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REMEMBERING/FORGETTING Vol. 2

Guest Editors:

Ewelina Feldman-Kołodziejuk,
Anna Maria Karczewska

EDITORIAL

As has already been observed by our colleagues, Sylwia Borowska-Szerszun and Tomasz Sawczuk, in Volume One of *Remembering/Forgetting* (Crossroads 14), memory studies have been gaining increased and unwavering attention for the last few decades. Even if Roediger and Wertsch (19) argue that “unless and until proper methods and theories are developed to lead to a coherent field, memory studies as a proper discipline may still be awaiting its birth,” it is impossible to deny their existence as a multi- or interdisciplinary field. Needless to say, the notion of memory has always lain at the heart of humanities and attracted the attention of philosophers, from Aristotle’s *On Memory and Recollection* to Maurice Halbwachs’ *La Mémoire collective* (1950) and Paul Ricoeur’s *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000), to mention but a few. After all, as Robin G. Collingwood (212) puts it, memory is “the mind’s triumph over time” or, as Jeanette Rodriguez and Ted Fortier (8) promulgate, “[w]ithout memory, the living of life would have no coherence at all.” Memory helps us survive as individuals, and also as groups or nations. As a repository of procedural knowledge, it guides us through the day without having to learn the already acquired skills anew, as is the case in Alzheimer’s or other memory-loss patients. As a collection of personal remembrances, it participates in the continuous process of identity formation and self-definition. The following passage by Astrid Erll (6) supports this view:

That memory and identity are closely linked on the individual level is a commonplace that goes back at least to John Locke, who maintained that there is no such thing as an essential identity, but that identities have to be constructed and reconstructed by acts of memory, by remembering who one was and by setting this past Self in relation to the present Self.

The term ‘memory’ opens up a wide range of interdisciplinary research, as it has been making its appearance in biology, psychology, and social, cultural, historical and literary studies. Literary texts provide valuable material for the classification of memory phenomena and play a crucial role in the representation of the past – from individual life experience to national history. Volume Two of *Remembering/Forgetting* discusses various aspects of literature and memory in literary works across genres and traditions, and yields a panorama of issues such as cultural memory, autobiography, herstory, female memoir, grief, mourning, trauma, amnesia, and voluntary and involuntary memory, among others.

Jadwiga Uchman demonstrates in her article in the current issue that reminiscing may be a distressing experience since some of the memories one cherished and wished to retain for future reference are inevitably lost or repressed by the later Self. In the retrospective view one’s aspirations and dreams, though frequently immature and naive, often testify to one’s failure and betrayal

of the past Self. As Samuel Beckett (13) proclaims, “There is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us.” Therefore, to protect oneself from disillusionment and a sense of defeat, while simultaneously granting oneself a sense of uninterrupted continuity, the present Self will employ a number of techniques to belie remembrances. Ultimately, as Rodriguez and Fortier (1) affirm, “Memory is the capacity to remember, to create and re-create our past.” Thus, to some extent every individual is their own writer/creator. The fact that “[n]ovelists also wrestle with issues of memory” for “characters in novels remember their past, so the memories created by the novelist must be realistic, neither too vague nor too specific” (Roediger, Wertsch, 13) is explored in the following issue by **Marek Pawlicki**.

Having mentioned individual memory, it is crucial to recall Maurice Halbwachs’ (43) dictum that “No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections.” In other words, individual memory is always dependent upon collective memory. As Lena Steveker (82) elucidates Halbwachs’ concept, “Although personal memory is always embodied by the individual, it is at the same time embedded in the individual’s social frameworks.” The way one experiences the world and views oneself is always conditioned by the social frameworks one is part of, whether through gender, religion, ethnicity, education, or economic status, among many. Drawing on Halbwachs’ findings, in the late 1980s Aleida and Jan Assmann introduced two new terms, namely, ‘communicative memory’ and ‘cultural memory’ to denote the repository of society’s recent and distant pasts, respectively (Steveker, 84). Jan Assmann (132) explicates the latter in the following terms:

[t]he concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity.

This notion seems to lie at the heart of Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Buried Giant*, a novel investigated by two authors in this issue, **Sylwia Borowska-Szerszun** and **Edyta Lorek-Jezińska**, though from very different perspectives. Referring to earlier literary texts, exemplified by *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Ishiguro testifies to the fact that literature has a memory of its own. Embedded in cultural frameworks, both writers and readers inevitably refer to former literary traditions. Their knowledge of literary genres, conventions or topoi, stored in memory, determines their creation and/or reception of new narratives. Moreover, rereading a particular text, be it a novel or one’s own memoir, engages the reader in the process of reminiscence, often enabling the present Self to gain access to the former Self, as is the case of Helen Macdonald’s rereading of Terence Hanbury White’s *The Goshawk*. The issue is widely discussed by **Anna Dziok-Łazarecka**. In *Affective Narratology* Patrick Colm Hogan (241) notes that readers may form “emotional memories” which are emotionally loaded remembrances spurred by the text itself. Interestingly, these second-hand literary experiences may prove to be useful in real life as they can actually affect one’s response

to particular life situations. Emotionally-charged remembrances of vital moments in one's life are absolutely indispensable in memoir writing. These either auspicious or critical life events demarcate the line of a life narrative, enhancing its sincerity, for, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (270) emphasizes in *Confessions*, "I may make factual omissions, transpositions, errors in dates; but I cannot be mistaken about what I felt, nor about what my feelings led me to do." Despite the fact that "memoirs are written late in life, sometimes without the aid of diaries or notes, so their veracity (especially of distant recollections of complex events) may be questioned" (Roediger, Wertsch, 12), as a literary genre they are compelling examples of identity formation. Since it is nothing short of a narrative, a memoir's "power resides in its ability to create, form, refashion, and reclaim identity" (Rodriguez, Fortier, 7). It becomes even more significant a step in identity formation if a thus-far male-dominated genre itself needs to be reclaimed by female artists, the phenomenon discussed by **Tomasz Sawczuk** with reference to the rise of female rock memoirs.

Remembering, however, is just one side of the memory coin, of which the other is forgetting. The loss of memory is often an individual's inadvertent protective response to a traumatic event. The erasure of trauma is supposed to defend the Self from shattering. Nevertheless, as **Magdalena Łapińska** demonstrates in her analysis of Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*, without the affective memory of the deceased the process of mourning can neither cease nor even commence. Historical amnesia is yet another face of cultural mechanisms which allow certain groups or nations to co-exist peacefully, though forgiveness does not, and perhaps ought not, necessarily equate to forgetting.

* * *

The articles collected in this issue beautifully exemplify the three approaches to the notion of memory within the field of literary studies proposed by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (2005), namely, 1) memory *in* literature, 2) memory *of* literature, 3) and literature as a medium of cultural memory. The articles by **Jadwiga Uchman**, **Marek Pawlicki**, **Edyta Lorek-Jezińska**, **Magdalena Łapińska** and **Tomasz Sawczuk** are primarily concerned with the first category, also referred to as the "mimesis of memory" (Erll and Nünning 2005, 265), as they focus on the ways in which memory, or its loss, are represented in literary texts. The essay by **Anna Dziok-Łazarecka** exemplifies how authors engage in a dialogue with other writers often on multiple levels, that of a reader, a scholar and a writer. Last but not least, the article by **Sylwia Borowska-Szerszun** consciously explores both the notion of "memory of literature" as well as "literature as a medium of cultural memory". Though the texts analyzed by the aforementioned authors seemingly differ, ranging from a play (*Krapp's Last Tape*), through a short story ("Envoy Extraordinary") and novels (*The Buried Giant*, *Fledgling*) to memoirs (*H is for Hawk*, three female rock memoirs), they all attest to the fact that "memories are not static representations of past events but 'advancing stories' through which individuals and communities forge their sense of identity. Or, to put it differently: memories offer heavily edited versions of the self and its world" (Caldicotts, Fuchs, 12-13).

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Voluntary and involuntary memory in Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*

Abstract. Even though *Krapp's Last Tape* presents a single character on the stage, it does not seem to adhere to the typical characteristics of a monodrama since, in fact, we become acquainted with three different Krapps. On the one hand, there is the 69-year-old Krapp visible on the stage, celebrating his birthday, and on the other, there are two more Krapps, who are not present physically, but only aurally – the first one existing as a voice on a recording made thirty years ago, and the second mentioned by the voice. These are his alter egos preserved on some tapes from the past. The drama presents the sameness and the change of Krapp over several years. At the same time, it deals with the concepts of voluntary and involuntary memory which are explained by Beckett in his *Proust* essay. The first kind of memory is dominated by a person's will to preserve certain things for the future. The remembrances, thus saved, are static and do not change with the passage of time. The tapes indicate what Krapp decided to commemorate in the past. As the play progresses the clash between the past, as he wanted to remember it, and the past as he actually recalls it, becomes evident. The present Krapp does not recall certain things, which were of vital importance to the past Krapp. The dynamic interplay of voluntary and involuntary memory seems to be one of the most intriguing features of the drama.

Keywords: Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, voluntary and involuntary memory.

Krapp's Last Tape (1958), originally entitled *Magee Monologue*, was written after Samuel Beckett had heard Pat Magee reading fragments of his fiction during a radio broadcast. The play was inspired by “the actor's distinctive whispering with its evocation of unrelieved weariness” (Cohn, 165). This short drama was later translated by Beckett himself into French, the title being changed to *La dernière bande*. Similarly, the German version of the play, co-directed by Beckett, was entitled *Das letzte Band*. The omission of Krapp's name in the German and French versions is indicative of Beckett's meticulous attention to detail, and his perfect command of several languages, all of which enabled him to take advantage of the specific quality of a given language to create concrete associations and meanings. The online *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines “scrap” as “a small piece or amount of something, esp. one that is left over after the greater part has been used”, and thus the protagonist's name, indicated only in the English version, may bring to mind

associations with scrap, which skillfully describes Krapp's impoverished identity and ongoing deterioration. What the play actually presents are scraps of information about Krapp as he is at present, at the age of sixty-nine, as well as bits and pieces telling us what he was like at the age of thirty-nine and even earlier, the latter being stored on the tapes he recorded in the past.

The play lacks the status of true monodrama even though on the stage we see only one person – Krapp celebrating his birthday and continuing his habit of commemorating this day by producing a recording indicating the most important events of the passing year. The structure and the overall meaning of the play are based on a number of binary oppositions: listening and not listening, separation and reconciliation, sameness and change, sound and silence, the Manichean duality of matter and spirit reflected in a specific use of light and darkness, as well as the presence of the sixty-nine-year-old Krapp and his past discernible in the metaphorical presence of the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp, whose voice we hear from a recording made thirty years ago. The last of these binary oppositions is the one presenting the past as Krapp wanted to remember it (the recordings), and the past as he actually remembers it now, that is the difference between voluntary and involuntary memory. The distinction between the two kinds of memory was introduced by Beckett in his *Proust* essay (1931), an essay about which Lee (196) writes: “Beckett's *Proust* has the double fascination of throwing light on Proust while revealing Beckett himself ... *A la Recherche du temps perdu* serves as a sort of Rorschach test in which the young critic discovers his own fetishes and his own *bêtes noires*.” *Proust* is not really so much a discussion and interpretation of the famous French novel but rather an investigation of Beckett's own ideas concerning “Time cancer” and its attributes, “Habit and Memory” (Beckett 1987, 18). Writing about “the double headed monster of damnation and salvation – Time” (11), Beckett concedes:

There is no escape from hours and days. Neither from to-morrow nor from yesterday. There is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us. The mood is of no importance. Deformation has taken place. Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a daystone on the beaten track of years, and irremediably a part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. We are not only more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday.... The aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday's ego, not for today's.

... But what is attainment? The identification of the subject with the object of his desire. The subject has died – and perhaps many times – on the way. For subject B to be disappointed by the banality of an object chosen by subject A is as illogical as to expect one's hunger to be dissipated by the spectacle of Uncle eating his dinner. (13-14)

Beckett perceives human life as a constant struggle between the dull Boredom of a controlling Habit and the immediate perception of things as they really are, intrinsically connected with suffering, which is a punishment for “the eternal sin of having been born” (67). Memory, as described in the *Proust* essay, is strictly connected with, and subject to, the laws of Habit. Since all living

is Habit,¹ Beckett warns us that this filters our perception and distorts our view of reality. For Beckett, memory becomes conditioned through perception. Rather than serve us as a moment of discovery and contemplation of reality, it becomes distorted through awareness. “Strictly speaking we can only remember what has been registered by our extreme inattention and stored in that ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being to what Habit does not possess the key” (31). This kind of memory is called involuntary memory by Beckett, and it is contrasted with voluntary memory, which “is of no use as an instrument of evocation, and provides an image far removed from the real” (14), and which, furthermore, “is not memory, but the application of a concordance to the Old Testament of the individual” (32). Voluntary memory is

the uniform memory of intelligence; and it can be relied on to reproduce for our gratified inspection those impressions of the past that were consciously and intelligently formed. It has no interest in the mysterious element of inattention that colours our most commonplace experiences. It presents the past in a monochrome. The images it chooses are as arbitrary as those chosen by imagination, and are equally remote from reality. Its action has been compared by Proust to that of turning the leaves of an album of photographs. The material that it furnishes contains nothing of the past, merely a blurred and uniform projection once removed of our anxiety and opportunism – that is to say, nothing. (32)

The binary opposition of voluntary and involuntary memory is the structural kernel stone of *Krapp's Last Tape*. On the one hand, there is the past as he wanted to remember it (the recordings) while, on the other, there is the past as he actually remembers it (indicated by his reactions while listening to the tape). It could be argued that the play presents two distinctive moments in Krapp's existence. While the Krapp visible on the stage exists in the present, the one whose voice is heard from the tapes belongs to the past of thirty years ago. The latter's existence is limited to its aural aspect solely, and depends on the presence of the tape recorder, which enables us to hear the recollections and remarks of the younger Krapp. In this context it seems justified to concentrate on the tape recorder, a machine on the meaning of which Beckett made some remarks in his *Theatre Notebook*, written during rehearsals at the Schiller-Theater Werkstatt, in Berlin in 1969, featuring Martin Held. His memoranda read:

Tape-recorder companion of his solitude. Masturbatory agent ... Anger and tenderness of Krapp towards the object which through language <becomes> has become the 'alternen Idioten' ['stupid bastard'] or [erasure] the girl on the lake.

Krapp-tape-recorder relationship both fundamental and almost impossible to convey through the acting without descending to the level of the sentimental.

¹ “Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals” (1970, 19).

Tendency of a solitary person to enjoy affective relationships with objects, in particular here with the tape recorder. Smiles, looks, reproaches, caresses, taps, exclamations ... A little throughout. Never forced. Like many lonely people he tends to have an emotional rapport with material objects.² (Beckett 1992, 181, 205, 248)

The first of the above remarks indicates that the tape recorder is an object which, in a sense, becomes the Krapp from the past, or the girl recalled in the farewell to love episode. In this sense the machine revives the past and makes it alive in the present, as it were. On the other hand, however, the inanimate machine is the only thing which the sixty-nine-year-old Krapp has as his companion, and thus the protagonist's terrible solitude is underlined.

When the play begins we see Krapp

Sitting at the table, facing front,<> a wearish old man: Krapp.... White face.<> Disordered grey hair. Unshaven. Very near-sighted (but unspectacled.) Hard of hearing. Cracked voice. Distinctive intonation. Laborious walk. (3)

Having gone to the cubby-hole three times to bring the ledger, the tin boxes containing reels of recorded tape and, finally, the tape recorder, he sits down again:

KRAPP: *(Briskly.) Ah! (He bends over the ledger, turns the pages, finds the entry he wants, reads) Box ... three ... spool ... five. (He raises his head and stares towards the front. With relish.) Spool! (Pause.) Spooooo! (Happy smile. Pause. He bends over the table, starts peering and poking at the boxes.) Box ... three ... three ... four ... two ... (with surprise) nine! Good God! ... seven ... ah! Little rascal! (He takes up box, peers at it.) Box three. (He lays it on the table, opens it, peers at spools.) Spool ... (he peers at ledger) ... five ... (he peers at spools) ... five ... five ... ah! The little scoundrel! (He takes out a spool, peers at it.) Spool five. (He [stands up,] lays it on the table, puts it back with the others, takes up the spool.) Box three, spool five. (He places spool on machine, looks up. With relish.) Spooooo! (Happy smile. He bends {threads tape} on machine, rubs his hands.) Ah! (He peers at ledger, reads entry at foot of page:) Mother at rest at last ... Hm ... The black ball (He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.) Black ball? ... (He peers again at the ledger, reads) The dark nurse ... (He raises his head, broods, peers again at the ledger, reads) Slight improvement in bowel condition ... Hm ... Memorable ... what? (He peers closer.) Equinox, memorable equinox. (He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.) Memorable equinox? ... (Pause. He shrugs his shoulders, peers again at ledger, reads) Farewell to – (he turns page [and raises his head]) – love. (4)*

² The typographical note states: "Text between square brackets [] has been added to the original English text. Text between pointed brackets {} has been revised. A pair of angle brackets<> indicates that a section of text has been cut from the original English text" (Knowlson 1992, 2).

Even though Krapp has been looking for a concrete tape, much of the description on the ledger seems to be strange to him, and thus he is puzzled. At the age of thirty-nine he wanted to preserve by means of voluntary memory his mother's death – the black nurse – but also the black ball and the memorable equinox, the inscriptions about which now puzzle him. Thirty years ago he recorded the following text:

throwing a ball for a little white dog as chance would have it. I happened to look up and there it was.... I sat on for a few moments with the ball in my hand and the dog yelping and pawing at me. *(Pause.)* Moments. Her moments, my moments. *(Pause.)* The dog's moments. *(Pause.)* In the end I held it out to him and he took it in his mouth, gently, gently. A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball. *(Pause.)* I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day. *(Pause.)* But I gave it to the dog. *(Pause.)* (7)

Thirty years ago he deemed the scene with the dog to be very important, he thought that he would feel the ball in his hand forever, yet now the inscription on the ledger does not ring a bell. The situation with the memorable equinox is similar. In the past he said:

Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indigence until the memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when I saw the whole thing.

([Impatient reaction from KRAPP])

The vision at last. This I fancy is what I have chiefly to *([Violent reaction from KRAPP.])* record this evening, against the day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory, warm or cold, for the miracle that *(hesitates)*. *([KRAPP thumbs on table.])*... for the fire that set it alight. What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely – *(KRAPP switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, [mechanical with gabble, 2 seconds,] switches on again.)*

great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propeller, clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under it in reality my most – *(KRAPP curses, switches off, winds tape forward, [mechanical gabble, 2 seconds], switches on again.)* – unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire – *(KRAPP curses louder, switches off, winds tape forward, [mechanical with gabble, 4 seconds], switches on again, [lowers head].)* – my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us gently, up and down, and from side to side. (7-8)

Thirty years ago he thought the memorable equinox to be of extreme importance. Now the recording referring to this event infuriates him and he switches it off and rewinds the tape to get to the last point of the ledger entry – “farewell to love”: “I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on and she agreed without opening her eyes” (8).

Having listened to the “farewell to love” episode, Krapp goes to the cubby-hole for a second time to have a drink and then he starts to record a new tape: “Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that” (9). It is worth

mentioning that on the tape recorded then, he said nearly the same about himself “at least ten or twelve years” earlier:

Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp. The voice! Jesus! And the aspirations! (*Brief laugh {tape alone}.*) ([KRAPP looks at tape-recorder.])

And the resolutions! (*Brief laugh in which KRAPP joins, [without moving].*)

To drink less, in particular. (*Brief laugh of KRAPP alone.*) (5)

Looking from the perspective of both the thirty-nine and the sixty-nine-year-old Krapp, the resolution to drink less, taken by the twenty-nine-year-old Krapp, is ridiculous, as indicated both by the visit to the Wine-house in the past, and his going twice to the cubby-hole in the present. The sameness of Krapp despite the passage of time, visible in his addiction to drink and women, is balanced by the simultaneous change of certain elements of his psyche, thus reflecting the already quoted sentences from the *Proust* essay: “We are not only more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday” and “The aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday’s ego, not for today’s” (13 and 14).

Discussing the drama as “the alteration of solipsistic monologues,” Aston points out: “The disjunction between the ‘I’ present and the ‘I’ past constitutes the negation of a unified character history” (163). Krapp himself must be aware of the discontinuity of his self since on the tape he is recording on his 69th birthday he avoids using the “I” pronoun in English and French versions, as well as in the authorised German version (Libera, note 78, 647). This leads us back to Beckett’s essay on Proust, where he wrote about the novel’s narrator:

... and he thinks how absurd is our dream of a Paradise with retention of personality, since our life is a succession of Paradises successively denied, that the only true Paradise is the Paradise that has been lost ...
... and we breathe the true air of Paradise, of the only Paradise that is not the dream of a madman, the Paradise that has been lost. (26 and 74)

At the age of thirty-nine Krapp rejected love in favour of another paradise – his opus magnum. This paradise, however, did not materialize either, as his words on the present birthday indicate: “Seventeen copies sold, of which eleven at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas” (9). He finishes the present recording with the words “Be again, be again. (*Pause.*) All that old misery. (*Pause.*) Once wasn’t enough for you. (*Pause.*) Lie down across her” (9). Who or what do the words “be again” refer to? Are they a comment on himself, his beloved or the moments on the punt while parting with the girl? It is not easy to answer these questions, and the replies may vary. What appears to be clear, however, is that he seems to want to relive his past, the past which he rejected thirty years ago. In a letter to Alan Schneider, his friend who directed *Krapp’s Last Tape* and many other plays written by him, Beckett wondered what would have happened “if instead of sacrificing the girl in the boat for the *opus ... magnum* he had done the reverse” (Harmon 57).

Discussing the black-and-white juxtaposition in *Krapp's Last Tape* in reference to Manichean philosophy, Knowlson argues:

Krapp is only too ready to associate woman with the darker side of existence and he clearly sees her as appealing to the dark, sensual side of man's nature, distracting him from the cultivation of the understanding and the spirit. Krapp's recorded renunciation of love is then no mere casual end of an affair. (Knowlson 1976, 59-60)

After finishing the recording on the day of his 69th birthday, Krapp turns on the tape from thirty years ago and listens to it again attentively and motionlessly:

TAPE – gooseberries, she said. `I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on and she agreed, without opening her eyes. (Pause.) I asked her to look at me and after a few moments – (pause) – after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. `I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. (Pause. Low.) Let me in. (Pause.) We drifted in among flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, before the stem! (Pause.) I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side. (26)

A remark must be made here about the directorial change introduced by Beckett during the Théâtre Récamier production of the drama, stated in Jean Martin's annotated script: "after 'Nous restions là, couchés, sans remuer' ('We lay there without moving'), Jean Martin noted, 'il a la tête dans l'appareil. La joue contre l'appareil' ('he has his head on the recorder, his cheek against the machine')" (Quoted in Knowlson 1992, 33). The tape recorder, preserving the happy memory of the moments spent with the girl friend, in a sense becomes the beloved. Having described his rejection of love, a moving moment of tenderness in the past, Krapp continues his recording, now referring to the present moment:

(Pause. {Face frozen till end.})

Past midnight. Never knew such silence. The earth might be uninhabited.

(Pause.)

Here I end this reel. Box – (pause) – three, spool – (pause) – five. (Pause.)

Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance for happiness. But I wouldn't want them back.

Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back.

(Krapp motionless staring before him. The tape runs on in silence. [Slow fade of stage light and cubby-hole light till only the light [that of 'eye'] of tape-recorder.] (Curtain.) (10)

The stage directions added in the Schiller Theater production, referring to the fade out of all the lights except the magic eye of the tape recorder add, it seems, an extra significance to the

play. Thus the tape recorder, the tool by which voluntary memory becomes obvious, dominates the stage image now. It must be remembered, however, that the phrase “I wouldn’t want them back” is repeated twice. It might be argued that Krapp repeats this phrase twice at the age of thirty-nine because he wants to convince himself that he really means it. He wants to preserve in the voluntary memory the conviction that choosing the opus magnum and rejecting love is the right decision. Taking into account the behaviour of the sixty-nine-year-old Krapp, it becomes obvious that his involuntary memory has preserved a different opinion. This outlook may be supported both by his search for the “farewell to love” episode in the recording, listening to it twice, motionlessly and attentively, and finally putting his cheek against the machine. Most critics agree that the final image of the drama presents a beaten man who regrets having devoted himself to the pursuit of intellectual fulfilment over love. Knowlson contends that Krapp’s life is “ruined”: “the final confrontation between the younger and the older Krapp evokes, then, more than mere sadness at the inevitable decline that occurs in man. For Krapp shows us a man who is torn by conflicting forces and whose life has been ruined by this conflict” (1973, 90). Similarly, Morrison (64-65) contends

It is all too clear, both to the motionless man on the stage and to the audience, that Krapp *does* want them back; that he forfeited the only real fire he ever had (that woman moving gently with him) for the sake of an illusory fire of the imagination which did not produce an opus magnum but rather left him with merely a narrated residue of himself, repudiated yet intensely desired.

Katharine Worth (98) has labelled *Krapp’s Last Tape* a memory play, and rightly so. The play presents a kind of dialogue, as it were, of two (or more precisely three) Krapps. This dialogue can also be viewed as an exchange between voluntary memory (the recordings) and involuntary memory (the recollections of Krapp present on the stage). Sabine Kozdon (179-180), on the other hand, in her book *Memory in Samuel Beckett’s Plays. A Psychological Approach*, contends that *Krapp’s Last Tape* is not a memory play, and furthermore concedes that “...Krapp’s memory, which is present in two forms, seems to suggest a comparison with Proust’s *mémoire volontaire* and *mémoire involontaire*. Such a comparison is problematic, however, as no *mémoire involontaire* as defined by Proust can be found in this play” (179). This article may be considered a proof that this critic’s opinions are unjustified.

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Memory performance in William Golding's "Envoy Extraordinary"

Abstract. William Golding's fascination with history is evident both in his essays and his novels. In an essay titled "Digging for Pictures" he observes that one of the main driving forces in his work as an amateur archaeologist was his desire for "a connection with the past." Knowing Golding's preoccupation with history, it should come as no surprise that he is also deeply interested in the means by which people represent the past to themselves – both the distant past, which they did not witness, and the past that belongs to their subjective experience. The aim of this article is to analyse Golding's "Envoy Extraordinary", the third novella published in *The Scorpion God*. The article begins with the discussion of recollective memory, concentrating on the notion of "memory performance." It then applies this concept to the analysis of chosen passages from Golding's novella in order to show the relational aspect of memory. The discussion emphasizes the important role of emotions in the recollection process, both in spoken and written discourse: emotions make autobiographical discourse seem more authentic, and they provide narrative continuity between the subject's past and present selves. Those observations are made in the context of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, and Golding's autobiographical texts, most importantly, his essay "The English Channel" from his collection *The Hot Gates*.

Keywords: memory, recollection, emotions, Golding.

The Scorpion God and "Envoy Extraordinary"

In 1971 Faber and Faber published William Golding's book titled *The Scorpion God*. The three stories collected in this volume take place in the distant past and in remote places: the title story is set in ancient Egypt, "Clonk Clonk" paints a vivid picture of prehistoric Africa, while the last story, "Envoy Extraordinary," takes its readers back to the Roman Empire. The three pieces of short fiction have a common theme, which is that of scepticism towards the notion of history as a narrative of social and cultural development. As James R. Baker comments, "they [the stories] are neither tragic nor purely comic" (64); indeed, their distinctive feature is their conflation of tragic and comic elements in a narrative which is both playful and somewhat cynical. Golding himself, in an interview with Baker, made a telling comment on the book. In response to Baker's observation that *The Scorpion God* creates the vision of history as a comedy, Golding offered the following comment: "You can't change history. You can't change what's happened, but you can have a little gentle fun at its expense" (159).

“Envoy Extraordinary,” with its witty dialogues and surprising plot developments, is perhaps the most amusing of all the three works. It had first been published in 1956 in a book titled *Sometime, Never*, together with the short fiction of John Wyndham and Mervyn Peake. Two years after its publication it was adapted by Golding into a play titled *The Brass Butterfly*, which was staged in the West End, with moderate success. The story starts with the arrival of the Greek scientist and inventor Phanocles, who presents the Emperor with three discoveries he claims will change the world: a steamboat, a bomb, and a printing press. As it soon transpires, the first two inventions prove instrumental in defeating Postumus, an ambitious and cruel heir apparent to the throne. While the sudden death of Postumus is the fulcrum of the plot, much of the story is devoted to conversations between the Emperor, Phanocles, and the Emperor’s beloved grandson, Mamillius.

Despite the fact that “Envoy Extraordinary” is a rather light-hearted piece, it raises a number of topics worth examining in more detail. One of these topics is the process of recollection, especially the role of memory in the creation of individual identity. This article will place special emphasis on the significance of emotions in what will be referred to as “memory performance”. This phenomenon will be discussed in the context of such works as *Confessions* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Golding’s essay titled “The English Channel”. In the conclusion, general comments will be made on the role of memory and imagination in the interpretation of literary works.

The recollection process in “Envoy Extraordinary”

Since the notion of recollection has already been mentioned and will be referred to several times throughout this article, it is important to specify what exactly is meant by this term. According to William F. Brewer, “recollective memory” concentrates on “a specific episode from an individual’s past. It typically appears to be a ‘reliving’ of the individual’s phenomenal experience during that earlier moment” (Brewer, 60). Two elements of this definition must be considered here: first of all, the notion of “episode”, which suggests the narrative potential of a given memory.³ What will be referred to as the episode is a series of events which constitute a self-contained whole in that they can be narrated as a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Secondly, and more importantly, it is argued in this definition that such a recollection is “a ‘reliving’ of the individual’s phenomenal experience”. It will be demonstrated in this article that this experience is based on evoking a given series of events privately or in the presence of others.

The narrative nature of memory is strongly connected with its affective aspect. This connection is highlighted by Mieke Bal, who observes that narrative memories can be distinguished by the fact that “they are affectively colored, surrounded by an emotional aura that, precisely, makes them memorable” (viii). Taking Bal’s definition as a premise, it may be argued that the recounting of such

³ The term memory, defined as that which is remembered from the past (for example an image or an episode), will be used interchangeably with *recollection*. Depending on the context in which it is used, *memory* will also refer to the faculty of storing and recalling information from the past.

episodes from one's past involves the construction of a story and the evocation of emotions accompanying it, the two processes being intertwined and simultaneous. When the recollection process is carried out in the presence of others, there is every reason to introduce the notion of "memory rehearsal"⁴ or "memory performance."⁵ The notion of performance was used by Mieke Bal in the already-quoted study, in which she notes that "cultural recall is not merely something of which you happen to be a bearer but something that you actually perform, even if, in many instances, such acts are not consciously and wilfully contrived" (ix). What Bal argues in the context of cultural memory is also true in the case of individual, autobiographical memory. Individuals also have a tendency to "perform" their memories in front of others, which is to say that they describe and frequently act out their memories, counting on their listeners' reaction. This is not merely an attempt to impress others, but is an important part of interpersonal communication. Bal acknowledges this fact when she argues that "ordinary narrative memory fundamentally serves a social function" (x). The following article on Golding's "Envoy Extraordinary" will make use of Bal's observation, especially her insistence on the interactive nature of the recollection process and the role emotions play in it.

As mentioned, Phanocles offers the Emperor three inventions which he considers groundbreaking: a steamboat, a bomb, and a printing machine. To Phanocles' surprise, the Emperor dismisses all three, but reacts enthusiastically to an object which the inventor presented as a curiosity – a pressure cooker. What the Greek considered an item of interest and merely an addition to his work earns him imperial admiration and ultimately elevates him to the rank of ambassador. Why does the Emperor take such great interest in this object? The answer to this question can be found at the end of the story, in which the Emperor, putting the invention to the test, orders fish to be prepared in the pressure cooker, and then invites Phanocles to supper. It soon becomes clear that the Emperor has little interest in the administration of his kingdom, but is solely concentrated on the task of reclaiming his memories. In this pursuit he has already tried rereading books from his childhood in order to evoke the pleasure which he felt when he first perused them, but is now looking for a more intense experience. As he explains to his baffled companion, he sees in the new invention his chance to reclaim his past. The experiment seems successful, as the taste of the specially-prepared trout enables the Emperor to recall an episode from his youth. In the following paragraph, worth quoting in full, he describes himself as a boy lying on the bank of a brook:

4 The notion of "memory rehearsal" was used by Richard Walker. Walker and four other psychologists suggest five distinct motivations why people relive or "rehearse" their memories. The five different "rehearsal types" discussed are 1) Involuntary; 2) Maintain memory details (in other words, to keep the details of the memory accurate), 3) Re-experience the emotion; 4) Social communication (in order to share a given memory with others); 5) Understand the event (Walker *et. al.*, 762).

5 The notion of "memory performance" emphasises an aspect of memory which is not highlighted by Walker's notion of "memory rehearsal," namely the relational and interactive character of the recollection process. As this article will show, the recollection process, when re-enacted in front of an audience, can be viewed as a performance because its effects can be judged in terms of success and failure; in other words, the addressees of the autobiographical discourse can be persuaded by the truth value of a given recollection, or they may choose not to invest their trust in it.

It comes back to me. I am lying on a rock that is only just as big as my body. The cliffs rise about me, the river runs by me and the water is dark for all the sun. Two pigeons discourse musically and monotonously. There is pain in my right side, for the edge of the rock cuts me: but I lie face-downward, my right arm moving slowly as a water-snail on a lump of stone. I touch a miracle of present actuality, I stroke—I am fiercely, passionately alive—a moment more and the exultation of my heart will burst in a fury of movement. But I still my ambition, my desire, my lust—I balance passion with will. I stroke slowly as a drifting weed. She lies there in the darkness, undulating, stemming the flow of water. Now—! A convulsion of two bodies, sense of terror, of rape—she flies in the air and I grab with lion’s claws. She is out, she is mine—. (Golding 1987, 175)

The sensuous description strongly suggests that the dinner has led the elderly Emperor to a recollection wholly unrelated to the pleasures of the table, but the comment immediately following this fragment explains the scene: the old man is in fact reminiscing about a fishing trip during which he caught his first trout. The reader has good reason to laugh at this humorous denouement, but the Emperor’s excitement and admiration are in earnest. There is not a hint of irony in his acclamation of the pressure cooker as “the most Promethean discovery of them all” (Golding 1987, 175).

Interestingly, the Emperor makes no attempts to explain the significance of this episode to his companion. What is sought by the Emperor is the experience of reliving his past. He does so by re-enacting his memory in front of Phanocles, who, despite being silent and withdrawn, is given the important role of listener. The process of describing his recollection is also the act of its performance in front of his one-person audience.

The role of emotions in memory performance cannot be overstated, as they profoundly affect the temporal progression of one’s recollections. That intense emotions – be they positive or negative – have a decisive influence on the temporality of the episode recalled is convincingly shown in Patrick Colm Hogan’s cognitive study *Affective Narratology: The Emotional Structure of Stories*. By analysing the opening scene of *Anna Karenina*, Hogan shows the human tendency to organise recollections around emotionally charged details, such as objects or seemingly trivial, yet significant and consequential events: “In sum, our experience of time is not uniform. We encode experience into hierarchized units, organizing temporality first of all by reference to our emotional response” (66). Our tendency to dwell on emotional moments or “incidents” (32), as Hogan calls them, is also clear in Golding’s story. Indeed, the effectiveness of the passage quoted from “Envoy Extraordinary” largely depends on its uneven temporal landscape: the Emperor first slows down the flow of narrative time by focusing on a detailed description of landscape and then plunges the reader into action with shorter sentences, containing ellipses and words either denoting or connected with intense emotions. As a result, the reader is made witness to the state of waiting, rapture, and fulfilment, which the Emperor relives in the episode.

The process of performing his memory cannot be viewed only as the Emperor’s self-indulgent search for a powerful and emotional experience which will break the monotony and boredom of his life. Emotions have two distinct roles in the recollection process: first of all, they provide proof that the re-enacted scenes from one’s life are genuine; secondly, they provide continuity

between the subject's past and present selves. The first function of memory is best analysed in the context of Rousseau's autobiography, *Confessions*. In one of the most famous passages in *Confessions*, Rousseau pledges his sincerity on the basis of the emotions felt in the moment of writing. As he argues, his readers should not pay attention to the factual accuracy, but to the honesty inherent in his memoirs:

I easily forget my misfortunes; but I cannot forget my faults, and I forget still less readily my better feelings. Their memory is too dear to me ever to be erased from my heart. I may make factual omissions, transpositions, errors in dates; but I cannot be mistaken about what I felt, nor about what my feelings led me to do; and this is what principally concerns me here. (Rousseau, 270)

Rather than retrace events in his memory and relive emotions associated with them, Rousseau reverses this logic and chooses his emotions as the most important point of reference in writing his autobiography. In this task he turns to "the chain of feelings" (*îne des sentiments*), which he calls the "only one faithful guide" (Rousseau, 270). Commenting on the quoted passage, Suzanne Nalbantian draws the reader's attention to the word heart (*coeur*), which signals the emotional nature of Rousseau's memoirs. The use of this word, both in this fragment and others, has the effect of "focusing on the heart as the retainer of memory. Hence, if the heart is untouched, there is little memory" (Nalbantian, 28). Reversing this statement, it can be argued that if the heart responds with emotions, then the memories can be trusted. It can be argued that emotions re-enacted by the subject act as proof that the recollections are both significant and genuine. Since emotions are not prone to distortion or manipulation (As Rousseau argues, "I cannot go wrong about what I felt"), their sudden emergence demonstrates that the episode from one's life is trustworthy.

The logic which links emotions, memory, and autobiographical truth may be appealing, but it is also flawed: the emotions felt by the subject (writer or speaker) cannot be treated as an unambiguous connection with the past, because they may well be manipulated by the circumstances of enunciation. By the same token, distorted or even fabricated memories⁶ are capable of provoking strong emotional reactions. Despite these arguments, it is true to say that people have the tendency to invest more trust in recollections which are emotionally charged.⁷ It seems that this natural

6 In the interesting study *Remembering Our Childhood: How Memory Betrays Us*, Karl Sabbagh demonstrates how people distort their childhood memories or even appropriate them from other sources. Sabbagh concludes his study by stating that "all memory, whatever age it is laid down or recalled, is unreliable." He adds that those distorted memories demonstrate the considerable influence of our present subjectivity on the re-enacted past: "we sculpt our memories to fit within the outline of who we are, who we would like to be" (194).

7 Psychological studies have demonstrated that people have the tendency to invest more trust in emotionally-charged memories than in those which are not accompanied by emotions. Christianson and Safer, summing up the research of many authors, note that "the more intense the emotional event, the more confident one was of the memory" (222). It is worth adding in this context that Christianson and Safer also observe that emotional events are better retained in memory than non-emotional ones. For more information see the article "Emotional events and emotions in autobiographical memories" by Sven-Åke Christianson and Martin A. Safer.

tendency is what stands behind memory performance, be it in the shape of spoken or written discourse. Viewed in this way, the process of remembering is based not only on the feeling of trust that the subject invests in his past, but also on the contention that this trust can be shared by the listener/reader. In other words, what the subject seeks to share is not only his emotions, but also his trust in the veracity of the episode recalled.

The recollection process is also significant for the formation of the subject's identity. It can be argued that memories which are emotionally charged are considered significant for the subject, or "precious", to quote the Emperor in Golding's story, because they encapsulate crucial information about one's subjectivity. The emotionally-charged rehearsal of essential moments in one's life is strong proof that one's former beliefs, convictions, and actions – in other words, the conditions and circumstances that formed one's past self – are still an important part of one's current subjectivity. In other words, by performing his memories, the subject demonstrates the continuity of his identity over time.⁸ Viewed in the context of Golding's story, this act may be seen as the Emperor's attempt to overcome the distance dividing his past and present selves.

Performing his memories is one way in which the Emperor attempts to alter his subjective experience of time. Earlier in the story, he mourns the passing of the years, observing to his grandson, Mamillius: "Time slips through our fingers like water. We gape in astonishment to see how little is left" (Golding 1987, 118). While there is nothing that the Emperor can do to counteract the process of ageing, he can change – at least for a moment – his perception of time by imbuing it with subjective experience. That the Emperor is aware of such a possibility is demonstrated by the following words, which he directs to Phanocles before their shared supper: "If you can restore to me not the gratifications of an appetite, but a single precious memory! How else but by the enlargements of anticipation and memory does our human instant differ from the mindless movement of the nature's clock?" (Golding 1987, 174). The two mechanisms which the Emperor mentions – anticipating future events and looking back upon those which are long gone – have one important feature in common: they place the future as well as the past in the present moment of reflection/recollection, and by doing so they create the illusion – however momentary it may be – that the subject has command over his life.

A similar commentary on the role of memory in one's perception of time can be found in the already quoted study by Mary Warnock. Warnock refers to the theories of R.G. Colingwood, who in his work *Speculum Mentis*, published in 1924, argued that memory can be considered "the mind's triumph over time" (Quoted in Warnock, 135) because it is capable of evoking events in the past and making them part of the moment of recollection. Warnock concludes her discussion of Colingwood's work with the following words: "We turn our life into a story by remembering it,

⁸ A similar point is raised by Mary Warnock in her analysis of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. She argues that "the personality, the series of experiences and attitudes and emotions which go to make up one person, is not a coherent or continuously conscious whole, but fragmentary. Yet the broken and fragmentary self can be given a unity by the reliving of the past in the present" (Warnock, 99).

and any story, or history, is thus timeless; we can tell the story to ourselves again and again, and the truth it contains does not change” (135). While there is good reason to raise some objections with respect to Warnock’s argument – it is questionable whether the truth of a given episode really remains the same every time it is recalled – nevertheless it can be argued that the ability to tell and retell memories creates a precious sense of command over one’s past.

Memory performance in a narrative text

It was argued in this article that since emotions have a crucial role in the validation of the subject’s memories, a convincing manifestation of these emotions is of the utmost importance. The nature of this performance will necessarily differ in the case of a live description or re-enactment of events – such as the one described in the episode quoted – and a narrative text, for example an autobiography.⁹ Nonetheless, there is no reason to draw a strict boundary between the two, as certain notable similarities can be found. Indeed, it can be argued that the relationship between the two protagonists in Golding’s story can serve as a model for the author-reader interaction in a narrative text of autobiographical nature. The memory performance carried out by the Emperor is akin to that of an autobiographer, who tries to engage his silent audience, represented here by the passive and withdrawn Phanocles, with a description of episodes from his past. The image of autobiography which emerges from this short comment is that of an experiential narrative,¹⁰ in which the author performs his memories in front of his readers, counting on their emotional reaction.

An interesting insight into the role of emotions in autobiographical narrative is offered by Jean Starobinski in his seminal essay “The Style of Autobiography”. In this study Starobinski raises a similar point, namely that emotions have for Rousseau the crucial role of confirming the authenticity of his autobiographical narrative. He writes: “the veracity of the narrative must be demonstrated with reference to intimate feeling, to the strict contemporaneity of emotions communicated in the writing” (81). Similarly to the protagonist of Golding’s story, Rousseau describes his memories by concentrating on the emotions he once felt, and proving that they still have the power to affect him. Whereas the Emperor is given the opportunity to affect his listener directly,

⁹ In his article on the notion of performativity Ute Berns divides the phenomenon into two basic forms. The first is a performance which is “the embodied live presentation of events in the co-presence of an audience at a specific place and time” (370) (this is referred to as “Performativity I”). According to this definition, Performativity I refers to situations in the real world or a theatre performance. This notion is juxtaposed with a wider definition of performativity as “non-corporeal presentation, e.g. in written narratives” (Performativity II) (Berns, 370). The Emperor’s act of describing his memories and displaying his emotions in front of his one-person audience can be considered in the light of Performativity I – it is not unlike a theatre performance.

¹⁰ I am referring to the essay on autobiography “Full of Life Now” by Barret J. Mandel, in which the critic comments that autobiography is experiential in that it “shares experience as its way of revealing reality” (55).

Rousseau attempts to do so by means of a carefully crafted style of writing, whose purpose is to give the reader the impression of spontaneity and authenticity.¹¹

Memory performance in “The English Channel”

Memory performance is a notion which can be used in the discussion of Golding’s essay entitled “The English Channel.” The essay was first published in *Holiday* magazine, and later reprinted in his collection of non-fiction titled *The Hot Gates* (1965). It starts with his description of the English Channel, as seen from the window of an airplane. The view triggers a series of wartime memories, which provoke such emotions as apprehension and excitement. Taking care to suppress them (“After all, I am English. Mustn’t speak” (Golding 1965, 42)), Golding imagines himself addressing the passengers and telling them about his participation in the Normandy landings on D-Day. The short account – just over one page – concentrates on his experience on the night of the landings (5-6 June 1944). He describes his sense of excitement, responsibility, and fear lest he should fail to carry out his duties. This part of the essay ends with a short paragraph describing the targeting of a fighter plane and its destruction. Golding goes on to discuss the English Channel from the perspective of its geography, climate, as well as various stories connected with it.

“The English Channel” is interesting not least because it is so far the only published text in which Golding recalls the years he spent in the army. As mentioned, he imagines himself in the role of a speaker addressing his audience – his fellow passengers – and telling them about his war years. Despite his strong desire to share his memories, he decides to withhold them for the sake of what he sees as propriety. While the suppressing of his recollections highlights their confessional aspect – their intimate and emotional nature – it does not annul the communication situation he created at the beginning of the essay. Instead, the reader is encouraged to see himself in the role of listener and the addressee of his autobiographical discourse. In this way Golding creates a sense of spontaneity, not unlike that analysed in the context of “Envoy Extraordinary”. The intense emotions felt by the author in the course of the flight confirm the authenticity and the significance of his recollections. The affective aspect of his narrative also demonstrates that despite the passage of time, his war memories are still an important part of his identity.

The discussion of “The English Channel” will be concluded with a general comment on Golding’s strategy of narrating the past. Such essays as “The Hot Gates”, “Digging for Pictures”, “Egypt from My Inside”, and “The English Channel” have a similar construction: they are all based on the juxtaposition of the distant past (the Battle of Thermopylae in “The Hot Gates”, prehistoric times in “Digging for Pictures”, ancient Egypt in “Egypt from My Inside”, and D-Day in “The English Channel”) with a more recent one (Golding’s childhood in “Egypt from My Inside”, and his recent travels and fascination with history in the case of the other essays), or the present, namely the moment of writing. The to-and-fro movement between the time references shows the considerable

¹¹ Starobinski in his analysis convincingly shows that Rousseau’s style is calculated to convey the experience of re-enacting his emotions, by means of which the writer attempts to validate his memories.

influence of history on the writer's subjectivity – the fact that he sees the present coloured by his perception of the past.

The temporal organization of the texts mentioned can also function as a device by which Golding distances himself from the past. In “The English Channel”, having described the strong emotions he felt on D-Day, he returns to more recent times, commenting on himself: “I find him funny now, that young man with the naval profile and the greening badge on his cap” (Golding 1965, 42). This rule is at work both in the context of events which he witnessed and those which are known only from historical records. The essay “The Hot Gates”, in which Golding relates his journey to Thessaly in Greece and describes the Battle of Thermopylae, is a good example of this tendency. His detailed relation of the journey includes a visit to the site of the battle, in which to his dismay he finds that “history has not left a trace of scar on this landscape” (Golding 1965, 15). This, however, does not stop him from his task of imagining the historical event. The outcome is that passages of detailed and vivid description are combined with comments which point to the impossibility of knowing the past. As a result, the experience of reading the essay is that of simultaneous proximity and distance with respect to the past.

Conclusion: empathy and responsibility in the interpretation of literary works

The conclusion of this article will consider the role of memory and imagination in the reception of literary narratives. One of the most interesting studies to raise this topic is the previously-quoted *Affective Narratology* by Patrick Colm Hogan. In the conclusion to his study, Hogan reflects on the effect that stories, including literary narratives, have on the readers' subjectivity. He first notes that stories may affect readers by creating what he calls “emotional memories” (241) – recollections of intense emotions we felt in the course of reading a given story. Making sure not to overemphasize his point, Hogan nevertheless makes it clear that this impact, however limited it may be, can affect our attitude by conditioning our responses to particular life situations.

Hogan's second point, which is related to the first, is connected with the human capacity for empathy. The critic writes about “our willingness and ability to simulate other people's situations and thereby experience the emotions they [the fictional protagonists] are likely to be feeling” (243). He argues that narrative has a direct influence on the readers' empathy because it is capable of widening (as well as narrowing) our scope of “empathic associations” (244). Reading affects our imagination and appeals to our emotions, thus developing our ability to empathize with given individuals or social groups.

The notion of empathy described here, based on the reader's imaginative and affective involvement in the narrative text, is also present in Golding's essay, “Digging for Pictures”. Describing his work as an amateur archaeologist, Golding recalls finding the remains of a woman whose skeleton unambiguously points to the fact that she was murdered. Having made this shocking discovery, Golding describes a baffling sense of complicity and guilt: “There is a sense in which I share the guilt buried beneath the runway, a sense in which my imagination has locked me to

them” (Golding 1965, 70). Although the possible act of cruelty must have taken place in prehistoric times, Golding finds himself curiously implicated in it because of his emotional and intellectual involvement with the past.

Golding’s comment applies not only to the work of an archaeologist and historian, but also to that of a writer and reader. There is a sense in which the reception of the narrative text can be described as a sharing of emotions between the writer and the reader, not unlike that between the two protagonists of “Envoy Extraordinary”. An emotional reaction can consist in accepting or rejecting the writer’s vision, both of which necessitate the reader’s involvement in the events described. It can be concluded that the experience of reading is connected with the responsibility that the reader takes for the world they have created.

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The giants beneath: Cultural memory and literature in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant*

Abstract. Drawing on the approaches of discussing the concept of memory within literary studies, as delineated by Erll and Nünning (2005), this paper examines *The Buried Giant* by Kazuo Ishiguro as a site of 'memory of literature' and as a 'medium of cultural memory'. Reworking the well-known cultural motif of quest, Ishiguro's novel also evokes associations with the medieval literary tradition, especially *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and contemporary fantasy literature, understood as a mode of writing rather than a formula. It is also argued that by referring to a fictional past of Arthurian romances rather than historiography, the novel comments on the role of literature in creating cultural remembrance, becoming a specific metaphor of its processes.

Keywords: Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Buried Giant*, memory of literature, cultural memory, fantasy, J.R.R. Tolkien, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Ten years before the publication of *The Buried Giant*, Kazuo Ishiguro, who had written five novels by then, was described by Peter Childs as an author concerned "with individuals scanning their pasts for clues to their sense of identity, loss, or abandonment" (23). In a more recent study Wojciech Drąg observes that the narrators of Ishiguro's novels are motivated to revisit their pasts by the following desires: to tell about their loss, to forget or deny it, or to return to the time before the traumatic experience (2-3). In all his novels Ishiguro revisits the theme of memory, and he seems to be as fascinated and haunted with it as his narrators are with their past experiences. He does not, however, refrain from experimenting with different literary genres, employing the conventions of the detective novel in *When We Were Orphans* (2000), science fiction and dystopia in *Never Let Me Go* (2005), and fantasy in *The Buried Giant* (2015). This combination of thematic consistency and openness towards various literary traditions draws attention to the relationship between memory and literature, suggesting their inherent interconnectedness. As a novel that focuses not only on individual but also collective past, *The Buried Giant* is indebted to the genre of fantasy, which in J.R.R. Tolkien's understanding of its foundations draws so much of its inspiration from earlier literary and non-literary phenomena and is essentially mythopoeic.

The concept of memory, both individual and collective, has been examined over the last few decades from a variety of angles, proving that the field of memory studies is open to contributions from many different disciplines. This interdisciplinary character of research on memory is evident in a collection of essays edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (2008), in which various methodological perspectives and practices meet to examine the concept of cultural memory – an umbrella term used to refer to “the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts” (Erll 2008, 2). As one of the media in which memory can be ‘stored’ and through which it can be transmitted, literature has obviously played an important role in the representation of the past – from individual experiences to national history. A literary text, therefore, can be seen as a specific way of memory-making, contributing significantly to the ways in which the past is constructed. In fact, both literature and memory rely on similar processes of selecting, organizing and arranging individual elements to form a coherent whole, and these similarities include “the forming of condensed ‘memory’ figures and a tendency towards creating meaning through narrativization and genre patterns” (Erll 2011, 145). These peculiar meeting points can be examined in a more systematic way according to Erll and Nünning (2005), who propose three approaches to discuss the notion of memory within the field of literary studies. These can be broadly characterized as 1) memory *in* literature, 2) memory *of* literature, 3) and literature *as a medium of* cultural memory.

The first of these problems, also referred to as the “mimesis of memory” (Erll and Nünning 2005, 265), i.e. the representation of the nature, workings and functions of memory in literary texts, has been examined in the present issue by Edyta Lorek-Jezińska, who focuses on the psychological processes of remembering and forgetting traumatic experiences and their ethical dimensions in Ishiguro’s novel. However, the title metaphor of the ‘buried giant’ seems to refer not only to the repressed traumatic memory, which constitutes the main theme of the narrative, but also to the foundations that lie beneath its structural framework. This article, therefore, aims to examine the other ‘giants’ lurking beneath the surface of Ishiguro’s novel, which consciously plays with and reworks earlier literary traditions, including mythical, medieval and fantasy narratives, to reveal its preoccupation with the ways literature participates in the processes of cultural remembrance.

Memory of literature

If literature can metaphorically possess its own memory, literary texts can ‘remember’ other texts. Examining the memory of literature can thus focus on the recurrence of topoi and various intertextual relations as well as on the development of literary genres, perceived as repositories of cultural memory, which is in turn shaped by them. Importantly, the memory of literature does not rely on passive transmission as writing is “both an act of memory and a new interpretation, by which every new text is etched into memory space” (Lachman, 301). Such an approach to fiction is evident in *The Buried Giant*, which incorporates a number of well-recognized cultural motifs within its structure, as well as evokes associations with medieval literary tradition and resonates with contemporary fantasy literature.

Probably the most prominent of the motifs reworked by Ishiguro is the pattern of quest in its three interrelated manifestations. The first quest is undertaken by an elderly couple, Axl and Beatrice, to find their son, rediscover memories and, ultimately, face death. The second one belongs to Wistan, a virile Saxon warrior sent by his king to kill the she-dragon, named Querig, whose magical breath literally causes the mist that takes away people's memories. By slaying her, Wistan aims to remove the veil of oblivion from the community that has forgotten the traumatic experience of war, or rather ethnic cleansing executed by Arthurian knights against the Saxons. The last quest is an ambiguous mission of Sir Gawain, entrusted to him by King Arthur, to protect the dragon, whose lasting presence on the one hand causes amnesia, but on the other one ensures relative peace in a society which has forgotten its painful past. Such an organization of the plot clearly derives from mythological narratives, whose fundamental structure has been identified and defined by Joseph Campbell as monomyth – the universal pattern of mythological adventure or hero's journey, which can be divided into three key stages of separation (or departure), initiation, and return. In numerous myths worldwide, Campbell observes, “[a] hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (28). In this optimistic pattern of myth and fairy-tale, adopted in both medieval chivalric romances and numerous contemporary fantasy novels, the adventures of the hero in the fantastic realm are crucial to his spiritual, moral, or emotional development and eventually result in the well-being of the community at microcosmic and/or macrocosmic levels (cf. Campbell, 33). In *The Buried Giant* the basic pattern of monomyth is followed. The characters roam their way in pursuit of their goals while certain features of the semantically significant landscape stir their memories, bringing back chaotic recollections that are made sense of only at the end of the journey. Yet the novel stands in a dialogic relationship to the traditional narratives rather than repeats or recounts them, especially in its ambiguous depiction of the results of the accomplishment of the quest.

Axl and Beatrice fail to achieve the initial purpose of their mission as their son turns out to be long dead, but they do regain memories of their life together, including its harshest moments – Beatrice's unfaithfulness to her husband, Axl's subsequent anger, and the couple's reconciliation, which results from covering the problem with a veil of silence rather than forgiveness. This personal buried 'giant' leads to the suppression of another trauma when Axl, out of vengeance, prevents both of them from visiting the grave of their son and mourning his death: “It was just foolishness and pride. And whatever else lurks in the depths of a man's heart. Perhaps it was a craving to punish, sir. I spoke and acted forgiveness, yet kept locked through long years some small chamber in my heart that yearned for vengeance” (Ishiguro, 357). The “small chamber” in his heart, where the grudge has been secretly buried for years, is finally opened upon Querig's death, and Axl discovers that in the course of time, without even realizing that, he has finally managed to forgive his wife: “And I think now it's no single thing changed my heart, but it was gradually won back by the years shared between us... A wound that healed slowly, but heal it did” (Ishiguro, 357). Ishiguro's

message that time heals all wounds verges on the banal here; and yet the conclusion of the novel challenges reading his narrative as a truly “eucatastrophic tale”¹², which is for Tolkien “the true form of fairy-tale,” whose most important function is to give readers “the joy of the happy ending” and consolation (2006a, 153). No such solace is offered here. Having regained their memories and granted each other forgiveness, Axl and Beatrice are not true winners, and their victory brings little change to their fate. No matter how strong their love has proved to be, they cannot undertake the final journey together. The passage to the otherworld, envisioned in the novel as a mysterious island, where everyone “walks ... alone, his neighbours unseen and unheard” (Ishiguro, 350), cannot be shared. And so the novel closes with the image of a ferryman, whose name is never uttered but could be Charon (Greek mythology), Manannán (Irish mythology) or Urshanabi (Mesopotamian mythology), ferrying Beatrice to the island while Axl remains on the shore alone. Just as the quest, marriage and life end, the story reaches its conclusion, leaving readers with sadness rather than joy.

The implications of Wistan accomplishing the quest do not provide eucatastrophe either, which is emphasized by the image of the hero himself, who appears “overwhelmed and not in the least triumphant” (Ishiguro, 338) upon slaying the dragon. Although his belief in his mission is genuine and the reader is led to admit that “old wounds [cannot] heal while the maggots linger so richly” (Ishiguro, 327), the victory seems hollow. There is nothing heroic in his clash with Querig, which is sketched as a creature on the verge of death rather than a terrifying monster:

Her posture – prone head twisted to one side, limbs outspread – might easily have resulted from her corpse being hurled into the pit from a height. In fact it took a moment to ascertain this was a dragon at all: she was so emaciated she looked more some worm-like reptile accustomed to water that had mistakenly come aground and was in the process of dehydrating... The remnants of her wings were sagging folds of skin that a careless glance might have taken for dead leaves accumulated to either side of her. (Ishiguro, 325)

Here again, Ishiguro consciously diverts from a dragon-slayer narrative, which is typically based on a combination of the following elements: a fight to free a woman (e.g. the legend of Saint George), a struggle for treasure (e.g. Fafnir in Norse mythology), and a battle to save the slayer’s people (e.g. *Beowulf*). This departure serves to highlight the inherent ambiguity of the construction of Querig – a dragon that paradoxically embodies the power and perils of forgetting simultaneously. In Ishiguro’s take on the tale, the princess is freed from amnesia and given back her recollections but has to die anyway; the treasure of memories turns out to be a heavy burden; and the act of slaying the dragon is doomed to bring chaos not peace. Although one monster is killed, another one, probably even more ominous, is awoken:

¹² Tolkien understands eucatastrophe as a ‘good catastrophe’, i.e. an unexpected turn of events at the end of a story that appears to be doomed to a tragic ending. It prevents the unfortunate fate of the protagonist and offers joy, often mixed with tears. For Tolkien eucatastrophe does not exclude the possibility of sorrow or failure, yet ultimately constitutes a happy ending, and offers consolation, relief and a glimpse of truth about the nature of things (Tolkien 2006a, 153-154).

The giant, once well-buried, now stirs. When soon he rises, as surely he will, the friendly bonds between us will prove as knots young girls make with the stems of small flowers. Men will burn their neighbours' houses by night. Hang children from trees at dawn. The rivers will stink with corpses bloated from their days of voyaging. (Ishiguro, 340)

It is implied over and over again that while keeping Querig alive prevents justice and covers up the atrocities of war, killing her will result in perpetuating the cycle of violence and vengeance, rather than reconciliation. Thus, employing the pattern of myth or fairy tale serves to provide neither comfort nor a straightforward answer, but poses a difficult question about when to silence and when to confront the past. The once-upon-a-time, allegorical setting of the novel is in fact a conscious attempt to shift the focus of the narrative from personal to social past and from individual to collective memory. As a result, Ishiguro's tale refrains from pointing to any historical genocide and trauma, but simultaneously encompasses all of them within its scope. In terms of emotional involvement, *The Buried Giant* distances the readers from the characters, sketched as Everyman figures, *actants* rather than *acteurs* in Algirdas Julien Greimas' nomenclature, and yet it appeals to our perception of fairy tales as stories of universal significance and derives its power from them.

'Remembering' *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Still, the text that *The Buried Giant* 'remembers' particularly well is the late fourteenth-century chivalric romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* – a source of inspiration to which Ishiguro openly admits in an interview with Lorien Kite, referring in particular to the passages that describe the wanderings of Sir Gawain: "I particularly liked the fact that ogres were mentioned just in passing, as though they were like untamed bulls, an everyday hazard that Gawain had to contend with." The treatment of the fantastic element in the novel is indeed more akin to the handling of the matter by the Gawain poet, who simply observes "So many were the wonders he wandered among / That to tell but the tenth part would tax my wits" (ll. 718-719), than to the conventions adopted by contemporary fantasy novelists, for whom creating a convincing and elaborate detailed fictional world is usually a task of prime importance. In *Sir Gawain* the marvels and wonders are taken for granted as a natural setting of Arthurian Britain (ll. 24-25), becoming a part of its founding myth. Likewise, in *The Buried Giant* ogres, pixies, and dragons are a part of the world, yet no explanation of their existence or provenance is given, as if they personified what is unknown and inexplicable with no need for further details. Like the Gawain poet, who as Tolkien observes, "was not interested in the fairy-tale or in romance for their own sake" (2006b, 97), Ishiguro is not concerned with fantasy for the sake of the fantastic. It is interesting, in fact, that some reflections made by Tolkien about *Sir Gawain* in his lecture read like a valid commentary on Ishiguro's novel as well¹³.

13 This is not to suggest that Tolkien's lecture could have been among Ishiguro's inspirations, but to reveal a similar sensitivity of both authors, manifesting itself in their approach to the source materials that are creatively reshaped

One of Tolkien's observations on *Sir Gawain*, which can be applied to *The Buried Giant*, is that it is a "rooted" work "made of tales often told before and elsewhere, and of elements that derive from remote times, beyond the vision or awareness of the poet" (2006b, 72). Yet, such a rooted work never merely repeats the plots, motifs and symbols, but employs them to convey ideas important for a new audience, "the changed minds of a later time" (2006b, 72), which can differ considerably from those that have originally produced them. This comment seems to be crucial to grasp the nature of the correspondences and echoes in which these works are entangled. Although the Gawain poet inherits the chivalric tradition of the High Middle Ages together with "the air of the Faerie" (Tolkien 2006b, 83) and assumes a certain familiarity of his audience with the subject matter of Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Troyes, the narrative is not based on a single French original, but combines elements of different sources (Burrow, 79-80). Despite recalling this earlier tradition, *Sir Gawain* is a product of its own times and engages in the late medieval process of "morally corrective reworking" (Gilbert, 161), inviting both Gawain and the audience to reconsider the nature of courtly games and chivalric tests. According to Tolkien's interpretation of the poem, the whole tale is fashioned to depict a dilemma, structured as temptation and faced by the protagonist, who must choose between courtesy and Christian morality. Violating the rules of the courtly Exchange Game imposed by Lord Bertilak, who finally turns out to be the Green Knight himself, through accepting the green girdle from Lady Bertilak, Gawain manages to refrain from adultery and keeps to the 'real' Christian virtues, coming to understand that the rules of courtesy are not crucial for salvation (Tolkien 2006b, 89-95). Yet, there seems to be a certain ambiguity inherent in the poem that causes the ongoing critical discussion about its meaning. After all, Gawain himself is ashamed of his deceitful act and returns to Camelot wearing the girdle as a sign of his cowardice and failure to keep the promise given to Lord Bertilak.

In *The Buried Giant*, Sir Gawain, the protector of the dragon and collective amnesia, is an aged shadow of his fourteenth-century self – a geriatric knight wearing armour that is "frayed and rusted", in a tunic that "once white now showed repeating mending", with "several long strands of snowy hair [that] fluttered from an otherwise bald head" (Ishiguro, 119), which contrasts sharply with the figure of the young and vigorous knight glistening in red armour from the original. Supposed to keep peace by suppressing memory of the atrocities of war, his mission is, nevertheless, doomed to failure, which the readers are made to realize the moment they juxtapose his image with that of the virile Wistan. Ishiguro's Gawain does not wear a girdle that implies a diminution of his knightly virtues, yet the ambiguity of his moral code is well rendered in the two chapters that contain his "reveries", expressed as a first-person interior monologue, and distinct from the remaining part of the narrative in their stream of consciousness quality. The reveries reveal Sir Gawain to hold more memories than any other character of the novel, even though his recollections are chaotic and not structured into a coherent narrative. He is depicted as recalling his active participation in the genocide of the Saxons and seeing this act as the only way of preventing further war, yet a part of

for the needs of their narratives.

him does not want to admit the truth, even when he is openly accused of murdering the innocents. “A slaughterer of babes. Is that what we were that day?” (Ishiguro, 244), he wonders.

Relying on a certain arbitrariness fundamental to the original poem itself, Ishiguro’s reworking of the Gawain figure illustrates the author’s tendency to explore the problem central to his narrative from a variety of perspectives. Ishiguro’s Gawain is a loyal knight determined to fulfil his mission even in the face of death, but his attitude raises questions about whether his loyalty has been appropriately invested and whether his cause is indeed worth fighting for. There is also weariness in Sir Gawain, who fathoms the futility of his task and senses that his forthcoming duel with Wistan will inevitably result in his own death. The chapters devoted to his reveries purposefully stand out from the rest of *The Buried Giant* in terms of the narrative mode, which mirrors the flow of the protagonist’s thoughts. As such they illustrate one more aspect of memory making. If the journey of Axl and Beatrice can be interpreted as a quest for one’s own identity that requires dealing with individual traumatic experience, and the mission of Wistan as looking for justice and historical truth that has been suppressed, Gawain’s main goal seems to be to rationalize the violence committed in the past. The reveries, therefore, shift the emphasis from the depiction of psychological processes typical for victims who need to regain their past, to those employed by the perpetrators of violence to justify its use.

The fantasy mode

The relationship of *The Buried Giant* with the tradition of fantasy literature should be perceived not as adherence to the rules established in the popular literature genre, but rather as a (re)discovery of its potential for spreading the memory of literature akin to Tolkien’s creative strategies. As works written by a philologist and medievalist, Tolkien’s own novels are also immensely ‘rooted’ and imaginatively draw on a wide range of Scandinavian myths and sagas as well as on Old English and medieval literature to shape meanings for twentieth-century minds. More importantly, however, at the heart of his creative approach, underlying *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*, lies the concept of “sub-creation”, i.e. the process of building a Secondary World (with its myths, history, and geography) so consistent and coherent that it would command Secondary Belief (Tolkien 2006a, 139-140). In this context, the author of fantasy becomes a sub-creator, whose fictional world-building emulates the primary act of creation performed by God, and as such can offer Recovery, or “regaining of a clear view” (Tolkien 2006a, 146), enabling its readers to avoid cognitive stereotypes and rediscover the marvels and wonders of the primary reality. Tolkien’s mythopoeic activity is also aimed at providing Escape, which is not simply ‘escapist’ but understood as turning away from the problems of modernity (progress, mechanization, mass production, death) and directing attention towards the values of the past (communion with nature, stable order of moral values, immortality) (2006a, 151-152). Thus, his works lovingly embrace the fantastic to tell tales of courage and fellowship, temptation and resistance, fate and free will, sin and redemption, and above all hope. Tolkien’s grand project has definitely redefined the conventions of the fantastic literature, becoming a prototypical centre for numerous followers – some of whom limited themselves to the

nearly mechanical repetition of tropes and motifs while others proposed alternative and often polemical solutions. By the time of the publication of *The Buried Giant*, fantasy had become a popular genre, divided into numerous subgenres, theorized, and academically examined.

Kazuo Ishiguro's venture into this territory has caused a stir, inspiring a considerable discussion on the status of fantasy literature in relation to literary fiction, and made the author himself unsure of the reception of the novel: "Will readers follow me into this? Will they understand what I'm trying to do, or will they be prejudiced against the surface elements? Are they going to say this is fantasy?" (quoted in Alter). These doubts seem to imply that Ishiguro intuitively attempts to go beyond the surface elements of fantasy, aiming for something deeper and more all-encompassing. Rejecting the concept of 'fantasy as formula' that is defined by Brian Attebery as a certain commercial storytelling recipe "restricted in scope, recent in origin, and specialized in audience appeal" (2), whose success depends on predictability and consistency with other works marketed as such, the author of *The Buried Giant* fully embraces 'fantasy as a mode' that takes in "all literary manifestations of the imagination's ability to soar above the merely possible" (2), originally created as collective literature, whose symbols were shared by whole societies and cultures. Consequently, his novel may disappoint the readers accustomed to the high fantasy or epic fantasy strategies that have come to rely on elaborate world-building, fast-moving action, detailed descriptions of sword-fights, and magic.

Despite this *The Buried Giant* remains surprisingly close to the tradition of story-telling that lies at the heart of *Sir Gawain* and Tolkien's narratives, deriving its power from being rooted in earlier tales and yet telling them anew and shifting the emphasis to engage in moral or philosophical questions that preoccupy their teller. While *Sir Gawain* employs the formula of a romance to study temptation on a plane of Christian morality, *Lord of the Rings* examines the temptation to submit to the corruptive power symbolized by the One Ring. *The Buried Giant*, in turn, is fashioned to offer questions – rather than answers – on the temptation to forget, and explores moral and psychological themes we are more accustomed to being addressed by realistic or autobiographical novels and memoirs. The intended vagueness of the novel contrasts sharply with Tolkienian mythopoeic sub-creation, implying perhaps that Ishiguro strives for creating disbelief, rather than secondary belief. Consequently, *The Buried Giant* offers neither escape nor consolation, and if any clear view is regained or recovered on reading the novel, it concerns the innate ambiguity of all narratives that pertain to the past, exposing the strategy of silencing certain voices to highlight others.

Literature as a medium of memory

The choice of the novel's structural framework, derived from myth, fairy tale and medieval romance, seems particularly suited for exploring the issues pertaining to collective memory, which is after all perpetuated through literature as well. By referring to the legendary Matter of Britain, as reflected in the fourteenth-century poem rather than historiography, *The Buried Giant* seems to draw attention to the fictionalising aspect of memory-making. The manner in which Ishiguro adopts the elements for his tale mirrors the way both individual and collective memories are made. In the last chapter of the story it turns out that the narrator of the tale is the nameless ferryman,

the timeless death figure, who pieces the story together from the confessions of people he takes to the otherworld, represented in the novel by Axl and Beatrice. The boatman is the only person who can see the whole picture and give his tale at least a veneer of objectivity, which implies that no matter how important the memories are for individual identity, they will always remain subjective, fragmentary, and different from the collective ones, recorded as history. Taking into account that creating any narrative is a selective process, the reader is led to conclude that both individual experiences and collective past are subject to fictionalisation, narrativization and interpretation – the processes in which literary transmission plays an important role.

The quests undertaken by Sir Gawain and Wistan are mutually exclusive and may be seen as attempts to impose on the audience equally contradictory narratives, created by victors and victims respectively. The rivalry between the two knights can be then understood not only as a conflict between two different approaches to remembering the past, but also as a clash for the control of the historical narrative. While it is difficult to sympathize with Gawain's design of the past that excludes the victims' point of view, Wistan, who wins the duel, does not simply aim to add a new dimension to the existing tale. On the contrary, as a new victor, he intends to change history completely, eradicating all memory of the Brits, even from the landscape: "And country by country, this will become a new land, a Saxon land, with no more trace of your people's time here than a flock or two of sheep wandering the hills untended" (Ishiguro, 340). Lacking both historical monuments and narrative to testify to their past, the Britons will fall into oblivion, suffering from the same kind of amnesia that characterised Wistan at the beginning of his quest, and the whole cycle will probably repeat itself over and over again. Ishiguro recognizes that this is a perpetual process, in which the canon of "memory sites", understood as both geographical locations, cultural artefacts and literary texts, is never stable but subject to constant revision by groups who aim to assert their own identity through replacing, shifting, or revising dominant representations of the past (Rigney, 345-346).

Apparently distancing the readers from the narrative through its post-Roman background, episodic quest structure, symbolical characters and reliance on earlier texts, the narrative technique adopted in *The Buried Giant* paradoxically reduces the gap between its remote setting and modernity through exposing its own fictionality and fashioning itself as an oral tale. This orality is emphasized from the opening sentence by addressing the reader with the second-person pronoun: "You would have searched a long time for the sort of winding lane or tranquil meadow for which England later became celebrated" (Ishiguro, 3). Such a beginning forces the readers to identify themselves as familiar with this "later" England, yet eager to listen to the legendary story of its origins. At various points of the narrative, we are reminded that the tale is meant for a contemporary audience who notice that no attempt is being made at either representing historical reality or sub-creating a fully-believable fictional secondary world that would facilitate immersion in the story. Instead, the story-teller presents the fictional world in terms understandable to a modern reader, for instance when he compares "a tall fence of tethered timber poles" to "giant pencils" (Ishiguro, 53), or a village longhouse to "a rustic canteen" (Ishiguro, 83). Such a strategy

of inviting readers to visualize historically distant settings in terms of contemporary images is consistent, though not overused, and culminates when the narrator destroys the illusion of the audience being just listeners and makes them unnamed participants of the story that would inevitably take place in a different place at a different time:

Some of you will have fine monuments by which the living may remember the evil done to you. Some of you will have only crude wooden crosses or painted rocks, while yet others of you must remain hidden in the shadows of history. You are in any case part of an ancient procession, and so it is always possible the giant's cairn was erected to mark the site of some such tragedy long ago when young innocents were slaughtered in war. (Ishiguro, 305)

Drawing his readers into the tale while simultaneously distancing them from it seems to lie at the heart of Ishiguro's enterprise, indicating his deep understanding of the complexity of the role of a literary work in cultural remembrance. Certain texts, printed and reprinted over and over again, can be seen as more formative than others. Like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or *Lord of the Rings*, they become "textual monuments" (Rigney, 349), which not only shape our perception of the past and literature itself, but also reinforce the feeling of belonging to a given community familiar with these works in the present. Yet, as such they still remain open to new readings, adaptations and appropriations, becoming building blocks for new narratives. When a work built of such blocks emerges, it can actively participate in spreading the plots, motifs, and topoi in different media or to different audiences. It can also become a "catalyst" (Rigney, 351) that draws attention to the new topics that were earlier neglected. Such catalysing power seems to be inherent in *The Buried Giant*, which does not simply remake the earlier texts to make them more up-to-date with contemporary tastes, but refashions them to explore ideas related to contemporary psychology, trauma, and the processes of remembrance.

Conclusion

While *The Buried Giant* participates in reinterpreting an earlier literary tradition, it does not do so for the sake of intertextual games only, but is engaged in posing questions pertinent to philosophy, psychology and ethics. It actively 'remembers' and exposes the kernels of previous narratives, like the plot outline, a bold character, an image, etc., yet is not concerned with creating a fictional world that would be fully convincing to the readers. It remains a text that stubbornly lingers between fairy tale, romance and fantasy to draw attention to the ideas that have always preoccupied Ishiguro rather than the story itself, unveiling complicated relationships between individual and collective memories, remembering and forgetting, past and present. Instead of referring to a particular historical moment that would necessarily evoke emotional response, *The Buried Giant* universalizes its message to refer to all and any 'giants' individuals, communities and countries have buried and then, wittingly or not, uncovered. Simultaneously, by referring to the quasi-historical but essentially fictional past of the Arthurian romances, Ishiguro draws his readers' attention to

the role of literature in preserving, spreading and shifting the focus of cultural memories, the novel becoming a specific metaphor of the processes involved in cultural remembrance.

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Testimonies of absence: Trauma and forgetting in *The Buried Giant* by Kazuo Ishiguro

Abstract. In their *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, Felman and Laub associate the trauma narrative with a gap or omission: “The victim’s narrative – the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma – does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence” (Felman and Laub, 57). The event in which the traumatic experience is located cannot be accessed directly, but, as Caruth argues, “only in and through its inherent forgetting” (Caruth, 8). *The Buried Giant* by Kazuo Ishiguro begins with a hiatus expressed in the main character’s (Axl’s) realisation of the missing past that has disappeared from people’s memory. Embarking on a journey that proceeds across geographical and historical space, the narrative delves into private mental topographies and the post-apocalyptic debris. By trying to make sense of the landscape troubled by “inherent forgetting” and simultaneously testifying to “massive trauma”, the narrative of Ishiguro’s novel reveals the double process of coming to terms with loss and (the perpetrator/victim’s) traumatic experience. My objective is to examine the story of *The Buried Giant* as an instance of trauma narrative starting with an absence and a melancholic text revealing the complexity of the mourning process. In my study I primarily draw upon the narrative theories of trauma and its latency (Felman and Laub, Caruth), as well as the psychoanalytic concepts of incorporation and introjection (Abraham and Torok) to investigate the narrative and conceptual structures of loss in the novel.

Keywords: trauma, memory, forgetting, post-apocalypse, Kazuo Ishiguro.

Introduction

In his influential book *The Empty Space* (1968), Peter Brook described an experiment conducted by him to examine the significance of the audience’s attention in theatre. Brook explored the different ways of reacting to death and how they were affected by memory and historical knowledge. The director juxtaposed the intensity of the response to a fragment of a play about death in Auschwitz – *The Investigation* (1965) by Peter Weiss – with the lack of interest in a passage listing the names of the French and English dead from *Henry V* by William Shakespeare. Trying to understand why the audience felt so differently about the deaths in Auschwitz and at Agincourt, Peter Brook asked them about how long it takes for an event to become the past, or when a corpse turns into “a historical corpse”. Finally, the theatre director requested the audience to listen to the frag-

ment from *Henry V* again, this time trying to look at Shakespeare's text in the way they reacted to Weiss's – making connections between memory and history in the long pauses made by the actor. Spectators were encouraged to react “as vividly as if the butchery had occurred in living memory” (Brook, 29). By following Brook's suggestions, the audience was supposed to discover that each pause was pregnant with tension and emotion, making them aware of “how many layers silence can contain” (Brook, 29). Brook's experiment exposes two important aspects: the relation between the living memory and forgetting, as well as the significance of silence or ellipsis as a means of expressing the horror of war and “butchery”. Time can change the living memory of the dead into history, which can be exhumed to become meaningful by making connections to present atrocities. Silence evokes those connections between the past and the present: it becomes a testimony and points to a meaningful absence.

Although referring to a different historical and artistic context, Peter Brook's commentary on the living memory provides a significant background to the discussion of the novel published in 2015 by Kazuo Ishiguro – *The Buried Giant*. Ishiguro's novel investigates the complexity of forgetting and remembering processes, referring to the early medieval history of the post-Roman period in Britain. By investigating the memory of previous wars and traumatic events and amnesia, the novel comments on how each of them might be simultaneously destructive towards and constitutive of one's personal and collective identity. Ishiguro's novel begins with silence, which is gradually discovered to veil the buried past, whose traces disturb the peacefulness of amnesia. When aided by memory, the silent ground reverberates with the unbearable noise of battlegrounds, slaughter and suffering.

These aspects of memory and silence are also highlighted by the author in interviews. In an interview recorded for *The Agenda*, Kazuo Ishiguro explained why he decided to write a story set in 5th or early 6th century Britain. The time between the end of the Roman and the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon invasion was to him – and many historians – a blank period in history. This historical gap, as Ishiguro mentions, invites a number of speculations about the possible “ethnic cleansing or genocide” that occurred then. However, this blank space in history could in fact be a time of relative peace, leaving no trace in historical or legendary archives, which tend to prioritize historical conflicts over uneventful stability. The other aspect of memory and forgetting refers to the questions of what forces and violence are involved in creating peace and to what extent they can be kept under control. In the interview mentioned above, Ishiguro explains how universal the problem is, enumerating historical moments and political contexts of collective memories and their consequences, including North American slavery, Nazi collaborators, or Britain's colonial past, among many others. Ishiguro concludes the list with the statement that “There are buried giants in every society and these giants are going to wake up” (interview with Piya Chattopadhyay, *The Agenda*).

Thus the questions asked in the novel are essentially questions posed by post-apocalyptic literature about the trauma of survival and traumatic memory that persists beyond an end. *The Buried Giant* investigates the significance of traumatic memory on two levels – the collective one – affecting the integrity of the group and the peaceful co-existence of former adversary na-

tions or communities, and the individual level – having an influence on the integrity of one’s self and one’s relation to other human beings. The novel exposes the complexity and painfulness of remembering and forgetting processes and the ethical contradictions involved in them.

My objective is to examine the story of *The Buried Giant* as an instance of trauma narrative, starting with an absence and a post-apocalyptic text that positions the characters and the reader in the context of catastrophic survival and traumatic loss of memory. In my analysis I will primarily draw upon the narrative theories of trauma and its latency (Felman and Laub, Caruth), as well as the psychoanalytic concepts of incorporation (Abraham and Torok) to investigate the narrative and conceptual structures of loss in the novel. *The Buried Giant* by Kazuo Ishiguro begins with a hiatus expressed in the main character’s (Axl’s) realisation of the past that has disappeared from people’s memory. Embarking on a journey that proceeds across geographical and historical space, the narrative delves into private mental topographies and post-apocalyptic debris. By trying to make sense of the landscape troubled by “inherent forgetting” and simultaneously testifying to “massive trauma”, the narrative of Ishiguro’s novel reveals the double process of coming to terms with loss and (the perpetrator/victim’s) traumatic experience.

Trauma and memory

In their *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, Felman and Laub associate the trauma narrative with a gap or omission: “The victim’s narrative – the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma – does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence” (Felman and Laub, 57). In *The Buried Giant*, Axl, the main character, living in a Brittonic village, realises that the life of his community and his own is incomplete, that there used to be something more to it before, yet he cannot remember what it was. Firstly, it is just a subconscious intuition, but gradually Axl witnesses the moments of collective misremembrance or forgetting and can link these events to other occasions in the past of similar amnesia. Although the collective amnesia is attributed in the novel to the magic influence of the dragon Querig (the spell cast by Merlin at King Arthur’s request), as a literary device it primarily represents the mechanisms of the trauma narrative. The novel starts with the disconnected memories and incidents that seem to have no coherent meaning, because the main characters cannot create a coherent picture of their lives, missing large parts of their past and thus unable to make sense of the present. Because of the inability to remember trauma, the events and places appear in the characters’ experience as if happening for the first time. It is only after some time, when the influence of the spell decreases, that the characters discover the meaning of places and their own identities. What is significant is that the process is gradual and slow, starting from the details that can be safely accommodated within one’s psyche. Commenting on the Freudian concept of belatedness, Christina Wald emphasises that “the traumatic event as such has never taken place: the past is belatedly created through its ostensive repetition in the future” (Wald, 96). In Ishiguro’s novel we are confronted with a landscape that testifies to the atrocities and butchery of war, while the main characters are unable to read what it

signifies because of their inability to remember the past, or their avoidance strategies. We follow the characters in their prospective journey to extract the past from it. Each new place evokes stories told by encountered characters which later on turn out to be memories:

'For this house has witnessed days of war, when many others like it were burnt to the ground and are no more now than a mound or two beneath grass and heather.' ... 'What is it, Axl?' she asked, her voice lowered. 'You're troubled, I can see it.' 'It's nothing, princess. It's just this ruin here. For a moment it was as if I were the one remembering things here.' (Ishiguro, 47)

It seems that the very act of forgetting is the condition through which the past can be recovered without directly raising resistance to its horrors. An incomplete memory can be suspended in its innocuous form, as in the case of Wistan, a Saxon warrior dedicated to revenge, who experiences joy on revisiting the land which he believes to be visiting for the first time:

'We raced across fields, past lake and river and my spirit soared. A strange thing, as if I were returning to scenes from an early life, though to my knowledge I've never before visited this country... The trees and moorland here, the sky itself seem to tug at some lost memory.' (Ishiguro, 91)

As Caruth suggests, "[t]he historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all" (Caruth, 8). The event in which the traumatic experience is located cannot be reached directly, but, as Peter Buse argues in his study of Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, traumatic experience can only be accessed in "its circuitous returns" (Buse, 177). The narrative of *The Buried Giant* leads both the characters and the reader through the process of recovering memory that follows a circuitous path. The path is first delineated by sudden glimpses of remembered scenes and utterances that cannot be verified. It is only on the second or third occasion that memory of the event appears. At the early stage of the novel Wistan compares his awakened memories to "some restless sparrow [he] know[s] will flee any moment into the breeze" (Ishiguro, 123). When travelling in what should be a strange land to him, he realises that "at each turn it's as if another distant memory stirs" (Ishiguro, 121). On the collective level the novel juxtaposes those who, under the influence of the spell-induced amnesia, are ready to live in relative peace with their former enemies and those who manage to remember the past atrocities and treasure them so as to take revenge again. On the personal level, the conflict is between the belief in the importance of memories in human relations and the possibility of their destructive influence. In both cases the main characters' strategy is that of avoiding and bypassing the metaphorical burial ground.

The Buried Giant

The image of the eponymous *Buried Giant* activates a number of different reflections on the nature of memory and forgetting. In the meaning employed by Ishiguro in an interview, the giant signifies

the past violence and guilt that have been buried by force or consensus, sometimes to avoid further bloodshed. Historical amnesia seems to be the main condition on which the status quo can be preserved with all the benefits of social and political stability. At the early stage of the novel Wistan is wondering: "By what strange skill did your great king heal the scars of war in these lands that a traveller can see barely a mark or shadow left of them today? ... [I]sn't it a strange thing when a man calls another brother who only yesterday slaughtered his children?" (Ishiguro, 127). Towards the end of the novel Wistan cannot accept the peace "built on slaughter and a magician's trickery" or believe in the healing of wounds "while maggots linger so richly" (Ishiguro, 327). The buried giant, Wistan believes, has to be excavated to reveal the atrocities committed and deceptions practised by those in power to sustain peace. This is revealed in the flashback scene presenting the confrontation between Axl and Gawain after the battle. Axl accuses King Arthur and his knights of the unjustified and cruel murders of the weakest, and warns them against the hatred it causes in the enemy:

'News of their women, children and elderly, left unprotected after our solemn agreement not to harm them, now all slaughtered by our hands, even the smallest babes. If this were lately done to us, would our hatred exhaust itself? Would we not also fight to the last as they do...?' (Ishiguro, 242)

Gawain justifies the murder of the "civilians" by the necessity to eliminate the generation that is capable of remembering the battle and their fathers killed in war:

'Those small Saxon boys you lament would soon have become warriors burning to avenge their fathers fallen today. The small girls soon bearing more in their wombs, and this circle of slaughter would never be broken... We may once and for all sever this evil circle.' (Ishiguro, 243)

The burial of the past depends on the violent elimination of one or two generations so that no one will be left to remember what had happened.

The novel further complicates the collective meaning of the buried giant metaphor by adding a further individual layer to it. The paradox of amnesia is that some of the characters selectively remember only the negative aspects of the past, its violence and butchery, having forgotten sometimes the trivial reasons for hating other people or the affection they felt for those whom they now come to hate only. Brennus wastes his time by trying to defend himself against a childhood enemy, in a conflict which throughout the years has risen to enormous proportions because of having forgotten the original reason. Wistan discovers that beside hatred he also feels affection towards individual Britons when the spell no longer works on him.

The concept of the buried giant is also one of the central elements of the individual trauma discussed in Ishiguro's novel. It symbolically defines the nature of the relationship between the two main characters, the married couple Axl and Beatrice. The first occasion on which the buried giant is mentioned in the novel refers to the early stage of Axl's and Beatrice's journey. When crossing the Great Plain, the couple are careful not to tread upon the hill where the giant is buried, tak-

ing the longer route to bypass the dangerous area. In their private trauma of having lost their son, the buried giant might be seen as the externalization of the intrapsychic tomb that they built inside themselves devoted to their dead son. The concept of the intrapsychic tomb was developed by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok to describe the dependence of the bereaved on the lost object. The tomb or crypt stands for “the words that cannot be uttered, the scenes that cannot be recalled, the tears that cannot be shed – everything will be swallowed along with the trauma that led to the loss. Swallowed and preserved” (Abraham and Torok, 130). The lost object of love in fantasy gains almost an ordinary living existence inside the subject’s psyche. According to Abraham and Torok,

[i]nexpressible mourning erects a secret tomb inside the subject. Reconstituted from the memories of words, scenes, and affects, the objectal correlative of the loss is buried alive in the crypt as a full-fledged person, complete with its own topography... A whole world of unconscious fantasy is created, one that leads its separate and concealed existence. (130)

Neither Axl nor Beatrice can remember what happened to their son, nor can they verify properly the memories or fantasies they seem to have. A story of a voyage to their son’s village seems to be the only permitted way of addressing the trauma of loss and survival. It persists till the very end of the novel as a hope that is never fulfilled, based on their – and also partly the reader’s – repetitive re-invention of their son’s corporeal existence. Whenever another relatively young character appears in the story the reader expects him to either be their son or that he will lead the couple to him. The journey postpones the moment of completion, allowing the characters to avoid the confrontation with the past and the memory of death. Bypassing the burial ground makes it possible for them to sustain the illusion.

However, the memory of the son and the erasure of his death are closely linked with the way Axl and Beatrice remember their relationship. Finally, it seems that it is the fear of losing each other that drives Axl and his wife to support Wistan in his mission to put an end to the she-dragon Querig and her magic breath. Beatrice seems to suffer from abandonment anxiety, asking repeatedly whether Axl is still with her, seemingly reliving the original trauma of having been abandoned by Axl. However, as the mist of amnesia gradually lifts, it turns out that it was she and not Axl that left. The journey to the son’s village/grave is a fulfillment of Beatrice’s wish to visit her son’s tomb from which she was prevented by Axl as an act of revenge for her being unfaithful to him. Thus, the trauma of loss encapsulated in the couple’s search for their son functions as a displacement of the couple’s fear of and experience of losing each other. On the personal level the retreat of the mist reveals the suffering of both the perpetrators and the victims, and the changing roles that the characters occupy in their relationship.

The post-apocalyptic mode

Although post-apocalyptic fiction usually explores the future consequences of catastrophic events, the past presented in *The Buried Giant* bears many traces of the post-apocalyptic genre. Approach-

ing *The Buried Giant* as a post-apocalyptic narrative poses important questions of the past, one of them being whether the characters should attempt to decipher the meaning of the ruins which are left after the catastrophe. According to James Berger, “Post-apocalyptic discourses try to say what cannot be said ... and what must not be said...” (14). Heffernan describes Berger’s approach as one that demands identifying the absent event that led to the life after the end: “The post-apocalyptic narrative is a symptom that demands to be read in terms of its underlying traumatic history and the historical specificity of the event must be restored to interrupt readings of trauma as bloodless universal trope” (Heffernan, 6). According to Heffernan, Berger argues that “[t]he absent referent that haunts these narratives of rupture and ruin ... must be identified in order for us not to be trapped by them” (6). In other words, as Heffernan suggests Berger proposes reading “the remainder, the ruins of the world that persist after the unspeakable trauma, after its end” (Heffernan, 6). The post-apocalyptic landscape thus contains the traces of the story, and the obligation of the post-apocalyptic subject is to decode the elusive meaning that it contains, to trace the trauma and violence that has led to the catastrophe. Such an approach has much in common with Walter Benjamin’s understanding of history, in which the victor’s story is always based on violence and suppression: “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (256). In representing the victor’s story we construct history as a procession of victors walking over the bodies of their victims. The historical gap that stands for a peaceful period in history is seen as one that reveals its own barbarism. Heffernan approaches post-apocalyptic narratives differently – suggesting that loss coexists together with historical archive and cannot be as such identified – expressed in language. It exists as the element that keeps haunting the historical narrative but cannot lead to revelation (7).

The Buried Giant presents the tensions between reading the post-apocalyptic landscape for a specific historical description of the catastrophe that offers revelations about the past and the ambiguous, and contradictory space from which no single interpretation can emerge. The former is instantiated by Wistan’s attitude, whereas the latter approach is represented by Gawain. Wistan has the ability to read historical detail from seemingly unreadable features. He represents the belief in the possibility of extracting the original trauma and violence, of reading the post-apocalyptic landscape and debris to trace back the past events and preserve their significance as an element of one identity. Where others see a peaceful place, a monastery inhabited by pious monks, Wistan sees the “fascinating traces of the past” which are unreadable to others: “[t]he monks ... hardly know what they pass each day” (Ishiguro, 163). Wistan can hear and comprehend “what [the] walls whisper to [him] of days gone by” (Ishiguro, 160) and that is why he suspects that similar atrocities can still happen there. He tells a precise story of what happened in the fort, reading the traces left in the architecture:

‘Through this watergate would be let past, quite deliberately, a measured number of the enemy... Now those isolated between the two gates, in that space just there, ... would be slaughtered before the next

group let through. You see how it worked, sir. This is today a place of peace and prayer, yet you needn't gaze so deep to find blood and terror'

'You read it well, Master Wistan, and I shudder at what you show me.' (Ishiguro, 161)

Wistan then further interprets the story written in the architecture of the yard, now used by the monks as a gathering place. It was used to form a kind of auditorium in which children, women and old people gathered to watch their enemy die in agony – “to witness the invaders squeal like trapped mice between the two gates” (Ishiguro, 161). It is a pleasure they experience before they lose the battle, knowing that in the end they will be defeated:

'But they know that in the end they will face their own slaughter ... it's vengeance to be relished *in advance* by those not able to take it in its proper place. That's why I say, sir, my Saxon cousins would have stood here to cheer and clap, and the more cruel the death, the more merry they would have been.' (Ishiguro, 162)

Later on Wistan discovers another story of butchery inscribed in the awkward architecture of the old tower. Again this device is meant to cause as much damage and suffering as possible, inflicted by the losing party against their enemies. This time the enemies are trapped by fire in the high tower from which there is no escape. Wistan takes an opportunity to try out the way the tower operates when the soldiers searching for him arrive at the monastery, performing something similar to a historical reconstruction of the past catastrophe, reliving the trauma simultaneously as victim and perpetrator.

In contrast to Wistan, who tries to reconstruct a historical detail from the post-apocalyptic landscape, Gawain exposes the ability of the landscape to heal its wounds and conceal the burial grounds under a layer of greenery: “The bones lie sheltered beneath a pleasant green carpet” (Ishiguro, 327). The signs of past battles and atrocities are interpreted by him as a natural aspect of the cycle of life and death. The crimes committed recently are placed in the general historical framework of the past that is no longer available to them:

'Here are the skulls of men, I won't deny it. There an arm, there a leg, but just bones now. An old burial ground. And so it may be. I dare say, sir, our whole country is this way. A fine green valley. A pleasant copse in the springtime. Dig its soil, and not far beneath the daisies and buttercups come the dead. And I don't talk, sir, only of those who received Christian burial. Beneath our soil lie the remains of old slaughter.' (Ishiguro, 195)

Conclusion

I would like to conclude by referring once again to the problems raised by Peter Brook in his experiment. One of the questions that emerges after reading the above passage from the novel is “How long does it take for the bodies of the slaughtered to become just bones?” In one scene of *The*

Buried Giant the characters tread upon the bones and skeletons lying on the ground in the dark underground passage in order to escape from danger. The old burial ground evokes some degree of horror but no memories. Because of this the experience of walking on the old burial ground is manageable. The characters cannot relate to the bones; the stories they could present to the viewers are unreadable. The silence of the bones evokes no feelings or urgency of reaction.

The second question raised by Peter Brook in his experiment can refer to the consequences of Ishiguro's decision to set the story in post-Arthurian Britain. The corpses and testimonies of slaughter do not belong to the living memory of contemporary readers. They belong to historical or even legendary past. In such a distant setting the corpse certainly becomes something less and more than a historical corpse – a symbolic or mythical corpse. Setting the narrative in such a context seems to be a deliberate strategy to consider the processes of remembering and forgetting the past with a critical distance, exploring the consequences of trying to make sense of the catastrophe and trauma and the benefits and risks of amnesia, without taking the side of victims or perpetrators. One of the significant questions is whether and how the novel tries to establish a link between the distant times of the narrative and the living memory of its readers. It can be argued that such a link is established in the elliptical traumatic and open post-apocalyptic structure of its narrative, which involves the readers in the process of revealing the traumatic kernel to which it refers.

Finally, the manner in which *The Buried Giant* operates with silence and absence places its main themes among the concerns of what Clifton Spargo calls elegiac literature. As a melancholic text revealing the complexity of the mourning process, the novel employs silence also as a dissenting factor or critique (Spargo, 51) that makes progress impossible. Silence and absence testify to the mourning process that is not and cannot be completed.

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“I must fight, always, against forgetting”*: A journey through memory and grief in Helen Macdonald’s relational autobiography *H is for Hawk

Abstract. The article presents how Helen Macdonald, the author of *H is for Hawk*, undertakes the task of ordering ‘the archaeology of grief’ – uncovering strata of remembrance with past states of mind, forgotten events, emotions, and earlier perspectives. Because the book reveals the author’s strong sense of connection with nature, it is therefore classified under the heading ‘nature writing’ or ‘new nature writing’. This non-fiction autobiographical narrative is, however, primarily a personal journey where the narrator’s/author’s inner self is revealed through carefully orchestrated memories which form her as a protagonist. The narrative is a confession of how she struggled through the ordeal of mourning after her father’s death and how in order to cope with the trauma of loss she undertook the task of taming a hawk. The story shows how in the course of manning the hawk Helen begins to ‘forget’ or rather deny civilisation, social ties, her own professional duties, and how the obsession with bird taming takes her to the very edge of sanity. At the same time, however, it is the hawk that becomes a lifeline, a connection with the corporeal, the tangible, and the physical. Moreover, the narrator’s journey with the goshawk through English landscape becomes a catalyst for remembrance that belongs to public realm. And so, it evokes more lengthy reflections on environment, literary heritage, history, society, and relations between humans and nature.

Keywords: relational autobiography, mourning, nature writing, *H is for Hawk*, Helen Macdonald.

The memories are like heavy blocks of glass.

I can put them down in different places but they don’t make a story.

Helen Macdonald, *H is for Hawk*

In one of the first scenes of Helen Macdonald’s 2014 book *H is for Hawk*, Helen, the protagonist, travels to the Breckland region of Norfolk in East Anglia. There she spots a sparrowhawk. To preserve the memory of the sighting she takes a piece of reindeer moss, a “memento of the time” –

a botanical keepsake. As if shifting through the landscape required a material witness. Thus, memory is given a physical dimension; it becomes preserved in a tangible object, the recollection is embodied. The narrator calls this observation “candescent”, “irresistible”, and it takes her back to the time when she was little – a small watcher obsessed with raptors, rambling the countryside with her father in search of birds of prey (Macdonald, 9). Now, through the recreation of this past moment, the readers are allowed to enter the world of Helen, the adult. Unbound by spatial-temporal constraints, the narrator’s mind moves from physical location to another time, another consciousness, another way of seeing the world.

The above scene is suggestive of the extent to which Macdonald’s narrative relies on apparently random acts of remembering. The book’s generic affinity is quite elusive. On the one hand, it has added to the abundance of narratives which are presently labelled under the common term ‘nature writing’ or ‘new nature writing’. Even though many authors whose writing is thematically akin would rather discard this term (Macfarlane, 34). Macdonald’s account indeed demonstrates primarily her strong sense of connection with nature and landscape, in-depth environmental knowledge, experience in bird watching and concern for natural surroundings. The narrative is at the same time an autobiographical account of the author’s dealing with a personal loss and her own year-long, intimate travel inwards. “The writer of autobiography depends on access to memory to tell a retrospective narrative of the past and to situate the present within that experiential history. Memory is thus both source and authenticator of autobiographical acts” (Smith and Watson, 16). In its confessional form the narrative is intrinsically retrospective, and so its reliance on memory is unquestionable.

By setting Macdonald’s narrative within the framework of self-referential autobiography this article aims to discover how the author’s access to memory becomes an organizational tool. In reading the meanings of this intricate account, it further attempts to implement the concept of ‘relational autobiography’. Here, textualization of the author’s traumatic experience is realized by relating the self to the world of birds of prey. It is therefore through presenting the natural world of hawks, or rather one hawk in particular, that Macdonald participates in the process of literary self-creation.

Additionally, personal memory in *H is for Hawk* becomes a narrative strategy encouraging insights into literature, culture, history and society. To this aim it offers a literary academic reading of another author’s memoirs, namely T.H. White’s *The Goshawk*. This training account by another writer is yet one more act of ‘relating’ to another subject, which apparently diminishes the position of the solipsistic narrator.

Defining the genre – some problematics of autobiographical narratives

Linda Anderson, a literary critic and author in life writing, traces the origins of the term ‘autobiography’ to its first use by Robert Southey in 1809. She emphasizes, however, that other earlier uses of the notion are discussed by literary critics and points to the fact that its definition has al-

ways been a work in progress. In defining this self-narrative category, Anderson indicates its main distinguishing feature, namely the sameness of the author, protagonist and narrator. Additionally, autobiographical writing in its very act seeks organization and framing. It aims at ordering experience in the form of a narrative, offering “the possibility of alleviating the dangers and anxieties of fragmentation” (Anderson, 5). Furthermore, she demonstrates that the critical analyses of the genre have pinpointed “intention” as its other unique characteristic: the earnest intention to represent both the events and oneself truthfully. And it is this intention, she notices, that constitutes a connection between the figures of author, narrator and protagonist (Anderson, 3-7).

This intentional seeking of truth in the creative act of writing has invariably attracted critical interest. Many autobiographical theorists have investigated the tensions between non-fiction narratives, which attempt at documenting reality, and fictional acts of self-creation, which seem to subvert the former aim (Allister, 5-6). For in autobiography the quest for discovering objective truth is undermined by the authorial strategy of organizing, and consequently fictionalizing experience. The validity of self-referential writing was an important aspect by which the readers assessed the value of literature. For instance, in the nineteenth century any form of populism or commercialization at the expense of integrity would be unthinkable (Anderson, 8).

The currency of the above question persists in the twentieth century. In the 1970s, under the influence of Paul De Man, literary critics debate the generic affiliation of autobiography. One of the problems posed at the time is again the genuineness of life narratives. Can self writing be considered a non-fictional act? Or are all autobiographical texts in fact fictions? And consequently, is autobiography a separate genre at all? De Man concludes that it is “a figure of reading or understanding” of a text which inevitably camouflages the author’s own fictionalization (Anderson, 12-13). The complex problematics of the genre are also addressed by Roland Barthes. He further destabilizes it by questioning the unity of the self-narrating subject and by defying the text’s potential to reconstruct or restore the past coherently (Anderson, 70-74). However, even earlier the unity of the autobiographical subject had already been questioned by Virginia Woolf, who shifts the dominating central (masculine) “I”. In the 1970s and early 1980s other fissions within life writing emerge, prompting questions of ethnicity, sexuality, race and class (Anderson, 92-103): “autobiography becomes both a way of testifying to oppression and empowering the subject through their cultural inscription and recognition” (Anderson, 104).

The question of truth continues to remain an important constituent element of autobiographical criticism. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, influential critics in autobiography, conclude on the demarcation line between fiction and nonfiction in the following way: “A life narrative is not a novel, although calling life narrative ‘nonfiction’ ... confuses rather than resolves the issue” (Smith and Watson, 7). Yet it should be remembered that there are many features which differentiate life writing from a novel, and among the most distinguishable include the following. First, the author’s name merges with that of the narrator’s. Second, the narrator of self-referential mode must rely on his or her locality within the certain (real) time, space and culture they lived in or experienced (Smith and Watson, 8-10). Finally, rather than representing a fact or factual truth, life writing cre-

ates the truth of the narrative, one author's truth or, so the argument goes, "a shared [between narrator and reader] understanding of the meaning of a life" (Smith and Watson, 13).

The proliferation of self-referential writing has always called for making distinctions into types or modes of self-representation. In an attempt to address such abundance, Smith and Watson propose three categories: "life writing", "life narrative" and "autobiography". The first term is the broadest, and indicates any written form of explicit strategies of turning somebody's life into the subject, including biographies and historical novels. "Life narrative" is narrower in that it includes self-referential or self-reflecting techniques which evoke past events but endow them with present meanings, shaping present identity. Finally, "autobiography", which was earlier canonized as "master narrative" to represent universal truths about somebody's lifetime, was in due course subverted by postmodern and postcolonial critiques. It is now viewed as unsatisfactory and too inefficient to encompass the diverse life-narrating practices around the world (Smith and Watson, 3-4). True, the above remarks emphasize generic diversity. However, because it is a widely recognized fact that the types are mutually complementary and overlap in many respects, the following analysis of *H is for Hawk* will use the notions interchangeably.

Generic hybridity – between 'relational autobiography' and 'nature writing'

Mark Allister, in his book *Refiguring the Map of Sorrow: Nature Writing and Autobiography*, investigates how the genre of autobiography evolved in critical discourse to finally generate the so called "relational autobiography". Rooted in great founding texts such as Saint Augustine's *Confessions* (written at the end of the 4th century) or *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (published in 1782), autobiography was understood as an act of emerging identity, self-discovery and self-growth¹⁴. In his proposal of reading life narratives Allister indicates the expansion of the genre and its contemporary unquestionable status with literary critics. But, by his own admission, he does not wish to engage in the debate on whether autobiography constitutes a work of non-fiction or whether it is a form of fictitious construction. He chooses not to take sides in the controversy about the dissolving boundary between a real living author and the author created within the narrative (Allister, 21-27). Instead his focus remains on how the narrative subject has evolved to refer to the realm beyond the human self.

In the twentieth century the scope of reading autobiography was extended owing to feminist critique. As a result the process of self-identification and formulation of subject became more inclusive in that it assumed the existence of some other self (Allister, 14-16). Gender related criticism centred on the subject which was established in relation to some other presence, some other entity. This shifting of subject marked the emergence of 'relational identity'. The concept of 'relational-

14 The idea of individual growth emerged as a formal tool organizing autobiographical texts in the nineteenth century, but as early as in the founding autobiographical text St. Augustine's *Confessions* apparently insignificant moments become subsequent meaningful stages in personal development (Anderson, 19).

ity' emphasised the fact "that the boundaries of an 'I' are often shifting and flexible" (Smith and Watson, 64). The term was first proposed by Susan Stanford Friedman in 1985 to denote a certain type of self-representative mode in women's autobiographical writing. Characteristically, the shared identity with other women was contrasted with that of an autonomous individual (more typical for masculine writing).¹⁵ However, this narrower understanding of 'relational' writing was later disputed by Paul John Eakin¹⁶ and Nancy K. Miller on the grounds that formation of identity in childhood formative years included both autonomous and relational practices (Smith and Watson, 201-2). Consequently, the authors argue after Eakin, "because the assertion of autonomy is dependent on this dynamic recognition [of the intersubjectivity of identity], identity is necessarily relational" (Smith and Watson, 202). Therefore, any literary act of identity formation will be somehow relational. Finally, in the 1990s under Eakin's influence, the term "relational autobiography" gained in popularity and became pivotal in reading the life-writing genre (Allister, 15-17).

Following other readers of autobiography, Allister finds it too narrow to accommodate the multitude of memoirs, journals and diaries: "Traditional autobiographies depict through time and space a single self, undeniably the star of the show, around whom everything revolves. An artist asked to represent the subject of an autobiography would in most cases draw a portrait of the writer" (Allister, 19-20). In 'relational autobiography', on the other hand, in order to arrive at the state of "self-knowledge", the writer observes and resonates with the outer world and other people, usually family members.

Drawing from autobiographical theory, psychology and eco-criticism, Allister's inquiry seems much more selective. It concentrates on nature, that is the non-human other to which memoir writers relate in order to textualize their experience of mourning¹⁷. While a traditional autobiography narrates life events and covers a longer period of time, 'relational autobiography' concentrates on the personal trauma and on the act of grieving, the rite of passage he calls "the arc of mourning" (Allister, 2). It demonstrates how the moments of self realisation mark the drama of loss and how the literary act of writing becomes its testimony. Most importantly, emphasis is placed on the theme selected for the 'relational' other, namely the world of nature.

15 The polarisation towards 'relationality' versus individuality was further applied in differentiating native indigenous cultures (e.g. the native subjectivity of American Indians with the emphasis on kinship and community) from Western (European) autonomous subjectivity. Such binary oppositions, though, are held by some critics to be reductionist and simplistic. And while the 'relational' mode of reading is a useful analytical tool, it does not represent the diversity of any biological, ethnic or social subject. (Wong, 168-69)

16 As Smith and Watson (64) indicate, the notion of 'relationality', in a variety of forms, is proposed by the following critics of life writing: Nancy K. Miller ("Representing Others"), Paul John Eakin (*How Our Lives Become Stories*, 43-98), and G. Thomas Couser (*Recovering Bodies*).

17 In his critical analysis Allister selects five non-fiction narratives: Sue Hubbell's *A Country Year* (1986), Terry Tempest Williams's *Refuge* (1991), Bill Barich's *Laughing in the Hills* (1981), William Least Heat-Moon's *Blue Highways* (1982), Peter Matthiessen's *The Snow Leopard* (1979), and Gretel Ehrlich's *The Solace of Open Spaces* (1985). Whereas collectively the books reveal a number of themes, what they share is how the autobiographical act leads to the self-creation of the traumatized narrator and how it is realized through the introduction of nature themes.

Yet life narratives in which authors turn to nature have not so far received due attention within the sphere of literary criticism. One of the reasons behind this observation is that such texts have been largely typecast as thematic. Its 'relational' subject, nature, has pushed them outside the scope of autobiography into the category of 'nature writing' (Allister, 18). Another explanation, Allister continues, is in the cultural bias of literary academics, who are typically urban residents. Therefore, their interest lies primarily in textualizing the experience of culture and the human world. And this only augments the challenge of textualizing the "unfathomable" non-human sphere (27). Nature writers contest the dominant "relational view of humans" and traditional solipsistic human-centred autobiography, and write non-human others into the textual expression of their grieving experience (33).

While they write directly about nature (including humans), their self-creation becomes spiritual autobiography because only in that form are they able to transcend their loss. The tension of their narratives—and the alternation of voice—concerns the psychological swings between grieving and a hope that grieving is coming to an end. (Allister, 170)

Writing one's loss into a narrative by relating to nature effaces the author from the text. In this respect 'relational' life-nature writing poses an additional challenge for critical reading.

Obliterating personal memory, *unbecoming human*

In *H is for Hawk* the botanical Breckland reminder is accidentally the first thing the narrator looks at when she receives the call about her father's death. Previously a relaxed itinerant savouring the local landscape, she will later become a restless wanderer who roams the countryside in order to rediscover her shattered self. She will struggle to make sense of the world as she knows it but to no avail. The fragmentariness of remembrance, the accidentality of recollections, their unexpected and persistent reoccurrence are all elements she will have to learn to accept in the painful process of mourning. Then, shattered by her loss, she will set off on an inner journey in an effort to write or rewrite the self. The goshawk will become her companion, her breakout from reality, and for some time her only connection to the lost world.

The unexpected loss of her father prompts Helen into isolation and an obsessive pursuit of her childhood dream – birds of prey. Equipped with all the falconry know-how, and against the better judgement of friends, family and other experienced falconers, she purchases Mabel – a female hawk that she intends to tame, an aim difficult to attain even for professional hawk trainers. Early in the narrative the subject self is localized within the realm of feral raptors. First, the reader's attention is shifted to observe their brutal hunting ways. Then Macdonald presents the first step of taming the bird, called 'watching'. From this moment onwards Helen embarks on a psychological process in which she will purposefully forget her human world. In order to succeed at this mourning stage, falconers must discard their human ways and become invisible. It is a highly medita-

tive state in which the bird tamer concentrates on “not being there”. Because hawks are not social animals, they will not yield to constraint or punishment. So the bond between human and non-human is possible only through the positive lure of meat. But nothing seems possible at first as the bird is petrified by the fear of her human presence (Macdonald, 62-81). The narrator explains:

The space between the [bird’s] fear and the food is the vast, vast gulf, and you have to cross it together... Imagine: you’re in a darkened room. You are sitting with a hawk on your fist. She is as immobile, as tense and sprung as a catapult at full stretch. Underneath her huge thorny feet is a chunk of raw steak. You’re trying to get her to look at the steak, not at you, because you know - though you haven’t looked - that her eyes are fixed in horror at your profile. All you can hear is the wet click, *click*, click of her blinking. (Macdonald, 67)

The taming process involves, if only temporarily, renouncing the human way of seeing. It makes one freeze in time and realize the acuteness of the bird’s sense of sight. And if the eventual inter-species concord is to be possible, the falconer needs “very urgently not to be there”. What must come first, though, is comprehension of the fear:

The goshawk is staring at me in mortal terror, and I can feel the silences between both our heartbeats coincide... It feels like I’m holding a flaming torch. I can feel the heat of her fear on my face. She stares. She stares and stares... What I am doing is concentrating very hard on the process of *not being there*. (Macdonald, 66-67)

Macdonald’s detailed descriptions of ‘watching’ clearly demonstrate how conscious she is of the other, the non-human. The success of shifting her perspective, of going beyond the anthropocentric relies here as much on her expertise as on her (and the reader’s) imagination. It also demonstrates one feature of ‘relational’ life writing. The author effaces herself from the narrative. She is “not there” because she is taming the young raptor. Her absence, nonetheless, indicates the denial of her trauma. Being there would necessitate becoming a subject of the story and it would entail the admission of emotional suffering. The early stage of ‘watching’, watching the bird and watching with the bird, is primarily her implementation of falconry know-how. But it is additionally an organizational phase within the narrative which correlates the process of hawk manning with the process of grieving. The early stages of bereavement obliterate the protagonist from the central position within the narrative. ‘Watching’ diverts the reader’s attention from the solipsistic subject towards the world of the non-human. The readers, however, interpret this shift within the context of mourning, making sense of the way the narrative is structured.

In the course of the account, the narrator, immersed in bird taming, gradually dismisses her everyday responsibilities: academic duties as a fellow scholar at Cambridge College, prosaic household chores and any form of social interaction. Gradually Helen disappears from the world that she was part of until the traditionally acceptable axis which organizes common life dissolves.

Consequently, she will eventually suffer the professional and material losses of her career and house. Alone, with her phone unplugged, the house spattered with bird droppings and shreds of raw meat, she becomes “a hermit with a hawk in a darkened room” and “forgets how to speak” (Macdonald, 69-84). She engages in a journey of obliterating the outside world. Human memory becomes marginal, secondary. At the same time as protagonist Macdonald consistently marginalizes her narrative self. She reveals her subject position only as an observer. The reader is invited to follow into this human and non-human world but it is the bird that is centralized. Apparently, Mabel’s feral appetite takes precedence over Helen’s feeling of loss. Human “forgetting how to speak” is suggestive of how the author textualizes her inability to express sorrow.

The civil, domestic and cultural have slipped into oblivion, to be now replaced by the feral, wild and untamed. These indicate the state of perpetual inner anguish. The narrator strives at developing “the sixth sense”, at acquiring “hawk’s apprehension”. Her perception sharpens but she becomes easily alert or instantly agitated. The bonding process for both parties seems conversely related: “As the hawk became tamer I was growing wilder” (Macdonald, 108). In her present “visceral, bloody life with Mabel” she watches the bird kill and feed on its prey. This is an attempt at eradicating the human way of perceiving reality, including the residual human suffering: “I stayed out with Mabel, found it harder and harder to return, because out with the hawk I didn’t need a home. Out there I forgot I was human at all” (Macdonald, 186). Hunting with the hawk becomes a coping strategy of the bereaved. Human memory of loss is replaced with “hawkish things”, which now make absolute sense. It allows temporal reference points, such as the past or the future, to dissolve into the instantaneousness of the moment and be replaced with the hawkish reference points. The protagonist shares with other writers this need to dramatize the process of grieving. Likewise, “they seek experience that will divert them, or teach them, and then in the autobiographical act they discover and create a construction of that experience that is ultimately therapeutic” (Allister, 141). Of special significance are realistic accounts of hunting, which show Helen’s protectiveness towards the bird:

She is a child. A baby hawk that’s just worked out who she is. What she’s for. I reach down and start, unconsciously as a mother helping a child with her dinner, plucking the pheasant with the hawk. For the hawk. And when she starts eating, I sit on my heels and watch, watch her eat. (Macdonald, 184)

The above illustration figuratively obscures the perimeters of human and savage. Smith and Watson observe that when the self-creation of a subject evolves in relation to another, it is typically the subject that differs. So, the narrative self is formulated through disparity. But conversely, on other occasions self-identification can draw from similarities. It is the progression of the “constant placement and displacement of ‘who’ we are” (33). In her description of hunting Helen feels “the human below” the hunting bird. She reports the strangeness of this experience, the “splitting” as if time was “stretching” and “slowing”. In the narrative such are the moments of complete derealisation, of annihilating one’s place in material reality. In *H is for Hawk* the narrator’s identification

with the hawkish perspective alternates with her human perception. Both ways of self-positioning are ever-changing and demonstrate the narrator struggling towards self-awareness.

In such instances, Helen is slowly beginning to recognize that her mind has been slipping away. Such as the moment when she is invited to a summer lunch party at the Master of the college's house. Now, the centre of everyone's attention, surrounded by the elegant upper class intellectuals her late father used to admire so much, she experiences a moment of derealisation: "*I am the Fool, I think dully. I used to be a Research Fellow, a proper academic. Now I am in motley. I am not Helen any more. I am the hawk woman*" (Macdonald, 129). But while she loses the sense of reality or belonging, in the meantime the corporeality of the bird seems unaffected:

The hawk pulls on the rabbit leg. Wasps circle her like electrons. They land on her feet, on her nose, seeking shreds of rabbit flesh to take back to their paper nest in some nearby Cambridge loft... This summer lunch feels deeply unreal. Shadows of damask and silver, a photogravure in an album, something from Agatha Christie, from Evelyn Waugh, from another time. But the wasps are real. They are here, and they are present. So is the hawk, the sun at their centre. (Macdonald, 129-130)

The above passage illustrates the apparently contradictory paths the narrator takes in writing of her mourning. On the one hand, by taking refuge from the civilised world she comes to rely on hawkish ways of seeing. On the other, as narrator, she invites the reader to notice how impossible this refuge is in the long run. Living a feral life and attempting to empty one's mind from human perception is visibly at odds with the literary act, which involves logic, organization, finding patterns of cause and effect.

Meredith Skura, an author in psychoanalysis, explains that the grieving process involves moments of insights and self-awareness which occur throughout the mourner's process towards healing. Random or infrequent, they gradually accumulate to allow self-realisation. Finally the truth, the sense or the explanation emerges (Allister, 56). Apart from hunting descriptions in *H is for hawk* such moments of insight are marked by random acts of childhood remembrance. Consistently they relate to the non-human world and include, for example, the memories of numerous hunting trips. These recollections often evoke "killing things", "making death". Now the narrator's adult consciousness dissects her own complex perspective on hunting: "the vocabulary I'd learned from the books distanced me from death. Trained hawks didn't catch animals. They caught *quarry*. They caught *game*. What an extraordinary term. *Game*." (Macdonald, 160). Informed by years of falconry, the author reflects on how the language obliterates certain awareness, human sensitivity.

Paradoxically, while it is hunting that makes the narrator transgress the borders of humanity, it is also this very same act of killing that brings her back. She has already lived for months on the verge of the civilized world. She has also literally touched death and suffering and pain. She sabotaged her own life, bringing in self-destruction, isolation and self-annihilation. Now, by the instinctive decision to put Mabel's game out of its misery, she reclaims her own humanity:

If I didn't kill the rabbit, the hawk would sit on top of it and start eating; and at some point in the eating the rabbit would die. That is how goshawks kill. The borders between life and death are somewhere in the taking of their meal. I couldn't let that suffering happen. Hunting makes you animal, but the death of an animal makes you human. (Macdonald, 196)

The ethical perplexity of hunting moments finally restores in her the lost sense of reality. Through empathy she eventually regains her forgotten or obliterated capacity to feel, suffer, and be able to stop the suffering. At the same time, by accounting her violent hunting with Mabel, Macdonald achieves the level of realism which autobiography needs to reveal if it is to be credible. Because the therapeutic self-construction does not involve distortion of truth; in this case Helen's partaking in "making death" must expose the drama of killing. Characteristically, her descriptions are not emotional. In her struggling to arrive at autobiographical truth she resorts to the mode of 'testimony'¹⁸. Testimony entails relating the facts objectively without having to rely on personal commentary. "To testify, in its legal sense, is to produce one's speech or one's story as part of a larger verdict yet to be made. Testimony is called for in a situation where the truth is not clear, where there is already a 'crisis of truth'" (Anderson, 126). Beside the factual and informative aspect of falconry, the reader is likely to recognize the psychological truth within the narrative and is invited to make judgements. This further authenticates the hunting account.

Literary dialogue with the past

Throughout the memoirs, and especially when the protagonist is lost in those "dark days", the goshawk continues to remain the lifeline to the rest of the real world. Mabel, the bird, signifies corporeal, tangible nature. Suggestively, in the narrative the moments of physical proximity with the hawk are the ones which are void of memories. As if the anguished mind, which incessantly forces painful introspection, achieved the state of utter sensory concentration, the state of being present in the now; mind and body united in a single moment. No chasm between the physical and mental presence. The hawk is her "material reassurance", especially in the moments when the world is "unrecognizable".

However, beside the hawk, the narrative introduces one more intermediary with the protagonist's human awareness, one more 'relating subject'. And Macdonald now speaks not only in her capacity as a bird tamer but also as a Cambridge academic. Throughout her account she maintains a dialogic connection with another English author – Terence Hanbury White – best known for his fantasy novellas about King Arthur, such as *The Sword in the Stone* (1938) or *The Once and Future King* (1958). Macdonald's rereading of White's memoirs maintains her attachment to civilization, culture and history. But she states emphatically that her account is not Terence Hanbury White's biography. By way of explaining why she needs White, the author recounts her first

18 In broaching the concept of 'testimony' in autobiographical narratives Anderson (126-27) follows Shoshana Felman's book *What Does a Woman Want?: Reading and Sexual Difference* (1993).

encounter with his book, which pre-dated the current events by around three decades. At first the necessity to speak of him is rationalized by the simple: “because he was there” (Macdonald, 38). But weaving White’s journals into her own memories is illustrative of how carefully the narrator is working on creating her new self. In other words she is using the narrative as a healing tool to help her struggle through grief. The need to interpret it reflects the need to look for new meanings, and to organize and order the shattered reality. Apparently, telling White’s story means telling Helen’s story.

White’s much disliked training journal begins to haunt her as if demanding her attention, wanting to be reread. Her obsession with the other book, similarly to her hawking pursuits, diverts the attention of the mourning mind. Roy Shaffer argues from the position of a Freudian psychoanalyst that a traumatised patient needs to create new meanings, new narratives. A new explanatory story is needed in order to facilitate the healing process (Allister, 39). The first sentence in White’s diary lures Helen into her own past and into the cultural-historical moment in which White recorded his bird manning attempts: “It was a sentence from a long time ago, and it carried with it the apprehension of another self. Not the man who wrote it: me. Me, when I was eight years old” (Macdonald, 27). *The Goshawk*’s opening line incites childhood memory and imagination of which White has remained a part. By analysing White’s memoirs Macdonald indicates that she is now searching for new ways of seeing the world; her new reading is part of her own self-creation as protagonist.

Macdonald’s reading of *Goshawk* (1951) only adds to the intricate composition of her own book. White’s memoirs become the object of scholarly analysis. On the one hand, both training accounts are intertwined into parallel emotionally loaded stories clearly intensified by personal traumas. On the other, the chapters on White attempt to appear informative, reliable, objective. This is reflected, for example, by Macdonald’s use of endnote references. The discourse of academic interpretation has the effect of detachment. The narrator’s own self is decentralized again and replaced with White’s figure. Macdonald rereads the 1951 diaries in order to comprehend the famous English writer. White is therefore granted the status of ‘relational’ subject, and all other qualities of a protagonist such as history, motivation, family background and the socio-historical moment he lived in.

So from *H is for Hawk* the reader learns that T.H. White, tormented by his inner anguish, forsakes his teaching career at Stowe School in Buckinghamshire and retreats to a nearby cottage. He has only old-fashioned hawk training manuals on which to rely, and these are poorly informed. Nonetheless, he embarks on an attempt to tame Gos, his newly purchased goshawk. The taming quickly turns into breaking and, by all accounts, White’s narrative becomes anything but what bird training should present. It is a combat of human and “ferocious” other. In her introduction to the 2007 edition of *The Goshawk*, Marie Winn presents White’s strikingly controversial personality; his brilliance and talents, but also his eccentricity, propensity for competition, his obsession with control and self-control, and his willingness to subjugate the feral bird (Winn, x-xv).

Macdonald sets White's failures side by side with her own. Both accounts reveal quite contrary uses of avifaunal knowledge. Helen's enterprise, albeit emotionally driven, is submitted to rigorous falconry know-how. It involves technique, measurement, routine and distanced scientific rigidity. White's engagement in raptor training is dictated as much by passion for falconry as by his unpredictable impulsive reactions to failures and personal agonies. But what is at stake here is not merely addressing his deplorable mistreatment of the bird. White, embedded into her own life story, becomes her 'relational' other. Helen's story of mourning must inevitably entail understanding White's errant ways. Her Freudian explanation leads to the conclusion that by attempting to tame the hawk White was re-enacting, responding to painful experiences from the past, his troubled relationship with his parents, especially with the dominant father, and his suppressed homosexuality. His failures stemmed from inexperience in hawk taming and were coupled with an excessive desire to prove his own prowess. And also, paradoxically, with the constant unconscious drive to sabotage his successes: "He had taken something wild and free, something innocent and full of life, and fought with it. The cost of his mastery would be to reduce it to a biddable, broken-feathered, dull-eyed shadow of the bird it was meant to be" (Macdonald, 162). The compassion for the troubled man as she sees him through his diaries *The Goshawk* corresponds with Macdonald's disavowal of his manning methods.

The parts of Macdonald's own narrative in which she interprets White's text show how as author she carefully crafts the narrative self. Without emphasizing her own perspective, she balances the triple auto-representation of Helen: an experienced hawk trainer, a distanced literary critic and, conversely, an emotionally engaged mourning daughter. The temporary self effacement of the author in order to present a more scientific view of the world is one of the features of grief narratives which relate to nature (Allister, 41-45). As an author of non-fiction, Macdonald cannot allow herself to fictionalize certain events. Additionally, her knowledge of falconry in fact limits her to objective analysis of White's erroneous training. But her ability to read the diaries again (she read them first as a child) is an act of finding new meanings. She first read them with innocent naivety, with the credulity that can be typical of any first reading of a text. Now, her interpretation is critical. She is looking for new answers and reads retrospectively. And in this act of reading she is returning to her own self when she was young. She is also returning to White's times.

To explore further the intertextuality in Macdonald's own memoirs, it is worth mentioning that her critical, distanced analysis is evocative of the term 'personal criticism'. The notion, proposed in the 1990s, denotes such reading in which the author reveals her or his own identity as a critic (Anderson, 121-26). The reading allows compassion for the analysed subject. Hence its limitations. 'Personal criticism' easily acknowledges the constraints of objective knowledge and its own right to err. Such is the analysis of *The Goshawk* within *H is for Hawk*. Here the very act of intertextuality achieves manifold aims. It first avows Macdonald's self-creation, admitting her own background in academia. Yet, paradoxically, by making her analysis 'personal', the author also subverts her own privileged position as a critic. Consequently, the reader's perception is diverted towards Helen the hawk trainer, or Helen the bereaved daughter. It finally results in

fragmenting identity. The reader becomes a witness of how the narrator struggles to reconstruct a coherent self.

Linda Anderson, after Nancy K. Miller, also points to the problems of locating the subject in ‘personal criticism’¹⁹, and more specifically to the origin of the subject’s authority. Can the subject speak of other authors without admitting his or her own “locatedness as a social subject” (Anderson, 125)? Can a literary analysis be void of the analyst’s own social standing, class or gender perspective, which tinge the very analytical act? While Miller talks about “‘autobiographical acts’ within criticism” (Anderson, 126), in *H is for Hawk* Macdonald introduces ‘critical acts’ within autobiographical writing.

Macdonald’s account demonstrates how the narrative subject locates herself in a social context. Her repudiation of White’s manning techniques goes further to extend onto the social system of the 1930s, which he belonged to and at the same time fell victim of. Macdonald frequently criticises the oppressive social relations of the era, its forceful schooling system and family relations. She emphasises the personal tensions which must have ensued as a result of excessive belief in authority, class privilege, male dominance and striving for perfection. She disdains that “aristocratic moral certainty” which advocated “ancient virtue” but suppressed and stigmatized any form of otherness (Macdonald, 281-82). On a symbolic level, on her own way to recovery, she finally visits the premises of Stowe school and White’s cottage. Initially tempted to go inside, learn more about her protagonist and “make him alive again”, she decides to the contrary: “I put [that thought] down, and the relief was immense, as if I had dragged a half-ton weight from myself and cast it by the grassy road” (Macdonald, 283). White’s ghost-like shadow memoir performs the function of a catalyst, which ultimately brings the lost sense of reality. It evokes as much critical analysis as compassionate understanding for both human and non-human. It is at the same time catharsis, the lifting of the “heavy block of glass” that memory is.

Mosaic of haunting pasts

In *H is for Hawk* various narrative threads are weaved together and then unfolded along the space-temporal journey towards self-realisation. But in addition to forming Helen as the protagonist of a private intimate realm, the carefully orchestrated recounting also becomes a catalyst for remembrance which belongs to the public orbit. On the narrative platform various literary, cultural, and social pasts intersect with the present.

An illustration of current social commentary comes in the following scene. On one occasion, a friend comments about the superb crafting of the falcon hood, the delicate object the narrator carries in her bag at all times. It is an entirely innocuous remark. Helen’s troubled mind, however, responds with a jumbled list of cultural and historical connotations:

19 In her book *Getting Personal* (1991) Nancy K. Miller discusses the limitations and potential of ‘personal criticism’. But rather than perceiving it as contrary to objective theoretical analysis, she points to how both modes of reading may become mutually complementary.

I shut my eyes and my head is full of hoods... I think of fetish hoods. I think of distant wars. I think of Abu Ghraib. Sand in the mouth. Coercion. History and hawks and hoods and the implications of taking something's sight away to calm it. *It's in your own best interest*. Rising nausea. There is a sensation of ground being lost, of wet sand washing from under my feet. I don't want to think of the photographs of the tortured man with the hood on his head and the wires to his hands and the invisible enemy who holds the camera, but it is all I can see and the word hood like a hot stone in my mouth. *Burqua*, the word in Arabic. Hood. (Macdonald, 94-95)

The authorial thoughts generate a mosaic newsflash where in the collective consciousness of Western readers the falcon hood becomes an instant signifier of dominance, oppression, torture. This organizational pattern suggests a lack of unity or coherence of the narrative subject (Smith and Watson, 71-75). The shattered suffering self produces fragmented images of the world falling apart. They are an individual's response to both personal and global instability. The process of textualizing one's suffering is demonstrated by the fragmentation of memories. The author offers merely vignettes into her former life as a social person. The interpretation of uncovered fragments is left to the reader, who makes connections and by observing comprehends the narrator's struggle out of depression (Allister, 40).

Macdonald is consistent throughout her diaries in using memory as a narrative tool to provoke observations which go beyond the personal. Here the act of uncovering strata of historical remembrance resembles unearthing geological layers: "The archaeology of grief is not ordered. It is more like earth under a spade, turning up things you had forgotten. Surprising things come to life: not simply memories, but states of mind, emotions, older ways of seeing the world" (Macdonald, 199). Macdonald's use of archaeology here is analogical to Freud's argument: the uncovering of fragmented memories may help in the healing process and may offer insight into the hidden problems of the past. "The analyst ... becomes an archaeologist sifting through memories and desire, careful to keep what is of value... [But] if we cannot recover the past, we can create it in order to make sense out of later symptoms" (Allister, 39-40). Macdonald uses memoir writing as a tool for recovering or creating her shattered past memories. Writing a coherent narrative may be an attempt to recreate past meanings but also to create new ones.

To provide insight into public problems of the past the author uses apparently accidental personal memories. She recollects, for example, her visit to a friend – the president of the British Falconer's Club. He presents her with an artefact that neither of them actually enjoys looking at: "He pulled open a cupboard, and there, right at the back, half-obscured by the usual household bits and bobs, I saw it" (Macdonald, 200). The "it" is a stylised statuette of a bronze falcon, an award sent to the British representatives from the International Hunting Exhibition held in Germany in 1937. The relic of an unwanted past was sent by Hermann Göring, who himself was known for taking great satisfaction from hunting with hawks. Falconry was the realization of power and dominance over the less fit – the embodiment of Nazism (Macdonald, 200-201). And it is this

very closeness to brute wild nature which served as an ideological tool for the Nazis to engineer Aryan supremacy and the purity of the master race. The evidence for racial supremacy came to be situated in the wild sylvan settings of the primeval forest. A nature myth came to play a part in the birth of Nazi ideology (Schama, 118-119). Clearly, throughout her memoirs Macdonald goes beyond striving towards self-realisation. Her personal memories become instructive, revisionary. She explicitly speaks against becoming obsessed with nature and transforming the non-human surroundings into a construct that may later produce lethal ideologies.

The collective response to landscape seems to be one of the many-layered concerns in *H is for Hawk*. In exploring further the mechanism of how the countryside conveys shared memory, the author goes beyond a mere response to its picturesque beauty. The landscape amalgamates past cultural imagery. It is further unfailingly the material location of national identity. "Landscape is the work of the mind, its terrain formed by strata of rock *and* memory" (Schama, 7). Macdonald recounts the mystic moment when she saw chalk landscapes for the first time. Even as a child she felt it reverberated with meanings accumulated over the centuries. And "if a child's vision of nature can already be loaded with complicating memories, myths, and meanings, how much more elaborately wrought is the frame through which our adult eyes survey the landscape" (Schama, 6). Now she refers to the chalk scenery as "the grand conjuration of our mythical English past" (Macdonald, 261). Chalk hills, Macdonald explains, may invoke a sense of "blood belonging", a shared recognition of the birth-place of the nation. This symbolism encourages the cultivation of an intimate, exclusive connection with the scenery. But natural remembrance and its celebration may result in the formulation of the national, or worse, the nationalistic.

By musing on the function of landscape the author disclaims the belief that what is familiar is also superior to the other, unknown and foreign. "And it was much later, too, that I realized that these myths hurt. That they work to wipe away other cultures, other ways of loving, working and being in landscape. How they tiptoe towards darkness" (Macdonald, 261). Such reflections are followed by the recounting of another memory. While rambling with Mabel through terrain around Cambridge the narrator witnesses a herd of fallow deer. She is dazzled by the view and runs to share it with an elderly English couple. "Doesn't it give you hope? [the man] says suddenly... Isn't it a relief that there are things still like that, a real bit of Old England still left, despite all these immigrants coming in?" (Macdonald, 264). So the human-landscape connection is as organic as it is exclusive, in that it excludes 'the other'. What the narrator evaluates to be "Old England" is little more than "words", "woodcuts", "picturesque engravings", representations of the visual. It is merely an imaginary construct. Dangerously, this collective imagination may arouse national myths that drive people to wars and conquests. The similarity of the contemporary Isles to Old England is an illusion, a token semblance, a fabrication of imagination and memory. And yet, at the same time, people fail to think and imagine beyond their own human scale, both in time and space. They are unable to picture what complex histories landscapes had before and what life will be like when we are no longer here (Macdonald, 260-265).

In the course of her grieving the author is clearly challenging certain persisting imaginations about land, landscape and belonging. Her social critique is far from subtle or understated. She frequently provides commentary which distances her from the social framework, tradition, and commonly accepted ways of conduct. Her escape from the civilized world seems to be spurred by the pressures of grief. So are her outspoken social comments. Yet, far from incriminating others Macdonald confesses:

And I am guilty, too. I'd wanted to escape history by running to the hawk. Forget the darkness, forget Göring's hawks, forget death, forget all the things that had been before. But my flight was wrong, always wrong. Worse than wrong. It was dangerous. *I must fight, always, against forgetting.* (Macdonald, 265)

As the protagonist proceeds along the “arc of mourning” the moments of personal insights, if still blending with the public sphere, become more frequent.

Like other contemporary writers who use their narratives to provide an insight into the human-landscape interaction, Macdonald is wary of the powerful and seductive myth of pastoral and romantic visions of nature. As she explains, T.H. White, despite his non-conformity, was markedly in connection with his own times, for during the 1930s countryside walks and tours proliferated. The English began to search for “mystical communion with the land”, for the magnetism of an unspoilt pre-industrial epoch; an attempt which was to offer “solace and safety to sorely troubled minds” of the mid-war era (Macdonald, 103-104). The author is utterly suspicious of any attempts at using the natural world as a surrogate for national ideologies, for anything more than it truly is – nature itself. The aforementioned passages again indicate Macdonald’s organizational strategies. Her speaking as a historian, an academic, effaces her mourning self. At the same time, nonetheless, her remarks are suggestive of conscious autobiographical attempts to provide explanations, meanings which may have healing power. Moreover, collective remembering is politically charged and it is also endowed with intention. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson note, “acts of personal remembering are fundamentally social and collective” (21). Practising personal and collective remembrance has the capacity of shaping the future (for an individual or for other subjects). Macdonald’s recollecting extends beyond the personal to make claims for “those on whose behalf one remembers” (Smith and Watson, 20).

Robert Macfarlane, a distinguished author of travel books which deal with the natural landscape and the human soul, claims that “powerful writing can revise our ethical relations with the natural world, shaping our place consciousness and our place conscience” (Macfarlane, 34). *H is for Hawk* indeed reveals this interplay between consciousness and conscience. For certain moments in the narrative expose how the narrator’s hawk training excursions come to represent memorialization of a different loss – that of the natural landscape, human contact with nature, or even the blissfully misleading ignorance about the extent of environmental damage people cause. A symbolic memento of this most devastating loss is a misshapen rabbit, stricken with myxo-

matosis²⁰. In her diaries Helen remembers seeing people crowding around a ghost-like, blistered, deformed shape lying by the road. She kneels down and puts it out of its misery. But the persistent rabbit memory haunts her. And she later recollects: “It felt like a revenant, something pulled from the past, from back when I was small and the countryside was in crisis” (Macdonald, 198). Again the memory spurs a mosaic of apocalyptic images that evoke past fears, both from personal and collective memory – hawks exterminated by pesticides, felled elm trees, polluted rivers, oil-drowned guillemots – the whole ecosystem was endangered. “Everything was sick. And we’d be next” (Macdonald, 198). The memories are reminiscent of the ecological thinking and movements which emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a reaction to countryside pollution, economic recession and the nuclear threat (Moran, 54-58).

This crafting of Macdonald’s personal memoir into a broader environmentally conscious perspective offers a platform for an intersection between memory and the natural landscape. Instead of invoking Arcadian countryside dreams, Macdonald does the opposite; she explores past fears which belong to both the personal and collective memory. It does serve the purpose of creating a synergy between awareness of the place and “place conscience”. The spectre of the rabbit is a reminder, a lest-we-forget contemporary indication of ecological problems.

Conclusion

H is for Hawk is an intricate interplay of perfectly organized recollections whose randomness is, as the reader finally discovers, a narrational method. If ‘relational’ reading is implemented to understand the narrative strategies, the book reveals how the world of nature, the world of birds of prey becomes instrumental in the process of grieving. The hawk is a refuge in a time of personal crisis and, conversely, the only tangible material reassurance that the fragmented reality may be reordered again. Further, Macdonald’s account offers enough self-analysis for her seclusion, her rite of passage to clarify the rationale behind narrative events. Her purpose was to obliterate the memory: “I did not want the hawk to make me feel I was striding righteously across the lands of my long-lost ancestors. I had no use for history, no use for time at all. I was training the hawk to make it all disappear” (Macdonald, 117). It is self-evident that Helen’s attempts to erase her life as she had known it before the loss of her father constituted a coping strategy of grief. This ultimately led her to a deeper dysfunction than she had been willing to admit. Equally important is the author’s methodological weaving of intimately introspective memories with collective remembrance, and localizing her narrative self in a broader social and historical context.

Yet Helen’s self enquiry leads her inevitably to learn that feral birds hardly yield the consolation she craved. Nature does not offer the cure. This conclusion corresponds with some other literary narratives branded ‘nature writing’ (Moran, 57). Still, such inner revelation of nature’s mute indif-

20 A virus brought to the British Isles in the 1950s from South America which within two years exterminated almost the entire rabbit population, littering the English countryside with millions of misshapen dead bodies. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myxomatosis> (03 March 2017).

ference is only partly devastating, for Macdonald's misgivings seem to permeate the entire memoir. The effects of her disillusion are therefore intentionally invalidated. Instead, time is the healer. Symbolically, this is expressed by the season in which the narrative ends – spring, a natural symbol of renewal. The mourning has completed its natural cycle. Helen realizes she no longer needs the hawk's presence; the gradual acceptance is indicated by their growing physical separation. She accepts the fact that she will live with a loss. And the elusive memory of loss, of absence, is given a spatial dimension, so it can be preserved, touched, tamed: "you have to grow around and between the gaps, though you can put your hand out to where things were and feel that tense, shining dullness of the space where the memories are" (Macdonald, 171).

As narrator and author, Macdonald too completes the process of textualizing her grief. All the tools of 'relational' autobiography have accomplished their tasks: the connection with the raptor loosens, White's diaries lose their haunting power and gain new understanding, the protagonist's self is written anew. But is it? Eliminating nature's capacity to heal seems to have an overwhelmingly destabilizing impact on the entire self-creation strategy of autobiography. As Smith and Watson note:

Readers often conceive of autobiographical narrators as telling unified stories of their lives, as creating or discovering coherent selves. But both the unified story and the coherent self are myths of identity. For there is no coherent "self" that predates stories about identity, about "who" one is. (47)

This double subversion (of nature's and autobiography's potential) surprisingly threatens to overthrow the reader's expectations for closure. What is offered then as consolation is the materiality of the present and past. The recurring motif of the need to restore the physicality of the past is illustrated in the book in a number of ways: collecting mementos of place, writing a journal, 'revisiting' somebody else's memoirs. One of the final scenes in the narrative is evocative of the elusive, intangible nature of human memory, i.e. the moment when Helen finds her father's plane-spotting diaries, his "records of ordered transcendence". The author recognizes his need to preserve the sightings of planes, birds, his whole diary keeping mania. Likewise, she understands his boyhood obsession with war artifacts – shrapnel, helmets, bullet shells, items recovered after the London bombings. They are as much an act of resistance against oblivion as her own survival tactics. And while browsing through his records she accidentally finds the key to his flat (Macdonald, 267). Finally, it is this human artifact, the key, that becomes a symbolic witness of her mourning. Holding the key in this epiphanic moment she suddenly feels crushed by the weight of her sorrow, the physicality of absence, the touch of the loss she has suffered. And it is the key, not the bird, that momentarily takes "the shape of [her] grief". Helen has reached her destination, she is now in the place and moment when "time had passed all the same, and worked its careful magic" (Macdonald, 268). Time heals. Nature instead remains mute, unredemptive and indifferent.

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“I’ve been crawling up so long on your stairway to heaven”: The rise of the female rock memoir

Abstract. Similarly to rock music, the rock memoir has long been considered a male genre by both the general public and publishers. It might well be claimed that throughout the years there have been many seminal female rock performers, yet only a few of them gained well deserved recognition and engaged the minds of wider audiences. The history of rock had been predominantly a (*his*)story until 2012 and the publication of Patti Smith’s *Just Kids*, a female rock memoir which paved the way for many other women thus far silenced by the male-oriented genre. This paper seeks to delve into some of the female rock narratives in order to analyze the ways in which their authors construct their stories and their authorial selves. It also points to those territories of the music industry and the rock memoir which female performers strive to enrich or reclaim by the acts of writing and performing.

Keywords: female rock memoir, feminism, life writing, performance, popular culture.

With over a dozen books released in the last few years and a number of titles awaiting publication, the female rock memoir has become the latest craze in the Anglophone publishing market, frequently outnumbering the print runs of its male counterpart. A considerable part of the success of the genre and the glory of the “trailblazer” has been credited to Patti Smith and her 2010 National Book Award-winning *Just Kids*, an autobiographical account of the artist’s life with the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. As agreed by commentators, the rock memoir has allowed female rock artists to claim their place in the male-dominated history of rock music. A male-oriented literary genre itself, it has also opened up for the thus far marginalized experience of the feminine.

The present paper sets out to explore the storytelling and the construction(s) of the literary self in female rock memoirs. By doing so, it will demonstrate how female rock artists reconfigure the male-dominated rock memoir by touching upon the topics of independence and womanhood against the backdrop of the “man’s world” of show-business. Additionally, it ventures into performance studies and the category of the liminoid to offer a better understanding of female em-

powerment gained by performing live. Given the diversity of authors representative of the genre, the study will be confined to three recently published books, which are Kim Gordon's *Girl in a Band: A Memoir* (2015), Carrie Brownstein's *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl: A Memoir* (2015), and Brix Smith Start's *The Rise, the Fall, and the Rise* (2016). All three, written by seminal figures active in the last decades of the twentieth century, attest to the importance of enriching the genre with a female perspective.

In Chapter 9 of her memoir, Carrie Brownstein, the guitar player and singer of the American all-female rock band Sleater-Kinney, writes:

There is the identity you have in a band or as an artist when you exist for no one other than yourself, or for your co-conspirators, your co-collaborators. When you own the sounds and when who you are is whoever you want to be. There are no definitions as prescribed by outsiders, strangers; you feel capricious, full of contradictions, and areas of yourself feel frayed or blurred... But once your sound exits that room, it is no longer just yours—it belongs to everyone who hears it. And who you are is at the mercy of the audience's opinions and imagination. If you haven't spent any time deliberately and intentionally shaping your narrative, if you're unprepared, like I was, then one will be written for you. ("Mediated")

The importance of reclaiming one's artistic self and immunizing it to the projections of the male and the medial other appears to have guided not only Brownstein's project, but also many other female artists who decided to write and publish their memoirs. If, as suggested by Benie Bruner Colvin, the memoir is about constructing values (114), then, in the most general view, the female rock memoir is to deconstruct the values which were enforced on the female performers to be further able to erect a truer image of women entwined in show-business. While the rationale behind writing their own stories differs, female artists, one might infer, are bonded against being "frequently relegated to the footnotes of official rock history and the male canon" (O'Brien, 27).

Speaking in terms of narrative patterns, the scrutinized texts do not necessarily try to evade resemblance to a typical rock star memoir. They follow a general plot common to many male artist accounts, what David R. Shumway calls "the trauma and recovery story" (69), which is sometimes evident from the title of the work (as in the case of Brix Smith Start and her book entitled *The Rise, The Fall, and the Rise*). Shaping oneself as "a success and as a survivor" (Shumway, 69), as done, for instance, by James Brown in his memoirs, gets manifested in various ways depending on the catalyst moment in the author's life. For the discussed female memoirists such an episode comes with either leaving the band or disbanding due to health problems and family commitments (Brownstein), or due to learning about the infidelities of their husbands who also happen to be band members (Smith Start and Gordon). Also, the analyzed works fall well under what is defined by G. Thomas Couser as "a coming-of-age narrative," and, what is crucial for the further part of the study, "a conversion narrative," in which the author epitomizes "a convert ... [who] defines him- or herself in opposition to some earlier self" (9). Additionally, all of the scrutinized memoirs concur on the level of sub-narratives typical for a rock memoir. We thus encounter stories about finding

musical inspirations, acquiring the skills of musicianship, song-writing and recording processes, band rifts, the hardships of touring, drug trips and break-ups; one also comes across elucidating song lyrics and demythologizing famous people. However, divergent from those of male rock memoirs, the language and the narrative of female rock memoirs tend to display high levels of self-reflexivity and awareness with respect to the authorial self-creation in the text. Brownstein's parlance emerges as if directly taken from the poststructuralist idiom, which in the famous words of Derrida, has made it certain that "there is nothing outside the text" ("il n'y a pas de hors-texte") since everything, including our identities, is a cultural construct mediated by language. Brownstein repeatedly summons her literary selves with respect to the textual character of one's identity just as when she begins Chapter 1 of her memoir:

This is the story of the ways I created a territory, something more than just an archipelago of identities, something that could steady me, somewhere that I belonged. ("The Sound of Where You Are")

On hearing for the first time Bikini Kill, an American punk rock band associated with the Riot grrrl movement, she reveals:

Here was a narrative that I could place myself inside, that I could share with other people to help explain how I felt... Bikini Kill's music really gave a form, a home, and a physicality to my teenage turmoil. ("Born Naked")

With a similar attentiveness to the narrative patterns governing life writing, Kim Gordon, in the introductory chapter of her book, perversely entitled "The End", undermines the very sense of writing the memoir, when she characterizes its core issue, the break-up with her husband in the following way: "[W]hat had happened was probably the most conventional story ever" ("The End").

The alertness to the ways of rendering femininity in popular culture, as well as the special emphasis which is put by the female rock memoirists on the textual character of their identity should come as no surprise. As aptly observed by Elaine Showalter, the female author has had to

find her self-in-the-world ... by facing (affronting?) and mounting an enormous struggle with the cultural fictions—myths, narratives, iconographies, languages—which heretofore have delimited the representation of women. And which are culturally and physically saturating. (Showalter, quoted in McCue)

Female rock memoirists appear to have been triply muted and stigmatized – as female authors, as those who undertake work in the male-dominated genre of the (rock) memoir, and, finally, as female rock musicians; in his essay on gender in popular music, Keith Negus points to a number of studies which give evidence to marginalizing the female in the music scene throughout the twentieth century, be it jazz, pop or rock (154). Hence, if "[t]he female-authored memoir provides a broader perspective into the lives of contemporary women—the experiences of whom have his-

torically been silenced or Othered” (McCue), then life writing offered by female rock musicians extends the scope of the insight by reclaiming the place of the female in the male-dominated fields of rock music and rock memoir. Additionally, as regards deciding on the right literary genre to thwart the misappropriation of women in show business and to regain their image, what better choice to make than to pick one which has perhaps had the most profound impact on the shape of modern culture. As pointed out by Ben Yagoda,

[m]emoir has become the central form of the culture: not only the way stories are told, but the way arguments are put forth, products and properties marketed, ideas floated, acts justified, reputations constructed or salvaged. (Yagoda, quoted in Couser, 8)

Unlike with most accounts of male rock stars, the main thrust of the discussed female rock memoirs is their way to empowerment, often self-questioned and still in the making. A special place in the process is allotted to the act of writing. Apart from Brownstein’s stance, somewhat reminiscent of Helene Cixous’s call for a female writership, both Gordon and Smith Start seem to emphasize its importance, and they call for taking one’s narrative in one’s own hands. Encouraged by an American visual artist and a friend, Dan Graham, Gordon, a respected visual artist in her own right, began writing on art and music for REALLIFE Magazine, which paved her the way into the New York art milieu of the 1980s. As she recalls,

I got a lot of positive feedback and felt suddenly as though I had an identity in the downtown community. That essay topic unlocked the next thirty years of my life... [W]hatever doubts I had about pursuing a career in art commingled to create a forward wave of momentum, noise, and motion. It was also my way of rebelling—writing about men when it would be more natural to write about women. It was a conscious faux-intellectual premise I could indulge in, and a nod to the work that Dan, my mentor, was doing. (“Chapter 16”)

Brix Smith Start gives the image of how co-authorship could change the image of a woman who recently joined the band: “When people saw that I was actually a writer, and that I was credited, they began to come around. I was no longer perceived as a hanger-on or groupie” (“1983”). Thus, what is shared by the analyzed authors is their conviction of the act of writing as something founding for one’s sense of meaningfulness in the discourse, or simply, for one’s sense of existence in it. Such a stance is corroborated by modern-day academia and its claims “that selves (or subjects) are always in the process of being constructed; that identity is a function of performative traits, ... and that life narrative produces a new subject” (Couser, 182). The writing subjects’ heightened awareness of how empowering a tool the text may be transits the female rock memoir onto a higher level of quality. Couser continues: “at its best, life writing does not register preexisting selfhood, but rather somehow creates it. This inverts the intuitive idea that one lives one’s life, then simply writes it down” (14), and such an “approach can be seen, not as denying the life in life

writing, but as empowering life writers – and life writing” (182-183). Concluding, if “genres of life writing are sometimes *defined* by what they do – the *work* of memoir” (Courser, 14), then female rock memoirs perform two significant functions as regards empowerment. They offer female rock artists a sense of textual stability while simultaneously calling for female authorship and participation (Courser suggests that memoirs are a “particularly *interactive* medium” (14)).

Another contribution to independence and sense of value comes for all three memoirists with the act of performing live. Underscoring how groundbreaking and confidence-building her first performance with a punk rock band at the age of 17 was, Lucy O’Brien, a journalist writing on women in music, states: “[B]eing in a girl band at that age should be a national requirement” (16). Brownstein recalls that her first performances, child’s antics, were a matter of gaining visibility and communicating successfully:

My other form of validation was through performance. Performing gave me something to do in a given moment in a room. It was a heightened way of relating to people; I could act out feelings instead of dealing with them. (“Chapter 2”)

As for Brixton Smith Start, a formative experience came with a job as a live window display. The artist recalls:

I began mentally to separate the insecure teenager I was in real life and replace it with an entirely new person on stage. On stage I felt free and empowered. Old Laura was gone. I stepped up, stood in my light, and let it rip. It felt good.” (“My first proper job”)

We also find an analogous shift in the self in Gordon’s ruminations on her first and later shows:

When I first began playing onstage, I was pretty self-conscious. I was just trying to hold my own with the bass guitar, hoping the strings wouldn’t snap, that the audience would have a good experience... When I’m at my most focused onstage, I feel a sense of space with edges around it, a glow of self-confident, joyful sexiness. (“21”)

Venturing into the field of performance studies, it might be observed that female rock memoirs address issues relating to the assumptions of liminoidality. A derivative of liminality, thus all nameable and indispensable rites of passage in a given community, liminoidality refers to their artistic and leisure counterparts, which might strive for similar goals. Coined by Victor Turner, the liminoid, as suggested by Jacek Wachowski, characterizes all kinds of performances and connotes finding oneself in a marginal state of being (Wachowski, 181-182).²¹ Taking up the risk, the performer

²¹ All translations here and henceforth are by the author of the article.

finds her/himself separated from and exposed to the audience so as to experience a conversion, after which she/he unites with the community. Kim Gordon's memoir carries a similar image:

For me performing has a lot to do with being fearless. I wrote an article for Artforum in the mid-eighties that had a line in it ... quoted a lot: "People pay money to see others believe in themselves." Meaning, the higher the chance you can fall down in public, the more value the culture places on what you do. Unlike, say, a writer or a painter, when you're onstage you can't hide from other people, or from yourself either. ("The End")

As recorded by female memoirists, over the course of time and owing to performing, their vulnerability and anxiety were transformed into strengths. Brownstein notes:

Sleater-Kinney was my rescue and salvation. It was the first time I felt I could be vulnerable in my creativity in which the emotional and psychic stakes were neither futile nor self-annihilating. ("Chapter 21")

Smith Start speaks of her acting classes: "Acting class was teaching me more than acting. It was teaching me how to love myself, and how perceived weaknesses could actually turn to strengths" ("Earthquake"). Although she speaks of it as an act of "cleansing" ("The End"), Gordon approaches performing differently since, unlike Brownstein and Smith Start, she relies on her artistic personas as comfort zones:

[T]he page, the gallery, and the stage became the only places my emotions could be expressed and acted out comfortably. These were the venues where I could exhibit sexuality, anger, a lack of concern for what people thought. The image a lot of people have of me as detached, impassive, or remote is a persona that comes from years of being teased for every feeling I ever expressed. When I was young, there was never any space for me to get attention of my own that wasn't negative. Art, and the practice of making art, was the only space that was mine alone, where I could be anyone and do anything, where just by using my head and my hands I could cry, or laugh, or get pissed off. ("6")

As observed by Wachowski, the marginal phase of the liminoid is "some kind of a critical point, the state of intensified activity and creativity" (180), which "entails moving from one frame of mind to an entirely different one" (180). The discussed female rock narratives resemble a procession of such moments, putting emphasis on the fluid nature of both artistic and real-life identities and therefore making another original contribution to the genre of rock memoir. Brownstein writes:

[P]erforming was no longer about trying to harness a cursory attention or to be a distraction. Sleater-Kinney allowed me to perform both away from and into myself, to leave and to return, forget and discover. Within the world of the band there was a me and a not me, a fluctuation of selves that I could reinvent along the flight between perches. I could, at last, let go ... ("Chapter 21")

Reinvention is also the key word in the lexicon of Smith Start's memoir since it links the breaking points of her experience as a TV show host, an actress, a musician, and a businesswoman. "Every performance," Wachowski continues, "always has to disturb the already-established state of balance" (263). The authenticity and value in both life and art emerge, as the discussed memoirists would say, not with yielding to categorizing and complacency but with a hunger for uncertainty and challenge, which is another feature distinctive to female rock narratives. Of entitlement, so common in the world of art and music, Brownstein writes:

[It] is a precarious place from which to create or perform—it projects the idea that you have nothing to prove, nothing to claim, nothing to show but self-satisfaction, a smug boredom. It breeds ambivalence. It's as if instead of having to prove they are something, these musicians prove they aren't anything. It's an inverted dynamic, one that sets performers up to fail, but also gives them a false sense of having already arrived. I don't understand how someone would not push, challenge . . . ("Chapter 17")

Such tactics seem to find their way into the creation of the female memoir. Brownstein writes: "I learned later on how hard it can become to unsettle yourself, to trip yourself up, and I think that's a good place to write from. It's important to undermine yourself and create a level of difficulty so the work doesn't come too easily" ("Chapter 7"). Rather than delve nostalgically and safely into the past, the discussed memoirs prefer to set out as a challenge to the present. In this respect, Brownstein continuously unbalances and reworks her authorial self. Writing about her father's homosexuality, she realizes the need to retroactively revalue parts of herself which were already categorized: "I have to turn over and reimagine certain moments from my childhood and make them conform to a different narrative, a different outcome ("No Normal"). Similarly, Brix Smith Start's book emerges as a painful readjustment of neglected and traumatic events. In the acknowledgments to her memoir she admits:

Being so honest in public was/is scary. Being so honest with myself has been life-changing. Writing this book unearthed many buried feelings and experiences, which rose like noxious gases through the layers of my subconscious. I was forced to look at these unpleasant and uncomfortable aspects of myself in the harsh light of day, and make peace with them. ("Acknowledgements")

Similarly, Kim Gordon's edifice occasionally crumbles under the self-interrogatory mode of her memoir as she ponders over taking more risk: "Back then, and even now, I wonder: Am I "empowered"? If you have to hide your hypersensitivity, are you really a "strong woman"?" ("Confusion"). Thus, the scrutinized female writing subjects seem not to find completion in the text of the memoir, nor do they perceive past events as carrying permanently fixed meanings. They instead wish to see themselves in a perennial state of in-betweenness, which they embrace as a form of resistance against appropriation and self-complacency. Such authorial strategies echo Nancy Chodorow's views on the female as characterized with a fluid sense of self:

[G]rowing girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible and permeable ego boundaries. Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with a greater sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiation. (169)

It is interesting to see how the discussed memoirists engage the metaphor of girlhood to add some further impetus to the concept of in-betweenness. Jacqueline Warwick and Allison Adrian point out that

Carrie Brownstein of Sleater-Kinney titled her memoir *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl* at age 41, while Kim Gordon, whose musical career did not even begin until she co-founded the band Sonic Youth at the age of 28, called her memoir *Girl in a Band*. (4)

While, on the one hand, the present-day “discourse is indicative of the expansion of girlhood into what was once considered adulthood” (Warwick and Adrian, 4), on the other hand, assuming the identity of a girl makes a perfect vessel for the female performers’ sense of creative hunger and the always-becoming of their selves.

Extrapolating Chodorow’s ideas to the field of life writing, the narrative rendition of the female is also frequently considered to be a multiple, contradictory and linguistically inconsistent creation. Such is the stance of the Personal Narratives Group and their seminal examination of female narratives entitled *Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (1989), in which the stylistic diversity and heterodoxy of female accounts is to be underscored, embraced and preserved: “[W]omen’s personal narratives are essential primary documents for feminist research... They can take many forms, including biography, autobiography, life history – a life story told to a second person who records it – diaries, journals, and letters” (4). Embracing various faces of in-betweenness, female rock memoirs appear to modify the conversion subgenre they represent – the writing female subject is no longer a one-time convert yet a perpetual one, which defines itself not in opposition to a single previous self, but to previous selves.

Finally, the scrutinized memoirs serve as a pungent commentary on the misappropriations of the female-in-a-band image. They allocate numerous pages to settling with the confined number of behavioural patterns expected of women in popular culture. A line from Sleater-Kinney’s song entitled “#1 Must Have” reads: “I’ve been crawling up so long on your stairway to heaven” (2010) and, as reflected in the discussed memoirs, it holds for much of the struggle a woman goes through to be acknowledged as an artist in her own right. The space has already been taken. As suggested by Brownstein, “[t]he archetypes, the stage moves, the representations of rebellion and debauchery were all male” (“Chapter 8”), as in the case of a male loner figure. The male loner, Brownstein continues, “is a hero of sorts, a rebel, an iconoclast, but the same is not true of a female loner. There is no virility in a woman’s autonomy, there is only pity” (“Chapter 20”). Kim Gordon corroborates the image:

In general ... women aren't really allowed to be kick-ass. It's like the famous distinction between art and craft: Art, and wildness, and pushing against the edges, is a male thing. Craft, and control, and polish, is for women. Culturally we don't allow women to be as free as they would like, because that is frightening. We either shun those women or deem them crazy. ("21")

Clear gender distinctions also hold for the choice of the instrument and the music genre. Keith Negus points to a number of studies devoted to female rock musicianship. All of them "demonstrate how children and young adults, along with their teachers, parents and carers, have been grappling with enduring historical legacies whereby certain instruments and performance styles are deemed more appropriate for boys and girls" (154). He moreover points to sentiments of the community fiercely defending rock as "phallo-centric music" and the rock voice as "almost definitely masculine" (155). Not toeing the line, as the discussed memoirs demonstrate, ends up with commodification and misappropriation of various sorts. Upon going through Sleater-Kinney's first big feature in *Spin* magazine, Brownstein reflects

[I]t was the first time I felt like I was reading about someone I didn't know. The writer characterized me as a burbling groupie of Corin's, casting me as obsequious and frivolous. I wasn't reading about myself; I was reading about a character the writer had made up to fit his tendentious point of view about the band, a narrative he was creating that we needed to fit inside. ("Mediated")

For Gordon, the ultimate level of commodifying the female in show-biz comes with

The Spice Girls, a group put together by men, each Spice Girl branded with a different personality, polished and stylized to be made marketable as a faux female type. ("21")

Both she and Brownstein identify in their memoirs the quintessential role that a woman gets in the culture, and more specifically, in the world of entertainment:

The role of a woman onstage is often indistinct from her role offstage—pleasing, appeasing, striking some balance between larger-than-life and iconic with approachable, likable, and down-to-earth, the fans like gaping mouths, hungry for more of you. (Brownstein, "Chapter 12")

The discussed authors' experience informs criticism devoted to the expectations of the music industry and its male decision makers in regards to the image of the female. Andi Zeisler explains the role of the male gaze in shaping certain assumptions functioning in show business:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled

accordingly... It makes sense that many girls and women grow up seeing images of girls and women the way men do—the images themselves are simply constructed that way. ... Seeing the visual cues of the male gaze, in turn, affects how women understand images of other women. (quoted in McCue)

Not being able to pigeonhole a female artist as either an accessory to the show or an attractive creature comfort, the media exert all of their power to make her explain herself. Brownstein draws a broad image of the problem:

This is where we were starting to grapple with something we would grapple with for the rest of our time as a band: that there was always a sense we were going to have to defend and analyze what we were doing. Why are you in an all-female band? Why do you not have a bass player? What does it feel like to be a woman in a band? ["What's it like to be a mom in rock?" ("35"), Gordon adds in her memoir]

I realized that those questions—that talking about the experience—had become part of the experience itself. More than anything, I feel that this meta-discourse, talking about the talk, is part of how it feels to be a "woman in music" (or a "woman in anything," for that matter—politics, business, comedy, power). There is the music itself, and then there is the ongoing dialogue about how it feels... To this day, because I know no other way of being or feeling, I don't know what it's like to be a woman in a band—I have nothing else to compare it to. But I will say that I doubt in the history of rock journalism and writing any man has been asked, "Why are you in an all-male band?" ("Chapter 8")

"I've been crawling up so long on your stairway to Heaven" Sleater-Kinney sings in "#1 Must Have," and it adds straightaway: "And now I no longer believe that I wanna get in" (2010). To conclude, speaking of the female experience from the heart of the male-dominated discourse of rock music and the rock memoir, the discussed female rock narratives achieve a number of goals. In the most general sense they enrich the well-established type of narrative with the thus far marginalized accounts of the female rock artists and ensure their rightful place in the history of rock music. In the spirit of Nancy K. Miller and her calls for deconstructing the alleged maleness of the literary canon, they advocate a gendered rereading of the rock memoir narrative. Since "memoir is ... the narration of our own lives in our own terms" (Couser, 9), the life writing of female rock musicians reclaims space for personal freedom to construct one's identity and challenges various gendered misconceptions regarding the image and place of women in the entertainment industry, as well as in modern-day society. It is both a proof of female empowerment (even if not ultimate) and a call for female empowerment, which, as all three works demonstrate, might come with the acts of performing and/by writing. Finally, in line with the bulk of feminist criticism and against the prevailing trends in rock memoir writing, the discussed memoirists espouse textual fluidity, contradictoriness and in-betweenness of their writing selves, which, on the one hand, allows them and their public images to evade being locked within a fixed set of categories, and on the other, enables them to remain truly active and ambitious in the sphere of art.

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Memory-dependent grief in Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*

Abstract. The article explores grief as a memory-related emotional response to the loss of loved ones as presented in Octavia Butler's fantasy novel *Fledgling*. The article deals with the inability to experience grief due to memory loss and the struggles that come with it. The reasons behind the inability of the main character to experience grief and its meaning are investigated. Two potential explanations are explored: the inability to experience grief as a result of general dissociative amnesia caused by the traumatic experience of witnessing the slaughter of one's family and being left on the brink of death, and the possibility of the loss of affect induced by overwhelming feelings of loss. The grief over a person of whom the memories are intact is analyzed and contrasted with the lack of grief for the forgotten relatives. The idea of continuing bonds connected with the mourning process is briefly presented and illustrated using examples from *Fledgling*. The theory of five stages of grief formulated by the psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross is briefly introduced. Some of the stages of Kübler-Ross's theory (denial, anger and acceptance) are illustrated through the analysis of the grief experienced by the main character. The distinct inability to govern or temper the emotional response to death is presented. Grief is also briefly introduced as a possible bonding instrument.

Keywords: grief, mourning, memories, amnesia, emotions.

Death is a part of life one can never escape. One needs only to look around to find a multitude of stories of the dead and the ones who mourn them. Death and grief are inextricably connected. As Elizabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler wrote: "Grief is one of life's passages we all experience. It is one of life's equalizers, a shared experience for every man and woman who lives" (229). Although grief is a universal response to death, its experience is not, as every person grieves in their unique way. In Octavia Butler's science fantasy novel *Fledgling* the author approaches the subject of grief and explores how one deals with the aftermath of death. Butler's story also poses a question: How do you grieve if you do not remember those you have lost?

To analyze how the matter of grief as a memory-related emotional reaction is presented in *Fledgling*, first I would like to establish what meaning of grief I will refer to. As Kübler-Ross and Kessler observe, "[g]rief is the intense emotional response to the pain of a loss. It is the reflection of a connection that has been broken" (227). Although people come to form connections with inanimate objects or places, and grief can be associated with any loss, I would like to focus on grief as a response to the loss of a person, someone whom we cannot replace. When somebody loses a loved one, they do not move on as easily as when they lose an object, even though they may have had

an unusually strong emotional connection to it. The death of a person close to us begins mourning, which William Worden defines as “the *process* that one goes through in adapting to the death of the person”, whereas grief, as he explains it, is “the *experience* of one who has lost a loved one to death” (17, italics in original). It seems logical, then, to state that grief is an intricate part of the mourning process. One cannot truly mourn if one does not grieve. Although Vamik Volkan postulates that grief is only “the initial reaction” (91) to the loss, I am partial to different outlooks, including that of Worden, which does not limit the experience of grief to the beginning of the mourning process but looks at grief as present throughout the entirety of the process.

Octavia Butler was an African American writer, and most of her works belong to the science fiction genre. The majority of her writing concerns the topic of race, and *Fledgling* does not deviate from her other writing subjectwise. The main character in *Fledgling* is the result of a science experiment which mixed the DNA of an Ina (a species introduced in the novel) and an African American person. Because of her uniqueness the main character is approached in a tentative manner by some and unequivocally rejected by others. Although race plays a role in the plot of the novel, this article will not explore this aspect of the story in any significant manner.

In *Fledgling* the main character is thrown into a life which is permeated by the emotions one experiences when faced with death, as the whole community she lived with has been killed. Shori, the main character, suffers from amnesia, and her first memories are of entering “[t]he world made strange by death” (Bennet, 346). The readers learn together with Shori what happened on the day that those closest to her met their fate. When she emerges from a cave, which was her shelter at the time of healing from the injuries which left her on the brink of death, one of the first images she sees is the site of the village, which has been burned to the ground. No memories are stirred by the images, and Shori does not recall that the place was once her home, despite having an emotional reaction to what she sees. She thinks: “That felt right. It felt like something I would want - living together with other people instead of wandering alone” (Butler, 5). In spite of the lack of recollection of any bond linking her to other people, she yearns for it. Later on, when she explains how she found the site of the village, she remarks that no memories were involved. She clarifies: “Only a feeling that I’m somehow connected to this place. I came here when I was able to leave the cave where I woke up, but I didn’t know why. It was as though my feet just brought me here” (Butler, 62). It seems as if her instincts overrode her conscious mind, and when she was seeking a safe place they led her to a place she once loved, though at the time could not recall. Through the account of the man who, as she learns, is her father, Shori discovers that the burnt village she has found was the community she lived in, and the victims were her family. Her father reveals what he knows to have occurred. He tells her: “Someone burned your mothers and your sisters as well as all of the human members of your family to death here. They shot the ones who tried to get out, shot them and threw most of them back into the fire” (Butler, 64). Although Iosif, Shori’s father, and some members of his community searched for survivors, finding Shori was a surprise. How she managed to survive is a mystery no one can explain. However, her dark skin and ability to withstand daylight are thought to have aided her in the escape. Iosif also confirms Shori’s suspicions that she

is not human. He provides her with basic information about Ina – the species of which they are members.

We live alongside, yet apart from, human beings, except for those humans who become our symbionts. We have much longer lives than humans. Most of us must sleep during the day and, yes, we need blood to live. Human blood is most satisfying to us, and fortunately, we don't have to injure the humans we take it from. But we are born as we are. We can't magically convert humans into our kind. (Butler, 63)

The information Shori receives clarifies many issues that have haunted her since she woke up without her memory, but they also raise a number of questions, the answers to which she will seek throughout the story. Learning who she is, what happened to her loved ones, and that her father and members of his community searched far and wide for the survivors and the killers, leads her into revealing that she has killed someone.

Despite not remembering her father and not being completely certain she can trust him, she confesses that she killed a man soon after she awoke in the cave. She divulges: "Someone found me as I was waking up in the cave... I was regaining consciousness, and someone found me. I didn't know at the time that it was ... a person, a man. I didn't know anything except ... I killed him" (Butler, 65). As it turns out, the man was a member of Iosif's community who was helping with the search after the tragedy. Iosif's reaction to Shori's confession is the first glimpse she gets into how someone feels when they lose a loved one. "He stared at me, first with anger and grief, then, it seemed, only with sorrow" (Butler, 66). His emotional reaction is clearly visible. "I looked at him and saw his sorrow. He knew who the man was, and he mourned him. I shook my head. 'I'm sorry'" (Butler, 66). She repeats her apology and one can hear her own sadness in her voice. Possibly, she does not only feel guilty that she killed someone, but she also experiences guilt and sadness over the realization that she caused someone emotional pain.

Once Shori is reunited with her father and brothers' community she observes the emotional reactions others exhibit in connection to the death of their loved ones. She sees how the memories cause others to experience emotions she does not have: "He smiled, apparently taking pleasure in his memories, then his expression sagged into sadness" (Butler, 78). Although she does not feel the same as they do about the death of the members of her community, due to her lack of recollection of them, she realizes that those emotions are precious: "I found that I almost envied his pain. He hurt because he remembered" (Butler, 74). Shori desires the ability to reclaim her memories, which for her is also the only way to reclaim the emotional bond with the family she has lost.

Unfortunately for her, Shori's father, brothers and their whole community are killed before she can reconnect with the forgotten relatives, or receive the answers and help which she desperately needs. When she finds another community of Ina she witnesses even more bereavement. She struggles with the fact that unlike others she cannot deal with the death of her family in a similar way. "Sometimes I recall disconnected bits about myself or about the Ina in general. But I've lost

my past, my memory of my families, symbionts, friends... The people of my families who are dead are so completely gone from me that I can't truly miss them or mourn them because, for me, it's as though they never existed" (Butler, 207). She seems to express the wish for the ability to grieve for her dead and, once the mourning process comes to an end, to be able to move on with her life. However, this is not possible for her, as she does not grieve. The fragments of memories and knowledge that she keeps recovering seem to make her distraught, even more than she already is, as they seem to intensify the feeling that she is missing something, even though she neither truly misses it or recalls having cared about it in the first place.

Characters in the novel express their grief in different manners, most of which are clearly visible. Shori, however, does not express grief for the lost relatives as she is not able to produce the emotional reaction because of her lost memories. Although once perceived as something abnormal, "[t]he absence of grief is no longer seen, by definition, as pathological" (Hall). Albeit not considered pathological, grief's absence in the face of the loss of a loved one may seem questionable. One could speculate that there was no love or other significant emotional connection between the deceased and the person who is supposed to grieve to begin with. However, Shori's situation is more complex than usual mourning processes, and because of that the expectations concerning the mourning process should also be different.

One of the characters in the novel ponders whether Shori's loss of memory is a way of coping with the severe feelings of bereavement. "I wonder if that's part of why your memory is gone, not just because you suffered blows to the head, but because of the emotional blow of the death of all your symbionts, your sisters, and your mothers – everyone. You must have seen it happen. Maybe that's what destroyed the person you were" (Butler, 267). The character's musings that Shori's memory loss is the result of emotional distress may not be that far off when it comes to dealing with her traumatic experiences.

When a person experiences a traumatic event they can react in various ways. One of the possibilities is dissociative amnesia, which "is an inability to recall important autobiographical information" (DSM V, 298). The American Psychiatric Association distinguishes three types of dissociative amnesia based on what kind of information a person cannot remember: localized amnesia, selective amnesia, and generalized amnesia. Generalized amnesia means that someone has no recollection of their life and their identity, which is the case with Shori. According to the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, generalized dissociative amnesia is rare, and those who experience it may "lose previous knowledge about the world (i.e. semantic knowledge) and can no longer access well-learned skills (i.e. procedural knowledge)" (298-299). Shori seems to be suffering from dissociative amnesia as she does not remember either her personal identity or any events from her past. Throughout the course of the novel she tries to recall certain events or people, but she is unsuccessful.

I shut my eyes and tried to find something of this woman in my memory—something. But there was nothing. All of my life had been erased, and I could not bring it back. Each time I was confronted with the

reality of this, it was like turning to go into what should have been a familiar, welcoming place and finding absolutely nothing, emptiness, space. (Butler, 132)

The failures to regain her memories cause continuous disappointment, but Shori does not abandon her quest to bring back her lost personal past. Instead of admitting defeat she seeks information from those surrounding her. She also does not recall information about the unique species she is a part of. She has to learn everything once again, although some of her well-learned skills manifest themselves once she attempts to use them: "I read aloud from the first [book] in a language that I could not recall having heard or seen. And yet as soon as I opened the book, the language seemed to click into place with an oddly comfortable shifting of mental gears" (Butler, 187). The skill of using the Ina language comes back to her immediately once she is exposed to it. The fact that one of the forgotten skills is so easily recovered seems to give Shori hope that some of the other pieces of her life will also return. She wonders what else about her past will reveal itself when her mind is prompted by an everyday situation. Since "[s]ome episodes of dissociative amnesia resolve rapidly ... whereas other episodes persist for long periods of time" one cannot be sure when or even if they will regain their memories (DSM V, 299). Although Shori seems to recover snippets of her past, the memories about her dead loved ones or about how she felt about them do not return, and it seems that they may be gone forever. If in fact they never return, she will never be able to fully mourn those that were close to her.

Shori's experience of the traumatic event, which is the slaughter of her family, could explain the loss of her memory, which in turn prevents her from properly mourning her loved ones. However, if we were to isolate her inability to experience grief from her amnesia, we could assume it is due to the loss of affect.

Donald Gustafson in his article on grief writes that "grief can express itself in what is called 'a loss of feeling or affect,' ... this condition of psychological immobilization is brought about by feelings of loss, anguish, fear, pain, and the rest" (465). Each person reacts differently to the death of a person dear to them; some have more extreme reactions than others. "Loss of affect is exemplified by an individual who lacks any apparent emotion in an emotionally stimulating situation, or by an individual who displays inappropriate emotions and so 'loses' the affect that belongs in the situation" (Herron, 37). The inability to produce the appropriate emotional reactions in certain situations can have various causes. When we consider the lack of grief after the death of a loved one it can have something to do with, for instance, the kind of relationship we had with the deceased. We may not grieve if the relationship was ambivalent, abusive or dependent (Worden, 127-128). Sometimes the manner in which the loss had occurred may prevent us from grieving. If the loss cannot be confirmed, as often happens when someone goes missing, grief may not come (Worden, 129). If we contemplate Shori's lack of grief, perhaps the theory relating to the number of the people one loses is the most suitable.

In *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy* Worden mentions an instance where a patient did not grieve after a multiple loss. He recounts: "The sheer volume of people to be grieved was over-

whelming, and in a case like this, it can seem easier to close down the mourning process altogether” (Worden, 130). Shori has suffered a monumental loss. She lost every person she ever cared about, and in the light of her situation one could postulate that Shori suffers from the loss of affect, as she does not exhibit any emotional reactions to the death of her relatives. If we take her amnesia out of the equation, her inability to grieve seems not to be so uncommon as one could presume. One can never know if the loss of affect will persist indefinitely, or if it will pour out one day as it was simply delayed. (I will discuss the notion of delayed grief later on, when Shori’s experience of grief over a lost symbiont is analyzed.) The fact that she is Ina meant that her grief should be even more severe than that of a human, a notion she is reminded of and later learns on her own, and thus her lack of grief seems highly unusual. “We Ina don’t handle loss as well as most humans do. It’s a much rarer thing with us, and when it happens, the grief is ... almost unbearable” (Butler, 265). One could try and explain Shori’s state in various ways. She could have dissociative amnesia, which severs her emotional connection with the past, or she could suffer from the loss of affect, and her amnesia is a result of the physical injuries she had suffered. We can theorize but we cannot be certain. The only undeniable thing is that she does not grieve after the family she does not remember.

In “Mourning and Melancholia” Sigmund Freud talked about the normal process of grieving and its extreme case, which he referred to as melancholia. He wrote: “In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself” (22). If one were to understand Freud’s words literally, Shori would clearly suffer from melancholia, as she is truly empty after her loss: she has no memory and no identity; she has to create them from the very beginning. Of course, one should not rely on the literal meaning of the words. Instead, what we can infer from Freud’s words is that both in the usual and the extreme instances of mourning something is askew in the life of the mourner. “Freud advocated killing off the trace of the other in the self as a means to reestablish psychic health”, by which he seemed to mean to eradicate any remaining emotion one has for the deceased (Clewell, 60). However, this idea has its source in his initial work concerning grief, which is “Mourning and Melancholia”. In the years following the publication of “Mourning and Melancholia” Freud revised his findings. From his subsequent publications one can learn that in his view “[w]orking through [a loss] no longer entails abandoning the object and reinvesting the free libido in a new one; ... [it] depends on taking the lost other into the structure of one’s own identity, a form of preserving the lost object in and as the self” (Clewell, 61). His idea of making the deceased a part of one’s identity and only then being able to move on seems to be the notion which is embraced today by many. Once, “the idea of successful grieving require[d] ‘letting go’” (Hall) of the lost loved one. Nowadays, however, the idea of continuing bonds which were forged between us and the deceased throughout the duration of the relationship has been welcomed. “This idea represents recognition that death ends a life, not necessarily a relationship. Rather than ‘saying goodbye’ or seeking closure, there exists the possibility of the deceased being both present and absent” (Hall). Although the dead are physically absent from our lives, they remain present in them through our memories and emotions.

In *Fledgling* we can see an example of the idea of continuing bonds. Because Shori does not have either the memories or the emotional connection to the deceased, the bonds she formed seem to have already been broken. Nevertheless, the members of the community she temporarily lives in try to encourage her to take advantage of the bonds that are still present in others. During the trial a member of the Ina community advises Shori: "You must bring them [her family] into the room with you and stand them beside you whenever you can" (Butler, 222). The idea of bringing the dead back to life through our memories and imagination, according to Tammy Clewell, is something that Freud included in the mourning process. It seems that some mourners restore "the existence of the lost other in the space of the psyche, replacing an actual absence with an imaginary presence" (Clewell, 44). Being able to have the dead present and to talk with them is something that many mourners yearn for, and so does Shori. Although she cannot bring her dead even into the imaginary presence, as she has no emotional bonds to rely on, she attempts to do it by using the bonds of others. Through the stories about her dead family she regains small pieces of them. However, the most visible continuation of bonds can be seen in Celia and Brook, symbionts of the members of Iosif's community. Due to their physical dependency on the particular Ina of whom they were symbionts, they not only suffer emotionally but also physically after the death of their Ina. In order to survive Brook and Celia have to break the physical connection to the deceased Ina and try to create a new connection between them and Shori. However, it is not so easily done as both their bodies and their minds yearn to remain connected to the loved ones who died. They fight to create new connections, and at the same time remain connected to their dead. "I knew they smelled wrong, but if he knew what had happened to my family, he must know why they smelled the way they did - of both the dead and the living" (Butler, 143). This seems to be what stands behind the idea of continuing bonds. We struggle to stay connected with those that are no longer with us in such a way that will allow us to create new bonds, to continue living without abandoning those who cannot accompany us forward, but without whom our past would not be complete, just like Celia and Brook. Although the struggle is painful, especially at the beginning, discovering that new bonds bring us joy seems to allow a person to reach the realization that the past, the present and hope for the future can coexist within us, and allows us to simply live.

In *Fledgling* Octavia Butler contrasts Shori's lack of grief for those who were erased from her memory with the grief for a person she remembers. Despite doing her utmost to reclaim her past and regain the memories of emotional connections she had with her loved ones, Shori does not succeed. However, when Theodora, one of Shori's symbionts whom she loved, is killed, the grief which would not come for her lost family pours out while she struggles to contain it.

Although everyone grieves in their own way, there are various theories which explore the emotional reactions to loss, for instance Stroebe and Schut's Dual Process Model of Grief, and Worden's Task-Based Model. There are also multiple views of grief as a series of stages, for example the models of Bowlby and Parkes, but probably the most widely recognized stage model is the one put forward by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (Hall). Kübler-Ross formulated a model of five stages of dying, which nowadays are also commonly used with reference to grief and mourning. These

five stages are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance (Kübler-Ross, 31,40,66,69,91). The stages differ in intensity and length, may happen in various order, and not all must occur in every person's mourning process. Although some question all stage models of grief, these theories have been frequently incorporated in the education of medical specialists (Hall). Because of this I would like to explore some of the stages presented by Kübler-Ross, as I believe we can easily spot some of them in Octavia Butler's novel.

At first Shori is in denial about what has happened to Theodora: "I was not truly seeing or understanding what was happening around me. I could not believe my Theodora was dead. It made no sense that she would be dead. None" (Butler, 251). The idea that someone she loved, someone close to her, no longer had a place in this world is unimaginable for her. She wants to isolate herself and find a reason for what happened, to make sense of something that seems senseless. Shori quite quickly moves on from denial to anger.

Kübler-Ross explained that "anger is displaced in all directions and projected onto the environment at times almost at random" (Kübler-Ross, 40). When Shori examines Theodora's body she unexpectedly starts shouting at the person nearest to her, and only after her outburst does she realize that it was someone whom she holds dear. "Someone spoke to me, came near, and I shouted, 'Let me alone! Get away from me!' A moment later, I realized that I had shouted at Wright, my first. I had told him to go away. Stupid of me. Stupid!" (Butler, 253). The anger overtook Shori in that instance; she was not in control of herself, but as the outburst of the anger passes she feels regretful of her action. Later, Shori's anger is more focused; she is angry at the person responsible for killing her symbiont. "I had to do something. What I wanted to do was tear her apart with my teeth and hands" (Butler, 266). Once she is able to guide her anger in a specific direction she no longer has random outbursts of anger. Despite wanting to avenge her loved one, Shori cannot do it at the time, as the rules of Ina society have to be abided by. She needs to rein in her anger and try to remain composed.

Shori needed to find a way to function after losing Theodora, as she was in the middle of the trial, whose goal was to find justice for the family she lost. She wanted to restrain her emotional reaction: "I could not dissolve emotionally and lose myself in grief. I did not dare. There was no time" (Butler, 253). However, it is not easy to control one's emotions, especially when they are heightened. It is hard to try and go about your life as if nothing happened. Shori observes that "It hurt to say her name" (Butler, 255) when she mentioned Theodora. It seems that when we lose someone, the memories that once brought us joy now bring us pain. The emotional pain is a part of grieving, and Shori wanted to be able to experience and deal with her grief: "I wanted to run away from these strangers, find a dark corner, and huddle there rocking my body back and forth, moaning and mourning" (Butler, 258). Even though she tried, she could not hide her emotional state from others. Preston remarks on Shori's inability to hide her grief: "You stand there hugging yourself as though you were trying to hold yourself together" (Butler, 265). He compares Shori's efforts to stay composed to an attempt not to fall to pieces. Maybe she is trying to remain whole. So many pieces of her had been stolen that she may crumble if something or someone does not help

her stay upright and glue herself back together in such a way that the missing pieces do not prevent her from continuing to live.

Some emotions can be alleviated or avoided through specific behavior or activities, for instance anger can lose its intensity after intense exercise, or we can avoid situations that would cause us to experience fear. However, there is no action one can undertake in order to lessen one's grief, or a way to ward it off. It is out of one's hands (Gustafson, 469-470). Gustafson wrote that although we can regulate some of our emotions "[t]he will has little or no force against grief... Only grief's manifestations can be controlled and then only in part" (Gustafson, 470). Shori seems to be able to control the manifestations of her grief, regardless of the emotional turmoil that is going on inside of her. Her actions bring Theodora's killer to justice, and in the end it is Shori that kills her symbiont's murderer. The fact that Theodora was avenged seems to bring Shori much closer to the stage of acceptance, and not only when the death of the person she loved was concerned, but also when it came to her lost memories and the relatives she lost twice: once through their death and once through her amnesia. "They were all gone. The person I had been was gone. I couldn't bring anyone back, not even myself. I could only learn what I could about the Ina, about my families. I would restore what could be restored" (Butler, 310). Through acceptance Shori is able to start a new life for herself, and the grief that she both witnessed and experienced could, in a way, help her with that.

However, is Shori's mourning process truly over? One of the characteristics of the Ina is that they grieve very deeply. Some members of Ina society questioned Shori's low intensity of grief: "[T]he Dahlmans expected you ... to be out of your mind with pain, grief, and anger, to be a pitiable, dangerous, crazed thing" (Butler, 265). To the surprise of many Shori was nowhere near being defeated by her grief, although she was expected to have been. Even though she had emotional bonds linking her to Theodora, her grief was inappropriately moderate in comparison to the loss. Some members of the Ina community argued that Shori's hybridity was the reason for her unusual grieving. They claimed that the part of her which is human overshadows the Ina in her, and because of that her emotional response is different from that of the ordinary Ina.

No one can be certain of the truth of anything you say because you are neither Ina nor human. Your scent, your reactions, your facial expressions, your body language—none of it is right. You say your symbiont has just died. If that were so, you would be prostrate. You would not be able to sit here telling lies and arguing. True Ina know the pain of losing a symbiont. We are Ina. You are nothing! (Butler, 272)

Shori's grief was certainly different than expected, she did not meet the standards of a grieving Ina. However, Shori might not have expressed the full extent of her emotional turmoil; she might have suffered from delayed grief. In the case of delayed grief "the person may have had an emotional reaction at the time of the loss, but it is not sufficient to the loss. At a future date the person may experience the symptoms of grief over some subsequent and immediate loss, and the intensity of his or her grieving will seem excessive" (Worden, 140). The timing of Theodora's death was very unfortunate (not that any death can really be fortunately placed), as Shori was in the middle of

doing her utmost to find justice for her dead family. The circumstances might have caused Shori to curb her immediate reaction to her symbiont's death. It might be that in the future, when some time has elapsed and some of the chaos in her life has dissipated, the delayed emotions would come.

Grief can be a powerful instrument in creating relationships. As Gustafson emphasizes, “[F]rom the psychiatric literature there is ample evidence of the bonding that grief, tragedy, and the like produce among both individuals and groups” (459). In *Fledgling* the tragedy concerning the Ina allows the main character to find her way into a closed community. Moreover, the grief that others experience, and the understanding of the suffered loss, allows Shori to create bonds with the members of the community more easily. Shortly after her arrival she becomes a part of the community. The Gordons assure her: “You’re with us now. You aren’t alone” (Butler, 153). The new relationships created amongst the grief may be fragile, as they were forged in times of distress, but they are also a sign that one does not give up but continues to live, creating new memories, and not only dwelling on reminders of the past. Perhaps the created ties with the Ina community will aid Shori in creating a new beginning and possibly regaining some of the lost memories.

In Octavia Butler’s novel the reader can see that memories play an imperative role when it comes to grief. The reader can see how one struggles when one is denied the possibility to grieve, and how one suffers when one is inevitably forced to experience it. The reader sees that the knowledge that you have loved someone cannot replace the memory of the feeling; they do not equate. Knowing that you once felt a certain way does not evoke emotional responses the same way the recollection of those feelings does. Memories are crucial when it comes to grief, and although they may bring pain, they also allow us to keep the love alive long after someone is gone.

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