Persistence and Resistance in English Studies

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New Research

Edited by

Sara Martin, David Owen
and Elisabet Pladevall-Ballester

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Persistence and Resistance emerges from the enthusiasm of the members of ASYRAS (the Association of Young Researchers on Anglophone Studies), all post-graduate students based at diverse Departments of English. ASYRAS has been celebrating biannual conferences since 2009 and the articles that we gather together here are a selection of the best papers presented at the fifth event, a conference celebrated at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona between 25 and 27 January 2016. The complete title of this meeting was *Against all Odds: Persistence and Resistance in Young Researchers' Work* and, as the reader can see, as editors we have decided to maintain part of this title for our volume.

As experienced academics, we—the editors—are very much concerned about the increasing difficulties that young researchers face today. The days when university departments offered full-time employment to newly graduated, budding researchers now seem like a utopia, even though at the time (not so long ago; all in all about a decade in the past) the contracts seemed fragile and poorly paid. The financial crisis of 2007 brought uncertainty about present and future employment, and temporary budget cuts that have become part of restrictive policies which threaten to destroy the university and, above all, the Humanities. This is why all researchers but, above all, the young ones, need a great capacity for persistence and resistance to do new work against all odds. The fifth ASYRAS meeting invited participants to present papers that would showcase their own research, in an optimistic attempt to overcome the everyday difficulties in their lives as young scholars.

The papers presented dealt with a wide range of issues, corresponding to the usual convergence of Literature, Culture, Language and Linguistics in Spanish departments that, like ours, focus on the study of a 'philology'. Although our degrees our now called 'English Studies' or 'Spanish Language and Literature', the department names still maintain the word *Filologia*, as our academic practices are rooted in the tradition, originating in Germany, according to which a particular culture should be studied through a combined effort to learn its language and its artistic expression, Literature. This approach explains the two main parts into which the present volume is divided, Part I: New Research in English Literature and Culture, and Part II: New Research in Language and Linguistics. In its

current state *Filologia* is now far more open than it used to be, and, consequently, it is inclusive of Cultural Studies and Theoretical as well as Applied Linguistics, thus transcending the limitations imposed in the more conservative past. The selection of seventeen papers presented in this volume is, therefore, necessarily heterogeneous yet, at the same time, it is fairly compact as a sample of the research being done today in English Studies.

The first part groups ten essays that focus on diverse fictions; these are examined by the authors in the light of how they challenge the boundaries of the genres within which they operate. The two chapters by Clara Román and Christina Howes consider short fiction by, respectively, American author Raymond Carver and British novelist Rachel Seiffert, bringing a new theoretical awareness to the texts analysed. Saffana Manoun Sahyouni and Josephine Swarbrick use a comparative approach to examine films connected in different ways. In the first case, two very diverse films, *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Sheik*, are connected through an assessment of the racial issues raised in them; whereas in the second, the two versions of *Robocop* are considered by comparing their representation of US masculinity. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss singular works that try hard to break away from current conceptualizations of how genres operate. Eimantė Liubertaitė analyses Dave Eggers' remarkable memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* as an outstanding example of metamodern narrative. For her part, Amanda Jones questions colonial and postcolonial discourse by offering an insightful analysis of how Afropolitanism shapes the novel *Open City*, by Teju Cole. The two following chapters also examine genre but in the context of the 18th century and with a focus on women. Paula Yurss Lasanta analyses Helen Maria Williams' revolutionary discourse as expressed mainly in her letters, whilst, through her reading of Anna Seward's poem "Llangollen Vale", Francesca Blanch discusses the construction of the alternative female Romantic community. Finally, the chapters by José Viera and Laura Gálvez-Gómez centre on ways in which the past shapes the present in fiction. Viera considers the presentation of Charles Dickens as a pioneering literary celebrity in Matthew Pearl's *The Last Dickens* (2009) and Gálvez-Gómez investigates the echoes of the Grail legend in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

The second part of the volume, New Research in Language and Linguistics, highlights a very different area of English Studies and includes chapters on the history of the English language, corpus linguistics, language identity, L2 pragmatics and L2 speech. The first chapter, by Paula Schintu, diachronically analyses the enregisterment of Cant, a language variety spoken by rogues and criminals in early and late modern England. The

chapter focuses on a selection of 17th and 18th century plays and describes the linguistic and socio-cultural features associated with this variety. Chapter 12, written by Marina Asián, examines the linguistic features of Old Norse substratum that lie beneath Middle English through Chaucer's most representative work, *The Canterbury Tales*. In the next chapter, Eleonora Nakova explores the process of creating neologisms from a morphological perspective using corpus linguistics; she analyses which morphological process is most common in such creation and which is most predominant in different word classes. In Chapter 14, Patrícia Jiménez presents preliminary results regarding the impact of study abroad programmes on participants' identities and on the emotional process of (re)negotiating one's identity in the home community through a chronotopic analysis of participants' narrative discourse. Chapter 15, by Kai Voltmer, deals with pragmatic transfer of German modal particles in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) requests. Through a written discourse completion test and a post-test questionnaire, the author sets out to explore whether modal particles interfere in native German speakers' acquisition of the pragmatics of English in the speech act of requests. The final two chapters focus on L2 English speech production and perception, respectively. In Chapter 16, Zhao Liu presents her research on the influence of acquiring a third language (Spanish) on the Voice Onset Time (VOT) production of bilabial stops in L1 and L2 (English) by Mandarin native speakers. Finally, in Chapter 17, Celia Gorba Masip explores the effect of L2 experience on the categorisation of utterance-initial bilabial stops through two identification tasks by Spanish learners of English in both Spanish and English.

As editors of the volume it is our duty, but above all our pleasure, to thank the seventeen authors for their contributions. We hope that readers will find these authors' work to be thought-provoking and inspiring.

A Note on the Text

The chapters in this collection reflect both UK and US English, partly in consequence of the authors' own origins and training, partly as a result of the predominance of certain studies on specific sides of the Atlantic. We have respected our authors' preference throughout.

Hypertext links indicated in chapter notes and bibliographies are rendered as stable, short URLs.

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PART I:

NEW RESEARCH IN ENGLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE

CHAPTER ONE

'NO OTHER WORD WILL DO': LANGUAGE AND NARRATIVE UNRELIABILITY IN RAYMOND CARVER'S "BLACKBIRD PIE"

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Much of the literary criticism on Raymond Carver's late collections describes them as more generous and optimistic compared to the early works (see, for instance, Claire Fabre-Clark 2008, 173). Carver himself contended that his newly-found positivity was already present when he published his second collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981), which, as a letter sent to his then-editor Gordon Lish proves, did not see the light of day as he would have wished (Carver 2009, 992). Carver, previously an alcoholic, stopped drinking in 1977 and started what he would call his "second life" (McCaffery and Gregory 1990, 100), now more hopeful and confident. However, and in spite of this contrast to his first two major collections, *Cathedral* (1983) and *Elephant* (1988) are far from similar. As Kirk Nesset notes, "the last stories [in *Elephant*] extend and sharpen Carver's vision of human relationships even as they delimit the affirmative potential of that vision, tempering to a degree the burgeoning optimism marking his preceding volume" (1995, 74). Indeed, where one could find momentary epiphanies in stories like "Cathedral" or "A Small, Good Thing" in the 1983 collection, such privileges are not given to the characters in *Elephant*. Thus, Carver recuperates his old themes and pushes them even further.

Nevertheless, many critics (Fabre-Clark and Nesset included) fail to note that Carver's first two collections were heavily edited by Gordon Lish. A look at the original draft of *What We Talk About…*, titled *Beginners* (2009), suggests that the optimistic nature of *Cathedral* was already present in some of the previous stories. Even the ending of the story "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" from Carver's first collection of the same name (1976) hints at a more hopeful future.

That said, there are notable differences between the early and late stories. In contrast to the former, saturated with inarticulate characters, *Elephant* seems to introduce individuals who are wordier and more aware of language. Nesset postulates that "Carver's last characters […] typically *articulate* their recognitions, even if only to vent dismay at how impossible […] freedom seems in relation to their lives. Newly articulate, increasingly self-aware, they embody on Carver's part a simultaneous closing down and opening up of hopeful possibility" (1995, 74, emphasis added). However, a closer look at stories such as "Intimacy" or "Blackbird Pie" (1988) suggests that these characters are not as articulate as they seem, and their recognitions are merely a distorted version of the truth. Their self-awareness does not lead them anywhere, and the endings of many of the stories seem reminiscent of that of early texts such as "Put Yourself in My Shoes" (1976) or "A Serious Talk" (1983), among others, in which the characters displace their emotions and prove unable to assess and address the source of their misery. Told mostly from a first-person perspective, these stories almost seem like a continuation of Carver's earliest collections, featuring people who feel growingly isolated and lost, unable to use words fruitfully.

This essay aims to confront Nesset's hypothesis by analyzing "Blackbird Pie" (1988), a story about a couple on the verge of separation, and to suggest that—despite the narrator's apparent awareness of language—his words betray him and show his inability to successfully deal with the issues at hand. More specifically, I will look into the notion of narrative unreliability and how it seems to point to the narrator's denial and avoidance of the events as well as his displacement of feelings. The first part of this chapter will explore the concept of narrative unreliability, following Ansgar Nünning's 1997 model, to attempt to discredit the apparent self-awareness and integrity the narrator boasts about. The second part will focus on the varying modes of communication present in the text, studying the different types of language used by the narrator and his (now presumably) ex-wife.

The story begins like this: "I was in my room one night when I heard something in the corridor" (Carver 2003, 91). Already the first word of the story provides the reader with crucial information—this is a first-person narrative, which by its very nature lends itself to suspicion as regards its narrative veracity. As the paragraph goes on, the narrator explains how he "saw an envelope slide under the door" (91), the choice of words denoting a refusal to acknowledge that a person sent him this envelope, thus distancing himself from said person. When he sees the contents of the envelope, he claims that it "purported to be a letter from my wife. I say

'purported' because […] the charges were outrageous and completely out of keeping with my wife's character. Most important, however, the handwriting was not my wife's handwriting" (91). He places more importance on the form of the letter in an attempt to avoid dealing with the charges.

In the second paragraph, our initial suspicion grows further as he admits he does not have the letter anymore, and the way he words the loss suggests that the narrator might not be entirely trustworthy:

> I wish now I'd kept the letter […]. But I didn't keep it, I'm sorry to say. I lost it, or else misplaced it. Later, after the sorry business I'm about to relate, I was cleaning out my desk and may have accidentally thrown it away—which is uncharacteristic of *me*, since I usually don't throw anything away. (2003, 91)

He ironically hedges his statement by coupling the verb "throw away", which indicates intent, with modals ("may") and adverbs ("accidentally") to evade blame and then highlights how atypical this is of him so as to remain reliable to the reader.

The notion of narrative unreliability was first detailed by Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). Most criticism dealing with this issue acknowledges Booth as the first formal proponent of this concept (see Olson 2003; Köppe and Kindt 2011; and Murphy 2012, among others) and while many scholars follow his definition, others have taken issue with or expanded it, Ansgar Nünning among them. Nünning argues that Booth's "canonized definition does not really make for clarity […] since it falls back on the ill-defined and elusive notion of the implied author, which hardly provides a reliable basis for determining a narrator's unreliability" (1997, 85). Consequently, Nünning establishes his own set of rules for how to identify an unreliable narrator, which Carver's character in this story seems to fit. Indeed, in contrast to Booth's "implied author", Nünning holds that "the recognition of a narrator's unreliability […] does not depend solely or even primarily on the critic's intuition" (1997, 85). Instead, he argues that "signals such as textual inconsistencies, the verbal habits of the narrator, and discrepancies between the fictional world presented by a text and the reader's world-knowledge and standards of normality provide the basis for establishing a narrator's unreliability" (1997, 85).

"Blackbird Pie" is saturated with such signals. From the very beginning, the narrator sounds unreliable. He admits he does not have the letter anymore but he hedges his words, later conveniently stating that such things are "uncharacteristic of" (91) him, although he again qualifies his statement by saying that he "usually do[es]n't throw anything away"

(91). In order to increase his credibility, he devotes more than a page to his allegedly fantastic memory (92), highlighting how easily he remembers facts so that he can faithfully recreate the letter his wife sent him and avoid making the reader suspicious, though to no avail. Martin Scofield notes that there is in this character a "tendency to overdetermine the factual accuracy of his narration by unnecessary repetition" (1999, 272). Indeed, one can find many instances of such repetition in the text:

> The moment was there, but I hesitated. Suddenly it was too late for any decisive action. The moment had come and gone, and could not be called back. Just so did Darius hesitate and then fail to act at the Battle of Granicus, and the day was lost, Alexander the Great rolling him up on every side and giving him a real walloping. (2003, 100)

While the narrator acknowledges that he could have done something about the situation but hesitated, he resorts to ancient historical facts, dubiously-sourced (and thus perhaps unreliable), to divert the reader's attention.

What is more, tautology riddled with historical facts also appears in the narrator's transcription of his wife's letter. Part of it reads "the time has come and gone for us—us, you and me—to put all our cards on the table. Thee and me. Lancelot and Guinevere. Abélard and Héloïse. Troilus and Cressida. Pyramus and Thisbe. JAJ and Nora Barnacle, etc". (98-9). Arthur Saltzman (1988) suggested that the reader could initially believe that the narrator himself might have written the letter, though it is later proven that the wife did in fact write it (102). However, even though she wrote the document itself, what the reader is presented with is the narrator's transcription of this; that is, in a certain sense, he did actually write it. As much as he wants to believe his memory is as precise as can be, and given his propensity to lie and to decorate the truth, a word-for-word transcription from memory is bound be somewhat inaccurate. Thus, similarities between the narrator's language and that of the wife draw our attention to the narrator's unreliability.

The narrator's approach to the letter also shows signs of unreliability. As previously mentioned, he no longer has the letter, but he is adamant that he can replicate it. However, just as he is about to do so, he admits that he can only "re-create […] the portion that I read", later stating "*In part*, the letter went as follows" (93, emphasis added). Moreover, the original contents of the letter are polite and attenuated: "*It happens*. […] In any case, no blame" (93, emphasis added), hence contradicting the narrator's initial comments on it being "outrageous" (91). He stops reading the letter after about one page and, even though he initially refused to accept that the letter came from his wife, he now states "The sentiments

expressed in the letter *may* have belonged to my wife. Maybe they did. Say they did" (94, emphasis added), still hedging the sentences to try to maintain his credibility. After several unsuccessful attempts to get out of his room to find and confront his wife, he returns to the letter, this time reading it in a non-linear way until it "took on quite another character— one more acceptable" (100). The narrator transforms reality to suit his needs, unwilling to face the truth of the situation and move on. This statement becomes even more ironic and unreliable if we take into account that the narrator is probably a historian, yet his hermeneutical process is far from proficient. Not only does he refuse to analyze the letter as a professional historian, but his obsession with the letter itself and the handwriting also denotes an avoidance and displacement of his emotions, as he obsesses over the text instead of attempting to come to terms with the fact that his wife is leaving him.

In this sense, it is interesting to observe Nünning's "distinction between an unreliable narrator and an untrustworthy one" (1997, 89). Nünning quotes Renate Hof's comment that "a narrator may be quite trustworthy in reporting events but not competent in interpreting them" (89). In "Blackbird Pie", however, the narrator appears both unreliable and untrustworthy, as his statements prove contradictory and he inadequately decodes the situation for fear of acknowledging the truth. His inability to communicate with his wife, and his apprehension about confronting her, suggests that—in opposition to what Nesset postulated—Carver's collection *Elephant* does not necessarily feature "newly articulate" (1995, 74) characters.

As we have seen, the narrator in "Blackbird Pie" saturates his account with repetitions, irrelevant facts, and contradictions. At one point, contradicting his initial remarks, he acknowledges that his wife's letter may contain some truth: "I would go so far as to say that every word of this entire letter […] is utterly false. I don't mean false in the sense of 'untrue', necessarily. There is some truth, perhaps, to the charges. I don't want to quibble" (96). His lack of self-awareness highlights his inability to cope with the situation; and the fact that he spends so much time trying to analyze the letter reveals his unwillingness to have a conversation with his wife.

From his earliest writings, Carver's characters have struggled to communicate their feelings effectively, in part because they cannot understand them. Although in the later stories the characters seem more aware of what worries them, they remain unable to discuss matters appropriately. Moreover, they resort to communicating in an indirect manner. In "Blackbird Pie", instead of straightforwardly talking to him,

the narrator's wife slides an envelope under the door and explains the situation through written words. This could mean that she is more comfortable with scripted language, although it is later revealed that the narrator locks himself in his room when he works (98), thereby physically building a barrier to prevent direct communication and thus probably forcing the wife to send him the letter as her only means of breaking up with him.

In the letter, the narrator's wife mentions how they used to talk often, which now rarely happens. In fact, now that she is leaving him, she writes "I find myself wishing we could have talked about it" (93), denoting how even though they live together, communication has now become truly ineffective or inexistent. Indeed, when the narrator recounts an episode in which they were both having dinner silently he is shocked to hear his wife ask him if he is going to stay in his room for the rest of the night, as "such a question was altogether out of character for her" (97). After an awkward silence, he notes, "I felt as if dinner had somehow ended on an unsatisfactory note. Something else—a few words maybe—was needed to round things off and put the situation right again" (97). For a moment, it seems as though he is on the verge of a revelation, understanding that through meaningful conversation much can be solved, but his transient awareness ends abruptly when all that he is capable of uttering is "[t]here's a fog coming in" (97), describing both the weather outside and, perhaps inadvertently, his marital situation.

Throughout the story, and especially during the first part, the narrator—though apparently not possessed of an obvious articulateness—nevertheless demonstrates an awareness of language and an understanding of his feelings previously unseen in Carver's collections. Unable to get out of his studio to talk to his wife, he acknowledges that "perhaps [he] wanted to avoid a frontal attack", admitting that upon going out he immediately "drew back and shut and locked the door" (98), thereby also shutting himself in emotionally. He also mentions that he "was beginning to feel *uneasy*. (No other word will do.)" (98, emphasis in original), this time finding the right word instead of using repetitions. However, these insightful remarks are simply ephemeral; the reality demonstrating that no matter how much he pretends to master language, he is ultimately unable to use words to save his marriage.

When he finally goes outside to find his wife observing some horses wandering in the fog, he asks her what is happening (although if he had read the letter he would probably know), but she initially doesn't answer (101). When he asks again, she resorts to metafiction, much like Edgar in Carver's "Put Yourself in My Shoes" (1976), avoiding a direct confrontation

with the narrator: "[t]here was this girl, you see. Are you listening? And this girl loved this boy so much. […] But the boy—well, he grew up. I don't know what happened to him" (102). It seems as though these characters, in spite of being more aware of language, are still unable to make use of it successfully. Ironically, just before his wife leaves, the narrator states that "for the first time in [his] life, [he] felt at a loss for words" (107), but it is clear that he has been feeling that way for a long time, as his wife's letter evidences.

Soon, a rancher and a deputy arrive, presumably to deal with the horses. After assessing the situation, the sheriff tells the narrator "[d]on't say anything, and there won't be anything" (106) which in a way encapsulates Carver's approach to language with regards to his characters, who by avoiding communication remain stagnant in their lives. However, when the wife is about to leave and promises that she will write a letter sometime, the sheriff adds, "[n]ow you're talking […] Keep all lines of communication open" (107), a statement that, again, sounds rather ironic considering the characters' communicative history.

History is precisely what the narrator resorts to in order to cope with the situation. Throughout the story, he historicizes his wife and their relationship, referring to its beginning as their "prehistory days" and defining his wife's frustration as her "decline" (95). Perhaps most telling is the last paragraph of the story, in which the narrator states that "to take a wife is to take a history. And if that's so, then I understand that I'm outside history now" (109). He can only try to understand and study what happened if his wife becomes a concept, thereby detaching himself once again from the physicality and reality of the situation; yet, after having spoken to her outside in the fog, he understands and seems now to accept that she is forever gone. As Scofield points out, "[t]hat experience of something mysterious is an essential part of the process by which the pedantic, literal-minded, history buff narrator comes to a deeper realization of his own state and of the real nature of history" (275). Although Carver finally grants this character the privilege of understanding—if only for a moment—it comes too late.

The narrator in "Blackbird Pie", in contrast to what Kirk Nesset claimed, is not articulate and is hardly self-aware at all; he is wordy when writing and quiet when speaking, but both instances of communication produce the same useless effect. As we have seen, the narrator's unreliability is a testament to his inability to deal with his wife's parting, as he is much too focused on the concept of the letter, its contents and handwriting. Moreover, the language the narrator uses and the distinct means of the written and oral communication used both by him and his

wife, underscore their distance and isolation. Finally, the narrator historicizes his wife in order to displace his feelings and thus cope with the situation in a way he can understand. These characters are neither "newly articulate" nor "increasingly self-aware" and they do not "embody on Carver's part [an] […] opening up of hopeful possibility" (Nesset 1995, 74). While they use language more freely and abundantly than many of Carver's early characters, they still do not know how to make use of that language in a constructive manner. In this way, and in spite of certain stylistic differences with earlier texts, "Blackbird Pie" suggests that Carver kept working on the same themes until his untimely death.

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CHAPTER TWO

NOT QUITE AT HOME:
ARCHITECTURE, AUTHENTICITY
AND TRANSMODERNITY
IN RACHEL SEIFFERT'S "ARCHITECT"

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> Ontological security (that is a sense of order and continuity) is maintained when home is able to provide a site of constancy in the social and material environment. Home, in this sense, constitutes a spatial context in which daily routines of human existence are performed. It is a domain where people feel most in control of their lives because they feel free from the social pressure that is part of the contemporary world. (Kinnvall 2004, 747)

Contemporary British writer Rachel Seiffert (b. 1971) received much critical attention for her award-winning debut novel, *The Dark Room* (2001), principally through the lens of Holocaust literary theories, trauma and postmemorial fiction. This has overshadowed other aspects of Seiffert's work that align her with a wider array of contemporary writers, such as Kazuo Ishiguro, James Kellman or J.G. Ballard to name but a few, whose writings are concerned with a specifically contemporary experience of ontological displacement, placelessness and existential anxiety. This essay redirects this critical gaze to Seiffert's contemporary critique through insights from existentialism, with emphasis on Heideggerian notions of authenticity and dwelling, and Edward Casey's observations on place and home. Through a textual analysis of the short story "Architect", from the collection *Field Study* (2005), as seminal text, I suggest that Seiffert offers a tentative possibility of a metaphorical homecoming, as a palliative measure for the sense of futility and angst inherent in our late-capitalist era, thus pointing towards a transmodern way of thinking, primarily in its attention to environmentalism and family relationships.

Indeed, there are affinities between transmodernist philosophy, with its concern for spirituality, environmentalist and humanistic values, with Heidegger's thoughts on essential dwelling; "[b]y a primal oneness the four-earth, sky, divinities and mortals-belong together as one" (Heidegger 1971, 149). Seiffert infers a return home on a narrative level, as we shall see, but also through an aesthetics that incites the readers' imaginative return. Indeed, Edward Casey, in his work on place, fittingly observes how Freud, Bachelard, and Proust suggest "to refind place, a place we have already been losing-we may need to return, if not in actual fact, then in memory or imagination, to the very earliest places we have known" (1993, x). Seiffert also provokes, through a poetics of home, this return in our imaginations, placing us back into a more vital experience of being.

The notion of home certainly remains complex. Ideas about home might involve nostalgic notions of childhood, or idealizations of place. It could be a sensation, a place, a space, or "an active state of being in the world" (Mallett 2004, 65). Whatever it means, most of us would agree that it implies protection, security and safety, and a place that we can be ourselves, without judgement; a haven from a hostile world. It reaches beyond our own intimate space into countries, regions, suburbs, cities or neighbourhoods and community. Home is not necessarily anchored in place, but is also related to a space inhabited by "family, people, things and belongings" (Mallet 2004, 63). In our times of rapid globalization and change, nomadism, insecurity, literal and phenomenological homelessness, the sense of alienation and isolation experienced by individuals, particularly in urban environments, has been strengthened by the decline in support networks, such as family and community (Bauman 2001). Seiffert's narratives invoke, through a poetics of home, in which the reader imagines a place of comfort and security, a tentative hope of return, and this works both on the physical and metaphorical planes.

Seiffert's architect epitomizes a postmodern man; successful, wealthy, and well-respected. But, he also embodies what existentialists referred to as 'inauthenticity' in our everyday life-world. We live in a world where we strive to 'be someone', worry what others think of us, consume in excess, maintain meaningless relationships and live by traditions and codes, performing roles. Thus, In James Park's words,

> [o]ur hectic and 'involved' way of life effectively shields us from the disclosure of our underlying existential anxiety, guilt, & death. Our culture provides ready-made ways of interpreting everything. By keeping ourselves preoccupied with small talk, chatter, and "everydayness", we lose the uncanniness of existence in a tranquilized and familiar world. (Park 2007, 70)

In the aftermath of World War Two, moreover, Heidegger already noted how this inauthenticity served as a diversion to a deeper reflection on the essential things, our mortality and existence. He observed how we abide by what he termed the 'they-world' by conforming to the image others have of us, and behaving according to our self-projection to the world. Thus, by referring to the protagonist simply as 'the architect', Seiffert clearly evokes universality and allegorical status, but also a man branded by his profession, performing his expected role; he has no identity, or worth except that of his achievements and his marketability: "His drawings and his gracious manner somehow inseparable [and] the clients who fell for his designs also fell for him" (Seiffert 2005, 101). He worries about what others think of him; "he worries about the need to be something worthwhile, meaningful, substantial, good. He worries about being boring" (104).

Nevertheless, Seiffert's ultra-minimalist prose also mirrors the superficiality and idle conversations that "make up the inauthentic version of discourse" (Hall 1993, 134) and serve as distraction for more meaningful exchanges; with his brother "[t]hey talk women, politics […]" (111). Furthermore, he does what he considers to be publicly acceptable and conforms to "tacit norms of appropriateness" (Hall 1993, 134). Seiffert maintains a touch of comic irony through the absurdity of these norms that constitute our world, exemplified in the scene where the architect and his brother's girlfriend "[are] washing the dishes in the kitchen and "[…] he asks her to take off her clothes. She is charming, unfailingly polite and ignores his request. […]. His dad tells the architect that he really mustn't say such things" (105). This inauthenticity is strengthened in the next scene where he has a "twice weekly hour of silence with a counsellor […]" (105) in which he fails to tell the truth, as "he knows how banal [it is]. Instead he cries a little, and after she expresses approval he cries a great deal" (105). The irony implied in "banal" is clear, since we know his condition is anything but "banal", and yet, it also implies a sense of something inexpressible and incommunicable; a contemporary human experience. The scene exposes inauthenticity embedded in norms that are ascribed to different activities and that distract us from thinking about ontological homelessness.

Yet, Seiffert's simplicity and extreme *ordinariness* keeps the reader on guard. Reminiscent of Katherine Mansfield's modernist irony, such flawless success and blissful perfection must conceal something darker. Conclusively, almost like a parody of postmodernist subversion, the smug exterior of the architect shrouds a deeper, inexpressible and unconscious

angst. He begins to feel critical of his designs, and a "cold cloud gathers in his belly" (102).

The inauthenticity of the architect's exterior world reflects the architectural spaces he designs, since they neglect an essential human experience. Although Heidegger notoriously lamented this disregard, Lewis Mumford in the early 20th century had already mediated on the disconnection between architecture and humane elements, and more recently, in his book *Heidegger for Architects*, British architect Adam Sharr mentions contemporaries, such as Christopher Alexander and Christian Norberg-Schulz, who continue to reflect on this issue. Seiffert's architect also seems to echo these thoughts, as he realises "what he has produced bears no relation to his expectations" (101). Reflecting the mood of discontent is the error with the car park, "[t]welve executive spaces are required, not ten" (101-102), but "he does not show" (102) his uneasiness. Ironically, the error lies not in the design of human dwellings, but in 'housing' cars. The car parks signify a technocratic modernity dominating mankind; resounding Heidegger's example of the airliner "we are not subjects who use the transportation system, but rather we are used by it to fill the planes" (Dreyfus 1993, 306). Thus, humanity has become "part of the system that no-one directs, but that moves towards the total mobilization and enhancement of all beings, even us" (Dreyfus 1993, 306). The architect also forms part of this system. Significantly, the word 'executive' recurs in *The Walk Home* (2014) as the old Glaswegian tenements are replaced with executive homes; a cultural signifier, undoubtedly denoting Britain's ingrained sense of class, but also inauthenticity and uniformity reflected in architectural design.

Furthermore, the inauthenticity of the building projects lies in their misalliance with the Heideggerian 'fourfold'; that is, buildings, such as the bridge in Heidelberg or the farmhouse in the Black Forest, which for the philosopher epitomized the unity of the four vital elements; earth, sky, divinities and mortals. In a nutshell, phenomenological dwelling constitutes not only the unification and presence of all four elements, but also the recognition of mortality as well as attention to environmental harmony. As we shall see, only when the architect lives by this unity can he find consolation for his existential angst.

In literature, additionally, architecture remains synonymous with "the nature of experience" (Frank 1979, 4), and with the character's interiority. The simple image of the executive car parking spaces, then, signifies the late-capitalist condition, but also encapsulates the architect's angst and mirrors his psyche. He loses interest in the grandiosity and awe of public buildings which "begin to be a puzzle to him, a shape […] his minds' eye

sees no interior" (102); the sterility of the buildings reflects his soul, and his inability to dwell authentically in his art and his imagination. For Heidegger (2000), dwelling also meant to dwell poetically, in the imagination. Thus, the flat characters, the architect's boss, the secretaries, and his colleagues do not dwell, in this sense, since, like the grandiose buildings they extol, they embody mere geometric shape with little essential interiority. They merely conform to the system that defines them, because they do not give thought to their dilemma, and neither to their mortality.

Notably, for Heidegger, the way back into dwelling was to give thought to our ontological homelessness and to our life on earth as mortal beings. The architect, however, had been "keeping busy, long hours with little time for brooding, reflecting" (102), without engaging himself in thinking about his homelessness. The architect's epiphany occurs after his descent into an existential depression, whereby he imagines his own death. In addition, as Pio Colonnello remarks "only in estrangement is it possible to find oneself" (1999, 45), and so, through his estrangement from mundane life, the architect realises "he had been walking into buildings without thinking about them" (106). Heidegger observed that when things run smoothly at work, the tools and material objects remain unnoticed, but when "something goes wrong in the workshop […] there is a 'changeover' in the way things show up for us" (Guignon 1993, 11). Thus, the architect's design errors, and his subsequent mental breakdown allow him to "catch sight of the worldhood of the world" (Guignon, 11). He realises that his buildings had become contextless objects standing for what Heidegger would name a 'dis-worlding of the world', and not the authentic components, at one with the fourfold, that truly construct it. Consequently, the architect's estrangement, together with the thought of his mortality drives him to resolve his dilemma. He thereby sells his house and returns to the comforting and protective environment of his childhood home, where he resumes his familial bonds with his father and brother. Nevertheless, the irony remains clear, since, surely, he should be 'at home' in his own house.

In his work on the significance of place, Edward Casey notes "the way in is also the way out: truly to go into a place on earth, to homestead there, is to be released from the limes, the wall, and at last the mall" (2009, 298), thus echoing Heidegger in his implication that the cure for our homelessness is to return to 'place', to find a re-implacement, as Casey terms it. By returning to his father's home, then, the architect encounters a psychological re-implacement, back "in his old room with the Meccano under the bed" (104). Hence, released from the shackles of society, or

metaphorically, the mall, he goes home to an "inner realm, a private world, our special place distinct from the rest of the world" (Ginsberg 1999, 31). Once back in his childhood home, he finds himself feeling "much better" (104).

Now let us return to my point made at the beginning of this essay about home; our childhood home invokes familiarity, routine, and a place where we might encounter intergenerational support, advice, comfort and protection (Dupuis and Thorns 1998, 34). By returning home, then, the architect re-discovers what Gaston Bachelard nominated his "corner of the world" (2014, 14), which remains embodied and immemorial. He observes that the "house we were born in is more than an embodiment of home, it is also an embodiment of dreams" (Bachelard, 15); the imaginative dreams of childhood that do not necessarily correspond to reality, but lie in a fusion of imagination and memory. Nevertheless, for Bachelard, the house remains human beings' first cradle, the epitome of security. By appealing to our imaginative sense of childhood, Seiffert moves us to feel the same tonality of poetic depth, to use Bachelard's term, of the 'space of the house', and to reflect on a comforting re-implacement.

The simple image of the Meccano set under the architect's childhood bed evokes the retention of memory and the tonality of home. The apparently banal image of the toy is a "picturesque detail" (Bachelard 2014, 85) that belongs to each reader in a subjective and incommunicable way, and as Bachelard suggests "we should never want to tell all there is to tell about it" (85). Yet, it not only suggests an embodiment of childhood happiness and daydreaming, but also subjectivity and intimacy. The image of our childhood home, and the objects of memory that often remain there, like the house itself or our childhood rooms, resonate not only with the depths of time and the melancholy impossibility of return, but also a yearning for protection and security. Like the toys that Stevie finds in the old Glasgow tenements in *The Walk Home* (2014), the Meccano embodies memory, and as Bachelard notes, such things are "motionless, mute things that never forget" (Bachelard 2014, 143). Furthermore, the childhood home points to Bachelard's 'community of affection', and like the vegetables the architect cultivates on his father's allotment, affords protection from hostile elements; for the vegetables, this means the hard rain and wind, snow and frost, but for the architect, it is the hostility of men and the inauthenticity of the world around him. Nevertheless, the toy embodies memory and tradition within the architectural structure of the house.

For Heidegger, building also implies cultivating, or 'taking care of' the natural location and 'fourfold' elements as well as the buildings'

inhabitants. Once home, the architect helps his father to care for the vegetables on the allotment, cultivating plants and digging the soil. The naïve structures of "crooked panes and corrugated iron" (107) suggest a symbolic return to a more vital dwelling on earth, and a need to recover the essential. But, significantly, they represent unpretentiousness, austerity and authenticity that the grandiose or uniform designs of modern architecture lacked. The allotment structures display Heideggerianism in their attention to site and location and as constructions arising from natural necessity. Casey similarly remarks that such buildings "start from the intentions and wishes and practical purposes of those who are to live in the dwelling" (2009, 174), proposing a human-centred architecture deriving from the necessities of its occupants, such as that advocated by Mumford, Alexander and others.

Moreover, existentialists proposed the implication in a project as a palliative measure for nausea or angst. Certainly, the architect seems to find relief from his latest endeavour, as he sets about designing and building a new structure to protect his father's tomatoes. Significantly, he employs recycled materials, the residue of capitalism, echoing Ballard's novel *Concrete Island*. The anti-modernity discourse is strengthened in the architects use of a "brown paper bag and pencil" (107), rather than a highly technological computer program to draw up the plan, thus highlighting the gap between the carpenter builder, as Mumford reified, more at one with the essential, humane elements than the gentleman architect (1924, 54). But, above all, the allotment structure acquires real purpose as a building project because of its emergence from the natural necessity of shelter and sensitivity to place.

The story finishes on a note of careful optimism, a blend of hope and melancholia, raising more questions than it answers. The architect is "proud and pleased and also sad. The sun still shines, but the wind has picked up […] he is stable and disappointed, no longer an architect" (107). Paradoxically, the architect feels at one with himself, providing an inkling of hopefulness, yet harmony does not completely prevail, since there remains a hint of uncertainty. Mumford remarks that "in a barren soil the most fertile of geniuses are cut off from their full growth" (1924, 193). Likewise, the architect's failure to create new designs expresses the "barren soil" of postmodernity. Furthermore, he asserted that apart from the jewels of architecture, "most of our buildings will be outside the province of the architectural profession-they will be the product of minds untouched, for the most part, by humane standards" (Mumford, 194). Certainly, Mumford's words shed light on the architect's disappointment with his profession, since this had been to promote "buildings as products

or as art objects" (Sharr 2007, 38), rather than a more humane architecture attuned to sustainability and the environment.

In conclusion, the story presents tensions between material and spiritual life, reflecting a crisis of postmodernity through a crisis of architecture. The metaphorical return home is also a 'getting back into place' in Casey's parlance. The architect regains the Garden of Eden, in an age of destruction and environmental degradation. But above all, this is an allegory of loss on a spiritual, cosmic level. We can appreciate the simple, only when we have lost it and given thought to it. Furthermore, the real crisis of the architect lies not in the loss of his job, nor in the re-discovery of the simplicity of rural construction as material element, but the drama of a man's value and self-worth, and finding his place on earth, an authentic homecoming. Seiffert's story, then, points to a post-postmodern discourse, since not only does she portray the postmodern condition, but also endeavours to provide a careful, but not overly optimistic, solution in the way of a return to a more authentic or essential dwelling and to humanistic values; in other words, one that gestures towards a philosophy of transmodernity.

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