

Introduction:

On Space/Time

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Spatiality and temporality underpin the 'modern humanities', conditioning their very 'modernity', their relativistic place in time, as well as their their 'humanity', that is, the relationship of the human, both physical and psychological, to culture in particular spaces and times. One aim of this, the fourth volume of *MHRA Working Papers in the Humanities*, is to explore this hypothesis in terms of literary and other narrative discourses. The essays presented here address this relationship between space, time, and the humanities in different and fruitful ways, taking up, in particular, the ways in which space and time condition social and national borders and identity, as well as collective and individual memory.

This collection is also concerned to address the spatial and temporal relations internal to those texts (in the broadest sense) that are studied within the modern humanities. Susan Sontag sets out how these two concepts provide a model of internal deferral and relation:

There is an old riff I've always imagined to have been invented by some graduate student [...] late one night, who had been struggling through Kant's abstruse account in his *Critique of Pure Reason* of the barely comprehensible categories of time and space, and decided that all of this could be put much more simply. It goes as follows: 'Time exists in order that everything doesn't happen all at once . . . and space exists so that it doesn't all happen to you.' By this standard, the novel is an ideal vehicle both of space and of time.¹

¹ Susan Sontag, *At the Same Time: Essays and Speeches*, ed. by Paolo Dilonardo and Anne Jump (New York: Picador, 2007), pp. 214-15.

The novel, or cultural product, is here taken to be a ‘vehicle’ for space and time. We can infer that the novel would be a model or exposition of time and space in a wider understanding of language and discourse. However, if literature is to retain any specificity or any resistance to being a simple index to historical issues, then the ‘vehicle’, not merely in its modernist or self-reflexive mode but *as such*, must also be seen as a supplement, a retelling, a distortion.

Mark C. Taylor states that, ‘the space and time of literature are space and time’; thus, literature should not be absolved from responsibility, viewed as fundamentally aloof or escapist.² However, he continues, ‘literary space-time is a space without presence and a time without the present.’³ This may be seen as an admonition to caution when dealing with any scholarly approach to literature that remains purely within the category of temporal or historical presence. The articles this journal presents seek, then, to respond to two demands facing the modern humanities: that of remaining responsive to what surrounds literature, and that of retaining its irreducible fragility. Each of these working papers by early career researchers appears at the critical juncture of space and time in the humanities, parts of works-in-progress which probe the boundaries of contemporary critical thought.

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Abigail Dennis’s paper takes up the relation of the human body to space in her essay on Elizabeth Gaskell’s novel, *North and South* (1855). Dennis develops Raymond Williams’s notion of the ‘knowable community’ in order to examine the text’s construction of social space and of class boundaries. For Dennis, Gaskell’s novel does not simply work through a dichotomy of urban and rural space, but rather characterizes the movement of the gendered body through a social space that is itself mapped by class and gender, so that Margaret Hale might be read as a social and spatial mediatrix. While this works to promote active identification with, rather than an aestheticization of, the working-class poor, Dennis posits, *North and South*’s urban rusticism means that the novel ultimately stops short of endowing working-class characters with individuated consciousness, and of a radical rethinking of class relations. Dennis’s paper thus offers a feminist and cultural-materialist reconsideration of the social function of Gaskell’s work.

Georges Bataille’s *Le Bleu du ciel* (written in 1935 and published in 1957) is the subject of Michael Eades’s investigation into space, understood as a principle governing the

² Mark C. Taylor, ‘Introduction: System ... Structure ... Difference ... Other’, in *Postmodernism: Critical Concepts*, ed. by Victor E. Taylor and Charles E. Winquist, 4 vols. (London: Routledge, 1998), III, pp. 373-404 (p. 399). This recalls Maurice Blanchot’s notions of the space of literature and of the ‘time of time’s absence’: see *The Space of Literature* (1955), trans. by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 30.

³ Taylor, p. 399.

relations of physiognomy and architecture. His interest is in the possibility of transgression raised by social space, and his article sees recesses, cells, basements, and tombs as the privileged sites of that possibility. The article concerns itself, then, with an antistructural impulse in Bataille's thought: not merely on a conceptual level, but also in terms of how that impulse relates to literary form. This relation is developed through a parallel reading of Maurice Blanchot's conception of reading as an experience of vertigo and fascination. Throughout the article Eades engages with the fruitful paradox that Bataille's writing represents: that the notions of the erotic, the riot, the 'fête', and so on, are strikingly literal in his experience and, simultaneously, that this experience should so thirst for abstraction.

Richard Lee's 'The Rebirth of Inherited Memories' looks at Shauna Singh Baldwin's novel, *What the Body Remembers* (2001). It investigates the violent contestation of shared spaces, as well as how Baldwin attempts to interrupt the neatly packaged, linear time of ideological nationalist narrative. In the novel in question, the intrigue behind a particular, and particularly, horrific murder serves to trigger an investigation into the intersections of religious and gender-orientated violence. Lee draws enlightening parallels between the novel's models of intersubjective relationships and those found in various Eastern religions, Jungian psychology, and the philosophy of science, as each explores the relation of body and mind or soul. For instance, one particular character is able to become a conduit both for her murdered sister-in-law, and for her late co-wife (whose animosity to the first character when alive is replaced by a posthumous benevolence). This is a way of preserving the memory of the traumatic event and, it seems, casting light on unequal gender relations. This could be seen to work against Sontag's principle of spatio-temporal separation: in this case, not only does time refuse to move on, but the spatial boundaries between people are broken down.

For Elaine Luck, the interaction of spatiality, temporality, and the humanities is exemplified by the museum: a spatial organization of time, mediated and interpreted by the human body. Luck's research on Mexico's *Museo Nacional de Arte* points up the sociocultural role of the museum in the work of nation building; museums, in other words, work as models of national and cultural identity. The organization of the past in the *Museo Nacional*, Luck argues, demonstrates how visual culture can come to shape state discourses. Luck's paper thus at once offers an analysis of the way in which bodies in museums negotiate a path through the past, and of the way in which the spatio-temporal organization of the museum influences the national and cultural identity of that body, and of the state.

Will Slocombe's piece also takes up ideas about national and racial identity through an examination of Herman Melville's 1855 text, *Benito Cereno*. For Slocombe, Melville's

‘misplacing’ of the island of Santa Maria in his novella is an important point in critical interpretation of the work’s social function. In this way, the fictional representation of real space and place in Melville’s work can be read, Slocombe argues, as part of his criticism of colonialism and of contemporary race relations. Spatial reference, in *Benito Cereno* (as in Dennis’s work on Gaskell’s *North and South*), thus has broader social implications. Slocombe’s close readings in the current essay bring forth new evidence which contributes to current critical debate over this ambiguous text.

One final essay stands outside the theme of space and time. Brian Sudlow brings various aspects of René Girard’s theories to bear on two works from the French Catholic literary revival: Paul Bourget’s novel *Le Sens de la mort* (1915) and Georges Bernanos’s political pamphlet *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune* (1938). More particularly, Sudlow explores in these pieces Girard’s theory of desire based on mimesis; the resolution of the resulting conflict through the ‘scapegoating’ of one party, whose violence provides the basis for the sacred; and a non-violent, biblically based, alternative resolution of this same conflict. In his reading of the first work, Sudlow carefully weaves Girard’s theory together with the Christic sacrifice the novel discusses, and disregards relative, worldly concerns in favour of the absolute. In the second work, an earlier intimation of a meta-level of mimetic rivalry between Catholicism and secularism is confirmed by following Bernanos as he tries to avoid the violence of the Spanish Fascist rivalry with the Communists, whilst retaining a nationalist effectivity for the French Catholic Right. This article poses searching questions, and asks whether a non-conflictual, non-violent approach might provide an answer precisely in its abstention from giving any.

Violence and Non-Violence: French Catholic Writers between the Mimetic Crisis and the Crucified

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This article explores the hypothesis that using René Girard's literary and anthropological theories of mimesis, violence, and Christianity to analyse some of the works of the French Catholic literary revival could challenge interpretations which have hitherto characterized such writings as 'reactionary'.

A preliminary exploration of Girard's theory traces its three main branches. Girardian mimesis redefines desire as essentially imitative in nature; the scapegoat mechanism describes a cathartic process which provides the resolution of mimetic conflict through the religious victimization of some individual or group; the Gospel alternative to the scapegoat stems from Girard's rereading of the Bible in which he finds non-violent solutions for mimetic conflict.

*These theoretical tools are then applied to Paul Bourget's novel *Le Sens de la mort* (1915) and Georges Bernanos's political pamphlet *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune* (1938). Bourget's novel presents a clear case of mimetic conflict. Jealous of an apparent rival, an older man tests his young wife's love in a suicide pact. His apparent rival undermines this hostility by sacrificing his genuine but controlled affection for the older man's wife. Bernanos's pamphlet depicts the ills of French and Spanish conservatives, lamenting their mimetic cupidity and attacking the nationalists' involvement in the Spanish Civil War as an outbreak of mimetic violence. He proposes the espousal of Franciscan poverty as a cure for mimetic cupidity and the rediscovery of evangelical childhood as a cure for mimetic violence.*

The discoveries made by undertaking a Girardian reading of these works suggest the potential for a more comprehensive Girardian rereading of the French Catholic literary revival to challenge our understanding of their reactionary character. They also point to new sources and perspectives from which to explore Girardian paradigms.

In the conclusion of *Les Origines de la culture* René Girard answers certain criticisms made in Régis Debray's *Le Feu sacré* against Girard's theory of desire and its evangelical resolution.¹ Notably, Girard attacks Debray's assumption that '*si un raisonnement est, si peu que ce soit, peu importe pour quelles raisons, favorable au christianisme, il ne peut pas être scientifique*' [if an argument is favourable to Christianity, no matter how little and regardless of the reason, it cannot be scientific].² Girard associates Debray with a tradition of secularist

¹ René Girard, *Les Origines de la culture* (Paris: Hachette, 2003); Régis Debray, *Le Feu Sacré: fonctions du Religieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003).

² Girard, *Les Origines de la culture*, p. 265. All translations in this essay are by the author.

anthropology which goes back to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France.³ This tradition generally saw Christianity as one religious myth among many, and correlates with other intellectual trends of the period, including positivism and scientism, which often exhibited hostility to the Christian religion.⁴

By complaining, however, about anthropologists' attitudes to Christianity, Girard joins a line of French Catholic intellectuals who, since the late nineteenth century, have reacted against the constraints placed on the Gospel by secular ideologies. From the novels of Léon Bloy and J.K. Huysmans to the poetry of Paul Verlaine and Francis Jammes, from the pamphlets of Charles Péguy and Georges Bernanos to the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel and Jacques Maritain, the history of the period is awash with Christian reflection on the ideological dilemmas of which secularizing reforms in France were but the political denotation. These writings have rightly been seen as a reactionary *cri de coeur*, violently rejecting the secular worldview.⁵ Might it be possible, however, to find among these Catholic intellectuals a resolution to problems of desire and conflict which correlates with Girard's discovery of a paradigm of non-violence in the Christian scriptures?⁶

To explore this hypothesis, I propose to consider two contrasting works – Paul Bourget's *Le Sens de la mort* (1915) and Bernanos's *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune* (1938) – and to analyse them through the tensions which Girard has identified between mimetic violence and the Gospel.⁷ First, however, we must review the principal lines of Girard's theory of mimesis, scapegoating, and the Gospel to set the analysis of Bourget's and Bernanos's works in a theoretical context.

Girard's thought can be schematized into three main areas: literary commentary, cultural anthropology, and biblical studies. In opposition to the Romantic tradition in which desire expresses the autonomous and authentic self, Girard's initial theoretical insight was that desire is mimetic or imitative. In his 1961 work *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* he argued that a particular canon of Western literature, including works of Cervantes, Dostoyevsky, and Proust, demonstrates that a subject's desires are aroused by the mediation

³ See, for example, Emile Bournouf, *La Science des religions* (Paris: Delagrave, 1885); and Emile Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Paris: Alcan, 1912).

⁴ Juliette Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France 1848-1940* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997). Of course, some positivists, such as Charles Maurras, believed in the social utility of Christianity (see *La Politique religieuse* (Paris: Nouvelle librairie nationale, 1912)).

⁵ See Richard Griffiths, *The Reactionary Revolution: The French Catholic Literary Revival 1870-1914* (London: Constable, 1966).

⁶ See René Girard, *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (1978; repr. Paris: Grasset, 2007).

⁷ Paul Bourget, *Le Sens de la mort* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1915); Georges Bernanos, 'Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune', in *Essais et écrits de combat*, ed. by Jacques Chabot and Michel Estève, 2 vols. (1938; repr. Paris: Gallimard, 1971), I, pp. 351-575.

of a model whose own desires indicate the desirability of an object.⁸ The model could be a person or indeed an institution capable of possessing some object or desirable quality; for Girard, the model's possession/desire of the object is imitated by the subject. In this triangulation of subject, object, and model the distance between subject and model is crucial. In older, hierarchical societies, social or cultural barriers provided what Girard calls external mediation, preventing conflict between subject and model. In the modern period, the decline of such barriers leaves internal mediation as the only obstacle to acquisitive mimesis (where the object desired is something concrete or material) or metaphysical desire (where the object desired is something abstract).

From these literary beginnings, Girard drew conclusions which passed into the field of social and cultural theories. In *La Violence et le sacré* Girard meditated on the rivalry that arose from mimetic desire, and began to understand ordinary social mechanisms, notably taboos and sacrifices, as ways of controlling the aggression provoked by mimetic rivalry.⁹ Still, the escalation of that rivalry can lead to a crisis in which rivals become reflections of each other, fixed in reciprocal hostility, their true selves distorted and exhibiting indifferently human and bestial characteristics. Ultimately, Girard argued that this aggression was not solved historically by contractual models of society, but rather by a process of scapegoating, restoring the unity disturbed in mimetic conflict by pouring communal aggression onto a selected victim, or by directing that aggression against an exterior enemy. The new harmony experienced after the scapegoat is rejected leads the community to treat the scapegoat as something evil and good; evil because deserving of victimization, good because a resolver of the mimetic crisis. Fundamentally, then, Girard's theory makes violence the 'secret heart and soul of the sacred' as his chief English commentator, Michael Kirwan, has observed.¹⁰

In the 1970s, nevertheless, while rereading the Bible Girard perceived a different cultural pattern which led him to the conclusion that Christianity, and notably the Gospels, represents a discarding of the scapegoat mechanism. Such was the argument of his 1978 work *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*. The drama of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is an acting out of the scapegoat mechanism, but the violence is overcome by God's refusal to work revenge; in this model the way of harmony lies not in violence, nor in the

⁸ René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961).

⁹ René Girard, *La Violence et le sacré* (1972; repr. Paris: Hachette, 2008).

¹⁰ Michael Kirwan, *Discovering Girard* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), p. 41.

theodicy of a persecuting deity, but in the self-sacrificing death and resurrection of the Crucified, representing a non-retaliatory resolution of the mimetic crisis.¹¹

Girard's theories raise many questions. For example, does violence always arise from mimesis, and if not, how can it be explained otherwise? Are all victims social scapegoats and why might persecution tend to induce further persecution rather than resolution? Finally, if the Gospels carry the solution to mimetic violence, why has the history of Christianity been marked by violence at various stages? Debate ranges widely on these and other issues.¹² My interest in Girard's theory, however, lies not in answering such queries but in the light it can potentially cast on the French Catholic literary revival referred to at the beginning of this essay.

Bourget and Bernanos are two writers and intellectuals who can be considered representative of the French Catholic literary revival in the twentieth century.¹³ Bourget tends to reflect the intellectualized branch of this revival, in line with the philosophical traditions of Joseph de Maistre or Louis de Bonald.¹⁴ Bernanos can be taken as an example of the strongly imaginative, non-intellectual, or polemical branch, exhibiting the passion of a Léon Bloy or a Charles Péguy.¹⁵ Both Bourget and Bernanos are of course recognized as distinguished Catholic authors, but in what ways can their writing be seen in the light of the Girardian theories outlined above? Moreover, what is the advantage of seeing them in that light? To begin sketching an answer to such questions, I propose here to analyse one work by each of these authors: Bourget's novel *Le Sens de la mort* and Bernanos's political pamphlet *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune*.

Mimetic rivalry appears to be at the heart of the tensions driving Bourget's 1915 novel *Le Sens de la mort*. Bourget places these tensions in the context of World War One and in a quasi-love triangle between Michel Ortègue, a brilliant surgeon, director of a clinic and an ideological secularist; Catherine, Ortègue's wife and twenty years his junior; and Ernest Le Gallic, a soldier, a devout Catholic and cousin of Catherine. Gallic is secretly, and in spite of

¹¹ In this work, Girard argued that Christ's death was not sacrificial, but he modified this theory through his dialogue with Swiss theologian Raymund Schwager S.J. to embrace a concept of Christ's crucifixion which was sacrificial but not punitive (see Raymund Schwager, *Jesus im Heildrama: Entwurf einer biblischen Erlösungslehre* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1992)).

¹² See Kirwan, *Discovering Girard*, pp. 87-111.

¹³ While the two works analysed here date from the twentieth century, the French Catholic literary revival proper stretches back into the nineteenth century, encompassing writers active in the 1880s and 1890s. Griffiths's study only goes up to the First World War, but he alludes to various writers, including Bernanos and François Mauriac, whose creative periods stretch into the interwar years and beyond.

¹⁴ See Paul Bourget, *Pages de critique et de doctrine* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1912).

¹⁵ See Bernanos, *Essais et écrits*. For a discussion of the intellectual and non-intellectual trends among French Catholic writers, see Griffiths, *The Reactionary Revolution*, pp. 20-22.

his best efforts, in love with Catherine, and, subsequently, during his military service on the Western Front he is badly injured and evacuated to Paris where he is treated at Ortège's clinic. This circumstance brings the three protagonists before the watchful eye of Dr Marsal, who narrates their tragic story.

Bourget was less polemical than some French Catholic authors, but behind this plot, and behind so many of Bourget's novels, run incessant hostilities between secularism and Catholicism. For example, the ideology of scientism which makes everything subject to science's power of explanation resembles religion mimetically in promising a total explanation of the world. The dynamics of this conflict are epitomized by Ortège who points out that while the pivotal point of religion is '*la destinée de la personne humaine*' [the destiny of the human person], the pivotal point for science (or rather, scientism) is '*la conception de la loi sans finalité*' [the conception of law without finality].¹⁶ This tension provides as it were the background against which the principal characters of this novel enter into romantic hostilities.

When these hostilities break out, however, they are directed mainly by Ortège at Le Gallic and Catherine. Early in the novel Ortège is merely annoyed by Le Gallic's visit to the clinic, but when Le Gallic comes back later as a patient Ortège's hostility develops into hatred as he correctly divines Le Gallic's love for Catherine.¹⁷ Yet Ortège's worst violence is directed at himself and at Catherine. Diagnosed secretly with terminal pancreatic cancer, Ortège thinks about killing Catherine to take her with him to the grave, but, ultimately, they make a suicide pact in which Catherine's death will provide the aging, insecure Ortège with a guarantee of her love.¹⁸ A contagion of violence – which, according to Girard, arises in the context of unresolved desire – breaks out, as Catherine embraces self-destruction as a means of solving the dilemma of disunity arising from Ortège's death. Catherine becomes a Girardian scapegoat whose life (as evil) means disunity with the dying Ortège and whose death (as good) will bring about unity in what they both believe is the sleep of non-existence.

As Ortège's hostility to Le Gallic reaches its height, however, Le Gallic offers a different resolution to Ortège's hostility as he swears on his death bed he has fought every feeling of attraction to Catherine. This claim overcomes the hostility of Ortège and promises to recover the unity of their erstwhile friendship, not through violent rivalry but through Le

¹⁶ Bourget, *Le Sens de la mort*, pp. 175-76.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

Gallic's self-sacrifice.¹⁹ Likewise, convinced of the self-centredness of a suicide pact in a time of war, Catherine steps back from offering herself as a scapegoat as she realizes her union with Ortègue is not the only source of meaning in her life. Ortègue then commits suicide alone.

Bourget's 'sense of death' presents two rival options: a scapegoating or violent action which leads to meaningless isolation, or a self-sacrificial death, akin to that of the Crucified, which leads to purposeful unity. Thus Dr Marsal concludes, '[i]l a vécu dans la communion. Il est mort dans la communion. Il repose dans la communion. Mon pauvre maître reste solitaire dans la mort' [[Le Gallic] lived in communion. He died in communion. He rests in communion. My poor master [Ortègue] remains solitary in death].²⁰ Catherine's refusal to accept the exigencies of scapegoating appears also as a rejection of violence, even if Ortègue chooses to answer this by his own suicide. The fact that Le Gallic must in a sense do violence to himself by restraining his own desires correlates with the Girardian insight that avoidance of social violence requires in fact individual renunciation.

In Bourget's *Le Sens de la mort*, Le Gallic's self-sacrifice represents a non-violent solution to Ortègue's hostility. In this way it presents us with a paradigm similar to that underpinning Bernanos's *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune*. This pamphlet was written by Bernanos during the Spanish Civil War, which he had witnessed firsthand in Majorca. A French Catholic monarchist and man of the Right, Bernanos initially supported Franco's *pronunciamento*, but on seeing the violence which accompanied the nationalists' campaign on Majorca, he felt disgust not only for the bestial atrocities before him, but also, and perhaps more importantly, for the French conservatives who were potential imitators of Franco's forces. Indeed, in *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune* the Spanish Civil War provides an ongoing parable for the political ills of the French Right. Bernanos's analysis thus raises two questions: to what extent were the actions of the Spanish nationalists and French conservatives a sign of mimetic rivalry and violence, and what solution did Bernanos see to the violent dilemmas thus created?

Reflecting the Girardian theory of rivals, Bernanos's analysis identifies the polarization characterizing the hostility of French and Spanish conservatives to the communists: it is a case of the 'us' and 'them' of mimetic rivalry. Bernanos attributes such polarity to the conservatives' stupidity but instantly connects their stupidity to a love for violent destruction, facilitated by advances in armament technologies: '*En attendant la*

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 270.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 313.

machine à penser qu'ils attendent, qu'ils exigent, qui va venir, ils se contenteront très bien de la machine à tuer, elle leur va même comme un gant' [As they wait for the thinking machine, which they expect, which they demand and which will come, they will make do very happily with the killing machine, which suits them just like a glove].²¹ The Girardian process of monstrous doubles in which rivals become a horror to each other corresponds to Bernanos's description of the Spanish nationalists who institute a blind 'Terror' to persecute their communist rivals (their Girardian model) who contend with them over Spanish sovereignty (the object desired).²² Bernanos's immediate fear for the French Right is that they will mimic the Spaniards' violent tactics. His ultimate fear is that this spectacle of violence could unleash '*la Guerre absolue*' [absolute war] in which the most predatory sentiments – vanity, cupidity, envy – would express the basest forms of collective life.²³ In other words, Bernanos's 'absolute war' represents a society in which the forces of mimetic rivalry are the constant violent driving force guiding the dynamics of the community through acquisitive conquest. Here, there appears in fact to be no scapegoat mechanism available.

Bernanos does, however, offer the French Right – and by extension the Spaniards – another option. In his view, among the causes of the war is a neglect of Christ's love of poverty. The grasping pursuit of money and profit which drives capitalist society (through cupidity and envy) and feeds the fires of socialist revolution is both a symptom of its own abandonment of Christianity and a sign of the necessary cure. Thus Bernanos proposes two solutions: as a cure for mimetic desire, the example of the champion of poverty St Francis of Assisi, and as a cure for mimetic violence, the way of St Theresa of the Child Jesus: '*[r]edevenez, donc, des enfants*' [become, then, children once more].²⁴ And he continues to explain what this Christian fight must now involve: '*[i]ls ont trouvé le joint de l'armure, vous ne désarmerez leur ironie qu'à force de simplicité, de franchise, d'audace*' [they have found the chink in [your] armour [but] you will not disarm their irony except by simplicity, openness and boldness].²⁵ Bernanos was avowedly a man of violence – as a student with the *Camelots du roi*, the street fighting foot soldiers of Charles Maurras's royalist league Action Française, he was censured by Maurras for trying to become involved in a royalist coup in Portugal – and his call for a revival of Christian sanctity appears to sit awkwardly alongside

²¹ Bernanos, '*Les Grands Cimetières*', p. 362.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 431-32.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 461.

²⁴ The Carmelite nun also known as Saint Thérèse de Lisieux.

²⁵ Bernanos, '*Les Grands Cimetières*', p. 518.

his call for a renewal of French *chevalerie*.²⁶ Still, this *chevalerie* is not principally martial but moral. At its heart is the practice of honour which Bernanos saw precisely as the freedom-giving antidote to a society driven by vanity, cupidity, and envy. Like Bourget's *Le Gallic*, Bernanos's *chevaliers* will achieve their goals not through a violent grasping of power levers, but through fidelity to evangelical sources; not through a mimetic mirroring of their aggressors, but through an appropriation of the virtues of the Christian saints.

There are two advantages in reading these works from the perspective of Girardian theory. First, it suggests the possibility of reappraising the polemical character of some writings associated with the French Catholic literary revival. If their proclivities for polemical violence are justifiably noted, especially with regard to secularism and secularists, does the way in which they subvert aggression against secularism (by portraying evangelical non-violence imaginatively or rhetorically in their writings) not deserve equal attention? In this light, the label of 'reactionary' as applied to such writers may stand in need not of complete rejection but of careful revision.

Secondly, analysing other French Catholic writers from this perspective could uncover more literary adumbrations of Girard's theory of mimesis, scapegoating and the Gospel solution. If, after all, Girard's theory has identified important paradigms in culture, literature, and Christianity, can their presence in self-consciously Christian writings not be reasonably predicted? Moreover, might not their discovery further the elaboration of Girardian theory, not only regarding mimetic conflict but also regarding evangelical solutions, both paradoxically at war within one and the same subject as the process of internal mediation unfolds in Christian asceticism?²⁷ Since Girard was not consciously placing himself in this French Catholic literary tradition when he undertook his literary and anthropological investigations, it is all the more curious that his work casts light on, and is in turn illuminated by, some of its writings.

The conclusions arrived at through analysing Bourget's *Le Sens de la mort* and Bernanos's *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune* are encouraging enough to invite further Girardian inquiry among the works of the French Catholic literary revival.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 573.

²⁷ Kirwan, *Discovering Girard*, pp. 119-23.

Cells, Recesses, Tombs:

Vertiginous Spaces in Bataille's *Le Bleu du ciel*

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*As part of an ongoing PhD project exploring transgressive literary approaches to urban space and the city in twentieth-century Paris and London, this essay examines the writing of space in Georges Bataille's 1957 work of erotic fiction *Le Bleu du ciel* [Blue of Noon]. Considered in the light of Bataille's own early theoretical writings of the late 1920s and early 1930s, as found in articles published in the avant-garde journal Documents, *Le Bleu du ciel* will be viewed as the staging of an essential conflict, present throughout Bataille's thought, between transgression and containment, structure and formlessness.*

*Denis Hollier has suggested that Bataille's recourse to architectural and spatial analogy is tied to a wider impulse to question and transgress structure in general, for which the vocabulary of architecture provides a linguistic base. Drawing upon this argument, my study suggests that in *Le Bleu du ciel* Bataille's antistructural impulse is developed, within the inherently structured form of the novel, through the exploration of a network of thematically interconnecting spaces: cells, recesses, tombs. These spaces, it will be suggested, are in a state of vacillation in the novel, constantly enclosed and thrown open, confined and transgressed. Drawing upon theoretical work by Maurice Blanchot, the article considers how these vacillating, unstable, and vertiginous depictions of space might relate to the experience of reading – ultimately considering the status of *Le Bleu du ciel* as a textual space that induces vertigo in its readers.*

Towards the end of Georges Bataille's short novel *Le Bleu du ciel* (1957) the protagonist and narrator of the piece, Henri Troppmann, sits in a car outside an apartment building in Barcelona, waiting for a friend to emerge from a radical political meeting. In this meeting, headed by a fervent but unconventional revolutionary whom Troppmann refers to only by her surname, Lazare, a plan has been taking shape. The group, or *cell* (my stress on this word will be explained shortly), of revolutionary agitators has been debating the idea of mounting an assault on a local prison. This plan sparks the interest of the generally cynical and apathetic Troppmann, who immediately offers to act as getaway driver in the raid. It is not latent revolutionary fervor that has been stirred here, however, but rather an intuitive sympathy for the project in hand. Troppmann reflects that: '[a]u fond, j'étais fasciné par

l'idée d'une prison attaquée ['basically, I was fascinated by the idea of assaulting a prison'].¹

If Troppmann is intrigued by the idea of a prison break, this is a fascination he inherited directly from Bataille, who had written about the symbolic value of such an endeavour as early as 1929. Indeed, Bataille's enthusiasm for breaching the walls of penal institutions was to maintain a continuous presence throughout his work. In 1957, only five years before his death, he would write in his collection of essays on *La littérature et le mal* [Literature and Evil] that, '[i]l n'est pas de signe plus parlant de la fête que la démolition insurrectionnelle d'une prison' ['there is no greater symbol of festivity than the insurrectional storming of a prison'].² Denis Hollier has been instrumental in drawing attention to the significance of Bataille's sustained interest in carceral architecture and space.³ Despite work by authors such as the architectural theorist Anthony Vidler, however, this aspect of Bataille's work has remained a somewhat neglected area of study, and little has so far been written that explicitly ties the key principles of Bataille's implicit critique of space to the spaces of his own fiction.⁴ Though Susan Rubin Suleiman has provided a highly influential analysis of *Le Bleu du ciel's* exterior spaces and street scenes, relating these to the social and political context of the period in which the novel was written, her article does not dwell in detail on the dark, enclosed interiors of the novel.⁵ My essay takes these spaces as its chosen terrain, looking at how the reader's passage through these claustrophobic, carceral, and vertiginous enclosures shapes the reading experience of *Le Bleu du ciel* itself.

Architecture: Cells

As noted above, Hollier has been pivotal in illuminating Bataille's interest in penal architecture, arguing that such structures were, for Bataille, at the very origins of

¹ Georges Bataille, *Le Bleu du ciel* (1957; repr. Paris: Flammarion, 2004), p. 135; English translation from Georges Bataille, *The Blue of Noon*, trans. by Harry Matthews (1979; repr. London: Marion Boyars, 1988), p. 110. Though a more literal translation of Bataille's title would be *The Blue of the Sky*, in what follows I refer to Matthews's translation of the novel, *The Blue of Noon*. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from *Le Bleu de ciel* are from this source. All further references to these editions will be cited parenthetically as *BC* (in reference to Bataille's original text) and *BN* (in reference to Matthews's translation).

² Georges Bataille, *La littérature et le mal*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 12 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1970-1988), IX (1979), pp. 169-316 (p. 241); English translation from Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, trans. by Alastair Hamilton (London: Marion Boyars, 1993), p. 107.

³ Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

⁴ See Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

⁵ Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Bataille in the Street: The Search for Virility in the 1930s', *Critical Inquiry*, 21.1 (1994), 61-79.

architecture itself.⁶ This argument is principally based on Bataille's early text 'Architecture', first published in the second issue of the subversive arts journal *Documents*.⁷ Here Bataille compares architectural edifices to the '*physionomie*' ['physiognomy'] of the most imposing figureheads of society, '*prélats, magistrats, amiraux*' ['prelates, magistrates, admirals'], arguing that architectural form *in general* presents an imposing expression comparable to the most officious, controlling, and hierarchical aspects of a given society.⁸ Hence the prison is the architectural form *par excellence* – a bald expression of a carceral aspect Bataille sees lurking in all monumental structures. Bataille provides 'proof' of this by referring to the historical example of the fall of the Bastille – a riotous moment that is best understood, he contends, as a venting of the deep animosity felt by the masses '*contre les monuments qui sont ses véritables maîtres*' ['towards monuments which are their veritable masters'].⁹ The prison thus becomes a visible example of an entrenched power relation in which all architecture – in a wider sense, all structure, all form – is implicated. As far as Bataille is concerned, all architecture is repressive and, therefore, '*les grands monuments s'élèvent comme des digues, opposant la logique de la majesté et de l'autorité à tous les éléments troubles*' ['great monuments rise up like dams, opposing a logic of majesty and authority to all unquiet elements'].¹⁰

Bataille's early description of architecture as a dam that holds back unruly elements is highly important. The specific choice of example here – the storming of the Bastille – is also revealing, tacitly relating this repressive, carceral, quality of architecture to an understanding of space. Famously, when the walls of the Bastille were breached the prison was found to be all but empty; the cells containing only seven prisoners.¹¹ Even the prison's most notorious occupant, the Marquis de Sade, was absent, having been transferred to another prison mere days before the liberation. There is a sense, then, in which both the storming and later the destruction of the Bastille can be seen primarily as liberations of *space*. What was predominantly set free in this 'prison break' was the empty space

⁶ Hollier, p. xiv.

⁷ This journal, founded by Bataille, started life as an academic arts review but is better known today as a gathering place for various disaffected members of the Surrealist movement. For more detailed explorations of *Documents* see, for example, Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (London: Zone, 1997); and Dawn Ades and Simon Baker, *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2006).

⁸ Georges Bataille, 'Architecture', in *Œuvres complètes*, 1 (1970), pp. 171-72 (p. 171); English translation from Georges Bataille, 'Architecture', in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, ed. by Alastair Brotchie, trans. by Iain White (London: Atlas Press, 1995), pp. 35-36 (p. 35).

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ Idem.

¹¹ Richard D.E. Burton, *Blood in the City: Violence and Revelation in Paris 1789-1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 30.

contained within the cells – a process continued by the almost immediate destruction of the prison and ‘setting free’ of the *Place de la Bastille*, a public space created on the site of the former prison. That more or less the only thing locked up in the Bastille was space would perhaps have made perfect sense to Bataille who, as Vidler has elucidated, was consistently interested in investigating the ‘latent criminality’ of space itself.¹²

‘Espace’ [‘Space’] is the subject and title of another of Bataille’s *Documents* articles, in which he explored space with reference to a series of unexpected metaphors, all marked in some way by deviancy and taboo. Space is like an ape dressed as a woman, he says (implying that it is deceptive, anthropomorphic); it is also like ‘*un rite ignoble d’initiation*’ [‘an ignoble initiation rite’] or ‘*un poisson qui en mange un autre*’ [‘a fish swallowing another’].¹³ This last comparison is particularly resonant, suggesting that space is both stratified, like a series of Russian dolls fitting one inside the other, and predatory, devouring. For all these reasons – presented with all this evidence of deviancy – Bataille argues, the ‘*philosophe-papa*’ [‘philosopher-papa’] embodied by the architect or town planner recognizes space as criminal and seeks to contain and incarcerate it.¹⁴ Structures are built, walls erected. The architectural edifice is raised to impose order on unruly or ‘criminal’ space. Space itself thus becomes the ultimate ‘unquiet’ element held back by the architectural/philosophical order. As a partial remedy to this, Bataille mischievously suggests reversing the terms of criminality and putting the philosophers in prison, incarcerating them, ‘*pour leur apprendre ce que c’est que l’espace*’ [‘to teach them what space is’].¹⁵

The prison cell thus becomes the place to go to learn a hard lesson about the nature of space. This is partly, for Bataille, because it is analogous to another kind of cell: those that make up the human body. Here we come to the second key contention laid out in ‘Architecture’, where Bataille argued that: ‘*[L]es hommes ne représentent apparemment dans le processus morphologique, qu’une étape intermédiaire entre les singes et les grands édifices*’ [‘man would seem to represent merely an intermediary stage within the morphological development between monkey and building’].¹⁶ This suggests that humans are caught in the middle, somewhere between the animals that have preceded them and the buildings that rise around them. In this chain of relation the human is rendered, or perhaps

¹² Vidler, p. 130.

¹³ Georges Bataille, ‘Espace’, in *Œuvres complètes*, I, p. 227; English translation from Georges Bataille, ‘Space’, in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, pp. 75-77 (p. 75).

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ Ibid., orig. p. 227; trans. p. 77.

¹⁶ Bataille, ‘Architecture’, orig. p. 172; trans., p. 35.

renders itself, increasingly redundant by the forms it creates. In modelling architecture on the human form, the human becomes a compromised link in an evolutionary process that climaxes in the construction of grand and imposing buildings. Hence architecture's fearful and imposing aspect. The building, for Bataille, is a reminder of a prison we have constructed around ourselves, an external form that surpasses our own.

Darkness: Recesses

The prison break proposed in *Le Bleu du ciel* is never enacted. Troppmann is distracted from it by the arrival in Barcelona of his lover, a typically Bataillean erotic female named Dorothea, or 'Dirty'.¹⁷ The prison walls are left standing, the 'unquiet elements' contained. Nevertheless, while the prison break remains an unrealized project, glimpses of the criminal disquiet contained within the cells are allowed to leak out, finding their way into the text in mediated, symbolic forms. An example of this comes as Troppmann recounts a visit paid to him by Lazare at a point at which he was himself 'imprisoned' – confined to his bed by illness. Recounting this incident to a friend, he says that: '[i]l y avait du soleil dans la chambre mais elle, Lazare, elle était noire, elle était noire comme le sont les prisons' ['There was sunlight in the room, but Lazare was dark. Dark the way prisons are dark'] (*BC*, p. 114-15; *BN* p. 94). Lazare, who proposes the plan to storm the Barcelonan gaol, also embodies something of the darkness and criminal ineffability such structures are built to contain. Her presence brings darkness into the sunny room, and into the imaginative space of the text, just as a successful assault on the prison would, we might infer, allow sunlight into the cells and release 'unquiet elements' onto the streets of Barcelona.

Lazare here becomes an ambiguous, dualistic figure. She carries darkness into the sunlight of Troppmann's room, yet also strives through her revolutionary activities to throw open dark spaces such as prisons. Bearing in mind the unusual biblical name given to this female character, it is revealing to turn here to the work of Bataille's friend and contemporary Maurice Blanchot, who also drew upon the figure of *Lazare* [Lazarus] in his 1955 work *L'Espace littéraire* [The Space of Literature]. In this book Blanchot uses the resurrection of Lazarus as a metaphor for the experience of reading. When approaching a literary work, Blanchot suggests, the reader assumes a role analogous to that of Christ on the threshold of Lazarus's tomb, demanding that meaning emerge from the text with a

¹⁷ For a more detailed critique of Bataille's representations of women in his fiction see Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Pornography, Transgression, and the Avant-Garde: Bataille's *Story of the Eye*', in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. by Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 117-36.

command comparable to the Biblical ‘*Lazare, veni foras*’ [Lazarus, come forth].¹⁸ The experience of reading therefore becomes for Blanchot ‘*quelque chose de vertigineux qui ressemble au mouvement déraisonnable par lequel nous voulons ouvrir à la vie des yeux déjà fermés*’ [‘something vertiginous that resembles the movement by which, going against reason, we want to open onto life eyes already closed’].¹⁹ Just as Lazarus is an ambiguous figure who moves between death and life, dark and light, reading, Blanchot suggests, is an ambiguous, vertiginous experience. Meaning comes forth in response to our call, but something also stays behind, overlooked, in the darkness of the tomb. Thus, for Blanchot, the miraculous ‘*ouverture*’ [opening] of reading is also an enclosure, its meaning also an obscurity: ‘*ne s’ouvre que ce qui est mieux fermé; n’est transparent que ce qui appartient à la plus grande opacité*’ [nothing opens but that which is closed tighter; only that which belongs to the greatest opacity is transparent].²⁰

Vertigo: Tombs

Le Bleu du ciel was fully drafted by May 1935. However, as Michel Surya, Bataille’s biographer, has illustrated, the text of the novel was revisited and revised prior to its eventual publication in 1957.²¹ Given that, as Surya also illustrates, Blanchot and Bataille were close friends from 1941 onwards, and that Blanchot’s 1948 novel *L’Arrêt de mort* [The Death Sentence] is briefly mentioned in the foreword to *Le Bleu du ciel*, it does not seem beyond the bounds of possibility that the Lazare of Blanchot’s work may have had some influence on that of Bataille’s novel.²² Certainly vertigo, and vertiginous spaces, were of the utmost importance to Bataille. In *L’Impossible* [The Impossible], a text written some years after the initial draft of *Le Bleu du ciel* (though published before it), he would write that: ‘*[c]e qui nous fascine est vertigineux: la fadeur, les replis, l’égout ont la même essence, illusoire, que le vide d’un ravin où l’on va tomber*’ [‘what fascinates us is vertiginous: insipidity, recesses, the sewer, have the same illusory essence as the void of a

¹⁸ Maurice Blanchot, *L’Espace littéraire* (1955; repr. Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 256 (translation by the author).

¹⁹ Blanchot, *L’Espace littéraire*, p. 257; Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. by Anne Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 257. All further English translations of Blanchot are from this source.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, orig. p. 258; trans., p. 195 (modified).

²¹ Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 2002), p. 216.

²² Surya, p. 311. Along with such novels as *Wuthering Heights*, *L’Arrêt de mort* is mentioned in Bataille’s foreword to *Le Bleu de ciel* as an example of a literary work which embodies a state of anguish and excess that Bataille sees as key to his authorship of *Le Bleu du ciel* (BC p. 12).

ravine into which one is about to fall’].²³ *Le Bleu du ciel* offers various explorations of this feeling of vertigo – explorations which play, significantly, upon some of the same motifs of ambiguity and contradiction (openness and enclosure, dark and light, life and death) suggested by Blanchot.

The most intense example of this comes in a scene in the closing sections of the novel. Here Troppmann and Dirty, walking on the outskirts of the German town of Trier, find themselves on the edge of a cliff overlooking the city’s cemetery. Candles mark out the graves below, and the view becomes a vision of a night sky lit by star-like ‘*tombes illuminées*’ [illuminated tombs] (*BC* p. 174).²⁴ A curiously inverted and hallucinatory perspective is achieved – a sense of the sky opening up below as well as above. Troppmann notes that ‘*ce vide n’était pas moins illimité, à nos pieds, qu’un ciel étoilé sur nos têtes*’ [‘this empty space, at our feet, was no less infinite than a starry sky over our heads’] (*BC* p. 174; *BN* p. 143). Space in its most limitless form opens up around them as Troppmann and Dirty, making love for the first time, teeter on the cliff’s edge and nearly fall to their deaths. The vertigo experienced is intense, but also complex. What is conjured is an impression of weightlessness – what Patrick ffrench, borrowing from Paul Virilio, describes as ‘the “fall upwards” into the blue of the sky’.²⁵ This is vertigo as Bataille understands it: not simply a fear of falling, but a moment of abandon in which notions of ‘up’ and ‘down’ are rendered meaningless. Here we glimpse space at its most ‘unquiet’ and unruly. As space becomes unbound and unordered, all means of orientation are surrendered in a moment of limitlessness and impossibility.

Even within this moment of openness, however, a sense of containment is maintained. Dirty and Troppmann push themselves quite literally to the edge of the void, but they do not fall. They achieve a fleeting moment of limitlessness, but even this is compromised by a dual thread of suffocation and enclosure that runs alongside it. Troppmann’s description of the sex taking place between himself and Dirty underlines this impression: ‘*je m’enfonçai dans son corps humide comme une charrue bien manœuvrée s’enfonce dans la terre. La terre, sous ce corps, était ouverte comme une tombe, son ventre nu s’ouvrit à moi comme une tombe fraîche*’ [‘I sank into her moist body the way a well-

²³ This book was first published in 1947 as *La Haine de la poésie* [The Hatred of Poetry] and reissued in 1962 as *L’Impossible*. The quotation here is from George Bataille, ‘*L’Impossible*’, in *Œuvres complètes*, III (1971), pp. 97-232 (p. 123); English translation from Georges Bataille, *The Impossible*, trans. by Robert Hurley (San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 1991), p. 38 (translation modified).

²⁴ Translation by the author.

²⁵ Patrick ffrench, ‘Dirty Life: London – Paris – Barcelona – Trier – Frankfurt’, in *The Beast at Heaven’s Gate: Georges Bataille and the Art of Transgression*, ed. by Andrew Hussey (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 61-73 (p. 65).

guided plough sinks into earth. The earth beneath that body lay open to me like a grave; her naked cleft lay open to me like a freshly dug grave'] (*BC* p. 175; *BN* p. 144). The meeting point of sex and death that would become an increasing preoccupation in Bataille's later work could hardly be more explicit here. But it is also significant that this episode, which initially seems like a radical 'opening' of space, in fact involves a far more ambiguous vacillation. The panorama of ravine, cemetery, and sky seem to expand and, simultaneously, to narrow. Everything is drawn back into the enclosed space, the recess, found between Dirty's legs. Both the cut in the landscape and the slit in Dirty's body become 'vertiginous' spaces, open to the vastness of sky and void, certainly, but also drawing us back to the subterranean level of dungeons, basements, graves. Making love above the cemetery, Troppmann finds himself lost in the immensity of the void and, figuratively speaking, dragged beneath the earth, buried alive.

Shortly after this episode Troppmann and Dirty descend and enter Trier itself, passing through the streets of a rundown district on the edge of town. Here they encounter an obnoxious young boy who reminds Troppmann of a '*petit Karl Marx*' (*BC* p. 177). As Troppmann watches this boy pass on the streets, he thinks of the real Karl Marx lying in his grave, '*sous terre, près de Londres*' ['underground now, near London'] (*BC* p. 177; *BN* p. 146). Both Surya and ffrench have noted the significance of this episode, pointing to the fact that *Le Bleu du ciel* is structured by its beginning in London, where Marx is buried, and climax in Trier, where he was born.²⁶ Indeed, if Marx is '*sous terre*', near London, at the novel's opening we find Troppmann and Dirty in a similarly subterranean context: '[*d*]ans un bouge de quartier de Londres, dans un lieu heteroclite des plus sales, au sous-sol' ['in London, in a cellar, in a neighbourhood dive – the most squalid of unlikely places'] (*BC*, p. 17; *BN* p. 11). This basement bar, haunt of drunks and rodents, can be seen as a dungeon-like place. More importantly, when viewed in relation to the '*sous terre*' Marx, whom the novel is subtly structured around, the opening setting of the novel might also be seen to resemble a tomb, a grave ready to accommodate the '*corps étalés*' ['sprawled bodies'] of Dirty and Troppmann (*BC* p. 18; *BN* p. 12). In the most subtle way, through a light but definitely present association, the reader is drawn back to the opening pages of the book, where we find ourselves, much like the reader evoked by Blanchot, standing on the threshold, gazing back into a tomb-like space.

²⁶ Surya, p. 213; ffrench, p. 62.

Conclusion

Narrative pathways through *Le Bleu du ciel* are never straightforward. Moving through the text involves negotiating one unstable, disorientating space after another, passing through an elaborate network of symbolic spaces – basements, recesses, cells, and tombs – whose borders touch each other and whose limits are continuously lacerated and transgressed. The text itself becomes labyrinthine and circuitous, subject to what Bataille himself refers to in the novel's foreword as '*monstrueuses anomalies*' ['freakish anomalies'] (BC p. 12; BN p. 154). Through a study of the treatment of space in the *Le Bleu du ciel* – spaces constantly shifting between light and dark, openness and enclosure, form and the formless, this essay has examined some of the novel's 'anomalies' and obsessions, looking at their place in relation to ideas explored in the broader corpus of Bataille's thought. Seen in this context, what has become apparent is that such anomalies are not anomalies at all, but rather nodal points in a system of thought itself devoted to an interrogation of notions of impossibility and contradiction. Reference to the work of Blanchot, itself linked to the territory inhabited by Bataille through numerous biographical and textual connections, expands the scope of this interrogation, helping to show how the spaces of *Le Bleu du ciel* might be seen to relate to experiences outside the limits of that book, and ultimately to a broader understanding of the unstable, vertiginous experience of reading itself.

The Rebirth of Inherited Memories

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*Women were arguably the worst victims of the Partition of India in 1947 and endured displacement, violence, abduction, prostitution, mutilation, and rape. However, on reading histories of the division of India, one finds that the life-stories of women are often elided, and that there is an unwillingness to address the atrocities of 1947. This reticence results partly from the desires of the Indian and Pakistani governments to portray the events as freak occurrences with no place in their modern nations. Literature can play an important role in interrupting state-managed histories, and 'The Rebirth of Inherited Memories' focuses upon the manner in which Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* (2001) unsettles official versions of Partition. It examines how the novel acts as a counterpoint to 'national' accounts of 1947 through its depiction of the gendered nature of much of the violence, and it explores Baldwin's representation of the elusive concept of 'body memory'. The possibility of remembrances being passed on physically, or born within people, has found support in the eschatologies of Eastern religions, in Western psychological theories, and in recent scientific investigations into the 'mind-body' problem. The transmission of 'body memories' between generations serves to disrupt accounts that downplay the brutalities at the splitting of India. This paper draws upon a chapter of my doctoral thesis that investigates issues of memory and the enduring influence of Partition in South Asia.*

What the Body Remembers (2001), by Shauna Singh Baldwin, delineates the battle between two Sikh women, Satya and Roop, for the affections of their shared husband. Sardarji marries Roop, his second wife, due to Satya's inability to produce children. The disputes between the two women take place against the backdrop of the division of India, but rather than allowing their fighting to become emblematic of the conflict between Hindus/Sikhs and Muslims, Baldwin employs Satya and Roop to illuminate the social standing of women in 1947. At Partition women became sites of contestation for the men of different religious communities and women's bodies bore the brunt of violence and sexual assaults. However, the physical markings and memories carried by thousands of women allow them to fulfil a more subversive role. The attacks, maiming, and bodily inscriptions act as counter-narratives that ensure such atrocities are not edited out of the stories that India and Pakistan create of their pasts. In *What the Body Remembers*, Baldwin undermines revisionist histories that underplay the horrors of 1947, and depicts how horrific memories can be as much embodied as, as it were, embrained. She achieves this in her representation of the physical suffering of her female characters and of the transference of recollections between generations.

The gendered nature of the violence at Partition is evident in ‘Delhi, September 1947’, the final subsection of the last chapter of the novel. Its compressed nature allows a rapid reenactment of an appalling event, and it is revealed partially as an eye-witness account as Jeevan (Roop’s brother) describes his discovery of the mutilated body of his wife (Kusum). This excentric perspective breaks up the linear narration of the main story, and draws attention to women’s suffering post-Independence: ‘[a] woman’s body lay beneath, each limb severed at the joint. This body was sliced into six parts, then arranged to look as if she were whole again’.¹ The ‘partitioning’ of Kusum is symptomatic of the vicious nature of attacks, but Jeevan, who as a soldier is accustomed to brutality, is unsettled as his wife has *not* been the victim of sexual assault: ‘[t]o cut a woman apart without first raping – a waste, surely’ (*WBR* p. 511). Jeevan is aware of the prevalence of rape as a weapon to emasculate men of a different religious community. However, a closer examination of Kusum’s body uncovers the full extent of the barbarism of the Muslim gang that has removed her womb to symbolize their desire to eliminate all Sikhs, in the present and in the future.

As Roop attempts to rebuild her life with her family in Delhi after Independence, she begins to share her brother’s misgivings about the death of her sister-in-law, and she realizes that the full story has yet to be told. She cannot understand why it was *only* Kusum who was killed while the rest of her family escaped. Roop’s worst fears are proved right when, at last, her father unburdens himself to her, revealing that he beheaded his daughter-in-law as the fighting escalated: ‘[e]very day I had been hearing that the seeds of that foreign religion were being planted in Sikh women’s wombs. No, I said: I must do my duty’ (p. 520). He delineates how he explained what ‘had’ to be done to Kusum, and how she concurred, allegedly, with his plan. However, his martyring of Kusum is presented as being more about *his* wishes than about the aspirations of his daughter-in-law. Baldwin depicts Roop as unprepared to accept the execution as a necessary sacrifice. She wants Kusum to be remembered in her own right, not as a victim of her father’s unstinting belief in the need to maintain female sexual purity and family honour. Throughout her father’s narration of the last moments of Kusum’s life, Baldwin employs Roop’s thoughts to interrupt the fable that her father wants to enshrine, and her cynicism is apparent when he declares how the gods helped him to decapitate Kusum cleanly with a single blow: ‘[o]ne stroke? Just one stroke’ (p. 521). Roop will not credit the idea that her sister-in-law’s meek acceptance of her fate can *only* be ascribed to her virtuousness, and views Kusum’s inability to protest as stemming from her inculcation with

¹ Shauna Singh Baldwin, *What the Body Remembers* (London: Black Swan, 2001), p. 510. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *WBR*.

the norms of Sikh society. Through Roop's enquiries, Baldwin reinscribes a fuller account of what happened to many women in 1947, and Roop's investigation prevents her sister-in-law from becoming an anonymous victim. Baldwin is keen to ensure that women's experiences are remembered and is fascinated by the ways in which memories are passed from generation to generation.

One of the most interesting aspects of *What the Body Remembers* is its revelation of the transmission of the past through non-verbal or non-textual means. Theorists such as Dominick LaCapra have discussed the difficulties in finding means to express adequately 'limit-events' such as the Holocaust or, in this case, Partition.² Problems include the gap between the possibilities of language and the actualities of events, the 'transference' of writers' personal feelings of anger or hatred, and the danger of trivialization through the selection of material and its editing. Baldwin explores the idea that, given these complexities, there may be alternative bodily methods of witnessing history's worst atrocities. The concept of 'body memories' is found, for example, in the eschatology of Sikhism, in psychological ideas such as Carl Jung's 'archetypes', or Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's 'transgenerational phantoms', and in the rejection of Cartesian dualism by scientists such as Antonio Damasio.³ A closer examination of religious, psychological, and scientific theory suggests a degree of agreement or overlap concerning such physical recollections. Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism all involve a belief in reincarnation. The soul (*atma*) is viewed as immortal and persists once the body dies. The future destination of a person's soul is determined by the ethics of her past actions (her *karma*):

The Indian sages conceived of life, within both the micro- and macro-cosmic spheres, not as a steady state but as a process, a continual and protracted (if not interminable) flow of life-powers, a perpetual fluctuation of forces or a coursing of energies through channels that pervade the body of the universe and the bodies of all the creatures who inhabit it.⁴

² See, for example, Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998).

³ C.G. Jung, 'On the Psychology of the Unconscious', in *The Essential Jung*, ed. by Anthony Storr (London: Fontana, 1998), pp. 68-71; Nicolas Abraham, 'Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology' (1975), in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, ed. and trans. by Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), I, pp. 171-76; Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (London: Penguin, 1994).

Virtues, talents, and powers can be transferred, not only from a person's current existence to a future life, but also between family members. This idea of merit transfer leads to the possibility of *karma* flowing between relatives, living and dead. A person's actions create 'karmic residues' (*karmasaya*) that are either meritorious (*dharma*) or unmeritorious (*adharmā*) depending on their behaviour. These residues are accompanied by 'dispositional tendencies' (*samskara*) that can, when activated, recreate memories of the acts that produced the residue. They can be triggered within the originator's lifetime, but may not be reanimated until a future existence.

It is not difficult to see how links can be drawn between the eschatologies of Eastern religions and modern Western psychotherapy and philosophy of science. Jung's delineation of 'collective consciousness', 'ancestral heritage', and 'archetypes' reveals the influence upon his work of religious concepts such as *karma*, *karmasaya*, and *samskara*.⁵ This is something which he admits readily, and his description of archetypes as those dreams, visions, and delusions that influence our instinctual behaviour, forges closer connections with ideas embedded within Eastern philosophical traditions. Jung's portrayal of archetypes is reminiscent of the concept of *karmasaya*, and their power and influence can be related to the reactivation of *samskara*. Similarly, in the field of neuroscience Damasio expounds his belief that our minds are embodied, with mind and body ultimately inseparable:

In human societies there are social conventions and ethical rules over and above those that biology already provides [...]. Although such conventions and rules need be transmitted only through education and socialization, from generation to generation, I suspect that the neural representations of the wisdom they embody, and of the means to implement that wisdom are inextricably linked to the neural representation of innate regulatory biological processes.⁶

Damasio recognizes the importance of socialization in transmitting automated alarm signals that affect the decisions that we make when avoiding pain or discomfort. Nevertheless, the fact that our mental processes so often coexist with bodily sensations, or what Damasio terms

⁴ J. Bruce Long, 'The Concepts of Human Action and Rebirth in the *Mahabharata*', in *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, ed. by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), pp. 38-60 (p. 57).

⁵ C.G. Jung, 'Psychological Commentary on "The Tibetan Book of the Dead"', in *The Collected Works*, trans. by R.F.C. Hull, ed. by Herbert Read and others, 20 vols. (London: Routledge, 1977), XI, pp. 509-26.

⁶ Damasio, pp. 124-25.

‘somatic markers’, suggests that our ‘innate regulatory dispositions’ are biological as well as psychological.⁷

The importance of the concept of ‘body memory’ is more apparent when its role with regard to trauma is evaluated. Marianne Hirsch employs the term ‘postmemory’ to explore how knowledge of the past can be passed on to descendants of victims of ‘limit-events’, and how brutalities may be relived vicariously: ‘[p]ostmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that precede their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right’.⁸ Hirsch views family as a privileged site of memory transmission, and selects Art Spiegelman’s cartoon depiction of his family’s experiences of the Holocaust, *Maus* (1980-1991), to consider how texts, fictional or non-fictional, can represent the effects on children of living with parents whose past traumas cause long-term mental suffering. Spiegelman’s trope of constructing a narrative that involves his reconstruction of his relatives’ lives under the Nazis is mirrored by the detective work undertaken by Roop in *What the Body Remembers*. Such investigations are fundamental to the creation of countervailing accounts of significant world events, and ‘draw attention to the failure of professional historians to uncover these particular hidden crimes’.⁹ Examinations of historical presentations of Partition reveal how, often for nationalistic or ideological reasons, biographies of the Indian and Pakistani nations have understated the violence surrounding Independence. The preservation and sharing of inherited memories serves, therefore, to counter simplistic linear plotlines that offer a seamless transition from the protests of the Indian nationalist movement to the establishment of two separate self-governing nations.

In *What the Body Remembers*, the death of Kusum leads to Roop’s attempts to form an accurate picture of her sister-in-law’s brutal demise. Roop believes it is her duty to ensure that this element of her family’s history is not forgotten. As Roop uncovers the truth, Baldwin describes her as becoming a living embodiment of Kusum’s memory: ‘Jeevan continues and his story enters Roop’s body. This telling is not for Roop, this telling is for Roop to tell his sons, and her sons’ (*WBR* p. 509). While Jeevan recounts his tale, Kusum’s traumatic death sediments itself into Roop’s memory, to be retold and relived in the future. As Baldwin presents the months before and after the splitting of India, Roop becomes a conduit also for the knowledge and experience of Satya, her co-wife. This is more surprising as, during the six

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁸ Marianne Hirsch, ‘The Generation of Postmemory’, in *Poetics Today*, 29.1 (2008), 103-28 (p. 103).

⁹ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 285.

years that they share a husband, Satya tries to vanquish Roop through a combination of humiliation, intimidation, and violence. Given the conflict between the two wives, Roop seems an unlikely resting place for Satya's soul, when the first wife dies of tuberculosis. Roop is forced to visit Satya on her deathbed, and it is as Satya expires that Baldwin imagines the karmic transfer between the two women: '[b]ut because Roop felt that one, single moment, that single solitary empathetic moment, Satya will live on in Roop [...] Roop will be Satya's vessel, bearing Satya's anger, pride and ambition forward from this minute. Like the Gurus, they might be one spirit, different bodies' (p. 378). The revelation of Satya's 'possession' of Roop allows connections to be drawn with the religious and psychological theories discussed previously. Baldwin alludes to the transmission of 'karmic residues' as Satya's energies are reincarnated within Roop. Furthermore, Jung's formulation of 'archetypes' as 'deposits of the constantly repeated experiences of humanity' is equally applicable as Roop inherits Satya's wisdom.¹⁰

Despite Roop's reluctance to empathize with Satya, her former tormentor's spirit acts hereafter like a guardian angel, guiding and empowering her at critical junctures. The benign nature of Satya's karma becomes apparent: '[a]nd Roop – I have amends to make to Roop, for my anger and actions, for the way I used her . . .' (*WBR* p. 404). Satya's soul is determined to put right its unmeritorious actions in its previous incarnation by ensuring that such errors are not repeated, as it paraphrases George Santayana's well-known argument that '*if you do not learn what you are meant to learn from your past lives, you are condemned to repeat them*' (p. 404). Towards the close of *What the Body Remembers*, as the full horror of the violence at Partition unfolds, Satya reappears to affect Roop's behaviour at pivotal moments. When Roop is forced to lie about her religious background as she escapes from Pakistan to Delhi, it seems to be the spirit of Satya that compels her to action:

Comes a thought from the fringe of awareness as if some other woman spoke from the wings, shaped the thoughts that speed across the theatre of Roop's mind: *Surrender is not the only option.*

And then another.

Some men are not entitled to the truth. (p. 484)

¹⁰ C.G. Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, trans. by R.F.C. Hull, 2nd ed. (1966; repr. London: Routledge, 1990), p. 69.

The pride and defiance that characterized Satya's personality give Roop the strength to challenge Pakistani soldiers and to defend her children. While, at times, Satya's impact is presented as operating at an unconscious level, setting off alarm signals within Roop, there are also occasions when Roop is fully aware of Satya's influence and she looks to her former enemy as a role model. As Roop waits in Delhi for the arrival of her husband by rail, and witnesses the slaughter of train-loads of Hindus and Sikhs, she is inspired by the confidence of her erstwhile rival:

Afterwards, when the stench overtakes the crying and moaning, Roop models her voice on Satya's to ask questions the way Satya would have asked them. 'Where did this train start from?' 'Where did it stop on its way?' with that peremptory edge that says she has a right to their answers because of her high birth. (p. 496)

The concept of 'body memories', and the importance of learning from history, is at the heart of Baldwin's novel. Her representation of the transfer of recollections between women from different generations underlines her interest in how the division of India is remembered and, in particular, how women's experiences are reimagined. Passing on memories within families or social groups, either through storytelling or via more elusive mind-body connections, acts to ensure that traumatic events are not glossed over in the histories of communities or nations. Within *What the Body Remembers*, Baldwin's delineation of Roop's sense of responsibility regarding the transmission of an accurate account of Kusum's death, and of the manner in which Satya is reborn within Roop, emphasizes the agency of women in preserving their biographies within communal memory.

Did Melville Misplace Santa Maria in *Benito Cereno*?

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Herman Melville's Benito Cereno (1855) adapted Captain Amasa Delano's Voyages and Travels (1817) in order to draw out particular subtexts of racial politics and prejudicial attitudes, and thus to resonate with a contemporary antebellum audience. Exploring the rationale for these changes more broadly, this paper proposes that another change has so far gone unnoticed in critical responses to the tale: the transposition of Santa Maria, an island off the coast of Chile. Demonstrating that this is unlikely to be an unintentional slip, given Melville's familiarity with both the source text and the Chilean coastline, it argues that there were numerous possible reasons for doing this, including a desire to highlight colonial issues and comment on contemporary race relations both north and south of the Equator. As such, this piece utilizes a small array of key texts, rather than the broader biographical and contextually oriented sources that comprise the core of the larger piece of ongoing research to which this belongs. In so doing, it asserts that Melville's desire to change the source text to fit with his own artistic, political, and aesthetic goals still causes problems for critics today, inasmuch as this geographical mischief is yet another 'knotty problem' in the ongoing debate about Melville's motives for writing Benito Cereno.

Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno* is a text to which Melville readers often return. Virtually ignored upon its publication in *Putnam's* in 1855, it has similarly been overshadowed by the status or recognition afforded to works such as *Moby Dick* (1851) or *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (1853). Nevertheless, its nuances and complexities ensure that, once read, it lingers, encouraging readers back into its complex knots. One of the primary points of interest in the text, and which has raised issues as to its status as art is the tale's use of the diary of Captain Amasa Delano, *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres* (1817). This use of historical source material was first noted by Harold Scudder in 1928. Scudder recognized that Melville had utilized elements of chapter eighteen of Delano's *Voyages*, to which was added a limited third-person narrative (the reader sees what Delano sees), in order to construct a story ostensibly concerned with a slave rebellion, but more concerned with an ideological critique of Delano's original narrative. Melville's tale focuses on Amasa Delano's discovery of a moored ship, his subsequent meetings with its captain, Benito Cereno, and his complete misrecognition of the fact that a slave rebellion had occurred onboard. The result, familiar to readers of *Benito Cereno*, is a narrative concerned with the problems of interpretation, as we observe Delano's naivety and prejudice (he

assumes that the slaves are incapable of rebelling because ‘they know their place’), knowing that something more is going on, but unsure as to what exactly it might be. Ambiguities abound in the text, and Melville prompts the reader to question what the narrator, Amasa Delano, sees, referring to knots that must be untied or cut, oakum-pickers and hatchet polishers, and chess pieces. For most critics, these ambiguities have to do with race relations, with the assumption that Delano’s biased narrative – clearly more concerned with his own lack of spoils than with the slave rebellion, or indeed the causes behind such a rebellion – represented for Melville an opportunity to intervene in antebellum America’s slavery debate.

Since Scudder identified the source for *Benito Cereno*, particular critics have interpreted the story through its differences from Delano’s *Voyages*, employing techniques of literary excavation rather than literary interpretation (the most important of these is arguably William Richardson’s *Melville’s ‘Benito Cereno’*). Both Scudder’s and Richardson’s works have produced invaluable insights into the documentary origins of *Benito Cereno*, and offered a number of interpretations for Melville’s various changes to the source material. Such alterations include changes of name (such as changing the name of the ship from *Tryal* to *San Dominick*, or changing the captain’s name from ‘Bonito Sereno’ to ‘Benito Cereno’) and date (amending the year from 1805 to 1799, for example); the inclusion of invented characters; and ship fixtures not present in the original (the skeleton as the figurehead). Furthermore, the narrative is dominated by religious and colonial terminology and references, especially to Catholicism and Spain.

One of the primary debates about Melville’s amendments is concerned with his rationale, if any, for moving the date of the capture of the *Tryal*, the ship upon which *Benito Cereno*’s *San Dominick* is based. Scudder summarizes the voyage thus: ‘[Delano] left Boston Nov. 10, 1799, and early in 1800 arrived in the neighborhood of Santa Maria, an island a few leagues from the mainland in the vicinity of the port of Talcahuano, and the city of Concepcion’.¹ Scudder notes, in relation to this date, that Delano’s capture of the *Tryal* actually occurred in 1805, when Delano returned to the area, and asserts that ‘[p]erhaps Melville failed to note this silent transition [between 1800 and 1805]’ because Melville sets the action of the text in 1799.² In contrast, H. Bruce Franklin asserts that ‘Melville changes the year of Delano’s narrative from 1805 to 1799, thus making Babo’s rule on the *San*

¹ Harold H. Scudder, ‘Melville’s *Benito Cereno* and Captain Delano’s *Voyages*’, *PMLA*, 43 (1928), 502-32 (p. 530).

² *Idem*.

Dominick contemporaneous with Toussaint L'Ouverture's rule on San Domingo'.³ Franklin further contends that this is because of the importance of 'the successful bloody rebellion of the slaves of San Domingo, a topic of great antebellum interest'.⁴ In agreement with Franklin, Richardson later examined the significance not only of the years, but also of the respective calendar dates of the voyages of the *Tryal* and *San Dominick*, asserting that 'the year 1799 assumes considerable importance' as the midpoint of both the French Revolution and 'the American Constitution's 20-year ban on slavery', and that the midpoint of the voyage of Melville's *San Dominick* is 4 July, Independence Day.⁵

For Scudder, then, Melville's slip is merely a by-product of Delano's narrative digressing from chronology at this point, towards a memory of another event, and is thus 'accidental rather than intentional'.⁶ For Franklin and Richardson, however, the change of date is vital to understanding the importance of anti-slavery sentiment embedded in the text of *Benito Cereno*; as Richardson states, 'the reader is justified in assuming that he attached some importance to those deviations'.⁷ In each case, however, the focus of the debate is in Melville's use of an alternative date, a temporal focus that elides a possible geographical problem. As quoted earlier, Scudder notes that Santa Maria is 'an island a few leagues from the mainland in the vicinity of the port of Talcahuano', yet in *Benito Cereno* Melville describes Santa Maria as 'a small, desert, uninhabited island toward the southern extremity of the long coast of Chili'.⁸ In essence, Melville translocates the island of Santa Maria in *Benito Cereno*, moving it from off the coast of central Chile to its southern tip. It is this discrepancy that I wish to examine, using it to offer some complicating factors – further knots to untie or cut, in the language of *Benito Cereno* – in the debate between Scudder, Franklin, and Richardson.

What does Delano's narrative have to say on this matter? The *Voyages* are fairly explicit about the location of Santa Maria, even without log books, and Melville's inclusion of the legally witnessed documents within his account imply that Delano's version of the events must be at least geographically accurate. That is, Melville did not propose sweeping changes

³ H. Bruce Franklin, "'Apparent Symbol of Despotism': Melville's *Benito Cereno*", *New England Quarterly*, 34 (1961), 462-77 (p. 471). See also Jonathan Beecher's recent 'Echoes of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution in Melville's *Benito Cereno*', *Leviathan*, 9.2 (2007), 43-58.

⁴ Franklin, p. 471.

⁵ William D. Richardson, *Melville's 'Benito Cereno': An Interpretation with Annotated Text and Concordance* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1987), p. 71.

⁶ Scudder, p. 530.

⁷ Richardson, p. 71.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

to such geographical information, but left it more or less verbatim, and reproduced Sereno's declaration of the events:

[Bonito Sereno] told them that what was most wanting for the voyage was water; that they would go near the coast to take it, and thence they would proceed on their course – that the negroes agreed to it; and the deponent steered towards the intermediate ports, hoping to meet some Spanish or foreign vessel that would save them; that within ten or eleven days they saw the land, and continued their course by it *in the vicinity of Nasca*; that the deponent observed that the negroes were now restless and mutinous, because he did not effect the taking in of water, they having required with threats that it should be done, without fail the following day; he told them that *they saw plainly that the coast was steep*, and the rivers designated in the maps were not to be found, with other reasons suitable to the circumstances; that *the best way would be to go to the island of Santa Maria*, where they might water and victual easily, it being a desert island, as the foreigners did; that the deponent *did not go to Pisco, that was near*, not make any other port of the coast, because the negroes had intimated to him several times, that they would kill them all the very moment they should perceive any city, town, or settlement, on the shores to which they would be carried; that having determined to go to the island of Santa Maria, as the deponent had planned, for the purpose of trying whether in the passage or in the island itself, they could find any vessel that should favour them, or whether he could escape from it in a boat *to the neighboring coast of Arruco*.⁹

Both Pisco and Nasca are located in Peru; Pisco is approximately 150 miles south along the coast from Lima, and Nasca a further 150 miles along the coast. From Delano's account, it seems as if the rebellious slaves were persuaded that it was too dangerous to land near such inhabited areas, and that they should instead head towards the island of Santa Maria. This trip took them from Peru to Chile, following the coastal regions of the Andes – 'they saw plainly that the coast was steep' – until they came to the lower-lying coastal areas south of Valparaiso, in Chile. Santa Maria, described as being off 'the neighboring coast of Arruco' was a long distance to travel with supplies running low, and from Delano's quotation of Sereno's disposition, it is implied that this was planned so that he could escape. Arauco (as

⁹ Ibid., p. 108 (my emphasis).

Arruco is now called) is approximately 75 miles south of Concepción, and this geographical signpost locates the island of Santa Maria close to the thirty-seventh southern parallel along the coast of Chile.

As noted previously, however, there remains a problem inasmuch as Melville seems to provide Santa Maria with a voyage of its own. Whilst Melville takes pains to disorientate the reader of *Benito Cereno*, shrouding the text in ambiguity, he opens the narrative very explicitly:

In the year 1799, Captain Amasa Delano, of Duxbury, in Massachusetts, commanding a large sealer and general trader, lay at anchor[,] with a valuable cargo, in the harbour of St. Maria – a small, desert, uninhabited island toward the southern extremity of the long coast of Chili.¹⁰

The political boundaries of Chile have of course changed since Melville's time, for now the 'southern extremity' of Chile is Cape Horn, but these boundaries were remarkably fluid during the early nineteenth century. The area around Arauco, the Bío-Bío, had only succumbed to white (especially Spanish) influence in the mid-eighteenth century, but there were nevertheless towns established as far south as Osorno and San Pablo (approximately 250 miles south of Concepción) even by the time Delano wrote his *Voyages*; by the time Melville was writing *Benito Cereno*, further towns had been established on the mainland near the island of Chiloé, and Chile's borders extended to two further provinces in the area as the indigenous Mapuche were brought into Chilean society (Arauco became a province in 1853). From the thirty-seventh southern parallel, where Santa Maria is located, to the southern extremity of Chile – at that time, on approximately the forty-first southern parallel – is a remarkably long journey.

Of course, much of this supposition rests on what precisely Melville means by the phrase 'toward the southern extremity of the long coast of Chili'. Santa Maria is certainly further south along the Chilean coast than its midpoint, which is on approximately the thirtieth southern parallel, and thus 'toward' the south, yet Melville's use of the term 'extremity' implies a much more southern position than it in fact occupies. The preposition 'toward' merely implies a direction, but the noun 'extremity' and the description of the coast as 'long' countermand this, and pull the reader further south. Rhetorically, his opening

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

description isolates the island, distancing the events that occur within the narrative from normalized society, and we can certainly see why Melville would want to do this; but he grounds the island in this passage nonetheless, emphasizing its (misplaced) location. Why would Melville make this emphasis? He was certainly reasonably well-versed in maritime matters, having spent the years 1839-1844 travelling, and whilst he was a 'green hand' on board the whaling ship *Acushnet* actually travelled north along the coast of Chile from Cape Horn to the Juan Fernández Islands (where Alexander Selkirk was marooned) between 15 April 1841 and May 1841.¹¹ Through these experiences, he clearly possessed some awareness of nautical distances and travel times, especially with regard to the region described in Delano's *Voyages*, lending credence to Richardson's observation of the specificity of the dates, and thence to the specificity of the location itself.

If it is not an unfortunate mistake, then why did Melville move Santa Maria? Within *Benito Cereno*, including the rewritten legal documents he incorporates into it, he does not revise the other locations mentioned in the narrative. Melville recounts much of the detail of Delano's narrative in *Benito Cereno*, including the above excerpt. He adds Babo's name to the deposition, and makes some minor changes in punctuation, but beyond that the only differences are that he calls Santa Maria 'solitary' rather than 'desert' and, significantly, includes the key phrase 'the neighboring coast of Arruco'.¹² Furthermore, Cereno's description of the long voyage from Cape Horn to Santa Maria also raises questions in Delano's mind:

For here, by your account, have you been these two months and more getting from Cape Horn to St. Maria, a distance which I myself, with a good wind, have sailed in a few days. True, you had calms, and long ones, but to be becalmed for two months, that is, at least, unusual.¹³

Delano then waits for an explanation as to why 'the passage from Cape Horn to St. Maria had been so exceedingly long', an explanation punctuated by Babo holding a knife to Cereno's throat, pretending to shave him, which Delano omits to consider as significant (in hindsight, it indicates that Cereno is under duress).¹⁴ Location thus plays a significant role in *Benito*

¹¹ Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: A Biography*, 2 vols. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), I, p. 193.

¹² Compare Richardson, pp. 57-58 and p. 108.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Cereno, given the lies Cereno tells to cover the fact that the slave rebellion has occurred; what, then, is the significance of the opening paragraph locating Santa Maria in such a way?

Was Melville perhaps aware of the laws passed in 1819, after Chile gained full independence from Spain in 1818, that abolished ‘the distinction between Spaniard and Indian’ because ‘all inhabitants of the republic were proclaimed “Chileans” with equal political rights’?¹⁵ Despite this treaty, Chilean southwards and eastwards expansion into Mapuche territory continued, giving the Mapuche rights to be equal subjects under Chilean law but not independent in their own right, and leading to a series of violent struggles.¹⁶ Santa Maria would thus stand as a sign for the continued southwards expansion into Mapuche territories that was ongoing at the time. Given the ironic distance with which Melville tells Delano’s story in *Benito Cereno*, and the racial dimension to this distance, this is certainly a possibility. It tallies with the way in which Melville incorporates key elements of the Spanish colonization of the ‘New World’ into the narrative, including the name change from *Tryal* to *San Dominick*, the creation of a ‘Christopher Colon’ figurehead for the *San Dominick*, and the ‘Follow Your Leader’ motto appended to it. Nevertheless, it seems too far from Melville’s own experience to force *Benito Cereno* to correspond to a broader picture of race that incorporates Chilean politics, and the extension of the rights of slaves to be free to include aboriginal rights. Perhaps more plausibly, given the rhetorical significance of ‘southern’ in the period in which Melville was writing, and particularly ‘southern extremity’ as a euphemism for ‘southern extremism’, we can ask whether Santa Maria is Melville’s chosen site for the ethical debate on slavery, and especially the prejudice with which slaves were viewed. This seems far more likely, and relates the movement, albeit implied, of Santa Maria, to the growing divisions in antebellum American society.

This is perhaps seen most clearly when we juxtapose this expression with Melville’s clear assertion of Delano’s origins. He is of ‘Duxbury, in Massachusetts’, a small shipbuilding town in a northern state. This is indeed accurate, but plays no subsequent part in the narrative and does not appear to aid Melville in developing Delano’s character. Given the antebellum context of the story, it is thus significant that Delano is given an origin (‘Massachusetts’) and a destination (the ‘southern extremity’) in this opening paragraph. As Richardson states:

¹⁵ George McCutchen McBride, *Chile: Land and Society* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1936), p. 148.

¹⁶ See also Simon Collier and William F. Sater, *A History of Chile, 1808-2002* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 95-96.

[Many] citizens coalesced into two violently opposing camps: the abolitionists, composed primarily of Northerners from regions (such as Massachusetts) that no longer derived much or any commercial benefit from slavery, and the pro-slavery faction, composed largely, but certainly not exclusively, of Southern slave owners who obviously had a large investment in slaves.¹⁷

Richardson's own analysis of the opening paragraphs of the narrative focuses almost exclusively on the 'muddying of colors' of the third paragraph, and devotes no time to the remarkable specificity with which Melville opens *Benito Cereno*.¹⁸ By locating Delano as a Northerner, and thus ostensibly linking him to the emancipation of slaves by geographical location, while at the same time using *Benito Cereno* to demonstrate Delano's inherent racial prejudices, Melville emphasizes the ideological distance between assumption and reality in the then ongoing race debate.

If this is the case, and Melville's rhetorical strategy of *implying*, but not *stating*, that the island is further south than it actually is related to his overall aims for *Benito Cereno*, then this certainly lends credence to Richardson's and Franklin's trust in Melville. Rather than losing or misplacing the island, the politics of Spanish-governed Chile becomes Melville's catalyst for a transposition of the race debate, elided in Delano's original *Voyages*, into American consciousness. Scudder's belief that Melville 'mistimed' the tale fails to take into account the deliberation with which Melville transposed details of Delano's narrative, and Scudder's desire to see this as an error (can we ever finally say?), means that he overlooks the fact that this is an error Melville would be committing geographically as well as temporally. At this point, Darryl Hattenhauer's argument, that '[f]or Melville, there is no New World of the saved and Old and Third World of the damned, but rather a common continent of the sinful brotherhood', seems to be borne out.¹⁹ *Benito Cereno* is not a narrative about redemption, but damnation, and given the (possible) Chilean/Spanish political contexts and (more plausible) American antebellum contexts, Santa Maria can be understood as the locus of this debate, not as a site of righteous rebellion or implicit white superiority, but as humanity *in extremis*, at its lowest ebb. The significance of the island is briefly alluded to by Richardson, in his brief aside on the relationship between the history of Saint Francis and

¹⁷ Richardson, p. 70.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁹ Darryl Hattenhauer, "'Follow your leader": Knowing One's Place in *Benito Cereno*', *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 45 (1991), 7-17 (p. 13).

Benito Cereno, yet Melville foregrounds this island, and not just for the reason that it is the setting for the story.²⁰

Given this interpretation, Hattenhauer's introduction to his essay, where he states that Melville's writing can be understood in relation to the distinction between the 'chronometrical' and the 'horological', 'the transcendent, heavenly, sacred, and timeless' and 'fallen, earthly, profane, and historical', falls into place.²¹ He argues that Melville's narrative moves between the two in order to demonstrate Delano's preconceptions, and concludes that '[Delano] puts what he wants to see in place of what is actually there' and thus 'forces the horological to correspond to his preconceptions about the chronometrical'.²² In essence, he asserts that Delano's ideological spectacles colour the world about him, making the world appear in a particular manner. This is a common reading of the text, but Hattenhauer's spatial account of the narrative gives me pause for thought. Given the 'voyage' of the island of Santa Maria, and the fact that it does not 'know its place' in *Benito Cereno*, might we equally assert that Melville, in addressing the ideological (chronometrical) status of American perceptions of slavery, subverted the actual (horological) location of the island of Santa Maria to further his aims?

²⁰ See Richardson p. 209, n. 18.

²¹ Hattenhauer, p. 7.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

Museums and the Narrative Representation of the Nation: *Mexico's Museo Nacional de Arte*

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This paper examines Mexico City's new Museo Nacional de Arte [National Museum of Art], addressing the implications of establishing a national museum, a form closely associated with nineteenth-century nation-building processes, in a global era in which the role of nation-states is said to be reduced. This study, which forms part of my wider research on Mexican visual culture in relation to state discourses, argues that the establishment of this new museum should be viewed in the context of the economic and political changes that began to take place during the 1980s as a result of International Monetary Fund restructuring policies. Focusing on the internal organization of this museum as a form of narrative, I approach it as a contemporary repositioning of the nation which constitutes a departure from the model of national identity developed during the seventy-year period of Partido Revolucionario Institucional [Institutional Revolutionary Party] rule. I propose that unlike the Museo Nacional de Antropología [National Museum of Anthropology], which embodied official identity constructions by emphasizing the pre-Hispanic origins of Mexican culture, MUNAL emphasizes its modern European foundations, attempting to inscribe it into a 'universal' narrative of Western civilization.

Until 1982 Mexico had no national art museum: a surprising fact given the strength of cultural nationalism throughout the twentieth century and its role in the legitimization of the authoritarian *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, which ruled continuously throughout much of the twentieth century until their election defeat in 2000), and the instrumental role the visual arts have played in the construction of nationalist iconography.¹ This paper will examine the establishment of this new museum in the context of the political circumstances from which it emerged, and analyse its narrative organization in relation to Mexican nationalist discourses of the twentieth century. Museology has been a growing field of enquiry since the 1980s, but has tended to focus on the Museum's

¹ Roger Bartra, *Blood, Ink and Culture: Miseries and Splendours of the Post-Mexican Condition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 8-10. On the development of nationalist imagery in painting see Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963). For a broader discussion of the image/nation relationship see Andrea Noble, *Mexican National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 11. Unless stated otherwise, all translations in this essay are by the author.

European development.² Studies of the Museum in Mexico have taken place within analyses of nationalist discourses rather than within the field of museology; the Museum has been acknowledged as a crucial site for the institutionalization of official ideology. However, the impact of Neoliberalism upon the state museum infrastructure has not been sufficiently investigated.³ Moreover, the implications of establishing a national museum in a ‘postnational’ era have not been addressed.⁴ I argue that the opening of Mexico’s *Museo Nacional de Arte* [National Museum of Art] (MUNAL) represents a significant step in the resignification of the nation and its symbolic repositioning within the global system.

While art museums differ in some ways from other kinds of museum, my approach is based upon their shared histories and modes of display.⁵ Before analysing MUNAL’s narrative structure, I will outline the historical role of the Museum in Mexican nationalist discourses. Many authors have noted the instrumental role of the Museum in forging a sense of national unity in newly independent nations.⁶ However, the ideological function of the Museum depends upon its conscious manipulation of symbols, and its effectiveness as an ideological tool depends upon a clear definition of the nation. Mexico’s first national museum, the *Museo Nacional* [National Museum], was established soon after Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821. Unlike the museums which emerged in Europe based around a clear idea of national identity, it was reported to be chaotic and inconsistent, lacking in any clear conceptual direction.⁷ The confused and inconsistent representation of pre-Columbian artefacts reflected a lack of consensus about the definition of national identity, and in particular about the symbolic role indigenous groups would play in it.⁸

² For a particularly exhaustive account of the Museum’s genesis in Europe see Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995). For the sake of clarity, I will distinguish between ‘the Museum’ as a concept, and the museum discussed in this essay, which I will refer to as MUNAL.

³ Mary Coffey’s study examines the proliferation of local community museums under Neoliberalism, but MUNAL’s opening has not been addressed (‘From Nation to Community: Museums and the Reconfiguration of Mexican Society under Neoliberalism’, in *Foucault, Cultural Studies, and Governmentality*, ed. by Jack Z. Bratich, Jeremy Packer and Cameron McCarthy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 207-42).

⁴ Jürgen Habermas has used the term ‘postnational constellation’ to describe the reorganization of global political/economic spheres (*The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, ed. and trans. by Max Pensky (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), pp. 51-65).

⁵ While many museums select objects for their typicality as representative specimens, art museums emphasize the singularity of the objects they display (Bennett, p. 20).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁷ Sophia C. Vackimes, ‘Indians in Formaldehyde – Nation of Progress: The *Museo Nacional* of Mexico and the Construction of National Identity’, *Museum Anthropology*, 25.1 (2001), 20-30 (p. 26).

⁸ Due to such inconsistencies and uncertainties Vackimes has argued that nineteenth-century Mexican museums cannot be viewed in the same way as those established in Europe, which were based upon a clear idea of national identity and cultural unity (p. 26).

After the revolution of 1910 indigenous culture came to occupy a privileged position as the basis for a homogenous identity: the concept of *mestizaje* answered calls for a unifying identity based upon mixed racial and cultural origins.⁹ The post-revolutionary government promoted *mestizaje* not only as a means of unifying a diverse and fragmented population, but also as a way of expanding the workforce and accelerating industrialization through the assimilation of indigenous groups. The *Museo Nacional de Antropología* [National Museum of Anthropology], which opened in 1963, was the first clear museological manifestation of a coherent policy regarding the representation of national identity, and helped to construct a sense of historical cultural unity.¹⁰ The centralization of the museum network within Mexico City and the all-encompassing approach of the *Museo Nacional de Antropología* drew the representation of all regions and ethnicities into the centre, allowing specific cultural and historical symbols to transcend local contexts and become national culture.¹¹ This museum aimed also to establish pre-Columbian civilizations as an alternative to European classical cultures, thus providing an alternative foundation for Mexican cultural production that marked it out as discrete from European forms.¹²

The *Museo Nacional de Antropología* constitutes a celebration of *mestizaje*, an attempt to forge a homogenous national identity based upon a common indigenous heritage, while for the most part encouraging the assimilation of indigenous groups by portraying their cultures as archaeological relics. Anthony Alan Shelton's essay brings out the contradictions in Mexican official discourse developed during the twentieth century: attempts to narrow the gulf between representations of an idealized pre-Columbian past and approaches towards contemporary indigenous populations by establishing a sense of cultural continuity which portrays present-day indigenous people as descendents of the pre-Colonial past were only partly achieved, as demonstrated by the curatorial separation between archaeology and ethnology in the *Museo Nacional de Antropología*.¹³ However, this museum shows the importance placed upon indigenous culture in the ideology of revolutionary nationalism, and was an important part of the structure of the *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia*

⁹ The term *mestizaje* literally refers to racial mixing, although it can also refer to mixed cultural origins, specifically mixed Indigenous and Hispanic heritage. As a means of conceptualizing postcolonial identities in Latin America it has come to define national identity in many countries.

¹⁰ Vackimes, p. 30.

¹¹ Néstor García Canclini, 'Las cuatro ciudades de México', in *Cultura y comunicación en la Ciudad de México*, ed. by Néstor García Canclini (Mexico: Grijalbo, 1998), pp. 19-39 (p. 21).

¹² Anthony Alan Shelton, 'Dispossessed Histories: Mexican Museums and the Institutionalization of the Past', *Cultural Dynamics*, 7.1 (1995), 69-100 (p. 91).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

[National Institute of Anthropology and History] (INAH), one of the means by which the ruling party constructed and reproduced ideas about Mexican national identity.

The Museum is implicated in the representation and reproduction of narratives: both constructing historical narratives of the nation through chronological modes of display, and reproducing the ‘Grand Narratives’ of modernity that have validated and underpinned Western knowledge.¹⁴ The Museum emerged as a product of modernity and Enlightenment thinking and has been linked to the consolidation of the modern nation.¹⁵ It subsumes objects into an evolutionary narrative of progress and the development of civilization, using narrative representation to construct continuity and establish a sense of order, thus ironing out any incongruities.¹⁶ Thus the Museum unites two mutually reinforcing understandings of narrative: the Museum’s temporal representation and the ‘Grand Narratives’ of modernity that it reinforces, both of which are underscored by its spatial articulation and forward-moving itinerary, which represent the evolution of man and culminate in the present.¹⁷ The role of space in the production of museum narratives is emphasized by Giuliana Bruno’s evocation of Quintilian’s method of remembering discourse by mentally furnishing a space with objects, which serves as an apt metaphor for the Museum’s interlinking of space and temporality in the production of historical memory.¹⁸

While the Museum’s floorspace reinforces its temporal narrative, the Museum also represents national space, symbolizing the abstract space of the state that frames social relations between individuals and institutions.¹⁹ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill proposes an understanding of the parallel functions of museology and cartography by suggesting that both fulfil similar functions of delineating territories and power relations.²⁰ The Museum inscribes a historical narrative onto a national space, interlinking time and space in the production of the nation. State collections not only play a part in the construction of historical narratives and

¹⁴ Jean-François Lyotard has theorized ‘Grand Narratives’ as performing a legitimizing function, providing the fundamental assumptions upon which Western knowledge is based (*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 23-26).

¹⁵ Bennett, p. 76. See also Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 16-17.

¹⁶ Taxonomy and cartography also emerged from the Enlightenment as a means of conceptualizing the world and establishing a sense of order. However, an analysis of this topic does not fall within the scope of this essay.

¹⁷ Bennett, pp. 178-79.

¹⁸ Quintilian’s method for memorizing text and discourse involved placing objects, each associated with a component of the discourse, in a sequence, so that in order to recall the narrative, one must mentally walk through the space (Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002), p. 220).

¹⁹ Claudio Lomnitz-Adler has reframed national culture as ‘culture within the national space’ (*Exits from the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in the Mexican National Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 3).

²⁰ Hooper-Greenhill, p. 17.

canons, but also in defining a museum's national public, bringing together legal and cultural definitions of the nation by marking out a heritage which belongs to all within its borders.

Mexico's national collection of art was brought together for the first time in 1982, when the *Museo Nacional de Pintura* [National Museum of Painting] assembled the collection of the *Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes* [National Institute of Fine Arts] (INBA), previously distributed among several art museums. The new museum was founded in a decisive year in Mexico's recent history, coinciding with a deep economic crisis linked to the fall of global oil prices, leading to loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which came with demands that Mexico's economy be restructured to meet the demands of globalization and free trade.²¹ This involved a reduction in social spending and the restructuring of financial institutions to allow a greater level of foreign investment. However, it has been noted that while social spending decreased, funding for culture did not, signalling the importance of culture as legitimization for government action.²²

This new museum was established in a portion of the *Palacio de Comunicaciones* [Palace of Communications] in the historic centre of Mexico City. However, the partial occupation of the building made it difficult to establish a continuous route through the collection, and after gaining full occupation of the building this museum closed for reconstruction in 1997. After a complete museological overhaul, as well as architectural changes to adapt the building to its new museological purpose, it reopened in 2000 as MUNAL.²³ The reopening coincided with the 2000 presidential elections, and was therefore a means of promotion for the PRI as they attempted to cling to power and redefine the party: incidentally, they lost to the centre-right *Partido de Acción Nacional* [National Action Party] (PAN), marking the end of seventy years of authoritarian rule.

MUNAL's permanent collection forms the *recorrido historico-artístico* [art-historical route].²⁴ Changes made to the building before its reopening allow a more coherent navigation through the collection, beginning at the earliest point and finally arriving at the end of its narrative, although a coherent navigation is impeded at times, as the spectator is often forced to backtrack.²⁵ The collection is divided into three temporally defined sections, marking out

²¹ For a concise and comprehensive outline of Mexico's transition to democracy, see Alexander S. Dawson, *First World Dreams: Mexico after 1989*, Global History of the Present (London: Zed, 2006).

²² George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in a Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 276.

²³ Gabriela Fong and Carmén León de la Barra, *Memoria del Munal* (Mexico: Conaculta-Inba, 2001), pp. 33-34.

²⁴ MUNAL's space is divided between the *recorrido historico-artístico*, which houses its permanent collection and constitutes its narrative, and the *recorrido alterno*, which includes temporary exhibition spaces and interactive spaces which propose different ways of approaching the objects on display.

²⁵ These observations are based upon visits made to MUNAL during May 2008.

Mexican history into three epochs beginning with the Spanish conquest. The first section, '*Assimilación de Occidente 1550-1821*' [Western Assimilation 1550-1821], covers the colonial period, charting the development of art in New Spain from a European base, without any acknowledgement of the indigenous cultural heritage later reclaimed by Mexican modernist painters. Paintings that appear towards the end of this section register the development of a *Criollo* identity separate from that of the *Peninsulares* (those born in Spain), as religious iconography is adapted towards a proto-nationalist imaginary, most notably with the development of *Guadalupismo*.²⁶

The second section, '*Construcción de una nación 1810-1910*' [Nation-Building 1810-1910], defines the second historical epoch as the period between independence and revolution. The emphasis is on the tensions between idealized representation (myth, allegory) and the quotidian (popular types, rural life) in the construction of an independent national identity. Indigenous subjects begin to appear for the first time in MUNAL's narrative in paintings depicting historical scenes from the Aztec codices, displaying a desire to construct an authentic and original national history in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. One of the largest spaces is divided between landscape paintings and portraits, visualizing national space and the national subject, with much space being devoted to Jose María Velasco's landscape paintings. The third and final section, '*Estrategias plásticas para un México moderno 1900-1954*' [Strategies for a Modern Mexico 1900-1954], seems less thorough than the preceding one, perhaps due to the dominance of public mural painting, not given to museological display, during this period. It follows a similar structure to the previous section and elaborates some of the same themes: a series of modernist landscapes and portraits shows the reconstruction of the nation after the revolution through a reimagining of national space and citizenship. Velasco's nineteenth-century landscapes are mirrored by the dramatic landscapes of 'Dr Atl' (Gerardo Murillo) characteristic of the post-revolutionary aesthetic and the attempts to redefine national culture as distinctly Mexican.

By representing the two post-independence periods in this way, mirroring one another with their constructions of national territory and national subjects, the cyclical processes of symbolic national construction are emphasized: the making and remaking of the nation within periods delimited by historical ruptures. The events that mark these periods are not directly addressed but made visible only as ruptures that divide the collection, and taken for granted as

²⁶ According to traditional accounts, the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to an indigenous man named Juan Diego in 1531, becoming Mexico's most popular religious and cultural image. Since independence it has come to symbolize the nation.

already-narrated events. This is particularly true of the revolution, an event now closely associated with PRI nationalism and by extension authoritarian politics, which is conspicuously absent from MUNAL's narrative. Even the tensions that preceded it are given very little space: one small room contains paintings which to a certain extent celebrate modernization, such as Velasco's depictions of industrialization within the rural landscape, while two display boards of Jose Guadalupe Posada's popular satirical prints present an alternative view. However, these two displays are separated, so that any explicit relation between them is softened. The development of notions of cultural continuity and *mestizaje* are visualized and narrativized within MUNAL, which acts not only as a monument to and institutionalization of the past and its representation in images, but also charts a history of intellectual constructions of national culture. Homi K. Bhabha argues that the nation is narrativized in two ways: the accumulative teleology of progress (embodied by the Museum), and the performative retelling of the nation in the present.²⁷ MUNAL visualizes the continual retelling of the nation, and is in itself an example of the reformulation of the national past.

While the *Museo Nacional de Antropología* served a specific nation-building purpose, the demands of the late twentieth century were somewhat different. The notion of culture as resource, used by Tony Bennett to describe the nineteenth-century shift in governmental approaches to culture, has been taken up by George Yúdice as a means of approaching the instrumentalization of culture in the global era, less as a means of civilizing and instructing than at the service of global capital. Museums now play a decisive role in urban development and tourism, as well as creating a favourable impression of a city in order to attract foreign investment.²⁸ As Carol Duncan has argued, 'Western-style museums are now deployed as a means of signalling to the West that one is a reliable political ally, imbued with proper respect for and adherence to Western symbols and values'.²⁹ Mexico's transition posed challenges to the dominant conceptions of national identity, which had previously been defined in opposition to the US. The symbolic realignment of Mexican culture with its Western counterparts has disrupted models of national identity that had not only defined the nation as *mestizo*, but also symbolically anti-Western and anti-capitalist.

While serving a strategic purpose with regard to economic restructuring and attracting foreign investment, the creation of a new national museum can be read as an attempt to reduce

²⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 291-322 (p. 297).

²⁸ Yúdice, pp. 9-11.

²⁹ Carol Duncan, 'Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship', in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. by Susan M. Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 279-286 (p. 279).

fears about the loss of cultural identity often thought to accompany globalization, even while it paradoxically denaturalizes national identity by visualizing the intellectual processes of its construction. These processes are systematized through MUNAL's narrative structure and emphasized by display boards that contextualize the images on display in terms of the cultural discourses of their time.³⁰ Diverse cultural agents influence museum display, sometimes with conflicting agendas. MUNAL balances the state's strategic uses of the Museum with the curatorial team's aim towards an academically legitimate exhibition that questions received narratives. MUNAL's seemingly contradictory position embodies the ambivalence of the contemporary state, which finds itself in the position of needing to express a defence of the nation while creating distance from the post-revolutionary nationalist discourses that have become so closely associated with authoritarianism.

MUNAL traces the development in Mexico of a liberal tradition, a genealogy that links Mexican modernism, through the religious art of New Spain, to European 'high' culture. The role of indigenous culture in artistic genealogies is downplayed, if not completely denied, as the concept of art upon which the Museum is based is in itself a historical European construction founded upon a system of value which excludes indigenous cultural products as archaeology, ethnographic objects or handicrafts. MUNAL portrays a national cultural tradition founded on European liberal values, as opposed to the *Museo Nacional de Antropología*, which despite being constituted through disciplinary knowledges and systems of classification proceeding from the Enlightenment, has 'third world' associations. MUNAL's representation of elite culture exposes the subordination of the cultural production of subaltern groups within hierarchies of value, which is at odds with nationalist discourses that have traditionally elevated indigenous culture. However, it reproduces rather than confronts such hierarchies.

The absence of a national museum of art in Mexico throughout much of the twentieth century requires some explanation: a genealogy of the development of this particular concept of art in Mexico not only works against the indigenist basis of the PRI's nationalist project, but also cannot be extended beyond its colonial origins, and therefore does not support the concept of the nation as a timeless entity which the *Museo Nacional de Antropología* achieves through its extension of national history into an indefinite past. It is perhaps for this reason that MUNAL breaks with officially sanctioned museological divisions of Mexican history. The museum network in Mexico divides national history into three periods, each covered by a

³⁰ MUNAL operates a multi-level system of contextualization which gives prominence to key themes. Extra levels of theoretical detail are provided, but do not interrupt the basic narrative.

different museum: pre-Columbian heritage in the *Museo Nacional de Antropología*, the colonial period covered by the *Museo Verreinato*, and post-independence represented by the *Museo Nacional de Historia* [National Museum of History].³¹ A similar tripartite division is used at MUNAL, but here national history begins with colonization, and independent Mexico is divided into two periods separated by the revolution.

As noted by Bennett, the division of national museum networks according to separate disciplines presents each period as a chapter in a universal narrative of human development. Beginning with the evolution of life on earth (natural history), through the development of ‘primitive’ man (anthropology), this narrative culminates in Western civilization (art).³² In Mexico colonial rule disrupts such narratives, and the museological division between not only different time periods but also elite and popular cultural forms makes plain the historical and cultural ruptures that post-revolutionary indigenist discourses had attempted to conceal. The contradictions Shelton notes between idealized representations of pre-Colonial history and representations of present-day indigenous cultures as cut off from their past and incongruous with the present are also made obvious by the founding of MUNAL. The attempts made by the *Museo Nacional de Antropología* to establish pre-Columbian culture as an alternative classical cultural foundation for Mexican modernism are negated by MUNAL’s narrative of artistic production which traces its genealogy exclusively to Europe. These museological divisions expose the contradictions in an official culture that attempted to establish a sense of historical continuity, and signals the incompleteness of the now-abandoned attempts to construct a homogenous culture.

³¹ Shelton, p. 69.

³² Bennett, p. 181.

Mobile Narrative, Spatial Mediation, and Gaskell's Urban Rustics in *North and South*

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Addressing the (hitherto relatively neglected) question of spatial relations in Elizabeth Gaskell's industrial novel North and South (1855), this essay draws on Raymond Williams's concept of the 'knowable community', as well as nineteenth-century notions of the aesthetics of the picturesque (as elucidated by Linda Austin and Nancy Armstrong), to examine Gaskell's construction of class and social space. I employ close reading of the text and critical synthesis to demonstrate that Margaret Hale, posited as a 'spatial mediatrix' and ethnographer of the nascent industrial metropolis of Milton/Manchester, progresses from a conception of working-class life as essentially picturesque – aesthetically stimulating, but lacking in material substance – to an appreciation of the complexity and materiality of social spaces. Margaret is a flâneuse, who attempts an active identification with the urban environment and its inhabitants. By enabling Margaret to view her own position in society relative to that of others, Gaskell makes visible the 'knowable community' of the industrial urban poor, and demonstrates the importance of moving beyond an aestheticized mode of comprehending this community's material concerns and conditions. Paradoxically, however, a consistent lack of subjectivity and interiority in Gaskell's representations of the members of this community testifies to their status as 'urban rustics', a term the author uses to describe a version of the deindividuated choral mode that Williams identifies as characterizing George Eliot's 1859 portrait of rural life, Adam Bede. While Gaskell's novel succeeds in introducing its heroine and its reader to the private spaces of the industrial working classes, it ultimately stops short of bestowing fully formed and individualized consciousnesses on the knowable community it renders visible, thus negating its social and literary effectiveness. Significantly, however, Gaskell's novel comes to terms with the loss of an idealized rural past, and the ascendance of the urban, in a way that Eliot's seems, finally, unable to countenance.

Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) is a remarkably mobile narrative. The action moves between Helstone (Margaret Hale's rural childhood home); Milton-Northern (a fictionalized Manchester); Milton's surrounding countryside; London's Harley Street; Oxford; the Outwood train station, scene of a crucial plot development; Heston and Cromer, both coastal resorts; Corfu; Spain; and (North) America. Beyond its wide-ranging traversal of physical space, however, the novel is concerned with the journeying and border-crossings of its heroine, Margaret, a spatial mediatrix of considerable social and imaginative mobility. Her urban wanderings, first as a female philanthropist and eventually as a kind of *flâneuse*, enable her to cognitively map the social spaces of Milton, her new and unfamiliar home. In doing so she progresses from a conception of working-class life as essentially picturesque – aesthetically stimulating, but lacking in material substance – to an appreciation of the

complexity and materiality of social spaces and modes of existence different to those she has known. Her newfound perspectival advantage allows her to mediate across the barriers that divide the social spaces of Milton, a city riven by industrial conflict, and institute dialogue and understanding in place of pride and resentment. By enabling Margaret to view her own position in society relative to that of others, Gaskell makes visible what Raymond Williams calls a 'knowable community' – in this case, that of the industrial urban poor – and demonstrates the importance for England's middle and upper classes at this time of moving beyond an aestheticized, 'picturesque' mode of comprehending this community's material concerns and conditions.¹ Ultimately, however, a lack of subjectivity and interiority in Gaskell's representations of the members of these communities testifies to their status as what I somewhat paradoxically term 'urban rustics', after Williams's conception of the deindividuated 'choral mode' evident in George Eliot's 1859 novel of rural life, *Adam Bede*.² This essay will develop Williams's conception of the rustic in light of Linda Austin and Nancy Armstrong's work on the 'picturesque', or aesthetics of the surface, in Victorian fiction, as a mode of representation that tends to reduce the social to the aesthetic.³ It will thereby illuminate Gaskell's representation of social spaces in *North and South*, and provide a new mode of approach to the spatial and social divisions in evidence throughout the genre of the Victorian urban-industrial novel. The centrality of spatial relations to *North and South* makes it a productive and illuminating textual field against which to examine, develop, and synthesize these complementary critical paradigms.

The significance of spatial relations in Gaskell's work remains a relatively neglected area of critical inquiry, but in a chapter of her doctoral dissertation on architectural and bodily motifs in Victorian fiction, Keiko P. Kagawa gestures towards the importance of spatial representation in *North and South*, and its fruitfulness for a reading of Gaskell's social politics:

[C]lass and gender roles in city and country spaces, as well as national and continental boundaries, are succinctly established through her articulation of space [...] [so that]

¹ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (1973; repr. London: Hogarth, 1985), p. 165.

² *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³ Linda Marilyn Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition, 1780-1917* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007); Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

reading Gaskell through her spaces becomes a coherent organizing system for both her novel's narrative form and thematic content.⁴

It is, in fact, the *differentiation* of spaces that Gaskell repeatedly emphasizes: contrasts between the urban and rural, the domestic and public, and the commercial and the personal form a vivid background to the story of industrial unrest and unlikely romance. Such distinctions formed part of the code governing Victorian social interactions, based on a doctrine of naturalized separation of classes and genders. Gaskell defends Margaret's transgressions of these boundaries (her visits to the home of factory-worker Nicholas Higgins) through her invocation of the figure of the benevolent 'lady visitor', a role assumed by Gaskell herself throughout her time in Manchester. A committed Unitarian, the author fulfilled her social obligations with regular visits to the poor; her exposure to the domestic consequences of industrial and social disputes, and her ability to fictionalize the squalid reality of human suffering, form the basis of a plea for a more compassionate society in many of her novels. Such female philanthropy was generally recognized as contributing positively to efforts at building a rapprochement between classes, as an anonymous Victorian commentator suggests: '[o]nce in awhile a [lady] visitor may mediate between the master and the man. So the circle widens and spreads, and who can tell the misery which that one kind woman's call may have averted?'⁵

Nonetheless, the very necessity of such justifications suggests that considerable anxieties persisted surrounding the displacement of middle-class females from their insular domesticity; as Dorice Williams Elliot suggests, '[t]he question of ladies' visiting was a contest over who had access to and who would control a whole range of social spaces and practices'.⁶ But Gaskell also figures Margaret as a kind of amateur ethnographer, taking her middle-class readership into strange and unknown social territory in order to engage with a community and experience that had been, to use Williams's term, 'essentially opaque'.⁷ Gaskell develops this impulse in her earlier 'social problem' or 'condition of England' novels, *Mary Barton* (1848) and *Ruth* (1853); of the former, Borislav Knezevic notes:

⁴ Keiko P. Kagawa, 'Bodies in the "House of Fiction": The Architecture of Domestic and Narrative Spaces by Jane Austen, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oregon, 2002), p. 134.

⁵ Cited in Dorice Williams Elliot, 'The Female Visitor and the Marriage of Classes in Gaskell's *North and South*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 49.1 (1994), 21-49 (p. 22).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 165.

The industrial novel often took upon itself tasks we have come to associate with the practice and discourse of ethnography, which was just beginning to emerge as part of a comprehensive epistemological reorganization of science in the nineteenth century. [...] [A] novel like *Mary Barton* does seem to be predicated on the idea that there is such a thing as a distinct culture of the Manchester working class, and that this thing can be isolated for the attention of a concerned middle class.⁸

Knezevic goes on to suggest that a preoccupation with ‘cultural mapping’ (Knezevic’s term) is also at the heart of Gaskell’s *Cranford* (1853), a comic novel that is commonly supposed to eschew such perplexing problems: ‘[j]ust how Cranford culture is to be mapped and measured in its relationship to the industrial modernization of the north, or in its relationship to the state culture of the south, is the central question of the novel’.⁹ A similar challenge orientates the action of *North and South*. Middle-class expeditionist Margaret constructs an ethnography of the industrial, and maps the social geography of Milton’s working class. As she moves across and between social spaces – the Higgins’ cottage, the city streets, the Thorntons’ drawing room, the mill yard – she mediates relations between their inhabitants, negotiating geographical, political, and sexual borders.

On first encountering Milton, however, Margaret finds herself disoriented and overwhelmed, both by its geography and by its inhabitants. She perceives the city as a bewildering aggregate of unfamiliar social and economic relationships, manifested as a grey, smoky opacity:

For several miles before they reached Milton, they saw a deep, lead-coloured cloud hanging over the horizon in the direction in which it lay. [...] Nearer to the town, the air had a faint taste and smell of smoke [...]. Quickly they whirled over long, straight, hopeless streets of regularly built houses, all small and of brick.¹⁰

Milton’s industrial pall and its uncannily uniform streets, so different from the crooked, rural picturesqueness to which she is accustomed, render the city unreadable for Margaret. Here, Gaskell fictionalizes the disconcertedness expressed by many Victorian commentators and

⁸ Borislav Knezevic, ‘An Ethnography of the Provincial: The Social Geography of Gentility in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford*’, *Victorian Studies*, 41.3 (1998), 405-26 (p. 405).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (1855; repr. Ware: Wordsworth, 1994), p. 55. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *NS*.

artists at the changes wrought by processes of rapid urbanization and the unprecedented transformations, particularly in the north of England, of small market towns into teeming centres of industry.¹¹ As Deborah L. Parsons notes, '[t]he city is not only aesthetically but also structurally a different environment from the open landscape. Crucially, it is labyrinthine, and although mappable, is a place of numerous trajectories'.¹² Milton is built partly on ground that was once an orchard belonging to Margaret's godfather, Mr Bell, and he represents the prevailing mood, particularly among the upper classes, of nostalgia for a cognitively dependable rural past:

It is years since I've been at Helstone – but I'll answer for it, it is standing there yet – every stick and every stone, as it has done for the last century, while Milton! I go there every four or five years – and I was born there – yet I do assure you, I often lose my way – aye, among the very piles of warehouses that are built upon my father's orchard. (*NS* p. 352)

Like Margaret, Mr Bell finds the new metropolis unnavigable; his solution is to retreat into the unchanging and socially immobile world of Oxford. The indomitable Margaret, however, determined to engage productively with the ascendant forces of industrialism, attempts the production of a workable social map of the incomprehensible city of Milton/Manchester.

Her forays into its streets are initially undertaken out of necessity, and are highly discomfiting experiences since they bring her into contact with the factory workers – a group newly emboldened, Gaskell suggests, by a sense of their economic power: '[u]ntil Margaret had learnt the times of their ingress and egress, she was very unfortunate in constantly falling in with them. They came rushing along, with bold, fearless faces, and loud laughs and jests, particularly aimed at all those who appeared to be above them in rank or station' (p. 66). These trespasses on Margaret's jealously guarded physical and psychological space are all the more alarming to her because of a sense of superiority fostered by her privileged upbringing and her class-conscious mother.¹³ As Barbara Leah Harman notes, these 'verbal and physical invasions are meant to disrupt the very sense of class distinction that Margaret, for one, has

¹¹ Perhaps the greatest (certainly the most well-known) of the Victorian urban novelists is Charles Dickens, but as Williams observes, '[t]he only novelist of the mid-nineteenth century who comes as close as Dickens to the intricacies and paradoxes of the city experience is Elizabeth Gaskell' (*The Country and the City*, p. 219).

¹² Deborah L. Parsons, 'The Passante as *Flâneuse* in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*', in *Babylon or New Jerusalem?: Perceptions of the City in Literature*, ed. by Valeria Tinkler-Villani (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 155-68 (p. 156).

¹³ Before arriving in Milton, Margaret had spoken disdainfully of merchants like Mr Thornton as 'shoppy people' (*NS* p. 18).

been so eager in the past to maintain'.¹⁴ Soon, however, Margaret's walking begins to resemble that of a *flâneuse*; she wanders the streets not out of necessity, but because she has developed an interest in the life of the city's spaces. Parsons suggests that what differentiates the female *flâneuse* from the male *flâneur* is the impulse, not merely to create and influence one's surroundings through the subjectivity of perception, but to actively *identify* with the urban environment: 'the tendency of the *flâneuse* seem[s] to be not so much the careful detachment from the crowd practised by her male counterpart but rather a merging with it'.¹⁵ As she embarks on active exploration of the city streets, Margaret begins to observe as well as to be observed, thus initiating a process of identification with the external urban environment (and, by extension, its inhabitants):

Margaret went out heavily and unwillingly enough. But the length of a street – yes, the air of a Milton street – cheered her young blood before she reached her first turning. Her step grew lighter, her lip redder. She began to take notice, instead of having her thoughts turned so exclusively inward. (*NS* p. 123)

Margaret's developing interest in the conditions of those around her eventually enables her not only to navigate, but also to take pleasure in the city.¹⁶ From the day of her first visit to the home of the Higgins family, Gaskell tells us, 'Milton became a brighter place to her. It was not the long, bleak, sunny days of spring; nor yet was it that time was reconciling her to the town of her habitation. It was that in it she had found a human interest' (*NS* p. 69). Margaret, recognizing the humanity of its inhabitants, no longer finds Milton threatening; these relationships form markers that contribute to her psychic construction of the city as habitable space (and, perhaps, of the city *as* psyche; again, Parsons's notion of the *flâneuse*'s creation of the city through perception is relevant). From this moment on, Margaret becomes increasingly attuned to her physical environment, and to the energies and concerns of the workers who populate it. Immediately preceding the protest that forms one of the narrative's dramatic climaxes, Margaret is en route to the Thorntons' house when she is 'struck with an unusual heaving among the mass of people in the crowded road upon which she was entering.

¹⁴ Barbara Leah Harman, 'In Promiscuous Company: Female Public Appearance in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*', *Victorian Studies*, 31.3 (1988), 351-74 (p. 365).

¹⁵ Deborah L. Parsons, 'Souls Astray: Elizabeth Bowen's Landscape of War', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 8.1 (1997), 24-32 (p. 28).

¹⁶ The explicitly affective nature of Margaret's urban experience – '[h]er step grew lighter, her lip redder' – may recall the subversive pleasures young Victorian women were said to derive from novel-reading. For more on nineteenth-century women's reading as pleasurable and/or physically affective, see Pamela K. Gilbert, 'Ingestion, Contagion, Seduction: Victorian Metaphors of Reading', *LIT*, 8.1 (1997), 83-104.

[...] There was a restless, oppressive sense of irritation abroad among the people; a thunderous atmosphere morally as well as physically, around her' (p. 160). Margaret has developed a sympathetic intuition of the ideological (or 'moral') energies of Milton's workers, which manifests itself in her ability to detect disturbances in the physical space she shares with them. Throughout this crucial scene, Margaret's unusual capacity for sympathy is emphasized: '[b]ut now, in this real great time of reasonable fear and nearness of terror, she forgot herself, and felt only an intense sympathy – intense to painfulness – in the interests of the moment' (p. 163). This culminates in Margaret's physically placing herself between Thornton and his striking workers in an attempt to defuse a violent conflict. The spatial construction of the scene is telling. Margaret leaves the safety of the feminized domestic sphere to enter the site of industrial conflict. Standing on the steps of the Thorntons' imposing mansion, she speaks from a position of economic and social privilege; but as she faces the mill yard and the workers, her sympathetic capacity allows her to psychically cross the class divide and 'read' the motivations of the strikers: '[s]he knew how it was [...] Margaret knew it all; she read it in Boucher's face, forlornly desperate and livid with rage'; '[s]he saw their gesture – she knew its meaning – she read their aim' (p. 165, p. 166). Margaret's experiences on the city streets and in the homes of the poor have given her a perspectival advantage, and her knowledge of the city's diverse spaces enables her to create pathways between them, leading to desirable political and personal outcomes. One telling example occurs towards the end of the novel: a shift towards mutual understanding between Thornton and his workers, the result of Margaret's intervention, leads to the institution of a dining-room scheme, in which 'masters and men' take their midday meal together. Gaskell's suggestion is that the scheme will enable meaningful and sustained dialogue through the merging of previously distinct social spaces; as Elliot argues, '[t]he dining room domesticates the factory [and] blurs the boundaries between public and private spheres'.¹⁷

Gaskell traces Margaret's developing appreciation of the complexity of Milton's social economy through her changing aesthetic understanding of the spaces to which she is exposed (and to which she increasingly seeks exposure). Austin's analysis of the picturesque cottage in Victorian landscape painting illuminates the processes by which a middle- and upper-class conception of the rural poor excluded the material hardship the latter faced, and appropriated their crumbling dwellings as memorials of quintessential Englishness, 'depicting "decay" as a natural growth overtaking a cottage or as a luxurious and infantilizing *physis*'.¹⁸

¹⁷ Elliot, p. 48.

¹⁸ Austin, p. 134.

An example of this figuration of material degradation as rustic picturesqueness occurs at the beginning of *North and South*, in the rural idyll of Helstone, which ‘represents to Margaret everything that she values in home as a place’.¹⁹ Margaret and her suitor, Henry Lennox, venture into the surrounding countryside to sketch a set of derelict cottages:

‘These are the cottages that haunted me so during the rainy fortnight, reproaching me for not having sketched them.’

‘Before they tumbled down and were no more seen. Truly, if they are to be sketched – and they are very picturesque – we had better not put it off till next year. [...] Who lives in these cottages?’

‘They were built by squatters fifty or sixty years ago. One is uninhabited; the foresters are going to take it down, as soon as the old man who lives in the other is dead, poor old fellow!’ (*NS* p. 23)

Here, Gaskell fictionalizes ‘the conventionally picturesque vision of the built landscape naturalizing into its environment’, and in Margaret and Henry, we have two observers fundamentally detached from the scenery’s material implications.²⁰ Since ‘aesthetic principle dictated that the inside of the cottage be hidden, sometimes deliberately, from the viewer’, the reader is not shown the interior of the decrepit dwelling.²¹ Like Margaret and Henry, we remain unaware of the living conditions of its inhabitant, and ‘have no economic or political stake in the truth of the thing represented’.²² By comparison, Margaret’s temporary return, at the end of the novel, to her former life of privilege is characterized by a newfound awareness of her position relative to those on whose labour it rests:

She found herself at once an inmate of a luxurious house, where the bare knowledge of the existence of every trouble or care seemed scarcely to have penetrated. The wheels of the machinery of daily life were well oiled, and went along with delicious smoothness. [...] There might be toilers and moilers there in London, but she never saw them; the very servants lived in an underground world of their own, of which she

¹⁹ Harman, p. 362.

²⁰ Austin, p. 131.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 132.

knew neither the hopes nor the fears; they only seemed to start into existence when some want or whim of their master and mistress needed them. (*NS* pp. 344-45)²³

Margaret's experiences in Milton have clearly helped her to appreciate the moral obligation to examine obscured social and economic relations.

Thornton initially appears to conceive of his labourers and their environs in terms of what Armstrong calls 'the metropolitan picturesque': '[h]ere was the same æsthetics of the surface applied to those sectors of the city too dangerous to inhabit and to the people who inhabited them'.²⁴ With Margaret's encouragement, however, he too begins to question the æsthetics of the surface. Leaving his fortress-like factory, Thornton makes his own journey into the realm of 'the Other', visiting Higgins's home. What he witnesses there catalyzes a rethinking of his attitude to relations with his men: 'I saw such a miserable black frizzle of a dinner – a greasy cinder of meat, as first set me a-thinking' (*NS* p. 334). As Austin argues, '[t]he absence of the dwelling's interior in picturesque representation [...] precluded awareness not only of material hardship but of individual, private life'.²⁵ Thornton's viewing of the interior, private space of working-class experience (again, an indirect result of Margaret's intervention), leads to a newfound appreciation of the material circumstances of those upon whom his own wealth relies. As Elliot suggests:

When Gaskell has Margaret teach Thornton [...] that he can initiate such personal contact with his employees in their homes as well as in the workplace, she is not merely idealizing or romanticizing industrial relations; rather, she is advocating a type of social management, pioneered by women in the social space of the home.²⁶

North and South, then, constitutes an attempt, through the medium of fiction, to restore some of the materiality that Armstrong argues the urban poor were losing in the new visual order of the nineteenth century.²⁷ Gaskell's factory workers are an example of Williams's notion of a 'knowable community' – a previously marginalized community that becomes 'knowable' through literary representation. Williams posits that 'what is knowable is not only a function of objects – what is there to be known. It is also a function of subjects, of

²³ Note also how Margaret has adopted Milton working-class slang: the phrase 'toil and moil' is first used by Bessy Higgins (*NS* p. 140).

²⁴ Armstrong, pp. 97-98.

²⁵ Austin, p. 150.

²⁶ Elliot, p. 31.

²⁷ Armstrong, p. 95.

observers – of what is desired and what needs to be known'.²⁸ In tracing the development of Margaret's, and finally Thornton's, recognition of the need to make themselves aware of working-class experience, Gaskell's novel stands as an example of the literary development that Williams sees occurring throughout the nineteenth century: 'a recognition of other kinds of people, other kinds of country [in this case, other kinds of city], other kinds of action on which a moral emphasis must be brought to bear'.²⁹

However, Williams also points to the danger inherent in the artistic attempt at such representations (exemplified, he argues, in Eliot's *Adam Bede*): that of presenting members of this community as merely part of a (social) landscape, in which characters are collectivized and generalized rather than endowed with individual consciousness. A disconnection between the author and her characters occurs, and the result, rather than the rendering of finely nuanced fictive voices, is either a chorus of inauthentic 'rustics', or the substitution of the author's own voice in place of that of her characters.³⁰ Williams's discussion, of course, refers specifically to the portrayal of rural communities; however, I use the term 'rustic' not only in its better-known sense of pertaining to the countryside, but more pertinently in its secondary meaning of simplistic, or rough-hewn. In so doing, one can ask whether, despite the novel's implicit aim – the presentation of a realistic portrayal of the working-class community of Milton/Manchester – there is a sense in which Gaskell's characters may be described as what I will call 'urban rustics'.³¹ We have already seen, in the passage quoted above, an instance of the literary rural picturesque in *North and South*, the crumbling cottage inhabited by an aging, deaf, rheumatic labourer, who stands next to his dwelling as Margaret and Henry sketch. Gaskell, in turn, draws him as a charming but somewhat irrelevant aspect of the landscape, grateful for the attention granted him ('[h]is stiff features relaxed into a slow smile as Margaret went up and spoke to him'); but denied the opportunity to speak (as Margaret approaches him, the narrative defers to Lennox's point of view, as he pencils the two figures into his sketch of the cottage) (*NS* p. 23). The aging peasant's representation in the novel as silent, visual, and 'placed' next to his picturesque dwelling strongly suggests the photographic subjects Armstrong refers to in her discussion of the metropolitan picturesque: '[t]hese figures do not ask to be photographed; they are caught in the act of living their lives and seem unable

²⁸ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 165.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

³¹ The term is seemingly oxymoronic, but in this context – derived as it is from Williams's usage – I use it to refer to a mode of representation of the *urban* working classes that, similarly to Eliot's rural villagers, fails in its attempt to bestow authentic individual consciousnesses on the members of this community.

to resist being turned into images'.³² The rustic is not involved in his representation; extracted and isolated from his labour, he is placed externally to the conditions (his damp, decrepit cottage) that have contributed to his own physical decay. Like Austin's cottages, he exhibits the qualities of the picturesque, but is devoid of interiority. Gaskell, then, remains unwilling or unable to offer her working-class characters an authentic voice. This is true despite – or perhaps partly because of – her appropriation of dialect, a technique Eliot adopted without success, according to Williams: 'Eliot gives her own consciousness, often disguised as a personal dialect, to the characters with whom she does really feel; but the strain of the impersonation is usually evident'.³³ The result, in Bakhtinian terms, is a novel that elides its dialogic potential even while seeming to embrace a multiplicity of voice and experience. Significantly, Williams's primary criticism of *North and South* is that 'the emphasis of the novel, as the lengthy inclusion of [political] argument suggests, is almost entirely now on attitudes *to* the working people, rather than the attempt to reach, imaginatively, their feelings about their lives'.³⁴ While the novel succeeds in introducing its heroine and its reader to the private spaces of the working classes, and even in engendering sympathy for the inhabitants of those spaces, it ultimately stops short of bestowing fully formed and individualized consciousnesses on the knowable community it renders visible. To use Williams's terms, 'as themselves they are still only socially present, and can emerge into personal consciousness only through externally formulated attitudes and ideas'.³⁵

In his discussion of Eliot's failure to create authentic rural characters in *Adam Bede*, Williams argues that 'the farmers and craftsmen can be included as "country people", but much less significantly as the bearers of active experience'.³⁶ By the logical substitution of a few terms, with which I doubt Williams would take issue – 'mill workers' for 'farmers and craftsmen', 'city dwellers' for 'country people' – the same could be said, I have suggested, of the 'urban rustics' of Gaskell's *North and South*. Yet, for all that, there are important differences between the two novels. Whereas Eliot 'conceives but cannot sustain acceptable social solutions [...] [so that] it is not then transcendence but a sad resignation on which she comes to rest', Gaskell's knowable community arguably comes closer to this transcendence, even if it rests on the improbable peacemaking marriage of classes and ideologies represented

³² Armstrong, p. 98.

³³ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 169.

³⁴ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (1953; repr. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 91-92.

³⁵ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 168.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

by Margaret and Thornton's romance.³⁷ More significantly, Gaskell's novel comes to terms with the loss of an idealized rural past, and the ascendance of the urban, in a way that Eliot's seems, finally, unable to countenance. In the latter, suggests Williams,

A natural country ease is contrasted with an unnatural urban unrest. The 'modern world', both in its suffering and crucially, in its protest against suffering, is mediated by reference to a lost condition which is better than both and which can place both: a condition imagined out of a landscape and a selective observation and memory.³⁸

At the end of *North and South*, Margaret's return to Helstone confirms her new appreciation of what she had initially perceived as the 'unnatural urban unrest' of Milton; although she still experiences a longing for her rural Eden, Gaskell emphasizes that this nostalgia stems from Helstone's personal associations with Margaret's now-dead parents. There is a clear recognition on the heroine's part of the folly of returning to her cocoon of ignorance of 'the suffering of the modern world, and the protest against it'; like Gaskell, who came to love 'dear old dull ugly smoky grim grey Manchester', the city is valued on its own terms, and with its own social difficulties.³⁹

While the social and literary force of Gaskell's attempt at the representation of a 'knowable community' of the urban working poor is, ultimately, hobbled by her inability (or unwillingness) to fully give voice or subjectivity to the individuals she creates, *North and South* nonetheless offers a politically useful – and arguably pioneering – paradigm in its depiction of Margaret as a spatial and social mediatrix. Similarly, despite the concessions in characterization to what I have called a kind of urban rusticism, there remains a certain visionary ability evident in Gaskell's navigation of a path for her heroine through social space; and, indeed, in her signalling of the necessity of moving beyond a picturesque mode of apprehending the material conditions of the working classes, on whose labour the wealth of nineteenth-century industrial Britain was founded.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

³⁹ Elizabeth Gaskell, cited in Patsy Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), p. 28.