Introduction:  
On Forgetting  

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Losing also is ours; and even forgetting 
gathers a shape in the permanent realm of mutation.¹

If the limits of our language coincide with those of our world, then the world of Mnemosyne is today a vast cosmos. What the Greeks and Romans began — Ars Memoriae — was later reconfigured in the nineteenth century by philosophers and psychoanalysts alike, leading in recent decades to the establishment of Memory Studies as a discipline. Since Maurice Halbwachs’ work on collective memory and Pierre Nora’s on the lieux de mémoire, the critical vocabulary around remembering has only expanded. Memory as seen by the twenty-first century scholar is active, constantly on the move: it persists across generations, embodied in descendants of trauma (postmemory — Marianne Hirsch), it circulates in mass media such as film and music (prosthetic memory — Alison Landsberg), it is non-linear and can contain traces of multiple perspectives (palimpsestic memory — Max Silverman), and it can be comparative across time and place (multidirectional memory — Michael Rothberg). In tandem, memory has moved its way into politics: to create a vision of the future one must offer a contrast (or continuation) with the past. Here, too, memory’s role is difficult to pinpoint, with attitudes diverging across political lines. And in the shadows of memory, one can find its inverse — forgetting.

Of the extant examples of state-wide ‘forgetting’ policy, one might turn to twentieth-century Spain, where dialogue concerning the Spanish Civil War was heavily repressed both in the war’s immediate aftermath and during the ensuing decades of Franco’s dictatorship. While the 1977 Pacto del Olvido [Pact of Forgetting] — which proposed a move towards democracy through a sort of state-sanctioned amnesia — had its support, recent years have seen public attitudes shift towards the opposite: an active search for a culture of remembering. This has led to what some have termed a bona fide ‘memory boom’: an explosion in civic discourse about the crimes committed during the war and under the regime. This mnemonic move undeniably has helped citizens come to terms with difficult pasts (see, for example, the aftereffects of the trial


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of Baltasar Garzón). Across Europe and beyond, the social, historical, and cultural importance of remembering is less questioned than taken as an ethical imperative. It is said that those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it: memory has a moral dimension. No wonder, then, that forgetting — or its sibling, oblivion — is relegated to the sidelines, if not invoked as something to be feared.

Must this be so? We began preparation for this volume with reference to Borges’ short story *Funes el memorioso*, whose eponymous character is so incapable of forgetting that his life becomes torture. Unable to separate the significant from the incidental, Funes’ life becomes akin to a boundless encyclopaedia. Funes’ problem, if this is what we are to call it, runs counter to what might be considered a gut reaction to memory — that it is precious, and must be guarded at all costs. Needless to say, the costs can be high: here we turn to historian David Rieff, whose *In Praise of Forgetting* (2016) elaborates on the dangers of excessive memory in the political and social sphere. Rieff employs various countries as case studies to explore the dangers of memory wounds that are perpetually kept open, albeit with good intention. With this volume, we wished to shed light on the potential positives of forgetting, though here from a literary and historical, rather than sociological, perspective. Our authors explore this theme in great breadth, pursuing memory’s absence across time periods and genres. While we may not yet speak of postforgetting or of *prosthetic oblivion*, the themes and questions raised here suggest that to forgo the study of forgetting would represent an interpretive loss.

This volume begins with two articles that discuss memory and forgetfulness through the navigation between different realms and realities. Firstly, J. C. Wiles (University of Cambridge) presents us with a discourse on the consequences and intentionality of Dante’s apparent ‘forgetfulness’ in the *Divine Comedy*. By exploring those instances in which characters appear to have been forgotten — or intentionally omitted — from the narrative of the poem, Wiles argues that Dante is able to reflect the magnitude of those infinite realms which cannot be fully contained within the finite cantos of the *Comedy*. The two primary instances of such forgetfulness are the mysterious Arrigo heralded by Ciacco (*Inferno VI*), and Cacciaguida’s allusion to Dante’s ancestor Alighiero I (*Paradiso XV*). In the first instance, Arrigo is a figure whose subsequent absence creates an expectation or desire in the reader which remains frustrated, and in the second, with Alighiero I, it is more likely to be an encounter that did take place but was not narrated. These narrative gaps, Wiles claims, allow Dante to broaden the reach of his verses: by stressing tangible limits of this otherwise universal poem, Dante implies the limitless nature of these otherworldly realms.

Moving on from the realms of the afterlife, Daniel Clark (University of Cambridge), by analysing dream narratives in Tristan l’Hermite’s *Mariane* and Jean de Schelandre’s *Tyr et Sidon, Seconde Journée*, also contends with forgetting and recollection as a struggle between realms: wakefulness and sleep, but also theatrical reality and actual reality. Through considering the ephemerality of
dreams, their recollection onstage and the layers of perspectives through which they are brought to an early modern audience, Clark is able to negotiate the complex relationship between the fictitious realm of dreams — made all the more fictitious through being offstage dreams recalled by fictional characters played by tangible actors — and the theatrical reality or wakefulness in which these dreams are recounted to the audience. Beyond this, Clark extends his discourse to encompass the distinction between the theatrical reality depicted by the characters onstage, and the reality of the audience experiencing the depiction of these fictional realities: specifically, the (in-)verisimilitude of the characters’ near-perfect recollection of their offstage dreams, as well as the dreamlike ephemerality of live theatrical performance.

We now arrive at the modern period, in which Catherine Kelly (King’s College London) and Tim Farrant (University of Oxford) are able to carry two important threads: firstly, society’s forgetting of an important literary figure, and secondly, how the works by the writer in question embody narratives of forgetting, demonstrating the value of this kind of interdisciplinary study. In Kelly’s case, the subject is the life and works of lesbian author Bertha Harris. In this article, Kelly intertwines literary analysis with archival research to piece together an impression of an elusive writer with a disjointed historical legacy, and whose works include similarly disjointed first-person narration. Text and context thus converge to represent Harris’ predilection for queer narratives — in the ‘failed’ attempts at memoir in Lover (1976) and the unpublished The Dream Life of Maria Callas — which necessarily constitute a distortion of reality. In these texts, Kelly identifies the fragmentary and digressive way in which the protagonists recount their lives, which is mirrored in Harris’ own life or ‘queer past’. Though fragmentary, Harris’s influence on queer feminist intellectual circles during her lifetime is undeniable, and it is accessible only if one embraces her elusiveness.

Farrant, on the other hand, explores the figure of Alphonse de Lamartine. Focusing predominantly on the recent centenary of Lamartine’s Méditations poétiques (1820), Farrant asks why such an important writer and complex historical and political figure has not been commemorated to the same degree as his contemporaries. Farrant firstly explores how Lamartine’s loss of capital and political failure contributed to this social oblivion and his own loss of identity, especially the loss of his estate at Milly. This particular tragedy is included in the Méditations through reflections on the loss of the mundane in the hope of salvation. Farrant then identifies forgetting as a recurrent theme in Lamartine’s works, particularly through similar Biblical conceptions of forgetting, explored in his 1818 drama Saül, which was not performed in his lifetime. Thus, similarly to Bertha Harris a century later, Lamartine is a figure whose life and works have suffered from a social oblivion. However, unlike Harris, this oblivion occurred during his lifetime, and undoubtedly influenced his literary output, as Farrant attests.
Adjacent to Kelly and Farrant is Stuart Bowes (University of Leeds, Royal Armouries), who also explores the consequences of historical forgetting, but through a different lens — particularly how museums contribute to societal forgetting in the curation of their collections. By using the Royal Armouries as a case study, Bowes addresses the question of a museum’s responsibility to preserve, display and contextualise items with a contentious past. Alongside this, Bowes considers the pressure museums face when confronted with social movements that contest the way history has been presented, and subsequent governmental regulation, specifically ‘retain and explain’. The threat of funding being withdrawn from such institutions leads to a lack of autonomy in curatorial practice, whereby their motives could be called into question. This leads to a separate but related issue, that of the impossibility of storing and displaying absolutely everything. Such concerns remind us of Funes’s dilemma and return us to the preoccupations examined by Wiles: just as the infinite afterlife cannot be contained in Dante’s one hundred cantos, how can the tangible and finite space of a museum building contain and (re-)contextualise something as vast as human history?

Finally, the contributions by Daisy Towers (University of Leeds) and Gareth Brookes (University of the Arts London) explore depictions of trauma across two different media: novels in translation and graphic novels. Towers examines Mercè Rodoreda’s *El carrer de las Camèlies* (1966), and how traumatic narratives, characterised by fragmentary narrative strategies with an ambiguous distortion of reality — not dissimilar to Harris’s works explored by Kelly — survive in translation. By examining key moments in the 1993 translation by David Rosenthal, *Camelia Street*, Towers questions the role of the translator and the contentious debate as to whether one should simplify, or render more intelligible, what is purposefully disjointed. The ambiguousness of Cecilia’s experiences and the unreliability of her memory recall the struggle between the realms of wakefulness and sleep explored by Clark, but also introduces two further realities: Cecilia’s narrative reality as envisioned by Rodoreda, alongside its new, tempered iteration in Rosenthal’s translation. In this way, Cecilia’s own act of forgetting or distorting her traumatic memories is what is lost in translation.

Brookes closes the volume with an analysis of the representation of traumatic memory in two graphic novels, *Lighter than my Shadow* (2013) by Katie Green, and *Becoming Unbecoming* (2015) by Una. The focus of this article goes beyond the text/image binary, rather it considers the body and materials that create those images and how they interact with the text. Brookes argues that a consideration of the process of the creation of the works in question allows one to perceive the experience of trauma the author wishes to express. Brookes achieves this by considering the visual motifs, in a technique known as ‘braiding’; alongside more evident examples, such as repeated images, both authors use more subtle approaches, such as the repetition of specific types of
haptic mark-marking, to invite the reader to consider the physical interaction between artist and paper and thus disrupt the temporal logic of the narrative and express what is unspeakable or forgotten.

The volume ‘On Forgetting’ does not claim to be encyclopaedic like the *Comedy*, but to offer a series of entry points in literature and history where the act of forgetting does not necessarily lead to oblivion, to loss, but to thoughtful considerations on what has been omitted, and what these omissions can, paradoxically, reveal. From Dante’s strategic omissions we embark on a journey that traverses nations, disciplines, and eras, finally culminating in the twenty-first century graphic novel, where images begin to fill the void of what is lost when words fail.
‘Tutto avem veduto’?
Enumeration and ‘Forgetfulness’ in
Dante’s *Commedia*

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**Abstract.** Despite the *Commedia*’s nominal aspiration towards encyclopaedism, Dante consistently draws attention to the apparent incompleteness of his vision. One of the primary ways in which this is accomplished is, paradoxically, through Dante’s use of enumeration. Scholars have frequently interpreted the poem’s rosters of souls as symptomatic of its epic impulse towards totality, and though they have often examined Dante’s use of preterition in these cases, less attention has been given to those instances where they draw attention to characters ‘present’ in the afterlife, but conspicuously absent from the poem’s narrative. In this paper, I focus on two particularly suggestive cases. The first occurs in *Inferno* 6, where Ciacco informs Dante that he will meet a figure named ‘Arrigo’: an encounter that does not take place. The second is in *Paradiso* 15, in which Cacciaguida alludes to Dante’s ancestor Alighiero I, telling him that he is among the penitent prideful in *Purgatorio*. Though Dante spends a great deal of time on this terrace, he does not meet his namesake. I propose here that, far from being any kind of mistake, these ‘forgetful’ moments cast significant light on the poem’s shifting treatments of absence, as well as its overarching narrative strategies.

Dante’s *Commedia* consistently underscores its project of containing the universe within its hundred cantos. Its final vision seeks to draw together the poem’s carefully arranged and expansive cosmos, ‘legato con amore in un volume’ (*Par*. 33.86).¹ It is, as many have observed, a poem which strives towards encyclopaedism.² Despite this nominal aspiration, however, there are moments in which the poem draws attention to its own incompleteness. Commentators have long noted the conspicuous absences of certain characters

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in the *Commedia*, not least Guido Cavalcanti, alluded to in *Inferno* 10, and St Augustine, who is named but does not appear in the Heaven of the Sun in *Paradiso* 10. One of the subtler ways in which Dante delineates narrative voids of this kind is, paradoxically, through his use of condensed enumerations of souls in the afterlife. The poem’s deployment of rhetorical *enumeratio* has often been read as symptomatic of its epic impulse towards totality: each enumerated person, place, or thing invariably brings its own context to bear on the narrative world of the poem itself. As scholars have routinely observed, Dante’s frequent use of preterition in these moments allows him to suggest a cosmos larger than can be described in the poem’s finite textual space. Less attention, however, has been given to those instances where such enumerations reference characters ‘present’ in the afterlife, but conspicuously absent from the poem’s narrative. In the opening remarks of their 2010 *Anthropology of Absence*, the editors note that experiences of real-world absences are predicated upon ‘confrontation with the incomplete,’ and here I wish to suggest that Dante introduces generative literary incompleteness at key junctures in the *Commedia* precisely and paradoxically in order to convey the fullness of its universe. In order to contextualize the issue, I will first examine a particularly well-known example of preterition, before shifting focus to two suggestive, though far less critically frequented, enumerations of souls which exemplify the *Commedia*’s structured incompleteness. Both moments draw attention to characters absent from the poem’s narrative: characters which seem, in some way, to have been ‘forgotten’ in its construction. I submit that, far from being any kind of mistake, these moments are integral to the *Commedia*’s shifting treatments of absence, and the effects of absence more broadly on the development of its poetics.

Dante repeatedly stresses that Hell is thronging with souls, and frequently deploys rhetorical strategies to imply numbers greater than the poem can name. This limitation is directly addressed as early as *Inferno* 4, where Dante expresses his inability to name each of the virtuous pagans he sees in Limbo. Having enumerated some thirty-five of them, he concedes that ‘Io non posso ritrar di tutti a pieno, / però che sì mi caccia il lungo tema, / che molte volte a fatto il dir vien meno’ (*Inf.* 4.145–47). Though this roster of pagans present in

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6 ‘I cannot here draw portraits of them all: / my lengthy subject presses me ahead, / and saying often falls far short of fact.’
Limbo will, in fact, be further extended by Virgil in *Purgatorio* 22, it serves as an early indicator that the *Commedia*’s ‘lungo tema’ will be in constant tension with the expansive cosmos it seeks to contain. A further programmatic example of this is Virgil’s naming of the lustful in *Inferno* 5:

> ‘Ell’è Semiramis, di cui si legge
> che succedette a Nino e fu sua sposa:
> tenne la terra che’l Soldan corregge.
> L’altra è colei che s’ancise amorosa,
> e ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo;
> poi è Cleopatrás lussuriosa.
> Elena vedi, per cui tanto reo
tempo si volse, e vedi’l grande Achille,
> che con amore al fine combatteo.
> Vedi Paris, Tristano; e più di mille
ombre mostrommi e nominommi a dito,
ch’amor di nostra vita dipartille

(*Inf.* 5.58–69)\(^7\)

Each of these figures adds their own allusive texture to the *Commedia*’s rich thematisation of desire, widening the poem’s historical and intertextual scope. These elements, in conjunction with the list’s sheer vertiginousness, inescapably recall those catalogues typical of the classical epics: the *Iliad*’s catalogue of ships (2.484–759); the *Aeneid*’s list of warring kings (7.641–782); the *Thebaid*’s account of the seven against Thebes (4.32–245). In deploying this hallmark epic mechanism, Dante foregrounds the influence of his classical sources in a canto which also brings the poetics of the *dolce stil novo* under close scrutiny. That tantalising ‘più di mille’, moreover, performs the list’s incompleteness, offering a view of Hell’s second circle as one replete with souls, the full enumeration of whom would extend well beyond these lines. As I have already intimated, extensive critical attention has been given to Dante’s use of preterition in *Inferno* 5 and elsewhere, and it is not my intention here to revisit that well-frequented critical arena.\(^8\) To the contrary, though with this epic strategy of enumeration in mind, I propose to examine those enumerations of souls in the *Commedia* which are nominally complete, but which in fact reveal telling gaps in the poem’s narrative. The first of these occurs, whether by design or not, in the canto following the elliptical enumeration of the lustful.

\(^7\) “This is Semiramis. Of her one reads / that she, though heir to Ninus, was his bride. / Her lands were those where now the Sultan reigns. / The other, lovelorn, slew herself and broke / her vow of faith to Sichaues’s ashes. / And next, so lascivious, Cleopatra. / Helen. You see? Because of her, a wretched / waste of years went by. See! Great Achiles. / He fought with love until his final day. / Paris you see, and Tristan there. / And more / than a thousand shadows he numbered, naming / them all, whom Love had led to leave our life.”

\(^8\) Though see, for example, Thomas E. Mussio, ‘The Poetics of Compression: The Role of *aposiopesis* in the Representation of Conversion in Dante’s *Commedia*’, *Italica*, 81.2 (2004), 157–69; Usher, ‘“Più di mille”’. 
The twinned stilnovistic and epic impulses of *Inferno* 5 fall away in canto 6, which depicts the punishment of the gluttons. In stark contrast to canto 5, it is marked by a sparseness of character, metaphor, and even poetic substance, tying with *Inferno* 11 as the *Commedia*’s shortest canto by an appreciable margin of fifteen lines. In a structural and linguistic reflection of the punishment of bodily excess, *Inferno* 6 is, textually and texturally ‘thin’. Despite the sparseness of the canto, it nevertheless contains a notable enumeration of damned souls. In his dialogue with the glutton Ciacco, Dante expresses a wish to know the fates of eminent Florentines whose deaths predate the poem’s fictional setting in Holy Week of 1300:

Farinata e l’Tegghiaio, che fuor si digni,  
Iacopo Rusticucci, Arrigo e l’Mosca  
e li altri ch’a ben far puoser li’ngegni,  
dimmì ove sono e fa ch’io li conosca;  
ché gran disio mi stringe di savere  
se’l ciel li addolcia o lo’inferno li attosca.  
(*Inf.* 6.79–84)\(^9\)

This enumeration is markedly different from Virgil’s in the previous canto. Aside from its relative concision, it makes no recourse to preterition: there is no sense that Dante names more souls than are listed in the text. It is a complete, self-contained enumeration. For our purposes, it is also significant that Ciacco’s response to Dante’s enquiry is definitive: ‘Ei son tra l’anime più nere; / diverse colpe giù li grava al fondo: / se tanto scendi, là i potrai vedere’ (*Inf.* 6.85–87).\(^10\) The result of this exchange is that Dante’s list of souls becomes a narrative prolepsis: Ciacco confirms that all of them are already in Hell, and that Dante can expect to encounter them later in his journey. Sure enough, he will shortly meet Farinata degli Uberti in the circle of the heretics (*Inf.* 10.32–120); Tegghiaio Aldobrandi and Jacopo Rusticucci will be seen among those damned for violence against nature (*Inf.* 16.40–45). Still further down in Hell, in the ninth pocket of the eighth circle, Mosca dei Lamberti is among the sowers of social and political discord (*Inf.* 28.106–08). By the end of *Inferno*, then, each of the souls in Dante’s list is accounted for, apart from one. Scholars and readers have never agreed on who ‘Arrigo’ is, and the poem offers us no clues.\(^11\) His identity, however, is less important than the fact that he is named at all: whoever he is, Dante-as-poet primes our expectations for an encounter with him as with the other Florentine magnates, but Arrigo is never so much

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\(^9\) ‘Tegghiaio, Farinata- men of rank- / Mosca, Arrigo, Rusticucci, too, / and others with their minds on noble deeds, / tell me, so I may know them, where they are. / For I am gripped by great desire, to tell / if Heaven holds them sweet- or poisonous Hell’.

\(^10\) ‘These dwell among the blackest souls, / loaded down deep by sins of differing types. / If you sink far enough, you’ll see them all.’

as named again in *Inferno*. This despite the fact that Virgil tells Dante at the bottom of Hell that 'tutto avem veduto' (*Inf.* 34.69): they have seen everything there is to see. It is only at this disquieting moment in *Inferno* 34 that we in fact become retrospectively cognisant of what has *not* been seen.

Far from being any kind of mistake on Dante's part, I would suggest that Arrigo's narrative exclusion casts significant light on the function of absence in *Inferno* as a whole. One of the key ways in which absence is experienced, after all, is through the violation of expectation: we register absence when our expectation of presence is deferred. Once Ciacco has told Dante that he will meet all of the souls he has named, every subsequent canto evokes a degree of readerly anticipation. Under this principle, Arrigo's conspicuous non-appearance in *Inferno* leads him to constitute what literary theorist Timothy Walsh calls a 'structured' literary absence, defined as a missing textual element whose absence is linguistically signalled, as distinct from 'pure' literary absence, where no such signalling takes place. The distinction is clearly illustrated in an example from *Purgatorio* during Dante's dialogue with the poet Bonagiunta da Lucca:

> E io a lui: 'T’mi son un che, quando
> Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo
> ch’è ditta dentro vo significando.’
> ‘O frate, issa vegg’io’ dis’ elli, ‘il nodo
> che’l Notaro e Guittone e me ritenne
> di qua dal dolce stil novo ch’i’odo.’
>
> (*Purg.* 24.52–57)

Long glossed as a blueprint for Dante's conscious overturning of thirteenth-century poetic praxis, this moment also instantiates the *Commedia*’s deployment of structured absence. Guittone D’Arezzo and Giacomo da Lentini (the 'Notaro', or 'Notary') are directly invoked here as Bonagiunta’s and Dante’s artistic predecessors, but despite Dante’s engagement with both poets on the thematic and lexical levels, neither appears as a character in the poem. Like Arrigo, logic dictates that they must be *somewhere* in the poem’s three realms: the *Commedia*’s fictional setting in 1300, after all, comfortably postdates their deaths in c.1260 and 1294 respectively. Of course, this could be said of any person whose death predates the *Commedia*’s narrative, and who is not named in the poem itself. Herein lies the importance of the distinction between

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14 "Dear brother, now I see," he said, "the knot / that kept the Notary, Guittone and me, too, / from reaching to that sweet new style I hear of." Translation adapted.

structured and pure absence: the absences of Arrigo, Giacomo and Guittone are made conspicuous in a way that those of, say, Gallo Pisano or Mino Mocato, named alongside Guittone and Giacomo as poets of fame in *De vulgari eloquentia* (1.13.1), are not.

Naturally, a key difference between the structured absences of Giacomo and Guittone and that of Arrigo lies in the fact that Dante’s encounter with the latter is explicitly introduced as prolepsis: though overt reference to the poets in *Purgatorio* 24 alerts the reader to their absence from the *Commedia*’s narrative, expectation of their appearance is not primed as it is in the case of Arrigo. Why, then, should Dante choose to include Arrigo in the poem as a structured absence in this way? I propose that the significance of the choice lies precisely in the fact that it is introduced proleptically but can only be understood retrospectively. After all, for as long as there is more infernal narrative ahead, there is the potential for the encounter to happen. The *aporia* provoked by this omission is key to Dante’s system of infernal metaphysics: if the wayfarer has not seen an infernal soul before he emerges from the pit, there is no possibility of his meeting them elsewhere. There is no continuity between Hell and the other realms: while all the penitents of *Purgatorio* are ultimately destined for Paradise, *Inferno* is, in essence, a narrative and teleological cul-de-sac. It is for this reason that such destabilizing non-encounters do not occur in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, characterised as they are by a poetics of return and reunion: no such *aporia* can be expected. Though Giacomo and Guittone are structured absences in *Purgatorio*, Bonagiunta does not prime readerly expectation for encounters with them as Ciacco does with Arrigo in *Inferno* 6, and Dante’s progression from Purgatory to Paradise does not, in any case, preclude the possibility of encounter given the theological continuity between the poem’s latter two realms. The infernal omission solidifies the necessity of reading the *Commedia* with a keen retrospective eye, and one which is trained on absence as well as presence. This example of structured incompleteness in *Inferno* is, as I hope now to show, fundamental to an understanding of the evolving poetics of absence at work across the poem. Aporetic infernal voids of the kind occupied by Arrigo will necessarily always be voids, while empty spaces in post-infernal contexts serve markedly different purposes.

Preterition cannot hope to convey the fullness of *Paradiso* as it does in *Inferno*. It is made clear at several junctures in the third *cantica* that the number of inhabitants in Paradise is on a different scale altogether, as in the case of the angels of canto 28:

L’incendio suo seguiva ogne scintilla
ed eran tante, che’l numero loro
più che’l doppiar de li scacchi s’inmilla.

*(Par. 28.91–93)*

16 ‘This surge of fire was following every glint. / These glints, en-thousanding, outnumbered far / progressive doubling of the chessboard squares.’
Here Dante alludes to the Arabic fable of the origin of chess, whose inventor claims as his reward a quantity of grains of wheat, starting with one, which doubles for each of a chess board’s sixty-four squares. The resultant number of grains is astronomically large in itself (over eighteen quintillion), and Dante has it ‘en-thousand’ itself, and even this Dantean neologism — which renders *Inferno* 5’s ‘più di mille’ minuscule by comparison — cannot account for the total number of angels. Moreover, in the context of *Paradiso*, this number is no hyperbole: it is, after all, a realm characterised by immense harmonious plenitude. Nevertheless, there is a particularly notable moment of apparent ‘forgetfulness’ in *Paradiso*, once again in the context of an enumeration, which evinces change in the *Commedia*’s treatment of absence as Dante progresses in his journey through a theological space which radically complicates the dialectic of presence and absence.

At the numerological centre of *Paradiso* (cantos 15–17), Dante encounters his crusader ancestor, Cacciaguida. The episode is one rich with pathos, not least because it sees Cacciaguida give the poem’s most notable prophecy of Dante’s imminent exile from Florence: ‘Tu lascerai ogni cosa diletta / più caramente; e questo è quello strale / che l’arco de lo essilio pria saetta’ (*Par.* 17.55–57). It is an encounter, therefore, that is strongly proleptic, but it is also one heavily invested in political and personal history. So important is the personal historical dimension of the prophecy that Dante deviates from his projected narrative in order to have Cacciaguida deliver it, for both Virgil and Brunetto Latini strongly imply, in *Inferno* 10 and 15 respectively, that it will come from Beatrice. Whatever Dante’s motivation, the decision strengthens the juxtaposition of his protagonist’s future with accounts of the Florentine past, and a result of this is that the three cantos are run through with vast rosters of historical Florentine nobles. The longest of these, extending over sixty-six lines (more than two thirds of the length of *Inferno* 6) ends with a familiar strategy of preterition: ‘Con queste genti, e con altre con esse, / vid’io Fiorenza in sì fatto riposo, / che non avea cagione onde piangesse’ (*Par.* 16.148–50). The first of Cacciaguida’s lists, however, has a more focused historical scope, seeking specifically to account for Dante’s ancestors since Cacciaguida within their Florentine context (*Par.* 15.88–148). The fact that it deploys no preterition is perhaps unsurprising: it is an enumeration with a distinctly finite genealogical reach, and one which details the heritage of a family which, Dante strongly underscores, stems from a singular, superior ‘radice’ (‘root’, *Par.* 15.89). To this end, the first historical

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17 ‘You’ll leave behind you all you hold most dear. / And this will be the grievous arrow barb / that exile, first of all, will shoot your way.’
19 ‘With all of these people and with others, too, / I saw Florentia in such repose / that nothing could have caused it to lament.’
figure to whom Cacciaguida alludes is of particular importance to Dante:

Poscia mi disse: ‘Quel da cui si dice
tua cognazione e che cent’anni e più
girato ha’l monte in prima cornice,
mio figlio fu e tuo bisavol fue.’

(Par. 15.91–94)\(^{20}\)

The ancestor in question is Alighiero I, for whom Cacciaguida asks Dante to pray in order to shorten his ‘lunga fatica’ (‘long labour’, Par. 15.95) on the purgatorial terrace of the prideful. Intriguingly, though, while Dante spends a great deal of time with the prideful souls, he does not meet his ancestor and namesake. It is a significant instance of what Filippo Fabbricatore has recently termed an ‘incontro mancato’: a narrative meeting which does not happen, but which gestures towards a contingent version of events in which it does, in fact, take place.\(^{21}\) It is true that Dante stages other *incontri mancati* in the *Commedia*, perhaps most notably in *Inferno*, where the wayfarer believes he has seen another ancestor, Geri del Bello, among the sowers of discord, and lingers in order to try to identify him (Inf. 29.1–36). Nowhere else in the poem, however, does Dante stage such a long-range *incontro mancato* than at this moment in *Paradiso* 15: since Dante remains with the prideful between cantos 10 and 12 of *Purgatorio*, Alighiero’s absence is made conspicuous up to thirty-eight cantos after the prospective encounter. Such far-sighted analepsis requires explanation.\(^{22}\)

Did Dante-as-poet simply forget to include the encounter in *Purgatorio*, and use the Cacciaguida cantos as a means to retrospectively include his nearer ancestor in the poem’s narrative? This is hardly likely. Rather, it serves the poem’s thematic and theological trajectories for Alighiero to be ‘present’ in the poem only as an *incontro mancato*. For, though Dante presents us here with another structured incompleteness, and though it might be expected that its effect on the poem’s theological and narrative textures would be similar to the retrospective non-encounter with Arrigo, the poetics of *Paradiso* shape this *incontro mancato* rather differently. The blessed all look forward to a time when they will be reunited with their ‘corpi morti: / forse non pur per lor, ma per le mamme, / per li padri e per li altri che fuor cari / anzi che fosser sempiterne fiamme’ (Par. 14.63–66).\(^{23}\) The souls of the blessed, that is to say, still experience lack, but in a way that has been completely separated from negative narrative or affective implications: there is no doubt that these

\(^{20}\) ‘And then he said: “The one from whom your clan / takes its cognomen has walked the first ring / of the hill below a hundred years or more. / He was my son, to you great-grandfather.”’


\(^{22}\) On ‘long-range’ narrative contingencies, see Crisafi, *Dante’s Masterplot*, pp. 43–82.

\(^{23}\) ‘long dead bones, / not only for themselves but for their mums, / their fathers, too, and others dear to them, / before they were these sempiternal flames.’
reunions will happen, it is simply a question of time.\textsuperscript{24} Considered in this light, the ‘forgetfulness’ of this moment becomes key to understanding the heuristic journey of Paradiso, as Dante gradually adjusts to the third cantica’s dynamic of harmonious deferral: whatever incompleteness may be encountered on the journeys through Purgatorio and Paradiso will eventually be resolved. Had Dante encountered Alighiero among the penitent prideful, the resonance of this fundamental paradisiacal lesson would have been drastically reduced. While Inferno’s forgetful enumeration provokes aporia, then, Paradiso’s reminds us of the relative relaxation of assured divine reunion. Teleologically, it does not matter that Dante does not meet Alighiero in Purgatory: the narrative ‘lack’ of Dante’s ancestor serves, paradoxically, to reaffirm the teleological stability of the poem’s latter two realms, setting the narrative dead end of Inferno into sharp relief, and vice-versa.

Both of these cases of structured incompleteness reveal key ways in which the Commedia strategically gestures towards that which its narrative does not contain. By encoding absent figures such as Arrigo and Alighiero into the poem, Dante contrives to include far more in his cosmos than the text of his universal ‘volume’ can encompass. In these moments, the afterlife of the Commedia expands, both narratively and theologically, beyond the limitations of textuality, allowing it to broaden its encyclopaedic reach. Indeed, operating in conjunction with the perfomatively elliptical catalogues of the likes of Inferno 4 and 5, the enumerations of Inferno 6 and Paradiso 15, in their postured closure and completeness, effectively provide us with a microcosmic view of the Commedia itself: constructed as they are around highly generative empty spaces, through which they push beyond textual confines. In these ‘forgetful’ moments, then, we witness a performance of totality which mirrors in miniature one of the Commedia’s core mechanisms of expansion and inclusion.

Lost and Found: 
Dream Memory on the 
Early Modern French Stage

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Abstract. To speak of memory loss in the theatre most commonly evokes the image of actors fumbling their lines. Another type of theatrical forgetting can, however, be equally problematic: failing to forget dreams. While real-life dream recall is startlingly poor, early modern French characters ‘remember’ their night-time visions with remarkable lucidity. When these (non-existent) experiences from pre-theatrical time are narrated as veridical fact, the audience seems to gain privileged access to a doubly fictional world. In fact, as this paper will show, onstage dream narratives combine creation and recollection. In doing so, they further complicate the relationship between truth and fiction. Through analysis of two suitably peripheral dream narrations — Tristan l’Hermite’s Mariane and Jean de Schelandre’s Tyr et Sidon, Seconde Journée — this paper will probe the status of dream memory on the early modern stage.

Losing the Stage

In seventeenth-century France, to forget was to ‘[p]erdre le souvenir de quelque chose’. Although their exact memorial status is still disputed, dreams certainly disappear if not re-discovered upon waking. The idea of losing a dream conjures an image of someone searching for the missing piece of a puzzle, desperate to find the shape that will bring sense to the entire scene. This frantic search will provide the impetus for the present discussion about the relationship between the (re)living of dreams onstage and the fragile liveness of theatrical performance.

The theatre is a uniquely revealing space in which to discuss dream memory because seeing a dream narrated onstage blurs the — already shrouded — lines between creation and recollection. In the first instance, an actor is reciting pre-learned lines for an audience. Within that framework, however, a character


2 See, for example, Daniel C. Dennett, ‘Are dreams experiences?’, The Philosophical Review, 85.2 (1976), 151–71.
Daniel Clark
gives voice to their (offstage) dream world for the benefit of an onstage interlocutor or, in the case of monologues, for themselves. A theatrical dream narrator, therefore, brings to the stage a representation of their own private world, one that exists outside the common space of the theatre.

Plurality troubles early modern theatrical certainties. Florence Dumora, in her fascinating book on early modern representations of dreams in literature, considers the symbolism of revelatory dreams in the seventeenth-century theatre. While building on Dumora’s work, the present paper will pay greater attention to the phenomenological impact of the onstage dream search. This involves following in the footsteps of scholars like Joseph Harris, who, in Inventing the Spectator, invites us to consider early modern audiences as dynamic and multi-directional. The fragmentation of the audience-as-bloc is crucial to understanding the fragmented nature of dream narration, which is inevitably incomplete.

Generally, the relationship between dreaming and memory can be considered on three main levels. First, sleep is essential for cognitive performance and the processing of long-term memory. Second, real-world memories permeate into dreams; for example, sleepers often dream of something they have experienced in waking life. Even in Freud’s psychoanalytical reading of dreams, which considers nocturnal visions to be expressions of future desires, the content of these desires is undoubtedly influenced by past experiences. Third, and at the forefront of this paper, is the act of ‘remembering’ a dream after the event.

The foregrounding of loss is a fittingly frustrating starting point for this discussion. Dream action — a private, silent, and non-performative spectacle experienced by a single mind during sleep — is conspicuously absent from early modern French theatre. Owing to the demands of bienséance (propriety) and vraisemblance (verisimilitude), the early modern French stage could not overtly host dream worlds in the same way English and Spanish plays frequently did. Instead, dreams are found mostly when narrated by characters who have recently awoken, who give voice to a doubly fictional world: an oneiric vision couched in a literary creation.

Dreams ‘take place’ in a parallel world, in which the mind’s subdued consciousness prohibits its normal function. The detachment of dreams from waking life means that trying to recall a dream experience always involves looking back on events that are, at least partly, external to the self. Traces of this experience can remain vividly in a person’s mind; these traces are, as we

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4 See Joseph Harris, Inventing the Spectator (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
7 For a discussion of dreams on the Shakespearian stage, see, for example, Claude Fretz, Dreams, Sleep and Shakespeare’s Genres (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).
shall observe, akin to creative seeds ready to flourish in waking life. Onstage, of course, what seems to be taking place in-the-moment is in fact the performance of something pre-learned.

Each performance of a play is both the repetition of a script and a once-in-a-lifetime phenomenological experience. Like the multi-layered temporalities of dreams, theatre produces experiences that are both singular and cyclical. Overly detached spectatorship (that prioritizes cyclicality over singularity) risks overlooking the impact that a dreaming character has on a live audience. In order not to lose the stage, it is vital for the critic to consider the immediacy of theatrical dreams.

Disorder, Disappearance, and Dream Time

If to forget, in seventeenth-century France, meant to lose, then to lose was to be ‘privé par accident de quelque chose qu’on avoit’.8 The possessive quality of this definition lies in stark contrast to the language used to describe dreaming: unlike English dreamers, the French do not ‘have’ dreams — they ‘make’ them. This more active construction suggests process rather than product: a ‘songe’ is Penelope weaving in The Odyssey, not the burial shroud her weaving creates.9 Accordingly, the French stage is a space for dreaming more than a space of dreams. Implicit in the creation of dreams, therefore, is the possibility of un-making. Just as Penelope un-picks her shroud each night to thwart her suitors, even the most intricate dream can be undone simply by waking up. It is the possibility to unpick (or forget) that makes the in-the-moment experience of a dream all the more urgent.

Likewise, the spontaneity explicit in the dictionary definition of ‘lose’ (‘par accident’) seems incompatible with the careful design of the early modern French theatrical space. According to regular critical theory, every scene should connect logically to contiguous scenes (liaison des scènes); every action should contribute to the play’s central plot (unity of action); every scene should take place in the same location (unity of place), and everything should be wrapped up ‘within a single circuit of the sun’ (unity of time).10 None of these rules apply in dreams, which often flit between actions, times, and places with scant regard for waking order or logic.

Consequently, theatrical dream scenes can appear chaotic and multi-faceted. In the designed theatrical space of early modern France, where plots were crafted with forethought and lines learned by heart, the imposition of a dream, however well scripted, necessarily instils a sense of spontaneity and aimlessness. In a technical sense then, narrating a dream onstage does involve an act of memory (by an actor). Yet for the character who relates their (offstage)

dream, the relationship between dream and memory is more complicated. Remembering requires a 'relationship between representations located at two different points in time'. Dreams, like the theatre, exist at a specific moment in time, whilst also being timeless. Just as it is possible to state that Corneille’s *Le Cid* was performed at the Théâtre du Marais in December 1636, a dream can be said to have happened last night in the dreamer’s mind. In both cases, such pinpointing belies an unstable temporo-spatial existence.

Indeed, like *Le Cid*’s eponymous character, theatre and dreams both have historical and mythical lives. Each time a play is performed, or a dream experienced, a new liveness is created. James Wierzbicki highlights this temporo-spatial contradiction when he describes dream time as a 'special kind of time that does not really take time or occupy time' (my emphasis). A character who narrates a dream onstage is re-constructing, re-vivifying, re-imagining or re-creating their (fictional) night-time vision, turning something (or nothing) from a different time (or non-time) and space (or non-space) into a story to tell onstage. Although the actor speaking the words is engaging in a memorial activity, the character is not: they are trying to find something before it is lost. Just as plays can be based on historical, mythical or fictional sources, or be entirely made up, this ‘something’ can be a story, a fragment of a story, inspiration for a story or a deceptive story. Theatrical dream narration, in short, always turns an absent (offstage) action or non-action into a present (onstage) experience.

### Between Places: Phantom Memories

The 1630s and 1640s are by no means a golden age for dream literature in France. These decades fit into a wider context of French literary dreamers that reach back to medieval times. The early modern stage, however, is a fascinating space in which to dream. In the theatre, a dream (and an actor’s ‘memory’ of it) is doubly unreal. The slipperiness of dreams clashes with attempts made by early modern critics to impose order on the stage, of which the infamous *Querelle du Cid* (1637–38) is the most famous example. During this literary quarrel, the *Académie Française*, among others, admonished Pierre Corneille for his rule-breaking tragicomedy, *Le Cid*. Dreams, although mostly overlooked in such criticisms, would seem a fundamental threat to the supposed unity of the early modern French stage.

When a character narrates a dream onstage, they are simultaneously bringing the experience out of their sleeping state and placing it before an audience. Playwrights often emphasize the two-step process. In Tristan l’Hermite’s *Mariane* (1643), for example, the play opens with Hérode ‘s’éveillant en sursaut’.

Once awake, he immediately apostrophizes the phantom that has disturbed him: ‘Fantôme injurieux qui troubles mon repos...’ (l. 1). In this state between waking and sleeping, he commands the phantom to return to ‘l’ombre éternelle’ (l. 3), thus highlighting his inability to contain the dream within its own realm. In this way, the phantom, transported out of the dream, is the bridge between distinct experiential states.

By opening the play with Hérode’s awakening, Tristan reinforces the dream–stage divide, even as he undermines it. Within the theatrical world, pre-theatrical time is non-existent — a character’s past is shaped entirely by how it is constructed onstage during theatrical time. The precise correspondence between the opening curtain rising and the dreamer’s eyes opening situates the stage as the space of reality, in contradistinction to the illusory offstage non-space. The co-existence of embodied present performance and the ‘ghosts’ of past lives is a theatrical crucible; indeed, theatre is, in Marvin Carlson’s formulation, ‘the most haunted of human cultural structures’. The presence of a phantom as a bridge between past and present in *Mariane* makes the play’s memorial status especially troubling.

Losing the Self

According to Patricia A. Kilroe, ‘once experienced, all dreams are texts’. Ascribing dream memory fictional status reinforces the impression that ‘remembering’ dreams is, in fact, a creative process. Given the elusiveness of theatrical truth, recounting an unverifiable experience onstage further complicates the relationship between word and world. Although the re-telling of dreams onstage necessarily indicates presence, loss is never far away. Indeed, according to J. Allan Hobson, some of the main cognitive functions of dreaming are ‘loss of awareness of self [...] loss of orientational stability; loss of directed thought [and] poor memory both within and after the dream’.

Hobson’s formulation is especially pertinent in a theatrical context, where notions of self, thought, and memory are perennially unstable. Disoriented characters forget themselves and their surroundings most frequently through the form of the monologue. A single character alone onstage giving voice to

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14 ‘waking with a start’.
15 ‘Insulting phantom that troubles my sleep’.
16 ‘the eternal darkness’.
their thoughts troubled early modern critics. D'Aubignac, for example, called monologues ‘un défaut du Théâtre’.20 The staging of solitude is a challenge for the early modern playwright because it involves turning the silent, solitary, and non-performative workings of a mind into something loud, public, and performed.

A vivid example of a dream-tinged monologue is Hermione’s three questions that open act V of Racine’s *Andromaque* (1667): ‘Où suis-je ? Qu’ai-je fait ? Que dois-je faire encore ?’ (l. 1401).21 Ravaged by madness, her monologue exhibits loss of self-awareness, orientational stability, and directed thought, which helps make the experience eminently dreamlike.22 More fundamentally, however, certainty is threatened by the very foundations of the theatre. First, the plurality of Hermione’s ‘self’ is ensured by the fact that the character is embodied by another person. Second, the answer to ‘Where am I?’ is complicated by the dramatic illusion: Hermione (or the actress interpreting Hermione) is simultaneously in a palace in Epirus and a theatre in Paris (or wherever else the play is being performed). Third, Hermione’s thought, externalized through the monologue, does not actually lose direction; although seemingly disordered, she is in fact following a clear sequence of words as established by Racine’s script.

When Oreste later gives voice to his own confusion, he too exhibits similar dreamlike qualities: ‘Que vois-je ? Est-ce Hermione ? Et que viens-je d’entendre ? [...] Est-ce Pyrrhus qui meurt ? et suis-je Oreste enfin ?’ (ll. 1609–12).23 These confused lines resemble Porcie’s exclamations in Boyer’s *La Porcie Romaine* (1646): ‘Dieux que viens-je d’entendre ! Et que viens-je de voir !/ N’est-ce point un fantôme, ou n’est-ce point un songe...’ (ll. 776–77).24 Less than a decade after Descartes had used a dream argument to cast doubt on perception, such evocations cannot pass for mere commonplaces.25 Seeing a character flailing around for their self is a troubling spectacle — and one which brings dreams to the forefront of the dramatic illusion.

**Finding the Self**

Hobson’s fourth cognitive function (‘poor memory both within and after the dream’) is notably absent from onstage narrations of dreams.26 In contrast to real-life dreamers, theatrical dreamers recall their dream content with startling

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21 *‘Where am I? What have I done? What must I still do?’*
22 In *Andromaque*, references to ‘songe’ do not evoke literal dreams. Even so, abundant similarities mean that theatrical aloneness can be readily associated with the solitary process of dreaming.
23 *‘What am I seeing? Is it Hermione? And what have I just heard? [...] Is it Pyrrhus who has died? And am I at last Oreste?’*
24 *‘Gods, what have I just heard? And what have I seen? / Is it not a phantom or not, indeed, a dream?’*
25 Descartes wrote ‘Supposons donc maintenant que nous sommes endormis...’ [Suppose then that we are asleep...] to begin a philosophical study of the senses. See René Descartes, *Méditations métaphysiques* (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1979), p. 58.
lucidity. When Hérode narrates his dream in Mariane, his memory is decisive. To a listener unaware that the experience was a dream, these lines would be indistinguishable from the retelling of a real-life memory:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Je me suis trouvé seul dans un bois écarté,} \\
\text{Où l’horreur habitait avec l’obscurité,} \\
\text{Lorsqu’une voix plaintive a percé les ténèbres,} \\
\text{Appelant MARIANE avec des tons funèbres,} \\
\text{J’ai couru vers le lieu d’où le bruit s’épandait,} \\
\text{Suivant dans ce transport l’amour qui me guidait... (ll. 93–98)}^{27}
\end{align*}
\]

In this short passage, Hérode describes a physical action (running) and the setting where this action took place (the forest), while identifying the tonality of the voice he hears (plaintive and deathly), and even the emotional impact the experience exerted on him (compulsion driven by love).

Although he reconstructs without hesitation his dream experience, the internal framework of Hérode’s narrative reflects the nature of dreams. The isolated forest is a fittingly liminal setting for his solitary dream experience, while the darkness and mysterious voice give a sense of transgression and danger. There is a semblance of chronology, though the precise time frame remains uncertain. As such, even if a memorial point of reference is created, this nevertheless falls short of true memory.\(^{28}\)

The most impactful moment of the dream is the appearance of the murdered Aristobule, which Hérode relates as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{J’ai senti sous mes pieds un tremblement de terre,} \\
\text{Et dessus ce rivage, environné d’effroi,} \\
\text{Le jeune Aristobule a paru devant moi [...]} \\
\text{À la fin j’ai levé le bras pour le frapper :} \\
\text{Mais pensant de la main repousser cet outrage,} \\
\text{Je n’ai trouvé que l’air au lieu de son visage :} \\
\text{Ainsi de violence, et d’horreur travaillé,} \\
\text{Avec un cri fort haut je me suis éveillé... (ll. 104–38)}^{29}
\end{align*}
\]

Here again, absence is emphasized despite the presence of the dream. The earth shaking under Hérode’s feet reflects the dream’s unstable foundations, while the image of him striking thin air aptly represents the frustrations of trying to hold onto a dream. Staging Hérode waking up onstage and then proceeding to re-live his dream provides tantalizing access to an experience that is ordinarily private.

\(^{27}\) ‘I found myself alone in an isolated forest,/ Where horror co-habited alongside obscurity,/ When a plaintive voice pierced the darkness,/ Calling MARIANE in deathly tones,/ I ran towards the spot from where the noise was originating,/ Following in this movement my guiding love...’.


\(^{29}\) ‘I felt the earth shaking beneath my feet,/ And above the coastline, surrounded by fear,/ The young Aristobule appeared before me [...]/ Eventually, I raised my arm to strike him:/ But thinking to repel this insult physically,/ I met not with his face, but with only air:/ Thus, my violence and horror enacted,/ With a loud cry I awoke...’.
Still, dream narration is troubling for its tangling of truthful and deceitful discourses. Two first-person narrators compete: dream-Ḥerōde (‘j’ai senti’, l. 104) and Ḥerōde (‘je me suis éveillé’, l. 138). This means that when (an actor pretending to be) Ḥerōde recounts that Aristobule appeared before him, the statement is both true and false — and disorienting.

The declaration, indistinguishable as it is from the narration of a perceptual experience, weaves an additional layer of reality into the theatrical tapestry of lies and half-truths. In a setting where appearances dominate reality, this is especially significant: Ḥerōde does not lose the memory of his dream experience because he carries it out of the dream and relives it in front of an audience. That he starts his dream narration with the claim that he found himself alone in the forest is perhaps the most fitting formulation of the process of re-living dreams.

Changing Dreams

The experience of dreaming can helpfully be compared with the liveness of theatre. Peggy Phelan underlines the fleetingness of theatre when she writes that ‘[p]erformance’s only life is in the present’, going on to claim that, because of this, performance ‘cannot be saved, recorded [or] documented’.30 Although Phelan’s absolutism may tip into hyperbole, her formulation is intriguing in the dream context.

A theatregoer’s memory of a play’s content is inevitably filtered through their memory of the whole experience: a seventeenth-century spectator of Le Cid might remember Chimène’s agonising conflict and the gasps of fellow audience members in response to her decision; they might recall the imposing presence of the king drawing the play to a close and their own legs aching from standing in the parterre. The point is that waking liveness is always plural, combining real and illusory events, and physical and mental action.

A dreamer, on the other hand, is entirely absorbed in their present state. Since awareness of the external self is inhibited during sleep, reconstructing a dream experience after waking means searching for traces of the internal dream content. Early modern narrations of dreams, however, often use a wider framework that pays attention to the distinction between self and dream-self.

A good example of this is provided by Jean de Schelandre’s Tyr et Sidon, Seconde Journée (1628). Cassandre’s dream narration, which opens the play, highlights the instability of self and other by blending the voices of her real self and dream-self. In the opening monologue, she declares that ‘un songe, cette nuit, m’a brouillé le cerveau...’ (l. 104).31 The uncertainty implicit in the term ‘brouiller’ contrasts markedly with the detailed dream description that follows. Cassandre re-lives her dream from the previous night with extraordinary lucidity. She recounts that (1) she and her sister were approached by a deer (ll.

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31 ‘a dream, last night, muddled my brain’.
123–40); (2) the deer then spurned her (ll. 141–50); (3) enraged, she chased the
der (ll. 151–58), (4) which then metamorphosed into a lion (ll. 159–72).

Despite being a unified actional sequence, these extraordinary — and
unbelievable — events could not be portrayed on the early modern French stage
without flouting the conventions of bienséance and vraisemblance. The start of
the dream ‘takes place’ in a pastoral setting, far removed from the realities of
waking life:

Etant, me semblait-il, loin du bruit soucieux,
Sises dessous un aulne en un pré spacieux,
Seules, ma sœur et moi, nous cueillions des fleurettes... (ll. 119–21)32

When the deer first arrives, several lines are used to convey an image that would
appear instantaneously in a dream. As well as highlighting the ineffectiveness
of narration, the fact that Cassandre is providing such descriptive detail while
alone onstage renders her motives to speak unclear. One way to reconfigure this
problem is not to consider the monologue as a simple retelling but rather an
exercise in remembrance. To keep the ‘memory’ of the dream alive, Cassandre
must convert the dream world into words; otherwise, the experience — and
whatever meaning she can gain from it — will be lost.

Initially, dream-Cassandre chases the deer in anger at being spurned. This
behaviour can be understood symbolically: the deer represents Belcar, for
whom the sisters are competing amorously. Hence, (dream-)Cassandre’s desire
to catch him and have him for herself exists on two levels: one experienced
within the dream and a second symbolic level that can be unravelled later. In
her description of the chase, Cassandre emphasizes physicality: she describes
the feeling of her ‘membres légers’ (l. 155) as she runs.33 That these limbs could
belong to either Cassandre (asleep in bed) or dream-Cassandre (running
through the valley) further underlines the plurality of theatrical dream-identity.

The range of places through which dream-Cassandre and the deer pass
is improbably large: ‘... parmi les forts et les ronces poignantes,/ Par Vallons
raboteux, par cavernes sonnantes’ (ll. 157–58).34 When they finally stop running,
Cassandre narrates the deer’s metamorphosis into a lion in simple, matter-of-
fact terms: ‘Son chef devint tout rond,/ Il perdit à l’instant les armes de son
front’ (ll. 159–60).35 Trapped and helpless, dream-Cassandre desires a way out.
She achieves this through the uniquely oneric escape mechanism of waking up:

De si soudaine peur ma pauvre âme frappée
Fit bondir en sursaut un inutile réveil,
Qui n’ôta point le songe en ôtant le sommeil (ll. 170–72)36

32 ‘Being, it seemed to me, far from the worrisome noise,/ Sitting beneath an alder tree in a spacious
meadow,/ Alone, my sister and I, we picked flowers...’
33 ‘light limbs’.
34 ‘...through forts and stinging brambles/ through rugged valleys, through ringing caverns’.
35 ‘His head became round / He suddenly lost the antlers from his forehead’.
36 ‘With fear as sudden as my poor soul was struck,/ I leapt out through a useless awakening,/ That
rid me not of the dream as it rid me of sleep’.
The successful escape of dream-Cassandre from the dream-lion is ‘inutile’ precisely because she brings the lion out of the dream world with her. Like with Hérode’s phantom, nightmarish dreams impact on reality only when they are transported out of the dream world. This lesson should have resonated pointedly with theatregoers of the day: around this time, the stage was starting to spill out into wider society, as *La Querelle du Cid* proved.

**Presenting Absence**

Through the collective re-living of dream experiences, playwrights allow non-existence to be ‘remembered’ as though it were a real-life event. Memory is central to the structures of theatre and its absence, in a theatrical context, usually represents failure. Amidst the stage’s multi-layered realities, however, the elusiveness of narration prevents spectators from distinguishing dream recall from retellings of perceptual experiences. Whether the narrated dream is nightmarish or desirable, it is an inherently individual experience ordinarily inaccessible to any other mind. By attempting to transport an event from their private dream world onto a public stage, Hérode and Cassandre erode early modern theatrical certainties — whether their dream is ultimately lost or found.
(Mis)remembering Bertha Harris

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Abstract. A once influential writer, editor and theorist of lesbian identity, the North Carolina-born novelist Bertha Harris is today best remembered for Lover (1976), a fragmentary and difficult to summarise novel that explores questions of fabrication, memory, and queer desire through the lives of a shifting family of saints and art forgers. Harris expressed scepticism about the conventions of queer life-writing, arguing that writers who ‘continually reproduce the coming out process’ in their work were ‘acting[ing] like a heterosexual’. In both her fiction and her life-writing, she articulates what she considered to be a specifically lesbian literary practise that prioritizes the pleasures of artifice and disguise over what she dismissed as the dull work of ‘telling it like it is’. How, then, should the literary historian seek to remember and reconstruct Harris’s life and work? This essay explores two, at times contradictory, threads. The first is the attempt to draw on the ephemeral genres of the mid-twentieth century lesbian archive — rumour, oral history, personal correspondence — to recover and remember Harris’s life and work. The second is Harris’s articulation of what she described as the ‘gay sensibility, whose practice hinges [… on decisively choosing as if over is]’, treating the queer past as a site of speculation and invention. Taking these threads together reveals the limits of feminist literary recovery and considers practises of misremembering and fabrication as queer archival method.

Recalling her first encounter with the novelist Bertha Harris, Dorothy Allison writes, ‘it quickly became apparent to me that this woman simply was lesbian literature — outrageous, complicated, fascinating, uncompromising’.¹ Gayle Rubin, too, is effusive in her memories, calling Harris ‘a streaking comet across the firmament of lesbian activist intellectuals’.² Throughout the 1970s, Harris was a singular, leading voice within a rapidly expanding network of lesbian feminist writers, artists, theorists, and political activists. In her novels, alongside her essays in Sinister Wisdom, Heresies, Quest, Christopher Street and Thirteenth Moon, she theorised and pioneered a queer literary sensibility.³ Through her work as an editor with the New York-based lesbian feminist press Daughters, Inc., Harris played a central role in the Women in Print movement

² Gayle Rubin, email received by Catherine Kelly, 12 March 2019.
of the 1970s. In 1976, Daughters published *Lover*, Harris’s third and best-known novel. *Lover*’s first edition looks like a memoir: its cover shows a black and white photo of a smiling young girl, and a detailed family tree is displayed on its first page. Instead, what follows is a disjunctive text that centres on a shifting cast of saints, writers, and art forgers. In Harris’s view, it was the role of the queer writer to tamper with and distort reality, particularly the reality of their own life. *Lover* is a paean to queer artifice in which, as one character states, ‘the forgery is no different from the real thing’. This approach poses a challenge to anyone who might wish to recover and verify details of the life of an important lesbian feminist writer who is, in the words of Martin Duberman, ‘all but forgotten’. Harris has no dedicated archive and published little after 1976. The physical inaccessibility of much of her work leads to one kind of misremembering: her influence on lesbian print culture remains underexamined. It is, however, Harris’s investment in misrepresenting and fabricating aspects of her own life in her writing that brings about another kind of misremembering: one that illuminates Harris’s queer artistic practise even as it may frustrate the work of the literary historian. This essay sketches the contours of these forms of neglect and recuperation, and considers Harris’s own ambivalent relationship to the work of queer feminist literary recovery in an era in which figures such as Djuna Barnes began to be reclaimed by a burgeoning lesbian readership.

As the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) seeded the ground for new ecologies of feminist print culture in the United States, lesbian readers and writers sought out traces of a queer literary heritage. The feminist theorist Monique Wittig describes the ‘blank’, that lesbian readers faced in the late 1960s, a literary ‘nonexistence’ in which there seemed to be ‘no lesbian books except Sappho’. Responding to the persistent dearth of information about the lives of lesbian writers, Naiad Press co-founder Barbara Grier published *Lesbian Lives* in 1976. This anthology offered short biographies of women who had written for the *Ladder*, the first widely-distributed lesbian magazine in the US. Speaking in 1987, Grier observed that there remained ‘a lot of demand for biography’ among her queer readership. The demand for work by and about lesbian writers extended beyond grassroots literary networks into the academy, where feminist scholarship was ascendant across disciplines. At Richmond College in the early 1970s, Harris was among the first academics to teach a Women’s Studies syllabus at university level. She dedicated much of her academic career to the work of reconstructing a lesbian literary heritage,

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6 Martin Duberman, email received by Catherine Kelly, 19 July 2019.
presenting her research at the first MLA panel dedicated to lesbian literature, as well as at the first conference of the Gay Academic Union, where her 1973 paper was titled ‘The Lesbian in Literature, Or Is There Life on Mars?’.

Writing in Sinister Wisdom in 1977, Adrienne Rich acknowledges Harris’s influence:

“I found [Harris] had described to me for the first time my own searches through literature in the past, in pursuit of a flickering, often disguised reality which came and went throughout women’s books.”

Harris dramatizes this pursuit in her 1973 essay ‘The More Profound Nationality of Their Lesbianism’, in which she describes hours spent lingering outside Djuna Barnes’s Manhattan apartment in the summer of 1959: ‘As often as I could (and with discretion) I followed her, and trailing her, received the silent messages about my past I needed and she could give’. In spite of her hostility to queer feminist readings of her work, Barnes was a highly venerated figure among lesbian writers and readers in this era. Wittig’s observation about Sappho, quoted above, is followed by the parenthetical ‘I did not know Djuna Barnes yet.’ For Harris, Barnes was the last living connection to a semi-mythic 1920s Parisian lesbian coterie that included Gertrude Stein, Renée Vivien, Natalie Clifford Barney and Colette. ‘Shadowing Djuna Barnes’ was an entry point into a transnational queer literary genealogy, which Harris felt had been withheld from her. Reading Barnes’s work in the late 1950s demanded some ingenuity. Harris writes that she took to ‘prevaricating’ her way into the New York Public Library’s rare books room, passing herself off as a Cambridge professor with a forged ID, dressed in ‘a dumpy tweed skirt, a starched white shirt, black necktie’. For Harris, participating in this act of forgery and disguise is part of what it means to ‘shadow’ Barnes and claim a place in her queer artistic genealogy.

At the centre of each project of literary recovery is a claim that the figure in question is significant, neglected, and recuperable. Barnes’s critical recuperation provides a useful counterpoint against which to consider the ongoing neglect of Harris’s work. Barnes, who once described herself as ‘the most famous unknown of the century’, has long since been dredged from ‘virtual oblivion’ to take her seat somewhere near the modernist canon. In Harris’s case, the argument for her significance within the literature of the WLM must still be

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9 Adrienne Rich, ‘It is the lesbian in us...’, Sinister Wisdom, 3 (1977), 6–9 (p. 7)
11 Wittig, p. 44.
made. Writing in 2010, Elizabeth Freeman observes that *Lover* still has ‘only a cult following and little scholarly attention’. This remains true more than a decade later. Harris, like Barnes, had a tendency to dramatize her neglect. Less than ten years after *Lover*’s publication, she declared herself ‘something of a museum piece. The museum I belong in is the old Ripley’s Believe it or Not, of Oddities and Curiosities, right next to the two headed calf’. Here, Harris alludes not only to the scholarly neglect of her own writing but to the broader neglect of the political and literary tendency to which she belonged: a largely separatist — in theory if not in practise — strain of lesbian feminism embodied by figures such as Monique Wittig and Jill Johnston. Harris was a friend and collaborator of Johnston’s and played a role in bringing Wittig’s work to an American feminist audience through Daughters’ 1976 reissuing of Wittig’s first novel, *The Opopanax*. Catharine Stimpson declared Harris an ‘American equivalent of Monique Wittig’, in part because the two theorists shared a conceptualization of the lesbian as, in Harris’s words, ‘neither man nor woman [but] a new separate creature’. Harris, however, is an idiosyncratic thinker, disloyal to a fault and hard to pin to one tendency or another. At times she aligns herself with separatism, at others she suggests her stronger allegiance is to a multigendered politics of gay liberation, and her relationship to the sometimes mutually hostile Marxist feminist and cultural feminist threads of the WLM fluctuated throughout her life. Harris also diverged from many of her lesbian contemporaries in her fondness for the term ‘queer’: ‘I love the word queer and all of its meanings,’ she remarked in 1978, ‘so I am going to use it’. If Harris is due some critical reappraisal, it is in part for the ways in which her work, like Wittig’s, complicates narratives of a monolithic second wave.

Alongside her political idiosyncrasies, Harris’s profoundly ambivalent relationship to biographical fact and personal disclosure pose another challenge to a straightforward recuperation of her work. Harris was sympathetic to the organizing efforts of the post-Stonewall gay liberation groups but their emphasis on the liberatory power of public disclosure ran counter to Harris’s

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20. Harris, Catherine Nicholson Papers. A conversation between Harris, Barbara Smith, Jill Johnston and Maria Irene Fornes on the 1993 panel cited above provides an example of varying relationships to the term ‘queer’ among lesbian writers of this generation.
preoccupation with the subversive potential of disguise.\textsuperscript{22} Harris wrote to Joanna Russ in 1980 that

\textit{Part of my trouble is that in a season that openly worships Honesty, Openness and — above all — Telling It Like It Is, I am still fatally attracted to the Masquerade, The Costume, the Disguise, the Theatrical rather than the sincere disclosure of the facts-of-the-matter.}\textsuperscript{23}

In the pursuit of what Rich calls the ‘disguised reality’ of lesbian literary ancestors, Harris’s work is often more interested in the disguise than the reality. For Harris, ‘shadowing Djuna Barnes’ is first and foremost an act of fantasy and infatuation. This ‘shadowing’ is a kind of courtship, in which she takes on new identities — the Cambridge don in the archive — and showers her beloved with gifts like the ‘scrunched up sweetheart roses’ she stuffs into Barnes’s Patchin Place mailbox.\textsuperscript{24} In the queer underworld of New York a decade before Stonewall, Harris and a queer friend ‘roamed the streets, making up our histories as we went along’, always in the hope that Barnes ‘would stop and take my hand’.\textsuperscript{25} Harris’s account points to what Lauren Berlant calls the ‘fundamentally social character’ of fantasy, which functions as ‘a site in which a person’s relations to history, the present, the future, and herself are performed without necessarily being represented coherently or directly’.\textsuperscript{26} At the heart of Harris’s pursuit of Barnes is the fantasy-work of remembering Barnes differently, of inventing rather than merely uncovering a lesbian literary past, and with it a conception of a collective lesbian identity in the present. Hers is a fantasized lesbian community with a history, a present and a future, in spite of the unrepresentable and incoherent desires that undergird it.

Performing seduction as queer literary practise is central to Harris’s fiction, particularly \textit{Lover}. In a 1993 introduction to the novel, Harris writes, ‘I wrote \textit{Lover} to seduce Louise Fishman. It worked’.\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Lover} is a novel of disguises, in which desire flows unpredictably — perversely, incestuously — and in which no identity is fixed or reliable. As Freeman observes, \textit{Lover}’s characters ‘do not so much develop as simply enter and exit’.\textsuperscript{28} At one point in the novel, a character named Flynn experiences a sensation of profound disorientation while assembling photographs of her childhood:

None of these things are Flynn. They are a lie about Flynn, or they are pictures of herself her fantasies have contrived, or they are her overworked imagination forcing memories of things that have never really happened to

\textsuperscript{22} See \textit{Come Out!}, the newspaper of the New York Gay Liberation Front.
\textsuperscript{23} Harris, Letter to Joanna Russ, 1980, Joanna Russ Papers, University of Oregon, Box 18, Folder 4.
\textsuperscript{24} Harris, ‘The More Profound Nationality of Their Lesbianism’, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{25} Harris, ‘The More Profound Nationality of Their Lesbianism’, p. 78.
In *Lover*, the figure of the lesbian is a kind of forgery, a fabrication that signals that possibility of other worlds. Yet even this identity exists in a state of doubt and fragmentation. Reflecting on *Lover*’s ‘sexual subversives’, Harris writes:

I am no longer as certain as I used to be about the constituents of attraction and desire; the less certain I become, the more interesting, the more like art-making, the practice of love and lust seems to me: it becomes more like something I first grasped as a child.\(^{29}\)

In Harris’s fiction there is abundant space for the inchoate and contradictory threads of fantasy and desire. This uncertain space seems to run counter to the work of the literary historian or biographer. The more I attempt to verify forms of evidence — census records, a marriage license, an address on a letter — in order to construct a narrative of Harris’s life, the more her queer self-fashioning slips further out of view.\(^{31}\)

When Harris died in 2005, she had long been absent from the lesbian feminist literary world she helped to build. She left no collected papers. Far from being absent from the archive of lesbian feminist print culture, however, Harris is abundantly present, threaded through personal correspondence, periodicals and queer ephemera in other archives. Letters from Harris in the collected papers of Joanna Russ, Martin Duberman, Karla Jay, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Kate Millett, Barbara Grier and Phyllis Birkby provide some insight into the more opaque periods of Harris’s life. An address on a postcard to Russ reveals that Harris briefly lived in Malibu, California in the early 1980s; letters written to Birkby in 1972 contain details of Harris’s experiences as an undergraduate in the 1950s. Beyond these insights into Harris’s life, tracing her through other archives illuminates the expansive networks of collaboration and mutual influence within the WLM. In this way, biographical research performs a collective rather than a narrowly individual function. Although she often emerges through the eyes of other feminist writers, thinkers and organizers, I often rely on Harris’s own accounts of her life, and here the record is at once vivid and murky.

Consider for example, the last piece of writing Harris published, a 1999 essay titled ‘This Song is Dedicated to the One I Love’, which contains an account of her parents’ wedding:

John and Mary Zuleika eloped one night by driving across the state line [...] Her Coty powder and lipstick were in her navy blue pocketbook, which almost exactly matched the navy blue suit and the little veiled hat she was

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29 Harris, *Lover*, p. 74.
30 Harris, *Lover*, p. 18.
wearing. She had chosen the navy blue suit because it would set off the white orchid he would give her.32

This passage reads as if Harris is describing a photograph or perhaps retelling a memory her mother shared with her. She quickly tells us that neither is the case: ‘I’m making this up. I questioned her about every instance of her life before John, and then before me. ‘You hush,’ she always said’. Harris’s essay appears in an anthology of ‘coming out stories’ by queer women. Appropriately for a writer who professed disdain for the genre, Harris’s essay is not a coming out story. Instead, it explores her early childhood in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and in particular her strained relationship with her mother. This moment in the essay in which Harris undercuts her own account is significant. ‘I’m making this up’ is both a self-consciously glib assessment of her literary practise, her long entanglement with, as she puts it, ‘the lies that happen to be fiction’, and also an invocation of what she calls both a queer and a Southern way of life.34 ‘Storytellers’, she remarks in a letter to Duberman, ‘is just a Southernism for liars’.35 The fabricated details of her parents’ elopement serve a storyteller’s purpose in Harris’s personal familial mythology. It is necessary to misremember the past, to partially invent Mary Zuleika Jones, the wide-eyed bride-to-be — dressed for an orchid that she will not receive — in order to make sense of the mother Harris remembers: the violent, embittered Mary Zuleika Harris. Harris conducts a similar kind of misremembering in writing about her own life, prioritising constructed narrative over ‘the facts-of-the-matter’.

Perhaps this is what Harris is getting at when she describes the indeterminacy of desire and ‘art-making’ as something she grasped as a child. In her 1999 essay, Harris places her early experience of enforced silence within the home alongside her first brushes with queer desire. Hot housed in codes of silence, pleasure, and shame, Harris develops an appreciation for the power of the hidden, the distorted, the repressed. From her mother, who kept her own past stubbornly opaque, Harris learns to ‘cultivate the curse of amnesia’:

My ability to forget has been essential to reinventing myself. I was ashamed of myself. Mary Zuleika made it plain how I ought to be ashamed of myself. I became fiction. My secret life has always been memory in infinite detail, and its reworking.36

33 Harris, ‘This Song is Dedicated to the One I Love’, p. 18.
35 Bertha Harris, Letter to Martin Duberman, 3 January 1994, Martin B. Duberman Papers, Box. 120, Manuscripts and Archive Division, New York Public Library.
36 Harris, ‘This Song is Dedicated to the One I Love’, p. 16.
In a 1972 letter to the filmmaker and architect Phyllis Birkby, Harris strikes a similar note: ‘got this memory I call a fictionmemory [...] I keep telling people that fiction is truth and they say, No, truth is one thing, fiction another and I say, they are the same when I am in the car’.\(^{37}\) This too is a moment in which queer desire and literary fabrication are tightly bound. This is a love letter, and a trace of Harris’s ‘secret life’. Harris, who had been in a relationship with the academic and *Sinister Wisdom* co-founder Catherine Nicholson for several years, had recently begun an affair with Birkby, writing letters from the safety of her office at the University of North Carolina. Indeed, the articulation of ‘fictionmemory’ emerges in the letter as Harris lingers on the moment in which she first met Birkby in New York: ‘it was Kate [Millett] driving that godawful car around all over town after the bar closed [...] and I sort of fell over the seat and kissed you twice’.\(^{38}\) This is ‘the car’ that Harris refers to in the passage from her letter quoted above, a machine in which Harris transforms memory into fiction. Like *Lover*, it is a transformation crafted to seduce.

In 1982, Harris moderated a panel at the New Museum in New York on the subject of ‘The Homosexual Sensibility’. On this panel, Vito Russo also turned to childhood to consider the roots of his relationship to queer artistic practice and worldmaking. Drawing on W.E.B DuBois’s articulation of ‘double consciousness’, Russo states,

> you grow up and the people around you, including your parents, assume that you’re straight, and yet you know different at some point in your life and so you have this double vision. You’re able to see both the truth and the illusion. [...] You imagine all sorts of things in order to create a world where you exist.\(^{39}\)

That the skills of self-fashioning and disguise, like the double vision of the queer child, are forged through shame does not lessen their importance as strategies of queer world-making. Harris takes pleasure in her ‘secret life’ as a space of imaginative play, even as the ‘secret life’ remains a painful tool of queer survival. Indeed, for Harris, distortion and fabrication are integral to the ‘homosexual sensibility’ because the role of the lesbian feminist artist is not simply to describe the world as she sees it but to reinvent it — to ‘create a world where [she] exist[s]’. Queer sensibility, she suggests,

> might be described as a refusal to leave the world alone. As a tampering with reality, a manipulation of things as they appear to be, ordained or otherwise until they seem to be something more than the real thing.\(^{40}\)

Russo makes a similar claim for the role of fabrication and speculation. He describes his experiences of projecting queer narratives onto the apparently un-queer films he watched as a child and a teenager: ‘What I was doing was,

\(^{37}\) Harris, Letter to Birkby, 15 March 1972.

\(^{38}\) Harris, Letter to Birkby, 15 March 1972.

\(^{39}\) Bertha Harris, Kate Millett, Vito Russo, Jeff Weinstein, Edmund White.

\(^{40}\) Bertha Harris, Kate Millett, Vito Russo, Jeff Weinstein, Edmund White.
I was saying, ‘I live here too’. And since this image does not serve my life, I will imagine a way in which it could if the world were different. Projecting, misinterpreting and misremembering, beginning anew — these are, for Harris, indispensable strategies for building a world in which queer feminists could ‘live here too’.

If the work of recovering, assembling, and verifying evidence falls short as a method for remembering Bertha Harris, attention to her own life writing may produce a different method. In her 1993 introduction to Lover, she recalls (or invents) a ‘yard sale’ which she named ‘The Maria Callas Memorial Yard Sale’.

Swarms of strangers approached, dropped some small change into my cigar box, and reverently bore away my mismatched kneesocks. No one charged me with falsifying my old clothes; everybody already knew that Maria Callas had never set foot in my socks. Together, the patrons of my ‘Maria Callas Memorial Yard Sale’ and I were collaborating in a sort of workshop production of the gay sensibility, whose practice hinges, like the arts, very much on decisively choosing as if over is.

Harris’s final, unfinished and unpublished novel which she drafted sometime around 2000, is titled The Dream Life of Maria Callas. At the beginning of the novel, an unnamed protagonist is living in a London hotel, attempting to write a biography of Callas. But like Flynn’s attempt at memoir in Lover, Callas quickly fades from view, in favour of increasingly dream-like and fragmented accounts of other lives. Here once more is fantasy’s social character. Harris’s life-writing method resembles the collaborative mode of gossip, in which details are refined and embellished as they pass along the grapevine.

Harris’s fantasy-work of misremembering her own life and the lives of those around her recalls a character in Lover who describes the joys of embellishing her memoir:

My life, as plain and tasteless as white bread in its beginning has become richer than fruitcake. Already, I’ve had everything — love, passion, loss, grief, mutilation of the spirit, and sex. These things taste like the candied fruit inside dark cake.

The fruitcake is a particularly evocative image, one that is suggestive of Harris’s investment in narrative pleasure and in the affective structures of memoir — how a life might taste, how its fragments might be held together in a state of functional disorder like the ‘candied fruit inside dark cake’. For Harris, misremembering is collaborative record-keeping. As a method for reconstructing and contextualising Harris’s life and work, it foregrounds the element of fantasy in the work of queer feminist literary recovery, in which the status and identifications of a writer are always provisional — subject to

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41 Bertha Harris, Kate Millett, Vito Russo, Jeff Weinstein, Edmund White.
42 Harris, Lover, p. 20.
43 A copy of this manuscript was given to me by Harris’s daughter, Jennifer Wyland.
44 Harris, Lover, p. 86.
fluctuation and change. Instead of working to establish a single narrative of Harris’s life and her significance to the literature of the WLM, it allows us instead to hold her as a figure to be remembered differently, by different readers at different points in time and space.
Commemoration and Forgetting: Lamartine’s Lost Afterlife

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Abstract. Beginning with Kundera’s declaration ‘The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting’, this article asks why, amongst a rash of anniversaries, Lamartine’s groundbreaking 1820 Méditations poétiques went virtually unremembered, and probes the implications of memory and forgetting for our futures. Finding a first reason in Lamartine’s association with failure, it links that failure with Lamartine’s great, if transient, political success, which gave a template for poètes maudits from Baudelaire onwards — something reflected by Flaubert’s derisory picture of Lamartine’s political and poetic agency in L’Education sentimentale. Spotlighting something Flaubert neglects, it finds oblivion in Lamartine’s genotype, in the earthly transience of the Christian, of little account against celestial transcendence, situating this, like Lamartine himself and subsequently Pierre Nora, in the lieu de mémoire — here, Lamartine’s house at Milly. Noting that Lamartine is seemingly the more forgotten for having more lieux de mémoire, memorial properties, than more remembered contemporaries, it attributes this to their being in private (albeit welcoming) rather than public hands, and to Lamartine’s own introspection and inwardness. Tensions between public and private, poetry and politics, are shown to be present since the beginning of Lamartine’s career, and have recurrently marked his work’s reception ever since. Taking as a litmus test his 1818 drama Saül, it juxtaposes Des Cognets’s 1918 centenary edition with Barrès’s 1914 polemic L’Abdication du poète to give contrasting readings of Lamartine’s drama and politico-poetic world-view: for Barrès, too ready to compromise doctrine for politics; for the more scholarly Des Cognets, revealing poetry-politics conflicts inherent in Lamartine’s make-up and his work. If oblivion is perhaps inevitable fate for those too prominent or controversial in their own time, Lamartine’s latent assimilation as one of the great uncommemorated, and unread, may give us pause, if memory is indeed our chief defence against oppression.
Mon cher, c’est là une histoire qu’il faut aller chercher déjà loin, comme une balle perdue sous des chairs revenues; car l’oubli, c’est comme une chair de choses vivantes qui se reforme par-dessus les événements et qui empêche d’en voir rien, d’en soupçonner rien au bout d’un certain temps, même la place.¹

The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.²

2020–2021 saw a rash of French anniversaries: of the births of Baudelaire and Flaubert (both 1821), of others less remembered (Nadar, Daumier, Champfleury), and above all Napoleon’s death. But the bicentenary of the groundbreaking poetic collection of French Romanticism, Lamartine’s *Méditations poétiques*, went virtually totally uncommemorated.³ Here, one line above all is widely encountered, if not remembered, online, on t-shirts, on postcards and in rap: ‘Un seul être vous manque, et tout est dépeuplé’.⁴ In 1820, the *Méditations* were the greatest poetic sensation of the moment; now Lamartine himself seems almost to have gone missing. Who, or what, do we remember, and why? What are the implications of remembering or forgetting? This article explores how Lamartine has been largely forgotten when some contemporaries have been more substantially remembered, and probes the implications of memory and forgetting for our futures.

A first, paradoxical reason for Lamartine’s relative forgetting might be his association with failure, particularly his failure to consummate Romanticism’s transformation into political power, launched by Victor Hugo’s *Préface de Cromwell* (1827), sunk by Lamartine’s abject rejection as President in 1848, to the advantage first of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte and, ultimately, of Hugo post-1870. It was Lamartine’s failure which was remembered in Baudelaire’s *Bénédiction*, setting a new template for the poet, not as prophet, but outcast,⁵ and in Flaubert’s *L’Éducation sentimentale* (1869), whose anti-heroic Frédéric fails where Balzac’s heroes succeed. Lamartine’s eight mentions in *L’Éducation* ram home his ill-

¹ ‘My dear fellow, that is itself a story you have to go a long way to explain, like a stray bullet under flesh which has covered it; for forgetting is like living flesh which grows over events after a certain length of time, and prevents anything about them being seen or suspected, even where they were’: Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly, *Le Bonheur dans le crime, Les Diaboliques*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Séguin (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967), p. 130.


suitedness to politics, capped by his failure to quell the rioters invading the *Assemblée Nationale* on 15 May 1848. The businessman Dambreuse registers fluctuations of contemporary opinion like a barometer: ‘On ne parlait pas de Lamartine sans qu’il citât ce mot d’un homme du peuple: « Assez de lyre! »’.6 The rioters’ cry — a desire for the material at the expense of the spiritual — perhaps explains why Lamartine’s reputation has been so challenged, both then and now. If *L’Éducation sentimentale* hardly initiates Lamartine’s declining reputation, it certainly reflects a dwindling respect Flaubert had already expressed in 1853: ‘Il faut s’en tenir aux sources, or Lamartine est un robinet’.7 Hugo reaped the benefits of Lamartine’s demise, consecrated by his 1885 state funeral with its million mourners and interment in the Panthéon, in contrast to Lamartine’s modest ceremony in 1869, in Saint-Point (Mâconnais), close to his ancestral home at Milly.

One might think no-one would welcome being remembered for failure — better to be forgotten altogether. But Lamartine’s ultimate paradox is perhaps that forgetting is in his genotype. His baseline assumptions are place, creation, affirmation, the foundations of his career, from birth and youth in Milly, via success at thirty with the 1820 *Médiations*, to mayorship of Belley in 1828, to his subsequent meteoric national, political, almost presidential career. As an aristocrat, his celebration of identity is indissociable from memory and place, nowhere more so than in *La Vigne et la Maison*, commemorating his hereditary estate in a dialogue between his soul and himself.8 Its poignancy derives from a powerful dialectic of presence and absence, remembering and forgetting, driven by oblivion of the earthly in the sure hope of heaven, as its final lines attest:

> Il me semblait qu’une main d’ange  
> De mon berceau prenait un lange  
> Pour m’en faire un sacré linceul!9

*Oubli*, then, virtually shadows Lamartine’s destiny, and for him all our destinies, either to be forgotten by memory, history and contemporaries, or as the earthly death which must inevitably precede salvation and resurrection. Transience is his watchword, encapsulated by the opening of the ninth *Méditation*, entitled, somewhat ironically, *Souvenir*: ‘En vain le jour succède au jour, / Ils glissent sans laisser de trace’.10 But it is only when place, the paternal estate at Milly, is lost, that time and identity themselves disappear: Lamartine

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7 ‘You must keep to the springs, but Lamartine is a tap’: to Louise Colet, Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ed. by Jean Bruneau and others, 5 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1973–2007), II, 432.


10 ‘In vain each day succeeds each day, / Slips by without leaving a trace’: Lamartine, *Méditations poétiques*, p. 52.
had to sell Milly in 1860, bankrupted by generosity, profligacy, and his failed 1848 bid to be President of the Second Republic. Left in permanent penury, he was compelled to exchange seigneurial benevolence and otherworldliness for forced engagement with the bourgeois via relentless self-publication of his works until his death in 1869. As Pierre Nora suggests, loss of the place, of the house, brings loss of memory: witness Lamartine’s unrealistic entreaty to Milly’s new owner to leave its atmosphere unchanged. Whilst writers (like other past figures: artists, musicians, thinkers, leaders) who have houses generally fare better in posterity than those who do not, Lamartine is again an exception, despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that Milly has been in the same hands since his lifetime and is part of a cluster of other properties close by, including his grave at Saint-Point. That those hands are private, rather than of a hagiographic society, appears both to reflect the poet’s own inwardness and to explain his relative neglect — along with Milly’s remoteness from Paris, and despite the present owners’ devotion to the memory and readiness to receive sur rendez-vous. The loss of Lamartine’s place, figurative if not literal, seems almost to perpetuate the bourgeois vindictiveness which refused him a national pension in 1858.

Forgetting is so omnipresent in Lamartine first because it is the lot of the Christian. It is nowhere more completely expressed than in the twenty-sixth of the Harmonies poétiques et religieuses, Milly ou la terre natale, enshrining dichotomies of history and memory, the material and the spiritual, ending, in this extract, with a preference for loss, for the physical ruin of the house as a threnodic memory — a worldly forgetting, but a spiritual transfiguration:

Roulez de la montagne un fragment du rocher;  
Que nul ciseau surtout ne le taille et n’efface  
La mousse des vieux jours qui brunit sa surface  
Et, d’hiver en hiver incrustée à ses flancs,  
Donne en lettre vivante une date à ses ans !  
Point de siècle ou de nom sur cette agreste page !  
Devant l’Éternité tout siècle est du même âge,  
Et Celui dont la voix réveille le trépas


12 ‘Quand il l’a cédée, Alphonse de Lamartine avait demandé au nouvel occupant que lui et ses descendants préservent de génération en génération cette atmosphère romantique, une promesse que la famille a toujours su tenir’ [‘When he ceded the property, Alphonse de Lamartine had asked the new occupant and his descendants to preserve its romantic atmosphere from one generation to the nex, a promise the family has always been able to keep’]: <https://www.archeologie-et-histoire-morestel.fr/event/bourgogne-du-sud-chateau-maison-denfance-de-lamartine-chapelle-des-minimes-tour-a-montmerle-sur-saone/> [accessed 24 August 2022].

13 Voltaire, Stael, Wordsworth, Balzac, Shakespeare, Sand, Flaubert, Zola, Daudet are more securely housed, literally and figuratively, than the ‘homeless’ Gautier or Mérimée.


15 ‘Milly or the birth-land’.
Au défaut d’un vain nom ne nous oublira pas !
Là, sous des cieux connus, sous les collines sombres
Qui couvrirent jadis mon berceau des leurs ombres,
Plus près du sol natal, de l’air et du soleil,
D’un sommeil plus léger j’attendrai le réveil!16

The lieu de mémoire becomes a lieu d’oubli, earthly death the precondition of spiritual transcendence. Oblivion is our destiny: to be forgotten and, like grass and wind in the Bible,17 passed over and known no more.

This first, ‘Biblical’ conception of forgetting is embodied by Lamartine’s drama Saül, written in 1818, presented to, but refused by, the great tragedian Talma, first published in 1861 and never performed in Lamartine’s lifetime. This refusal turned Lamartine inwards, via the initial pieces of the future original edition of the Méditations poétiques. Here was, in miniature, a founding example, at least in Lamartine, of Nora’s distinction between history and memory; of individual memory, whether private or collective, beginning to supersede the objective, public national history — at the very moment when histories were beginning to dominate, in the shape of those by Thiers, Barante and later Michelet, contemporary with the first memoirs by Chateaubriand or Stendhal.18 For Lamartine, who knew his Bible inwardly and intimately, it was a matter of personal memory and faith.

A century later, in 1918, the seasoned Lamartinian Jean des Cognets’s publication of the first (and only) scholarly and centennial edition of Saül both acknowledges the importance of this drama of inheritance and forgetting for the young Lamartine back in 1818, and its significance for the understanding of Lamartine and the themes of inheritance, transmission and forgetting at the end of the Great War. This understanding can be contrasted with the key contemporary alternative position, the reactionary ideologue Barrès’s 1914 polemic L’Abdication du poète. Des Cognets’s Saül and Barrès’s 1914 Abdication effectively bookend conceptions of Lamartine a century ago, marking the outer limits of the Great War. But they also express conflicting conceptions of remembering and forgetting, of the transmission and loss of inheritance and its causes.

On the one hand is Barrès’s indictment of Lamartine for abandoning doctrinal Catholicism, a crime for Barrès in 1914: the poet has fallen prey to democratic

16 ‘Roll from the mountain a part of the rock; / Especially no chisel must cut or erase / The moss of days past which darkens its face / Which, from winter to winter o’erveiling its sides / Gives a living letter, a date to its age! / No year or name on this rural page! / In Eternity’s eyes all are of the same time, / And He whose voice awakens very death / For want of a vain name will us not forget! / There, under known skies, beneath the dark hills / Whose changing shades once shielded my cradle, / Nearer my home soil, its sun and its air, / For a lighter sleep’s rising I shall prepare!’: Milly ou la terre natale, ll. 288–300, Méditations poétiques, p. 278.
17 Psalms 103. 15–16: ‘As for man, his days are as grass (...) For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more’.
pressures, acceding to the will of the people, seeing that will as God’s. For Barrès, Lamartine’s kindness, desire to please, and well-intentioned yet reckless financial nonchalance make him take chances doomed to fail. When calamity comes, Lamartine with equal generosity falls silent, abandoning poetry for ever. Barrès gives Lamartine a deadly legacy, to add to the one the poet made (and lost) for himself. He appropriates the Christian’s hope of redemption and transcendence in oblivion and crumbles it into forgetting and decadent dust, comparing Lamartine first to Moses, then to that most aberrant and outcast Romantic, Nerval’s grand oublié, El desdichado, and to a crumbling tower — having swiftly summoned up and felled the ageless oak, subject and title of one of the most famous Méditations, and symbol of the burnt-out poet himself:

Qu’est-ce donc s’il s’agit d’un prophète, d’un de ces hommes mystérieux qu’a visités l’esprit de Dieu ? On se penche sur la ruine calcinée par le feu du ciel: on espère y surprendre les secrets de l’inspiration. Le vieux Lamartine, c’est Moïse qui redescend des pentes du mont Sinaï, et qui peut-être va nous laisser surprendre sur son front les reflets du buisson ardent. [...] L’âme ancienne demeure dans la tour ruinée. Voilà le drame, voilà ce qui est beau, complexe, déchirant.

Barrès distils transcendent religious oblivion into decadent pleasure, finishing the job by citing Lamartine’s erstwhile secretary, Charles Alexandre, voicing his master’s despair in 1850 after his rejection by the people:

Quand le bronze, écumant dans ton moule d’argile,
Lèguera par ta main mon image fragile
À l’œil indifférent des hommes qui naîtront,
Et que, passant leurs doigts dans ces tempes ridées,
Comme un lit dévasté du torrent des idées,
Pleins de doute, ils diront entre eux: « De qui ce front ? »

It is a poisoned chalice indeed.

On the other hand comes des Cognets’s presentation of Lamartine’s drama, Saül, of the death of the Old Testament king and of his son, Jonathan, unwittingly killed by his son-in-law David. In 1818 this perhaps read as an allegory of the threat to the valetudinarian monarch Louis XVIII, if not from Bonaparte, now exiled, then from the opposite branch and next generation of the royal family (as actually happened not much more than a decade later with

20 'What does it mean to be a poet, one of those mysterious men visited by the spirit of God? You stoop over the ruin burnt out by the fire of heaven: you hope to detect the secrets of inspiration. Lamartine in old age is Moses coming down from Mount Sinai, and who will perhaps allow us to see on his brow the glints of the burning bush. [...] The soul of the past still dwells in the ruined tower. There’s the drama; there’s the beauty: complex and devastating': Barrès, L’Abdication du poète, pp. 18, 28.
21 ‘When the bronze, streaming into your mould of clay / Will by your hand bequeath my fragile likeness / To the indifferent eye of men yet to be born / Who, running their fingers over those furrowed temples, / Like a river bed devastated by torrential ideas, / Doubt-filled, will murmur, and wonder: / Whose was this brow?': Barrès, L’Abdication du poète, p. 39.
Commemoration and Forgetting

the accession of Louis-Philippe d’Orléans in 1830):\textsuperscript{22} an error the play promises to correct in David’s final speech:

\begin{quote}
\textit{en quel deuil mon triomphe est changé!}
Mais nous te pleurerons quand nous t’aurons vengé.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

In 1918 it might still seem to promise as it did (if only implicitly) a century earlier the victory of a young King David (Lamartine) over injustice. Des Cognets’s introduction stresses the young Lamartine’s cynicism yet also ambivalence, ‘tour à tour Saül et David, le roi révolté et le roi soumis’, clearly believing that victory can be won only by force.\textsuperscript{24} But signs of weakness, fallibility and defeat are already visible, suggested by the very choice of Saul as subject, by definition a struggle between young and old,\textsuperscript{25} and of a Staël epigraph attesting Lamartine’s deep intention: to show someone like us struggling with suffering, succumbing, overcoming, in line with the power of fate.\textsuperscript{26} And the preamble confirms the Saul / Lamartine parallel, relating how Saul, first king of Israel, abandoned by God in his old age, driven back into his own land and surrounded by philistines, is saved by the David to whom he has given his daughter but since out of jealousy exiled: ‘Ici commence l’action tragique’.\textsuperscript{27}

One might say as much of Lamartine, in 1818, 1918, or even 2018 and beyond. Saül is a threnody before it begins; being forgotten, an inevitable destiny: Lamartine’s \textit{titre de gloire}, an afterlife almost before life, as des Cognet’s 1918 edition perhaps unwittingly attests.

Des Cognet’s publication (re)asserts Lamartine’s political significance for the twentieth century at another difficult moment of transition, recalling the Restoration a century earlier. His claim to be memory, rather than history, is indicated by the many publications both up to, around and beyond the centenary of the publication of the \textit{Méditations}, many focussing on quite personal, even medical aspects of Lamartine’s experience and entourage and extending at least to Levaillant’s erudite (and still useful) 1930 critical anthology.\textsuperscript{28} Thereafter

\begin{itemize}
\item[] \textsuperscript{22} Although the play had first been conceived a decade earlier.
\item[] \textsuperscript{23} ‘Into what sorrow my triumph is changed! / But you we will grieve, once we you avenge’: \textit{Saül}, ed. by Jean Des Cognets (Paris: Hachette, 1918), Act V, scene 8, p. 126.
\item[] \textsuperscript{24} ‘At once Saül and David, the king in revolt and the king submissive’ (\textit{Saül}, p. ix). Des Cognets highlights the marrying of rationalism and spirituality, politics and religion, seeing in Saül the unbeliever bloodied but unbowed by fate, the believer who surrenders to God’s will, and citing Lamartine’s belief in force, that ‘tout est soumis dans l’univers [...] à une toute-puissante Providence que j’appelle quelquefois fatalité; elle nous perd et elle nous sauve par des moyens que nous ne prévoyons pas parce qu’ils sont au-dessus de notre prévoyance: Saül, pp. viii-xi. [‘Everything in the universe is subordinate to an all-powerful Providence which I sometimes call fate; it loses and saves us by means we cannot foretell because they are beyond our ability to foresee.’] This Lamartinian God looks very like an eighteenth-century, almost Voltairian fate, appropriately prepared for a post-\textit{Grande guerre} Republic.
\item[] \textsuperscript{25} I Samuel 8–31 passim.
\item[] \textsuperscript{26} \textit{Saül}, pp. viii-xi.
\item[] \textsuperscript{27} ‘Here begins the tragic action’: \textit{Saül}, p. 6.
\item[] \textsuperscript{28} Lamartine, \textit{Oeuvres choisies, disposées d’après l’ordre chronologique, avec biographie, notes critiques, grammaticales, historiques et illustrations documentaires}, ed. by Maurice Levaillant, 2nd
Lamartine’s trajectory, and presence, becomes gradually more exclusively *scolaire* and academic (in textbooks and syllabusses), apart from anthologized lines such as that with which we began, largely subsumed, if not superseded by his later nineteenth-century poet-heirs, or by the more politically dominant and acceptable figure of Hugo, present also as a writer of prose.

Lamartine is defined by forgetting, whether cultural amnesia or metaphysical oblivion, and, to reprise Nora’s terms, by an existence as history, which, for Nora, is the function or property of the institution, rather than by memory, which is the function of a community. For what strikes, comparing the anniversaries of his birth in 1890 and 1990, or of the *Méditations* in 1920 or 1921, and the scant commemoration a century later, is a story of rise and fall, political and personal: a story begun in his life and sealed by his death in 1869. The proffered *obsèques nationales* refused, his funeral was modestly attended: some thirty notables, including Dumas fils; some thirty dignitaries, watched by numerous onlookers. ‘L’homme qui avant connu tant d’acclamations populaires s’en allait dans un cortège d’oubliés’, comments Levaillant.29 The first celebrations, from Chasles to Pelletan,30 highlight the dichotomies of memory and forgetting, poetic genius and politician, foreseeing the ‘résurrection’, which, for Paul Desjardins, would come from 1886, when, at the beginnings of Symbolism, Brunet would view Lamartine as the poet of music, a great formal inventor, ‘le plus universellement vrai des grands poètes de ce siècle’, for Morice ‘mieux qu’un poète: la poésie pure’; for Lemaître, in 1896, ‘le moins classique et le plus primitif de nos poètes’.31

In the turbulent early Third Republic, the 1890 celebrations commemorate a presence both literary and political: the poet still counts, but so does the politician (for Lamartine, the true destiny he had been denied) as the embodiment of an authenticity implicit in Lemaître’s ‘primitif’, at present badly lacking.32 A generation later, the flowering of writing on Lamartine around

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29 ‘The man who had known so many popular accolades passed away in a cortège of the forgotten’: Lamartine, *Oeuvres choisies*, p. 1056.
32 See, for example, Adolphe Perraud, *A. de Lamartine, le poète, l’orateur et l’homme public*, le
1920, as France was emerging from the Great War, driven doubtless by the Méditations’ centenary, but also by a wider concern with interiority rising since the turn of the century, and des Cognets’s La Vie intérieure de Lamartine, highlights just how much those of a century ago were still both post-Romantic and the heirs of Symbolism. And perhaps that context of the 1920 centenary, in the immediate aftermath of war, can help explain how this poetry of transience, loss, and vulnerability should have had such appeal. In 2020, with a different pandemic, the personal was still present, but the political totally absent, at least in public. There were no actual events; the date was auréolé, as a century earlier, by a clutch of publications in the run-up and beyond, many focussing on ideological aspects of the writer; but, unlike a century earlier, essentially vested in scholarly journals. The most recent contribution has been, tellingly, Édouard Leduc’s Lamartine ou du rayonnement à l’oubli.

This is the second kind of oubli to which a writer or historical figure can be subjected: not the kind which leads the Christian to transcendence through death, via the indispensable dying of the corn (John 12. 24), explored in the paradoxical dissolution of La Maison de Milly, but the kind which is really oblivion, of the place which the wind passes over and knows no more. It is the fate of all those who have chosen or had thrust upon them greatness or agency in their own time, of those celebrities who, in Greg Jenner’s arresting formulation, ‘function as psychic breeze blocks; they’re part of the sturdy foundations upon which we build our identities’. Those who live by the word die by the word, when the word speaks to contemporaries but not posterity, digested, assimilated, but not remembered, into a certain kind of seemingly now forgotten interiority, letter killed but spirit giving life. And this is what has happened to Lamartine: a pinnacle of inwardness, yet minus the public presence which was always this politician’s ambition, niche-interest of scholars chrétien: discours prononcé, le 21 octobre 1890, à l’occasion du premier centenaire de la naissance de Lamartine, après le service funèbre célébré pour le repos de son âme dans l’église cathédrale de Saint-Vincent de Mâcon (Autun: Dejussieu Père et fils, Imprimeurs de l’Évêche, 1869).


or internet quote-fodder, the opposite of embodiment. Does this matter, or is wider currency not essential to the freedom and multiplicity of perspectives which, through memory, is the chief defence against oppression and forgetting? *Assez de lyre?* Lamartine’s afterlife may yet revive, not as bicentenary, but as a reminder that our naively forgotten travails are far from over.
On Museums, Conflict, and Forgetting: An Immutable Cultural Heritage?

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Abstract. Forgetfulness is not a trait generally associated with museums. In principle, they endeavour to cultivate a direct link with the past by safeguarding the surviving material fragments of our cultural inheritance. However, for every object or narrative that museums preserve, there are many more that they cannot retain. This paper explores the symbiotic relationship of remembering and forgetting within contemporary museological practice. Drawing on the fall of Edward Colston’s statue in Bristol and its subsequent afterlife as a museum object, it considers the pressures on all institutions to forget in a time of marked cultural upheaval. This process is particularly significant for museums concerned with human conflict, a subject whose legacy is often highly contentious. This study draws on the example of the Royal Armouries, the UK’s national museum of arms and armour, to explore the dynamics of forgetting in an institution whose work is inextricably bound up with conflict. It assesses the diverse reasons for forgetting at this institution, including the enduring influence of historical assumptions, the strength of public opinion, legal obligations, and the promotion of inclusivity. These processes are shown to highlight the plurality of forgetting in museums, which requires institutions to adopt a flexible approach to its challenges. Ultimately, this paper addresses a perpetual dilemma faced by museums, but one that has become especially pressing in the current climate of heightened cultural sensitivity: what is acceptable for a museum to forget?

Museums, Cultural Upheaval, and the Challenges of Forgetting

On 7 June 2020, a statue of Edward Colston was toppled and then tossed into Bristol harbour by a crowd of anti-racism protestors. This momentous event ignited an intense national conversation over the nature of his memorialisation, as to whether he should be remembered as a slave trader, a philanthropist, or an uneasy combination of the two.¹ These ongoing debates have highlighted the sensitivities surrounding the transmission of historical memory, a process in which museums play a crucial role. Their involvement in Colston’s ‘afterlife’


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has certainly been noteworthy: first taken into protective custody by Bristol City Council, then temporarily displayed at Bristol’s M Shed museum, and now returned to the latter’s stores for the time being. It has been a complicated journey that has seen this contested figure flit in and out of public awareness, while never being lost from view entirely. A complex interplay between remembering and forgetting has been evident throughout. In an unexpected turn of events, a campaign group named Save Our Statues — proclaiming their opposition to ‘criminal violence’ and ‘mob rule’ — protested the statue’s removal by booking out its exhibition at the M Shed to prevent visitors from observing its disfigured state. Their actions were calculated to criticise its public exhibition in a museum, perceiving it as a tacit endorsement of its unauthorised removal. This episode could be read as an attempt to return to the previous status quo, as if the events of 7 June 2020 had never occurred. Paradoxically, any effort to erase particular aspects of Colston’s complex history (or his statue’s history, for that matter) is unlikely to succeed, for the simple reason that the increased attention serves to embed it more deeply in cultural consciousness. As of September 2022, the statue’s fate remains uncertain, but from the outset there has been considerable support for it to enter a museum collection permanently. If this does transpire, it will be intriguing to observe how this new status influences the conversation surrounding this totemic object. Whatever the statue’s eventual fate, it seems inconceivable that Colston or his contentious legacy will be forgotten any time soon.

This episode foregrounds the fragile tension that exists between remembering and forgetting in the public discourse around cultural identity, and the complex role of museums in mediating this dialogue. According to the definition adopted by the International Council of Museums — recently ratified by an overwhelming majority of its members — these institutions seek to serve the cause of memory, furthering our understanding of past societies through the stewardship and interpretation of their cultural legacy. If we accept this particular conception of the museum’s role, then forgetting surely contradicts their fundamental purpose. Yet, the compulsion to forget still has a profound effect on their operations. One of its numerous manifestations is a consequence of the institution’s materiality. Given the immense profusion of the past, museums are simply unable to safeguard everything for posterity. All

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physical institutions, whatever their size or status, are subject to the practical considerations of space, cost, and manpower, which compel them to be selective in what they preserve. These natural limitations are central to understanding the controversial issue of disposal, a process commonly associated with the spectre of forgetting. The removal of objects from museums can help rationalise their collections and release valuable resources for use elsewhere, but it also risks cultural loss if the new owner does not share their commitment to universal access. Opponents of the controversial 2014 Sekhemka sale — where Northampton Museum sold an ancient Egyptian statue to a private buyer — feared that this invaluable item could permanently disappear from public view. Alienating what is perceived to be communal heritage is basically anathema, certainly in a British context. Therefore, the removal of accessioned objects from museum collections is only deemed acceptable under extremely limited circumstances, lest their significance be forgotten for good.

The peculiar relationship between museums and forgetting is also shaped by external pressures. As the supposed guardians of public memory, museums can become the focus of controversy when their actions are perceived to ‘cancel’ prevailing narratives. In the wake of Colston’s fall, impassioned debates over the interpretive capacity of museums have even elicited Government intervention. All taxpayer-funded museums are now expected to observe the official line of ‘retain and explain’, a stance predicated on the idea that the removal of contested heritage is tantamount to forgetting it and should be avoided at all costs. The veiled threat is that their funding from the Government could be cut if they do not comply. Many voices across the cultural sector have challenged this development, perceiving it as a politically motivated assault on institutional and curatorial independence. The Museums Association, the professional representative of British museums, for example, has openly articulated its disquiet. In October 2020, it published an open letter expressing concern that implementing ‘retain and explain’ would compromise the ability of museums to make ‘carefully considered decisions about contested heritage’.

Interestingly, it was not the substance of the policy but the UK Government’s role as its proposed executor that was the focus of the Museum Association’s objections. Securing relative influence over the enduring legacies of cultural heritage is clearly a priority of both the museum sector and the political establishment.
is the power to determine what is preserved as culturally significant and what is ultimately forgotten. This underlying struggle for mastery raises a series of challenging questions to which there are no easy answers. Who should make key decisions about the alienation of cultural heritage? What is an acceptable level of political involvement in this process? Are there appropriate safeguards to ensure that museums act in the public interest? How should public interest even be defined? As long as there is disagreement over these fundamental matters, the role of forgetting in museums will remain a battleground.

Museums, Memory, and Conflict: The Plurality of Forgetting

The battlefield metaphor is apt, as the tension between remembering and forgetting is especially strong in museums that explore human conflict. Striking an acceptable balance between these two competing claims is a delicate business in such a contested area of historical memory. As the national museum of arms and armour, operating sites in Leeds, London, and Portsmouth, the Royal Armouries (hereafter, the Armouries) is no stranger to this challenge. It is important to note, however, that it approaches the subject from a slightly different perspective than other comparable institutions. It is better characterised as a museum about conflict than a museum of conflict, given that it specialises in the development of armaments from antiquity to the present day. Nevertheless, its engagement with many of the same issues makes it an instructive case study to explore the peculiar relationships between museums, conflict, and forgetting. Firstly, forgetfulness can be furthered inadvertently by institutions, the result of longstanding assumptions or practices. Historically, museums have privileged ‘elite’ experiences of various forms through their collecting and interpretation, leading to alternative narratives being overlooked and even forgotten. \(^{12}\) The historical legacies of conflict, both intellectual and material, exhibit this tendency. It is certainly visible in the gender imbalance that permeates museums of conflict, one that has largely consigned women to the margins. The subject has traditionally been viewed as a male preserve, an assumption that has continued to influence museum engagement with the history of conflict. The Armouries’ Keeper of Firearms, for example, has acknowledged that women are barely represented in its firearms collections or displays. \(^{13}\) This persistent historical assumption therefore still has the power to dictate which narratives are remembered or forgotten in the museum, not least through their accumulated material holdings. There are nevertheless signs that the Armouries is starting to revise its approach in this area. In 2019,

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it purchased a set of female body armour for its collections. This acquisition represents a conscious attempt to reinstate women as full participants in the history of arms and armour, addressing their prior absence from institutional narratives head-on. It reflects a wider move over the last few decades by museums to diversify their narratives of conflict and expand the range of groups featured in their programming. It must be stressed that acquiring individual objects or developing innovative exhibitions are small steps in the laborious process of rehabilitating neglected chapters of the past. Nonetheless, it shows that where there is the will, the means, and an enduring legacy, museums are able to retrieve certain overlooked experiences of conflict from apparent cultural oblivion. They are constantly in dialogue with the concept of forgetting, simultaneously shaping and being shaped by the surviving fragments of historical memory.

Museums are not only beholden to precedent in their approach to forgetting, they have to be just as aware of contemporary concerns. As the example of the UK Government has already shown, the potency of cultural memory prompts the intervention of external parties in its mobilisation. This form of compulsion operates to varying degrees of success in affecting museums’ treatment of conflict. In 2021, the Armouries was criticised by historians affiliated with the History Reclaimed group for undertaking a review into its displays of policing equipment in the wake of Colston’s fall and the wider Black Lives Matter protests. Against this febrile backdrop, the possibility that its staff might revise existing narratives was enough to evoke fears of cultural erasure. The institutional defence against this charge was that the review would seek to provide a more complete history of these collections rather than purposefully forgetting it. In the event, this criticism had a limited impact on the Armouries’ operations, but it does highlight the persuasiveness of the argument that the more contentious aspects of conflict are best left forgotten by museums. This heightened potential for controversy is by no means confined to the Armouries. In 1995, a public outcry forced the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC to cancel and later replace an exhibition of the Enola Gay that emphasised the human suffering the aircraft inflicted when it dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. As an example of an object’s traumatic associations being set aside in favour of a more celebratory narrative, this episode underscores the conflicting legacies that are so often ingrained

15 Barton C. Hacker and Margaret Vining, ‘Military Museums and Social History’, in Does War Belong in Museums? The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions, ed. by Wolfgang Muchitsch (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), pp. 41–60 (pp. 51–52).
in the material remnants of conflict. The pressure on museums to forget the more troubling aspects of these holdings can thus be overwhelming at times. However, the fact that it is still possible to discuss this episode suggests a more complex aftermath. The more ambivalent iteration of the *Enola Gay* exhibition may have been withdrawn under external pressure, yet critical analysis of this polarising incident has ultimately continued. The persistent nature of memory, whether embodied in tangible objects or intangible ideas, can only be overcome through systematic efforts. The challenging legacies of conflict may therefore be silenced temporarily under external duress but are seldom forgotten completely.

It is true that attempts to compel museums of conflict to forget particular details rarely result in total erasure, but there are certain circumstances where this outcome is unavoidable. Given the sensitivities surrounding their collections and wider subject matter, they are often subject to greater statutory obligations than other museums. English weapons law, for example, requires articles passing through law enforcement custody to be stripped of any identifying data before re-entering circulation, leaving museums to understand these decontextualised collections as best as they can. The Armouries has faced this challenge when weapons have entered its collection through police amnesties, most notably following the introduction of stricter firearms legislation in 1988 and 1997.\textsuperscript{18} No details about an amnestied object’s past before its surrender can be passed onto a recipient museum. The Armouries’ online record for a relinquished Luger pistol is typical in its brevity: ‘Transferred to the Royal Armouries via the National Museums Consortium from the Home Office Firearms Compensation Scheme, 1997’.\textsuperscript{19} This object’s biography prior to its renunciation has effectively been obliterated. The legal obligation to protect the identity of a weapon’s donor overrides the professional expectation to record its origins for posterity. The Armouries has to start afresh with these objects, even though any information about their provenance could greatly enrich institutional understanding of them. In this specific instance, the need to forget is seen to take precedence over that of remembering. When forgetting is buttressed by legal force — a common occurrence where the material legacy of conflict is concerned — the Armouries and its peers have little choice but to acquiesce.

If the situation was not already complex enough, there are certain instances where museums themselves mobilise forgetting to serve specific ends. Developing a sensitive portrayal of conflict in particular often relies on the museum omitting some of the more challenging aspects of its history. Exploring the workings of memorial museums, Paul Williams has identified the fundamental difficulty of providing an accurate representation of uncomfortable subjects.
while also accommodating visitor sensitivities.\(^{20}\) This need for compromise does not just apply to memorial museums, but any institution that exhibits collections of a potentially distressing nature. The Armouries’ galleries on war, for example, show little sign of ‘the history of blood, guts, misery, and despair’ intrinsic to combat.\(^{21}\) Instead, its interpretative approach focuses on the material development of weapons over their use, a consequence of its specific designation as a museum of arms and armour. The promotion of its newly unveiled ‘Firefight: The Second World War’ gallery display, for example, emphasises the prominence of the combatants’ weapons and strategies, but makes no mention of the resulting casualties.\(^{22}\) This mode of exhibition is not unique to the Armouries. James Scott has identified ‘sanitised’ presentation as one of the main archetypes of war in museums, characterised by an aesthetic or technological focus that circumvents their problematic origins.\(^{23}\) What is sanitisation if not a way of forgetting difficult aspects of cultural heritage? This is not meant as a criticism, despite the term’s uneasy association with the whitewashing of history. It would surely be much more difficult for the Armouries to fulfil its public role without some form of self-effacement. After all, its institutional policy commits it to making its programming ‘accessible and comprehensible [to] as many people as possible’.\(^{24}\) As this includes children and young people, it would hardly be appropriate for the Armouries to show the graphic consequences of its weapons collections in full. Few would censure this form of exclusion, undertaken to inform society of the influential role of conflict while insulating more vulnerable individuals from its worst excesses. This does raise an important question: on what grounds is it admissible to omit, or indeed forget, controversial aspects of cultural heritage? In practice, it depends on a variety of criteria: the mode of forgetting, the subject discussed, the objects involved, the proposed justification, the institutional mission, the target audience, the cultural landscape, an observer’s convictions, and so on. In short, there is no single answer. When interpreting conflict, museums therefore have to maintain a fine balance between their obligation to recognise the powerful narratives embodied in its material remnants and the need to efface their most traumatic aspects. The challenge lies in finding an acceptable equilibrium.


‘Through their collections, museums sanctify some forms of remembering, yet also endorse forgetting.’25 With this incisive observation, Gaynor Kavanagh pinpoints the contradiction endemic to their very existence. Museums are undoubtedly complicated places, so it follows that their relationship with memory is hardly straightforward. The place of forgetting within these institutions is especially ambiguous, not least because it seems to contradict everything they should represent as foundations dedicated to the preservation of cultural heritage. This article has sought to demonstrate that the reality is more nuanced. Forgetting impacts on the ability of museums to fulfil their functions in complex ways. This is particularly evident in the case of museums associated with the legacy of conflict, like the Armouries in its role as the UK’s national museum of arms and armour. In addition to the forms of forgetfulness experienced by all museums, its more challenging holdings engender a number of distinct modes of forgetting. Firstly, it can be inadvertent, such as the Armouries’ unconscious prioritisation of certain narratives over others as a result of lingering assumptions in the wider study of conflict. Then, there is forgetting as an external imposition, manifested more or less successfully through public criticism and legal obligation. Finally, forgetting can be a purposeful choice, reflected in the omission of ‘blood, guts, misery, and despair’ from the Armouries’ gallery spaces. Few aspects of collections practice in museums escape the consequences of forgetting entirely unscathed. The Armouries’ experience of forgetting also underscores the varied manifestation of this phenomenon in a museum context. This fluidity is rooted in the very meaning — or, more appropriately, meanings — of the word ‘forget’. Forgetting can be construed as both active, a means ‘to remove the traces of conflict, failure and disaster’, and passive, a ‘naturally occurring process which museums disturb’.26 The inherent duality of the term means that it can be applied to a range of otherwise disparate actions and developments. In the case of museums, whose work with material collections is intended to foster remembering, a complex relationship with forgetting is surely the logical counterpoint. However forgetting is conceptualised, contemporary institutions have to come to terms with the powerful influence it exerts on their operations.

It is one thing to acknowledge the impact of forgetting on museum practice, but it is quite another for institutions to embrace its potential. Museums may ‘endorse forgetting’ through their actions, but is it appropriate for them to actively harness it? This is a contentious subject, especially so in the wake of Colston’s fall and increasingly strident calls for museums to tackle issues of

social justice.²⁷ Despite this turbulent backdrop, forgetting will likely play a significant role in their future operations, especially if they intend to thrive in today’s dynamic and interconnected world. The constructive repatriation of objects removed under colonial rule, for example, relies on the mutual acknowledgement of distinct cultural traditions of memory practiced by museums and source communities to underpin the work of reconciliation.²⁸ Sometimes, the best way to proceed is to start afresh. It is paramount, however, that museums approach all instances of forgetting with caution. Given the diversity in the mission, scale, and subject of these institutions, seeking a definitive blueprint for success is essentially futile. Even so, there are certain basic tenets that all museums would be wise to heed. Firstly, there needs to be a clear justification for initiating any process of forgetting. The exclusion of the most distressing aspects of conflict from the Armouries’ public galleries on the grounds of catering to the widest possible audience serves as an instructive example. Forgetting should also be proportional to the proposed outcome. If a museum destroyed a large swathe of its holdings, for instance, it would likely be criticised for dereliction of duty, even if it advanced a compelling reason for doing so. Likewise, any institutional use of forgetting should be thoroughly considered, as an action that is nigh-on impossible to reverse. There have been numerous instances of museum disposal that have resulted in the permanent ‘loss’ of objects whose full significance was only realised long afterwards.²⁹ Finally, any decision to forget should be a collaborative endeavour, acknowledging the current expectation for museums to be inclusive in their decision-making processes. Forgetting in the course of routine institutional operations should occasion wide-ranging internal conversations as a minimum, while more high-profile cases should involve consultation with other museums, representative bodies, and public stakeholders. It is no coincidence that institutions have been censured when their actions have blatantly disregarded professional opinion, as with the Sekhemka statue sale. By observing these general principles in their approach to forgetting, museums should be better equipped to negotiate its many intricacies. Forgetting is ultimately a useful tool in their arsenal, if one that institutions are often reluctant to wield for fear of the possible backlash. When used appropriately it can help museums better respond to the needs of contemporary audiences by reducing the burden of obsolescence. Museums do not have the power to preserve everything. Surely the next best option is allowing them the scope to make informed decisions about what they should seek to remember and what can permissibly be forgotten.

Translating Traumatic Memories: What is forgotten in the English translation of Mercè Rodoreda’s *El carrer de les Camèlies*?

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Abstract. This working paper explores trauma, memory, translation, and loss. The paper discusses the extent to which traumatic events impact memory retelling and the ways in which this can be conveyed in literary fiction, exploring how this also affects the narrative and its portrayal in translation. Through the analysis of extracts from the novel *El carrer de les Camèlies* by Catalan author Mercè Rodoreda (1908–83) and its English translation, the paper considers how the retelling of traumatic memories impacts a text, leading to repetition, fragmentation, and the breakdown of a linear narrative. Rodoreda’s work depicts women as victims of trauma and male violence, often against the background of the Spanish Civil War, with female protagonists who struggle to come to terms with or voice their experiences of trauma. Both personal and collective trauma is apparent within the texts, which are engaged with to varying degrees in translation. The paper will focus firstly on how trauma and its memory affect the literary narrative, considering then how this is conveyed and retold in translation. By drawing on the work of Siobhan Brownlie on memory studies and translation, and Sharon Deane-Cox and Helena Buffery on the role of the translator and the representation of trauma in translation, I consider how the English-language versions of Rodoreda’s work attempt to (re)create or (re)narrate the traumatic memories of the source text, and whether this contributes to a sense of loss.

Siobhan Brownlie’s 2016 work, *Mapping Memory in Translation*, outlines the links between memory and translation, demonstrating how translation can perpetuate memory or, conversely, contribute to the forgetting of texts. Brownlie writes:

> All interlingual translation is a matter of textual memory, since the translation embeds the memory of its source text. Even if a translation can also be conceived as forgetting the source text in the sense of effacing it through the act of replacement or reproducing it selectively, a translation maintains at the same time the role of perpetuating memory of its source text. ¹

The question I will explore in this paper is the extent to which translation leads to the forgetting of the source text, by effacing, altering, and adding to its narratives, or whether the very existence of a translation contributes to the remembering of said text. Forgetting is itself inherent to the process of remembering, as we cannot remember everything, thus the choice to remember something necessitates forgetting something else. This process of remembering is reflected in translation, as the rewriting of the text in another language causes elements of the source text to be forgotten. In particular, I will explore how texts that feature a traumatic narrative, which I will here refer to as traumatic texts, can be remembered in translation, and how the renarration of trauma in translation can lead to the forgetting, or loss, of these memories.

Catalan writer Mercè Rodoreda’s novels frequently feature women protagonists as victims of trauma and of male violence, often against the background of the Spanish Civil War, who struggle to come to terms with and voice their experiences of trauma. This is manifest within the texts through disruptive narrative strategies. Personal and collective trauma is apparent in Rodoreda’s works, which translators then engage with to varying degrees. I will therefore consider how the memory of trauma leads to the breakdown of a linear narrative, turning then to how this is conveyed in translation, and the extent to which such trauma is indeed remembered or forgotten.

Traumatic Texts as Memory Sites

Mercè Rodoreda is the most translated author in Catalan literature. Her most celebrated and well-known novel is *La plaça del Diamant* (1962), which has been translated from Catalan into over thirty languages (including three English translations) and forms part of the Catalan literary canon. Brownlie claims that classic novels can constitute cultural beacons or ‘memory sites’, defined as ‘a phenomenon that has acquired a special memorial status for a particular social group’. In linking this concept to translation, Brownlie proposes that ‘because interlingual translation involves different languages and possibly different cultures and time periods, it will entail transformation, including the proliferation of different interpretations that renew the memory site’. I propose that Rodoreda’s novels constitute memory sites, namely of Catalan society and culture both during and after the Spanish Civil War, whilst also featuring collective female trauma. Buffery notes that *La plaça del Diamant* is now a ‘potent place of memory both of Catalan cultural trauma and of the social alienation and oppression of women in twentieth century Spain’.

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4. Brownlie, p. 76.
5. Brownlie, p. 77.
are several English translations of Rodoreda’s work; the first English translation of *La plaça del Diamant* was carried out by Irish translator Eda O’Shiel in 1967, under the title *The Pigeon Girl*, David Rosenthal then translated this novel, entitled *The Time of the Doves*, which was published in 1986, and the most recent translation is by Peter Bush, *In Diamond Square*, published in 2013.\(^7\) The numerous fruitful studies on *La plaça del Diamant* invite us to consider another of Rodoreda’s popular novels, *El carrer de les Camèlies*, which has also been translated into several languages including English, French, Italian and Chinese.\(^8\) The novel portrays the protagonist, Cecília Ce, as a woman who experiences trauma and abuse throughout her life. Brownlie notes that ‘the kind of memory that leaves its mark the most heavily in an individual is the memory of traumatic events’.\(^9\) It is therefore worthwhile to reflect on how such powerful memories of trauma are narrated in the source text, in comparison to how they are depicted in translation, and how this impacts the reader’s distance from the text. These traumatic memories are thus unavoidably forgotten or replaced when the text, a memory site, is translated.

The question of whether trauma can be successfully translated has been addressed by Bella Brodzki, Sharon Deane-Cox, and Helena Buffery, amongst others.\(^10\) Deane-Cox studies the translation of trauma in relation to Holocaust memory retellings, arguing that ‘the task of the translator as a listener and responder to traumatic narratives has too long been overlooked’.\(^11\) She introduces the concept of the translator as a ‘secondary-witness’ to the trauma, as someone who will necessarily rewrite the trauma that is present in the source text.\(^12\) Buffery has also focused on the translation of ‘cultural trauma’, with specific reference to Rodoreda’s *La plaça del Diamant*, in which she considers what the English translations of the novel ‘can tell us about the shifting functions of the past in contemporary Catalonia’, as they ‘retrace the limits of translatability of cultural trauma’.\(^13\) According to Buffery, there is a constant tension present between translation and ‘the impossibility of translating trauma into language’.\(^14\) It is this ‘impossibility’ of retelling, or remembering trauma, that I would like to further probe, first by focusing on how traumatic experiences may be expressed via a literary narrative, and

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\(^7\) Eda O’Shiel’s translation was published by André Deutsch in 1967, but is no longer in print.

\(^8\) Mercè Rodoreda, *El carrer de les Camèlies*, (Barcelona: Club Editor, 1966).

\(^9\) Brownlie, p. 6.


\(^11\) Deane-Cox, p. 321.

\(^12\) Deane-Cox, ibid.

\(^13\) Buffery, p. 200.

\(^14\) Buffery, p. 215.
then turning to how this is carried out in interlingual translation. In contrast, Brodzki, in her assessment of translation and the survival of cultural memory, offers the view that translating ‘elicits what might otherwise remain recessed or unarticulated’, linking translation ‘to a concept of survival’. Brodzki offers that as all representation of trauma is translated and transformed, this enables the memory to survive: memory is translation, and translation is memory.

I propose that whilst the existence of a translation may indeed perpetuate the memory of the source text, by introducing the work to new audiences across different time periods, the specific case of traumatic texts is different. Traumatic memories, as retold by the female protagonists in Rodoreda’s works, are portrayed through the loss of a linear narrative, introducing fragmentation, repetition, and non-standard language to the text. In translation, however, the impact of trauma in the source text is at times lost; the translator standardizes the language and therefore subdues the impact of trauma. Consequently, the memories of both personal and collective trauma are effaced for an anglophone audience, leading to the replacement, and ultimately the forgetting, of the original narratives.

Tensions in Translating Personal Trauma

Trauma is not easily translated. Buffery explores the depiction of trauma within texts and their translations, specifically in reference to Rodoreda’s novel *La plaça del Diamant*. In this novel, the protagonist, Natàlia, lives in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War, where she experiences extreme poverty and the loss of her husband in the war. Buffery states that ‘in translations we see a tendency to normalize the narrative voice’, as ‘we are faced with the tension between the need to translate and the impossibility of translating trauma into language’; there is thus a shift from the mimetic to the diegetic in the representation of trauma. Rather than the trauma being demonstrated through disruptions within the text, in translation it is explained and narrativized. It is this normalization or standardization of the narrative voice on which I focus on in my analysis.

Antoine Berman outlines the ‘deforming tendencies’ present in literary translation in his classic essay ‘La traduction comme épreuve de l’étranger’, of which the most relevant for my analysis are rationalization and clarification. Berman explains that in translation, ‘rationalization recomposes sentences and the sequence of sentences’, and in doing so, ‘rationalization makes the original pass from concrete to abstract’. This takes place in the translation of traumatic

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15 Brodzki, p. 2; p. 4.
18 Berman, p. 251.
texts, as translation necessitates movement from concrete depictions of trauma to those which are more abstract, impacting how such trauma is received and remembered. The second tendency identified by Berman is ‘clarification’, which he offers ‘is inherent to translation, to the extent that every translation comprises some degree of explicitation’. These tendencies can be observed in the English translations of Rodoreda’s works, and impact how the textual trauma is transmitted and therefore forgotten.

Mercè Rodoreda’s *El carrer de les Camèlies*, originally published in 1966, depicts the trajectory of the life of Cecília Ce. She is abandoned on a doorstep as a baby on the eponymous street — with only a note pinned to her denoting her name — and lives on the margins of society, later forced to rely on abusive men for survival. One crucial scene depicts Cecília living in one such man’s flat, confined day and night, unable to leave. This scene, as with the rest of the novel, is told from Cecília’s point of view through a stream of consciousness. The scene features Cecília hallucinating, experiencing nightmarish visions with flashbacks to sexual abuse. Here it is often difficult for the reader to comprehend whether events have really taken place or if they exist solely in Cecília’s imagination. The extract depicts Cecília self-harming, culminating with the realisation that she is pregnant. The physical body and the trauma enacted upon it is central to the narrative and further links to memory, as her scars leave a visual reminder and trace of her trauma, whilst also being written into the text. As Navajas observes, ‘la única posesión de Cecília es su cuerpo’, and yet despite this, her body is exploited by others, just as the body of the text is also altered and appropriated.

Throughout my analysis of the English translation of this work, entitled *Camellia Street*, by American translator David Rosenthal (originally translated in 1993 and republished by Open Letter in 2008), I explore how Cecília’s trauma is translated. As mentioned above, Deane-Cox describes the translator as a ‘secondary witness [who is] one step removed from the lived experience being recounted, but nevertheless plays an essential and generative role in its telling’. By building on this concept in relation to translating literary fiction, I argue that the translator is therefore actively involved in renarrating the trauma, as the translator will necessarily adapt the text, leading to differences in the depiction of the traumatic memories. As the translator occupies a position in which they have not experienced or written the trauma themselves, the tension between witnessing and narrating these memories is brought to light.

The translator David Rosenthal follows the tendency to normalize the narrative voice in *Camellia Street*; his translation standardizes the language and introduces punctuation which is not present in the source text. Rosenthal

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19 Berman, p. 252.
21 Deane-Cox, p. 312.
states in the introduction that ‘everything is presented from Cecilia’s point of view, in a stream-of-consciousness similar to that in The Time of the Doves’\textsuperscript{22}.

While Rosenthal forewarns the reader of the style of the text, his translation and renarration still includes interventions which render the text easier to follow. For example, in the scene referred to above, Cecilia is in a hallucinatory state, with visions of men coming into her room at night, and she asks Eladi in the morning what has happened. The original Catalan reads: ‘vaig preguntar a l’Eladi plorant què feien amb mi a les nits, què feien amb mi’.\textsuperscript{23} This is translated by Rosenthal as ‘I started crying and asked Eladi what they did to me at night, what did they do?’ The introduction of the question mark here adds a sense of a two-way conversation with Eladi, rather than Cecilia recounting her inner thoughts, whilst the phrase ‘I started crying’, expanded upon from the Catalan ‘plorant’ (crying), and moved to the start of the sentence gives more context to the phrase and creates a logical order to the sentence, which is not the case in the source text.

Similarly, Cecilia recounts voices she hears, and it is unclear if these come from a real person who is present in the room, or if they are a figment of her imagination. For example, the Catalan text reads as ‘has de dormir deia una veu sense parar’, and later in the same sentence, ‘has de dormir deia sense parar una veu’.\textsuperscript{24} Rosenthal adapts this in his translation, rendering these phrases as ‘“you have to sleep”, a voice kept repeating’. The addition of speech marks here creates the feeling that there really is someone talking to Cecilia, removing the ambiguity that is present in the source text, and reducing the sense that Cecilia, in hearing voices which are not there, is hallucinating and experiencing psychosis. Rosenthal’s translation, in adding punctuation and explicating sentences and phrases, at times softens or weakens the effect of the stream of consciousness style in the source text. Rosenthal renarrates the recounting of Cecilia’s personal trauma by standardizing the language, which reduces the uncertainty and eases comprehension for the anglophone reader.

Rosenthal not only follows the rationalization and clarification tendencies observed by Berman, and described by Buffery as ‘strategies of explicitation, standardisation and disambiguation, often considered to be universals of the translation process’, but also introduces slight changes of meaning in his rendering of the text.\textsuperscript{25} After Cecilia self-harms and begins to cut a vein in her wrist, losing consciousness, perhaps signalling a suicide attempt, the Catalan reads as ‘em van fer viure i estava embarassada’.\textsuperscript{26} This is translated by

\textsuperscript{23} Rodoreda, p. 167. ‘I asked Eladi crying what they did with me at night, what they did with me.’ (a gloss translation).
\textsuperscript{24} Rodoreda, p. 167. ‘you have to sleep said a voice without stopping’, ‘you have to sleep said without stopping a voice’ (a gloss translation).
\textsuperscript{25} Buffery, p. 206.
\textsuperscript{26} Rodoreda, p. 168. ‘they made me live and I was pregnant’ (a gloss translation).
Rosenthal as ‘they brought me back to life and I was pregnant’. This difference in meaning, whilst seemingly minor, loses the sense that Cecília is forced — against her will — to live. The English translation, however, gives the sense that Cecília was saved, and that her near death experience was an accident or unintentional tragedy. As such, not only does the translation remove the ambiguity in Cecília’s hallucinatory account, but also alters the meaning of certain phrases, which serves to reduce or remove Cecília’s sense of desperation and hopelessness after the trauma she has experienced. Cecília’s body, as a site of trauma, reflects the body of the text, as her words are adapted, and her original description is effaced. Likewise in the translation, the trauma enacted upon her by others is altered, and the text is ultimately transformed.

Rosenthal’s translation also seems to confirm some of Lawrence Venuti’s arguments about the norms of the literary translation market: Venuti argues that ‘a translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers, and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent’. Whilst this may account for the justification or reasoning behind such translation decisions, the effect this has on the translated text should also be further explored, in particular in relation to the depiction of trauma and its memory. To return to Buffery’s statement, this extract demonstrates an ‘impossibility’ in translating trauma, revealing the tension between what is ‘forgotten’ or ‘remembered’ in translation, as the strategies of normalizing the style of the text conceal the subjective nature of the process of remembering. In rendering the English text easier to comprehend and follow, Rosenthal makes the trauma present in the Catalan text more palatable: firstly, by making the text itself less ‘traumatic’, or difficult to read and navigate, and also by removing the hallucinatory and delusionary nature of the text. The personal narrative of trauma in the source text is renarrated, the sense of Cecília’s desperation is forgotten to a degree, and the impact of the literary trauma on an Anglophone reader is lessened.

**Representative Trauma in Rodoreda’s work**

The analysis above focused on the effects of trauma on the individual body of Cecília; at this point it is necessary to reflect on the collective or representative trauma depicted through her character and what this represents regarding memory and loss. As outlined above, the English translation renarrates the traumatic source text to varying degrees, as these memories of trauma are left in the Catalan and thus forgotten in translation, replaced with new memories for a new audience. The character of Cecília has been read by many as a representative figure, embodying larger marginalised groups, including the

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precarious status of many women in twentieth-century Spain, as well as the position of Catalonia as a nation. Navajas claims that ‘Cataluña se enfrenta a su situación insegura con actitudes y procedimientos similares a los de la narradora de El carrer de les Camèlies’, constructing a parallel between the individual and the nation.28 In addition, Ernst observes that ‘although the novel focuses upon Cecilia’s subjectivity, Cecilia’s vision, it does not grant her freedom from the confines of the patriarchal power system’.29 Both of these readings perceive the character of Cecilia as being representative of an oppressed group, as one who is often powerless and vulnerable to the actions of others.

The powerlessness of Cecilia and the fact that her life is controlled by the men she meets is further exemplified in this scene with Eladi, as she recounts ‘va fer amb mi el que li va semblar’, translated as ‘he did what he wanted with me’.30 Whilst the rest of the scene, as discussed above, relates the sexual abuse to which Cecilia is subjected, this phrase epitomizes the extent to which she is controlled by external forces and the men in the novel. Cecilia describes how disorienting and confusing the trauma and its effects were, as she recalls ‘però això que sembla tan clar quan em va passar sembla tèrbol i com més clar ho volia veure més tèrbol se’m feia’.31 Rosenthal renders this as ‘what sounds so clear seemed so blurry when it happened and the clearer I tried to see it the blurrier it got’, maintaining the stream of consciousness present in the Catalan.32 This phrase both reflects Cecilia’s attempts to voice her trauma despite it being repressed by her subconscious, and underlines the tensions present in translating traumatic literature. This struggle between clarity and blurriness reflects Berman’s argument that the clarification tendencies which occur in translation transform the text from concrete to abstract. In Rosenthal’s reformulation of the text, memories of trauma are altered and adapted between source and target text; the translation attempts to make the text clearer, yet ultimately the memories remain unclear and vague.

Translation as Memory, or a Means of Forgetting?

To return to the question posed at the beginning of the paper, I conclude with some thoughts on whether the very existence of a translation can contribute to the perpetuation of the memory of the source text, or whether the inevitable renarration of the text, specifically one depicting trauma, makes it more vulnerable to being forgotten. Brodzki posits that a translation ‘enabl[es] the source text to live beyond itself’ and is a ‘testimony to the power and persistence of cultural memory’, yet I consider that, as in the examples demonstrated, the act

28 Navajas, p. 852. ‘Catalonia faces its insecure situation with attitudes and methods similar to those of the narrator of El carrer de les Camèlies’ (my translation).
30 Rodoreda, p. 165; Rosenthal, p. 112.
31 Rodoreda, p. 165.
32 Rosenthal, p. 112.
of translating trauma in fact contributes to its forgetting. As Deane-Cox labels the translator a ‘secondary witness’, the translator will indeed be secondary to, or removed from, the original traumatic narratives. A translator may then only attempt to retell the trauma, and furthermore ‘the risk of appropriation is compounded’ as they have not experienced the events themselves. In the case of literary fiction and the translation of traumatic texts, I propose that the translators are in this instance secondary narrators, as they are renarrating Rodoreda’s fictional narratives, thus they are even further removed from the trauma depicted in the text, as to witness and to narrate do not connote the same level of proximity.

There is, therefore, an inevitable or unavoidable tension between the act of translation as an attempt to memorialize and conserve the memory of the source text, and the rewriting of the text as contributing to the effacement and erasure of the original narratives. I reach the conclusion that, specifically in the case of trauma (both personal and collective), translation necessarily leads to the forgetting or a re-remembering of events, as the traumatic memories are renarrated and transformed. This is due to the translator’s attempts to make sense of the source text for a new audience, to standardize the language and reformulate the depictions of trauma. Whilst this strategy may help the reader to understand the narrative, it also necessarily leads to an inability to experience the original depictions or memories of trauma, as the text shifts from the mimetic to the diegetic. While Rodoreda’s novels depict female physical and psychological trauma, often through confusing, hallucinatory narratives, the English translations restructure and reconfigure them. Despite the translations’ attempt to keep the traumatic memories alive, this is a process that inevitably leads to their forgetting and loss.

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33 Brodzki, p. 6.
34 Deane-Cox, p. 312.
Dwelling with Traumatic Memory through Embodied Drawing in the Structure of Graphic Novels

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Abstract. Autobiographical graphic novels dealing with personal trauma have gained widespread popularity and critical recognition over the past ten years. The depiction of traumatic memory in graphic narrative has been characterized by writers such as Harriet Earle in terms of recurrence and non-integration. In this paper I will examine the difficulties of representing memories that occupy a space between forgetting and re-experience, and how these difficulties have led graphic novelists to foreground the materiality of the comics form and rethink elements of its formal structure. I will consider the representation of traumatic memory in two graphic novels, Lighter than my Shadow by Katie Green (2013), and Becoming Unbecoming by Una (2015), which tell stories of recovery from trauma related to eating disorders and sexual abuse. I will examine such representations through a discussion of the materials and processes used in the production of these works and argue that these works utilize a convergence of haptic visuality and embodied drawing to appeal to the reader’s embodied experience of memory through indexicality. Through a discussion of braided visual relationships, grounded in theory developed by Thierry Groensteen, I will argue that haptic forms of mark-making, which include soaking, scribbling, and folding, generate recurring networks of haptically charged engagement, allowing the reader to dwell with the trauma of the protagonist in spaces outside of the temporal logic of the main narrative. The central argument of this paper is that such networks are structurally embedded in the narrative of these works and constitute an overlooked modality through which unintegrated and unspeakable elements of traumatic experience can be expressed.

The rise in popularity of the graphic novel has coincided with an interest in the representation of personal and autobiographical histories in alternative cartooning. With the canonization of such works as Fun Home by Alison Bechdel, the swiftly developing field of the academic study of graphic novels has produced new theories regarding the representation of subjective memory in graphic narrative. It has been argued by such scholars as Hillary Chute, Jared Gardner, and Eszter Szép that narrative drawings are able to access unique
registers in the representation of autobiography. The reasoning for this is that each mark of a drawing is an index of the artist/author’s body, and that a claim to authorial subjectivity is therefore encoded in each mark. Nina Mickwitz argues that non-fiction comics mediated through the first-person perspective represent a specific ‘mode of address’ in which the reader is positioned in relation to drawings made by the body of a witnessing ‘autographer’.

For all that has been achieved in establishing the importance of the drawing body in autobiographical comics, very little has been said about the role of the materials that these drawing bodies manipulate. Many comics scholars refer to ‘the line’ in drawing as if its material composition were self-evident, but comics creators use a wide variety of different methods to produce images, and, as Henri Focillon argues, ‘the substances of art are not interchangeable’. The aim of this paper is to establish that the materials and processes involved in the production of the graphic novels *Becoming Unbecoming* by Una, and *Lighter than my Shadow* by Katie Green contribute significantly to the meaning of these works. I will argue that the materials and processes used in the representation of traumatic memory, an experience characterized by non-integration, forgetting, and recurrence, are key to understanding the narratological structure of these works. With reference to the work of Szép and her development of Rosalyn Diprose’s concept of ‘dwelling’, I will demonstrate that the haptic surfaces of these graphic novels can generate metaphorical spaces in which the reader can ‘dwell with’ the author’s subjective experience of trauma, and that the repetition of such surfaces can produce a specific type of relationship that has not yet been recognized by comics scholarship.

In order to make this argument, I must briefly detour into some theory regarding the representation of memory through the static images that comprise a comic. Most comics are made up of panels containing images and

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2 In this essay I will use the term ‘comics’ to refer to the medium of sequential art, a category which includes graphic novels. I will use the term ‘graphic novel’ when referring to a work that identifies itself in this way, or to a tendency or approach which is more typical of graphic novels than of comics in general. There has been much debate over the last forty years as to what differentiates the two terms, the only consensus that has emerged being that graphic novels are generally more ‘serious’ in content, generally longer in length, and make use of higher levels of production techniques leading to a higher retail price. As Roger Sabin notes, rather than being a separate genre, the graphic novel can be defined most clearly as a marketing term. (Roger Sabin, *Adult Comics: An Introduction*, New Accents (London; New York: Routledge, 1993.)


words which sit beside one another on the page. These panels have an implicit relationship to one another, the suggestion being that these enclosed images exist in a temporal relationship. The information contained within the panel borders framing these images is a snapshot, and it is the task of the reader to imaginatively ‘fill in’ the gaps between one panel and another.\(^5\)

When a comic’s narrative continues across several pages, a new relationship between panels emerges. This is called ‘braiding’, a term coined by comics theorist Thierry Groensteen to account for the relationship between networks of panels or images at a distance.\(^7\) The reader makes connections between similar images at different points in the comic as a whole, and not just between the panels immediately following or preceding the one they are reading. A classic example of braiding is found in the graphic novel *Watchmen*, where the image of the smiley badge appears in the first and final panels of the book and recurs throughout, forming a network with other circular motifs.\(^8\) The term is somewhat contested: Groensteen has resisted the expansion of his concept by other scholars and maintained an insistence on braiding’s arbitrary nature. He maintains that it is ‘a supplementary, contingent procedure, which is never necessary to the structuring and intelligibility of the narrative — at least at the first level of meaning that is perfectly satisfactory in itself’.\(^9\)

Nonetheless, an example of a graphic novel in which braiding is essential to the intelligibility of the narrative is provided by Richard McGuire, whose graphic novel *Here* relies on the reader to navigate a complex network of spatial and temporal relationships.\(^10\) The action of *Here* takes place in a single room. Through the device of the panel, different temporal spaces open up simultaneously within the room, revealing images and narratives that reach far into the past or future.\(^11\) Fragments of these narratives include panels showing prehistoric landscapes and an underwater future. As the graphic novel progresses, other recurring narratives emerge involving the history of the family who occupy the room. These networks rely on the reader recognizing braided relationships between panels or sequences of narrative on distant pages and connecting temporal strands presented in the space of the room through their own memory of reading the text. Groensteen has dismissed such examples as being atypical or experimental. However, I would argue that since the model of braiding was first proposed, a growing tendency has emerged in graphic novels to use such networks as an intrinsic, structuring element of their narratives, and that a revision of braiding, or a formulation of a new term to account for such examples, is necessary.

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\(^7\) Thierry Groensteen and Ann Miller, *Comics and Narration* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013).


One example of this tendency is Una’s *Becoming Unbecoming*. This graphic novel relates the author’s experiences of male violence against the backdrop of seventies Yorkshire, in a community gripped by the unfolding events of the Yorkshire Ripper case. The attitudes of society laid bare by the botched police investigation contribute to and prevent recovery from the trauma represented in the book.

Olga Michael has studied these recurring images in *Becoming Unbecoming* and identifies several braided elements relating to the representation of recurring traumatic memory. One example is the image of Una’s avatar climbing over a mountain, dragging an empty speech balloon behind her. Michael writes that ‘this motif reappears frequently throughout the book to illustrate the weight of the unspeakable secret and the psychological burden it causes her’.\(^{12}\) Michael identifies networked images in a braided relationship based solely on image content and the similarity between what these images depict. While this approach is successful in supporting Michael’s argument, it overlooks another type of recurrence present in this book, wherein images are connected in a braided network through specific types of haptic surface.

The majority of the pages that comprise *Becoming Unbecoming* are informational in their nature. They are text heavy, and utilize visual devices from infographics, such as diagrams which help the reader to visualize and digest the information Una is relating. These pages form a stark contrast with other, largely wordless pages, with backgrounds rendered in a diffused ink wash. These types of marks form regular intervals in which informational tone of the narrative drops away, and the reader enters a quieter space wherein Una’s avatar can reflect on her traumatic memories.

Compare the two images shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2. According to Michael’s analysis, and following Groensteen’s definition of braiding, the second image (which appears forty-eight pages after the first) can be said to have a braided relationship to the first image, as both depict Una dragging or carrying a speech balloon. But what of the ink wash that appears behind Una’s avatar in the second image? I would argue that this wash forms a braided relationship with nineteen other pages that appear at various places in the book which employ the same washy brushwork. This includes the page shown in Figure 3, in which no representational image is apparent, but for a single horizontal ink brush stroke which bleeds into the paper, seeming to signify an opening or wound forming on the surface. Such images do not merely suggest a connection with each other based on memory, but through the haptic surfaces they present, suggest metaphors related to fluidity, diffusion, and drowning. Understood as a braided network, these passages signal an alternative narratological space where Una’s subjectivity is expressed metaphorically through tactility and


Figs. 3 & 4. Una, *Becoming Unbecoming* (Myriad Editions, 2015)
an imaginative engagement with haptic surface. These surfaces are not just an index of the author/artist’s body, but also an index of a material process involving the water, ink, and paper which produced them.

Consider this image of Una’s avatar sinking into the ground (Figure 4) which Michael describes as follows: ‘Una’s sleeping or dead-like representation visually embodies her inability to escape from sexual trauma... The surface on which she is lying dominates the page and her figure almost blends into darkness, illustrating her inability to detach herself from it’. One can sense in Michael’s use of words such as ‘surface’, ‘blends’, and ‘inability to detach’, responses to the materiality of the image, but she stops short of analysing the meaning of this ink wash or connecting it with the presence of ink wash on other pages. Consider, also, Henri Micheaux’s description of the loss of control he experiences when using watercolours in his 1963 work ‘Untitled Passages’:

This letting go that becomes ever more pronounced and leaves me feeling ever more helpless... making an absurd muddle of my lines that were clearly marked out to begin with, that swim away on all sides, carrying off my subject towards a blur that increasingly dilates, or changes tack, (a) surface of dissolution.

The intentional gesture of Micheaux and his control over the expression of his subjective trace is thwarted by the agency of his materials. He experiences a dissolution of the self, a blurring of the subject on all sides. For Micheaux, materials themselves represent a theatre of conflict between his will and the seemingly counteractive will of his materials, in which the memory of his past is active. He writes:

Panic, then, on seeing the paper soak up too quickly, or the blob turn me away from my purpose, that panic is almost immediately echoed in me by a thousand other moments of panic, called up from my not too happy past.

This description of the experience of producing an ink wash suggests a psychological catalyst to the reexperience of the author’s half-forgotten past and provides a succinct summary of some of the metaphors I believe are at play in Una’s image, where her connection to selfhood and agency is dissolved by her reflection on trauma. This metaphor is recurring and is present each time the ink wash is deployed. This forms a braided relationship to a network of similar material-based metaphors, which can be identified through Elisabeth El Refaie’s term ‘indexical metaphor’ defined as ‘higher order features of style that point to the creative process and/or the modes of production involved,

13 Michael, p. 401.
15 In Zegher, p. 195.
which in turn evokes metaphorical meanings.\textsuperscript{16} El Refaie’s work, alongside that of scholars such as John Miers, highlight the fiendish complexity of analysing visual metaphor.\textsuperscript{17} El Refaie’s approach is fruitful in identifying dozens of visual metaphors active in the panels of comics and in articulating them as propositions. However, I believe this approach does not offer a full account of the metaphors arising from materiality discussed here. While El Refaie recognizes that ‘one of the defining characteristics of alternative comics is that they typically include at least some self-reflexive engagement with the tools, materials, and processes of their own creation’,\textsuperscript{18} and that consequently such narratives ‘are able to exploit the metaphorical meaning potentials of both diegetic space and of the physical space of the page/book’,\textsuperscript{19} I would question the term’s utility in offering a complete account of what such tools, materials and processes are and what they might mean. Indexical metaphor gives us a useful definition to work from but requires expansion. It is the final category in El Refaie’s system; it is the one she does least to clarify, and the examples she offers are few.

I believe that rather than indicating the obscurity of indexical metaphor in comics, this gap in its theorization highlights the limitations of applying models of analysis based on the propositional nature of language to haptic imagery. Put simply, the metaphorical meanings of narrative drawings are ascribed to what such drawings represent as can be expressed through language, but our understanding would benefit from a consideration, largely absent from comics scholarship, of what such drawings are made of and how they are felt by the body. Alternative models of understanding metaphor through embodiment may here be more appropriate. Mark Johnson, for example, proposes a model of understanding metaphorical meaning based on embodied feeling and experience.\textsuperscript{20} This seems the correct approach when analysing metaphors arising from the experience of interpreting haptic surfaces visually. I would argue that such an analysis in comics would require a revision of the terms by which indexical metaphors are understood based on an embodied understanding of the materiality of surface. This clarification would in turn suggest a revision of the terms by which braiding is recognized to accommodate recurring indexical metaphor.

A further example of the foregrounding of a comic’s materiality in the representation of traumatic memory is provided by Katie Green’s \textit{Lighter than my Shadow}. As I will argue, this graphic novel employs haptic elements to alter the dynamic between reading and drawing bodies through engagement with

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} El Refaie, p. 78.
\item \textsuperscript{19} El Refaie, p. 78.
\end{itemize}
the inter-constitutive touching point of surface. The book relates the author’s struggles with, and slow recovery from an eating disorder. The artwork is back-grounded, and occasionally interrupted by, the ominous presence of what Green calls ‘the scribble’ (Figure 5). This amorphous cloud of marks is constantly present in the book, and at times when Katie is at the mercy of the disorder, overwhelms the narrative space of the comic. The panel borders and background are over-run by ‘the scribble’, producing a space outside the main narrative where Green is able to present distorted and highly morphological representations of the authorial body. These include a sequence where Katie’s stomach becomes a mouth which consumes large amounts of food; in another, Katie’s body appears to be dissolving. Much in the same way that the ink wash background works as a space of reflection in Becoming Unbecoming, these sequences are presented upon the ground of the scribble, offering a space of metaphor where traumatic experience can be represented in silence.

The densely drawn space of the scribble, which present the marks of the artist’s body in a compressed and laborious way, produce a space which Eszter Szép calls ‘dwelling’. Szép is one of the few comics scholars who addresses the act of drawing in a way that is attentive to the materials involved. In Comics and the Body, Szép suggests that highly worked haptic spaces affect the temporal reading of a comic, slowing down the reading process and emphasising surface as a ‘site of dynamic engagement’ that represents both place and process. Dwelling is a concept borrowed from Rosalyn Diprose, which Szép uses to argue that certain collections of marks invite the reader to ‘dwell with’ the author of the trace in certain locations on the surface of a page. It offers a connection between the bodies of artist and reader that is defined by separation: ‘it is the separation of bodies in communion that maintains the event of dwelling.’

The application of Diprose’s term is compelling. Szép foregrounds the density of the creator’s trace through a discussion of the highly crosshatched work of Joe Sacco, arguing that his haptic surfaces ‘offer immersion and invite the reader to exit from the temporality of action and dwell with both the represented subject and the artist’. Szép does not give an account of networks of such haptic surfaces and the effect they have on narrative, but it seems reasonable to propose that passages that slow down the reading of a comic must produce a structural change in the way a text is read. In both of the graphic novels I have discussed, haptic surfaces appear in passages that deal with the impact of traumatic experience in a way that offers a recurring invitation to the reader to dwell with the author’s subjectivity. This recurring invitation comprises a structural element of these works that has been largely overlooked.

In order to further understand how material elements communicate meaning

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21 Szép, pp. 123–34.
22 Szép, p. 130.
23 Drichel and Diprose, p. 198.
24 Szép, p. 124.
to the reader, it will be necessary to consider haptic surfaces more deeply. *Lighter than my Shadow* offers an opportunity to do so, if we examine the paper support upon which the comic is drawn. To represent the panel borders of the narrative, Green has chosen to use folds or creases in the paper support of the comic. This intervention on the physical material of representation puts the reader in a unique embodied relationship with the page’s surface. The creases suggest something folded that has remained secret, coming to light only through an action of unfolding, but threatening at any moment to collapse back, beyond the perception of the reader.

Both the creases in Green’s *Lighter than my Shadow*, and the inky, haptically charged surfaces in Una’s *Becoming Unbecoming* make an appeal to what Laura U. Marks calls haptic visuality. In describing the mechanism of haptic visuality, Marks describes a process where the eye becomes an organ of touch: ‘the viewer has to work to constitute the image, to bring it forth from latency. Thus, the
act of viewing [...] is one in which both I and the object of my vision constitute each other.25

Film theorist Tarja Laine similarly describes a process of affect where the spectator of the film ‘reaches out and opens up to touch, touches the screen in order to be touched back’.26 This ‘touching eye’ is an openness waiting to touch and to be touched. For Laine this invitation to touch, and openness to the reciprocating touch of the spectator, is what separates classical from post-classical cinema. It replaces identification with ‘being with’, a strategy of engagement with the trace of the body that is inter-constitutive and operates through the touch of imaginative embodiment.

Of course, reading a book is different from watching a film in that it includes

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an element of actual, as well as imaginative, touch in the performance of reading. This sense of touch is usually left far in the background of the sensory awareness of the reader and is automatic enough to barely merit consideration. However, the touching of these haptic surfaces and the fact that the thumb does not encounter wetness in the case of Becoming Unbecoming, nor the raised surface of actual creases in Lighter than my Shadow, refocuses our attention on touch, albeit in a way that reveals the deceptive nature of the image we are encountering.

This potential for confusing the embodied response of the reading subject, so habituated to the privileging of the visual in western thought and art, represents further possibilities for haptic visuality to generate meaning through embodied response to the comic’s surface. In the following quote, Szép describes reading a page of Miriam Katin’s graphic novel We Are On Our Own, during which she finds herself responding to marks drawn onto the comic’s surface with soft black pencil:

Though it is part of a printed book, touching the page or tracing any of its lines carries a sense of risk; the risk of making one’s hands dirty by touching the intense black lines, and the risk of causing damage to this intensely woven surface.  

The body of the reader is thus confused by the mimetic surface of representation. A similar mechanism is at play in the aforementioned panel borders in Lighter than my Shadow. These creases offer no dent in the paper surface to the touching hand. If the reader attempts through an effort of haptic visuality to imaginatively refold the surface, they will encounter an impossibility, since no paper could ever be folded or unfolded in such a way. The surface of the page, upon which so many tense domestic scenes ‘unfold’, reveals itself to be a strange and uncanny puzzle (Figure 6).

Consider Jill Bennett’s description of the ‘squirm’ response to images in horror films: Bennett argues that the viewer squirms in order to feel their own body, fulfilling a need arising from the lack of touch relationship either to the surface of the cinematic projection or to the subjects depicted. She describes this as ‘a moment of regrouping’ where the viewer feels the image and at the same time maintains a distance from it, a recoil that allows us to incorporate the image’s impact while maintaining our own subjectivity:

Although the squirm is a recoil, a moment of regrouping the self, it is also the condition of continued participation... The squirm lets us feel the image, but also maintain a tension between self and image.

These accounts offer evidence of visceral embodied responses to haptically charged surfaces. They suggest that the materiality of drawing can be felt by the

27 Szép, p. 142.
body through the eye as touching organ, and that the inter-constitutive space of haptic visuality offers alternative spaces of reading.

In this paper I have called for a recognition of drawing’s materiality as part of the experience of its meaning both metaphorically and inter-constitutively. My contention is that such drawings should be understood in an embodied way, attentive to how they are felt by the body, and that networks grounded in embodied response to materiality should be recognized as an essential component of the narrative framework of the graphic novels I have discussed. This will require a focus on both materiality and the body in comics scholarship, as well as a revision of how we understand structure in comic’s braided relationships. Such a shift is essential to an analysis of the representation of non-integrated memory in the two trauma narratives I have discussed, and new terms of analysis will become increasingly necessary as comics continue to experiment with self-reflexive and metaphorical approaches to the materials involved in their production.