate would he in fact rescue his own life in the long run. As Domańska observes, at the centre of rescue history, “there is a realistic and carnal subject-agent, acting in certain socio-political surroundings, belonging to a certain community, whose view of the world and of the past are conditioned by various locations” (19).<sup>7</sup> Ironically, the illusorily peripheral characters and events in the novel become central in its grand finale. The illicit love affair between Cassie and Captain Buchan, accidentally discovered by Peyton Junior, saves Reilly from the gallows. The prospects of shame that would come with the public discovery of the captain’s adultery prevent him from revealing the actual circumstances of the death of two Red Indians during the second expedition in the official report, thus acquitting its members of the killings.

Alongside empowering individual characters regardless of their peripheral locality, rescue history looks for “innovative forms of agency” that encompass non-human elements such as animals, plants, objects or even sounds and light. In this respect, it transcends the Anthropocene and points to nature in its own right (Domańska, 20). Nature features prominently in *River Thieves*, as in every Crummey novel, for life on this island is closely intertwined with its climate and animal resources. Though generous and picturesque in summer months, in winters the Newfoundland of *River Thieves* turns into a hostile land where some paths are impenetrable and the harsh climate kills inhabitants due to cold-induced diseases, starvation or injuries incurred during fishing or hunting expeditions. In the winter of 1817, the governor of Newfoundland dies of bronchial congestion that resulted from “the constant damp and cold of the governor’s residence” (Crummey, 158). The severity of this winter is demonstrated in the following passage from the novel:

The constant frost of that year had sealed the coast in a solid band of ice from the early days of December. In order to return the governor’s body to England, Buchan pressed three hundred shoremen into service beside crewmen from the *Drake*, *Egeria* and the *Fly* to carve a passage clear of the harbour. ... Three weeks after the work began, the HMS *Fly* left St. John’s with the earthly remains of Governor Pickmore preserved in a large puncheon of rum. ... Within a week the relentlessly cold weather had closed it over again and the harbour remained inaccessible to shipping until May. (Crummey, 158-9)

Similarly, both expeditions to Red Indian Lake that take place in the winters of 1811 and 1818 demonstrate how human history is closely entangled in or becomes natural history. The men struggle with the elements and the unbridled river that almost claims the life of one of the soldiers, as well as hunt down animals to ensure their provisions are sufficient and do not run out prematurely. Their lives depend on nature that, in turn, becomes an agent in their history.

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<sup>7</sup> Author’s own translation from Polish.

On principle, rescue history questions the notion of human exceptionalism, as well as the instrumental treatment of nature as a resource to satisfy human needs, drawing upon ecological and environmental studies. It calls for “a heightened sensitivity towards the environment in which we try to live” (White, 165). Nearly all characters in the novel kill various animals for food without getting squeamish, for their survival relies on animal flesh. Yet, *River Thieves* features one scene of seal slaughter for pelts that most readers will probably find abhorrent. This scene, which involves ripping still warm nearly beating hearts out of seals’ chests to satisfy hunger after the hard toil of slaughter, demonstrates a clear transgression (Crummey, 71). It is not the act of eating a raw seal heart that makes the scene savage but the manner in which it is done, which is totally devoid of any empathy.

He [old Peyton] used the heel of the boot to crack the exposed breastbone and then opened the chest cavity to cut the large fist of its heart free. He held it in his hand, the organ still hot to the touch, and he brought it to his mouth, biting into it as he would an apple. He offered it to Cassie and then to Peyton, and they ate the raw flesh together, licking the blood from their lips. (Crummey, 71)

The violent and haughty behaviour of old Peyton stands in stark contrast with young Peyton’s empathetic observation first of the seal’s “dark delicate nostrils testing the air” (70), and then the painful recollection of “stripped carcasses on ice, inert, emptied of the energy of the animate” (71). Peyton Junior’s sympathy for other people as well as other creatures, and his resistance to violence, unfortunately make him a laughingstock among his father’s friends and workers. Nonetheless, it is Peyton Junior that is nominated a new justice of the peace, setting a new paradigm for a more empathetic administrative face.

Last but not the least, rescue history emphasizes different forms of witnessing and giving testimony than human only. It points to trees, rivers or animals as witnesses. Certain ethnic groups may be long gone, having left no artifacts, but trees and rivers may remember their presence and their songs. The closing paragraph of the novel seems to be the epitome of this theoretical concept.

*There is no record of the lyrics of these [Beothuk] songs or the music to which the words were set. What remains of them is the property of brooks and ponds and marshes, of caribou and fox moving through the interior as they were sung two hundred years ago. Of each black spruce and fir offering its single note to the air where not a soul is left to hear it. (Crummey, 370)*

To conclude, *River Thieves* is a compassionate novel that succeeds in telling the story of the Red Indians’ extinction without appropriating it. The author bases his novel on scarce historical accounts of the described events and tries to imagine the actual motives that drove the settlers involved in the events. He consciously refuses to even fathom what colonization must have been like for the Beothuk or show their perspective from the first person narrative. In one of the interviews he explicates this in the following words:

I'm dealing with the historical reality of the extinction of an entire race of people, the Beothuk. . . . I was hoping the novel would give some sense of the enormity of that loss. . . . But I felt it would be wrong to write a novel about the Beothuk — to write as if we know more about them than we do, or to try to give them a voice that is absent from the historical record. Their absence, to my mind, is the point. The Beothuk are a shadowy presence in *River Thieves*, just as they are in what we know of the past. . . .

In the end, *River Thieves* is a book about regret. For the individual characters, it's usually regret of a personal nature. For me, and hopefully for a reader, it goes somewhere beyond that, encompasses something larger. (Quoted in Chafe, 97)

The novel indisputably leaves the reader with the sense of loss and mourning, but simultaneously, in an amber-like manner, it preserves the existence of the Red Indians and commemorates their status as the first inhabitants of Newfoundland. Unearthing a dramatic past, the novel preserves the future memory of the Beothuk and saves it from sinking into oblivion. As Chafe observes, “[t]he Beothuk of *River Thieves* function more as an absence than a *presence* and are thus inseparable from the notion of loss that has become a fundamental part of Newfoundland's culture” (96). Nevertheless, rather than historical fiction, *River Thieves* is above all a story about the human condition per se. Weaving an intricate web of human relations and interdependencies, Crummey manages to restore agency to those who are situated on the periphery either due to gender, status or origin, thus reminding the reader that we are all capable of changing the course of history.

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# The Mirabal sisters and their *testimonio* in Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*

**Abstract.** The Mirabal sisters opposed the regime of Rafael Trujillo, a notorious Dominican dictator who terrorized the nation for almost 30 years. Their brutal deaths on the dictator's order served as a catalyst for change. The sisters became heroines and martyrs in the fight against Trujillo's repressive regime, and symbols of both popular and feminist resistance. Julia Alvarez's novel tells the Mirabal story and describes their legacy. The aim of the paper is to demonstrate how *In the Time of the Butterflies* gives access to Dominican history, and how literature creates a voice for victims of political violence and terror.

**Keywords:** Rafael Trujillo, dictatorship, the Dominican Republic, Julia Alvarez, the Mirabal sisters.

I myself invent time by first conjuring up the voices and spirits of the women living under brutal repressive regimes . . . [b]ecause I want to do justice to their voices. To tell these women, in my own gentle way, that I will fight for them, that they provide me with my own source of humanity.

*Helena María Viramontes*

The official website of the United Nations informs us that through the resolution of 17 December 1999, the United Nations General Assembly designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women to raise public awareness of the problem. This date came from the brutal assassination of three sisters, Patria, Maria Teresa and Minerva Mirabal ("International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women"). They were political activists from the Dominican Republic, who were labelled with the underground code name *Las Mariposas* (Eng. Butterflies), and who were killed on the orders of the notorious Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. The Mirabal sisters inspired resistance cells throughout the country, and their brutal deaths on the dictator's order served as a catalyst for change. The sisters became heroines

and martyrs in the fight against Trujillo's repressive regime, and symbols of both popular and feminist resistance.

The Dominican American writer, Julia Alvarez, in her collection of essays entitled *Something To Declare* (1998) describes her fascination with the story of the Dominican heroines as her life parallels that of the Butterflies. Alvarez's father had been part of the same revolutionary underground movement and was involved in the plot to overthrow the dictator. For this reason the family was forced to flee to the United States, and Alvarez explains the situation:

[a]nd so it was that my family's emigration to the United States started at the very time their lives ended. These three brave sisters and their husbands stood in stark contrast to the self-saving actions of my own family and of other Dominican exiles. Because of this, the Mirabal sisters haunted me. Indeed, they haunted the whole country. (1998, 198)

The writer was haunted by the story since she was ten. However, it was not until 1986 that she became personally involved. In 1992 Alvarez met Dedé Mirabal, a fourth sister who survived, and this encounter resulted in a book (Alvarez 1998, 198, 202) that was nominated for the 1995 National Book Critics Award (Fregoso, 8).

Alvarez's novel tells the Mirabal story and describes their legacy through the lens of fiction. The aim of the paper is to demonstrate how *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1995) gives access to Dominican history and memory, how it creates a voice for victims of terror, and lets them be heard on their own terms.

The story of *In the Time of the Butterflies* unfolds against a background of The Era of Trujillo (1930-1961), which was characterized by totalitarian rule, terror, torture and assassinations. With the dictator's predatory regime, his personality cult, deification and mandatory parades in honor of *El Jefe*, Trujillo's image was inscribed upon every aspect of Dominican society. The successful Cuban revolution and Fidel Castro's coming to power in 1959 played a major role in radicalizing many Dominicans, including the Mirabal sisters. They took part in clandestine activities organized by the anti-Trujillo Movimiento Revolucionario 14 de Junio (MR1J4). This was a leftist underground revolutionary movement whose leader was Manolo Tavarez, Minerva's husband. Members of The 14th of June Movement tried to assassinate the dictator in 1960, but their efforts were defeated by Trujillo's army, which resulted in the imprisonment and torture of the three sisters and their husbands, among others. The sisters were soon released from prison, but Trujillo was alleged to have given orders to kill them. The Mirabal sisters were assassinated on their way back from prison, where they visited their incarcerated husbands on November 25, 1960 (Peguero, 182). To hide the nature of the crime, their bodies and that of their driver, Rufino de la Cruz, were placed in their own jeep, which was pushed over a cliff near Santiago. Their deaths were reported in the press as an automobile accident. However, Dominican people were not fooled by the story. The murder of the sisters planted the seed of rebellion among the Dominican population and served as a catalyst for overthrowing Trujillo. Although many factors were at play in Trujillo's downfall, Bernard Diederich credits the

murders with providing the motivation to end the tyrannical dictatorship, and claims that “the cowardly killing of three beautiful women in such a manner had greater effect on Dominicans than most of Trujillo’s other crimes. . . . It did something to their machismo. They could never forgive Trujillo this crime” (Diederich, 72). After their deaths and in the years to follow the Mirabal sisters became hallowed icons for the Dominican Republic, and they were transformed into symbols of martyrdom, feminist icons and revolutionary heroines. Monuments stand in their honor in many Dominican towns. The whole country bears commemorative markers in the form of street names, schools or murals. Their family home in the province of Salcedo was converted into a museum. Gradually, their fame spread internationally, and not only with the help of Alvarez, whose book was adapted into a movie of the same title starring Salma Hayek. In 2010, Juan Delancer directed *Trópico de Sangre*, a film drama based on the true story of the historic Mirabal sisters. The Dominican heroines are also present in two highly acclaimed novels: *The Feast of the Goat* (2000) by Mario Vargas Llosa, and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) by Junot Díaz, who writes:

The Mirabal Sisters were the Great Martyrs of that period. Patria Mercedes, Minerva Argentina, and Antonia María—three beautiful sisters from Salcedo who resisted Trujillo and were murdered for it. . . . Their murders and the subsequent public outcry are believed by many to have signaled the official beginning of the end of the Trujillato, the “tipping point,” when folks finally decided enough was enough. (83)

Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies* is categorized by different critics as a historical novel, a dictator novel, fictionalized biography, historiographic metafiction, or hagiographic commemorative fiction. I propose to read Alvarez’s novel as *testimonio*, a relatively new genre in Latin American literature. George Yúdice defines it as “an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g. war, oppression, revolution, etc.)” (17). He also explains: “... the *testimonialista* gives his or her personal testimony “directly,” addressing a specific interlocutor” (15). According to Yúdice, in *testimonio* “truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history” (17). In the case of *In the Time of the Butterflies* the surviving Dedé tells the story of her sisters’ lives, and their active opposition and resistance to the notorious regime of Rafael Trujillo. She tells her story to a *gringa dominicana*, who is the author’s alter ego. The author’s interest in *Las Mariposas* triggers Dedé’s memories, and through her recollections the reader travels back into the past to learn the story of Patria, Minerva and María Teresa.

*Testimonio*, as a genre, is notoriously fluid and difficult to categorize, because the word “testimonio” can describe anything written by a first-person witness who wishes to tell her/his story of trauma. John Beverley, an expert on testimonial literature, defines it as

a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a life or a significant life experience. (31)

Linda J. Craft adds to this definition additional characteristics. She claims that a *testimonio* may include all categories considered conventional literature, such as autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, novella-testimonio, nonfiction novel, or “factographic” literature (22). The definition of *testimonio* of the Cuban cultural center Casa de las Américas reads:

*Testimonios* must document some aspect of Latin American or Caribbean reality from a direct source. A direct source is understood as knowledge of the facts by the author or his or her compilation of narratives or evidence obtained from the individuals involved or qualified witnesses. (quoted in Beverley, 103)

Because in many cases the witness is someone illiterate, or if literate, not a professional writer, the production of a *testimonio* generally involves the tape-recording and then the transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is an intellectual, often a journalist or a writer. Yúdice and Beverley, however, insist on the nonliterary purity of the *testimonio*. Unfortunately, this idea “shrinks the parameters of the genre considerably, for not many narrative texts – as Hayden White and others have made clear – evade the effects of the literary” (Emery, 17). What is more, the definition offered by the Casa de las Américas asserts that “literary quality is also indispensable” (in Beverley, 103). Moreover, “what we encounter in testimonial narrative is not the Real as such ... but rather a “reality effect” created by the peculiar mechanisms and conventions of the text, which include a textual simulacrum” (a literary simulacrum of oral narrative) (Beverley, 2). By the same token Alvarez affirms that the sisters whose life and death she described are neither the Mirabals of fact nor the Mirabals of legend. They are the Mirabals of her creation to show their humanity, which was removed in the process of acquiring legendary status. Alvarez worried that by becoming too iconic they would be robbed “of the dignity of being real human beings” (Rosario-Sievert, 35). The writer wanted to show that *Las Mariposas* were flesh and blood, real-life women, imperfect as people are, with all their fears, insecurities, marital strife and other human flaws, to create a connection between them and the reader. This “readerly intimacy” is required here as the role of *testimonio* is to place the reader under an obligation to respond: “... we may act or not on that obligation, we may resent or welcome it, but we cannot ignore it. Something is asked of us by *testimonio*” (Beverley, 1). *Testimonio* asks for solidarity with liberation movements and human rights struggles; it involves a political response from the audience.

Reading Rigoberta Menchú’s controversial *testimonio*, one also realizes that the genre is intended to represent “the reality of a whole people” (Menchú, 1), which is also affirmed by Domitila Barrios in her *testimonio* entitled *Let Me Speak! Testimony of Domitila, A Woman of the Bolivian Mines* (1977):

I don’t want the story that I am about to tell to be interpreted as a personal matter. Because I think that my life is related to my people. What has happened to me might have happened to hundreds of others in my

country. . . . That's why I say that I do not want to simply tell a personal story, I want to speak of my people. I want to bear witness to all the experience that we have gained through so many years of struggle. (13)

Although Alvarez pays tribute to only three women, the rest of the victims are evoked in the pages of her book because the events she describes changed the course of the lives of a large segment of the population, and they constitute a shared sense of anxiety and fear, the collective memory<sup>8</sup> of the Dominican Republic. Those historic memories are fixed events that affected the lives of virtually all members of Dominican society. Alon Confino defined collective memory much more broadly, as "the representation of the past and the making of it into shared cultural knowledge by successive generations in books, films, museums, commemorations, and others" (1386). Through the prism of these multiple 'sites of memory' (Pierre Nora's phrase) people negotiate the past. Therefore, the memories of the individual became merged, and submerged, within group, or collective, memory.

The narrative frame of the novel is constructed via conversations between Dedé and the *gringa dominicana*. The novel spans the period from 1938-1994, although the major part of the story takes place during the brutal regime of Rafael Trujillo. The novel is divided into three parts, with chapters narrated by the Mirabal sisters. The dead sisters speak in the first person, and the plot is chronological. It covers the sisters' family life, schooling, political awakening, their activities in opposition, and finally their death. The book amalgamates the voices to give a multiperspective picture of life under Trujillo's dictatorship.

The story unfolds during the brutal regime of Trujillo, against a background of persecution and oppression. As young girls, at the Inmaculada Concepción boarding school, the sisters experience eye opening events connected with the injustices rampant in their country and the evils of Trujillo. One of Minerva's friends, Sinita, tells her a story of how Trujillo killed the members of her family. At first, Minerva could not believe her words in the face of the process of the deification of the dictator and overwhelming propaganda:

"Bad things?" I interrupted. "Trujillo was doing bad things?" It was as if I had just heard Jesus had slapped a baby or Our Blessed Mother had not conceived Him the immaculate conception way. "That can't be true", I said, but in my heart, I felt a china-crack of doubt. . . . The country people around the farm say that until the nail is hit, it doesn't believe in the hammer. Everything Sinita said I filed away as a terrible mistake that wouldn't happen again. Then the hammer came down hard right in our school, right on Lina Lovatón's head. (Alvarez 1995, 17, 20)

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<sup>8</sup> "Despite widespread use of the term 'collective memory,' it is only fair to point out that many historians are very uneasy about the concept. A number explicitly substitute parallel or alternative terms that better reflect their understanding of the processes through which particular groups, communities or nations collectively remember their past. These terms include, for example, 'collective remembrance,' 'collected memories,' 'cultural memory,' 'public memory,' or 'mnemonic communities'" (Green 37).

It became clear for Minerva that Trujillo exercised his masculine entitlement ruthlessly, seducing young women. The story of Lina Lovatón is an example of the abuse and sexual harassment that were used as a psychological instrument of torture by the Trujillo regime against women and their families, such as the Mirabals. It indicates *machismo* as the necessary underpinning for the Latin American dictatorship. Trujillo's appetite for young women was legendary. Dominican families used to hide their daughters when Trujillo visited their areas. Trujillo's statutory rape of fourteen-year-old Lina Lovatón happened with the nuns' tacit blessing, and it was a revealing experience for Minerva Mirabal. This experience coincides with the beginning of her first menstrual cycle, and both are understood as a loss of innocence and the onset of problems in her life, since the nuns at school use a euphemism for menstruation and call it *complications*: "I lifted the covers, and for a moment, I couldn't make sense of the dark stains on the bottom sheet. Then I brought up my hand from checking myself. Sure enough, my complications had started" (Alvarez 1995, 20). With the awakening of Minerva's political conscience come problems, not only hers, but also her whole family's. Minerva is the driving force behind her family's activism. However, all the sisters sooner or later come to painful awareness of the cruelties and injustices in their country and realize that its citizens live in terror of their own government (Sirias, 55-56). When they get more deeply involved in the underground movement it leads to the imprisonment of Minerva, Mate, Patria and their husbands, and other resistance leaders and sympathizers.

Although the dominant theme of Alvarez's book is the cruelty of the dictator, his pathological thirst for revenge and adulation, Trujillo's appearances are brief and infrequent. The notorious dictator appears in the book as a theme rather than a character, but his ominous shadow dominates every aspect of Dominican society in such a way that he becomes a leitmotiv and omnipresent obsession. His authoritarianism, immorality and wickedness are compared to the patriarchal society. The Mirabal father embodies male privilege in Latin American families, and maintains and reinforces gender hierarchies, refusing to allow Minerva to attend the university or see boyfriends. In Paulo Freire's words he becomes "sub oppressor" (45) and such sub oppressors supported Trujillo and kept him in power. When the sisters discover their father's double life with a mistress and four other illegitimate daughters, they begin to question everything they hold sacred. For Minerva, her beloved father matches the dictator on the scale of hypocrisy. Hence their rebellion is not only against the dictator, but also against *machismo* and patriarchy. They contest their subaltern condition by actively joining the resistance and by denouncing male chauvinism. The second pillar of women's oppression in provincial Dominican society appears to be Catholicism. It helps maintain the socially prescribed roles of mothers and wives. It plays a central role in the formation of gender roles, norms and expectations in the male-controlled totalitarian regime, where girls are prepared for motherhood and marriage instead of university studies (Fregoso, 10-11).

In her novel Alvarez presents the everyday lives of the sisters, with all their joys and problems, in order not to make them exotic or turn them into a myth, and also to validate the feminist motto: "The personal is political." The motto underscores the connections between personal experience and larger social and political structures (López-Calvo, 95). Alvarez wanted to show the

real spirit of the sisters. “I wanted to understand the living, breathing women who had faced all the difficult challenges and choices of those terrible years. I believe that only by making them real, alive, could I make them mean anything to the rest of us” (Alvarez 1998, 203). The author honors their lives with all their quirks and weaknesses, because, as she notes, “they have been so wrapped in superlatives and ascended into myth that they have become inaccessible and unknown to us” (Alvarez 1995, 342). Furthermore, she adds that deifications of all kind are dangerous, because behind them is the same god-making impulse that created Trujillo the tyrant (Alvarez 1995, 324). She wished to humanize *The Butterflies* as “becoming too iconic would rob them of the dignity of being real human beings and the dignity of what that sacrifice means” (Sievert, 35). In doing so, Alvarez allows the reader the luxury of personal contact with each of the sisters, and this in turn involves some kind of reaction, a political response so demanded by *testimonio*. “The book incites us to go beyond the text, to raise more questions and to search for more answers” (McCallum, 114). Moreover, Alvarez recovers women’s personal voices, desires and ambitions, and “feeds the need to know the dead, and even to be voyeuristically close to the moment of their death” (Socolovsky, 8).

Alvarez, by giving voice to female characters, gives voice in literature to the previously voiceless, and she replaces the traditionally male history with a feminine one, bringing Latin American women “into history as agents, out from under the shadows of ... men” (Behar, 6). In the same spirit Hélène Cixous maintains that

woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement. (309)

Stavans, in his review, also praises Alvarez for representing the Mirabals’ political struggle as “an attack against phallocentrism as an accepted way of life in Hispanic societies” (554). Moreover, *In the Time of the Butterflies* refuses to construct Latinas only as victims of male oppression or objects of patriarchy. The book refuses to accept the traditional perception of Latin American women as politically passive and socially marginalized, voiceless and submissive (Bados Ciria, 311).

Although the three brave subversive wives were crushed by the phallocentric regime, they record a posthumous victory, and since then these sisters, “who fought one tyrant, have served as models for women fighting against injustices of all kinds” (Alvarez 1995, 342).

The story of the Mirabal sisters presented in the form of a novel has a particular significance for a nation which was never able to confront the crimes of its own past in the aftermath of Trujillismo. The written story of the Mirabal sisters to a certain extent symbolizes a substitute for the truth and justice that was never granted to the victims. Their history is symbolic of a tragedy, which Valerio Holguín calls “*el trauma histórico del Trujillato*” (Holguín, 92), which belongs not just to the Mirabal family but also to all Dominicans. Alvarez’s sonnet suggests that the trauma of the Dominican past has yet to be claimed, owned, and fully acknowledged: “In my own D.R. we

have many rains: /the sprinkle, the shower, the hurricane, / the tears, the many tears for our many dead” (Alvarez 1996, 25).

The events that change the course of lives of whole populations are at first characterized by a high level of talking. Later, monuments are built and movies are made at predictable times after the upheavals occur. *Testimonios* are also such monuments, which aid memory, help to keep collective memories alive to organize and assimilate the event in people’s minds and allow the society to move past the experience (Pennebaker et al., viii).

By writing in English Alvarez makes this fragment of Dominican history accessible to a wider audience, a public far greater outside Latin America (Craft, 3). Once *testimonio* reaches the international community, it provides evidence for human rights offences, as well as causes for action. Beverley supports this point in his book on *testimonio*, positing that testimonial novels are used primarily “as a way of mobilizing international opinion in favor of an end to the violence” (84). *Testimonio* deliberately blurs the line between “the personal and the political” to give the women (and men) on the margins a voice. The testimonial novel is a forum of participation for all underprivileged peoples to have the power of the written word. Such stories create a representative voice for victims of political violence and psychological terror who have been silenced. They seem necessary for the process of reburial and grieving, and they can promote healing and solidarity among disaffected groups and expand human capacity for empathy (Mullins, 4-12). *Testimonios* are texts that cross borders and bring the subjugated knowledge of people’s history and their memory into the consciousness of mainstream readers.

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# Oblivion and vengeance: Charles II Stuart's policy towards the republicans at the Restoration of 1660

**Abstract.** The Restoration of Charles II Stuart in 1660 was reckoned in post-revolutionary England both in terms of a long-awaited relief and an inevitable menace. The return of the exiled prince, whose father's disgraceful decapitation in the name of law eleven years earlier marked the end of the British monarchy, must have been looked forward to by those who expected rewards for their loyalty, inflexibility and royal affiliation in the turbulent times of the Interregnum. It must have been, however, feared by those who directly contributed to issuing the death warrant on the legally ruling king and to violating the irrefutable divine right of kings. Even though Charles II's mercy was widely known, hardly anyone expected that the restored monarch's inborn mildness would win over his well-grounded will to revenge his father's death and the collapse of the British monarchy. It seems that Charles II was not exceptionally vindictive and was eager to show mercy and oblivion understood as an act of amnesty to those who sided with Cromwell and Parliament but did not contribute directly to the executioner raising his axe over the royal neck. On the other hand, the country's unstable situation and the King's newly-built reputation required some firm-handed actions taken by the sovereign in order to prevent further rebellions or plots in the future, and to strengthen the position of the monarchy so shattered by the Civil War and the Interregnum.

**Keywords:** Restoration, Charles II, English Civil War, Oliver Cromwell, regicide.

## Introduction

When in 1660 Charles II returned from his exile in France, many saw the Restoration of the House of Stuart as a chance to regain peace and order after the turbulent period of the Civil War and the Interregnum. For those who supported the King after his father had been beheaded and continued to fight against Cromwell's army, it was a sigh of relief and an obvious opportunity to be rewarded for their loyalty. Those who sided with the republicans and contributed to the overthrow and consequently the regicide must have felt unsure of their future and feared royal vengeance. The restored King's policy towards the rebels in the new political reality was hardly predictable and hard to be anticipated. Some believed that the new monarch would be much less lenient and merciful towards his and his father's enemies and would try to revenge those who triggered Charles I's

disgraceful execution and the collapse of the House of Stuart in 1642. Charles II entered London on May 29th 1660 and, as Fraser says, this day “ushered in an age of anxiety as well as an age of rejoicing” (187).

The paper looks at Charles II’s policy towards those who sided with the parliamentarians and those who signed his father’s death warrant. Its major aim is to look at selected events that took place at the Restoration in order to define the policy towards republicans that Charles II exercised upon his arrival in England, and to try to understand the criteria and reasons hidden behind the royal decisions to punish and to pardon.

### **Oblivion and mercy**

When Charles II was restored to the throne, one of his supporters – the poet John Dryden – praised the great return in a panegyric called “*Astrea Redux*” (10), where he clearly hopes that the new reign will be marked by mercifulness rather than vindictiveness:

But you, whose Goodness your Descent doth show,  
 Your Heav’nly Parentage and Earthly too;  
 By that same mildness which your Fathers Crown  
 Before did ravish, shall secure your own.  
 Not ty’d to rules of policy, you find  
 Revenge less sweet than a forgiving mind.  
 Thus, when th’ Almighty would to *Moses* give  
 A sight of all he could behold and live;  
 A voice before his Entry did proclaim  
*Long-Suffring, Goodness, Mercy* in his Name.  
 Your Pow’r to Justice doth submit your Cause,  
 Your Goodness only is above the Laws. (256-267)

The poet, who was a close observant of the turmoil of the Civil War, notes that Charles I’s mildness was something that his son should take over in his dealings with the rebels. Moreover, he suggests that forgiveness will be more beneficial and advantageous to the King than the potential revenge.

Indeed, the King did not seem to be taking pleasure in punishing those who violated the divine right of kings by deposing and decapitating his father 11 years earlier. It was not only Dryden who pinpointed the King’s mercifulness as his great merit. Historians also pay attention to Charles II’s conciliatory approach towards those who rebelled: “In his determined mercy, King Charles in 1660 did show himself indeed a veritable olive-branch-bearing dove” (Fraser, 187). Fraser (187) also notes that the peaceful image of the King was based upon his will to follow two paths of his policy towards those engaged in the Civil War: reward and conciliation. His policy was to reward those royalists who suffered exile, imprisonment or physical wounds during the War and the Interreg-

num, and to reconcile with the Cromwellians. Hutton says that “the charitable view of Charles’s reactions is that they reveal a remarkable moderation and self-restraint. The skeptical one is that he found it easy to forgive individual English republicans because he had no personal grudges against them” (141). Hutton gives an example of Charles’s mercy when he followed the advice of the House of Commons, who suggested relieving the republican general John Lambert and the politician Sir Henry Vane, who were exposed to death by the House of Lords (141). The King’s forgiving attitude towards Lambert may seem exceptionally generous as, according to C.P. Hill, “among the Parliamentary commanders only Fairfax and Cromwell were more gifted soldiers [than Lambert]” (167). If Lambert was the third most responsible person for ruining the House of Stuart, then why would the King have pardoned him? The answer might be quite complex. First of all, Lambert “was less disliked by the Royalists than most of the Parliamentary leaders” (167) because he was not a Puritan. Secondly, he was out of London on the day of the King’s execution, which might suggest that he did not fully support or accept the idea of the King’s condemnation to death. In fact, he was not among those 59 regicides who signed the death warrant on King Charles I. Thirdly, “he opposed the proposals to make Cromwell king and the Protectorate hereditary, and this action ... led to a breach and to his dismissal” (Hill, 168). Therefore, it is easy to understand the King’s inclination to spare Lambert’s life and to punish him only by sentencing him to life imprisonment. Vane’s case is much more complicated. In spite of being an influential politician whose persuasive speeches spurred the collapse of the English monarchy, he “was no ardent supporter of the Army ... and he played no part in the King’s trial or in the events leading to it” (116). When the parliament passed the Indemnity and Oblivion Act in order to minimize the vengeance for the actions taken during the Interregnum, Vane was excluded from oblivion and treated as an exception, together with those who were directly involved in the King’s death. Vane was imprisoned in 1660 in the Tower until parliament petitioned the King to grant mercy to the politician, which the monarch took advantage of and accepted. Vane himself, however, turned the tide against himself when during his trial at court he “chose to defend himself by vindicating parliamentary sovereignty” (117) and undermined the King’s *de jure* possession. This made the King realize that Vane was not only dangerous to the restored monarchy in his views but also unwilling to show repentance for his republican support during the Civil War. In such a case, the King could not allow his name to be shattered and accused of exercising excessive mercy to those who were not even eager to bend and apologize for their previous political siding. Charles could not do anything else but to go back on his word, and Vane was sentenced to death. Although he was supposed to be hanged, drawn and quartered, the King’s inborn mildness let him muster up his last act of mercy towards Vane and grant him the gentleman’s death of beheading. Hence, one might have the impression that Vane “was charged with treason against Charles II rather than against Charles I” (Fraser, 185). Samuel Pepys’s account on Vane’s execution is also quite telling as for the King’s attitude towards the convict: “The King had given his body to his friends; and, therefore, he told them that he hoped they would be civil to his body when dead; and he desired they would let him die like a gentleman and a Christian, and not crowded and pressed as he was” (66).

Both historians and eyewitnesses seem to note and highlight the King's forgetful policy. In fact, ten years after the Restoration "he was accepting hospitality from Henry Cromwell, second son of the late Protector, at his home near Newmarket" (Fraser, 186). What is more, the King sought conciliation of the Cromwellians and resolved that "service during the Interregnum should be no disqualification" (190). This rule was, for instance, applied to Sir Matthew Hale and Edward Atkins. Hale and Atkins were renowned judges under the Protectorate and the Commonwealth who accepted the Parliamentary regime. This, however, did not discourage the King from reappointing them to their posts as he valued their integrity and even-handedness.

The most convincing argument for acknowledging Charles's merciful and mild character lies in his dealings with some of the regicides. Even though he had the power to revenge his father's death by executing all living signatories of the death warrant, he did not resolve to do so. Fraser's account of the King's policy towards the regicides shows Charles as a merciful monarch: "Of the forty-one surviving regicides, those who had signed the warrant and a few others closely associated with the King's death as well as the two (unidentified) executioners of Charles I, twelve died altogether. It was the King who prevented a further nineteen of their number" (185).

The issuance of the Indemnity and Oblivion Act in 1660 confirmed the resolutions of the Declaration of Breda. The Act promised amnesty and pardon to Cromwellians excluding fifty individuals, of whom thirteen were executed. If one remembers that there were fifty-nine signatories of the death warrant on King Charles I, eleven commissioners who did not sign it, but were involved in the process, twelve officers at the court trying Charles I, and eleven other associates, then thirteen executions seems to be a symbolic punishment. When only the fifty-nine regicides are taken into account, only eight of them were executed (or died awaiting execution), whereas nineteen were given life sentences. Six out of the nineteen (Peter Temple, Henry Smith, Augustine Garland, Gilbert Millington, Robert Lilburne, Robert Tichborne) were first sentenced to death, but this was later commuted to life imprisonment.

Charles II, in historians' and eyewitnesses' views, was "never a personally vindictive man" (Fraser, 185) and in his policy towards the rebels he did not turn out to be like the mythological Orestes, who revenged his father Agamemnon by killing his murderers (185).

### **Vengeance and remembrance**

In 1661, when Charles II was crowned, John Dryden, now appointed the Poet Laureate, once more referred to the King's policy towards the republicans in the panegyric "To His Sacred Majesty" (13):

Among our crimes oblivion may be set,  
But 'tis our Kings perfection to forget. (87-88)

Here, Dryden seems to imply that although it is the Kings' right to forget and forgive, excessive mercy and oblivion might be dangerous and even perceived as a crime against the country. In fact, the King did not need to rely on the poet's advice to know that mercy and forgiveness should have

limits, otherwise the royal grandeur and authority might be considerably diminished or jeopardized. Therefore, Charles's "temperamental disinclination to vengeance was not at all the same thing as an inclination to forget the past" (Fraser, 186).

Charles II, as a newly restored monarch, whose primary role was to restore peace and order in the mayhem of post-revolutionary England, could not afford to forgive all his and his father's enemies and forget all their sins. The violation of the divine rights of kings was, in fact, a violation of the fundamental principles which the country was built upon. Moreover, the fact that such an unthinkable and unprecedented *coup de etat* did happen in 1649 meant it might happen again in the future. Revolutions are generally not very frequent, but when they do occur they usually make people realize that the overthrow of a monarch or, at least, quick and sudden political turbulence is possible and might be used as a tool to warn a disobedient king again. Therefore, Charles II's mercy and oblivion had to be limited to an extent allowing the people to appreciate the King's great mercifulness towards his father's executors, but, on the other hand, notice his firmness, strength, and authority which would scare off potential revolutionists.

Fraser claims (186) that an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty was present at the King's court: "Revolution and its possible consequences, was one spectre which stalked the corridors of the King's palace from the inception of his reign to its end... But at no point was the presence of such a threatening ghost felt more acutely than in the early 1660s." There was a general readiness and alertness to prevent criticism and dissatisfaction of those who had not yet got accustomed to the restored monarchy from turning into another rebellion and consequently a revolution:

Thus one finds the implicit fear of another revolution expressed continuously and in all sorts of different ways in the early years of the reign. There were significant details such as the preference for Windsor Castle as a royal fortress ... because it was properly garrisoned. There were broader policies, such as the concentration on forming a proper body of guards to surround the monarch ... A general jumpiness animated surveys of the careers of those with regicide connections. (Fraser, 186)

Such an overwhelming atmosphere of distrustfulness and invigilation did not allow the exercise of excessive mercy and risk being perceived as weak, thus an easy obstacle to be got rid of. In order to make the King appear powerful and yet forgiving but remembering, the dealings with the key regicides had taken a much rougher path. The punishment for Oliver Cromwell, Henry Ireton, and John Bradshaw were aimed to manifest the King's sturdiness and to send a clear message to all those who conspired and plotted against the restored monarchy. The posthumous executions of the three leaders were to demonstrate that Charles II's mercy was limited and did not apply to those who directly violated the divine right of kings. It was supposed to reiterate the fact that the King's memory of his late father was still vivid. As there is no question of doubt as for Cromwell, who was believed to have orchestrated the regicide, the choice of Ireton and Bradshaw needs to be reflected upon.

Ireton commanded the left wing at the momentous battle of Naseby in 1645, where he "fought like a lion" (Hill, 141). He is frequently reported to have been brave, competent and to have had a

considerable influence “on the slower and far less clear mind of Cromwell” (142). In 1647 he was the major architect of the Heads of the Proposals – the settlement offered to Charles I. When the proposals were consecutively being rejected by the King, it was Ireton who willingly advocated the idea of bringing Charles I to trial. What is most justifying about the choice of Ireton to be posthumously executed was his personal engagement in writing the Remonstrance of Army – a statement about the regicide, his active part in the King’s trial, his signature on the death warrant, and most importantly the fact that he was the son-in-law to Cromwell himself.

Bradshaw’s fault seems to be even more evident. He became a prosecutor on behalf of Parliament at the time of the Civil War, and was “a competent and reasonable choice, if not a notably distinguished one, for membership of the commission set up by the Rump [Parliament] to try the King” (166). His role as President of the High Court of Justice for the trial of King Charles I was widely reverberating. Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, who witnessed the trial, described Bradshaw as the one who administered the office “with all the pride, impudence, and superciliousness imaginable” (Clarendon, 327).

Cromwell, Ireton, and Bradshaw embodied audacity and tenacity in trying and, as a result, executing Charles I. Therefore, having all three perpetrators dead (Cromwell died in 1658, Ireton in 1651, and Bradshaw in 1659), the newly restored King could not let them rest in peace and ordered their posthumous executions. To make them even more symbolic and hence meaningful, the executions were scheduled on 30th January 1661, exactly twelve years after the infamous regicide had taken place. All three signatories of the late King’s death warrant were disinterred, hanged at Tyburn and decapitated. Their bodies were thrown into a pit and their heads were placed on spikes and displayed at the end of Westminster Hall facing the direction of the place where Charles I had been executed.

The executions were reported by eye-witnesses who must have perceived the event as exceptionally significant. Samuel Pepys does not mention any other punishments for the regicides as frequently as he does in case of these three. On 30th January 1661, Pepys reports: “then to my Lady Batten’s; where my wife and she are lately come again from being abroad, and seeing of Cromwell, Ireton, and Bradshaw hanged and buried at Tyburn” (43). Six days later Pepys returns to the subject, writing: “my wife and I by water to Westminster. Into the Hall and there saw my Lord Treasurer ... go up to the Treasury Office and take possessions thereof; and also saw the heads of Cromwell, Bradshaw, and Ireton, set up upon the further end of the Hall” (44). Even though Pepys’s report seems to be a little laconic, it is still crucial that the diarist considered the event to be worth mentioning, and exposed the three names twice in his diary while enumerating the other chores and duties of his routine, everyday life. John Evelyn offers a much more lively and descriptive account of the executions:

This day (o the stupendious & inscrutable Judgements of God) were the Carkasses of that arch-rebell Cromwell, Bradshaw the Judge who condemned his Majestie & Ireton, sonn in law to the Usurper, dragged out of their superbe Tombs (in Westminster among the Kings), to Tyburne, & hanged on the Gallows

there from 9 in the morning til 6 at night, & and then buried under that fatal & ignominious Monument, in a deepe pitt: Thousands of people (who had seene them in all their pride & pompous insults) being spectators: looke back at November 22: 1658 be astnosh'd – And (fear) God & honor the King, but meddle not with them who are given to change. (Evelyn, 380)

What seems important in Evelyn's report is the symbolic relocation of the three regicides' bodies from the "superb Tombs" to the "ignominious monument in a deep pit." The chronicler reminds his readers of Cromwell's funeral on 22nd 1658 and warns not to "meddle with" Gods and Kings' divine rights. Evelyn highlights the most probable reason why Charles II resolved to have the bodies exhumed and publicly defamed. It was not pure and uninhibited vengeance that drove the King in disturbing the dead Cromwellians but to make the memory of his father endless and durable. The three heads now spiked and gazing at those visiting Westminster Hall were to make sure that nobody forgot the regicide, the revolution and the Protectorate and all their burdensome aftermaths. They also served to discourage those who considered another dethronement and those who missed the Republic.

The list of those who were to be posthumously executed included yet another name – Thomas Pride. He was one of those officers who were outstandingly hostile to the House of Commons in 1647. He carried out the "Purge" in 1648, "which immortalized his name" (Hill, 145), and, most importantly, he signed the death warrant on King Charles I. He died in 1658 and was also earmarked to share the fate of Cromwell, Ireton, and Bradshaw, but his execution was not carried out. Although it is difficult to guess the reason for his posthumous reprieve, it may lie in the fact that it was Pride who instigated "the officer's petition to which finally determined Cromwell not to take the Crown" (145).

Apart from the symbolic but still spectacular posthumous executions of the principal leaders of the regicide, there was a list consisting of those who were sentenced for life and those who were indeed quite cruelly lost. Adrian Scrope, Gregory Clement, and Thomas Harrison were all hanged, drawn, and quartered. Both Scrope and Clement were executed because they were among the judges who tried the King and signed the death warrant. Harrison, however, lost his life because apart from being one of the fifty-nine commissioners, he posed some real danger to the newly restored monarchy. He was one of the most skilful and eminent Cromwellian generals actively participating in the battles of Marston Moore, Naseby, and Preston, and it was he who "guarded Charles on his last journey to London" (Hill, 171). What must have worried Charles II, however, was that Harrison was a leader of a nonconformist dissenting group called the Fifth Monarchists (or Fifth Monarchy Men), who believed that "the vision of Daniel was about to be fulfilled, when the saints of the Most High would possess the kingdom for ever and ever" (171). As Cromwell's Protectorate set up in 1653 constituted the contradiction of Harrison's visions, he "lost his commission, declined to serve the Protectorate, and was twice imprisoned in Oliver's later years" (171). Even though, he must have posed a threat to the newly restored King for a number of reasons, he still believed in Daniel's prophecy and was awaiting the year 1666, which he believed had some

relationship with the biblical Number of the Beast. If, according to the prophecy, the year 1666 was to put an end to the earthly rule of human beings and replace it with the Second Coming of the messiah, then the King might have suspected that Harrison would plot against him and the monarchy to facilitate the fulfilment of the prophecy he promoted and advocated so strongly. Such suspicions were well-grounded as Harrison decided not to flee England even when he knew that his fate had already been sealed. Therefore, the King's decision to hang, draw, and quarter Harrison had a more preventive than revengeful background.

## Conclusions

What best defines and determines the King's dealings with his father's enemies after the Restoration in 1660 is his attitude towards Thomas Fairfax. Once the commander-in-chief in the Civil War and the most influential officer in revolutionary England, who indeed greatly contributed to the King's disposal, he refused to sign the death warrant and hence was given a royal pardon and kept his titles. Moreover, it was he who "was sent to invite Charles II to return, he welcomed the Restoration – although characteristically, he was deeply angered by the disinterment and gibbeting of Cromwell's corpse" (Hill, 133). It seems, then, that it was not the sheer participation or leadership in the military actions of the Civil War that was the criterion whether to punish or to reprieve, but the ability or disability to rehabilitate and to redeem one's sins committed against the monarchy.

It might also seem plausible that Charles II, as a prudent politician, had orchestrated to implement the "divide and rule" strategy in his policy to gain, maintain and reinforce his authority. Therefore, he resolved to punish selected Cromwellians and to spare the others in order to prevent the republicans from linking up, and to spur rivalries and foment discord among those who had sided with Cromwell a few years earlier. Moreover, despite his mild character, Charles could not afford to acquit those who had tried his father and hence directly violated the divine rights of kings that the Stuarts had been advocating so firmly. Therefore, the restored King had to face a difficult challenge by keeping the balance between conciliation with the Cromwellians and punishing the chief ringleaders and perpetrators of the temporary fall of the House of Stuart in order to highlight his own firmness and prevent future revolutions.

The quoted verses from Dryden's "To His Sacred Majesty" reiterate the King's "perfection to forget." This pampering tone of the Poet Laureate serves to highlight Charles's merciful approach to some of his enemies and to foreground his greatness as a monarch who brings back peace, order and justice to a country tormented by revolution. In the following lines Dryden makes it clear that peace is the ultimate purpose of the King's policy towards the republicans, and this may be achieved only if the monarch proves to be forgiving:

Virtues unknown to these rough Northern climes  
 From milder heav'ns you bring, without their crimes:  
 Your calmnesse does no after storms provide,  
 Nor seeming patience mortal anger hide. (89–92)

As in the earlier poem “Astrea Redux,” Dryden claims that the King’s “mildness, calmness, and patience” are “the royal virtues necessary for domestic tranquillity” (Garrison 1975, 171). Although Dryden’s praise may be read as advice to Charles for the future, the King seemed to have already been aware that peace was what the people of Britain longed for after years of political instability. In order to achieve it, the newly-crowned monarch had to find an equilibrium between forgetting and remembering, between forgiving and punishing.

Fraser’s description of the King’s return to England in an age of anxiety and rejoicing synthesizes the above argument: “Yet with these twin provisions of watchfulness against the repetition of revolution and concern for justice to his father’s memory, Charles II arrived in a healing mood” (187).

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# Childhood memories in three novels by Philip Roth: *Portnoy's Complaint*, *The Plot Against America*, and *American Pastoral* as pivotal components of the protagonists' identities

**Abstract.** The objective of the paper is to discuss Philip Roth's approach to the Jewish community in Newark, where he spent his childhood and where he chose to set several of his novels. Roth's narrations referring to his hometown are written in the first person singular and often take the form of childhood memories. The persistent return to the settings of the Jewish quarter of Newark in the past seems an attempt at understanding the reality of a relatively closed community, yet far from isolation, which provided him with all the elements determining his complex sense of identity. Despite the various grades of fictitiousness of the characters and settings, the narrating protagonist of a number of Roth's novels is usually a Jewish schoolboy born and brought up in Newark. The paper includes short analyses of "Jewish memories" in three novels by Philip Roth: *The Plot Against America*, where the narrator is called Philip Roth but the circumstances are elements of pure political/historical fiction, *American Pastoral*, where the speaker is Nathan Zuckerman, Roth's frequent alter ego, and *Portnoy's Complaint*, narrated by the fictitious Alexander Portnoy. Being both American and Jewish has considerable implications, which include, for example, the characters' sexuality. The image of the childhood and adolescence of Roth's protagonists seems not only an obsessive theme to be found in so many of his texts, but also the core of the intellectual construct which may be recognized as his sense of identity.

**Keywords:** childhood, memory, Jewishness, Jewish identity, Philip Roth.

## Introduction

This article is an attempt to follow a mechanism of constructing the cultural identity of the protagonists of three novels by Philip Roth. The criteria of their selection and the order of their presenting is the importance of Jewishness in the main characters' narrations. Therefore, the first book discussed in this paper is *Portnoy's Complaint*, the protagonist of which carries out a permanent argument with the Jewish tradition imposed, as he believes, upon him by his family. Being a Jew in *The Plot Against America* plays an extremely important role, although the main character and narrator is much younger than Alex Portnoy, and he may be treated as more prone to the circum-

stances that form his personality and attitude to his own identity. The narrator of *American Pastoral*, Nathan Zuckerman, tells the story of a person whose Jewishness seems to be of little importance save certain moments where his father's strong sense of Jewish identity and its effect on the protagonist are mentioned. However, the narrator dedicates quite a number of introductory pages to the description of the Jewish neighbourhood where both he and the character whose story he tells grew up. I will try to demonstrate that in the secular world, where all apparent components of Jewish identity cease to be of much importance, the narrators are not able to avoid constructing their identities, which are still Jewish. The construction of Jewish identity is based on childhood and adolescent memory. Through the analysis of the narration of particular parts in the novels, especially those dedicated to certain recurring elements which refer to Jewish lifestyle and Jewishness in general, I shall try to demonstrate the *implied author's*<sup>9</sup> attitude towards them, which, in the case of Philip Roth, will inevitably lead to the real author, whose background includes, not coincidentally, the same elements which can be found in almost all his novels.

### Memory and identity

Attributing such an important role to memory requires certain explanation. Recent memory studies demonstrate clearly that a human mind is not the best instrument to store data consisting of explicit facts accompanied by specific circumstances. It is undeniable that memory is deceptive and distorts the image of past reality. As Martin Pollack observes, no bad intentions, deliberate confabulation or concealment are necessary to let one's memory erase one event and "invent" another, or rearrange the chronological order of facts and events (Pollack, 6).

It is important to take into consideration the fact that, as Katherine Nelson asserts,

The general function of memory is to predict and prepare for future encounters, actions, and experiences . . . . That is, memory as such has no value in and of itself, but takes on value only as it contributes to the individual's ability to behave adaptively. (Quoted in Sabbagh, 55)

In the light of this assertion, constructing one's identity through memories does not require their accuracy. It suffices that they provide individuals with protective/adaptive instruments to survive in any environment, including society and a local community, a part of which they are or may become.

Individuals' memories depend on their emotional approach to the places, objects or people they recollect. As the psychiatrist, Donald Spence, observes:

[P]eople often will feel dissatisfied when ... they go back to their elementary school or their college

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9 A concept proposed by Wayne C. Booth in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, where "the implied author" is "the second self-created in the work," whose beliefs are consistent but not necessarily identical with those of the real author (Booth, 137).

fraternity – because looking at the real object does not substitute for remembering it, because the remembering, often inadvertent, is embedded in a specific situation with its special context and its own dynamics. A trip to the fraternity house is simply a trip, and it produces a sense of disappointment because it is deprived of the critical surround. (Quoted in Sabbagh, 28)

Thus, inasmuch as remembrance is the process of reconstruction, it also contains elements of construction, which results from current emotional and social needs. A confrontation with physical objects recollected for the purpose of constructing one's identity may either ruin the construction or reinforce it. Nevertheless, no memory precision seems necessary to build the sense of identity.

According to the social psychologist Henry Tajfel, ethnicity is:

[t]hat part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. (Tajfel, 255)

This short definition may be a point of departure for exploring the issue of Jewish identity in Philip Roth's novels. The question of where this knowledge comes from, or perhaps where, when and how it is produced, seems crucial. The Brazilian sociologist, Bernardo Sorj, maintains that

[s]ocial identity is constructed around an identification with beliefs, symbols, and practices that delimit, or create boundaries, constraining the individual or group tendency to blend with others. Identities allow the construction of 'memories' and narratives of selves and groups. (Sorj, 1)

The fact that memories are not only effects of remembrance but also products of construction seems essential to understand the interconnection between them and identities.

Identity is a construct without which it is difficult to imagine functioning in society. Identities connected with belonging to particular groups or communities often result from several historical and sociological processes. The most popular adjectives to describe collective identities are: national (referring to a particular state or autonomous area), ethnic (usually associated with the language, customs and "tribal" sense of community) and religious.

As regards Jews, it is really difficult to find one satisfactory attribute of their identity. For nearly two thousand years there was no territory which could be referred to as a Jewish state. Over more than two millennia of Diaspora, Hebrew ceased to be the language of everyday communication, and was superseded by Aramaic, Greek and other local languages of the ancient world, and later by Yiddish and Ladino. For all those centuries religion and the customs resulting therefrom were practically the only determinants of belonging to the Jewish people. Political changes in the 19th century brought several new political concepts, including the nation-state and nationalism on the one hand, and on the other hand, modern civil rights, which resulted, for example, in the emancipation of the European Jews. The idea of Jewish identity, for so long associated with religion, commenced its evolution along with abandoning Orthodoxy, assimilation movements, Zionism,

socialism, and many other factors. The problematic definition of Jewishness tempts certain authors to undermine the very idea of such an identity.

Having gathered considerable material, an Israeli historian, Shlomo Sand, published in 2008 his controversial book titled *The Invention of the Jewish People*, in which he argues that there is no continuity between the ancient people of Israel, whose biblical history is also dubious. According to Sand, present day residents of the State of Israel are just a result of political ideology rather than a historical fact. In the light of Sand's critical deconstruction of the idea of collective identity, Jewishness loses its clear solid definition and attributes.

Anti-Semitism, especially that of the 20th century, contributed to the beginning of a new type of the sense of Jewishness, based on the threat from the external enemy, who found all the degrees of assimilation irrelevant. The Holocaust became an additional factor that fueled the Zionist efforts to build a country for the Jews in Palestine, the Biblical Promised Land, the state of Israel. The existence of such a political entity provided many Jews with a new concept of identity, which was very similar to that developed in the 19th century in other nation-states. Thus, the loyalty and love of the state of Israel became one of the determinants of the sense of Jewishness. However, in the United States lived quite a number of Jews who did not suffer from the atrocities of the German Nazis or built the state of Israel; who were by no means Orthodox, even though observing the Jewish tradition in its modified, reformed versions. Moreover, the generation of their children may not be religious at all. Having joined the American mainstream lifestyle, many of them still have a feeling of strong affiliation with their ancestry, even though they may be atheists not observing any Jewish rites or customs.

Philip Roth, an American novelist born in 1933 in Newark, New Jersey, has written a number of books set in the Jewish neighbourhood of this city. The writer himself is not a religious Jew, and his texts exposed him to severe criticism on the part of American Jews. However, Jewishness is present in almost all his novels and stories, being a more or less important thread in each of them. A number of Roth's novels are *bildungsromans*, where the protagonists tell stories about their early years as children of American Jewish parents. The selection of texts to discuss in this paper was determined by the role played by the reference to Jewish childhood. As A. James Rudin observed, "Roth is akin to a literary archeologist who digs deep into his imagination and brings up youthful remembrances of things past to re-create the American Jewish milieu of his youth" (Rudin). In *Portnoy's Complaint*, published in 1969, Jewishness seems to be a key to understanding the protagonist's identity formation problem. In *The Plot Against America* (2004), Anti-Semitism determines the importance of being a Jew, whereas in *American Pastoral* (1997) Jewishness appears with no crucial purpose, since the main character does not seem to attach much importance to his religious or ethnic origins.

The novels differ in terms of the tone of narration. Whereas *Portnoy's Complaint* is the confession of Alex Portnoy to his psychoanalyst, a long soliloquy full of irony and humour, *The Plot Against America* is a serious alternative history, though not devoid of self-sarcastic elements of the protagonist's narration, where the narrator recalls the presidency of the famous aviator Charles Lindbergh, known for his sympathy with Nazi Germany. *American Pastoral*, on the other hand, is

the poignant portrayal of a tragic relationship between a father and a daughter who has become a terrorist and assassin.

The narrators are also different, even though it is not difficult to perceive similarities between them and the author himself. Whether it is Alex Portnoy or Nathan Zuckerman (*American Pastoral*), they are all Jewish boys who grew up in Newark, New Jersey in the 1940s and attended Weequahic High School. Philip Roth, the narrator and protagonist of *The Plot Against America*, is too young for this school but his brother is its student. Naming one of the protagonists after the author himself in *The Plot Against America* is a kind of literary trick enhancing the impression of authenticity of the account which, of course, cannot be real. Nevertheless, it does not require much effort to discover very strong similarities between Roth characters. It also seems obvious that certainly most of his texts include recurring autobiographical elements, which has been observed by other researchers writing about his works (Kalay, 891).

Novelists have their favorite themes and problems, which sometimes become their obsessions; problems which they attempt, if not to resolve, to reach a deeper insight into. Beside the typical issues of male puberty every boy has to face, being brought up by Jewish parents and growing up in the Jewish community seems to be an obsession, and questions are asked by literary theorists about whether Philip Roth's novels and stories can or should be called "Jewish" in the sense of the classification adopted by traditional history of literature, which cannot do without national, if not nationalistic attributes of literary texts. Although "identity-based literary study" may lose its clearly defined grounds (Schreier, 104), it is still fascinating that in spite of Roth's characters' and alter ego's rebellion (and the rebellion of Roth himself) against confining them in any simply understood identities, the Jewishness is simply impossible to evade. As S. Lillian Kremer observed, "[s]elf-reflexivity and exploration of their own nature and status as fiction ... are recurrent themes in Philip Roth's fiction" (Kremer, 57).

### ***Portnoy's Complaint***

The depiction of the Newark Jewish community in Alex Portnoy's humourous monologue is an example of vivid memory infused with emotions. The protagonist's fascination with masturbation, perfectly normal for a boy of his age, puts him in agony. His problem cannot be called an internal conflict, because he does not seem to struggle with his inclination, but his parents warn him of so many things that he cannot even imagine telling them about masturbation, which entails a chain of hilarious consequences. This experience is very present in Alex's memory:

Because I haven't even begun to mention everything I remember with pleasure – I mean with a rapturous, biting sense of loss! All those memories that seem somehow to be bound up with the weather and the time of day, and that flash into mind with such poignancy, that momentarily I am not down in the subway, or at my office, or at dinner with a pretty girl, but back in my childhood, *with them*. Memories of practically nothing – and yet they seem moments of history as crucial to my being as the moment of my conception. (PC, 26)

The rules established by Alex's overbearing mother and whining father inflicted a sense of guilt which he ascribes to Jewish history. He exclaims: "I couldn't even contemplate drinking a glass of milk with my salami sandwich without giving serious offence to God Almighty!" (PC, 33) and sums up: "The guilt, the fears – the terror bred into my bones!" (PC, 33). Furthermore, he calls his parents "the outstanding producers and packagers of guilt" (PC, 35). Even though the reader could interpret the behaviour portrayed by their son as quite common among doting and overprotective parents, Alex Portnoy goes much further. He ascribes their infliction of guilt to the burden of Jewish tradition. He says: "I'm living in the middle of a Jewish joke! I am the son in the Jewish joke – only it ain't no joke! Please, who crippled us like this?" (PC, 35) Imploring Dr Spielvogel to explain his problem, Alex Portnoy asks: "Is this the Jewish suffering I used to hear so much about? Is this what has come down to me from the pogroms and persecution? from the mockery and abuse bestowed by the *goyim* over these two thousand lovely years?" (PC, 35).

Alex's father is no role-model to him. Not educated, frustrated by his low status, Mr. Portnoy feels oppressed and powerless. In contrast, Mrs. Portnoy is a strong, bossy woman who runs the household, and to whom Alex is addicted.

The protagonist is a critical observer of community life. His father's brother, Uncle Hymie, "the only one of my aunts and uncles to have been born on the other side talk with an accent" (PC, 50) is also a successful businessman. He strongly believes that "the only place for a Jew to live is among other Jews" (PC, 51), and consequently forbids his son, Heshie, to stay in a romantic relationship with a *shikse*, Alice Dembosky. When Heshie is killed in the war the neighbours try to console his parents with the words: "At least he didn't leave you with *goyische* children" (PC, 58). The way Alex Portnoy describes those events to Dr Spielvogel evokes such a comical effect that the reader has no doubt that the tone of the account is sarcastic.

The conversation with his father, when Alex refuses not only to go to synagogue but also to put on smarter clothes at Rosh Hashana, on the grounds that he does not believe in God, is another signal of his rebellious approach to his Jewish heritage. His father's reaction is also significant when he accuses Alex of ignorance of Jewish history, the Talmud and disrespect to the Jewish people (PC, 61). Alex Portnoy will have an opportunity to visit Israel and confront his sense of Jewishness with that of the Israeli Jews, which results in the conclusion that Israel is not his place, even though America seems not to be, either.

### ***The Plot Against America***

Philip Roth, the protagonist and the first-person narrator of *The Plot Against America*, is also an intelligent and perceptive boy, who observes the changes in the United States after the election of Charles Lindbergh for president. Along with the depiction of the anti-Semitic mood all over the country and the nationalist course of the president's policy, he introduces the Jewish community of Newark. Whereas the events resulting from the presidency of a friend of Hitler and the Nazis are part of alternative history, what is important to concentrate on is the description of the young protagonist's neighbourhood, which seems so similar to that in other texts by Philip Roth.

The narrator begins with the portrayal of the Parent-Teacher Association at Chancellor Avenue School. The narrator Philip Roth informs the reader that:

All were Jews. The neighborhood men either were in business for themselves – the owners of the local candy store, grocery store, jewelry store, dress shop, furniture shop, service station, and delicatessen, or the proprietors of tiny industrial job shops over by Newark-Irvington line, or self-employed plumbers, electricians, housepainters, and boilermen – or were foot-soldier salesmen like my father. (PAA, 2)

Among the residents were also Jewish doctors, lawyers and “successful merchants” (PAA, 2).

After the introduction the narrator unfolds the list of the elements which did not determine his concept of Jewishness: “It was work that identified and distinguished our neighbors for me far more than religion. Nobody in the neighborhood had a beard or dressed in the antiquated Old World style or wore a skullcap . . . . The adults were no longer observant in the outward, recognizable ways, if they were seriously observant at all” (PAA, 4). Moreover, “hardly anyone in the vicinity spoke with an accent” (PAA, 4). Roth makes a clear distinction between his Jewish neighbourhood and other Jewish communities. The Newark Jews spoke and read almost exclusively in English, since a newspaper in English was bought by “ten times more customers” than “the Yiddish daily, the *Forvertz*” (PAA, 4).

As Roth the narrator observes, “Israel didn’t yet exist, six million European Jews hadn’t yet ceased to exist, and the local relevance of distant Palestine . . . was a mystery to me” (PAA, 4). He admits that he did not understand the periodical visits from a bearded Jew who raised money for “the establishment of the Jewish national homeland in Palestine” (PAA, 4). As far as he is concerned, he did everything any other American child did, including pledging allegiance to the flag and observing national holidays. As he sums up, “[o]ur homeland was America” (PAA, 5).

This boyhood memory demonstrates what being a Jew meant to the generation of the protagonist’s parents and how his sense of identity was formed. The adjective that could be placed in front of ‘identity’ is already elusive, since it can be called neither ethnic nor national, even though for his parents and their peers ‘religious’ may still make some sense.

On the imaginary plane of Roth’s alternative history Jewishness gains an additional definition. The definition triggered by anti-Semites who did not let the Jews forget that they are Jews. This identity imposed by the enemies, regardless of the degree of assimilation of the Jewish community itself, however undesirable, is unavoidable. Anti-Semites in *The Plot Against America* do not want people with this defined identity in their country. Martine Chard-Hutchinson perceives Alvin’s (the protagonist’s cousin mutilated in the war) stump as

the icon of Jewishness in America or what it means to be a Jew when your identity is only defined in the negative – best summed up in: “What they were was what they couldn’t get rid of — what they couldn’t even begin to want to get rid of” [Plot 220]. Like the stump (Chard-Hutchinson, 149).

### *American Pastoral*

It takes a while before the reader realizes that *American Pastoral* is the harrowing story of a father whose daughter became an assassin, planting explosives in public places and killing innocent people. Being a paragon for his fellow students at Weequahic High School for his sporting achievements and general moral decency, Seymour 'Swede' Levov is unable to cope with his 16-year-old child. 'Swede' owes his nickname to his blond hair and 'Nordic' appearance. If not for his parents' visits, for whom being Jewish matters, the reader could find the Jewishness irrelevant. Nevertheless, Nathan Zuckerman, Philip Roth's narrator, dedicates a number of pages to introducing the reader to the Newark Jewish community. His school reunion provides him with a pretext to reconstruct the Jewish district and its inhabitants back in the 1940s:

Keer Avenue was where the rich Jews lived – or rich they seemed to most of the families who rented apartments in the two-, three- and four-family dwellings with the brick stoops integral to our after-school sporting life . . . . Here, on this grid of locust-tree-lined streets into which the Lyons farm had been partitioned during the boom years of the early twenties, the first postimmigrant generation of Newark's Jews had regrouped into a community that took its inspiration more from the mainstream of American life than from the Polish shtetl their Yiddish-speaking parents had re-created around Prince Street in the impoverished Third Ward. The Keer Avenue Jews, with their finished basements, their screened-in porches, their flagstone front steps, seemed to be at the forefront, laying claim like audacious pioneers to the normalizing American amenities. (AP, 10)

It is important to underscore the inspiration taken from the mainstream of American life. These American Jews are still strongly emotionally attached to their Jewishness, even though it is difficult to assess their children's sense of identity. Nathan Zuckerman, the non-religious narrator, refuses to bother to describe his cohorts' attitude to their ethnic or religious affiliation. However, the memories reaching back to their school years demonstrate how much their childhood and adolescence is present in their life, including their Jewish parents. Zuckerman, in his never delivered speech, wrote:

Am I wrong to think that we delighted in living there? No delusions are more familiar than those inspired in the elderly by nostalgia, but am I completely mistaken to think that living as well-born children in Renaissance Florence could not have held a candle to growing up within aromatic range of Tabachnik's pickle barrels? (AP, 42)

Zuckerman remembers the post war energy and ambition characterizing his neighbourhood back in the 1940s, "despite a generalized mistrust of the Gentile world" (AP, 41). The country was recovering from the Depression and "the place was bright with industriousness" (AP, 41) The place and its residents had to determine their children's mentality. However, the Jewish tradition and lifestyle had not necessarily become its component. 'Swede's' Levov's cynical brother, Jerry,

describing the post-school life of Seymour, calls his wife “post-Catholic” and his brother “post-Jewish,” who were going to raise “little post-toasties” (AP, 73).

The main character, Seymour ‘Swede’ Levov, hardly mentions his Jewish origins. He is absolutely against forcing his newly-wed Irish Catholic wife Dawn to convert to Judaism, which is his mother’s idea. As he admits, Judaism means nothing to him. In the flashback of his early days in their house in Old Rimrock his new acquaintance invites him to join the local Jewish congregation with their own temple. This triggers Seymour’s memories, reaching back to his childhood, with his father as a person whose religiousness he perceived as false and superficial. As he confesses to Dawn: “I didn’t come out here for that stuff. I never got that stuff anyway” (AP, 314), which a clear signal that religion cannot have been of great importance in his formative years. “Even seeing my father there never made sense. It wasn’t him, it wasn’t like him – he was bending to something that he didn’t have to, something he didn’t even understand. He was bending to this because of my grandfather” (AP, 314). Seymour concludes his account of his father’s Judaism with the thought that the old businessman Lou Levov’s expertise in gloves surpassed his knowledge of God.

The reader may infer that Lou Levov was his older son’s role model because of his integrity and the high moral standards which can be found in Seymour himself. Probably his father’s hesitant and shallow faith, if not just vacant participation in traditional rituals, inadvertently affected the boy’s attitude towards religion.

### **Philip Roth and Jewishness**

Detecting the implied author in Roth’s fiction is not a challenging task. He is an expert on the Jewish district of Newark, where young people attend Weequahic High School. The implied author speaks through his narrators, who are Jewish males of different ages and who love recalling their Jewish parents and neighbours.

As Alan Cooper observes, referring to a number of Roth’s texts, in all his

first person narratives, the easiest kind to confuse with autobiography, particular aspects of the Jewish difference early become obsessive challenges to the protagonists. For Portnoy Jewish restraint is symbolized in the *kashruth* laws, which the culture extends to anything that comes in contact with the mouth, to unkosher sex, to social interaction with Gentiles. (Cooper, 63)

The characters of Roth’s novels suffer from the problem of identity, which can be explained with their teenage rebellion affecting the rest of their lives. Robert Greenberg, like many other commentators, sees the strong influence of the author’s own experience and feelings.

Roth’s frustration with his subcultural position as a Jew in American society is, in many ways, the irritant that produces his fiction. His irritation, however, is not simply the result of overt resistance by mainstream society. His frustration is also clearly determined by his position in Jewish-American culture – by his embroilment in and rebellion against the world of his parents. (Greenberg, 481)

Even though Roth's protagonists are completely different characters, the recurrence of certain *topoi* entitles the reader to look for a quite clear message permeating all his texts. Much as we would like to separate the author from the figures he created, it is inevitable to conclude that he obsessively returns to the issue of Jewishness as if he tried to define a problem he deals with every time he writes a book: a problem with no possible ultimate solution.

Roth's critical approach to the generation of his parents, who personify the Jewish tradition in the protagonists' eyes, even though the former are far from Jewish Orthodoxy, provoked strong criticism from certain Jewish circles in America. He was even accused of promoting "self-loathing' Jews who provided anti-Semitism with confirmation and validation for their hatred of Jews and Judaism" (Rudin). In 2014, Roth was honoured by the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, the chancellor of which, Arnold Eisen, had no doubts about Roth's real intentions behind his texts:

His questions about Jewish life and identity and their dilemmas have always been the right questions, even if I haven't always agreed with his answers. The outrage that greeted his early work belongs to another era, and so does the sense of being a pariah. (Rudin)

In response, Philip Roth joked "I have not been embraced by a gathering like this since March of 1946, when my family and friends were assembled to celebrate my bar mitzvah" (Rudin).

However elusive Jewish identity is, and however critical of the Jewish tradition Roth and his protagonists are, the author of *Portnoy's Complaint* has never ceased to feel strong bonds with his cultural roots.

## Conclusion

Summing up this short review of the elements of identity in three novels by Philip Roth, it is inevitable to conclude that the identity which, for the lack of a better term, could be called ethnic, which resulted from thousands years of Jewish religious tradition, in the generation of descendants of Jewish immigrants in the United States was subject to dramatic yet not revolutionary changes. Far from Jewish Orthodoxy, the protagonists' parents make some effort to remain religious or at least traditional. Their children, like the author Philip Roth himself, can be defined as post-Jewish atheists. Nevertheless, much as they renounce the tradition, they never deny their Jewishness. Being a Jew, whatever this means to them, seems as natural as being a human. Again, the analysis of their sense of identity evades scientific classifications, because without the religion, without the language, without the nation-state (which now exists, but anyway their home is America), without the tradition superseded by American customs, it is theoretically impossible to find anything Jewish in them. However, the Jewishness seems to remain a very strong element of their personalities and accompanies them throughout life. It is memory, in particular the memory of their childhood, which is unique, sometimes stormy yet happy, and foremost Jewish.

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# The witness of the unspoken experience: Postmemory in Bernice Eisenstein's *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*

**Abstract.** In the graphic memoir *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (2006) Bernice Eisenstein examines her identity as a second generation survivor, tells stories about her parents, and depicts the community of survivors in Toronto. Eisenstein's memoir is most often described as a graphic novel. However, the book is a specific combination of words and drawings, and can be hard to categorize. In my paper I focus on Eisenstein's complex relationship with her father presented in the novel, and argue that the way she writes about him and draws him is anchored in his unsaid Holocaust experience. I read Eisenstein's portrayal of her father in reference to the concept of postmemory, and suggest that Eisenstein was heavily affected by her father's experience of being a Holocaust survivor. Her deep connection to the past is demonstrated in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* through drawings, selected memories, and references to numerous works of culture. I discuss how Eisenstein draws her father and how she commemorates him in images – not as a victim, but as extremely strong personas: movie star, gangster or sheriff. I analyze the role of shtetl culture in the memoir as another way of linking present with past. I suggest that the books and movies about the Holocaust which Eisenstein references in the memoir create a basis for changing the confusing, or even unexpressed traumas, into an understandable story.

**Keywords:** postmemory, graphic novel, illustrated novel, memoir, trauma.

## Introduction

In the graphic memoir *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* Bernice Eisenstein examines her identity as a second generation survivor. The choice of the medium of comics to explore Holocaust-related issues is not new: the most prominent example is, of course, Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1991). Yet Eisenstein manages to tell her family's story without providing a detailed account of her parents' experience of living in Auschwitz. Instead, she focuses on the difficulties of growing up, her complicated relationship with her father, and depicts the community of survivors in Toronto. In her intertextual and complex narrative, Eisenstein often references various works of art, literature, and popular culture. The difficult to categorize medium of the illustrated memoir or graphic nov-

el, as well as the dreamy, ghost-like illustrations, help to create a very original vision. Eisenstein's work not only focuses on the trauma of the Holocaust, but on the ways of sharing and transferring the memory of these events.

The book, divided into eleven thematic chapters, is a non-linear narrative about different aspects of being a Holocaust survivor, as well as a reflection on how memory works. Memories are focused on certain images, and necessitate work to shape them into a narrative. Scott McCloud describes a similar phenomenon – closure – in comics, defining it as “observing the parts but perceiving the whole” (63), and adds that specifically in this medium “the audience is a willing and conscious collaborator” (65). In *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* the form of the memoir – that is the unique juxtaposition of verbal and graphic – is as important as its content. Eisenstein states herself: “[t]here is no center to be found in memory, but each place holds its heartbeat” (83). The non-linear order is well justified, since Eisenstein's main focus is how her parents' experiences have impacted on her life, and therefore: how the past influences the present. Miriam Harris suggests that rejection of linearity serves as a way of giving the past a specific dimension: “to transform this haunting world of the past into a more tangible state, and thereby to banish what is mythlike and ghostly, Eisenstein collapses the linearity of time” (131). Rejecting chronology gives Eisenstein freedom to focus on those aspects of the story which for her are the most significant. In *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* she describes her relationship with her parents, who were born in Poland, met in Auschwitz, and then emigrated to Canada. In the memoir she analyzes more closely her relations with her father (who was unable to speak about his experience), than with her mother.<sup>10</sup> Eisenstein declares: “all my life, I have looked for more in order to fill in the parts of my father that have gone missing” (16). *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* belongs not only to the sub-genre of graphic narratives about the Holocaust, but can also be examined in comparison to other graphic memoirs about the father-daughter relationship, for example Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*. Throughout the novel Eisenstein explores her relationship with her father Ben, trying to understand him better, as she has attempted to do her entire life.

In this article I read Eisenstein's portrayal of her father Ben through the concept of postmemory. Eisenstein's deep connection to the past is present in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* through drawings, selected memories, and several references to works of culture. I discuss how Eisenstein draws her father and how she commemorates him in images – not as a victim, but as extremely strong personas: movie star, gangster or sheriff. The books and movies about the Holocaust which Eisenstein mentions in the memoir create a basis for changing unexpressed traumas into an understandable story. I analyze how the concept of postmemory is seen by Marianne Hirsch and Ernst van Alphen. Van Alphen emphasizes disconnection rather than symbolic transmission of

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<sup>10</sup> Eisenstein portrays her mother as more eager to open up about her life in Auschwitz. She even took part in the Archives of the Holocaust Project, where she answered several questions about her past.

the memories, and in my article I argue that the father-daughter relationship portrayed in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* is anchored in van Alphen's understanding of postmemory.

### **Drawing the father: A hero**

Marianne Hirsch states that postmemory:

describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. (106-107)

Therefore, the Holocaust influences those who were not part of these traumatic events, but were close to the survivors. Growing up surrounded with recollections of the Holocaust survivors (not always expressed out loud) affects the second generation so much that the memories of something they have not experienced feel like their own. The need to understand, to pass on the stories, to never forget about the past, influences the second generation to various extents, including shaping one's identity. Hirsch continues discussing how important family ties and parent-child relationships are in the case of postmemory:

second generation fiction, art, memoir, and testimony are shaped by the attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain ... of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma. They are shaped by the child's confusion and responsibility, by the desire to repair. (112)

Children growing up close to those who survived the Holocaust are looking for ways to express what they have experienced. Numerous works of culture prove that for many second generation survivors this issue plays a significant role throughout their whole lives. *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* is precisely an attempt to portray what it means to be influenced by one's parents' trauma. Eisenstein ponders on her experience of growing up with parents who are Holocaust survivors – sometimes it is what makes her special, “Hey man, I'm different, my parents were in Auschwitz” (21). Another time it is the baggage, “[b]ackpacking in Europe, the heaviest part of my baggage was my parents' history” (Eisenstein, 22), or a “drug” (20). In *After Such Knowledge* Eva Hoffman examines “the baggage” of the second generation, and states that “for the second generation, the anxieties, the symptoms, no matter how genuine in themselves, no longer correspond to actual experience or external realities. . . . [T]his is exactly the crux of the second generation's difficulty: that it has inherited not experience, but its shadows” (66). These shadows of parents' experiences play a central role in many second generation survivors' lives. The drawing on the cover of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* is a powerful visual representation of the baggage: Eisenstein – portrayed as a child – casts a shadow that resembles her parents.

From the beginning Eisenstein portrays her father Ben as athletic, elegant and dapper. In almost all of his pictures Ben is youthful and handsome, and I argue that this is how Eisenstein wishes the reader to remember him; she commemorates him as vigorous and tough. To describe her father, Eisenstein quotes Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "The Panther," and states that Ben always reminded her of an animal in a cage: "a panther, sleek and mysterious with the elegant sheen on its fur" (29). In this description Ben resembles an animal that is strong, majestic, yet limited by something beyond its control. There is anti-Semitic history behind Jewish animal metaphors. Jonathan Freedman notes that in "the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Jew's monstrosity is performed by the transformation of the hand – the emblem of warmth, love and pleasure – into bat wings, vampire talons, spider legs or octopus tentacles" (94). Yet another association can be drawn to Spiegelman's portrayal of Jews as mice in *Maus*. Michael E. Staub observes that "the choice to turn people into animals, as the Hitler quote that opens the first volume [of *Maus*] ('The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human') makes clear, can be read as straightforward metaphor for the dehumanization of victims that allows genocide to occur" (37). Portraying Jews as animals was often used in anti-Semitic or Nazi propaganda. In *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* Eisenstein manages to subvert this image and create a contrastive metaphor: she imagines Ben as a powerful animal – a panther – to demonstrate his strength and dominance. The animal is no longer a metaphor of a monster or a rodent, but a source of power.

On the following pages Eisenstein draws her father as extremely elegant, looking somewhere far away – it is probably one of the most thorough drawings in the memoir. This portrait follows a detailed description of Ben: Eisenstein writes with true admiration and fondness that "his thick black hair was always swept back dramatically" (30), and "there was always a ferocity in his gaze, luminous throughout and invisible darkness" (31). She describes him with awe and fascination. In one of the first drawings of Eisenstein's parents the reader sees them fully dressed up: Regina is wearing a black dress with a small hand-bag, and Ben is in a suit with a hat. On the previous page, Eisenstein states about her father: "I searched to find his face among those documented photographs of survivors of Auschwitz ... if I could see him staring out through the barbed wire" (16). The contrast between the referenced image of concentration camps and the somehow glamorous illustration on the following page is striking. These are the parents Eisenstein knows and remembers, not people from the photographs she is looking for. Although a large part of her memoir is devoted to examining her father's past and its influence, it is not apparent in the visual dimension of the narrative. Eisenstein's vague speculations about Ben's life as a Holocaust survivor end within the dimension of the text; she does not draw her father as how he might have looked in Auschwitz. In the memoir, he is a star: the Jewish version of Heathcliff or Robert De Niro's character in *Casino*.

In "Absent Fathers, Present Mothers" Margarete Myers Feinstein notes that "there is evidence that some survivors believed Jewish masculinity and paternal authority have been called into question by the destruction of Jewish families in the Holocaust" (176). Yet the way Eisenstein draws Ben proves that she is able to see him as one of the archetypes of Western masculinity. In the

narrative she admits that she could not always see him as authority. However, her portraits demonstrate how strong he looked in her eyes. One of the most powerful images in the narrative is the portrayal of Eisenstein's father as a sheriff. Ben was an enthusiast of the Western, a genre which in its most classic form offers a clear distinction between villains and heroes. Eisenstein observes that "only here, lying in bed watching television, could he stand alongside his heroes" (49). It is possible to trace in the narrative signs of Ben's dream to become the hero from American Westerns: before the Holocaust he was fighting in the cavalry, and after the war he was briefly in the Polish paramilitary movement seeking out collaborators and Nazis. In the memoir, Eisenstein writes a short passage of alternative history, depicting her father as a sheriff. She creates a mock-western narrative, in which Ben frees Jews from Auschwitz. She illustrates the story with an image of her father in a cowboy hat, with the Star of David in place of the sheriff's star; in this picture he is stronger and more mighty than ever. Behind him the reader sees the open gate to Auschwitz: Ben is not looking back. I suggest that this powerful image can be read as the way Eisenstein wants to commemorate her father. Harris comments on the described illustration: "[g]iven the Holocaust survivors suffered horrific persecution and their identities were reduced to numbers, Eisenstein's conferring upon her father the powers of resistance is a glorious act of liberation for both him and herself" (141). With this image, Eisenstein is able to show Ben as a hero, not only a hero to his daughter, but to a much broader audience. Only in his last portrait – opening the final chapter, the epilogue of the story – Eisenstein's father does not look like a movie star or an American gangster. Exclusively in this picture, he is dressed in a simple T-shirt, with a hand on his stomach, looking tired and in pain. In the epilogue about his death Eisenstein allows herself to portray her father as weak; she allows the reader to see Ben as fragile and ill.

### **Transmitting other people's stories: The Holocaust becoming narratable**

Eisenstein's illustrations often reflect or echo what she writes about; they serve as comments on the text and add a new dimension to the memoir. Several of Eisenstein's illustrations are direct references to early 20th-century artists: Eisenstein portrays herself in the pose known from Auguste Rodin's sculpture "The Thinker," and she draws her parents, aunt and uncle dancing in a circle, resembling Henri Matisse's painting "Dance." Eisenstein uses iconic art to create yet another dialogue with history. Among the influential artists, the one who stands out is Marc Chagall. Eisenstein references his aesthetics throughout the memoir. She draws her parents in an affectionate hug (resembling famous couples from Chagall's paintings) and portrays her aunt singing on the roof along with a fiddler, a motif also known from Chagall's works. I read her allusions to Chagall as a recognition of the importance of Jewish culture in shaping her identity. This, again, connects past with present, her life with Ben's life before the Holocaust. The basis for this connection is Jewish culture, later put to the test of survival through the Holocaust – this disappearing world is the world of her father. The reader gets to know some aspects of Ben's life, yet just elementary information: when and where he was born, what he was doing when the war broke out. There is almost no account of his life before the Holocaust, no illustrations of Ben as a child or before the war. Eisen-

stein draws how her father could have looked when he got to Canada, but she does not attempt to create an illustration of him as a child, or just before the Holocaust. She cannot imagine her father before the Holocaust. Her references to his life before the war are only in the illustrations influenced by Chagall and shtetl culture. By incorporating those visual tropes into her memoir she is closer to understanding Ben's background.

Eisenstein describes the Holocaust as her drug (20) – she craves knowledge and testimonies. This is an excellent example of Eisenstein's dark humor, which penetrates her memoir. In one of the illustrations Moses holds a giant letter "H," while Eisenstein asks him: "Hey, wait! Which is it? Thou shalt not take its name in vain or not take it into a vain? Help me out" (22). I read her way of describing the Holocaust as the effect of highly personalized and individual means of thinking about her parents' experiences. Harris argues that "humor, such as Eisenstein's use of the pulsating stone H, is an important tool for integrating the past and keeping the terror of the uncanny at bay" (132). Eisenstein's playful comments and drawings help her story be original, and establish distance, in spite of her involvement in the topic.<sup>11</sup> Eyal Zandberg examines black comedy sketches from the TV program *Hahamishia Hakamerit (The Chamber Quintet)*, and quotes Des Pres' thought that "by putting things at a distance humor permits us a more active response" (568), pointing out its liberating characteristics. In *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* humor creates distance, serves as comic relief, and helps the reader see the topic as less intimidating. Eisenstein's narrative creates the possibility of reading it as the intimate, highly personal story of a child, without experiencing fully the burden of the topic.

Zandberg also notes that the "third generation's commemoration looks at the Holocaust from a different point of view, one that encompasses both thoughts about the event and its memory, raising questions about history and its representation" (575). The third generation often employs a very critical perception on the current nature of the Holocaust commemoration and its social construction. Zandberg continues, "they use genres such as satire and humor, genres that have rarely been used before to deal with Holocaust memoir" (575). Those elements are visible in Eisenstein's narrative. *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* was published in 2006, and although Eisenstein herself is a second generation survivor, her memoir is historically closer to the narratives of the third generation.

Pointing out similarities between Ben and the actors or characters from movies is just one of the references to works of culture in Eisenstein's novel. Movies and books about the Holocaust were essential for Eisenstein in understanding her parents' trauma. She turned to testimonies, including *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Book of Alfred Kantor*. Harris notices that "words and images

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, Eisenstein's is not the first one to connect pop-culture or humour with Holocaust trauma. The Frenchman Horst Rosenthal, who was in the French internment camp Gurs, and later died in Auschwitz, created in 1942 a comic strip titled *Mickey au Camp de Gurs: Publié Sans Autorisation de Walt Disney*. It shows life in the camps from the point of view of Mickey Mouse (who is not an inmate, but an outsider); his work is full of absurd and irony. However, the juxtaposition of Mickey Mouse and the Holocaust creates an even more tragic picture, while Eisenstein's references to movies are a source of power and strength, for her and her father.

have functioned for Eisenstein, then, as potent symbols of presence in the face of the absence, and as keys to enable the unlocking of secrets” (132). These words and images from other narratives are transmitted onto her memoir – Eisenstein writes: “the Holocaust arrived in Hollywood and the new images I saw, stripped of color, penetrated deeper and were filled with something different yet strangely familiar, connecting to my parents’ past” (92). Testimonies of the Holocaust survivors create the basis for transforming traumas, and fragmented narratives into an understandable story, both for survivors of the Holocaust, and for the second-generation. Ernst van Alphen argues that “the coherence [of survivors’ narratives] rather came from the outside, through literature and film, through memories and testimonies of others, which circulated more and more in public culture. So ‘official’ and public accounts of the Holocaust enabled personal memories to become narratable” (485). Therefore, different works of culture helped individual testimonies come to light. I propose that a very similar approach can be observed in the case of the testimonies of the second generation survivors. Public accounts of the Holocaust constitute the fundamentals of what later becomes an attempt to grasp what happened to survivors, what shaped them – and in consequence – so heavily influenced the lives of second generation survivors. This idea is clearly visible in Eisenstein’s memoir. Numerous references to works of culture prove that those testimonies, found outside of the family, are what brought Eisenstein closer to her father. She states: “I wanted to see a replication of Auschwitz and be able to imagine my mother and father standing in the background among the other starving inmates. In that way, I thought I could find them” (Eisenstein, 21). Through movies and other narratives, she seeks to understand what her father went through, to ultimately be closer to him. Her attempts to find Ben’s face among the Holocaust victims is a recurring issue. Eisenstein explains: “if I could see him staring out through barbered wire, I would then know how to remember him, know what he was made to become, and then possibly know what he might have been” (16). While in the book there are no reproductions of photographs, their importance is marked. Hirsch characterizes the role of photography: “Holocaust photographs are the fragmentary remnants that shape the cultural work of postmemory. The work that they have been mobilized to do for the second generation, in particular, ranges from the indexical to the symbolic, and it is precisely their slippage within this range that needs to be scrutinized” (116). Eisenstein’s persistence in searching for Ben’s face among photographs from the Holocaust suggests that for her it could be highly symbolic. She bases her narrative on numerous testimonies, yet in none of them can she find her father.

In *Prosthetic Memory* Alison Landsberg discusses the structure and function of collective and individual memory in the age of mass culture. She claims that prosthetic memories “originate outside a person’s lived experience and yet are taken on and worn by that person through mass cultural technologies of memory” and “develop after an encounter with a mass cultural representation of the past, when new images and ideas come into contact with a person’s own archive of experience” (Landsberg, 19). Therefore, through different works of culture, prosthetic memories enable people who have not witnessed certain events, to feel as if they did. This idea is somehow similar to van Alphen’s claim about the role of literature and film in helping personal memories

of the Holocaust become narratable. However, Landsberg argues that prosthetic memories can be gained by anyone, and therefore they are not connected with genealogy, as in the concept of post-memory. The emphasized importance of works of culture about the Holocaust in Eisenstein's life proves that these narratives influence her perception of the Holocaust.

Eisenstein's reaction to one of the narratives – *The Book of Alfred Kantor* – causes an important confrontation between her and her father. *The Book of Alfred Kantor*, published in 1971, is a collection of sketches and watercolors drawn by Kantor to show the terror of living and dying in a concentration camp. Eisenstein was deeply moved by Kantor's testimony and wanted to share his book with Ben, but looking at those pictures was too difficult for him. Eisenstein examines the meaning of this situation – she states that it helped her see how similar she and Ben were. They both were “without the means to say what was in [their] hearts” (Eisenstein, 97). For Eisenstein it was the struggle to understand her own feelings; for her father it was his silence about his Holocaust experience. This realization may have been crucial for their relationship and its portrayal in the memoir. Throughout the narrative, Eisenstein simultaneously tries to find a way to understand herself and her feelings, and to find a language in which she can speak about it. *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* proves that she has found the language in which she is able to speak about herself and her family – it is her unique mixture of words and images. Her memoir is an attempt to comprehend what has happened to her parents, and how it influenced her. Ernst van Alphen redefines Hirsch's concept of postmemory, and argues that difficulties with comprehensibility are what constitutes postmemory and relations between survivors and second generation: “the dynamics between children and survivor parents is rather defined by dis-connection, hence dis-continuity: disconnection is not an emotional, personal sense, but in terms of intelligibility” (488). In his definition – in contrast to Hirsch's – the emphasis is put on the incapacity to connect with parents and create an understandable narrative of their experience. Eisenstein's efforts to see her parents' faces among the photos of survivors, to discuss with her father his trauma, to watch movies about the Holocaust, then to examine how it affected her identity, are all attempts to create a comprehensive narrative. Her incomprehension of her father's past is what brings her closer and closer to him.

### **Concluding remarks**

In the memoir Eisenstein examines how her parents' trauma has been passed on to her, and how her identity was shaped by her parents' experience of the Holocaust. Efraim Sicher argues that “second-generation writing ... is breaking away from all master narratives to focus on personal memory. ... There can indeed be no future without the past, but, when remembrance relies on imagination to give it meaning, one must be aware of the risks that are involved” (84). Eisenstein looks for clues about her father's past without much speculating and imagining what he came through. She looks for photos, but does not draw him as a Holocaust survivor. She is, however, deeply influenced by his past. Yet it is important to ask: which memories, if he did not speak about

them? From where comes the postmemory of Ben's trauma, transmitted to his daughter? Looking for ways of understanding what happened to him, Eisenstein turns to testimonies in literature and cinema. Hirsch notes that "family life, even in its most intimate moments, is entrenched in a collective imaginary, shaped by public, generational structures of fantasy and projection by a shared archive of stories" (114). The collective memory and existing testimonies give Eisenstein a basis for her search for understanding. In numerous second generation survivors' narratives there is a need to carry on their parents' legacy. In *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* stories of her father's time in the concentration camp are almost non-existent. In contrast to Spiegelman's *Maus*, there is no detailed narrative of Ben's life in Auschwitz, because Eisenstein's father did not speak about the Holocaust. That is why I argue that their relationship is anchored in the postmemory characterized by van Alphen. He emphasizes that what is crucial in postmemory is based on the second generation's disconnection with their parents' past: "the more children feel disconnected from the past of their survivor parents – the less they are able to understand it – the deeper they feel personally connected to them or the more they need that connection" (van Alphen, 488). Eisenstein's difficult relationship with her father is fueled by the lack of a coherent narrative of his trauma. She focuses on Ben much more than on her mother, who eventually spoke about the Holocaust. Eisenstein in different ways attempts to get closer to her father and his trauma, for example when she shows him *The Book of Alfred Kantor*. Several of her decisions are driven by the need to complete the image of Ben.

Eisenstein creates a clash between text and image in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*. On the textual level, her memoir is focused on her father's difficult experience of the Holocaust. However, on the visual level, she is trying to commemorate him as strong and powerful, always drawing him as young and healthy. She incorporates humor to the narrative, but when describing her father, she is almost always serious. On the final pages of her memoir Eisenstein writes:

I had always felt that if I could find my parents' deepest hurt I could locate my own grief, for them. But how could I have ever imagined that everything the Holocaust had voided in their lives could be replaced, as if my need to understand could somehow make up for such sorrow. I will never be able to know the truth of what my parents had experienced. It is beyond my reach, and perhaps even theirs, to know the full extent of their loss. (178)

Ben's untold stories create the basis for the development of Eisenstein's identity. She commits large part of her life to grasp his pain, with the hope that it would be helpful both for her, and him. Hirsch stresses that the children of the Holocaust survivors grow up wanting to help – Eisenstein revisions this naïve wish. Her unfeasible quest for a coherent narrative and ultimate truth about her father's experience of the Holocaust is supposed to improve their relationship. She has to accept that it is a futile wish, but in the meantime Eisenstein gains something different – she is able to redefine her needs and explore her relationship with Ben from a new perspective.

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# Ways of forgetting: Memory and identity in Alzheimer's fiction

**Abstract.** Alzheimer's is a disease that poses a challenge to the established ways of thinking about the relation between memory, identity and narrative. In this article, I offer a reading of Lisa Genova's *Still Alice* (2007), Stefan Merrill Block's *The Story of Forgetting* (2008), and Matthew Thomas's *We Are Not Ourselves* (2014) to examine the ways in which the increasingly popular literature of Alzheimer's represents, and possibly reconfigures, the prevalent notions of identity and memory, as well as the relation between literature and science. A number of critics have noted a shift in contemporary literature demonstrated by the growing focus on neurological conditions. Accordingly, the analysis of Alzheimer's novels refers to selected critical descriptions of this shift, including the discussions of syndrome literature and the neuronovel.

**Keywords:** memory, identity, Alzheimer's fiction, syndrome literature, neuronovel.

Alongside this world there's another. There are places where you can cross.

Stefan Merrill Block, *The Story of Forgetting* (2008)

Dr. Alice Howland, the protagonist of Lisa Genova's *Still Alice* (2007), is "the eminent William James Professor of Psychology at Harvard University" and the author of "many of the flagship touchstones in psycholinguistics" (9). When she first notices some disturbing problems with her memory and complains to her husband, a cancer cell biologist also working in Harvard, he tries to calm her down by explaining that "Everyone's stressed. Everyone's tired. Everyone forgets things" (38). Since the problems continue, interfering with Dr. Howland's professional life, she decides to consult a neurologist and, after a series of tests, is diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's disease. Alice reacts to the diagnosis with terror and declares that "[s]he'd rather die than lose her mind" (78). Accordingly, she prepares for her future self a set of questions that are to test her ability to remember, and a file named "Butterfly" with suicide instructions should she fail to answer them.

As the disease progresses, however, Alice finds it increasingly difficult not only to supply the answers, but also to remember to take the test, a process of inevitable forgetting mirrored by the shift of perspective in the novel from the woman to those around her. Spanning the period from September 2003 to September 2005, from the appearance of identifiable symptoms to the late stages of the illness, the novel traces the development of Alzheimer's and the loss of identity it entails, while insisting that, in the forgetting, Alice is still Alice.

Lisa Genova's book about "a cognitive psychology professor with a broken cognitive psyche" (198) is an example of the numerous novels dealing with Alzheimer's disease that have been published in recent years, leading to the emergence of what Stefan Block calls "the literature of Alzheimer's" (2014), a separate and burgeoning genre with its own set of themes and conventions.<sup>12</sup> In this article, I refer to Genova's *Still Alice* (2007), Stefan Merrill Block's *The Story of Forgetting* (2008), and Matthew Thomas's *We Are Not Ourselves* (2014) as examples of Alzheimer's literature in order to examine the ways in which such fiction represents, and possibly reconfigures, the prevalent notions of memory and identity, as well as the relation between literature and science. The focus on neurological conditions in Alzheimer's fiction reflects a larger transformation in contemporary literature, a shift which Patricia Waugh has aptly called "the naturalistic turn" (2013) and which other critics have described as the rise of syndrome fiction (Lustig and Peacock, 2013) or of the neuronovel (Roth, 2009). While this turn to neurological disorders to re-consider the meaning of the human and the biological lies at the centre of Alzheimer's novels, it is also present in other kinds of fiction, such as Lance Olsen's *Theories of Forgetting* (2014). Olsen's postmodern book, similarly to the Alzheimer's novels discussed in this article, dwells on acts of forgetting and remembering to foreground the process of dissolution of the various boundaries – between the brain and the mind, the self and others, or art and science – that may point to some new ways of thinking about memory, identity and narrative.

What distinguishes Alzheimer's fiction from other contemporary genres is its semi-documentary character and the intention, sometimes explicitly expressed, to shape the public perception of the illness and those suffering from it. Frequently, the books are based on the writers' personal experience: Genova, whose grandmother suffered from dementia, holds a Ph.D. in neuroscience and contributes articles to the National Alzheimer's Association website; Matthew Thomas's *We Are Not Ourselves* (2014) was inspired by his father's early-onset Alzheimer's; the memory of Stefan Merrill Block's grandmother lies behind *The Story of Forgetting* (2008); Jean Lee's *Alzheimer's Daughter* (2015) recounts the story of her parents' struggle with the disease; and Shannon Wiersbitzky points to the experience with her grandfather as the inspiration for *What Flowers Remember* (2014). In many of the novels, the detailed descriptions of the disease and its treatment serve as guides for those affected by the illness and their families: the narrator of Block's *The Story of Forgetting*, for example, recounts the latest findings and outlines the possible future directions in

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<sup>12</sup> The success of the 2014 movie based on Genova's novel testifies to the growing popularity of Alzheimer's fiction as well as to the concomitant need to translate and represent the experience of the disease in various narrative forms.

Alzheimer's research, and the protagonist of Genova's novel joins the Alzheimer's Association and participates in the annual Dementia Care Conference. In addition to including information about the existing organizations and treatment, some of the novels provide lists of the institutions dedicated to Alzheimer's patients and caregivers, and advocate for financial support for Alzheimer's research. By adopting such strategies, Alzheimer's fiction attempts to move beyond the level of imaginative description to intervene in the real problems encountered by the readers and to combat the social stigma frequently attached to those suffering from the disease.

The problems of the lack of communal support and the status of Alzheimer's patients as social outcasts recur in numerous novels, whose protagonists experience various degrees of exile and alienation. Thus, in *We Are Not Ourselves*, Eileen Leary, taking care of her demented husband Edmund, is abandoned by her friends, so that "[t]hey were staying home on New Year's Eve for the first time in the twenty-eight years since they'd met" (Thomas, 384), as well as by her son, who escapes from his father's illness to a far away college, hoping that "the farther he went, the harder it would be to come back" (Thomas, 397). In *Still Alice*, Dr. Howland envies the people suffering from cancer since they "could expect to be supported by their community. Alice expected to be cast out" (Genova, 118), and in *The Story of Forgetting*, the ailing Jamie, whose favourite novel is *Jane Eyre* (Block, 84), immediately after the diagnosis is placed by her husband in Willow Acres Assisted Care Facility, renamed by her son as "The Waiting Room" (Block, 83). Alzheimer's, as the narrator of *The Story of Forgetting* states, has risen "in the public consciousness to the rank of true epidemic" (Block, 303), a "mysterious" and strangely ubiquitous illness feared by nearly everyone. The fact that, as Susan Sontag claims in *Illness as Metaphor*, "any disease that is treated as a mystery and acutely enough feared will be felt to be morally, if not literally, contagious" (6) may provide one explanation for the interventionist character of the literature of Alzheimer's, in particular for its attempts to bridge the long-established gap between science and fiction.

The fear that underlies the public response to Alzheimer's and that forms the core of the novels is that of the loss of memory and the ensuing loss of identity. Alzheimer's is commonly perceived as synonymous with forgetting, in particular with short-term memory loss, although its symptoms include various other impairments, such as deteriorating emotional control, social behaviour or motivation (Robert, 129). If, as Susannah Radstone writes, "memories make us" (19), and if "memory is above all a form of representation" (Passerini, 238), then the loss of memory makes it impossible to construct narratives, including the story of one's self. In Alzheimer's fiction, the loss of memory is almost invariably translated into the loss of self, even if, as the narrator of *The Story of Forgetting* admits, "it's not just memories that people with [the] disease forget but increasingly basic things. How to write, how to speak, how to walk, how to sit up, how to swallow, how to breathe, and ... how to stay alive" (Block, 51).

The connection between identity and memory is positioned at the centre of Alzheimer's novels, leading to the questioning of what constitutes a self both for the individual and for others, but also signalling a shift of perspective in approaching the relation between identity, memory and narrative. The progressive neurodegenerative disease makes forgetting inevitable, gradually depriving

the sufferers of the basic and seemingly stable coordinates of identity and forcing them to radically change their lives. In *Still Alice*, the prospect of having to give up her job leads the protagonist to question her own identity, not knowing “Who was she if she wasn’t a Harvard psychology professor?” (Genova, 96), while the gradual loss of speech makes her interrogate the very distinctiveness of humans: “Her ability to use language, that thing that most separates humans from animals, was leaving her, and she was feeling less and less human as it departed” (Genova, 270). A similar set of questions appears in *We Are Not Ourselves*, where Edmund, a professor at Bronx Community College and “an expert on the brain” (Thomas, 73) suffering from early-onset Alzheimer’s, confesses to feeling like “one of [his] rats” (Thomas, 333), the animals he used in his lab to test “the effects of psychotropic drugs on neural functioning” (Thomas, 73). For Alice, the feature defining humans is the ability to use language, and for Ed it is the possibility to learn – as he states, “If we don’t learn, we die” (Thomas, 180); both are seen as essential components of identity in contemporary critical and literary texts, and both are lost in Alzheimer’s disease. Rather than pointing to the original emptiness of the self or to the bankruptcy of the concept, however, the stories of memory loss may suggest the need to rethink the prevailing notions of selfhood in order to take into account the fact that, as Ed’s wife states, “[h]is real self wasn’t hiding in there waiting to be sprung for a day of freedom. This was his real self now” (Thomas, 334).

Commenting on the recent developments in literature, a number of critics have pointed to the increasing use of neurological conditions as indicative of a major shift in fiction and in the conceptualization of selfhood. Thus, Patricia Waugh describes “the naturalistic turn” away from the “hermeneutic sense of selfhood as a complex and dynamic reframing of experience” and the concomitant “medicalization of the mind” as the key characteristics of the literature succeeding postmodernism (2013: 20). T. J. Lustig and James Peacock, in turn, portray the shift as the rise of syndrome fiction, which focuses on the exploration of the “neurological, and also genetic factors, affecting human existence” and in which “the self, bound up in any number of complex systems, is largely determined not by its choices or its past, but by the very cells with which it becomes aware (or ceases to be) or by its own conditioning” (10). According to Lustig and Peacock, a key feature of syndrome novels is a “reinvigorated embrace of science” that alters “our sense of how the world works” (9), and that may suggest a return to the biological and the human. In “The Rise of the Neuronovel,” Marco Roth offers perhaps the most radical – and controversial – description of the new fiction, claiming that it reflects a larger cultural movement “away from environmental and relational theories of personality back to the study of brains themselves, as the source of who we are” (2009). In the neuronovel, as Roth argues, the mind becomes the brain and the self is lost, to literature at least, as it is turned into “an object whose intricacies can only be described by future science” or by specialists “writing in the idioms of their disciplines” (2009). The neuronovel demonstrates the decline of the novel, if not its death, as a form which, as Roth claims, can merely register the failure of “the metaphoric impulse” and present its readers with “the experience of a cognitive defeat” (2009).

As Alzheimer's novels, *Still Alice*, *The Story of Forgetting*, and *We Are Not Ourselves* are records of cognitive defeat, though perhaps not as absolute as Roth would have it and not for the reader. While the novels medicalize the mind and explore the neurological and genetic determinants dissolving the self, frequently adopting a specialized language, they do so in a way that produces rather than defies metaphorization. The metaphor that consistently returns in these books is the belief that, as memories are taken away as the disease progresses, the core components of selfhood are revealed, showing the "real self" that exceeds the record of past experiences and choices. Sontag dates the emergence of this "romantic idea that the disease expresses the character" back to the nineteenth century (46). This portrayal of disease as "a form of self-expression" (Sontag, 44) returns in Alzheimer's fiction to argue for the persistence of emotions when cognitive functions fail. The protagonist of *Still Alice* continues to be defined by her love for the family members she no longer recognizes; in *We Are Not Ourselves*, Ed is distinguished by "a naked desire to please" his wife (429); and Jamie in *The Story of Forgetting* is driven by the visceral longing to return to her family home from which she escaped when she turned eighteen in an attempt to forget about her past. Inasmuch as emotions are presented as delineating a stable core of the self, however, they are revealed only through and in relations to others, thereby portraying this self as relational and unstable, "formed through interaction with others" (Basting, 80). As the novels suggest, it is the task of the significant others to remember and re-constitute the self, as well as to preserve memories. In *Still Alice*, Alice's Ph.D. student begins every conversation with telling her who she is, and her children prepare for her a video memoir titled "The Howlands Kids" with their memories of her; in *We Are Not Ourselves*, Connell realizes that the memories about his father are preserved in the latter's "contribution to science; ... the altered lives of the students he'd taught, and the impacts those students had had, and would have, on others" (Thomas, 588). Ultimately, as Connell states, the memories will stay in himself, "his father's real estate" (Thomas, 588), preserved through the genetic code that may contain the genes of Alzheimer's disease.

While memory and genetics are an important theme of Genova's *Still Alice* and Thomas's *We Are Not Ourselves*, they are the explicit focus of Block's *The Story of Forgetting*, which includes extensive descriptions of the research on memory, real and imagined, in the parts titled "Genetic History." Seth, one of the novel's narrators, decides "to become an expert on the human brain" (24) when his mother is diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's, and he sets out to construct her genetic history as his "first official research project" (95). This leads him to investigate the findings on familial early-onset Alzheimer's by Dr. Marvin Shellard, a fictitious scientist who discovers the roots of the disease in Lord Alban Mapplethorpe, "a scion of the Mapplethorpe family of Iddylwahl, England (now long since wiped from map and memory alike)" (53), whose offspring carried the illness centuries ago to all parts of the world. Seth's search is based on the finding that "any one sufferer of EOA23 Morbus Alzheimer is at most the twelfth or thirteenth cousin of any other" (51). Accordingly, it is the search for his own family past in order to fill the gaps in his memory which, unlike the gaps in his mother's, are not "the result of a disease" and thus "beyond ... control," but are "deliberate," the effect of his parents' decision

to forget their past when they left their homes and started their life together (198). The gaps in Seth's memory are filled for the reader by the stories of Abel, the other narrator in the novel and the boy's grandfather, who recounts the long history of his family's curse of forgetting. For Seth, they are completed at the end of the novel when, following the map of Isidora, a place from his mother's childhood stories which she claims is real (27), he takes Jamie from the Waiting Room to her long-lost home and father.

Like Alzheimer's genes, the story of Isidora has been passed in Seth's family from generation to generation "for potentially hundreds of years" (27), forming another kind of heritage and a proof of common descent. This "land without memory" (174) is inhabited by people who "can't hold on to any memory, even the memory of death" (38), and who use a language that "is based not on words but on touch" (62), conducting "one another's feelings through their hands" (75). In this place "where every need is met and every sadness is forgotten" (13), the only kind of memory that is known is that of every Isidoran's death which is remembered by the earth, so that "each step across the cemetery" fills the Isidorans "with the startling sensations of their ancestors' final moments, the corpses conducting their own epitaphs" (75). The kingdom of Isidora exists alongside the real world as its uncanny double, and there are secret passages that can take one there. Such a passage is found by a little girl from Earth who brings with her "words and thoughts and memories," showing Isidorans how "to remember, to think, and to speak" (201). The new skills lead them to try to understand death and, because of the different opinions on the nature of the Total Memory which they claim follows the end of life, the War of Isidora breaks out. Some Isidorans see the Total Memory as a "reunion with all they ha[ve] lost," others hold it tantamount to shedding "one's self into something far greater," and still others argue that "the afterlife [is] identical to life, with the exception that all other Isidorans' motives and desires and needs [are] known and so there [can] never be misunderstandings" (201). In the midst of the war, there appears another group of Isidorans who dream, "instead of Total Memory, of no memory at all" and of "a return to the blissful amnesia of Isidora's past" (201). Desiring "to discover a way to forget" (237), they form the Amnesia Club and restore Isidora in microcosm by placing their children in a secret cave, with no memory of their land. This Isidora "in miniature" that is "buried deep underground" (238) is visited once in a generation by an outsider in order to choose a boy or a girl to carry "the Great Burden" and "to be the only descendant of the Amnesia Club to remain with the memory of it all, to take sole responsibility for seeing that those hidden underground [are] protected and left alone" (237).

The "idea of Isidora," as *The Story of Forgetting* claims, "has always been as important as Isidora itself," since without it, we would be left "blind to fumble and crash about our things" (292). This reversed image of the real world provides both the imaginative space to tell the stories of those who can no longer remember and a different idiom to recount the discoveries of science. The stories of Jamie, her son's search for her genetic history, and her father's family curse are situated alongside those of neurological malfunctions, including that of "a German woman, named Auguste D., who came into the office of Dr. Alois Alzheimer and explained to the doctor, 'I have lost myself'" (50).

The novel gives Alzheimer's a (family) history, positioning it between the cases of the famous amnesiac Henry Molaison, who lost the ability to make new memories after a brain surgery in 1953, but kept "all of his memories before the surgery perfectly intact, his mind frozen in an endless present" (80), and of Solomon Shereshevsky, who could "remember everything," but could not "find patterns in anything" (80) and to whom theorists refer "to support the hypothesis that our success as a species is based as much, if not more, on our ability to forget than on our ability to remember" (81). It also gives Alzheimer's a context, setting it against such disorders as Cotard's syndrome, the Fregoli delusion, "forms of coma in which sufferers are conscious and receptive yet totally unable to respond externally," and adrenoleukodystrophy (81). From the perspective of the various malfunctions listed in the novel, the concept of memory itself becomes hard to define, and the difficulty is reinforced by the fact that "new forms of memory [are] invented all the time: instinctual memory, procedural memory, sensory memory, short-term memory" (240), or, most importantly perhaps, transactive memory (212), where the task of encoding, preserving and recalling memories becomes a shared, and not individual responsibility.

Describing the "aesthetic sensation a reader gets from the neuronovel," Roth states that it "is not the pleasure of finding the general in the particular, but a frustration born of the defeat of the metaphoric impulse" (2009). The multiplicity of stories that span centuries and that are woven around an individual suffering from Alzheimer's in *The Story of Forgetting*, or the fact that the story of Eileen's husband in *We Are Not Ourselves* is a part of the history of her family that covers several decades, seem to question this description. Additionally, Alzheimer's fiction can be seen as an example of the social novel, using the description of individual problems to form communities both within and without the books, thereby finding the general in the particular. This movement is repeated in the novels' presentation of the relation between memory and identity, where the responsibility to preserve the forgetting self and its memories is relocated onto others. The communities in and outside the novels are frequently constructed around scientists and science, thus emphasising its growing importance, but also moving towards dissolving the boundaries between science and literature which, no longer incompatible, are both called for to describe and explain the process of dissolution. Even though, as Eileen states after her husband's death in *We Are Not Ourselves*, Alzheimer's may be the point where "science ha[s] reached the end of its utility" (Thomas, 569), it continues to be represented in Alzheimer's novels as a viable and important option. Significantly, *Still Alice*, *We Are Not Ourselves*, and *The Story of Forgetting* end with deaths but not with a rejection of science: Alice's husband continues his cancer research; Connell, Ed's son, becomes a teacher, like his father; and Seth ends his narrative as "a third-year graduate student in Marvin Shellard's Neurodegenerative Studies Lab," spending his days "taking measurements of what can be measured, gathering oral histories, entering data, correlating the findings" (Block, 309). This embracement of science, however, is not entirely optimistic, but is marked by a guarded hopefulness checked by the awareness of the limits of what can be measured, and the possibility of failure, driven by "a kind of informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism"

(Vermeulen and Akker, 5) that form the structure of feeling that dominates in the period following the postmodern.

The dominant sense of loss and weariness suffused with hope may be the best description of Alzheimer's fiction, inscribing it within the general mood that permeates contemporary cultural production. Lustig and Peacock write that the focus on neurological conditions in syndrome novels and their embracement of science may reflect a wider "paradigm shift in our understanding of the world and of ourselves" (5) towards "a new post-humanism, where certain kinds of value relocate from their old centre in 'man' and take up residence in complex systems like the bloodstream or the cosmos or the living environment" (11). This movement away from the "man" as centre is registered by the literature of Alzheimer's, which dissociates the locus of the self from the individual and moves it into more complex systems – generations, genetics, neuroscience, evolution, or, as in the case of the Isidoran earth which remembers, the living environment – to reconfigure dissolution as re-composition. This movement is also the guiding principle of Lance Olsen's *Theories of Forgetting* (2014), an experimental novel which presents the mechanisms of remembering and forgetting as an ongoing and inevitable process of de- and re-composition that is simultaneously entropic and productive. Olsen's book is composed of three parts: the story of Alana, who, while working on a documentary about Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, falls victim to the pandemic called The Frost, which causes gradual amnesia; the record of the slow disappearance of Alana's husband, Hugh, on a journey he makes after her death; and the comments of their daughter, Aila, which are transcribed across her father's manuscript and which are addressed to her brother, Lance. The accounts by Alana, Hugh and Aila are interspersed with photographs, some still and some in motion, and with quotes from famous critics and artists, including Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard and John Cage. Each page of the book is divided in half, with one of the stories printed upside down, and with one text running from front to back and the other from back to front. The linearity of the narrative is further interrupted by the fact that the book has no front cover, but instead features the same back page at its beginning and end. Accordingly, the choice of what constitutes the novel, how it is read and remembered, depends on the reader. *Theories of Forgetting* should be described as formed by a series of surfaces rather than by pages which, like memories, can be infinitely re-arranged and reconfigured. Subtitled *A Novel After Robert Smithton*, the book returns to the artist's most famous earthwork *Spiral Jetty* (1970) at Great Salt Lake, Utah, and to his concept of entropy in order to emphasize the ubiquity of progressive dissolution, also of the boundaries between science and art. Referring to physics, Smithton defined entropy as "in the first instance a measure of something that happens when one state is transformed into another" (21). *Theories of Forgetting* returns to this concept to re-present dedifferentiation and to theorize decay "not merely as a process of emptying and exhaustion, but also as one of relay & salvage" (Olsen, 99). The awareness of the inevitability of such transformation, as well as the constant relaying and salvaging of memories and identities, lie at the core of Alzheimer's fiction, which, like Seth's living environment in *The Story of Forgetting*, may turn into "a case study on the principles of entropy" (Block, 76), on the various ways of forgetting, and the possibilities of (literary) remembering.

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