

Acts of Memory

Acts of Memory:
The Victorians and Beyond

Edited by

Ryan Barnett and Serena Trowbridge

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P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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Cover Design and Image © Louise Barr, 2010

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-2567-0, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2567-2

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INTRODUCTION

REMEMBERING AND MOURNING THE VICTORIAN ARCHIVE

RYAN BARNETT AND SERENA TROWBRIDGE

[A]n act of memory, the desire to identify
with the past, is always a work of mourning.¹

Victorian Memory

“What is memory?” asks Forbes Benignus Winslow in his 1860 study *On Obscure Diseases of the Brain and Disorders of the Mind* (Taylor and Shuttleworth 1998, 145). Winslow’s question—the question of memory (what it is, how it works, why it fails)—haunted nineteenth century thinkers and can be said to dominate the inquiry into the discourse of memory which took place throughout the period. In his essay “Memory” (published in 1894 but written in 1857), Ralph Waldo Emerson declares that “[m]emory is a primary and fundamental faculty, without which none other can work” and one that also “performs the impossible for man by the strength of his divine arms” (Emerson 1977, 271). Yet, Emerson adds, how this “primary and fundamental faculty” functions is beyond the realms of current knowledge. “We can tell much about it, but you must not ask us what it is”, Emerson writes of the faculty of memory, because “never any man was so sharp-sighted” to discover its workings (Ibid., 273). But while the processes enabling one to remember remained “involuntary and secret”—in the words of Eneas Sweetland Dallas, in his 1866 text *The Gay Science*—this did not prevent nineteenth century thinkers (including Emerson and Dallas) from delving into the workings of the mind in an attempt to discover the essence of memory (Taylor and Shuttleworth 1998, 150). Despite various studies striving to unravel the

¹ Dooley and Kavanagh 2007, 7-8.

mysteries of memory, many questions remained unanswered as the century drew near its close. Some of these unresolved queries are provided in William James's *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). "[T]ake the case of memory", James states, "no reason is given why we should remember a fact as it happened, except that so to remember it constitutes the essence of our recollective power":

why should this absolute God-given faculty retain so much better the events of yesterday than those of last year, and, best of all, those of an hour ago? Why, again, in old age should its grasp of childhood's events seem firmest? Why should illness and exhaustion enfeeble it? Why should repeating an experience strengthen our recollection of it? Why should drugs, fevers, asphyxia and excitement resuscitate things long since forgotten? (James 1995, 120).

Memory, James continues, "*does not exist absolutely, but works under conditions*; and *the quest of the conditions* becomes the psychologists most interesting task" (Ibid., 121, original emphasis). Writing five years later, Sigmund Freud concurs with James, arguing that "[a] psychological theory deserving any consideration must furnish an explanation of 'memory'" (Freud 1966, 299).² Freud may not have "explained" the workings of memory, but, with his pioneering discovery of the Unconscious, his formulation of Repression, and his concept of "Screen Memories" he, perhaps more than any other thinker, has done most to illuminate our understanding of the complex and multitudinous ways in which it shapes subjectivity.

Like philosophers and psychologists of the period, novelists and poets in the nineteenth century were fascinated by the faculty of memory.³ As various critics have noted, acts of memory provide the focal point in numerous Victorian literary texts; be it in the form of remembrance,

² We would like to thank Geoffrey Bennington for helping us to locate this reference.

³ As Sally Shuttleworth explains, it is anachronistic to make too sharp a distinction between the fields of literature and psychology in the Victorian era: "Literary and medical texts played a crucial role in mid-nineteenth-century society, offering an arena where cultural meanings could be negotiated, and anxieties expressed and explored. In the constant cycle of textual exchange, social images were endorsed and modified, strengthened by repetition, and subtly transformed to suggest new meanings. Psychiatry was just beginning to emerge as a science, but had not yet covered over its links with literature, or obscured its ideological assumptions under a cloak of specialized language"; see Shuttleworth 1996, 12-13.

nostalgia, amnesia, or mourning.⁴ One immediately recalls the eponymous narrator of *David Copperfield* (1849-50) who remarks that his text is his “written memory” (Dickens 1999, 671); *In Memoriam* (1850), a poem in which Tennyson mourns the memory of Arthur Hallam; and Franklin Blake’s opium-induced amnesia that drives the plot of Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1868). For the Victorians, it seems, the act of memory was indissociable from the art of literature. The rich and diverse exploration of memory within (and at times beyond) the Victorian era provides the cornerstone for this collection of essays which discuss well-known literary figures, texts, and movements—as well as some less well-known—alongside key theoretical, psychological, and philosophical works.

The nine essays which make up this collection offer a variety of perspectives on nineteenth-century works which interact with memory in very different ways and with divergent effects. In the first essay, “Sentimental Journey: Memory and Repetition in Narratives of Return”, Anna Jörngården offers a perspective on the work of a Swedish author of the fin de siècle, Ola Hansson, whose work is perhaps less well-known outside his homeland, but whose work, as Jörngården demonstrates, is pertinent to the study of nineteenth-century literature, particularly in the field of memory. In Hansson’s work, acts of memory are figured as a return or a homecoming, featuring in the narrative as a repetition. To return, whether physically or metaphorically, is always a repetition, yet, as Derrida emphasizes, is also a first time: “Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time* makes of it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time” (Derrida 1994, 10, original emphasis). A return thus also symbolizes a duality, which Jörngården explores in her essay. Memory, in Hansson’s work, is related to home, to the past, possibly childhood, and to a sense of belonging when away from home, which can never be entirely resolved even through return. As Jörngården explains: “For Hansson, the past can similarly never be satisfactorily worked through and can therefore never pass by”. It is this repetitious search for resolution, through continents and through memory, which characterizes the stories examined in this essay, and which indicates the compulsive nature of memory.

The difficulties of remembrance and the effect of trauma in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* form the central thesis of Alexandra Lewis’s essay, “Memory Possessed: Trauma and Pathologies of Remembrance in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*”. An early reviewer of *Wuthering Heights* suggested that “as a whole, it is wild, confused, disjointed, and

⁴ See, for example, Bowen 2000, Colley 1998, Dames 2001, and Davis 1983.

improbable” (Allott 1974, 220). Such a statement is perhaps appropriate, for, as Lewis discusses, the characters of the novel undergo traumatic transformations which are “too painful to be dwelt upon” (Brontë 2003, 166). In this essay, these psychic disturbances and the characters’ recollections of them are contextualized, considered alongside the understanding of trauma, shock and insanity in the nineteenth century. In particular, Lewis examines the “psychic woundings” of Emily Brontë, and the inevitable role that memory must play in both an unhealthy dwelling on grief and in a form of emotional healing and recovery. Especially in considering Heathcliff’s mourning for Cathy, and the return of Cathy’s ghost as an embodiment of Heathcliff’s sorrow and remembrance, this offers a striking reading of the novel which resists a neat resolution or final closure, suggesting instead that the novel allows the function of memory and trauma in the novel to operate upon the reader.

Alice in Wonderland and *Through the Looking Glass* have been remembered, and indeed commemorated, in a range of media and for a variety of purposes and audiences, from entertainment to education. G.K. Chesterton, writing on *Alice in Wonderland* in 1932, pointed out that *Alice* had fallen into the hands of scholars, and consequently had become herself an instrument of education: “She has not only been caught and made to do lessons; she has been forced to inflict lessons on others” (Chesterton 2000, 235). Yet Vivian Kao, in her essay “Childhood’s Dream and Memory’s Nightmare: Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* Stories and Jan Švankmajer’s *Alice* (*Něco z Alenky*)”, draws out a darker side to *Alice*, in considering the adult’s memory of childhood as a period of disorientating experience, drawing on Lacan’s discussion of the child’s “mirror phase” of development. This is enacted in the *Alice* stories and remembered and replayed in Czech surrealist film-maker, Jan Švankmajer’s, version of *Alice*. The nightmarish re-interpretation of Švankmajer is emphasized by the close-up of Alice’s mouth as she narrates, adding an interiority and claustrophobia to the child Alice’s nightmare-dream. By examining the film alongside Lacan’s theory of fragmentation, the fractured memories of childhood are refigured as terrifying, yet, Kao suggests, may also account for the continuing popularity of the *Alice* stories.

The poetry of George Eliot is sometimes overlooked in favour of her more famous novels, but, as Gregory Tate indicates in his essay “‘My present Past’: Memory and Identity in the Poetry of George Eliot”, it has much to offer from a psychological reading. Tate demonstrates that “Eliot saw poetic form as enabling an alternative approach to the mind, fundamentally different from the ‘realistic’ accounts of psychological processes that typically populate her novels”, examining in particular the

effect of memory on the establishment of a mature identity, through a meticulous reading of Eliot's poems "The Legend of Jubal" and *The Spanish Gypsy*, as well as the sonnet sequence "Brother and Sister". Significantly, Tate's reading contextualizes Eliot's interest in memory with the ideas of contemporary psychologists, including Herbert Spencer, and Eliot's partner George Henry Lewes. This contextualization permits a reading of Eliot's use of "organic memory", figuring remembrance as a mutable but defining process in the shaping of identity.

The past returns in many shapes and forms; Antonio Sanna's essay "Repressed Memories Versus Pleasurable Revivals: The Traumatic and Joyful Encounters with the Spectre in Victorian Literary Ghostly Tales" examines the return of the spectre, disputing the common configuration of the ghost as something to be feared, and instead arguing that for many nineteenth-century fictional ghost-seers, the revenant was a welcome and often a joyful event. Though the ghost may bring with it memories of a difficult or unhappy period, they also offer a chance for reparation. Sanna reads Henry James's story "Sir Edmund Orme" and Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'", among others, as examples; these spectres might be conjured from the mind, but they represent something quite other than the fear typically associated with the return of the dead. Julian Wolfreys suggests:

to tell a story is always to invoke ghosts, to open a space through which something other returns, although never as a presence or to the present. Ghosts return via narratives, and come back, again and again, across centuries, every time a tale is unfolded" (Wolfreys 2002, 3).

The invocation of ghosts is thus inevitable in all texts, and intrinsic to the task of telling a tale, but in invoking a spectre, the memories revived may provide a form of psychic healing.

It is the ghost of Victorianism which haunted Virginia Woolf, who wrote of the "classic" novelists that "in the crowd, half blind with dust, we look back with envy to those happier warriors, whose battle is won and whose achievements wear so serene an air of accomplishment" (Woolf 2003, 146). John Morton, in his essay "Virginia Woolf and Tennyson: Remembering the Victorians", examines the complicated relationship between Woolf and Tennyson, and the interaction of Woolf's memories of Victorianism with her own writing, particularly in *Night and Day*, *Jacob's Room* and *To the Lighthouse*. Morton examines how the past and present collide in Woolf's fiction—for example, Mr Ramsey's recitation of "The Charge of the Light Brigade" in *To the Lighthouse* takes on a different and more sombre appearance when considered against the backdrop of the

losses suffered in the Great War. Yet Woolf takes a different approach in *Freshwater*, where her satire is more humorous, and bears out Morton's assertion that "Woolf's approach to Tennyson [...] veered between affection and hostility".

The construction of the past in the memory is a feature of the next essay, Małgorzata Milczarek's "Landscape of Life: Past and Present in *All Passion Spent* by Vita Sackville-West". Written from the perspective of an elderly woman, the novel uses memory and the "feminine consciousness" to contrast the twentieth-century present and the Victorian past of the central character, Lady Slane. Lady Slane's apparent passivity permits her to reflect, using her memories to construct a new independence for her in old age; her reverie-induced memories offer her a freedom which her past life denied her. Though, as Milczarek points out, Sackville-West does not use the experimental methodologies of Joyce or Woolf, for example, her engagement with elements of the past and present permits the author to problematize the memories of the elderly.

This notion of reverie as a state for remembrance and the invoking of the past is the focus of Anne Anderson's essay, "Before the Mirror: Reflections and Recollections in the Pre-Raphaelite/Aesthetic Circle". Anderson discusses the mirror-gazing subject of Whistler's *Symphony in White No.2: The White Girl* as an Aestheticist symbol, whose subjectivity is divided between her present and past selves. The aestheticized woman appears to be remembering, yet the memories are obscure, which, Anderson argues, is a feature of the Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic depiction of womanhood, forever reflecting on a mysterious past but to no apparent purpose. The essay also examines Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* and Burne-Jones's paintings of women as further examples of "the dangers of feminine consumer desire (desire either out of control or controlled by the wrong sort of people) and of the difficulties posed by the commodification of Aestheticism" (Psomiades 1997, 134). In effect, the reverie of remembrance becomes a token of this commodification, in which the woman represents the dangers of a passive remembering which leads nowhere.

The remembering of the dead is the subject of the final essay in the collection, "'Nothing can wipe out the memory': Remembering the Dead in Florence Marryat's 'The Box with the Iron Clamps'", by Georgina O'Brien Hill. This essay considers the context of nineteenth-century mourning rituals and contemporary "consolation literature" alongside Florence Marryat's short story. The essence of the story, Hill argues, is the necessity of remembering the dead as a means to moving on; the grieving process is depicted as a necessary psychological step towards the future of

the living. The story “explores the disastrous results of a mother being unable to remember openly her dead child through tokens of public display, thus falling into what Freud would have diagnosed as melancholia”, whilst drawing on sensation fiction to construct a narrative which raises issues of women’s sexuality. Hill reads this in the context of Freud’s discussions of repressed memory and his work on *Mourning and Melancholia*.

The essays in this collection take a variety of approaches, from the Freudian and psychological to the literal and contextual. Through them, it is possible to perceive a thread of memory running through nineteenth-century literature which raises a range of questions. How do we remember the Victorians now? How did they reconstruct the past—both the distant past, in a historical sense, and their own pasts? How do memories affect identity, and position in society? Is memory a physiological concept, a spiritual phenomenon, or both? From Christina Rossetti’s notion of “blessed memory”—in her poem “Memory” (1866)—to Emily Brontë’s recollections which are “too painful to be dwelt upon”, this volume offers a fresh approach to the study of memory in the nineteenth century (Rossetti 2005, 23). In conclusion, we would like to explore the connections between the act of memory and the Victorian archive, specifically in relation to Henry James’s *The Aspern Papers*.

Victorian Archive

Writing to his father, on 19 March 1870, James remembers his recent sojourn in Italy—“bright immortal Italy” as he describes it—with joy and affection (Walker and Zacharias 2006, 323). Yet, so overwhelmed was James by the beauty and grandeur of Italy that he explains in the letter: “I feel at moments as if it were only now that I am beginning to enjoy my Italian journey. My memory, at any rate, is a storehouse of treasures” (Ibid., 323). The metaphor that James employs—that his “memory [...] is a storehouse of treasures”—is reminiscent of “The Fallacies of Memory”, Frances Power Cobbe’s 1866 psychological treatise. Describing the retrieval of one’s memories (specifically one’s memories of “regular verse”), Cobbe states: “

After the lapse of twenty years, a few leading words will suggest to us, line after line, perhaps hundreds of lines together, till we seem to draw out an endless coil of golden chain which has lain hidden in the deepest treasury of our minds (Taylor and Shuttleworth 1998, 153).

Etymologically linked by the Latin-Greek term “thesaurus”, the near synonymous words employed by James and Cobbe (“storehouse” and “treasury”) represent the architecture of one’s memory as analogous to that of a psychic archive. In doing so, James and Cobbe recall Thomas de Quincey’s 1845 text *Suspiria de Profundis*, in which he makes a connection between one’s hidden memory and the “*diplomata* of human archives or libraries”, as well as Winslow’s notion of “the memorial archives” of the mind; while also prefiguring Freud’s later theories of memory (Ibid., 143, 148).⁵ James’s reference to the “storehouse” of his memory, in a letter which itself forms part of the Jamesian archive, might appear casual and innocuous; as well it might be. But this would ignore *The Aspern Papers*, published in the *Atlantic* from March to May 1888; a short story set in Florence which makes use of the “storehouse of treasures” contained in James’s memory of his time in Italy. In the preface to the twelfth volume of the New York Edition of *The Novels and Tales of Henry James* (1908), James refers to the conception of the story (“[i]t was in Florence years ago”), as well as “the inexhaustible charm of [his] Roman and Florentine memories” (James 1984a, 28). More generally, in *The Aspern Papers*, James elaborates upon the notion of the mind containing “a storehouse of treasures”, how it is an archive of memory and of mourning.

The unnamed male narrator of *The Aspern Papers* describes himself as “a critic, a commentator, an historian, in a small way” who specializes in “the great philosophers and poets of the past; those who are dead and gone and can’t, poor darlings, speak for themselves” (James 1984b, 105). For the narrator and his friend John Cumnor, a fellow literary historian, the greatest of these greats is the poet Jeffrey Aspern—a fictional Romantic poet—whose death predates the setting of the story by several years. The story begins in Italy with the narrator and Mrs Prest discussing the mysterious figure of Juliana Bordereau. The narrator is intrigued by Juliana, now a woman of “venerable age” who lives with her niece Tina, because she had “relations with Jeffrey Aspern [...] in her early-womanhood” and, what is more, she possesses letters from the poet that nobody but herself has read, which she keeps hidden in her house (Ibid., 47). The narrator desires these letters—the eponymous Aspern papers—with a passion bordering on mania; “a fine case of monomania”, in the opinion of Mrs Prest (Ibid., 46). He regards the possession of these hitherto unseen letters as being of inestimable value to the Aspern archive: “It’s simply that they would be of such immense interest to the public,

⁵ For a discussion of how the notion of the archive informs Freud’s work see Derrida 2002, 42.

such immeasurable importance as a contribution to Jeffrey Aspern's history", the narrator tells Tina (Ibid., 100).

James does not explicitly mention the term "archive" in his story, but the location of the Aspern papers—Juliana's home—is significant, while also suggestive of a link between James's "storehouse of memories" and the archive. As Derrida explains:

the meaning of "archive," its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded [...] On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that *place* which is their house (private house, family house, or employee's house), that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents' guardians (Derrida 1996, 2, original emphasis).

Juliana acts in the manner of an "archon" concerning the Aspern Papers in the sense that she fiercely guards the documents from everyone except herself. When Cumnor writes to Juliana enquiring if he can peruse what she has of Aspern's "literary remains" he is firmly rebuffed in a reply written in Tina's hand, but dictated by Juliana (James 1984b, 51). Realising that any legitimate means of accessing the letters is futile, the two literary historians hatch a plot to infiltrate Juliana's home. In the guise of a gentleman needing accommodation, with "some literary work, some reading and writing to do", the narrator manages to convince Tina and Juliana to accept him as a lodger—a fact made easier by their near penury (Ibid., 56). While residing at Juliana's home—the Aspern archive—the narrator is anxious that she will "burn her treasure" before he has a chance to peruse it or, worse, that she has already "sacrificed her treasures" (Ibid., 91, 104). (Like James's memory, it seems, the Aspern archive is also "a storehouse of treasures"). Indeed, more than anything, the narrator dreads "the possibility of her destroying her documents on the day she should feel her end at hand" (Ibid., 68). Such an act on the part of Juliana, as the archon or guardian of the Aspern archive, would be the ultimate (but paradoxical) means by which she could protect the documents from prying eyes.⁶ And this is exactly what she attempts to do near the conclusion of the story. But it is Tina's fate to destroy the letters, not Juliana's. As well as being the archon of the Aspern papers Juliana is figured by the narrator as being herself an archive of memories concerning Aspern. Speculating on Juliana's "esoteric knowledge" of her time spent with Aspern, the

⁶ Juliana does allow the narrator to view a rare portrait of Aspern, though, which she offers to sell to him for a thousand pounds (James 1984b, 108-10, 133).

narrator wonders (in words echoing James's letter to his father): "what store of memories had she laid away for the monotonous future?" (Ibid., 74-76).

For Derrida, "the work of the archivist is not simply a work of memory" but also "a work of mourning" (Derrida 2002, 54). The narrative of *The Aspern Papers* is illustrative of the ways in which the acts of memory and mourning are indissociable from the archon and the archive. Befriending Tina in an attempt to persuade her to let him have access to the letters the narrator states that he "felt almost as base as the reporter of a newspaper who forces his way into a house of mourning" (James 1984b, 100). What the narrator fails to understand, however, is that Juliana's house—the home of the Aspern archive—is nothing other than a "house of mourning". Throughout the text, Juliana mourns Aspern through his letters—"she lived on them", according to Tina (Ibid., 135). Moreover, by keeping Aspern "buried in her soul", as the narrator puts it, Juliana is also an archive in memory of Aspern; at once mourning and resurrecting the poet through her very existence (Ibid., 91). On first meeting Juliana, the narrator relates: "Her presence seemed somehow to contain and express his own, and I felt nearer to him at that first moment of seeing her than I ever had been before or ever have been since" (Ibid., 59). By the same token, in this respect Juliana can also be said to form part of the Aspern archive herself. Indeed, like the Aspern papers, which the narrator terms "that lady's relics", Juliana is referred to by the narrator as "so terrible a relic" (Ibid., 130, 60). The conflation of archon and archive in the text—as well as that of resurrection and of mourning—is also suggested by Tina's admission that Juliana had "wanted to give directions that her papers should be buried with her", but, fearing that Aspern's followers would exhume her grave to obtain them, had decided against it (Ibid., 136). It appears that Juliana is not necessarily speaking figuratively when, aware of the narrator's intentions concerning the Aspern papers, she asks him: "Do you think it's right to rake up the past?" (Ibid., 106).

The sense of mourning in *The Aspern Papers* is not confined to Juliana. Tina, the narrator notes, "always had a look of musty mourning, as if she were wearing out old robes of sorrow that wouldn't come to an end" (Ibid., 128). Like Juliana, the narrator, for his part, also mourns the Aspern archive. What distinguishes his mourning from Juliana's, however, is that whereas she privately mourns a cherished companion through his letters, the narrator can only mourn the absence of Aspern's public persona: "the divine poet", as he calls him (Ibid., 47). This is not to denigrate the narrator's adoration of Aspern. The narrator's love of the poet is genuine and he remains haunted by Aspern's "bright ghost", a

spectre who figures as an absent presence throughout his narrative (Ibid., 73). The narrator also mourns the loss of the Aspern archive in a more literal sense. Following Juliana's death, Tina comes into possession of the letters, and consequently becomes the archon of the Aspern archive. Unlike Juliana, she is willing to let the narrator lay his hands upon the Aspern papers, but only on the condition that he agrees to marry her. If not, she tells him, she will destroy the documents. At first the narrator refuses and leaves her, but, on waking the next morning, his "monomaniacal" desire to possess the Aspern papers returns. He decides to meet Tina and consent to her demands, but, much to his horror, he finds he is too late because she has already incinerated them. Mourning the destruction of the much sought-after letters, but not the end of his marriage prospects, the narrator bemoans: "I can scarcely bear my loss" (Ibid., 142). The fact that *The Aspern Papers*—a text which, like his letter to his father, belongs to the Jamesian archive—ends with the burning of the Aspern papers is of no small significance. Like Aspern, after being destroyed the letters exist only as a memory to be mourned by the narrator.

In his relentless pursuit of the Aspern papers, the narrator, it seems, is suffering from a literalized version of a condition which Derrida terms "*mal d'archive*"—"archive fever": "It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there's too much of it" (Derrida 1996, 91). Certainly, the "monomaniacal" narrator—who feels "a passionate appreciation of Juliana's treasure [...] and a positive ferocity [...] to acquire them" and who claims that he and Cumnor "had more than enough material" on Aspern without the letters—can be seen to "run after the archive, even if there's too much of it" (James 1984b, 140-41, 138). However, while Derrida states "[w]e are *en mal d'archive*: in need of archives", his notion of *mal d'archive* is not as straightforward as denoting a person, group, or culture simply overcome by an overwhelming "need" for archives (Derrida 1996, 91). Rather, in his exploration of the archive, Mark Dooley and Liam Kavanagh explain, "Derrida plays on the double meaning of [...] *mal d'archive*, which can be translated both as 'archive fever' and the 'evil' or 'sickness of the archive'" (Dooley and Kavanagh 2007, 100).

Dooley and Kavanagh note that "[b]y 'archive fever', Derrida means the desire for identity, completion and conservation. As a work of mourning, archive fever is the desire to keep the other close, to remember them and do them justice" (Ibid., 100). In this sense, then, the *mal d'archive* is a desire to create, what Derrida calls, "a successful archive"; one that not only "succeed[s] in gathering everything you need in

reference to the past”, but also “interpret[s] it in a way which is totally satisfactory” (Derrida 2002, 54). The fact that Derrida believes such a desire “for identity, completion and conservation” in terms of the archive is “impossible” does not diminish or arrest this desire (Ibid., 54). Instead, this impossibility is precisely what sets the desire, the “archive fever”, in motion to begin with; but, by the same token, it is also a factor in accounting for why the *mal d’archive* is a “sickness”. “The sickness of the archive”, Dooley and Kavanagh add, “is that this attempt to conserve or keep memory is always incomplete, and can always be reinterpreted and potentially abused” (Dooley and Kavanagh 2007, 101). “[I]t is impossible to close the archive”, Derrida writes, but “[i]t’s always possible to reinterpret an archive” (Derrida 2002, 46). The “reinterpretations” of the Holocaust by right-wing groups—most sinisterly, the denials that it ever took place—illustrate the potential abuse, the “sickness” and the “evil” of the *mal d’archive*. Yet, without the possible threat of abuse or harmful reinterpretation of the archive, and without the impossibility of it ever being in a state of total “completion”, it cannot fulfil its function as an archive, which, according to Derrida, is nothing less than “to *call into question* the coming of the future” (Derrida 1996, 33-4, original emphasis). For Derrida, “this future-oriented structure of the archive is precisely what confronts us with a responsibility, an ethical and political responsibility” (Derrida 2002, 46).

The twin impulses of Derrida’s notion of *mal d’archive* are present within *The Aspern Papers*, a narrative driven by the work of mourning which manifests itself, at least in terms of the narrator, in the impossible yet relentless desire to create a “successful” or complete archive. In addition, Derrida’s belief that the archive “confronts us with [...] an ethical and political responsibility” is echoed in *The Aspern Papers*, which is likewise concerned with the ethical imperative which the archive demands; the ethics of remembrance. When referring to his and Cumnor’s work on Aspern and, in the process, justifying their desire to possess the Aspern papers, the narrator states: “We held, justly, as I think, that we had done more for his memory than anyone else” (James 1984b, 47). For James, however, doing “more for [Aspern’s] memory than anyone else” is to be admired, but so is doing justice to his memory, a duty which involves a responsibility to the living as well as the dead. This is precisely what the narrator fails to grasp in his inexorable pursuit of the letters, which as he acknowledges may contain “painful memories” that Juliana would wish to keep private (Ibid., 99). Indeed, the narrator’s actions are so thoroughly ignoble because he is blind to the fact that, while the Aspern papers would undoubtedly be of “immense interest to the public”, they

mean far more to Juliana as mementoes of the past, her past. A renowned writer himself, James was as aware as anybody about the potential abuse authors—and their families—could be subjected to after their death by intrusive critics. It was perhaps for this reason that, near the end of his life, he destroyed what he possessed of his own correspondence in order to protect his own literary legacy, his own memory.

In this respect, James's story can be read as a cautionary tale directed at those who, akin to the narrator of *The Aspern Papers*, might wish to "rake up the past" (to borrow Juliana's expression) and desecrate the archive, all in the name of literary research. However, such a reading would be too simplistic and ignores James's understanding of the profound connections that exist between literature, memory, and the archive. Rather than prohibiting us, as readers and critics of fiction, from crossing the threshold of the literary archive, *The Archive Papers* can instead be viewed as a text inviting us to enter; but only on the condition or the promise—a promise as sacred as a marriage vow—to do its contents justice and to act in accordance with the ethics of remembrance. Clearly, James implies, remembering and mourning the archive is not something to take lightly. Nor should it be. As mentioned above, Derrida believes that what is at stake in terms of the archive is nothing less than the very coming of the future. The ethical and theoretical implications of James's story resonate throughout this collection of essays on Victorian memory. Unlike the narrator of *The Aspern Papers*, whose association with the Aspern archive is dubious, it is hoped that the following essays offer fresh and compelling reinterpretations of the Victorian archive, an archive which they at once mourn and remember.

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CHAPTER ONE

SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY: MEMORY AND REPETITION IN OLA HANSSON'S NARRATIVES OF RETURN

ANNA JÖRNGÅRDEN

How does one deal with the awareness of losing the known world? In fin de siècle literature, changes in the experience of time and place and the struggle to bridge a perceived abyss opening between past and present are widespread themes. The old, traditional world was rapidly giving way to a new, modern way of living, leading to discourses of loss and longing. The late nineteenth century is often described as being obsessed with time and memory and this gave rise to a deluge of narratives of nostalgia that came to characterize the literature at the turn of the century.¹ The feeling of dislocation, in time as well as in space, caused a desire to return, but the question for many was: return to where? Attempts to return in a physical sense to one's origin increasingly revealed that the longed-for place was no longer there, but had vanished or been changed beyond recognition by the whirlwind of time. When actual return could not resurrect a lost life, memory as a path of return increased in importance.

In this chapter, I will discuss narratives of return in the writings of the Swedish author Ola Hansson (1860–1925). After receiving scathing critique for his daringly decadent stories, Hansson went into voluntary exile in 1889. This year marked the beginning of a wandering, émigré existence, that would last until his death in a village on the Bosphorus in Turkey. He settled for a while in Germany, where his achievements as a critic had a “profound” influence on the literary scene, according to Malcolm Bradbury's and James McFarlane's standard work *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890–1930*. Bradbury and McFarlane give him prominence as the first of the Berlin-based intellectuals and artists to

¹ See for example Terdiman 1993 and Agacinski 2000.

advocate a break with naturalism and a reorientation towards psychological *Nervenkunst* (Bradbury and McFarlane 1976, 115-16). Dislocation and nostalgia are fundamental themes in his oeuvre, becoming all the more critical when he left Sweden for the Continent. But the feeling of an insurmountable division between an old and a new world characterized even his early writings. Already his first published poems, from when he was 19 years old, brim with nostalgia and are directed towards home and vanishing time.

One of the most striking features of his writings of dislocation is their repetitiveness; in text upon text he returns to the dilemma of a lost time and place. The narrative solutions he presents seem unable to discharge the conflict; they only tempt him to reiterate it, again and again. Consequently, the question of return is significant in a double sense: thematically, as a desire to return to something vanished, in space and in time, and narratively, as a return, verging on obsessiveness, to virtually the same story. In the following discussion, I will explore these two understandings of return, and consider a possible connection between them, discussing memory and repetition as two means of repossessing the past in three texts: the short story “Homeless” (1889); the autobiographical novel *The Journey Home* (written 1890–1892); and, finally, another short story, “Archimedes’ point” (1894).² As a theoretical framework, I will make use of Kierkegaard’s discussion of the meaning of and the relationship between memory and repetition.

In *Repetition* (1843), Søren Kierkegaard has his narrator Constantin Constantius describe the concepts of memory and repetition as at once doubled and divided, joined yet opposed:

Repetition and recollection are the same movement, only in opposite directions; for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas

² “Husvill” [“Homeless”] is dated March 1889 by Hansson, but was first published serially in German translation as “Heimatslos” in the Austrian journal *Wiener Mode* beginning 1 January 1890. In Swedish, it was first published in a collection of short stories entitled *Kärlekens trångmål* [*Straits of Love*] (1892). *Resan hem* [*The Journey Home*] was published by Aschehoug in Norwegian translation in 1894 and in Swedish in 1895, but is dated by Hansson to “St. Légier sur Vevey 1890—Friedrichshagen 1892”. “Arkimedes’ punkt” [“Archimedes’ Point”] was first published in German translation as “Der Punkt des Archimedes” in *Nord und Süd* (1894)—a Berlin-based monthly dedicated to literature, academia and art—and appeared in Swedish for the first time in the collection of short stories *Vägen till lifvet* [*The Road to Life*] (Kristiania: Aschehoug, 1896). I quote throughout from the first Swedish editions of the texts and, unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

repetition properly so called is recollected forwards. Therefore repetition, if it is possible, makes a person happy, whereas recollection makes him unhappy (Kierkegaard 1941, 3-4).

According to this somewhat mystifying statement, the contradiction between memory and repetition occurs in their relationship to the past. On the one hand, then, recollection or memory is understood as a desire to return to the irreclaimable past. On the other hand, repetition is paradoxically described as “recollect[ing] forwards”; that is, as marking a positive resurrection of the past in the present, and even the future. Kierkegaard develops the temporality of repetition in this way:

The dialectic of repetition is easy; for what is repeated has been, otherwise it could not be repeated, but precisely the fact that it has been gives to repetition the character of novelty. When the Greeks said that all knowledge is recollection they affirmed that all that is has been; when one says that life is a repetition one affirms that existence which has been becomes (Ibid., 34).

For Kierkegaard, then, the concept of repetition is itself divided; at once a form of return, a recovery of the past, but one in which the past is transformed to the present tense, and which heralds the future. I will consider this Kierkegaardian perspective in more detail when turning to the thematics of return, as either repetition or memory, later on in this essay.

All three of Hansson's texts share the same structure and theme—a male protagonist is torn between the opposing forces of a new, modern world and a traditional lifestyle.³ For each narrator, merely to remember what he has left behind does not seem to offer a viable alternative, as it only elicits grief for what no longer is, without giving the past back. Instead, the desire awakens, with each narrator, to travel back to his origins. However, this attempt to recollect the past by actual return also fails, as the protagonist is forced to understand that neither he nor his old

³ In terms of “Homeless” and “Archimedes’ point”, this theme and structure is further explored in my article “Exile, Time, and Memory in Ola Hansson's Short Stories”; see Jörngården 2008. In that essay, I also discuss the short stories’ gendered encoding of time that is similarly evident in *The Journey Home*. However, to avoid unnecessary repetitions, and due to the limited space, I will leave the gender analysis aside. For the same reasons, my account will allow more space to the novel than the short stories. For previous Swedish-language research on the life and works of Ola Hansson, I also refer readers to my aforementioned article.

home are the same any longer. Thus unable to resolve the conflict, the perpetual vacillation between home and away divides the self, and threatens to absorb him into a vicious circle of eternal repetition, devoid of progression, in which every departure directly gives rise to the next one. This is how the tyranny of repetition, far from Kierkegaard's productive sense of the concept, is expressed in *The Journey Home*, a description that sums up the predicament in all of Hansson's stories of return:

Was he split in two, double? There must be *something* constituting his one real, original, undivided self! Or was he blown to pieces, condemned to wander eternally and restlessly on a sentimental journey until his dying hour,—a modern version of the Wandering Jew: he who could not find his way home? No return possible! Nor a path straight forward, in the same direction as during the last few years. Homeless here, homeless there (Hansson 1895, 159, original emphasis).⁴

However, in *The Journey Home* a third alternative is discovered, intertwining repetition and memory in what can be called a recollection forwards. Highly emotive forms of memory are explored—*rêverie* and *mémoire involontaire*—that involve remembering without distance. In these emotionally charged states, time is suspended and the past is relived—given back in the form of repetition. In this context literature is put forward as a bridge between past and present; to write about the past serves as a way of recovering and resurrecting a lost time and place. Writing becomes a ritualized act to rescue the past from becoming overgrown with the weeds of forgetfulness. This brings us back to how the notion of return is figured in Hansson's narratives, specifically whether or not these repetitions move forwards or backwards. Before discussing this in any more detail, however, I will take a closer look at the three stories, beginning with “Homeless”.

Returning, Remembering, Repeating

In “Homeless”, Hansson establishes an image of a polarized world. The short story, which he wrote during a period when he had decided to leave Sweden for the continent, depicts a man embarking upon an opposite

⁴ “Var han då klufven, dubbel? Det måste dock finnas *något* inom honom, som var hans enda verkliga, ursprungliga, odelade jag! Eller var han sprängd, dömd till att evigt vandra kring utan rast och ro på sin sentimentala resa ända till sina döddagar, —en modern typ för den vandrande juden: han, som icke kunde finna hem? Ingen återvändo möjlig! Heller ingen väg rakt fram, i samma riktning som de sista åren gått! Hemlös der, hemlös här”.

journey; that is, a journey home. A sudden revelation that his urban life as a decadent flâneur in Copenhagen has been misspent leads the protagonist to return to his roots in a Swedish country village, in the hope of reliving the lifestyle of previous generations. Accordingly, his attempt to overcome the fissure in time and space becomes a form of nostalgic return. However, the tension between a modern and a traditional way of life gives rise to an irreconcilable internal division, which ends with his suicide. His identity split in two, he finally stabs himself after mistaking himself for his own doppelgänger.

"Homeless" is introduced by a frame-narrative, which doubles the thematics of duality, homelessness and loss. In the frame-narrative a nameless chronicler, who also suffers from a case of split-identity, remembers the main protagonist's destiny and in the process mirrors the central character's dilemma of duality. This narrative structure, with its relation between frame and main conflict, directly focuses attention on the significance of memory and repetition. The entire short story is in fact a related recollection, with several retrospective layers. During an evening stroll in the country village, the frame narrator remembers a similar night five years ago, when the main character told him his story: "My memories were unfurled by invisible hands, like a tangled skein" (Hansson 1892, 7).⁵ Revisiting the place where the story was originally told brings it back to life and repeats it in the form of the short story. Thus, storytelling itself with its conveying chain of memory and repetition is thematized, where telling and retelling function as a process of working through. However, the memory around which the story revolves neither evokes a lost continuity with the past nor restores what has gone, but instead looks back towards the absence and separation caused by the dislocation with the past itself. This situation creates a multilayered experience of loss and bereavement—an ineluctable displacement—where being torn between the old and the new is an inevitable condition.

In a discussion about narrativity and time, Paul Ricoeur describes how repetition is the driving force at two levels in the *Odyssey*, where the going back to the origin and the retrieval of the self is the same motion. The *Odyssey's* conflation of temporal and geographical return becomes a paradigm for a certain type of quest narratives: "Repetition thus tends to become the main issue in narratives in which the quest itself duplicates a travel in space that assumes the shape of a return to the origin" (Ricoeur 1980, 185). "Homeless" can be read as an odyssey that does not reach its goal; the nostalgic return turns out to be unrealizable as the mental distance created between origin and the modern world cannot be

⁵ "Som en hoptrasslad trådhärfva vecklades mina minnen upp af osynliga händer".

obliterated by spatial travel. External repetition in the form of actual return cannot recapture the lost home. Ola Hansson's Ulysses can no longer feel at home on his Ithaca, nor does he wish to eternally navigate the billowing sea of modern life. Instead, the retrospective narration memorializes, both thematically and structurally, the inescapable experience of loss. The spatial and temporal distance between home and away is repeated and duplicated, in a seemingly endless chain.

In the autobiographical novel *The Journey Home*, Hansson revisits the problem of return. The novel depicts a series of departures and homecomings: his alter ego repeatedly and euphorically leaves a constrictive village life for the open horizon of continental Europe, only to be stricken with passionate homesickness and nostalgia that send him back again. Every return ends in the same experience: the much longed-for home does not fulfil his expectations and fails to restore his lost sense of belonging:

In the countryside everything was the same; and yet he could not recognize these old, so well-known surroundings. It was as if he saw everything differently; the people seemed to him totally altered compared with how he knew them before, and did not correspond to the image he had had of them up to now; and he was similarly struck by all other situations. He wandered amid everything familiar like a stranger, discovering falseness and pettiness, limited space and stuffy atmosphere, and felt ill at ease (Hansson 1895, 137).⁶

In the novel's denouement, when the dilemma of dislocation is brought to a head, the protagonist himself names his rootless quest for "the indefinite and the indefinable": "Sentimental journey, sentimental journey——". The repeated words occur rhythmically again in the same paragraph, like the constant sound of the train against the rail on the eternal voyage: "Sentimental journey, sentimental journey!" (Ibid., 158).⁷ However, the novel does eventually reach a harmonious solution, in which the protagonist appears to overcome this discord, and "away" becomes a kind of home.

⁶ "Derute på landet var allt sig likt; och dock kände han sig sjelf icke igen i dessa gamla, så väl kända omgifningar. Det var som hade han fått en ny syn på allt; människorna tycktes honom vara helt annorlunda, än han förut känt dem, och motsvarade icke den bild, han hittills burit af dem inom sig; och det förhöll sig med alla förhållanden på alldeles samma sätt. Han gick rundt ibland allt det kända såsom en främling, konstaterade falska värden och små intressen, trångt utrymme och instängd luft, samt vantrifdes".

⁷ The English expression is Hansson's own. Cf. Ingvar Holm's thesis on Ola Hansson where the analysis of *The Journey Home* is the focal point (Holm 1957).