# DELEUZIAN FABULATION

## AND THE SCARS OF HISTORY

Ronald Bogue

# Deleuzian Fabulation and the Scars of History

**Plateaus – New Directions in Deleuze Studies**

'It's not a matter of bringing all sorts of things together under a single concept but rather of relating each concept to variables that explain its mutations.'
Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*



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*Ronald Bogue*

Edinburgh University Press

For Jarrett Hedborg,

the good brother

and illustrious founder of the Swedish-Hawaiian school of design



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# Introduction

For the last twenty-five years, I have been studying the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. In an initial effort, when Deleuze was not as well known as he is today, I tried to provide a general introduction to his thought and that of his frequent collaborator, Félix Guattari. In a subsequent series of books, I offered an assessment of the relevance of Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari for understanding the arts, especially those of music, painting, cinema and literature. In the course of these investigations, I gradually became aware of a faint yet persistent anti-narrative strain in Deleuze's thought, or at least a predilection for disruptions of conventional narrative and a valorisation of the visual image over the verbal story. This struck me as odd, since Deleuze wrote three brilliant books on creative writers (Proust, Sacher-Masoch, Kafka) and frequently discussed works of literature, many of which have a strong narrative component. I pursued this question further in essays devoted to the concept of fabulation, the vague outlines of which Deleuze articulated late in his career, and after that inquiry, I felt convinced that Deleuze could be of little assistance in the analysis of the properly narrative aspect of literature. My views were altered, however, when I read Jay Lampert's groundbreaking *Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy of History* (2006), which suggested a means of integrating two different theories of time found in Deleuze: his notion of the three passive syntheses of time from *Difference and Repetition* (1968); and the opposition of the times of Chronos and Aion, first voiced in *The Logic of Sense* (1969) and later developed as part of his and Guattari's pronouncements against history in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). Lampert's conclusion was that, all appearances to the contrary, Deleuze and Guattari did have a philosophy of history, and that it could best be understood through the integration of these two temporal models. Although the problems of history and those of narrative fiction are not identical, the question of the temporality of events and their recounting is common to both domains, and Lampert's analysis of the three passive syntheses struck me as particularly useful in approaching the questions I had

been exploring. With an expanded sense of Deleuze's thought about time, I returned to the concept of fabulation and saw emergent in that concept, when combined with insights drawn from Lampert's work and from Deleuze-Guattari's writings on 'minor literature', the outlines of a viable Deleuzian approach to narrative.

While pursuing my interest in Deleuze over the last quarter century, I have also been teaching courses in world literature, including a regular offering titled Contemporary World Literature. My objective in that course has been to examine works written (or at least made newly available in English translation) within the decade preceding the semester in question, and to select texts by male and female writers from as many parts of the globe as possible. As I have accompanied my students in this selective review of contemporary world fiction over the years, I have encountered a widespread concern with the problem of history in writers whose themes, styles and methods otherwise differ markedly. Whether assigned by critics and blurb writers to the category third-world, magical realist, postcolonial, realist, modernist, postmodern, feminist, or what have you, these writers exhibited a profound concern with the myriad historical forces that have come together to shape their particular cultures. And in most of these writers, this historical labour has entailed an accounting of great suffering and an effort to find in that suffering the elements of a usable past – that is, a past that is true to what happened but capable of engendering new possibilities.

As my views of fabulation began to take shape, I increasingly saw resonances between Deleuze's concepts and the practices of these writers. It seemed logical, then, to test the viability of fabulation as a critical tool by conducting analyses of some of these contemporary narratives that grapple with the problem of history. I knew that I wanted to deal with Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Roberto Bolaño's *Amulet*, Assia Djebar's *So Vast the Prison*, and Richard Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish*, not only because they are extraordinary works of art by major contemporary writers, but also because the problem of history is explicitly thematised in all five novels. But my initial plan was to examine a larger corpus of texts that focus on history, devoting no more than ten or twenty pages to each novel, in that way demonstrating the geographic, cultural and stylistic range of works that could be illuminated by the concept of fabulation. Among the novels I had hoped to include were Toni Morrison's *Paradise*, Günter Grass' *Crabwalk*, Sylvie Germain's *Magnus*, Mo Yan's *Life and Death Are*

*Wearing Me Out*, Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Mia Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, Ignacio Padilla's *Shadow Without a Name*, Bharati Mukherjee's *Holder of the World*, and Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. It soon became clear, however, that the short chapter plan was not viable and I decided to limit my study to the novels of Mda, Roy, Bolaño, Djebar and Flanagan.

My decision was based on several considerations. First, it would be easy enough to gesture vaguely toward a given text and cite elements that exemplify selected aspects of fabulation, but that would provide little evidence that fabulation significantly illuminates the novel as a whole or that the multiple components of the theoretical apparatus function together in a meaningful manner when tested in actual critical analysis. Only a close reading of a small corpus would meet these ends. Second, the subtle and inventive treatment of history in these novels cannot be appreciated without familiarity with rich sets of data specific to each novelist's culture. Even well-informed members of any one of the novelist's native audience might easily be unaware of all the historical materials the author is bringing to bear on the work, and it seems highly unlikely that many individuals would have expertise in the history of the nineteenth-century Xhosa; the Mar Thoma Christian culture of Kerala, India; the Tlatelolco Massacre during the UNAM occupation in Mexico and the Pinochet coup in Chile; the discovery and decipherment of the Libyco-Berber script, the French occupation of Algeria and the post-independence Algerian violence of the 1990s; and the fate of convicts and Aborigines in early nineteenth-century Tasmania. Hence, extensive background information would be necessary in each analysis in order to understand how the novelist is engaging history and how that engagement is assimilable within the concept of fabulation. Finally, the audience of this book would be unnecessarily restricted were it to consist solely of readers who are intimately familiar with all five novels. It could be argued that there is no point in reading about novels one has never read, but I believe that such is not the case, that with adequate synopses, representative citations and careful descriptions of a work's structure, themes and style, readers can profit from – and enjoy – an analysis of a work they have yet to read. But of course, providing such expository information necessarily lengthens an analysis and further precludes the possibility of short chapters. (If those who have read any of the novels find the expository material tedious, I beg their

indulgence and invite them to skim quickly through those passages and move on to the more substantive sections.)

Of the many novels I could have chosen for close analysis, I felt that those of Mda, Roy, Bolaño, Djebar and Flanagan were especially useful. Although many contemporary novels 'thematise history' in a general sense, these novels are unusual in their treatment of history in such a prominent and insistent fashion. Not only does History writ large appear over and over again in all the novels, but in a sense it becomes a veritable allegorical presence, such that in Roy, for example, History emerges as the dominant actor in the novel, and in Bolaño, the 'birth of History' proves to be the climactic event of the work. Each text also provides a very different set of interpretive problems, ranging from those of uncovering the narrative subtleties in Mda's seemingly straightforward account of events, to those of simply making sense of Bolaño's poetic and hallucinatory narrative – a text that has baffled many of its readers. Further, as practitioners of fabulation, each novelist offers a markedly different perspective on the elements of fabulation and their relation to history and Deleuze's three passive syntheses of time. Mda explores the crushing historical burden of a collective catastrophe; Roy deals with the conjunction of personal trauma and centuries-long prejudice and oppression; Bolaño reflects on memory, political action and the role of the Latin American writer; Djebar confronts cultural amnesia and develops a collective autobiography within a vast historical, sociopolitical context; and Flanagan discloses coexisting strata of histories, counter-histories, historical allegories and transhistorical ineffabilities, all of which finally have enduring efficacy. Each work forces a rethinking of the implications of fabulation, and each testifies to the multi-dimensional potential of the concept for application to other narratives. Finally, the five novels differ enough from one another that when read in succession, many readers might well judge them to be similar only in a very general sense, whereas, when examined through the lens of fabulation, they emerge as paradigmatic instances of the phenomenon, united in method, orientation and purpose. Certainly, other novels could have served a comparable, if somewhat different, function in my study, and in fact, the concept of fabulation would be of little use were it applicable only to these five novels. But these five texts are especially telling instances of fabulation that illuminate the concept in essential ways.

My primary objective has been to develop the Deleuzian notion of fabulation into a properly literary theoretical concept and then

demonstrate its potential as a tool for practical critical analysis. Yet the relationship between theoretical concept and object of analysis is by no means a one-way street. It would be a weary exercise indeed simply to construct the fabulation grinder and then crank out uniform sausage as each novel is passed through the rotor blades. All five novelists have a profound understanding of narrative, and in examining their works through the concept of fabulation, possibilities emerge for modifying and expanding the concept itself. Hence, each analytic chapter is as much an effort to enrich the notion of fabulation as it is an attempt to elucidate a text, and in the conclusion I try to assess the alterations in the concept that these novelists have led me to make. Of course, I also hope that specialists will find something new in the readings I offer of individual works. Although these readings seldom depart radically from those of other critics, they do aim at reconfiguring and reorienting ongoing discussions of the novels. I also believe that the juxtaposition of these five novels opens them all to an expanded sense of their authors' achievements, as well as an enhanced understanding of the local and global contexts in which they have produced these works. And finally, I hope that readers will find the subject matter of each novel interesting in its own right, in particular the details of each novel's cultural and historical context, which have fascinated me as I discovered more about them during this research project.

In Chapter 1, I offer a detailed explication of the term 'fabulation' and its multiple associations with other concepts in Deleuze's works, but before tackling this complex of terms and texts, I would like to outline briefly the key elements of fabulation that will emerge from Chapter 1's analysis and situate them in relationship to Deleuze's general approach to literature, which has been articulated in various ways throughout his career.[1]

In his early book *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962), Deleuze supports Nietzsche's contention that the philosopher should be a 'cultural physician', both a diagnostician who correctly identifies the signs of social illness and a healer who provides a cure. As cultural physician, the philosopher is also an artist, who creates new possibilities for life, and a legislator, who creatively revalues all values. Hence, what Nietzsche calls the 'philosopher of the future' would be a philosopher-physician, a philosopher-artist, and a philosopher-legislator. This notion of cultural physician also informs one of Deleuze's early literary studies, *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty* (1967), in which he argues that sadism and

masochism are qualitatively different phenomena, and that if the Marquis de Sade is the great diagnostician of sadism, masochism's great analyst is Leopold Ritter von Sacher-Masoch. Both Sade and Masoch, Deleuze claims, are not perverts who impulsively detail their fantasies, but symptomatologists who disclose the full dynamics of sadism and masochism. Literature, then, shares philosophy's end of diagnosing culture's illnesses and inventing possible cures. This broad conception of literature, evident in Deleuze's early thought, is one that he maintains throughout his career. In a 1988 interview, for example, he reiterates his reading of Masoch as a great symptomatologist, but adds to the list of cultural physicians Proust and Kafka, noting that Proust's '*Recherche* is a general semiology, a symptomatology of different worlds. Kafka's work is a diagnosis of all the diabolical powers around us. As Nietzsche said, artists and philosophers are civilization's doctors'. These artists do more than simply diagnose signs of illness, for signs 'imply ways of living, possibilities of existence, they're the symptoms of life gushing forth or draining away. . . . In the act of writing there's an attempt to make life something more than personal, to free life from what imprisons it' (Deleuze 1995: 142–3). And in his last book, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1993), Deleuze states once again that the writer is 'a physician, the physician of himself and of the world. The world is the set of symptoms whose illness merges with man. Literature then appears as an enterprise of health', a health that would be 'sufficient to liberate life wherever it is imprisoned by and within man, by and within organisms and genera' (Deleuze 1997: 3).

In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975), Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on the diagnostic element of Kafka's labour as a cultural physician, detailing the ways in which Kafka's fiction at once serves as a critique of the sociopolitical workings of Prague and the Austro-Hungarian Empire and as a prophetic articulation of the 'diabolical powers of the future', to wit, the bureaucratic regimes of Nazi Germany, Soviet Communism and American capitalism. In Deleuze and Guattari's reading, Kafka is neither a religious mystic nor a self-consumed explorer of his personal neuroses, but a thoroughly political writer whose fiction directly confronts and transforms the signs and forces of his world in an experimentation on the real. This diagnostic component of Kafka's work, argue Deleuze and Guattari, may be seen as one aspect of Kafka's practice as a 'minor writer' who produces 'minor literature', which they define as literature that is immediately social and political, that engages a 'collective

assemblage of enunciation', and that uses language with a 'high coefficient of deterritorialization' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 18, 16).

Minor literature, then, incorporates Deleuze's long-standing sense of the writer as cultural physician, in that the minor writer's works are immediately social and political, while adding the notions of the writer as articulator of a 'collective assemblage of enunciation' and practitioner of a 'deterritorialization' of language. Through the concept of the 'collective assemblage of enunciation', Deleuze and Guattari stress first, that language is never truly individual but always collective, and second, that minor writers embrace their role as mediums of a collective voice, unlike major writers who confirm the fiction of the artist as a depoliticised individual, a fiction that helps solidify the dominant power structures of the society in which the major writers work. By engaging a collective assemblage of enunciation, minor writers strive to assist in the creation of a viable collectivity, which, unfortunately, does not yet exist. Although minor writers alone cannot create such a collectivity, they can offer interventions in the political sphere that might enable the invention of a genuine community in the future.

Hence, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minor literature's engagement of a collective assemblage of enunciation may be seen as a complementary extension of its basic function as sociopolitical practice, and in that regard, as yet one more development of the broad conception of the artist as cultural physician. With the notion of minor literature's deterritorialisation, Deleuze and Guattari add a political dimension to the formal element of literary style, understood in the widest sense of the term. Minor writers make language stutter and stammer. They disclose a foreign language within their own language. Through linguistic experimentation of various sorts, they destabilise the regularities of standard usage and thereby set in disequilibrium the sociopolitical forces that permeate 'proper' speech and enforce the status quo. In some cases that experimentation is obvious – nonstandard syntax, fragmentation of words, proliferation of figures of speech – whereas in others (such as Kafka), it is less pronounced, consisting of a deliberate impoverishment of language that lends a subtle strangeness and affective resonance to the language. But in both instances, the object is to render style a component of the political function of minor literature, that of an instigator of transformations in the dominant relations of power.

In their treatment of Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari also introduce the concept of 'becoming-animal', concentrating specifically

on Gregor's becoming-insect in 'The Metamorphosis'. They argue that Gregor's transformation is not a metaphor, but a real process of 'becoming' (which I shall refer to as 'becoming-other' throughout this study).[2] They view Gregor's becoming-insect as a mutative process that opens up a zone of indiscernibility between the human and the animal and thereby offers possibilities for altered practices and understandings outside orthodox conceptions of what human beings are and how they differ from animals. Deleuze and Guattari find evidence of becoming-animal in many of Kafka's stories, and they subsume this 'becoming-other' within the general category of experimenting on the real. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they develop the concept of becoming-other at great length, exploring the dynamics of becoming-woman, becoming-child, becoming-animal, becoming-molecular, becoming-imperceptible, and so on. All such becomings, they assert, are political in nature. Asymmetrical power relations the world over are regulated by the implicit valorisation of the categories of white, male, European, adult and human over those of non-white, female, non-European, child, animal. And any process that serves to scramble these codes, to set in disequilibrium the binary oppositions that are formulated and enforced by power (oppositions of white vs. non-white, male vs. female, and so on, *as defined by white males*), has a political force with the potential of transforming social and environmental relations in unpredictable ways.

It is not surprising, then, that Deleuze and Guattari identify writers and artists in general as primary exponents of becoming-other, for this fundamentally political practice is merely an added dimension of the minor writer's production of immediately social and political literature, and of the cultural physician's generation of art that engenders sociopolitical health. Nor is it surprising that when Deleuze lists the basic elements of literature in the late essay 'Literature and Life' (in *Essays Critical and Clinical*), becoming-other is the first he discusses. To that element he adds three others: stuttering in one's own language, creating visions and auditions, and inventing a 'people to come'. 'Stuttering', of course, is simply another name for minor literature's deterritorialisation of language. The creation of visions and auditions Deleuze presents as an extension of stuttering. The visions and auditions produced through the writer's stammerings are hallucinatory visual and sonic images, such as psychotics experience (seeing phantoms and hearing alien voices, for example). They are 'not outside language', but 'the outside *of* language', 'not of language, but [that] which language alone makes

possible' (Deleuze 1997: lv). Like stutters and stammers, visions and auditions are deterritorialisations of language that push language to its limits and reveal its outside – the paradoxical 'beyond' of language that can only be produced through language. And 'inventing a people to come' is basically a reformulation of minor literature's political aim of contributing to the creation of a viable future collectivity.

This final characterisation of literature, then, is essentially an elaboration on themes that appear early in the concept of the writer as cultural physician and later in the concept of minor literature. It is within this broad context that I situate my analysis of fabulation. In 'Literature and Life', Deleuze speaks of fabulation as an aspect of inventing a people to come, but as I show in the next chapter, if one follows carefully Deleuze's and Deleuze-Guattari's statements about fabulation, from *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985), through interviews in the late 1980s, to *What Is Philosophy?* (1991) and *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1993), the concept of fabulation so permeates and infiltrates other concepts related to the arts and to literature that one may use the term to characterise most of the elements of the literary enterprise as Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari have understood it throughout their careers. My objective is not to subsume all literature within the category of fabulation, however, but to develop an approach to narrative fiction, under the rubric of fabulation, that incorporates the fundamental dimensions of literary practice as Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari describe it. As I will show, an approach to narrative fiction via the concept of fabulation may be divided into five components: becoming-other, experimenting on the real, 'legending', inventing a people to come, and deterritorialising language.

The full sense of what I mean by these terms will emerge in the ensuing chapters, but a few preliminary remarks about the components of fabulation and their application to the five novels I discuss may help map the territory ahead. Becoming-other, as I said earlier, entails a passage between categories, modes of existence and discrete entities such that stable elements are set in metamorphic disequilibrium. In the five novels I analyse I show the centrality of various becomings: in Mda, a becoming-prophet; in Roy, a pervasive becoming-child, within which are situated a becoming-woman and a becoming-untouchable; in Bolaño, a becoming-memory; in Djebar, a becoming-girl and a becoming-woman; and in Flanagan, a becoming-fish (the protagonist literally turns into a weedy seadragon). In characterising fabulation as an experimentation on the real, I stress the

efficacy of fabulative works as interventions in their ambient social, political, institutional, environmental and material worlds. I include within this notion much of the 'labour of history' carried out by the five novelists, a labour that involves: a diagnostic critique of forces, events, memories and documents that shape the present; an articulation of untold, erased and forgotten events; and a reconfiguration of the past that discloses present junctures of potential transformation. In this regard, the act of fabulation may be seen as consonant with the practice of the cultural physician as symptomatologist and healer. Fabulative 'legending', I argue, involves both the treatment of characters and their actions as immediately sociopolitical in nature, and the development of a projective mythography of images that take on a life of their own. In all the novels I examine, the persistent focus on the historical dimension of the action imbues the characters with both personal and collective identities. In this regard, the novels resemble what Fredric Jameson calls third-world 'national allegories', in which '*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*' (Jameson 2000: 320). At the same time, the actions of the novel's characters trace patterns of a broadly mythic nature. Indeed, in each novel certain characters gradually assume a larger-than-life, heroic, or even quasi-divine stature, and it is this aspect of 'legending' I am labelling 'projective mythography'. Such mythographic projections, in fact, are essential to the invention of a people to come, the fourth element of fabulation. As I noted earlier, novelists alone cannot overcome the absence of a viable collectivity and create one on their own, but they can offer intimations of a potential collectivity, and in each of the novels I examine, the mythically enlarged characters serve as vague representatives of a transformed mode of social interaction.

As regards the fifth dimension of fabulation, the deterritorialisation of language, a disclaimer is in order at this point. Despite the importance of this dimension, I do not discuss it at any length in this study, although I do make reference to it in the chapters on Roy and Djebar. This decision is based on three concerns. First, an adequate stylistic treatment of the five novels would significantly lengthen each chapter. Second, it would engage an element of fabulation that is not specific to narrative fiction, which is my focus here. And third, I simply lack the knowledge and ability to carry out such an analysis. All too often in discussions of the deterritorialisation of language, including those of Deleuze and Guattari, concrete examples and extended close readings are rare. Even rarer are discussions

that examine the deterritorialisations of one language via another, as takes place when a bi- or tri-lingual novelist allows the sounds, rhythms and syntactic patterns of a second or third language subtly to modify and render 'other' the language in which the novel is written. In *Kafka*, Deleuze and Guattari point toward such a phenomenon when they argue that aspects of Czech and Yiddish speech contribute to the deterritorialisation of Kafka's German. Not only do I concur with this assessment, but I also believe that one of the most important elements of the deterritorialisation of language in much of contemporary world literature arises from the multilingual environment in which many writers work. This is especially the case with the five writers I examine here. In my judgement, therefore, an adequate analysis of the ways that the five novelists 'create a foreign language within their own language' would require fluency in several regional versions and stylistic registers of English, French, Spanish, Xhosa, Malayalam, Arabic and Berber. This is a skill-set I am unashamed to admit that I do not possess.

My first object in the next chapter, then, is to enlarge upon Deleuze's and Deleuze-Guattari's scattered remarks about fabulation and indicate how the concept may be understood in terms of becoming-other, experimenting on the real, legending, and inventing a people to come. But the second half of the chapter is devoted to an additional concern: the problem of time and its relation to history and narrative fiction. As I will show, becoming-other in Deleuze-Guattari is consistently associated with the disruption of ordinary, commonsense time (referred to as Chronos) and the emergence of a floating, unfixed time (called Aion). Aion is also often opposed to history and memory, and by implication, to conventional narrative. Obviously, if the concept of fabulation is to provide an approach to narrative fiction, this apparent valorisation of Aion and denigration of Chronos must be addressed. What I will argue is that the Chronos/Aion distinction is much less rigid than it might appear, and that Deleuze's theory of the three passive syntheses of time in *Difference and Repetition* offers a means of enriching the Chronos/Aion opposition while disclosing a wide range of temporal distinctions that make room for diverse, complex narrative practices. Hence, though the temporal distinctions I draw do not appear directly in my five-fold characterisation of fabulation, they are vital to all aspects of the concept and to the analyses of fabulation in the novels of Mda, Roy, Bolaño, Djebar and Flanagan.

A final note about the word *fabulation*. Why use this term to

discuss narrative fiction? Every word brings with it multiple connotations, conflicting associations and complex histories of deployment in diverse contexts. As a result, there are advantages and disadvantages to the adoption of any word as the controlling term in an analysis. (Even coining a new term has its disadvantages, since the coinage cannot be explained without reference to conventional words with their own host of mixed associations.) The notion of minor literature, for example, is one that has proved popular among literary critics, and perhaps it could have been used as a replacement for fabulation. But that term, besides suggesting that minor literature is lesser literature, has led many critics to employ it as a synonym for minority literature, which simplifies and distorts the concept in essential ways. Minorities may well create minor literature, but they may also write works that are as rigid and stultifying as those of the most conventional Western author. Conversely, writers within a dominant Western tradition may engage in practices that fulfil all the characteristics of minor literature. Given the accumulated body of misuses of 'minor literature', adopting a new, and relatively undeveloped, Deleuzian term struck me as a better strategy than trying to approach narrative fiction as simply a subdivision of minor literature.

I decided to use 'fabulation' for three reasons. First, granting prominence to this somewhat marginal Deleuzian concept allows a rethinking of his understanding of literature in general and narrative fiction in particular, which should be of interest to anyone concerned with Deleuze's philosophy of the arts. Second, the word is not in common use (at least in my experience), and hence brings with it fewer firmly established connotations than many other terms might. Granted, 'to fabulate', according to the American Heritage Dictionary, is 'to engage in the composition of fables or stories, especially those in which the element of fantasy comes into heavy play', and a 'fabulist' is 'a composer of fables', or 'a teller of tales; a liar', and these associations with fantasy and lying are not helpful in my enterprise. But 'fabulate', 'fabulist', and especially 'fabulation' strike me as rare enough locutions that a specialised appropriation of the term 'fabulation' may be undertaken without need for a protracted struggle to counter common understandings of the word. Finally, 'fabulation' comes from the Latin *fabula*, and one of my basic aims is to stress the centrality of *stories* in the novels I discuss.[3] Deleuze often emphasises the 'powers of the false' when discussing narrative, arguing that in the creation of genuinely new stories the very categories of true and false become irrelevant, and I wish to make

a similar point, but I feel that the phrase 'the powers of the false' too readily invites a reintroduction of the true/false distinction in its orthodox formulation. The term 'fabulation', by contrast, allows one to conceive of storytelling simultaneously as a way of engaging and articulating real and material problems – and hence as a way of getting at truths of a certain sort, of countering lies and insisting on historical facts that have been denied, buried or distorted – *and* as a means of inventing new possibilities for construing the world and its future development.

## *Notes*

1. For an extended treatment of the stages in Deleuze's thought about literature, see Bogue 2003b. Daniel W. Smith provides a similar history in his excellent introduction to *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Deleuze 1997: xi–liii).
2. Deleuze and Guattari usually speak of 'becomings' to designate the general processes of becoming-woman, becoming-child, becoming-animal, becoming-imperceptible, and so on. In my view, all of these 'becomings' may be accurately characterised as instances of 'becoming-other', and if so designated, the word 'becoming' may then be reserved for its more idiomatic usages. I believe that this strategic designation of 'becoming' as 'becoming-other' reduces the possibilities of confusion in the exposition of the concept.
3. Literary theorists, of course, will immediately think of the Russian Formalist distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzhet*, a complex differentiation that may be roughly rendered as one of story versus plot. This association is not entirely advantageous to my use of the term 'fabulation', although all the novelists I discuss do make creative use of *fabula* and *sjuzhet* in their works. As I employ the concept, fabulation refers to all aspects of storytelling, and hence includes both *fabula* and *sjuzhet* within it.

*1*

# The Concept of Fabulation

In a 1990 interview, Deleuze observed that

> It's the greatest artists (rather than populist artists) who invoke a people, and find they 'lack a people': Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Klee, Berg. The Straubs in cinema. Artists can only invoke a people, their need for one goes to the very heart of what they're doing, it's not their job to create one, and they can't. . . . How is a people created, through what terrible suffering? When a people's created, it's through its own resources, but in a way that links up with something in art (Garrel says there's a mass of terrible suffering in the Louvre, too) or links up art to what it lacked. Utopia isn't the right concept: it's more a question of a 'fabulation' in which a people and art both share. We ought to take up Bergson's notion of fabulation and give it a political meaning. (Deleuze 1995: 174)

Although Deleuze proposes here to develop a political conception of Bergsonian fabulation, he was able to offer only cursory intimations of what such an idea might be before his death in 1995. Nonetheless, these hints are sufficient to suggest what he meant by fabulation and how the concept might be situated within his thought as a whole.

## *Bergsonian Fabulation*

Even in French, the word 'fabulation' is somewhat rare, and according to the Robert *Dictionnaire*, Bergson is the first to use the word in a philosophical sense (which the *Dictionnaire* defines as an 'activity of the imagination').[1] The concept plays an important role in Bergson's primary essay in social theory, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932). His central thesis is that a social order based on a universal love of human kind cannot be generated from a social order based on bonds of a more limited sort. Traditional communities, which he labels 'closed societies', establish an opposition of 'us' and 'them' – indeed, this is one of their fundamental characteristics. What he calls 'open societies', by contrast, require a qualitatively different principle of organisation from closed societies, and they can

only come into existence through a creative reconception of humanity and community.

Bergson notes that social organisation is widespread in nature, with two evolutionary tendencies in collective life represented by hymenoptera (bees, wasps, ants) and Homo sapiens. Bee societies are essentially the product of instinct, and as a result they are stable and invariant in structure from hive to hive. By contrast, human societies vary widely in their mode of organisation, since they are formed through communicative interaction that is not fixed by instinct. As a result, human societies are more flexible than bee societies, and hence better able to adapt to new situations, but also inherently unstable. In the absence of specifically social instincts, however, humans do have one primary instinct, without which social organisation would be impossible: a basic sense of moral obligation to others. This primary instinct is what holds closed societies together, and what informs the religion and morality of such societies. One important component of religion in closed societies is 'fabulation' (rendered by Bergson's English translators as 'myth-making'), which Bergson describes as the act whereby 'fantasmatic representations' (Bergson 1954: 108) of spirits, forces and gods are brought forth. Fabulation and religion together function as fundamental means of reinforcing social cohesion in closed societies.

Bergson finds the essence of fabulation in a tendency of the mind to attribute will and agency to natural phenomena. To support this thesis, he cites at length an account by William James of his experience of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. James notes that his immediate reaction when the earthquake struck was to conceive of it as an individual entity that was related to him personally. As James puts it, 'Animus and intent were never more present in any human action, nor did any human activity ever more definitely point back to a living agent as its source and origin' (cited in Bergson 1954: 155). According to Bergson, we see here fabulation in its barest, simplest form. Intelligence,

> impelled by instinct, transforms the situation. It brings forth the image that reassures. It gives to the Event a unity and an individuality which make of the event a being that is malicious or perhaps mischievous, but a being similar to us, with something of the sociable and human about it. (Bergson 1954: 158)

Ultimately, fabulation may produce fictions so powerful, so 'vivid and haunting', that they 'may precisely imitate perception, and

thereby prevent or modify action' (Bergson 1954: 109). Fabulation, then, has as its goal the creation of hallucinatory fictions that regulate behaviour and reinforce social cohesion.

## *Fabulation and Giants*

Bergson's treatment of fabulation is largely negative, and it is striking that Deleuze, clearly no advocate of closed societies, should find something so positive in this concept. His reading of Bergson, however, leads him to see in fabulation an activity that need not reinforce restrictive power structures. He and Guattari remark in *What Is Philosophy?* that

> Bergson analyzes fabulation as a visionary faculty very different from the imagination and that consists in creating gods and giants, 'semi-personal powers or effective presences'. It is exercised first of all in religions, but it is freely developed in art and literature. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 230)

What they stress in Bergsonian fabulation, and what they appropriate for their own use of the term, is that fabulation is a 'visionary faculty', one that fashions 'effective presences' and creates 'giants'. A brief summary of Deleuze and Guattari's aesthetic should help clarify these terms.

The arts, according to Deleuze and Guattari, have as their goal the preservation of the 'being of sensation' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164). In every work of art, 'what is preserved – the thing or the work of art – is *a bloc of sensation, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164). Percepts, they explain, are not the same as perceptions, just as affects are not the same as affections (that is, feelings). Percepts are like the landscapes Cézanne said he painted, in which man is '"absent from but entirely within the landscape"' (cited in Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 169). Affects are becomings – becoming-other, 'becoming animal, plant, molecular, becoming zero'. (We shall return to becomings shortly.) Affects, then, '*are precisely these nonhuman becomings of men*, just as percepts – including the town – are *nonhuman landscapes of nature*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 169), and the aim of art 'is to wrest the percept from perceptions of objects and the states of a perceiving subject, to wrest the affect from affections as the transition from one state to another: to extract a bloc of sensations, a pure being of sensations' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 167). If the artist's

task is to extract a bloc of sensation, 'the artist's greatest difficulty is to make it *stand up on its own*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164), that is, to develop a medium in which sensation may be preserved, and in this sense, to fashion a work that is a 'monument' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164).

Although the designation 'monument' may seem to imply that the work is a kind of 'memorial', Deleuze and Guattari insist that artworks have little to do with memory, but instead with fabulation.

> Memory plays a small part in art (even and especially in Proust). It is true that every work of art is a *monument*, but here the monument is not something commemorating a past, it is a bloc of present sensations that owe their preservation only to themselves and provide the event with the compound that celebrates it. The monument's action is not memory but fabulation. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 167–8)

Fabulation concerns the vision of percepts and the becoming of affects.

> Creative fabulation has nothing to do with a memory, however exaggerated, or with a fantasy. In fact, the artist, including the novelist, goes beyond the perceptual states and affective transitions of the lived. The artist is a seer [*voyant*], a becomer [*devenant*]. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 171)

In acting as a seer and becomer, the artist fashions an 'effective presence', a genuine 'being of sensation' that has the solidity and materiality of a monument. In rendering sensation 'monumental', the artist fills the work with a non-personal life, that of the 'nonhuman landscapes of nature' and the 'nonhuman becomings' of humans. Hence, 'percepts can be telescopic or microscopic, giving characters and landscapes giant dimensions as if they were swollen by a life that no lived perception can attain', for which reason we may say that 'all fabulation is the fabrication of giants' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 171).

In 'The Shame and the Glory: T. E. Lawrence', a late study from *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze provides an example of fabulation's creation of 'giants'. Deleuze regards T. E. Lawrence as 'one of the great portrayers of landscapes in literature', who is able to 'shape aesthetic percepts like veritable visions' (Deleuze 1997: 116) and project them into the real world he describes. In characterising the deserts he travels, Lawrence also recounts his efforts to recruit Arabs in a fight against the Ottoman Empire. He finds the mission especially difficult because the nomadic Arabs are not a cohesive group,

but a loose collection of tribes held together only through temporary and shifting alliances. Part of his task, therefore, he sees as helping the Arabs form a collectivity capable of coordinated action, including that of eventually developing a state. To meet this end, he adopts postures among the Arabs meant to encourage them in the creation of a heroic self-image, and many readers of Lawrence have judged his stances to be instances of a self-aggrandising 'mythomania'. Deleuze argues, however, that Lawrence's effort is not to inflate his own ego but 'to project – into things, into reality, into the future and even into the sky – an image of himself and of others so intense enough that *it has a life of its own* . . . It is a machine for manufacturing giants, what Bergson called a fabulatory function' (Deleuze 1997: 118).

## *Giants and People to Come*

The 'fabrication of giants', then, is one aspect of fabulation's creation of visions that have a life of their own, of percepts that have a solidity and monumentality. In Lawrence's case, we see with especial clarity the connection between fabulation and the invention of a social collectivity, which Deleuze refers to as a 'people to come' [*peuple à venir*]. Deleuze elaborates on the artistic invention of a people to come in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, offering the films of Pierre Perrault as instructive examples of that creative process. Perrault is a documentary filmmaker, but one whose relation to his subjects is decidedly interactive. In *Pour la suite du monde* (1963), for instance, Perrault suggests to a group of Québequois islanders that they resume a long-abandoned collective practice of erecting weir barriers in the St Lawrence river to snare white dolphins. The islanders oblige, and Perrault films them in the endeavour. The Québequois must revive distant memories and ancestral lore in order to snare the dolphins, and as they share these stories, the camera captures them, in Perrault's words, 'in a state of legending', 'of legending in *flagrante delicto*' [*en flagrant délit de légender*] (Perrault 1983: 54). Deleuze sees here 'the pure and simple *function of fabulation*', in which 'the becoming of the real character' [that is, the Québequois fisherman] 'starts to "make fiction"', and '"legends in *flagrante delicto*" and so contributes to the invention of his people' (Deleuze 1989: 150, translation modified).

Perrault argues that neither he nor the islanders are capable of producing such 'legending' by themselves, for they need one another as 'intercessors'. He needs them because he has been separated from

his Québequois roots through his formal education, which has 'colonised' his thought and speech with traditional French concepts and language. The islanders in turn would never have resurrected their former customs without Perrault, nor would they have generated a new self-conception without his film project. In this collective process of intercession, Deleuze identifies an important aspect of fabulation, that of the artist's relationship to the people. All genuine art is a collective enterprise, though one that goes beyond anything either the artist or the collectivity can do alone. This does not mean, however, that the artist must be a man or woman 'of the people', in intimate communion with the proletariat. Every artistic project need not be as directly interactive as Perrault's. Rather, it simply indicates that the artist's task always has a collective dimension and that its ultimate function is to invent a people to come. Kafka, for example, is often regarded as an isolated writer, alienated from society, but in Deleuze's view, all his works are immediately social. The actual author and the envisioned 'people to come' are each functioning parts of an art-machine that produces possibilities beyond those available within Kafka's historical situation. In *The Trial*, for example, K is the

> *functioning of a polyvalent assemblage of which the solitary individual is only a part*, the coming collectivity being another part, another piece of the machine—without our knowing yet what this assemblage will be: fascist? revolutionary? socialist? capitalist? Or even all of these at the same time, connected in the most repugnant or diabolical way? (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 85)

One cannot know ahead of time what the artistic invention of a people to come will lead to, but despite its risks, it is the only means of developing new possibilities for art and the social collectivity.

Deleuzian fabulation, then, is first a form of 'legending', of creating larger-than-life 'giants', hallucinatory visions of future collectivities, and second, a means toward the invention of a people to come. But we must recall as well that, according to *What Is Philosophy?*, when engaged in fabulation, the artist is 'a seer, a becomer', who creates visions of percepts and the becoming-other of affects. In Perrault's film, both he and the Québequois become-other, in that through their interaction he and the islanders move beyond their ordinary identities. Yet the connection between fabulation and becoming-other is much more extensive than that of legending and inventing a people to come. Indeed, as Deleuze says in 'Literature and Life', writing as a whole 'is inseparable from becoming: in writing, one

becomes-woman, becomes-animal or vegetable, becomes-molecule to the point of becoming-imperceptible' (Deleuze 1997: 1).

## *Becoming*

Human interactions are structured by categories that enforce asymmetrical power relations: male–female, white–black (or brown, red, yellow), adult–child, human–animal, and so on. In the contestation of such categories, it is not enough simply to increase the power of the dominated category, since the categories themselves are inherently tainted. The classifications 'woman', 'black', 'child' and 'animal' are functions of their dominant oppositional term, constructed in order to institute and sustain patterns of domination. Essential to the function of such categories is the fixing of identities, the establishment of a stable taxonomy that assigns individuals their roles, characteristics, motives, abilities, and so on. Hence, the path of resistance to oppressive power relations is not simply through struggle with dominant authorities but also through subversion of the categories we live by, an unfixing of identities and inauguration of a process of metamorphosis. Becoming-other is a passage between categories that undermines both poles of an opposition. Becoming-woman is a passage between the categories of man and woman, just as becoming-child is a passage between those of adult and child. Because the poles are unevenly weighted, all becomings move away from the dominant and toward the dominated – hence, there is no becoming-male, becoming-white, becoming-adult, or becoming-human. A becoming-woman or a becoming-animal, however, is not a matter of imitating a woman or mimicking a dog or cat. A becoming-woman establishes a 'zone of proximity . . . an objective zone of indetermination or uncertainty', a '*proximity, an indiscernibility*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 273, 279), between 'man' and 'woman'. The object of such a mutative undoing of male and female identities is the creation of a 'line of flight' toward some hitherto unmapped gendering of the human, just as becoming-animal is a passage between the categories of the human and the animal toward something new.

> A becoming is always in the middle; . . . it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both . . . it constitutes a zone of proximity and indiscernibility, a no-man's land, a nonlocalizable relation sweeping up the two distant or contiguous points, carrying one into the proximity of the other. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 293)

Yet becoming-other is more than mere ideology critique, for becomings cut across distinctions between the mental and the material, the human and the nonhuman, culture and nature. Indeed, becomings are evident throughout nature. Deleuze often cites the reproductive symbiosis of the orchid and the wasp as an instance of becoming. The Australian hammer orchid's floral patterns, for example, resemble a female wasp; attracted to this lure, the male wasp enters the flower, makes contact with pollen, and then carries the pollen to another orchid, thereby enabling the reproduction of the orchid species. This phenomenon is frequently classified as natural mimicry, but Deleuze argues that it is not an instance of mimesis but of an a-parallel evolutionary development inducing a becoming-other of both organisms, the orchid becoming-wasp, the wasp becoming-orchid. Neither truly exchanges identity with the other, and in fact, something new emerges between the two, a symbiotic sign–body relationship. What is significant is that this relationship involves a co-evolution of species within an evolving environment, each creature itself developing in a process of continuous change (that is, organic growth), the interactive system of signs, actions and bodies forming an indivisible complex. In an analogous way, human sign systems, including ideological taxonomies, must be treated as material complexes of signs, actions and bodies developing within co-evolving environmental networks of relations.

## *The Virtual and the Actual*

In a limited sense, this ecological, developmental model may be said to be that of a general becoming, in that it is characterised by unceasing change. But much more is entailed in the Deleuzian notion of becoming. Throughout his work, Deleuze makes use of a distinction between the virtual and the actual, an opposition he draws from Bergson, and it is the virtual that is the domain of pure becoming. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze speaks of the virtual as 'an impersonal and pre-individual transcendental field, which does not resemble the corresponding empirical field, and which nevertheless is not confused with an undifferentiated depth' (Deleuze 1990: 102). All too often, it is assumed that reality must be characterised either as a collection of discrete, clearly demarcated entities, or as an amorphous chaos. Deleuze counters, however, that between these extremes lies the virtual, which is the transcendental condition of possibility of all empirical, individual entities. The virtual, this transcendental

field, and the actual, the world of commonsense entities, are both real, and the virtual is immanent within the actual, but the two exist in different ways and have qualitatively different characteristics. Three models may help clarify what this difficult concept of the virtual entails.

The first is that of individuation, which Deleuze takes from the philosopher Gilbert Simondon. Simondon points out that in traditional accounts of living organisms the ruling assumption is that analysis begins with fully constituted individuals and that the characterisation of a given creature may be conducted in terms of a 'hylemorphic', or form-matter, model, in which an ideal form imposes organisation on an amorphous matter (such as a brick mould imposing a shape on a viscous blob of clay). Simondon finds fault with both assumptions. His contention is that the process of individuation precedes the existence of actual individuals, and that form and matter, rather than being separate elements, in fact constitute an interactive complex of self-forming matter-in-formation. As a rudimentary instance of individuation, Simondon considers the process of crystal formation in certain non-crystallised chemical solutions. The production of an individual crystal proceeds along an incipient surface, the process of individuation itself preceding the formed individual crystal. Upon the delineation of a completed crystal, the formation of the next crystal has already begun, such that individual crystals continue to emerge as the end result of individuation, not as the explanatory cause of the process. The chemical solution is in a metastable state, that is, a state in which energy is unevenly distributed and available for metamorphic activity. Further, there exist solutions that are capable of forming more than one kind of crystal, depending on the stimulus that instigates crystallisation – the introduction of a seed crystal, changes in temperature or pressure, random fluctuations in the medium, and so on. From all this Simondon concludes that metastable states constitute a 'more-than-one', a being beyond that of the individual, an excess of being capable of multiple differentiation. And in the process of individuation, both the individual crystal and its surrounding medium co-structure one another in an ongoing, mutually constituting process whose outcome is never fully determinable. Using this simple model, Simondon moves to an analysis of living entities, and eventually to diverse organisms, their collective behaviour and the development of 'transindividuals', such as human societies, arguing that all such individuated entities should be conceived of as the products of hierarchically sustained systems of

metastable entities engaged in a perpetual co-structuring process of open-ended individuation.

In a first approximation, then, we may say that the 'transcendental plane' of the virtual is something like a distribution of metastable sites of individuation before actual individuals have taken shape, and hence it is 'impersonal and pre-individual' (Deleuze 1990: 102). In Deleuze's terms, each metastable site is a difference capable of self-differentiation. A second model that Deleuze often uses in characterising such metastable sites is that of 'singular points', or 'singularities'. A parabola, for example, consists of a U-shaped form, its various points organised around a focus, the point at which the U's left side and right side meet. The focus is a singular point, all the other points generated in the parabola being regular points. Every parabola has a singular point, and there is a sense in which the general 'problem' of the parabola consists of this relationship of singular point to regular points. Individual parabolas may be generated from various numerical values assigned to the elements of an equation, each parabola being a specific actualisation of the general problem of the parabola. In each parabola, the shape will vary, and hence the regular points will also vary, but in all parabolas the singular point will occupy the same central position, for which reason the singular point may be taken as the key element of the parabola as general 'problem'. Thus, the singular point, before the assignment of specific values to an equation, may be said to be the virtual site for the actualisation of multiple parabolas, the singular point in this regard resembling a metastable locus of incipient individuation.

Finally, each metastable site or singular point may be thought of as a 'line of continuous variation'. In countering the hylemorphic model, Simondon differentiates the notion of a 'mould' from that of 'modulation'. A brick mould is a fixed frame (say, a rectangular wooden box) within which viscous clay is shaped. A triode tube, by contrast, is an instance of continuous moulding, which Simondon calls 'modulation'. In such a tube, electrons pass from one terminal to another, and between the terminals is a 'gate' that opens and closes to control the flow of electrons. Simondon views the gate as a 'mould' that is constantly 'shaping' the electron flow, its shaping in this sense constituting a continuous moulding, or modulation. Deleuze adapts this terminology, at times speaking of 'lines of continuous variation' to characterise such modulatory phenomena. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, for example, he and Guattari analyse the elements of language as lines of continuous variation, each line being a virtual zone of modulation that may

be actualised in diverse concrete ways. In phonology, phonemes are usually thought of as ideal constants, defined through a system of pertinent differences, and variations in pronunciation of a given phoneme as inessential accidents of the phoneme's performative utterance. Hence, regional variants of 'dog', such as 'dawg', or 'dahg', as well as idiosyncratic pronunciations by individual speakers, are mere deviations from a given norm. In Deleuze and Guattari's account, however, all the potential pronunciations of 'dog' constitute a continuum of 'dog-dawg-dahg . . .', a virtual zone of modulatory variation which is actualised in each performance in a specific way. That line of continuous variation, the virtual continuum of 'dog', remains immanent within each actualisation of the word. The phonemic system of a given language consists of such lines of continuous variation, the sum total together forming a plane of virtual zones of sonic modulation. In the same manner, the other elements of a language, morphological and semantic, are made up of lines of continuous variation.

## *The Virtual and the Plane of Consistency*

These models help stress three aspects of the virtual: each element of the virtual is a site of metastable, 'impersonal and pre-individual', metamorphic, individuating self-differentiation; each is a site of coexisting possibilities determined by a singular point whose position cannot be known before it is actualised in a given situation; and each is a site of continuous variation, both spatially, as a continuum of coexisting possibilities, and temporally, as a time-line of that continuum, the entire continuum being always immanent within every one of its sequential actualisations. The real is constituted by a constant passage of the virtual into the actual, but the relationship between the two is not that of cause to effect, or of idea to embodiment, or of structure, plan, or code to a constructed artefact. The virtual is not Aristotelian *dynamis*, or *potentia*, a generative force that develops the acorn into the oak tree. The energy of specific individuation in the natural world belongs to the actual, not the virtual, though the virtual does not exist outside its material immanence within the actual and its ongoing processes of energetic individuation. Nor is the virtual a realm of Platonic ideas, but instead, one of 'problems'. The actual is not a copy of a model virtual – in fact, the two are qualitatively distinct, actualisations bearing no fixed resemblance to the virtual elements immanent within them. Finally, the virtual is not like a chart, blueprint, or genetic code that the actual

executes. Rather, the virtual is like a vector map of zones of ongoing constructive, generative activity, each zone serving at most as a pilot in an open-ended movement beyond any pre-constructed map. In the passage of the virtual into the actual, the virtual is always immanent as an unexhausted remainder, as that which could have been, and might in the future be, actualised. Philosophy is capable of 'counter-effecting' the virtual, extracting it from the actual and formulating it in concepts, whereas the arts are capable of engaging the virtual and giving it a new embodiment as a 'monument' of sensation.

In the tenth section of *A Thousand Plateaus*, '1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible . . .', Deleuze and Guattari speak at length about becoming, and in that discussion the virtual is most often characterised as a 'plane of consistency' (or plane of composition, or plane of immanence), whereas the actual is called a 'plane of organization' (or plane of development). Becomings take place on the plane of consistency. That plane is a 'multiplicity', and 'becoming and multiplicity are the same thing'. A multiplicity

> is defined by the number of dimensions it has; it is not divisible, it cannot lose or gain a dimension *without changing its nature*. Since its variations and dimensions are immanent to it, *it amounts to the same thing to say that each multiplicity is already composed of heterogeneous terms in symbiosis, and that a multiplicity is continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities, according to its thresholds and doors*. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 249)

As a qualitative multiplicity, its elements cannot be reduced to a unity, as would be the case with a quantitative multiplicity (such as, say, a bucket of sand), whose elements (individual grains of sand) could be treated as mere interchangeable units, ready to be subtracted, added, or eventually summed up in a grand One, the multiplicity itself remaining unchanged in quality, nature and dimensions.

On the plane of consistency, there is no distinction between 'the inanimate and the animate, the artificial and the natural' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 254), nor is it possible to tell whether a given element is 'a particle or a sign' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 141). The plane of consistency is a 'pure Matter-Function', a 'matter-content having only degrees of intensity, resistance, conductivity, heating, stretching, speed, or tardiness; and a function-expression having only "tensors," as in a system of mathematical, or musical, writing' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 141). It is a plane 'upon which things are distinguished from one another only by speed and slowness' (Deleuze and Guattari

1987: 254) and by their corresponding 'degree of power' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 256). A degree of power is determined by an entity's affects – its power of affecting and being affected – and 'Affects are becomings' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 256). If, then, one wishes to characterise a body on the plane of consistency, one may say that

> *a body is defined only by a longitude and a latitude*: in other words the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential (latitude). Nothing but affects and local movements, differential speeds. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 260)

One can see, then, how becoming-other could end in a becoming-molecular or becoming-imperceptible. Becomings are most readily initiated through modifications of categories, actions and material relations within the sphere of the human, for which reason 'becoming-woman, more than any other becoming, possesses a special introductory power' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 248). Becoming-child has a similar function. Intermediary is becoming-animal, a more thoroughgoing dissolution of coded patterns and relations than becoming-woman or becoming-child. And the most extreme form of becoming is that of a becoming-imperceptible. 'On the far side, we find becomings-elementary, – cellular, – molecular, and even becoming-imperceptible' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 248). Such a becoming emerges when all commonsense distinctions are effaced and one becomes nothing but differential speeds and intensive affects. At this point, rather than becoming within the world, one becomes with the world. To engage in a becoming-imperceptible 'is to world (*faire monde*), to make a world (*faire un monde*). By process of elimination, one is no longer anything more than an abstract line, or a piece in a puzzle that is itself abstract' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 280). When becoming-imperceptible, one operates as does the camouflage fish: 'this fish is crisscrossed by abstract lines that resemble nothing, that do not even follow its organic divisions; but thus disorganized, disarticulated, it worlds with the lines of a rock, sand, and plants, becoming imperceptible' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 280).

## *Haecceities*

It would seem that in a domain made up solely of speeds and affects any characterisation of phenomena in specific terms would

be hopeless, but Deleuze and Guattari insist that on the plane of consistency there exists a kind of identity that may be characterised with some precision. For bodies and their becomings on the plane of consistency,

> there is a mode of individuation very different from that of a person, subject, thing, or substance. We reserve the name *haecceity* for it. A season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have a perfect individuality lacking nothing, even though this individuality is different from that of a thing or a subject. They are haecceities in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 261)

A given becoming is a haecceity, a 'thisness', and 'if the plane of consistency only has haecceities for content, it also has its own particular semiotic to serve as expression'. That semiotic, or means of describing a haecceity, has as its 'basic chain of expression' the sequence '*indefinite article* + *proper name* + *infinitive verb*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 263). An indefinite article is used because a haecceity is neither a concrete thing nor a universal category. It is not *this* girl, this isolable, specific entity, nor is it *the* girl, the idea or classificatory slot including all girls. Rather, it is *a* girl, or perhaps something like *a girlness*. (Deleuze finds something of this same distinction in Husserl when he speaks of the 'anexact'. For Husserl, between a specific instance of a circle and the general idea of a circle, there is something like 'circleness', or 'roundness', capable of precise characterisation, but only in terms that are 'anexact', that is, inherently outside the sphere of things to which the notion of exactitude applies.) Yet, despite this indefinite quality, the haecceity may be granted a proper name, thereby marking it as a singular entity. That proper name, however, is not like the name of a person, but instead like the label of a scientific effect – the Doppler effect, the Kelvin effect, or the Joule-Thomson effect. It functions much as the name of a hurricane or a strategic war operation. And finally, the haecceity has its own temporality. Its time is that of the infinitive, 'to dream', 'to walk', 'to eat', and in this sense the proper name of a haecceity 'is not the subject of a tense but the agent of an infinitive' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 264).

The temporal dimension of the haecceity requires careful elaboration, especially since it would seem to bear directly on Deleuze and Guattari's decision to use the temporal term 'becomings' as a synonym for haecceities. The time of haecceities, becomings and the plane of

consistency is that of Aion, whereas that of the plane of organisation is Chronos. (The terms 'Aion' ['Eternity' in Greek] and 'Chronos' [Greek for 'Time'] are taken from Stoic writings on time.)[2] Chronos is the commonsense time of regular sequential movement in a single direction, from past through the present to the future. Aion, by contrast, is a floating time of flux. Aion corresponds to what the composer Pierre Boulez calls 'nonpulsed time', as opposed to 'pulsed time'. In Boulez's compositions, sections of regularly pulsed music in standard meters alternate with sections in which the performers are free to execute their parts as they see fit, the conductor providing no regular pulse but simply marking the onset of the section by starting a stopwatch and then signalling the end when the allotted 17, 19 or 23 seconds have elapsed. Yet unlike Boulez's 'nonpulsed time', Aion lacks even a predictable forward thrust. If Chronos focuses on the passing present, Aion is the time of a simultaneous past-future, with the flow erratically moving forward and backward. It is the time of the infinitive, in the sense that it is all the tenses of a verb wrapped up in a single generative unit. In the domain of Aion, 'to live' is the generative source of 'I will live', 'He was to have lived', 'They might have been living', and so on. Each infinitive, each locus of time, is a site of self-differentiating difference, time in a metastable state, a singular point of time, a time-line of continuous variation. Aion is time itself becoming-other.

## *Aion and History*

Throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari align Aion with becoming and Chronos with history, arguing that becoming inaugurates a break in the historical flow of time. Those who make history, they assert, are 'those who oppose history' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 295). Yet the anti-historical time of Aion is not exactly timeless or eternal, in the ordinary or theological sense of the two words. Rather, it is transhistorical, or in Nietzschean terminology, untimely.

> There is no act of creation that is not transhistorical and does not come up from behind or proceed by way of a liberated line. Nietzsche opposes history not to the eternal but to the subhistorical or superhistorical: the Untimely, which is another name for haecceity, becoming, the innocence of becoming. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 296)

The untimely serves not as an escape from time but as an intervention in time, a disruption that establishes a creative connection of events

transcending their linear, sequential divisions and sequestrations. In Nietzsche's words, the untimely is 'acting counter to our time and thereby acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come' (Nietzsche 1997: 60).

Despite the fact that becoming is opposed to history, becoming does make possible a creative use of history. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari describe such a creative use as hallucinating the names of history. When schizophrenics have the delusion of being Napoleon, Christ or Joan of Arc, they are not simply insane, claim Deleuze and Guattari. Rather, they are obliquely referring to an experience in which their bodies are undergoing certain effects, which are associated with these historical figures but continuing to exist as events within the untimely realm of becoming. Events on the plane of consistency, or haecceities, have the identity of a scientific effect, a hurricane or a military operation. When schizophrenics hallucinate the names of history, they sense their bodies as a surface of intensities engaged with these events – events that initially were embodied in Napoleon, Christ or Joan of Arc, but that continue to exist on the plane of consistency and find embodiment at various times and in various places.

> Whence the role of names, with a magic all their own: there is no ego that identifies with races, peoples, and persons in a theater of representation, but proper names that identify races, peoples, and persons with regions, thresholds, or effects in a production of intensive quantities. . . . This can be clearly seen in physics, where proper names designate such effects within fields of potentials: the Joule effect, the Seebeck effect, the Kelvin effect. History is like physics: a Joan of Arc effect, a Heliogabalus effect – all the *names* of history, and not the name of the father. (Deleuze and Guattari 1977: 86)

## *Stories and Time*

The hallucination of the names of history may suggest a positive use of history, but the question remains: how can one write about history, whether as a historiographer or a novelist, and engage in fabulation, if indeed, fabulation is one with becoming, and if becoming is opposed to Chronos? What story, what *fabula*, can one tell that dispenses with chronology, or subordinates chronological narration to the eruption of the floating time of the untimely? How can fabulative becoming fulfil fabulation's other aims of 'legending' and of inventing a people to come? It would seem that only historians

and writers who subvert the forms of commonsense time could be considered fabulists, or that they engage in fabulation only at those moments when they problematise the temporal conventions of ordinary storytelling. If this were the case, then fabulation would be merely a form of experimental modernism and its engagement with history would be solely disruptive, forcing us to the odd conclusion that fabulists only fabulate when they destroy *fabulae*. Such a characterisation of fabulation, however, is unnecessarily restrictive and potentially misleading. While the novelists I examine in this study employ modernist narrative techniques to a lesser or greater extent, frequently juxtaposing and interweaving diverse plot segments in such a way as to interrupt the diegetic flow, their primary effort is to tell stories, and those stories are largely recuperable within a single chronological time, which may be demarcated with specific dates and coordinated with the dates of historical events. Nonetheless, I believe that they are all exemplars of the art of fabulation, and in fact, that much of the power of their fabulation rests in their abilities as storytellers to engage with the stories of history. Perhaps the simplest strategy at this point would be to depart from Deleuze and alter his conception of fabulation in such a way that valorises storytelling within a coherent, self-consistent chronological time. Fortunately, we need not resort to such desperate measures, for there are elements within Deleuze's thought that can lead us beyond this apparent impasse.

In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze contrasts the classic cinema and the modern cinema in terms of two regimes of the image, 'an organic regime and a crystalline regime' (Deleuze 1989: 126), associating narration with the organic and the story [*récit*] with the crystalline. Narration reinforces the spatiotemporal structures of the commonsense world by subordinating time to regulated movement, whereas the story problematises those structures. Narration is one of the means whereby the organic regime reinforces the discrimination of the true from the false. In cinematic terms, the organic regime of the classic cinema ensures that whatever apparent deviation from ordinary reality a film may present, whether dream sequence, hallucinatory vision, contradictory memory or what have you, that deviation will eventually be brought within a single spatiotemporal framework such that one can decide what was true and what was false. The story [*récit*], by contrast, is representative of one of the crystalline regime's two basic kinds of time-images that put truth in question by engaging the 'powers of the false' (Deleuze 1989: 126). The first kind involves 'the

*order of time*, that is, the coexistence of relations or the simultaneity of the elements internal to time' (Deleuze 1989: 155). In films that engage the order of time, one can see diverse images of multiple past events that coexist in a single domain ('sheets of the past') or images of multiple, contradictory present events that occur simultaneously ('peaks of the present'). The second kind of time image, by contrast, 'concerns the *series of time*, which brings together the before and the after in a becoming, instead of separating them; its paradox is to introduce an enduring interval in the moment itself' (Deleuze 1989: 155). It is to this second category that the story belongs.

In images that reveal the series of time, the succession of images does not concern a before and an after constituted by a sequence of discrete, empirical moments external to one another (as in the classic cinema), but a stretch of temporal becoming in which before and after are subsumed within an internally cohesive, continuous series.

> The before and the after are then no longer successive determinations of the course of time, but the two sides of the power, or the passage of the power to a higher power. The direct time-image here does not appear in an order of coexistences or simultaneities [as in the sheets of the past and peaks of the present of the order of time], but in a becoming as potentialization, as series of powers. (Deleuze 1989: 275)

In that the images belonging to the series of time display becoming as a process of constant change, they undermine any fixed determination of the true or the false. Deleuze identifies various categories of films that present time-images of a 'becoming as potentialization, as series of powers', one such category being documentary films like those of Pierre Perrault and Jean Rouch. It is in films of this sort that the function of the *récit*, or story, is especially important.[3]

The French word *récit*, like the English word 'story', can be used to describe both true and false accounts of events. One can tell the true story, but one can also lie by 'telling stories', or creatively 'make up stories' to entertain, enlighten, astonish, and so on. In the films of Perrault and Rouch, the spoken word takes on a special significance. While the visual images of the films display the becoming of time that fuses before and after in an ongoing process, the voices of the speakers engage 'the pure and simple *function of fabulation*' as they 'legend *in flagrante delicto*' (Deleuze 1989: 150, translation modified). In Rouch's cinema, the subjects of his documentaries often collaborate with him in the invention of the films' stories; in *Les maîtres*

*fous*, they take on fictional identities in 'real life', assuming strange identities when they leave their weekday jobs to conduct weekend rituals involving ecstatic possession; in *Moi, un noir*, an 'ethnofiction' documenting the lives of real urban workers in Nigeria, the documentary subjects adopt pseudonyms during the making of the film (the four players refer to themselves as Edward G. Robinson, Eddie Constantine-Lemmy Caution, Tarzan and Dorothy Lamour). In all of Rouch's films, the subjects tell stories that capture 'truths' about the world, but in fictions that make undecidable the line between the true and false, and they invent stories for which questions of the true and the false are irrelevant, in that such stories open new possibilities for the future. And as they speak, their stories accompany visual images of becoming as a process of continuous change.[4]

Much of Deleuze's analysis of 'story' is specific to film, but what is significant is that the chronological, in its loosest construal as events following the arrow of time, is not categorically suspect, and that storytelling, at least in certain guises, can be valorised as a creative force. This suggests as well that the opposition of Chronos and Aion may not be as simple as it might at first appear. Only in Deleuze's initial presentation of the Chronos/Aion distinction ('Twenty-Third Series of the Aion', in *The Logic of Sense* [Deleuze 1990: 162–8]) does he give equal attention to both forms of time, and then primarily to describe the logic behind the distinction within the system of Stoic thought. And only in this text are hints provided of the complexities that might reside in Chronos. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, by contrast, Chronos is simply presented as that from which Aion differs, with the focus of the discussion bearing almost exclusively on the characteristics of Aion; Chronos here serves merely to denote unproblematic, commonsense time. But we know that such a brute opposition of commonsense time and a pure, floating time cannot capture the entirety of Deleuze's understanding of time, since throughout his career he stresses the significance of Bergson's distinction between *durée* and chronometric time, which emphasises the dynamic becoming of the present of *durée* and the illusory spatialisation of time inherent in the chronometric conception of the present as a discrete point on a number line. And in fact, in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze grants *durée* a significant role in his analysis of time, which he articulates there in terms of the 'three passive syntheses of time', one each for the past, present and future. It is this subtle and extended explication of the three passive syntheses in *Difference and Repetition* that will allow us to enrich and qualify the broad

delineation of Aion and Chronos and thereby find a means of valorising stories and accommodating history, narrative and temporality within a Deleuzian literary aesthetic.[5]

## *Three Passive Syntheses of Time: The First Synthesis*

Our first intuition of time is of a Now that passes, that is, a dynamic, directional flow of time. That Now is not an infinitesimal, mathematical point. Rather, it has a certain 'thickness', a duration of discrete instants that holds them together in a succession, contracting earlier ones into later ones and thrusting those on toward a future. In this regard, the present is already a synthesis of past-present-future instants in dynamic movement. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze argues that the direction of that movement is a constituent of 'good sense', which operates in coordination with 'common sense' to produce our ordinary world. (Deleuze treats common sense as *sensus communis*, the common functioning of our faculties in accordance with one another – the five senses, imagination, memory, understanding all identifying objects of attention as 'the same'.) Playing on the double meaning of the French word *sens* as 'sense' and 'direction', Deleuze asserts that 'good sense', *le bon sens*, is also 'the good direction', from a past to a future, and that such is the direction of Chronos, whereas Aion is the realm of forward and backward at the same time, and hence of 'non-sense', or 'non-direction'. Deleuze does not take up this question in *Difference and Repetition*, but instead merely notes that in the synthesis that constitutes the present, the movement from past to present includes particular instants, moments when something specific has happened or is happening, whereas the future is general and unspecified. This passage from particularity to generality is asymmetrical, and hence inherently directional. 'Passive synthesis or contraction is essentially asymmetrical: it goes from the past to the future in the present, thus from the particular to the general, thereby imparting direction to the arrow of time' (Deleuze 1994: 71). The Now passes, dynamically and directionally, but one question persists: *why* does the present pass? That question will prove to be one that the first passive synthesis alone cannot answer.

In his exposition of the first passive synthesis of the present, Deleuze starts with the simple instance of two elements, A and B (perhaps 'tick' and 'tock'), and asks how time might come to be constituted from this. The sense of A–B as a meaningful sequence would come only with the inception of a second appearance of A and

B. Hence, only in a second A and its confirming paired B would the first A–B constitute a sequence, and only if there were a contraction of all four into a single apprehension. That contraction would bring together a difference (A and B) in a repetition (the second A–B) that is the origin of the conception of the first A–B as a unit, the whole of the four elements establishing a relation among differences (the first A–B as difference; the second A–B as difference; the first and second A–B as different from one another) held together in a contraction of originary repetition. That contraction produces a synthesis of moments, yet its operation is not active but passive, in that it takes place automatically, unconsciously, and without the need of any subject as agent. In fact, Deleuze argues that it is only out of this first passive synthesis that a subject can take form. We should note as well that already, in this analysis of the succession of instants in the present, we find hints of what will be identified as the coexistence of moments of the second synthesis of the past and the retroactive delay-effect of the third synthesis of the future.

From this psychological account of the passive synthesis of the present Deleuze turns to a broader analysis of the organic temporality of living entities. This organic synthesis is revealed in an organism's habits. By habits, Deleuze means not active, consciously formed behavioural patterns, but pre-conscious contractions of elements within the organism. According to Deleuze, the absorption of nutrients into our cells is a contraction of elements and a component of habit. Cellular heredity is a contraction of the past into the present, just as drives and instincts are a contraction of that past heredity through the present and toward a future. Every 'need' of an organism is a passive synthesis of past, present and future, a contraction of those moments within a present. The present of need is an extended synthesis of moments, which may be defined as 'the time in which the past has a future that satisfies its past' (Lampert 2006: 24). The succession of presents, then, is a succession in which the 'present extends between two eruptions of need' (Deleuze 1994: 77).

The contraction of habit is a process in which a difference is extracted from repetition, and with that extraction a mind comes into existence. For every contraction of a difference within an organism, say the contraction of water within a cell, there is a mind or 'soul' within which the contraction takes place, and in extracting a difference as foregrounded object from a background flux of repetition, the mind 'contemplates' that difference and, in a sense, *is* that contemplative contraction. With that contraction a sign-function

emerges. At this fundamental level, signs are not representations but instead 'the cross-references of heterogeneous elements that have been contracted into a single case without erasing their difference' (Lampert 2006: 21). When an animal senses the presence of water, the water is extracted from a background and contracted within an action sequence leading to the satisfaction of thirst. The water and organism are a contracted unit, but one within which water and organism retain their difference, for which reason the water serves as a sign, that is, something outside the organism yet related to it through this contraction. The existence of a contemplative mind also implies a self-reference function, in that the organism experiences self-enjoyment and a general vitality as a coordinated set of contractions. For every contraction there is a contemplative mind or soul, and hence, Deleuze argues,

> a soul must be attributed to the heart, to the muscles, nerves and cells, but a contemplative soul whose entire function is to contract a habit. This is no mystical or barbarous hypothesis. On the contrary, habit here manifests its full generality: it concerns not only the sensory-motor habits that we have (psychologically), but also, before these, the primary habits that we are; the thousands of passive syntheses of which we are organically composed. (Deleuze 1994: 74)

Yet in self-enjoyment, the organism attains a meta-awareness as the general pleasure-sensing totality of contemplative minds. In this sense, then, a self-reference function is an emergent component of an organism's contractions.

## *The Polytemporal Present*

In the coexistence of multiple contemplative minds within the self-enjoying organism, the simple present that contracts a past and future within itself becomes more complex, for at this stage the synthesis of the present discloses itself as multi-layered, or what we might call 'polytemporal'. Each contemplative mind has its own rhythms of contraction, its own extent of past-present-future that it contracts within a given process. The heart, muscles, nerves and cells operate at different speeds, such that the present of one operation need not coincide with the present of another. In the organism's self-enjoyment, a meta-present puts these varying presents in relation to one another, making possible a 'polytemporal' present of simultaneous, heterogeneous presents.

> Two successive presents may be contemporaneous with a third present, more extended by virtue of the number of instants it contracts. The duration of an organism's present, or of its various presents, will vary according to the natural contractile range of its contemplative souls. (Deleuze 1994: 77)

The sign-function produces another polytemporal effect. Deleuze defines signs as 'habitudes or contractions referring to one another', and as such, he argues, signs 'always belong to the present'. In this, he sees himself as a successor to the Stoics, who argue that 'a scar is the sign not of a past wound but of "the present fact of having been wounded": we can say that it is the contemplation of the wound, that it contracts all the instants which separate us from it into a living present' (Deleuze 1994: 77). In the simple contraction of instants whereby a dynamic, passing present subsumes within itself a unit of past-present-future, the past instant of that contraction is simply a component of the moving present. But with the sign, the past as separate moment (the moment one is wounded) becomes part of the present (the scar as present fact of the past event). The sign of the scar, then, includes two times within the present, that of the wound and that of the scar. The sign at once reveals our distance from a past event ('all the instants which separate us from it') and overcomes that distance (the sign 'contracts' the instants 'into a living present'). And in this incorporation of a distinct past within a present, the inadequacy of the first synthesis to account for all temporal phenomena begins to appear.

Finally, the passive synthesis of the present is polytemporal because organisms are finite creatures. It is possible to imagine all of time as a perpetual present, if contemplative contraction were extended to infinity. But only an infinite creature could exercise such a contraction. For finite organisms, contraction

> necessarily forms a present which may be exhausted and which passes, a present of a certain duration which varies according to the species, the individuals, the organisms and the parts of organisms under consideration. . . . The duration of an organism's present, or its various presents, will vary according to the natural contractile range of its contemplative souls. (Deleuze 1994: 77)

As a result, an organism will experience a succession of presents, and between each present a gap in which each contemplative soul faces the question 'what next?' 'What difference will be contracted within the next contemplation?' In this sense, an organism's multiple contemplations are questions, which eventuate in the affirmations of

subsequent contractions. 'Contemplations are questions, while the contractions which occur in them and complete them are so many finite affirmations produced in the same way as presents are produced out of the perpetual present by means of the passive synthesis of time' (Deleuze 1994: 78). In this polytemporal succession of presents, the present itself takes on the characteristic of a problematic field, a distribution of questions and finite affirmations positively linking one present to another in a present that is always 'passing'.

The present of the first passive synthesis, then, is no simple, uncomplicated, commonsense time. It brings together a dynamic, directional unit of past-present-future. Diverse presents, of varying rhythm and duration, may be nested within one another, such that two or more presents, by themselves in a relationship of succession, may be contemporaneous within a higher-level present that contains them. Although Deleuze does not elaborate on this point, the higher-level present may be that of an individual organism, but also that of groups of organisms functioning together as a social body, such as a family, tribe, or society, in which case the higher-level present could subsume within it years or even centuries. The signs contracted within a present introduce another dimension of the past or future within the present. And the successive fluctuations of finite contractions, perpetually renewed with the question, 'what is to be contracted next?', turn the present into a problematic field of discontinuities and gaps, of stuttering starts and stops.

## *The Second Synthesis*

Still, a question remains. The present passes, but *why* does it pass? Deleuze claims that the answer leads us necessarily to the second synthesis of the past, a synthesis of what Deleuze calls 'pure memory'. If the present did not in some sense become genuinely past, it would never pass. Instead, it would simply keep moving, enduring in a perpetually mobile present. Now, it is the case that we can bring to mind a past moment within our present, and in this regard we can represent a past present in the current present. But this fact presumes not simply the representation of a past moment but also the present's simultaneous representation of itself, such that it can distinguish its present moment from the remembered past moment. 'The present and former present are not, therefore, like two successive instants on the line of time; rather, the present one necessarily contains an extra dimension in which it represents the former and also represents

itself' (Deleuze 1994: 80). That extra dimension within which the two presents are represented, the time line on which the two points in time are represented, is the past. In this way, the past may be seen as the container within which the present passes. With the second synthesis, a new temporal asymmetry arises.

> Whereas the passive synthesis of habit constitutes the living present in time and makes the past and the future two asymmetrical elements of that present, the passive synthesis of memory constitutes the pure past in time, and makes the former and the present present (thus the present in reproduction and the future in reflection) two asymmetrical elements of this past as such. (Deleuze 1994: 81)

The past of the second synthesis is not just a different aspect of time, but itself a separate time. It is virtual, as opposed to the actual time of the present. It is a pure past that has never been present – at least not in the same way that the present of the first synthesis is present. Here, Deleuze is following Bergson, who argues at length that there is a qualitative difference between events as we experience them and as we remember them. A past memory is not just a faded present experience, Bergson claims, and we will never be able to develop an account of a past of memory out of an account of the present. Instead, Bergson proposes that there is a pure past, a virtual past within which memories arise. When we actively remember something, we leap from the present into a different realm, search within the field of the past for the memory we seek, and then find an image within the present that allows us to represent that past to ourselves. In dreams, we start to see something of the qualitative difference of memories, as we move freely from image to image, with experiences ranging in intensity and immediacy without regard to their nearness or distance in time from our present situation. Deleuze adds to the Bergsonian analysis that in Proustian involuntary memory, as when Marcel tastes a madeleine dipped in a lime-tea infusion and recalls the town of Combray, we discern the pure past in its full being, as an essence. In this experience, 'Combray reappears in the form of a past which was never present: the in-itself of Combray' (Deleuze 1994: 85). It is through involuntary memory that 'we can in some sense live the being in itself of the past in the same way that we live the passive synthesis of habit' (Deleuze 1994: 84). When we do so, we inhabit the past as pure memory, as a past that retains itself in itself. In this virtual past of pure memory, it is not memory that is inside our heads, but we who are inside memory, like fish in the sea.

The virtual past is paradoxical in three ways. First, the past is simultaneous with the present. If the past is qualitatively distinct from the present, one must ask when that past comes into existence. If it appears after the present, there must be either a continuous, shared territory with the present, which would lead to a confusion of the two, or a gap between the two. If there is a gap between the present and the past, some other time would have to exist between the present and past. We must conclude, then, that the past emerges at the same time as the present, that every present moment has its virtual double. Time splits in the present, the virtual present of the past falling back into the field of all past moments, the actual present moving forward in its surge toward successive actual present moments. The second paradox is that the past coexists with itself. 'If each past is contemporaneous with the present that it was, then *all* of the past coexists with the new present in relation to which it is now past' (Deleuze 1994: 81–2). The virtual past constitutes a single field in which all past moments coexist. Bergson asserts that the virtual past should be pictured as a cone, with its point representing the coincidence of the past with the present, and the expanding conic volume below representing the ever-increasing domain of the past. In concerted action, says Bergson, the entire past is contracted into the present, whereas in dreams (and we would add, in involuntary memory) a dilated, extended past is explored. The third paradox is that the past pre-exists every present moment. The present passes within the virtual past, and with each successive present there is the presupposition of that virtual medium as already existing. 'Its manner of being contemporaneous with itself as present is that of being posed as already-there, presupposed by the passing present and causing it to pass' (Deleuze 1994: 82). Thus,

> each past is contemporaneous with the present it was, the whole past coexists with the present in relation to which it is past, but the pure element of the past in general pre-exists the passing present. . . . The transcendental passive synthesis bears upon this pure past from the triple point of view of contemporaneity, coexistence and pre-existence. (Deleuze 1994: 82)

## *The Third Synthesis*

The third passive synthesis of the future is perhaps the most elusive of the three. Its relationship to the first and second syntheses is mediated by an erotic force of exploration, interrogation and utilisation of the past and its various suspended presents.

> The present exists, but the past alone insists and provides the element in which the present passes and successive presents are telescoped. The echo of the two presents forms only a persistent question, which it unfolds within representation like a field of problems, with the rigorous imperative to search, to respond, to resolve. However, the response always comes from elsewhere: every reminiscence, whether of a town or a woman, is erotic. It is always Eros, the noumenon, who allows us to penetrate this pure past in itself, this virginal repetition which is Mnemosyne. (Deleuze 1994: 85)

The third synthesis is essentially one of response and action, and hence a synthesis oriented toward the future. It is erotic in that all action is an expression of desire – not desire in the sense of a longing to fill a lack, but desire in the sense of a positive affective energy, what Deleuze and Guattari call 'desiring production' in *Anti-Oedipus*. But Eros proper belongs only to the second synthesis, which constitutes the virtual past as a field of problems, with the rigorous imperative to search, to respond, to resolve. The action itself, the enacted response to the virtual past's problems and imperatives, is Thanatos, not a negative death-drive, but a disruptive force that shatters identities and ungrounds any spatiotemporal grounding. It is only in the third synthesis that the questions of the present cease to be simply blind, disconnected moments between contractions (what next? and now what?) and the problems of the past mere subjects of passive, endless reminiscence (Ah, Combray!). Instead, these questions and problems become usable in a creative way.

The third synthesis is a simultaneous split in time and split in the self. It is a time in which time itself becomes unhinged, 'out of joint', untimely, and one in which Rimbaud's dictum is fulfilled: 'I is an other', the self is a 'fractured I' (Deleuze 1994: 86). The third synthesis reveals 'the empty form of time' (Deleuze 1994: 88). Traditionally, time is treated as a function of movement, as the measure and number of periodic motion (the orbit of the planets, the cycling of the constellations). But in the third synthesis, time is no longer subordinate to movement, no longer regulated by any internal or external measure. 'Time itself unfolds (that is, apparently ceases to be a circle) instead of things unfolding within it (following the overly simple circular figure)' (Deleuze 1994: 88). It is time as pure form of time, and since unmeasured, produced in an essentially static synthesis. 'The synthesis is necessarily static, since time is no longer subordinated to movement; time is the most radical form of change, but the form of change does not change' (Deleuze 1994: 89).

In the third synthesis, an unclassifiable, disorienting time erupts, 'demented time' (Deleuze 1994: 88), the time of what Deleuze calls 'the event'. This fulguration of demented time creates a new order, a caesura in time that establishes an incommensurable 'before' and 'after'. 'We may define the order of time as this purely formal distribution of the unequal in the function of a caesura' (Deleuze 1994: 89). This caesura is the moment of the split of the subject and the instigation of an action. Deleuze's main example of the caesura in time and the self is that experienced by Hamlet, when he says that the 'time is out of joint'. At the crisis of a disruptive summons to action, the past takes on the characteristic of something that is 'too big for me'. 'In effect, there is always a time at which the imagined act is supposed "too big for me". This defines *a priori* the past or the before'. The caesura itself is 'the present of metamorphosis, a becoming-equal to the act and a doubling of the self, and the projection of an ideal self in the image of the act' (Deleuze 1994: 89). For Hamlet, the metamorphosis occurs between acts four and five during his sea voyage and capture by pirates. Through this experience, he becomes capable of action. Yet in discharging the action, Deleuze claims, Hamlet himself is effaced. The action itself allows no room for a stable self, since the demented time of the third synthesis lacks the cohesiveness necessary to hold a subject together.

> As for the third time in which the future appears, this signifies that the event and the act possess a secret coherence which excludes that of the self; that they turn back against the self which has become their equal and smash it to pieces, as though the bearer of the new world were carried away and dispersed by the shock of the multiplicity to which it gives birth: what the self has become equal to is the unequal in itself. (Deleuze 1994: 89–90)

Action in the third synthesis proceeds through repetition, albeit repetition that inserts a difference. 'Repetition is never a historical fact, but rather the historical condition under which something new is effectively produced'. Martin Luther imitates Paul; the French revolutionaries of 1789 act as 'resuscitated Romans'. 'We produce something new only on condition that we repeat – once in the mode which constitutes the past, and once more in the present of metamorphosis' (Deleuze 1994: 90). Hence, though Luther imitates Paul, and the revolutionaries imitate ancient Romans, Luther and the revolutionaries do so only in order to determine the configuration of their situation, become adequate to that situation, and then transform

themselves beyond what they imitate by extracting a difference from this repetition. And what is produced, 'the absolutely new itself', is something that excludes the imitating subjects, a repetition of difference itself, 'the third repetition, this time by excess, the repetition of the future as eternal return' (Deleuze 1994: 90) – not the return of the same, but the eternal return at every instant of difference, the incommensurable, the multiple.

This time 'out of joint' follows the logic of delay and what Deleuze calls the 'dark precursor' (Deleuze 1994: 119). In an adult neurosis, a childhood experience suddenly takes on a new sense. The child affects the adult from a distance, retroactively. An adult scene repeats an infantile scene, and something that earlier meant nothing now becomes traumatic. Though the two scenes are successive present moments, 'in fact they form, rather, *two real series which coexist in relation to a virtual object of another kind*' (Deleuze 1994: 104). That virtual object is the 'dark precursor'. We think of the adult scene as an imitation of the infantile scene, but the adult scene is already something other than it was. The infantile scene does not cause the adult scene, so much as something puts the two moments in contact with one another, allowing a resonance to arise. The effect is one of delay, the delayed effect of an infantile scene on an adult scene, but 'there is no question as to how the childhood event acts only with a delay. It *is* this delay, but this delay itself is the pure form of time in which before and after coexist' (Deleuze 1994: 124). In this delay, 'the childhood event is not one of the two real series but, rather, the dark precursor which establishes communication between the basic series, that of the adults we knew as a child and that of the adult we are among other adults and other children' (Deleuze 1994: 124). When lightning strikes, its course is established by something that precedes it, but which is only faintly perceived when it happens. It is a dark precursor.

> Thunderbolts explode between different intensities, but they are preceded by an invisible, imperceptible *dark precursor*, which determines their path in advance but in reverse, as though intagliated. Likewise, every system contains its dark precursor which ensures the communication of peripheral series. (Deleuze 1994: 119)

The third synthesis, then, is a passive synthesis of the future, one oriented toward action and desire. It is a synthesis that probes, questions and responds to the multiple, 'polytemporal' presents of the first synthesis and the second's field of the past. It manifests itself fully as

a split in time and in the self, a fissure in which a pure form of time, a demented time out of joint and no longer subject to movement, erupts and a 'fractured I' emerges. Although it is a static synthesis, it does establish an order of time – a caesura with incommensurable Before and After. The Before is revealed as the momentous condition of action (this act is too big for me), the caesura as the moment of the actor's self-metamorphosis, and the After as the act itself, in which the actor is decimated. That order of time, though sequential, is created in the caesura all at once, with its prevailing edge being the future side of the caesura. It appears like a stroke of lightning, yet it traces a course made possible by a dark precursor, a dimly perceptible element that sets a configuration of temporal events in resonance within the pure form of time. The dark precursor is itself delay, and the consequent resonance and fulgurating caesura are components of the delay effect of the third synthesis. The dark precursor, we might say, is the faint index of a configuration of diverse presents of the first synthesis and pasts of the second synthesis, assembled through the searches, interrogations and responses of the third synthesis; yet that dark precursor, and its attendant configuration of moments, is only fully revealed in a delayed fissure in time, a pure form of time that distributes a Before, a Caesura and an After, which three moments together constitute a single, future-oriented unit of condition, actor and actor-obliterating action.

## *Aion, Chronos and the Three Syntheses*

In a loose sense, one may say that *Difference and Repetition*'s first synthesis corresponds to the Chronos of *The Logic of Sense* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, and that the second and third syntheses correspond to Aion. The tripartite analysis of *Difference and Repetition*, however, when accommodated within the Chronos–Aion scheme, does significantly enhance the binary opposition, by both clarifying and complicating it. The clarification comes in the differentiation of past condition and future action within the realm of Aion. Aion is a simultaneous past-future of the event, of becomings, of haecceities of nonpulsed infinitives. By separating past and future, we are able to distinguish within Aion a time of coexistence and a time of eruption, an extensive field of past moments as well as a specific, fulgurating configuration of moments. The complications introduced by the tripartite scheme are several. The present of Chronos is no longer simply that of commonsense, measured time, but now also a

polytemporal dimension – a dimension of nested contractions of multiple presents varying in duration; of signs contracting external pasts into a present; and of questions within a problematic field of stutters and stops. Aion, when treated as the domain of the second synthesis, is revealed as including within it a domain of pure memory, an a-personal retention of virtual pasts as a coexisting field. The association of the virtual with memory adds an element to the conception of the virtual as a metastable configuration of singular points and lines of continuous variation – that of an ongoing and ever-cumulative history of the individuation process' actualisation of the virtual. Conversely, the identification of the metastable virtual with memory forces a mental corrective to our ordinary conception of memory as a simple reproduction in the present of past moments, a mere duplication of originals. Instead, the virtual past must be thought of as qualitatively different from any lived present, as a retention of past configurations of metastable, singular points of continuous variation that were actualised in specific ways, but which, as virtual, exceeded their actualisation, remaining immanent within their actualisation as potentials and possibilities that were not actualised. Finally, the accommodation of the third synthesis within Aion emphasises the virtual's future orientation – something that is not as readily evident in *Difference and Repetition* as in other texts – while providing a model of action as temporal order that is not clearly established in *A Thousand Plateaus* and later works. The delineation of before, caesura and after (condition, actor and actor-less action), as well as the attribution of the resonance of delay to the dark precursor, give some shape to the concept of becoming-other, and especially to the concept of fabulation, which in its cursory formulations includes no properly narrative component.

## *The Historical Task of Fabulation*

The novels I have chosen for consideration in this study are all acts of fabulation, instances of 'legending *in flagrante delicto*'. As such, they are efforts to invent a 'people to come', to envision a collectivity beyond that which exists in actuality. In each work, there is a 'becoming-other' that serves as an instigating force in the formation of such a people. In each, there is an attempt to extract the virtual, immanent within the actual, and activate its potential for producing new ways of living. The difficulties of fabulating and inventing a people are imbedded in irreducible historical circumstances. Hence,

in each novel the creative process entails a labour of history, both a clarifying articulation of the burdens of the past and a working upon and through the accumulated material, social and psychological constraints that shape and inhibit future action.

The limiting, constraining aspect of history is evident in the actualisation of all three syntheses of time. In the present, history is revealed as habit, as a configuration of contractions of elements that have been subsumed within a regular, stultifying rhythm of limited expectations. The signs of the present, those external elements contracted within individuals, include scars, which are present marks of a past action, but also quite often marks of an unhealed wound, and hence of a continuing process of wounding that has become habitual in its own right. In the second synthesis, the coexistence of past moments reinforces the limiting habits of the present. The past in this regard is lived as a suffocating miasma of swarming phantoms from different eras resurrected within a single noxious cloud. The repetitions of ancestral customs sustained in this oppressive atmosphere encourage memory in the restrictive tendency of its mythologising function – that of memorialising a vanished order and nostalgically projecting that order as the sole legitimate end of future action. The third synthesis might seem incapable of cooptation, but constraint is possible here as well, primarily in a culture's obsessive fixation on past transformative events that did not lead to positive results. Although the creation of something new can only take place through a fulgurating split in time, there is no guarantee that the process of subsequent actualisation will bring something better. Revolutions may fail and thereby usher in diabolical regimes. And to the extent that such failed moments are commemorated and performed again in a modified guise, or conversely, resurrected as terrifying warnings against any deviation from the status quo, the future, too, bears its historical burden.

The positive labour of history is to work within these constraining accumulated habits, memories and decisions, induce perturbations in them, and activate their immanent lines of continuous variation in new actualisations. The historical task of the present is to exacerbate the polytemporal qualities of the first synthesis – to suspend the cohesion of multiple rhythms of contraction; to detach signs from their customary referents and reconnect them in new configurations; and to amplify the stutterings of successive contractions. The labour of the second synthesis is to delineate virtual memories from their actual representations and thereby extract the aspects of the past that have

not been actualised; to hallucinate the names of history as a field of haecceities, or atmospheric effects (the Doppler effect, Hurricane Katrina); and to interconnect the events of the historical field and set their metastable, singular modulations in resonance. And the most important task of fabulation, that of the third synthesis, is to search, interrogate and respond to the elements of the historical field; to identify dark precursors that faintly promise delayed fulgurations; to select specific metastable sites for utilisation; and to perform an action with the hope that something new and better may result. The fables of these novels are histories, factual accounts of empirically verifiable events that continue to live on in the present, but also stories, legends, fabulations, creative uses of history that transcend empirical circumstances by engaging their virtual components in new actualisations.

Finally, it must be stressed that fabulation's labour of history is not a discretely mental or linguistic action but an 'experimentation on the real'. In *Kafka*, Deleuze and Guattari treat the works of Kafka, such as *The Trial*, as machines, arguing that these literary works do not 'mean' so much as they function.[6] *The Trial* is a functioning machine generated within the functioning social machine of its time, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and once completed (although Kafka never did finish the novel), the *Trial* machine is plugged into the social machine as a new functioning component of the larger social machine. As the novel is read and reread in ever new contexts, it functions anew in different social machines. The point of this image of the novel as machine within a social machine is to stress the pragmatic, functional nature of literature as well as the material embeddedness of all art within a physical, biological, social and technological world. The signs of semiotic systems, including language, are not separable from the institutions, practices and power relations that permeate human interaction, nor from the buildings people construct and inhabit, the food they produce and eat, the material existence of their bodies, including the reproductive generation of new bodies, or the interconnecting networks of ecological relations that enmesh all these signs, practices, bodies and forces in a dynamic, open-ended 'system of systems'. When novelists engage in fabulation, when they diagnose the impasses of the present and their historical causes, and then instigate disruptive becomings-other and lines of flight toward a people to come, they are experimenting on the real, fashioning machines within machines that have a real existence within a material world that is inseparably cultural, semiotic, biological and physical

in its functioning. This does not mean that fabulation is guaranteed a lasting or even measurable effect, for novels do not necessarily change the world (although some have, such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). But it does indicate that in fabulation the realm of the aesthetic is inextricable from the larger world in which it functions.

## *Methodological Postscript*

As I indicated in the Introduction, there is one important dimension of fabulation that I will largely ignore in the following analyses: the deterritorialisation of language. Although Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari do not directly link the deterritorialisation of language to fabulation in their scattered remarks on the subject, it is clear that this becoming-other of language, this minorisation of a major language, whereby authors open up a foreign language within their own language and make language stutter, should be included, along with becoming-other, experimenting on the real, legending and inventing a people to come, as a fifth characteristic of fabulation. Practical considerations of length and linguistic expertise, however, make such an analysis here impossible

Hence, I ask readers, whenever they encounter the word fabulation or any characterisation of the concept, to remember that the deterritorialisation of language is an essential component of fabulation, even if it remains largely unexamined in this study. I also invite others who possess the necessary linguistic skills to take up the question of inter-lingual othering and offer the rest of us detailed analyses of how this process might work.

## *Notes*

1. I discuss the relationship between Bergsonian and Deleuzian fabulation at greater length in Bogue 2007: 91–106.
2. See Sellars 2007 for an astute analysis of the important differences between Deleuze's and the Stoics' understanding of these terms.
3. For an excellent account of fabulation and the '*récit*' in film, see Rodowick 1997: 139–69.
4. I discuss Rouch's films at greater length in Bogue 2003a: 150–4.
5. For an outstanding analysis of the three passive syntheses of time, as well as an illuminating discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's treatment of history in general, see Lampert 2006. See also K. Faulkner 2006, Bryant 2008, Hughes 2009, Williams 2003 and Young 2008. One option I have not explored is that of adding to this discussion of time the multiple

temporal distinctions Deleuze makes in the cinema books. I felt that the complications of situating the terminology of Deleuze's elaborate cinematic taxonomy within this already complex integration of Chronos/Aion and the three passive syntheses would be overwhelming and possibly distracting.

6. For more on Kafka and literary machines in Deleuze and Guattari, see Bogue 2003b: 59–89.

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# Becoming-Prophet: Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*

Zakes Mda (the pen name of Zanemvula Kizito Gatyeni Mda) has spent most of his literary career in an artistic engagement with the social and political struggles of South Africa, both before and after Apartheid. In the 1970s and 1980s, he devoted his efforts primarily to the theatre, combining traditions of African oral narrative, the Xhosa Intsomi Theatre and the Western Theatre of the Absurd in over thirty dramas of protest and cultural critique. With *Ways of Dying* in 1995, Mda turned from the theatre to fiction, following that novel with *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995), *The Heart of Redness* (2000), *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002), *The Whale Caller* (2005) and *Cion* (2007). Of these works, perhaps none more fully exemplifies the dynamics of fabulation than does *The Heart of Redness*.[1]

The novel's central conflict is indicated in its Conradian title.[2] The heart of the Xhosa people is in their traditions and customs. For those Xhosa inhabiting the Wild Coast region of South Africa, about 650 miles east of Cape Town along the Indian Ocean, the redness of the ochre dye that the women smear on their bodies and use to colour their clothing is a symbol of their culture. Some of the Xhosa, however, reject Xhosa traditions and object to those who would perpetuate native practices. '"They want us to remain in our wildness!" says the elder. "To remain red all our lives! To stay in the darkness of redness!"'. The opponents of redness call themselves Unbelievers. 'The Unbelievers stand for civilization' and against 'the redness of unenlightenment' (Mda 2000: 71). The proponents of redness are the Believers. What makes the debate between the two groups so intense is the history that informs it. The Believers and Unbelievers take their names from the parties who supported or rejected the prophet Nongqawuse in 1856. At age fifteen, Nongqawuse had been visited by strangers telling her to direct the people to slaughter all their cattle, destroy all their crops,

and await the coming of the new people, who would arrive from the ocean with splendid new cattle. Many of the Xhosa heeded her prophecies, which led to the decimation of the Xhosa. Although reliable statistics concerning the disaster as a whole are unavailable, we do know that the Xhosa population in Kaffraria dropped from 105,000 to 37,500 between January and December of 1857, and then again to 25,916 in 1858 (Peires 1989: 319). For many of the present-day survivors, Nongqawuse

> is an embarrassment. Some say she never existed and that the story is a lie concocted by white people to defame blacks. Others say she existed but not in this village. She must have lived somewhere else, in Umtata or even in Cape Town. Another group says that even if she did live in these parts, she was a liar and a disgrace. They don't want to hear or know anything about her. (Mda 2000: 150)

The impasse facing the Xhosa community is that of a rejected past, an ongoing crisis that threatens to destroy the culture and sever its ties to its history and traditions. Mda's task as a fabulist, then, is to engage the historical catastrophe of 1856 and construct a usable past for the formation of a Xhosa people to come. To meet that end, Mda interweaves two plot lines, one focusing on a fictional family caught up in the real events of the 1840s and 1850s, the second involving the descendants of that fictional family in the contemporary Xhosa village of Qolorha-by-Sea. Mda's narrative experimentation on the real may be divided into four critical operations. The first is a diagnosis of the 'scars of history' (Mda 2000: 12), that is, the enduring effects of the Nongqawuse disaster of 1856 on the present Xhosa community. The second is an interpretive reading of the historical events leading up to the crisis of 1856. In the narrative, Nongqawuse is presented as one of a succession of Xhosa prophets, all of whom seek means of countering white colonial predation, and do so through fabulation in their own right – each of the prophets engaging in a becoming-other, experimenting on the real, legending and envisioning a people to come. The third is a dramatisation of these historical events through the actions of the fictional characters of the 1840s and 1850s, a form of legending in which the lives of the twin brothers lend a collective and mythological dimension to the historical events. The fourth is an exploration of potential forces within the present that might reconnect the Xhosa to their history while simultaneously instigating processes of becoming-other, through which a renewed community might begin to take form.

## *Qolorha-by-Sea*

The novel's present-day action centres on the community of Qolorha-by-Sea, a Xhosa village near the valley where Nongqawuse issued her nineteenth-century prophecies. The Unbelievers of Qholora-by-Sea are led by Bhonco, a descendant of Twin-Twin, who was a noted Unbeliever during the time of Nongqawuse. Bhonco is the latest of Twin-Twin's descendants to bear the mysterious 'scars of history' (Mda 2000: 12), for ever since Twin-Twin was beaten for alleged wizardry and thereby scarred in the 1850s, 'every first boy-child in subsequent generations of Twin-Twin's tree is born with the scars' (Mda 2000: 13). As the novel opens, Bhonco's daughter, Xoliswa Ximiya, has just been promoted to the prestigious community position of head mistress of the local school. Xoliswa Ximiya is an even more vociferous opponent of redness than Bhonco. The recipient of a college degree from Hare State, she also boasts of having studied for six months in the United States. Her mother, NoPetticoat, is a less adamant enemy of redness than her husband and daughter, refusing to dress in Western clothing and give up all Xhosa customs. The leader of the Believers in Qolorha-by-Sea is Zim, a descendant of Twin, who was the identical twin brother of Twin-Twin and a fervent supporter of Nongqawuse. Zim has been a widower for a year and still mourns the loss of his wife, NoEngland. His daughter, Qukezwa, is an impish nineteen-year-old who works to preserve traditional Xhosa wisdom and customs. We learn later that Zim's son, Twin, was a talented wood sculptor who had left Qolorha-by-Sea to find success in Johannesburg, but who has recently died an unhappy failure.

The Believers and Unbelievers are at loggerheads over a proposed hotel-casino development in Qolorha-by-Sea. The Believers oppose the plan, which they see as inevitably disrupting the Xhosa way of life, whereas the Unbelievers support it, arguing that only through development can the community modernise and grow prosperous. The situation is soon complicated by the arrival of a stranger, Camagu, a Xhosa from another clan, whose customs and lore differ markedly from those of the Qolorha-by-Sea residents. At an early age, Camagu's family had left its native village and moved to the township of Orlando East, in Johannesburg, and as a result, he 'is filled with a searing longing for an imagined blissfulness of his youth' (Mda 2000: 59). In his late teens, he had gone into exile in the United States, eventually earning a doctorate in communications

and economic development. He had worked in New York, Paris and Rome for various international organisations before deciding to return to post-Apartheid South Africa in 1994. The South Africa he had found upon his arrival, however, was not what he had hoped it would be. Influence peddling and corruption were such that he could not find employment without surrendering his self-respect. So, when he happens on Qolorha-by-Sea while trying to track down a beautiful woman he had briefly met in Johannesburg, he is open to the charm of the village, a community which, despite the rivalry between Believers and Unbelievers, remains in many ways a culturally coherent traditional settlement.

Given his educational background, the locals assume that Camagu continues to stay on in Qolorha because he is courting Xoliswa Ximiya, but in fact he is becoming increasingly attracted to the younger Qukezwa, and he is growing more engrossed with the life of the community, including its deliberations over the hotel-casino development. His sympathies eventually go to the Believers who oppose the project, but he attempts to escape firm alliance with either faction (an effort made especially difficult, given the fact that Xoliswa Ximiya is Bhonco's daughter, and Qukezwa is Zim's child). His chief ally becomes John Dalton, the owner of the town's trading store. Dalton's great grandfather was a British colonial official who had fought against the Xhosa, but Dalton himself is sympathetic to the Xhosa. His

> heart is an umXhosa heart. He speaks better isiXhosa than most of the amaXhosa people in the village. In his youth, against his father's wishes, he went to the initiation school and was circumcised in accordance with the customs of the amaXhosa people. He therefore knows the secret of the mountain. He is a man. (Mda 2000: 8)

Like Camagu, Dalton opposes the resort development, but he tries to persuade others to his position by transcending the partisan bickering between Believers and Unbelievers.

Mda's diagnosis, then, is clear: the scars of Nongqawuse's cattle-killing movement continue to mark and divide the Xhosa people. Families are fixated on the disaster of 1856–7, either nostalgically commemorating it, or rejecting it and in the process abandoning their own culture. Denial of the present or denial of the past seem the only alternatives – reactionary traditionalism or wholesale Westernisation. The cattle-killing movement, a past instance of the third passive synthesis and its caesura in time, which should have

given rise to transformative possibilities, has become a stultifying presence that blocks any movement toward a viable Xhosa future.

## *The Xhosa Tradition of Prophecy*

The novel's second plot follows the actions of Twin and Twin-Twin during the decades leading up to the cattle-killing movement of 1856–7. Twin and Twin-Twin are fictional characters, but the events they witness are all too real. Mda's primary historical source is J. B. Peires' remarkable *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856–7*,[3] an insightful reading of the cattle-killing tragedy that stresses the understandable motives of the Xhosa and the unfortunate conjunction of circumstances that exacerbated the effects of Nongqawuse's prophecies. Mda skilfully incorporates much of Peires' material into the novel, and Peires' sympathetic analysis of the Xhosa mentality subtly informs Mda's own presentation of the events. At least one reviewer of the novel has accused Mda of glamorising the traditional Xhosa worldview and advocating irrationality,[4] but he clearly misses the narrative's implicit interpretation of the events, something that is made explicit in Peires and well worth summarising here.

From the eighteenth century, the Xhosa had had to deal with the presence of European settlers and missionaries. From 1781 to 1878, the Xhosa fought nine Frontier Wars in an effort to maintain their sovereignty. During the Fourth Frontier War (1811–12) the Xhosa experienced for the first time the full impact of Western-style warfare. In a traditional Xhosa war between rival chiefs, few lives were lost and the object was to subdue opponents and acquire their goods. By Xhosa standards, European behaviour during the 1811–12 War was incoherent, since in this case the opponent's object clearly was to kill as many people as possible and destroy all their cattle, crops and settlements. Xhosa losses in the Fourth Frontier War were considerable. The extent of the technological and material might of the whites had suddenly been revealed, and many Xhosa realised that further European encroachments were inevitable. Not only did political instability within Xhosa tribes ensue, but alterations in Xhosa religious life soon began to emerge.

Traditional Xhosa religion was not as complexly structured and elaborated as some belief systems, such as that of the Dogons; it focused less on cosmic myth than on the practical exercise of magic and witchcraft.[5] Amulets, charms, potions, curses and protective

icons played a prominent role in Xhosa life. A significant figure in this religious domain was the *igqirha*, 'diviner' or 'doctor'. Typically, individuals destined for this function would feel 'an irresistible impulse either to enter a deep pool in a river or to penetrate into the depths of a forest' (Mabona 2004: 322). They would feel mentally troubled (*inkathazo*), physically ill (*ukugula*) (Mabona 2004: 428), and would exhibit 'wild uncontrolled behaviour like sudden screams, shakings, aimless wanderings in inaccessible places, violent dreams and frequent shedding of tears' (Mabona 2004: 323). Initiates would refuse common foods, shed old garments and wander alone, listening to spirit voices, *imilozi*, 'which spoke a strange whistling kind of language that only the privileged could understand' (Peires 1989: 91). According to Xhosa thought, such individuals were being possessed by spirits of various sorts – ancestral, animal, or vaguely mysterious. When possessed individuals gradually emerged from these extreme states, they began a period of tutelage with a master diviner (*isanuse*) for several years until they were eventually confirmed as genuine diviners (Mabona 2004: 327–8). The traumatic and transformative initiatory experience was referred to as *thwasa*, 'renewal', a word associated with natural cycles such as the appearance of the new moon or the commencement of spring (Peires 1989: 129).

In Deleuze-Guattari's analysis, we should note parenthetically, Xhosa initiates are undergoing a process of becoming-other, and that process continues once they emerge as full-fledged diviners. The Xhosa diviner is an instance of what Deleuze-Guattari refer to as the 'sorcerer' in the tenth section of *A Thousand Plateaus* ('Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible . . .'). The sorcerer (Deleuze-Guattari's generic designation for the diviner, seer, shaman, healer, witch and so on) is an anomalous element on the border between various spaces and states of being. 'Sorcerers have always held the anomalous position, at the edge of the fields or woods. They haunt the fringes. They are at the borderline of the village, or *between* villages' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 246). Their liminal position affords alliances with and passages among various cosmic forces, as manifested in plants, animals, special places, spirits and so on. Although they are anomalous individuals, however, they are not isolated entities but instead functional components of multiplicities, and hence agents of social collectivities. The Xhosa diviner, then, is someone who enters an initiatory period of intense becoming-other and then emerges to occupy a permanent liminal position within the community as the vehicle for various cosmic processes of becoming-other.

In the wake of the Fourth Frontier War, however, the traditional role of diviner began to be altered, giving rise to a figure known as the *indoli*, the 'seer' or 'prophet'. Nongqawuse was one such prophet, and her pronouncements of 1856 only gain full coherence when situated within a tradition of prophecy that includes two key predecessors: Nxele and Mlanjeni. Nxele was one of the first prophets to emerge after the Fourth Frontier War. He was reared on a Boer farm in the Cape Colony where he learned Dutch and encountered some of the rudiments of Christianity. Shortly after the Xhosa defeat in 1812,

> while still a young man he began to exhibit the hysterical symptoms associated with the initial calling of a diviner, but to an exaggerated degree. He lived in the woods and fields, refusing to eat any prepared food because it had become unclean through the 'sins' of the people. After his circumcision he began to preach, saying 'Forsake witchcraft! Forsake blood!' This was unusual behaviour even for a diviner. (Peires 1981: 69)

Nxele was bound and tied round his neck until an observer convinced others that his madness was unusual and that he should be released. Once set free, Nxele went to Grahamstown, intent, it would seem, on learning more about Christianity and its magical powers, which, according to Xhosa logic, must have been instrumental in the European triumph of the latest war. Nxele spoke at length with Chaplain Vanderlingen about various metaphysical questions and began preaching a doctrine that seemed broadly consonant with orthodox Christianity. He saw himself as a co-worker of the missionaries and a potential mediator between the Europeans and the Xhosa. His influence among the Xhosa was limited, however, and the missionaries distrusted his mystical pronouncements, especially his claim to be a son of Mary and hence the younger brother of Christ. But in 1816, for unknown reasons, Nxele radically transformed his teachings, claiming that there was not one God, but two: Mdalidephu, the God of the blacks, and his opponent Thixo, the God of the whites. Nxele retained the Christian doctrines of the crucifixion and the resurrection of the dead, but reconfigured them within this dualism. Nxele taught that the whites had murdered Tayi, the son of Thixo, and as a result 'the whites had been thrown into the sea whence they had emerged to trouble the sinful Xhosa nation' (Peires 1989: 2). Nxele claimed that he had been sent

> to *lungisa* (put right) the world. . . . He ordered people to abandon witchcraft, to slaughter all red cattle and to destroy stores of corn. He predicted

> that the ancestors and new herds of cattle would rise from the dead, and he attempted to resurrect them out of a cavern below Gompo Rock. (Peires 1989: 135; cf. Mda 2000: 15)

By 1818, Nxele was at the height of his power. Many Xhosa found in his teachings inspiration to oppose the Europeans, and in 1819 a coalition of Xhosa chiefs coalesced around Nxele, who assumed the traditional role of *iTola*, or 'war doctor'. Promising to turn bullets to water with his magic, he led Xhosa warriors in several attacks on the colony. During an attack on Grahamstown in May 1819, Nxele was captured and subsequently imprisoned on Robben Island. With his capture and imprisonment, the Fifth Frontier War came to an end. In 1820 Nxele drowned while attempting to escape from Robben Island, but many Xhosa maintained that he would return, and for decades after his death individuals reported having seen him in dreams and visions.

Clearly, Nxele greatly extended the traditional role of the Xhosa diviner, and in his prophetic teachings and actions he established a new Xhosa practice that bears a close resemblance to Deleuzian fabulation. Nxele combined the traditional diviner's becoming-other with a creative deformation of Xhosa and Christian beliefs, an 'othering' of doctrines that reconfigured recent Xhosa history and inspired a collective course of action. His 'legending' engendered resistance to the Europeans while envisioning a people to come, a new people with new cattle that would rise from the dead.

A key successor to Nxele was the prophet Mlanjeni (Xhosa for 'Riverman'), himself a fabulist whose predictions inspired the Eighth Frontier War (1850–3). At age eighteen, he began having visions. He thought that evil pervaded the world, and he suspected that his mother's cooking was poisoned.

> In order to keep himself pure and undefiled, Mlanjeni withdrew from the society of men and spent much of his time alone. Most especially, he liked to go down to a deep pool on the Keiskamma River where he would sit up to his neck in water for hours – some said days – subsisting only on ants' eggs, water grass and other foods of nature. (Peires 1989: 1/Mda 2000: 14)

Mlanjeni, whom many greeted as a new Nxele, preached against witchcraft and called upon all Xhosa to give up their magical objects. Outside his father's dwelling, he erected two witchcraft poles, and he invited people to pass between the poles to prove that they were innocent of witchcraft. Those who were pure easily passed through,

whereas those who were guilty would become paralyzed, 'while Mlanjeni shook and twitched and danced'. Crowds witnessing this spectacle, unheard of in Xhosaland, 'shouted "He is fixed! He is fixed!" and then, while the witch writhed on the spot quite unable to move, the people would shout, "Get out! Get out! *Bolowane*!" to drive the witchcraft out of its victim' (Peires 1989: 3). Mlanjeni worshiped the sun, and he was reputed to have performed miracles. He lit his pipe with the sun; when he danced, drops of his sweat brought rain; he commanded a star to descend in the day and sit on his forehead (Peires 1989: 3/Mda 2000: 16).

In 1850, Sir Harry Smith, the Governor of the Cape Colony, attempted to secure pledges of loyalty from all Xhosa chiefs, and in the process, managed to ignite another frontier war. Mlanjeni had advised the Xhosa chiefs to purify the land by slaughtering all yellow cattle, and, as 'war doctor', he had provided Xhosa warriors with magical charms, such that 'the guns of the British would shoot hot water, their bullets would do no harm, and their gunpowder would fail to ignite' (Peires 1989: 10–11/Mda 2000: 18–19). Unfortunately, Mlanjeni's charms did not work, and after several bloody battles, the Xhosa chiefs sought an honourable truce. Governor Smith, however, felt that '"Extermination is now the only principle to guide us"' (Peires 1989: 12/Mda 2000: 19). Only upon suffering a series of lopsided massacres did the Xhosa finally secure peace in 1853. Mlanjeni died of tuberculosis the same year.

We can see, then, that the prophetic tradition of Nxele and Mlanjeni stressed the abandonment of witchcraft and the ritual slaughter of cattle. The emphasis on cattle is understandable, since in Xhosa culture, as in that of the Masai, cattle are the central signs of male prestige and the basic commodity of social and ritual exchange. We see as well that the prophets adopted an adversarial position toward the whites – in Mlanjeni's case, out of necessity. The Xhosa had no indigenous beliefs concerning resurrection per se, but they did hold that creation was an ongoing event, and that new people and animals were continually being created by the god uHlanga and emerging from a subterranean cavern in the far north. Clearly, Nxele had combined the Christian doctrine of resurrection and the Xhosa belief in uHlanga's creation to formulate his prediction of the coming of a new people and new cattle, resurrected from a cavern near Gompo Rock.

The Xhosa belief in resurrection as a dimension of historical intervention was further strengthened in 1854 by rumours that spread

throughout the land concerning the death of Sir George Cathcart. Cathcart, contemptuously referred to as 'Old Boots' by the British veterans who served under him, had been Governor of the Cape Colony from 1852 to 1854, during the final days of the Fifth Frontier War (Mlanjeni's War). In 1854, he was sent to fight in the Crimea, where he died in battle 5 November 1854. Soon news spread among the Xhosa that Cathcart had been killed by the Russians, and rumours began to circulate that the Russians were actually a black nation and that their soldiers were the spirits of Xhosa warriors who had died in previous battles and had returned to take vengeance on Cathcart. Nxele's son claimed that his father had not died in 1819, but had gone on to lead the Russians in Crimea. Mlanjeni was also believed to have risen from the dead to lead the fighting (Peires 1989: 72).

## *Nongqawuse*

The periodic call of Xhosa prophets to slaughter cattle took on an added dimension in the years 1853 through 1856, when a cattle disease began to spread among the Xhosa. Lungsickness, a disease that had ravaged Europe for years, was introduced into the Cape Colony in September 1853 by a Dutch ship carrying Friesland bulls to the colony. Virulently contagious, and nearly always fatal, the disease spread rapidly in the colony and soon began to affect Xhosa herds as well. The Xhosa tried to protect their cattle, but within a year Xhosa losses were about 5,000 cattle a month, and in some areas two out of every three cattle died (Peires 1989: 71). Obviously, in such a dire situation, any call for ritual cattle slaughter would assume a redoubled urgency.

This, then, was the context within which the fifteen-year-old Nongqawuse issued her first prophecy. In April 1856, she and another young girl were guarding the crops when Nongqawuse saw two strangers, who said to her,

> Tell that the whole community will rise from the dead; and that all cattle now living must be slaughtered, for they have been reared by contaminated hands because there are people about who deal in witchcraft. . . . So says the chief Napakade, the descendant of Sifuba-sibanzi. (Peires 1989: 79/Mda 2000: 54)

A few days later, the strangers reappeared, telling her

> that they were the people often spoken of in former days by [Nxele] and Umlanjeni, as being a strong people, who would in the course of time

> render the [Xhosa] the assistance they required in driving the white men out of the land, that they had been sent by their great chief Sifubasibanzi, who is likewise the Great Chief of all the [Xhosa]. (Peires 1989: 79/Mda 2000: 54)

Nongqawuse's invocation of Napakade and Sifuba-sibanzi is noteworthy, since Napakade, 'the Eternal One', and Sifuba-sibanzi, 'the Broad-Chested One', were the names used by Xhosa translators for the Christian 'God the Father' and 'Christ the Son'. (Xhosa translators may have borrowed the name Sifuba-sibanzi from Khoikhoi mythology, though the provenance of the name is uncertain.) Nongqawuse's reference to Napakade as the descendant of Sifuba-sibanzi seems consistent with a general Xhosa confusion about the relationship between the two persons of the deity, for often the Xhosa made reference to 'Napakade, son of Sifuba-sibanzi', as well as the reverse. Whether Nongqawuse intended to invoke Christian deities is not clear. She was an orphan living with her uncle Mhlakaza, who had spent many years in the settler city of Grahamstown. The son of a councillor of chief Sarhili, Mhlakaza had at some point left Xhosaland, assumed the name Wilhelm Goliath, and become a baptised member of the Methodist Church in Grahamstown. In 1849, he was hired as the personal servant of Nathaniel James Merriman, the newly appointed Anglican Archdeacon of Grahamstown. For over a year, Goliath travelled with Merriman, helping him in his preaching. Goliath found himself increasingly attracted to Anglicanism, and in April 1850 he became the first Xhosa confirmed in the Anglican Church. Later that year, however, Merriman finished his tour of the colony, and when he settled in Grahamstown, he dismissed his servant Goliath and helped him secure a teaching position in the Xhosa school at Southwell. Unfortunately, the school closed during the Fifth Frontier War, and by 1853 Goliath had returned to his sister's home on the Gxarha River. Embittered by his treatment in the colony, he resumed his own name of Mhlakaza and foreswore the Christian faith. It seems unlikely that in Mhlakaza's household Nongqawuse would have been taught Christian theology per se, but it is possible that she had there heard the names Napakade and Sifuba-sibanzi and that she had been exposed to the millennialism of the syncretic Xhosa/Christian prophetic tradition. Given the fact that, in the months following Nongqawuse's initial prophecies, Mhlakaza often served as the spokesperson for Nongqawuse, and indeed seemed to function with her as a co-prophet, it may well be

that the use of these names reflected not simply the syncretic nature of Xhosa beliefs at the time but also a creative subversion and reappropriation of Christian culture for decidedly unchristian ends on the part of Mhlakaza.

Word soon spread of Nongqawuse's visions and prophecies, and in the ensuing months, many Xhosa heeded her call, slaughtering their cattle and neglecting their crops. Some refused to kill their cattle, however, and those who believed in Nongqawuse's prophecies saw such refusals as impediments to the realisation of the prophecies. Friends and families quarrelled and fought, and two groups began to take form, which the Xhosa labelled Believers and Unbelievers. The Believers expected the appearance of the new people at any moment, and after waiting several months, many became impatient and eventually pressured Nongqawuse and Mhlakaza into predicting a date for the fulfilment of the prophecies. 16 August 1856 was announced as the day the new people would appear. On that day a red sun would arise, then darkness would cover the earth and a storm would rage. Believers gathered near Nongqawuse to witness this great event, but when the day finally arrived, nothing happened. This event was later named the First Disappointment.

The First Disappointment might well have signalled the end of the cattle destruction, had it not been for the actions of the Cape Colony Governor, Sir George Grey. As the cattle killing was spreading, he had threatened to invade Xhosa territories if Xhosa chiefs did not put an end to the movement. In November of 1856, he decided to impress the Xhosa with the might of the British military by sending the ship *Geyser* up the Kei River. This ill-advised gesture backfired in spectacular fashion. When the *Geyser* entered the river, the Xhosa raised the war cry, assuming that the British were making good on their threat of invading. Xhosa warriors gathered on the banks of the river and awaited battle. The drunken commander of the *Geyser*, however, had neglected to bring along a pilot who knew the river, and the ship entered by the wrong channel. Befuddled, the captain sent an exploratory boat from the *Geyser*, but the boat capsized, nearly drowning its crew. The *Geyser* then unceremoniously departed.

Rumours soon spread among the Xhosa of a great military victory, in which the new people were reputed to have destroyed a British ship. Sarhili's father, the long-dead warrior Hintsa, was said to have appeared among the Xhosa forces and caused the destruction of the ship by merely lifting his hand. Mhlakaza was also reported to have been present, using his magic to drive the British sailors mad.

Such a resounding victory spurred many Believers to cling fast to their faith in Nongqawuse, and others who had been uncertain about the prophecies now felt that the predictions had been confirmed and that they should join the movement. The cattle slaughter continued to grow throughout 1856, and by 1857 the devastating effects of all the killing and the neglect of crops had become irreversible. A second date of 16 February 1857 was predicted for the arrival of the new people, but this too proved to be another ordinary day, which soon became known as the Great Disappointment. By mid 1857, starvation was becoming commonplace among the Xhosa. Christian relief societies in the colony attempted to aid the Xhosa, but Governor Grey forbade them from intervening. His policy was to use starvation to force the Xhosa to give up their lands and sign contracts as labourers in the colony. Some Xhosa did succumb to this strategy, some sought refuge in neighbouring territories, and many simply died. By 1858, the Xhosa population had been severely reduced, perhaps to as little as one-quarter or one-fifth of what it had been before. Mhlakaza died of starvation in November of 1857. Nongqawuse survived and was handed over to Major Gawler, who kept her in his household for a year. In October 1858, Nongqawuse was taken to the Cape Town Paupers' Lodge. At this point, she disappears from the historical record.

## *Twin and Twin-Twin*

Virtually all of these details are incorporated into the novel's 1850s narrative, which focuses on the relationship between Twin and Twin-Twin, sons of Xikixa, 'a patriarch and a patrician of the Great Place of King Sarhili'. 'Twin and Twin-Twin were like one person' (Mda 2000: 13), inseparable and always of one mind throughout their childhood and youth. As young men, they gained prominence within the community, and Twin-Twin, ever a lover of women, soon had several wives. Twin and Twin-Twin remained close friends, until they began to argue one day over Mlanjeni's status as a prophet – whether he was the incarnation of Nxele or a prophet in his own right. That day the two came to blows for the first time, much to the delight of their father, who exclaimed, '"Now you are becoming human beings"' (Mda 2000: 15). Later, when Mlanjeni's campaign against witchcraft was well underway, Twin-Twin's senior wife was pressed to walk between Mlanjeni's witchcraft poles, and as she approached, 'she was paralyzed. Mlanjeni began to dance a frenzied

dance around the poles, and the crowd chanted, "She is fixed! She is fixed! She is a witch!"' (Mda 2000: 17). Twin-Twin intervened in her defence, but he was seized by zealots who dragged him off and flogged him with whips. When the wounds healed, they left deep scars on his back that tormented him the rest of his life, itching whenever he became angry. His father and brother ostracised his first wife, and he became incensed at the injustice. 'It did not escape Twin-Twin that this was the second time he had quarrelled with his twin brother, and on both occasions the prophet was the cause' (Mda 2000: 17).

Twin and Twin-Twin fought in Mlanjeni's War, serving under General Maqoma in a guerrilla struggle in the Amathole Mountains. One day, their small guerrilla band stumbled on a British encampment, and much to their horror, they saw one soldier behead a dead Xhosa warrior and place the head in a pot of boiling water. They recognised the soldier as John Dalton, one of the Governor's administrators. As they looked closely, Twin and Twin-Twin realised that the beheaded warrior was their father. They attacked the British, scattering most of the camp and taking Dalton prisoner. When they accused Dalton of cannibalism, he responded that the British were not boiling the heads in order to eat them. '"These heads are either going to be souvenirs, or will be used for scientific inquiry"' (Mda 2000: 20). Before the twins could inquire further, British reinforcements arrived and the twins were forced to retreat.

We should note that such specimen collection was not unheard of in South Africa. Peires provides the following passage from a letter of Stephen Lakeman, an officer fighting in the Waterkloof:

> Doctor A – of the 60th had asked my men to procure for him a few native skulls of both sexes. This was a task easily accomplished. One morning they brought back to camp about two dozen heads of various ages. As these were not supposed to be in a presentable state for the doctor's acceptance, the next night they turned my vat into a cauldron for the removal of superfluous flesh. And there these men sat, gravely smoking their pipes during the live-long night, and stirring round and round the heads in that seething boiler, as though they were cooking black-apple dumplings. (Peires 1989: 24)

No doubt this account served as a model for the incident involving Dalton and the boiling head of the twins' father.

During the war, Twin met a Khoikhoi woman named Qukezwa, with whom he fell in love. Twin-Twin reminded his brother that Khoikhoi women had prostituted themselves to British soldiers in

order to secure bullets and gunpowder for the struggle (cf. Peires 1989: 18), and he begged Twin to forget about Qukezwa and look for a wife among the Xhosa. But Twin ignored these pleas and married Qukezwa. She told him about the Khoikhoi creator god Tsiqwa and taught him to sing the song of Heitsi Eibab, the earliest Khoikhoi prophet, who, like Moses, had parted the waters of a river and then brought them down on the enemy warriors who were chasing the Khoikhoi people. 'Whenever they sang this song, Twin wished the same thing could happen to the British' (Mda 2000: 23).

Twin and Twin-Twin managed to protect most of their herds during Mlanjeni's War, so when the war was over and lungsickness came to their region, they were directly affected. They decided to leave the region with their cattle, and eventually settled in Qolorha. Shortly after their arrival, Nongqawuse began to prophesy, and eventually Twin and Qukezwa joined the ranks of the Believers, whereas Twin-Twin became a leader of the Unbelievers. Once Twin and Qukezwa had killed all their cattle, they spent most of their time at Mhlakaza's settlement, where they joined an idyllic band of fellow believers.

> The daily feasting, the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood that permeated the very air that they were breathing, the singing and dancing, the hope for the future, all made the multitudes forget about the troubles of the outside world and the lungsickness that tortured the Unbelievers. (Mda 2000: 107)

Meanwhile, Twin-Twin found himself increasingly forced to consort with Christian converts and sycophants of the British, the primary constituents of the party of Unbelievers. He and his brother became estranged, and following the First Disappointment, Twin even went so far as to lead a raid upon his brother's herds, convinced that the failure of Nongqawuse's prophecy was caused by the refusal of Unbelievers, like Twin-Twin, to slaughter their cattle.

Following the Great Disappointment, Qukezwa concluded that the prophets had failed them and that they should seek refuge to avoid starvation. Twin, however, disagreed. '"The prophets have not failed us," declared Twin. "We have failed them. We have failed ourselves. The fault is not with the prophecies, but with the Unbelievers, who failed to obey Nongqawuse! The dead will yet arise!"' (Mda 2000: 254). Given Twin's intransigence, Qukezwa saw no option but to leave Twin and seek food and refuge for herself and her son, Heitsi, among the Khoikhoi. Eventually, Twin

> ended up an inmate of the Kaffir Relief House, and there he lived with people who had been made raving mad by starvation, until he went raving mad himself. Meanwhile, Qukezwa wandered from village to village with Heitsi, begging for scraps of food. She hoped that one day she would locate her Khoikhoi people and would be welcomed into their warm bosom. (Mda 2000: 258)

Twin-Twin, for his part, survived physically but became thoroughly disillusioned with the British and their Xhosa collaborators. 'He was filled with bitterness and his scars went wild' (Mda 2000: 258). He came to see religion as the source of his people's problems. 'He was indeed disillusioned with all religions. He therefore invented his own Cult of the Unbelievers – elevating unbelieving to the heights of a religion' (Mda 2000: 259).

## *The Prophetic Event*

The story of Twin and Twin-Twin is a fable of social division and disintegration, a clear instance of fabulative 'legending' in which the characters function both as allegorical representatives of social groups and as figures in a creative mythography. The family, the fundamental unit of Xhosa society, is deprived of its leader when the patriarch is beheaded, and the basic social bond among males is severed, as the twins, 'who were like one person' (Mda 2000: 13), quarrel and eventually become bitter enemies. In Xhosa culture, this division has especially deep resonance, since twins are fundamental to Xhosa thought about the cosmos. Among the Xhosa, 'full, genuine – and therefore also sovereign – being is twin-being. Godhead, the human condition, and all other ontological categories are possible accidental states of this twin mode of being' (Mabona 2004: 273). The rift between the twins, then, may be seen as a mythic rending of the Xhosa cosmos.

The colonial occupation of the British is largely responsible for this social collapse. The patriarch is beheaded by the British, and though Twin-Twin reflects that twice when he quarrelled with his brother, 'the prophet was the cause' (Mda 2000: 17), the entire tradition of nineteenth-century Xhosa prophecy is itself shaped by the presence of the British. Nxele taught that Mdalidephu, the God of the black man, had come to oppose the white God, whose son had been murdered by the whites. As a punishment, 'the whites had been thrown into the sea whence they had emerged to trouble the Xhosa nation', and now Mdalidephu's emissary, Nxele, was prophesying

'so that the world can be made right again' (Peires 1989: 2). Mlanjeni provided charms to counter the British weapons, and his prophecies served as the rallying point for Xhosa resistance to colonial intervention. Nxele and Mlanjeni were rumoured to have led the fighting against Cathcart in the Crimea and again later in the defeat of the *Geyser*. And Nongqawuse predicted that 'if the people killed all their cattle and set all their granaries alight, the spirits would rise from the dead and drive all the white people into the sea' (Mda 2000: 77).

At the centre of Mda's narrative is Nongqawuse. Her pronouncements represent the culmination of the Xhosa prophetic tradition, with its syncretic combination of native and Christian beliefs, its calls for reform, purification and ritual sacrifice, and its millennial promise of liberation from the whites. The cattle-killing movement of Nongqawuse introduces a caesura in time marking a clear 'before' and 'after', a 'becoming-other' that is literally directed toward the creation of a 'new people'. Like Nxele and Mlanjeni before her, she 'legends *in flagrante delicto*'. Nongqawuse also sees strangers in the fields and hears their voices; later, she sees the new people riding on the waves, though no one else can see them. If, as Deleuze asserts, fabulation entails a projection into the real of images that take on a life of their own, an invention of visual and aural images with the intensity and immediacy of hallucinations (what Deleuze calls 'Visions and Auditions'), then Nongqawuse is decidedly a fabulist.

The time of the Xhosa prophets is that of a resurgent past constantly reappearing in the present. The past is a cumulative reservoir of possibilities, as successors to one another, such as Nxele and Mlanjeni, return and coexist in a new present, intervening in the Crimean War or the fight against the *Geyser*. In Nongqawuse's case, it is also a suspended time, a hiatus in the temporal flow. Following Nongqawuse's predictions, the customary rhythms of livestock care and cultivation come undone, and a floating time of perpetual feasting and celebration ensues. It is a time between ordinary moments, a 'between-time', which allows Twin and Qukezwa to enter a paradisiacal order of universal brother- and sisterhood, joy and liberation from oppression. The time of Nongqawuse's prophecy is a manifestation of the third synthesis of time, for it is a moment in which a past, which seems too much to bear and which overwhelms and hence stifles action, is reconfigured by a vision of the future. On that basis, the past ushers in a transformation that enables future action.[6]

Unfortunately, the event of Nongqawuse is also paradigmatic

of the dangers of fabulation and becoming-other. Deleuze repeatedly stresses that there are great hazards in becoming-other and no guarantees that what emerges will be better than what preceded it. As Deleuze and Guattari say of Kafka's *Trial*, the coming collectivity imagined by Kafka is a part of a literary machine, 'another piece of the machine – without our knowing yet what this assemblage will be: fascist? revolutionary? socialist? capitalist? Or even all of these at the same time, connected in the most repugnant or diabolical way?' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 85). For this reason Deleuze recommends caution in all becomings, a partial engagement of the speeds of metamorphosis, rather than an absolute abandonment of all coordinates of social and material organisation. The cattle-killing movement, like many apocalyptic movements, displays no such caution, and in fact Nongqawuse frames the efficacy of her prophecies in terms of a total commitment of all Xhosa to the complete eradication of their cattle and crops.

From the outside, the Xhosa cattle-killing movement looked like mass suicide, but from within, it seemed a viable strategy for overcoming an intolerable situation – one that was focused on the crisis of lungsickness, but also compounded by an encroaching missionary culture and an ever-aggressive alien colonial power. The faith in supernatural forces proved to be misplaced, yet rumour and popular belief had led many to conclude that genuine evidence existed to warrant following Nongqawuse's instructions. And one must ask, did the Xhosa have any viable alternatives to submission to colonial rule? Given the technological superiority of British arms and the persistent encroachments of white settlers, could any strategy of resistance have delivered the Xhosa from the inevitable?

## *The Legacy of the Past*

Perhaps not, but for the descendents of Nongqawuse's generation the problem remains that the Xhosa seemed to bring about their own destruction. For the inhabitants of contemporary Qolorha-by-Sea, the difficult task is to turn that history into a usable past. For many, the task is impossible.

> The sufferings of the Middle Generations [those between the 1850s and the 1990s] are only whispered. It is because of the insistence: *Forget the past. Don't only forgive it. Forget it as well. The past did not happen. You only dreamt it. It is a figment of your rich collective imagination. It did not happen. Banish your memory. It is a sin to have a memory. There is*

> *virtue in amnesia. The past. It did not happen. It did not happen. It did not happen.* (Mda 2000: 137)

For Bhonco, however, forgetting the past is not an option. He, like his ancestor Twin-Twin, bears 'the scars of history' (Mda 2000: 12). Whenever Bhonco grows sad or gets angry at Zim, his scars itch and torment him.

Yet one would expect that at least those Unbelievers who do not bear the scars would be among the amnesiacs, but such is not the case. Like Twin-Twin, who had elevated 'unbelieving to the heights of a religion' (Mda 2000: 259), the Unbelievers of modern Qolorha-by-Sea have invented their own ritual of unbelief. They have borrowed a dance from the amaThwa that puts them in a trance. Like the amaThwa, 'the elders seem to induce death through their dance. When they are dead they visit the world of the ancestors'. Yet the ancestral world visited by the Unbelievers is unlike that of the amaThwa or the traditional Xhosa. As NoPetticoat explains to Camagu,

> 'They are going into a trance that takes them back to the past. To the world of the ancestors. Not the Otherworld where the ancestors live today. Not the world that lives parallel to our world. But to this world when it still belonged to them. When they were still people of flesh and blood like the people who walk the world today.' (Mda 2000: 73)

The object of the ritual, she says, is to induce '"sadness in their lives, so that they may have a greater appreciation of happiness"' (Mda 2000: 73). Theirs is a 'memory ritual', in which 'they fleet back through the Middle Generations, and linger in the years when their forebears were hungry' (Mda 2000: 74). The Unbelievers, in short, are fixated on the suffering of the past, obsessively repeating the catastrophe of Nongqawuse in a ritual reliving of a vanished present.

Unlike the Unbelievers, Zim, the paradigmatic Believer, does commune with the ancestors in the Otherworld. He sits for hours beneath the wild fig tree outside his house. There he finds solace, for the tree 'is directly linked to the ancestors – all of Twin's progeny who planted it more than a hundred years ago' (Mda 2000: 38). There Zim communes with four different kinds of ancestors, 'the ancestors of the sea, the ancestors of the forest, the ancestors of the veld, and the ancestors of the homestead. They are all regular visitors to this tree' (Mda 2000: 38). The Unbelievers find a way to access a present that has passed, and in that regard they inhabit the expanded, dilated present of the first synthesis. Zim, by contrast, gains access to something like the Bergsonian virtual past of the second passive

synthesis. The realm of the ancestors is parallel to the actual domain of the living, a realm that constantly adds new inhabitants, but within a field of coexistence across its accumulated past. To a certain extent the deceased ancestors resemble their former selves, but in passing into the realm of the ancestors they take on a new identity, that of a virtual double that has never been actual. Once in the virtual field of the past, the ancestors become powers of possible influence, alliance or obstruction, but ultimately forces incapable of influencing action among the living without the active participation of the living in the actualisation of the virtual.

Zim's communing with the ancestors, however, is largely nostalgic. He is lonely for his dead wife, and in his meditation he seeks escape from the present rather than assistance in meeting the future. In this regard, his is no more a usable past than is the past revisited by the Unbelievers. Signs of a different Zim are evident when he speaks with his daughter, Qukezwa, early in the novel. Together, Zim and Qukezwa commune with the natural world of Nongqawuse's Valley, and Zim teaches Qukezwa about her people and their past.

> He talks passionately about this valley. When he began to walk, he walked in this valley. He looked after cattle in this valley. He was circumcised here. His grandfather's fields were here. His whole life is centered in this valley. He is one with Intlambo-ka-Nongqawuse – Nongqawuse's Valley. (Mda 2000: 46)

When Qukezwa remarks that Mlanjeni's prophecies were false, Zim replies,

> 'Who teaches you these things? Mlanjeni was a true prophet. All his sayings were true, but everything was spoiled by young men who could not leave women alone. Mlanjeni said so right from the beginning. His medicine and women did not mix. That is why he himself eschewed women all his life.' (Mda 2000: 47)

Zim's teachings about the veracity of Mlanjeni's prophecies may be questionable, but at least here he is passing a knowledge of the past on to his descendant, whereas in the rest of the novel he is merely sunk in reverie when engaged with the past.

Qukezwa, for her part, makes a more positive use of the past than does Zim. She learns to sing using the traditional Xhosa split-tone technique (a technique like that of Tibetan monks, who can produce simultaneously a low drone and a high-pitched harmonic tone). She masters the '*umrhubhe*, the isiXhosa musical instrument that is made of a wooden bow and a single string. Women play the instrument by

stroking and sometimes plucking the string, using their mouths as an acoustic box' (Mda 2000: 151). From Zim she acquires knowledge of 'the language of the birds' (Mda 2000: 39), the language of whistles with which Believers speak to the ancestors and occasionally to one another. Most importantly, she learns about the indigenous plants and wildlife of her region and becomes an activist in the preservation of the local ecological system. She uproots invasive plants like the inkberry, which, as she tells Camagu,

> 'comes from across the Kei River. It kills other plants. These flowers that you like so much will eventually become berries. Each berry is a prospective plant that will kill the plants of my forefathers. And this plant is poisonous to animals too, although its berries are not. Birds eat the berries without any harm, and spread these terrible plants with their droppings.' (Mda 2000: 90)

Qukezwa is not entirely happy in Qolorha-by-Sea, however. Early in the novel, she tells Zim that she is thinking of leaving for Johannesburg. Zim is dismayed, since 'she is the only one left to carry forward the tradition of belief'. Zim's hope is that Qukezwa will remain simply to repeat the past. 'Zim assures his daughter that if she works hard enough she will end up being a prophetess like Nongqawuse'. And there is something appealing in Zim's wish, with its suggestion that she sustain the spirit of Nongqawuse and the tradition of Xhosa prophecy. Later that night, after recalling Zim's desire that she become a prophet like Nongqawuse, she thinks of Nongqawuse's association with the Nomyayi bird, and when she falls asleep, she dreams of 'Nongqawuse flying with a crow – the Nomyayi bird'. Though she often has nightmares, 'tonight there is no need to run away. She flies with Nomyayi in the land of the prophets' (Mda 2000: 47).

## *Anomalous Intercessors*

What allows Qukezwa to go beyond Zim's desire that she merely repeat the past – and what allows her to avoid the opposing lure of an alien city life – is Camagu. (The name means '"forgive and be pacified", and is usually addressed to an ancestor or a diviner' [Peires 1981: 218]; it is the word addressed to Nxele by the man who convinced others to free Nxele when he was bound by ropes early in his career [Peires 1981: 69].) Camagu is an anomalous force in Qolorha-by-Sea, a locus of becoming-other that induces change in the community. He is Xhosa, but from a distant clan. He has some knowledge

of and respect for traditional culture, but he was raised in an urban township. He has lived abroad for years, but has ultimately rejected Euro-American culture. Yet he has also seen the downside of the post-Apartheid order, including life in the big city, and in Qolorha-by-Sea he has discovered some of the elements of a viable community and way of life that he has never experienced before. He is an intercessor, who, with Qukezwa and John Dalton, is able to work collectively to invent a usable past that fosters a people to come.

In Qukezwa and John Dalton we see figures of the generative power of repetition as differentiation. Unlike the doubling of Twin and Twin-Twin, a horizontal temporal repetition that results in a negative division of an initial harmonious unity, the vertical repetition of the Qukezwa and John Dalton of the past in their present namesakes is a positive repetition with a difference. Already in the past-Qukezwa we see an anomalous element of becoming-other – she is a Khoikhoi who teaches Twin another culture's lore and inspires in him a longing for a Xhosa prophet and for liberation from the whites. And even in the past-John Dalton there is a hint of the anomalous, in that, unlike most whites, he speaks 'perfect isiXhosa' (Mda 2000: 20). But the present avatars of Qukezwa and John Dalton are much more markedly anomalous sites of potential change than were their predecessors. The present-Qukezwa preserves the lore of the past, but actively seeks an existence that exceeds that past. The present-John Dalton, himself more Xhosa than many of those born of Xhosa stock, wants to find a viable means of sustaining the Xhosa way of life in the modern world, a task which, he recognises, cannot be accomplished by simply ignoring the encroachments of globalisation. Ultimately, the three anomalous figures, Camagu, Qukezwa and John Dalton, combine their forces and together develop alternative economies for the Xhosa that might foster a rejuvenated Xhosa culture. Qukezwa introduces Camagu to local seafood, and Camagu then organises local women in a cooperative to sell seafood to hotels in the region. In this enterprise, Camagu unsettles traditional Xhosa gender relations, for, as Qukezwa remarks, '"Men are insecure when women make more money. It makes women more independent."' She adds, however, that '"Men will just have to get used to it"' (Mda 2000: 220), a comment that suggests the change in Xhosa ways of life induced by Camagu's innovation will not necessarily undermine the culture entirely. John Dalton manages to secure Qolorha-by-Sea's designation as a national heritage site, and thereby fends off development of the hotel-casino. Camagu proposes that the community

foster eco-tourism by constructing a backpackers' hostel, and Dalton suggests that the Xhosa start a 'cultural village' where tourists can observe Xhosa daily life and customs. Initially Camagu and Dalton quarrel over the cultural village concept, since, in Camagu's judgement, it distorts the past and fossilises the present. '"The amaXhosa people are not a museum piece"', says Camagu. '"Like all cultures, their culture is dynamic"' (Mda 2000: 248). Eventually, however, the Xhosa make room for both the backpackers' hostel and the cultural village. With the development of cooperative businesses, the creation of the hostel and the establishment of the cultural village, the Xhosa find a way of using the past, of continuing traditions and remembering their history in the formation of a dynamic culture and a new people, a contemporary Xhosa people that has overcome the divisions of Believers and Unbelievers and that incorporates outsiders like Camagu and Dalton within its confines.

## *The New People and the Usable Past*

This rather programmatic solution to the social problems of the Xhosa may seem too pat and optimistic, but in the final page of the novel Mda introduces a note of uncertainty about the future. Earlier in the novel, Qukezwa tells Camagu that she loves the sea and '"The sea loves me"' (Mda 2000: 121), yet she adds that as a child she had always been afraid of the sea. Her mother had never allowed her to play with the other children in the ocean, and as a result, she had never learned to swim. Later, when she was a secondary school student, she nearly drowned when she and a friend ventured into the sea. But when Qukezwa's mother died, Qukezwa learned to swim, and 'Now she swims with a vengeance and is not scared of the most vicious storms' (Mda 2000: 121). In the final scene of the novel, Qukezwa is at the shore with Heitsi, Qukezwa and Camagu's young son. As Qukezwa surveys the landscape, she reflects, 'Those who want to preserve indigenous plants and birds have won the day there. At least for now. But for how long? The whole country is ruled by greed' (Mda 2000: 277). She then turns to look at Heitsi. 'Oh, this Heitsi! He is afraid of the sea. How will he survive without the sea? How will he carry out the business of saving his people?' (Mda 2000: 277). The novel closes as 'Heitsi screams even louder, pulling away from her grip, "No mama! No! This boy does not belong in the sea! This boy belongs in the man village!"' (Mda 2000: 277). Clearly, there is some doubt whether Heitsi's generation will sustain the spirit

of Qukezwa – an oceanic spirit that is sensitive to the rhythms and forces of nature, independent, open to change, and courageous in defying ossified, constraining concepts and habits.

By the end of the novel, Zim has died, infuriating Bhonco since Zim has beaten him in becoming an ancestor before he could do so, and since Bhonco now has no enemy to fight with. Bhonco eventually grows despondent and incoherent, assaulting John Dalton and demanding that Dalton return the head of Bhonco's ancestor, Xikixa. Dalton nearly dies, but once he recovers, he and Camagu are reconciled and the community is healed. No more is heard of Bhonco, but the strife between Believers and Unbelievers has ended. The only traces of the historical conflict that remain are the 'scars of history', which suddenly appear on the back of Bhonco's daughter, Xoliswa Ximiya – the first female to be so afflicted. She rejected the past and is most deeply marked by it, and even after she leaves Qolorha-by-Sea for Pretoria, the scars remain.

A moment of transformation had erupted in the past, as a young woman named Nongqawuse entered into a process of becoming-prophet and projected her Visions and Auditions into the world, ushering in a floating time of metamorphosis, summoning a new people to come, and inviting the Xhosa to join the new people in a rejuvenated community. That revolutionary moment proved disastrous, and the generations that followed suffered the consequences. The scars of history marked the Xhosa until a second moment of transformation, quieter and more subtle than the last, allowed the formation of an incipient community with the promise of being something new. This extended moment, that of the collective becoming-other of Camagu, Qukezwa and John Dalton, unfolded at a slower pace than the first, and proceeded with greater caution, in a less apocalyptic fashion. Eventually, a new articulation of the past was made possible, a fabulation in which Nongqawuse and her generation were celebrated for their wisdom, their belief and their courage, however misguided its application, and in which the present Xhosa could see themselves as bearers of a viable tradition, a tradition capable of positive change without losing its coherence in that metamorphosis. In this fabulation, the scars of history were transformed into signs of identity.

## *Notes*

1. For an illuminating comparison of the representation of history in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and *The Heart of Redness*, see

Gohrisch 2006. Many of her points about Mda are consonant with my own.

2. For a suggestive exploration of the resonances between Conrad's novella and *The Heart of Redness*, see Sewlall 2003. Mda himself has downplayed the allusion to Conrad, asserting that his novel had nothing to do with *The Heart of Darkness* and 'everything to do with the Xhosa expression . . . *ububomvu*, which means redness, or the heart of redness' (cited in Offenburger 2008: 177). I doubt that Mda could have chosen his title without expecting readers to recognize an allusion to Conrad, given the centrality Conrad's text has had in discussions of African literature during the last half century. I suspect that his emphasis on the expression *ububomvu* rather than Conrad's title is meant simply to insist on the autonomy of his own work and to direct attention away from Conrad and instead focus it squarely on *The Heart of Redness*. It should be added that Mda's novel is hardly a derivative version of *The Heart of Darkness*, and Sewlall makes no such argument.
3. Mda's novel often makes use of specific details provided in Peires, and at such points I include parenthetical page references to both Mda and Peires, for example: (Peires 1989: 1/Mda 2000: 14). Something of a controversy arose in 2008 concerning Mda's novel and Peires' history when Andrew Offenburger published an essay accusing Mda of plagiarising Peires and therefore writing a novel that is duplicitous and derivative. The case is unusual in that Mda openly acknowledged his debt to Peires' study in the novel's Dedication, and Peires has not only thanked Mda in the 2003 Afterword to his book for bringing renewed attention to *The Dead Will Arise* but also responded to Offenburger's charges by saying that he has no objections to Mda's use of his book. Mda's response (Mda 2008) strikes me as reasonable, and Offenburger's argument misguided and unconvincing.
4. Norman Rush concludes his review of *The Heart of Redness* by calling it the product of a 'controlling, reflexive, culturally backward-looking ideology' (Rush 2003: 31–2).
5. My account of traditional Xhosa religion draws on Peires 1981: 64–78, and Mabona 2004, in addition to Peires 1989.
6. Peires draws several 'important parallels between the process of *thwasa* [the initiatory period of unusual behaviour undergone by diviners] and the Cattle-Killing movement' (Peires 1989: 129) – refusing to eat one's usual food; disposing of personal ornaments; sacrificing animals as a prelude to a future rebirth; experiencing hallucinatory visions and auditions. The implication, I believe, is that the Cattle-Killing movement was a social *thwasa*, a year-long collective becoming-other analogous to the becoming-other of the individual Xhosa diviners and prophets.

*3*

# Becoming-Child, Becoming-Untouchable: Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) was one of the most successful Indian novels of recent decades, reaching a significant audience both in India and abroad. Its widespread reception in the Anglophone world also sparked considerable controversy, especially in regard to the political implications of the work. Predictably, hardline Communists were affronted by Roy's presentation of Comrade K. M. N. Pillai, the novel's local Party official, and doctrinaire leftists in general chided her for her lack of practical commitment to the struggle. Less simplistic analysts, however, recognised that Roy's fiction was not a programmatic *roman engagé* but a poetic and emotive evocation of memory, desire and loss, as well as an historically situated study of the social and psychological dynamics of racial, caste and gender power relations. For such analysts, the primary questions raised by the work concerned Roy's relative success in balancing aesthetic and thematic concerns; the extent to which she resisted or surrendered to the temptations of exoticism or sentimentality; the nature of the interconnections among the thematic strands of race, caste and gender; and the implications and validity of her analysis of the problems presented in the novel.[1] If Roy is approached as a fabulist who engages the differential times of becoming-other and invents a people to come, all of these issues emerge in a configuration that suggests an integration of aesthetic, thematic, historical and social concerns. It is a story of the small-scale suffering of large-scale history, a tale of trauma, unhealed wounds and the faintest glimmer of hope.

## *Things Can Change in a Day*

The story is set in Kerala, the southwest Indian coastal region that has the nation's highest number of Christians and elected Communist officials. The primary events unfold in the summer of

1992 and during a four-week period between December 1969 and January 1970. The central characters are Rahel; her dizygotic (fraternal) twin brother, Estha; the twins' mother, Ammu; the twins' unmarried great aunt, Baby Kochamma; Ammu's brother, Chacko; Chacko and Ammu's mother, Mammachi; Chacko's former English wife, Margaret Kochamma (the couple divorced a year after their marriage); Chacko and Margaret's daughter, Sophie Mol; and the Paravan (untouchable) Velutha.[2] The 1992 narrative focuses on Rahel's return from the United States to the family home in the small town of Ayemenem. She arrives to find a dilapidated house inhabited solely by her octogenarian great aunt, Baby Kochamma, the maid Kochu Maria, and her recently returned twin brother, Estha, who wanders the neighbourhood in a virtually catatonic state. The source of Rahel's malaise, her brother's catatonia, and the family's general decline, we come to learn, lies in the fatal weeks of December 1969–January 1970, when the twins were seven years old. The complex sequence of events defies ready summary and requires a rather detailed synopsis to be intelligible.

In 1957, Chacko had gone to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, and the following year he met and eventually married Margaret. Shortly after the birth of their daughter, Sophie, Margaret divorced Chacko and married a biologist named Joe. Chacko returned to India and remained in contact with Margaret. When Joe was killed in a car accident in October 1969, Chacko invited Margaret and their daughter to spend the Christmas holidays in Ayemenem. The 1969 narrative commences with the family car ride to Cochin to pick up Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol at the airport. Chacko, Ammu, Baby Kochamma and the twins plan to drive to Cochin, attend a 70mm CinemaScope showing of *The Sound of Music*, spend the night at the Hotel Sea Queen, and meet the English travellers at the airport the next day. Midway to Cochin, a Communist demonstration holds up the motorists, and as a result they arrive late for the film, but decide to watch the movie anyway. During a musical number, Estha cannot resist singing along with the nuns, and after repeated shushing from the audience, he is sent alone to the lobby. There, a pederast concession stand worker, the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, coerces Estha into holding the man's erect penis while the man masturbates. Confused and embarrassed, Estha is sickened by the sweet soda the man gives him to drink, and after his return to his theatre seat, he is sufficiently nauseated that Ammu decides the family should leave immediately. As the family passes through the lobby, the

Orangedrink Lemondrink Man engages Ammu in conversation, and through his casual remarks he slyly communicates to Estha that he knows where the young boy lives and that he will pay the boy a visit if he lets anyone know what has transpired.

The next day, the family members meet Margaret and Sophie at the airport, and they all then drive to Ayemenem. During the family's 'Welcome Home, Sophie Mol' celebration, Ammu catches the eye of Velutha, the untouchable, who has come to the Ipe house to report on his repairs of machinery at the family's small pickle factory. Velutha and Ammu experience a sudden and unexpected mutual attraction. Ammu had married at the age of eighteen, and her husband had proved to be an alcoholic. After the birth of the twins, Ammu's husband's drinking had become so bad that his English boss threatened to fire him. The boss suggested, however, that if the alcoholic employee were to persuade his beautiful wife to become his mistress, the supervisor might spare him his job. When Ammu's husband proposed this arrangement to her, she refused. Eventually, she divorced her husband and returned with the children to Ayemenem. Soon after her return, she realised 'that there would be no more chances' (Roy 1997: 42), 'that Life had been Lived. That her cup was full of dust' (Roy 1997: 212). With two young children and the disgrace of divorce, she knew that she was condemned to a lonely, subservient existence. Velutha, three years younger than Ammu, had been someone she had been fond of as a child, and upon seeing him now as a strong young man, she found in him an improbable and forbidden object of attraction. For his part, Velutha suddenly 'saw that Rahel's mother was a woman' (Roy 1997: 168).

While the family celebration is going on, Estha slips away to the pickle factory to plan his escape, lest the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man come to get him. Rahel manages to join Estha after awhile, and the two conclude that they should find a boat to take them across the river to an abandoned house where they can hide if they need to escape. The twins walk to the river and find a debris-covered boat, which, however, is full of holes. They carry the boat to their friend Velutha's hut, and Velutha helps them repair the boat. The twins use the boat to carry supplies to the abandoned house in preparation for a possible flight. In the meantime, Velutha and Ammu meet at night by the river and begin an affair, using the boat in subsequent nights to conduct their secret relationship in the abandoned house. Vigilant eyes soon betray the secret, however, and when Velutha's father hears the rumours, he hides in the dark and verifies the shameful truth. He

reports the news to Mammachi, his old patroness, and volunteers to kill his own son. Mammachi is filled with rage, and she and Chacko lock Ammu in her room. When the twins ask their mother why she is locked up, she screams, '"Because of you! . . . If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be here! . . . I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born!"' (Roy 1997: 239–40).

When the twins hear this, they decide to run away to the abandoned house. Later that evening, they leave, accompanied by Sophie Mol, who insists on joining them. As they cross the river, the boat capsizes and Sophie Mol is swept away and drowned. The twins manage to swim to shore and find refuge in the abandoned house. While these events transpire, another plot line unfolds, bringing Velutha to the same house. After Velutha's father informs Mammachi of the affair, Mammachi summons Velutha to the Ipe home. When he arrives, she assaults him with obscenities. Velutha leaves and then goes to the home of Comrade Pillai, the local Communist Party official, hoping that Pillai will help him, since Velutha is a loyal Party member. Pillai refuses, however, since Velutha is an untouchable, whose presence in the Party has irritated the non-untouchable members. At this point Velutha retreats to the abandoned house to consider his next course of action. When the twins arrive later, he is unaware of their presence.

While Velutha is scrambling to save himself, Baby Kochamma is working to salvage the family's reputation. She goes to the Police station and tells Inspector Mathew that Velutha had earlier tried to rape Ammu and that the twins were missing – possibly, abducted by Velutha, she hints. Before acting on this report, the politic Inspector meets with Pillai to assess the ramifications of arresting a Party member; Pillai lets it be known that the Party will not stand up for Velutha. So, at dawn, the day following the twins' fatal river crossing and Velutha's retreat to the house, the police respond to intelligence that Velutha is in the house and stage a raid. They find him and beat him savagely. The twins, who had passed the night unaware of Velutha's presence, witness the beating. The police discover the twins and bring them back to the station, along with the mortally wounded Velutha. After questioning the twins, Inspector Mathew comes to realise that Ammu was a willing partner of Velutha's. When Baby Kochamma arrives to pick up the children, the Inspector threatens her for filing a false report that led to the probable death of an innocent man. She is offered three alternatives: she must admit to the crime of filing a false report; Ammu must testify that Velutha

raped her; or the twins must swear that Velutha abducted them. She asks for a few minutes to speak alone with the twins. She tells them that Sophie Mol's body has been found and that the twins are guilty of her murder. If they do not identify Velutha as their abductor, they and their mother will go to prison. The twins acquiesce, and Estha is chosen to view the dying Velutha. When asked if the horribly deformed body before him is that of the man who abducted the twins, Estha says 'Yes'.

After Sophie Mol's funeral the next day, Ammu takes the twins to the Police Station to make a statement in defence of Velutha. Inspector Mathew calls her a whore and refuses to accept her testimony. When Baby Kochamma learns of Ammu's actions, she is alarmed that the official story may come unravelled. She begins plotting the removal of Ammu and the twins, working on Chacko to oust Ammu from the house. Eventually she manages to force Ammu to leave in search of a job elsewhere and to have Estha sent to live with his father, while Rahel remains in Ayemenem. Ammu develops asthma and dies four years later. Estha attends a boarding school where he performs as an undistinguished and largely invisible student. Upon graduation, he refuses to go to college and instead returns to his father's home, where he sees after household chores and gradually slips into a silent, near catatonic trance. Rahel, in the meantime, is expelled from three schools before she finally completes her secondary education. She spends eight years in a mediocre architecture college in Delhi and leaves without a degree when she meets and marries an American. She moves to New York with her husband but soon is divorced. She works as a waitress in New York for a few months, and then spends 'several years as a night clerk in a bullet-proof cabin at a gas station outside Washington' (Roy 1997: 21). In 1992, she receives word that her brother has returned to Ayemenem, since their father has moved to Australia and can no longer take care of Estha. When she hears the news, she returns to see her brother for the first time since their separation following the deaths of Velutha and Sophie Mol. Upon her arrival in Ayemenem, she finds mere vestiges of the world she had known. Mammachi has died, the family pickle factory has failed, and Chacko has emigrated to Canada to run an unsuccessful antiques business. Baby Kochamma has discovered satellite television and spends all day with her maid in front of the TV. Estha wanders the house and neighbourhood, scarcely acknowledging Rahel's presence. Eventually Rahel touches Estha and the two embrace. They make love, but 'what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief' (Roy 1997: 311).

## *Time and Trauma*

Clearly, the novel's pivotal events of 1969–70 establish a radical before and after. In this regard, the narrative's structure resembles that of Deleuze's third passive synthesis of time. That synthesis introduces a gap in time, a split that simultaneously determines a past and future as pure form of time oriented around that gap. The past is the act that is 'too big for me', the present is a metamorphic becoming-equal to the act, and the future is the disintegration of the self in the emergent action. Deleuze envisions this synthesis as a positive 'ungrounding' of time, as the necessary concomitant to any creative unfolding of the new. The events of Roy's novel are far from positive, however, and their unfolding engages the third synthesis in a complex manner. There is, of course, already an ominous residue in Deleuze's exposition of the third synthesis, for Deleuze models it on the crises of tragedies. The third synthesis' pure form of time is 'time out of joint', and Hamlet is the actor for whom the task is too big. Deleuze cites Hölderlin when he says that in this synthesis, time 'no longer "rhymed", because it was distributed unequally on both sides of a "caesura", as a result of which beginning and end no longer coincided' (Deleuze 1994: 89), and these terms come from Hölderlin's 'Remarks on *Oedipus* and *Antigone*'. In *Oedipus*, *Antigone* and *Hamlet*, a crisis punctuates time, and in all three tragedies, death and loss ensue. It would seem that if the eruption of a disorienting event can open possibilities, then, it also can annihilate and destroy. The third synthesis is a moment of danger, a cosmic throw of the dice with a potential for creation and renewal but also for failure and collapse. In *The Heart of Redness*, that danger is revealed in the sociopolitical outcome of Nongqawuse's prophecy (Chapter 2), but danger resides as well in the personal and psychological dimension of a cosmic throw of the dice. The event may indeed prove to be 'too much for me' in a definitive sense, and there may be nothing left on the far side of the self-fracturing fissure in time. Such is the case in *The God of Small Things*.

Yet even in tragedies such as *Oedipus*, *Antigone* and *Hamlet*, the protagonists are agents whose tragedies are bound to their actions. They react to a crisis outside themselves, but they also induce a caesura in time when they act within that situation. They are not mere victims. But tragic victims do exist. Sometimes catastrophe befalls the individual without warning and without reason. The Jew who survives the deathcamp and the woman who survives the rape have a caesura in time forced upon them. Their dilemma involves

an inversion of the third synthesis, a traumatic counter-time of an incommensurable before and after.

The deaths of Sophie Mol and Velutha, the twins' betrayal of Velutha, and the twins' separation from their mother and from each other, together form the contents of a single traumatic event. The time of trauma has a specific structure, which a number of important studies have elucidated. Lawrence Langer observes that

> in Holocaust testimony time itself divides, so that memory must contend with the paradox enshrined in Charlotte Delbo's statement 'I died in Auschwitz, but no one knows it', or in the words of the former death-camp inmate who said, 'One can be alive after Sobibor without having survived Sobibor' (Langer 1995: 13–4).

The deathcamp determines a caesura in time, a before and an after, but the survivor is no longer genuinely alive after the event. As for the period of trauma itself, that caesura in ordinary time, it has its own temporality, that of a present that can never be fully past. Langer distinguishes 'chronological time' from 'durational time', arguing that in Holocaust testimonies speakers typically narrate events in a rational, impersonal chronological time, but that at key moments they find themselves suddenly present in the events they narrate, no longer recalling past moments but living them again, as if they were in a durational time of a perpetual present. Two selves appear in these Holocaust testimonies, a zombie self that remembers events and a traumatised self that relives them.

But in many cases of trauma, there is a sense in which the original traumatic event is only fully experienced after the fact. In such cases the trauma as lived event cannot be registered and absorbed; its full force instead only becomes manifest later in a delayed reliving of the event as if for the first time. Cathy Caruth says of the temporal structure of trauma that 'the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it' (Caruth 1995: 4). The term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) itself signals this temporal phenomenon. Caruth also notes that analysts who work with trauma victims frequently comment on 'the surprising *literality* and non-symbolic nature of traumatic dreams and flashbacks' (Caruth 1995: 5). The symptom of trauma is not a neurotic fantasy or a repressed desire but an actual event lived in a delayed present. Hence, Caruth argues,

> If PTSD must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history.

> The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess. (Caruth 1995: 5)

Estha and Rahel are obviously trauma victims. After the events of 1969–70, Estha spoke less and less.

> Once the quietness arrived, it stayed and spread in Estha. . . . It stripped his thoughts of the words that described them and left them pared and naked. Unspeakable. Numb. And to an observer therefore, perhaps barely there. Slowly, over the years, Estha withdrew from the world. He grew accustomed to the uneasy octopus that lived inside him and squirted its inky tranquilizer on his past. (Roy 1997: 13)

Rahel, for her part, grew increasingly empty within. When her husband looked into her eyes, he would sense that something was missing. What he could not understand was that 'the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other. That the two things fitted together. Like stacked spoons. Like familiar lovers' bodies' (Roy 1997: 20–1). The twins have only partially survived their past, and they continue to suffer the effects of their history.

Whether their rememoration of the past plunges them into the 'durational time' of a revived present is difficult to tell, since the twins do not speak directly of their experiences. Langer's primary evidence of durational time in Holocaust testimony consists of video recordings of first-person narrations. In these recordings, the emergence of durational time is manifest in the voice, gestures, facial expressions and pauses that signal a resuscitated reality that exceeds expression. In *The God of Small Things*, by contrast, a third-person narrator mediates all memories, and the evidence of trauma is, of course, rendered in an exclusively written verbal medium. Still, there are signs that the twins' traumatic memories have not been assimilated within the past and that the memories live on as perpetually present fragments of experience. Estha's protective habits of 'hoovering the knolls and dells of his memory', of nurturing 'the uneasy octopus that lived inside him and squirted its inky tranquilizer on his past' (Roy 1997: 13), are only partially successful. The problem is that

> He had terrible pictures in his head.
>
> Rain. Rushing, inky water. And a smell. Sicksweet. Like old roses on a breeze.
>
> But worst of all, he carried inside him the memory of a young man with an old man's mouth. The memory of a swollen face and a smashed, upside-down smile. (Roy 1997: 32)

And associated with that image is the word 'yes', the word with which he betrayed Velutha. 'The word Estha's octopus couldn't get at. *Yes*. Hoovering didn't seem to help. It was lodged there, deep inside some fold or furrow like a mango hair between molars. That couldn't be worried loose' (Roy 1997: 32). Rahel, too, is haunted by the 'sicksweet' smell of Velutha's spilled blood. Rahel and Estha 'smelled its smell and never forgot it. . . . It would lurk forever in ordinary things. In coat hangers. Tomatoes. In the tar on roads. In certain colors. In the plates at a restaurant. In the absence of words. And the emptiness in eyes' (Roy 1997: 54). Following the period of trauma, the twins become 'A pair of actors trapped in a recondite play with no hint of plot or narrative'. They remain 'Unable, somehow, to change plays. Or purchase, for a fee, some cheap brand of exorcism from a counselor with a fancy degree.' Had they been able to escape this play, they 'would have been able to put a face on it, and conjure up fury at what had happened. Or seek redress. And eventually, perhaps, exorcise the memories that haunted them' (Roy 1997: 182). The twins are unable to forget, yet unable to remember as past, the traumatic events that live on as haunting presences.

## *Archaeology of the Keralan Present*

One of Roy's primary themes is that the individual histories of the novel's characters are themselves mere effects of larger historical forces beyond the actors' direct control. To an extent, the characters recognize their subservience to grand historical events, in part because of their nation's history. In 'the country Rahel came from, various kinds of despair competed for primacy. And . . . *personal* despair could never be desperate enough'. The Big God of History writ large 'howled like a hot wind, and demanded obeisance', whereas the 'Small God (cozy and contained, private and limited) came away cauterized, laughing numbly at his own temerity'. As a result, nothing much mattered on a personal level. 'Because Worse Things had happened. In the country that she came from, poised forever between the terror of war and the horror of peace, Worse Things kept happening' (Roy 1997: 20). One implication of this analysis is that all of India's citizens are vulnerable to the numbing effects of trauma. Roy's purpose, however, is not simply to portray the twins as representatives of a widespread disorder, but also to identify the specific forces that shape the destinies of the characters. Roy seeks the underlying causes of the novel's traumatic events,

including the origins of the story that ends in disaster. One lesson of the novel is that 'things can change in a day' (Roy 1997: 32). But the origin of such changes may not be local. The story begins with the arrival of Sophie Mol; however,

> Equally, it could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch Ascendancy, before Vasco da Gama arrived, before the Zamorin's conquest of Calicut. Before three purple-robed Syrian bishops murdered by the Portuguese were found floating in the sea, with coiled sea serpents riding on their chests and oysters knotted in their tangled beards. It could be argued that it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag.
>
> That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved. And how.
>
> And how much. (Roy 1997: 33)

In this quest for origins, the narrator sifts through key moments in the history of Kerala, concluding that the beginning of the story lies in the ancient past. Yet what the novel shows is that all of these moments, in varying degrees, contribute to the traumatic events of 1969–70. The history of Kerala is one of accretion, not succession. In Faulkner's oft-quoted words, 'The past is never dead. It's not even past' (Faulkner 1950: 92). Hindu, Christian, Zamorin, Portuguese, Dutch, British and Communist elements of culture continue to exist in the present, and it is only an archaeology of the present that can account for the complex causality of Roy's fiction.[3]

The central strata of the narrator's retrospective list are those of Communist, British, Christian and Hindu culture, all of which enforce asymmetrical distinctions of race, caste and gender. The most recent of these cultural forces to arrive in Kerala is Communism. In March 1957, Kerala became the first Indian state with a democratically elected Communist Party in power. It was at this time that Chacko became a sentimental quasi-Communist: 'He was an undergraduate at Delhi University during the euphoria of 1957, when the Communists won the State Assembly elections and Nehru invited them to form a government' (Roy 1997: 64). Chacko's hero, 'Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad, the flamboyant Brahmin high priest of Marxism in Kerala' (Roy 1997: 64), promised a peaceful transition to Communism, but a succession of unpopular bills plunged the region into chaos, and within a year the government failed. Ten years later, however, Namboodiripad's party was re-elected, and the Communists managed to rule until their government collapsed under

internal dissension in 1970. At the time of the novel's crucial events, then, the Communist Party was still in the ascendancy. The narrator considers the two explanations most often proposed for the success of the Kerala Communists, but rejects them both. The large population of Christians in Kerala, many argued, smoothed the way for a secular version of a doctrine of salvation, but in reality Kerala Christians were overwhelmingly opposed to Communism. Others argued that Kerala's high literacy rate accounted for the Communists' success, but in fact the Communists were the ones responsible for the rise of literacy in the state. What the narrator concludes instead is that the Communists succeeded because they

> never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community. The Marxists worked from *within* the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to. They offered a cocktail revolution. A heady mix of Eastern Marxism and orthodox Hinduism, spiked with a shot of democracy. (Roy 1997: 64)

Comrade Pillai is the novel's representative Communist. A pragmatic official who conveniently compartmentalises the personal and the political, Pillai designs labels and signage for Chacko's pickle factory while leading the factory workers in the struggle against the bourgeoisie. For Pillai, it was as though

> Chacko was many people. Apart from it being tactically the right thing to do, this disjunction between the man and his job helped Comrade Pillai to keep his conscience clear about his own private business dealings with Chacko. His contract for printing the Paradise Pickles labels gave him an income that he badly needed. He told himself that Chacko-the-client and Chacko-the-Management were two different people. Quite separate of course from Chacko-the-Comrade. (Roy 1997: 115)

Chacko the Comrade, for his part, talks revolution while maintaining his position of power. He vaguely plans to create a labour union of his own for the workers, but his primary action consists of seducing the factory's vulnerable female employees. (Chacko clearly sees no connection between Communism and sexual equality. As Chacko blithely tells his sister, when discussing her lack of legal standing as a female heir, '"What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine"' [Roy 1997: 56]. Pillai's sexism is summarised in his relationship with his wife, who addresses him with the honorific *addeham*, whereas he 'called her "*edi*", which was, approximately, "Hey, you!"' [Roy 1997: 256].)

Pillai's chief problem is not Chacko, however. It is Velutha, an

untouchable and the factory's only card-carrying member of the Party. 'He knew that all the other Touchable workers in the factory resented Velutha for ancient reasons of their own. Comrade Pillai stepped carefully around this wrinkle, waiting for a suitable opportunity to iron it out' (Roy 1997: 115). That opportunity comes when Baby Kochamma tells Inspector Mathew that Velutha had tried to rape Ammu. Before searching for Velutha, Inspector Mathew brings Pillai to his office, and during their conversation, 'No explanations seemed necessary' (Roy 1997: 248). Pillai 'merely assured Inspector Thomas Mathew that as far as he was concerned Velutha did not have the patronage or the protection of the Communist Party. That he was on his own' (Roy 1997: 248). Of course, once Velutha dies, Pillai salutes him as a fallen brother. Presenting himself as 'Ayemenem's own Crusader for Justice and Spokesman for the Oppressed', Comrade Pillai organises a siege of the pickle factory and claims 'that the Management had implicated the Paravan in a false police case because he was an active member of the Communist Party' (Roy 1997: 286).

The enduring effects of British rule, the second stratum of Roy's archaeology of the present, are most evident in the Ipe family's Anglophilia. Chacko instructs the twins that their grandfather Pappachi was an Anglophile, and in fact, that 'they were a *family* of Anglophiles' (Roy 1997: 51). Pappachi was an Imperial Entomologist who, even after retirement, dressed in immaculately tailored three-piece suits. Chacko continued Pappachi's legacy, studying at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar and proudly displaying his Balliol oar in the pickle factory after his return. When Chacko is in what Ammu calls one of his 'Oxford moods', with his 'Reading Aloud voice' (Roy 1997: 53) he pontificates in an inflated British diction. Baby Kochamma shows a similar pride of language, citing Shakespeare to the English guests, enforcing correct pronunciation on the twins and disciplining them when they speak Malayalam rather than English. In the Kerala of the novel, the language of power and privilege is English, as Inspector Mathew brutally demonstrates when Ammu tries to file a complaint over Velutha's death. She addresses him in English, but he bullies her in 'the coarse Kottayam dialect of Malayalam' (Roy 1997: 9), calling her *veshya*, or whore.

The colonial legacy of British racial and class prejudice endures in Kerala society, indigenous caste and colour distinctions fitting neatly with Western biases. Chacko takes pride in Margaret both for her nationality and her race: 'Anybody could see that Chacko was

a proud and happy man to have had a wife like Margaret. White' (Roy 1997: 136). Rahel assumes that Sophie Mol's lighter skin will displace her in her mother's affection. (When the two girls are playing together, Rahel's feelings are channelled through the narrative voice: 'Little Girls Playing. / Sweet. / One beach-colored. / One brown. / One Loved. / One Loved a Little Less' [Roy 1997: 177].) And Velutha, besides being an untouchable, is repeatedly identified as black.

Kerala Christianity, Roy's third archaeological stratum, antedates the incursion of Western colonialism by several centuries. According to tradition, in 52 CE the apostle Thomas came to India near the port of Crangapore and established seven churches on the Malabar coast. Thomas' first converts, it was said, were thirty-two *brahmin* families. Whatever the truth of this lore, by the fifth century CE a sizable community of Syrian Christians was established in Kerala, and its members were among the social elite. When the Portuguese came to the region, they insisted that the local Christians sever their ties to the Patriarch of Antioch, the Eastern Nestorian church head, and instead recognise the authority of the Pope. Kerala Christians largely succumbed to intense Portuguese pressure, but in 1653 they rebelled against the Roman Church and reaffirmed their affiliation with the Syrian tradition. (The rebellion was instigated by rumours that a Syrian bishop sent to Kerala had been captured and drowned by the Portuguese – an event Roy alludes to in an embellished form when she speaks of the 'three purple-robed Syrian bishops murdered by the Portuguese [who] were found floating in the sea' [Roy 1997: 33].) Some Kerala Christians, however, remained loyal to the Roman Church. When the British moved into Kerala in the nineteenth century, further schisms ensued, with one offshoot of the Kerala church being the Mar Thoma Church. Founded in 1889, the Mar Thoma Church was the most Protestant version of Syrian Christianity, and it is to this group that the Ipe family belongs. The twins' great-grandfather, the Reverend E. John Ipe, was a local legend, as a child having kissed the ring of the Patriarch of Antioch during the latter's visit to Kerala – for which reason the Reverend Ipe was known throughout his lifetime as '*Punnyan Kunju* – Little Blessed One' (Roy 1997: 23).

The Reverend Ipe founded the local Untouchables' School (where Velutha was later educated [Roy 1997: 72]), but such charity by no means signalled acceptance of untouchables within the Mar Thoma community. Rather, as Roy makes clear, the church maintained rigid distinctions that stressed the privileged status of the sect while

reinforcing social hierarchies prevalent in all religious groups across the region. Baby Kochamma looks down on the twins because they are 'Half-Hindu Hybrids, whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would every marry' (Roy 1997: 44). She regards a woman like Ammu, with children and no husband, as someone with no standing in the family household. 'And as for a *divorced* daughter from a *love* marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage. As for a *divorced* daughter from an *intercommunity love* marriage – Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject' (Roy 1997: 45). Mammachi despises Margaret Kochamma, classifying her as a mere '*shopkeeper's daughter*'.

> Mammachi's world was arranged that way. If she was invited to a wedding in Kottayam, she would spend the whole time whispering to whoever she went with, '*The bride's maternal grandfather was my father's carpenter. Kunjukutty Eapen? His great-grandmother's sister was just a midwife in Trivandrum. My husband's family used to own this whole hill.*' (Roy 1997: 160)

When Mammachi learns of Ammu's affair with Velutha, all her religious, racial, class and cultural biases emerge. She is filled with

> unmanageable fury at her daughter. She had defiled generations of breeding (The Little Blessed One, blessed personally by the patriarch of Antioch, an Imperial Entomologist, a Rhodes Scholar from Oxford) and brought the family to its knees. For generations to come, *forever* now, people would point at them at weddings and funerals. At baptisms and birthday parties. They'd nudge and whisper. It was all finished now. (Roy 1997: 244)

The oldest surviving traditions in the novel, Roy's fourth archaeological stratum, are those associated with the Hindu caste system, especially those concerning untouchables. The caste system is an ancient four-part division of Hindu society into *brahmin* (priests), *ksatriya* (nobles associated with warfare and military service), *vaisya* (those associated with trade, business and agriculture) and *sudra* (the service caste performing agricultural labour and menial tasks). Historians of caste debate the origins of the 'outcastes', or untouchables, some arguing that this fifth caste (or subdivision of the fourth caste) may not have been part of the original system, but only emerged gradually over the centuries. All agree, however, that by the eighteenth century untouchables were clearly identified and assigned a demeaning position in the social order. Mammachi placidly tells the twins that

> she could remember a time, in her girlhood, when Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's footprint. In Mammachi's time, Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. (Roy 1997: 71)

Roy repeatedly states that Ammu and Velutha violated the 'Love Laws . . . that lay down who should be loved, and how' (Roy 1997: 32). Roy's allusion is probably to the body of regulations that accrued around the influential *Manava Dharmashastra*, compiled in the first two centuries CE and attributed to Manu. This book, often referred to as the *Manusmriti*, or Laws of Manu, copiously details the proper conduct of caste members and the punishments administered for specific violations of the code. The *Manusmriti* contains a section devoted to inter-caste marriage, as well as the earliest written record of a differentiation among the lowest *sudra* caste between servants and untouchables.

In speaking of 'Love Laws', of course, Roy is touching on sexual as well as caste relations, and hence on relations between men and women. As many have pointed out, regulations of race and caste are inseparable from strictures that maintain purity and men's control of women's bodies. Mammachi's horror at Ammu's transgression is that she 'defiled generations of breeding' (Roy 1997: 244). Even Inspector Mathew understands Baby Kochamma's concern with family purity when she lodges her initial complaint against Velutha. 'He had a Touchable wife, two Touchable daughters – whole Touchable generations waiting in their Touchable wombs' (Roy 1997: 245). For the Inspector, as for most of the novel's characters, women ultimately are receptacles – Touchable wombs – for the transmission of an undefiled caste lineage. Sexism, then, is as much a constituent of the Love Laws as caste prejudice, and hence sexism must be seen as one additional pervasive historical force affecting the novel's central events. For years, Pappachi beat Mammachi and Ammu. Ammu was denied a college education, whereas Chacko was sent to Delhi University and Oxford. Ammu's husband tried to pimp her to his English boss. Chacko, Pillai and Inspector Mathew openly denigrate women. To attribute such sexism to local traditions, of course, would be foolish, as Roy makes plain. When Rahel is remembering her years working as a night clerk in a Washington, D. C. gas station, she thinks of the

'*punctual drunk with sober eyes who arrives exactly at 10:00 P.M.: "Hey, you! Black bitch! Suck my dick!*"' (Roy 1997: 179). Gender discrimination, it would seem, is cross-cultural, and perhaps even more ancient than Hindu caste prejudices.

## *History at Work in its House*

Roy stresses the centrality of history at several points in the novel through her characterisations of the abandoned house where Velutha is captured and beaten. When explaining the term 'Anglophile' to the twins, Chacko sentimentally laments that the Ipes are 'trapped outside their own history and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away. He explained to them that history was like an old house at night. With all the lamps lit. And ancestors whispering inside' (Roy 1997: 51). Because of their Anglophilia, the Ipes cannot enter the house but can only look through the windows and listen to whispers they cannot understand. The whisperings are unintelligible, says Chacko, '"because our minds have been invaded by a war. . . . A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves"' (Roy 1997: 52). To the literal-minded twins, however, the house Chacko is describing is most certainly the abandoned house across the river, which they (and the narrator) thenceforth call the History House.

> Kari Saipu's house. The Black Sahib. The Englishman who had 'gone native'. Who spoke Malayalam and wore mundus. Ayemenem's own Kurtz. Ayemenem his private Heart of Darkness. He had shot himself through the head ten years ago, when his young lover's parents had taken the boy away from him and sent him to school. (Roy 1997: 51)

When Velutha was beaten in 1969, the History House was a ruin, but by the time Rahel returns in 1992, it has been restored and made part of a luxury hotel. Traditional Keralan dwellings have been moved to the site and 'arranged around the History House in attitudes of deference. "Heritage", the hotel was called' (Roy 1997: 120). According to the 'Hotel People', the oldest of the native structures was 'the ancestral home of Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad, "Kerala's Mao Tse-tung", they explained to the uninitiated' (Roy 1997: 120). Umbrellas, furniture, dowry-boxes and other Keralan objects are on display in Namboodiripad's home, with edifying labels identifying them for the tourists.

'So there it was then, History and Literature enlisted by commerce. Kurtz and Karl Marx joining palms to greet rich guests as they stepped off the boat' (Roy 1997: 120).

An embodiment of the colonial past and the present of globalisation, the History House was constructed during British rule and restored in the era of post-colonial, post-Communist transnational capitalism. If Anglophiles such as Chacko find themselves outside the house of their own history, Keralans as a whole are estranged from the history represented in the contemporary History House. Its restoration is a degradation, a conversion of genuine history into 'Toy Histories for tourists to play in' (Roy 1997: 120). But the History House is also the Heart of Darkness of Ayemenem's own Kurtz, the place where an Englishman went native and engaged in illicit sexual acts. It is the refuge for Ammu and Velutha during their brief affair, and it is the theatre of violence in which the police exact their punishment of the untouchable transgressor. In this sense, it is the house in which the forces of history detailed in the novel converge on the protagonists.

The narrator repeatedly stresses that History is the controlling agent of the events of 1969 and that the characters themselves are mere players in a drama that transcends their understanding. When Velutha flees to the History House, he feels as if his feet 'were the leash and he was the dog. History walking the dog' (Roy 1997: 272). Velutha's father Vellya Paapen had not known that 'History would choose him for its deputy' when he informed on his son to Mammachi, and it was only later that he 'understood his part in History's Plans' (Roy 1997: 190). When Pillai betrayed Velutha, 'he did not plan the course of events that followed. He merely slipped his ready fingers into History's waiting glove' (Roy 1997: 266–7). Pillai and Inspector Mathew are both mere functionaries within a larger power structure. 'They looked out at the world and never wondered how it worked, because they knew. *They* worked it. They were mechanics who serviced different parts of the same machine' (Roy 1997: 248). Likewise, the police who beat Velutha are only cogs in that machine, 'history's henchmen. Sent to square the books and collect the dues from those who broke its laws' (Roy 1997: 292). The fatal beating administered by the police and witnessed by the twins 'was human history, masquerading as God's Purpose, revealing herself to an under-age audience. . . . History in live performance' (Roy 1997: 293).

## *History and Contingency*

It might seem that Roy's novel is simply a contemporary revival of nineteenth-century Naturalism, and indeed Roy shares with the Naturalists a vision of humans as all too often the playthings of transindividual social forces. Her analysis of human history's fundamental motivations in fact sounds like a Naturalistic fatalism, which pits culture against nature in an inevitable and insurmountable struggle and condemns the weak and marginal to destruction. The police who beat Velutha are

> Impelled by feelings that were primal yet paradoxically wholly impersonal. Feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear – civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness.
>
> Man's subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify. (Roy 1997: 292)

What the twins saw in this police brutality was 'human nature's pursuit of ascendancy. Structure. Order. Complete monopoly' (Roy 1997: 292–3). That rage for order is manifest in society's insistence on rigid distinctions of race, caste and gender. When Rahel as an adult reflects on her family's past, she finds a paradigm for their problems in Mammachi's banana jam, which had been outlawed because 'it was neither jam nor jelly. Too thin for jelly and too thick for jam. An ambiguous, unclassifiable consistency, they said' (Roy 1997: 30–1). She decides that 'this difficulty that her family had with classification ran much deeper than the jam-jelly question', for if Ammu, Estha and she 'were the worst transgressors', the others were guilty as well. 'They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much' (Roy 1997: 31).

It might seem that these passages promote a rather unsophisticated critique of patriarchal power and a Romantic celebration of the irrational. Civilisation is opposed to nature as men to women, order to disorder, law to love. The traditional dualism that celebrates the dominance of men, culture and reason over women, nature and passion apparently is accepted in its structure while being simply revalorised. Patriarchal power, shown to be the product of fear rather than enlightenment, becomes negative, whereas female disorder and passion are revealed as positive. But such a reading is not supported by the text. The dualisms of civilisation–nature, men–women,

power–powerlessness are historical, not ontological. It is the case that the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Western view of civilisation as a conquest and domination of nature, has been globally disseminated and assimilated through colonialism and international capitalism. It is true that men have sought to control women's minds and bodies in most, if not all, of the world's cultures. And undeniably those in power – autocrats, patriarchs, masters, bosses – have often feared those over whom they exercise their power. It may also be the case that fear is the primal motivation for such historical patterns, and it may be true that humans have a universal desire to order reality. But by no means must we conclude that the asymmetries of patriarchy are inevitable and ineradicable, nor that the only possible resistance to patriarchal power lies in transgressive irrationality.

The novel presents History as a controlling agent – devising plans, choosing deputies, enlisting henchmen, employing engineers in its machines, staging performances, and administering lessons. But this allegorical god is only 'human history, masquerading as God's Purpose' (Roy 1997: 293). By History Roy means less than 'all past events' and more than 'an official recording of the past'. History as agent is the present configuration of institutions, customs, laws, practices, ideologies and prejudices that have developed by accretion over time and that continue to operate, as in the past, to enforce dominant power relations. When the police issue the 'Official Version' (Roy 1997: 287) of Velutha's death, that account is part of History, but only a subordinate textual component of History as concatenation of time-honoured, fully embodied forces. Yet there is also a world outside this History. When Velutha for the first time saw Ammu as a desirable woman, 'History was wrong-footed, caught off guard. . . . In its absence it left an aura' (Roy 1997: 167–8). As Ammu and Velutha caught each other's eyes, 'Madness slunk in through a chink in History. It only took a moment' (Roy 1997: 204). The History House is the locus of History's punishment of Velutha, but it is also a gap in history. The roof of the House 'had buckled at the center, leaving a yawning, gaping hole. A History-hole. A History-shaped Hole in the Universe through which, at twilight, dense clouds of silent bats billowed like factory smoke and drifted into the night' (Roy 1997: 291). The recurring motif of the 'Hole in the Universe' is associated with death (a 'Joe-shaped Hole in the Universe' [Roy 1997: 112, 136], a 'Hole in the Universe' left by Velutha [Roy 1997: 182]), but the History House as History-hole is more than the site of death. It is a place of becoming-other, of an alternative economy

and a time outside History's time. Such a time is not decontextualised and ahistorical; rather, it is the time of a different history, immanent within yet separable from History as dominant macro-power, a history that is molecular and untimely.

## *Becoming-Child*

The positive dimension of the History House as History-shaped Hole in the Universe involves the relationship of Ammu and Velutha, but its full significance cannot be grasped outside the context of a general 'becoming-child' that permeates the novel. One of Roy's great achievements is to create a third-person narration that subtly blends authorial omniscience and varied subjective perspectives within a single poetic voice.[4] The narrator reveals the psyches of Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Pillai and Inspector Mathew with a savage ironic detachment; Chacko and Margaret Kochamma receive a slightly more sympathetic, though still distanced treatment. Narrative focalisation is restricted primarily to the protagonists, Ammu, Velutha, Estha and Rahel, and especially to the twins. In their case, free indirect discourse is extensive, and as the narrative develops, the narrator's voice and those of the twins form a composite identity that fuses the past of 1969–70 and the present of 1992 within a fluid zone of interconnecting memories and events.

Throughout the course of the novel, elements of the seven-year-old twins' experience and language are added to the narrative voice to form an idiolect at once childlike and poetic. The twins take literally Chacko's metaphor of the house of history, and from that point on the History House becomes a central figure and verbal motif in the story. When the twins fought, 'Estha called Rahel a Refugee Stick Insect. Rahel called him Elvis the Pelvis' (Roy 1997: 60); at the Cochin Airport, Baby Kochamma tells them they are 'Ambassadors of India' (Roy 1997: 133). Thus, the narrator labels them 'Twin Ambassadors. Their Excellencies Ambassador E(lvis) Pelvis, and Ambassador S(tick) Insect' (Roy 1997: 133), and in subsequent chapters, 'Ambassador E. Pelvis' and 'Ambassador S. Insect' become regular designations of the twins. The twins like to read backwards, and the narrative includes occasional transcriptions of their readings ('Together they were trouble. *nataS ni rieht seye*' [Roy 1997: 286]). The children's deformation of language contributes to the narrator's vocabulary, Ammu's lack of *locus standi* being rendered as 'Locusts Stand I' (Roy 1997: 56, 179); the resident barn owl appearing as

'Ousa, the Bar Nowl' (Roy 1997: 184); the stern parental 'later' being transcribed as 'Lay Ter' (Roy 1997: 215). Snippets of childhood songs, verse and nursery rhymes are absorbed within the narrative voice and repeated sporadically, as are image clusters associated with the early memories of the twins.

The twins' playful approach to language is reflected in the narrator's regular use of rhyme, neologism, verbal transposition and lyrical cadence. The narrator says, for example, that when Ammu died, she was 'Thirty-one. / Not old. / Not young. / But a viable dieable age' (Roy 1997: 5). This piece of sing-song quasi-verse (repeated at regular intervals in the narrative), while not attributed to the children, clearly echoes their verbal habits, as does the narrator's description of the police as they approach the History House: 'Hairy fairies with lethal wands. . . . Dark of Heartness tiptoed into the Heart of Darkness' (Roy 1997: 290). The children's perspective is also evident in the narrator's focus on minute, concrete details. The world of the twins is one of closely observed images, sounds, tastes and smells, often disconnected from a larger conventional interpretive context. When Baby Kochamma is trying to coerce the twins into betraying Velutha, for example, Rahel is distracted by jeeps, pedestrians and a motorcyclist she sees out the window, and by a paperweight on the Inspector's desk with 'bubbles inside . . . which made the man and woman [inside the paperweight] look as though they were waltzing underwater' (Roy 1997: 301). This attention to concrete detail, while obviously the stock-in-trade of any novelist, is in this work primarily associated with the children's perspective, and the appropriation of the twins' perceptions within the image repertoire of the novel imbues the narrative with a general childlike aura. That aura is enhanced by the novel's profusion of sentence fragments, generally consisting of imagistic noun phrases, and often presented as single paragraph verses. These image fragments are incorporated within the narrator's idiolect of repeated terms, phrases and sentences to form a poetic, imagistic prose that suggests a continuum between the twins' world and that of the novel as a whole.

If the narrative voice is open to the world of the twins, it must be stressed that the novel does not simply capture a child's consciousness, though on occasion the narrative focalisation does bring to the fore specific experiences of Rahel and Estha. When discussing 'becoming-child', Deleuze and Guattari stress that they are not talking about imitating children or reviving childhood memories. Rather, they are speaking of a becoming that involves 'a childhood block [*un bloc*

*d'enfance*]' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 294), a unit of 'child-ness' within which something involving children takes place.

> If becoming is a block (a line-block), it is because it constitutes a zone of proximity and indiscernibility, a no-man's land, a nonlocalizable relation sweeping up the two distant or contiguous points, carrying one into the proximity of the other . . . A coexistence of two asymmetrical movements that combine to form a block. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 293–4)

A block of becoming has an atmospheric identity – the ambience of a specific configuration of multiple elements, what Deleuze and Guattari call a 'haecceity', a *thisness*.

> A season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have a perfect individuality lacking nothing, even though this individuality is different from that of a thing or a subject. They are haecceities in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 261)

The becoming-child of *The God of Small Things* is marked by the 'thisness' of the narrative, the atmospheric ambience of the twins' world that seeps into the narrative voice. Crucial is the fact that the perspectives of the children and of the adult narrator (and, through focalisation, that of the adult Rahel and Estha) are combined in a zone of indiscernibility whereby their views are put in contact with one another and mutually modified. What complicates matters is that the becoming-child of the narrative voice subsumes within it the different phenomenal worlds of the twins preceding, during and following the traumatic events of 1969–70. The twins do not narrate their own trauma, and hence we have no direct evidence of whether they enter the 'durational time' of Holocaust testimonies when reliving their experiences, but the close identification of the narrative voice and the voices of the children suggests that the novel itself is the act of rememoration, and in this regard the narrative constitutes a tentative form of psychic reparation, if only by proxy.

The time scheme of the narrative is complex, with frequent shifts forward and backward mediated in various ways. As Baneth-Nouailhetas details at length, the fragmented temporality 'provokes, in narratological terms, a combination of paralepsis (the withholding, by the narrator, of some key information), of prolepsis (the reference to some future event of the story by the omniscient narrator), and analepsis (a retrospective narration)' (Baneth-Nouailhetas 2002: 50). The novel's patterns of projection and retrospection, foreshadowing and reinterpretation, enigmatic hints and unexpected

revelations, follow the associational links of the twins' memories. The guiding principles of the narrative's organisation are revealed in one of Rahel's recollections of her life in New York. While riding a train from Grand Central to Croton Harmon, Rahel sits across the aisle from a woman who coughs up phlegm, wraps it in wads of newspaper, arranges the wads in rows and chats quietly to herself. Rahel realises that

> Memory was that woman on the train. Insane in the way she sifted through dark things in a closet and emerged with the most unlikely ones – a fleeting look, a feeling. The smell of smoke. A windscreen wiper. A mother's marble eyes. Quite sane in the way she left huge tracts of darkness veiled. Unremembered. (Roy 1997: 69–70)

At times, memory assaults: 'Heaven opened and the water hammered down, . . . bombing still, tea-colored puddles the way memory bombs still, tea-colored minds' (Roy 1997: 11). At others, it insinuates itself, like the smell of death that 'would lurk forever in ordinary things. In coat hangers. Tomatoes. In the tar on roads. In certain colors. In the plates at a restaurant' (Roy 1997: 54).

The end result is that the narrative functions as a memory-space within which the twins, and to a lesser extent Ammu and Velutha, relive and reassemble the past. That memory space, however, includes more than one kind of time. The time of becoming-child is that of the twins before the trauma. Deleuze and Guattari call the time of becoming Aion, a floating, nonpulsed time that unsettles the rational time of successive events (Chronos). If Deleuze and Guattari speak of becoming-child as the activation of a 'childhood block', it is to suggest that the unit of child-ness is a block, or chunk of time-space, with its own consistency and 'thisness', with both a temporal and a spatial identity, like that of an atmospheric milieu. 'Every becoming is a block of coexistence' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 292), a coexistence of relations among multiple entities, but also a coexistence across a succession of interconnecting moments. Such a coexistence of succession and contemporaneity is evident because the opposition of Aion and Chronos does not constitute an exclusive disjunction. The floating time of Aion is immanent within Chronos, and the two only appear in mixtures, as coexisting temporal realities. Things happen in the children's pre-trauma world, one moment succeeds another, but the moments appear differently, hold together differently, and accumulate differently. 'In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings

and no Ends, and Everything was Forever, Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us' (Roy 1997: 4). Each moment is an origin, an emergent presence, but not evanescent, since memory has (just) begun. The emerging new moments endure and adhere, forming a growing collection of unending beginnings, a Forever as unfolding multiplicity of coexistent moments (the Greek *Aion* = eternity). Within this Forever, the twins are one, and the destruction of this Forever will be coterminous with the twins' separation from one another.

Rahel's plastic watch is in some ways a figure of the twins' pre-trauma time. 'Rahel's toy wristwatch had the time painted on it. Ten to two' (Roy 1997: 37). The watch is a toy, a playful imitation of an adult artefact with no practical function. The twins' time is a perpetual present, 'ten to two', one unburdened with adult responsibilities, demands, anxieties and crises. Yet the watch is also a sign of the time of trauma. With each repetition of the 'ten to two' motif, the watch takes on a foreboding aura. When Velutha is beaten and dragged from the History House, the police gather all of the children's toys except the watch. 'The watch they all forgot. It stayed behind in the History House. In the back verandah. / A faulty record of the time. Ten to two' (Roy 1997: 295). The time of trauma is a splintering of time that disorganises events. As adults, the twins would try to make sense of their past, but during the time of trauma,

> there would only be incoherence. As though meaning had slunk out of things and left them fragmented. Disconnected. The glint of Ammu's needle. The color of a ribbon. The weave of the cross-stitch counterpane. A door slowly breaking. Isolated things that didn't *mean* anything. As though the intelligence that decodes life's hidden patterns – that connects reflections to images, glints to light, weaves to fabrics, needles to thread, walls to rooms, love to fear to anger to remorse – was suddenly lost. (Roy 1997: 215)

And, of course, the watch also represents the post-trauma time of an insistent past moment that perpetually threatens to break into a leaden, anesthetised present. At the site of the refurbished History House hotel, 'Something lay buried in the ground. Under grass. Under twenty-three years of June rain. / A small forgotten thing. / Nothing that the world would miss. / A child's plastic wristwatch with the time painted on it. / Ten to two, it said' (Roy 1997: 121). The world and its History have forgotten this small thing, but not History's victims. Though buried, 'ten to two' cannot be forgotten.

## *Becoming-Child, Becoming-Woman, Becoming-Untouchable*

Becoming-child is not a matter of imitating children, but of entering into a relation with child-ness that unsettles fixed identities and categories. Hence, in the broadest sense, the novel's becoming-child is a characteristic of the narrative itself, but in a narrower sense, Velutha's relationship with the twins is also an instance of becoming-child. The twins love Velutha for reasons that are made clear during a visit they and Sophie Mol pay to Velutha at his family hut. The three children dress in saris and introduce themselves as 'Mrs. Pillai, Mrs. Eapen and Mrs. Rajagopana' (Roy 1997: 181). Velutha responds 'with the utmost courtesy', chatting with them and offering them fresh coconut water to drink.

> It is only now, these years later, that Rahel with adult hindsight recognized the sweetness of that gesture. A grown man entertaining three raccoons, treating them like real ladies. Instinctively colluding in the conspiracy of their fiction, taking care not to decimate it with adult carelessness. Or affection. (Roy 1997: 181)

Neither does Velutha force an adult consciousness on their play, nor does he try to be a child. Either action would disrupt the children's fiction, for both would impose an adult world on the children's reality, in the first instance directly, and in the second indirectly via an adult's simulation of childhood. 'It is after all so easy to shatter a story. To break a chain of thought. To ruin a fragment of a dream being carried around carefully like a piece of porcelain. / To let it be, to travel with it, as Velutha did, is much the harder thing to do' (Roy 1997: 181). Rather than impose himself on the children's drama, he travels with it, finding a space alongside their play, a zone of indiscernibility in which he is neither adult nor child, but a passage between those identities. In that play, he and the children interact within the becoming of a childhood block.

Velutha's relationship with Ammu also has connections with a becoming-child. When Ammu first looks at Velutha and perceives him as a desirable male, his smile reminds her of

> Velutha as a little boy. Helping Vellya Paapen to count coconuts. Holding out little gifts he had made for her, flat on the palm of his hand so that she could take them without touching him. Boats, boxes, small windmills. Calling her Ammukutty. Little Ammu. Though she was so much less little than he was. When she looked at him now, she couldn't help thinking that the man he had become bore so little resemblance to the boy he had

> been. His smile was the only piece of baggage he had carried with him from boyhood into manhood. (Roy 1997: 167)

His smile serves as the mediation between childhood and adulthood, and though their sexual relationship will be decidedly adult, it will also have something childlike about it. Although Mammachi and Baby Kochamma scold the twins for interacting with Velutha, the twins are given a loose rein and through benign neglect allowed to associate with an untouchable. As is often the case in highly stratified societies, children are permitted interactions across class and caste lines that are forbidden their elders. Thus, we may say that in abandoning their caste roles, Velutha and Ammu move into an undercoded zone like that of the children's play, in which social restrictions are held in abeyance. 'In that brief moment, Velutha looked up and saw things that he hadn't seen before. Things that had been out of bounds so far, obscured by history's blinkers' (Roy 1997: 168). What is beyond the boundaries of caste, made invisible by ancient customs and mental categories, comes into view. They see each other, with childlike innocence, as attractive human beings of the opposite sex.

Ultimately, what matters most about becoming-child is not the specific age of children but the deterritorialising force that is activated in the playful world of the child. For this reason, Deleuze and Guattari say that 'the child is the becoming-young of every age. Knowing how to age does not mean remaining young; it means extracting from one's age the particles, the speeds and slownesses, the flows that constitute the youth of *that* age' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 277). The 'youth' of a given age is its newness, its power of setting in disequilibrium the codes, conventions and practices of fixed power structures.[5] Thus, there is a continuum of becomings – becoming-woman, becoming-child, becoming-animal, becoming-molecular, and so on – across which forces of deterritorialisation play, each instance creating a metamorphic zone of possibilities specific to that becoming. Not surprisingly, then, the becoming-child of Ammu and Velutha's relationship is connected to other becomings. Somewhat cryptically (and controversially), Deleuze and Guattari say that 'Even blacks, as the Black Panthers said, must become-black. Even women must become-woman' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 291). Their point, often misconstrued, is that one's social position as an oppressed individual is not sufficient to undo hierarchical institutions and practices. Unless the categories of black–white or

male–female, as defined and enforced in a given order, are themselves undone, no genuine transformation is possible. Only when the white-defined notions of blackness or the male-defined ideas of femaleness are set in disequilibrium, only when blacks become-black or women become-woman, can something new emerge.

In choosing Velutha as a lover, Ammu transgresses caste boundaries, but she also acts against gender expectations. Hence, her transgression of caste necessarily entails a becoming-woman, an activation of the deterritorialising force latent within her as a woman in a patriarchal society. As a child, she was beaten and psychologically abused by her father, and as a result 'She developed a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak that develops in Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big' (Roy 1997: 172–3). When she returned to Ayemenem with the twins, that reckless streak continued to surface from time to time. At such moments, 'she walked out of the world like a witch, to a better, happier place. On days like this there was something restless and untamed about her. As though she had temporarily set aside the morality of motherhood and divorcée-hood' (Roy 1997: 43). This 'Unsafe Edge', this 'air of unpredictability', was that of 'An unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber' (Roy 1997: 44). Her position as an abused child is continuous with her status as an abused woman, and in this sense her resistance to patriarchy is both a becoming-child and a becoming-woman. The deterritorialising force of her becoming is an 'Unsafe Edge', and though described as an 'unmixable mix', that force encompasses both 'infinite tenderness' and 'reckless rage'. This combination of love and resistance, impossible within the categories of a patriarchal order, is at the heart of her becoming-woman.

In transgressing caste boundaries, Velutha also engages in a becoming-other, which might be labelled a becoming-untouchable. His father, Vellya Paapen, was 'an Old-World Paravan' who 'had seen the Crawling Backwards Days' (Roy 1997: 73). As a result, he behaved as a proper untouchable, with appropriate deference and gratitude toward Mammachi and everyone else of her caste. Vellya Paapen feared for his son, however, though for reasons he found difficult to articulate. 'It was not *what* he said, but the *way* he said it. Not *what* he did, but the *way* he did it' (Roy 1997: 73). What Velutha exhibited was 'An unwarranted assurance. In the way he walked. The way he held his head. The quiet way he offered suggestions without being asked. Or the quiet way in which he disregarded

suggestions without appearing to rebel' (Roy 1997: 73). Velutha, like Ammu, has an Unsafe Edge, an untamed wildness, which, if calmer in appearance than Ammu's 'reckless rage', is equally disruptive. His becoming-untouchable is a deterritorialisation of untouchability, and it is through this becoming that he is able to enter into his relationship with Ammu. Like Ammu as well, his becoming-other is tied up with his becoming-child. The tenderness he shows Ammu is continuous with the tenderness he shows the twins. And that tenderness, finally, is associated with gender identities. When he plays with the twins, he lets them paint his fingernails with red Cutex. Later, when he is beaten, the police mock him: '"What's this?" one had said. "AC-DC?"' (Roy 1997: 181). The sign of his kindness is regarded by the police as a transgression of true masculinity, suggesting that his becoming-other is at once a becoming-child, a becoming-woman and a becoming-untouchable.

In the novel's final chapter, which focuses on the erotics of Ammu and Velutha's affair, the child-like nature of their relationship is stressed once again. When they first consummate their relationship, 'At the moment that she guided him into her, she caught a passing glimpse of his youth, his *youngness*, the wonder in his eyes at the secret he had unearthed and she smiled down at him as though he was her child' (Roy 1997: 318). Briefly, they experience the same time of Aion as that experienced by the pre-trauma twins, in which 'life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was Forever' (Roy 1997: 4). 'Then, for what seemed like an eternity, but was really no more than five minutes, she slept leaning against him, her back against his chest. Seven years of oblivion lifted off her and flew into the shadows on weighty, quaking wings' (Roy 1997: 319). Although they know that their relationship cannot endure, they try to stay within the time and space of innocence. Like the young twins, they 'instinctively stuck to the Small Things' (Roy 1997: 320), to their minute sensations and their immediate surroundings. At the end of each night of their affair, despite their adult knowledge that it will not last, 'they extracted only one small promise from each other: / *Tomorrow? / Tomorrow*' (Roy 1997: 321).

## *Generosity and Micropolitics*

It is important not to construe Velutha and Ammu's affair as a blanket valorisation of passion and the irrational, something that an incautious reading of the text might allow. Velutha and Ammu meet

in the History House, Ayemenem's 'Heart of Darkness' (Roy 1997: 51), but this does not mean that the House is a Conradian symbol of the irrational as a whole, let alone a symbol of the dark unconscious passions that possess primitive, non-Western savages. It is the 'private Heart of Darkness' of Kari Saipu, the 'Englishman who had "gone native"' (Roy 1997: 51) and given himself over to pederasty. It is also the Heart of Darkness of the police who show their 'Dark of Heartness' in brutalising Velutha.[6] The History House has a dual role: it is the locus of a gap, a 'History-shaped Hole in the Universe', and it is the site of History's revenge, a Heart of violent, patriarchal Darkness. It is a Heart of Darkness for colonial authorities and their neo-colonial heirs, but not for Keralans as a group. For this reason, the passion of Kari Saipu must be dissociated from the passion of Velutha and Ammu. No specifics of Kari Saipu's paedophilia are provided, but Estha's abuse by the Orangedrink Lemondrink man is described at length and in detail. There is no liberating sexuality in the adult's actions, no becoming-child in this perverse act of violence. The Orangedrink Lemondrink man forces adult sexuality on Estha, instilling nothing but fear in his victim. The violator's class resentment and desire for power and revenge find an outlet in the violation of the child: '"You're a lucky rich boy, with porketmunny and a grandmother's factory to inherit"', he tells Estha after he has ejaculated. '"You should Thank God that you have no worries"' (Roy 1997: 100).

Ammu and Velutha's relationship, by contrast, is not motivated by power and resentment. Rather, it is informed by mutuality and generosity. When Velutha first looks on Ammu as a sexually attractive woman, he recalls the times as a child when he would offer her gifts and then reflects on the new reality that has suddenly appeared. 'He saw that when he gave her gifts they no longer needed to be offered flat on the palms of his hands so that she wouldn't have to touch him. His boats and boxes. His little gifts. That *she* had gifts to give him, too' (Roy 1997: 168). It is in this light as well that the adult twins' sexual intercourse must be read. The two give themselves to one another, and this exchange of gifts is significant not simply because it transgresses the Love Laws but also because it does so in an effort to repair the damage caused by the forces of History, whose agents are filled with 'Feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear – civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness' (Roy 1997: 292). The twins' incestuous act, though 'not happiness, but hideous grief' (Roy 1997: 311), is still the only

mode of exchange open to them. Theirs is an act of consolation and a desperate attempt at mutual redemption, and as such it has a value that transcends even the incest prohibition.

Roy here is not indulging in a Romantic fascination with brother–sister incest, as one finds, say, in Byron's Manfred or Chateaubriand's René. The ideal couple is not Estha and Rahel, whose sexual relationship is indelibly marked by the trauma they have suffered. Rather, it is Ammu and Velutha. To stress the significance of their relationship, Roy ends the novel with the couple making love during the brief period of their affair, before 'the Terror' (Roy 1997: 290) destroys them. In an interview, Roy comments:

> The structure of the book ambushes the story – by that I mean the novel ends more or less in the middle of the story and it ends with Ammu and Velutha making love and it ends on the word tomorrow. Though you know that what tomorrow brings is terrible it is saying that the fact that this [relationship between Ammu and Velutha] happened at all is wonderful. (Cited in Mullaney 2002: 56)

Still, if Velutha and Ammu are the ideal couple, they cannot be separated from Estha and Rahel. Together, the four constitute an unholy family – Velutha, the renegade untouchable, Ammu, the tender mother and suicide bomber, and Estha and Rahel, the once two-in-one children and now incestuous survivors. This family is representative of a people to come, a collectivity that is possible even if it does not yet exist. In Deleuzian terms, this collectivity is actually absent but virtually present, the potential for its future actual emergence being immanent within the real. The forces of deterritorialisation, of becoming-other – becoming-untouchable, becoming-woman, becoming-child – are virtual components of the present, forces that may be engaged at any time and used as lines of flight for the formation of an alternative mode of social relation and interaction. These virtual forces of becoming-other are the forces manifest in the unholy family.

Ammu, Velutha, Rahel and Estha find these virtual forces in small things. The Big God rules over History, but the Small God presides over the counter-history of resistance, experimentation and invention. In their brief moments of happiness, Ammu and Velutha 'stuck to the Small Things. The Big Things ever lurked inside. They knew that there was nowhere for them to go. They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to the small things' (Roy 1997: 320). Yet if they had no future, there was a future within their situation, for which reason the

novel closes with the word 'Tomorrow' (Roy 1997: 321). They concentrate on the small things, but not simply as a means of escaping reality. The small things – sensations, perceptions, discrete objects, images, atmospheres, evanescent configurations of multiplicities – rather than existing in opposition to big things, coexist with them. The opposition of Big Things to Small Things is one of the macroscopic and the microscopic, the molar and the molecular. Big Things no more stand apart from Small Things than do organisms from the molecules of which they are composed. The novel's aura of childness, its poetic language of minutiae that develops from the twins' world and permeates the space of Velutha and Ammu's brief affair, is part of a micropolitics that includes the becomings of the characters. The personal is the political, it is often said, and equally so is the molecular immanent within the macropolitical. There is no escape from temporality or historical context, but the molecular becomings within the real can dislodge the dominant structures formed by History's grand forces and engender different historical outcomes.

## *Fabulation*

Roy's fabulation articulates the various temporalities of History and its counter-histories specific to the Kerala of the novel. The present configuration of the forces of macro-History is shown to be a coalescence of strata of diverse provenance, Communist, British, Syrian Christian, Hindu. If the present is a contraction of past moments within a trajectory of retention and protention, the Historical present of the novel is a manifestation of the 'polytemporal' present of Deleuze's first passive synthesis of time, a present of multiple, coexisting presents differing in their rhythms and contracted durations. The world of the twins, by contrast, is imbued with the floating time of Aion. The assimilation of the twins' voices within the narrative voice creates a memory space of coexisting pasts like that of the second passive synthesis, though one which includes within it the perduring present of Beginnings without End in which Everything is Forever; the frozen present of crisis; and the anesthetised present perpetually threatened by the durational time of trauma rememoration. That trauma is a negative instance of the third passive synthesis, the pure form of time that manifests itself as an untimely gap in time, an ungrounding ground of time 'out of joint'. But the Hole in History inhabited by Ammu and Velutha for thirteen days is a positive instance of the third synthesis, a time of molecular becoming-other

that instigates trajectories of metamorphosis, even if those trajectories fail to survive.

As fabulist, Roy creates characters who gradually assume a vaguely mythic stature. Ammu, Velutha, Estha and Rahel become figures both of universal human experience and of an imagined future community. Midway through the novel, the adult Rahel and Estha visit the Ayemenem temple and witness an impromptu, all-night performance of two kathakali dance dramas. In this traditional form of Keralan theatre, actors in elaborate costumes enact in dance and stylised facial, hand and body gestures stories that are recited by a singer to the accompaniment of a percussion ensemble. Generally, the stories come from the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* and focus on the actions of gods in their various incarnations.[7] As Estha and Rahel watch the kathakali performance, the narrator comments that

> kathakali discovered long ago that the secret of the Great Stories is that they *have* no secrets. The Great Stories are the ones you have heard and want to hear again. The ones you can enter anywhere and inhabit comfortably. . . . In the Great Stories you know who lives, who dies, who finds love, who doesn't. And yet you want to know again. (Roy 1997: 218)

What makes these stories compelling is that they involve basic human emotions. The singer in kathakali dramas 'tells stories of the gods, but his yarn is spun from the ungodly, human heart' (Roy 1997: 219). The performances witnessed by Rahel and Estha clearly echo motifs in the novel – maternal affection and abandonment, betrayals and retribution. As dawn breaks, the drama concludes with Bhima's violent destruction of Dushasana.

> He continued to kill him long after he was dead. Then, with his bare hands, he tore the body open. He ripped its innards out and stooped to lap blood straight from the bowl of the torn carcass, his crazed eyes peeping over the rim, glittering with rage and hate and mad fulfillment. (Roy 1997: 224)

This moment captures the same passions the twins had witnessed as children.

> There was madness there that morning. Under the rose bowl. It was no performance. Esthappan and Rahel recognized it. They had seen its work before. Another morning. Another stage. Another kind of frenzy (with millipedes on the soles of its shoes). The brutal extravagance of this matched by the savage economy of that. (Roy 1997: 224)

In some ways, Roy pursues the same ends as the kathakali performers. She articulates the basic human emotions that the Great Stories convey, especially that of 'the boundless, infinitely inventive art of human hatred' (Roy 1997: 225). Like the kathakali characters, hers assume an identity midway between humans and gods. Early in the novel, the narrator speaks of the God of Small Things in general terms, but by the end of the novel the narrator refers to Velutha by that name. His characterisation is less detailed than that of the other protagonists, in large part because he is a semi-mythic man-god, in whom the becoming-child, becoming-woman and becoming-untouchable of Estha, Rahel and Ammu converge. To fabulate, says Deleuze, is 'to legend *in flagrante delicto*', to create giants whose projected images take on a life of their own. By the novel's close, the unholy family as a whole has taken on the semi-mythic dimension of Velutha. Yet Roy's fabulation differs from that of the kathakali drama in essential ways. The traditional stories invoke the Love Laws, but only to ratify them. When the drama is over, the 'Kathakali Men took off their makeup and went home to beat their wives. Even Kunti, the soft one with breasts' (Roy 1997: 224). The Great Stories convey basic human emotions, but they leave the oppressive power relations of class, caste and gender intact. They also dehistoricise human passions, extracting them from a specific context. Roy, by contrast, situates her human drama within a unique, contingent configuration of forces that cannot be separated from the action. Her fabulation is an intervention within History, an effort to create fissures within the edifice of power. Her mythic protagonists are visions of real possibilities, human gods inhabiting a dimension immanent within the world of coercion and violence but capable of engendering something new.

In *What Is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari identify the problem common to philosophy and art as resistance to the present. 'We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it. We lack creation. *We lack resistance to the present*.' As a result, 'The creation of concepts in itself calls for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist. . . . Art and philosophy converge at this point: the constitution of an earth and a people that are lacking as the correlate of creation' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 108). Roy's fabulation strives toward this end – resistance to the present and the creation of a new earth and a people to come.

## *Notes*

1. The critical literature on *The God of Small Things* is extensive. Excellent introductions to the novel are Mullaney 2002 and Tickell 2007. Besides providing detailed information about the background and reception of the work, Tickell also includes excerpts of important critical essays on the novel. Baneth-Nouailhetas 2002 offers an outstanding textual analysis of the work.
2. Throughout the novel, Roy includes occasional words and phrases in Malayalam, a Dravidian language spoken widely in Kerala, and the names of some of the characters reflect that linguistic context. Baby Kochamma's given name is Navomi Ipe, but she is called 'Baby Kochamma' by everyone in the novel. 'Kochamma' is a Malayalam honorofic for a female (thus the reference to Chacko's ex-wife, Margaret, as 'Margaret Kochamma'). 'Mammachi' is Malayalam for 'grandmother' (Mammachi's married name is 'Soshamma Ipe'). Mammachi's husband, Shri Benaan John Ipe, is referred to as 'Pappachi', or 'grandfather'. The Malayam words for boy and girl are 'mon' and 'mol', hence Sophie's designation as 'Sophie Mol'.
3. For detailed information about the historical background of the novel, see Tickell 2007: 19–46.
4. My remarks on the language and structure of the novel only scratch the surface of the work's formal complexity. Especially perceptive analyses of this dimension of the text include vanden Driesen 1999, Baneth-Nouailhetas 2002, Chawla 1999 and Oumhani 2000. Chawla's emphasis on Bakhtinian dialogism in her reading and Oumhani's concentration on hybridity in hers suggest obvious ways in which Roy's linguistic experimentation might be approached via Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'minor literature'.
5. One might argue that the 'youth' of any age may be measured by its powers of creativity and imagination. The narrator says of Inspector Mathew and Comrade Pillai, the 'mechanics who serviced different parts of the same machine', that 'They were both men whom childhood had abandoned without a trace. Men without curiosity. Without doubt. Both in their own way truly terrifyingly adult' (Roy 1997: 248).
6. When asked in an interview about her reference to Conrad, Roy remarked, 'It's saying that we, the characters in the book, are not the White Men, the people who are scared of the Heart of Darkness. We are the people who live in it; we are the people without stories' (cited in Tickell 2007: 54).
7. For a detailed account of the history and practice of kathakali dance drama, see Zarrilli 2000.

*4*

# Becoming-Memory: Roberto Bolaño's *Amulet*

With the publication of *The Savage Detectives* in 1998, Roberto Bolaño rose to prominence as one of Latin America's leading writers. That status was confirmed the next year when he received Latin America's highest literary honour, the Rómulo Gallegos Prize. By the time of his death in 2003 at the age of fifty, Bolaño had produced ten novels and three short story collections, including the posthumously published, sprawling thousand-page masterpiece *2666*. Between his two massive narratives, *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*, Bolaño crafted a brilliant short novel, *Amulet* (1999), that exemplifies in miniature the art of fabulation as he practised it in all his fiction.

## *Auxilio's Memory Space*

*Amulet* is the first-person narration of Auxilio Lacouture, an illegal Uruguayan immigrant in Mexico City who hides in the women's bathroom of the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature Building at UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, National Autonomous University of Mexico) from 18 to 30 September 1968, during the army occupation of the campus. In the course of that ordeal, she undergoes a decided process of becoming-other. Her story, she announces at the novel's outset, 'is going to be a horror story. A story of murder, detection and horror . . . it's the story of a terrible crime' ('Ésta será una historia de terror. Será una historia policiaca, un relato de serie negra y de terror. . . . es la historia de un crimen atroz') (Bolaño 2006: 1/1999: 11).[1] The novel is indeed 'una historia', both a fictional story and a factual history, a fiction that includes a portion of the 'historia de terror', the history of state-sponsored terror, with distant allusions to the Spanish Civil War and direct references to the state suppression of the left in Mexico in 1968 and to the military junta in Chile in 1973. It is a mystery or detective story, 'una historia policiaca', but literally a 'police history'. It is a hard-boiled mystery, 'un relato de serie negra', 'serie negra' being an allusion to Gallimard's landmark collection of hard-boiled

fiction that began appearing in 1945 as the 'Series Noire', yet quite literally a tale of a black series of events, each extending darkness further across Latin America. All told, the political history informing the novel constitutes a single 'crimen atroz', an atrocious, terrible crime.

On 18 September 1968, the day armed troops invaded UNAM and occupied its 'autonomous' Mexico City campus, Auxilio was seated in a bathroom stall when she heard 'a sound of shouting, a petrifying, history-making sound' (Bolaño 2006: 25). She lifted her feet 'like a Renoir ballerina, as if I were about to give birth (and in a sense, in effect, I was preparing to deliver something and to be delivered myself)' (Bolaño 2006: 29). A soldier entered the bathroom, and a sudden silence prevailed. She looked over the top of the stall door and saw the soldier 'staring entranced at his image in the mirror' (Bolaño 2006: 30). At that moment, she and the soldier were brought together in that bathroom mirror,

> our two faces embedded in a black rhombus or sunk in a lake, and a shiver ran down my spine, alas, because I knew that for the moment the laws of mathematics were protecting me, I knew that the tyrannical laws of the cosmos, which are opposed to the laws of poetry, were protecting me and that the soldier would stare entranced at his image in the mirror and I, in the singularity of my stall, would hear and imagine him, entranced in turn, and that our singularities, from that moment on, would be joined like the two faces of a terrible, fatal coin. (Bolaño 2006: 30)

The angle of their glances was such that she saw him without being seen herself. The laws of physics, geometry and mathematics, those 'tyrannical laws of the cosmos', protected her, but their mutual trance froze them in the mirror, that fascinating 'lake' of narcissistic self-absorption and medium of artistic reflection. Like the singularities of two black holes, Auxilio and the soldier became fused, their faces like the two sides 'of a terrible, fatal coin' ('de una moneda atroz como la muerte' [Bolaño 1999: 34], literally: 'a coin atrocious like death'). Once the soldier had left, 'The birth was over' (Bolaño 2006: 31).

What birth is this? Auxilio says at several points that she is 'the mother of Mexican poetry' (Bolaño 2006: 1), and it seems that at this moment, as she is 'preparing to deliver something and to be delivered [her]self', she is presiding over the birth of a new generation of poets while being delivered into her role as their tutelary spirit. She is an unlikely 'mother of Mexican poetry', in that she is neither Mexican

nor a mother, but rather an illegal Uruguayan immigrant with no children. Still, she is old enough to be the mother of the post-1968 poets, and she spends most of her time with them. During the day, she finds occasional work at UNAM where she is witness to the academic side of literary life, and by night she accompanies the young bohemian poets as they rove from bar to bar. She is a vagabond, staying with whatever acquaintance will have her temporarily, and in this sense, she is a proper mother for the post-'68 poets, who are themselves wandering descendants of Rimbaud and the *poètes maudits*.

Auxilio's becoming-other begins on 18 September, but it continues for several days. As the reader learns late in the narrative, Auxilio has most likely remained in the bathroom until 30 September.

> I am the mother of Mexico's poets. I am the only one who held out in the university in 1968, when the riot police and the army came in. I stayed there on my own in the Faculty, shut up in a bathroom, with no food, for more than ten days, for more than fifteen days, from the eighteenth to the thirtieth of September, I think, I'm not sure any more. (Bolaño 2006: 172)

Hence, the novel's puzzling time shifts, bizarre transitions and hallucinatory scenes may all be explained as the thoughts of someone rendered increasingly delusional through prolonged isolation and starvation. This narrative frame, however, is only a pretence, a device that helps generate a time-space of memory, history and fabulation.[2]

When Auxilio initially sees the soldier in the mirror and senses her becoming-other, she says that it was 'as if time were coming apart and flying off in different directions simultaneously, a pure time, neither verbal nor composed of gestures and actions' (Bolaño 2006: 30). Clearly, she has entered the time of Aion, the floating time of becoming that expands in both directions, past and future, a 'pure time', which is the form of time, the time of the infinitive that contains all tenses and modes within it. Once the soldier leaves, Auxilio elaborates on the nature of this time:

> Then I began to think about my past as I am doing now. As I went back through the dates, the rhombus shattered in a space of speculative desperation, images rose from the bottom of the lake, no one could stop them emerging from the pitiful body of water, unlit by sun or moon, and time folded and unfolded itself like a dream. The year 1968 became the year 1964 and the year 1960 became the year 1956. But it also became the years 1970 and 1973 and the years 1975 and 1976. As if I had died

> and was viewing the years from an unaccustomed vantage point. I mean: I started thinking about my past as if I was thinking about my present, future, and past, all mixed together and dormant in the one tepid egg, the enormous egg of some inner bird (an archaeopteryx?) nestled on a bed of smoking rubble. (Bolaño 2006: 32)

In some ways, she has entered a memory-space like that of the second passive synthesis of time, the virtual past in which one moves from layer to layer in a cone of coexisting pasts that have never been present. Though Auxilio initially appears to be an unreliable narrator, confessing 'I've got no memory for dates anymore, or exactly where my wanderings took me' (Bolaño 2006: 2), late in the novel she states, 'I can't forget anything. That's my problem, or so I've been told' (Bolaño 2006: 172), and eventually she concludes, 'I am the memory' (Bolaño 2006: 174).That memory-space, of course, is not simply a virtual past, since she remembers retrospectively and prospectively: 'That afternoon of 1971 or 1972. And the strangest thing is that I remember it prospectively, from 1968' (Bolaño 2006: 56).

Most important, however, is the fact that her memory-space is not strictly personal. One extended memory Auxilio relates is that of her meeting with the Spanish para-surrealist painter Remedios Varo (1908–63), who in 1941 permanently emigrated to Mexico City from Paris during the Nazi occupation. Auxilio notes that 'Memory plays malicious tricks on me when the light of the waning moon creeps into the women's bathroom like a spider' (Bolaño 2006: 107), and indeed memory is playing an interesting trick on her at this point, since, as Auxilio observes, 'I never met her, not because I was too timid to pay her a visit at her house, not because I didn't admire her work (which I admire wholeheartedly), but because Remedios Varo died in 1963, and in 1963 I was still living in my beloved, faraway Montevideo' (Bolaño 2006: 106). Clearly, Auxilio's is a collective memory, and in the fullest sense she is 'the memory' (Bolaño 2006: 174), a voice of memory itself.

## *The Dust of Literature*

Auxilio's confrontation with the soldier's image takes place in chapters three and four, and the subsequent ten chapters concern her exploration of the memory-space unfolding in the UNAM bathroom. The first two chapters serve as a prelude to Auxilio's becoming-other, but even before she falls into the time of Aion, time is already beginning to change and her narrative develops in

unconventional ways. She initially cannot remember whether she came to Mexico City in 1967, 1965 or 1962, but then she makes an effort to remember. 'Hold on, let me try to remember. Let me stretch time out like a plastic surgeon stretching the skin of a patient under anesthesia' (Bolaño 2006: 2). As she stretches time, she concludes that she must have arrived in 1965. She then tells of her contact with the poets Léon Felipe and Pedro Garfías and of her offer to serve as their maid. But this account soon turns into an imagistic, vaguely allegorical meditation on art and concludes with a hallucinatory vision of a menacing dust cloud that is at once psychic and sociohistorical.

Besides establishing the frame of the narrative, the first chapter also provides key elements of the novel's political themes. Léon Felipe (1884–1968) and Pedro Garfías (1901–67) are both Spanish poets who had fled Spain during the Spanish Civil War and settled permanently in Mexico City. Both died before the 18 September 1968 occupation of UNAM (Léon Felipe just the day before, 17 September). In these figures, we see the continuity of the Spanish arts in Mexican culture, and by extension in the Latin American arts in general, particularly in the tradition of leftist writers as political activists. Pedro Garfías especially is associated with the era of the Spanish Civil War. Initially, he was a proponent of Ultraismo, a literary movement with similarities to Italian Futurism, Dada and French Surrealism. By the mid 1930s, however, Garfías found himself drawn less to avant-garde experimentation with form and increasingly committed to the Republican struggle against fascism. He wrote several poems during the Civil War, which were published in a 1938 collection titled *Poesías de la guerra española* (Poetry of the Spanish Civil War). That same year, he received the Premio Nacional de Literatura (National Award for Literature) for the collection, and it remains his best-known literary work.[3]

Bolaño signals the relevance of these details in a somewhat indirect fashion. While Auxilio cleans Garfías' apartment, she notes that his melancholy gaze often fixed on some object, 'a vase or a shelf full of books'. She wonders what he sees there and concludes 'that Hell or one of its secret doors was hidden there in those seemingly inoffensive objects' (Bolaño 2006: 6). She becomes obsessed with a flower vase, terrified of what might happen if she put her hand in the vase's mouth, certain that 'If it isn't Hell in there, it's nightmares, and all that is lost, all that causes pain and is better forgotten' (Bolaño 2006: 9). She then asks herself,

> Does Pedrito Garfías know what's hidden in his vase? Do poets have any idea what lurks in the bottomless maws of their vases? And if they know, why don't they take it upon themselves ['assumen . . . esta responsibilidad', literally: 'assume this responsibility'] to destroy them? (Bolaño 2006: 9/1999: 17)

Later, as she sits in the Chapultepec Park, she wonders why Garfías simply stared at the vase rather than smashing it to the floor, but eventually 'I came to realize that, over the years, Pedrito Garfías had already smashed his fair share of vases and other mysterious objects, countless vases, on two continents!' (Bolaño 2006: 10). Clearly, Auxilio's thoughts about the vase indicate that the poet had fought infernal forces, 'all that is lost, all that causes pain and is better forgotten', in his Civil War poems and his subsequent works written in Mexico, but he let his sad gaze rest on this particular untouched vase, knowing that the world's infernal forces can never be definitively eradicated.

This melancholy meditation is reinforced by Auxilio's reflections on the relationship between literature and dust. When Auxilio cleaned their apartments, both Léon Felipe and Pedro Garfías would say, 'Auxilio, leave those papers alone, woman, dust and literature have always gone together. And I would look at them and think, How right they are, dust and literature, from the beginning' (Bolaño 2006: 4). As she reflects further on this fact,

> I saw whirlwinds, clouds of dust gathering over a plain somewhere deep in my memory, and the clouds advanced until they reached Mexico City . . .: however heroic my efforts with broom and rag, the dust was never going to go away, since it was an integral part of the books, their way of living or of mimicking something like life. (Bolaño 2006: 4–5)

Literature, it would seem, must eventually succumb to the processes of decay, and literature's 'way of living' may be regarded as a slow struggle of memory against the disintegrating forces of oblivion. But literature's connection with dust is also tied to the novel's political themes. Léon Felipe and Pedro Garfías gave Auxilio gifts of Mexican clay figurines and books in exchange for her work, and at the end of the first chapter she ponders the fate of these gifts, the broken figurines, she surmises, eventually nourishing 'the dust of Mexico City' along with the dust of her books. She then asks herself whether the dust of the figurines and books has not 'dissolved into the air of Mexico City' and become 'part of the ash that blows through the city'. That wind full of ash and dust, she continues, is 'the dark

night of the soul' that 'advances through the streets of Mexico City sweeping all before it' (Bolaño 2006: 13). Her apocalyptic vision, as Auxilio later indicates, is that of 'the winds of 1968' (Bolaño 2006: 176). The 'convulsive sky of Mexico City' (Bolaño 2006: 43–4) is the sky beneath which the post-1968 generation of poets was destined to come of age: 'They were all growing up exposed to the storms of Mexico and the storms of Latin America' (Bolaño 2006: 44). The 'black wind' (Bolaño 2006: 129) of the city casts a pall over everything. At the conclusion of her first-chapter meditation, Auxilio laments:

> And now it is rare to hear singing, where once everything was song. The dust cloud reduces everything to dust. [La nube de polvo lo pulveriza todo.] First the poets, then love, then, when it seems to be sated and about to disperse, the cloud returns to hang high over your city or your mind, with a mysterious air that means it has no intention of moving. (Bolaño 2006: 13/1999: 21)

The forces of disintegration, then, are both physical and sociopolitical. Literature is linked not simply to dust but to destruction as well. As Auxilio becomes increasingly delusional late in the novel, she copies verses from Garfías' poetry collection on strips of toilet paper; eventually, however, she flushes the poems down the toilet. Then she comments,

> The vanity of writing, the vanity of destruction. I thought, Because I wrote, I endured ['resistí', literally: 'I resisted']. I thought, Because I destroyed what I had written, they will find me, they will hit me, they will rape me, they will kill me. I thought, The two things are connected, writing and destroying, hiding and being found' ['escribir y destruir, ocultarse y ser descubierta', literally: 'to write and to destroy, to hide oneself and to be discovered']. (Bolaño 2006: 175/1999: 147)

In one sense, Auxilio is suggesting that writing, resisting and hiding are the interconnected opposites of destroying, hitting/raping/killing and being found. But the relationship between the elements is more complicated than that. Perhaps writing is always opposed to physical violence (though in *Distant Star* Bolaño draws the portrait of a poet whose art extends to his murders as an officer in the service of Pinochet), but writing is at once a way of disguising oneself and revealing oneself. Writing is a mode of resistance, but in resisting, writers expose themselves more openly to the forces of violence. And if writing is a politically engaged activity, it is also a force of destruction. As Auxilio thinks about Garfías' vase and the vases of

other poets, we will recall, she asks, 'por qué no los destrozan' (why don't they destroy them), why don't they assume 'esta responsibilidad' (this responsibility) (Bolaño 2006: 9). If the poets do destroy the vases, the poets pulverize the objects, turn them into dust (like Auxilio's figurines), and that dust eventually combines with the ominous, black storm clouds of dust that sweep across Latin America and settle over Mexico City. This does not mean that the destruction of activist resistance is the same as the destruction of state terrorism, but it does indicate that the status of resistance is morally complex, and that its fate is uncertain – possibly self-destructive, and at best, only temporarily triumphant.

## *The Generation of 1968*

Bolaño suggests parallels between the Spanish Civil War and the events of September 1968 in Mexico, but the similarities are only broadly drawn. Many in Mexico felt that they had already had their revolution in the early twentieth century, and that with the Constitution of 1917 and the establishment of a viable government by 1920, the revolution had attained its ends. The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party), or PRI, had issued in the Mexican Miracle, an extraordinary four-decade period of economic growth that continued into the 1960s. Though the miracle did not bring about universal prosperity, and though some protested the monopolistic dominance of the PRI, the government of the 1960s remained relatively stable and, at least in the eyes of PRI officials, successful. The PRI had scored a public relations triumph in having submitted the winning bid for the 1968 Olympics, making Mexico the first country in the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking world to host the Games. It was with considerable surprise that President Gustavo Días Ordaz found himself confronted with popular unrest in July 1968, just weeks before the scheduled opening of the Games on 12 October.

The origins of the mass demonstrations of July, August and September remain obscure. What is known is that on 22 July a fight broke out between students from two high schools, one of which was affiliated with UNAM, the other with the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (National Polytechnic Institute, or IPN). UNAM and IPN were the two main universities in Mexico, the UNAM students coming primarily from the ranks of the upper and middle class, and the IPN students from the ranks of the less privileged population that

had seen its lot improve during the Mexican Miracle. Most likely, street gangs joined in the 22 July fight between the students. When fighting erupted again the next day, the government responded by sending out 200 *grenaderos*, or riot police, who reportedly beat many students while restoring order. On 26 July, two university student organisations staged large demonstrations. Although the protests were held in accordance with law, riot police confronted the groups and violence broke out, with looting and destruction of property that many attributed to the police themselves. By 27 July, students had barricaded streets close to their schools, and the *grenaderos* responded by reinforcing their troops in the area. Throughout August and into September, protests grew in number and size, sometimes involving as many as 200,000 demonstrators. Among the demands that emerged from the protests were the repeal of articles 145 and 145b, which allowed the imprisonment of anyone attending a meeting judged a threat to public order, and the disbandment of the *grenaderos*. The Corps of the *Grenaderos* had been created during the presidency of Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940–6), and had been used primarily to suppress opposition to the government, including union strikes in the 1950s and 1960s and student protests in 1964 and 1965. It had come to be seen as a symbol of the PRI's inflexible and dictatorial rule.

As protests increased in September, UNAM became a centre of resistance, and students began occupying buildings on campus. On 18 September, army troops invaded the UNAM campus, arresting the students, faculty and staff who were unable to escape. The army kept the campus closed until the evening of 30 September. On 2 October, a massive demonstration was held on the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in the Tlatelolco section of Mexico City. *Grenaderos* and plain-clothed police surrounded the crowd, helicopters descended and illuminated the plaza with Bengal lights, and shots began to be fired from the helicopters, the rooftops and the periphery of the plaza. The government claimed that members of the crowd had initiated the shooting and that government forces had merely responded in self-defence. The government initially reported that only twenty-nine people had died, but eventually officials settled on a figure of forty-nine dead. Most analysts of the Tlatelolco massacre estimate a much higher death toll, somewhere between 200 and 700 fatalities. Whatever the legitimacy of the government action, however, it achieved its end. There were no subsequent demonstrations and the Olympics went forward without any external disturbances.[4]

The 1968 movement focused on issues specific to Mexico, but in many ways it bore resemblances to movements in Europe and the United States. Like the Vietnam protests in the US or the May '68 strikes in France, the Mexican resistance to state power was as much a youth movement as a leftist political initiative. Its politics did not conform to the orthodoxies of revolutionary struggle – so much so, that in Mexico, as in France, the Communist Party ended up siding with the government against the students. The post-'68 Mexican poets who appear in *Amulet* are defined by this movement, even if they were not necessarily participants in the events. Auxilio says that the adolescent poets with whom she associates

> seemed to have graduated from the great orphanage of Mexico City's subway rather than from the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature. Sometimes I'd see them peering through the windows of the cafés and bars on Bucareli, and the mere sight made me shudder, as if they weren't creatures of flesh and blood but a generation sprung from the open wound of Tlatelolco, like ants or cicadas or pus, although they couldn't have been there or taken part in the demonstrations of '68; these were kids who, in September '68, when I was shut up in the bathroom, were still in junior high school. (Bolaño 2006: 77)

These adolescents were separated even from the generation of poets known in 1968 as the 'young poets'. They 'didn't speak the same language as me or the young poets' (Bolaño 2006: 78), says Auxilio.

> No one could understand these voices, which were saying: We're not from this part of Mexico City, we come from the subway, the underworld, the sewers, we live in the darkest, dirtiest places, where the toughest of the young poets would be reduced to retching. (Bolaño 2006: 78)

The novel's chief representative of this group is Arturo Belano, a character who is in many ways a stand-in for Bolaño himself. Both author and character were born to working-class families in Chile in 1953, and both moved with their families to Mexico City in 1968 at the age of fifteen. Once they arrived in Mexico, both dropped out of school to devote themselves to writing and to a bohemian life on the margins of society. Both returned to Chile in 1973 to participate in the Allende revolution; they were present on 11 September when Pinochet staged his military coup; they were arrested and held prisoner for eight days, though neither was tortured; and they both returned to Mexico City in January 1974. It is via these experiences of Arturo Belano (and Bolaño) that the Mexican events of 1968 are linked to those in Chile five years later. One of Auxilio's 'prospective'

memories is of a 1973 demonstration in Mexico City, which 'might even have been the first protest against the overthrow of Allende in the whole of Latin America' (Bolaño 2006: 74). As she reflects on the demonstration, she comments, 'And the dream of September 1968 reappeared in that September of 1973, which must mean something surely, it can't have been purely coincidental; no one can elude the combinations or permutations or dispositions of chance' (Bolaño 2006: 75). The post-1968 generation of Mexico, Bolaño suggests, is part of a larger generation of Latin American youth who have been shaped by events that confirm the ubiquity of state power and repressive military force. If the older immigrant poets of Mexico City were defined by the Spanish Civil War, the poets of Bolaño's generation are children of September 1968 and September 1973. Both groups faced the violence of military rule, but those of Bolaño's age spoke a different language. What separated them from their predecessors was the extent of their disillusionment and despair, whose intensity propelled them into a life in the netherworld.

Though Belano is the chief representative of a new generation of poets, little is said and nothing is shown of his writings per se, or for that matter, of any of his companions' works. Auxilio even comments at one point that these poets were 'a band of young drunkards versed in the art of hospitality but not in the art of verse' (Bolaño 2006: 64). Bolaño's focus, however, is less on a generational aesthetic than on a temperament. Their status as poets is defined not by what they produce, but by how they live and view the world. Auxilio says that some nights, as she would look at the young poets,

> my friends even seemed, for a second, to be the incarnations of those who had never come into existence: the Latin American poets who died in childhood, at the age of five or ten, or just a few months after they were born. This exercise in vision was difficult, and futile too, or so it seemed, but, by the purplish light of certain nights, I could see through the features of my friends to the little faces of the babies who never grew up. I saw the little angels they bury in shoeboxes in Latin America, or in little wooden coffins painted white. (Bolaño 2006: 63–4)

They may be poets or simply proto-poets, the incarnations of those cut off before they could fulfil their promise, each a 'mute inglorious Milton', as Gray's Elegy frames it. They are all poets, even if some are 'condemned to fail prematurely, as so many things in Latin America fail' (Bolaño 2006: 63).

The chief episode involving Arturo Belano is an incursion he and

a friend make into the underworld of male prostitution. Upon his return from Chile, Auxilio touts Belano's status as one of the 'hard men' who 'have seen death at close range' (Bolaño 2006: 80). One night Belano's friend Ernesto San Epifanio approaches him and seeks his aid as a tough guy in confronting 'the King of the Rent Boys [el rey de los putos] in Colonia Guerrero, a guy known as the King, who had a monopoly on male prostitution in that picturesque and indeed charming neighborhood of the capital' (Bolaño 2006: 83/1999: 74). Ernesto had enjoyed two nights of sex with the King, and now the King claimed Ernesto as his property. Belano agrees to accompany Ernesto to the King's headquarters, and when they set out, Auxilio follows the two. Their journey to the King is a descent into hell, the Avenida Guerrero being 'in every respect a damned river, a river of the damned, ferrying corpses and corpses-to-be, black automobiles that appeared, vanished, and then reappeared, the same ones or their silent, demented echoes, as if the river of Hell were circular' (Bolaño 2006: 90). When they enter the King's room, with Auxilio lurking behind, they find themselves in the presence of the King and his lieutenants. In the rear of the room, a seriously ill young man is stretched out on a bed against the wall. The King claims that Ernesto is his 'fucking slave' ['puto esclavo', literally: 'slave whore'] (Bolaño 2006: 94/1999: 82), and Ernesto counters somewhat pompously that he is a 'Mexican homosexual poet' who has the right 'to sleep with whoever he liked without having to become anybody's slave' (Bolaño 2006: 95). Arturo then asks who the sick boy on the bed is. Somewhat stunned, the King responds, 'Who the fuck are *you*?' (Bolaño 2006: 96). Without answering his question, Arturo starts talking to the King about death and the shivering sick boy:

> He spoke of death, and repeated himself over and over, always going back to death, as if telling the King of the Rent Boys in Colonia Guerrero that he had no competency in matters of death, and at the time I thought: He's making this up, it's fiction, a story, none of this is true [está haciendo literatura, está haciendo cuento, todo es falso]. (Bolaño 2006: 98/1999: 85)

When the King asks Arturo if Ernesto is his boy, Arturo says yes, which, says Auxilio, 'proved that I was right: it was the storyteller talking, not the booze' [que demostraba claramente que de pedernal nada y de literatura mucho] (Bolaño 2006: 98/1999: 85). Arturo finally instructs Ernesto and Auxilio to help dress the sick boy and carry him out of the room. Surprisingly, the King lets them leave with

the boy. Arturo remains in the room, saying 'I have one more story [una última historia] to tell His Majesty' (Bolaño 2006: 100/1999: 87). Shortly thereafter, Arturo emerges unscathed from the King's quarters.

Arturo's status as a tough is scarcely well-earned. When he initially agrees to accompany Ernesto to the King's lair, Auxilio comments, 'And then I thought of Arturo, who had suddenly been promoted to the rank of revolutionary veteran and had, for some obscure reason best known to himself, accepted the responsibilities entailed by that error' (Bolaño 2006: 86). A bit later, Auxilio remarks that

> Arturito was resolved to continue, having entirely assumed the role of hard man, which was partly my creation, and which, in the course of that helpless, airless night, he had accepted like a wafer of bitter flesh, the host that no one can be qualified to swallow. (Bolaño 2006: 91)

Arturo is like Lawrence of Arabia, whose supposed mythomania was actually a dimension of the fabulation whereby he projected into the real an image of himself and his troops as a people to come. And when Arturo comes before the King, he continues to fabulate, to tell stories and engage what Deleuze calls the 'powers of the false'. Improbably, the gambit works. Ernesto is freed and the sick boy is raised from the dead.

## *Erigone and the Birth of History*

In this episode of unlikely salvation, we see, perhaps, a comic, gay version of Orpheus and Euridice, the poet using his fictions to liberate those trapped in the underworld, or possibly a parody of the harrowing of Hell, the Christ-like Arturo rescuing Old Testament worthies. Though the similarities are loose at best, the mythic pattern of the incident is unmistakable. The triumphant outcome of this mythic tale, however, hardly represents Bolaño's vision of the post-'68 poets' future or their standing in the world. Another myth serves that purpose – the little-known Greek myth of Erigone, which Bolaño embellishes and modifies considerably.

After her narration of Arturo's descent into the underworld, Auxilio tells of her meeting with the surrealist painter Remedios Varo and then of her brief interactions with Lilian Serpas (1905–85), yet another historical figure who appears in the novel. Lilian is identified as a Mexican poet (she was actually Salvadoran) who is 'the real mother of Mexican poetry' (Bolaño 2006: 118), and indeed, her

poetry did exert some influence on Mexican poets in the 1950s. She is also a biological mother, whose son, the recluse painter Carlos Coffeen Serpas, lives with her. (The real Lilian Serpas did in fact have a lover named Carlos Coffeen, but there is no record of her having a son by Coffeen.) One night, Lilian asks Auxilio to go to her apartment and tell her son that she will not be home until the next morning. Auxilio does so, and as she enters the Serpas dwelling, she feels herself 'plunging into the depths of an Atlantic trench' (Bolaño 2006: 134). The apartment, she senses, 'draws its sustenance from anti-life, from anti-matter, from the black holes of Mexico and Latin America, from all that once tried to find a way out into life but now leads only back to death' (Bolaño 2006: 137). At first, Carlos Coffeen treats her with suspicion, but soon he launches into the story of Erigone, the daughter of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and Erigone's relationship with her half-brother, Orestes.

As Coffeen tells the tale, Erigone is the most beautiful woman in Greece, and Orestes is a brutal avenger, whose slaughter of his mother, Aegisthus and his followers, says Coffeen, 'must have been stupefying' (Bolaño 2006: 140) in its savagery. After killing his mother and step-father, Orestes declares himself king, but he spares Erigone, for 'Nothing but her extraordinary beauty can momentarily placate his homicidal fury' (Bolaño 2006: 141–2). Crazed with desire, Orestes rapes Erigone. Over the next few weeks, he persecutes the followers of Aegisthus by day and, 'like a drug addict or a wino' (Bolaño 2006: 142), makes love to Erigone by night. She becomes pregnant, and when Orestes' sister Electra finds out, she counsels Orestes to kill Erigone and her foetus. Orestes decides to take Electra's advice, but he craves one last night with Erigone. The two spend hours in passion, but sometime before dawn, Orestes tells her that he wants to save her from the murderous Electra. He has arranged for a guide to lead Erigone out of the city to safety. Erigone, however, grows suspicious and fears that the guide 'will turn out to be her executioner'. Orestes loses his patience. 'If you stay here, I will kill you, he says' (Bolaño 2006: 143). Despite this threat, Erigone continues to resist. Moved by her resolve, Orestes begins 'to give serious thought to the idea of protecting Erigone from the dangers besetting her in devastated Argos' (Bolaño 2006: 145). He then bares his soul 'as never before', and by dawn he has convinced her to leave with the guide. From a tower, Orestes watches her walk away from the city. 'Then he shut his eyes and, when he opened them again, Erigone was nowhere to be seen' (Bolaño 2006: 146).

Erigone's ultimate fate is unclear. Coffeen stresses that it was only '*after* having been moved' (Bolaño 2006: 145) by Erigone's refusal to leave that he seriously considered saving her. The implication is that the guide had in fact been instructed to kill Erigone. If Orestes' final decision had been to save Erigone, he would have had to send new instructions to the guide, but Coffeen says nothing about any such directives being conveyed. When Orestes closes his eyes, Erigone is nowhere to be seen, which may mean that she has gone to her death or that she has simply left the city. Auxilio finds herself unsettled by Coffeen's narrative, and as Coffeen continues to talk, she says, 'suddenly I realized something about the story that had escaped my notice until then. Something, something, but what?' (Bolaño 2006: 148). What that something is, the reader is never told. Perhaps it is the fact that Erigone's fate is not explicitly indicated. But as Coffeen talks, Auxilio says that 'it seemed that Coffeen was Orestes and I was Erigone, which meant that the night would have no end, I would never see the light of day again, I would be incinerated by the black gaze of Lilian's son' (Bolaño 2006: 149). Coffeen pauses in the narrative and turns to Auxilio with a blank gaze as if he were looking at a stranger, 'but as he gradually recognized me, perplexity gave way to hatred, rancor, and homicidal fury'. At that point Auxilio 'understood and seized upon what had escaped my notice'. She tells him that she has remembered what she had missed in the story. But before she discloses that information, she looks again at Coffeen. 'I was looking at an airport devoid of planes and people, from whose shadowless hangars and runways only dreams and visions departed. It was the airport of the drunks and the drug addicts.' As this hallucinatory scene evaporates, 'in its place I saw Coffeen's eyes wanting to know what it was that I had remembered. And I said: Nothing. Nothing, just some crazy idea I had' (Bolaño 2006: 150).

Orestes is possessed of 'homicidal fury' (Bolaño 2006: 146), and Coffeen looks at Auxilio with 'hatred, rancor, and homicidal fury' (Bolaño 2006: 150). Orestes is obsessed with Erigone 'like a drug addict or a wino' (Bolaño 2006: 142), and Coffeen's face is associated with 'the airport of the drunks and the drug addicts' (Bolaño 2006: 150). Whatever Orestes' final intentions toward Erigone, those of Coffeen are unmistakably violent. Auxilio's decision to remain silent about what she has remembered may well imply that she suspects that Orestes betrayed Erigone in the end and that Coffeen's intentions are as murderous as Orestes'. But before any further clarification comes from Auxilio, she is caught up in another

hallucinatory vision. 'I felt as though I was being wheeled into an operating room. I thought: I am in the women's bathroom in the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature and I am the last person left. I was heading for the operating room, I was heading for the birth of History' (Bolaño 2006: 151). She is moving 'toward an operating room dilating in time, as History announced its birth with raucous cries'. She asks the doctors who are accompanying her if she is pregnant, and they answer, '"No, Ma'am, we're just taking you to attend the birth of History."' She asks why they are hurrying, and is told, '"The birth of History can't wait, and if we arrive late you won't see anything, only ruins and smoke, an empty landscape"' (Bolaño 2006: 152). When she reaches the operating room, however, 'the vision misted over, cracked, fell and shattered, and then the fragments were pulverized by a bolt of lightning, and a gust of wind blew the dust away to nowhere or spread it through Mexico City' (Bolaño 2006: 153). The face of Coffeen reappears before her, she rises from the sofa and leaves the apartment.

In a 2002 interview, Bolaño says that the myth of Erigone serves 'as a counterpoint to the story of Orestes, but also as a representation of Latin American political ruin and destruction' (Aussenac 2002: 40). As a political allegory, the Erigone myth is simple: Orestes the political strong man must choose between violence and love. He feels compelled to choose violence by the arguments of state and self-interest articulated by Electra. When Orestes begins to give serious thought to saving Erigone, he reflects on

> the dangers besetting her in devastated Argos, which consisted, fundamentally, of his own madness, his homicidal fury, his shame and repentance, that is, the components of what he liked to call the destiny of Orestes, a high-sounding name for self-destruction [a name for 'el camino de la auto-destrucción', 'the path of auto-destruction']. (Bolaño 2006: 145–6/1999: 123)

In sum, the political impasse within which Orestes finds himself is of his own making, and his decision to continue on the path of self-destruction, he tells himself, springs from a destiny beyond his control. Auxilio's confrontation with Coffeen repeats the pattern of the Erigone myth. Coffeen's apartment, which 'draws its sustenance from anti-life, from anti-matter, from the black holes of Mexico and Latin America', represents the essence of Latin American politics, everything 'that once tried to find a way into life but now leads only back to death' (Bolaño 2006: 137). This confluence of a mythic

pattern and a contemporary reality leads Auxilio to the final hallucination of the birth of History, a history incessantly repeated in Latin America and instantiated in her September 1968 UNAM vigil. Earlier, when Auxilio told of an episode in which she thought she was being followed, she paused in her narrative to say: 'And I thought: History is like a horror story' ['Y pensé: así es la Historia, un cuento corto de terror', literally: 'And I thought: such is History, a short story of terror'] (Bolaño 2006: 66/1999: 60). The birth of History she is witnessing is that of the ever-repeated short and brutal story of terror. The 'historia de terror', which Auxilio had promised in the novel's opening sentence, is part of Latin America's perpetually reiterated 'cuento corto de terror'. Latin America's destiny of self-destruction is like the cloud described by Auxilio in the first chapter, a 'dust cloud' [nube del polvo] hovering over Mexico City that 'reduces everything to dust' [polveriza todo] (Bolaño 2006: 13/1999: 21). Fittingly, then, when Auxilio's narration of the birth of History ends,

> the vision misted over, cracked, fell and shattered, and then the fragments were pulverized by a bolt of lightning, and a gust of wind blew the dust [polvo] away to nowhere [en medio de la nada, 'into the middle of the void'] or spread it through Mexico City. (Bolaño 2006: 153/1999: 129)

## *Auxilio's Becoming and the People to Come*

In the final two chapters, Auxilio's visions become increasingly phantasmagorical. She dreams of visits from her guardian angel, and she begins to issue 'idiotic prophecies' (Bolaño 2006: 157), such as 'Virginia Woolf shall be reincarnated as an Argentinean fiction writer in the year 2076' (Bolaño 2006: 159), or 'Alejandra Pizarnik shall lose her last reader in the year 2100' (Bolaño 2006: 161). Auxilio starts to freeze with cold, and finds herself in the 'snowbound wilderness' of the Andes. She feels 'as if the cold, while numbing and killing me, were simultaneously turning me into a kind of yeti, a muscle-bound snow-woman, hirsute and stentorian' (Bolaño 2006: 166). In the last chapter, she begins her descent from the snowbound wilderness.

> That was when I decided to come down from the mountains. I decided not to starve to death in the women's bathroom. I decided not to go crazy. I decided not to become a beggar. I decided to tell the truth even if it meant being pointed at. I began my descent. (Bolaño 2006: 169)

But her return to the reality of 30 September 1968 and her emergence from the women's bathroom do not put an end to her visions. She

relates her rescue and the spread of her legend as the sole resister to remain in UNAM during the army occupation, 'the woman who had gone without food for thirteen days, shut up in the bathroom' (Bolaño 2006: 176–7). She tells of wandering the city after her rescue, but in the midst of her narration, without transition, she returns to her descent from the mountain. As she descends, she comes to the rim of a valley stretching far below her. She sees a tree on which are perched a sparrow and a quetzal. She moves toward the tree, but 'When I reached the tree, the birds had flown away. Then I saw that at its far end, to the west, the valley opened into a bottomless abyss' (Bolaño 2006: 179–80).

This is the third time such a valley has appeared in the novel. The first time, Auxilio is speaking of the Mexico City protest at the overthrow of Allende. As she looks at the faces of the protestors, she says, 'I also saw something else: I saw a mirror and, peering into it, I could see an enormous uninhabited valley, and the vision of that valley brought tears to my eyes' (Bolaño 2006: 74–5). Initially, she cannot tell 'if it was the vale of joy or the vale of tears', but then she comes to think, 'perhaps that lonely valley is an emblem of death, because death is the staff of Latin America and Latin America cannot walk without its staff' (Bolaño 2006: 75). The valley appears a second time when Auxilio visits the studio of the painter Remedios Varo. One of Varo's paintings is covered by a cloth, and when Varo lifts the cloth, Auxilio sees

> an enormous valley, viewed from the highest mountain, a green and brown valley, and the mere sight of that landscape makes me anxious, because I know . . . that what the painter is showing me is a prelude, the setting for a scene that will be scorched into my soul. (Bolaño 2006: 110)

The landscape, she says, 'the enormous valley, vaguely reminiscent of a Renaissance background, is *waiting*' (Bolaño 2006: 110–11), but for what, she does not yet know.

What the valley is awaiting is Auxilio's arrival at the end of the novel. 'The valley led straight into the abyss' (Bolaño 2006: 180), and on the other side of the valley she sees a spreading shadow. 'And I realized that the shadow sweeping the broad field was a multitude of young people, an interminable legion of young people on the march to somewhere.' She cannot tell whether the people 'were creatures of flesh and blood or ghosts'. They form a group, but 'they did not constitute what is commonly known as a mass: their destinies were

not oriented by a common idea. They were united only by their generosity and courage' (Bolaño 2006: 181). Then she hears a murmur and realises that they are singing.

> The children, the young people, were singing and heading for the abyss. . . . My mind endeavored to remember a text about children intoning canticles as they marched to war. . . . I held out both hands, as if imploring the sky to let me embrace them, and I shouted, but my shout was lost among the heights and did not reach down into the valley . . . I looked for the birds as if those poor creatures could be of any help to me when the whole world was facing extinction. (Bolaño 2006: 182–3)

Auxilio's apocalyptic vision is that of a people to come, a collectivity defined not by a controlling idea, but only by generosity and courage. This is the final image of the post-'68 poets. At this juncture, the point of the episode involving the King of the Rent Boys becomes clear. Belano's decision to accompany Ernesto into the inferno is a gesture of pure generosity and courage. And though Ernesto ventures into Hell out of self-interest, he too exercises generosity and courage when he helps liberate the sick young man. The people to come are a people of song, and though they are condemned, they march to their death chanting poems.

> So the ghost-children marched down the valley and fell into the abyss. Their passage was brief. And their ghost-song or its echo, which is almost to say the echo of nothingness, went on marching, I could hear it marching on at the same pace, the pace of courage and generosity. A barely audible song, a song of war and love, because although the children were clearly marching to war, the way they marched recalled the superb, theatrical attitudes of love. (Bolaño 2006: 184)

Though the song was about war, 'about the heroic deeds of a whole generation of young Latin Americans led to sacrifice, I knew that above and beyond all, it was about courage and mirrors, desire and pleasure. And that song is our amulet' (Bolaño 2006: 184).

## *History and Memory*

In his 1999 acceptance speech for the Rómulo Gallegos Prize, Bolaño spoke of the writers of his generation.

> Needless to say, we fought tooth and nail, but we had corrupt bosses, cowardly leaders, an apparatus of propaganda that was worse than that of a leper colony. We fought for parties that, had they emerged victorious, would have immediately sent us to a forced-labor camp. We fought and

> poured all our generosity into an ideal that had been dead for over fifty years, and some of us knew that: How were we not going to know that if we had read Trotsky or were Trotskyites? But nevertheless we did it, because we were stupid and generous, as young people are, giving everything and asking for nothing in return. And now nothing is left of those young people, those who died in Bolivia, died in Argentina or in Peru, and those who survived went to Chile or Mexico to die, and the ones they didn't kill there they killed later in Nicaragua, in Colombia, in El Salvador. All of Latin America is sown with the bones of these forgotten youths. (Bolaño 2004: 37–8)[5]

Auxilio's vision is a tribute to the forgotten youths of Bolaño's generation, whose courage and generosity he celebrates in his acceptance speech. And though Auxilio's tribute, like Bolaño's, is an elegy for the dead, it is also the articulation of a spirit that forms the collective identity of a people to come. We must note, however, that though this poetic collectivity is engaged in political struggle, it is not an agent of power. One of Auxilio's 'idiotic prophecies' (Bolaño 2006: 157) reads, 'Metempsychosis. Poetry shall not disappear. Its non-power shall manifest itself in a different form' (Bolaño 2006: 159). In a 2002 interview Bolaño comments on this passage, saying that 'When I speak of "non-power" I make reference to something that is self-evident: poetry is a sumptuary object, devoid of power. Poetic discourse (that of true poetry) does not tend toward power. Toward revolution, but never toward power' (Aussenac 2002: 40).[6] For this reason, though poetry may at times be a song of war, its song is not about power but the sumptuary yet revolutionary values of 'courage and mirrors, desire and pleasure' (Bolaño 2006: 184).

In the same interview, Bolaño says that poetry's non-power is also tied to memory. 'The counter-image of poetry is forgetfulness. The absolute forgetfulness to which every human being is driven' (Aussenac 2002: 40). When one is faced with horrific events, the temptation may be to forget, but to do so is to betray the vocation of poetry. 'I believe that one must forget nothing even when one wants to forget. If one were able to forget one would be irresponsible again. . . . Culture is based on memory. From the age of the Enlightenment, memory has engendered responsibility' (Aussenac 2002: 41). Thus, if poets must follow the example of León Felipe and Pedro Garfías and destroy the vases containing 'all that is lost, all that causes pain and is better forgotten' (Bolaño 2006: 9), they must also join all modern artists in the Enlightenment struggle to remember that which may seem better forgotten. Auxilio says of the painter Remedios Varo, a

Mexican exile from the Spanish Civil War like Felipe and Garfías, that

> she had seen many bad things, the ascension of the devil, the unstoppable procession of termites climbing the Tree of Life, the conflict between the Enlightenment and the Shadow or the Empire or the Kingdom of Order, which are all proper names for the irrational stain that is bent on turning us into beasts or robots, and which has been fighting against the Enlightenment since the beginning of time. (Bolaño 2006: 108–9)

Ultimately, that irrational, bestial, mechanical stain is one of a blank forgetfulness and an erasure of time.

At this point, it might seem that Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming is antithetical to Bolaño's understanding of art. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari say that '*Becoming is an antimemory*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 294), and in this regard, they assert that becoming is an anti-history as well. This opposition of becoming and memory/history, however, is polemical and based on restricted definitions of memory and history. Deleuze and Guattari's object is to differentiate the becomings of minorities from the static power structures of majorities (majorities and minorities defined not by their absolute number but by their functional positions as dominant and dominated groups). Becoming-minority, they assert,

> is a political affair and necessitates a labor of power (*puissance*), an active micropolitics. This is the opposite of macropolitics, and even of History, in which it is a question of knowing how to win or obtain a majority. . . . There is no history but of the majority, or of minorities as defined in relation to the majority. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 292)

The *puissance*, or potency, of the minority is opposed to the *pouvoir*, or power, of the majority, and that *pouvoir* is manifest in the majority's ability to control the historical record. The anti-memory of becoming is part of its *puissance*, part of its resistance to the majority's controlling map of the past. 'Of course, the child, the woman, the black have memories; but the Memory that collects those memories is still a virile majoritarian agency treating them as "childhood memories", as conjugal, or colonial memories' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 293). What Deleuze and Guattari could well have said is that the majority's construction of history is also an obliteration of history, an active force that erases the stories and memories of minorities.

The history of Latin America is replete with the state erasure of history. One thinks, for example, of the 6 March 1928 massacre

of banana workers in Aracataca, Colombia (referenced in García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*), which the Colombian government denied ever happened; of the official account of the Tlatelolco massacre, with its gross underestimation of the casualties; of the thousands of *desaparecidos* who vanished in the 1970s and 1980s in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil; or of any of the other atrocities documented in Latin America's all-too-voluminous testimonial literature. Latin American history has been 'un cuento corto de terror', and its terror has included the erasure of memory. Resistance to that history requires a counter-history and a counter-memory, and such is the history and memory provided by Auxilio in *Amulet*. 'I thought: I am the memory' (Bolaño 2006: 174). She is the memory that struggles against the dust of oblivion and provides 'una historia de terror', a documentation of the political force that attempts to write history by erasing the history of those it destroys.

What, then, is the becoming that Auxilio undergoes? The imminent birth she senses when she is in the bathroom stall 'preparing to deliver something and to be delivered myself' (Bolaño 2006: 29) is in part the birth of her identity as the mother of Mexican poetry, a birth that is a becoming-other in that she is neither Mexican nor a mother. But as we learn later in the novel, the approaching birth is also the birth of History, and her role is to witness that event. The specific history unfolding in September 1968 is the 'historia de terror' of the military occupation of UNAM and the subsequent Tlatelolco Massacre. That history, however, is only one repetition of the 'cuento corto de terror' that had played out in Spain in the 1930s and that will manifest itself in Chile in 1973. And writ large, the History Auxilio witnesses is that of 'the irrational stain that is bent on turning us into beasts or robots, and which has been fighting against the Enlightenment since the beginning of time' (Bolaño 2006: 109). When she hallucinates that she is freezing in the Andes, the cold seems to turn her 'into some kind of yeti', but she says 'of course I knew that was all in my imagination' (Bolaño 2006: 166) since she had not acquired bulging muscles or a resonant voice. Instead, she possessed only 'a self-sufficient voice with no function but to articulate a single, vacuous, hollow, insomniac's question – Why? Why?' (Bolaño 2006: 167). She is becoming nonhuman, and she is becoming a voice asking Why?, but the trajectory of her becoming is finally toward a collective identity, that of memory itself. 'Then I woke up. I thought: I am the memory' (Bolaño 2006: 174). The memory-space

she inhabits is that of 'a pure time', 'as if time were coming apart and flying off in different directions simultaneously' (Bolaño 2006: 30), time that 'folded and unfolded itself like a dream' (Bolaño 2006: 32). She remembers retrospectively and prospectively, and her personal memories merge with those of others. When she becomes-memory, she merges with that pure time and its plenum of memories. As Memory, she witnesses to the History that tries to erase itself and all its victims, and her testimony serves as a voice 'with no function but to articulate a single, vacuous, hollow, insomniac's question – Why? Why?' (Bolaño 2006: 167). And yet that 'Why?', though plaintive and mournful, is also a tribute to a collectivity held together only by courage and generosity, a collectivity headed for death, but singing nonetheless, and perhaps – just perhaps – signalling the nebulous possibility of a people to come.

## *Notes*

1. When reference is made to both the English and Spanish texts, citations will include the English page number followed by the corresponding page in the Spanish text, the two separated by a slash.
2. Auxilio is based on a real person. Carmen Boullosa, in an article detailing her relationship with Bolaño in Mexico City, says that when she entered UNAM in 1974, 'The corridors of the faculty of philosophy and literature were haunted by an Uruguayan exile and poet named Alcira, who had gone nuts after spending more than ten days hiding in the bathroom of the faculty building, when the campus was occupied by the army in 1968. She would become Auxilio Lacouture, . . . the protagonist and narrator of *Amulet*' (Boullosa 2007: 25–6). A blogger who goes by the name of Grande Enchilada, says of *Amulet*: 'It is a beautiful novel about an actual character I remember from my days as a university student in Mexico City. A woman, whose real name was Alcira, an illegal Uruguayan alien who survived the Army's taking of the National University campus in 1968 by staying for ten days in the bathroom of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters . . . in Mexico. If you saw the bathrooms, you'd be impressed by her heroic feat of resistance. I remember Alcira . . . hanging around the campus, an old, loony lady without teeth, a poetic, raving mad, lefty dreamer from the sixties. By the time I was there, in 1981, the university's authorities let her wander around, vociferate in the hallways, sometimes interrupt classes. She was a living myth and she was untouchable. As someone generously describes her in the book, a female version of Don Quixote. Bolaño's book is a loving recollection of her and her times' (7 June 2007).

3. See Castro 2003 for details about Garfías' *Poesia de la Guerra Civil Española*.
4. For details about the 1968 upheavals in Mexico City, see Poniatowska 1975 and Carey 2005.
5. The full Spanish text, 'Discurso de Caracas', is available in Bolaño 2004: 31–9. The translation quoted here is from 'The Caracas Speech', trans. David Noriega, *Triple Canopy* 2 (4 June 2008), no pagination.
6. Aussenac's interview appeared in her own French translation. To my knowledge, no Spanish version of the interview has been published. All translations of the French text are my own.

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# Becoming-Woman, Becoming-Girl: Assia Djebar's *So Vast the Prison*

Assia Djebar (the pen-name of Fatima-Zohra Imalayen) is Algeria's greatest woman writer and a major presence in contemporary French literature. She is the recipient of numerous prizes and awards, and in 2006 was elected to the Académie Française, the first North African writer so distinguished, and only the second African to join this body (the first being Léopold Sédar Senghor, elected in 1983). Her 1995 novel, *So Vast the Prison* (*Vaste est la prison*), is among her finest achievements, a lyrical, at times poetic, semi-autobiographical text that combines multiple narratives and reflective commentary to explore the tangled networks of language, gender and history that inform her past and her practice as a writer.[1] She has spoken of the novel as an exercise in 'anamnesis', an effort to overcome the amnesia of feminine memory and restore a usable feminine past.[2] She has also stated that the work, written in a short burst in 1994, 'although not at all a novel about current events [sur l'actualité], was my confrontation with this risk of the destruction of Algeria, with this shattering of a country' (interview in Gauvin 1997: 18), a collapse she deemed possible in the wake of the increasing violence manifest in Algeria in the 1990s.[3] Her novelistic 'un-forgetting' of an occulted past and her confrontation with a perilous national present take her as far back as the fall of Carthage and forward through two millennia of subterranean linguistic and gender memories. Her own becoming-other as a writer is one with her becoming-woman within a rigidly gender-structured society. The line of flight she creates for herself as a woman and a writer serves also as a way toward a collective feminine identity and the invention of a people to come. The formation of that future people, a hopeful but fragile possibility, while energised through an extended societal becoming-woman, is not gender-exclusive, but ultimately oriented toward a new means of bringing both women and men into harmonious relations with one another.[4]

## *The Shape of Memory*

Djebar has said that the construction of her fiction is 'conceived for me in an alternation between my need for architecture and my aspiration to music' (Djebar 1999a: 150), and both models are evident in the structure of *So Vast the Prison*. Organised in five sections, the novel consists of multiple narrative units arranged in no single temporal sequence, but rather, as the narrator herself says of the first part, 'with so many convolutions, in a disorder that is wilfully not chronological' (Djebar 1999b: 118). The work is framed by an opening introduction, 'The Silence of Writing', and the concluding brief Part Four, 'The Blood of Writing', each unit containing a lyrical passage and a short narrative. 'The Silence of Writing' first evokes the narrator's long-held sense of writing as at once a slow form of dying and a means of escape, and then presents a scene in a local bath, in which 'the mother tongue had shown me her teeth' (Djebar 1999b: 15) as her mother-in-law explained that in the colloquial Arabic of her town, women refer to their husbands as 'the enemy'. The shock of 'this word – not one of hatred, no, rather one of despair long frozen in place between the sexes – this word left in its wake within me a dangerous urge to self-erasure [une pulsion dangereuse d'éffacement]' (Djebar 1999b: 15/1995: 15) and induced an extended silence in her writing. (Djebar has spoken frequently of the hiatus in her own publications from 1967 to 1980, and she has identified this section of the novel as one that bears on this period in her own career.) The novel's final section, 'The Blood of Writing', opens with a short account of the 1994 abduction, murder and mutilation of Yasmina, a twenty-eight-year-old teacher. A poetic lament then brings the work to a close, as the narrator asks how one can speak of violence, how one can find a language adequate to the brutality reigning in the Algeria of 1994 – in short, how one can keep 'the blood of writing' from succumbing to 'the silence of writing'.

Within this frame are the novel's principal units. In Part One, 'What is Erased in the Heart' [L'éffacement dans le coeur], Isma, the thirty-seven-year-old married narrator, tells of her thirteen-month infatuation with a man eight years her junior. Her narrative commences with a sudden and unexpected awakening from her extended infatuation following an afternoon siesta, moves back to the inception of her obsession, and then forward to vignettes highlighting the stages of its development – key moments being the scene in which her husband beats her and tries to blind her when she confesses her

unconsummated passion to him, and the scene in which she becomes disillusioned with her beloved. Part One concludes with Isma's chance encounter years later with the once-beloved and her reflection on the reconciliation she has reached in assimilating this past period within her life.

Part Two, 'Erased in Stone' [L'éffacement sur la pierre], offers a historical account of the decipherment of the inscription on Masinissa's mausoleum at Dougga, an ancient settlement near Carthage. The inscription bears two parallel texts, one in what was early recognised as Punic (the Carthaginian language that fell out of use in the fifth century CE), the other in a mysterious script that was only deciphered in the nineteenth century. The first five chapters of Part Two present episodes in the sporadic progress toward the solution of the mystery, a history that culminates in the discovery that the script is a Libyan alphabet, similar to a Berber alphabet still in use in remote parts of Algeria. Once the narrator establishes the provenance of this script, in chapter six she reconstructs the scene of the Dougga mausoleum's dedication in 138 BCE, and in chapter seven, she reflects on the historical record of the ancient Berber past, preserved not in Berber but in the Latin and Greek of Roman historians. Part Two comes to a close with the narrator's speculative reverie that Tin Hinan, the legendary matriarch of the Tuareg people, was the person who brought the Libyco-Berber script to the Tuaregs when she fled from the north and settled with them in the fourth century CE, and in so doing preserved the Berber alphabet.

Part Three, 'A Silent Desire', is the longest and structurally most complex section of the novel. It is prefaced by a meditation on the *Quijote* character Zoraida, a 'fugitive without knowing it' (Djebar 1999b: 171) whom the narrator regards as the '*metaphor for Algerian women writing today – among them myself*' (Djebar 1999b: 173). A series of seven paired units makes up the rest of Part Three. The first unit of each pair, designated 'Arable Woman I', 'Arable Woman II', and so on, details the narrator's experience in making a movie titled *Arable Woman*. These events are based on Djebar's work in 1978–79 when she shot her award-winning film *La nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* (Celebration of the Women from Mount Chenoua). The Arable Woman units are arranged in a roughly chronological sequence, with each exploring the problematic of seeing and the feminine gaze. The second unit in each pair bears the musical heading 'First Movement', 'Second Movement', and so on, followed by a title describing its contents. These units may be seen as

the collective autobiography of the narrator's feminine past, a resuscitation and recovery of unwritten memories, many half-forgotten or nearly erased. The first relates the journey of the narrator's mother to see her son in a French prison; the second focuses on the narrator's paternal grandmother, her marriage at fourteen to an aged patriarch and her later repudiation of her third husband; the third returns to the mother and her traumatic loss at age six of a beloved older sister. In movements four and five the narrator tells of her own childhood and adolescence. Movements six and seven bring together multiple narratives in an increasingly complex collage of events. In the Sixth Movement, five subsections record the narrator's meeting with a lawyer during her divorce; the death of a woman whose relentless pregnancies render her speechless and eventually take her life; the narrator's onset of puberty; the narrator's selection of an infant for adoption; and the narrator's advice to her grown daughter not to take a job in Algeria. The Seventh Movement's five subsections include a scene in which the narrator, years after her divorce, has a chance encounter with her former mother-in-law; a meditation on the death of a favourite uncle; an evocation of Jugurtha's lament as he dies in a Roman prison; an account of an Algerian woman's song of lamentation conveyed by long-distance telephone to her dying sister in Paris; and the narrator's closing lament at the mounting deaths in Algeria and her difficulty in finding a voice to speak of the bloodshed.

The novel's division into discrete and contrasting units; the chiastic frame (lyric-narrative/narrative-lyric) of the introductory section, 'The Silence of Writing', and the closing Part Four, 'The Blood of Writing'; the juxtaposition of the contemporary Part One (L'éffacement dans le coeur) and the historical Part Two (L'éffacement sur la pierre); Part Three's alternation of series (Arable Woman I, II . . . / First Movement, Second Movement . . .), one in chronological sequence, the other not – all bear witness to Djebar's architectural proclivities. The designation 'Movement' in turn signals the novel's musical inspiration, not simply in Part Three, but throughout, for the disposition of the five principal sections and their constituent units is informed as much by questions of tone, mood, rhythm and tempo as by considerations of plot and character. This complex assemblage of musical movements and architectural correspondences constitutes a Bergsonian memory-space of varying dimensions and reach – at times narrow and personal, at others broadly social and extended in duration – over which a narrative consciousness floats in its own nonpulsed present. Shifting from site to site, the narrator engages

past moments, restores temporal continuities, imaginatively relives others' experiences, interrogates motives, discrepancies and enigmas, all while fashioning a reading of the past events as elements in an ongoing project of self-invention.

## *The Language of Love*

*So Vast the Prison* is the third novel of an 'Algerian quartet', the fourth of which remains to be published. The first of the quartet's works, *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* (*L'amour, la fantasia*), appeared in 1985, the second, *A Sister to Scheherazade* (*Ombre sultane*), in 1987. Though a part of the quartet, *A Sister to Scheherazade* is a much more self-contained work than the other two, and hence has only limited importance as an intertextual component of *So Vast the Prison*. *Fantasia*, by contrast, is quite similar to *So Vast the Prison*, so much so that one could read the novels as two halves of a single work (though the scope of such an analysis would be too broad to undertake here). Like *Vast*, *Fantasia* is structured in a musical and architectural montage of commentaries, lyrics and narratives situated in diverse settings and eras; it offers elements of a collective autobiography through the evocation of personal and familial memories; it juxtaposes family lore with accounts of Algerian history – most notably the French assault on Algeria from 1830 to 1860 and the Algerian War of 1954–62; and it includes voices from the film *La nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* as constituents of the group portrait of Algerian women.

The problem Djebar confronts in *Fantasia* is that of a conflict of languages, a struggle between the written French of colonial power and the oral Arabic of family tradition. Through her French education she is able to escape the sequestration from the outside world that most Algerian women of her era must endure after reaching puberty. Her father, a proud Algerian nationalist and native speaker of Arabic who found in French 'a means of escape from his family's poverty' (Djebar 1993: 213), is a French teacher charged with instructing 'indigenous' students, and he insists that his daughter be educated in that language. Hence, French for Djebar is a paternal language yet a force less of patriarchal oppression than of liberation from traditional patriarchal constraints. Nevertheless, French is also the language of violence, bloodshed, and colonial administrative domination. Arabic, by contrast, is her mother tongue, the oral language of the feminine community. In that tongue she can speak of

sensuality, desire and love. Yet it is solely an oral medium for her and the Algerian women around her. In the colonial Algeria of Djebar's youth, women received only a rudimentary education and had little opportunity for linguistic exchange beyond the family circle. And formal instruction in Arabic was severely limited by French policy, such that even males faced obstacles in developing mastery of written Arabic. Thus, for Djebar, French came to be 'a casement opening on the spectacle of the world and all its riches' (Djebar 1993: 126), but also a language devoid of any connection with her body and her desires: 'from the time of my adolescence I experienced a kind of aphasia in matters of love: the written words, the words I had learned, retreated before me as soon as the slightest heart-felt emotion sought for expression' (Djebar 1993: 128). The question she faces in *Fantasia*, then, is how she can *write* about herself and her desires, if that writing must take place in an anesthetised, de-personalised medium. When Djebar inscribes even 'the most commonplace of sentences, my writing is immediately caught in the snare of the old war between two peoples' (Djebar 1993: 216), a 'seemingly endless strife between the spoken and written word' (Djebar 1993: 215).

In *So Vast the Prison*, this problem of languages takes on a new dimension. The goal of *Fantasia* is to find a voice within written French for oral Arabic sensation, emotion and desire.[5] What Djebar comes to realise as she embarks on *Vast*, however, is that the solace of an affective Arabic is compromised by significant tensions within the language itself. In the novel's opening section, set in the baths of a small Algerian city, the narrator, Isma, overhears a woman saying that she cannot stay since '"The enemy is at home!"' (Djebar 1999b: 13). Puzzled by this phrase, Isma asks her mother-in-law what enemy she is referring to, and her mother-in-law whispers, '"Don't you know how women in our town talk among themselves? . . . Don't you understand? By enemy, she meant her husband"' (Djebar 1999b: 14). The word *l'edou*, *enemy*, says Isma, 'bored endlessly into the depths of my soul, and thus into the source of my writing' (Djebar 1999b: 14). With that word, 'the mother tongue had shown me her teeth, inscribing within me a deadly bitterness' (Djebar 1999b: 15). Djebar's project in *Vast*, then, goes beyond *Fantasia*'s exploration of the war between written, colonial French and oral, indigenous Arabic, to include as well an exploration of the war within Arabic between men and women, signalled by the word *enemy*, a word not 'of hatred, no, rather one of despair long frozen in place between the sexes' (Djebar 1999b: 15).

In Part One, 'What is Erased in the Heart', the problem of language is approached in an oblique manner, surfacing only late in the narrative of Isma's passionate obsession with 'the Beloved' (as he is called throughout the section). The story opens with Isma's awakening from an afternoon siesta in her father's library in the family house. As she comes to consciousness, she senses 'something both new and vulnerable, a beginning of something, I don't know what, something strange. . . . And this "something" is inside me and at the same time it envelops me' (Djebar 1999b: 20–1). She finds herself in a floating time, suspended in a gap in duration:

> Azure space envelopes me, the air is still ['Un creux de l'azur m'enveloppe, un suspens de l'air', literally: 'A hollow in the azure envelops me, a suspension of the air'] . . . The world stands still . . . Space gaps around me ['Une béance de l'atmosphère se creuse autour de moi', 'A gap in the atmosphere hollows out around me'] . . . Everything fits ['S'installe un gel concerté des choses', 'A unified freezing of things settles in']. (Djebar 1999b: 21/1995: 21)

When events begin to surge forward again, 'flooding' [en flux] in a 'glissando' (Djebar 1999b: 21), she realises that she has traversed a caesura in time, a definitive break that has established a clear 'before' and 'after': 'Relief sweeps over me: I am no longer living "before", I am no longer ill, I have left the dream. A thirteen-month-long dream' (Djebar 1999b: 22). It is from the far side of this paradigmatic instance of Deleuze's third passive synthesis of time, from the vantage of the 'after' of this gap, that Isma will relive the course of her extended dream, retrace and assess the space of her thirteen-month-long memory.

At first glance, Isma's narrative might seem a conventional tale of uncontrollable passion, but its significance resides less in the passion itself than in the becoming-woman and becoming-girl that take place through it. By the standards of many of the women of Djebar's fiction, Isma enjoys relative freedom from traditional gender constraints. She does not wear the veil, she works outside the home in a professional environment that allows her to interact casually with men and women, and she moves about with a degree of autonomy. Nevertheless, as she realises in retrospect, her obsession with the Beloved was part of an effort to liberate herself from a lifetime of gender proscriptions.

Initially, she was uncertain what attracted her to the Beloved. He had 'a frail young man's build', and he was 'still wearing hints of

his slightly crazy adolescence and the offended air of youth' (Djebar 1999b: 27). Physically slight and delicate, with 'poetry dwelling in [his] face' (Djebar 1999b: 28), he 'harbored a strange peace' that would 'make me a prisoner for months', she came to realise, and yet there was also 'a hidden crack behind this tranquil manner, so openly vulnerable yet proud' (Djebar 1999b: 27). This decidedly unmacho man, almost ten years her junior, afforded her access to an intimacy outside standard gender codes, one associated with childhood and early adolescence. When she first met the Beloved, he was one of three men with whom she had established a 'camaraderie' that 'seemed out of the ordinary, a game among old adolescents' (Djebar 1999b: 51). What she experienced with them was not the fulfilment of a teenage need to belong to a clique, but 'nostalgia for that lost age: for not having had boys as friends, for having missed that light hearted, disinterested conspiring with the other sex' (Djebar 1999b: 52). Later, as she began to single out the Beloved from the trio, she formed her bond with him along the lines of a childhood relationship. During a visit to his seaside house, she insisted that they play ping-pong, and as they played, she exclaimed, '"How much fun it is, being children together!"'. She then asked herself, '*Am I going to relive a past I never knew? Find myself in childhood with you? Is that the whole mystery?*' (Djebar 1999b: 34). In their carefree, lighthearted play, she thought:

> I am six or ten years old, you are my playmate, this yard becomes the one in the village where I lived as a little girl . . . Where I might have met you before. No one around us would have found fault. Would you have been a cousin, or better, a paternal first cousin? (Djebar 1999b: 35)

Of course, their age difference would have made such a childhood scene impossible, she reflects, but 'It does not matter: Is every love not a return to the first realm, that Eden? Since I could not have known him before (the prohibitions of my Muslin education having operated in two ways), I savor him as we play these games' (Djebar 1999b: 35).

What she longed for in this relationship was not simply a restored innocence. Despite having experienced during her seventeen years of marriage 'a calm, enriching love, full of ambiguities I did not understand' (Djebar 1999b: 36), she sought something more. 'Why, I wondered, did I have this mad desire to relive childhood, or rather to be finally fully alive? [pourquoi, me demandais-je, ce désir fou d'enfance à revivre, ou plutôt à vivre enfin et pleinement?]' (Djebar 1999b:

36/1995: 36–7). Her desire to relive (revivre) childhood, then, was a desire simply to live (vivre), to live at long last (enfin) and to live fully (pleinement) – something she evidently had never done before. To live fully is to live freely, and in this growing infatuation with the Beloved she unconsciously sought a line of flight, a way out of the limitations that had kept her from living a full life.

## *Becoming-Girl*

Her line of flight is that of a 'becoming-girl', what Deleuze and Guattari posit as an essence of 'becoming-woman'. The great binary machine of gender codification fabricates 'opposable organisms', and in their mythos of gender origins Deleuze and Guattari posit the young girl as the first victim of this machine. The object of gender coding is to steal our bodies from ourselves and put them in service of a binarised sexuality.

> This body is stolen first from the girl: Stop behaving like that, you're not a little girl anymore, you're not a tomboy, etc. The girl's becoming is stolen first, in order to impose a history, or prehistory, upon her. The boy's turn comes next, but it is by using the girl as an example, by pointing to the girl as the object of his desire, that an opposed organism, a dominant history is fabricated for him too. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 276)

The girl is 'the first victim', but she is also the key to an escape from such bondage. The girl is the site of encoding but also the locus of potential decodings, the very zone of the becoming-woman all gender coded beings have the possibility of undergoing. The girl

> is defined by a relation of movement and rest, speed and slowness, by a combination of atoms, an emission of particles: haecceity. She never ceases to roam upon a body without organs. She is an abstract line, or a line of flight. Thus girls do not belong to an age group, sex, order, or kingdom: they slip in everywhere, between orders, acts, ages, sexes; they produce *n* molecular sexes on the line of flight in relation to the dualism machines they cross right through. The only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between, to pass between, the intermezzo . . . The girl is like the block of becoming that remains contemporaneous to each opposable term, man, woman, child, adult. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 277)

The girl 'is the becoming-woman of each sex. . . . Sexuality, any sexuality, is a becoming-woman, in other words, a girl' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 277).

If the coding of gender is a theft of the body, and if the first victim

of the binary machine is the girl, then the undoing of gender codes is a liberation of the body in a process of becoming-girl. When Isma seeks the origin of her passion, 'this opening in my life' [cette fracture de ma vie] (Djebar 1999b: 49/1995: 50), she returns to a scene she calls 'the night of the dance' (Djebar 1999b: 51). After a concert by the singer Leo Ferré, Isma joined a group, including Ferré, her husband, and the Beloved, in a celebration at a discotheque. The concert itself, she sensed, had taken place 'in an in-between' and she had felt herself 'neither here nor there' (Djebar 1999b: 58). At the club, after declining an invitation to dance, she took the floor by herself and danced non-stop for more than an hour. In a trance-like state, she felt she 'was alone, suddenly bursting out of a long night' (Djebar 1999b: 59), sensing the 'secret of the body and its autonomous rhythm, the velvety texture inside the body and, in the dark, in the emptiness, the music goading me on' (Djebar 1999b: 62). During this experience of 'movement simultaneously inside and outside of me' (Djebar 1999b: 63), Isma entered a mode of being that continued from that point on. 'I danced on [Je dansais]. I danced [J'ai dansé]. I feel I have been dancing ever since' [Je danse encore depuis cet instant, me semble-t-il] (Djebar 1999b: 60/1995: 61). She was engaged in an ongoing past event (Je dansais, 'I was dancing'), that event came to a close (J'ai dansé), but only as a phase of a process that persisted through that event into an ongoing present (Je danse encore depuis cet instant). Within this musical movement fusing inside and outside Isma sensed the emergence of an autonomous, unconstrained movement-body, a haecceity of speeds and slownesses.

The line of escape provided by dance was not entirely without precedent for Isma. From the age of twenty to thirty-six, she had participated in the ritual dances among the women of her tribe. As Djebar comments in *Fantasia*, if French, Arabic and Berber are the three languages of Algeria,

> The fourth language, for all females, young or old, cloistered or half-emancipated, remains that of the body: the body which male neighbours' and cousins' eyes require to be deaf and blind, since they cannot completely incarcerate it; the body which, in traces, dances or vociferations, in fits of hope or despair, rebels, and unable to read or write, seeks some unknown shore as destination for its message of love. (Djebar 1993: 180)

As a married woman, Isma regularly joined the ritual dances, during which each woman would dance 'in the manner traditional to the

town she came from', but when her turn came, she performed 'some nervous, hybrid dance', transforming 'this constraint into a solitary dance, fleeting and "modern" – as the women called it, disappointed by my imagination, which seemed to them a betrayal'. The dance was a form of release for all the women, but one enclosed within the system of gender coding, and the other women intuited in her body a betrayal of group solidarity. For Isma, 'The important thing was to distance myself as much as possible from the collective frenzy of those women, my relatives', to reject 'the almost funereal joy of their bodies, verging on a fettered despair' (Djebar 1999b: 61).

If the traditional dance of her tribe offered no means of escape from gender coding, Western dance was equally constraining. She had danced a waltz or fox-trot with her husband a few times, but 'despite the fashions I *had* to escape that, I had to avoid being "touched" in such a manner by a man, no matter what man, in a crowd'. Her becoming-other had to pass between cultures, to break away from the Algerian cloistered female community and from the male touch of Western gender customs. And in both cases, she had to escape the objectifying male gaze. In her tribe's traditional dance, the women were sequestered from men, free from any contact with them. Following one dance, however, she learned that her husband had spied on her, and she suddenly felt 'some unaccountable distress . . . just because he was a man and had caught me in my dance among women' (Djebar 1999b: 62). Even when her partner in the Western dance was her husband, his touch and his glance in public were intolerable. Isma did not wear the veil, yet as she walked the city she had always felt that she was invisible, veiled by the fact that the ambient male gaze reified her and failed to see her for who she truly was. Yet during 'the night of the dance', when she first experienced her passion for the Beloved, she had come to understand the dance not simply as the means to an autonomous body but also as the opening to a new relation to the male other. 'I understood, plainly and simply, that I was becoming aware of someone else. Thus a man had watched me dance and I had been "seen".' Isma had become 'visible' to the Beloved, and as a result, 'My visibility for him made me visible to myself' (Djebar 1999b: 64). In her impromptu, uncoded dance, she had found a way of unveiling herself and approaching the male other – and herself – as a visible, physical, yet also authentic being.

Isma's passage toward a liberated body and a genuine visibility is long and perilous. Her becoming-woman begins with the inception of her passion and continues through its thirteen-month stretch and

beyond into the period after her transformative awakening from an afternoon siesta. Her awakening marks an 'after', but the 'before' it establishes is the time before her passion. The thirteen months themselves constitute a break in time, a fracture in her life ('cette fracture de ma vie' [Djebar 1999b: 49/1995: 50]), but that long gap in time itself contains smaller gaps, other moments of rupture. One of the most prominent of these smaller gaps is that in which she confesses her passion to her husband.

One evening, after her husband had waited vainly for her to come to bed, Isma, in a variant of *La Princesse de Clèves* (as Isma later comments to her sister [Djebar 1999b: 316]), informed her husband of her obsessive, yet unconsummated desire, and he responded by beating her and trying to blind her with a broken whiskey bottle. This traumatic event established a clear 'after', but not a definitive break. A few weeks after his assault, her husband tried to convince her to return and resume their marriage as if nothing had happened. As he begged her to return, Isma thought that 'This man who was pleading with me spoke from the other side of a gaping rift' (Djebar 1999b: 98), and yet the rift was not one that led to a change in her life. In fact, 'two or three weeks after this breakup, I agreed, yes, agreed to return to my life as a wife . . . In short, hardly had I bandaged the wounds on my body when I instantly returned to my prison' (Djebar 1999b: 97).

## *The Beloved and the Enemy*

In certain respects, the gaping rift of the assault brings to a halt her journey toward liberation. Nevertheless, her passion and its restlessness continue. Only when the passion ends is she able to escape her marriage prison, and its end takes place through a second trauma, a temporal gap tied up with the problem of language. The question of language first appears in Part One during a telephone conversation between Isma and her beloved. They had been chatting casually in French when she began speaking in Arabic. After a period of awkward silence, she returned to French and discovered that he spoke no Arabic. He explained that he grew up speaking only French with his mother, though Berber was her first language. '"I was twelve at Independence"', he explained. '"I shut myself off completely from Arabic – 'the national language,' as they call it here. And I don't think that I'll develop a taste for the official language. I'm not planning a career!"' (Djebar 1999b: 41). Isma then realised that their

difference in age marked the changing of an era. '*When I was fifteen I lived in a country at war! Arabic was the language of flames – not governmental power, as it is now. When one learned Arabic, outside of school, it was not to have a career but to be willing to die!*' (Djebar 1999b: 41).

In *Fantasia*, Arabic is the language of love, and on reading in *Vast* that the Beloved spoke no Arabic, one might have expected this fact to have brought about a crisis. Yet Isma's passion continued, and it was only later, when Arabic, 'the mother tongue', once again showed 'her teeth' (Djebar 1999b: 15), as it had in the novel's opening section, that the passion came to an end in a 'moment of open rupture' (Djebar 1999b: 104). One night, after returning to her marriage prison, Isma and her husband went to a club where, by chance, her husband saw the Beloved. The husband challenged the Beloved to a fight, and the Beloved simply turned and walked away. Isma immediately felt deep shame, and inside herself, she heard 'a colorless voice', saying '*I loved a child, an adolescent, a young, brother, a cousin, not a man*' (Djebar 1999b: 104–5). That voice, she soon realised, was the internalised voice of her paternal grandmother, now dead for fifteen years, who had told Isma when she was a young girl, that a man '"is someone whose back one does not see!" . . . "Someone", she went on more specifically, "whose back the enemy never sees!"' As Isma reflected on this moment of shame, she realised that her shame was subverting both her desire for the Beloved and the very notion of a woman's passionate love for another human being. The dead grandmother, Isma came to see, 'was living through my defeat', and hence Isma began 'trying to free myself from her. I was no longer seeking liberation from the husband with his melodramatic mask, but trying to get away from the virile grandmother, away, at least, from this bitter, virile woman' (Djebar 1999b: 106).

Isma wanted her grandmother's voice to speak of her grandmother's own love, to '*confess the passions you felt as a young girl, your emotions*' (Djebar 1999b: 107). What Isma sought was a '*passion to the point of death*', a *Liebestod* like that of Tristan and Isolde. Yet she understood suddenly that '*there is no Isolde in Islam, because there is only sexual ecstasy in the instant, in the ephemeral present, because Muslim death, no matter what they say, is masculine*'. Death in Islam is masculine since '*love, because it is only celebrated in sensual delights, disappears as soon as the first steps of heralded death are danced*'. In the grandmother's dictum that a man is someone 'whose back the enemy never sees!', Isma had heard the language of

aggressive masculine violence defined through its relationship to imminent death. And behind that language of enemies and death, she sensed the effacement of feminine desire. The latent significance of the grandmother's remark was that in Islam, a moment of feminine peace (*sakina* in Arabic) may arise with the approach of death, '*But after this introduction, which is light as a woman's breath, death seizes the living, living men and women, to plunge them as equals – and suddenly all of them masculine – into the abyss inhabited by souls "obedient to God"'* (Djebar 1999b: 108).

Strictly speaking, this moment of revelation is less linguistic than cultural, for Isma says of the voice that arose within her, 'it did not speak in French or Arabic or Berber but in some language from the hereafter spoken by women who had vanished before me and into me' (Djebar 1999b: 105). Yet the focus of the grandmother's definition of a man is the word 'enemy', and immediately after Isma's meditation on this definition, 'the face of the husband twisted in hatred' enters her mind, and 'suddenly I remember that he is from the city, where married women, even in a harmonious marriage or one, in any case, with no apparent conflict, secretly call any husband "the enemy". Women speaking among women'. Thus the husband, she says, 'finally returned to the role that for generations he had been assigned by the memory of the city' (Djebar 1999b: 109). Clearly, the language 'of despair long frozen in place between the sexes' (Djebar 1999b: 15), encoded in the word 'enemy', is continuous with the culture of masculine violence and death, which, though not exclusive to Arabic, is articulated in that medium, and evident in the voice of the 'virile, bitter' grandmother.

The eruption of the grandmother's voice during the nightmare scene of her Beloved's cowardice put an end to her passion, but that same voice, three days later, allowed Isma to escape the prison of her marriage. As she awoke on the third day, she heard 'French words, bizarrely wrapped in the harsh and passionate voice of the grandmother, the fearsome woman: *Put up a door between the husband and myself. Now. Forever!*' After enunciating this resolution, she spoke a solemn oath, 'In the name of God and his Prophet!' These words, 'in Arabic, were mine and at the same time my grandmother's (I tell myself that I was spontaneously rediscovering the first Koranic tradition whereby women also repudiated their men!)' (Djebar 1999b: 109). Indeed, as we learn later in the novel, the grandmother had repudiated her third husband according to this first Koranic tradition. Thus the virile grandmother, who had killed passion and

revealed the masculine nature of Islamic death, also offered words of encouragement for Isma's escape from her patriarchal prison, words voiced in the language of the Prophet.

Isma's passion afforded her a line of flight, yet so too did the cessation of that passion. She managed to leave her prison and begin writing in an 'in-between space' (Djebar 1999b: 115), and through that writing she eventually found reconciliation with her former passion. That reconciliation, however, was complex and ambiguous, suggesting a resolution that was a provisional stage in an ongoing process of change. Years after her divorce from her husband, Isma unexpectedly met the once-Beloved in a Paris street. As they exchanged pleasantries, she felt herself 'full of a new affection' ['habitée d'une tendresse nouvelle', literally: 'inhabited by a new tenderness'] (Djebar 1999b: 117/1995: 115). Seeing him no longer as an adolescent but as a grown man, she suddenly realised that her new tenderness was maternal. '*I love him*, I said to myself, *like a young mother! As if, even though he was far away, I had contributed to transforming him, to bringing him to this mature state!*' Her 'silent love, formerly so hard to control', had 'changed in nature' (Djebar 1999b: 118).

This alteration of her passion allowed her to preserve her 'silent love', but according to a pattern that reinforces the patriarchal order of traditional Algerian society. In *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*, Djebar comments on the long history of the sequestration and silencing of women, a process intensified during French colonisation, noting that with the spatial tightening of women's space there is a parallel tightening of family relationships, with the women 'disinherited to the advantage of the males in the family'. She notes one exception to the rule of women's diminished relationships, however. 'Only the mother-son relation has grown stronger to the point of obstructing all other exchanges' (Djebar 1992: 146). As the narrator of *A Sister to Scheherazade* laments, the lot of the traditional woman is to be little more than a mother to sons, perpetually bearing and nurturing them. As son follows son, 'The first son, the second and the third no longer suck at the milk-swollen breasts; but they prowl around, begging for the maternal warmth, first cooled and then denied them' (Djebar 1987: 127). At best, a woman's husband will be an overgrown boy, a son competing with his sons for the mother's affection. 'Nurturing sons by day, husband by night, so that they alone may enjoy the broad light of day! Nurturing them tirelessly, tying a permanent knot so that we can hold them in check by invisible reins' (Djebar 1987: 128).

Isma's new tenderness, then, is not free of associations with traditional gender relationships. Yet that maternal love, in the process of its internalisation, turns into something more. The Beloved becomes a figure for her own becoming-woman; he is transformed into someone 'who was neither foreign to me nor someone inside me [ni étranger ni en moi], as if I had suddenly given birth to him, almost an adult' (Djebar 1999b: 118/1995: 116). That newly formed image of the Beloved is that of the Beloved-in-her-embrace, the two of them forming a composite being. Hence she finds in this image of the Beloved the image of an emergent new self, the 'me' of an autonomous, sensual body, and the 'me' of someone who becomes visible to herself, 'this "me" a stranger and another [étranger et autre], becoming me for the first time in that very instant, precisely because of this translation through the vision of the other' (Djebar 1999b: 119/1995: 116). In his role as symbol of her own transformation, 'the man became my closest relative, he moved into the primary vacancy laid waste around me by the women of the tribe, from the days of my childhood and before I reached nubility, while I took the first shaky step of my freedom' (Djebar 1999b: 119).

## *The Mysterious Script*

Djebar was a professor of history at the University of Rabat from 1959 to 1962, and at the University of Algiers from 1962 to 1965.[6] In an interview published shortly after the appearance of *Fantasia*, Djebar remarked that 'during the 1980s I came to realise that I had been a professor of history for a long time, that I had a relationship with history that I had set aside from my work as a novelist'. In *Fantasia*, she discovered a way to integrate history into the novel and use it 'as a quest for identity', alternating sections on the written history of the French subjugation of Algeria with sections on the oral history of women, including herself. In this way, she established 'a relation with the history of the nineteenth century *written* by French officers, and a relation with the *oral* stories of traditional Algerian women of today' (Mortimer 1988: 200–1).

In *Vast*, as in *Fantasia*, Djebar includes extended historical accounts in the novel, but in *Vast* the relationship between the macro-history of writing and the micro-history of personal oral stories is less obvious than in *Fantasia*.[7] As autobiographical chapters in *Fantasia* alternate with chapters devoted to the French conquest of Algeria,

the reader soon recognises that the French violence of the nineteenth century is a large-scale version of the violence that continues in the individual lives of present-day Algerians. Also evident is that the silences in the macro-history's record, especially in regard to the role of Algerian women in the struggle, bear oblique resemblances to the silences imposed on women in contemporary Algerian society. In *Vast*, by contrast, the historical chapters, rather than alternating with autobiographical chapters, are grouped within a single section. The first five sections relate the history of the decipherment of an ancient script, which proved to be that of Libyan, an early form of Berber (hence the designation 'Libyco-Berber' used by Djebar and others to refer the Libyan-Berber language and writing system throughout its history [see Galand 2002: 6]); the last two, the history of the fall of Carthage. The basic themes of the historical chapters – language, culture, gender, writing and orality – are of clear relevance to the rest of the novel, but one might well wonder why the narrator provides so many details, so many subplots and apparent digressions, in this account of the recovery of the Libyco-Berber alphabet.

The story of the decipherment of Libyan is intriguing in itself, and Djebar's narrative unfolds like a well-crafted mystery, but the historical chapters also have the broader function of establishing complex resonances with the rest of the novel that only emerge slowly and subtly. The first five chapters detail the fits and starts by which the mystery of the Libyan script came to be solved. The key to its decipherment lay in the bilingual text etched on the mausoleum of Masinissa, one of the many ruins of the ancient city of Dougga, near Carthage.[8] Significantly, the dormant message of this Algerian monument was revived largely through the efforts of Europeans. Djebar has spoken often of her position between two languages and two cultures, and of her status as someone who literally shuttles between cultures and languages in her periodic travels between Algeria and France. The Mediterranean for her is the space of cultural interaction, mediation and metamorphosis, and one element stressed in *Vast* is the passage across that space as a sign of the necessary impurity and ambiguity of all cultural identity. As she says of the historical chapters of *Vast*,

> the restoration of reading, the end of the illegibility of the most ancient writing (I was going to say the mother writing), only takes place through the efforts of so many foreigners (travellers, former slaves, archaeologists) come to solve the mystery or, by contrast, come simply to gain a very concrete profit. (Djebar 1999a: 148)

The story of the script, then, is a story of the revival of memory through the intervention of the other.[9]

Thomas d'Arcos, a relatively obscure Frenchman born in 1565, was the first to record the inscription. Full of 'unmethodical but unflagging curiosity' (Djebar 1999b: 123), d'Arcos pursued various interests, eventually, in 1628, after being captured by pirates from Tunis, finding himself a slave of the Turks. He managed to negotiate his freedom two years later, and rather than return to Europe, he stayed on in northern Africa, took a wife and converted to Islam. In his correspondence with Peiresc, a scholar and royal counsellor at the parliament of Provence in Aix, d'Arcos spoke of an excursion he made to Dougga in 1631, and included in his letter a transcription of the writing on Masinissa's mausoleum. D'Arcos also entrusted a copy of the transcription to a visiting Maronite and scholar, Abraham Echellen, who was fascinated by the mysterious script. Peiresc, however, could not decide what to do with d'Arcos' 'hieroglyphs', as he called them, and Echellen was unable to decipher the text and died before telling anyone else about them. As a result, d'Arcos' transcription, preserved in the papers of Peiresc and Echellen, only came to light upon the publication of those papers two centuries later.

What intrigues the narrator, however, is not just the story of the script, but also its relation to d'Arcos' apostasy. D'Arcos converted to Islam shortly after his trip to Dougga, and in his correspondence with Peiresc he referred to his conversion as a 'shift' (Djebar 1999b: 129/1995: 127), 'un glissement', a sliding, a slippage, a skidding across a smooth surface. This movement into apostasy, 'a passage, a shift' [un passage, un glissement] (Djebar 1999b: 125/1995: 123), is a becoming-other, one which, according to the narrator's speculation, may have been induced by the unsettling Dougga inscription. It is 'as if, drawn by an obscure call from something far back in time, something unknown and as far back and ancient as these stones in Dougga, his soul regained a sort of equilibrium thanks to this conversion' (Djebar 1999b: 129). Like this man, 'between two shores, between two beliefs' (Djebar 1999b: 130), the recovery of the Libyan script takes place in the space between cultures and beliefs, in a zone of passage and slippage.[10]

The next two chapters offer brief portraits of d'Arcos' nineteenth-century successors in the search for the inscription's decipherment. The first is Camille Borgia, an Italian count in exile for having supported the deposed King Joachim Murat. In 1815, he fled to northern

Africa, and this is how 'the renegade Neapolitan count' ended up 'following in the footsteps of the Provençal slave' (Djebar 1999b: 132). Like d'Arcos, Borgia recorded the Dougga inscription, but he died suddenly in 1817, and his papers were only published in 1959.[11] Shortly after the 'renegade count' journeyed to Dougga, an 'archaeologist lord', Sir Grenville Temple, paid a visit to Masinissa's tomb and copied the bilingual inscription, which was later reproduced by the scholar Gesenius. As the narrator details in the fourth chapter, Masinissa's tomb was disassembled by Thomas Reade, the English consul general in Tunis, in 1842, and then shipped to the British Museum. In the process, large portions of the monument were damaged or destroyed. When Claude Poinssot reviewed the papers of Count Borgia in the twentieth century, he concluded that there were two stone inscriptions at Dougga, and that 'the second – probably the most important – of these had been partially erased'. Hence, even as the mystery of the script begins to be revealed, its trace in stone is being erased, its words 'desecrated and carried off, . . . victims of erosion, . . . almost entirely vanished' (Djebar 1999b: 145).

The mystery's solution, presented in Chapter Five, is the result of a confluence of linguistic and cultural interactions. In 1822, a traveller named Scholz reports seeing strange markings on modern Arab buildings and the same signs on ancient monuments. In 1823, a medical doctor named Walter Oudney returns from a trip to the Algerian interior, reporting that the signs he found on modern buildings and ancient monuments, while indecipherable to the inhabitants of Germa, were understood by the nomadic Tuaregs to the south. In 1827, Pacho, a traveller from Cyrenaica, observes odd markings not simply on buildings and rocks, but also on the flanks of camels, leading him to conclude that the signs are those of an active, utilitarian language. In 1836, upon the publication of Oudney's travel account, de Saulcy and Célestin Judas, the men who eventually crack the code, learn of this script that is understood by the Tuareg. That same year, Ali Effendi, an acquaintance of de Saulcy's who is living in Paris, lends de Saulcy a letter from the bey Ahmed to Ali Effendi's father. The letter is in Arabic, but in its margins are several lines of a secret code. Intrigued, de Saulcy compares the signs with those recorded by Dr Oudney and finds them to be roughly the same. Realising that the bey Ahmed could speak Chaoui Berber, de Saulcy has the revelation that the letter's marginal signs are in Berber, a language hitherto thought by scholars to be recorded only in Arabic characters. Finally, after the publication of the first French-Berber

dictionary in 1844, Célestin Judas reviews the accounts of the English travellers, ponders de Saulcy's intuition, and then 'sees the solution – clear as day: Whether Libyan or Berber, for thousands of years this has been the same writing with a few variations: ancient and neo-Libyan' (Djebar 1999b: 151).

## *Carthage, Dougga and Abalessa*

At the end of this history of preservation and destruction, of barely preserved records, colonial depredations, multicultural interactions, and Orientalist scholarship, a writing system comes to light, one that has been preserved through the most tenuous of connections. Only among the nomadic Tuareg, whose women alone understand the script does written Berber survive. Libyan lives on by becoming a nomadic, female writing, as if

> the ancestral writing, maintained outside of any state of submission, went hand in hand with the intractability and mobility of a people who, in a gesture of supreme elegance, let their women preserve the writing while their men wage war in the sun or dance before the fires at night. (Djebar 1999b: 151)

This mobile script, however, is almost lost, and for most Berber speakers the sounds of their speech have been divorced from its written signs. Hence, the narrator asks,

> how many women and men are there still, from the oasis of Siwa in Egypt to the Atlantic and even beyond . . . yes, how many of us are there who, although the heirs of the bey Ahmed, the Tuaregs of the last century and the *aediles*, bilingual Roman magistrates in charge of the monument of Dougga, feel exiled from their first writing? (Djebar 1999b: 152)

Thus, like the vast majority of Algerian women of Djebar's generation, the speakers of Berber are largely a people without their own writing.

After disclosing the mystery of the Berber script, the narrator returns to the monument at Dougga to imagine the ceremonial dedication of Masinissa's mausoleum in 138 BCE. Masinissa (240 or 238–148 BCE) had been the founder of the Numidian empire, a Berber Kingdom in what is today east Algeria and part of Tunisia. He had formed an alliance with the Romans against his long-standing enemy, the Carthaginians, and had fought alongside the Romans in the Third Punic War. He had been present as the siege of Carthage began, but he had died two years before the city's fall. It was his

son, Micipsa, who erected the monument at Dougga. At its dedication, the narrator conjectures, local officials made speeches in three languages: Carthaginian (or Punic), '"the Others' language"', but also the language of power, since Masinissa had declared it the official language of his kingdom; Berber, the ancestral language of the nomadic Numidian tribes; and Latin, '*the language of the future*' (Djebar 1999b: 156). Following these speeches, Micipsa then asked Jugurtha to read aloud the inscriptions on the monument, first in Carthaginian, then in Berber.

One of Djebar's main purposes in imagining this scene is to insist on the multicultural, polyglot nature of Algerian history. Implicit in her account is a protest against efforts in the 1990s to establish literary Arabic as the official, and only acceptable, language of the nation. (In fact, three years after the publication of *Vast* the Algerian government banned the official use of all languages except Arabic.) And one dimension of protest is Djebar's defence of her own use of French, a practice which linguistic purists in Algeria had been criticising with increasing vehemence and intolerance. In a 1988 essay titled 'The Linguistic Triangle', Djebar argues that there are three basic kinds of language at work in any culture: a popular, largely oral language; a language of prestige and learning; and a language of governance and power. In Algeria, the popular language has long been 'the millennial Libyco-Berber (since Punic disappeared during the Vandal tidal wave, and then in the first Arab incursions)' (Djebar 1999a: 55). The language of cultural prestige has been Greek, followed by Latin, Arabic, Turkish and French. And the language of power has followed a similar succession of Latin, classical Arabic, Turkish and French. Algeria, in short, has always had many tongues and many cultures. Hence, the ceremony at Dougga, conducted in Carthaginian, Berber and Latin, provides an ancient example of the same linguistic triangle evident in contemporary Algeria, in which Arabic (literary and dialectal), Berber and French function together.[12]

In the seventh chapter, thoughts of Masinissa's tomb lead the narrator to reflections on the fall of Carthage. The sole eye-witness account of the city's destruction is that of the historian Polybius, whose patron was Scipio Aemelianus, the Roman commander at Carthage.[13] As Scipio watched the city burn, Polybius tells us, Scipio was moved to cite the *Iliad* and reflect on the inevitable fall of empires, including that of Rome. Scipio also saved the books of the Carthage library, presenting them as a gift to his Numidian allies.[14] In these actions, the narrator implies, Scipio showed a degree of

self-awareness and a minimal respect for learning that are sorely lacking in contemporary Algeria. But it is Polybius himself who most fascinates the narrator, for his position resonates with that of the narrator-novelist herself. He was a Greek who had been exiled to Rome at the age of thirty-five. There he remained for seventeen years, serving as tutor and later companion to Scipio Aemilianus. Though primarily a historian of Rome, he wrote in Greek, and only fragmented portions of his voluminous writings survive. Besides witnessing the siege of Carthage in 146 BCE, he was present at the fall of Corinth that same year and at the siege of Numantia in Spain in 134 BCE. Hence, the narrator comments, as Polybius begins to write, 'destruction is his point of departure'. As he looks on at the fall of Corinth, he witnesses the onset of his permanent exile. 'He watches the light of Greece suddenly flickering out; he accepts it and writes' (Djebar 1999b: 161). As an exile in the midst of the destruction of Carthage, Corinth and Numantia, Polybius writes 'at the very center of a strange triangle, in a neutral zone that he discovers though he did not expect it or seek it out'. By situating his history in a 'somewhere else' [ailleurs], a neutral 'elsewhere', he achieves an 'astonishing "realism"'. In so doing, he finds a way of infusing humble prose with the force of poetry, turning 'the coat of mail worn by all resistance inside out, the one implied by a language of poetry'. He can do so because 'for him the writing of history is writing first of all'. Neither 'a loyalist nor a collaborator', he can instil into 'the deadly reality he describes . . . some obscure germ of life' (Djebar 1999b: 162/1995: 159).

Polybius is an exile, and 'All that he has is a language, whose beauty warms him and that he uses to enlighten the enemies of yesterday who are now his allies' (Djebar 1999b: 162). In this regard, however, he is not alone, for all writers are exiles whose only true home is language. As Djebar says in a 1995 essay, 'The Writing of Expatriation', if you are a 'writer, poet, novelist, fabulist', wherever you may go, 'the terrain has slipped under your feet [le terrain a glissé sous vos pas]. You have to understand – though you have known it from the beginning – that your only true territory has been language, and not the earth' (Djebar 1999a: 215). As Djebar says elsewhere, literature is always 'the place of the non-place [lieu du non-lieu]' (Djebar 1999a: 194), a neutral zone, an elsewhere, a perpetual in-between. Hence, the historian Polybius is first and foremost a writer, and his testimony to the destruction surrounding him is a mode of resistance infused with 'an obscure germ of life' (Djebar 1999b:

162). Polybius is a precursor of Djebar herself, and in the narrator's characterisation of Polybius we find a self-portrait of the author as historian and an explanation of the role history plays in the novel. The tale of the fall of Carthage, the monument at Dougga, and the decipherment of Libyan is written from an 'elsewhere', with destruction and effacement as its point of departure. Neither loyalist nor collaborator, Djebar thereby recovers a forgotten past and instils that deadly reality with 'an obscure germ of life'.

Djebar concludes Part Two with an italicised coda titled '*Abalessa*', a rhapsodic tribute to the royal Tin Hinan, whom the narrator celebrates as the tutelary spirit of the Berber alphabet. The legendary unifier of the Tuareg tribes and founder of an empire in the Ahaggar Mountains, Tin Hinan was a '*fugitive princess*' who had fled from the northern Tiafilalt region in the fourth century CE. She and her caravan of mostly women nearly starved in their flight until they were miraculously saved as they happened upon anthills filled with grain harvested by the ants. Among the Tuareg, '*Her history had long been told like a dream wreathed in legends, a fleeting silhouette as evanescent as smoke, as a ghost, or a myth, an imaginary figure*' (Djebar 1999b: 164). But in 1925, during an excavation of her tomb at Abalessa, archaeologists determined that Tin Hinan had indeed been a real woman. In her tomb and in the neighbouring chambers are Libyco-Berber inscriptions, which prompt the narrator to imagine that Tin Hinan, the fugitive princess who had fled for her freedom and become the matriarch of the nomadic Tuareg, had also been the bearer of the Libyco-Berber script to the Tuareg and thereby the saviour of the mysterious writing that was to fall out of use in the north. This story is the narrator's '*dream*', she repeats several times. Djebar's account is an effort to '*reassemble the ashes of time*' (Djebar 1999b: 166) and turn this legendary Tuareg ancestor, now proved to be real, into a different mythic figure, a female spirit of flight, freedom, resistance and the writing of the mother tongue.

> *Thus, more than four centuries after the resistance and dramatic defeat of Yougourtha to the north, also four centuries before the grandiose defeat of la Kahina – the Berber queen who will resist the Arab conquests – Tin Hinan of the sands, almost obliterated, leaves us an inheritance . . . Our most secret writing, as ancient as Etruscan or the writing of the runes, but unlike these a writing still noisy with the sounds and breaths of today, is indeed the legacy of a woman in the deepest deserts.* (Djebar 1999b: 167)

## *Zoraida and the Flight of Writing*

The narrator's dream portrait of Tin Hinan is an act of fabulation, an imaginative projection from the past of a mythic figure into the future. In a similar fashion, Djebar opens Part Three with a companion piece to '*Abalessa*', an italicised section titled '*Fugitive Without Knowing It*', in which the narrator invokes the minor character Zoraida from the *Quijote* and celebrates her as '*the metaphor for Algerian women writing today – among them myself*' (Djebar 1999b: 173). In Cervantes' novel, Quijote and Sancho Panza meet a man and woman in an inn and listen to the man's tale of his captivity in a prison in Algiers. The woman by his side never speaks. The captive had been saved by Zoraida, the woman accompanying him. The daughter of a wealthy merchant, Zoraida had seen the captive in his prison courtyard and had passed a note to him in Arabic, offering to pay his ransom if he would take her with him when he returned to Spain. He had agreed to the plan, and after Zoraida took money from her father's treasury, the two had escaped to Spain where she was to become his bride. We know little about Zoraida, says Djebar's narrator, '*but certainly she was a woman who was locked away*' (Djebar 1999b: 171). She was saved by her writing, set free '*from the father who has given her everything except freedom*' (Djebar 1999b: 172). She had exchanged '*her gilded cage . . . for an elsewhere that is boundless but uncertain*' [*pour un ailleurs illimité mais incertain*] (Djebar 1999b: 172/1995: 168). Her flight across the Mediterranean had involved a '*transmutation of roles: the woman free and the man a slave, the first image of the couple in this shift in worlds*' [*dans ce glissement des mondes*] (Djebar 1999b: 173/1995: 168). Yet in this becoming-other, this sliding of worlds, Zoraida's '*writing is erased*'. No one can read her Arabic writing in Spain, and she does not speak Spanish. Her future husband now speaks for her and she is silent.

The narrator then recalls a traumatic event from her mother's life that took place in their family's native city, Cherchell, the former Caesarea. Hundreds of Moriscos had settled in the city when they had been expelled from Spain during Cervantes' time. They had brought with them Andalusian traditions, including '*the music known as* andalouse' (Djebar 1999b: 174), which continued to be popular among the women of Cherchell for hundreds of years. One of the prize possessions of Isma's mother was the collection of andalouse lyrics she had compiled and transcribed as an adolescent. During the Algerian war, French soldiers had broken into the family

home and destroyed the manuscripts, which, since they were written in Arabic, the soldiers found unintelligible and hence suspect. Isma's mother was inconsolable at this loss, since, as Isma realises, '*my mother, the bearer of this ancestral legacy, suddenly saw the legacy erased and felt an ineffable sadness*'. Ironically, Isma's mother, who had ceased to wear the veil and who would later dare to go alone to France to see her imprisoned son, had gained her freedom but had lost her writing, '*as if, as her body begins to move, no longer wearing her grandparents' veil, her writing hand then lost both its passion and its sense of its own destiny!*' Thus in Isma's mother, an incarnation of Zoraida has returned, '*but in the opposite direction*' (Djebar 1999b: 176).

Isma's mother had become a 'fugitive without knowing it'. Like Zoraida, her escape from traditional confinement had brought freedom but also an uncertain and unforeseeable future, unmapped by social codes. As Isma reflects on Zoraida and her mother, Isma sees that she herself is a fugitive without knowing it,

> *or rather without knowing it yet. At least up to this precise instant in which I am relating these comings and goings of women in flight from the long-ago or recent past. Up to the moment in which I become conscious of my permanent condition as a fugitive – I would even say: as someone rooted in flight – just because I am writing and so that I write.* (Djebar 1999b: 176)

To write is to flee, to become rooted in flight, and hence to be a permanent fugitive. Such flight is the condition of writing, that which makes it possible, and thus a condition that cannot end as long as the process of writing continues. '*I write to clear my secret path*', says Isma. But she writes in French, and as a result, like Zoraida, '*I have lost the wealth I began with – in my case, my maternal heritage – and I have gained only the simple mobility of the bare body, only freedom*' (Djebar 1999b: 177).

## *Arable Woman*

Part Three is punctuated by seven short sections recording Isma's reflections while shooting a film titled *Arable Woman* (an account clearly modelled on Djebar's own experiences while directing *La nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*).[15] In these short sections, Djebar picks up the theme of seeing and being seen that she had introduced in Part One. From the beginning of the film project,

Isma's goal is to explore the female gaze and to invent a new way of seeing. 'Community of women shut away yesterday and today, an image-symbol that is the true action, the drive behind this hunt for images that is beginning' (Djebar 1999b: 179). As a confined woman scrutinised by the objectifying male gaze, says Isma, 'you try to make yourself invisible . . . Theoretically you have the right to equality, but shut up "inside", confined. Incarcerated.' The only gaze left such women is from behind the veil, 'a hole left in the concealment of a face' (Djebar 1999b: 180). Isma's goal is less to document women's subjugated gaze than to discover a different form of living and looking that will make possible a transformed domain of visibility. This project is part of Isma's own becoming-woman, an important stage in her movement beyond received gender categories. Early in the shooting, she expresses her delight in directing the film: 'I am happy and regal. . . . I "direct", . . . the way that, in bed, I would show the motions of love to someone, whose inexperience I would pardon, happy to lead him because I feel secure in the kingdom of fluidity. . . . I am working as a woman' (Djebar 1999b: 204–5). She is in the kingdom of fluidity, of becoming and the desiring body. And as an artist she is in an in-between space. At one point, as Isma is seated on the platform of a crane, forty feet above the ground, she suddenly realises that the tomb of one of her famous male ancestors is immediately below her. In this position, she recalls, 'high up in the air, directly above my ancestor's body, . . . all I cared about was the horizon, the Roman aqueduct'. Was she being faithless by not paying homage to the buried saint? No, she concludes. She was returning 'to what is truest, while poised precisely between heaven and earth, practically in a state of levitation' (Djebar 1999b: 331). It is in this state of levitation, this in-between elsewhere, that she, the ancestor's 'great-granddaughter, in jeans and wearing a cap on her head' (Djebar 1999b: 332), is able to seek what is 'truest', a woman's vision and a fresh image of the world.

To see differently, Isma tries to open herself to the space around her, unlike the members of her technical crew, who, 'being men, imposing their bodies on space, have not the slightest idea that one can slip through it softly and stealthily as if breaking and entering' (Djebar 1999b: 303). Her goal is to make films inspired by the intensity of 'blind people propelled by the fierce desire to see truly' (Djebar 1999b: 304). For her, filming means 'trying to look every time with the first look, listen with the first listening' (Djebar 1999b: 205). The 'work of image and sound' (Djebar 1999b: 206) is that of closing the

eyes, heeding the rhythms of the body and the surrounding space, and then opening the eyes as if one were a blind person seeing for the first time. To see in this way, Isma realises, one must return to childhood and look through those early memories as if through a corrective lens. In months of groping for a new way of seeing the world, she says,

> I learned that looking at the outside in this way is simultaneously a return to memory, to oneself as a child . . . This introspective, backward-looking gaze [Ce regard réflexif sur le passé] could make it possible to search the present, a future on the doorstep. (Djebar 1999b: 306/1995: 298)

To search the present, to interrogate it, dispel its conventional and custom-tinted images, and then discern the immediacy of an emergent, uncoded 'future on the doorstep', requires an inward gaze upon the past of earliest memories. In this regard, Isma's cinematic project is part of a becoming-child, a becoming-girl. The location she chooses for the film 'is the space of my childhood and something else . . . perhaps the space of this fiction to be created' (Djebar 1999b: 225). The bed she uses as a prop is one she slept in as an infant and young girl. When Isma prepares the eight-year-old Aichoucha to pretend that she is sleeping in this bed, Isma undresses her and feels herself 'going back in time', and she realises that her own return to childhood 'is what this story in images and sound is, an attempt to navigate as smoothly as possible back through the stream of my memory and the memory of several other women' (Djebar 1999b: 279). In this scene, Isma seeks 'a feminine childhood intimacy' (Djebar 1999b: 252). In another sequence, the young girl Ferial, 'who was truly the "star" in this fictional world' (Djebar 1999b: 280), plays with her make-believe mother and 'imagines her present as she goes along' (Djebar 1999b: 281). In her play, 'she does whatever she wants, and it is still grace and pure joy, and life, unrestricted, following its life line' (Djebar 1999b: 282).

Yet even in the childlike freshness of the film's images, Isma finds reminders of another reality. In real life, the young Aichoucha is illiterate, and hence she 'is the real outsider [l'étrangère véritable] in these regions where I think I see the future dawning imperceptibly' (Djebar 1999b: 257/1995: 252). Isma also recalls that off-camera is a young mother who was not allowed to appear on the set, and this cloistered woman served as the film's 'somewhere else', its 'ailleurs'. She who had been forbidden to appear on camera 'was an extension, the background that made those in the film uncertain. She evoked

the persistence of things enduring back in time forever' [Elle évoquait la durée pour toujours en arrière] (Djebar 1999b: 228/1995: 223). Had this young mother been allowed to walk outside whenever she wished, Isma muses, there would be no need for the film: 'there would be no point to the fiction because, wonder of wonders, suddenly every woman on this earth would be able to come and go' (Djebar 1999b: 229).

Such is not the case, however, and hence the need for the film's fiction remains. The purpose of Isma's fiction, she states, is to challenge the dominant reality of the status quo. For each film image of alternative ways of seeing and being, there are voices crying, 'What gives them the right?', how dare they disrupt prevailing conventions? This tension is visible in the images themselves, 'the constant process of reality against fiction, of reality ever more present'. At one point in the film, a young girl named Zohra meets the gaze of Lila, an unveiled adult woman who possesses a full autonomy of body and speech. Zohra's eyes seem to ask, 'Is she indeed real? Is she not rather merely our dream transposed?' In this moment, says Isma, the child Zohra, 'who moves with regal grace through space that, in a year or two, when they shut her up, will become constrained' (Djebar 1999b: 310), serves as a witness and issues a silent appeal to Lila.

> *No, don't be a dream, you at least, win this freedom of movement, to question, to see, that we will all envy you for afterward, myself first of all! Trace a path before us. . . . I seem to leave you in your individual story, but in fact you are living for us all. As we watch you . . . we demonstrate our solidarity with you. Thanks to you we are not condemned!* (Djebar 1999b: 310)

Here we see fabulation's pre-eminent function of inventing a people to come. Lila is the representative of a collectivity that is missing, the 'dream' of an alternative reality. Like the royal Tin Hinan, Lila is made more than a human being. Through the act of fabulation the two women become giants, iconic images of possibilities. 'Thus the fiction, within the documentary, carries a symbol of hope' (Djebar 1999b: 310).

## *Collective Autobiography*

Many have observed that Djebar's exploration of her past and that of her mother, grandmother and other female relatives is a form of 'collective autobiography'. In this kind of literature, the individual's

story is never separated from the stories of others.[16] The memories of one person fuse with the memories of many. Part Three's seven 'movements', which alternate with the seven Arable Woman chapters, provide the core elements of this collective recovery of the past, and each story has its own gaps and slippages, its own repressed, forgotten or misunderstood moments that require un-forgetting, rememoration and rethinking.

Fatima, Isma's paternal grandmother, the 'virile, bitter' ancestor of Part One, at fourteen was 'given in marriage by her father – who was scarcely more than forty – to an old man, the city's wealthiest man' (Djebar 1999b: 207). As Isma's aunt relates the story, Soliman, the ancient patriarch who was reputed to be a hundred, had already buried three wives and sired grandsons with beards, but on his third wife's death, he '"was afraid of how cold his bed would be! He wanted a woman . . ."' (Djebar 1999b: 210). People were puzzled that Ferhani, Fatima's father, would give her to Soliman, since Soliman's wealth would pass to Soliman's many male children and never to Ferhani. But soon they learned that Soliman and Ferhani had made a deal: in exchange for Fatima, Soliman would supply Ferhani with a second wife, 'the most beloved Amna, daughter of Soliman's second wife' (Djebar 1999b: 211), a woman so beautiful that she was nicknamed 'the Golden Woman'. Isma tries to imagine Fatima's thoughts about the marriage, her reactions to her new female relatives and her experiences on her wedding night. But Fatima had never spoken of these matters, to Isma or anyone else. 'She said nothing. She confessed nothing. Nor did she seem to regret anything either' (Djebar 1999b: 216). More striking than her reticence about her marriage, however, was Fatima's silence about her own mother's fate. Within a week of Ferhani's marriage to the Golden Woman, his first wife, Fatima's mother, died of an unknown ailment, though the local women surmised 'that it was livid, powerless jealousy that "made her blood go bad"' (Djebar 1999b: 218).

Fatima never spoke of this incident, and Isma's aunt only found out about it through one of Fatima's younger sisters. In the novel, Djebar does not call attention to this detail, but in the essay 'Anamnesis' she stresses its importance. Fatima's mother must have died shortly before Fatima's own marriage to Soliman, and this denial of her mother's death was no doubt the price Fatima paid to face her impending marriage. Only in forgetting her mother's death could she find the strength to confront her own situation.

> She, a fourteen-year-old adolescent, ready to conclude her precocious nuptials, . . . suddenly wanted to efface her mother and her defeat, the struck-down mother, carried away and quickly interred. She, my grandmother, in that moment was hardened, was armed with virile energy, but also with voracious silence and the mire of forgetfulness. (Djebar 1999a: 141)

Fatima endured, surviving not only her first husband but also her second. Her third husband she renounced, leaving her husband and mountain home to settle with her children in the city. Among her children was Bahia, the sole offspring of her third marriage and Isma's mother. This abrupt move from the father's Berber-speaking village to the Arabophone city was one of three traumas that punctuated Bahia's life. The second was the death of her favourite older sister and surrogate mother, Chérifa, who was the victim of a typhoid epidemic in 1924 when Bahia was six. It was during Chérifa's funeral that a mourner chanted the lines of a Berber lament, '*So vast the prison crushing me / Release, where will you come from?*' (Djebar 1999b: 243), and it was then that Bahia stopped speaking, only to break her silence one year later. Bahia's third trauma came in 1938 when she was twenty. Bahia's first child, Isma, had been born in 1936. Thirteen months later she bore her first son. When she had given birth to Isma, Bahia had travelled to the ancestral mountain village, where, upon Isma's birth, the midwife had greeted the baby with a Berber blessing: '"Hail to thee, daughter of the mountain. . . . you will be a traveller, a nomad whose journey started at this mountain to go far, and then farther still!"' (Djebar 1999b: 247). When Bahia gave birth to her son, by contrast, she had to do so in the exile of the city. Nonetheless, the boy was safely delivered, and when he began to babble, Bahia's mother-in-law exclaimed, '"Do you hear, my daughter: He just spoke in Berber!"' (Djebar 1999b: 249) (an unlikely possibility, thought Bahia, since Berber was never spoken in the house). Six months after his birth, however, the boy died. Isma only learned of this brother and his death twenty-four years after the event, when Isma was accompanying Bahia on a trip to visit her second son, who was confined in a French prison. It was at this point that Isma saw the pattern of her mother's losses. With her first son's death, Bahia had not only interred his memory but also 'first buried the [Berber] language above all'. Yet as Isma reflects further, she considers that 'this forgetting, this refusal, this denial had already come once long before when, at the age of six, she lost her voice when Chérifa, the all-beautiful, died'. Or perhaps, Isma considers, the forgetting went

back to the loss of her father at age two, when she was taken from the 'language of the father who preferred to remain at the *zaouia* up in the mountains' (Djebar 1999b: 251). All three traumatic losses were entwined with the loss of the Berber language. Yet those losses, perhaps, were what allowed Bahia to marry a French teacher, eventually learn to speak French and dare to travel alone to France. As Djebar says of this episode in the essay 'Anamnesis',

> The strength of my mother . . . was grafted on this initial vocal loss: the strength as a child to turn her back on Berber, the language of the father who would never return, as a young woman to love the suitor who carried French books in his hands, and then later risk . . . dialogue in French with European neighbours. . . . Loss of her voice in the past: in that break, in that time without memory, almost without a trace . . . is inscribed the victorious mobility of my mother. Her rebirth. (Djebar 1999a: 146)

Isma's own life is marked by traumas, including, as we have seen, her passionate obsession with the Beloved and her earlier confrontation in the baths with 'the teeth' of the mother tongue. Her earliest trauma also involved language, but this time the language was French. 'It was only decades later', Isma says of this event, 'that I would become aware of its subterranean swell'. It occurred when she was three, during 'a night that caused some imperceptible shift [un imperceptible glissement] in me' (Djebar 1999b: 258/1995: 253). During the Second World War, Isma's family lived in housing set aside for teachers at the French school. All the inhabitants save Isma's family were from France. Isma did not speak French, and to her, as to most native Algerians, the French were, if not 'the enemy', 'the "nonfriend", an impossible familiar with whom one associated only by force of circumstances' (Djebar 1999b: 263). During the war years, a blackout was instituted to thwart night-time bombings, and one night following the alert of an impending attack, Isma awoke in her parents' bed to discover two strangers beside her. When one of them spoke softly, she realised that they were two neighbours, a single French mother and her twelve-year-old son, who had been frightened by the alert and come to Isma's parents for comfort. In that moment,

> It was as if the parents' bedroom had shifted horizontally [avait glissé horizontalement] . . . it was obvious: I was waking up somewhere else, in a room that seemed the same but was totally different. . . . And still there was this absurd impression of being both there and somewhere else [là et ailleurs] . . . I was definitely waking up in the home of foreigners! (Djebar 1999b: 265–6/1995: 260)

It is only with great difficulty that Isma revives this first memory. 'Is it a knot that I am only now going to disentangle?' she asks. 'Is it a welt, a crack, a definitive break that I immediately tried to erase on that night when these "French from France" did not seem to me (how strange [étrange] this is) completely foreign [tout à fait étrangers]?' (Djebar 1999b: 263/1995: 258). This sliding, this 'definitive break', marked her entrance into the foreign tongue that would help her escape confinement and allow her to become '*rooted in flight*' (Djebar 1999b: 176). That night 'became one of transmutation' (Djebar 1999b: 268).

> Was I not going to become different [devenir autre, 'become other'] all of a sudden? In the slow shifts [le lent glissement] of this astonishing night was I not going to remain like this: simultaneously in the bedroom of my parents . . . and in the opposite camp? (Djebar 1999b: 268/1995: 263)

Yet as Isma sifts through this forgotten memory, she realises that the anxiety associated with it was not that of an abandoned child, and not simply that of a young girl among foreigners. Most troubling, she concludes, was the presence of the twelve-year-old boy, an 'unexpected familiarity' that 'provided an ambiguity and keen pleasure' (Djebar 1999b: 268). She had played with the boy, named Maurice, and as Isma thinks of him she remembers another scene from her childhood, when Maurice climbed a tree and invited Isma to join him. As she climbed, she became afraid, 'As if reaching the same branch, squatting there beside him, seemed to me in some vague way utterly sinful' (Djebar 1999b: 270). Not only was he French, but he was also a male. Hence, she says, 'In the silence of childhood, the image of childish temptation, the first garden, the first forbidden thing – takes shape.' This scene, she thinks, comes 'almost immediately after I awoke that night in a room that had suddenly become "French"' (Djebar 1999b: 271). What Isma's memory work discloses, then, is that her linguistic becoming-other is enmeshed with her becoming-woman, and in particular, her becoming-girl, a becoming that surfaces much later in her life with the advent of her passion for the Beloved.

Other 'slidings' mark Isma's life, all of them instilling in her 'the feel of passages' [le goût des passages, 'the taste for passages'] and the 'slow joy in space each time it opens up, unscathed joy' (Djebar 1999b: 302/1995: 294). She, like her mother and grandmother before her, is a fugitive, and her story is part of the collective story of the women of her family. That story continues in Isma's daughter's life, when Isma advises her twenty-year-old child not to take a job in the

Algerian city where women speak of husbands as 'the enemy'. Isma convinces her daughter to decline the offer, and instead her daughter chooses to study in Rouen. As Isma recalls the incident, she remarks, 'Now I was making my daughter, who had been ready to settle into her father's country, into the latest fugitive.' If asked whether a desire for her daughter's freedom had motivated her, she would have replied, '"Freedom is far too vast a word! Let us be more modest, desiring only to breathe in air that is free"' (Djebar 1999b: 329).

## *The Blood of Writing*

In many ways *Vast* is a novel of hope, a celebration of the difficult labour of finding a line of flight into 'air that is free'. The novel, however, does not end on a note of triumph. Djebar has said that the novel arose as a sudden response to the increasing violence in Algeria that had claimed the lives of several of her close friends and fellow artists. Her anguish and despair come to the fore in the novel's closing pages. When she tries to write about the murder of a friend in 1993, she says that she is 'attempting to bring his last breath back to life'. However, she finds herself 'only capable of raising familiar ghosts and inviting them to a selfish, egotistical celebration. . . . No, it is not the dead people who are close to me that I call up before. Probably, alas, because their blood has not dried!' So, she revives the ghost of Jugurtha, though 'not as he is so often summoned up, by all those fine nationalist emotions!' (Djebar 1999b: 343).[17] She recalls his presence at the dedication of Masinissa's tomb, his years as a warrior, and his final incarceration in Rome. She envisions him in his Roman dungeon, yet above all, she hears his voice as he intones in Berber, '"*Meqqwer lhebs!*," So vast the prison!' But then she hears him question the word *lhebs*, 'vast', and mutter '"*Tasraft!*"', 'narrow'. In that word he voices his despair, one deeper even than that of the traditional lament. 'He died in a hole, in Rome. Narrow the prison, nowhere release!' (Djebar 1999b: 345).

Jugurtha is just one of the phantoms who haunt Isma, for 'in my country, these past two or three seasons, all the dead are returning indiscriminately'. The dead are clamouring for a voice, and 'We women are haunted by their desire' (Djebar 1999b: 346). 'Onto Algerian soil the dead (men) are returning after so long', and 'The women, because they have no writing, make up the funeral procession, new Bacchantes' (Djebar 1999b: 348–9). Isma realises that the collective autobiography of her female ancestors has been an effort to

let the dead speak through her. In that autobiography, 'I relived the grief of my mother, banished from her childhood, just as I am myself, from the most ancient form of writing [that is, Libyco-Berber]' (Djebar 1999b: 348, translation modified). As Isma wrote, it was 'As if I were simultaneously Chérifa, dead at eighteen; Chérifa, the happy, expectant fiancée; Chérifa, her beauty shattered by the typhus epidemic in Caesarea', all the while being at the same time her mother, 'this little girl, an extra, an onlooker who wanders, voiceless' (Djebar 1999b: 348). Throughout the novel, Isma has been a medium through whom the dead speak and live again, but as Isma tries to write about those who are dying from the violence around her, she fears that 'the blood of men today (the blood of History and the suffocation of women)' [le sang de l'Histoire et l'étouffement des femmes] will 'spatter my writing and condemn me to silence' (Djebar 1999b: 347/1995: 337, translation modified). In an arresting recurrent dream, Isma feels that she is smothering. 'In the bottom of my open mouth a soft, viscous paste, phlegm, stagnates', and she tries to cut the obstruction out with a knife. Eventually she vomits forth a cry. In that moment,

> I do not cry, I am the cry, stretched out into resonant blind flight; the white procession of ghost-grandmothers behind me becomes an army propelling me on; words of the quavering, lost language rise up while the males out in front gesticulate in the field of death or of its masks. (Djebar 1999b: 350)

As the novel closes, Isma stands 'at the end of a year of dark, incomprehensible death, defiled deaths, in the shadow of fratricidal conflict'. The motherland has become 'the monster Algeria – and do not call it woman anymore, unless it is a ghoul (which is feminine), or a voracious female centaur risen from some abyss, no, not even madwoman' (Djebar 1999b: 356). The dead are returning, all of them caught up in the masculine death of Islam, 'old women and old men, mere slips of girls and male corpses, all of them forming only an asexual mass without tenderness, merged out of fear or resignation into something ghastly and impersonal' (Djebar 1999b: 349). In this infernal landscape, all becoming-woman is banished, and in its stead is a monstrous exaggeration of masculine death, an Algeria that is not 'woman anymore'. The dead 'want to write through us' (Djebar 1999b: 357), and Isma tries to transcribe their cries. Yet she also tries to imagine an alternative order, one inspired not by masculine death but by feminine peace. What she wants to preserve and promote is the

> serenity that is called *sakina* in Arabic: not the sudden transparency of being that, they say, shortly precedes the coming of death, no! but the serenity of passages that seem never to need to end. As they stream by, *sakina* – serenity – fills your heart and soul, reinforces you with liquidity, nourishes you with surfeit, while around you everything tips and capsizes and changes. (Djebar 1999b: 341)

It is this quiet feminine power of serenity and peace, of endless passages, open metamorphosis and becoming-other that Isma wants to foster. And so, even as she laments the monstrous violence of Algeria, she subsumes that lost mother within her trajectory toward an unmapped elsewhere. 'The trail all migration takes is flight, / Abduction with no abductor, / No end to the horizon line, / Erasing in me each point of departure, / Origin vanishes, / Even the new start'. And so she becomes a 'Fugitive and knowing it midflight', and with 'Death ahead, antelope encircled,/ Algeria the huntress, is swallowed up in me' (Djebar 1999b: 359).

## *The Movement of Memory*

Given that *Vast* is in large part an autobiographical work, its temporality is primarily that of memory and the second passive synthesis of time. The present narrator explores the coexisting stories of a collective memory-space, which includes within it the memories of Isma's mother, grandmother and great-grandmother and extends to the long-buried memories of the Berber past. Within that memory-space, moments of sliding, passage and rupture mark key events, each such gap or break constituting an eruption of the time 'out of joint' of the third passive synthesis. The relationship between the virtual past and the actual present, however, is particularly complex, since there is a periodic fusion of the two as Isma lives into the past and the ghosts of the past speak through her. Her film, she says, is 'an attempt to navigate as smoothly as possible back through the stream of my memory and the memory of several other women' (Djebar 1999b: 279). That navigation is not simply a remembering; it is also a reliving, a rendering present of that past through a movement back in time. Conversely, when the dead return, the past moves forward and invades the present. Djebar has said of *Vast* that

> autobiographical writing is necessarily a retrospective writing, in which your "I" is not always the "I", or it is an "I-we" or a fractionated "I". But in *So Vast the Prison*, there is an ascent [une remontée] in

> autobiographical and historical time; the starting point of the book was occasioned by the death of someone close, inscribed in the present, a violent death, a murder. (Gauvin 1997: 33)

The novel is simultaneously a movement back in time and a re-ascent from the past into the present. A permeable present descends backward into the past just as the phantoms of the past live themselves forward into the present.[18]

Nor does this movement of rememoration stop with the present. In 'Anamnesis' Djebar says that her writing in *Vast* involves a 'return to the body, or at least to the mobile hand' and a turning away from the oppressive memories of all the women who have been cloistered and confined. Primary in the writing process, she says, is a 'push in advance' [poussée en avant], a movement forward toward an open horizon, 'only the dawning, only the light, only the sun persisting into the heart of the night'. In this regard, hers is 'a writing of flight' in which one writes 'in order to run'. Such writing involves recollection, Djebar adds, though 'not of the past, but of the *avant-mémoire*, of the before in front of the first light [de l'avant avant la première aube], in front of the night of nights, in advance [avant la nuit des nuits, avant]' (Djebar 1999a: 138). In this complex and untranslatable passage, Djebar plays on the double sense of *avant* as 'preceding, coming before' and 'in front of, before oneself'. The memory of this 'writing of flight' is a kind of anti-memory, or perhaps an 'avant-memory', a kind of avant-garde of the faculty of memory, a remembering into the future. Initially in 'Anamnesis', Djebar opposes this avant-memory to the work of anamnesis, but by the end of the essay, she realises that the movement backward through anamnesis and the movement forward through an avant-memory amount to the same thing. As she explores the past in *Vast*,

> I no longer know whether the others within me (the mothers, sisters, female ancestors) are what carry us – language and me its rider – or if it is the language of writing, neither dominated nor untamed, simply inhabited, and hence transformed, that leads us, carries us along. Us? The other women and I, all those women, indeed, all those of my populous memory. (Djebar 1999a: 150)

To write, then, is to flee, to run, but also to remember. 'To run and to recall. Forward [en avant], backward [en arrière], what would be the difference? (Djebar 1999a: 150).

The paradox of this anamnesis that simultaneously moves forward

and backward arises from the nature of the novel's un-forgetting of the past in an act of creation. The process of living into the past is a recovery of lost memory, of gaps, fissures, traumas and losses. In that resuscitation of the unspoken and unwritten past, a force of transformation is engaged, one that makes possible new modes of being, new lines of flight. The present process of writing the story of that past is itself an experimentation with language, a movement forward into an unknown future. It is a writing in flight toward an open horizon. Yet the power of that language that is being activated in the process of writing is fed by the voices of the past that are being resurrected in that language. Are the voices of the past bearing the writer forward into the present, or is language itself, in its creative surge, bearing the writer and her ghost voices into the future? Djebar concludes that it is both at the same time.

A process of transmutation is taking place, a becoming-woman, a becoming-girl, in which memory serves to transform the present in the hope of a people to come. The avatars of that people are Tin Hinan, Zoraida, all those ancestors who were fugitives without knowing it, Isma herself (especially Isma-in-the-embrace-of-the-Beloved), and all those figures from the many fictions that contest reality, such as Lila in the film *Arable Woman*, 'a symbol of hope' thanks to whom '*we are not condemned!*' (Djebar 1999b: 310). This collectivity will embrace the feminine principle of *sakina*, 'the serenity of passages that seem never to need to end' (Djebar 1999b: 341). Through writing, the becoming-other of a search into the past is simultaneously a becoming-other as line of flight. Despite the waves of violence and the insistent return of the dead, the novel's anamnesis of the 'blood of History and the suffocation of women' enunciates a faint note of hope, a belief in the possibility of a world in which women move freely, experiencing the 'joy in space each time it opens up, unscathed joy' (Djebar 1999b: 302).

## *Notes*

1. Although I characterise *So Vast the Prison* as 'semi-autobiographical', it is clear from Djebar's interviews that the contents of the novel are largely autobiographical. However, throughout the work Djebar refers to the narrator as 'Isma', and rather than press the issue of the relationship between narrator and author, in my analysis I refer to the narrator as Isma and distinguish her remarks in the novel from those made by the author Djebar in interviews and essays about the novel.

2. For an insightful study of anamnesis in Djebar, see Faulkner 2008. Lionnet 1989 also makes insightful observations about anamnesis and collective amnesia among colonised peoples and women.
3. Translation mine. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this chapter are my own. When reference is made to both English and French texts, citations will include the English page number followed by the corresponding page in the French text, the two separated by a slash.
4. The critical literature on Djebar is voluminous. I have found Rocca 2004 especially useful, both in her insightful readings of *Vast* and in her conscientious documentation of secondary sources. Other outstanding studies of Djebar and *Vast* include Gracki 1996, Hiddleston 2006, Orlando 1999 and Ringrose 2006. The most insightful critic of Djebar, however, remains Djebar herself. Her chief critical work is *Ces voix qui m'assiègent* (*These Voices that Besiege Me*), an invaluable collection of essays and lectures presented between 1980 and 1998. This book is a modified version of her 1997 doctoral thesis. For a fascinating study of Djebar's doctoral thesis and *Cex voix qui m'assiègent*, see Lionnet 2008.
5. In essays and interviews Djebar speaks at length about her efforts to incorporate the sounds and cadences of Arabic within her French writing, and from *Fantasia* on, this remains one of her goals as a writer. Thus, though the language problem is complicated in *Vast*, by no means is the project of bringing oral Arabic into written French abandoned. In this effort to introduce a becoming-other into French, we can see a clear instance of the deterritorialisation of language that Deleuze and Guattari refer to in their remarks on minor literature. Although I consider the deterritorialisation of language to be a dimension of fabulation, I will concentrate on other matters here, since many commentators have examined Djebar's 'othering' of French in detail. See especially Walker 2008, as well as the critics cited in note four.
6. The profession of historian was especially controversial in post-independence Algeria. Citing Renan's observation that historical studies are often a danger to nationality, Evans and Phillips observe, 'Nowhere has this adage been more true than in post-independence Algeria. The function of history for the regime was neither truth nor scholarship. The population was discouraged from a critical historical consciousness because history had just one usage: to construct a heroic narrative that legitimized the post-independence regime and build a clear national identity' (Evans and Phillips 2007: 9).
7. Or less obvious, perhaps, to many readers outside Algeria. The status of Berber culture and language was a major political issue in post-independence Algeria, and any Algerian reader of *Vast* would immediately recognise the political significance of Djebar's reflections on

the Berber language. As Evans and Phillips point out, the governing National Liberation Front (FLN) attempted to enforce an exclusively Arab identity for Algeria, whereas those within the Berber movement stressed the multicultural nature of the country. In 1980, 'demands for the recognition of Berber rights provoked the train of events which led to the "Berber spring", one of the most significant events in post-independence Algeria . . . the "Berber spring" challenged the fundamental tenets of all the post-1962 regimes. By denouncing the FLN definition of the Algerian people as far too narrow, it was characterising the notion of an Arab-Islamic identity as an imposition. This authoritarian approach to history, Berber activists continued, reflected the state's anti-democratic and anti-pluralist character' (Evans and Phillips 2007: 8).

8. Some scholars have recently questioned the association of Masinissa with the inscription and the mausoleum, since the inscription mentions only the artisans who constructed the mausoleum. See Ferron 1969 for a defence of the traditional view and Moore 2007 for the counter-argument. In 1904, however, another inscription was unearthed at Dougga, which records the dedication of a temple to Masinissa in 138 BCE. Such a temple was probably a different monument than the mausoleum associated with the first inscription. Djebar appears to have treated the two inscriptions as if they are related to the same structure. For reproductions and discussion of the two inscriptions, see Chabot 1918: 260–79. For a French translation of the two inscriptions, see Marcy 1936: 22, 56. The mausoleum was severely damaged when Reade removed its inscription in 1842. A two-year project to restore the mausoleum was completed in 1910. For photographs of the monument before and after restoration, see Poinssot 1958, Plates XVII and XVIII, between pages 60 and 61.
9. For a brief history of the decipherment of Libyco-Berber, see Galand 2002: 3–28.
10. For the correspondence of d'Arcos, see Tamizey de Laroque 1972 and Fauris de Saint-Vincens 1806. On d'Arcos' apostasy, see Tolbert 2009.
11. See Poinssot and Salomonson 1959 for information about Borgia and his papers. See Ferron 1969: 108, Plate VII, for a reproduction of Borgia's manuscript copy of the inscription.
12. In a 1995 interview, Djebar says of *Vast*, 'To ask myself in a novel about the duration of languages following catastrophes is a way of reflecting in my own fashion on present-day Algeria: while various crises have been occurring, a sort of hatred of languages has become established. If you are francophone, the *intégristes* say to you, "Ah! She speaks French, therefore she is on France's side". This did not happen right away after independence. With fascism, languages are ascribed

virtues and failings. . . . These relations of rivalry – of false rivalry – between languages are in reality manipulated by political interests. This appears as a constant in our history and that is what motivated me to rediscover twenty-one centuries of the past' (Gauvin 1997: 20).

13. See Astin 1967 for information about Scipio Aemilianus, and Walbank 1972 for details about Polybius.
14. Polybius relates the scene of Scipio's recitation of the *Iliad* passage, but he is silent about the fate of the Carthaginian library. The only evidence for the existence of such a library, or its allocation to the Numidians, is one sentence in Pliny's *Naturalis Historiae*, xviii, 22, in which he speaks of 'the Carthaginian Mago, on whom indeed our senate bestowed such great honour, after the taking of Carthage, that when it gave away the city's libraries [*bibliothecae*] to the petty kings of Africa it passed a resolution that in his case alone his twenty-eight volumes should be translated into Latin' (Pliny 1938: 203). Scholars have debated the significance of this passage, especially whether *bibliothecae* refers to a small number of scrolls or an actual library. See Lancel 1995: 358–60 for a summary of the debate.
15. For a brilliant analysis of *La nouba* from a Deleuzian perspective, see Bensmaïa 1996. His reading of the film's structure and themes reinforces many of the points made here. For illuminating studies of the gaze in Djebar's films and fiction, see Huughe 1996 and Mortimer 1996.
16. One of the first areas to stress the concept of collective autobiography is the field of Latin American testimonial literature (see Sommer 1988, for example). For collective autobiography in Djebar, see Geesey 1996 and Mortimer 1997.
17. Evans and Phillips note that during the 1940s and 1950s Jugurtha was appropriated by the nationalist movement 'as an inspirational figure for the anti-colonial struggle. Mohammed Sahli's 1947 study, *Le Message de Yougourtha*, was crucial in establishing a modern cult, whereby Jugurtha became a reference point for a new generation of militant anti-colonialists like the writer Kateb Yacine. In his 1956 novel *Nedjma* Kateb invoked Jugurtha as one of the ancestors of the Algerian nation, incarnating the spirit of resistance at the heart of Algerian history; likewise, the National Charter of 1976 traced the origins of the modern nation back to the Numidian king. However, the truth is that Jugurtha's afterlife as national icon challenges any singular narrative of Algerian history. After all, as a pagan Berber, his identity is at odds with the official Arab-Islamic definition of the nation that prevailed in post-independence Algeria' (Evans and Phillips 2007: 15).
18. A dramatic instance of the permeable present and its relationship to the past occurs when Isma tells about a research trip to Tlemcen, during which she studied documents about a twelfth-century Sufi mystic.

When she left the library, 'I walked and I became the spectator of a day in 1198.' As she passed through the busy streets, 'I skimmed lightly through the shocks of the present. I kept on going, living far back in the past.' Eventually, however, her re-living of the past brings her back to the actual present. 'And along the way I lost the accompanying shadow of the saint of Béjaia . . . I am no longer protected by my ghosts; they are replaced by my own sense of loss' (Djebar 1999b: 73–4).

6

# Becoming-Fish: Richard Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish*

Richard Flanagan is one of Australia's leading writers, whose five novels have gained increasing attention over the last decade. A fifth-generation Tasmanian, his first three novels, *Death of a River Guide* (1997), *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (1998) and *Gould's Book of Fish. A Novel in Twelve Fish* (2001), all focused on Tasmanian characters and themes. His 2006 work, *The Unknown Terrorist*, told the story of a pole dancer in Sydney who is mistakenly identified as a terrorist. In his most recent novel, *Waiting* (2009), Flanagan has returned to his concentration on Tasmanian subjects, fashioning a narrative that taps the rich vein of nineteenth-century Tasmanian history that he had earlier utilised in *Gould's Book of Fish*.

Among his novels, perhaps *Gould's Book of Fish* has drawn the widest range of responses, from one critic's characterisation of it as 'a monstrosity of a book', to another's description of it as 'remarkable', 'astonishing', 'a wondrous phantasmagorical meditation on art and history and nature'.[1] Detractors and supporters alike recognise that the novel is playful, inventive, ambitious in scope, convoluted in plot, filled with comic exaggeration, satiric grotesques, improbable events and literary allusions. In part, the divergent responses among critics merely reflect differences of taste, but a common misconception among its detractors is that the novel is primarily an exercise in postmodern metafiction, a demonstration of the solipsistic reflexivity of language. Robert MacFarlane astutely observes, however, that the novel is remarkable in 'its reconciliation of metafiction with humanity. For while it is pervasively self-conscious, it is also a humanly troubled book: ferocious in its anger, grotesque, sexy, funny, violent, startlingly beautiful, and perhaps above all, heartbreakingly sad' (MacFarlane 2002). The human dimension of the novel is reinforced by its grounding in the facts of history, and it is this aspect of the book that has been appreciated least, in large part because most critics know little about nineteenth-century Tasmanian history, but

also because Flanagan makes artistic use of that history in a remarkable and extremely subtle way.

What must be recognised is that Flanagan is a fabulist, and *Gould's Book of Fish* is a paradigmatic example of fabulation's 'hallucination of history'. Replete with references to actual people and events, the novel atomises the historical record, reconfigures its particles, fuses some, distorts others, and then combines them with fictional details to fashion a narrative that reads at times like a delusional nightmare and at others like a whimsically exaggerated tale of adventure. The novel claims to be the reconstruction of a strange book discovered by Sid Hammet, a Tasmanian dealer in forged antiques. The book in question is a volume with a glowing, phosphorescent cover, filled with paintings of fish, handwritten text in various colours of ink, and addenda on loose scraps of paper. Its author is a convict named William Buelow Gould, who produced the work in 1828 while incarcerated on Sarah Island, the notoriously brutal penal colony in the wilds of western Tasmania. Unfortunately, Hammet loses this mysterious artefact, and the rest of the novel is Hammet's effort to recreate Gould's work, complete with paintings of fish and text in six different colours of ink. The twelve paintings reproduced in the novel are indeed by a real William Buelow Gould, part of a collection of thirty-five watercolours commonly referred to as *The Book of Fish*, painted while Gould was imprisoned on Sarah Island (though in 1833 rather than 1828). The text, of course, is Flanagan's, and while the events it records often coincide with historical fact, they frequently deviate markedly from the archival record into realms of the phantasmatic. Yet Flanagan's hallucination of history is no facile postmodern stunt designed to subvert truth and celebrate the reign of simulacra. Rather, it is an effort to recover lost histories, challenge orthodox narratives, and interrogate the relationship between history and language. It proceeds via a gradual becoming-other – a passage from the verbal to the visual, from Western to Aboriginal concepts of time and order, from the human to the nonhuman. And it ends in a vision of a future collectivity, though not that of a people but of a fish to come.

## *Gould the Man*

First the facts about the historical Gould.[2] Who Gould's parents were and when he was born have not been proved conclusively, but we know for certain that his given name was William Holland and that

his birthplace was Liverpool. Most likely he was born 8 November 1803, the son of James Holland, a Mersey river pilot, and his wife, Ellen. He received enough education to learn to read and write, and as a youth he fell in with disreputable company, card-sharping along the docks and indulging in the alcoholic excesses that would plague him throughout his life. Sometime in the early 1820s, William Holland moved to London and began work as an apprentice artist for Rudolph Ackermann, an inventor and entrepreneur who marketed sporting and topographical aquatints. Holland probably married in 1823. In October of that year, he was questioned by police about a murder committed by one of his drinking associates, and shortly thereafter Holland and his wife decided to relocate to Liverpool, and then to Burslem in Staffordshire, where he worked as a china decorator at the Spode factory. In 1825, Holland's first child was born. In July 1826 he deserted his wife and child and moved to Northampton, adopting the name William Buelow Gould. With this artistic sounding name, Gould landed a job with a Mr Thomas Smith, Painter and Glazier. It was not long, however, before he ran into trouble with the law. He stole paint, brushes and a waistcoat from his employer, and in August 1826 was sentenced to three months imprisonment and a public whipping. Only a few days after release from his three-month incarceration, he was arrested again for stealing a great coat, silk handkerchief and gloves. He was sentenced to transportation for seven years.

After his conviction, Gould was sent to Portsmouth Harbour and held in the brig of the *York* to await transportation to Van Diemen's Land, as Tasmania was known at the time. He remained on the *York* for over eight months, finally departing for Van Diemen's Land on 8 August 1827 aboard the *Asia*. He was one of 200 convicts who made the 112-day voyage to Hobart Town, the capital city of Van Diemen's Land. During the voyage, he painted portraits of some of the ship's officers, who judged his efforts to be only moderately successful. Shortly after his arrival in Hobart Town on 13 December 1827, Gould fell afoul of the law once again, receiving a sentence of fourteen days on the chain gang for drunkenness. Four months after completing his chain-gang punishment, he was arrested for stealing a silver watch, and his transportation sentence was extended an additional seven years. One year later, on 28 June 1829, he was arrested for forging a bank note, and for this crime he was sentenced to three years at the dreaded Sarah Island penal colony in Macquarie Harbour.

Gould spent four months in the Hobart Town Gaol before being boarded on the *Cyprus*, which set out on its 290-mile journey to Macquarie Harbour 18 July 1829. One month into the voyage, seven convicts staged a successful mutiny. On the shore of Recherche Bay they left the ship's crew, passengers and thirteen convicts who had not joined in the mutiny, one of whom was Gould. Fifty miles from Hobart Town and civilisation, the abandoned crew and passengers had only limited supplies. A sailor named Morgan and a convict named Pobjoy built a small craft and set out by sea for help from Hobart Town. Another group of five convicts, including Gould, sought assistance by attempting to walk overland to the capital. Morgan and Pobjoy succeeded in their mission when they came upon the *Orelia* anchored off Partridge Island and convinced the ship's captain to rescue the *Cyprus'* marooned passengers. By contrast, Gould's party found the overland trek much more difficult than they had anticipated, and had they not been saved by a search party sent out by the *Orelia*, they would no doubt have starved to death. Following the successful rescue of those stranded by the *Cyprus* mutineers, the convicts among the saved were returned to Hobart Town, and Gould's sentence to Sarah Island was rescinded, in recognition of his efforts on behalf of his fellow passengers. Rather than send him to the penal island, the court assigned him to serve Dr James Scott, Colonial Surgeon, on 7 October 1829. (Curiously, Flanagan makes no use of this novelistic episode in the real Gould's life, save to appropriate the Dickensian sounding name Pobjoy for one of his fictional characters.)

Scott had an interest in natural history, and while serving Scott, Gould produced several sketches and watercolours of indigenous plants, some of which accompanied Scott's publications in botanical journals. Gould served Scott for three years, during which time he met and married a fellow convict named Susan Reynolds. Gould's duties with Scott were light in comparison with those of other convicts, but apparently he was unable to control his dissolute behaviour. On 28 February 1831, he was sentenced to six days on the treadmill for being absent without leave, and on 9 August 1831, to fourteen more days on the treadmill for drunkenness. On 15 January 1832, he was sentenced to 25 lashes for absence without leave; 3 April 1832, to three months imprisonment with hard labour for absence without leave; and 26 August 1832, to 36 lashes for drunkenness. On 7 September 1832, he was finally deemed incorrigible and shipped to Sarah Island for an indefinite period of incarceration.

When he arrived at the penal island, Gould was assigned as house servant to Dr William de Little, a punishment considerably lighter than that accorded most prisoners, who spent their days in the gruelling and dangerous work of harvesting Huon pines. Dr de Little, like Dr Scott, was a natural history enthusiast, and he set Gould to work painting various island flora and fauna. It was during his incarceration on Sarah Island that Gould executed the 35 watercolours gathered in what came to be known as *The Book of Fish*. Also during this period, Gould produced portraits of two Aborigines, one of an unknown subject, *A Native Wearing a Blue Jacket*, and another of a chief of the Macquarie Harbour area, *Towterer*. Gould remained at Sarah Island until the penal facility was closed down in November 1833. He was then transferred to the Port Arthur prison colony, where he was made house servant to the colony's physician, Dr Thomas Coke Brownwell, and then to his successor, Dr John McBraine. In 1835, Gould was returned to Hobart Town, and received his certification of freedom on 25 June of that year. Soon thereafter, he moved to Launceton to work for a coachbuilder named Henry Palmer. After several disputes with Palmer, with accusations of drunkenness, theft and embezzlement, Gould managed to escape conviction and return to Hobart Town, where he lived out the rest of his life, fathering six children and earning a precarious livelihood as a painter of portraits, still lifes, seascapes and floral arrangements. In 1846, he was sentenced to two years imprisonment for theft, and apparently this period of incarceration seriously compromised his health. Following several bouts of illness, he died on 11 December 1853, one month after his fiftieth birthday.

## *Gould the Character*

And now the fictional Gould. Flanagan's Gould was the child of a casual liaison between a French Jewish weaver and an inebriated young woman at an Irish fair. Only moments after Gould was conceived, his father died in the woman's arms. She wandered the fair and witnessed a hanging, dreaming later that a blue flame had issued from the hanged man's mouth and leapt into her own, perhaps thus entering her foetus as well. She died shortly after Gould was born, and he grew up in a poorhouse, surrounded by old women and a pederast priest. After rejecting the priest's advances, young Gould was apprenticed to a stonemason, whose heavy trade was unsuited

to the boy's frail constitution. Gould soon ran away to sea, serving as a deckhand with Lieutenant Bowen on his voyage to Australia and eventually to Van Diemen's Land. As a result, the fictional Gould was present when the historically real first British colonial expeditionary force led by Bowen made its landing at Risdon Cove in 1803, and ever since that moment, Gould remarks, 'both me & this country seem to have been in trouble' (Flanagan 2001: 41). Bowen's sailors slaughtered forty-five Aboriginal men, women and children whom they encountered on the beach, and the convicts on board 'got on with the severing & pickling of the heads of the blacks' (Flanagan 2001: 43), which were then stowed in barrels to be shipped back to England.[3]

Gould did not stay long in Van Diemen's Land, however, but soon travelled to America, where he met and worked with Jean-Babeuf Audubon, a Creole entrepreneur and painter of birds. Gould invested in a steamboat business that Audubon and George Keats, brother of the poet John Keats, had started in Kentucky.[4] When the steamboat burned and creditors came calling, Gould absconded to England. There, he spent the next twenty years, working first for the London engraver Ackermann and later for a Birmingham potter named Gould. When Old Gould died, our narrator adopted the name William Buelow Gould ('it sounded all Frenchie & fancy-like' [Flanagan 2001: 113]) and set out to establish himself as an artist. Soon, however, he got into trouble, and in 1825 he was convicted of forgery in Bristol and sentenced to transportation for seven years to Van Diemen's Land.

On the voyage to Van Diemen's Land, Gould painted a portrait of the ship's captain (a fictional man named Pinchbeck), using as his model a lithograph he had seen of Robespierre. Unfortunately, Pinchbeck had been cuckolded by a French whaler and hence hated anything French, including Gould's portrait. As a result, Gould was punished by being dragged behind the ship in a cage until he was close to drowning. The ship eventually landed at Launceton, where Gould was assigned to the coachbuilder Palmer. After six months working for Palmer, Gould fled to Hobart and began painting and drinking. One painting executed to pay off a drinking debt caused Gould particular difficulty – a sign for the pub *Labour in Vain*. 'It showed an exasperated white woman (model: Mrs Arthur, wife of the Governor of the island colony, Lieutenant George Arthur [the actual governor, 1823–37]) scrubbing as hard as she could a black baby in a wood tub who smiles back at her' (Flanagan 2001: 76).

Gould's friend Capois Death 'found the picture amusing & instructive', and said 'that I had caught the spirit of the island precisely' (Flanagan 2001: 77), but the Governor took offence and sentenced Gould to fourteen days on the treadmill (dubbed the 'Cockchafer' by the convicts).[5] Later, the Governor condemned Gould to seven years at the Sarah Island penal colony (extended to fourteen years when Gould responded to his sentence, '"I am William Buelow Gould, & my name is a song that will be sung"' [Flanagan 2001: 79]).

Upon arriving at Sarah Island, Gould was assigned to serve the colony's surgeon, Tobias Achilles Lempriere, who was an amateur natural scientist intent on securing election to the Royal Society.[6] The enormously fat Lempriere, who covered his face and bald head with white lead powder (perhaps a cause of 'his later erratic behaviour' [Flanagan 2001: 108–9], Gould suggests), set Gould to painting fish. Gould also spent time painting for the Commandant, who, like Lempriere, was mentally unstable, perhaps caused by his regular doses of laudanum and mercury to treat a venereal disease. During his incarceration, Gould met the explorer and 'conciliator' Guster Robinson, who visited the penal colony with his Aboriginal entourage, which included local chief Towtereh. Gould also engaged in a furtive and sporadic affair with the Commandant's mistress, an Aboriginal known as Twopenny Sal. Eventually, Lempriere was devoured by his gargantuan pet pig, whom Lempriere had dubbed Castlereagh, and upon the disappearance of the surgeon's body Gould was accused of Lempriere's murder and held in a 'fish cell', a prison cell open to the tides such that at high tide the prisoner floats near the roof of the cell.

While in the fish cell, Gould began his book of fish. Lempriere had appropriated Gould's previous paintings of fish, but Gould felt compelled to continue painting fish and to write the narrative of his life. Gould's jailer, Pobjoy, had coerced him into painting fake Constable landscapes which Pobjoy would sell, but Gould managed to steal and hide paint and paper for his fish watercolours, fashioning ink for his text from various substances (kangaroo blood, sea urchin spikes, cuttlefish ink, ground lapis lazuli, excrement). One evening, while floating near the ceiling of his cell, Gould pushed idly on the ceiling and it suddenly collapsed. Gould climbed from his cell into the room above and found himself in the prison library. There he discovered an elaborate and absolutely false history of the colony, written by the settlement's Commissariat Officer, Jorgen Jorgensen. While reading the history, Gould was surprised by Jorgensen, who confronted the

convict and threatened to kill him. The two fought, and Jorgensen died when a bookcase fell on him.

Gould escaped, taking with him on a hastily fashioned sled the volumes of the false history. Histories in tow, Gould struck out into the wilds, hoping to meet up with Matt Brady, a bushranger who had escaped from Sarah Island and had taken on a mythical status among the convicts as a potential liberator.[7] After days of travel, Gould came upon Twopenny Sal, four of her children, and another Aborigine named Tracker Marks. Marks had had his nose and ears sliced off by whites, and he was near death. During the evening of Gould's initial contact with the Aborigine group, Marks died, and Gould joined Twopenny Sal and her children in a funeral dance around Marks' pyre. When Twopenny Sal prepared to move on the following day, Gould decided to continue his search for Matt Brady. A few days later, he came upon an abandoned camp, and in one of the shelters found a notebook penned by Brady. After reading Brady's book, he fell asleep. When he awoke, he was surrounded by soldiers and guards from the prison, who put him in chains and then carried him back to Sarah Island. Upon his return to the penal colony, he was condemned to hang for the murders of Lempriere and Jorgensen. Eight days before Gould's scheduled execution, a fire broke out on the island. The fire spread in the ensuing week, growing increasingly intense. On the eighth day, as Gould ascended the scaffold, the fire reached a windmill filled with explosives. Gould heard a massive explosion. As the flames of an apocalyptic firestorm neared, he jumped from the scaffold and crawled into the water. There, he turned into a fish.

As one can see, Flanagan incorporates many details from the real Gould's life in the portrait of his hero, but always with a difference, and once the fictional Gould reaches Sarah Island, all connections with the historical figure cease. Flanagan turns a real, humdrum alcoholic into a picaresque conman and a Van Diemonian Everyman, whose narrative serves as an allegorical distillation of the dark side of the island's early history. And just as he freely integrates multiple factual details into his hero's fictional and sometimes fantastic story, so Flanagan treats the larger events of the novel. Yet Flanagan's account of the fictional Gould, and that of the fictional Van Diemen's Land, no matter how surreal and improbable, never ceases to be an experimentation on the real, a fabulative rendering of Tasmania's actual history that exposes and analyses its cruelties and injustices while disclosing its immanent possibilities of transformation.

## *Empire's Fabulation*

Flanagan clearly signals some of his playful distortions of history, as in the names Jean-Babeuf Audubon (Flanagan 2001: 60) or Sir Isaiah Newton (Flanagan 2001: 203), and at times the exaggerated scale of events makes certain their fictional provenance – the behemoth pig Castlereagh's ingestion of the equally gargantuan Lempriere, or the narrator's metamorphosis into a fish, for example. Yet improbability is not always a sign of Flanagan's distortion or invention of history. When Gould first arrived in Hobart Town, the settlement 'seemed something of an artist's colony with more than a few working there under government patronage: there was Bock the abortionist . . .Wainewright the murderer . . . & Savery the forger' (Flanagan 2001: 72–3). Though this might seem an instance of Flanagan's fanciful comic exuberance, in fact all three were real individuals who lived and worked in Hobart: Thomas Bock (1790–1855), printer, engraver and pioneer photographer, transported in 1823 for supposedly assisting in an abortion; Thomas Wainewright (1794–1847), painter and dandy who had associated with Hazlitt, de Quincy, Dickens and Lamb, reputed to have poisoned several relatives (though never convicted), transported for forgery in 1837; and Henry Savery (1791–1842), author of Australia's first novel, *Quinton Servinton* (1830–1), transported for forgery in 1825.[8] Save for the fact that only two of the three were in Hobart Town when the fictional Gould arrived in 1826, Gould's portrait of the town as a convict artist colony is true. Consider as well the oddly named character Capois Death, the Haitian-born Liverpool maroon who suffers with Gould on the Cockchafer and later accompanies Gould to Sarah Island. Although much of Capois' life story is invented, his reminiscences of the Haitian revolution do bear some resemblance to the actual events of that struggle, in which François Capois, known as Capois-la-Mort (1766–1806), played a prominent and heroic role, first as a soldier under Colonel Jacques Maurepas, then as a Lieutenant, and later Captain of the Third Battalion of the rebel forces.[9] Even more improbable, however, is Gould's sketch of the life of the Commissariat Officer, Jorgen Jorgensen, but again, such an individual did exist, and if every detail of Gould's account is not true or entirely accurate, many details are, and others not mentioned by Gould are just as improbable as those he does provide. The Danish-born Jorgensen (1780–1840) was a larger-than-life adventurer and ne'er-do-well who witnessed the first settlement of the Derwent

in Van Diemen's Land in 1804, returned to Europe, and was then transported to Van Diemen's Land in 1826. He became a convict-constable, participated actively in the roundup of Aborigines, and after receiving a conditional pardon in 1830, spent the rest of his life as an impoverished scribe and writer. Among his most notable feats was that of having landed in Iceland in June 1809, arrested the Danish governor, and appointed himself King of Iceland (though his reign lasted only nine weeks). Hence, though on first glance Gould's portrait of Jorgensen might strain credulity, the Dane had indeed 'made his own revolution . . . overthrowing . . . the defenceless Danish governor of Iceland with the aid of an English privateer', and in fact, 'Forever after he insisted on titling himself the King of Iceland' (Flanagan 2001: 252).[10]

Unlike Jorgensen, the Commandant is modelled on no single historical individual, yet this oversized grotesque, with his excesses and manias, is an only slightly parodic exemplar of the colonial entrepreneurship and autocratic megalomania that have been widespread over the last several centuries. Himself a former convict on Norfolk Island (a penal colony 1,000 miles east of Sydney), the Commandant had been sent to Van Diemen's Land when the Norfolk Island colony was closed, but while passing through the Bass Strait (off Tasmania's northern shore), the ship ran aground and he alone survived. He found himself on an uninhabited island covered with hundreds of thousands of moonbirds, and for several months he survived 'upon the moonbirds' fatty mutton-like meat & the solace provided by the one book washed up with him, Huntington's *History of the Napoleonic Wars*, until rescued by two Quaker missionaries' (Flanagan 2001: 144). He assumed the name of Lieutenant Horace, one of the officers who had drowned in the shipwreck, and eventually came to Sarah Island as a penal officer. When the colony Commandant died, the self-named Lieutenant Horace took over and declared himself the new Commandant, continuing the policies of the former regime for a time. Following a series of unpleasant communications with his Hobart Town superiors, 'the Commandant entered a slough of despond lasting several months', from which he eventually emerged 'wearing a gold mask that perennially smiled' and 'a magnificent new blue uniform reminiscent of that worn by Marshall Ney at the battle of Waterloo, featuring oversized feathered epaulettes startlingly similar in form to outstretched moonbird wings'. Thereafter, the image of the mask was seen everywhere, 'stencilled on barrels & tools alike, later branded on our forearms, in a spectacular

fusion of state & self & concealment so characteristick of the great man' (Flanagan 2001: 150).

One does not have to look far for real-life versions of Sarah Island's megalomaniacal tyrant – Hitler, Stalin, Trujillo, Idi Amin come to mind, all self-made strongmen enamoured of military regalia whose faces (figurative, if not literal golden masks) adorned every public space. The Commandant also embodied the political and economic ambitions so widespread in the colonial phase of Western modernity. Soon after his metamorphosis, the Commandant determined that 'man's highest creative urges would henceforth be realised through engineering' (Flanagan 2001: 102), and so he set about transforming the colony into a city bisected by 'an immense, straight Boulevard of Destiny' (Flanagan 2001: 103). The Commandant's plan was to build a new city, but his ambition soon became that of creating a new nation. As the Commandant told Lempriere, his aspiration was for

> A nation & me its founder & it a Nation not some godforsaken dreg of a Prison Island. A nation of which I will be the father, the father whom they will honour & revere & write epic poems & paint atop glorious white stallions rearing against a tempestuous night. (Flanagan 2001: 209)

To foster the new nation, the Commandant 'doubled the rate of felling of Huon pine, & halved the amount he sent back to the colonial authorities' (Flanagan 2001: 151). With the extra pine he built a fleet of ships and began a lively trade in diverse commodities. (In fact, shipbuilding was an important industry on the Sarah Island colony, and during the 1820s 'more ships were built on Sarah Island than in any other Australian shipyard at that time' [Julen 1976: 22].) While the Commandant's 'trading grew exuberant & exotic' (Flanagan 2001: 152), and the colony's wealth increased exponentially, the Commandant developed a voluminous correspondence with Miss Anne, the sister of the real Lieutenant Horace whose identity the Commandant had assumed. Miss Anne wrote endlessly of 'the wonders of the age', 'exaggerating the marvelous, the sublime, the astounding of that distant world half a year's voyage away' (Flanagan 2001: 155–6). In her retelling, virtually all the wonders of modern European technology were due to her inspiration, and at a certain point, 'With the force of profound revelation' the Commandant 'realised that his sister was inventing Europe' and he began 'to wonder if he might not do the same' (Flanagan 2001: 156–7). He shook his head in revelation and decided that 'He would reinvent Europe on Sarah Island, only this time it would be even

more extraordinary than any of his sister's descriptions' (Flanagan 2001: 157).

One of his grand projects was to build the 'National Sarah Island Railway Station' (Flanagan 2001: 165). When timidly reminded by his subordinates that a train station on a five-acre island in the wilderness might not attract many rail passengers, the Commandant was undeterred. Shortly after construction on the station was underway, the Commandant imported a steam train and laid track from the Station to a roundhouse. Each night the Commandant would take his leave of the island with great ceremony and

> travel two hundred yards in the train from the station to the roundhouse. Here the train would spend the rest of the evening travelling around in circles until the engineer was vomiting & the outward wheels grew so worn from the extra weight thrown by centrifugal force that the train developed a wearying outward tilt. (Flanagan 2001: 168–9)

When the Commandant tired of the unchanging view from the train window, he hired Gould to paint theatrical backdrops of the world's great landscapes along the walls of the roundhouse,

> the drop screens replaced every week with a fresh set; one of the Swiss alps, the next of the great Russian taiga (which was just the alps with the rain-dissolved mountains presented as sky), the next of the African veldt (the further distressed taiga) then the sublime Lake district (the veldt with daffodils) & so on, round & round. (Flanagan 2001: 181)

Night after night the Commandant circled, his belief in his manifest destiny increasing as his sanity declined. 'His talk became of impossibilities – of building a temple of odours; of lifting the Penitentiary into the air by the power of levitation . . .; of developing mesmerism as an offensive weapon for his army'. Yet, 'in spite of his epic nation-building projects' (Flanagan 2001: 182), the Commandant grew despondent at the island's drop in trade, until he hit upon the 'grandest idea of all, that of the Great Mah-Jong Hall', a tourist site he was sure 'would attract Javanese & Chinese traders, Moluccan pirates & Dutch merchants, English sailors & French scientists, all searching for a place in the South Seas to gamble their hard-won fortunes' (Flanagan 2001: 183). Designed in 'the Egyptian revival style with some rococo elements' (Flanagan 2001: 184), the Great Mah-Jong Hall was conceived on a staggering scale,

> its construction a nightmare of suffering for all who worked upon it, the hundreds who died in its construction, the thousands who were maimed

> & crippled in the forging of the iron, the cutting & carrying of the timber, the quarrying of the stone, the masonry, the carpentry. Yet it was a nightmare of such stupendous proportions that it was impossible not to feel a perverse astonishment at what was being raised in the middle of that wilderness. (Flanagan 2001: 185)

In the Commandant and his minuscule island-nation we find a distillation, exaggeration and critique of nineteenth-century European beliefs and aspirations. With his energy and vision, his unwavering faith in commerce, technology and progress, his entrepreneurial spirit and sense of his manifest destiny, the Commandant is the quintessential capitalist, even if his talents are in service of an insane undertaking. The stylistic monstrosity of the Great Mah-Jong Hall sounds only slightly less preposterous than some of the nineteenth-century's monuments to bad taste, and its epic construction, involving the suffering and death of thousands of labourers, recalls many similarly costly engineering feats of the century (the Panama Canal, for example, said to have claimed the lives of 27,500 workers during its construction from 1880 to its opening in 1914). The Commandant's efforts to reinvent Europe reflect colonial aspirations in general, as settlers sought to transform the rest of the world into a new and improved Europe. His Great Mah-Jong Hall, which eventually collapses in ruins, could easily take its place with the many abandoned structures littering our globe that bear testimony to the grandiose ambitions of misguided visionaries. And in the circular railway with its virtual tourism, we find a critique of the culture of production and consumption, of its endless cycles of supposed progress and ersatz entertainment whereby, as Wordsworth observes, 'late and soon, / Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers'.

## *The Carceral Cosmos*

What makes the Commandant's entrepreneurial nation-building so spectacularly absurd is that it takes place on a remote island penal colony. Sarah Island, one might say, was an essence of penality.[11] Australia had initially been settled by convicts and their overseers. Free settlers soon followed, but for decades criminals continued to be transported to New South Wales. Gradually, however, the mainland government began removing their problem convicts to Van Diemen's Land. As a contemporary of Gould's and fellow Van Diemonian observed in his history of Van Diemen Land, 'The Sydney Government by degrees took charge of the settlement, and converted

Van Diemen's Land into a penal station of their own, and all the men of bad character, or those suffering under additional sentences in New South Wales, were transported to the younger colony' (Grey 1851: 204–5). Once in Van Diemen's Land, the convicts received sentences of varying degrees of severity, depending upon their assignment to one of seven classes officially established in 1826:

> The first class . . . were all men of especially good conduct . . . The second class convicts were slightly less dependable and had to sleep in the barracks. . . . The third class men worked on roads and other public works . . . The fourth class convicts were in chain gangs . . . The fifth class convicts worked in irons . . . The sixth class was composed of men of the most degraded character. They were sent to Maria Island Penal settlement. The seventh class convicts . . . were considered as incorrigible characters and were sent to Macquarie Harbour [Sarah Island] for particularly severe punishment. (Julen 1976: 43–4)

Sarah Island, in short, was the endpoint of a carceral trajectory, a microscopic island penal colony within the larger island penal colony of a continental penal colony. (As the ship bearing Gould and his fellow convicts neared their new island prison home, Gould heard the captain say, '"A full stop . . . to the end of Empire"' [Flanagan 2001: 99].)

The utopian nation envisioned by the Commandant would seem the antithesis of a penal settlement such as Sarah Island, but Gould came to recognise that the island prison and the Commandant's model city-state were ultimately allied. After the failure of the Great Mah-Jong Hall, the Commandant indulged in one last dream. 'He wanted the city to be silent. He wanted the people no longer to talk but to communicate through an elaborate system of written messages.' While playing cribbage one night, the Commandant had sighed that 'a great city is a great solitude', and Gould suspected that this remark expressed 'his true motivation for first turning the prison island into a city, & then, later, the city into a larger, more complete gaol'. The Commandant's ultimate goal, Gould concluded, was to create 'a city where every man could be trusted to be his own gaoler, living in perfect isolation from every other man' (Flanagan 2001: 195).

The Commandant was not alone in his carceral visions. In Gould's opinion, the same inspiration lay behind the Linnaean natural history studies of the colony surgeon, Lempriere. In one regard, Lempriere's enterprise enforced a separation of the realms of nature and the human, establishing humans as superiors imposing order on their

inferiors. Yet such a separation was merely methodological, for Lempriere sought to classify people as well as flora and fauna, and 'THEN ON SUCH BASIS MAKE SOCIETY ANEW' (Flanagan 2001: 122). (Throughout the novel Lempriere's speech is rendered in capital letters and telegraphic fragments.) Lempriere's belief was that

> if he could only smash the mystery of the world up into enough fragments . . ., then the mystery would disappear & all would be knowable, & with all knowable, everything would be solvable & improvable, all matters of good & evil explicable & remediable on some Linnaean ladder of creation. (Flanagan 2001: 125–6)

Lempriere's contribution to this grand taxonomic enterprise was to assist in the cataloguing of the fish of Van Diemen's Land, providing the great naturalist Cosmo Wheeler, member of the Royal Society, with anatomically accurate paintings of various species (the perishable nature of fish making transport of actual specimens to England impossible). Gould was charged with executing the requisite paintings. As Gould advanced in this project, he became increasingly wary of the enterprise. When Lempriere exclaimed, 'MAN'S DOMINION WILL BE ENTIRELY KNOWN & KNOWABLE, & MAN'S MASTERY COMPLETE – HIS FINAL EMPIRE NATURE', Gould thought, 'It sounded suspiciously like an attempt by the Surgeon & Mr Cosmo Wheeler to recreate the natural world as a penal colony, with me, the gaoled, now to play the part of turnkey' (Flanagan 2001: 129). In fact, Lempriere had himself seen a connection between prisons and taxonomies, for among his most prized possessions was

> a short letter he had received from Jeremy Bentham in answer to a long discourse the Surgeon had written to the great man on how Bentham's principle of the panopticon – a model prison in which all men could be constantly watched – might profitably be extended to natural history. (Flanagan 2001: 131)

Gould had come upon the Bentham letter while rummaging through Lempriere's portmanteau, but in that bag he had also found a chapbook edition of Pliny's *Natural History*, a book that offered Gould an alternative model for investigating the natural world. Lempriere dismissed the book as 'superstitious claptrap', but Gould discovered in its pages not a rational cosmos under human domination but 'a world in which man is lost & less but lost & less amidst the marvellous, the extraordinary, the gorgeously inexplicable wonder of

a universe only limited by one's own imagining of it' (Flanagan 2001: 131). Gould's job was to expunge the marvelous, the extraordinary and the wondrous and to render the world in terms of impersonal descriptions and objective measurements. As Gould sought a model for his work in the prints in Lempriere's natural history books, Gould wondered whether he had the talent necessary for the task, since 'the best of them showed a certain spontaneity that I knew I could never approach', but he decided that 'the worst of them were as flat & dead as their subjects must have been when studied, & I flattered myself I could do no worse' (Flanagan 2001: 135).

## *Painting Fish*

Gould's initial problem in painting fish was that his drafting skills

> were restricted to a crude copying of the details of bank & promissory notes or caricaturing the whims of the lowly & the vanities of the free settlers, all flat objects that can be part traced, part graphed & reproduced through a system of squares, part easily guessed at. (Flanagan 2001: 133)

His talents were in line with the flat, static, geometrically rigid Linnaean system of Lempriere, but the subject matter of his art ran counter to his abilities, since 'A fish is a slippery & three-dimensional monster that exists in all manner of curves, whose colouring & surfaces & translucent fins suggest the very reason & riddle of life' (Flanagan 2001: 133). Luckily for Gould, with practice he was able to produce serviceable paintings that met with Lempriere's approval.

Yet even early on in his career as fish painter, Gould saw something in his subjects that compelled him to seek more than a functional representation of a dead specimen in his compositions. While onboard the ship bound for Sarah Island, Captain Pinchbeck had instructed Gould to paint a kelpy, and to provide Gould with a model, sailors had hooked one and brought it to him live in a bucket of water. To sketch the fish, Gould would place the kelpy on a dry table, draw a few lines, then plunge it back in the bucket before it died. As he repeated this process, he realised that he was the torturer and the kelpy the tortured, and that he was repeating the experience he had undergone when Pinchbeck had placed him in a cage and dragged him behind the ship until he had nearly drowned. 'This dry table, I realised, was the kelpy's *petite noyade* [Pinchbeck's name for the cage torture inflicted on Gould], & I his Captain Pinchbeck. Like

me, the kelpy was guilty. Like me, it had no idea why' (Flanagan 2001: 89). What arrested Gould most was the kelpy's eyes, which reminded him of the eyes of a Glasgow machine breaker who had lain in agony after being crushed by the treadmill on which he, Gould and Capois Death had been punished a few weeks earlier. The machine breaker had begged to be put out of his misery, and Capois Death had eventually complied. Hence, as Gould painted,

> I began taking liberties with that fish's face, so it was both the fish's knowing eye & the horror of the machine breaker's eye, watching us on the treadwheel . . . and it was my own fear at this cracked world in which I & they & everything was trapped. (Flanagan 2001: 90)

In the kelpy's eye Gould caught a glimpse of the life of the fish, its spirit and character, but also a sign of the sufferings common to animals and humans. This connection between fish and people grew as Gould executed his watercolours for Lempriere, and as Gould's understanding of the fish increased, so did his tendency to see their essences reflected in the people around him. As he painted the porcupine fish, for example, he caught 'the slightly fearful, slightly bellicose uplift of the eye's large pupil' and sensed that he was approaching the true character of the fish. Gould began to see that this fish, which 'blew itself up to triple its size, spikes bristling, to intimidate other fish' (Flanagan 2001: 138) embodied the spirit and nature of the surgeon Lempriere. Later, Gould saw that the Commandant, with his grandiose dreams of creating a Nation out of the penal colony, was like the Stargazer, 'a cold thing, a frightful, frightening, frightened thing' (Flanagan 2001: 173). In a sense, Gould anthropomorphised the fish, seeing a human character in each specimen. But the more he painted the fish, the more he reached 'the awful truth about Sarah Island: that this was not a colony of men at all, but a colony of fish masquerading as men' (Flanagan 2001: 250). No longer did he see humans in fish, but he saw fish in humans. When he looked on Jorgen Jorgensen, the colony's Commissariat Officer, 'I recognized not Jorgen Jorgensen but saw a sawtooth shark, thrusting & cutting me into pieces with his long mouth' (Flanagan 2001: 250). As he sought an explanation for Jorgensen's malevolence, Gould discerned no reason or conscious motivation behind the clerk's actions. 'It was, I suppose, simply his nature, as it is that of a sawtooth shark's' (Flanagan 2001: 251).

The fish, then, became the means whereby Gould learned of human beings and their natural characters, but the fish also began to

change Gould. When initially assigned to paint fish for Lempriere, he had disliked the task. Yet when the Commandant reassigned Gould to paint backdrops for the circular railway, he began developing an unexpected need for the fish: 'the truth was that no longer being compelled to paint for Science, my feelings for the fish were for a second time changing, & what I had formerly hated I now missed' (Flanagan 2001: 213). He felt driven to learn about the fish, study their bodies and try to capture the mystery of their forms. It was as if one could not spend time with the fish 'without something of their cold eye & quivering flesh passing across the air into your soul' (Flanagan 2001: 214). He sensed that 'some small part of me, without me willing it, was beginning a long, fateful journey into them!' (Flanagan 2001: 257). This journey into fish, he realised, was symptomatic of a general breakdown in his defences against the cruelty of the world. 'I knew in order to survive & prosper it was important to feel nothing for anyone or anything, & I knew I wanted to survive & prosper'. But as he felt the fish working their way into his soul, 'I began to dream that there was nothing in the extraordinary universe opening up in front of me, not a man or woman, not a plant or tree, not a bird or fish, to which I might be allowed to continue remaining indifferent' (Flanagan 2001: 258).

## *The Power of Words*

As the fish passed into Gould, he felt himself inexorably opening to the world, and in this regard, he was becoming the antithesis of Jorgensen, whose primary motivation was to use words to divorce himself from life and, in his own way, extend Lempriere's project of imposing a carceral order on reality. Jorgensen's primary responsibility in the colony had been to serve as clerk and factotum to the Commandant, but following an extended period of mental derangement, the Commandant assigned Jorgensen a new duty. In a growing delirium induced by laudanum and mercury, the Commandant 'spoke of how history, far from being past, was ever present. All those who had over the centuries deliberately or inadvertently discovered Van Diemen's Land, he now believed all to be here, now, sailing into Twopenny Sal's bedroom': twelfth-century Arab traders, fourteenth-century Japanese pirates, fifteenth-century Portuguese adventurers, the Dutch, the Javanese, 'a French expedition of naturalists, astronomers, artists, philosophers, encyclopaedists, & savants' (Flanagan 2001: 242–3).[12] With horror, the Commandant cried, '"What if time

never passed?"' What if 'the Arabs, Japanese, Portuguese, Dutch, Javanese & French were always all there discovering Van Diemen's Land in Twopenny Sal's bedroom[?]' (Flanagan 2001: 244). His only means of exorcising this nightmare, he concluded, was to engage in 'temporal tyranny' and become the master of history. '"If I cannot control the past now, . . . I will at least control it in the future"' (Flanagan 2001: 246), and with that goal in mind, he solemnly charged Jorgensen with maintaining the records of the island.

Jorgensen was well suited for his task of annalist in service of temporal tyranny. As a youth, Jorgensen, like Don Quijote, had read too many tales of romance and adventure, and when at age sixteen he set forth from his hometown, he soon discovered 'that the world did not correspond to anything he had read'. Reality and fiction diverged at every point. 'Books were solid, yet time was molten. Books were consistent, yet people were not. Books dealt in cause & effect, yet life was inexplicable disorder.' The discrepancy between life and books filled him with 'a dull resentment that finally found expression as vengeance' (Flanagan 2001: 251). He learned, however, that despite this rift between life and art, with words he could impose his will on the world by telling stories that others would believe. And so he became 'a journeyman of tales, a traveller through the republic of fictions' (Flanagan 2001: 253). On Sarah Island he had continued in his storyteller trade and had shown his 'capacity to be ever ready to invent whatever story he fancied the Commandant might want to hear'. His reward was to write a history that answered to the Commandant's desires, but that task also satisfied Jorgensen's own deepest yearnings: 'he found in the Commandant a mirror to his own long repressed desires to betray the world in a more fundamental way, as he felt the world had once betrayed him by not being a book' (Flanagan 2001: 254).

When the ceiling of Gould's fish cell collapsed and he climbed into the library above, he discovered volume upon volume of Jorgensen's secret history of the island. For seven days, Gould read the colony archives, year by year, tracing the development of Jorgensen's inventive history. In the beginning, Jorgensen had modestly attempted to record events and include misleading or false letters that he had composed on the Commandant's behalf in order to placate the Hobart Town authorities and the London Colonial Office. At a certain point, however, 'this necessary clerical invention' was extended 'to the much grander project of reimagining the penal colony' (Flanagan 2001: 284). As Gould read, his initial fascination with the archive

soon gave way to wonder. He saw that increasingly in Jorgensen's pages the world 'was at war with the reality in which we lived. The bad news was that reality was losing' (Flanagan 2001: 284–5). In Jorgensen's account, everything was different, 'every life, every action, every motive, every consequence' (Flanagan 2001: 285). The result was 'an image of the settlement that would persuade posterity of both the convicts' animality & the administrator's sagacity, a model of the power of unremitting, tempered discipline to transform pickpockets into cobblers & catamites into Christians' (Flanagan 2001: 287).

In Jorgensen's alternative universe, the colony was 'a system in which one was accorded an ignoble but necessary part, like a piston head or belt in the steam engines the Scot weaver had once so futilely smashed' (Flanagan 2001: 288). Gould admired the audacity of Jorgensen's fictions and saluted his genius, but gradually Gould was overcome with 'the dreadful awareness that all he had read was simply the Commandant's image of rational society as a prison of which even Miss Anne in Europe did not dare dream' (Flanagan 2001: 289), and that this 'universal history' (Flanagan 2001: 290) was perhaps the fullest achievement of the Commandant's dream of reinventing Europe.

As Gould finished reading the history, Jorgensen surprised him and assaulted him. In the ensuing fight, Jorgensen was crushed to death by falling books (including Pliny's *Natural History*), and Gould devised a plan to escape the colony and take Jorgensen's multi-volume history with him. He worried that the false history would come to be the world's sole memory of the island, and if so, then he and his fellow prisoners would be 'condemned to an eternity of imprisonment' (Flanagan 2001: 290). His intention was to flee inland, find the bushranger Matt Brady, tell the truth about the colony, and then accompany Brady and his men in a raid to liberate the prisoners. As he hauled his book-laden sassafras sled through the wilderness, he worried

> that unless I did something, the lies I now dragged behind me would one day be all that remained of the settlement, & posterity would seek . . . to judge us all through the machine of the Commandant's monstrous fictions! As though they were the truth! As though history & the written word were friends, rather than adversaries! (Flanagan 2001: 312)

He began to think that the paper records of the colony were 'the necessary fiction by which the reality of the prison-island was maintained

. . . for it was clear to me now that it was these false words which enslaved us'. Jorgensen's history was a 'prison of paper', and his hope was that Brady would be 'the one who might avenge History' (Flanagan 2001: 312–3).

Gould despaired that 'the Word & the World were no longer what they seemed, that they were no longer One', and his mission became that of repairing this rift and thereby 'once & for all destroying the Convict System' (Flanagan 2001: 309). But before he could make contact with Brady and achieve his goal, he came upon Twopenny Sal, who had also left the colony, accompanied by her four children and the mainland Aborigine Tracker Marks. Gould was near starvation from his week-long trek through the wilds, and Tracker Marks himself was dying from mutilations he had suffered at the hands of the whites whom Marks had been serving as a guide. After sharing dinner with the Aborigine group and falling into an exhausted sleep, Gould awoke in the dark to see the flames of a funeral pyre for the now-dead Marks. As he watched Twopenny Sal fuel the fire, he realised with horror that she was feeding the flames with the pages of Jorgensen's history. '*The registers!* The registers I had dragged for so many days with so great a sacrifice! The registers with which Brady would liberate us! The registers that had killed Jorgen Jorgensen & for which I had risked my life' (Flanagan 2001: 335). Gould wrested a volume from Twopenny Sal, but as he began reading a page of the volume, he was confounded to find text from the novel *Gould's Book of Fish*, including a passage that repeats what the reader of the novel has just read:

> I then realised that the book was not near ended, that it contained several more chapters, & with mounting terror I read on the succeeding page of how – 'I realised that the book was not near ended, that it contained several more chapters, & with mounting terror I read on the succeeding page of how – ' (Flanagan 2001: 337)

## *On the Way Beyond Words*

Flanagan's playfulness seldom extends to such self-referential devices as this *mise en abîme* of Gould reading his own narrative in a book already written, and some might view this metafictional twist in the plot as a hackneyed bit of self-indulgent postmodernism. Yet this motif does more than simply call attention to the artifice of Flanagan's fiction. As Gould began reading passages from his own story, he said of himself,

> Billy Gould could not escape the growing suspicion that he had become entrapped in a book, a character whose future as much as his past was already written, determined, foretold, as unalterable as it was intolerable. What choice did he have but to destroy that book? (Flanagan 2001: 336)

What Gould was coming to realise was the unreliability of stories – or at least, of conventional stories, with consistent characters, understandable motives, predictable actions, and satisfying beginnings, middles and ends. His goal had been to preserve Jorgensen's false history, present his own true history, and thereby bring Word and World back together again. He had concluded that the fictions of Jorgensen's text were the 'paper prison' upon which the colony was based, and that Gould's true account of Sarah Island would lead to the destruction of the 'Convict System' (Flanagan 2001: 309). Yet now he was forced to abandon his mission of countering Jorgensen's false record with his own true history. He had been horrified that Twopenny Sal was burning Jorgensen's volumes, but as he read his own story, he felt compelled to join her in the destruction of the books.

As Gould stoked the flames, he felt a sense of liberation. 'Onto that pyre I threw so many, many words – that entire untrue literature of the past which had shackled & subjected me . . . that had so long denied me my free voice & the stories I needed to tell'. What he needed to tell were the stories meant to be suppressed by the books he was burning, 'those books of betrayals, . . . all with treacheries great & insignificant at their core hiding from us our shame at how we were made to be both gaoled & gaoler', 'all those lies that obscured the mysteries & clues & echoes & questions & answers' (Flanagan 2001: 338). But as he burned the books, Gould did not launch forth into stories. Instead, he joined Twopenny Sal in her funeral dance.

> I dragged my withered, ulcerated legs in poor but definite imitation of her jumps & leaps, & together with her & the children I danced so many things that lay so deep within my soul it felt like a purifying fire itself. It was a joy & it was a sadness & it was inexplicable . . . We were dancing something beyond words. (Flanagan 2001: 339)

The stories Gould needed to tell were of mysteries and of gaoled and gaoler, yet they were also tales beyond words. Before escaping the prison, Gould at one point had elaborated on the shame of being both gaoled and gaoler. He was in his fish cell, and he had just seen

Twopenny Sal for what he thought was the last time, since he sensed somehow that she would soon be escaping into the wilderness. She was pregnant, possibly with his own child, and the sight of her belly had made him feel 'the malevolent power of jealousy' as he wondered 'which devil was responsible'. Yet as she left his prison cell, he wanted to overcome his rancour and tell her that he understood the compromises she had had to make in order to survive, including having sex with the Commandant and no doubt with others. 'Do you think I was only gaoled? I wanted to cry out as she turned to leave & rapped thrice on the door for Pobjoy to come & open – for I too was the gaoler' (Flanagan 2001: 260). He wanted to tell her that he had informed on his fellow prisoners, stolen from them, told lies about them to dodge punishment. 'I have a great fear of pain. I am beyond shame. . . . I survived. It was bad & wrong & I may as well be the cat-o'-nine tails stripping bark off their backs when I traded souls for some scraps of food or paint' (Flanagan 2001: 261). But as he continued in his imaginary address to Twopenny Sal, shame at his complicity in his own punishment gradually gave way to a broader vision of his inextricable involvement in the horrors and beauties of life. He wanted to tell her,

> I was a vile piece of cell-shit. . . . I was the filthy lice that didn't stop itching. I was Australia. I was dying before I was born. I was a rat eating its young. I was Mary Magdalene. I was Jesus. I was sinner, I was saint. I was flesh & flesh's appetite & flesh's union & death & love were all equally rank & all equally beautiful in my eyes. . . . I was spirit & I was God & I was untranslatable & unknowable even to myself. How I hated myself for it. (Flanagan 2001: 261)

He wanted to say to Twopenny Sal, 'I was Divine in Your image & I was You & I was no longer long for this grand earth & why is it no words would tell how I was so much hurting aching bidding farewell?' (Flanagan 2001: 262).

This tale of gaoled and gaoler addressed to Twopenny Sal was one 'no words would tell', 'untranslatable & unknowable', a confession of shame, a mystic vision of interpenetrating contraries, and an expression of love and loss. This tale brings the 'Sawtooth Shark' chapter to a close, but in typically Gouldian fashion, the next chapter winds back to an earlier scene that elucidates further the sense of Gould's ineffable, untranslatable and unknowable tale. Gould had lured Twopenny Sal to a sexual rendezvous with the promise of tobacco he had managed to acquire. After they made love, Gould

painted a striped cowfish on her breast, and some moments later she began to dance.

> Her dance had nothing of the feminine about it; nothing that we might know by the words woman & womanly. It was by turns violent, shameless, devoid of grace, & seemed to aspire not to beauty but only to tell a story that I had the vanity of thinking might be intended for me. She seemed to be seeking to exist in defiance of weight, of gravity. The striped cowfish leapt & cavorted & flitted through the ocean of her dance. (Flanagan 2001: 274–5)

As he looked at her body, he saw a silver bangle on one wrist, an unlanced boil on the other, and a staring cowfish.

> Lice crawling up her arm & onto a cowfished breast; this sight of one body ceding to others, of the inevitable advance of death & at the same time its transformation into new life, struck me as terrible & wonderful. Nothing was reconciled: everything was beautiful. (Flanagan 2001: 275)

Twopenny Sal's dance was a story without words, in which nothing was reconciled and everything was beautiful. It was a story of life, death and transformation into new life, at once terrifying and awe inspiring. This dance story was also mysterious, and its mystery was inseparable from the dancer. 'That day, the more I loved her, the more mysterious she became to me' (Flanagan 2001: 275). When Gould was a young man in England apprenticed to Old Gould, the man from whom he took his name, Old Gould would say 'Life is a mystery . . . & love the mystery within the mystery' (Flanagan 2001: 201). As Gould threw books on Tracker Marks' funeral pyre, he burned the stories 'that obscured the mysteries & clues & echoes & questions & answers' (Flanagan 2001: 338). He felt liberated to tell the stories he needed to tell, and those were stories of the mystery of life and the mystery within the mystery of love. And so he eventually began his *Book of Fish* during his final captivity in the fish cell. He was never satisfied with his efforts, but

> Still, I continued making this *Book of Fish* because I could not laugh it or dance it like Twopenny Sal might have, because I could not swim it & live it like my subjects had, because this most inadequate form of communication – these images & words falling stillborn from my brush & quill – was all I was capable of realising. (Flanagan 2001: 385)

The mystery of life is metamorphosis, a cycle of life, death and regeneration that conjoins everything and reconciles nothing. The mystery of love is an openness to the other that leads to the unsettling

interconnection of gaoler and gaoled, sinner and saint, pus, spirit and God. And there is a hierarchy in the communication of these mysteries: to live them as do fish; to dance them as does Twopenny Sal; to paint them and write them as does Gould. Yet even within Gould's project, there is a hierarchy, a superiority of paintings over words. The mysteries of life and death are inherently ineffable. Gould's words are in service of his images of fish, in which he tries to capture the life and spirit that speak to him in the eye of each fish he paints. When Gould issued a prefatory address to the reader early in the novel, he explained the odd format he had chosen of paintings accompanied by text: 'Next to my paintings I intend to make a bonfire of words, say anything if it illuminates a paltry moment of truth in my poor pictures' (Flanagan 2001: 91). At one point, when the Commandant had dreamed of turning the colony into a silent city, he had remarked, '"Speech was given to man to conceal thought"' (Flanagan 2001: 195), and Gould had developed a similar awareness of words' power to deceive and lie. When Gould first faced the prospect of painting fish for Lempriere, he was befuddled by the creatures, 'whose colouring & surfaces & translucent fins suggest the very reason & riddle of life'. He recognised that 'A fish is a truth, & having no idea how to tell a truth, far less paint it, for several days I entirely avoided the issue' (Flanagan 2001: 133). When Gould finally attempted in earnest to paint and tell the truth of fish, his words functioned as disposable vehicles for illuminating the images, his text 'a bonfire of words' like the funeral pyre for Tracker Marks around which he later danced.

## *Aborigines*

Gould's quest to live and express the mysteries of life and love began and would end with fish. When he first painted fish, he saw in the kelpy's eye the suffering of the Glasgow machine breaker. As he painted other specimens, he began to see the characters of various humans in the fish. Eventually, he ceased seeing humans in fish and 'realised the awful truth about Sarah Island: that this was not a colony of men at all, but a colony of fish masquerading as men' (Flanagan 2001: 250). He then sensed that some part of himself was passing into the fish, and that as a result he was being opened and exposed to all creatures and all life. And by the novel's conclusion, Gould's 'long, fateful journey' (Flanagan 2001: 257) would end in his becoming a fish. But along the way, Gould's becoming-fish journey passed through Twopenny Sal and her Aboriginal wisdom.

Flanagan's presentation of the fate of the Tasmanian Aborigines in the early nineteenth century is accurate in spirit, if not always in specific details. Gould said that when the first British settlement party, led by Bowen, landed at Risdon Bay in 1803, the sailors opened fire on the Aborigines assembled on the shore, 'leaving some forty-five dead men, women & children on the sand' (Flanagan 2001: 42). Gould's account would not be supported by modern historians, such as Robson and Ryan, who have concluded that Bowen's initial contact with the Aborigines was probably peaceful. However, it is true that within months soldiers at Risdon Bay had a violent confrontation with the Aborigines, and 'in the ensuing skirmish at least three Aborigines were killed' (Ryan 1981: 75; see also Robson 1983: 45–6). In the three decades following the Risdon Bay landing, incidents involving the death of Aborigines in Tasmania increased in frequency, brutality and the number of casualties. Gould's account of the 1803 slaughter, then, while most likely inaccurate, is a conflation into a single episode of a long process that included scenes of barbarity far worse than that presented in the novel.[13]

Gould also told of the arrival at Sarah Island of 'the white conciliator Guster Robinson', who in a 'quixotic, government-sponsored venture' had set out on 'a white man's mission to round up all the savages who had for so long waged war against them & who still remained at large in the wilds' (Flanagan 2001: 215–6). Indeed, a George Augustus Robinson (1791–1866) did visit Sarah Island in 1833, and he was engaged in a government-sponsored effort to gather Aborigines and move them to a separate settlement.[14] Gould's Robinson is a much less sympathetic individual than some historians portray, in that the fictional Robinson is a thoroughly unpleasant, condescending racist, and the real man seemed to have had a degree of respect for some of the Aborigines who accompanied him on his journeys, and he believed that he was helping the Aborigines to survive what he considered inevitable extermination if they did not move to separate settlements.[15] But whatever his motives, the real Robinson did in fact execute policies that led to the removal of the Aborigines from their land. Gould also reported that Robinson was accompanied by 'a tall elegant man . . . called Towtereh', who was 'a chief of the Port Davey people'. Gould was invited to paint Towtereh's portrait, and 'I painted Towtereh as a man of dignity', judging him to be 'a true patriot, whose profound love of his country seemed undeniable' (Flanagan 2001: 219). One of the real Gould's extant watercolours is in fact of Towterer, Chief

of the Port Davey Tribe, who was present at Sarah Island with Robinson in 1833, and the fictional Gould's characterisation of Towtereh's portrait as that of a 'man of dignity' is consonant with the surviving painting.[16]

Also among the fictional Robinson's party was Tracker Marks, 'a mainland native who had for a time worked for the Van Diemonian troopers tracking down bushrangers, & had then, for no clear reason, fallen in with Robinson's mission to bring in the warring tribes from the wilderness' (Flanagan 2001: 219–20). Marks is clearly modelled on Musquito (c. 1780–1825), an Aborigine from New South Wales who had participated in raids against settlers and had subsequently been exiled to the Norfolk Island prison colony for eight years, after which he was sent to Van Diemen's Land in 1813. In October of that year, he served as a tracker in the hunting and killing of the bushranger Michael Howe. Unlike Tracker Marks, Musquito did not join Robinson. Instead, he formed his own outlaw gang after the leaders of the Howe expedition failed to fulfil the promises Musquito thought that they had made him. Nor did his death resemble that of Tracker Marks, who died from wounds inflicted when his nose and ears were severed. Musquito met his end when he was captured, convicted of murder, and hanged on 25 February 1825.[17] The mutilation Marks endured, however, was not without precedent in the real Van Diemen's Land. In recounting Robinson's journeys across the island, Robson notes that 'Robinson also heard from an individual who recollected the circumstance of a man receiving corporal punishment for carrying in his pack the ears and noses of those [Aborigines] whom he had slain, and afterwards exhibiting them as trophies' (Robson 1983: 224).

The central Aboriginal figure in the novel is Twopenny Sal, and though not modelled on any specific real individual, she endured a fate that many Aboriginal women shared. The daughter of Towtereh, Twopenny Sal had been abducted by the sealer Clucas and 'condemned to live as a slave' (Flanagan 2001: 218) on Clucas' island.[18] In point of fact, sealers 'specialized in the kidnapping of women and forced labour' (Robson 1983: 227). In his 10 October 1829 diary entry, Robinson writes, 'an Aboriginal woman informed me that sealers at the straits carry on a complete system of slavery; that they barter in exchange for women flour and potatoes; that she herself was bought off the black men for a bag of flour and potatoes' (Plomley 1966: 82).[19] While living as a slave, 'Twopenny Sal was reputed to have had two children to Clucas, & killed both by

stuffing grass in their mouths' (Flanagan 2001: 218). Robson, again paraphrasing Robinson, states that some of the Aboriginal women enslaved by sealers 'aborted themselves by beating their belly with their fist and sometimes secretly killed their half-caste children in the bush' (Robson 1983: 230).

Especially horrific were the events that transpired during Twopenny Sal's abduction. Clucas and some other sealers had landed and charged a group of Aborigines on the shore, intent on abducting the women, but they had been beaten back, managing only to seize a baby boy as a hostage. The child was Twopenny Sal's. Clucas announced that the mother could have her child only if she came with the sealers. Twopenny Sal approached the sealers' boat and offered to come with them if the boy could return to his tribe.

> The sealers grabbed her. Clucas, taking hold of the boy by his legs, swung him against the rocks & beat his brains out. One native man swam after him & succeeded in gaining hold of their stern post. Clucas chopped off his hands with a tomahawk. (Flanagan 2001: 218)

This episode is modelled on two actual events. The first, reported by Robinson, involved an aborted effort of five sealers to abduct Aboriginal women. The sealers were accompanied by a female Aboriginal slave, who was to assist in the raid. Four sealers set forth on the raid, while the fifth remained with their boat. The four raiders were killed, and the fifth only survived because he was warned of approaching warriors by a little child. After hours of fighting in which the sealer kept the warriors at bay with his gun, the Aborigines allowed him to leave, accompanied, if he wished, by the Aboriginal slave who had come with him. The sealer 'asked the woman if she would go with him or stop with the natives and she answered she would stop. The child was on the beach and the man seized hold of it and beat its brains out' (Plomley 1966: 193–4). The second episode was reported by Trucanini, one of the Aboriginal women who travelled with Robinson in his journeys.

> In her girlhood, accompanied by her intended husband, Paraweena, and another native man, she was once on the mainland of Van Diemen's Land. Two sawyers, Watkin Lowe and Paddy Newell, undertook to row the party to nearby Bruny Island. In mid-channel the white men threw the natives overboard. As they struggled to the boat and grasped the gunwale Lowe and Newell chopped off their hands with hatchets. The mutilated aborigines were left to drown and the Europeans were free to do as they pleased with the girl. (Turnbull 1965: 100)[20]

## *Twopenny Sal's Wisdom*

Gould initially shared his fellow convicts' prejudices against the Aborigines. When he met and talked with the Port Davey Chief Towtereh, however, 'I found my own opinions of the savages changing, & I could no longer think of them as I formerly had' (Flanagan 2001: 219). His attitude toward Twopenny Sal likewise changed over time. 'I began with certainty; that she was black, that she was for me pleasure, & that I could make love to her without consequence. I ended in doubt, both as to who she was &, even more shockingly, as to who I was' (Flanagan 2001: 275). As his views of her altered, he began not only to love her but also to sense unexpected depths in her being.

Twopenny Sal exposes Gould to Aboriginal practices and beliefs, and through this encounter with a non-Western mentality, he is able to enter a becoming-other. It is at this stage of the narrative, we should observe, that Flanagan's fabulative negotiation of fact and fiction becomes most perilous, in that the novel's Aborigines might seem to the uninformed to be mere versions of Rousseau's noble savages. Yet such is not the case. Crucial is the fact that even when Flanagan may seem to be idealising the other, he is actually adhering closely to the anthropological record (something I will try to substantiate – though by no means exhaustively – with occasional footnotes).

When Gould had painted the cowfish on Twopenny Sal's breast and they had made love, 'Her eyes seemed so full of wisdom, but when she spoke it was only to ask for more pisco, & then she danced' (Flanagan 2001: 274). The ensuing dance was her primary wisdom, but she had disclosed hints of other wisdom earlier that evening. Before they had made love, she had shown Gould the ritual scars of two circles incised on the back of her calves.[21] 'One circle she touched & said "Sun", the other, bisected but not broken by a single line, she touched &, again in English, said "Moon"' (Flanagan 2001: 271). She then picked up a sharp stick and inscribed similar circles on Gould's back, rubbing ash into the wounds to form scars. She 'touched the first circle & said, "Palawa", her word for her own people; then when rubbing ash into the circle that she had bisected, said she one word over & over, "Numminer"' (Flanagan 2001: 271). Gould knew that *numminer* 'was their word both for ghosts & white men, that they believed England was where their spirits went after death to be reborn as English men & women, that the white men were their ancestors returned' (Flanagan 2001: 271).[22] Gould

protested that he was no 'numminer', and to prove it he painted the cowfish on her breast.

Only gradually did the wisdom of this scene of scarification emerge for Gould. When he later escaped the colony and came upon Twopenny Sal, her children and Tracker Marks, Gould received a second lesson in this wisdom. After awakening from his exhausted sleep and approaching Tracker Marks' funeral pyre, Twopenny Sal rubbed him with the ritual ochre that covered her own body, doing so 'as though I were some long lost friend, as if I were her man, her brother, her father, her sons, all the other people who had preceded Tracker Marks' (Flanagan 2001: 333). Gould then joined the funeral dance, and as the fire died down at dawn the next day, Twopenny Sal said to him, '"No you worry, Tracker he go to England"', to which Gould replied that Tracker had gone nowhere, that he was just dead. '"Numminer!" cried she. "Tracker numminer! Gould numminer, but long time before you were Palawa. . . . Long time before", said she, "you were us"' (Flanagan 2001: 340). Gould showed no sign of comprehending the significance of this exchange, and though he recognised his own deep attachment to Twopenny Sal, he remained obsessed in his quest to find Matt Brady and thus parted ways with her. Eventually he discovered an abandoned Aborigine village, and it was here that he finally made his own sense of the wisdom Twopenny Sal had been offering him.

Starved and exhausted, Gould crawled into one of the village's domed shelters. Buried under a cairn, he discovered a diary on whose opening page was inscribed 'Matt Brady'. As Gould read the diary, he found no great thoughts, no plans of liberation for the convicts, only the record of an ordinary man who had fallen in love with an Aboriginal woman and taken up residence in her village, and whose only memorable comment was, 'To love is not safe.' In profound disillusionment, Gould wondered, 'To love is not safe. Whole circle, black man. Circle bisected, white man. . . . Love. Forgiveness. Love, love, love, thought I – is that all? is that it?' (Flanagan 2001: 350). For several hours, he lay on the shelter floor, waiting for death. He stared at the Aboriginal drawings above him on the domed ceiling 'over which kangaroos & wombats & devils & dancers & hunters & the moon roamed in stories I had no way of understanding'. He fell asleep, and then, like a crayfish moulting its shell, 'I prepared to abandon the shell of who & what I was, & metamorphose into something else.' Feeling his 'soul taking flight', he realised

> Stories as written are progressive, sentence must build upon sentence as brick upon brick, yet the beauty of this life in its endless mystery is circular. Sun & moon, spheres endlessly circling. Black man, full circle; white man, bisected circle; life, the third circle, on & on, & round & round. (Flanagan 2001: 352)

He had come to understand that 'implicit in a single seahorse was the universe, that everyone had the capacity to be someone, something, somebody else, that Numminer were Palawa & Palawa Numminer' (Flanagan 2001: 353).

Gould's revelation, though not Aboriginal per se, is one that passes through or alongside an Aboriginal view of the world. Though Flanagan does not say as much, Gould's revelation is influenced by the fundamental Aboriginal thought and practice of the Dreaming. For the Aborigines throughout Australia and Tasmania, there are two forms of time, ordinary and dream time, existing as parallel domains of action. The stream of ordinary time unfolds in a chronological fashion, whereas the stream of dream time is that of an infinite cycle of events that bear on the actual realm of ordinary time in a complex fashion. As W. E. H. Stanner says in his seminal essay, although the Dreaming is associated with foundational myths of creation and ancient, primal cosmic relationships, and hence 'conjures up the notion of a sacred, heroic time of the indefinitely remote past, such a time is also, in a sense, still part of the present. One cannot "fix" The Dreaming *in* time: it was, and is, everywhen.' The Dreaming, he concludes is 'a kind of narrative of things that once happened; a kind of charter of things that still happen; and a kind of *logos* or principle of order transcending everything significant for Aboriginal man' (Stanner 1998: 228). Events of the Dreaming took place long ago, but they also exist in the present, both in their own stratum of Dreaming time and in the stratum of lived time as those events are constantly enacted through rituals, customs and lore that permeate daily life. And the Dreaming events continue to exist simultaneously in the future. Implicit in this understanding of time is a view of the individual as a oneness of 'body, spirit, ghost, shadow, name, spirit-site and totem', in which 'man, society and nature, and past, present and future, are at one together within a unitary system of such a kind that its ontology cannot illumine minds too much under the influence of humanism, rationalism and science' (Stanner 1998: 229; see also Berndt and Berndt 1964: 138).

The Dreaming includes stories of ancient origins, but with no sense that their basic patterns differ from the present. There was no

Golden Age from which people have fallen, nor any Age of Chaotic Violence out of which people have ascended. From the beginning, individuals were like individuals today, good, bad and indifferent in multiple ways. As a result, the Aborigines 'have no gods, just or unjust, to adjudicate the world' (Stanner 1998: 232). Hence, in Stanner's assessment, with the metaphysic of the Dreaming 'goes a mood and spirit of "assent": neither despair nor resignation, optimism nor pessimism, quietism nor indifference' (Stanner 1998: 235). The Dreaming leads to 'a metaphysical emphasis on abidingness', and the Aboriginal valorisation of continuity 'is so high that they are not simply a people "without history": they are a people who have been able, in some sense, to "defeat" history, to become ahistorical in mood, outlook and life' (Stanner 1998: 236). It is this ahistorical metaphysic, he argues, that makes possible the mood and spirit of assent.

Gould's revelation involves first an opposition of Aboriginal and Western culture: 'Black man, full circle; white man, bisected circle'. This observation, which has become something of a commonplace in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, distinguishes the holistic view of humans held by many traditional, non-Western cultures, in this case Aborigines, from the dualistic view promulgated in European modernity, whereby a radical divide is made between mind and body, nature and culture, humans and animals, people and the land. But the 'full circle' also stands for the sun, and the 'bisected circle' (which, we recall, is 'bisected but not broken by a single line' [Flanagan 2001: 271] in Twopenny Sal's scar), stands for the moon. The differentiation of black man and white man, then, is also a complementarity that goes beyond antithesis. The full circle is 'Palawa', Twopenny Sal's name for her tribe, and the bisected circle is 'Numminer', the name for white man, but also for ghost, and by extension, for ancestor. The violent opposition of 'them' and 'us', while not necessarily ignored or passively accepted in its practical, sociopolitical guise, is metaphysically overcome. Tracker Marks becomes Numminer, just as Gould, the Numminer, long ago was Palawa. '"Long time before," said she, "you were us"' (Flanagan 2001: 340).

Both the full circle and the bisected circle are inscribed within a third circle, which Gould calls 'life' (Flanagan 2001: 372). The implication is that the cycles of human existence are inextricable from the myriad life cycles of all beings. Gould had earlier voiced a confused portion of this revelation when he said: 'I was sinner, I was saint . . .

I was God & I was pus & whatever was me was You & You were Holy' (Flanagan 2001: 261). In painting fish, he had reluctantly approached this insight, as he 'began to dream that there was nothing in the extraordinary universe opening up in front of me, not a man or woman, not a plant or tree, not a bird or fish, to which I might be allowed to continue remaining indifferent' (Flanagan 2001: 258). In his moment of full revelation, he realised 'that implicit in a single seahorse was the universe' (Flanagan 2001: 353). He had found no sense in Matt Brady's 'cryptic aside: "To love is not safe"', and had been disappointed by what he viewed as Brady's paltry wisdom. Yet Brady's insight was true. As Old Gould had said, 'Life is a mystery . . . & love the mystery within the mystery' (Flanagan 2001: 201). Late in the novel, Gould remarks, 'I just wanted to tell a story of love & it was about fish & it was about me & it was about everything' (Flanagan 2001: 385). As he painted the fish, 'I opened myself up to everything. The more I felt & the more I poured that feeling into my fish, the more feeling I saw all around me' (Flanagan 2001: 399). But in opening himself up to everything, he became vulnerable to all the world. Hence, Gould's conclusion that 'Matt Brady's book of dreams was right: to love is not safe' (Flanagan 2001: 402).

In his moment of revelation, Gould also understood that stories 'as written are progressive . . . yet the beauty of this life in its endless mystery is circular' (Flanagan 2001: 352). It may seem that here Gould is merely reiterating a common distinction drawn between linear time, dominant in Western modernity, and cyclical time, or the time of repeated regularities of days, months, seasons and years, prevalent in most traditional societies. But something more is going on. Gould's insight comes to him beneath the domed ceiling painted with the figures of Aboriginal stories. Those stories are stories of the Dreaming, existing in the time of an 'everywhen', parallel to ordinary time, in which regular cycles and repeated patterns do not so much follow one another in a linear sequence, as they reiterate themselves incessantly within a coexisting present that includes within it what we in ordinary time would call past, present and future, as if everywhere, always, the stories were taking place. Curiously, it is the Commandant who comes closest to articulating this Dreaming time. When deep in his laudanum delirium, the Commandant feared the possibility that 'time never passed', as though 'the Arabs, Japanese, Portuguese, Dutch, Javanese & French were always all there discovering Van Diemen's Land in Twopenny Sal's bedroom' (Flanagan 2001: 244). In his hallucinatory visions, 'He began to see everywhere

unsettling evidence that the Past is as much a Chaos as the Present, that there is no straight line only infinite circles, like rings proceeding ever outward from a stone sinking in the water of Now' (Flanagan 2001: 245). The Commandant's past that never passes is a coexistence of past times acting in the present, and since this present coexistence of past times continues to take place, it must be a non-passing past that extends into and encompasses the future. But most important is the fact that the Now creates circles that radiate 'ever outward', into the great expanses of both the coexisting past and the coexisting future. Hence, the Commandant's opposition of straight line and circle is more than one of linear and cyclical time, and instead, one that approaches the distinction between ordinary time and the time of the Dreaming. Unfortunately, the Commandant's chief desire was to exert 'temporal tyranny' (Flanagan 2001: 246) and control time, and thus in his delirium 'history became a nightmare from which the Commandant could not awake' (Flanagan 2001: 244–5). The infinite circles were a mere 'Chaos' (Flanagan 2001: 245), not signs of a cosmic order.

Besides the truths of love and circular time, Gould's revelation also articulated the principle of metamorphosis, the truth 'that everyone had the capacity to be someone, something, somebody else' (Flanagan 2001: 353). It is this principle that eventuates in his becoming-fish.

## *Becoming-Fish*

While looking over the *Book of Fish* he had nearly completed, Gould recalled a much earlier time when he had been asked to paint the sea god Proteus, who can 'miraculously assume the form of any aquatic creature'. Later, Lempriere had given him the task of painting 'all manner of sea life: sharks, crabs, octopuses, squid & penguins. But when I finished this work of my life, I stood back & to my horror saw all those images merge together into the outline of my own face.' Gould had then asked himself, 'Was I Proteus or was Proteus only another mug like me? Was I immortal or merely incompetent?' (Flanagan 2001: 54). He had indeed been Protean in his task, assuming many forms as he laboured, and in so doing he had come to understand a basic fact of human existence. He had learned that

> Men's lives are not progressions, as conventionally rendered in history paintings, nor are they a series of facts that may be enumerated & in their

> proper order understood. Rather they are a series of transformations, some immediate & some shocking, some so slow as to be imperceptible. (Flanagan 2001: 305)

His stay on Sarah Island, he realised, 'had really been an infinitely slow process of metamorphosis'. He had killed fish as he painted them, but he had come to see that 'I also had to die . . . that I was with my brush creating not so many pictures, but spinning out of the innumerable threads of my paintings a single cocoon' (Flanagan 2001: 305). Shortly before his revelation in the abandoned Aborigine village, Gould observed a freshwater crayfish that was 'shedding its carapace & emerging new & larger, yet still the same'. He 'marvelled at its metamorphosis, at the magical power it had to appear one thing & become another' (Flanagan 2001: 341), and when soon thereafter he felt himself slipping into his revelatory dream-trance, he 'prepared to abandon the shell of who & what I was, & metamorphose into something else' (Flanagan 2001: 352).

It is one thing to shed a carapace and emerge 'new & larger, yet still the same', but quite another to become a different species. Yet this is what Gould did. In the final hours of the penal colony, as a firestorm swept across the island, Musha Pug had placed Gould on the scaffold and prepared him for hanging. But when a massive explosion erupted, Gould leapt from the scaffold and into the sea. As he began to swim, 'There was no magick transformation, when hair fell out & skin slowly coarsened & divided into infinite scaling' (Flanagan 2001: 391). He simply dived deep and became a fish.

What is the import of this becoming-fish? First, it ushers Gould into a new collectivity.

> I live now in a perfect solitude. We fish keep company it is true, but our thoughts are our own & utterly incommunicable. Our thoughts deepen & we understand each other with a complete profundity only those unburdened by speech & its complications could understand. It is then untrue that we neither think nor feel. Indeed, apart from eating & swimming, it is all we have to occupy our minds. (Flanagan 2001: 397)

In this world of non-linguistic thought and feeling, Gould remains in perfect solitude, yet with a complete and profound understanding of his fellow fish. He likes them, he says, for 'They do not make me sick with their discussions about their duties to society or science or whatever God. Their violences to one another – murder, cannibalism – are honest & without evil' (Flanagan 2001: 398). The world of fish is one of Nietzschean innocence, beyond good and evil, and Gould's

attitude toward his fellows is one of acceptance. In this regard, Gould has come to experience the 'mood and spirit of assent' that Stanner finds in Aboriginal societies. In Gould's prefatory remarks to the would-be readers of his *Book of Fish*, he explained that he made no attempt to soar above the world in rhapsodic sublimity, but 'to crawl close to the ground'. And why? 'Because I care not to live above it like they may fancy is the way to live, the place to be, so that they in their eyries & guard towers might look down on the earth & us & judge it all wanting' (Flanagan 2001: 92–3). In his fish world, he does not pass judgement on other fish or the sea they inhabit. The cosmos is not lacking and hence guilty of betraying our desires. It is what it is, and it requires no justification.

Gould's becoming-fish, then, is a way of moving beyond the realm of the human, all too human, to imagine a different collectivity, a people to come, somewhere between the social order Gould briefly encounters among the Aborigines and the animal order of schools of fish among whom he swims – or rather, somewhere in passage between these two orders along a line of flight toward something not yet fully imaginable. Flanagan is no primitivist, recommending that we return to native ways and try to become Aborigines. Nor is he suggesting that we imitate animals that have no language or culture and simply live out our lives, even if we were able to do so in wordless communication of thought and feeling. It is important to stop judging the world and to adopt the mood and spirit of assent, but doing so is not enough to create a people to come.

Gould enjoys the world of fish he comes to inhabit more than he had the world of humans, yet he is still not fully satisfied. As he swims through the sea, a question haunts him: 'is it easier for a man to live his life as a fish, than to accept the wonder of being human?' He finds himself possessed of 'two entirely opposite emotions' that make him ask, 'why when all the evidence of my life tells me this world smells worse than the old Dane's bobbing corpse, why is it that I still can't help believing that the world is good & that without love I am nothing?' (Flanagan 2001: 400). He faces a puzzle that he can neither ignore nor solve. 'These two feelings, this knowledge of a world so awful, this sense of a life so extraordinary – how am I to resolve them? Can a man become a fish?' (Flanagan 2001: 401).

To become a fish, it would seem, would be to resolve this contradiction. But here we see the difference between becoming-fish and actually turning into a fish. Can a human completely abandon everything that makes up a human being and simply become an entirely

different species? Gould's transformation into a fish was in some sense an act of despair, an attempt to escape the miseries of human existence and reject the human species entirely. But that attempted escape proved in its very failure to be a line of flight, a means of instigating a metamorphosis of the human in passage alongside fish. He wanted to be a fish and stop asking questions, but he could not. Nor could he resolve the great enigma that troubled him. 'For I am not reconciled to this world. / I wished to be & I was not & so I tried to rewrite this world as a book of fish & set it to rights in the only manner I know how' (Flanagan 2001: 401).

How, then, can one set the world to rights and not pass judgement on it? How can one embrace the mood and spirit of assent and yet not be reconciled to this world? The answer, Flanagan tells us, is to be found in art. In the novel's opening chapter, Sid Hammet, the modern-day discoverer of Gould's *Book of Fish*, gazes at a weedy seadragon in Mr Hung's aquarium. At one time Sid had thought that the fish's beauty arose out of an evolutionary necessity, such as attracting a mate or blending in with a coral reef. But 'Now I know beauty is life's revolt against life, that the seadragon was that most perfect of things, a song of itself' (Flanagan 2001: 37). Life's revolt against life is not a judgement passed against life because the revolt comes not from some place outside life but from within. Beauty is a natural expression of life as extraordinary, good and bound together by love, and its revolt is against the equally natural necessities of survival, self-interest and violence. Each creature in its beauty is a song of itself, and every human artist is also such a creature. All the artworks created by an artist are simply components of that song of the self, and each work is as much a part of the artist's being as the seadragon's luminous colours are an expression of its being. As Sid looks at the seadragon in the opening chapter, he also studies a pot-bellied seahorse swimming in the same aquarium. We learn at the end of the novel that the seadragon is Gould (quite literally!), and Flanagan makes it clear that the pot-bellied seahorse is a figure for himself as artist. While Sid gazes at the seahorse, Mr Hung 'explained to me the seahorse's capacity to transform, how the male gave birth to hundreds of tiny seahorses that it had incubated in a brood pouch'. And as Mr Hung spoke, the seahorse began to give birth, and 'every minute or so another one or two black baby seahorses would shoot out of a vent in the centre of his swollen belly as he painfully flexed'. The baby seahorses, thought Sid, 'were like Gould's lost words, and I felt a little like that poor seahorse at the end of his prolonged labour'

(Flanagan 2001: 36). As the first chapter closes, Sid feels a sickening vertigo. 'I was falling, tumbling, passing through glass and through water into that seadragon's eye while that seadragon was passing into me' (Flanagan 2001: 38). And at the end of the novel, Gould, still the narrator of his *Book of Fish* and now a seadragon in Mr Hung's aquarium, stares out at Sid Hammet and then senses himself 'ascending from the night, rising, rolling, passing through glass & air into his sad eyes' (Flanagan 2001: 402).

Hammet becomes Gould becomes Hammet, and each becomes fish, Gould singing a song of himself that is fish, Hammet engaging the seahorse's 'capacity to transform' and create. Life's revolt against life is a revolt against the limited sense of existence as mere survival of the fittest, but that revolt is also life's affirmation of itself as the all-encompassing process of metamorphosis and creation. When Gould had seen only his own face in his many fish paintings and had wondered, 'Was I Proteus?' (Flanagan 2001: 54), he hinted at the relationship between the artist and the world. He painted fish in all their elusive, dynamic movements, their generative developments and transformations, seeking to capture in his images 'the very opacity of the souls themselves'. He also wrote the text of his own story, and in both his paintings and his writings he sought the same goal. 'I am shooting for freedom, nothing less, liberty'. His *Book of Fish*, even when it is about fish, is also a song of himself, about himself as a life form that is as elusive, dynamic and metamorphic as any fish. Other people try to define him, 'but I am William Buelow Gould, not a small or mean man. I am not bound to any idea of who I will be. I am not contained between my toes & my turf but am infinite as sand' (Flanagan 2001: 92). He is Protean, and his becoming-other proceeds via the line of flight that opens up through fish: 'But I am William Buelow Gould, party of one, undefinable, & my fish will free me & I shall flee with them' (Flanagan 2001: 93).

In counterpoint to Gould is the Commandant, who had attempted an artwork antithetical to Gould's – that of the nation-state of Sarah Island – but who ended up grasping the same insight as Gould's. While Gould was waiting to be hanged during the colony's final day, the Commandant reclined on a sofa in his palace, which was just beginning to collapse in flames. Oddly, 'He felt a great glee as burning roofs began caving in', and then 'he felt his glee transform into a great tranquillity' (Flanagan 2001: 369–70). The 'unbearable weight' of everything he had attempted to create and of the identity he had fashioned for himself began to dissolve and he found release

from 'a life – his own – which he now recognised as patently absurd' (Flanagan 2001: 370). He came to see that 'The idea of the past is as useless as the idea of the future'; that 'There is no Europe worth replicating'; and that 'There is only this life we know in all its wondrous dirt & filth & splendour.' His had been 'the folly of those who cannot accept life' (Flanagan 2001: 372). Before the Commandant could emerge from his reverie, however, soldiers entered the palace and seized him in the name of Marshall Musha Pug (as he now called himself), the leader of a coup d'état. The soldiers boarded him on a ship bound for the open sea, where they would dump his body. But before clearing Macquarie Harbour, the soldiers gave themselves the pleasure of castrating the Commandant, eviscerating him and pulling out his heart. As they did so, the Commandant wanted to tell them

> that finally he knew the answer to the question that had for so long haunted him. The search for power, he concluded in his last remaining moments of clarity, was the saddest expression of all, of an absence of love, worse yet, of the capacity to love. He wished to cry out, *I am imprisoned in the solitude of my love!* To yell, *See, see, that is all there is & I didn't see it!* (Flanagan 2001: 377–8)

To love is not safe, and power is an attempt to find safety through control. The prison of Sarah Island was a re-creation of Europe, a miniature quintessence of the panoptic ideal of the West. Lempriere's taxonomic project was the scientific expression of the same panoptic ideal, an attempt to define, classify and control that which constantly changes and defies fixed categories. The Commandant's ultimate dream was of a silent city 'where every man could be trusted to be his own gaoler, living in perfect isolation from every other man' (Flanagan 2001: 195). And his exercise in 'temporal tyranny' was an effort to dominate time by controlling the island's historical record. A simple opposition, then: Power, scientific taxonomy, carceral order, linear time, isolation and safety; versus Love, art, freedom, circular time, interaction and risk. The one a refusal to accept life, the other life's revolt against life's necessities and the barbarities that stem from fear and power's desire to control.

## *Versions of History*

The Commandant's revelation comes in a final moment of clarity, and as is often the case in such circumstances, the revelation is stunningly simple. But we should not thereby conclude that Flanagan's

view of the world is reductively simplistic. Flanagan's novel is an engagement with early Tasmanian history and all the forces – local and global – that were at play in that history. Were he to have reduced that history to nothing more than a brute opposition of power and love, he would have been exercising the very temporal tyranny sought by the Commandant and Jorgen Jorgensen, refusing to accept the complexities, paradoxes and confusions of life. But Flanagan's hallucination of history takes place on many levels that coexist with one another in no simple manner. And his engagement with the events of Tasmanian history is coupled to a meditation on the nature of historiography itself.

Moments before the Commandant's brutal execution, as he is forced to sign a false confession, the Commandant cites Engels (without attribution, of course, and anachronistically): '"History, the cruellest of goddesses", said the Commandant, handing the quill back after condemning himself in the name of several fictions that surprised him only in their banality, "rides her chariot over the corpses of the slain"' (Flanagan 2001: 376).[23] This notion of History, as inexorable macro-force of power, is on display throughout the novel. The cruelties inflicted on the treadmill prisoners, the punishments and tortures imposed on the Sarah Island convicts, the mutilations, beheadings and wanton shootings of Aborigines are all testimony to the British Empire's progress over the corpses of the slain. And as the Commandant's situation indicates, the macro-powers of history encompass forces that go beyond even the British Empire, such that a British Commandant may find himself being crushed by historical movements neither he nor his executioners can comprehend. Flanagan is relentless in documenting this aspect of history, and there is no doubt about his condemnation of the brutalities that have been visited on the weak or of his sympathy for the victims of ruthless power.

Flanagan focuses as well on historiography as an instrument of power. Jorgensen's history of the island is an invention that answers to the Commandant's desires. It is a 'universal history' (Flanagan 2001: 290) that distorts and lies, turning a monstrous carceral machine into a model of penal reform. This is history as written by the victors, a self-congratulatory fiction that erases the memory of the losers. Flanagan's effort throughout the novel is to decry this form of history in general, but also to counter the sanitised histories of Tasmania and preserve the memory of those whose sufferings have been forgotten. Gould eventually abandons his plan to rectify

history by exposing Jorgensen's lies and presenting the truth, but this decision does not signal Flanagan's own rejection of such a project – indeed, the novel functions in many ways as the very counter-history Gould at one time wanted to write.

But the task of memory is not always simple or comfortable. Late in the novel, Gould says,

> Everything that's wrong about this country begins in my story: they've all been making the place up, ever since the Commandant tried to reinvent Sarah Island as a New Venice, as the island of forgetting, because anything is easier than remembering. (Flanagan 2001: 401)

What is most difficult to remember is that the island's history is not a stark tale of evil villains and pure victims, but one of violence, cowardice, betrayal, compromise and complicity that makes any moral accounting difficult, if still necessary. Gould predicts that future historians will fashion their own versions of Jorgensen's lies,

> because any story will be better than the sorry truth that it wasn't the English who did this to us but ourselves, that convicts flogged convicts & pissed on blackfellas & spied on each other, that blackfellas sold black women for dogs & speared escaping convicts, that white sealers killed & raped black women, & black women killed the children that resulted. (Flanagan 2001: 401)

In enumerating these facts, Flanagan is not exonerating the British of their crimes. He is not cancelling the novel's incessant testimony to the barbarities of macro-power and the sufferings of its victims, absolving everyone because no one is without fault. But he is insisting that there be no sanitising of the behaviour of individuals of any sort, even if they belonged to groups that suffered unjustly, and even if the memory of their behaviour might complicate the stories various groups now want to tell and hear.

But Flanagan's hallucination of history goes beyond the remembrance of forgotten truths and the critique of power's fictional account of itself. He also addresses some of the fundamental questions of historiography. In the novel's opening chapter, Sid Hammet seeks an assessment of the *Book of Fish* he has just discovered from 'the eminent colonial historian Professor Roman de Silva', a tiny potbellied man with 'an improbable teddy boy haircut' (Flanagan 2001: 17). De Silva declares the book a '"piece of kitsch that has nothing to do with history"'. He tells Sid, '"History, Mr Hammet, is what you cannot see. History has power. But a fake has none"' (Flanagan 2001: 18). De Silva is voicing his faith in facts, which, in his view,

speak for themselves and have an inherent efficacy. Hammet continues to listen patiently to the professor's dismissive assessment of the book, but soon

> I knew . . . he hated the *Book of Fish*, that he looked for truth in facts and not in stories, that history for him was no more than the pretext for a rueful fatalism about the present, that a man with such hair was prone to a shallow nostalgia that would inevitably give way to a sense that life was as mundane as he was himself. (Flanagan 2001: 20)

Flanagan is here making two points. First, facts mean nothing without the stories that animate them, even if stories can also distort facts and support wholesale historical fictions (such as Jorgensen's account). Second, history is all too often fatalistic and diminishing, a projection of our own failings and limited expectations that confirms us in our passive acquiescence to a world without meaningful possibilities for something new.

That facts alone do not speak for themselves is hardly news to sophisticated historians, most of whom would readily agree that facts require interpretations, which themselves are inseparable from narratives. But there is more in this opposition between facts and stories than a mere insistence on narrative's centrality in history. Hammet looks for truth in stories, and ultimately such truth is larger than the truths that can be adduced through facts. Those larger truths can be accessed only through the stories of art. We might call this the fabulist's credo. One of Hammet's friends is Mr Hung, a Vietnamese follower of Cao Dai who has a shrine to saint Victor Hugo.[24] Hammet decides that Mr Hung's veneration of a writer is not as misguided as it might seem, for

> Perhaps reading and writing books is one of the last defences human dignity has left, because in the end they remind us of what God once reminded us before He too evaporated in this age of relentless humiliations – that we are more than ourselves; that we have souls. And more, moreover. (Flanagan 2001: 28)

What de Silva's history tells us is that we are what we are – small, limited, mundane and soulless. De Silva's history in its own way is a condemnation of life, for it presents the world as a dull repetition of the same rather than a metamorphic unfolding of the new. This history of mundane facts is a variant of Jorgensen's historical fictions that wreak vengeance on the world, and of Lempriere's natural history of flora and fauna as fixed entities – definable, knowable and essentially lifeless. The Commandant is no historian himself, but in

his final hours, as his palace collapses in flames, he reflects on the myths of history that inspire men such as himself:

> The notion of a golden age to come, of a fall only just hidden, of a utopia desecrated, of a hell that could be obliterated only by a determined amnesia, all this he finally smelt in the smoke of his burning palace as the folly of those who cannot accept life. (Flanagan 2001: 372)

The histories of de Silva, Jorgensen, Lempriere and the Commandant are life-denying acts of resentment against the world. What Flanagan, through Gould, seeks to write is a historical fabulation that accepts life, that affirms life and tells us 'that we are more than ourselves; that we have souls'.

Gould says of his *Book of Fish*, 'what here I write, & what here I paint are Experiment & Prophecy' (Flanagan 2001: 53), and the same may be said of Flanagan's novel. It is first an experiment on the real, an engagement with the historical record and its stories, told and untold, its memories and amnesias. Just as Gould seeks to paint the vibrant, changing soul of each fish, so Flanagan tries to animate his figures with the metamorphic force of life. As fabulist, Flanagan combines, condenses and intensifies the events of the historical real, creating a world that resembles one of Gould's paintings, which in Captain Pinchbeck's estimation, suggested 'a world at once more fantastick & yet bizarrely more familiar than the one we lived in' (Flanagan 2001: 85). Flanagan's major characters are excessive, larger than life. The Commandant, Lempriere, Jorgensen and Gould himself are mythic types of a sort – the Founder of Nations, the Scientist, the Historian, the Artist – extreme versions of real individuals who played important roles in the history of European imperialism in general and in Britain's colonisation of Tasmania in particular. Flanagan's experiment on the real, however, is also what we might call a gradual deterritorialisation of history, an unfixing and unhinging of the domain of the past. The world of the novel unfolds as 'more fantastick' than the one we live in, the characters increasingly psychotic. At a certain level, the fabulative characters seem embodiments of the two poles of desiring-production Deleuze and Guattari delineate in *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1977: 281–3): the Paranoid pole of control, regulation and territorialisation (the Commandant, Lempriere and Jorgensen); and the Schizophrenic pole of flux, decoding and deterritorialisation (Gould). At this level, history becomes delirium, but this hallucination of history also yields Prophecy in the form of Gould's great revelation.

Life is a mystery and love the mystery within the mystery. The principles of life are becoming and metamorphosis; those of love are intensity and affect. Late in the novel, Gould said that 'I just wanted to tell a story of love & it was about fish', yet he came to realise that 'it was not fish I was trying to net, but water, that it was the very sea itself, & in the way nets cannot hold water, nor could I paint the sea' (Flanagan 2001: 385). When Gould dived into the water and started becoming a fish, he found that

> the sea was an infinite love that encompassed not only those I had loved but those I had not, the Commandant as well as Capois Death, the blacks who had killed Capois Death as well as Tracker Marks, the Surgeon as well as the machine breaker, & they were all touching me & I them. (Flanagan 2001: 396)

In Deleuze-Guattari terms, the sea is a plane of consistency, an immanent dimension of speeds and intensities. Entities on the plane of consistency may be characterised only in terms of differential motions and affective connections. 'I have come to believe that trajectory is everything in this life' (Flanagan 2001: 52), says Gould, and the trajectory of all becoming-other, including his becoming-fish, traces curving, zigzag lines of flight across the plane of consistency. The plane is a sea of love in that it is a dimension of pure affectivity, in which the power of affecting is equally and inextricably a power of being affected. When Gould becomes-fish, he finds himself opening up to the world, such that he is unable to separate himself from any form of life, 'not a man or woman, not a plant or tree, not a bird or fish' (Flanagan 2001: 258). In the dimension of affectivity, enemy and friend 'were all touching me & I them'.

On the plane of consistency 'we are more than ourselves' (Flanagan 2001: 28) in two senses. As living, dynamic beings we are in constant metamorphosis, forever becoming something other than what we were, and in the process exceeding the limits of ourselves as completed entities, instead remaining works in progress, individuating processes rather than individuated things. Hence, in the words of Gould's revelation, 'everyone ha[s] the capacity to be someone, something, somebody else'. But we are also more than ourselves in that on the plane of consistency speeds and intensities form cohesive assemblages of multiplicities such that, at an absolute level of deterritorialisation, all speeds and intensities interconnect and interact, at which point, 'implicit in a single seahorse [is] the universe' (Flanagan 2001: 353). We are more than ourselves and 'we

have souls' (Flanagan 2001: 28), not spirits that transcend material reality, but spirits immanent within the world, animating powers of becoming and affectivity. And as creatures who create art, we manifest 'life's revolt against life', thereby joining the seadragon and all other organisms, each singing 'that most perfect of things, a song of itself' (Flanagan 2001: 37). Thus we have souls, but they are natural souls, like those of fish and all other living beings.

The time of the plane of consistency is that of Aion, a floating time not unlike that of the Dreaming, the 'everywhen' of stories coexisting in a single temporal dimension that includes within it our commonsense past, present and future. Gould's revelation is that 'this life in its endless mystery is circular' (Flanagan 2001: 352), but in no simple sense. His revelation is like the Commandant's, 'that there is no straight line only infinite circles, like rings proceeding ever outward from a stone sinking in the water of Now' (Flanagan 2001: 245). This circular time, like the Aion of the plane of consistency, is not so much ahistorical as 'untimely', other than, yet not apart from, the time of commonsense chronometric time. Hence Gould's revelation is not an escape from the events of lived history, not an erasure of the brutalities of conquest and the betrayals of victims victimising each other. The untimely plane of consistency is immanent within the real, as much a part of the material world as atoms are a part of our bodies. Flanagan's critique of history's nightmares coexists with the prophetic vision of a cosmic history of deterritorialised speeds and intensities resonating in a circular 'everywhen', and it is for this reason that Gould is unable to reconcile 'These two feelings, this knowledge of a world so awful, this sense of a life so extraordinary' (Flanagan 2001: 401).

*Gould's Book of Fish*, then, is Experiment and Prophecy, an experiment on the real that hallucinates history and thereby arrives at a prophetic vision of the mysteries of life and love. As fabulist, Flanagan narrates counter-histories to those that have been falsely told or left untold, while extracting truths of a different order through his condensations, intensifications and exaggerations of historical events. In his quasi-mythic, excessive characters he suggests historical patterns of beliefs, motivations, actions and events that radiate from Van Diemen's Land to the rest of the world. Flanagan's hallucination of history, however, goes beyond these clarifying exaggerations to include Gould's affirmation of life and of ourselves as more than ourselves. The novel is prophetic in this regard, but also in the implications such an affirmation of life might have for the

future. In Twopenny Sal's statement that '"Long time before . . . you were us"' (Flanagan 2001: 340), and in Gould's revelation 'that Numminer were Palawa & Palawa Numminer' (Flanagan 2001: 353), the possibility unfolds of a collectivity unlike any now in existence. In the community of fish that Gould joins after his metamorphosis, another hint at an alternative social order is disclosed. Thus Flanagan's prophecy is a vision both of the untimely mystery of life and of a people-fish to come, of a collectivity able to accept and affirm life while seeking a mode of relation beyond us and them.

## *Notes*

1. The praise for the novel comes from Kakutani 2002, and the scorn from Craven in *The Age* (Melbourne), November 2001 (cited in Sullivan 2002). Jane Sullivan reflects on these two contrasting responses in Sullivan 2002. For excellent scholarly studies of *Gould's Book of Fish*, see Shipway 2003, Jones 2008 and Wiese 2009. Wiese's Deleuzian approach is largely consonant with my own.
2. Garry Darby has produced an exhaustive study of Gould's life and work, accompanied by thirty-four plates of Gould's art and a Catalogue Raisonné of Gould's extant paintings and sketches (Darby 1980). Entries in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition* and in Hackforth-Jones 1977: 58–63, are also useful, though Darby's monograph should be relied upon when Hackforth-Jones or the *ADB* present facts at variance from Darby.
3. The collection of Aboriginal skulls as natural history specimens was not uncommon in the early nineteenth century. One such collector was George Augustus Robinson, the model for Flanagan's Guster Robinson (about whom I will say more later). Among his prized specimens was the skull of Towterer, whose portrait the real Gould executed in 1833 (Rae-Ellis 1988: 131). The collection of skulls features prominently in Flanagan's novel when Lempriere turns his natural historical study from fish to Aboriginal skulls. The number of skeletons from Aboriginal corpses in museum and private collections may be over 10,000, and since 1985, continuing efforts have been made to repatriate Aboriginal bones from various European museums (see www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/aboriginal-remains.html).
4. John James (Jean-Jacques Fougère) Audubon (1785–1851) was indeed of Creole extraction, being the son of a French naval officer Jean Audubon and his mistress Jeanne Rabin, a French-Spanish Creole from Louisiana. Audubon also did reside in Kentucky, running a general store in Louisville from 1808 to 1810, and in Henderson from 1810 to 1819. After buying a flour mill, he went bankrupt in 1819.

John Keats did have a brother named George (1797–1841), who emigrated to the United States in 1818. He and his wife became the houseguests of the Audubons in 1819, during which time Audubon persuaded Keats 'to invest his money in a boat that traded along the Mississippi and the Ohio. It was an unfortunate gamble, since the boat sank, taking along with it Keats' investment' (Willis 2003: 140). For more details, see, besides Willis 2003, Ford 1988: 100–5, and Keating 1976: 75–6.

5. Victorian prison slang for the treadmill was in fact 'cockchafer', no doubt in reference to the effect of rough pants on the genitalia after hours of labour on the machine. Some treadmills were designed, like Gould's cockchafer, to punish 'up to thirty men . . . simultaneously' (Flanagan 2001: 79), such as the St Albans' Prison treadmill, which could handle thirty-two prisoners at a time. The treadmill was outlawed in Britain in 1902. See the St Albans Museum web page on the Boiler and Laundry, Old Prison, www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/content/view/full/9790
6. A Thomas James Lempriere (1796–1852) 'was in charge of the Commissariat Store at Sarah Island from about 1826 to the closure of the settlement' (Julen 1976: 82). An informative account of the penal colony's history is Lempriere's 1842 'Account of Macquarie Harbour'. 'His artistic talent was well known and he was commissioned to paint landscapes and the portraits of many prominent settlers. He also maintained a keen interest in natural history and was prominent among the early collectors who provided specimens of Tasmanian animals and plants for study in England' (Lempriere entry, *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition*).
7. Matthew Brady (?1799–1826) was a notorious bushranger who escaped from Sarah Island on 7 June 1824. Following his escape he led a gang of outlaw robbers until he was captured in April 1826 and hanged on 4 May of that year.
8. For further information about Bock, Wainewright and Severer, see their respective entries in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition*.
9. For detailed information about Capois-la-Mort (also called Cappoix-la-Mort), see Dalencour 1957.
10. For an extended account of the life of Jorgensen, see Hogan 1891.
11. For information about the Sarah Island penal colony, see Julen 1976 as well as Pearn and Carter 1995, Chapter 1.
12. The Commandant's history of the discovery of Van Diemen's Land is fanciful. Abel Jansz Tasman is commonly identified as the first outsider to explore the island coast, in 1642 (Robson 1983: 3). If he had predecessors, they would have been a Japanese expedition in 1626 (MacFarlane 1955) or a Portuguese expedition in 1522 (McKiggan

1977). (Flanagan makes a playful reference to the 1626 Japanese expedition by using the name of the expedition leader in Gould's passing reference to 'a Japanese trader called Magamasa Yamada' [Flanagan 2001: 169].) It is unlikely that even Australia was visited by seafarers as early as the twelfth century.

13. The number of Aborigines massacred by whites cannot be determined with any certainty. In a recent history of Van Diemen's Land, Boyce argues persuasively that the slaughter was considerable, and if anything, is underestimated by modern historians (Boyce 2009: 10–11). See also Wiese 2009: 368.
14. The diaries, letters and papers of George Augustus Robinson provide the chief anthropological record of Aboriginal life in nineteenth-century Tasmania. Much of this material remains unpublished, but a significant selection is available in Plomley's edition, *Friendly Mission* (Plomley 1966).
15. In Flanagan's most recent novel, *Wanting*, Robinson is a more prominent character than in *Gould's Book of Fish*, and though the portrayal of Robinson in *Wanting* is still basically negative, Flanagan does explore the contradictions and complexities of Robinson's character with great subtlety. It should be noted that Flanagan is not alone in his damning assessment of Robinson – see, for example, Rae-Ellis 1988 and Boyce 2009: 279–313.
16. Of Gould's surviving works, three are representations of Aborigines. The drawing *Group of Aboriginals* (reproduced in Hackforth-Jones 1977: 59) is a caricature that Darby judges to have been 'produced with a view to poking fun at the black men'. The paintings *A Native Wearing a Blue Jacket* and *Towterer*, by contrast, 'are in a more serious vein and, whilst they are not accomplished portraits in the technical sense, they are well perceived and have a deal to say about the subjects' (Darby 1980: 54). We know that George Augustus Robinson was on Sarah Island when Gould executed the *Group of Aborigines* and *Towterer*, sometime between 21 and 23 June 1833. Plomley comments that 'the history of these two paintings is not known but it seems reasonable to assume that at least the portrait of TOWTERER was in Robinson's possession' (Plomley 1966: 809, n. 50). A reproduction of the *Towterer* watercolour may be found in Plomley 1966, facing page 674.
17. For details about Musquito, see the entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition*.
18. Flanagan probably takes the name Clucas from Daniel Clucas, who was appointed by the Aborigines Committee in 1831 to assist Robinson in capturing Aborigines and removing them to the Aboriginal Establishment on Gun Carriage Island (Ryan 1981: 152–3). After hearing rumours that Clucas had slept with an Aboriginal woman,

Robinson managed to have Clucas dismissed in 1832 (Rae-Ellis 1988: 70).

19. As Robinson's entry suggests, some Aborigines participated in the slave trade. In another diary entry, 20 October 1830, Robinson writes, 'Conversed with the native women from the islands. Jumbo [native name: DRUM.MER.NER.LOON.NER] said Cape Portland was her country; that her people took the black women from the natives at Port Dalrymple and sold them to the sealers for dogs, mutton birds, flour &c' (Plomley 1966: 254). Hence, Flanagan is not writing pure fiction when he has Gould lament 'that blackfellas sold black women for dogs' (Flanagan 2001: 401).
20. Turnbull's is a condensed version of the 1875 account in Calder 1875: 104–6, the primary written source of information about the event.
21. Information about Tasmanian Aborigines before European invasion is scanty. Ryan says that 'Both sexes incised their bodies and rubbed into their wounds powdered charcoal and red ochre mixed with grease, in order to raise high weals on the skin. These cicatrices took the form of lines, dashes, and circles and were to be found principally on the upper arm, chest, shoulder, back, and buttock. Their significance is not definitely known, but in the case of the women they could again have signified band or tribal affiliation' (Ryan 1981: 12). The Aborigines also made bark drawings and stone carvings with markings similar to the cicatrices. 'The significance of their linear, circular, and dot formations is unclear, although they could possibly represent the sun-male and the moon-female deities associated with tribal bands, formations, and numbers or movements in a similar context to their myths and legends' (Ryan 1981: 11).
22. At several points in his diary, Robinson says that NUM and NUMMER were Aboriginal words for whites (Plomley 1966: 137, 154, 784, 816, n. 148, for example). Robinson also gives PARLERWAR or PARLEVAR as the Aboriginal word for themselves (Plomley 1966: 61–2). Many activists in the present-day Tasmanian Aboriginal Community refer to themselves as Palawa. According to Ryan, pre-contact Aborigines 'believed in a life after death and that a guardian spirit or "soul" who lived within their left breast went to live elsewhere – in the case of the Aborigines from the northern part of the island, the islands in Bass Strait' (Ryan 1981: 11). In his 31 May 1829 diary entry, Robinson writes: 'I took occasion to converse with the natives on the circumstance of this man's death and that of his wives, but they told me they did not like to speak on the subject. I asked them where they went to after death. One said to England. I scarcely credited what I heard. I asked the question again, when they all replied that they went to England, that there was plenty of PARLEVAR in England' (Plomley 1966: 62). In his 13 July 1831 entry, Robinson remarks that the Brune

natives 'say that DROMEADEENE made the natives; also that the sun comes from England; and that the seal comes from England, and that the NEEDWONNE natives made large catamarans and went to England' (Plomley 1966: 377). Plomley comments in a note that 'These legendary beliefs in relation to "England" are probably no more than an indication that the place was distant and somewhere to the north. A comment by Curr is probably relevant to this. Writing to the Colonial Secretary . . . he mentioned that he had learnt from an aboriginal lad (NICERMENIC) who had been staying at Circular Head, "some curious facts regarding his countrymen, particularly that they burn their dead, who are supposed to go to some very distant place over the sea to the north-west, which they name MOO.AI"' (Plomley 1966: 465, n. 205).

23. Engels' actual words are less florid than the Commandant's. In a 24 February 1893 letter written in English to Nikolai Danielson, Engels closes by saying, 'But history is about the most cruel of all goddesses, and she leads her triumphal car over heaps of corpses, not only in war, but also in "peaceful" economic development. And we men and women are unfortunately so stupid that we never can pluck up courage to a real progress unless urged to it by sufferings that seem almost out of proportion' (Marx and Engels 2004: 112).
24. Cao Dai is in fact an actual religion. The third largest religion in Vietnam, Cao Dai (or Caodai) is a syncretic belief system that draws inspiration from a number of sources (for which reason it should not be identified as a 'Buddhist sect' [Flanagan 2001: 8]). In 1975, the Vietnamese government began persecuting key Caodai leaders and restricting the religion's activities, and as a result thousands of believers fled the country. The number of believers worldwide is estimated to be five million, with over 30,000 residing overseas, chiefly in the United States and Australia. Caodai recognises three saints: Sun-Yat Sen (1866–1925); the Vietnamese poet and prophet Nguyen Binh Khiem (1492–1587); and Victor Hugo (1802–1885). (Hence, Flanagan is again providing fictional embellishment in saying that Mr Hung 'regarded Victor Hugo as a god' [Flanagan 2001: 8], rather than identifying him as a saint.) For information on the history and tenets of Caodaism, see Blagov 2001 and Hartney 2002. For a fascinating study of the origins of the cult of Hugo in Caodaism, see Hartney 2004.

# Conclusion

What does it mean to be a writer today? For Djebar, to write is to run, to flee, to open a way forward; for Flanagan, to experiment and prophesy; for Bolaño, to battle forgetfulness, to preserve memory in the face of obliterating power; for Mda, to transform the scars of memory into a usable past; and for Roy, to revive traumatic memory but to find within it and preserve moments of possibility, when lovers may say 'Tomorrow'. Djebar remarks that 'perhaps the role of the writer is simply sometimes to witness to wounds' (Gauvin 1997: 32), and all these writers have witnessed to wounds, some healed, some not. They are the wounds and scars of history inscribed on the bodies of those who continue to live and suffer it.

When Deleuze suggests that we abandon the concept of utopia and 'take up Bergson's notion of fabulation and give it a political meaning' (Deleuze 1995: 174), he does so in the name of a people to come, whose precise nature cannot be specified in advance. For Deleuze, then, to write is not to propose models of an ideal world but to hint at possibilities, to open a way forward through an experimentation on the real, an unsettling of the powers that be – their institutions, practices, categories and concepts – a process of becoming-other that engages the generative forces of metamorphosis immanent within the world. Those metamorphic forces are immanent within grids of power, and the history of power remains active in the present, in its tacit assumptions, its routine habits, its unquestioned concepts, its zones of constructed and regulated memory and amnesia. Hence, any experimentation on the real must entail some engagement with history and its power in the present.

According to Deleuze, 'Writing is a question of becoming' (Deleuze 1997: 1). In *The Heart of Redness*, becoming-other is embodied in the prophetic tradition that culminates in the becoming-prophet of Nongqawuse, but also in the subtle becoming-other of the anomalous elements of Qolorah-by-Sea: Camagu, Dalton and Qukezwa. Becoming-other in *The God of Small Things* takes on at least three forms – becoming-child, becoming-woman, becoming-untouchable

– all of them significant in the fates of Rahel, Estha, Ammu and Velutha. In *Amulet*, virtually the entire text records a becoming-other, as Auxilio traverses an increasingly hallucinatory memory of past and future, a personal and collective memory that eventuates in her witnessing the birth of History. In Djebar, becoming-woman is evident in Isma, her mother, her grandmother, Zoraida, Tin Hinan, the heroine of *Arable Woman* (Lila), and for Isma, that becoming is also a becoming-girl. Flanagan's becoming-other, of course, is manifest in Gould's literal becoming-fish and in the passage of Hammet into Gould into Hammet, yet that becoming ultimately represents a means creating a zone of imperceptibility between humans and fish in which the human opens onto a plane of consistency, in which speeds and intensities, trajectories and affects, traverse what was once the human and bring all life's dynamic processes of metamorphosis into contact with one another.

The first stage in an experimentation on the real is a becoming-other, an instigation of disequilibrium and slippage (a *glissement* in Djebar's terms) within the regularities of dominant social practices. Such a becoming-other is an intervention in a specific situation, which emerges from and bears with it a complex of historical forces. All five novels engage the contingencies of a given culture and thematise the problems of history as a burdensome legacy and historiography as an instrument of both power and resistance.

What is History in these novels? Mda's 'scars of history' are the present signs of a past event, the continuing effects of a collective trauma that threatens eventually to destroy the community. Only when the history of Nongqawuse is fully and honestly remembered, in all its ambiguities, does it become a usable past for the sustenance of a viable, dynamic culture within a changing world. A similar sense of history may be seen in Roy's genealogy of the forces that destroy Velutha, Ammu, Rahel and Estha, though in this case the genealogy is also an archaeology of multiple causal layers – Kerala Communism, British colonialism, Mar Thoma Christianity, Hindu caste laws, seemingly timeless sexism – that coexist in the present, less as scars than as weapons for inflicting perpetual wounds. But Roy's dominant use of the word History is that of 'inexorable force beyond individual agents' control'. Despite this History's power, however, there is a 'hole in History', a zone of possibility represented in Ammu and Velutha's brief affair.

In *Amulet* Auxilio is present at the birth of History in two senses: she is a witness to the manifestation of repressive state power in

the occupation of UNAM, and she is herself the spiritual mother giving birth to the poets of the 1968 generation. The UNAM bathroom where she hides is, in a sense, another hole in History, a gap in time that allows her to traverse an unfolded field of past, present and future. The History of power that she witnesses is evident in Fascism's triumph in the Spanish Civil War, the Tlatelolco massacre of September 1968, and the Pinochet coup in September 1973. If not an inexorable force, this History of political repression is nonetheless relentless and depressingly manifest in endless reiterations across Latin America. Yet in *Amulet* these victims are not forgotten, for Auxilio is also the voice of a counter-history of resistance, courage and generosity.

Djebar's project in *So Vast the Prison* is in large part one of anamnesis, an inscription of the oral histories of a collective autobiography and an un-forgetting of the amnesias that have beset the fugitive women who have sought escape from their confinement. In the novel, history as inscription is an effort to grant women's voices the power of writing, and history as un-forgetting is an effort to revive voices that have been silenced and have remained unspoken, repressed and actively unremembered. But Djebar also offers a complex history lesson in her account of the decipherment of the Libyan inscription at Dougga. Here we find the fragile yet enduring trace of a Berber history that stretches back millennia and that challenges the Arabic-Islamic hegemony of the FLN in 1995. Djebar also teaches us that the revival of the Lybico-Berber script involved a trans-Mediterranean, multicultural quest intertwined with the history of European colonialism, one that does not yield itself to a simple, morally uncomplicated narrative. In her remarks about Polybius, Djebar turns to historiography proper, discerning in Polybius the historian-as-writer, and in this regard, as a figure for herself. Polybius was in permanent exile, surrounded by the destruction of Carthage, Corinth and Numantia, yet his homeland finally was language itself, and from the vantage of the 'elsewhere' of language he was able to render history with a startling realism. Like Polybius, Djebar as historiographer cannot be separated from Djebar the writer, an exile herself, '*rooted in flight*' (Djebar 1999b: 176), someone whose 'only true territory' is 'language, and not the earth' (Djebar 1999a: 215). It is from this perspective that she can bring writing and history together in a single act, retelling stories buried in arcane texts, inscribing oral tales that have been passed on for generations, and articulating the histories that have never been voiced. At the conclusion of the novel, however,

Djebar must also testify to History as macroscopic force, that same cruel goddess who 'rides her chariot over the corpses of the slain' in the novels of Roy, Bolaño and Flanagan. Djebar's lament at the violence of 1990s Algeria is a cry against 'the blood of History and the suffocation of women' (Djebar 1999b: 347), an ongoing history that has turned her country into 'the monster Algeria' (Djebar 1999b: 356).

Aside from the allusion to history as the 'cruellest goddess', Flanagan's meditation on history is largely focused on historiography. Like Djebar, he reflects on the relationship between creative and historical writing, worrying especially about the classic issue of the veracity of any narrative account of the past. Jorgensen's fictional history of the colony is an instance of power's self-confirmation and its obliteration of the suffering of its victims. Gould's planned counter-history of the colony was to be a truthful record that would overcome the lies of official history, and though Gould abandons this plan as inevitably compromised by the nature of language, it is clear that Flanagan himself sees his novel as such a counter-history in its witness to the truths of the sufferings of Tasmanian convicts and Aborigines. Like Mda, Bolaño and Djebar, Flanagan addresses the amnesias of history, and especially those that avoid the uncomfortable facts of compromises, duplicities and betrayals that undermine any simplistic account of human history as a battle between forces of pure good and absolute evil. Yet, though Flanagan does not surrender a faith in the existence and accessibility of historical truth, he also recognises the power of stories to reach truths that go beyond a mere recitation of facts. Without the genius of stories, a history of facts may become what it is for Roman de Silva, 'no more than the pretext for a rueful fatalism about the present' (Flanagan 2001: 20), a confirmation that life is as mundane and diminished as we are ourselves. Hence, *Gould's Book of Fish* is not simply a record of actual events remembered, repressed and distorted, but also an invention of stories that distil the essences of historical processes in narrative layers of increasing generality.

Besides becoming-other amidst a complex of historical forces, fabulation also involves what Deleuze elusively refers to as 'legending *in flagrante delicto*', fashioning giants and projecting images into the real that take on a life of their own. In one respect, 'to legend' is simply to create characters who represent more than themselves, who are never merely private individuals but always embodiments of social groups – ethnic, religious, racial, gender, class, caste, and so

on. As such, the characters of fabulation are figures in what Fredric Jameson has called 'national allegory' (Jameson 2000: 320). In all five novels, the principal characters clearly are specific individuals and, at the same time, figurative agents in a collective history whose dynamics are dramatised and analysed through their individual actions. The allegorical dimension of these five texts, then, is certainly one aspect of the 'legending' of fabulation, but such legending includes as well the creation of figures larger than life. Jameson notes that satire is a common mode in national allegories, and that frequently characters are drawn as exaggerated types in such literatures, but with the exception of Flanagan's oversized grotesques – the Commandant, Lempriere, Jorgensen – the creation of larger than life characters in our five novels is more often mythic than satiric.

In Mda's novel, the story of the beheading of Xikixa, the tribal patriarch, and the division between Twin and Twin-Twin, follows the lines of a primal myth of social disruption, dissension and differentiation. In *The God of Small Things*, the traumatic disturbance of Estha and Rahel's initial psychic oneness is another version of the common myth of Edenic union giving way to irreconcilable difference. Roy's legending, however, is most evident in her treatment of Velutha, who gradually emerges as not just an untouchable but also the God of Small Things, and as he takes on this god-like status, so too do Ammu, Estha and Rahel. In *Amulet*, the young Arturo Belano is his own mythographer, projecting an image of himself as revolutionary tough guy when he descends into the Inferno of the King of the Rent Boys. In the myth of Erigone, Bolaño offers 'a representation of Latin American political ruin and destruction' (Aussenac 2002: 40), and in the person of Auxilio he fashions a mythic spiritual mother of an entire generation. Djebar's Tin Hinan is a woman '*wreathed in legends*, . . . *a myth, an imaginary figure*' (Djebar 1999b: 164), yet someone who proves to have been real. Djebar's strategy, however, is to render this real woman mythic once again, to make her the heroic preserver of Berber writing and women's freedom. In a complementary fashion, Djebar adopts the fictional Zoraida as a symbol of all Algerian women writers. And in her film *Arable Woman*, Isma creates in the fictional character Lila 'a symbol of hope', an embodiment of the dreams of all those women who seek '*freedom of movement*', freedom '*to question, to see*' (Djebar 1999b: 310). In *Gould's Book of Fish*, the Commandant, Lempriere and Jorgensen are larger than life, but so too are Twopenny Sal and Gould, and neither is a satiric type. Twopenny Sal functions as the

representative of a people and the bearer of cosmic wisdom. Gould, besides undergoing an Ovidian metamorphosis, emerges as the Artist writ large, a Rabelaisian figure whose excesses are those of an expansive sensuality, humour, honesty and aesthetic appetite that are heroic and life affirming.

One may say, then, that 'to legend' is to create a diagnostic politico-historical allegory and an empowering projective mythography. And the goal of such legending, of course, is to invent a people to come. The collectivities envisioned in the five novels are only cursorily sketched, with the possible exception of the rejuvenated community of Qolorha-by-Sea, which begins to take shape at the end of Mda's novel. Yet even here, the disquieting coda in which the young boy Heitsi runs in fear from the sea suggests that the integration of tradition and change necessary to sustain this community is provisional at best. Roy's unholy family of Rahel, Estha, Velutha and Ammu, by contrast, is only the seed of a new social formation, as is Bolaño's army of ghost-child poets, whose 'song is our amulet' (Bolaño 2006: 184), a charm to ward off evil and a talisman of hope in the face of destruction. Djebar's mythic, fictional, ancestral and actual fugitives – Tin Hinan, Zoraida, Lila, Isma's grandmother and mother, Isma, and through her, Djebar herself – represent the ideal of a social world governed by *sakina*, 'the serenity of passages that seem never to need to end' (Djebar 1999b: 341), but they remain mere components of a collectivity yet to be assembled. And Flanagan's people to come exists only as a conjectural extrapolation of an alternative mode of social relation somewhere between two impossibilities, that of a vanished Aboriginal past and that of a community of fish.

Deleuze states that 'Utopia isn't the right concept' (Deleuze 1995: 174), and in its stead he proposes the concept of fabulation and the project of a people to come. In an essay titled 'Utopianism and Anti-Utopianism', Fredric Jameson notes that

> the ideals of Utopian living involve the imagination in a contradictory project, since they all presumably aim at illustrating and exercising that much-abused concept of freedom that, virtually by definition and in its very structure, cannot be defined in advance, let alone exemplified. (Jameson 2000: 385)

This certainly is the reason Deleuze rejects the concept of utopia, but Deleuze would agree with Jameson that the paradox of utopian thinking should not therefore nullify the utopian impulse within thought and encourage a dystopian vision of the future. Jameson incisively

observes that utopias and dystopias are qualitatively distinct, not two sides of the same coin. Whereas the utopian text 'is mostly non-narrative', the dystopia 'is generally a narrative, which happens to a specific subject or character'. The dystopia is 'a "near future" novel: it tells the story of an imminent disaster . . . waiting to come to pass in our own near future' (Jameson 2000: 384). One might argue, then, that Deleuze's people to come is an attempt to articulate a narrative counterpart to the non-narrative model of utopias, and hence to give voice to a properly temporal utopian impulse, one that issues in a necessarily vague, yet nonetheless existent, projection of virtual possibilities into the near future.

Time, after all, is central to fabulation, and the complexities of temporality distinguish it from conventional forms of narration. The times of Chronos, Aion and the three passive syntheses inform the five novels of this study, and it is perhaps in this area that the novelists are most helpful in shaping and refining a theoretical model of fabulation as a mode of critical analysis. The first synthesis is evident in instances of the 'polytemporal present', that contraction of multiple presents of varying extension into a single trajectory from the past toward the future. In all five novels the coexistence in the present of diverse historical strata may be observed – traditional Xhosa and Western practices; the mores of Kerala Communism, British colonialism, Mar Thoma Christianity, the Hindu caste system, and sexism; Spanish and diverse Latin American artistic traditions and political struggles; Berber, Arab-Islamic, and French colonial ways of living; the customs and structures of Aboriginal, convict, sealer and settler culture. But only in *The God of Small Things* is the polytemporal present thematised, and in identifying the strata of mores active in the present as constituents of the macro-force of History, Roy points to the predominantly social nature of this polytemporal present. The extent of any single contraction of instants within a present is a function of the contracting entity's power, for which reason the contractions of heart, lung, liver and the individual organism are limited. But the contractions of the social body are transindividual and capable of contractions that span centuries. When History bears down on Velutha, Ammu, Rahel and Estha, the social body contracts millennia into a polytemporal present that transcends the individual actors involved. It is this social dimension of the first synthesis that offers the most promise for an analytic model of fabulation.

The virtual past of the second synthesis might seem familiar to readers of novels of reminiscence, in which a narrative consciousness

traverses a domain of coexisting memories, but Deleuze insists that fabulation has nothing to do with memory in the ordinary sense. Proust's revelation of the virtual past comes through involuntary memory, not through a reasoned, controlled resuscitation of once living but now dead experiences. Crucial is that the virtual past contain blocks of becoming, units of unsettling metamorphosis, and that its memory space be collective rather than individual. *The God of Small Things* creates a memory space filled with blocks of childhood, and that space is disclosed as a 'haecceity', a 'thisness', infused with but separate from the consciousnesses of the narrator and the protagonists. Djebar's anamnesis similarly involves the activation of blocks of becoming-child and becoming-woman, and the memory space she invents is that of a collective autobiography. The time of the second synthesis appears in the time of the ancestors in *The Heart of Redness* and in the 'everywhen' of the Aboriginal Dreaming in *Gould's Book of Fish*. What the Dreaming suggests, however, is that the second synthesis entails more than a virtual past, in that the 'everywhen' is at once past, present and future, a domain through which the ripples of the Now expand in all directions. Auxilio's memory space has similar characteristics. In the UNAM bathroom, 'time folded and unfolded itself like a dream' (Bolaño 2006: 32), 'flying off in different directions simultaneously' (Bolaño 2006: 30), and within that time, she became one with memories of the past and future. And with Djebar's concept of an *avant-mémoire* we may discern another dimension of the second synthesis, that of an avant-garde of memory as the active edge of anamnesis that thrusts ahead into a future line of flight, even as remembrance moves back in time, the movement backward and the movement forward being two aspects of the same process. The second synthesis, then, reveals the domain of a memory of the past (recollection), a memory of the future (precollection), and an avant-memory as simultaneous trajectory into both the past and future (transcollection).

The third synthesis of 'time out of joint', the fissure that fragments the self and discloses the pure form of time, is central to becoming-other. Indeed, every becoming-other disrupts Chronos and ushers in the floating time of Aion. Such moments are most clearly characterised in Auxilio's account of time 'coming apart and flying off in different directions simultaneously, a pure form of time' (Bolaño 2006: 30), and in Isma's description of her awakening from a nap into a temporal gap in which 'The world stands still' (Djebar 1999b: 21). But we also find such temporal fissures in Gould's moment of

revelation, in the events surrounding Nongqawuse's prophecies, and in the violent suspension of time played out on the stage of the History House. In the case of Nongqawuse's prophecies, the perils of the third synthesis are apparent. Untimely moments of metamorphosis are precarious and unpredictable, capable of generating positive, problematic or cataclysmic developments. And in the case of *The God of Small Things*, the dark night of the third synthesis appears, the time of trauma. The third synthesis is a caesura that marks a before and an after, and the after of trauma is that of the living death of zombie souls. If the virtual past is a past that has never been present, the traumatic past is an actual past that has never stopped being present, especially when it has been erased from traumatised memory. In many instances, the gap of trauma befalls its victims through an external force – rape, ethnic cleansing, extraordinary rendition – but sometimes the agents themselves contribute to the trauma. Nongqawuse's adherents enthusiastically follow her into disaster, and their descendants inherit a collective trauma that induces a willed amnesia in those who try to deny their past. Nor are the positive and negative aspects of the third synthesis mutually exclusive. Isma's 'after' comes at the end of a thirteen-month infatuation, but she marks the 'before' as the inception of that passion, and within that thirteen-month period she undergoes the traumatic beating by her husband. Isma's passion also makes clear that the third synthesis may include gaps within gaps and that it may encompass chronological periods of varying dimensions. Isma's before and after are separated by thirteen months, Nongqawuse's by a year. Auxilio's gap in time includes the thirteen days she spends in the UNAM bathroom. And the trauma of Rahel and Estha takes place over four weeks, from Estha's molestation by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, to the murder of Velutha, to the separation of the twins when Estha is sent to live with his alcoholic father.

In summary, then, as I indicated at the outset of this study, the components of fabulation are becoming-other, experimenting on the real, legending, and inventing a people to come, all of which involve the alternative temporalities of Aion and the three syntheses of time. In testing the concept of fabulation as a critical tool, I have chosen a limited corpus of five contemporary novels that thematise the problem of history. The decision to conduct close textual analyses was based on three concerns: that the concept of fabulation be applied systematically to entire texts; that it be used to generate readings of each text as a whole; and that the texts' experimentations

on the real be traced in all their contingent historical specificity. Obviously, that decision has had its down side. Given the limited sample examined here, one might ask how useful the concept might be in reading other texts. Are these idiosyncratic novels? If not, how extensive is the corpus within which they may be assimilated as roughly representative works?[1]

The most cautious response would be simply to remain silent, but I will venture a few speculations that I believe could be substantiated with detailed analysis beyond what can be presented here. One might argue that I have merely proposed Deleuzian names for characteristics of postcolonial literature, given the fact that all five novels were written in a postcolonial context. I would counter, however, that Günter Grass' *Crabwalk* (2002) and Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1994–5) could easily have been treated in additional chapters of this book, and neither is a postcolonial text.

*Crabwalk* centres on the greatest disaster in naval history, the sinking of the Nazi ship *Wilhelm Gustloff* the evening of 30 January 1945, in which over 9,000 perished. Grass traces in scrupulous detail the radiating network of historical forces that converged in that event and that instigated continuing historical reverberations throughout the remainder of the century. Grass' protagonists, a grandmother, father and son, function as allegorical types of three generations of Germans. The principal becoming-other of the novel takes place through the son's internet debate with an anonymous opponent as the two discuss their mutual obsession with the *Wilhelm Gustloff*. The son increasingly adopts an extremist Nazi identity, while his opponent eventually claims to be a Jew. This process of becoming-Nazi and becoming-Jew eventuates in a meeting of the two, in which the son murders the other youth, who proves not to be Jewish. Their becoming-other fosters an odd complicity and friendship as they fulfil their self-willed destiny of repeating the traumatic past. Their mutual destruction takes on the quality of a distorted attempt at redemption from the past, and in their collaborative efforts and camaraderie one may discern the faintest signs of a people to come.

Murakami's sprawling novel includes within it events surrounding the Japanese occupation of Manchuria from 1931 to 1945 and the disastrous battle of Nomonhan in 1939, during which as many as 45,000 Japanese and 17,000 Russian troops died. The historical chapters about Manchuria are interpolated in a contemporary narrative of anomie and postmodern dislocation, and it is only slowly and partially that the earlier events are brought in contact with the present.

Murakami makes clear that the shame of the failure of Nomonhan has induced national amnesia and denial of the past, and that his novel is an effort to un-forget that trauma and bring it in contact with post-war, Westernised Japan. Toru, Murakami's protagonist, is an allegorical Everyman, and instances of legending abound in the surreal distortions and improbabilities that infiltrate both the contemporary world and the world of the Manchurian occupation (especially in the chapters recounting the slaughter of the zoo animals and the baseball-bat bludgeoning of a captured Chinese prisoner). Processes of becoming-other are widespread in the novel and defy ready characterisation, with Toru's repeated descent into a well perhaps marking the stages of a gradual becoming-imperceptible. If there is any element of fabulation missing in the work, it may be the invention of a people to come, although one might argue that the unfolding of Toru's peculiar bond with May Kasahara serves such a function.

Nor need examples of fabulation be restricted to contemporary fiction. One nearly paradigmatic instance of fabulation, I would argue, is Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). If we place the novel's appended Chronology beside a timeline of Mississippi history, we see immediately that the key events of the one parallel those of the other. Clearly, Thomas Sutpen is the central figure of a historical allegory of the formation and dissolution of the culture of the American South. Sutpen is his own mythographer, a larger-than-life figure who tries to impose his god-like 'design' on the world. Other characters, such as Henry and Bon, gradually acquire a similarly enlarged stature, and the underlying patterns of familial strife echo those of several primal myths. The dominant becoming-other is that of race, the inexorable becoming-black of Sutpen's progeny representing the world's defiance of power's rage for order. The complexities of time, both in the temporal construction of the novel and in the characters' own descriptions of time, exemplify all the anomalies of Aion and the three passive syntheses. Anamnesis, amnesias, un-forgetting and re-remembering all take place within various memory spaces, each with its own atmospheric 'thisness'. As with *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, however, the one element of fabulation absent in *Absalom* may be the invention of a people to come. Quentin's closing denial that he hates the South would seem to preclude any opening toward a different future, and there seems to be no evidence in the novel that a new collectivity is possible.

How far one might profitably extend the critical apparatus of fabulation I would hesitate to predict. I am not proposing fabulation

as a general theory of narrative. Not all novelist are fabulists, nor are all fabulists exemplars of every characteristic of fabulation.[2] One aim of this study has been to show the coherence of Deleuze's remarks on fabulation and time, and to suggest that their coherence has a logical structure, even if it is not systematic in the philosophical sense of the term, that is, part of a complete and closed system. But novelists are not theorists, and their creations, if successful, form systems of their own, sui generis and often open-ended, and any critical system is sure to fail in an effort to account for all the features of a given artwork. To what extent a given work or corpus of texts must exemplify the theoretical model or selected components of that model in order to qualify as fabulation is ultimately a matter of the questions one asks and the reasons one asks them. Categorisation in literary analysis is always guided by broad contexts of social practices, concerns, interests and purposes. It is for this reason that I have not presented fabulation as a competitor meant to displace any reigning critical approach. I see Deleuzian fabulation as an alternative way of looking at literature that proceeds from its own assumptions and goals, and that brings together works that other approaches might regard as opposed or unrelated. That some contemporary postcolonial and European novels exemplify characteristics of fabulation does not challenge the validity of postcolonial studies but instead invites investigation of commonalities and nuances of differentiation in contemporary literature that might otherwise remain dormant. Likewise, instances of fabulation in postmodernism, high modernism, or even, perhaps, nineteenth-century realism, would not necessarily invalidate those historical categories, though they might unsettle dogmatic positions and offer new ways of historically situating literary works produced over the last century or two.

The usefulness of the concept of fabulation as a critical tool will remain for others to decide. I have tried to demonstrate its value in reading five novels, and I have offered a few suggestions of ways in which it might be further tested. If I have been able to pique readers' interest in the concept and stimulated them to consider other works as instances of fabulation, I will have fulfilled at least one of the aims of this study.

But even if I have failed in that, I hope that I have drawn attention to five writers whose novels deserve to be read, studied and appreciated. Djebar has said that to write is to run '*extremely close to, no, all along the edge of, the abyss*' (Djebar 1999a: 139). Bolaño echoed these sentiments in his Rómulo Gallego Prize acceptance speech:

> What, then, is writing of quality? Well, what it has always been: knowing to stick one's head into the dark, knowing to jump into the void, knowing that literature is basically a dangerous occupation. To run along the edge of the precipice . . . Literature, as an Andalusian folk song might say, is dangerous. (Bolaño 2004: 36–7)

The novels of Mda, Roy, Bolaño, Djebar and Flanagan are acts of courage and beauty, to which we should pay tribute. Criticism, says Pope, is 'the Muse's Handmaid', and if I have done nothing more than attract a few new readers to these artists, I will have met the most important of my objectives.

## *Notes*

1. In a brilliant and far-ranging essay on Deleuze's stated preference for Anglo-American writers over French writers, Kenneth Surin poses a version of the same question, though from a somewhat different perspective. He asks why 'the novelists in Deleuze's "canon" are so emphatically modernist', and wonders whether this commitment to modernism, and especially to 'the experimentally minimalist wing of modernism', might limit the kinds of texts that could be viewed from a Deleuzian vantage. Surin proposes that just as Deleuze and Guattari call for a new 'geophilosophy' beyond national traditions in *What Is Philosophy?*, so too we should envision a 'geoliterature' that transcends parochial bounds. Any literary work, he asserts, 'will in principle qualify as "geoliterature" so long as it can be plugged into the adjacent geophilosophical assemblage, that is, provided it creates affects and percepts capable of functioning as the necessary correlate to geophilosophy's concepts'. On that basis, he argues that 'Garcia Márquez, Cortázar, Rushdie, Vargas Llosa, and others like them' would 'belong plausibly to a geoliterature constructed according to broadly Deleuzian specifications' (Surin 2000: 185).
2. Of all the elements of fabulation, inventing a people to come seems most likely the one that might be missing in a given instance of fabulation. But this would be true only if we required that some distinct trace of a new collectivity be offered in the text. Deleuze repeatedly insists that an artist alone cannot invent a people to come. Rather, the writer and readers together interact in that project. For this reason, one might argue that novels that present the disintegration of culture and community, such as *Absalom, Absalom!*, could be regarded as challenges to their audiences to overcome such decline, and that the project of inventing a people to come is therefore furthered through the image of the absence of such a people. In the case of *Absalom*, Faulkner may be urging Southerners to stop simultaneously hating and clinging to the past and to develop a usable past for the formation of a different social order. What is

fundamental in the invention of a people to come, finally, is resistance to the status quo, a refusal to accept the intolerable. As Deleuze and Guattari say in *What Is Philosophy?*, 'The artist or philosopher is quite incapable of creating a people, each can only summon it with all his strength. A people can only be created in abominable sufferings, and it cannot be concerned any more with art or philosophy. But books of philosophy and works of art also contain their sum of unimaginable sufferings that forewarn of the advent of a people. They have resistance in common – their resistance to death, to servitude, to the intolerable, to shame, and to the present' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 110).

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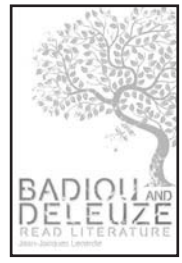


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