The Politics of Decomposition

Alan Durant

Daniel Tiffany, *Radio Corpse: Imagism and the Cryptaesthetic of Ezra Pound*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1995, £28.50 cloth.

In most contemporary cultural forms, images play a major role; precisely how we understand them accordingly helps define our modern media environment and culture. In varying degrees of association, images typify modern poetry; they characterise a number of styles of modern prose writing; they constitute a principal material of film, combined in techniques of montage; with captions or spoken commentary they form the basis of slide shows, comic strips and other series of pictures; and, as icons and multi-media resources, images propel the current emphasis in information technology on Graphic User Interfaces. What an image is may be understood slightly differently in each case; but collectively, within different semantic and aesthetic regimes, images are a significant defining element of modern cultural forms. Understanding how they function has consequently become an increasingly important goal of cultural analysis.

In the various contexts in which images occur, a fundamental connection holds between them and a dominant visual orientation, or, in stronger forms, between images and a kind of positivism: what is physically or transparently seen is invested with a claimed objectivity ostensibly freed from the constitutive role of point-of-view or interpretation. Even in more nuanced accounts, images often serve straightforwardly as indices of empirical fact: seeing is a persistent cue to believing. Registered and modulated by a variety of technological instruments, too, images have arguably become the privileged medium of scientific representation, on account of their seeming ability to disguise or obliterate subjective volition with neutral or dispassionate science.

From a critical or sceptical standpoint, of course, the functioning of images does not so much signal easy access to empirical truth as provide a fetish enabling the legitimation of science, by marginalising human constructions of meaning and encouraging relaxation into an unquestioned imaginary realm. From a critical perspective, accordingly, the interest of images lies more in how, by contesting or reinventing our sense of the visible, images redefine our visual field and create specific 'scopic regimes', such as the particular organisations of vision and knowledge typical of modernity. Among the many possible significances of artistic modernisms, therefore, is the way in which their innovative theories and uses of the image have contributed to what is sometimes called a 'reorganisation of the constitution of the real', with knock-on effects on contemporary theories and practices

of representation as well as on what may be meant by concepts such as modern spectatorship.

The poetry and cultural theories of Ezra Pound are interesting in this context for three reasons. First, Pound's literary networks from very early on, and his energetic artistic advocacy and polemic, place him at the centre of debates about Imagism, Vorticism, and other important engagements within literary modernism with the properties and significance of written and visual images. His own later, long and unfinished work, *The Cantos*, is itself exemplary of both the aspirations and also the contradictions of an imagistic aesthetic in poetry, testing to destruction most of Imagism's now famous (but still elusive and seemingly contradictory) commitments in terms of meaning and value. Second, Pound's brilliant but highly problematic explorations throughout his writings of a nexus of simultaneously sexual, aesthetic and political symbolic equations (and oppositions) illustrates how argued commitments to definition, order and authority are linked both to details of his own individual formation and to more public attachment to fascism and an unremitting anti-Semitism. Third, Pound's indictment for treason after World War II, and subsequent confinement in a mental institution, pose dramatically a set of deep questions about the relation between any given aesthetics or ideology of the image and alternative structures of meaning, cultural value and order.

Daniel Tiffany's *Radio Corpse* offers an eloquent investigation of Pound's complex beliefs and practices in these areas. Tiffany argues that Pound's imagistic techniques, while sometimes appearing settled in a positivistic framework of sight or vision, involve a less stable poetics of memory connected with deep impulses towards elegy and a fascination with decomposed bodies, necrophilia and reanimation. He claims (adding new directions to lines of argument associated with commentators as different from each other as Donald Davie and Jean-Michel Rabate) that Pound's youthful experiments with representing and symbolising death, coupled with his pain on the death of Gaudier Brzeska in 1915, govern a poetics whose own logical development leads through a series of beliefs in immanent or radiant meaning - including the luminous detail, Ernest Fenollosa's readings of the Chinese written character, the ideogrammic method, and so on - towards a belief in radio as the supreme 'radiological' medium and finally to Pound's own radio broadcasts on Rome Radio in the early 1940s.

In developing this account, Tiffany extends a rich tradition (perhaps most compellingly sign-posted in work by Marcelin Pleynet during the 1970s) of tying together details of Pound's biography (including evident psychical complexes) with extracts from the poetry and theses reiterated throughout the critical writing. Tiffany offers a persuasive description of how Pound's eyestrain problems are reworked as simultaneously a medical, aesthetic and political theory - linking concerns as diverse as the importance of lucidity in writing, Neo-platonic qualities of the invisible, and Pound's own 'X-ray' signature; and the reconsideration of Pound's priapic sexuality, in the light

of the poet's intimate letters to Gaudier Brzeska and the transvestite identity of the conventionally discussed 'woman' in Pound's room when he was expelled from college, offers an interesting gloss on otherwise puzzling patterns within Pound's symbolically associative modes of composition. Equally, Tiffany's discussion of links between the redemptive value for Pound of translation, as urgently a form of personal and cultural memory, and images of resuscitation and exhumation fills out more conventional literary understandings of Pound's *alter egos* and *personae*. In Tiffany's reading, it is waste material oozing from the ubiquitous symbolic cadavers that threatens Pound's fetishistic trust in translation and fixed meaning as conquerors of death; whenever such symbolic waste, instability or excess comes to the poet's attention, it inspires an equally visceral loathing for anyone or anything capable of symbolically representing subversion of fixed meaning or authority.

The arguments Tiffany develops are not based exclusively on his own, often original readings of Pound, however; they also draw on a larger framework of theoretical material. Much of Tiffany's discussion of death and the body, for instance, comes with acknowledgement from Maurice Blanchot, and is accompanied by frequent references also to Kristeva and Derrida; and there is an illuminating discussion of different concepts of fetishism in Marx and Freud, highlighting the divergent implications which follow from applying one or other concept to Pound's writing. In these respects, and because of the effective interweaving of theoretical mini-essays with the close readings themselves, *Radio Corpse* is throughout - at least after what seems a slightly over-speculative and under-supported introduction - a thought-provoking and important study.

Such features of *Radio Corpse* make the book a valuable study within a recognizable idiom of theory-led close reading of an individual author; and the limitations of the book are equally, I think, limitations of that genre. The close focus on a single author's work tends to close down lines of enquiry - often as regards contrasting cases, surprising omissions, or counterfactuals - which are not readily prompted by the writings themselves or by the author's known biography. To take just one local example: Tiffany makes much of Pound's interest in radio as an exemplary medium of communication, both technically and in terms of questions of free speech and propaganda; but the sense of Pound engaging with (and possibly being misled by) fascism's *cutting-edge* 'radioactive' communication technology would have been blunted by broader comparison of 1930s interest in radio with, for instance, government explorations of the propaganda potential of film (at least an equally image-driven medium) both in the USA and in Europe from as early as World War I onwards.

More generally, and presumably because of limited space in a single-author study, exposition of theoretical material is kept brief and not contextualised, functioning more often as presupposition and authority than as integral argument. This can become problematic where theoretical

frameworks are selectively multidisciplinary without comment or explanation. As part of its illustration of the cultural prevalence of the image, for instance, *Radio Corpse* contains suggestive but isolated references to positron-emission tomography, ultrasound, and magnetic resonance imaging, which provide a general 'technology' flavour but would be unlikely to survive much inspection; and competing accounts of image-interpretation and memory developed in psychology, modern linguistics or cognitive science - which are hardly compatible with Tiffany's chosen critical paradigm but surely merit at least an acknowledgement - are simply non-existent. *Radio Corpse* also lacks a conclusion, or at least the sorts of generalisation prefigured by its introduction. Such a low-key (and, as regards Pound, mid-career) end to what remains loosely a chronological study seems particularly surprising given Pound's intense interweaving of imagistic techniques and fragmented personal memory in the Pisan Cantos, which are hardly discussed in the book at all.

Finally, it seems possible that play throughout *Radio Corpse's* 'cryptaesthetic' on the word 'crypt' itself (and on the related semantic field of burial, decay, the undead, etc.) is slightly overworked. The link between the sense of 'crypt' as burial place and 'crypt' within the morphology of a cluster of words related to secret linguistic codes does effectively crystallise Tiffany's general argumentative connection between meaning slippage, death and desire. But the issue of how far such word-play actually conducts or constructs arguments and how far it is simply always an opportunistic linguistic accompaniment to them is too serious and too complex to be paraded as just a series of stylish but never analyzed puns. It is an open question, for instance, if or how far it matters that the polysemous potential of 'crypt' in the current context is not matched by that of 'grave' or 'mausoleum', or indeed by 'cipher' - a term whose sense shifts the linguistic level of the code-scrambling technically from word substitution to what is commonly celebrated in post-structuralism as the level of the letter.

Ethnic Memory

Alan J Rice

Amritjit Singh, Joseph T.Skerrett, Jr. and Robert E. Hoganl (eds), Memory and Cultural Politics: New Approaches to American Ethnic Literatures. Northeastern University Press, Boston and London, 1996; £15.95 paperback, and £42.75 cloth.

'Ethnic Memory' is one of those strange conceptual paradigms which, though seemingly transparent and obvious, become problematised almost immediately it is discussed. In this multivarious collection, which covers all the colours of the ethnic American rainbow, 'memory' runs the gamut from literal transcriber of an empirical truth to the creation of narratives which function as fictional critiques of 'truth as history'. Such a wide range of perspectives is illuminating, and necessary to discuss texts as wide-ranging as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, through Japanese internment poetry of the Second World War to Arab American literature and the extremely interesting reconstructed history of Louis Tikas, the Greek American who played a leading role in the mining strike and subsequent massacre in Ludlow, Colorado in 1914.

Many of the essays here include Michael M. J. Fischer's article, 'Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory' as a prime secondary source and its investigation of ethnic autobiography as a powerful counter-discourse to Anglo-American hegemony is astute. But less so is its attempt at a totalisation of ethnic experience, 'which comes from uncritically transposing anthropological discourse and methodology to literary texts'. This methodology 'wipes out ethnic literatures' historical and ideological specificities' (p213) as David Palumbo-Liu succinctly explains in his illuminating essay on the relationship of Alice Walker's short story 'Elethia' and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* to epistemology, history, memory and 'truth'. Other essays in the collection are much less questioning of Fischer and its lacunae are replicated in some of the essays here. For instance, G. Thomas Couser is over-schematic in his use of a formulaic approach to the connections between Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* and Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* because he is too unquestioning of the linkages between ethnic groups in the United States due to their shared history of oppression. In a sense Fischer and his acolytes repeat the methodological error of Werner Sollors' *Beyond Ethnicity* in which he constructed a useful typology to explicate ethnic assimilation involving a process of consent to Anglo-American hegemony but failed to flesh out how such a paradigm that could be usefully applied to many European Americans is only of limited value when applied to African Americans and Native Americans who encountered various forms of coercion

that make any paradigm of 'consent' vaguely grotesque.

Sollors is hardly mentioned in this collection, but his omission is not as crucial as that of Hayden White whose perception that history has more in common with literature than science could have provided an illuminating counterpoint to some of the more philosophically weighty essays here. For instance, Palumbo-Liu's explication of how memory challenges the 'objective' truths of history could have been given useful theoretical support by judicious use of Hayden White's sceptical tome *Metahistory*. Palumbo-Liu's intriguing discussion on the transfiguring power of memory leads to some trenchant commentary which is a useful corrective to some of the more bland descriptive essays in the volume. His positioning of memory as the central corrective which challenges history is succinctly put.

> All notions of ethnic writing as revision of history point to this term (memory), for it is through memory alone, as the repository of things left out of history, that the ethnic subject can challenge history. The texts treated here share methods of inverting the history-memory relation - both stabilize memory, imbuing it with the status of history, and destabilize history, critiquing its mode of assigning significance. In this double movement, ethnic narrative reinscribes memory as history (pp212-13).

If historical narrative is merely a literary construct then the truth of ethnic memory signifies on that seeming truth, constructing a different reality. Unfortunately such reversals are far from unproblematic and the better essays here do not shirk from exposing the dangers of fetishising certain ethnic memories. Lisa Suhair Majaj, for instance, shows how ethnic memory is distorted by chauvinist politics into a nostalgia for a pre-Lapsarian world of fixed gender roles in a mythologised paradisal Arab homeland which never existed in reality. Abla Farhoud's play, *The Girls from the Five and Ten*, is seen to be a partial nostalgic narrative which in remembering Lebanon as Utopian remembers only part of the story. Mujaj insightfully comments:

> Although this emphasis invests the past, ethnicity, and the women who represent these with mythic stature, such mythologization traps women in a static representational structure within which attempts to alter traditional roles are often taken as attempts to subvert ethnicity itself - an accusation that takes on particular potency when ethnic identity is fragile or contested (p275).

Ethnic memory here is rightfully seen as potentially as dangerous to full liberation as a colonialist or Anglo-American hegemonic discourse. Such reactionary uses of ethnic memory have led some astute critics to call for a politicisation of memory that would disavow such wallowings in nostalgia that benefit the status qou. As bell hooks has said what is needed is a,

'politicization of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as it once was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present' (p56).

Similar regrettable uses of ethnic memory to fetishise past glories are a staple of many other ethnic cultures. Rafael Perrez Torres shows how Chicano/ a literature, in using pre-Cortesian symbology, has at times valorised an ethnic memory that has sought to elide the differences of gender, sexuality and class within Chicano culture in the United States. He uses Gloria Anzaldua's work to critique such narrowness illustrating how her work. 'evokes mythic elements as part of a cultural pastiche that moves towards, but never ultimately fixes Chicano identity' (p312). Such conscious use of the many valences of ethnic memory to problematise cultural identity is central to the project of the post-colonial and postmodern moment, though again this collection is rather disappointing in that these central concerns are rather buried within the sectional concerns of the individual essays.

An essay that does not shrink from confrontation with these larger issues is William Boelhower's. His reading of Jean Toomer's *Cane*, Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* and John Edgar Wideman's *Homewood Trilogy* exemplifies an archeological approach to mapping American reality. He uses the concept of ethnic semiosis to show how beneath the political map of the United States there is an ethnic 'memory theatre' that reads a countervailing reality from the country's place names. Ethnic semiosis maps America 'not as the procedural landscape of political democracy, but as the typology of a people's dwelling' (p38). In ethnic novels he finds places imagined that are invisible to the majority culture, that are, in fact, 'below the cartographic surface of political representation' (p35). Boelhower illustrates founding postmodern principles of localism and difference in ethnic literatures which show that ownership is more contested than might at first seem to be the case. For the disinherited African American, power comes through a knowledge of origin, of at-homeness, which works against a racial oppression which marginalises him/her. No-one expressed this better than Zora Neale Hurston when she said, 'I was a Southerner, and had the map of Dixie on my tongue'. Her power might be circumscribed by her double jeopardy as women and African American, but as William Piersen's seminal study *Black Legacy* points out her race literally created many of the most basic characteristics of Southern life - language, manners, music and cooking to name but four.

Hurston's performative account of her Southern roots draws attention to a significant omission in a book on memory and cultural politics, popular cultural forms. They are marginalised here, and there is only peripheral mention of the most felicitous of modes for inscribing memory, music. There is much here on Caribbean literature, but nothing on Calypso or Reggae, much on African American literature, but little on jazz or the blues. As literature is increasingly studied in conjunction with film, music and the visual arts such a narrow focus is regrettable and makes the text less useful in a classroom context. Charles Mingus said in his autobiography, 'my music

is evidence of my soul's will to live beyond my sperm's grave'. His encoding of racialised memory in music which is a legacy for his race and which was listened to by many for whom literature is an alien Anglo concept is surely central to a project such as this book, but one that is unfortunately marginalised to the point of virtual non-existence.

Seeing Things

Rory O'Connell

Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory, Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Society*, Verso, London 1994; £14 paperback, £45 cloth; Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1994; £17.50 paperback, £34.95 cloth.

The discussion of image and reality in relation to representations of the past which has characterised the debate about 'heritage' in contemporary society has tended to focus on the relative moralities and accuracies of different versions of the past. In these two volumes the authors examine 'heritage' as visual culture in order to try to understand its appeal: for Samuel, the vast appeal which history continues to hold in the imagination of large sections of the UK population, evidenced by widespread and active engagement in history related activities; and for Boyer, the apparently universal appeal the past holds for public city authorities to reference the past in the redevelopment of public spaces.

In this volume of *Theatres of Memory*, a series of independent sections present old and new writing, designed to be read selectively or as a whole. In a new look at what is now regarded as old ground, Samuel surveys the area of 'Retrochic', the consumption of heritage through design and decorative objects, with wit and and considerably more detail than other contributors to this field. His reassessment of the use and meaning of 'Old Photographs' is a timely reminder that before the 1970s old black and white photographs were largely ignored as a source for serious historians. 'Reurrectionism' examines the explosion in opportunities for engaging in 'living history' through re-enactment and 'live' museum interpretation and at a growth of collecting memorabilia as a personal preservation project. A detailed study examines how Dickens has transferred to screen.

Samuel deliberately refuses to judge the merits or qualities of different kinds of activities, preferring to see them all as signs of a positive and active interest in the past. How much the general public really distinguish about who owns, runs and authors the variety of depictions of the past which are available is in any case open to question: museums and theme parks are all united by brown road signs, allocated by the Department of Transport not the Department of National Heritage.

This may obviously draw criticism from those who see themselves as legitimate and 'professional' protectors of the past and it is an issue which will presumably be addressed in the posthumous second volume, due to appear later this year. However it is important to Samuel that he views the

scene he describes as a consumer and a democrat and he replies to what he calls 'heritage baiting' in the most succinct chapter of the book.

He has no sympathy with the view that 'heritage' is the symptom of a sick society, dismissing such taunting as a 'favourite sport of the metropolitan intelligentsia'. His empirical evidence also dispatches the notion of site-visiting as a post-industrial leisure pursuit: 70,000 visited the new warehouses in Liverpool docks on Whit Monday, 1871. He is probably correct in suggesting that ultimately, derision of heritage by critics from both the right and the left is fuelled by good old-fashioned snobbery and in particular, the assumption that words are more important in communication than pictures:

> The perceived opposition between 'education' and 'entertainment' and the unspoken and unargued for assumption that pleasure is almost by definition mindless, ought not to go unchallenged. There is no reason to think that people are more passive when looking at old photographs or film footage, handling a museum exhibit, following a local history trail, or even buying a historical souvenir, than when reading a book... The pleasures of the gaze - scopophilia as it is disparagingly called - are different in kind from those of the written word but not necessarily less taxing on historical reflection and thought. (p271)

Christine Boyer is also concerned with tracing the genealogy of visual representations of the past, in particular how they have impacted on the plan and appearances of cities. The 1876 Centennial celebrations in the USA initiated a craze for ancestor worship which ranged from mass adoption of clapboard 'New England' Colonial Revival architecture to mass planting of elm trees and village greens, and even the invention of fictitious relatives. This is only one stop on a stupendously wide ranging journey through urban landscapes from Ancient Greece to 1990s New York.

Boyer organises the visual history of the city into different categories according to how the city has been depicted at different times: the 'traditional' city as a work of art; the 'modern' city as panorama; and the 'contemporary' city as theatre or spectacle. Within these the writing draws on a variety of different disciplines including geography, travel writing, art, architecture, film and historiography. No postmodern pick and mixing here however: Boyer demonstrates a profound understanding of the diversity of sources and histories she draws upon and which the urban historian must manipulate in order to understand 'the city of collective memory'. Politics and theory are also deftly handled ranging from the history of planning laws in Europe and America to the changing organising principles of museums and art galleries. In particular, the detailed account of the agencies instrumental in the transformation of New York's Battery Park City and South Street Seaport from industrial dereliction to heritage experience reveals the full complexity of public/private agendas in relation to urban renewal.

A central issue is that whoever controls the city's public space controls the right to tell the history of that place. History here is taken to mean the account which hides more than it reveals. She sees the growth of preservation of historic city quarters as a dangerous precedent, one which can only work by being historically censured and by being physically different from neighbouring and usually modern city fabric, whether high rise financial quarter or inner city housing project.

Boyer recognises why both public and private capital will usually elect to portray a conservative interpretation of the past, in order to return to a 'centred world'. Inevitably such reconstruction and preservation, a three dimensional version of history writing itself will preserve only one version of the past, excluding subjective accounts and eventually leading to the 'memory crisis' Walter Benjamin warned about. Whether an alternative is possible is left as a challenge, but it is one that Boyer says city dwellers will be compelled to address: 'But how can the arts of city building attend to the city of tradition and memory without limiting its horizons to conciliatory conclusions and foreclosing zones of uncertainty and complexity, without imposing unjustifiable control over the city and exercising unwarranted authority over others' (p29).

Neither *Theatres of Memory* nor *The City of Collective Memory* really connect their analysis to other ways in which collective memory is transmitted in contemporary society. Oral historians have long been attempting to record and peel back the layers which form collective memory in order to reveal and understand what a complex notion it is; Samuel barely mentions the existence of memory as an oral culture and Boyer does not mention it all. Even so, at a time when UK public spending on 'commemorative' projects to mark the Millennium is probably the only sector of public spending which is expanding, both texts propose serious a examination of what commemoration actually means to the people who pay for it.

Ghost Stories

Alasdair Pettinger

Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996, £20.00 cloth.

In 1897, so the story goes, Freud abandoned his traumatic theory of neurosis, choosing to believe, instead, that his patients' memories were in fact fantasies, which bore no necessary relation to the facts of their own childhood. This change of mind paved the way for the foundings of psychoanalysis as a science of a distinctive 'psychical reality', a realm irreducible to 'instinct' but also surprisingly resistant to the imposition of social and cultural norms.

And yet Freud could never quite get rid of the 'real event': the idea that fantasies were anchored historically in some way was one to which he returned periodically, even in his last great work, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). Jacqueline Rose finds this 'wild' account of the origins of Judaism of particular interest for a number of reasons. Firstly, it shows clearly that fantasy is not merely a private matter: it is a crucial force which binds a people together, a kind of 'psychic glue' (p3) by which 'statehood takes hold and binds its subjects' (p14). But the text's uncertainties and incompleteness suggest that fantasy - true to its more colloquial meaning - is always 'running ahead of itself' (p14); it can contribute to a loss of conviction too. *States of Fantasy* makes full use of the available puns: nation state, state of mind, being 'in a state', and so on.

Secondly, Freud's claim that the Jewish religion owes its particular character to a distant traumatic episode it tries to conceal (the ritual murder of Moses by his followers), raises the possibility that fantasy is a form of remembrance, after all. Drawing on the concept of 'trans-generational haunting', recently elaborated by Hungarian analysts Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham, Rose suggests that this might help explain - and remind us of - the tenacity of national identifications. Rooted in traumas of the past, transmitting and repeating themselves across time, they can't simply be shrugged off. Rose is concerned with the traumas of apartheid, colonialism, anti-semitism: rather less fanciful than Freud's. But the main point remains: one can't choose one's memories, either as an individual or a society. All the talk of invented traditions and imagined communities has encouraged the impression that the past is merely a cultural construct; the psychical obstacles that these constructions must take into account have gone largely unacknowledged.

One affect of *States of Fantasy* is to cast doubts on the attempts to respond to the nastier manifestations of nationalsim with an assertion and celebration of statelessness, exile, and non-belonging. Most famously expressed, perhaps,

in Virginia Woolfs's 'as a woman I have no country ... I want no country.' Such an assertion of enlightened cosmopolitan individualism often relies on a contrast with the persistent irrational backwardness of those still in the grip of communal traditions, and therefore not quite so enlightened after all. One chapter looks at Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage,* a key modernist text admired by Woolf, and shows how the validation of female self seems to be indissociably linked to the depredation of socialist and Jewish identities. The apparently sound contrast 'feminism against nationalism' slides into 'woman against Jew' (p128). Elsewhere Rose explores the critique of Zionism by the Israeli writer Amos Oz: here again the attempt to distance oneself from the rhetoric of messianism breaks down as it emerges that - in the midst of stereotypical representations of Arab, Sephardic Jew, woman - the ability to occupy the moral high ground is apparently possessed by some much more easily than others

If traumas of violence and exile haunt any attempt to renounce nationalist identifications altogether, they also bedevil attempts to switch one for another. Rose considers the case of two Lithuanian Jews who fled persecution in Europe to arrive in South Africa in the 1930s. Now white men in the tropics, the question arises whether 'the dispossessed [can] claim their legitimate rights without taking on the psychic trappings of the oppressor' (p53). One, the psychoanalyst Wulf Sachs, looked to Freud's (Egyptian) Moses as a model of one who 'crossed over'. Sach's account of his analysis of an African patient, John Chavafambira, evinces a desire to genuinely identify with the oppressed - and yet the structural similarity of the whole enterprise to colonial missionary work is never far from the surface. Joe Slovo, on the other hand, might be Sach's dream come true. A leading figure in the South African Communist Party, and a minister in Mandela's first cabinet, he was a hugely popular figure. And yet Rose chooses to give the 'last word' to his daughter Gillian, whose family saga *Ties of Blood* tells a more sobering tale of seduction and betrayal. Identities, she implies, cannot be so confidently repudiated or newly embraced.

Thus far, it might seem that *States of Fantasy* is suggesting that we are all doomed to inhabit forever different traditions, that communication between them is futile. But, early on, Rose points out that transgenerational haunting works not just down through the generations, but across them too (p31). In the case of Israel and Palestine, 'the problem is not ... how to get the two sides to the conflict to relate ... ; but rather - and as the already-existing obstacle to the first - the extent to which the two peoples have already taken up places in each other's heads' (pp32-33). As long as the mutual animosity persists, identifying with the other is more likely to help perpetuate violence rather than bring it to an end.

This raises all kinds of awkward questions about empathy and cross-cultural judgement which Rose explores in the course of a reading of Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*. Sensitive to the pitfalls to which a white critic might be especially prone, she discusses the madness of the central character,

Elizabeth. Do we understand it as something that would fit neatly into western diagnostic schema - paranoid schizophrenia, for example? Or might the symptoms have a rather different resonance in a culture in which the belief that ancestors can communicate with the living is commonplace? Rose suggests that *A Question of Power* is - like Toni Morrison's *Beloved* - a 'novel of transgenerational haunting where the woman becomes the repository of an unspoken and unspeakable history' (p108).

The madness - and the trauma giving rise to it - must, therefore, be read locally, historically. And yet in writing for a general readership, Bessie Head in some sense universalizes it, forcing those who do not share the same history to imagine it nevertheless; even as the author, imagining the other lives she might have lived had she been born in other circumstances, is brought to an even sharper understanding of her own particular situation (p108). 'Which means, perhaps oddly, that universality is also contingency' (p110): a formulation which highlights the difficulty in trying to promote and convey a form of understanding that does not dream of abolishing conflict. Just as 'normal sexuality' is a strictly unattainable aim, suggests Rose, so is 'justice'. The moral perfectionist's slogan of 'love thy neighbour' is as dangerous as that of rigid sex morality; and the more one tries to enforce it, the more elusive it becomes.

States of Fantasy is a brilliant, stimulating book, which exhibits a refreshing disregard for literary canons - other authors discussed include Muriel Spark, Iris Murdoch, Lionel Trilling, John Rawls, Beatrix Potter, and the former Conservative Education Minister, John Patten. But more provocative is its terminological novelty: the book's title heralds a departure from the more conventional 'culture and identity' approach. And yet, in contrast to the careful readings of the primary texts, there is little sustained engagement with existing theoretical work on race and nation beyond a vague reference to 'recent literary discussions' (p14) and some rejoinders to passing remarks made by Henry Louis Gates, twice chosen as the representative of prevailing trends.

This is doubtless partly explained by the fact that four of the six chapters (and the afterword) were originally delivered as lectures. But when the preface seems to be proposing a 'new theoretical turn' (p14), the no more than ghostly presence of other scholars is somewhat disappointing. At one point, for example, Rose distinguishes her argument on trauma from Homi Bhabha's remarks on parody (p31), while neglecting to acknowledge his own interest in memory and forgetting and Morrison's *Beloved*. It's hard in such cases not to be reminded of Freud's 'narcissism of minor differences'.