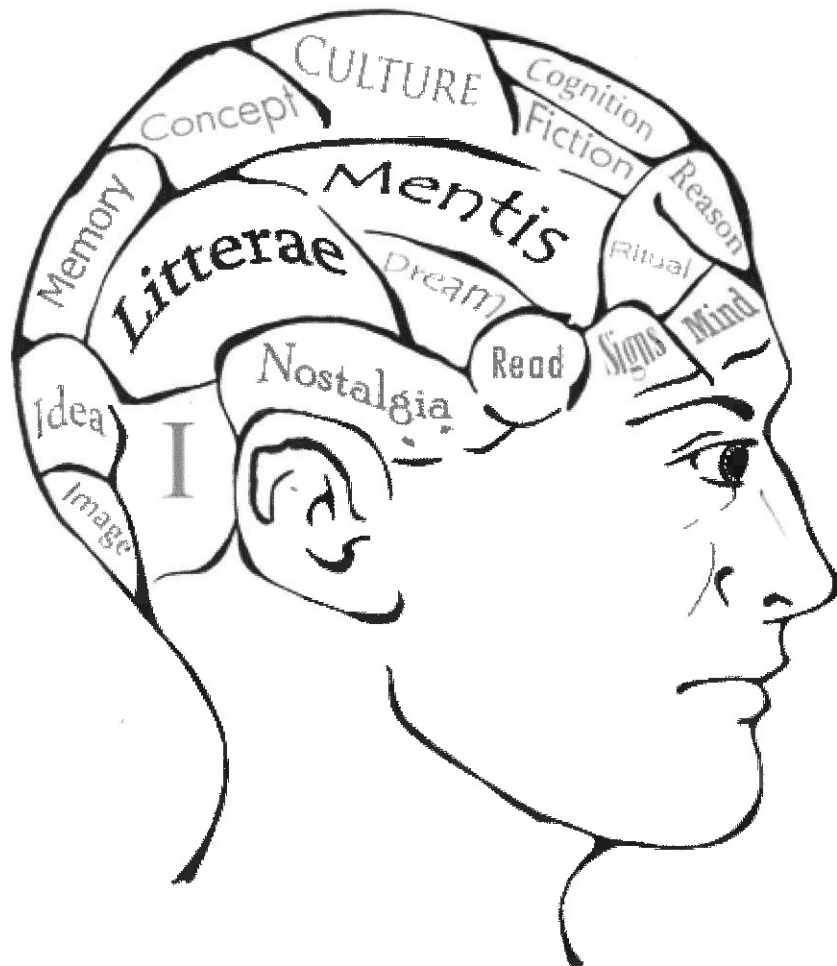


Litterae Mentis: A Journal of Literary Studies



Volume One: Memory

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Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of *Litterae Mentis: A Journal of Literary Studies*. Created in September 2013 and launched on the 25th September 2014, *Litterae Mentis* is a new interdisciplinary publishing initiative designed to provide a platform for early research from postgraduate students at the University of Kent. Created and edited by graduate students in the School of English, and funded by the department, the journal seeks to provide Kent's postgraduate students with the opportunity to make available to a wider academic community the excellent work which they produce, and to acquire the skills and experience applicable to a variety of career paths, academic or otherwise.

The current editors have elected to make *Litterae Mentis* an annual publication, which, as our chosen name implies, addresses those themes which pertain to the relationship between literature and the mind. From the perceptual organisation of information relayed by our senses, to the cognitive comprehension and interpretation of their meaning, and ultimately the creative articulation of this subjective understanding, the mind is at once the origin and destination of all artistic production. While we experience an ever-advancing technical awareness of the physical mechanisms of thought, colossal bodies of philosophical and psychological theory infuse our knowledge of our own consciousness; endowing us with a subject which, like literature itself, offers a vast repository of cultural and personal understanding extending into both past and future. *Litterae Mentis* encourages researchers of literature to reflect upon the relationship of their own work to this ever-developing field of enquiry, which on one level or another, pervades all literary endeavour and appreciation.

Our first edition requested the submission of articles contemplating the manner in which literary works acknowledge and interrogate diverse conceptions of memory, a theme skilfully and elegantly expressed in the foreword for this volume, graciously contributed by Kent's esteemed Dr Sarah Wood. The articles selected for this edition, written by students from the School of English and the School of European Culture and Languages, offer a varied and incisive examination of literature and memory, considering material ranging from Biblical texts to modern day publications. Isabella Norton explores Shakespeare's employment of the leitmotif of blood in *The Tragedy of Coriolanus* as a visceral and gory metaphor for memory, while Louise Willis offers an analysis of the interaction between fictional representation and psychological research findings concerning the condition of prodigious memory in Borges, Luria and Sacks. Rocío García-Romero examines the shift from historical fictionalizations, focusing on the psychology in the apocryphal *Book of Judith* to new creations during the late twentieth-century; while Veronica Frigeni explores the Freudian concept of *déjà vu* in Tabucchi's *Notte, mare o distanza*. Finally, Hannah Huxley studies the cultural value of trauma writing as a palliative means for the trans-generational conveyance of marginalised, oppressed knowledge against the backdrop of despotic regimes portrayed by Alvarez and Danticat.

Lastly, thanks are deserved to all those who made this journal possible. We are emphatically indebted to Director of Graduate Studies Dr Vybar Cregan-Reid for the opportunity to pursue this project, and to Dr Declan Kavanagh for both his initial call for a postgraduate journal, and for the limitless encouragement and invaluable advice he provided throughout the process. Furthermore, we are extremely grateful to Dr Sarah Wood for providing such an intriguing foreword for our first issue. We would also like to thank Eleri Caruana for her generous support in the construction of our website and matters of funding, and, with Sophie Baker, her enthusiastic assistance in preparation for the journal's launch. Additionally we would like to thank Lucy Panthaky for allowing us to use her fantastic artwork for our front cover. We would lastly like to express our gratitude towards those researchers who submitted their work for consideration; the response received was far greater than hoped for, and the selection of articles was both competitive and invigorating.

We sincerely hope that you find this first edition of *Litterae Mentis* as engaging and as enjoyable as we found the task of bringing it to fruition.

The Editors,

Carolyn Arend, Jo Neary, Frances Reading, James Robinson and Dan Stocker-Williams

Literature Ahead of Memory (Full Speed A-Home!)

Sarah Wood

A foreword stands at the head of the text, and in the academic world it's normal to lead with the head – especially with the kind of distinctness associated with the left hemisphere of the brain. Criticism can offer this 'very focused kind of attention, looking at detail, analysing, taking things apart and observing components.'¹ Critical argument cuts into the text, and cuts to the chase, exempting itself from the delayed effects of literature, its condensations and displacements, to produce, in a timely fashion, the clarity of images, figures, structures and ideas. But this need not be the only or the main gesture of literary criticism. This collection of essays is an example of the way that criticism may also take on literature's liberating tendency to orient itself in terms of forces that are uncontrollable, invisible or otherwise 'out of the picture.' This would be a kind of reading that works precisely to open and diversify, that responds with, and evokes, more open and uncertain states of body and mind. In Caravaggio's painting *Judith and Holofernes* (c.1599) we get to observe the difference between painting decapitation – which turns out to have a more curious and inventive relation to sight than one might expect – and those rather cut-off notions of psychology and sexual opposition that were for a time attached to the story of how the beautiful Israelite widow Judith seduced and killed the Assyrian general in order to save her people (Judith, 13:7-8). Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit read Caravaggio's picture in terms of the gaze of Holofernes, whose 'eyes are directing us to spaces outside the scene in which he is on the point of no longer being able to see anything.'² As they put it, narrative violence in *Judith and Holofernes* 'releases an uncontrollable energy' that takes the cutting off of a head as an opportunity not to become absorbed by but 'to whirl away from the scene of violence' (my emphasis). This kind of displacement of looking, Bersani and Dutoit argue, helps retrain us to see the world, its violence included, less violently, in a way that is less absolutely enthralled by the fascination of images that routinely solicit, provoke, baffle and invade us.

For a time it was possible to read on a wall near Canterbury West Station a piece of graffiti: 'The essential things in life are seen not with the eyes but with the heart.' Poetry is from the heart and goes directly to the heart - and the heart is not limited to its anatomical location. It is not here, or there, but everywhere. This is what circulation means, and colour, and fluidity. The youth of the contributors to this issue makes it possible to refer to them, in a rather vampiric institutional cliché, as 'new blood,' but blood is always new when it is flowing and moving, when the heart is beating, when poetry is there. (Does one not speak of an 'issue of blood'?) Poetry is a word for what connects fragments, not into structural totalities, but into life. Shakespeare tells us that memory runs in the blood and belongs in the living body (*Coriolanus* 1, 1, 132). Derrida distinguishes between the archive and living memory: 'the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory. ... *There is no archive without outside.*'³ What poetic marks can do, whether in the form of literature or painting or less official genres of experience, is exist - mysteriously and resonantly - both in us and outside us, in mortal and in more enduring forms. Thus the depiction of bloody scenes in art can be about more than cruelty, injury and catharsis.

It would seem that this theme of literature and memory has to do with the various modes of disjunction and relation between what is outside and what is inside – therefore with wounds and other

troubling, painful or strange displacements. It naturally finds itself in the realm of the uncanny, where, as Freud says, quoting Schelling, what 'ought to have remained . . . hidden and secret [...] has become visible.'⁴ Blood tells, truth will out. But still there will also be a struggle against prohibitions, inhibitions and other forms of secret-keeping that always want to separate an inside from an outside. Part of the critical and deconstructive work on memory is to bear the internal struggle with oneself, not to lie, not to re-cover in the act of uncovering or erase in the act of remembering. Those who bear wounds bear them alone. Those with an interest in letting wounds speak have to risk not-knowing, have to guess and surrender expectation in order to hear. Not only literature but the critic interested in memory, will be put to the question, interrogated in the act of bearing witness. It's not easy. We need the help of joy and love, joy in reading and writing, love for language, to carry out this memory work.

But it is easy to forget. We can do it, like Romeo, without being taught to (*Romeo and Juliet* 1, 1, 237). Until one day I can't, and I'm alone with, subjected to repetition. This experience takes all sorts of names and forms: hysteria, post-traumatic stress, prodigious memory. Peter Brook and Marie-Hélène Estienne's recent piece of theatre *The Valley of Astonishment* takes on the task of exploring 'the mountains and valleys of the brain.'⁵ One character, Sammy, played by Kathryn Hunter, has a miraculously fertile synaesthetic memory. She becomes a stage performer with a memory act and does brilliantly until the streets and buildings of her mind become so crowded with memory cues that there is no room left for more. She suffers from lack of space. She can't get back to home, where the memory-journeys always start and end. Watching, we suffer with her but we know, because we feel its freedom, that the space of Brook and Estienne's theatrical work is fundamentally an empty space. Theatre such as this moves confidently ahead, even when it shows blocks and impasses. Repetition, thought spaciouly enough, lovingly enough, takes us somewhere beyond. In Derrida's words it is 'as if the future were entrusted to us.'⁶ Or in Brook's words: 'As we go forward with our feet firmly on the ground, each step takes us further into the unknown.' The essays that follow know something of the joy in that experience of discovery, which is also an experience of satisfaction and return.

¹ Graham Music, *The Good Life: Wellbeing and the New Science of Altruism, Selfishness and Immorality* (Routledge, 2014) p. 177.

² Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets* (MIT Press, 1998) p. 94.

³ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, tr. Eric Prenowitz (University of Chicago Press, 1995) p. 11.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny",' tr. James Strachey, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (Vintage, 2002) p. 223.

⁵ Peter Brook, 'The Valley of Astonishment,' theatre programme for Peter Brook and Marie-Hélène Estienne, *The Valley of Astonishment* (Young Vic, June-July 2014) p. 3.

⁶ Derrida, 'Unsealing ("the old new language"),' *Points: Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford University Press, 1995) p. 130.

'He was a Thing of Blood': Blood, Wounds, and Memory in Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*

Isabella Norton

Between December 2013 and January 2014 attention for Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Coriolanus* was piqued to quite possibly historic magnitudes due to the Donmar Warehouse's December 2013 production in conjunction with Britain's National Theatre.¹ Though the play has gained temporary popularity upon the releases of Lawrence Olivier's production and more recently, Ralph Fiennes' film adaptation, the Donmar's production, fronted by movie star Tom Hiddleston, has easily been the most widely viewed version of *Coriolanus* to date. The importance of this staging's popularity lies in the extremely visual nature of *Coriolanus*, especially in comparison to more literary plays such as *Hamlet*. Because *Coriolanus* is performed rarely, most scholarship relies solely on readings of the play, which is where *Coriolanus* suffers. *Coriolanus* is a play which draws heavily on stage effects such as blood, makeup, and noise, and is experienced incompletely without these effects. However, supplementing the written work with performances of the play illuminates several otherwise understated themes. This article will focus on discussion of the text in conjunction with the Donmar performance specifically, as it is the most accessible and thematically relevant stage production in recent years. One of these visual themes, which is most important to the original text and most innovatively staged at the Donmar, is the use of blood in *Coriolanus*, particularly the blood of the main character. Many lines discuss blood or bloodiness, but upon viewing the play, audiences are entrenched in a dramatic world awash in blood. While alternately cold and childish on the page, Coriolanus' much-talked-of force of personality asserts itself undeniably when acted, and a great deal of that force is drawn from his own blood. Usually described in mechanical terms, the only organic component of Coriolanus seems to be his blood and the wounds that serve as evidence of his blood being spilled for Rome.

Every character in the play, including Coriolanus himself, is obsessed with Coriolanus' literal or metaphorical blood or wounds and constantly appeals to, makes demands of, and attempts to possess his blood or bloodied body in some way. In both the text and staged productions of *Coriolanus*, the motif of blood and wounds serves as a visual representation of his memories as a soldier and servant of Rome. These memories include all of the ideals entailed in battle, such as honour, gratitude, sacrifice, and physical prowess. The system by which Coriolanus and his memories are consumed, processed, and utilised are detailed in his fellow patrician Menenius' fable of the belly where he identifies each facet of the Roman state as a body part. In viewing film or (perhaps especially) live productions of *Coriolanus*, the audience also becomes implicated in the hunger for Coriolanus' bloodied body as if transformed into gladiatorial spectators. By representing his memories, Coriolanus' blood becomes bound up in themes of domination, identity, privilege, masculinity, rights of ownership, and consumption. In Coriolanus' often tumultuous and violent relationships with the Roman public, his political rivals, his mother, and his military rival/partner Aufidius, questions about who has the right to possess Coriolanus' memories and the effects of possessing these memories are raised. This obsession, which often edges towards frenzy, is also visualised in the actors' performances, where Coriolanus and Aufidius can both be seen bathing their faces in Coriolanus' blood at key moments in the Donmar Warehouse production. The most impacting question posed in the play arises from moments such as these: if you can reap someone's memories, can you become them?

Menenius' fable of the belly serves to set up the rest of the play by describing the system that the characters must navigate, a volatile state of both literal and metaphorical hungers. The government comprises the belly, the commoners are the mouth, and Coriolanus mediates between them as this body politic's blood. When the commoners threaten to revolt, 'the belly replies by sending rivers of blood to all parts of the body it serves as the source of the health and the very life of the whole organism', which is essentially Coriolanus' entire function.² The stomach earns its place in the body by processing all of the food taken in by the body and converting it into nutrient-rich blood. So the source of life for the body is not truly food, but blood. In the beginning of the play the commoners are starving because of a famine, and their distrust in the patrician government is made corporeal in the empty bellies of the rioters. This famine in particular has been caused by a drought, which is a critical lack of nourishing fluid, or widespread thirst. The common people, usually described as a mob, are designated to form the limbs of the body, but the mouth especially. Throughout the play the mob is referred to as a hungry mouth or collection of mouths, and in the beginning of the play they demand not only the nobles' stockpile of corn, but Coriolanus' life. Thus Coriolanus is equated with food, and this is only the first time in the course of the play that he will be made out as something for the peasantry to consume. Coriolanus cannot be responsible for a famine, he has no control over whether or not the government decides to bequeath corn gratis to the people because he is not a senator, and there is no reason to think that the rich would be holding a stockpile of corn anyway. The crops have not been seized from the people; they have simply failed to grow, and as the ones who perform the farm labour, the commoners must know this. So why call for Coriolanus' blood? Their starvation and Menenius' labelling of their function as a mouth provides the gruesome answer, which is only partly metaphorical: they need to consume it.

This theme continues throughout the play, curiously, the famine is never mentioned again; the people's hunger for Coriolanus has completely supplanted their physical hunger. Soon after the peasants nearly riot for food, they have the opportunity to conquer the grain-rich city of Corioles. However, the common soldiers refuse to enter its walls despite the promise of food (and it is Martius, not the peasants, who even note its supplies) and cower outside while Coriolanus storms the city alone. They remain immobile in the face of Coriolanus' insults, the scolding of another young noble who laments Coriolanus' sure death, and their own starvation. The army is only stirred to movement when Coriolanus exits the gates of Corioles, the carnage he has wrought written on his body, which is so bloodied that he appears to have been stripped of flesh. Rather than relating his acts of valour verbally, Coriolanus directs their awed attention to his battered body, asking if any 'love this painting/ Wherein you see me smear'd'.³ It has been made evident that the commoners do not love Coriolanus himself, but they do love that painting, his blood. By being invited to visually experience Coriolanus' wounds, the cowardly soldiers are invigorated by his memories of legendary achievement when they have personally shirked battlefield glory and are able to share Coriolanus' bloodlust by indulging in their own. The scene that displays this hunger most clearly is the one in which Coriolanus must appeal to the people for their 'voices,' votes, in order to become a senator. This ritual requires that Coriolanus don a very sheer or otherwise revealing garment and display his battle wounds and the stories attached to them for the people's gratification. The Donmar production represents each vote with a slip of red paper, visually linking the votes to the blood they are traded for. Coriolanus objects to this ritual and initially refuses to perform it, insisting that its completion would ask him to sell his wounds, and expresses a fear that his 'body's action teach [his] mind/ A most inherent baseness'.⁴ Coriolanus resists to hearing his wounds spoken of throughout the play, because to him they represent the memories of the things he has accomplished in battle, and he cannot bear to have those memories transferred economically. Coriolanus seems to own nothing else, he loses his horse in a bet, he refuses the treasure of war offered by Cominius, and his house is obviously run by his mother. His ambitions

also belong to Volumnia, as he does not think of running for senate until she mentions it, and it was she who 'cluck'd thee to the wars,' in the first place as a young man.⁵ The only other thing Coriolanus can be said to own would be his name, earned in the crushing of Corioles, much like his wounds, and he abandons that after his banishment. The blood coursing through his veins and the wounds it escapes from seem to be the only thing Coriolanus can truly claim as his own, symbols of his individual bravery and sacrifice, the only things he permits himself to keep so others will perceive that he only acts for the glory of the state. To Martius, the common people will never be able to commit their own acts of bravery, and must live vicariously through his retelling of war stories. He would not appear to be incorrect in this thinking, because the people act absolutely entitled to full viewing of his wounds, including the re-enactment that traditionally accompanies the viewing. Coriolanus must claim that his blood was spilt and his wounds suffered for the state, and the people consider themselves the state, therefore Coriolanus' spilt blood belongs to them.

This scene also evokes the sexual nature of accessing someone's most private memories, most commonly explored in Coriolanus and Aufidius' relationship. As Coriolanus demonstrates, his war memories are his most intimate details, and the commoner's viewing becomes voyeuristic at best and violating at worst. Every commoner seems to already know the number and location of Coriolanus' wounds, and have also lived through his wars, so there is no actual reason to force this ritual but to indulge in the pleasures of viewing. This voyeurism is one of the themes of the play which is most easily noticed when watched rather than read. Though he is not always portrayed this way, Coriolanus is written as one of Shakespeare's youngest tragic heroes, he is described as extremely comely, and he is the nation's finest athlete. Essentially, Coriolanus is extremely attractive, and his nearly naked body creates an entirely different spectacle than Lear in rags. It is also described that many of Coriolanus' scars are in fairly private places on his body, such as his thigh. In order to display all of his wounds, the flimsy 'humble robe' is still too much clothing, and Coriolanus would be forced to strip and subject his naked body to the stares of anyone who cared to ask. A plebeian conversation details how 'if he show us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues into those wounds' in a play where non-violent human contact appears in the stage direction only twice.⁶ The implication that the plebeians, even metaphorically, expect to tongue Coriolanus' thighs and neck is more sexual than any conversation between the man and his wife. This uncharacteristically sexual connotation is plausible when viewing the wounds only as marks upon an attractive body, but becomes considerably more disturbing when the wounds are taken as symbols of memory. Plunging their tongues into his wounds is metaphoric for the entire performance necessary to the ritual, the plebeians must not only see Coriolanus' external body, they need to probe his insides, both to explore what is contained therein and to say that they have been so intimately connected.

The commoners' inability to make valorous memories, and resultant need to consume Coriolanus', is supported by the plebeians' inability to remember anything at all besides those fantasy-inspiring wounds. When Coriolanus gains their votes, the tribunes whip the commoners into frenzy about being denied sight of the wounds, and many commoners declare that they did not truly support Coriolanus and demand his execution. Later, when news spreads that Coriolanus is coming to raze Rome, the very same citizens cry that they never wanted to punish him and said so at the time. They even go to a tribune's house and promise him 'death by inches' for banishing their beloved hero.⁷ Mrinal Miri notes 'in memory we have a special, logically distinct, access to our own identities, and that without such an access to our own identities, the very notion of a person would be inapplicable' hence the depiction of the commoners as a monstrous Hydra.⁸ The plebeians can only consume blood and memories, but never preserve their own.

Coriolanus' jealous guarding of his memories is not only based in his distaste for the commoners, as mentioned earlier, but in his own strong need of those memories for his own use. Coriolanus relies upon his memories of bloodshed as much as any other character in the play. When he is gravely injured in Corioles he becomes galvanized by the blood coating his body, and seems to feel no pain from his many wounds. Coriolanus is often described as a force of death and destruction, but it is his own battered body that seems to rally his spirits most. 'Heroic violence, it is suggested, is self-destructive', accurately describes this practice.⁹ Coriolanus' entire life is bound up in his military service, and the wounds he has acquired for his state are reminders of the circumstances of this service. In the Donmar production, the speech that Coriolanus makes following his solitary emergence from Corioles reveals that the blood has been running off Coriolanus' face and into his mouth. The fuel for Coriolanus' rallying speech is his own blood, as he speaks he literally consumes himself. This self-consumption is a reoccurring theme in the play, as the chief fault most can find with Coriolanus is his pride, particularly about his military prowess. He is a glutton for the memories of his own triumph, continually using them to either enliven himself or cow his enemies. In this way Coriolanus can sustain himself, he is entirely self-contained, free from his state and mother. Coriolanus' pride and bloodlust seems to correlate to the congealing of his blood. When he faces Aufidius near Corioles he is at peak performance both physically and mentally, he taunts Aufidius, who is the cunning member of the pair, and defeats him handily. After the battle has ceased, Coriolanus continually has to wipe blood from his eyes and grimaces to hide the pain of his wounds. During battle, being coated in blood seems totally advantageous, but outside of it he is literally blinded, just as he is blind to the wheedling and plotting necessary to save his own life later on. He is also blind to how his insistence on constantly recalling his triumphs endangers him, and this blindness costs Coriolanus his life in Antium. His pride prevents him from complaining about his pain, even when his fellow soldiers lift him bodily by the arm (which has been badly rent) Coriolanus conceals what must be excruciating pain. Because Coriolanus is so often described as being incapable of self-control, this moment is notable. His bloodlust is extremely targeted; he does not seem to enjoy causing violence to anyone for its own sake. When he is meant to be captured by the guards because of the tribune's plots, he nearly starts a riot in order to die in battle, but when his friend Cominius comes to his aid, Coriolanus immediately backs down. He accepts insults against his person, something many critics fail to notice, in order to keep his friend from danger. The only people Coriolanus has any desire to hurt are his enemies and himself. The Donmar production includes a rather interesting moment where we finally see Coriolanus' much-discussed wounds after the battle, when he washes the blood and grime from his body. The makeup has been done so the actor's torso is scored with tape or a similar substance, painted over with black and red, and the tape is removed to form his scars. This makeup technique is interesting because rather than create the scars with latex or other special effects, the scars are the actor's own skin; they are made of negative space. Coriolanus' scars are not merely things that exist on the surface of his skin using this method. His entire body is a scar, similarly to how his entire body is described as a weapon or machine. Even in regards to his bodily appearance Coriolanus 'is what he has done' through the presentation of his body as a massive scar.¹⁰

Though the relationship between Coriolanus and Aufidius has been discussed extensively and capably before, it is worth examining in this context as well. Many have commented on Coriolanus and Aufidius' desires to be one another, often assigning it a homosexual subtext. However, while the dialogue itself has been well analysed, the process by which both characters wish to unite is often overlooked. The warriors are always united in battle, and therefore Coriolanus relishes their fights and their memories draw unusually poetic and positive compliments from him. It is the blood that they have shed and wounds they have inflicted on each other that makes Coriolanus respect Aufidius to the point where he proclaims 'were I any thing but what I am, | I would wish me only he'.¹¹ Aufidius'

hunger is less valorous and at times nothing short of creepy. Aufidius' desire extends to wanting to murder Coriolanus any way he can, and to not only share mutual battle experiences through blood, but to consume Martius. The Donmar production illustrates this need in the scene directly following Coriolanus' shower/wound reveal. Servants are sweeping the bloodied water into grates built into the stage floor, though an off-coloured sheen remains. Aufidius halts one of the servants and kneels on the stage, and while delivering the line: 'He's mine, or I am his,' Aufidius gathers as much blood mixture into his hands as he can and vigorously lathers his face.¹² This foreshadows the final scene, in which Aufidius again bathes his face in Coriolanus' blood, and parallels the previous scene where Coriolanus is reinvigorated by bathing his face in his own blood. The motif that has been suggested with varying intensity in the text becomes literal here, and it is clear that the key to Coriolanus' identity is his blood. Unlike Coriolanus who views himself and Aufidius as equals, despite Aufidius' failure to defeat Coriolanus even once, Aufidius views Coriolanus as the superior warrior. Like Martius, Aufidius is a prideful individual, and the knowledge of Coriolanus' superiority fills him with spite and jealousy. He does not merely want to be united with Martius, this happens after Coriolanus' exile and would end his antagonism if it were the case; he wants to become Martius. Coriolanus' greatness is natural to him, speaking colloquially it is in his blood, and so are all of the memories of victory that Aufidius has been deprived of. Similarly to the peasants who wish to substitute Coriolanus' bravery for their cowardice, Aufidius believes that by consuming the essence of Coriolanus' victorious memories and nature, he can effectually become Martius.

The set design and overall staging of the play also suggests that it is not only the characters within the play that want Coriolanus' blood or wounded body. Almost all of the action in the Donmar production, and the entirety of Coriolanus' actions take place within a red square outline. This outline is meant to emulate a gladiator's arena, so that while Coriolanus may claim his various triumphs and sufferings in the name of the state, they are clearly marked as for the audience's entertainment. This particular entertainment experience also draws on memory, because though this obviously does not constitute the entire viewing audience, it is essentially obvious knowledge that casting one of the most in demand actors of the last few years with the creator/co-star of *Sherlock*, one of the biggest television phenomena in recent history, as a supporting role would draw the attention of people not typically interested in Shakespeare plays. While exposing new groups to classic drama is an admirable goal, the fact that audiences would bring their memories of past performances by Tom Hiddleston or Mark Gatiss is an unavoidable part of the production. One moment which clearly caters to the audience's reaction is when Tom Hiddleston, the Donmar lead, removes his shirt to shower and provokes audible gasps and murmurs from the crowd. While Hiddleston and professional reviewers politely credit these reactions to the shock of Coriolanus' mutilated body, fan reviews and the reporter in the National Theatre Live intermission suggest that the audience is actually gawking at Hiddleston's body. This moment purposefully occurs offstage in the text, so the Donmar staff must have included it onstage for a reason. Ostensibly, the scene exists because Coriolanus' wounds have been, and will continue to be, 'monster'd' in the dialogue.¹³ The placement of this scene allows the audience to have built up some curiosity about what Coriolanus' wounds look like and will henceforth understand why he is so reluctant to uncover himself. The scene is not blocked or performed sensuously at all, Hiddleston grimaces and emits strangled cries of immense pain for its short duration, but the joy of fans recalling Hiddleston's fan-favourite Loki in the Marvel film franchise at least dampens feelings of horror or shock from the audience. There is nothing strictly wrong with fans wanting to see their favourite actor with his shirt off, and this expected gazing is used to great effect by the production. If any audience members are inclined to notice what is going on around them, or to reflect on the play afterwards, the merging of the titillated crowd reaction to Coriolanus audibly and visibly wracked with agony creates a feeling of the grotesque. The grotesqueness is not based in

typical visual effect-triggered body horror, but in the audience, perhaps in your friends, perhaps in you. This scene pairs neatly with the humility robe scene, which has also gained fan attention for Hiddleston's nakedness, wherein the crowd prods Coriolanus to bare more skin for them. Again the gaze takes on a sexual nature, and Coriolanus' wounds are the vehicle for this voyeurism. Even disregarding the fan element, many viewers and readers approach the play with at least the basic memory of what a Shakespearean tragedy entails. Whether reading or watching the play, each audience member has agreed to exchange their time for the experience of watching a man torn to spiritual and physical pieces. The function of the tragic hero is described as 'the character that is to be sacrificed must be fit for his role as victim; and everything must so fit together that the audience will find the sacrifice plausible and acceptable'.¹⁴ In several other moments of the play, orators such as the tribunes address off-stage, including the audience as members of the mob. Overall, this staging allows *Coriolanus* to function as an extremely meta-textual play by drawing attention to the fact that every audience member has paid to watch a man be butchered for entertainment, and is therefore less condemnable than the mob which many scholars freely criticize, especially in regards to the play's finale.

The textual catastrophe is often altered in some way, presumably because of either staging difficulties or an attempt to balance audience contempt against the plebeians. Coriolanus seems to finally have gained the ability to mesh with the commoners, and enters amidst a crowd of them. It is only the memories of his past slaughters in Corioles, which Aufidius riles up the crowd with and Coriolanus cannot help but recount, to assert his manhood, that causes his death. The crowd frenzies, and in their cover Aufidius and his conspirators butcher Martius. He is stabbed multiple times, and Aufidius promptly stands on his corpse. Aufidius has finally succeeded in defeating Martius, and his final act of dominance is so profane that his own senators scold and revile him. By standing on Coriolanus' bleeding body, Aufidius literally takes his place, including his precarious political position. Once all of Coriolanus' blood has run into the dirt, Aufidius' virile anger is also spent. The final lines declare that Martius, though murdered and a murderer, he will possess a good memory, and Coriolanus exits as a body upon Volscian shoulders. The finale of the play breaks Coriolanus down into all he ever was to most of the characters, a collection of memories and a mutilated body. His memories have all been drawn out of him in his declaration and the crowd's cries, and murder confirms his loss of personal identity in the most absolute way. Even his mother seems to rejoice in his death due to the juxtaposition of the catastrophe to Volumnia's triumphant welcome as the 'life of Rome'.¹⁵ Coriolanus' sad comment that 'most dangerously you have with him prevail'd./ If not most mortal to him' proves accurate and Volumnia trades her son's blood for his title.¹⁶

The ending also raises interesting questions when considered with the majority of its criticisms. Namely, many critics do not believe that it is a true tragedy, because Coriolanus was a flawed man who remained prideful. This ignores all of the changes he is seen to have made, such as celebrating freely with the commoners, and continuing to uphold his promise to the Volces rather than become a traitor a second time. His final outburst is not of pride, but of genuine hurt and confusion. He loved Aufidius in his own way as much as he loved Cominius, and his honest nature led him to think that Aufidius felt the same. He understandably reacts badly to being chided as 'boy' when he at last has done what nearly every character and the audience has urged him to do, which is to essentially act more human. Coriolanus has done everything for everyone, only to have 'thing of blood' exchanged for 'boy of tears'.¹⁷ As one essay uniquely notes: 'The hero does not merely stand at the center of the tragedy; he *is* the tragedy'.¹⁸ This returns to the notion of the tragic hero as sacrificial victim, and transforms the central question of the play into whether or not Coriolanus is a suitable sacrifice. If audiences can complain a lack of sadness for an unarmed man being betrayed by his twisted version

of a soul-mate, outnumbered, stabbed, and desecrated within seconds of becoming a corpse because he refused to be responsible for rape and slaughter of his wife and mother, then what does this say about their own hungers? The commoners are often criticized in the play for being violent and fickle, but they do not appear very different than the audience who can deem a death satisfying or unsatisfying when the crowd cries 'Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill him!'¹⁹ The play is called a 'tragedy' in its title; readers know to expect death from memories of other tragedies, and the play also draws on the memory of Plutarch's history. If Aufidius is the only one who experiences catharsis at the closing of the play, it seems that Coriolanus was nothing more than a memory and a body to the audience as well.

The Donmar ending is radically different from the original text, cutting most of it, changing the placement of some lines, and altering the method of Coriolanus' murder drastically. Coriolanus emerges from promising a treaty with Rome, and only Aufidius and a few of their shared soldiers are present. Aufidius delivers his speech about how Coriolanus has 'given up/ For certain drops of salt, your city Rome' to his soldiers and Martius, condemning Coriolanus' trade of blood for tears.²⁰ Both become incensed, and Coriolanus is overwhelmed and beaten to the ground. Where it departs from the original text is when Aufidius' 'take him up' is moved much farther up so it no longer refers to the respectful balancing of Coriolanus' body upon their shoulders, but a command to have a rope tied around Coriolanus' feet.²¹ He is hauled up from the rafters of the stage until he is dangling upside down. Aufidius also delivers his: 'my rage is gone/ And I am struck with sorrow' line here, giving the impression that actually defeating Coriolanus is not what Aufidius thought it would be, but he cannot stop now.²² His memories of Coriolanus' greatness are swinging inverted before him, his expectations have been built too high to result in anything but disappointment. Aufidius then opens Coriolanus' chest-piece and destroys him. Coriolanus' back is facing the audience at this point, and some reviewers have described Aufidius as slitting Coriolanus' throat, but the mark seems too high and suggests that he was gutted. Even if viewers did not find Coriolanus a particularly nice person, his greatness is undeniable, and to see such a literally awesome man processed like a game animal is certainly tragic in addition to its obvious grotesqueness. His rewritten death also seems to allude to the Hanged Man, the Tarot symbol often linked to duty, knowledge in death, and the destruction of the self to sustain the many. Hanging was also the principal method of execution for traitors in Shakespeare's time, evidenced in Coriolanus' condemnations that his opponents be hanged. Coriolanus is murdered because Aufidius declares him a traitor to the Volscians, and he is arguably an actual traitor to Rome for defection, and despite his assertions to the contrary Coriolanus dies a traitor's death. The staging also provides a visual parallel with one of the first scenes in the play, where Coriolanus emerges from the gates of Corioles 'as he were flayed'.²³ The blood flows from the top of his head, over his entire face, into his parted mouth, and down his body. In his death scene the blood gushes from the neck of his armour (or his slit throat), into his open mouth, across his whole face, and drips from the top of his head onto the floor. The scene is thematically inverted, as well as visually inverted, because not all of Coriolanus' lifeblood lands on the floor. Where Coriolanus' blood originally gave him the energy to defeat Aufidius and related memories of triumph in Corioles, now his blood nourishes his enemy and creates for Aufidius memories of triumph. Aufidius kneels below Coriolanus' body, slathering his face in blood, his mouth also open. This is an obvious reference to the earlier scene where Aufidius bathes in Coriolanus' blood, confirming his promise that 'When, Caius, Rome is thine,/ Thou art poor'st of all; then shortly art thou mine'.²⁴ Still Aufidius must kneel for superior Martius; even in victory Aufidius cannot seem to gain dominance. By drinking his blood Aufidius begins to actually consume Martius, finally uniting their bodies inside his own. Though the seed of distrust shown in the Volscian senators has been edited out, Aufidius' decline is still foreshadowed. In consuming Coriolanus he only absorbs the man's most frequent criticism – his

unnaturalness. Because the play relies on memory of past scenes, we can assume what happens to Aufidius after the action of the play. Aufidius' feeding is so unnatural and profane that it will no doubt be talked of by his soldiers, and the cyclical style of the play suggests that he will also be tried for death or banishment.

The literal blood bath of *Coriolanus*' textual and staged settings provides for each character, as well as the audience, an opportunity to rely on static symbols of memory such as the title character's blood and wounds in an environment where identities are constantly shifting. The peasants are at once gullible pawns of their tribunes and a monstrous and powerful Hydra, Aufidius is an enemy and a dear friend, and Coriolanus himself is a machine, a boy, and a dragon. The only reliable identifiers in the play are the inscriptions upon Coriolanus' body, the scars that bear his valiant memories. Though he tries to jealously guard these memories, Coriolanus is constantly manipulated by those who wish to claim his memories and his identity for themselves, such as the inferior Aufidius or the amnesiac plebeians. Even the audience arrives only to use his body and the suffering inflicted upon it for a kind of voyeuristic or cathartic pleasure, as with all heroes of the tragic genre. While the text states these themes clearly with the repetitive use of plot points and phrases, staged productions such as the one performed at the Donmar Warehouse provide a more nuanced, visceral experience. As an incredibly visceral play, the visual representation of themes such as blood and wounds add force to these symbols just as actually hearing the thunderous voice of Coriolanus solidifies his powerful character. The tumultuous political relationships within the play are visually linked to blood by props and makeup, as well as the dialogue, strengthening the notion that everyone in the play is vying for ownership of Coriolanus' memories. Following the finale, it is clear that the only victors of this struggle are Volumnia and the audience. Readers and viewers leave the play to digest its bloody metaphors and the sacrificed hero at their leisure, and every ensuing review, retelling, or critical essay serves in its own way as a memory of *Coriolanus*.

¹ Henceforth, referred to in-text as: *Coriolanus*.

² O.J. Campbell, 'Experiment in Tragical Satire' in *Casebook Series: Coriolanus*, ed. by B. A. Brockman (London, UK : The MacMillan Press, 1982) pp. 73-91 (p. 79).

³ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, Collins edn (Champaign, IL, USA : Project Gutenberg, 1998), I. 6. 697

⁴ *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, III. 2. 2311

⁵ *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, V. 3. 3674

⁶ *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, II. 3. 1429

⁷ *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, V. 4. 3771

⁸ Mrinal Miri, 'Memory and Personal Identity', *Mind*, 82 (1973), pp. 1-21 (p. 2).

⁹ Reuben A. Brower, 'The Deeds of Coriolanus' in *Casebook Series: Coriolanus* (see Campbell above), pp. 197-224 (p.199).

¹⁰ Eve Rachel Sanders, 'The Body of the Actor in "Coriolanus"', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 57 (2006), pp. 387-412 (p. 397).

¹¹ *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, I. 1. 244

¹² Rob Hastie, Josie Rourke, *Coriolanus*, ed. by Peter Holland (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2014). I. 7. p. 25 N.B. This is a heavily edited and abridged edition of the original text used and produced by the National Theatre, and will be cited in contradistinction to *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, as *Coriolanus*.

¹³ *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, II. 2. 1322.

¹⁴ Kenneth Burke, 'The Delights of Faction' in *Casebook Series: Coriolanus* (see Campbell above), pp. 168-181 (p.168).

¹⁵ *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, V. 5. 3808.

¹⁶ *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, V. 3. 3702

¹⁷ *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, II. 2. 1356; V. 6. 3941

¹⁸ Willard Farnham, 'Tragic Pride', in *Casebook Series: Coriolanus* (see Campbell above), pp. 92-107 (p. 92).

¹⁹ *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, V. 6. 3976

²⁰ *Coriolanus*, V. 3. p. 108

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ *Coriolanus*, I. 4. p. 20.

²⁴ *Coriolanus*, IV. 6. p. 91

The interrelationship between the literary and medical representations of cases of prodigious memory, as depicted by J. L. Borges, Alexander Luria, and Oliver Sacks

Louise Willis

In 1959 the British scientist and novelist C.P. Snow delivered his inaugural lecture entitled 'The Two Cultures' in which he described the polarity between the intellectual disciplines of literature and science, and lamented their inability to connect. Snow also criticised the British education system for promoting literary culture yet failing to appreciate the equal value of scientific knowledge. The 'two cultures' argument had originated in the nineteenth century between Matthew Arnold and T.H. Huxley, and as a result of his polemic, Snow received an abrasive reaction from the literary academic F.R. Leavis.¹ One of the central issues of the debate is that literature is unique in its ability to communicate the essence of human experience, whilst science can only measure or inform us of human functions. Yet both fields are concerned with the human condition, so it is likely that some aspects will be shared, especially given the singular culture in which both writing practices are embedded. However, Snow reignited a controversial debate that has not only continued into the twenty-first century but has become even more important with the development of the comparatively new discipline of medical humanities. Following on from Snow's lecture, in 1981 the cultural historian George S. Rousseau claimed that scholars have shown less interest in the interaction between 'literature and medicine' than 'literature and science', because 'literature and medicine' is often unrecognised or problematical, yet it is actually more profound.² Rousseau also claimed that the inter-relationship between the two often appears to be following a sole trajectory - 'from medicine to literature' - with an author's acquired knowledge of contemporary medicine influencing his narrative. The period in which a novel is written usually reflects the medical preoccupation of its time and, as Susan Sontag argued in *Illness as Metaphor* (1978), it popularises and mythologises the given condition; this seldom works the other way, from literature to medicine, although literary language and metaphors are often incorporated into medical accounts.³ However more recently, in *Medicine, Health and the Arts* (2013), Anne Whitehead advances Patricia Waugh's suggestion that 'imaginative fiction' can enhance science by creating a space in which ideas may be explored and familiar topics can be reconsidered.⁴ This article will compare narratives on prodigious memory from both fields using a fictional tale offered by the Argentine author J.L. Borges, a medical case study from the Russian neurologist A.R. Luria, and a case study documented by Oliver Sacks, Anglo-American professor of neurology and psychiatry. Consideration will be given to the authors' treatment of prodigious memory and whether it is portrayed as a disability or a gift, also indicating whether the fields of literature and (scientific) medicine are integrated or separated by the respective narratives, with regard to Snow's thesis and the ideas presented by Rousseau, Whitehead and Waugh.

In each account of prodigious memory the authors present a tableau of exceptional abilities that operate using collective techniques. They also suggest that whilst extreme memory is remarkable it can be detrimental to ordinary life; this is a perspective that empirical case studies rarely explore in depth. In Borges' short story 'Funes the Memorious' in *Labyrinths* (1942), Funes' memory enables him to appreciate the minutiae of life that others cannot see, for example every hair on a horse or at a glance 'all the leaves and tendrils and fruit that make up a grape vine'.⁵ He has highly specific recall and can remember details from a particular date and time; for instance, 'he knew by heart the forms of the southern clouds at dawn on 30 April 1882'. In common with Luria's mnemonist, Solomon Shereshevsky, (known in the text as S.) Funes can remember 'every leaf of every tree of every wood' including every single occasion on which 'he had perceived or imagined it'. He also exhibits synaesthesia, the stimulation of a sense or part of the body that occurs simultaneously with another,

and this faculty meant that ‘each visual image was linked to muscular sensations, thermal sensations, etc’. Funes’ memory techniques are not explained but his innate skills are further stimulated by central nervous system damage following an accident, which along with his chronometric ability, hint at the medical condition of ‘savantism’.⁶ (Borges 91-93) Borges often uses reflective or labyrinthine techniques in his fiction and the intricacy of his story ‘Funes the Memorious’ echoes its subject’s complexity, creating a profundity that medical studies cannot replicate. The tale itself is a memory, a tribute to Funes, containing further ironies that emphasise the paradox of his condition. For example as a gaucho, Funes represents freedom, disorder and illiteracy, the narrator initially recalls him ‘running along a high place’ yet later remembers him ‘motionless’ and restrained by ‘certain incurable limitations’. Funes occupies his time cataloguing historical cases of exceptional memory and in particular recounts Pliny’s ancient discourse on memory, citing that nothing, which is heard, can be retold in the same words. More significantly, the narrator compares him to ‘a precursor of the supermen, “a vernacular and rustic Zarathustra”’, like the ‘Superman’ conceived by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche; with his restrained life cut short Funes is anything but akin to Zarathustra, yet this association is significant and it foreshadows his fate.⁷ (Borges 87, 89)

In *Untimely Meditations* (1873), Nietzsche discusses the importance of forgetting which is ‘essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic’.⁸ In ‘Funes the Memorious’ this counterbalance of remembering and forgetting manifests through the motif of darkness. Funes sits ‘in the dark’, his voice emanates from ‘the darkness’, and he perceives the unfamiliar as ‘homogeneous darkness’, yet he is deprived of the cerebral darkness that is indispensable to life. This vital equilibrium is impossible for him because ‘anything he thought of once would never be lost to him’. Funes’ inability to discard unnecessary images or memories renders his mind ‘like a garbage heap’ because it contains ‘more memories than all mankind’ and the distress of this compels him to imagine suicidal oblivion ‘at the bottom of the river’. Indeed Funes personifies Nietzsche’s belief that when man is compelled to live in this manner ‘there is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of the historical sense, which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing’.⁹ True to this edict his sleepless life of infinite cogitation becomes unsustainable and he succumbs to a premature death. (Borges 90, 92, 94) The contradictory nature of Funes’ brilliant, yet pointless abilities is reiterated throughout Borges’ tale. For example Funes develops a numbering system that ascribes a name to each figure, such as ‘Máximo Pérez’ in place of ‘seven thousand thirteen’, and a language system in which ‘each bird and each branch would have its own name’; both are discarded because they are ‘too general to him, too ambiguous’. Although the projects seem commendable, they are in fact ‘useless’, ‘senseless’, thus emphasising the absurdity of his condition through his inability to generalise. Borges also highlights the necessity of generalisation, categorisation and order.¹⁰ Funes cannot understand ordinary concepts such as mathematical shapes, and without the ability to generalise Funes is unable to recognise.¹¹ For example the generic symbol ‘dog’ represents a ‘diverse size and form’, but Funes perceives each nuanced image of a dog as a completely new entity that is disconnected to the previous one. Similarly each mirror image of his face or hands represents an entirely new visual experience that ‘surprised him every time’. Moreover, recognition along with remembering and forgetting may be considered an essential component in the operation of healthy memory; ‘Funes the Memorious’ movingly conveys the difficulty of existing without this function.¹² (Borges 91, 93, 94)

Borges explores the metaphysical concepts of time and space through the subject of prodigious memory, thus exemplifying the innate interface between literature and science and the singular nature of human experience. For Funes and S. time is a linear series of disconnected moments that elapse into an interminable bank of memories, ostensibly without termination, to infinity.¹³ Funes exists in

the ‘eternal now’, the infinite instant that is both chaotic and ‘almost intolerable in its richness and sharpness’.¹⁴ He cannot make a distinction between past and present and his suspension in time is especially ironic given that before his accident he had the knack of ‘always knowing what time it was, like a clock’. (Borges 88, 91) Funes considers his memory to be a gift; he claims to have woken up from the typical human condition of being ‘blind, deaf, addle-brained, absent-minded’ and seems unaware of his former skills, his ‘exact perception of time’ and ‘his memory for proper names’. Funes is ‘singularly remote’ he exists, as ‘a perpetual prisoner’ yet he feels his immobility is ‘a minimum price’ for the gift of ‘infallible’ memory and perception. Indeed, in all three accounts of prodigious memory it is the narrator who expresses the deep adversity of the condition, not the subject himself, thus illustrating the intermediate role of the practitioner in the case study. (Borges 87, 89, 91) Although scientific knowledge of prodigious memory circulated before Borges’ story was published, Borges anticipated the real-life case that Luria presents in *The Mind of a Mnemonist*, and he widely detailed the features of prodigious memory before science documented it. Luria later affirmed that Borges’ ‘imaginary portrait’ of memory in ‘Funes the Memorious’, ‘repeated’ some of his observations of S.¹⁵ This raises Rousseau’s argument that literature does not tend to inspire science or medicine. Debate has focused on *The Mind of a Mnemonist*’s impact on ‘Funes the Memorious’, yet it’s possible that Luria drew inspiration from Borges’ tale; however, the influence of Borges on Sacks’ account, as discussed later, is unquestionable. Furthermore, in the recent text *Borges and Memory* the neuroscientist Rodrigo Quiroga explains how the story of ‘Funes the Memorious’, ‘with astonishing clarity ended up sorting the pieces of the puzzle I had been working on’, in fact Quiroga’s discourse on Borges and his connection to neuroscience represents an ideal literary-scientific symbiosis.¹⁶ Although Borges’ tale was published fifty years before Quiroga’s work, it seems twenty-first century science may profit from early twentieth century fiction.

Alexander Luria published numerous scientific texts during his medical career yet his later writing, which he categorised as ‘romantic science’, established the medical case study as a distinctive literary genre. Luria claimed that ‘classical’ scientists took a reductionist approach by focusing purely on observable features in order to formulate scientific laws, a criticism that invokes aspects of the two cultures debate. In contrast, ‘romantic scholars’ considered the whole person and aspired to ‘preserve the wealth of living reality’ with all its richness.¹⁷ Luria’s combination of these two approaches creates a unique and insightful account of S.’s memory in *The Mind of a Mnemonist* that established his humane patient portraits as a ‘part of literature as well as science’ (Borges xii). *The Mind of a Mnemonist* is a medical study of Solomon Shereshevsky’s prodigious memory yet Luria uses literary tropes to enrich his work and remarkably, its epigraph quotes stem from the nineteenth century tale *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll. Luria states that alongside Alice and the reader, he aims to penetrate the ‘cold surface of the looking glass’ and into the depths below; he later reveals that his ‘amazing’ findings invoke feelings akin to Alice’s when she ‘found herself in a strange wonderland’.¹⁸ It is interesting that as a scientist, Luria humbly considers his curiosity to parallel that of a fictional child, which could not be further removed from the sphere of clinical medicine. Moreover, the adoption of literary tropes validates Whitehead and Waugh’s notion that imaginative fiction can encourage new approaches to established medical customs and themes, and ironically Luria’s case study was published just nine years after Snow’s lecture.

Like Borges’ fictional tale, Luria’s account presents a tableau of exceptional abilities as observed in his thirty-year study of S. One of the most significant aspects of S.’s memory is that it operates, like Funes’, with highly complex synaesthesia. In S.’s mind, any sound ‘immediately produced an experience of light and color’, with each tone having ‘its own distinct form, color, and taste’. Synaesthesia can stimulate physiological functions and S. possesses a ‘far greater control over his

own body processes' than ordinary people, for example, he can raise his pulse by imagining that he is running for a train. But conversely synaesthesia impairs S.'s life and makes it difficult for him to 'locate any dividing line between one sensation and another, or between sensations and actual experiences of events'. Furthermore, S.'s memory is limited because it can only function with visual images; if he cannot immediately see words or numbers, then he converts elements into pictures. Interestingly, S. tries to create an original numerical system and assigns a picture to each number for instance '2 is a high-spirited woman; 3 a gloomy person', which is rather like Funes' hopeless venture.¹⁹ Like Funes, S.'s extraordinary gifts reveal a paradox of ability and disability as an inherent aspect of his condition. (Luria 16, 21, 24, 25, 80,139) S.'s exceptional memory gifts him with a perspicacity that others can 'only dimly imagine', but whilst this vision allows him to 'become more deeply involved in a narrative' conversely, the profusion of images can inhibit interpretation and easily 'lead him astray'. Similarly, synaesthesia aids S.'s recall yet when it comes to recognising faces the patterns of 'light and shade' confuse him with their variability. His copious synaesthetic memories also mean that he continues to be 'flooded and disturbed by the images of [his] childhood', which suggests a loss of control. S. cannot distinguish general information so rather than being guided by logic, as is normal, he is directed by a series of overwhelming spontaneous images. Luria evaluates that S.'s 'wealth of thought and imagination were curiously combined with limitations of intellect', which are not only frustrating but impede his cognitive development so that it could not mature beyond that of an adolescent. In fact Luria's investigation reveals that virtually all of S.'s skills are incompatible with normal life and come at the vast expense of necessary functioning. (Luria xxiv, 64, 96, 97, 113, 131, 133) Like Borges, Luria communicates the infinite capacity of prodigious memory and the fundamental equilibrium between remembering and forgetting. S.'s recall remains constant years after processing information, if he fails to remember something it is due to initial processing problems rather than forgetfulness.

In fact there are no limits to the stability of S.'s impressions, which remain "imprinted" in his memory just as they [first] appeared'. Luria is reduced to 'a state verging on utter confusion' on realising that he cannot scientifically quantify S.'s memory because it '*had no distinct limits*'. Moreover, S.'s challenge, like Funes', is not one of capacity or retrieval but rather revolves around how to forget, or in other words, how to fail to recall. As the psychologist William James stated, 'one condition of remembering is that we should forget'.²⁰ S.'s failure to forget leaves him 'desperate' to discard the superfluous memories that 'became a torment'. Echoing Funes' 'garbage', S. also possessed a 'junk heap of impressions' - copious amounts of indelible images and memories that were impossible to annihilate. When S. later becomes a professional mnemonist performing for public entertainment, he attempts to erase surplus memories because he fears they will encumber his performances, he believes that by writing them down he can negate the compulsion to remember them. This proves unsuccessful but S. develops an 'inexplicable' ability to inhibit the free recall of images which allows him some control, and the sensation of being 'free'. (Luria xxii, 11, 20, 70-72) Unlike Funes and the twins, when S. becomes a professional mnemonist he decides to *adapt* his methodology through 'training' in order to manage the large quantity of meaningless information given to him during a performance. S.'s techniques 'gradually became enriched with new devices' and ultimately 'presented quite a different picture psychologically'. S. wishes to simplify his method for rapid recall and he does this by practicing eidotechnique, a 'shorthand', or abbreviated system that extracts a small detail which stimulates the recall of the whole image. His eidetically produced images are apparently 'not as well defined or as vivid as the earlier ones' but the technique allows him to convert '*senseless words into intelligible images*'. Interestingly, Borges describes this system inversely in 'Funes the Memorious' in order to inhibit total recall, whereby Funes 'decided to reduce each of his past days to some seventy thousand memories, which would then be defined by means of

ciphers'. (Borges 93) However, like his other projects the interminability of Funes' task renders it hopeless. (Luria 15, 42, 43) Luria notes that S. appeared to be discontented for the duration of his study and seemed to be waiting for something intangible. Although physically able, S. is actually more constrained than the incapacitated Funes, whose life is portrayed as one of acceptance and pride, with tacit frustration. (Luria xxiv) S.'s experience validates Nietzsche's notion that without the ability to settle in the moment, forgetful of the past, happiness will remain elusive. Luria's meticulous and compassionate account allows parallels to be drawn between the fictitious and the factual cases of prodigious memory, thus illustrating how literature and medicine can provide the 'profound' insight that Rousseau claimed.²¹

Oliver Sacks described *The Mind of a Mnemonist* as 'remarkable' because it conveyed 'the pathos and the poignancy and the drama, and all the feeling of a novel' and presented 'science and storytelling as complimentary'.²² Sacks intended to imitate Luria's romantic science by producing 'portraits' of his own patients including the phenomenon of prodigious memory as documented in chapter twenty-three entitled 'The Twins', in *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (1985). Sacks' epigraph asserts that 'talk of diseases is a sort of *Arabian Nights* entertainment' and with further allusions to fiction, the preface compares patients to 'archetypal figures' with 'lives' displaying 'a quality of the fabulous'.²³ Imitating Luria's use of Carrollian tropes, the twins are rather disparagingly introduced to the reader as 'absurd little professors', a 'sort of grotesque Tweedledum and Tweedledee', with mannerisms like 'pantomime puppets'. According to Sacks, popular reports had previously concluded that there was 'nothing much to them' except for their 'remarkable "documentary" memories'. Like Luria, Sacks endeavours to explore beyond the 'obvious and testable "surface"' and penetrate into the 'depths below' - with significant results. (Sacks 204, 205) The twins have a condition known as savant syndrome, which often includes the phenomenon of prodigious memory amongst other distinctive traits. The savant condition was widely publicized by Dustin Hoffman's character Raymond in the 1988 film *Rain Man*.²⁴ According to Sacks the twins are known as 'calendar calculators' and unlike S. they have already been the subjects of extensive medical study and they ultimately reside in a US medical centre for much of their lives. Like Funes and S. the twins demonstrate extraordinary abilities and can calculate the day on which any date in the past or future falls, for example 'the date of Easter during the [...] period of eighty thousand years'. They can also recall the weather or event that had occurred on any date in their lives after four years of age. Researchers had formerly attributed their technique to 'pure calculation' or computation, but Sacks perceives their eye movement as 'the look of "seeing"' of 'scrutinising, an inner landscape'. Unlike Luria, he does not consider the twins' childhood influences or the wider context and his investigation centres exclusively on observation and case analogies. Significantly, scientist William A. Horwitz et al had previously concluded that the twins' abilities were due to 'the prodigious and exclusive effort that they have devoted to the calendar for 15 years', an important fact that Sacks overlooks.²⁵ (Sacks 206) Like Luria and Borges, Sacks considers the shortcomings of the twins' abilities such as the distress of remembering unhappy personal experiences, but he does not mention whether it is a problem for them in terms of the remembering-forgetting balance. Apparently the twins' recollections invoke the 'poignant anguish of childhood' yet are delivered in a 'documentary' manner indicating 'no personal relation, no living centre whatever'. Although this is representative of 'obsessive or schizoid types', Sacks advocates that their detachment suggests they 'never had any personal character' and that it supports the notion that they use eidetic memory, like Funes and S., but the association is not explained. (Sacks 207) Despite their incredible calculating feats, Sacks reports that the twins 'cannot do simple addition or subtraction with any accuracy, and cannot even comprehend what multiplication or division means'. (Sacks 206) This suggests that like Funes and S., they have an inability to understand abstract concepts, seemingly an inherent aspect of their condition and as Sacks posits, surely an obstacle to

complex calculating. Nevertheless these peculiarities are consistent with other savants, whose abilities are characteristically deep and narrow and seemingly incongruous.²⁶ Moreover, it had previously been suggested that the twins had ‘context-dependent division abilities’, which could only be clearly determined by further empirical testing.²⁷ Either way, the inconsistency impels Sacks to look further into alternative explanations.

Sacks always observes the twins at the medical centre where they reside, and during one encounter a box of matches falls and the twins instantly call out the total number of matches strewn on the floor, including its multiple of three. The incident supports Sacks’ notion that the twins could literally “see” the properties’ of a number and could trisect it into its factors - ‘37, 37, 37, 111’; when asked how they do it they confirm his observation: ‘we see it’. The key to their memory is apparently “visualising” – of extraordinary intensity’, Sacks admits, ‘there is no doubt, in my mind’ that they can ‘retrieve’ almost anything from a ‘prodigious panorama’. He believes the twins’ memory for digits is ‘remarkable – and possibly unlimited’: like Funes and S., they seem to access an ‘immense mnemonic tapestry’ of infinite proportions. He also directly compares their abilities to S.’s as described in *The Mind of a Mnemonist*, whilst noting that the twins do not have his synaesthetic and organisational skills. (Sacks 208, 210) In his account of the twins, Sacks ruminates on the relationship between music and memory and reasons that they ‘must have “sense” in their numbers’ like ‘a musician must have harmony’. Apparently the twins’ visual capacity endows them with an ability to see ‘relations of form’ including a “constellation” of numbers’. Sacks considers it ‘likely, or certain’ that they are dealing with ‘real’ properties, which are felt as ‘forms’ or ‘tones’ in their imagination. (Notably, S.’s synaesthesia also included tones, which in turn stimulated visual images.) Again Sacks deviates from the previous scientific explanation of ‘rote memory’ proposed by Horwitz et al. yet remarkably his explanation is inspired by his recollection of Borges’ ‘Funes the Memorious’.²⁸ According to Sacks, the twins’ are accessing a visual ‘numerical “vine”’ that parallels Funes’ grape vine complete with ‘number-leaves, number-tendrils, number-fruit’; this allusion also implies that they use a system of eidetic memory.²⁹ This invokes Rousseau and Whitehead’s discussion of the influence of literature on science. Imaginative fiction plays a crucial role in Sacks’ theory and encourages him to reconsider the established medical ideas; it enriches both the form and content of his tale. (Sacks 208-210, 214, 216)

In his autobiography, Luria’s discourse on ‘romantic science’ states that ‘sometimes logical step-by-step analysis escapes romantic scholars, and on occasion, they let artistic preferences and intuitions take over’.³⁰ This may be the case in ‘The Twins’, which charts Sacks’ course of elucidation alongside his insight into the twins’ memory. Sacks counters previous explanations of the twins’ methodology boldly declaring that ‘they are not calculators, and their numeracy is “iconic”’. Interestingly, although the twins’ condition as savants differentiates them from Funes and S., their powers are attributed to the same phenomenon: ‘visualisation’. Like Funes and S. with their amazing acumen and their infinite visual experiences, the twins are deemed to be envisaging an immeasurable universe, ‘a whole world’ of iconic numbers. Unlike the other narratives Sacks’ account appears to be highly subjective, as a former ‘number brooder, a number “see-er”’ himself he identifies with the twins’ and their ‘peculiar passion for numbers’. Sacks intuitively understands that their calculations use prime numbers and he tests his hypothesis by interacting with them, again in natural mode, as opposed to the test conditions usually employed by empirical scientists including Luria. However Sacks’ informal and opportunistic experiment perhaps allows him admission into the twins’ (ostensibly) insular world at a deeper level. The results are limited but significant; by some ‘unimaginable internal process’ the twins determine prime numbers up to twenty digits, and yet there is ‘no simple method, for primes of this order’. Unfortunately the question of *how* they do this remains unanswered. (Sacks 210, 211, 213, 215)

Sacks’ results offer a profound perspective on savant skills, yet extraordinarily he ‘had no way of checking’ the calculations beyond ten figures and could not verify his findings with other empirical evidence. (Sacks 213) When challenged, Sacks later admitted that his resources were ‘lost’ and his data may have been limited to just ‘8-digit’ primes.³¹ As Luria cautioned, intuition can sometimes take over and Sacks creates a fascinating tale with ‘The Twins’, but its scientific shortcomings may diminish some of its value as a faithful medical representation of prodigious memory. Furthermore, Sacks’ narrative voice is a distinct presence in his account, as is his active participation in procedures. This is uncharacteristic of medical case studies and differs from the methodology used in *The Mind of a Mnemonist* in which the patient speaks, through his transcripts, alongside the physician.³² It could be said that the twins are disadvantaged by their condition by virtue of their solitude and incompatible traits. Sacks claims that they ‘live exclusively in a thought-world of numbers’, with no interest in ‘the stars shining, or the hearts of men’; numbers are their only ‘friends’ in a world of isolation. Yet the twins are not imprisoned by their memories or incapacitated by a remembering-forgetting imbalance like Funes and S., their memories appear to enhance their lives and allow them to communicate with one another uniquely, and like S. it enables them to connect with others through demonstrations. In fact it is the *only* way in which they truly connect and it provides their lives with meaning and purpose; they are proud of their skills, they are defined by them and admired for them. Later in their lives the twins are deliberately separated for medical reasons, but once parted, they are deprived of their ‘numerical “communion”’ and apparently fail to flourish. However speculative, Sacks’ account remains true to his endeavour to disclose the ‘quality of the fabulous’ while it existed. (Sacks 217, 218, 220)

In conclusion, despite their widely differing contexts the literary and medical representations of prodigious memory reveal a number of comparable traits and a few contrasting ones. All three cases present highly specific memory recall. Funes and S. both have remarkable acumen and recollection, the twins also recall dates and events, as well as demonstrating complex arithmetic. In each case the ability to ‘see’ by visualisation is a key component of prodigious memory. Funes and S. retain copious numbers of vivid images that are virtually impossible to erase, whilst Sacks posits that the twins’ abilities are not computational as previously claimed but are due to visualisation and iconicity. Eidetic methods are represented variously in each account. S. adopts eidotechnique in order to assist at performances, although eidetically formed images were less distinct than ordinarily formed images. Interestingly, Funes uses the technique by employing ciphers in order to try to reduce the vast quantity of memories he retained. The twins were thought to use eidotechnique by envisaging huge figures as a number-vine that resembled the vision of Funes’ grapevine. The system of synaesthesia is presented in Funes and S.’s cases but not in the twins’. Both Funes’ and S.’s synaesthesia portrayed a connection between visual images and physiological sensations, with S. having the capacity to alter his physiology. Synaesthesia could be highly complex and particularly detrimental to normal functioning, as shown by S. Borges and Luria emphasise the fundamental reciprocity between remembering and forgetting, highlighting the importance of dispensing with memories and the debilitating effects of an imbalance. The inability to obtain this balance leaves Funes (and S.) almost suspended in time. All three cases reveal an intrinsic problem with prodigious memory, the inability to generalise or understand general concepts, which limits normal functioning. Each one explores aspects of ability, which are countered by disability, and reveal the inherent paradox of extreme memory as simultaneously a gift yet also a curse. Funes’ talents are extraordinary but ultimately useless to him and his impractical life results in an untimely death. S.’s abilities are well regarded but he is ultimately dissatisfied and unsettled, his decision to become a performer creates further problems. The twins’ abilities draw much admiration and are particularly advantageous because they facilitate communication, however the medical establishment defines them as abnormal.

Consequently these qualities are the source of their indefinite institutionalisation and harmful separation. In all three cases extreme memory causes incarceration and social isolation; although senses are enriched, lives are sadly impoverished.

Borges, Luria, and Sacks each present meaningful accounts of prodigious memory that demonstrate a strong interface between literature and medicine. Literary fiction is traditionally associated with creativity and subjective insight, whilst scientific discourse tends to be the opposite with its prosaic, narrow and objective style. Luria combines these traditions in his comprehensive medical study of Shereshevsky that remains highly regarded in both fields. Although following Luria's tradition, Sacks' study lacks Luria's empiricism and sensitivity and sometimes relies on conjecture and creativity, rather like a work of fiction. In this sense it does not accomplish the literary-scientific equipoise that *The Mind of a Mnemonist* achieved, yet it endures as a popular and fascinating account. 'The Twins' does however, identify the twins' methodology as one of 'seeing' rather than computing, which not only advocates a parallel to non-savant mnemonists, but also advanced further scholarship on the topic. Sacks' account in particular, emphasises the connection between textual form and content, illustrating how the authorial agenda may shape the representation of its subject, in this case, prodigious memory. The lucidity and precision of Borges' visionary tale is reinforced by the content of 'The Twins' and by the testimonials from Sacks, Luria and more recently, Quiroga. Ironically Borges' legacy is just as valuable in the advancement of prodigious memory as that of the medical case studies. This refutes Rousseau's notion that literature seldom influences medicine yet it supports Whitehead and Waugh's ideas on the value of imaginative fiction; however, it should be noted that Sacks' text was published after Rousseau's 1981 analysis. As Rousseau and Sontag claimed, literature is influenced by the science of its time but equally, it can enrich scientific understanding and encourage new approaches, thus indicating a reciprocity that C.P. Snow would surely approve of.

- ¹ Daniel Cordle. *Postmodern Postures – Literature, Science and the Two Cultures Debate*. (Hants: Ashgate, 1999), p. 5, 17; C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures: and A Second Look*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959).
- ² G. S. Rousseau, 'Literature and Medicine: The State of the Field'. *Isis*, Vol.72, No. 3 (Sep. 1981), pp. 406-424, (p. 406).
- ³ Susan Sontag. *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*. (London: Penguin, 1978). Rousseau, pp. 407, 410, 412.
- ⁴ Victoria Bates, Sam Goodman, & Alan Bleakley, Eds. *Medicine, Health and the Arts*. (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 119. [14 December 2013] <https://www.dawsonera.com/abstract/9780203079614>
- ⁵ J. L. Borges. *Labyrinths*. (London: Penguin, 1962), p. 91. Further references to 'Funes the Memorious' will be cited parenthetically within the text as 'Borges'.
- ⁶ Patricia Novillo-Corvalán, 'Literature and disability: the medical interface in Borges and Beckett.' *J. Med. Ethics: Medical Humanities* 37: 38-43, (2011), (p. 40).
- ⁷ Michael Bell, 'Nietzsche, Borges, García Márquez on the art of memory and forgetting'. *The Romantic Review*. Vol. 98. No. 2-3, (2007), pp.123-134, (p. 123).
- ⁸ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *Untimely Meditations*. Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 62, 63. [25 November 2013.] <http://quod.lib.umich.edu.chain.kent.ac.uk/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=acls;idno=heb08912>
- ⁹ Nietzsche, p. 62.
- ¹⁰ Rodrigo Quian Quiroga. *Borges and Memory: Encounters with the Human Brain*. (Camb. Mass: MIT Press, 2012), p. 35.
- ¹¹ Paul Ricoeur. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. (London: University of Chicago, 2004), p. 39.
- ¹² Ricoeur, p. 39.
- ¹³ Floyd Merrell, 'Borges: between zero and infinity'. *Journal of Romance Studies*. Vol. 7, No. 3, (2007), Winter: 87-100, (p. 95).
- ¹⁴ Mark Mosher, 'Atemporal Labyrinths in Time: J. L. Borges and the New Physicists'. *Symposium* 48.1, (Spring), (1994), pp. 51-61, (p. 54).
- ¹⁵ Michael Cole, Karl Levitin, Alexander R. Luria. *The Autobiography of Alexander Luria: A Dialogue with the Making of Mind*. (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2010), p. 187.
- ¹⁶ Quian Quiroga, pp. 5, 7.
- ¹⁷ Cole et al., p. 174.
- ¹⁸ A. R. Luria. *The Mind of a Mnemonist*, (London: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. v, 73. Further references will be cited parenthetically within the text as 'Luria'.
- ¹⁹ Patricia Novillo-Corvalán. 'Literature and disability: the medical interface in Borges and Beckett.' *J. Med. Ethics: Medical Humanities* 37, (2011), pp. 38-43, (p. 41).
- ²⁰ Quian Quiroga, p. 21.
- ²¹ Quian Quiroga, p. 39.
- ²² Oliver Sacks. 'Narrative and Medicine: The Importance of the Case History'. University of Warwick lecture: 11 March 2013. [13 October 2013 & 3 January 2014] <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/newsandevents/events/distinguishedlecture/oliversacks/>
- ²³ Oliver Sacks. *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. (London: Picador, 1985), p. vi. Further references will be cited parenthetically within the text as 'Sacks'.
- ²⁴ Wisconsin Medical Society. [20 March 2014] <https://www.wisconsinmedicalsociety.org/professional/savant-syndrome/resources/articles/rain-man-the-movie-rain-man-real-life/>
- ²⁵ William A. Horwitz, & Deming W. Edwards et al. 'A Further Account of the Idiots Savants, Experts with the Calendar.' *Amer. J. Psychiat.* 126: 3, September, (1969), p. 414.
- ²⁶ Darold A. Treffert, 'The savant syndrome: an extraordinary condition. A synopsis: past, present, future.' *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B.*, 27 May, Vol. 364, no. 1522, (2009), pp. 1351-1357. (pp.1351, 1354).
- ²⁷ Yamaguchi, Makoto. 'Questionable Aspects of Oliver Sacks' (1985) Report'. *J. Autism Dev. Discord.* 37, (2006), p. 1396.
- ²⁸ Darold A. Treffert. *Extraordinary People – Understanding Savant Syndrome*. (Lincoln, N.E.: iUniverse, 1989), p. 64.
- ²⁹ Treffert, 1989, p.167.
- ³⁰ Cole et al., p. 175.
- ³¹ Makoto Yamaguchi. 'On the savant syndrome and prime numbers'. Undated. [26 October 2013 & 8 January 2014]

<http://goertzel.org/dynapsyc/yamaguchi.htm>

³² David H. Flood, Rhonda L. Soricelli, 'Development of the Physician's Narrative Voice in the Medical Case History.' *Literature and Medicine* 11, no. 1 (Spring) 64-83, (1992), p. 65.

Modern and Contemporary Visions of a Female Heroine: *Judith* in Twentieth-century Poetry

Rocío García-Romero

The question of influence on the apocryphal *Book of Judith* and its main protagonists has been discussed at great length for centuries, and the twentieth century is no exception. Regarded as a historical novel, it was composed in the late second century BC by an unknown author. It was conceived as a work of propaganda during the Jewish war of independence under the time of the Maccabees, aimed at portraying both the profound piety and the moral and military superiority of the Jews¹ exemplified in the figure of Judith, her name meaning the daughter of Judah, the people of Israel, the spouse of Jehovah.² The dramatic story narrated, with the account of the famous decapitation of Holofernes by the female protagonist, has been treated since then in a variety of literary forms.

This article's purpose is to compare and to contrast the poems that write back to this subject written by the early twentieth-century poets Rainer Maria Rilke and Gertrud Kolmar, and to further analyse the portrayal of the literary figure during the second half of the century by Patti Smith, Andrew Hudgins and Vicky Feather. This analysis is aimed at shedding some light on the shift of the treatment of the literary figure in poetry during the past century – from *femme fatale* in the early twentieth century, to more personal views reflected in themes such as male/female equality, homosexuality and trauma. The early visions of Judith in the midst of the battle between the sexes will be taken into consideration, as well as the more contemporary visions that seek new interpretations of the myth, which are the grounds on which the latest authors seem to base their personal perspectives on the figure.

At this point, it is worth reviewing the story narrated by the *Book of Judith* and the account of the famous decapitation of Holofernes by the female protagonist, since this will help gain a better understanding of the views portrayed in the poems by the different authors during the past century. The *Book of Judith*³ describes the invasion of the Assyrian army under king Nebuchadnezzar, who identifies himself as a god-king. In order to besiege the city of Bethulia, which stands at the doors of Israel, Nebuchadnezzar sends his general, Holofernes, to cut off all the supply routes in order to deprive the inhabitants of Bethulia of food and water. Achior, leader of the Ammonites accompanying Holofernes in his mission, warns him against the Jews, but his advice is disregarded. Faced with such adversity, the Bethulians begin to despair and consider surrendering, but it is at this point that Judith is introduced to the narrative. Judith is the widow of Manasseh and a woman respected in the community for her moral virtue and chastity. She has never remarried and is devoted to her daily prayers and the management of her state. In the tale, she rebels against the idea of surrender and tells her people that God has not abandoned them, and that they should give her three days before opening the gates of the city to the Assyrian army. With the approval of the elders, Judith removes her widow's clothes and adorns herself with the finest clothing and perfume. She calls one of her maids and both head for the enemy camp, where they are arrested by the

Assyrian soldiers and interrogated about their intentions. Judith calmly informs them that she is to betray her people so that their army can conquer the city, since that is God's will. Her charming character, the reassurance in her words and her stunning beauty immediately bring her before Holofernes, who is ultimately enchanted by her charms and the speech of the Jewish woman. He decides to assign her a tent, given that she would need three days of praying until she would receive directions from God regarding the invasion. During this short time, Holofernes becomes gradually more obsessed with Judith. It is in chapter 13 where the highest dramatic moment of the story starts taking shape. We learn that she has been invited to a banquet, where Judith gets Holofernes drunk until he is unconscious. Once the general and the Jewish widow are left alone by the soldiers in Holofernes' tent, Judith instructs her maid to remain outside until her completion of the murderous act. When alone, Judith calls God in an attempt to gain the necessary strength to perform his will; shortly afterwards, the decapitation is done. The final chapters deal with the return of Judith to Bethulia, the display of the head of Holofernes at the gates of the city, and the final Jewish triumph over the Assyrians, who retire to their homeland amidst confusion and chaos. Judith remains a heroine, an example of virtue, whose courageous act will be praised by the forthcoming generations.

The struggle between Judith's faith and Holofernes' autocracy could well raise questions concerning the tension between ideology and power, as well as other issues (either moral, psychological, political) which seem to take a central role in the later interpretations of the tale.⁴ The dramatic scene narrated with the decapitation of general Holofernes by Judith in her attempt to save Judaea from the Assyrian invasion is reviewed by each generation of writers in the light of their own concerns.⁵ First of all, the medieval views of Judith as a pious symbol of faith and courage took a more political dimension during the Renaissance period. Sandro Botticelli, Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, Jacopo Tintoretto, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio and other master painters were fascinated by this tale of violence as an allegory of triumph over tyranny. Interestingly, Artemisia Gentileschi's representation of her *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1612-1613) offers a different perspective on the female protagonist – Judith is a young innocent girl set against the masculine strength of Holofernes, her maid leaning on his stomach while she calmly slits the tyrant's throat. The work probably constitutes the first example of Judith taking an active role in the battle between the sexes, opening the door to new interpretations.⁶

Magda Motté provides a framework for analysing the literary figure of Judith, which structures its representation into three main categories⁷ [my translation]:

1. Historical paraphrase: retelling the story in its original setting while imposing the author's view on it.
2. Update with a focus on the problem: dramatic reflexions on the myth focusing primarily on the confronting issue, while respecting the account of the original story.
3. Update with transfiguration and new creation: works set in the writer's own time whose action follows a pattern identified with the mythical model.

For the purposes of this article, I will structure the analysis following the classification given by Theodore Ziolkowski⁸, who joins the first two categories into 'fictionalizations', reserving the term 'post-figurations' for the third. The first part will provide an overview of the 'paraphrases/fictionalization' technique by early twentieth-century poets. The second one will deal with the more contemporary 'new creations/post-figurations', preferred by authors writing in the second half of the twentieth century.

The battle of the sexes and the psychology of the individual woman

Works at the beginning of the twentieth century focused primarily on 'filling the blank spaces' left by the *Book of Judith*, which gave rise to interpretations that seek to explain certain psychological and moral issues. According to Katja Schettler:

The fascination of the subject matter results from the extraordinary situation: firstly, a seemingly hopeless war dispute which - leaving apart the biblical reading - is decided by the battle between man and woman. The supposed blank spaces left by the *Book of Judith* such as childlessness, widowhood, erotic vibe invite psychological explanations in the early 20th century, particularly in drama and lyrical texts, by expanding Judith's thoughts and reflections.⁹

Schettler then proceeds to explain that the roots of these early twentieth-century views of Judith are located in Germany, when major German playwrights did not focus upon Judith as a religious symbol, but on the psychology of the individual woman. It was Christian Friedrich Hebbel's play *Judith: Eine Tragödie in fünf Akten* [*Judith: a Tragedy in Five Acts*] which turned out to have a broad influence on the twentieth-century visions of the figure. Hebbel presents her as a widow who has remained a virgin despite her marriage because of her husband's impotence, and who kills Holofernes after being sexually abused by him. The playwright is thus creating a Judith that has lost her biblical rendering – she is motivated to murder the general not by the religious faith that initially brought her to the camp, but by her own wounded soul.

This more psychologically-driven treatment of the myth was the basis upon which other German playwrights conceived their own renderings of Judith.¹⁰ Johann Nestroy's *Judith und Holofernes* [*Judith and Holofernes*] and Georg Kaiser's *Die jüdische Witwe* [*The Jewish widow*], both of which are comedies that portray the literary figure in the same light as Hebbel's Judith – she murders Holofernes out of rage after her first sexual encounter. This theatrical and psychological *femme fatale* vision of Judith started to impregnate not only the literary domain, but also the arts as a whole, and vice versa.¹¹ Gustav Klimt's *Judith I* and *Judith II (Salomé)*, as well as Franz von Stuck's *Judith and Holofernes* are all examples of the portrayal of Judith's sexualised femininity, contradictorily combined with her masculine aggression. The image of Judith portrayed by Rainer Maria Rilke in his poem 'Judiths Rückkehr' ('Judith's Return') seems to invoke the Freudian contrast between the conscious

and the unconscious, as well as the contemporary concern on 'hysteria', understood back then as a pathology 'induced when the subject was bombarded by excessive impressions'.¹²

'Judiths Rückkehr'

Schläfer, schwarz ist das Nass noch an meinen Füßen, ungenau. Tau sagen sie.
 Ach, dass ich Judith bin, herkomme von ihm, aus dem Zelt aus dem Bett, austriefend sein
 Haupt, dreifach trunkenes Blut. Weintrunken, trunken vom Räucherwerk, trunken von mir -
 und jetzt nüchtern wie Tau.
 Niedrig gehaltenes Haupt über dem Morgen gras; ich aber oben auf meinem Gang, ich
 Erhobene.
 Plötzlich leeres Gehirn, abfließende Bilder ins Erdreich; mir aber quillend ins Herz alle Breite
 der Nacht-Tat.
 Liebende, die ich bin.
 Schrecken trieben in mir alle Wonnen zusamm, an mir sind alle Stellen.
 Herz, mein berühmtes Herz, schlag an den Gegenwind:
 wie ich geh, wie ich geh
 und schneller die Stimme in mir, meine, die rufen wird, Vogelruf, vor der Not-Stadt.¹³

'Judith's Return'

Sleepers, black is the wetness still upon my feet, imprecise. Dew, you say.
 O, that I am Judith, I come from him, from the tent from the bed, his head trickling, thrice-
 drunk blood. Wine-drunk, drunk on incense, drunk on me – and now arid as dew.
 Low-held head above the morning grass; but I, above in my going, I erect.
 Brain suddenly empty, images flowing out into the earth; but I am still pricked in the heart by
 the whole breadth of the night's deed.
 Lover that I am.
 Horrors drive all the pleasures in me together, all places are on me.
 Heart, my famed heart, beat against the wind:
 as I go, as I go
 and faster the voice in me, my voice, which will call a birdcall before the city of need.¹⁴

Judith's self-description as a 'Liebende' [lover] refers both to her love for her people, which has motivated her act against Holofernes, and her sexual awakening, which (in the interpretation derived from Hebbel's play) has paradoxically coupled hatred with desire.¹⁵ Judith's cry of despair over her own role, 'Ach, dass ich Judith bin' ['Oh, that I am Judith'] directs the poem towards the problem of identity. On the one hand, she is aware of her function in the salvation of the people of Israel, whereas on the other, she regrets being the person to perform God's will. The originality of the poem also stems from the fact that Rilke positions this monologue in what he perceives as a gap in the traditional narrative, as Schettler's above quotation suggests. In the *Book of Judith*, the return to Bethulia is barely described, transporting Judith almost immediately from Holofernes' camp to the walls of Bethulia. In this way, the poet explores the consciousness of the protagonist as she returns to

her hometown, struggling with contradictory feelings: 'Brain suddenly empty, images flowing out into the earth / but I am still pricked in the heart by the whole breadth of the night's deed'. Rilke's empathetic vision of a woman confused and virtually traumatised sets the poem in the domain of contemporary psychoanalytic discourse.¹⁶

A later work written by the (also German) poet Gertrud Kolmar in 1933 is likewise set in Judith's return to Bethulia after the decapitation of Holofernes:

<p>'Judith'</p> <p>Wo ist Tau? Wo ist Sand? Wo der Mond? Wo ein Stern? Wo sind meine Diener, meine Gesellen? Ich werf ihnen Schreie, die irr vergellen; Sie suchten all einen andern Gefährten und Herrn.</p> <p>Meine Füße tappen zwischen Skorpionen hin; Finsternis quilt aus den Zehen. Sie waren wie weiße Lämmer zu sehen Und sind die Füße der Mörderin.</p> <p>Wo schaute ich noch meines Volkes Abendrot? Es leuchtete blutig, doch hab ichs verloren; Im Sack blieb ein Haupt mit Schläfen und Ohren. Das Haupt ist tot.</p> <p>Es spricht: seine Zunge spricht. Worte steigen in graulichen Dämpfen, Winden sich wie ein Weib in Krämpfen, Lauern – verhallen nicht.</p> <p>Und Drohung ist über mir. Die Drohung wird über Israel lagern Gleich Flügeln von Raben, krächzenden, magern, Und plump vor ihm stehn als ein horniger Stier.</p>	<p>'Judith'</p> <p>Where is dew? Where is sand? Where the moon? Where a star? Where are my servants, my workers? I'm throwing them screams, which are denaturing crazily; They were all seeking another fellow or lord.</p> <p>My feet are tapping among scorpions; Darkness is coming up between the toes. They were visible like white lambs And they are the feet of the female murderer.</p> <p>Where could I still see the twilight of my people? It was glowing bloodily, but still I lost it; In the sack remained a head with temples and ears. The head is dead.</p> <p>It is speaking: his tongue is speaking. Words are rising up in greyish steam, They are wiggling like a woman in cramps, They are luring – not fading.</p> <p>A threat is upon me. The threat will set camp over Israel Like wings of a raven, cawing, croaking, And awkwardly standing in front of him like a horned bull.</p>
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Das Haupt wird wieder und wieder sein.
 Mit greisen Flüchen, in roten Jahren,
 Blondsträhnig oder mit düsteren Haaren
 Wird es Haß und Zerstörung gen meine
 Städte spein.

Vom Mute zerschlagen, in Erde versteckt,
 Sol les sich wieder und wieder heben.
 Ich schüttele den Beutel; da ist kein Leben,
 Mein Grauen hat es werweckt.

Ein langer Wurm ist die Nacht.
 Und der Morgen wird eisern, daß er sie
 schneide.
 Ich, die ich in Schande und meine Untat
 mich kleide,
 Trete unter das Erz, sobald ich gedacht.

Mein Dunkel hat es kaum noch gewußt;
 Aber der Tag wird es sagen:
 Bart und Stirn und die Augen lagen
 Schlafend in dir, zwischen Brust und
 Brust.

Was hast du die Stirn zur Erde gestürzt
 Und diese Augen gebrochen?
 Dein Stolz war Richter – und war nicht
 bestochen
 Und hat nicht dein Herz verkürzt?

Schau rückwärts! Kniet vor eurem Lager
 dein Land
 Mit dem weinenden Flehn von Müttern
 und Greisen,
 Dem rechtlos geängstigten Stauen der
 Waisen
 Und schüttet Dank aus zerfetztem
 Gewand?

Es folgte dir kindhaft in stillem Vertraun.
 Es hüllte sich ein und hat dich verlassen,

The head will be again and again.
 With aged swears, in red years,
 With blond strands or with dire hair
 It will spit hatred and desolation against
 my cities.

Destroyed by courage, hidden in soil,
 It shall rise again and again.
 I am shaking the pouch; there is no life,
 It has awakened my terror.

A long worm is the night.
 And the morning will be frozen, so that
 the creature will cut it.
 I, who in shame and in my misdeed, dress
 myself,
 I step under the ore, as soon as I had
 thought.

My dark hardly knew anymore;
 But the day will tell:
 Bear and forehead and the eyes were lying
 Sleeping in you, between breast and
 breast.

What for did you crash the forehead into
 the ground
 And break these eyes?
 Your pride was the judge – and was not
 blackmailed
 And did it not shorten your heart?

Look behind yourself! Kneel before your
 camp in your land
 With a crying beating of mothers and old
 people,
 The lawless frightened wondering of the
 orphans
 And was pouring thankfulness out of torn
 ropes?

It follows you innocently in silent trust.

Um nicht dein Lächeln der Wollust zu
 fassen,
 Nicht die Lästerung deiner glitzernden
 Lende zu schaun.

It wrapped itself up and it left you,
 And not to take your smile of lust,
 Not to view the disparaging remarks of
 your glittering loin.

Und ob du gepflanz mit dem Schwerte
 bist,
 Dir sind schon die Wurzeln vom Erdreich
 gerissen:
 Du magst einmal wandern und nicht mehr
 wissen,
 Wo dein Vaterland ist.¹⁷

And if you were planted with the sword,
 Your roots were already torn out of the
 ground:
 You may once be wandering not knowing
 Where your homeland is.¹⁸

As in Rilke's 'Judiths Rückkehr', the General's name does not appear in any of the verses, and the references from the *Book of Judith* are included to help the reader identify the context in which the voice of Judith speaks, a common feature shared among the two German poets. However, Kolmar portrays her Judith in a very different light. On this occasion, it is the context of the author (Kolmar's life as a Jewess in the turbulent pre-war Nazi Germany) the element which will better help the reader to interpret the role of Judith within the story:

The Judith Poem must be read beyond the context of Gertrud Kolmar's biography: isolation, homelessness and the feeling of guilt seem to be fundamental experiences of hers and ultimately an engine of her poetic creations.¹⁹

The reference to the *Book of Judith* serves not only to reveal the setting: 'Where are my servants, my workers?' / 'In the sack remained a head with temples and ears. The head is dead', but also to reference the nation of Israel and its suffering: 'With a crying beating of mothers and old people, / The lawless frightened wondering of the orphans'. The difference to Rilke's approach is clear – Gertrud Kolmar's adaptation of the myth does not reduce the poem to the battle of the sexes between man and woman, but presents a Judith for the first time deprived of any sexual connotations, who is more concerned with the future of her people when saying, 'A threat is upon me / The threat will set camp over Israel / Like wings of a raven, cawing, croaking'. The personal and historical circumstances of the author are permeated in the poem to the highest degree.

These personal interpretations of the story of Judith and Holofernes became more prominent during the second half of the century. Authors started moving away from the paraphrase/fictionalisation technique towards new themes and possibilities for poetical expression via different post-figurations. The focus on the psychology of the individual woman, set in the early twentieth century, starts losing ground to wider revisions of the myth in a contemporary setting. On this occasion, male authors move their focus from Judith's sexuality towards Holofernes' humanity. And female writers, such as Patti Smith and Vicky Feather, opt to release their own voices through that of Judith (echoing Gertrud Kolmar's

technique), outlining their own personal experiences as regards relationships and their own sexuality.

One of the most striking features of the second half of the century with regards to the interpretation of Judith is that poems indirectly promote a 're-reading' of the *Book of Judith* and, more specifically, of the roles played by the figures of Judith and Holofernes. In fact, the second half of the twentieth century proved to be prolific in new interpretations on the story, as more female authors started raising their own voices and men reconfigured their own conception towards the tale and the questions posed by it. A good example of this new trend can be found in Patti Smith's poem 'Judith 2'. The American singer and poet's work is highly influenced by the Decadent movement (Arthur Rimbaud was one of her main influences) as well as the poetry of the Beat Generation²⁰:

'Judith 2'

yet green eyed golden haired she
is not.
she is no angel baby, no candidate
for a
glass slipper. She is not the kind
of girl
you'd find in an eyebrow pencil ad.
no jelly bitch.

but the girl I'd like to touch,
we've shared
a bed but I could not touch her.
she turned
on her side. I could not touch her.
rustling
of new sheets, a very humid
memory. but I
could not touch her. nor would she
touch me.
plea plead pleading.

victims of the conceit that women
were made for
men. radium. I turn out the light. I
would not
touch her. after a while desire is
overcome.

sooner or later desire hides behind
the skin.
retracts, retreats. then sleeps and
sleeps and
keeps on sleeping.²¹

In her poem, Rimbaud's technique is reflected on the one hand, in her semantic indecisiveness (e.g. 'plea, plea, pleading'), and on the other, in the system based on phonetic resemblance – internal rhyme, alliterations ('then sleeps and sleeps and keeps on sleeping'), paronomasia ('retracts, retreats'). On the other, there is a peculiar use of diacritical markers – lowercase characters after full stops, absence of apostrophes and an abundance of commas. The poem reflects all these features, but its originality also lies in the fact that Smith is portraying Judith as the female friend she is secretly in love with, and this constitutes a totally new rendition. The title 'Judith 2' (probably echoing Klimt's *Judith II*) is followed by the first stanza, which presents Smith's Judith as the opposite of an 'angel' or 'green eyed golden haired', drawing an analogy between hers and Klimt's depiction. The next two stanzas move on to Smith's memories of her frustration at the impossibility to touch her female friend because they are both 'victims of the conceit that women were made for men', as she claims in one of her verses. Here the author is clearly pointing at the closed-mindedness of (patriarchal) society at the time, and the guilt induced by traditional values. For her, the battle of the sexes, that of Judith and Holofernes, is a different battle, that of homoeroticism and its individual/social acceptance.²² Judith clearly remains an object for lesbian desire, and Patti Smith seems not afraid of portraying Judith in this new light. Just a year earlier, in 1977, another poem on the subject was written by the American author Andrew Hudgins:

'Holofernes' Reminiscences after
Three Thousand Years'

Mine is the oldest story
in the world: a man who wields
great power finds the woman
who exists for him to wonder
over.

Truly, Assyria, I have no excuses
worth offering:
even now I am moved by
her beauty, inviolate, moist and
Hebrew.

Truly, a woman to astonish!
I was drunk, it is true,
the night she remained in my tent
and I sent the eunuch away.

So I remember only glimpses:

sandals
bracelets
brown flesh

under linen,
and the scent floating over
conversation:
perfumed oil, redolent more
of night and body,

more of the hollow of her throat
than perfume.
Drunk, Assyria, we exchanged
desires, an old man's night
for a woman's sword.

The world knows only
her side, and in the world mine
is the older story:
a man of merely great power

finds a woman with a gift for
doing
what must be done.²³

The first noticeable feature of the poem is that Judith's name has disappeared in favour of Holofernes' own account of the story. Curiously enough, the General has come back to the present time after a silence of three thousand years, and now he wants to explain his version of the story. He repeatedly reminds his readers (addressing them as 'Assyrians') that he was drunk, that his unconsciousness prevented him from being fully aware of what was happening in the tent, and that he would still be moved today by the beauty of the woman. The powerlessness of his speech is evident in the slow motion of the verse, the inclusion of expressions of acceptance and resignation: 'Truly, Assyria, I have no excuses / worth offering'; 'I was drunk, it is true'), who's contemporary speech style aims at emphasising the setting in which his speech is given: the present time. His final statement: 'The world knows only / her side, and in the world mine / is the older story: / a man of merely great power / finds a woman with a gift for doing / what must be done', reveals even with more intensity Hudgins' own views on the subject matter. On the one hand, the poet seems to claim unfairness in the fact that Judith was given more literary treatment than Holofernes throughout these three millennia; on the other, he totally rejects the traditional male

interpretation of Judith as *femme fatale* by stating (through Holofernes' words) that she simply has done 'what must be done'. The battle of the sexes seems to be over.

Another more recent approach to the figure of Judith and Holofernes can be found in Vicky Feaver's poem 'Judith', written in 1992.

'Judith'

Wondering how a good woman
can murder
I enter the tent of Holofernes,
holding in one hand his long oiled
hair
and in the other, raised above
his sleeping, wine-flushed face
his falchion with its unsheathed
curved blade. And I feel a rush
of tenderness, a longing
to put down my weapon, to lie
sheltered and safe in a warrior's
fummy sweat, under the emerald
stars
of his purple and gold canopy,
to melt like a sweet on his tongue
to nothing. and I remember the
glare
of the barley field; my husband
pushing away the sponge I pressed
to his burning head; the stubble
puncturing my feet as I ran,
flinging myself on a body
that was already cooling
and stiffening; and the nights
when I lay on the roof - my
emptiness
like the emptiness of a temple
with the doors kicked in; and the
mornings
when I rolled in the ash of the fire
just to be touched and dirtied
by something. And I bring my
blade
down on his neck - and it's easy
like slicing through fish.

And I bring it down again,
cleaving the bone.

24

In her study 'Judith: The Making of a Poem', Vicky Feaver firstly provides an interesting insight into the circumstances that led her to write on the subject, namely her self-identification with Judith. The literary figure is seen in a state of grief caused by her widowhood, which ultimately led her to commit her murderous act as a kind of cathartic experience. Feaver encountered the *Book of Judith* by chance, in a period of her life when she was recovering from a separation, and was looking for ways to release her emotions through her poetry, using it as a kind of catharsis as well. The title plays a major role in the interpretation of the poem, as she decided to change its former title ('Judith & Holofernes/Murder') to simply 'Judith', since she wanted to stress that the poem is Judith's story. The first verse of the poem transports the reader to Judith's mind, to the point when she is about to commit her murderous act: 'Wondering how a good woman can murder / I enter the tent of Holofernes'. This statement shows the point of view of the poet; feeling convinced that Judith was a good woman in spite of the evil nature of her mission. The woman now holds Holofernes' head and, for a moment, she feels touched by the look on his face induced by his peaceful sleep: 'And I feel a rush of tenderness, a longing / to put down my weapon'. These contradictory feelings are followed by Judith's past memories of her dying husband Manasseh: 'I remember the glare / of the barley field; my husband / pushing away the sponge I pressed / to his burning head', the immediate mourning process that surrounded his absence and the feelings of despair seen in 'and the nights / when I lay on the roof - my emptiness / like the emptiness of a temple / with the doors kicked in; and the mornings / when I rolled in the ash of the fire / just to be touched and dirtied / by something.' Ultimately, we learn from the last verses that this traumatic experience has finally lead her to that specific moment, giving her the strength to slice the tyrant's throat: 'And I / bring my blade / down on his neck - and it's easy / like slicing through fish. / And I bring it down again, / cleaving the bone. Feaver is depicting a heroine induced to her murderous act by the effects of a long depression and a state of grief and anger. To her, the decapitation by Judith's hand symbolises the end of Holofernes, or the end of a man in the life of a woman, as Feaver herself was aiming at in her own life.

What these few examples have tried to show is that works meet and interact in a dialogue that takes place beyond boundaries and historical periods. The *Book of Judith* perfectly exemplifies this phenomenon – the work is still enjoying popularity these days despite having been written three millennia ago, and each generation has revisited it in their own lights and concerns. In the late nineteenth century, psychoanalytic discourse and its focus on the psychology of the individual woman placed Judith as a *femme fatale*, as works of art reflected to a very high extent. Finally, the most modern literary treatments of the myth have tried to offer a more personal view. The three poems by Hudgins, Smith, and Feaver are all different examples of the contemporary choice of themes – male/female equality, homosexuality and trauma. The originality in their use of structure, language and rhetorical devices make their

poetry fit into the new ideals of the post-modernist era, with interpretations focused on more individual experiences.

Throughout the past century authors have shown different foci in their choice of themes, language and techniques (paraphrase was used in earlier works, post-figuration was preferred towards the end of the century). While it is true that poets in the last part of the century distance themselves from the early twentieth-century view of Judith as a *femme fatale*, moving towards a more individual approach, they share with the previous generations the fact of retelling the myth in their own terms. Both early and late twentieth-century poets share their own experiences and views in the narrative, drawing on the open questions posed by the myth. The present analysis of the literary figure of Judith has thus shown that there are points of convergence and divergence among poets of the early and late twentieth century, and themes can be adapted to modern circumstances and issues. Timeless ones such as that of Judith and Holofernes will be revisited throughout the ages, seeking reconciliations and new points of departure. It will certainly be interesting to see how the literary figure evolves in light of the new challenges of the twenty-first century.

Ethics and Aesthetics of Memory in Antonio Tabucchi's short story *Notte, mare o distanza*

Veronica Frigeni

Taking the lead from a close reading of Antonio Tabucchi's short story, the aim of this article is to investigate in what way and to what degree it succeeds in delineating both an ethics and aesthetics of memory. Memory constitutes, in fact, the skeleton of *Notte, mare o distanza*,¹ in which, in a sort of slow motion, 'come in un film proiettato a ritroso [like in a movie projected backwards]',² the narrator returns several times to a disturbing episode of the past. Shock and the impossibility for the conscience to interiorise it, both suggest how the short story unfolds in the modality of a fantasy, materialising at an unconscious level.

The narrator recounts a night of violence that occurred during António de Oliveira Salazar's dictatorship in Portugal. Following an evening of wine and poetry spent at the middle-aged poet, Tadeus' house, four young friends - Luisa, Tiago, Michel and Joana - are stopped and searched by the regime's secret police on their way home. The police intend to teach the group 'political lessons', beginning with the duty of loving one's own country. The policeman's lecture reaches its climax in the arrogant recollection of unspeakable atrocities he himself committed in the Portuguese colony of Angola. Indeed, as we shall see, despite providing cruel details relating to event, the storyteller creates a surreal sensation, always interrupting the flow of his recollection when his proximity to the trauma becomes unbearable. Thus, memory offers the only authentic way to cope with and to take hold of a disturbing experience. It unfolds a modality of experience, blending raw facts and subjective illusions, which demands, accordingly, further investigation. Ergo, the first step of the paper will be to examine Tabucchi's peculiar understanding of memory and of his interplay with the concepts of potentiality and imagination. Subsequently, the focus will shift onto those images, strategies and fictional tools that give the writer the opportunity to arrange a sort of short-circuit between the ethical and the aesthetical side of the mnemonic experience in the short story.

On the one hand, I will observe how Tabucchi employs the Freudian uncanny - specifically the concept of *déjà vu* - as a method to deal with a reality uncannily traumatic in itself. The ethical value of such an approach is revealed in the fact that for Tabucchi, memory allows for the narration of what might have taken place, of those potentialities of meaning that were not lived out in the past. In the light of this, availing myself of Walter Benjamin's philosophy of historical time, I will argue that memory and imagination, by contaminating one another, become the narrative tools the writer utilises in order to retrieve and fulfil unsolved potentialities of the past. Memory in fact retrieves not only what actually occurred, but also what might have happened.

On the other hand, I will posit the necessity to consider memory as the fundamental kernel of Tabucchi's overall poetics. In this sense, triggered by a reflection upon Martin Heidegger's understanding of Anaximander's saying, it is explainable why Tabucchi regards, in his words, *poetica a posteriori* as the only legitimate poetics; '*la previsione del passato che si realizza postumamente*',³ a sort of future ghostly premonition of the past. Benjamin himself talked of the difference between prediction and prophecy; while the former is characterised by being future-oriented, the latter is defined in terms of a quotation of the past without quotation marks. This creates, as anticipated, a peculiar interference between aesthetics and ethics of memory, insofar as quotation represents, for Benjamin, the narrative form proper to his materialistic - and ethical - view of history. Finally, I will examine the narratological devices Tabucchi adopts in order to orchestrate a dialogue between memory and the possibility of literature.

¹ Judith in the Twentieth century', *The Modern Language Review*, 104(2) (2009), 311-332, p. 312.

² Edward L. Hicks, 'Judith and Holofernes', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 6 (1885), 261-274, p. 263.

³ The following summary of the *Book of Judith* is based on the King James' version of the Bible.

⁴ Ziolkowski, p. 332.

⁵ Barbara Schmitz, 'Trickster, Schriftgelehrte oder *femme fatale*? Die Judithfigur zwischen biblischer Erzählung und kunstgeschichtlicher Rezeption', *Zeitschrift für Theologie aus biblischer Perspektive* (2004), 2, <<http://www.bibfor.de/archiv/04.schmitz.htm>> [accessed 14 January 2014]

⁶ Ziolkowski, p. 315.

⁷ Magda Motté in 'Esthers Tränen, Judiths Tapferkeit' *Biblische Frauen in der Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Darmstadt, 2003), cited by Katja Schettler in: *Töchter der Schrift: Literarische Blicke auf biblische Frauen 1: Eva, Sarah, Ruth, Judith, Sulamith*. Vol. 1, (Wuppertal: GEDOK Wuppertal, 2011), pp. 67-96.

⁸ Ziolkowski, p. 322.

⁹ Schettler, p. 79.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹¹ Schmitz, p. 6.

¹² Judith Ryan, *Rilke, modernism and poetic tradition / Cambridge Studies in German*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 105.

¹³ Cited by Schetter, p. 87.

¹⁴ Justin E.H. Smith, 'Rilke, A Translation' (2011) <<http://www.jchsmith.com/1/2011/02/a-translation.html>> [accessed 22 January 2014]

¹⁵ Ryan, p. 105.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁷ Gertrud Kolmar, *Das lyrische Werk*, (München: Kosel, 1960).

¹⁸ Self-translation made with emphasis on literality and content, as no published translation was available.

¹⁹ Schettler, p. 92.

²⁰ Carrie J. Noland, 'Rimbaud and Patti Smith: Style as Social Deviance', *Critical Inquiry*, 21(3) (1995), 581-610, p. 604.

²¹ Marion Kobelt-Groch, *"Ich bin Judith": Texte und Bilder zur Rezeption eines mythischen Stoffes*, (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2004).

²² Ziolkowski, p. 321.

²³ Kobelt-Groch.

²⁴ Vicky Feaver, *The Handless Maiden*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994).

Memory constitutes a consistent and substantial dimension within the entire oeuvre of Tabucchi. As Schwarz Lausten argues:

La memoria sembra sostituire l'essere stesso per diventare addirittura la condizione della conoscenza e dell'esistenza. È come se per mantenere un sentimento di sé fosse necessario confermare l'esistenza di un passato vissuto: l'io dei racconti di Tabucchi sembra dire 'ricordo dunque sono' o 'ricordo dunque sono stato' [...].

Memory seems to have substituted being itself, thus becoming the grounding of both knowledge and existence. It is as if, in order to preserve a feeling of oneself, it were necessary to confirm the existence of a lived past: the 'I' in Tabucchi's short stories seems to say 'I remember therefore I am' or 'I remember therefore I have been' [...].⁴

Memory circumscribes the ontological perimeter of Tabucchi's own ontology. The latter is developed by the writer in a way that evocatively resonates in Giorgio Agamben's speculation about the notion of potentiality. According to Agamben, potentiality designates a mode of existence that cannot be wholly attributed or reduced to actuality:

The first point that must be made about potentiality is its constitutive co-belonging – and ultimate identity – with impotentiality. [...] Thus, potentiality as such must pose some resistance to or independence from actualisation, and this resistance or independence is the potentiality not to pass over into the act. This potentiality-not-to is what Aristotle calls *adunamia* or impotentiality. To avoid an easy misunderstanding, it must always be kept in mind that in Agamben's usage 'impotentiality' (*impotenza*) does not mean inability, impossibility or mere passivity, but rather the potentiality not to (be or do), which is the constitutive counterpart to every potentiality to be or do. [...] Potentiality and impotentiality are not in fact opposite or contradictory to one another; rather, they co-exist, indeed are one and the same, on the plane of potentiality or future contingency (where the principle of non-contradiction does not apply).⁵

The fact that Agamben's theorisation of potentiality collapses the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction is of extreme significance in relation to Tabucchi's treatment of memory, insofar as for the writer, it is the gesture of remembrance to preserve the possibility of what might have occurred if those constructed facts were, instead, actually lived out.

The mnemonic experience presupposes a conception of experience freed from the constraint of actualisation. Such an assumption equally implicates a different understanding of history and of historical time. Relating to this, it is my contention that Tabucchi's conceptualisation of memory can be fully grasped only if one frames it through Benjamin's philosophy of time. According to Benjamin any historical experience entails the existence of a deep mutuality between configuration and legibility of time. In a sense, every form of time implicates a modality of legibility that is also politically connoted. On a theoretical level this is what explains the nexus between a teleological narrative of history and reactionary, bourgeois political position. Moving to a specific survey of *Notte, mare o distanza* this becomes evident in the opposition between two antithetic forms of remembrance, namely between the narrator's wavering account, which establishes a mnemonic modality dis-charged of any teleological narrative, and the policeman's testimony that finds legitimation in an understanding of history qua cause-and-effect process.

Furthermore Benjamin theorises, before Agamben, the centrality of the mode of potentiality and its correlation to his distinctive philosophy of time. The notion of potentiality postulates a whole new conception of time, framed in qualitative terms, within which time is to be conceived no longer as the continuity of a 'mere becoming', rather as an 'infinite process of fulfilment'.⁶ Accordingly, possibility describes no more a lack but a surplus over factuality.

This same principle theoretically grounds Tabucchi's short story, in which by confusing actuality and potentiality, memory also becomes a possibility to fulfil the past by contaminating itself with imagination. Indeed, '*immaginava* [he imagined]' is the opening verb in *Notte, mare o distanza*. The two faculties of memory and imagination are not at odds. On the contrary, following the author's reasoning, it turns out that they can mutually enhance one another. Such reciprocity is achievable insofar as we observe, in Tabucchi's text, a resemanticisation of the concept of remembrance; no longer gesturing univocally towards an actualised past, rather wavering across its plural, possible arrangements. How then, does memory work according to Tabucchi?:

'Evocare' significa 'richiamare alla memoria', è una parola che viene dal latino *ex vocare*, cioè 'chiamare fuori': ed è noto che la memoria passa attraverso le nostre attività sensoriali. La realtà [...] può ripresentarsi dopo anni grazie ai sensi che la percepirono: la vista, l'udito, il tatto, l'olfatto, il gusto. Evidentemente essa non si ripresenta in quanto 'Principio di realtà', bensì attraverso il nostro 'vissuto'. [...] In particolare, la letteratura ci insegna come una facoltà sensoriale possa scatenare la memoria, fino a costituire talvolta il punto di partenza dell'opera.

'To evoke' means 'to remember', it is a word derived from the Latin *ex vocare*, namely 'to call out': it is known that memory advances through our senses. Reality [...] can represent itself after years thanks to those senses that perceived it: sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste. Clearly it does not return as a 'Reality principle', rather mediated through our 'past'. [...] In particular, literature teaches us how a sensory perception might trigger memory, up to the point of becoming, at times, the starting point of a literary work.⁷

In a sense, Tabucchi's conceptualisation of memory overlaps with his thinking of the so-called *saudade*. A Portuguese term signifying a feeling of nostalgia and remorse not only for what has occurred in the past, but also for what never took place, preserving itself in the virtual realm of the possibilities. Additionally, the mnemonic experience is connected, for Tabucchi, to the literary concept of the reverse. After all, memory seems to be capable of revealing the disquieting value of literature, lying at the core of what I suggest calling the 'uncanny poetics' of Tabucchi.

The multiplication of historical and visual angles constitutes a peculiar feature of Tabucchi's poetics. By the term 'reverse' he means the possibility implicit to literature of looking at one situation from multiple angles; of dwelling in the hidden side of things and of life. However, what should be stressed is the way in which such narrative modalities combines with an ethical possibility of memory. It is my contention that what the writer orchestrates in terms of a formal game of plural perspectives –in a sense, a spatial backwards – constitutes, instead, the kernel of what Remo Bodei identifies as Tabucchi's 'civic geometry':

Story-telling has a civil function even when it is not recognisably political [...] in reshaping the situations in such a way to allow us see what could be in what is not.⁸

Literature, therefore, occurs as a possibility of knowledge of traumatic memories, to be intended as an ante-logic rather than an anti-logic:

Quello che mi interessò di più [...] era la reversibilità del Tempo. [...] Leggere la realtà al rovescio, scambiando l'asse causa-effetto era allettante. E se alla reversibilità del Tempo si sostituisce la reversibilità della Storia, la lettura si fa ancora più interessante e può riservare sorprese, soprattutto quando le cause sono avvolte nel mistero. [...] È davvero il Perturbante di Freudiana memoria, non più desunto da un racconto di Hoffmann, ma dalla Storia.

What interested me the most [...] was the reversibility of Time. Reading reality backwards, exchanging the axes cause-effect was tempting. And if to the reversibility of Time one substitutes that of History, than reading becomes even more interesting and it can have surprises in store, especially when the causes are shrouded in mystery. [...] It is really the Freudian Uncanny, no longer derived from a tale of Hoffmann, but from History.⁹

As previously indicated, Tabucchi defines the mnemonic experience through evocation. Yet recalling past episodes is only a partial explanation of such an expression. Thus, the author describes the other component of evocation; the one pointing towards the ethical implication of memory, in the following way:

Ho già detto che l'etimologia della parola 'evocare' è *ex vocare*. Ma sappiamo altresì che 'evocare' significa anche richiamare qualcuno dal regno dei trapassati per mezzo di facoltà medianiche. [...] Se la 'evocazione' ha il potere di richiamare i morti, se grazie a facoltà medianiche essa misteriosamente ce li riporta, è perché, oltre che 'evocazione', è anche 'convocazione'. [...] La voce della poesia ha il potere di stabilire il dialogo con il fantasma.¹⁰

I have already claimed that the etymology of the word 'to evoke' is *ex vocare*. Still, we know that 'to evoke' means also to recall someone from the realm of the dead, through extrasensory powers. [...] If 'evocation' has the capacity to call dead people back, if thanks to extrasensory powers it mysteriously brings them back to us, it is so because, apart from 'evocation', it also means 'convocation'. [...] The voice of poetry is able to establish a dialogue with the ghost.

Two comments should be made. Firstly it should be taken into consideration the fact that *Notte, mare o distanza* is included within an anthology of short stories, bound up with the dual theme of memory and remorse. As Joseph Francese maintains, the entire collection portrays 'heteronymic manifestations of [...] repressed traumata'.¹¹ Anna Dolfi explicitly labels the story in terms of the Freudian uncanny.¹² There is a twofold reason to share the scholar's categorisation: firstly the aforementioned traumatic implication of the historical episode chronicled by the narrator; then the enclosure of the surrealist detail of the grouper in the narration. By performing a gesture conjoining intertextuality and metafictionality, Tabucchi introduces in the evocation of the night of violence, such estranging elements. On the one hand, Tabucchi derives this dreamlike image of the fish from a painting by Hieronymus Bosch, 'The Temptation of St Anthony'. On the other hand, he readapts a reference already adopted in his 1991 novel *Requiem*:

E fu a quel punto che arrivò la cernia. [...] Che cosa incongrua, una mano e un muso di cernia dal finestrino di un'automobile nera nella Rua Dom Pedro Quinto in una notte di novembre del millenovecentosessantanove.

Ma questo dipendeva dall'immaginazione di chi pensava a come avrebbero potuto essersi svolti i fatti quella notte. Così, a quel punto, la sua immaginazione produceva una cernia.

And it was at that point that the grouper arrived. [...] What an incongruous thing, a hand and a grouper's face appearing from the window of a black car in Rua Dom Pedro Quinto, in a 1969 November's night. But this depended upon the imagination of who imagined how things might have gone that night. Thus, at that point, his imagination produced a grouper.¹³

Like in in Expressionist literature, Tabucchi utilises defamiliarising tools in order to experience and recall an uncanny reality. Ultimately, in the story the uncanny precedes memory itself. Relating to this, as Dolfi suggests, are the several attempts to remember, to narrate what might have happened, which turn out to be an impossible desire to grasping the *Unheimliche* of the real. Therefore, according to Dolfi, the narrator draws from a sort of anthropological, unconscious memory.

The additional aspect I intend to accentuate within Tabucchi's thinking about the logic of evocation is the fact that he posits a fundamental interdependence between the functioning of memory and the summoning of the dead. In an interview entitled 'The Deconstruction of Actuality', Jacques Derrida describes his notion of the event qua opening to the other, qua rupture of any expectation, precisely in terms of 'performative summoning'.¹⁴ For the event to occur, it must be called. Still, for Derrida, this summoning applies not only to what is still to come, but also to what has already taken place. Thus, he concludes, 'it must be possible to summon a spectre [...] there may be something of the revenant, of the return, at the origin of every come hither'.¹⁵ What Derrida's reflection gives us is another perspective from which to consider the intermingling between memory and potentiality at work within Tabucchi's oeuvre. To summon the event as a ghost or to recall the dead or what has yet to come, eventually extends the possibilities, the multiple configurations of the past. Here literature becomes a mnemonic exercise capable of imposing the temporal dimension of futurity to its own content. Also, memory qua evocation, i.e. qua calling of the dead, originates as a reply to a more original appeal. Thus Tabucchi writes in the forward to the collection, *L'angelo nero*, that 'quello che è stato torna, bussa alla porta, petulante questuante, insinuante. [what has been returns, knocks at the door, petulant, demanding, insinuating]'.¹⁶ Likewise, in a 1992 interview he affirms that:

In my opinion it is imperative that we talk with the dead because this means talking with our memory. [...] I believe that literature is this as well: a form of memory; a long term memory with respect to the short term memory that characterises our times.¹⁷

In the exergue of the short story *Notte, mare o distanza* Tabucchi inserts a quotation from Anaximander, which runs like this:

[...] And from what such things arise, to that they return when they are destroyed, for [...] they suffer punishment and give satisfaction to one another for injustice.¹⁸

The most eminent meditation about this fragment is the one formulated by Heidegger in his 1946 commentary.¹⁹ Here the German philosopher advances an interpretation of being freed from metaphysical oblivion, which is characterised as a wavering, a lingering between hiddenness and unconcealment. To be able to perceive, to take hold of being, individuals need to dismantle their traditional vision as a prisoner of forgetfulness, and embrace a new optical possibility entrenched in remembrance. This sight resembles, according to Heidegger, that of Calchas, a seer in Greek mythology, which is not –as ordinarily misperceived – unavoidably engaged with the future, but rather sunk into the abyss of recollection.

Anaximander's saying implicates, therefore, a different understanding of time, in which present, past and future are strictly intertwined. Similarly Benjamin maintains that 'the soothsayer who found out from time what it had in store certainly did not experience time as either homogeneous or empty'. A comparable position can be identified in Tabucchi's definition of his own poetics in terms of 'backwards poetics'. Notably he writes that:

La scrittura, a volte, è cieca. E nella sua cecità, oracolare. Solo che la sua previsione non riguarda il futuro, ma ciò che successe nel passato a noi o agli altri e che non avevamo capito che era successo e perché.

Sometimes literature is blind. And in its blindness, prophetic. Still its prediction does not concern the future, rather what happened in the past to us or to others and that we had not realized it had happened and why.²⁰

In a sense, therefore, literature shares the seer's vision; the capacity to uncover potentialities. Yet, how does it specifically relate to the theme of memory? The answer lies in the understanding of Anaximander's saying in its convergence with the possibility of a vision freed from the constraints of actuality. This refers to what I have previously argued about the centrality Tabucchi ascribes to the mode of potentiality and also introduces a merging between the ethics of memory and the role of the sight. Hence David Michael Levin explains how:

The seer's vision dislodges things from their placement in the conventional time-continuum of history and gathers everything into the preserve of *primordial temporality*, surrendering all things to the deconstructive interplay (the *Spielraum*) of concealment and unconcealment. [...] When Heidegger says that the seer has "always already seen" (*immer schon gesehen*), what he means is that, by virtue of a recollection of being, the seer sees the ontological dimension of time and history, sees the conditions of possibility for historical ruptures and radically new beginnings.²¹

In a similar vein, an equivalent parallel between memory and disquieting and plural perspectives is captured within the concept of *déjà vu*. Such thought, in fact, brings within itself a sense of duplicity that collapses the opposition between reality and illusion. Tellingly Nicholas Royle emphasises how *déjà vu* 'is the experience of the double par excellence: it is experience of experience as double'.²² Accordingly the OED explains it as 'a feeling of having previously experienced a present situation; a form of paramnesia',²³ thus a typology of mnemonic dysfunction. Likewise the definition of 'paramnesia' is particularly relevant here since it allows us to cast an innovative light on the narrative logic of Tabucchi's story. According to *Chambers* it pertains to:

1. A memory disorder in which words are remembered but not their proper meaning.
2. The condition of believing that one remembers events and circumstances which have not previously occurred.²⁴

The first connotation provides a new optic from which to scrutinise the sensorial solicitation that triggers the narrator's memory and which establishes, therefore, a short circuit between voice and memory. Deriving from the poem 'Nocturne At My Apartment Window' by the Brazilian poet Drummond de Andrade, the expression 'alla notte, al mare, alla distanza [to the night, to the sea, to the distance]', which also gives also the title to the short story, constitutes the raconteur's continuation and corollary of Tadeus' enunciation 'perché è un buon viatico' [because it is a good viaticum]. Accordingly the incipit of the story thus recites:

Ogni volta, quando immaginava come avrebbero potuto essersi svolti i fatti quella notte, gli arrivava la voce nasale e ironica di Tadeus che scandiva una di quelle sue frasi che volevano dire tutto e niente: perché è un buon viatico.

Every time, when he imagined how the events might have occurred that night, it used to arrive to him Tadeus' nasal and ironic voice, articulating one of those sentences of him which meant all and nothing: because it is a good viaticum.²⁵

Likewise Giorgio Bertone precisely recognises as the distinguishing feature of *L'angelo nero* 'the overlaying of different temporal planes of memories and the blending of voices'.²⁶ The second meaning, instead, helps in illuminating the condition of possibility and the mechanisms of narration itself. On the one hand it gestures towards the already investigated hybridisation between memory, imagination and potentiality. While on the other, it theoretically grounds within the field of the uncanny all those devices Tabucchi exploits to deal with trauma and to which I shall now turn.

In this section I intend to investigate in more detail the fictional strategies adopted by Tabucchi in *Notte, mare o distanza*, which will allow us to enumerate the basic components of his aesthetics of memory. The first aspect to be addressed is that of the arrangement of manifold temporal planes. What distinguishes the story is a pervasive sense of circularity, insofar as the writing begins and concludes at the moment of the narration, and therefore unfolding a narrative based on the interaction between the proceeding of its very imagination and what is imagined. In a sense, it is the blending of plural temporal layers to engender imaginary memories. This is made evident in the ending, when Tabucchi transforms the image of the grouper into a temporal shifter, which crosses the years, ultimately reaching the narrator himself and maybe venturing even beyond him.

Indeed, and this is the second feature to be stressed, the narrator is caught by the temptation as well as by the impossibility to reach a stable, fixed closure. Moreover, the linguistic transposition of such temporal oscillation is rendered through the overlapping of three main tenses: the imperfect, the past historic and the present. The latter, however, does not refer to the temporal positioning of the narrator, as the reader would expect. On the contrary, the present tense is used to signal the appearance of the grouper, hence characterising the instant of highest proximity to the uncanny and to trauma alike. Thanks to this fictional strategy, the short story gestures beyond the traditional, literary forms of memory writing, being classifiable neither as a testimony nor as an historical chronicle. Truly, the only conventional typology of historical account is that of the political policeman, occurring as a nauseating testimony. The fact that Tabucchi inserts, at the core of his eccentric narration, an established narrative of remembrance marks even more candidly the hiatus between literary habits and his idiosyncratic treatment of memory.

The centrality of the fish metaphor is the third element to be highlighted. As already asserted, such incongruous detail establishes a fracture between actuality and the potentiality of remembrance. By epitomising the atmosphere of guilty and remorse that pervades the entire narrative, the image of the grouper constitutes also the occasion to interlace memory and *saudade*. The fourth, yet most evident component, around which the short story is centred and structured, is that of what Tabucchi defines a 'circolo vizioso [vicious circle]', which in my opinion should be ascribed to the obsessive use of an interrupting repetition or a repeated interruption. In this perspective, a suggestive connection between potentiality and repetition is isolated by Agamben, to whom 'la ripetizione restituisce la possibilità a ciò che è stato, lo rende nuovamente possibile [...] La memoria restituisce al passato la sua possibilità [repetition restores the possibility to what

has been, it makes it possible again [...] Memory returns the past its possibility.]'.²⁷ Here it becomes evident the ethical component of such attitude, in which memory acts as the potentiality to revise the past:

E tutto ricominciava, nell'immaginazione di chi immaginava quella notte, come una pantomime o una stregoneria: [...] come povere creature [...] condannate a una ripetizione insensata, forzate a mimare e a ripercorrere il preludio all'avventura atroce che le aspettava nella notte e che una immaginazione non aveva il coraggio di far loro vivere come dovevano viverla.

And everything started anew, in the imagination of whom imagined that night, like a pantomime or a sorcery: [...] like unfortunate creatures [...] doomed to a senseless repetition, forced to mime and to go again through the prelude to the atrocious adventure which awaited them in the night and that an imagination was not courageous to make them live in the way they had to.²⁸

Also, this abundant use of repetition and interruption points towards the connection between memory and trauma. As Robert Eaglestone argues, when dealing with a traumatic past:

The memory of the event remains to haunt and disturb the person, as the memory is either repressed and ignored (and so comes back in complex and unpredictable ways) or constantly relived inside the mind as 'flashbacks' of images or behaviours.²⁹

Overtly, with Tabucchi, we dwell in the second track of traumatic memory. Ultimately, the narrative strategy of a obsessively recursive recalling that is always interrupted by temporal caesurae, allows Tabucchi to create a loop, a mnemonic paralysis, which mirrors, in a sort of *mise-en-abyme*, the circularity of the narration and which paradoxically blocks any linear development of history, dislocating writing on the edge of a filmic script. After all, Benjamin himself recognised the transposition of the montage principle to a critical historiography as a necessity.

In conclusion, therefore, what Tabucchi produces in the short story *Notte, mare o distanza*, is a literary experiment in which the form establishes and alters the plot. What unfolds in Tabucchi's narrative is precisely a mnemonic experience in which fictional schemes uncover and intertwine with the ethical side of memory. An interesting way to look at this writing would be, then, to consider the several, at once imaginary and mnemonic efforts, as literary incipits and, consequently, as the archetypical representation of the functioning of literature itself, when confronted with history and the past. Yet, this is a door that, for the time being, I leave open.

¹ Antonio Tabucchi, *Notte, mare o distanza*, in *L'angelo nero* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1991), pp. 29-49.

² Ibid., p. 32.

³ Antonio Tabucchi, *Autobiografie altrui. Poetiche a posteriori* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2003), p. 103.

⁴ Pia Schwarz Lausten, *L'uomo inquieto. Identità e alterità nell'opera di Antonio Tabucchi* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2005), p. 51, translation provided.

⁵ Kevin Attell, 'Potentiality/Impotentiality', in *The Agamben Dictionary*, ed. by Alex Murray and Jessica Whyte (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 159-162.

⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 4 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), I, p. 168.

⁷ Tabucchi, *Autobiografie altrui. Poetiche a posteriori*, pp. 20-21, translation provided.

⁸ Remo Bodei, 'The Geometry of Equality: Antonio Tabucchi and the Civic Dimension', in 'Antonio Tabucchi. A Collection of Essays', 44-48 (p. 47).

⁹ Antonio Tabucchi, *La Gastrite di Platone* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1998), pp. 24-26, translation provided.

¹⁰ Tabucchi, *Autobiografie altrui, Poetiche a posteriori*, pp. 23-24, translated.

¹¹ Joseph Francese, *Narrating Postmodern Time and Space* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 144.

¹² See: Anna Dolfi, *Tabucchi, la specularità, il rimorso* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2006).

¹³ Tabucchi, *L'angelo nero*, p. 39.

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, 'The Deconstruction of Actuality. An Interview with Jacques Derrida', *Radical Philosophy*, 68 (September 1993), 28-41, collected in *Deconstruction: A Reader*, ed. by Martin McQuillan (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 527-553 (p. 535).

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'The Deconstruction of Actuality', p. 535.

¹⁶ Tabucchi, *L'angelo nero*, p. 10, translated.

¹⁷ Alessandro Agostinelli, 'La mia anima incongrua', *L'Unità*, 5 April 1992. Translated by Anna Lepschy, 'The Role of Memory in Antonio Tabucchi's *Piccoli equivoci senza importanza*', in 'Antonio Tabucchi. A Collection of Essays', ed. by Bruno Ferraro and Nicole Prunster, *Spunti e Ricerche*, 12 (1997), 61-70 (61).

¹⁸ 'Anaximander's saying', in *Essays in Philosophical Analysis*, ed. by Nicholas Rescher (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969), p. 26.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, 'The Anaximander Fragment', in *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. by David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 13-58.

²⁰ Tabucchi, *Autobiografie altrui*, p. 103, translated.

²¹ David Michael Levin, *The Philosopher's Gaze. Modernity In The Shadows Of Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 395-98.

²² Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 182.

²³ 'Déjà vu', in *Paperback Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 185.

²⁴ 'Paramnesia', in *Chambers Concise Dictionary*, ed. by Ian Brooks (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2004), p. 865.

²⁵ Tabucchi, *Notte, mare o distanza*, p. 32.

²⁶ Giorgio Bertone, 'Notes for a Reconnaissance of Tabucchi's works', in 'Antonio Tabucchi. A Collection of Essays', 29-43 (39).

²⁷ Giorgio Agamben, 'Il Cinema di Guy Debord', in *Guy Debord (contro) il cinema*, ed. by Enrico Ghezzi and Roberto Turigliatto (Milano: Il Castoro, 2001), pp. 103-107 (p. 105), translated.

²⁸ Tabucchi, *L'angelo nero*, pp. 36-37.

²⁹ Robert Eaglestone, *Contemporary Fiction: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 45.

Impossible Truths and Impenetrable Silences: The Communication of Trauma and Testimony in Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* and Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*

Hannah Huxley

'Memory we cross and cross again. Treks, trauma, and on.'
- Simon J. Ortiz, *Time as Memory as Story*

'Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know.
Some things you forget. Other things you never do.'

-Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

In an interview discussing her second novel: *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994), Dominican-American author Julia Alvarez asserts 'I have to keep listening, I have to keep writing - for myself, for us'.¹ What might initially strike readers of this interview is the deliberate reference here to an unnamed, wider collective, 'I have to discover new, fresh ways to discover *our* reality, my reality'.² It is this inherent *need to tell*, on both an individual and collective level, which drives both Alvarez and Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat, author of *The Dew Breaker* (2004), to write these novels. Ten years apart in their publication, they nevertheless affirm the significance of writing trauma literature, in the process of remembering and communicating the memory of traumatic events. These are stories of turmoil, physical brutality and psychological terror. They address the conditions of traumatic experience – the conflict of internal memory between victim, survivor and perpetrator. Kalí Tal posits that '[I]terature of trauma is written from the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it "real" to both the victim and to the community'.³ This is a challenging area of human nature; individuals caught between an inability to re-visit and communicate harrowing traumatic experiences, against the inherent will to bear witness, offering testimony as part of the process of survival. In their contextual grounding, these novels present fictional, humane accounts rooted in the political turmoil of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, under the tyrannical regimes of Haitian President François "Papa Doc" Duvalier,⁴ and Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo.⁵ Amidst a history of authoritative regimes which sought to silence those who suffered under their rule, both Danticat and Alvarez seek to re-imagine the gaps and silences in both personal and collective pasts. Crucially, both authors recognize that these are silences which can never truly be 'filled'. Their narratives offer fictional representations of trauma, reflecting upon a temporal delay and chronological disruption in the re-calling of memory. Alvarez engages with the cultivating of traumatic memory, and vitally, witness accounts, as part of the process of constructing testimony. *In the Time of the Butterflies* presents a fictional account of the events which lead to the assassination of 'Las Hermanas Mirabal', sisters and ardent political activists set against Trujillo's despotic regime. Her narrative is constructed from the true story and memories of the last surviving Mirabal sister, Dedé, in an attempt to provide a testimony for the Mirabal 'Butterflies'. In contrast, *The Dew Breaker* depicts a delicate network of individuals, victims connected by the experience of trauma and the actions of a single perpetrator, each facing an internal struggle to voice their past suffering. For

Danticat, fractured recollection and temporal delay in the communication of trauma is key. Fragmented memories passed between trans-generational victims signal the complications in the communication of trauma and its subsequent long-lasting effects. Second generation victims frequently attempt to come to terms with past suffering through fictional or artistic forms of expression. This is the problem of the unknown – an attempt to piece together traumatic memory or testimony despite the gaps and silences in a fragmented personal and collective history. In writing trauma or testimonial literature it seems there is a contradiction; if traumatic memory negotiates an incident or experience which the victim or survivor consciously silences, then how can such memories be accessed and fully realized in fiction? Are these fragmentations a symbol of individual choice – a prerequisite of human nature to block painful experiences from our memory? Or do they symbolize an enforced silence and unavoidable temporal delay – one which can only be filled or represented by second generation, de-centralized victims of trauma?

Anne Whitehead affirms that that 'the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection'.⁶ It is important to recognise the distinct variations between recalling traumatic memory, and bearing witness to a traumatic event. Both Danticat and Alvarez highlight a disparity between internal personal memory and the formation of witness accounts. Traumatic *memory* suggests a historical suffering - that which may be silenced and repressed either by the choice of the individual or as an enforced silence by authoritative figures. When burdened with traumatic memory, for the survivor or witness, the past *is* present. In other words, past traumas cannot be erased. In either refraining from or choosing to voice the memory of traumatic events, the individual nevertheless recognises and acknowledges the impact of traumatic experiences which form part of the landscape of personal and collective memory. In contrast, *testimony* signals a process of survival, and a rather more forensic method of recollection. Testimony urges an active search for the truth, going beyond painful traumatic memory to provide factual evidence and a voice for the victim. For those who survive a traumatic experience, sharing testimonies is not only a responsibility but a form of survival in itself. For Dori Laub, the need to tell is integral to each individual; she asserts: 'There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus come to know one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life'.⁷ Whilst recognizing the distinction between traumatic memory and testimony is important, it is not to say that they are altogether separate concepts in both Alvarez and Danticat's novels. It is clear, throughout these narratives, that personal memory and testimony are inexorably intertwined. Testimony cannot be fully formed without accessing internal, deep-rooted memory. The reality of traumatic events must first be accessed through the individual's subconscious, in order to be constructed as part of a testimonial. Laub recognises the position of the witness as consisting of three distinct levels; '[...] the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience, the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others, and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself'.⁸ Both Danticat and Alvarez, in representing the process of re-visiting memory and constructing testimony, aim to address these various levels of witnessing and survival.

In positioning themselves within such writing, both authors seek to connect trauma and testimony as a shared experience, not only amongst those who witness and survive traumatic events first-hand, but in the importance of sharing such experiences in a wider cultural context. Traumatic memories become trans-generational, and through their representation in these novels (whether intentionally or otherwise) form part of a cultural, historic and nationalistic heritage. These novels can be considered in relation to the inter-generational structure of 'postmemory', defined by Marianne Hirsch as the

'[...] *structure* of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience [...] a *consequence* of traumatic recall'.⁹ Hirsch posits that '[s]econd generation fiction, art, memoir, and testimony are shaped by the attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression, and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma'.¹⁰ For Cathy Caruth however, the truth behind any traumatic experience remains irretrievable, the condition of human nature being to defer the immediacy of the event. She asserts '[...] the attempt to understand trauma brings one repeatedly to this paradox: that in trauma the greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it, that immediacy, paradoxically enough, may take the form of belatedness'.¹¹ In both *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *The Dew Breaker*, the process of remembering and voicing of trauma is equally as harrowing as the traumatic event itself. On this relation between the experience and the recollection of trauma, Caruth states that '[...] for those who undergo trauma, it is not only the moment of the event, but of the passing out of it that is traumatic; that *survival itself*, in other words, *can be a crisis*'.¹² Notably, *In the Time of the Butterflies* signals a delay in the process of constructing personal testimony. Alvarez gestures towards an inter-generational responsibility in representing and communicating past traumas felt on a national scale. She affirms that, as a consequence of her own experience as a Dominican-American migrant (and crucially as one of four sisters of her own) she perceived the writing of the novel and the re-telling of the story of the Mirabal Sisters as a 'debt' that she owed.¹³ Similarly, Danticat has often suggested experiencing a similar internal call to share such stories, the danger of forgetting being far more detrimental than the process of remembering. She questions the internal conflict of memory: 'But what happens when we cannot tell our own stories, when our memories have temporarily abandoned us? What is left is a longing for something we are not even sure we ever had but are certain we will never experience again'.¹⁴ It is clear in the writing of both women that these are stories that *need* to be heard, and for those who tell them, there is a redemptive quality. In her personal reflections on Haiti, Danticat highlights the conflicting process of shrouding in the 'passing on' of traumatic memory as something that is often cyclical and therefore potentially damaging to the collective consciousness: 'Grappling with memory is, I believe, one of many complicated Haitian obsessions [...] In order to shield our shattered collective psyche from a long history of setbacks and disillusionment, our constant roller-coaster ride between saviours and dictators, homespun oppression and foreign tyranny, we cultivate communal and historical amnesia, continually repeating cycles that we never see coming until we are reliving similar horrors'.¹⁵ Survival itself is presented as an inter-generational responsibility, as well as an instinctual process. Terrence Des Pres asserts that in the process of survival, the will to bear witness and to testify is the transmutation of 'an endless scream' becoming the eventual voice of the witness.¹⁶ He declares, '[s]urvival is an act involving choice; it requires courage and a clarity of vision; and it is governed by human impulses, some of them as deep-rooted as the desire for life itself [...] Terror dissolves the self in silence, but terror's aftermath, the spectacle of human mutilation, gives rise to a different reaction [...] in this crude cry, the will to bear witness is born'.¹⁷

In re-telling the story of Las Mariposas – the titular 'Butterflies' – through the voice of the last surviving Mirabal sister, Dedé, Alvarez confronts the importance of constructing witness testimonies in the process of survival. In accepting her responsibility as the last remaining Mirabal Sister, Dedé assumes the obligation of not only formulating her own testimonial in the search for truth, but extends her voice to the testimonies of her sisters, acting as a reciprocal for those who wish to share their witness stories: 'They would come with stories of that afternoon [...] They all wanted to give me something of the girls' last moments. Each visitor would break my heart all over again, but I would sit on this very rocker and listen for as long as they had something to say. It was the least I could do, being the one saved'.¹⁸ For Dedé, the process of paying tribute to her sisters and extending her voice

to enable the testimonials of others to be heard, is part of both her grieving process and her process of survival. She is able to reconstruct the events prior to the assassination of her sisters, yet forced to face the traumatic experiences of their collective past. Paradoxically, testimonies are here presented as a both a burden and a gift, the piecing together of events from multiple witness testimonies, relying upon fragmented memories that might aid Dedé in discovering the truth of her sisters' final moments. Testimony however, ultimately forms part of a trial process. By engaging with a fictional historiography Alvarez addresses an unavoidable reality; that in relying on a multitude of testimonials from both witnesses and perpetrators, Dedé cannot fully draw to a close her active search for the truth. 'The thing was', she claims, 'I just couldn't take one more story'.¹⁹ It is this difficulty in constructing testimonies from fragmented memory that Alvarez appears to recognize and address in the writing of the novel itself. Academic April Shemak considers *In the Time of the Butterflies* in her theorization of the term 'testimonio'²⁰ – a form of literature which brings to the fore the voices of the oppressed under such tyrannical regimes as that of Trujillo. Shemak recognizes the position of fictional historiographies, affirming that 'Often, these fictional testimonies represent actual historical events, but challenge existing histories through their representations'.²¹ Of Alvarez's novel however, she declares that '[...] for all of *In the Time of the Butterflies* radicalism, it ends up reproducing a nationalistic history that ignores class and racial divisions within the nation'.²² While the theory of 'testimonio' certainly appears apt when considering Alvarez's novel, Shemak seems to have patently overlooked Alvarez's own intentions in writing *In the Time of the Butterflies*. This is a novel which recognizes the importance of testimony as part of the process of survival, but which is consciously positioned as merely one story amongst countless traumatic experiences by those living within the Dominican Republic during this time. For Alvarez, the re-capturing of the story of the Mirabal Sisters is a testimony to their courage and humanity, unavoidably shrouded in the social and political turmoil of the Trujillo regime but not intended to act as a socio-political record of their lives. Alvarez openly recognizes the novel for its fictional constructs, in her postscript of the novel, she asserts:

[...] what you find in these pages are not the Mirabal sisters of fact, or even the Mirabal sisters of legend [...] wrapped in superlatives and ascended into myth, they were finally also inaccessible to me. I realized, too, that such deification was dangerous, the same god-making impulse that had created our tyrant [...] I wanted to immerse my readers in an epoch in the life of the Dominican Republic that I believe can only finally be understood by fiction, only finally redeemed by the imagination. A novel is not, after all, a historical document, but a way to travel through the human heart.²³

Alvarez's personal desire to tell the story of the Mirabal sisters is perhaps a reflection of her own experience under the threat of the Trujillo regime.²⁴ In locating Dedé as the sole agent in representing the lost voices of her sisters Minerva, Mate and Patria, Alvarez blurs the boundaries between offering testimony as evidential truth, and testimonial as a method of emotional and psychological survival. Dedé's testimonial is a complex one, pieced together from painful recollections and fragmented and disparate witness statements. Crucially, the climax of the novel - the assassination of the Mirabal sisters - is not described until Dedé's epilogue, and even then, contains very little in the description of events. To some extent, this reveals what little evidential facts are known regarding the true events of the Mirabal sisters' deaths; 'Over a year after Trujillo was gone, it all came out at the trial of the murderers. But even then, there were several versions. Each one of the five murderers saying that the others had done most of the murdering. One of them saying they hadn't done any murdering at all. Just taken them to a mansion in La Cumbre where El Jefe had finished them off'.²⁵ In an interview

with Mariá Garcíá Tabor, Alvarez recognizes the issue in attempting to present a true account amid numerous contrasting testimonies:

I originally planned to describe the murder, to take the reader through the scene. However, there were so many stories, so many different versions of the murder, which one would I choose? At the trial all the murderers tried to blame each other and say that they weren't responsible. So it never became quite clear what had happened. But also I decided that the horror is greater if left as a dark hole that the reader has to imagine, rather than have the writer portray.²⁶

The problems arises, it seems, not in attempting to re-capture a fictional historiography, but in attempting to re-write and create a voice for those who have been claimed as victims of political violence and psychological terror. Just as Dedé grapples with the ghosts of her past, in presenting a narrative filled with the distinctive voices of all four Mirabal sisters, Alvarez is seemingly 'negotiating with the dead'.²⁷ Margaret Atwood claims that such negotiation is essential for writers of fiction if the untold stories of the dead are to be recovered, '[...] all must commit acts of larceny, or else of reclamation, depending on how you look at it. The dead may guard the treasure, but it's useless treasure unless it can be brought back into the land of the living and allowed to enter time once more – which means to enter the realm of the audience, the realm of the readers, the realm of change'.²⁸ The spectral figures which pervade *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *The Dew Breaker* are unavoidably shrouded by the both the political and social impact of their deaths. To re-write and represent the dead can lead to various interpretations of each story. As the search for the truth becomes ever more impenetrable, the need to re-visit traumatic memory and bear witness becomes far greater for those who wish to offer their testimony. The political elevation and significance (whether of martyred figures or the nameless dead) retains an importance to both those who survive, and to a far wider collective consciousness, capable of permeating into the lives of 'persons, families, and small groups, through visceral processes of reburial and grieving or even vengeance'.²⁹ As Katherine Verdery posits: 'All that is shared is everyone's recognition of this dead person as somehow important. In other words, what gives a dead body symbolic effectiveness in politics is precisely its ambiguity, its capacity to evoke a variety of understandings'.³⁰

In *The Dew Breaker*, it is this recognition of both the dead and the victims of trauma which forms the inter-connection between the multiple individual stories which Danticat depicts. Here, traumatic memory is inexorably connected to a history of suffering, both on an individual and national level. The Haitian experience of political tyranny forms the contextual basis for Danticat's text. Jana Braziel affirms the oppressive nature of the Duvalier Regime, suggesting that '[t]he "symbolic value" of Duvalierist violence was its very arbitrariness, its willingness to kill anyone, anywhere, at any time [...] it ensured the regime total control – physical and psychological – over the Haitian people'.³¹ The resulting representation of such totalitarian control is a text which traces the formation of a complex network of traumatized individuals, each new character intrinsically linked with the last. Danticat depicts a ripple-effect of the acts of political torture by the text's chief perpetrator, the Dew Breaker (a representative of the oppressive regime in Haiti and an active member of the Tonton Macoute under the political rule of Duvalier). While both Danticat and Alvarez confront the issue of enforced silence by political tyranny, it is Danticat who emphasises most effectively the far-reaching impact of this intimately connected political autocracy. She highlights the extended roots of trauma, the direct implications that it has on a number of individuals who each experience the unbearable silence, which the aftermath of trauma evokes. Somewhat disparate to other chapters within *The Dew Breaker*, is "Water Child", the story of Haitian migrant Nadine, who maintains a self-inflicted isolation. Whilst the other chapters of Danticat's text examine the inability of victims to share the memory of their

traumatic experiences with those around them, Nadine appears to be unwilling to express her distressing past, instead isolating herself from those closest to her. Notably, Nadine is one of the few characters within the text who does not come into direct contact with the Dew Breaker – her trauma is one of a different nature. Her story reflects an inherent loneliness. "Water Child" resonates with a poignant silence, revealing her inability to grieve for the loss of her aborted child and her subsequent struggle to place herself within a new life. In the transition to America, she appears to have abandoned her Haitian identity and, following the abortion of her child, is denied her identity as a mother. These experiences have left her with a physical and emotional emptiness, and as such, she displays both an unwillingness and an inability to confront them. Her traumatic memories belong to someone whom appears unfamiliar to her: '[...] the widened unrecognizable woman staring back at her from the closed elevator doors'.³² Paradoxically, her most significant communication with another is formed with her patient, Ms. Hinds, a woman who has undergone the surgical removal of her larynx and is therefore physically unable to verbally communicate: 'Ms. Hinds opened her mouth wide, trying to force air past her lips, but all that came out was the hiss of oxygen and mucus filtering through the tube in her neck'.³³ It is Nadine's conscious unwillingness to communicate with others that remains the focus of this chapter. She fills the silences of her apartment with artificial voices from 'the large television set that she kept on twenty-four hours a day [...] her way of bringing voices into her life that required neither reaction or response'.³⁴ The traumas of her past inevitably seep into her present, and she displays an inability to assimilate into a new social environment, describing a distinct disdain for what she regards as 'too much superficial interaction with other people'.³⁵

Another chapter in Danticat's novel, "Night Talkers", depicts the story of Dany, a young man who returns to Haiti after discovering the whereabouts of the man who killed his parents (the Dew Breaker) in New York. For Dany, it seems the recollection of traumatic experiences is accessible only through his subconscious, rather than his conscious mind:

In the dark, listening to his aunt conduct entire conversations in her sleep, he realized that aside from blood, she and he shared nocturnal habits. They were both palannits, night talkers, people who wet their beds, not with urine but with words. He too spoke his dreams aloud in the night [...] Usually he could remember only the very last words he spoke, but remained with a lingering sensation that he had been talking, laughing, and at times crying all night long.³⁶

It is precisely this obscure, dreamlike form of reliving trauma which emphasizes the often impenetrable nature of both the personal memory of trauma, and the communication of traumatic experiences to others. In some cases, the recollection of such experiences is only accessible to the individual outside the realms of their conscious memory. For Caruth, the subconscious recall of trauma acts 'purely and inexplicably [as] the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits'.³⁷ As a child, Dany bears witness to his parents' death, at the hands of the Dew Breaker; his trauma haunts him both in memory, and in the physical form of the Dew Breaker himself.

In the experiencing or passing-on of such memories, Hirsch's 'postmemory' is once again present. In the relationship between the Dew Breaker and his daughter, Ka, the traumatic memory of Danticat's protagonist has an inevitable effect on the attempted recollections and interpretations of his daughter, signalling the passing on of 'residual traumas'.³⁸ Ka then, like other second generation victims throughout the novel, is positioned as a 'child of postmemory who suffers the trauma of being raised by traumatized parents'.³⁹ She strives to communicate with her father by interpreting the gaps in his past through creative means, notably in the form of a sculpture designed to represent him:

I had never tried to tell my father's story in words before now, but my first completed sculpture of him was the reason for our trip [...] It was hardly revolutionary, rough

and not too detailed, minimalist at best, but it was my favourite of all my attempted representations of my father. It was the way I had imagined him in prison.⁴⁰

Arguably, the memory Ka attempts to imagine and to recreate is never fully accessed - it remains an impenetrable memory. For Collins, Ka's attempts to interpret her father's past are inevitably 'misguided',⁴¹ she asserts that both 'Ka and the reader learn that such histories cannot be approached directly, or rendered completely [...] For Danticat, it is important that art can approach trauma without appropriating as a "whole" and misrepresenting it'.⁴² In the communication of trauma this signals a paradoxical issue. In the passing-on of residual traumas (the postmemory or *rememory*), there is a barrier in the verbal communication of traumatic experiences, leading to interminable silences between generations. The fundamental question of trauma fiction then, for both Danticat and Alvarez, is 'how to represent truths that exceed words, characters, stories [and] narratives'?⁴³ For Dori Laub, this task of representing and communicating past trauma is virtually impossible. She asserts 'There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate a story that cannot be fully captured in *thought, memory and speech*'.⁴⁴

For both Danticat and Alvarez, it seems that the notion of silence is inevitable in the communication of trauma, even in the construction of testimonies. Impenetrable silences form through the inability by both first and second generation victims of trauma to fully interpret the memories that disturb them. In a sense, this is a silence which speaks for itself. These are not novels which aim, not to fill these fragmentations, but to bridge the gap between silences, both a reflection and representation of the fractured memories of victims. In part, both *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *The Dew Breaker* act as testimonies to the human suffering of Dominican and Haitian civilians under the totalitarian regimes, bringing the events of torture and violence to the attention of a far wider audience. In fictional historiographies such as these, the notion of testimony is contested in the conflict between evidential truth and fictional re-interpretation. Whilst it is important, for both reader and author to recognise the fictional construct of these stories, for both those who survive traumatic experiences first-hand and those who are agents of trans-generational traumatic memory, the need to tell nevertheless remains an intrinsic part of confronting both personal memory and collective histories in the process and trials of survival. For Danticat and Alvarez it seems that these novels are a personal undertaking, offering a representative voice to both victims and survivors who have been silenced. Still, whilst these novels attempt to represent the suffering of victims and survivors, it is impossible for trauma or testimonial literature of any form to act as a voice for all, among the countless stories of suffering and witness accounts that spring from past horrors of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. And yet there are many memories and stories that need to be shared, whether immediately after the event or in the long time afterward. As Danticat states in her earlier writing, 'There are many stories. This is only one'.⁴⁵

¹ Mariá Garcíá Tabor, Silvio Sirias & Julia Alvarez, 'The Truth According to Your Characters: An Interview with Julia Alvarez', *Prairie Schooner*, 74.2 (2000): 151-156 (p. 156).

² *Ibid.*, p. 156.

³ Kalí Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 21.

⁴ François Duvalier was President of Haiti from 1957 until his death in 1971. Under his rule, a militia group known as the Tonton Macoute ruthlessly exercised a policy of torture and voodoo practices, resulting in the murder and disappearance of an estimated 30,000 Haitians. Many more Haitians were exiled under the repressive regime.

⁵ Rafael Trujillo served as President of the Dominican Republic from the period of 1930-1961. Widely referred to as El Jefe ("The Chief"), his tyrannical rule is considered as one of the most brutal periods in the history of the Dominican Republic. His regime engaged in methods of torture, murder, unlawful imprisonment and sexual assault. There was widespread psychological terror amongst civilians, and those suspected of opposition towards the regime often simply disappeared, rumoured to have been killed. Trujillo was assassinated on May 30th, 1961, during a plotted ambush of his vehicle on a road outside of the Dominican capital.

⁶ Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 3.

⁷ Dori Laub, 'An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival' in *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York & London: Routledge, 1992), p. 78.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁹ Marianne Hirsch, 'The Generation of Postmemory', *Poetics Today*, 29.1 (2008): 103-28 (p. 112).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹¹ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹³ Julia Alvarez, *In the Time of the Butterflies* (North Carolina: Algonquin Books, 2010), p. 330.

¹⁴ Edwidge Danticat, *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 65.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.63-64

¹⁶ Terrence Des Pres, 'Survivors and the Will to Bear Witness', *Social Research*, 40.4 (1973): 668-90 (672).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 672-3.

¹⁸ Alvarez, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, p. 301.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

²⁰ Defined as 'an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g. war, oppression, revolution, etc). Emphasizing popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of collective memory and identity'

George Yúdice, cited in Shemak, A. 'Re-Membering Hispaniola: Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 48.1 (2002) pp. 83-112 (p. 83).

²¹ April Shemak, 'Re-Membering Hispaniola: Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 48.1 (2002) 83-112 (84).

²² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

²³ Alvarez, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, p. 324

²⁴ Alvarez and her family fled the Dominican Republic, and arrived as exiles in New York on August 6th, 1960. Her father acted as a participant in an underground plot to overthrow Trujillo's regime, which was uncovered by SIM, secret police force of Trujillo. Alvarez's exile took place just four months before the assassination of the Mirabal sisters.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 302-3.

²⁶ Mariá Garcíá Tabor, Silvio Sirias & Julia Alvarez, 'The Truth According to Your Characters: An Interview with Julia Alvarez', *Prairie Schooner*, 74.2 (2000) 151-156 (p. 154).

²⁷ Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (Cambridge: Virago Press, 2005), p. 137.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

²⁹ Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³¹ Jana Evans Braziel, *Duvalier's Ghosts: Race, Diaspora and US Imperialism in Haitian Literatures* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), p. 187.

³² Edwidge Danticat, *The Dew Breaker* (London: Abacus, 2004) p. 57.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

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- ³⁷ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 5.
- ³⁸ Maria Rice Bellamy, "More than Hunter or Prey: Duality and Traumatic Memory in Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*", *MELUS*, 37, No.1 (2012), p. 178.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.
- ⁴⁰ Danticat, *The Dew Breaker*, p. 3.
- ⁴¹ Jo Collins, "The ethics and aesthetics of representing trauma: The textual politics of Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 47, No.1 (2011), p. 11.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- ⁴³ Braziel, *Duvalier's Ghosts: Race, Diaspora and US Imperialism in Haitian Literatures*, p. 186.
- ⁴⁴ Dori Laub, 'An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival' in *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York & London: Routledge, 1992), p. 78.
- ⁴⁵ Edwidge Danticat, *The Farming of Bones* (London: Abacus, 1999), p. 304.

