

The dispossessed self – how formative treatments of place explore the human interior from Pope’s Grotto to Palestine.

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Signed *T Sharp*

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1. Abstract

This essay uses Alexander Pope's grotto as a template with which to explore formative treatments of place in three contemporary novels.

Austerlitz (Sebald), *Mornings in Jenin* (Abulhawa) and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (Saadawi) use place to question and reinterpret senses of the self within our perceived physical contexts, and demonstrate ways in which place can lend new significance to reality itself.

Each of these progressively fundamental, paradigmatic challenges is set in a real, geographical location that has been robbed of permanence, substantiality or protection, and questions whether it is possible to reject and replace the fixed, entrapping nature of our physical circumstances.

I will show how these formative approaches to place explore the possibility that our notions of essence or significance can be found housed within ephemeral, or transient contexts, as antidotes to our usual perceptions of more tangible or physical embodiments of meaning. Pope's grotto, central as it is to my remembered childhood landscape, interweaves the essay as an instigator and ghostly extender of this formative tradition, and is shown to serve as an influence on my own novel writing process.

2. Introduction

This essay takes as its inspiration Alexander Pope's grotto in Twickenham, a space in which I spent hours of each school day for twelve years of childhood. Pope has been an abiding and central influence on my own writing, but this impact was not brought about by any long-established familiarity with his poetry. Rather, his effect has come unwittingly through memories of having existed inside a physical space he created. My relatively recent – and now fateful-seeming – engagement with Pope has unearthed a deeper awareness of the process behind my own craft, and increased my sense of formal advances in treatment of place unfolding in contemporary novelistic practice.

With the grotto as springboard for questions around the nature of the displaced self as contextualised by physical place, I will explore *Austerlitz* (Sebald), a novel in which re-articulations of place have been particularly influential in my own work; then, with *Mornings in Jenin* (Abulhawa) and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (Saadawi), two contemporary novels set in places that have been subject to very particular pressures of displacement and dispossession, I will investigate the innovative ways in which these questions are playing out in contemporary fiction now.

Central to this questioning is the idea that our perceived truths, and the nature of the physical world around us, often seem contradictory or irreconcilable, especially to those of us who have been uprooted or geographically dispossessed. Each of these novels finds ways to explore, challenge or reconcile our relationship to the limits set by the physical world within which we are bound to exist. That constant tension, too,

between our sense of self as physical matter, and thus a part of place itself, and the struggle we experience in the face of dispossession from it, not only forms the challenge faced by each writer here, but will be shown to provide the tension energising each novel's formative innovations.

In the sense that every place associated with the writers studied here has been in some way 'othered', by war, exile, dispossession or religious intolerance, the ideas around the formal representation of self in place can be seen continuing to play out and evolve in contemporary fiction. The unequivocally failed realignment of a sense of self in the face of such dislocations, which emerged in Pope's grotto as a created extension of perceived, projected and memorialised identity, will, in the fiction studied below, re-materialise in progressively enlightening formative responses.

Austerlitz, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *Mornings in Jenin* represent places that exist in their current forms as a result of conflict, incarceration, religious intolerance and struggles of power and ideology. As places and peoples that have been marginalised and caricatured, and by way of thinking about the current creative and political impetus behind contemporary fictional engagements with place, they also thereby connect to the creative preoccupations in my own novel. My protagonist's character is metafictionally revealed through the historical places he writes of, just as we all are present in what we produce creatively. Place can thus be regarded as an active cipher, the writer's broad and multi-layered canvas for the projected self.

Pope's unique position as a creator of place¹, away from his written work, and his demonstration of place as a creative expression of self-identity, have made him seem a serendipitous inspiration for this project. That I, too, grew up in the grotto space, brings to the fore the idea of place as an inspirational conduit for creative inheritance in my own craft. The site of Pope's creativity thus becomes an ironic kind of exhumation, positioning Pope as an influential ghost for my characterisation, utilising place, via my own memories of the grotto space.

As the only surviving physical embodiment of Pope's inner world, the grotto is also a template from which to explore the ways in which formal literary innovations of place might convey senses of the dispossessed self. The incarcerating system of my convent school, in my own memory, Pope's own geographical displacement and exile as a result of religious ideology, and the distortion of the physicality of the place itself,² all meet their modern mirror images in the novels explored below. But while the thematic similarities between the writers explored here are copious enough to appear uncanny, and though this may be explained, even centuries apart, by a common human grappling with our senses of self in displacement, the links serve as clues to a deeper understanding of the self in the context of the physical realities in which we must exist.

¹ Pope's lifelong obsession with the grotto involved its creation, adornment, major alteration (from shell house to mine), inhabitancy, and animation as a working form of camera obscura. As a man obliged to conceive and construct his own reality of place in exile, in an Augustan age during which landscape design and architecture were inextricably linked to perceptions of taste, art and even morality, Pope is widely regarded as a writer of place above all else. Pope's pioneering involvement in garden design extended beyond Twickenham, to Chiswick House and to Stowe, while his reference to the 'Aegerian grott' (Pope 19) indicates his awareness of the classical influence of place in his work. Beckles-Wilson reminds us that 'Pope conceived his grotto as a 'Musaeum' or 'Nymphaeum', a haunt where the muses communicated with him. In this he was reviving Homer's tradition that Muses made their homes where fresh springs ran through natural caverns'. (Beckles Willson 9) Pope's relatively early *Essay on Criticism* (Pope) too, presents physical manifestations of nature as a benchmark for taste and judgement in all things.

² Pope's villa itself, for example, was eventually razed to make way for a structure that became a Catholic convent, and it is this structure that now disables the grotto's camera obscura function, by blocking the light source from the riverbank.

3. Pope as precursor

The potency of place lies in that which is unmistakably external to us, or 'other', and yet holds the possibility of self-immersion. Our position in relation to any given place appears somewhat fateful - significant because of the accidental-seeming nature of our relationship to it in the great scheme of things. This sense of fate with regard to Pope is stronger, in that his position at Twickenham was a result of imposed external forces, rather than familial inheritance, or personal choice. England's anti-Catholic laws prevented Pope from owning, inheriting or bequeathing property, as well as from residing within a ten mile radius of London, so that place becomes circumstantially central to Pope in a deeply personal sense. and is even seen to define his work.

Mack refers to the grotto as a 'composition of place', as somewhere that 'expressed [Pope]', a construct of 'mythopoeic imagination', and an 'accessory to his muse' (Mack, *The Garden and the City: retirement and politics in the later poetry of Pope, 1731-1743* 42). He claims that, without the grotto setting '[Pope] could not have written his mature poems as we have them' (Mack, *Pope - A Life* 366), and reminds us that Pope's garden, too, presented 'as many quiet little mirrorings, reversals, and surprises as compete for our attention in his best couplets' (Mack, *Pope - A Life* 361).

Similarly, the myth unearthed by Brookes-Davies in Pope's *Dunciad* is that of Io, a gadfly reborn in the body of a dead cow as Isis, who wanders aimlessly about the world (Brooks-Davies 26). The link here is not only to Pope's self-burial in the grotto, for re-birth or self-preservation, but positions self-definition as a direct consequence of displacement. The nature of our relationship to place, as manifested in movement,

connects with the idea of a refugee's forced itinerancy, and the effect that such geographical self-contextualising has on the psyche and on formal creativity.

The upended nature of dwelling in place, of random disinheritance, origins rendered meaningless, and the disconnects between place and identity this produces connect precisely to Pope's own imposed circumstantial situation. In being banished from London for being Catholic, of being forced to live in a certain place, in being prevented from inheriting or bequeathing property (place), in being forced to remove himself whenever the court resided nearby,³ all make it no surprise that he went underground, to forge his writing space beneath the land from which he felt usurped. Pope's experience of marginalization, and the fracture in connection between self and place as physically expressed in the grotto, are inherited by and resonate in the novels below through very particular kinds of literary affect.

An engagement with that which exists below the surface is acutely present in Pope's writing, most notably in *The Dunciad* (Pope) with its central focus on the Fleet Ditch, and in the prototypically concrete composition of *Peri Bathous* (Pope) with its bottom heavy footnotes, like a grotto discovered when you dig beneath the text. Indeed, Hammond contends that 'it is in the almost phantasmagoric mutations of its places and spaces that *The Dunciad* is most striking' (Hammond 227). As a real space that represents many others, Hammond celebrates *The Dunciad* as 'a landmark in the imaginative invention of spatial practice,' and calls it 'the imaginative representation of the Popean heterotopia' (Hammond 231).

³ There were dangerous aspects of Pope's political position, both in terms of his religious circumstances as a Catholic and the enemies he made as a result of his persistent criticism of fellow public figures. Mack tell us that Pope never felt able to go out and about without his protective Great Dane, Bounce, for example, and was obliged to be removed from his own home whenever the Court was at Hampton Court, because he was regarded as a potential threat to the King (Mack 655).

The fact that the grotto operated literally as a mirror - a camera obscura, containing looking glasses positioned to project the outside world onto the interior - lends physical place the role of memoir, or autobiography. The space mirrors Pope's own interiority, as a cave-like brain reflecting upon what it takes in from the outside world. Pope wrote all of his mature poetry while hidden down inside of his grotto, like a brain housed inside a brain, making the matryoshka doll-like grotto a kind of machine for Pope's creativity, with Pope a cog in his own machine. This idea, of Pope as a physical component of his own camera obscura apparatus, also looks forward to the overarching impression, considered in all the works explored here, that the physical matter of place and self are one.

Aside from the poems, Pope's grotto is the only surviving physical entity we have of him, again making the physical a museum. *Obscure Imaginings* tells us that Pliny calls a museum 'an artificial imitation of a cave', and that 'we can surmise that the cave and grotto are part of the pre-history of the museum as we've known it since the late 18th century' (Cheetham and Harvey 107). The essay goes on to explain that Renaissance practice 'made explicit a combination of Pliny's description of a cave like place for the muses - a museum - with the later sense of the museum as a site in which to display curiosities and works of art' (112). They name Pope as the extender of this tradition, in that his camera obscura mechanism is 'forging his elaborate grotto... into nothing less than an organism for the creation of images' (112).

In this way too, the grotto demonstrates how place can reflect human interiority through almost cyborgian extensions of the body, 'skins' which represent or define inexpressible aspects of identity. Such use of physicality as a projection of human

interiority also reminds us, for example, of Pope's medical brace,⁴ without which he could hardly remain upright towards his later years, as well as the grotto itself as a kind of protective brace, fort, bunker, hiding place, or indeed tomb, reflecting its inhabitant's mortality.

Similarly, the history of the grotto's interior directly reflects Pope's evolving creative concerns. From a shell grotto during his preoccupation with classical civilisation, the grotto was painstakingly⁵ transformed into a more natural, semi-precious stone-encrusted mine – his 'mine without a wish for gold' (Pope, *On His Grotto at Twickenham*, in *The Complete Works of Alexander Pope* I 8).⁶ The mine suggests that which is precious, buried in the repressed unconscious, for example when Pope speaks of his writing as having 'stoop'd to truth' (Pope, *An Epistle from Mr. Pope to Dr. Arbuthnot* in *Alexander Pope: Works* I 341) or, as Damrosch describes, in Pope's 'descent to truth' (Damrosch 195). Via the grotto's function as mine and camera obscura, it is by digging, mining, reflecting, refracting and projecting in place that we approach a realm of deeper truth, where light is found and mirrored back, just as when unconscious insight remains obscured when one attempts to face it more directly or knowingly.

⁴ As a baby, Pope was given out for nursing to a woman who, according to Pope's biographer, Mack, 'almost certainly' gave him the lifelong, debilitating Potts Disease through her milk (Mack 153). Jane Spencer argues that tuberculosis of the bone can be transmitted via cows' milk, 'which seems the likelier culprit' (Spencer 177).

⁵ Willson reminds us that Pope was '*fond of saying that the grotto was complete, but it never was, and further development was only halted by his death.*' (Beckles Willson 57). Pope's letters suggest a sustained preoccupation in the embellishment of the grotto, through repeated requests for donations of materials from friends and acquaintances, spread over decades. This endless 'grottofying' is echoed in Sebald's record of obsessive, generation-spanning extensions to fortresses in *Austerlitz*: 'The constructions ...clearly showed how we feel obliged to keep surrounding ourselves with defences, built in successive phases as a precaution against any incursion by enemy powers, until the idea...comes up against its natural limits' (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 17).

⁶ This phase of alteration took place during Pope's writing of *The Dunciad* (Pope) and *Peri Bathous*, (Pope) - works replete with imagery around the idea of the unconscious, the buried or repressed self. These ideas are most explicitly represented by Pope in his references in *The Dunciad* to the 'Fleet Ditch', (Pope I 133) but interweave with rich complexity throughout his work during this mature period.

Noggle asserts that the 'idea that beauty's charms depend on its formal unknowability is commonplace', and points out that Pope himself articulates a direct association between place and that which is unknown, from the 'nameless Graces' of the *Essay on Criticism* (Pope I 144), to the celebration of landscape that 'pleasingly confounds' and provides an 'artful wildness to perplex the scene,' (Pope, *Epistles to Several Persons: Epistle IV* I 55 & 116) revealing Pope's awareness of a vital link between 'epistemological frustration and aesthetic pleasure' (Noggle 142).

Place, in this sense, allows us the oblique perspectives required for subtler or more accurate insights, just as unconscious thought is only revealed to us in indirect ways. The same theme expands across all the writings explored here, in a frequent use of underground space to imply, for example, that which is precious existing in an abyss, forgotten knowledge buried in history, or insights located in the inaccessible depths of a built structure.⁷

With the idea that all times seem to exist in the same place at once,⁸ or that each of these writers' interpretation of place is revealing of the others, one is reminded of Pope's manipulation of the water-filled grotto as a means of re-inhabiting his lost childhood basement, with all its gurgling water pipes. This subterranean cavity, so Mack tells us, is where Pope spent most of his time as a child, before his family was banished forever by the authorities: 'Yet he can hardly have been ignorant of the

⁷ Sebald's seemingly coincidental reference to diamond mines (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 413), is also a reminder of Pope's conjuring of reflective light in his jewel-studded grotto, the darkness of space with twinkling stars at the end of the *Dunciad*, and Pope's unwitting collusion with his own repressed self in the *Dunciad*'s Fleet Ditch. The abyss resurfaces in *Mornings in Jenin* (Abulhawa, *Mornings in Jenin*) as the place in which Huda and Amal cement their infinite bond - in a hole in the ground under the kitchen floor, as well as in the abyss in which a Jenin family is buried alive; it is present in the layers of Sebald's landscapes like physical manifestations of past time, and where Austerlitz refers to a 'painful sense that something within me was trying to surface from oblivion' (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 377).

⁸ Sebald writes in *Austerlitz* of all times existing at once, 'in layers upon the land' (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 188), and the thematic similarities in treatment of place, across centuries, gives an impression of inherited ghosts all present at once in the literary canon as well as in postcolonial theory. 'The map of the world can be seen as a palimpsest on which Europe has written its own dominance through the agency of history... The concept of place as palimpsest written and over-written by successive historical inscriptions is one way of circumventing history as a 'scientific narrative' of events' (Griffiths, Ashcroft, and Tiffin 356).

associations between cavern and consciousness...associations possibly reaching back in his case to his boyhood in Plough Court' (Mack 366). Here in this original, womb like space, the memory of an earlier, dead infant, a brother named Alexander Pope, and thus like a lost 'twin' of the poet, 'abandoned' in forced displacement, becomes immortalised in Pope's past as a possible motivation for the creation of the grotto.⁹

The grotto's role here as a physical housing of memory connects with a commonly discussed theme, in Pope's writing, of place as a museum to self-identity. It also looks forward to contemporary treatments of physical objects as silent guardians, or retainers, of human memory, identity, history and knowledge. Memory's role in individual or collective self-definition, according to Michael Rothberg, 'does not often figure' (Rothberg 360) in the 'classic texts' of postcolonial theory, though Anne Wilson reminds us that 'autobiographical memory plays an important role in the construction of personal identity' (Anne E. Wilson 147). Rothberg argues that 'postcolonial practices of memory reveal the intimacy of metropole and colony...as well as civilization and barbarism,' and that 'issues related to cultural memory make up some of the core concerns of postcolonial studies. Memory emerges not only from the closed field of organically defined groups ... but also in the very tensions and ruptures of imperial conquest...that dislocate space, time, and identity' (Rothberg 379). In this way, written history's imposition – on identity, roots, origins, family, name, cultural belonging – can be seen as a central effect of dispossession or colonisation upon both the individual and collective culture, and as something vital to the de-construction of

⁹ Mack tell us that this first home of Pope's was the place in which the family was effectively obliged to leave behind the ghost of an earlier 'Alexander Pope' - his father's first-born son. Pope may have retained, consciously or otherwise, a connection to the sense of coming after another 'Alexander Pope', who died in infancy (Mack 3). With Pope's disabled frame and lifetime of maternal support, too, the idea of the grotto serving Pope as a place of self-burial comes to the fore once more, as this second, 'imperfect' Alexander Pope is the one, ironically, to have survived.

self-identity. Through forms of displacement, histories are erased or become rewritten to establish and preserve the power of the 'coloniser' in all its forms. That sense of a preservation of self-defining memory through physicality likens Pope's grotto to a museum of the self, and is reminiscent of Orhan Pamuk's *Museum of Innocence* (Pamuk), where thousands of seemingly insignificant physical objects pay homage to the remembered essence of one lost individual.

The defining, revealing functions - of body, dwelling, abyss, basement, ditch, fort, clothing, the surfaces of skin or landscape, the porous or crumbling nature of flesh, building, city, country - are all colonised, contained, and controlled, in the writers studied here, in ways that merge our perceptions of self and place as one. At the same time, it is telling that the grotto, as Pope's most sustained, and sustaining, creative endeavor, is one in which fixed words are tellingly absent. As a precursor to later writers' interpretations of physicality and language as betrayals of genuinely truthful insight, Pope felt explicitly strongly about the folly of any superimposition of man's ego onto architecture, as opposed to landscape art as a fittingly harmonious celebration of nature. Indeed, Pope's letters and his *Epistle to Burlington* (Pope) criticized man's vanity and self-aggrandisement through the landscaping and architectural 'follies' of which he disapproved. Helen Deutsch points out that Burlington's 'status as paragon...is documented by his allegiance to classical models' (Deutsch 107). What Pope objects to, she explains, is the 'obvious distortion of natural forms by an art which exceeds its natural bounds, or 'a love of monstrosity...indicative of a "common level of understanding," untutored by that which is most necessary for proper taste: a familiarity with "Nature," the basis for all good art, in the form of long-held property' (Deutsch 93).

This position looks forward to later fictional condemnations of man's constructions of physical proclamations of identity, state, autonomy and power. The distinction, begun in the light and shade and watery reflections held deep down inside Pope's grotto, is between the concrete case and the fluid, inner world, the trapping nature of fixed paradigms and the vital essences which dance alive unknown and undefined inside us.

Pope's position in opposition to fixed meaning corresponds with an idea present across these later works, of language as treacherous, or of the writer as a liar, fake, or unreliable spinner of yarns. Pope denies his own identity through self-concealment in the grotto and in a withholding of his name from publication. In the *Dunciad* (Pope), and *Peri Bathous* (Pope), too, the writer is metafictionally shown to be orchestrating the story in ways that are questioned, or untrustworthy.¹⁰

The negation or burial of self-identity also corresponds with the later fiction, and indeed my own novel, through the theme of the twin. My protagonist senses a lost, yet remaining self, somehow jettisoned from one's inhabited body but just outside one's field of vision, out of reach. That one of these twins becomes buried in a mine, long before my conscious comparison of Pope to my own creative craft, again seems uncanny.¹¹ The twin theme raises questions across these works about the nature of otherness, of geographical origins, the significance of common bonds of memory, and the enigmatic nature of identity itself. It surfaces in the mirroring of Pope in his camera

¹⁰ The footnotes of *Peri Bathous* suggest that keener meaning, or that which is truly important, is buried, much like the unconscious, beneath the exposed surface of the principal text, where it can be more freely, or safely, expressed (Pope, *Peri Bathous, or the art of sinking in poetry*, pp 195-238 in *The Major Works*).

¹¹ Descriptions of tunnels in my own novel are reminiscent of the grotto, yet written long before conscious memories of the grotto began to feed into this essay. 'The tunnel is right before me now, its small black mouth billowing dust out into the sunlight, as if from a storm raging inside. Further inside there should be, by rights, a secondary tunnel at a tangent, but blocked off, in which something crucial is hidden, a grotto perhaps, studded with precious stones' (Sharp 318).

obscura, the treatment of oppositions and the 'Other' in the *Dunciad*, the existence in Twickenham of Pope's double, a 'Mr A. Pope' (Carruthers 408),¹² and finally in that 'other', earlier 'Alexander Pope', who emerged from the same womb and died just before our Pope's birth. One's sense of a twin, or 'othered self', positions us in an imagined place which lies outside of ourselves, and thus serves as a different experience of self-perception. This is the unconscious technique employed creatively by my own novel's protagonist in his journey towards self-discovery and recovery of repressed memory, and is a demonstration of how one's sense of self, in place specifically, facilitates, accentuates and deepens self-knowledge. Edward Said likens the West's perception of the Orient to an othered twin in this way, as a disowned location holding all that one perceives as opposite to, or unwanted in, the self (Said, Orientalism).

Mack describes Pope as the 'acutest observer of light among the English poets' (Mack, *The Garden and the City: retirement and politics in the later poetry of Pope, 1731-1743* 46).¹³ A deep preoccupation with the effect of nuances of light is certainly present in Pope's description of the grotto,¹⁴ and subtlety of degree, as the essential element in ascertaining truth, also corresponds to Pope's strongly felt resistance to any kind of directly asserted meaning.¹⁵ The grotto space, through Pope's active play, within, on light and image, can be compared to later treatments of the effects of light and

¹² 'He was always at Twickenham called Mr. *Alexander* Pope, probably because there was some other Mr. Pope in the village.' ('Incident related by an 'old shopman' of Cadell the publisher') (Carruthers 408).

¹³ In Pope's *Dunciad*, unknowability is directly associated with the death of light – 'that intellectual light which dies before the face of Dulness.' (Pope, *The Dunciad in Four Books* l 11-12 n. 7). That Pope went to such lengths to bring light into the darkness of the space in which he wrote the *Dunciad*, speaks of an inherent urge to transcend dark unknowability, even as he conjures it at the end of the final *Dunciad*. It suggests the grotto as his other, alternative creative journey, a direct counter to the public nature of his writing.

¹⁴ 'When you shut the Doors of this Grotto, it becomes on the instant, from a luminous Room, a Camera Obscura, on the walls of which all the objects of the River, Hills, Woods, and Boats, are forming a moving Picture... And when you have a mind to light it up, it affords you a very different Sense; it is finished with Shells interspersed with Pieces of Looking-glass in angular forms; and in the ceiling is a star of the same material, at which when a Lamp, (of an orbicular Figure of thin Alabaster) is hung in the Middle, a thousand pointed Rays glitter and are reflected over the Place' 1725 In a letter to Edward Blount (Pope, *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, George Sherburn, Ed. 297).

¹⁵ James Noggle writes on Pope's 'signature resistance' to direct assertions. For Noggle, 'absolute authority for Pope must somehow be at once perceptible and imperceptible, there to be invoked and beyond all invocation' (Noggle 100).

darkness in place. The ethereal nature of nuanced light, reflection, shadow, glimmers of precious stones, and the magical projection, onto the grotto's insides, of the outside world all demonstrate Pope's preoccupation, and resonate with later treatments where light evokes place, represents knowledge, insight, and memory, especially through the subtler nuances of fading or veiled light in *Austerlitz*.

The end of Pope's *Dunciad* makes one feel as one's remembered presence in the grotto itself does: cold and alone in the face of some dark, unnameable 'Other'. At the same time, it is Pope's final resistance of that darkness, in the last line of the final *Dunciad*, and his refusal to accept the unbridgeable chasm between man and any form of absolute assertion, physical or written, that ironically conveys its authority, and ensures its integrity. It is precisely Pope's *non-acceptance* of our physical human lot at the end of the poem, in other words, which maintains the energised tension, across centuries, required to keep alive literature's questioning of the nature of the existence of self in place and the seemingly irreconcilable nature of the two.

4. Austerlitz

The echoes, in *Austerlitz* (Sebald), of Pope's physical and creative relationship to place - both formatively in Pope's writing and thematically through the grotto - are plangent. But while, in the aspects of Pope's work mentioned above, the links between human interiority and place are more implicit – though made physically manifest in the grotto - Sebald lays out a sustained and transparent negotiation between character and place in the text itself.

Jacques Austerlitz meets the novel's narrator in Antwerp, and begins to tell him the story of his life between 1967 and 1997. A range of obscure photographs feature throughout the text, apparently pertaining to the ideas and fictional figures of Austerlitz's life experience. We learn that Austerlitz was adopted by a Welsh preacher and his wife, and spent an isolated and austere childhood in the remote Gwynedd countryside before attending public school. Austerlitz becomes an academic, immersed in the study of European architecture, and later works in London as an art historian and teacher. Much of Austerlitz's past, and his birth family's tragic fate, has been obscured from him through a combination of unconscious repression and the withholding of information by his foster parents. At a central point in the narrative, Austerlitz has his early memory jogged by association at the sight of a backpack in a station waiting room, and realises that he was one of the children transported to England during the Nazi invasion and occupation of Europe. After a nervous breakdown, Austerlitz visits Prague, where he finds Vera, his carer from childhood, who tells him the tragic story of how his mother was deported to Theresienstadt concentration camp. Vera confirms the identity of Austerlitz's mother in a photograph

Austerlitz unearths from a theatrical archive. Austerlitz later attempts to seek out evidence about the fate of his father in Paris.

Just as Pope's ensconcement in his grotto, simply in being underground, suggests buried self-knowledge or obscured meaning, so Sebald's most straightforward depictions of man's inner world are expressed through descriptions of physical architecture. Sebald represents repression and denial with buildings throughout the novel, in gates and doorways obstructing access to 'a darkness never yet penetrated' (268) or in 'silent' houses with 'blind windows' (146). The sheer enormity, too, implied by the public buildings that Austerlitz studies, evokes an overwhelming unfathomability which corresponds to an obscurity of self-knowledge, where impenetrable courtyards and labyrinthine passageways lead nowhere like thwarted lines of inquiry or trains of thought. Like the still-hidden chambers of Pope's grotto¹⁶, that which is repressed is embodied in rooms where impromptu shops are run without the knowledge of the institution's authorities, suggesting 'stored data' or memory of which one is unaware. Windows are often opened onto truth or knowledge (221), or otherwise misted over to obscure the view beyond them.

The narcissism betrayed by man's 'greatest projects' is most strikingly epitomised in Sebald's description of the Palace of Justice in Brussels (38). The 'singular architectural monstrosity', introduced as 'the largest accumulation of stone blocks anywhere in Europe' displays its overwhelming physical size in direct relation to the corresponding insecurity of its creators. The description is accompanied by a photograph of a structure so impossibly enormous as to appear almost digitally

¹⁶ The hand-drawn diagrams of the grotto plans and extensions in Pope's letters suggest that more caverns and underground extensions existed, and also perhaps that they have since been blocked off. (Pope, *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, George Sherburn, Ed.)

enhanced in the style of contemporary photographic artist Andreas Gursky (Schulz). The use of the word 'blocks' here is tellingly reminiscent of a child's game, or folly, suggesting that the motivation behind the building is childlike, and is reminiscent of the childish games depicted in Pope's *Dunciad* (Pope); there is significance too in the mentioning of the address on 'the Old Gallows Hill' (38), with its implication that the structure is built on the bones of those whom Belgium saw fit to execute.

Austerlitz himself speaks of 'once magnificent buildings' which 'precisely reflected [his] own state of mind' (199) while, towards the end of the novel, a station's architectural dome is half 'sliced away, so to speak' (307) like a brain at post mortem. The discernible shift in stylistic approach between these last two examples – from something explicit yet subtle, to an almost brutal rent in the fabric of things - also reflects the progressive stages in the protagonist's self-revelation. In Sebald's work, the formal progression from Pope's appears where place is not only equated to man's inner world, but draws out an ongoing, developmental negotiation between the two. Place is thus an active arbiter in Austerlitz's transformation, rendering transparent his geographically-framed journey to self-revelation.

In a treatment combining self and place in a way which looks forward to the near total meldings achieved in the novels studied in chapters 3 and 4 below, the self is atomized into the landscape as a fractured being. Austerlitz, 'being broken up from within' imagines that 'parts of [his] body were scattered over a dark and distant terrain'. Place is also an almost living, manipulative entity in Sebald's work, for example in London's evoking a 'dull despair', or an ordinary glove shop conveying a mood so powerful that,

'a muted atmosphere banishing all profane ideas reigned' (225). Similarly, Austerlitz describes a 'family likeness' between buildings, or feels dread at the thought that a station is built on Bedlam, lending architecture some anthropomorphic capability of genetic inheritability. Sebald's constant personification of place in *Austerlitz* looks forward to an even bolder definition of the self as architecture and landscape made manifest in the contemporary novels I will explore later, and it enables an active manipulation *by* place of Austerlitz's memory and inner world.

The penultimate location depicted in *Austerlitz* is a fort which, we are told, imprisoned hundreds of men in the dying days of WWII. Austerlitz finds their names scratched into the fort's walls in the apparent lead up to their deaths, as a last expression of identity. It is an image chillingly reminiscent of Austerlitz's earlier likening of his dying mother-tongue to something locked away, 'scratching' to get out (195). But it is the fact that these names, etched in stone, also include each man's self-recorded place of origin, or of perceived belonging, as a seemingly crucial part of the information that goes to make up their identity, which resonates so tellingly here.

With this last, small, understated scene at the fortress of Breendonk, Sebald encapsulates what each writer explored here is concerned with in one way or another – the effect on self-identity of geographical dislocation, and the dialogue between self and place which results under such circumstances. It is there, in another underground fortress - where these doomed men find themselves through externally imposed force or fate - that the critical act is to record self-identity through place, upon place.

One can describe Pope's situation in much the same way. As a Catholic, Pope lived in Twickenham not by choice but in an imposed banishment ten miles beyond London to property he was allowed neither to own, inherit or bequeath. Similarly, Pope spent most of his solitary time inside his fortress-like grotto, and wrote all of his identity-defining poetry inside it once exiled to Twickenham, so the parallels of geographical dislocation and its implications are more than palpable. His creative expressions of self-identification were, similarly, made *upon* place, as well as in place, in that Pope used the camera obscura mechanism, engineered water, light and shadow, crystals and semi-precious stones to enhance and transform the grotto space – as if into an extension of his inner world, into elsewhere, and perhaps also in a kind of harking back.¹⁷

Sebald's formal treatment takes on additional complexity through descriptions of man's folly-like, unwitting self-projection through fortifications. We are reminded of the role of the locked, disused room as the only space in which Austerlitz's stepmother finds herself able to cry (63), so that place becomes a direct enabler of emotion.

Sebald's fortifications represent an inherent human vulnerability, against which the constructions themselves become historic evidence of - or memorial to - their own inability to remedy. In *Austerlitz*, the fortress as place becomes a self-defining second skin, a form of dwelling, disguise, clothing – or 'skin', in the newest sense of the word, as a digital, bodily covering to convey identity in online gaming - which intentionally

¹⁷ This 'harking back' refers to the fair likelihood that Pope retained, consciously or otherwise, a sense of coming after another 'Alexander Pope', the 'precursor' sibling who died in infancy, as well as an awareness of the basement in which, according to Mack, our Pope spent much time as a child, with its gurgling pipes and subterranean location. 'Although it cannot have crossed his mind at the time and we have no reason to suppose that it ever did, this was in actual fact Pope's first grotto, hardly the progenitor but at any rate the forerunner of all those other caverns and subterranean territories that were to strike his fancy from the Cave of Spleen' in *The Rape of the Lock*, the 'Cave of Poverty and Poetry' in the *Dunciad*, and the grottoes encountered in classical epic, to that unique underground creation at Twickenham (also crammed with plumbing) which Robert Dodsley was to call 'The Cave of Pope' (Mack, *Pope - A Life* 31).

projects, on the one hand, infallibility or impenetrability, but on the other betrays vulnerability, frailty and fear.

In the case of *Austerlitz* at least, society's manipulation of, or self-surrounding by, place, fails to answer the sufferings of man's internal sensibilities. Sebald goes to great lengths to describe the ways in which, historically, the building of fortifications defeats their own purpose by enclosing, and thus ironically exposing and containing, what they set out to strengthen. Here again, the premise extends to the novels studied here later, where man's physical manipulation of place in response to fear and insecurity leads to further vulnerability, and thence destruction, in a downwards spiral. *Mornings in Jenin* (Abulhawa), for example, shows how the displacement of Palestinians by Israelis leads to their containment in refugee camps, which results in turn in further fear and violence, as epitomised by Israel's description of Jenin as a 'breeding ground for terrorists' and by their murderous chastisement of Jenin's inhabitants.

There is a real sense in *Austerlitz* that fortifications, especially those underground, possess a sinister, almost conscious power of oppression and threat. Austerlitz cites numerous defence projects conceived through history for the purpose of protection which, time and again, not only 'proved entirely useless' (414) in their intended role, but go on instead to become places of detention, often in the hands of the very enemy they were built to keep out. It is the accidental and repetitive nature of these ironic role shifts, out of the control of the architects and engineers who created them, which appear inherent instead in the buildings themselves. That the forts end up in enemy power lends them an anthropomorphically turncoat quality, innate in their very bricks and mortar. As at Breendonk, the Fort IX at Kaunas, Lithuania, becomes a prison,

‘where more than thirty thousand people were killed over the next three years’ (415). The unintended and repetitive nature of these transgressions endows the buildings with a will of their own; in taking on roles which are the precise opposite of those for which they were created, they betray a telling reflection of the underlying nature of their creators. Thus, seemingly at the hands of place itself, physical protection turns to containment, thence to annihilation.

By the end of the novel, Sebald brings the theme of the repetitive nature of human endeavour, as demonstrated by place, full circle. The atmosphere of oppression evoked in the closing pages of *Austerlitz*, back in the fort at Breendonk where the narrator began, is established directly through place in the subtlest suggestions of mounting threat. The narrator’s sleep on the preceding night is broken by sirens, whose ‘wailing’, a word more usually reserved for the noise of acute *human* suffering, is kept at the remove of machines, unseen, outside in the dark. The idea of anthropomorphised objects moving outside in the night, in itself, lends the inanimate a sinister quality reminiscent of machines in *The War of the Worlds* (Wells). The narrator’s hotel room is described as ‘ugly’ (410), a word again more often associated with human facial appearance, which lends physical space a living, conscious characteristic. The word also suggests containment in a negative physical space against one’s will.

There is a casual reference to the existence, outside the walls of the narrator’s immediate environment, of a ‘popular festival’ (410), some human event from which one is excluded but which is potentially ‘populist’, and places the narrator in the position of an excluded minority, as if in relation to the rally of a menacing political

movement. There is mention of a bad dream, too, as if in premonition of negative events to come. That planes are described like weapons, beside buildings, and the weather is unusually and anachronistically hot, raises even further ominous associations for today's reader, in the wake of 9/11 and amidst the threat of climate change. The narrator, indeed, imagines that his hair 'might catch fire' (412) in the extreme heat, which one associates not only with global catastrophe but also, horrifically, with the ovens used to dispose of millions of human corpses in the Nazi death camps.

Sebald gives the architecture of the general setting an innate intent, or conscious will, where apartment blocks appear almost to predict the future when they 'cast the shadow of their own destruction before them' (24). Like the increased crowds of people (411), an ominous anthropomorphism is delivered by the ever advancing tower blocks in Mechelen 'encroaching further and further on the fields' (412), as an unmistakably warlike threat, again reminiscent of machines from *War of the Worlds* (Wells), and animating architecture into both a demonstration of historical trends and a foretelling of future human society. The living and conscious nature of the fort is heightened by the roof and walls, which 'creaked in the heat' (412). Here, in endowing a building with some means of aural as well as visual or spatial expression, place appears able to communicate, about human nature and society, that which books, in spite of all their words, have failed to express.

The fort's significance in the narrative whole is further highlighted by the construction of fateful coincidence around the narrator's first visit to Breendonk. The narrator goes to some pains to explain that he only happens to notice the fort in the newspaper

because Austerlitz mentioned it, on the previous day, in the context of the general nature of fortifications. The visit, says the narrator, would hardly have occurred otherwise, 'even supposing I had noticed it at all' (24). So subtly again, the train carrying the narrator to the fort takes a long time to travel the short distance, which not only invokes a kind of suspenseful dread, but also makes it difficult not to associate the journey with the tortuous transports by train to the death camps.

Sebald goes to some length, too, to describe the topographical position of the fort (25), which sits on an island surrounded by water in a setting reminiscent of *Isle of the Dead* (Böcklin)¹⁸ and which intensifies its singular, brooding presence. The embankment, the barbed wire fence, and the wide moat all serve to separate and disassociate the fort from the small town, and thus from quotidian reality. This separation suggests that, upon passing through barriers and entering the fort's environs, one may undergo a shift, in time or perspective perhaps, or indeed in oneself. Place, here, thus takes on an accentuated or hyperreal significance, suggesting that all intended meaning lies within the nature of physical location. The narrator describes how he 'crossed the bridge over the dark water' (25), which again appears akin to entering a profoundly other realm, or underworld, not least with the Styx-like appearance of the moat. The intense and oppressive heat intensifies the charged or altered atmosphere, and the 'piling up' of large clouds, like an army gathering in preparation to charge, fuels the feeling of dread. The space shifts its natural physical state so that the 'air was growing thinner and the weight above me heavier' (31), as if this architecture has a supernatural ability to shift the fundamental laws of physics.

¹⁸ The famous painting (Böcklin), depicts what is generally regarded as a premonition of death, and summon a feeling of dread and despair at the approach by a boat, rowed by a Charon-like figure, to a desolate rocky islet. A black and white print of the painting inspired Rachmaninoff to create his symphonic poem of 1909 (London Symphony Orchestra).

The fort is described as if a live, organic mass, 'hunched and misshapen' (25), with a 'broad back' like a monster, brooding with ill intent. That the building is 'hunched' suggests it has positioned itself, and is waiting to move, bringing place itself to monstrous life in a way which reflects the nature of those who operated within it. The tunnel within the fort is likened to a backbone, its walls 'perspiring with cold beads of sweat', with 'open ulcers', and 'raw, crushed stone erupting from them', like sores on flesh; it is labelled as a 'monstrous incarnation of ugliness and blind violence', where 'incarnation' also brings flesh to mind. It is alive in possessing 'outgrowths of limbs and claws', has a 'body' and 'eyes', as well as a 'stumpy projection' like a tail, 'like some alien or crab like creature' which would have a consciousness and intent, and yet is likened to an animal one may expect would destroy or consume with indifference. On the other hand it is 'faceless', so evading identity, and thus comprehension, through unrecognizability, like a vast army or national strategy of intent.

Tension increases palpably as we are led deeper into the structure. The floor slopes down in a rather off-hand way, as if through underhand trickery, leading to a claustrophobic sense of being underground in an enclosed space 'not much more than the height of a man'. Just here, again as if through manipulation by the structure, it is as if the dimensions were conceived to contain – or enclose - the precise dimensions of an individual. To exist in this space is to have arrived there suddenly and unknowingly, as if against one's will. Claustrophobia is further increased by 'a layer of concrete several meters thick' (32) overhead, with converging walls like a tomb, or a burial alive. Conversely, the 'smooth, grey floor' appears to sink down limitlessly, as if to reach hell, while the drain and grating suggest the loss of bodily fluids during torture or death, hellish visions all the more intensely invoked here by not being referred to

directly. The grating, however, is undeniably there, allowing place here to bear brutal witness.

The grating prompts the narrator to a repressed childhood association with animal butchery, though here again the witnessing of the event is just missed and half-forgotten, like the human atrocities through history. The horror has taken place just before the narrator's arrival, because the butcher's tiles are being hosed down after the event - evidently from the spattering of animals' bodily fluids after unimaginable violence and the destruction of soft, helpless flesh. Here again the happening is lent its intensity, both for the reader and narrator, for being left to the imagination, especially that of a child, as the narrator was at the time of the event, and as indeed Austerlitz was at the time of his parents' disappearance. Here again, though, it is a basic and ostensibly insignificant physical feature of place which is employed to invoke everything profound in the narrative.

Sebald employs another, seemingly innocuous, inanimate object to work hard at this point within the fort. A 'scrubbing-brush' is mentioned, rather vaguely (33), when the narrator explains that he cannot recall the 'childhood horrors' associated with the butchery in his home town. The scrubbing away - or erasing, with soft, insipid and therefore somehow sinister soap - of memory, history, of horror itself, is brought to mind once again, like a literal whitewashing of the facts required to prevent future repetition. The mattresses at Breendonk, similarly, are likened to human bodies. Thinner, shorter and shrunken, 'the chaff in them disintegrated over years' (31), they are striking in their visual similarity to the bodies of starved and dying prisoners in the death camps. As impassive, inanimate objects, they are enrolled here to express

ironically more than books or human voices appear able to, as well as reminding us that such prisoners were treated no differently to such lumpen, insignificant objects.

The narrator's perception of the building is of something tellingly unfathomable – he cannot perceive of the whole, or the structural rationale of its form. As a live, shifting object, the building appears wilfully to evade comprehension, like a military force and its actions – made of humans yet inhuman. The impossibility of associating the fort with human civilisation again lends the building a separate cultural origin, an autonomy, as if set down or conceived through a mind of its own. Indeed, the longer he looks, the more often the narrator feels forced 'as I felt, to lower my eyes' (26), and the less comprehensible the fort becomes. This perception, through degrees of occlusion, ties in with Sebald's treatment of light and seeing in other parts of the novel, discussed further below, where varieties of darkness or opacity lead to more accurate, subtler perceptions, while harsh, direct light results in blunted vision and lack of understanding.

It is significant here too, and recurrent elsewhere, that the narrator encounters 'no other visitors' (31), at this most crucial of moments in his initial visit. It is in such situations of desolation and emptiness, in correlation with Sebald's treatment of degrees of darkness and light, that the greatest insights often occur in *Austerlitz*. The pattern of keener insight through the most obtuse angles of observation, in inaccessible places, also ties in with Sebald's withholding of direct references, and his use of inanimate objects, as the more subtly effective way of communicating harsh fact or urgent truth. A similar sequence takes place towards the end of the novel (266) when the narrator travels a great distance through almost surreally empty landscapes to the seemingly deserted and closed-up town of Terezin. Like the muteness of objects,

the emptiness of landscapes journeyed through in *Austerlitz*, 'where there was no-one else about' (74), or 'almost no other vehicles' (291), is strikingly reminiscent of that in *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came* (Browning), both in the empty desolation of place and the darkness of narrative mood. Indeed, the final scene in *Austerlitz* feels so similar in mood to the last lines of Browning's poem, not least in being the arrival of a traveller as darkness falls under the shadow of a forbidding, unwelcoming architectural structure. In Terezin once again, it is the inanimate objects in the shop windows which afford the narrator the most keenly expressed insight into our insufficient response to the lessons of historical events (276). Sebald offers up these inanimate objects as mute tokens in response to human failings. They are presented not only as guardians of human pain and loss, but also as ironically silent retainers of long term historical awareness, with all the lessons such a perspective might teach mankind, if only we were able to listen and understand. The crescendo of inanimate pieces here is resounding. They are all crowding in plain sight, quite silently, behind glass, in the windows of ironically closed up shops - figurines, stuffed animals, countless likenesses to reality - in a brutally damning observation of our inability to hear.

Sebald refers to the fourteen visitor points at Breendonk as 'stations', which reminds us of the fourteen stations of the cross, a long journey of torture through place towards a crucifixion - the murder of an ideologically persecuted victim committed by those forces in power. These stations are 'clouded over' (30) in the perception and memory of the narrator, while the fort's interior is illuminated by 'only a few dim electric bulbs', and 'cut off for ever from the light of nature' (30). Here again, as elsewhere in the novel where shaded subtleties of light are ciphers to truth, the misting over of

perception actually heralds in the most lucid expressions of the implications of place. Just here - precisely where understanding monstrous realities seems impossible, as darkness increases in the most deeply buried location of the site, and as if in penetration of an unconscious mind - Sebald writes most directly and explicitly of the central idea pervading the novel: 'I think how little we can hold in mind, how everything is constantly lapsing into oblivion with every extinguished life, how the world is, as it were, draining itself, in that the history of countless places and objects which themselves have no power of memory is never heard, never described or passed on' (30). The point, made so early on, seems, in retrospect, the lynchpin of the novel. Just as Pope 'stoop'd to truth' (Pope I 341) in his star-studded, underground grotto, so perception of truth with the utmost, starlit clarity surfaces in the fort's dimly lit basement. In both cases, ones travel towards and arrival in inaccessible place enables the highest truth. The approach of inaccessibility to, or obfuscation of, place, relates too to Pope's hallmark resistance of direct assertions of absolute truths, and his non-acceptance of our physical human lot. This sustained defiance can be seen as a means to keep alive the tensions of unknowability, apparent across the work of all these writers, about any ultimate sense of self in the physical context of our reality. This is not least the case for the geographically displaced or dispossessed self, when perceived truths, and the nature of the physical world around us, often seem contradictory or irreconcilable.

Sebald's focus on the futility of constructing ever larger and more useless fortifications illustrates his repeated suggestion that, as mortal humans, we appear able to remember so little from one generation to the next, in order to learn from the lessons of history. Human memory proves too short for society to gain the generation-spanning

perspective needed for fundamental change. Indeed, the final line in the novel, about arrival in a new, yet already darkening town as evening approaches, palpably expresses that fading nature of our opportunity to learn history's urgent lessons.

The structure at Breendonk, though initially conceived as a fort, became a prison and penal camp once captured, until at last becoming a memorial museum - an attempted reminder of former horrors to warn future generations. But Sebald demonstrates that the next generation is not learning the lessons of history. That the school children at Breendonk are referred to collectively as a 'troop' (412) pre-emptes their future military involvement, and thus the potential for more atrocities. That they all crowd around the 'cash desk' and 'small kiosk' (412) could also suggest war-inducing greed for consumption, or riches, as motivation for atrocities to be committed, while the word 'small' predicts limited future resources which may lead to dispute, and war.

In similar ways to inanimate objects, the animals in *Austerlitz* appear always to possess an air of knowing more than man, with their ironically expressive muteness. As Austerlitz himself wonders, in remembering a childhood question, and as if in prognostication of his lifelong quest, 'How indeed do the squirrels know, what do we know ourselves, how do we remember, and what is it we find in the end?' (287). Moths and pigeons, especially, are held up in the novel for their miraculous abilities in relation to place, in their homing skills, feats of memory and long distance orientation. The animals in *Austerlitz* often possess an unspoken awareness, or implicit cognizance, missing in humanity, which could save us from ourselves. Sebald's photographic vignette of the small group of deer staring out at the camera (368), as if looking out at humanity as a whole, is an abiding statement about man's inability to communicate

across species, or indeed across race, languages, or indeed even from one individual to another. In this context, a fortress comes to represent man himself as a limiting container, outside of which the individual is ultimately unable to reach, extend, merge, agree, understand or harmonise. Place, from this perspective of societal disputes, becomes an extension of that restricting fortress of human skin, an aspect of our physical containment which is developed further in the novels explored in sections 5 and 6, and focuses on the question of whether it is possible to reject and replace the fixed, entrapping nature of our physical circumstances.

But it is the ironic muteness of objects and animals which resonates most – their silent retention of the missing link that will make human society work, if only we were able to reach beyond our own limits to understand, remember, hear. Their silence also suggests the uselessness of words themselves in reaching for, or instilling, that understanding. The point becomes metafictional in the sense that even books themselves, with all their words, fail to remedy society's failures. With increasingly acute irony, Sebald presents a new and magnificent library - a place of ostensible communication, learning or amassed meaning - as a forbidding, impenetrable place of banishment (391) reiterating that even books fail to communicate and divert the destructive forces of humanity.

Although Austerlitz is led to his crucial moment of revelation via place, it is in fact a very ordinary, inanimate object - a backpack (193) - which finally unlocks his repressed memory. In the same way, in museums across the world, it is the tragically quotidian possessions, in storage, of all the Jews murdered by the Nazis – the great drifts of spectacles, shoes, toys – which most powerfully pay testament to the sheer statistical

magnitude of the atrocity committed, and most poignantly express the humanity and individuality of each single victim.

The physicality of the 'object', as an extension of physical place, can be seen as a kind of existential medium for man's self-definition. The object is a central theme in Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence* (Pamuk) where the amassing of ordinary things is an attempt to capture and experience the living quintessence of a loved one. Pamuk's titular museum houses thousands of seemingly insignificant physical objects, which pay homage to the remembered essence of one, lost individual. Objects are amassed and set out as commodities of identity, so that the vital essence of an individual is embodied by 'stuff', the principle means of definition in loss. In Weber's conception of memory (Weber), we can also regard the literary text itself as a place, a museum or physical entity in which memory and identity can be stored, preserved, reactivated. Place as writing thus becomes a crafted, curated creation, which affirms selfhood, lends characterisation or, as is the case in Sebald's libraries in *Austerlitz* (Sebald) and Saadawi's untrustworthy storyteller in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (Saadawi) cannot be relied upon to relate the truths to which they make claim. The sense of a preservation of defining memory through physicality is reminiscent again of Pope's grotto as a museum of the self, and of Weber's ideas on the physicality of identity-shaping memorialisation - much like the 'monumental aspirations' of his *Dunciad* - in that the grotto survives today as testament to Pope (Weber 3).

Sebald uses photographs in *Austerlitz* in a related extension of the idea that wordless, inanimate objects hold power, knowledge and meaning. Here again, it is the muteness of the captured image which, ironically, serves Sebald's purpose most, in that his use

of photos suggests the unreliability of officially recorded history. The images chosen by Sebald are, for the most part, randomly found pictures for which he then constructs a fictional identity or meaning. This is often achieved with some humour, for example when the relatives of Austerlitz's school friend are described at length to correspond with the figures captured in an old group photograph, down to the grumpy uncle with crippling back pain and the family's parrot (122) – all data quite apparent in the image. Each detail is woven so convincingly into the main story, that only the photo reminds us that the details only exist fictionally in response to the found image, and not the other way around, where a photo records identity or confirms the veracity of factual data. As an extension of the mute objectmotif, the demonstrated interchangeability of superficial image and narrative content, throughout *Austerlitz*, flies in the face of how we have come to exist alongside and within photographs today, and questions their reliability in representing reality.

One is again reminded of *Childe Roland* (Browning) here – specifically the beggar, or the 'hoary cripple' - much like the disabled Pope, who once described himself as 'the least thing like a man in England' (Pope, *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, George Sherburn, Ed. XIV) - who 'lied in every word' (Browning l 1-2). It is this figure of ostensible unreliability, however, like a self-deprecating dig at Browning himself, who points Roland towards the right path to the dark tower of self-knowledge. Place is central to this questioning of the officiality of image in *Austerlitz*, most strikingly with the film made about the ghetto village of Theresienstadt. The irony is all the more complex in this case, in that the fake nature of this record of place is, in actuality, verifiable historical fact, with the existence of the faked film itself as physical evidence to prove it. Here, the official recorded image acts as lie and truth at once, in a mirroring

of real evidence in fake evidence that leads us to question the nature of our relationship with all asserted and recorded meaning, and of history.

Indeed, the unequivocally failed realignment of a sense of self, in the face of dislocation and dispossession, shows up in a repeated frustration across these writers, about the ironic uselessness of words to represent 'truth', or history, in what is a failure of comprehension or of resolution. Muteness materialises in Pope's wordless, creative expression of the grotto, his resistance to directly-asserted meaning, in Sebald's mute objects and animals, in Saadawi's wordless yet all-knowing cat or untrustworthy storyteller, and the eternal silence of Abulhawa's character, Dalia, who withers and dies as a result of the silent pain kept trapped inside her own physical husk.

The frustration implicit in Sebald's sense of authorial impotence to divert the course of history connects with another preoccupation in *Austerlitz*, to do with a wish for travel through time in order to change the past. Place becomes a magical arbiter of such time travel, with the manipulation of space into a portal-like means of connection or reunification. Sebald likens time to place as if it were something geographical, or three dimensional, a space one may walk behind or travel backwards towards. Austerlitz talks of walking behind a clock, for example, and describes time as something he can 'turn back and go behind' (144). He comes to feel as if he had been 'travelling for weeks, going further and further east and further and further back in time' (262), and the idea recurs that all times are present in place at once, like physical layers of the landscape. Places have 'more of the past about them than the present', where '...all moments of our life occupy the same space...' (360).

Space and time swirl in and out of each other seamlessly within single sentences throughout *Austerlitz*, so that the waiting room, for example, where Austerlitz is finally reconnected with the memory of his former existence '...contained all the past hours of my past life...as if the black and white diamond pattern of the stone slabs beneath my feet were the board on which the end game would be played, and it covered the entire plane of time' (193).

That frustrated sense, in *Austerlitz*, of what has been lost in the past as if by carelessness or misplaced memory, is so keen that the desperate wish for a kind of time travel to retrieve, to make amends, or to reunite, becomes an overarching obsession of the novel, and indeed of Austerlitz's life, even before he is consciously aware of it. The convincing nature of the possibility of time travel is given life by its context of place, making time a space within which one may quite feasibly consider journeying backwards.

That yearning is also reflected in a preoccupation with the miraculous behaviour of moths and homing pigeons, whose spatial travel by memory far surpasses that of human ability. Austerlitz wonders, for example, at how a pigeon makes its impossibly long way home, on foot, across 'steep terrain' in spite of a broken leg. Austerlitz's own confused journey, similarly, is hinted at in the aimless floating back and forth of a grey goose - another creature possessing inspiring homing abilities across superhuman distances. Significantly too, the two discrete instances of geese in *Austerlitz* are presented singly which, for a creature usually seen in pairs, hints at absence or loss. (Indeed the important idea to do with the sensed presence, or indeed absence, of a

pair, or twin, connects all the writers studied here, is continued in my own novel, and is explored further here in section 6).

The lone grey goose (412), a creature which, by nature, exists in pairs and mates for life, is presented on its own without a mate, suggesting not only the unnatural nature of the loneliness of Austerlitz and the narrator, but also connecting that state with displacement. The goose is shown 'going a little way in one direction and then a little way back in the other' (412), as if lost in the world, or dispossessed of it, highlighting the animal's confusion and alienation in the landscape in which it finds itself. Sebald's use of the verb 'scrambled' to convey the creature's action suggests an awkward helplessness, again placing the creature at odds with its physical environment, and also implicitly suggests that this lack of cohesion with the surrounding environment is a direct result of its loneliness.

That such creatures cover incredibly long distances, to a former destination, parallels the vast journey travelled by Austerlitz to reach an unknown 'home'. It is a home located in a place he can reach neither spatially nor temporally: not only is his loss separated from memory but, since his parents' ultimate fates remain both unrevealed and dislocated, are separated from knowledge itself and are, in any case, fixed in the irretrievable past.

For the goose, natural identity and integrity are destroyed through a loss of togetherness, where 'pairness' is the rightful state of such a creature. Thus the goose effectively emblematises Austerlitz's position, the rending of self from identity not as a result of geographical dislocation, but a sense of self through perception of place when

identity has *already* been rended from the self. The goose 'settles' not far from the narrator, equating the two species and suggesting that both are lost, alone in the world and in need of attachment. This singular yet understated instance of reaching across the wordless divide between species, acknowledged yet unrealised by the herd of deer earlier (368), could be seen as a last minute vestige of hope during the dying light of the end of the novel. The goose's uncharacteristic actions, both in 'scrambling', and in seeking proximity to a human, given the general shyness of such wild creatures, suggest a desperation, and thus again a sense of time running out. The dying light here, while setting the scene for subtle nuance of understanding in Sebald's concluding pages, reminds us of the loss forever of the day at hand, and of all but lost opportunity. The last word of the novel - 'fall', implies a helplessness or physical loss of self-control within one's immediate context, placing the self at odds with surrounding physical space. The biblical fall of man also comes to mind, which invites us to regard the end of the novel as Sebald's final counsel of man's fall from grace through violence and destruction, in constant repetition from one generation to the next, like the cyclical dying and dawning of each new day.

All of the place-related 'signals', or memory clues, in *Austerlitz*, like signposts on the streets of Austerlitz's journey - whether they are a preoccupation with certain types of animal, the nature of public buildings, or the sketch of a camp, by which Austerlitz is struck by an overpowering yet unexplained feeling of belonging – give an impression of being so very meaningful even without an awareness of their specific significance. In a sense, the novel is almost wholly comprised of such indirect signs, which Austerlitz interprets as 'images at which we keep staring while the truth lies elsewhere, away from it all, somewhere as yet undiscovered' (101). Here again, when information that

is overly direct or insistent leads to occlusion, for example where Austerlitz finds that 'the longer I looked at it the less comprehensible it seemed to become' (26), it is the oblique nature of his perspective – which Austerlitz senses has 'always preserved me from my own secret' (60) - that ironically lends his journey to truth its essential prerequisites. Indeed, Sebald himself has commented on the use of oblique approaches to the subjects on which he wishes the reader to focus: 'I think that a subject which, at first glance, seems quite far removed from the undeclared concern of a book, can encapsulate that concern' (Gee, *Patience (After Sebald)*).

The unexplained and anonymous 'agency greater than or superior' to Austerlitz's own 'capacity for thought' which has preserved him from his 'own secret' (60) – corresponds to an implicit compass of the geographical journey in my own novel. This invisible lodestone, magnet, or gravitational pull, sends my novel in geographical directions which the protagonist does not understand but responds to nonetheless. The journey to knowledge here, in being an unconscious one, happens through place not only because place is the immediate medium of our physical existence, but because the necessarily unconscious journey through it offers us the only available sense of a progression towards that which is meaningful. The unwitting nature of that journey is demonstrated by Austerlitz's lifetime of obsessive pursuits in complete unawareness of their relevance to his story, or once again in the way in which Browning's *Childe Roland*, for example, is entirely unaware that he has at last reached his long-quested destination until he is right upon it:

...*Dunce*

Dotard, a-dozing at the very nonce,

After a life spent training for the sight! – (Browning I 178-180).

That indirectness, or obliqueness, of paths to true meaning and degrees of perception, is paired with the occluding darkness of the 'descent to truth' (Jones) in Pope's grotto, and with nuances of light and darkness throughout *Austerlitz*. Gradations in light appear at moments of degrees of revealed memory, while fading or veiled light, such as the mesh fabric of curtains in windows, and overexposed light or darkness often correspond with landscape or architecture to express emotion, clarity of awareness, or inner vision. Light is the medium, too, through which the dead often become visible to the living in *Austerlitz*, and twilight is offered as a magic atmosphere which enables their return.

Austerlitz's preoccupation with Rembrandt's *The Flight into Egypt* (Rembrandt) (169) for example, is reminiscent of the effects of the camera obscura on Pope's creative manipulations of his grotto space, reminding us that both writers' approach to meaning, their 'descent to truth' (Damrosch 195), is not through direct assertion but in subtleties akin to the play, on place, of light. For Austerlitz, nothing with direct relevance to the painting's actual subject matter, such as the bible story's figures, is discernible. Rather, he concentrates hypnotically on the small flame 'gleaming in the darkness' which he can see 'in his mind's eye to this day' (169). This statement is directly followed by a questioning of where to take up the story once again, thus equating the light with degrees of perceived meaning in Austerlitz's quest, not in a 'groping in the dark', but with a responsiveness to nuanced traces of signals.

Conversely, the idea of information being rendered unrecognisable, if offered too directly, is often suggested by the blinding effect of bright light. The fluorescent lighting of a MacDonald's restaurant, for example, illustrates an 'overexposure' where, 'the

glaring light...allowed not even a hint of a shadow and perpetuated the momentary terror of a lightning flash' in the leadup to Austerlitz's breakdown (159). The daylight in Ruzyne, too, is described as 'much too bright, almost over-exposed', as Austerlitz is taken ill when faced by overwhelming information in the public records office (203).

All times become one in place through the use of anachronism in *Austerlitz*. Sebald's hotel porter, who appears to move in a denser atmosphere than the rest of us, reminds us of a visitor from another time plane (292); the hotel room, too, is pristine but for the writing desk (294), not dusted for years like a remnant from some time warp (and metafictionally related to the writing of words, in this case). The decorative dog on his childhood apartment's staircase, carries in its mouth a branch like an amulet which, so Austerlitz asserts, 'by the prickling of my scalp, it had brought back out of my past' (213).

The frequent sense of the proximity of the dead in *Austerlitz*, or that all past times exist simultaneously in the landscape of the present, is evoked once more in the last moments of the novel through the gliding barge, which moves 'apparently without any boatman to steer it and leaving not a trace on the surface of the water' (411). It is as if the boat is operated by a ghost, and even as if the boat is not really present at all, since it has no discernible effect on the physical world through which it passes. Even its very gliding is reminiscent of the movement of a ghost. The echoes of a Charon or Styx like association, too, and thus the departure of dead souls, is evoked here, while the fact that the 'unusually hot' weather matches that of the narrator's previous visit, 'just as it was thirty years ago' (411), lends the setting the quality of a memorial occasion.

The loss, by death, of those we love, is addressed in *Austerlitz* as something made more complex and problematic by displacement, to become what James Wood describes as the 'paradoxically impossible project' (Wood xv) of *Austerlitz* – saving the dead. Significantly, Austerlitz's particular experience is a personal disconnect from more than just geographical dislocation. Austerlitz the child experiences a circumstantial rent from language, parents, information, love, communication, history, family, name and nomenclature, in a manner so comprehensive as to erase all personal memory and which feels, as Sebald's conscious representation of all the potential effects on the human self of imposed dislocation, tantamount to a death.

Strictly speaking though, in the case of Austerlitz's particular circumstances, Sebald's novel is not about a rending of self from identity by geographical dislocation, but rather about the subsequent effects of place on one's perception, when identity has *already* been rended from the self. This distinction, which begins to hint at a difference between identity in origins of geographical location, and other possible sources of belonging, points to an important motivation in the novels studied here. While each writer deals with forms of geographical dispossession, the subsequent experiences of belonging in the face of, or indeed *because* of, dislocation, start to burgeon, in an increasing formative blatancy, into what could be perceived as either hope or desperation, but most certainly as innovative exploration. Either way, extreme manipulation of place, physically in Pope's case or on the page in the other writers here, is the formative method by which to explore, challenge or reconcile our relationship to the limits set by the physical world within which we are bound to exist.

Austerlitz is a novel replete with desolate, dulled landscapes devoid of people, in which an awareness of purpose or explicit meaning is insistently absent. In spite, or because, of *the novel's* intrinsic emptiness and desolation, *Austerlitz* was widely proclaimed as one of the most historically meaningful and moving novels to appear in the first decade of this century,¹⁹ which, in the context of literature's failure to offer a sustained lesson from history, renders its effect implicitly yet intrinsically metafictional.²⁰ *Austerlitz* thus actively embodies, and immortalises, that idea of meaning in the face of dislocation or dispossession, of identity in spite of invisibility, of truth discernible in the fog of injustice and Popean 'dulness'.²¹

¹⁹ In 2019, *Austerlitz* was ranked 5th on *The Guardian's* list of the 100 best books of the 21st century; '[Sebald] is amply recognised today as a major voice in world literature. *Austerlitz* has been hailed as a great novel for our century and has taken a place in public life' (Davies); 'One of contemporary literature's most transformative figures...[Sebald] erased and redrew the boundaries of narrative fiction as radically as anyone since Borges' (O'Connell).

²⁰ Metafiction: 'Fiction about fiction; ...the term is normally used for works that involve a significant degree of self-consciousness about themselves as fictions, in ways that go beyond occasional apologetic addresses to the reader' (Baldick).

²¹ 'Dulness' appears in the *Dunciad* as a fictional goddess championing ignorance, darkness, indifference and stupidity. Pope counters the position through the concept of light, with imagery such as the stars in space while, at the end of the poem, 'Universal darkness covers all' (Pope, *The Dunciad* in *Four Books* 1 355-6).

5. Mornings in Jenin

An awareness of the significance of place is consistent and all-enveloping in *Mornings in Jenin* (Abulhawa). Place is present not only circumstantially, in the theft by Israel of Palestinian homelands, but also in that all self-identity, and much of reality itself, is perceived and expressed in relation to place. But the novel also sets out a distinct progression, begun in *Austerlitz* and developed here through four generations of characters, in the nature and representation of the dispossessed self in response to varieties of individual experience.

Based on historical fact, and presenting as a blend of fiction and documentary, *Mornings in Jenin* tells the story of the olive-farming Abulheja family from the Palestinian village of Ein Hod. Events begin with the 1948 *nakba*, or 'catastrophe' - the invasion of Palestine that led to the founding of the state of Israel. The family's infant child, Ismael, is snatched from his Palestinian mother, Dalia, by an Israeli soldier, who gives the child to his wife, a Polish Holocaust survivor, to be raised as a Zionist Jew. Later, Ismael - now known as David and serving in the Israeli army - meets his twin brother once again. More centrally, *Mornings in Jenin* is the life story of Amal, the twin boys' sister. Orphaned and injured in the 1967 war, she leaves her childhood home in the Jenin refugee camp to join a Jerusalem orphanage, then spends a lonely, early adulthood in Pennsylvania. On her return to Lebanon, Amal falls in love and marries, only to be met with yet more tragedy and loss at the hands of the continuing struggle. Amal has a daughter, and thus the tragic story continues to weave down through the generations of one family, expressing through individuals the extraordinary pain of the Palestinian people.

Older characters such as Yehya, the grandfather of protagonist Amal, are tied viscerally and permanently to their land of origin, even once separated from it, as a result of a lifetime of direct interaction with it. Amal's own generation, whose first-hand experience of Palestinian homelands ceases during childhood, displays a markedly changed relationship to physical surroundings, and embraces memories entwined instead with the experience of dispossession itself. It is this later response to place which corresponds more closely with that of Austerlitz, whose rending of a sense of self from physical location has already occurred in childhood.

Amal's mother Dalia, and her twin brother David, each mark individual variations on that distinction observed in *Austerlitz*, where self and identity have been torn asunder in advance of their response to place as it is formatively represented. Indeed, the main, circumstantial mirroring of *Austerlitz* in *Mornings in Jenin* comes through David, a Palestinian turned Israeli soldier who is separated from his birth family as a baby. His particular experience is a deletion of personal history so comprehensive that it not only robs him of self-definition, but removes the links to place which anchor him to reality.

In the context of 'colonisation', each generation of characters in *Mornings in Jenin* plays their part in an evolving relationship between war, rootlessness, and belonging. Earlier generations remain inextricably entwined with the land in a natural symbiosis, but it is this closeness which betrays them within a national system of proprietorial control. In this way, relationship to place in the novel begins steeped in concepts predicated on static property possession and fixed domicile, constructed more to serve

the interests of the nations in which the characters exist, rather than those of the individual.

But the idea of 'home' is shifted through the course of *Mornings in Jenin*, in response not only to the practical circumstances in which characters find themselves, but also because of changing values based on physical context, memory, and experience. Thus the nuanced interpretations of 'dispossession' - of land, purpose, history, motherhood, or indeed of one's entire identity – manifest in *Mornings in Jenin* in a progressive series of discretely defined relationships with the surrounding physical world which I will set out and interpret below.

The imprints, treads and pressures upon earth and skin are used not only to represent abstractions and emotions at the beginning of *Mornings in Jenin*, but signify a mutually defining relationship between self and place. An awareness of man's touch upon the earth, and a oneness with soil discernible on the landscape of a human face, are expressed in such equal measure as to seem interchangeable. Human interiority is conveyed through earth's viscosity, by the effect of humanity on the landscape, and by the physical ravages of the land on the human body, so that hands are 'infused with the melanin truths of...hills' (46), where toughness finds 'fertile soil in the hearts of Palestinians, and the grains of resistance embedded themselves in their skin' (108). Abulhawa's very particular kind of formative treatment at this early stage in the novel is the clearest demonstration of the idea that the physical matter of place and self are one, and exemplifies a way in which place can lend new significance to reality itself. The merging of place and self in this way also marks the start of Abulhawa's exploration of the possibility that our notions of essence or meaning can be found

housed within ephemeral, or transient contexts, as antidotes to our usual perceptions of more tangible or physical embodiments of significant truths.

It is that lifetime of deep symbiosis with the soil, which makes the dispossession of homelands so devastatingly problematic to process for the older characters in *Mornings in Jenin*. The Palestinian villagers respond to rumours of massacres simply by reaping early and pickling, showing how the people are tied to the land – to place – not just by livelihood and emotions, but in their very registering of reality. To perceive or respond to anything is to turn to the land, so that even during a bombing attack, it is the trees grandfather Yehya thinks of: ‘It wasn’t the season yet, but his trees needed water’ (32). Characters register and comprehend through their relationship with the soil, even when the object in question is not directly connected. The harvest, when regarded from the incarcerating remove of the refugee camp, is still seen as that which will ‘lessen father’s despondency’ (23), while Hasan questions his Jewish friend about the Israelis-Jewish question while ‘squeezing an olive between his fingers to gauge the harvest they might have in November’ (23).

The physicality of self and place merge in response to moments of heightened emotion, often in direct proportion to extremity of experience. After grandfather Yehya revisits his place of dispossessed origin before death, he returns to the refugee camp with ‘yellow clay across his teeth’ (44). Mourning manifests in the desire for a melding of self with the land: ‘Huda dug her fingers into the earth over the graves, kneading the dirt as if she were fondling fate itself, grabbing fistfuls of her pain and heaving it into the air and onto her face...’ (315).

The loss of purpose through the theft of 'agrarian self-sufficiency' reduces the first generation of refugees to the 'aimlessness of captive dispossession' (41), a totality which explains the death ritual of Yehya as 'a call to the earth...to the country within him' (42). Here again, Yehya's realisation of what he must do is perceived through his awareness of the harvest: 'the olives are ready' (42). This most tender of passages shows how the significance of place is not about ownership of land – indeed, 'nationalism was inconsequential' (27) - but rather mines a deeper seam of meaning where the self exists in symbiotic harmony with the natural order of the earth. Where function provides one's anchor to the world, Yehya is willing to regain his only known purpose in life, to be at one again with the soil, even if it means dying in the process.

Just as interaction with the earth, and its fruits and seeds, are the means by which self-perception is gained, physical place is the cipher through which the novel expresses all things. Even the Jewish settlers are depicted by 'imported shrubbery' (290), while Amal attempts to cover the scar on her belly with 'plastic daisies' (178), suggesting the futility of denying or hiding her experience with manmade pretensions to nature. Connected to this distinction is an important difference, emerging between natural place - the earth's fruitful soil and the hidden interiority of all earth's complex systems - and place as forged by man in stone, fences and trenches for human ownership of specific location, be it in Jerusalem or in *Austerlitz's* 'largest accumulation of stone blocks anywhere in Europe' (38), in Brussels. The body is often presented as a husk, or container of the human essence, which underpins the start of a distinct and evolving relationship in *Mornings in Jenin* between body and landscape.

The idea of the body containing that which is dying, or desperate for escape, is a meaningful echo of *Austerlitz* in *Mornings in Jenin*. Dalia's seemingly empty husk at first betrays physical signs of what remains inside, in ways which are uncannily reminiscent of both Austerlitz's dying mother tongue and the doomed prisoners at Breendonk scrawling on the walls: '...the wrinkles on mama's face had carved her skin like prison bars, behind which one could discern the perpetual plaint of something grand and sad, still alive and wanting to get out' (131). This aspect of Dalia's selfhood is often reinforced during the first half of the novel, for example in her 'giving the impression that she held something in her grip that was living and trying to get out' (15). Like the fort at Breendonk in *Austerlitz*, or the disused room in Wales, or even Pope's bunker or tomb-like grotto in exile, the body is represented not only as a protective fort but also as an imprisoning trap. Dalia advises her daughter, 'Whatever you feel, keep it inside', but it is this approach which leads to the eventual withdrawal and withering away of Dalia's essence, and of her links of communication to those around her, just like the dying of Austerlitz's mother tongue.

This bodily imprisonment of self, and its desperate revelation through outward physical signs upon the skin, is reminiscent of the scene in the 1973 horror film *The Exorcist* (Blatty), where the demonically repressed will of a child is signified by, and finds expression in, raised welts of lettering on the surface of her belly. While such signals are less controlled by inner will in *Mornings in Jenin*, the physical impressions of identity or experience, like desire paths or flood plains on the land, are literally written upon the characters: 'Gravity, sun and time had scrawled on their faces the travails of hard work' (131).

Later, Amal describes the absence of identity in the bodily housing that was her mother. 'I could not find in the small pale body the woman whose womb had given me life' (127). At Dalia's death, Amal sees the 'shadow of her stiff form flickering against the wall' (126), as if literally a shadow of her former self, one who had 'departed that body years before' (127) in response to the theft of her central and self-defining purpose - motherhood. Dalia's death is depicted in direct and vivid relation to her physical context. She dies on the floor, in the corner of her hut in the refugee camp, projected onto the wall, alone yet still inescapably shackled by her body to the place she must inhabit. While Dalia's attachment to the land is at one remove from that of Yehya's, it would still seem that only death can set Dalia free. Her imprisonment thrives partly on that inescapable dependence upon stolen function for self-definition, but also initiates a gradual progression of each generation's positioning of self in a changing physical context.

For Dalia, the effects of loss of land itself are almost secondary, amounting in effect to a colonisation of the body instead, and thus the dispossession of so much more – those truths, anchors of identity, purpose, memory and meaning which she has locked within her. Dalia's maternal advice to 'keep all inside' does not save her in the end. It is, after all, not simply the loss of her maternal role which devastates Dalia so completely. She still has other children to care for, and in fact fails to do so. Like the unknown past which haunts Austerlitz for a lifetime, the far greater torture suffered by Dalia, and which slowly withers her away, is the total ignorance of her baby's fate.

But a new question is raised by the nature of Dalia's tragic experience and formative representation. Abulhawa's intense focus on corporeal form continues to be

heightened in spite of that seemingly inescapable inner emptiness, and the younger generations in *Mornings in Jenin* have little choice but to address this emerging dichotomy. The question now facing a new generation is whether traumatic dispossession – of body *and* place – may be survivable by moving towards more abstract interpretations of the relationship between the self and its context.

Amal may see her life ‘trapped by longing between roots and soil’ (284) which, like her mother before her, manifests in the self-fortification of an inability to express motherly love ‘I feared touching Sara, lest I infect her with my destiny’ (231). But while land, family and freedom are lost to Amal, the cutting of ties to specific geographical origins, and the inhabiting instead of the body as a kind of place, now begins to be interpreted as a moveable means of globally valid self-sufficiency and a source of identity transformation. Just when the winds of change take the Palestinian homelands like a sheet, ‘at one corner’ and shake them ‘name and character’ (3), so the perception, projection and formative representation of self in physical context is remobilised anew.

Amal’s different circumstances initiate a progression away from place as something static, owned and bordered. In this way, her new understanding of the world serves to protect her from the property-dependent vulnerability of her forebears. Amal does remember the land of her birthright, which is enough to have afforded her a sense of origin-related identity. But while a forced migration from original homeland means her sense of self is one forged in loss, absence and struggle, still Amal’s intact memory at least ensures a valid selfhood, a starting point and springboard denied others, such as her twin brother David, or indeed Austerlitz.

The geographic location of original homeland is replaced, in the formative representation of Amal, by the visceral physicality of the body itself, and of experience written on the skin as a peripatetic yet anchoring means of expression and self-definition. The advice to 'keep all inside' may not have saved her mother, but Amal's own experience allows a more favorable interpretation. In this sense, the body begins to replace owned land as a kind of physical self-contextualisation that is carried with Amal – or indeed carries her - wherever she is obliged to move across the globe.

This relationship between the self, and the 'skin' which forms one's immediate physical context, is heralded first in the prelude to *Mornings in Jenin*. The opening passage focuses with some intensity on an Israeli soldier's contact lens. It is the unspoken, mutual acknowledgment, between the soldier and Amal, of an implication of false covering, of vulnerability or weakness, which initiates a crucial change in the dynamics of their exchange. The soldier, reminded of his own humanity by Amal's peering directly into his lensed eye, becomes unsure of himself, in spite of pointing a gun in Amal's face. This tell-tale sign of human weakness, beyond the firearm, allows them both to contemplate the soldier's interiority in an involuntary kind of levelling. The revelation results in a bead of sweat rolling down the soldier's skin, followed in turn by his body's own blink of self-betrayal. The extraordinary exchange serves to level out the dynamic of power and begins the novel's use of physical signs of the inner self on a variety of exteriors. From a feminist standpoint, too, this opening passage firmly establishes Amal in a far more empowered cultural context than that of her mother.

The novel's original title, 'Scar of David', suggests how lived experience becomes a readable signature upon the characters, as well as the land on which they exist. If a

title encapsulates a book, then it is telling that David's character is in fact one of the least developed in the novel. Having been stolen from his original, place-rooted family to be raised as a Jew, David only discovers the betrayal in adulthood, which positions him in a no man's land of unbelonging and leads in turn to his alcoholism. But David's own physical scar is in fact sustained before displacement, and serves as the plot device for his reidentification decades later. The rest of the family, and David's mother's own tragic experience especially, suggests that the titular 'scar' is in fact the one inflicted *by* the circumstances surrounding David's disappearance, on all other characters in the novel, rather than the physical one wrought upon him. The tell-tale bodily marks of colonisation are demonstrated more explicitly by Amal, who literally embodies the formative representation with her shrapnel-disfigured belly. Here, physicality is embraced by Amal as a means of self-determination in extremis, in a triumph over others in the determination of the self.

The land is similarly scarred in *Mornings in Jenin*, and often presented as damaged or broken by humanity, for example with 'barren wastelands, littered with rubble of old homes, burned tires, spent bullet casings and struggling olive saplings' (113). This post-apocalyptic landscape represents the earth's soft interior as something akin to man's, where struggling saplings suggest a failure to thrive in the context of war. It is a landscape written upon and literally scarred by violence, in a mirroring of the human skin. From a more environmental perspective, this mirroring of human interiority by the landscape suggests in turn that which is not immediately apparent about the land we desecrate. Humanity's effect upon the earth is revealed in clues to its damage, in forms of environmental colonialism which we often fail to recognise or understand, rather like the subtle signals or signs of neglect in a child.

On the other hand, a strikingly literal implication of the physicality of war-torn place is offered through the abyss, which operates as a metaphorical crucible of change in *Mornings in Jenin*. The abyss is first introduced to denote an abstract sense of the unknown, for example where 'there were moments that prodded me to look into the abyss separating me from those around me' (174). As with Pope's grotto, or Sebald's fort at Breendonk, the idea of a hole in the ground is simultaneously both a refuge and a trap in *Mornings in Jenin*, such as when Amal and her friend try to protect a baby from bombing underneath the floor of their kitchen (65). Later still, the abyss becomes literal, when the land opens up and swallows down Abu Sameeh's family, burying them alive: 'he stood on a threshold of an abyss' (70). The use of this somewhat clichéd form serves ironically to heighten the horrific nature of Abu Sameeh's actual experience - his unimaginable suffering whilst standing at the edge of a real chasm in the earth, his family down inside it. As a place and a people so marginalised, and in the context of the creative and political impetus behind this novel's formative engagements with place, *Mornings in Jenin* also hereby connects to the creative preoccupations in my own novel, where a mine features strongly as another kind of grotto-like hole in the ground, within which essences of understanding are housed, and realisations made about the nature of the dispossessed self. Here again, engagement with Pope has unearthed a deeper awareness of the process behind my own craft, and carries through uncannily in each of the writers here in between, re-materialising in progressively enlightening formative responses.

But the oxymoronic use of the word 'threshold', here in Abulhawa's abyss passage, also stands out, rendering Abu Sameeh's position, on the edge of the unknown, rather

more three dimensional and emancipatory. In this last sense, the abyss represents those in the camp, like Amal, who stand on the threshold of something different, and might now move on from the position of earlier generations in responding to traumatic displacement. The future may be obscured beyond the threshold of place, in the darkness of the unknown, but here, at this point where human existence is literally buried by the soil, the situation is desperate enough to engender adaptation. It is the beginning of a transformation for Amal which would not have been possible for Dalia's generation, who is more trapped not only by dislocation, but also through fixed associations of gender and culture. Thus the differences between Dalia's and Amal's experience of forced migration and dispossession begin to open up the concept of 'refugee', to include a far wider variety of contexts in which the individual may be 'uprooted'.

The differences between Amal and her mother are a part of Abulhawa's implicit demonstration of how ties to place are entwined in, and influenced by, gender, history and culture. Through education, Amal escapes and subverts the bodily imprisonment suffered by Dalia, whose only pre-established roles were those of wife and mother. Originally, even in humanitarian discourse on the position of refugees, there was a 'tendency to portray women as unable to survive and cope in hostile environments and even to adapt to new situations'.²² Abulhawa's portrayal of each character's relationship to place continually reflects a progressive trend in attitudes towards women in refugee situations from the 1980's onwards, from a position of victim, to one of empowerment.

²² 'In the mid 1980's, feminist discourse on gender relations...influenced the perception of refugee women as *victimized* rather than as victims *per se*...In addition, refugee women were learning and taking decision-making responsibilities beyond sex-defined roles. Respect replaced pity in the discourse' (Hajdukowski-Ahmed and Nazilla Khanlou 6).

Perception of self in place via the body reaches its most lyrical peak through Amal's friend Huda, who has a lifelong wish to sit by the ocean. Hers is a dream to simply exist *alongside* a specific place – ironically such an immersing, body-enfolding medium - since she cannot swim. It is a dream not realised in her lifetime, and the double irony of her dream, unrealised since her inability to swim may be a result of her displaced status, heightens the tragedy all the more. Amal develops Huda's wish into a more transformative longing when she says, 'There, in that silent world, like the stillness I had heard after the blast that had killed Aisha, I had an odd desire to be a fish' (76). For Michael Dash, describing Carpentier's novel *Explosion in a Cathedral* (Carpentier), 'nothing has a fixed contour in this submarine world in which matter cannot be discriminated from non-matter' (Dash 25). Similarly, 'the corporeal ideal is one of resilience, slipperiness and manoeuvrability. Bodies are repeatable, can be dissolved or can defy the force of gravity' (Dash 24). Dash also describes such imaginings as 'a process of psychic *marronnage* that allows the individual to survive even in the most vulnerable circumstances' (Dash 25).²³ In both cases, even in escape, it is the positioning of self in place - the contextualising of the soul's housing in a specific, chosen, encasing and yet self-negating medium - which, like Yehya's wish of self in place before them, constitutes the life-encompassing, death-transcending dream. The continuity lies in the fact that any realisation of selfhood must still be perceived through specific, physical contextualisation.

²³ Dash goes on to explain how, in Simone Schwarz-Bart's novel *The Bridge of Beyond* (Schwarz-Bart 104), Telumee deals with personal tragedy by imagining herself as floating free of the world and its destructive force, and interprets her fantasy as an 'imaginative strategy designed to resist the desecrating force of her oppressive world' (Dash 24) which 'demonstrates the corrective power of the folk imagination: "Then I would lie on the ground and try to dissolve my flesh: I would fill myself with bubbles and suddenly go light – a leg would be no longer there, then an arm, my head and whole body faded into air, and I was floating" (104)' (Dash 24). Such de-corporealisation of self pre-empted the treatment of the body in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (Saadawi), where the body of the monster is never static and thus indeterminate.

That Huda's wish is merely to exist *beside* place - that this approximation is enough to her - could point to a precision of the sheer physicality of self-perception, or an escapist negation of the corporeality of the self, in the sense that Huda's position is reduced to just an approximation, beside some 'elsewhere'. In her dream of self-contextualisation, Huda also represents a kind of half way point in the novel, in a progression from the land-tied, spiritual entrenchment of earlier generations, to a new anchoring of self to abstraction and a cutting of ties to the land. In this case, the metaphorical escape is to the body-negating sea, but later, poetry and metaphor blend increasingly with the possibility of geographical movement, as achieved ultimately by Amal herself. At first, however, it is only the empowering process of journeying away from the location of her displacement, for example, which allows Amal to achieve some self-definition through abstract sources of comfort. This is suggested where Amal compares herself to her mother, who 'could isolate each present moment while existing in an eternal past, but I needed physical distance to remove myself' (174). While Dalia escapes inside into the past, Amal discharges pain via her own geographical detachment. Place, though, even in extraction from it, remains as the fundamental arbiter of Amal's notion of selfhood.

Amal's other significant tool, in dispossession, is the anchor of identity discovered in uncertainty and upheaval. The paradoxical nature of a self forged in adversity creates a new, ironic form of 'roots' in *Mornings in Jenin* - ones *already* torn violently from their soils of origin. To be Palestinian, for Amal's generation, is to be more vital and passionate, more proclaimed and projected, than when the permanence of soil was central to existence: 'He was over one hundred years old, Mother. To have lived so long, only to be crushed to death by a bulldozer. Is this what it means to be

Palestinian?’ (314). The implicit answer, for Amal, and for *Mornings in Jenin*, is a passionate, yearning, loss-ravaged yes.

Though cursed with a ‘tentative destiny’ (107), self-identity for Amal is tangibly made up of loss, struggle, and an attachment to bonds forged by pain and love during the ‘offences of temporary life’ (46) in the refugee camp. But Amal’s progression also takes her beyond the limbo and destruction. McSpadden notes that, ‘As normal individuals confronting abnormal situations, [refugees] have to redefine themselves in relationship to those abnormal circumstances, and to the whole apparatus that constructs them as “refugee women”. Like refugee men, refugee women find themselves as “inside-outsiders” – or “a part of and apart from cultural context” – which is conducive to sharpening critical thinking and to making them into potential agents of change’ (Hajdukowski-Ahmed and Nazilla Khanlou 41). Once in America, memories of Jenin become Amal’s lodestone, and a centring device for her self-definition. Thus the temporary nature of the refugee camp becomes in turn a new kind of permanence, and a fertile soil for memories of friendship and familial love.²⁴ As a refugee, Amal produces ‘discourses to resist the identities that are imposed...and generate[s]...’re-selving” narratives and strategies’ (Hajdukowski-Ahmed and Nazilla Khanlou 49).

The body, here too, begins to take the place of soil as the keeper of memory and vessel of the self in *Mornings in Jenin*. In America, Amal reaches for the anchor of her

²⁴ ‘They reported a “re-selving” that was not linear, but the outcome of a constant struggle with “de-selving” factors they had experienced. In the process of their identity reconstruction, refugee women are engaged in a constant dialogical struggle between victimization and resistance, between being the helpless victim and the empowered survivor, between here “a present” and there “a past”, between what they say and what they are silent about, and between grasping a situation as a challenge or perceiving it as an opportunity’ (Hajdukowski-Ahmed and Nazilla Khanlou 49).

past by touching the 'mangled' skin of her belly. Similarly, the blink of Amal's eye is 'a twitch of contrition' that brings her 'face to face with the past...a persistent pull, living in the cells of my body, calling me to myself' (175). That sense of a generational progression is also expressed by Amal's needing 'physical distance' to remove herself from the past, while her mother Dalia could only isolate each present moment 'while existing in an eternal past' (173). This raises the implicit question, valid for any nation-based people, of whether it is possible to claim a land which belonged to long-past generations. It is just such a dispossessed existence, however, a people's response to injustices dealt by the world, which the novel offers as a resultant or at least emergent identity, forged in the 'quicksand' nature of Palestine's soil: 'My Arabness and Palestine's primal cries were my anchors to the world' (179). Such vivid self-definition is a direct and ironic *result* of upheaval, of a rending from place. Amal takes on her people's traumatic dislocation as a flag of selfhood, felt inside and projected onto a betraying world: '...a usurped life was my inheritance and I claimed it then and there with all the force of my confusion and longing, while the cocks crowed the announcement of another day' (179).

As Edward Said has noted of his own people, the Palestinian people, 'How rich our mutability, how easily we change (and are changed) from one thing to another, how unstable our place—and all because of the missing foundation of our existence, the lost ground of our origin, the broken link with our land and our past' (Said, *After the Last Sky* 26). Through facets such as the abyss as threshold, or Huda's wish for immersion in a transformative element, and Amal's focus on her own body as a lodestone in itinerancy, a new kind of self-mapping begins to develop in *Mornings in Jenin*. As Said notes, it is 'necessary to seek out, to map, to invent, or to discover, a

third nature, which is not pristine and prehistorical...but one that derives...from the deprivations of the present' (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 272).

In this context, and within post-colonial discourse, the body has long been regarded as a 'literal site on which resistance and oppression have struggled' (Griffiths, Ashcroft, and Tiffin 322), and as such has become a part of the place in which the dispossessed exist, over which it has become crucial to strive to maintain ownership and control. In the face of land loss, the body remains as a means of self-determination in spite of the determination of self by others, a form of place for re-enabling a perception of ourselves *within* reality. As Jameson notes, it operates as 'a gloss on what is essentially a spatial representation and a spatial perception: the philosophical thoughts (which in any case involve space, as we shall see) will finally have been dependent on space, and inexpressible without it' (Jameson 53).

In *Not Born a Refugee Woman*, Hajdukowski-Ahmed notes that 'a refugee who leaves her country is not necessarily only a victim or disconnected from home' (Hajdukowski-Ahmed and Nazilla Khanlou 41). Similarly, refugeeness 'puts the notion of home into question and deconstructs its feminized connotation of "a safe place where women belong"' (Hajdukowski-Ahmed and Nazilla Khanlou 41). In this way, for Amal, even war's violence is shown to strengthen bonds already forged by displacement: 'Our terror in the kitchen hole had only strengthened the bond between Huda and me' (82). Similarly, the 'foul slosh' in Jenin's gutter is regarded as a 'delightful escape' (174) by the children of Jenin and, once in America, while the Western students behave as if their world is ending as a result of a burst drain, Amal 'felt a sweet nostalgia and

longing for old friends' (175) – a longing, in fact, for the refugee camp her parents had regarded as the end of the world as they knew it, and an insupportable hell.

Here in America, memory too is expressed through the fruits of personified place and the visceral physicality of the body: 'the weeping willows ... would turn into Jenin's fig trees reaching down to offer me their fruit. It was a persistent pull, living in the cells of my body, calling me to myself' (173). Place remains a vital instrument of perception and understanding once Amal spreads her wings, for example in the girls who pay testament to slavery in Amal's modern America with 'their hair chained in obedient cornrows' (176), while Jerusalem has 'deaths and...birthmarks pressed deep into the city's viscera and onto the rubble of its edges' (140), so that skin and soil still reflect each other symbiotically with memories and histories inscribed on their surfaces.

In the emancipatory mobility of her body, new adaptations begin to free Amal from what could be regarded as a culturally gender-related 'internal colonialism' suffered by older generations. Indeed, the 'opportune moment of liberation' for any oppressed peoples is, in Fanon's words re-evoked by Homi Bhabha, 'a time of cultural uncertainty, and, most crucially, of signficatory or representational undecidability' (Bhabha 5). And Amal's adaptations to dispossession do bring their own, new forms of alienation. Displacement colours perception of place in Amal's America and her position within it, where the safety risks of not sharing a common language, and refuge from physical danger, are her foremost considerations: 'why would I risk going into an unfamiliar world where no one spoke Arabic and I knew no hiding places?' (157). In this case, registers of language prompt feelings of unfamiliarity and alienation, when 'language

is created at the border where the 'I' encounters an 'other'.²⁵ This linguistic element of geographical dispossession is one borne out by Austerlitz too, whom the narrator notes has a strikingly less confident and forthcoming personality when communicating with the narrator in a different language (42). For the conceptualisation and drawing of new maps, however, during Fanon's 'opportune moments' of liberation (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 136), a new, unfamiliar language, may be needed.

In Amal's relinquishment of fixed location, the body is still ironically tethered to the historical culture of the Palestinian people, like a physical container of memory. This is demonstrated, for example, through the exchange between Amal and Majid in the unavoidably close proximity of his tiny car. Here, the embarrassment of Majid's hand accidentally brushing Amal's leg, and his subsequent, sincere apology, shows the enduring sacrosanctity of bodily selfhood. Majid's humility appears here in stark comparison to the raping of home, land and life laid bare all about them: 'Excuse me. I'm very sorry' (187). The gentle simplicity of the exchange expresses an acute sensitivity to the historically-rooted cultural decorum around physical self, observed in spite of, or perhaps even because of, all the pillage and destruction. With a hole ripped through her belly, Amal is still able to say – 'It's okay' (187).

There is a double irony in Amal's position during this exchange, in that while her body is the very source of direct damage by inflicted violence, it is this body which slowly becomes her vehicle for transformation and emancipation. This protective and representative skin is Amal's new 'fixed domicile'. With its scar like a badge of honour,

²⁵ 'Like the self, language is a living organism shaped by the people who interact in the sociohistorical context in which they are grounded (Bakhtin 1986, 75)' (Hajdukowski-Ahmed and Nazilla Khanlou 47).

or testament to transformative experience, the body becomes all the more valued in this role, as 'the "literal "text" on which colonisation has written some of its most graphic and scrutable messages' (Griffiths, Ashcroft, and Tiffin 322). In the slave and penal colonies of the Americas, scars upon the skin are inscribed, like living testaments in flesh.²⁶ But Amal's mobile 'houser' of self-identity, no longer tied to the soil from which she has been uprooted, is a 'shell' which enables her geographical self-extraction. This same bodily containment trapped Amal's mother Dalia forever, through gender related and culturally inescapable shackles, so that like the abyss, the fort, or the grotto, the body is a medium which is shown both to entrap, incarcerate, protect, and enable transformation.

For the first half of *Mornings in Jenin*, death appears to be the only way to transcend the Palestinian predicament or achieve invulnerability against the complex brutalities of colonisation. Yehya gives his life willingly for a self-positioning in specific place, and Dalia has retreated permanently inside her bodily fortress even before relinquishing its physical bastions. But a developing sense of relativity - a kind of longer, more abstract view - emerges during the course of the novel, suggesting the possibility of an alternative path. The younger generations' unshackling of self from the specificity of location, and all its dependence on the beloved soil, celebrates itself in a different awareness of the oneness of nature and knowledge. Conscious appreciation of and sensitivity to the wonder of place, and the meaningful beauty of poetry are increasingly

²⁶ 'The female body has always been crucial to the reproduction of Empire, and deeply marked by it. On the other hand it can also be at the bosom of describing Empire' (Whitlock 349). In *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*, the description of her appearance is 'as if the flesh had been deeply cut, or lacerated with gashes, by some instrument wielded by most unmerciful hands'...or 'chequered with the vestiges of severe floggings' (Prince 64). Carter describes the nature of colonialism's spatial physicality. 'What is evoked here is the spatial forms and fantasies through which a culture declares its presence' (Carter, *Spatial History* 376).

presented together, for example where ‘under the shelter of trees, Yousef read’ (107), or where ‘he returned to the pastures with a book’ during times that are described as ‘conditions of helplessness...grasping at continuity, salvaging what could be kept of their source of strength...’ (108).

The likening, through Amal, of the self to a fruit or seed, increases the emerging possibility of movement and freedom while still maintaining a connection to the physicality of earth. That fruits and seeds of a static tree are carried elsewhere is suggested when Amal claims, ‘I belong to this land. It possesses me, no matter who conquers it, because its soil is the keeper of my roots...because I am the natural seed of its passionate, tempestuous past. I am a daughter of the land and Jerusalem reassures me of this inalienable title far more than the...decrees of superpowers could ever do’ (140). Rather than harking back to a position as caretaker of fixed land like the generations before her, Amal feels herself a product of personified, parental place, like a seed, to be carried necessarily elsewhere by the wind. Her belonging thus remains intact, but her role entails movement beyond the sites of her memories.

The question raised by *Austerlitz* and echoed in *Mornings in Jenin*, by David, is what the differences may be between a loss of self through geographical displacement, and an earlier, comprehensive theft of data, and thus formative identity. As David says in response to his sister’s own suffering, ‘At least you knew who you were and where you came from...’ (276). But while both *Austerlitz* and *David* demonstrate the effects upon the self when identity has already been taken away, *Abulhawa* touches only relatively briefly on David’s consequent experience. That David’s journey in particular is one towards the desired inebriation of alcoholism, almost suggests that such a level

of imposed self-ignorance is a nihilism only fittingly represented by the mind-darkening stupor of oblivion.

The occurrence of David's loss of self-identity in formative childhood is, in effect, an irrevocable theft of data, self-knowledge, and of any potential for triggers to early memory.²⁷ For David, ultimately, neither the persona of the Israeli soldier nor the dispossessed Palestinian feels ownable: 'The heritage that ran through his blood was vintage, yet somehow that, too, was not his. Fate had placed him somewhere between where he belonged to neither' (263). While both Amal's and David's respective limbos rid them of their original sense of secure, place-anchored identity, it is the latter who experiences an annihilation of selfhood. Like David, one senses that Austerlitz too, who by the end of the novel has seemingly wandered off into the world once more, (during approaching evening, and with a newly-discovered exit through a wall onto a graveyard), remains in an unresolvable limbo between the discreet selfhoods that have been revealed, stolen or imposed upon him during the course of his existence. Thus the distinction in *Austerlitz* is reiterated, in *Mornings in Jenin*, between theft of selfhood through geographical dispossession, and the total impossibility of self-identity through a more comprehensive ignorance of one's origin. In the wider, post-colonial sense, the systematic erasure of cultural memory of entire peoples is being demonstrated here at the level of the individual.²⁸ In both cases, the theft of memory and history mean the loss of the ability to self-define.

²⁷ As a character more fully developed than David, whose dispossession occurs later in childhood, Austerlitz does respond to triggers to early memory throughout the novel. He remains unaware of their significance, however, until revisiting the ladies waiting room of the station where he arrived as a child in England, which as a trigger leads to a more conscious knowledge of his forgotten origins.

²⁸ 'Clearly, what it means to have a history is the same as what it means to have a legitimate existence: history and legitimation go hand in hand; history legitimates 'us' and not others' (Griffiths, Ashcroft, and Tiffin 355). 'Thus, as we grow older as a race, we grow aware that history is written, that it is a kind of literature without morality, that in its acturaries the ego of the race is indissoluble and that everything depends on whether we write this fiction through the memory of hero or of victim' (Walcott 2). 'Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: "In reality, who am I?"' (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 123).

The idea of erased memory links to the existence, or the metaphorical notion, of a twin, and in diverse ways link all four of the writers studied here.²⁹ The twin implies an uprooting, or departure to an unknown existence elsewhere, of the original self, or suggests how loss of self results in the suspected presence of a geographically removed double or self. Such an awareness of a second, or externalised, self, could also exist as a clue to one's true, 'lost' sense of selfhood, incarcerated inside and, like Dalia's buried essence, the prisoners in Sebald's fort, or the language Austerlitz lost in childhood, 'like something shut up and scratching, or knocking...' (195).

Both David and Austerlitz share an impression of themselves as a 'non-self', as a result of withheld identity and geographic origin. The suspected or real existence of a twin elsewhere comes from that awareness of a 'wrongness' of self as it is positioned within one's context, and of another, more valid self, elsewhere, outside of one's own body. This particular 'paranoia' is a central aspect of the character of Daniel, the protagonist in my own novel, whose half-acknowledged suspicion of a lost twin, or double, manifests in the creation of fictional twins in his own novel. His gradual familiarisation with his repressed, damaged self during the course of his writing and travelling through place, eventually results in his literary 'killing off' of the second twin, as if a split in self has been resolved. Significantly, he achieves this creatively through burial in a mine, with its echoes of Pope's self-burial in his mine-grotto, the loss of one's entire family in a literal abyss in *Mornings in Jenin*, the discovery of truths deep

²⁹ This refers to the previously noted idea that Pope retained a sense of having come after another 'Alexander Pope', who died in infancy. The location of this first Pope's life, and the play site of our Pope's earliest childhood, was a basement complete with gurgling pipes, which Mack connects to the position and nature of the grotto. The notion had specific connotations for Pope's own sense of self in terms of his physical health and a potential sense of guilt, for having usurped a healthier version of himself, as if he were an imposter in his own life. There is also mention of 'another Mr A Pope' (Carruthers 408), who resided simultaneously in Twickenham, again suggesting the idea of a twin existing at one remove from the self, and revealing links with the twin concept explored in *Austerlitz*, *Mornings in Jenin*, and *Frankenstein in Baghdad*.

down inside in Sebald's forts, and the mass graves related to diamond mines in *Austerlitz*.³⁰ In each case, it is the repression, loss, or theft of formative memory which in a sense gives rise to each notion of the twin, or the idea of a more valid self in place elsewhere; a better or more 'authentic' self, perhaps, in whom conscious memory is retained intact.

Memory is presented as a significant and evolving conveyor of self-identity in *Mornings in Jenin*. Haj Salem tells Amal of the importance of remembering family history as a means of clinging to a sense of self. 'I have tried to use my mind and my heart to keep our people linked to history, so we do not become amnesiac creatures living arbitrarily at the whim of injustice' (133). As Jacques Monod notes, 'Every living being is also a fossil. Within it, all the way down to the microscopic structure of its proteins, it bears the traces if not the stigmata of its ancestry. This is even truer of man than of any other animal species because of the dual evolution – physical and ideational – to which he is heir' (Monod 160).

Time itself is merged with place in a similar, formative way to *Austerlitz*, to become a three-dimensional spatial entity one can move about in, or measure one's life by. Amal 'wandered nostalgically in and out of her memories' (208), and she refers to the 'barren, body strewn soil of my days'. Here too, the viscosity of the earth is central: '...confused months...stretched into years, until one day in 1953, when he realised that his miserable tent in Jenin had turned into clay' (41). Time and place have a

³⁰ 'Most of the mines, so I read as I sat there opposite the fortifications of Breendonk, were already disused at the time, including the two largest, the Kimberley and De Beers mines, and since they were not fenced off anyone who liked could venture to the edge of those vast pits and look down to a depth of several thousand feet. Jacobson writes that it was truly terrifying to see such emptiness open up a foot away from firm ground, to realize that there was no transition, only this dividing line, with ordinary life on one side and its unimaginable opposite on the other. The chasm into which no ray of light could penetrate was Jacobson's image of the vanished past of his family and his people which, as he knows, can never be brought up from those depths again' (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 415).

mutually physical effect on the human body, for example when 'time had scribbled lines on her cheeks and furrowed the tales of age in her brow' (155) or when 'those fruits of forty generations [are] like the nectar of her centuries' (45).

In a time-place perspective that is reminiscent of *Austerlitz's* waiting room floor as a chessboard, on which the 'end game' of life is played out, Amal refers to one week in September as 'the mantelpiece of my life...the centre of my gravity...the point on which all of my life's turning points hinge at once' (223). Indeed, Yehya revisits his dispossessed land as if in a transformative realisation of the time travel only wished for in *Austerlitz*. Yehya achieves that which, in *Austerlitz*, does not progress beyond a melancholic yearning for the physically impossible. His is a transcendent journey, which restores his youthful vitality and transports joy to Jenin's inhabitants on his return, even if, for Yehya's generation, the transcendent price to pay for such time travel is death.

In the sense that the past generates identity, personal histories and societal histories can be seen to have the same effect on selfhood: without a history there is no self-knowledge – memory is knowing. As noted in the introduction to 'History' in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, 'what it means to have a history is the same as what it means to have a legitimate existence: history and legitimation go hand in hand; history legitimates 'us' and not others' (Griffiths, Ashcroft, and Tiffin 355). In the same way, the dependence on memory as a safekeeper of cultural history, in order to retain a sense of identity, begins in *Mornings in Jenin* as something necessary for valid self-definition. It is expressed invariably through place, in that memories are 'pillars of strength' (156). The closing lines of the prelude in *Mornings in Jenin* bring us back to

the lands lost by Amal's forebears in her memory, the memory of a place 'she had never known' – as if place can exist inside us in a kind of genetic inheritance, regardless of lived experience or location. Indeed, when Amal changes her name on moving to America, she becomes 'a word drained of its meaning, a woman emptied of her past' (178), suggesting that memories of labels are a central component of one's sense of self. From one generation to the next, however, the novel bears witness to first hand memories of lived experience – for example in the refugee camp – having equal or greater value than inherited history. Jenin itself, in all its temporariness, foul squalor, death and injustice, becomes the most self-validating memory Amal possesses once she has removed herself to America.

That idea of inherited memory, as when the Palestinians in Jenin bequeath to 'their heirs the large iron keys to their ancestral homes' (35), as opposed to memory of lived experience, lends place a metaphysical quality, like a soul which survives our mortal physicality. Handed-down memory of place, rather than lived experience, is perceived as an inheritance continued through generations. Such a perspective, however, could also lend support to the Zionist argument for settlement in Judea, in the sense that it is a land claimed by genetic inheritance rather than somewhere Jewish descendants actually lived themselves. Such circularity of argument renders *any* claim over place akin to the 'subversion of thieves' (35), echoing Jerusalem's Orthodox Jews' anti-Zionist position on the sacrilege of an Israeli state.

This evolving response to dispossession reaches its ideational climax towards the end of the novel when Amal's daughter marvels at the architectural wonders of ancient Jerusalem. 'Why do dignity and honour hinge on stone and soil?' (290). Her mother

replies that it is 'only stone', and instead offers her daughter the memory of an olive tree. The tree was located not in the Palestinian homelands of her ancestors, but in Jenin, the temporary holding pen that in its own turn achieved a permanence of place – and a real sense of self in place acquired through memory, forged bonds, suffering, and the passing of time. A crucial distinction is made in this passage, too, between the manmade and natural physicalities of our world context. The problems of ownership and incarceration associated with the fixed nature of state-conceived buildings and borders are here set against nature's own, softer physicality - adaptable, moveable, evolvable and nurturing, Amal's chosen path, and the one along which she points her daughter, is gently tethered by new values to the physical world, in ways which nurture liberty.

That physical dimension of remembered time, too, progresses from the dreamlike atmosphere of *Austerlitz* to something potentially akin to hope in *Mornings in Jenin*. Certainly, the notion of the endlessness of history's tragedy, and the cyclically unresolvable nature of humanity's suffering is still questioned. A striking image, for example, shows the family enjoying a magical, love-filled meal on the dusty ground of Jenin's refugee camp. We learn that all the food is placed on top of old newspapers, suggesting that these people are 'yesterday's news'. But that news of the struggle, and the world's awareness of political manoeuvrings, could also be seen here as inconsequential in the face of essential human survival, the microcosm of familial love, and the importance of the individual over the national.

Amal herself vows to tell her daughter more of her own personal history, but dies in the midst of history's endless struggle before she is able. Death arrives, as in *Austerlitz*,

before any resolution within one lifespan, but in the case of *Mornings in Jenin*, not before positive learning and adaptation has occurred. Here, Amy hears of her mother's stories through the 'bonds of love' forged down through generations, suggesting hope for the possibility of lessons learned. One of the last scenes in the novel, for example, presents a vignette of a group of Jews and Arabs, united in love, loss, guilt, admission and self-knowledge, visiting the ancestral graves in Ein Hod, of characters featured as the novel began. White-streaked roses still thrive, miraculously, like hope in spite of all the physical desecration of man and land, and again highlighting nature's triumph over any of the ruins of man-made struggle. David, too, through the transformative fires of his pain, is able to clamber out of his own abyss, a lifetime of entrenchment, so that he and Amal manage to meet in neutral territory of honesty and reflection before her death.

While the physical context of place remains essential to the forging of identity throughout *Mornings in Jenin*, by the end of the novel Abulhawa has demonstrated how the relationship between place and self has had little choice but to evolve into something more abstract and ephemeral on the one hand, and body centred on the other, with nature as a potential answer to the nation-centred fixations of constructed ownership and containment.

Place may begin, in *Mornings in Jenin*, as a oneness with nature rooted in the permanent, visceral earth beneath one's feet, but this is place tragically at the mercy of the superimposed ideologies of nationhood. From this dispossession, place becomes more conceptual, located at a physically impossible yet still perceivable remove, imagined for example on stars beyond the distances of space or the depths

of oceans; metaphorical soils are tilled instead for the forging and growing of the bonds of human relationships. Together with this hope-infused, lyrical ephemerality, comes an increasing sense of manmade, physical solidity as something that is limiting, or in need of clearance, so that '...we lived behind our solid barriers, each craving the other's love', or 'loosened the crusted layers of loss, clearing fear from a small patch of my heart' (247). For Amal, Sara is a 'hearty vine creeping along the stone of my character' (246), where stone is incarcerating and inert, and natural growth is the strong, unshackled future. Love and relationships come to replace kinship to fixed physical location, for example where Amal 'would have gone anywhere, as long as Majid was by her side. He became her roots, her country' (208). Similarly, '[Majid's] shoulders spanned from one end of the ocean to the other' (197), and 'Amal at last found home in her daughter's eyes' (314).

In the sense that a yearning for place reaches back to what has been lost before lived experience, yet fights with hope for what may be in the future, time too is transcended in *Mornings in Jenin*, in a way which develops beyond Austerlitz's frustrated yearning for time travel. As Frantz Fanon notes, the claim to a national culture in the past '...is responsible for an important change in the native' (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 170). Colonialism 'turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today' (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 170). The blinding irony here, of course - and a direct testament to man's failure to learn the lessons of history as argued in Austerlitz - is that the forming of the state of Israel took place in response to the dispossession by Nazi Germany of Jews like Austerlitz, only to result in turn in the traumatic dislocation of Palestinians like Amal. Abulhawa herself likens atrocities

committed against Palestinians to those suffered by the Jews of previous generations: 'What is happening to Palestinians now whispers of Warsaw and Lodz . . . Just as Nazis gave Jews only the right to die silently, Israel starves and besieges Palestinians, giving them only that same right' (Abulhawa, *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs - Palestinians Will Never Forget*).

In *Mornings in Jenin*, the ties between identity, memory and location-bound history adapt and evolve not only to preserve a sense of identity but as a matter of survival. Abulhawa sets out a diorama of generations which prove that lessons can be learned, if not over one lifetime, then perhaps across generations, and only then in a crucible of great upheaval and suffering. Bhabha reminds us of Fanon's proclamation that we must 'join the people in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to...which will be the signal for everything to be called into question...it is to the zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come' (Bhabha 5) (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 168). Instead of the fixed land of her birth, permanent, physical location is replaced by the body's metaphorical ties to the different realities around Amal, such as through the 'solace in the bonds...formed by the strings of her own heart' (156), and the memory's ties to an outer reality are found in abstract, ephemeral notions, when a 'starry black sky is our roof in the courtyard where we talk and laugh' (206), or where childhood is 'enchanted by poetry and the dawn' (60). Both *Austerlitz* and *Mornings in Jenin* exist within a system of ownership, containment and control of physical space, including the body, and the 'nation' or any place as property, or the use of physical space to contain or control the bodies of others. The juxtaposition, in terms of real, chronological world history, of these two novels in particular, would suggest that the suffering of any such refugee people, Jew or

Palestinian, may cease only when notions of solidarity between self and place are less dependent on the proprietorial interests of nationhood, and when titleship of land makes way for a more nuanced symbiosis between natural physicality and the individual.

6. Frankenstein in Baghdad

Like the final instalment of a trilogy, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (Saadawi) could almost have been written in direct response to the novels preceding it here. In spite of its magic realism, and its upending of traditional understandings of place, Saadawi's novel is still, after all, an interpretation of real, contemporary Baghdad – a physical space suffering a set of circumstances formed by the geographical complexities of 20th century European and Middle Eastern political upheavals explored by Sebald and Abulhawa respectively.

Set in the violent and war torn Baghdad of 2005 during the U.S. occupation, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is a modern take on Mary Shelley's tale of a man made of sewn-together body parts. Hadi the junk dealer collects the scattered remains of bomb victims from the rubble-strewn streets and stitches them together to form a corpse that can receive a proper burial. But the corpse goes missing, and a wave of murders sweeps the city. The *Whatsitsname* embarks on a mission of vengeance, at first killing those he considers responsible for the deaths of the bomb victims, later targeting anyone who crosses his path. The story is told from several perspectives; residents, beggars, journalists and officials interact with the *Whatsitsname* in ways which emphasise the pointlessness and surrealism of war. Saadawi's world is one of magical-realism, government-appointed astrologers in pointy hats, wandering lost souls, car bombs, and the kind of warped reality brought about not only by literary technique, but also by the real implications of life in modern Baghdad after the US invasion. The novel peels back the superficial pages of foreign newsprint to reveal how violence begets violence, and blurs the lines between innocence and guilt.

In a city where war and terrorism have all but destroyed society on infrastructural, ideological, and personal levels, identity and meaning are challenged to the point of fracture through Saadawi's formative treatment of our physical contexts. In what feels like an ultimate philosophical impasse, or blockade, on that same road travelled by Sebald and Abulhawa, place and its meanings are here fully inverted, to reflect man's inner response to upheaval, to form even more deeply pervading embodiments of experienced loss, and to question our ways forward, as humans, in societies.

In a further continuation of the progressions set out by Abulhawa, from fixed, owned place to fluid interpretations of our physical contexts, Saadawi now challenges traditional paradigms of space, self, other and 'fact' at a more fundamental level. By highlighting the superficiality of physical containments of any essence, abstraction or idea, in both the manmade and in man himself, Saadawi raises a question which becomes central to *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. His formative treatment of place asks whether or not, as humans, we are in fact able to escape a seemingly innate need – that of recognising and interpreting inner meaning through the context of some tangible, physical casing or cover.

I will set out the ways in which Saadawi uses place to reject the fixed, entrapping nature of the physical, and to stress instead the importance of insubstantial qualities such as love, integrity, loyalty and hope. In the space of Baghdad, a place where violence has robbed the physical of any possibility of permanence, substantiality or protection, the problem Saadawi addresses is whether or not we can move on from that traditional approach, of seeing stability and significance housed in physicality, to

recognising value in those ephemeral qualities which actually *do* endow meaning and essence.

The 'invisible man' comes to mind here, as a simple way to consider man's difficulty in perceiving that which lies inside man. Like a version of the proverb that 'clothes maketh the man', so without the coverings which conceal yet reveal invisible essence, inner identity often appears, for Saadawi's characters, not to exist at all. That duality of the invisible man's simultaneous concealment and revelation is also tellingly reminiscent of the role of the fort/body/abyss as explored earlier, where that which protects or hides can also incarcerate, fix, betray or trap.

Invisibility is addressed in physical terms by Jameson, who equates the 'spatial disjunction' of any colonised or dispossessed society with an 'inability to grasp the way the system functions as a whole' (Jameson 157). The 'artistic content' of any colonised or dispossessed people is utilised by placing it in a spatial context and thus, like the developing child denied the parental 'mirroring' required to comprehend and assert selfhood, is 'comparable to another dimension, an outside like the other face of a mirror, which it constitutively lacks, and which can never be made up or made good' (Jameson 51).

The relationship between man's inner world and surrounding physicality certainly continues in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, where dilapidated or bombed out houses represent characters' circumstances and states of mind. Gone, however, is Abulhawa's sense of an innate symbiosis between man and the natural world. While this is perhaps only to be expected in the depiction of an urban space like Baghdad,

its total absence here could also be regarded as one valid reason behind the total devastation presented. Without an anchor to nature, in other words, man may feel intrinsically less connected to the physical world around him.

Storyteller Hadi's house, for example, 'wasn't really his and wasn't really a house. Most of what was in it was falling apart. There was only one room, right at the back; it had holes in the roof...' (22). The disintegrating state of the building reflects the position of its owner, an elderly woman with weakening perceptive faculties whose family has fled the city. The fact that the house, known locally as the 'Jewish ruin', is ramshackle, and not in fact Hadi's own property, suggests the damaged, removed or 'floating' nature of Hadi's role, as writer or ambiguous storyteller in the novel, while the holes in the roof might point to a vulnerability, or to his more receptive perspective on surrounding reality. It also hints at the 'porous' qualities of Hadi himself, who is not interested in material possessions for their own sake, and has long since relinquished the possibility of owned abode as a means of self-fortification or self-definition, so that the concept of material 'possession' begins to be offered as obsolete. That his room is 'right at the back', too, also suggests some denial, or reticence, around the idea of living there, or of existing in relation to fixed place, at all.

Clothing, possessions, furniture, car, and dwelling are the ways Saadawi's characters appear able to relate to both their inner identity and their existence within the spaces in which they find themselves. Hamid is the only human character in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* who resists the obsessive impulse to amass physical objects as a means of self-definition: 'He wanted to stay alive, buying stuff that people wanted to get rid of, restoring it, and selling it again, without thoughts of amassing a fortune or expanding

his operations, because that would be too much trouble, like having a disease' (87). This attitude is contrasted with the coveting of physical objects, presented as a sentiment based on fear of loss: '...the man would panic about losing his furniture, especially his chandeliers, reading lamps, and old-fashioned valve radios. He would cling to them as if he would drown without them' (27). Here again, the physical is presented as a trapping or destructive addiction, while the insubstantial is liberating.

The obsession with the accumulation of objects in Pamuk's *Museum of Innocence* is echoed again here, and similarly, Pope's letters also suggest a sustained preoccupation in the embellishment of the grotto, through repeated requests for donations of materials from friends and acquaintances, spread over decades. This endless 'grottofying' (Pope vol. iv 354) is there again in Sebald's record of obsessive, generation-spanning extensions to fortresses in *Austerlitz*: 'The constructions ...clearly showed how we feel obliged to keep surrounding ourselves with defences, built in successive phases as a precaution against any incursion by enemy powers, until the idea...comes up against its natural limits' (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 17). That which emerged in Pope's grotto as a created extension of perceived, projected and memorialised identity, is thus shown to have become a template with which to explore the evolving formal literary innovations of place that convey senses of the dispossessed self. The projected essence of identity, as physically expressed in the grotto, is inherited by and resonates in each of the novels here, lending the physical the role of memoir, or autobiography.

The human urge for physical self-preservation or fortification, much like Dalia's self-containment in her own body as a trap in *Mornings in Jenin*, is often presented by

Saadawi as something that is deluded or misguided. Elishva is shown to cling to her furniture and house as if to the very body of her lost son, even if it means dying alone in Baghdad away from the rest of her family. 'Of these antiques, some of which dated back to the 1940s, Hadi had asked Elishva, "Why don't you sell them, save yourself the trouble of dusting?" ...But the old woman just walked him to the front door and sent him out into the street, closing the door behind him. That was the only time Hadi had seen the inside of her house, and the impression it left him with was of a strange museum' (10).

The abyss motif is present again too, where the 'most important discovery in Islamic archaeology...for many decades' (265), an ancient wall, is revealed in a bomb crater deep below the road. Here the abyss is another chance unearthing of something precious and meaningful, yet forgotten in the past, like a repressed memory or a lesson from history which society has failed to recognise and learn.

Pain and loss are once again positioned underground as if buried in the unconscious, as expressed by the grandmother Elishva when referring to her son's death: 'Whenever anyone goes out that door, they never come back. It's like a door that opens into a hole' (66). But the idea of preservation through containment or burial, is finally and cynically rejected in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. The artefact beneath the road, though regarded as precious, is obscured, forgotten and thus rendered useless, just as the opportunity for humanity to learn lessons of the past are relinquished at the conclusion of each mortal lifespan. It is as if Saadawi has given up on the idea of humanity ever mending its ways through the lessons of history, and that the novel is searching for other answers. The artefact in this case is, after all, still merely a wall,

and in this sense ultimately insignificant in the novel's philosophical schematic of rejecting the intrinsic significance of the physical. The wall once again also demonstrates how those physical properties and boundaries, over which we have all been fighting for centuries, ultimately amount to nothing more than buried and forgotten rubble. Either way, Saadawi presents that futile cycle of amnesia comically, when the authorities announce nobly that they will 'preserve these remains for future generations' (266) simply by ignoring them and repaving the street.

Disconnection with place results in a variety of desperate grabbings at identity and history in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. Lost meaning is replaced by superimposed or fake coverings, for example in the pointy hats of the government soothsayers, with their inept implication of some mysterious old magic,³¹ reminiscent of Homi K Bhabha's interpretation of that which is 'translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic' (Bhabha 19). The ridiculous and unrealistic nature of the soothsayers' appearance, as a comic attempt to convey depth or significance, heightens the desperate nature of both their imposed authority and its acceptance by the community around them, and illustrates a symptom of unstable or meaningless infrastructure when society has been appropriated or has fallen apart.

³¹ Saadawi may also be making reference here to real figures from Iraq's own history, who were generally regarded as soothsayers, such as the mystical dervish orders, or 'turuq'. They wore distinctive ceremonial robes whose symbolism is central to the mysteries of the order. 'The [Mawlawiya] dervishes wear over all other garments a black robe (*khirqah*), which symbolizes the grave, and the tall camel's hair hat (*sikke*) represents the headstone. Underneath are the white "dancing" robes consisting of a very wide, pleated frock (*tannūr*), over which fits a short jacket (*destegül*). On arising to participate in the ritual dance, the dervish casts off the blackness of the grave and appears radiant in the white shroud of resurrection. The head of the order wears a green scarf of office wound around the base of his *sikke*' (Britannica.com).

Clothing shares an equal role to skin and building as a 'vessel' for perceived identity here. The senior astrologer, for example, having carried out his important role in a cloak and pointy hat, changes persona unceremoniously in immediate response to the disbandment of his official government department. '[He] rubbed his beard with soap and water to get rid of the hair gel. He took out a small pair of scissors, cut off half his beard, and trimmed it to suit the appearance of a religious man. That was to be his new image. He took off his flamboyant clothes and threw them into a large rubbish bin in the bathroom, then put on a white cotton shirt with thin vertical blue stripes, dark cotton trousers and summer shoes' (254). The casual spontaneity of the astrologer's actions highlights the meaningless nature of outer coverings, while the gravitas and mystique heretofore assigned him reminds us of the value society places in such physical superficiality nevertheless.

The sacred significance of specific place is similarly rendered interchangeable, for example when Elishva visits every church in town with her devotional offerings. This is especially ironic in that Baghdad's unrest is, at least ostensibly, predicated on religious difference in the first place. 'She put ... henna paste on the ... Anglican Church of Saint George in Bab al-Sharqi...sprinkled water...in the Syriac Orthodox church...another handful of henna on the ... Jewish synagogue and a third handful on the...only mosque in Bataween. In the Church of Saint Odisho, she lit sticks of Indian incense at the altar of the Virgin Mary... Now all her vows had been fulfilled' (94). But as Eagleton reminds us, there is an ultimate meaninglessness to the fixed labels around which human wars are fought. 'If the binary opposition between "man" and "woman" can always be deconstructed - if each term can always be shown to inhere parasitically within the other - then just the same is true of the opposition between

those other virulently metaphysical forms of identity, Catholic and Protestant' (Eagleton 24). Those oppositional principles of religion, or indeed any fixed paradigm, are challenged by Saadawi, through the physical spaces of churches, to demonstrate the assertion that Protestantism, for example, 'cannot exist as such without its historical antagonist. Socialism belongs to the capitalist epoch as much as does the stock exchange, and like any fixed emancipatory theory is 'preoccupied with putting itself progressively out of business' (Eagleton 26). Saadawi's Baghdad seems almost to usher in the post-colonial nirvana of place here, as further developed by Eagleton: 'There will be no temple in the New Jerusalem, so the New Testament informs us, since ecclesial apparatuses belong to a history in conflict, not to the realm of freedom beyond that history's extreme horizon' (Eagleton 26).

Indeed, even the action of moving from one specific location to another is shown as a futile gesture when the cat rejects its carer to remain in a war zone. The issue of physical safety in specific place is similarly rendered meaningless as Hadi waits on the street to be blown up, demonstrating an inversion in the perception of a place torn apart by violence: 'He assumed a car bomb or some other explosive might go off at any moment and that this was a good place to get killed by one. He sat there till darkness fell, deep in thought about the possibility that dozens of bombs had either exploded or been defused during that day ... Why did he see other people dying on the news and yet he was still alive?' (105).

The theme of the human body, as a place of containment, is further developed in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, but here the insignificance of physical casings is more fully stressed, as if to disconnect material covering from inner essence. Mortal flesh, the

architecture of a bombed out building, or even a wooden crate, each represent a kind of negligible housing around meaningful interiority: 'Yes, maybe. But I have to find the real killer of Hasib Mohamed Jaafar so his soul can find rest,' said the Whatsitsname, pulling up a wooden crate and sitting on it' (129). Physical containers are rendered interchangeable, their only relevance as vessels for us to conceive of what is housed inside. 'You were just a conduit, Hadi,' the Whatsitsname replied. 'Think how many stupid mothers and fathers have produced geniuses and great men in history ... You're just ... a surgical glove that Fate put on its hand to move pawns on the chessboard of life' (127).

The unimportant or substitutable nature of these physical 'containers' is further suggested when the soul of the dead guard seeks an earthly body to inhabit: 'In a house in Bataween he saw a naked man asleep. He went up to him and checked to see if he was dead. It wasn't anyone in particular; the man looked strange and horrible. ... he lodged inside the corpse, filling it from head to toe...' (39). Similarly, Grandmother Elishva's all too ready and unquestioning emotional acceptance of a rotting, sewn-together, murderous monster as her beloved, long lost son, or a militia group who choose to perceive their God and leader in this same, oozing monster, not only highlights a desperation to find significance amidst apparently meaningless circumstances, but also addresses the more fundamental issue of our human tendency to mistakenly project whatever significance we wish into empty husks. 'That evening I was amazed how many young gunmen bowed down to me in the street. All of them believed I was the face of God on Earth, according to the teachings of the eldest madman, who wore an orange turban, had a long beard, and became the prophet of a religion that was new in both substance and imagery. It was very much

the same with the elder madman, but his followers looked pale and were less noisy' (159).

The importance attached to superficial outer coverings is also directly connected to man's violent usurpations of place here, when Mahmoud's friend Farid says, 'Anyone who puts on a crown, even if only as an experiment, will end up looking for a kingdom' (181). The monster is appropriated by these same warring factions in Baghdad, where groups form identities which rise to oppose others, apparently and simply because it is in their very nature to assert difference, and thus opposition. This almost reflex human action of establishing binary difference is reminiscent of the description of nationalism in the *Postcolonial Studies Reader*, as something which 'frequently takes over the hegemonic control of the imperial power, thus replicating the conditions it rises up to combat. It develops as a function of this control, a monocular and sometimes Xenophobic view of identity and a coercive view of national commitment'. (Griffiths, Ashcroft, and Tiffin 151) In each of these cases, however, it is the appearance of the outer shell of the factions' leaders which is related as significant. But the idea of the physical shell as houser of meaning is turned on its head and rejected outright by Saadawi's biggest joke of all here, an oozing corpse as a worshipped manifestation of the divine being.

While Saadawi stresses the irrelevance of the outer containment, and thus a disconnect between our own perceptions and the physicality around us, at the same time he also suggests that we are unable to value significant truths *without* that physical contextualisation. Saadawi rejects the possessive materiality of being human, but those material signals of identity, from clothing to body to house, presented here

as silly disguises, rotting flesh, nameless and unoccupied hotels, or fancy dress, are seen by some deluded characters as indispensable: 'He felt instantly that this was the kind of sentence the well-dressed man on television might have said – the man who always wore suits the brigadier coveted but knew he would never wear as long as he was stuck in his office at the Tracking and Pursuit Department' (209).

In the face of mortality, too, where we perceive ourselves trapped within finite, decaying bodies, it appears that what we value, or love, must endure beyond our physical selves, elsewhere. The 'abandonment' of the dead, such as when one moves on from a physical space connected with a loved one, is highlighted by the grandmother who refuses to leave her war-torn, crumbling home to reach safety and join her family, because of her dead son. Here again, the most significant - and only remaining - connection with the lost beloved, is within physical place.

The physicality of a chiselled headstone, a coffin, or a place of scattered ashes, too, are the trappings enabling us to perceive a relationship with reality we hope will be sustained beyond our own mortal existence. A wife's grief is expressed by embracing a wooden box that does not even contain the inert corpse of her lost love, let alone his living essence: 'The guard's belongings were handed back to his family: his civilian clothes, a new pair of socks, a bottle of cologne, and the first volume of al-Sayyab's collected poems. In the coffin they put his burned black shoes; his shredded, bloodstained clothes; and small charred parts of his body. There was little left of Hasib Mohamed Jaafar; the coffin...was more of a token. Hasib's young wife wrapped her arms around it, wept bitterly, and wailed at length' (35).

As a human incarnation of the 'Other', Jameson reminds us of how figures like Saadawi's monster grew from the 'prototypical paradigm of the Other in the late nineteenth century' (Jameson 49). Like Said's 'Orient' as interpreted and projected by the West, Jameson's Other is the 'imperial nation-state...the quintessential ogres and bogeymen of childhood nightmare, physically alien and terrifying, barbarous, uncivilized, and still not terribly remote' (Jameson 49). This place-centred model stems, like Shelley's original monster, from the 'archaic wild man of the Middle Ages, who incarnates everything fascinating and frightening about the unbridled id for an agricultural or village society' (Jameson 49), and, like the externalised double or twin, always exists at one remove from the self/abode/village/state.

The fluid, oozing, interchangeability of the sewn corpse of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* appears to offer a kind of transcendence of our corporeal restrictions. In being made up of replaceable, uncontainable parts (because what is inside oozes out), in being non-static in identity, unbound by mortality, and transformative in its projected and perceived meaning, its nature defies the limitations of the usual bodily container of the human spirit. The monster's porous being simultaneously fulfils the roles of beloved son, superhuman god for warring factions in Baghdad, a murderous monster for the police and, in the eyes of an ethically aware journalist, the only being in the novel capable of delivering a moral message. As a personification of defied mortality then, death as the monster is portrayed as a means of transcending humanity's rigidly defined limits. But even the monster gradually falls prey to the same cycles of avengement suffered by all other mortal individuals, and begins to behave less 'scrupulously'. 'My face changes all the time,' the Whatsitsname told the old astrologer that night. "I kill in order to keep going."...he clung to life...out of fear' (268). Thus

Saadawi's monster betrays the weakness of his composite human parts, to suggest the downwards spiral of all men or, quite literally, the way of all flesh: "'I'm now taking revenge on people who insult me, not just on those who did violence to those whose body parts I'm made of," the Whatsitsname said' (185).

The mortal body, as a signifier of identity, is reminiscent of the Orthodox Jewish practice of collecting all the minutest scraps of body parts from the gutters and tree branches after a bomb explosion, in order to adhere to the holy rituals of death, and to satisfy the idea of the deceased as a valid being. With the monster, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* turns the identity-bestowing nature of bodily encasement on its head: with its blackly comic, oozing flesh and popping eyeballs, ironically the monster is still the being with the most fully drawn character and most clearly perceptible integrity of all the characters in the novel. The monster's ever-changing body is reminiscent of Dash's description of an 'aesthetic of incompleteness [which] offers an insight into a world where forms are unstable, where an intricate branching, adaptation and accretion governs the existence of all things'. Dash also mentions the symbolism of the grotesque as described by the Russian critic Bakhtin, in which the body 'is not something completed and finished, but open and uncompleted' (Dash 25).

With even the monster trapped in a cycle of avengement, Saadawi highlights our difficulty in escaping a human fixation – an understanding of reality where the abstract requires a physical 'skin'. It is the monster, in the end, in wishing to escape his own body's constant cycles of violent avengement, who demonstrates how this kind of physical containment, and the perception of reality via that physical containment, is an incarcerating trap. Here then the monster can be seen to represent all of mortal,

corporeal humanity as a collective, yet multiple entity, engaged in a seemingly inescapable cycle of death, rot and revenge. In the end, the example of the monster's simultaneous integrity, amorphousness and disintegration may suggest that only a full relinquishment of fixed, physical form, and the perceived identities accompanying it, may break humanity's cycles of loss and dispossession.

To demonstrate our resistance, or inability, to move beyond superficial physical layers to something more meaningful, yet ephemeral, beneath, we are shown man's refusal to acknowledge the eyes of all Baghdad's cats. 'Reduced to a state of childlike elation, no one could see, or even tried to see, those timid eyes looking out from behind the balconies and windows of the abandoned Orouba Hotel' (280). Elishva's cat is shown to harbour a knowledge similar to that of the animals in *Austerlitz*. Where the state of upheaval in Iraq is shown to destroy the apparent permanence of physical objects, and to invert our ideas of what can be relied upon, the cat embodies all those ostensibly fleeting qualities of love, bonding and loyalty. The characteristics of the apparently elusive, and yet somehow ever present, cat are offered as an ironically reliable feature of external reality when the physical world is being blown apart.

As with Sebald's use of animals, stuffed animals, and inanimate objects visible yet inaudible behind glass,³² and as the custodian of the ageless lessons humanity appears unable to learn, the cat's lack of human language is telling, as if to suggest we need to move beyond the fixed nature of words in order to breach our societal impasses. Sebald's mute vessels of extra-human comprehension correspond to the

³² Such inanimate, physical conduits of meaning or significance in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* are again reminiscent of *The Museum of Innocence* (Pamuk). Objects are displayed as commodities of identity, and the vital essence of an individual is the principle means of self-projection, perception or definition of others.

cat with its self-contained knowledge of what really matters, a knowledge held in spite of what is at first apparent. The reader, for example, is led to feel concern at the cat's being abandoned in a war zone, but the novel's final scene finds the cat contentedly at home with the monster. In these senses Saadawi's cat can be regarded as the figure of the successful anti-colonized in the novel.

That these animal vessels of truth do not use human language also suggests the writer's own metafictional frustration in wishing to communicate messages that will affect change. Here, though the cat is misunderstood, ignored and rejected by its owner Elishva, the total muteness of animals in *Austerlitz* has been replaced by deeply emotional, primal sounds: 'The cat let out a drawn-out howl' (243). The cat's noises are all too expressive, the rent from verbal language reminiscent of the wail of 'The horror!' in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad 62),³³ which aims to express the inexpressible nature of the human condition, or struggle.

The cat also embodies Saadawi's rejection of permanence of place. It is significant, for example, that the cat is constantly shedding its hairs over people and furniture, which like the porous quality of Baghdad's buildings, or of the monster itself, again confirms the impermanence of the outer casing of any living essence. 'The man crouched down to pet the old cat, which had lost even more of its hair. They were now close friends' (281). At the same time, the moulting cat appears to represent stability or steadfastness, in that it does not run in fear from a thrown brick, and constantly gravitates towards laps, legs, walls and warmth, finally refusing to leave home when

³³ 'He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath: "The horror! The horror!" (Conrad 62). The phrase is generally interpreted to be a response to colonialism, the nature of human existence, the state of colonised Africa, and the personal, existential fate of Kurtz, the character who utters the famous words.

its owner does. In the end, the cat chooses to remain in Baghdad with the 'non-entity' of the monster, who in fact 'holds' so many valid truths. Significance is thus contained by both within antitheses of identity – 'anti-bodies', so to speak, where meaningful essence is present in the absence of the physicality by which man appears to set so much store, but which leads him in turn to destruction and dispossession.

Tellingly, it is often through the negation of physical appearance that Saadawi's characters discover the strongest senses of identity. 'It wasn't pitch black – there were faint lights coming through the balcony window – but when he looked at her, he didn't see anything, just lines of light that traced the outline of a woman who could have been any woman in the world. And yet he still saw her as one particular woman, Nawal al-Wazir, the woman he loved' (220). Similarly, the figures which give Elishva the most significant emotional and relational satisfaction in the novel are the ephemerally morphing cut out head from a picture of a saint, which Elishva has trouble distinguishing due to her failing faculties, and a sewn together, falling apart, corpse.

In each case, appearances are deceptive, again highlighting the irrelevant or misleading nature of superficial context. That rejection of the physical which, in *Mornings in Jenin*, progressed through generations of experience from owned land, to self-definition by bodily scars, and finally to the abstractions of love and literary meaning, here in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is represented in the dripping off of eyeballs and a talking painting. "You have to be careful," it said. The saint's lips really were moving. "She's a hapless old woman. If you harm her or make her sad, I swear I'll plunge this lance in your throat" (56). Light here, too, in the nature of its perception-shifting subtleties and nuances, continues in its role from Pope and Sebald as a

revealer of hidden, less apparent, or subtler truths. 'Blinking, she looked at the patches of yellow lamplight on the rippled surface of the old picture, while the old cat curled up between her legs in search of warmth' (67). In each case, fixed physical boundaries become blurred and fluid at the same time that truths are most vividly perceived, like the insights expressed by the dripping flesh of the monster.

There is an increasing sense, through *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, of an imagined 'phantom' of fear, present in place behind all things. Just as all meaning appears to require some physical containment to enable our perception of it, so innate fear itself craves some externally projected identity. 'The definitive image of him was whatever lurked in people's heads, fed by fear and despair. It was an image that had as many forms as there were people to conjure it' (268). Here again, Saadawi shows how abstraction requires the physical manifestation or embodiment of a perpetrator, in order to be acknowledged and processed. 'It was a big disaster, the biggest disaster that had struck Iraq so far, as Abu Anmar put it. About a thousand people had been killed, either from drowning or being trampled to death, and no one knew who the culprit was. The government spokesman came out smiling as usual to announce that an attempted suicide bombing on the Imams Bridge had been prevented and that the criminal had escaped' (122). In this case, not only does the government deny responsibility, but blames a non-existent criminal for what was in fact a mass disaster borne of insubstantial fear itself, materialising not in bodily form but in a flight from imagined evil.

The 'Other' in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is necessarily nameless and faceless – and it is those very insubstantial attributes which ensure and sustain its power: 'The old

astrologer...had never before had any trouble conjuring up people's faces, but the features of the One Who Has No Name had always eluded him. That's what made him more mysterious and more dangerous than all the others' (246). While this spectre-like quality facilitates fear's potency, Saadawi suggests that fear is but a phantom, projected onto our outer physicality: 'One of the junior officers mentioned an important piece of information ...: these figures hovering over the bridge were ghosts that lived in people's bodies. ... According to the astrologers, these ghosts were called tawabie al-khouf, the 'familiar of fear' (112). Like the elusive monster, who nobody but Hadi and the cat ever lay eyes on, innate fear is subtly revealed here and there as the real phantom, as the 'Other' we are afraid of for the very reason that it lacks physical substantiality: 'Without thinking, he stretched out his arm to grab the 'familiar of his fear' by the neck, but when he opened his eyes, he couldn't see anything between himself and the ceiling' (114).

In this way, insubstantiality, as a fear of the unknown, becomes Saadawi's focus for the pervading sense of Otherness in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. That nameless, faceless, externalised nature of the 'Other' is once again strongly associated with the theme of the twin here, as the perceivable embodiment of that which is denied, or buried through fear, in ourselves. The twin too can be seen as a physical container, of the 'othered' self, or as a place of self-projection like a mirrored landscape.

The repressed sense of a double, jettisoned from one's inhabited body and just outside one's field of vision, is unravelled and embodied in the monster of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. In the monster, the twin finally takes centre stage - unseen, unnameable, indefinable, yet like us: the materialised, externalised ghost of our own self-fear. In

being made up of so many, interchangeable identities, Saadawi's monster represents all our 'others', the unknown insides of Everyman, like Mary Shelley's original (Shelley). The monster as the twinned Other is something necessarily situated in place as external to the self, yet placed in strategic spatial relation to the self in order to mirror.

Perhaps the monstrous Other takes centre stage for Pope, too, in that he once described himself as 'the least thing like a man in England' (Pope I 89). His tuberculosis of the spine resulted in a progressive spinal curvature, so that as an adult he was only four and a half feet high, and he describes the 'wretched carcass I am annexed to' (Pope III 444). In bodily terms at least, this clear sense of self-negation has no subtle hint at Freud's death drive, and we are reminded again of Pope's probable conscious awareness of having replaced a first 'twin', one without the poet's own outer signs of monstrosity, and his namesake, who died. Pope's own word 'annexed' here, most strongly suggests his idea of being set aside from himself into a space in which he does not belong. His further 'self-annexing' inside the grotto seems to demonstrate a spatial self-negation, or self-burial, in response not only to outside alienation, but self-alienation too.

The Other materialises in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* as mysterious criminal, nameless and faceless like the monster, but still believed because it is (just) physically contained: 'He flicked through all the Iraqi television channels and saw they were still preoccupied with the incident on the Imams Bridge. Something told him they were all wrong and that the real culprit was still at large. He might even be arrested that very night' (124). The two opposing aspects of the twin theme are present. One is a manifestation of an externalised self in twinned, physical similarity, in that the monster is the 'Everyman'

he very literally embodies; the other is the simultaneous materialisation of the feared Other, an embodiment of evil which is therefore all that one's own self need *not* be. This positioning in place of an externalised twinning is brought to the dimensions of Empire by Said, who suggests that the 'Orient', as labelled by the West, can in fact be viewed as 'as a sort of surrogate and even underground self....The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other' (Said, *Orientalism* 1). Here, the effect upon the self, or nation, of a parasitic projection of repressed inner fears onto an 'Other' in some externalised place, level, can be seen as literally 'orienting' as opposed to 'disorienting', and confirms the simultaneously essential yet phantom nature of the Other.

All of the characters in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* tend to merge vaguely into one another at the ends and beginnings of each chapter, as if, like the lives of all mortal individuals, they are all one on a continuum, and again as if identity is in fact interchangeable. Fixed outer identity belies inner essence, metafictionally again, when *Frankenstein in Baghdad* questions the author's own reliability or integrity. Hadi, the 'storyteller' is offered up as a liar, a spinner of yarns. '...he would forget about his story and never mention it to anyone again. But then he'd discovered the story was true, and he no longer found it amusing to tell it in front of other people' (108). The introduction to Chinua Achebe's *Colonialist Criticism* reminds us that 'history is simply the story of "Civilisation", and it is only when that language becomes "appropriated" by other cultures that the very concept of history can be questioned, and that the universal condition of humanity can be revealed as far more heterogeneous' (Griffiths, Ashcroft,

and Tiffin 56). Saadawi's assertion of the fundamental unreliability of the story and storyteller also echoes the view that, where acceptance of and subjugation to the state is dependent on the state's version of historical events, the postcolonial task is 'not simply to contest the message of history' but to interpret the concept of place as 'a palimpsest written and overwritten by successive historical inscriptions' as a way of 'circumventing history as the "scientific narrative" of events' (Griffiths, Ashcroft, and Tiffin 356).

The twin is present, too, in Hadi, as an 'othered' double of Saadawi himself, not quite identified as the author, and externalised in place from the author, yet shown to be orchestrating the story in ways that are questioned, or not trusted. Ashcroft reminds us that the problem of storytelling, or of recounting history, 'becomes particularly crucial for the postcolonial writer', not least because it 'exists in an awareness of the variety of ways of configuring a past which itself exists only as a chaos of formsand the historical narrative often is that which structures the forms of reality itself' (Griffiths, Ashcroft, and Tiffin 356). *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, as a novel, and where a book of fixed words can be considered a form of physical place, belies its own identity too, in a way which equates it with the monster's defiance of incarcerating labels. Saadawi's linguistic style is simple in the extreme, and yet the work could arguably be considered one of profound vision. It is thus an embodiment of the urgent secret revealed across all these writers - that fixed physicality, in all its forms, must begin to be seen to bear less relation to essence.

The non-naming of the monster, similarly, is a way in which Saadawi asserts its very freedom and autonomy, when 'one of the most subtle demonstrations of the power of

language is the means by which it provides, through the function of naming, a technique for knowing a colonised place or people. To name the world is to understand it, to know it and to have control over it' (Griffiths, Ashcroft, and Tiffin 283). Fanon reminds us that, in our skin, we are 'fixed', and that 'there are times when the black man is locked into his body' (Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* 225).³⁴ This is the imprisoning husk of corporeal identity, with all its corresponding labels, suffered by Dalia in *Mornings in Jenin* and here defied by Saadawi's monster. When Dash describes Carpentier's novel as 'a teeming world inhabited by fluid, evanescent form', as well as being reminiscent of the medium wished for as a place of bodily approximation by Huda - or immersion by Amal - in *Mornings in Jenin*, the label-defying nature of place could easily describe the unfixable identity of the monster: 'This world resists being named or structured. In its unspeakable nature it defies the efforts of the comprehending subject' (Dash 25).

Saadawi's Baghdad presents us with a new fluidity of place. The negation of significance in the physical points towards an ideological relinquishment of the importance of specificity of ownership, of body, property, land, from the level of the individual to the nation state as a whole. The pervading impermanence of life in Baghdad, where all that anchored self to place before now floats in a chaotic new reality, means that, for Saadawi, Baghdad is in fact serendipitously rendered a space of cathartic, transformative possibility. Like the progression from early attitudes in *Mornings in Jenin*, where identity is fixed to specific location, to the point where the

³⁴ 'The difference of the postcolonial subject by which s/he or he can be 'othered' is felt most directly and immediately in the way in which the superficial differences of the body and voice (skin colour, eye shape, hair texture, body shape, language, dialect or accent) are read as indelible signs of the 'natural' inferiority of their possessors'. As Fanon noted, this is the inescapable 'fact' of blackness, a 'fact' which forces on Negro people a heightened level of bodily self-consciousness, since it is the body which is the inescapable visible sign of their oppression and denigration' (Griffiths, Ashcroft, and Tiffin 321).

self is vitalised by anything *but* geographical origins, so the inversion of physical realities in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* sets us down in a new relational position to place, one in which our perceptions may slowly be freed to form new responses. Perhaps even more importantly, Saadawi's demonstration of the ways in which we begin to recognise vital meaning increasingly via those ephemerality and insubstantialities - the transformative subtleties of light on the painting of a Saint, the elusiveness of a cat's typical behaviour, the porous impermanence of mortar, stone, and even human flesh - he demonstrates how those new responses are perhaps achievable within the nature of what it is to be human.

Saadawi's form of magical place could be compared to what Marx enigmatically calls the poetry 'from the future', a content that 'surpasses the phrase' of the present (Marx 3). But it is in Saadawi's nameless, faceless monster itself that the ultimate creative subversion of dispossession lies, and which, according to Terry Eagleton, can be figured 'only in silence, exile, and cunning'. 'It is necessary...to remember', Eagleton continues, 'that as political radicals our identity stands and falls with those we oppose. It is in this sense, above all, that they have the upper hand. ... socialism is essential for genuine individualism;...any individualism of the present is bound to be a strained, fictive, parodic travesty of the real thing' (Eagleton 31).

In his creation of a monster as the place for a newly imagined self, Saadawi rejects that sense of history where to write post-colonially is to fix oneself in binary

opposition³⁵ to any given oppressor as a responding victim.³⁶ In the monster, and as Derek Walcott asserts of the great poets such as Neruda and Whitman, 'their vision of man in the New World is Adamic. In their exuberance he is still capable of enormous wonder' (Walcott 3). In his transformation of the physical matter of the place we knew as Baghdad, Saadawi's has indeed 'paid his accounts to Greece and Rome and walks in a world without monuments and ruins' (Walcott 3).

³⁵ 'The binary logic of imperialism is a development of that tendency of Western thought in general to see the world in terms of binary oppositions that establish a relation of dominance. A simple distinction between centre/margin, colonizer/colonized, metropolis/empire, civilized/primitive represents very efficiently the violent hierarchy on which imperialism is based and which it actively perpetuates. Binary oppositions are structurally related to one another, and in colonial discourse there may be a variation of the one underlying binary – colonizer/colonized – that becomes rearticulated in any particular text in a number of ways...' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 20).

³⁶ 'Thus, as we grow older as a race, we grow aware that history is written, that it is a kind of literature without morality, that in its acturaries the ego of the race is indissoluble and that everything depends on whether we write this fiction through the memory of hero or of victim' (Walcott 2).

Conclusion

The double bond³⁷ and the importance of elsewhere.³⁸

As George Lamming has said, 'the exile is a universal figure' (Lamming 1) - an everyman and no man, like Saadawi's anonymous monster. This is an idea which seems to encompass all our dispossessions through personal loss, of memory lost through traumatic experience, or fractured senses of belonging after traumatic upheaval. It is in these ways that the protagonist in my own novel is an exile too, with a relationship to place which reflects his inner struggle with dispossession – a form of 'internal colonisation',³⁹ like Dalia's. In the case of this essay specifically, place is most keenly present as the convent's grotto site recalled from childhood. Indeed, the past itself can be regarded as a kind of remembered landscape. In this sense, place in the past is a crucial ingredient in all memoir, created fiction or characterisation, as we use the landscapes of our own biographical histories with which to create.

With the grotto at the centre of Pope's existence as well as my own childhood, the differences between what is remembered, and what is related from history, begin to grow indistinct. The line, too, between the self, and selves created as fictional characterisation, become increasingly blurred. Central as it is to my childhood landscape, Pope's grotto has served as a way in to the novel writing process. My own grotto experience feeds into my protagonist's story in an experimental attempt to access repressed emotions with which to construct fictional character. Whilst

³⁷ Taken from the title of the biography of Primo Levi (Angier).

³⁸ 'Here no elsewhere underwrites my existence' (Larkin l 12).

³⁹ This is a phrase most often used in post-colonial theory to denote colonialism taking place from within a country or nation state, for example in *What Is My Nation?* (Cairns and Richards 9). It is, however, a term which seems equally suited to a kind of colonisation by another, or by external forces, of one's own thoughts or personal interiority.

childhood memories may have remained obscured, or disguised, still by revisiting the grotto as a place in memory, it has become possible to approach them obliquely, as inspirational building blocks for the more concrete, yet fictional, elements of my protagonist's identity.

Daniel reveals himself unconsciously through the historical places he visits and writes of, just as we all are present in what we creatively produce. *The High Lonesome* (Sharp) features place as physical travel in real time, journey through memory, through imagined and given histories, and ultimately towards the unconscious self. Journeys in *The High Lonesome* interpret places as memory triggers, or ways into buried experience, as the central means by which I (as projecting creator), the reader, and Daniel himself, gradually unearth a buried inner world and sense of identity. The reader learns of Daniel's relationship with his mother via memories, recovered in response to experience of place in real time, remembered place, and thence triggered through the process and product of his own creativity. It is place specifically which reveals the inner world of the protagonist, with fictional output as Daniel's (and perhaps my own) unwitting projection, or inheritance, of a past presented via a creative conjuring of place, in a metafictional cycle.

Daniel demonstrates how any artistic endeavour is not only a product of ourselves, but shaped in our own image, and before that the image of what created us, and so on down the line in an endless compulsion to repeat, or rewrite, buried history. Within that repetitive process of inheritances, place is ever present as an active cipher, or a conjuring trick – a kind of time travel into the past, into memory, into given and imagined histories - to become an infinitely stretching canvas for the projected self.

Such reverberating reflections of the self in place return us to the image of the grotto time and again, not least in its guise as a working camera obscura.

It is from this perspective, in looking at how the novels addressed here resurrect the questions Pope raises around place, that I have come to terms with an early memory of my own. While journeying towards the school above Pope's grotto, my train passed a vast football field in a bleak, suburban setting. A lone, distant figure was walking there with his dog across the grass. For reasons unfathomable to me at the time, I felt deeply envious of this person, based on the supposition that, in his apparently total belonging to the place in which he existed, he was somehow more truly alive, viscerally connected to the world on a more 'authentic' level. Not knowing this man from Adam, I was of course projecting, but the point is that my response was constructed on a general sense of the self as something defined in relation to place. The question is whether this kind of perception would have occurred in the same way without an already established experience of displacement, or not.

Strictly speaking, Austerlitz's particular relationship to place, for example, is not the result of a rending of self from identity by geographical dislocation, but rather the effects of place on one's perception, and vice versa, when identity has *already* been rended from the self. This distinction, which begins to hint at a difference between identity based on one's geographical origins, and other possible sources of belonging, also points to an important motivation in the novels studied here. The loss, by death for example, of those we love, is addressed in *Austerlitz* as something made more complex and problematic by displacement, reminding us again of James Wood's

description of Austerlitz's 'paradoxically impossible project' (Wood xv) – saving the dead.

My own, prior dislocation (divorce had resulted in uprooting to a new place, and to my father's permanent relocation to the far side of another continent), my movement on a train I did not want to be on, to a destination I had no desire to reach, resulted in a perception of this other being as one cozily surrounded by the home of his origin, contextualised in place by choice, and thus at peace. That forty year old image has an abiding vividness which prompts me now to wonder which of us, really, was more viscerally present, more vitally alive, at that moment of the passing train. Perhaps an important distinction has to be made, therefore, between the sense of self in place as it is, and what becomes of it in the face of the myriad forms of dislocation, colonisation and dispossession we may endure. The memory begins to persuade me, too, that my relationship to place has been heightened to the extent that it is made centrally manifest in my own creative work, and also starts to suggest something, explored in the novels above, about the perception of place as it is experienced through distinct varieties of displacement.

That Judaic practice of collecting minute scraps of body parts from gutters and branches after a bomb, in order to adhere to strict rituals surrounding respect for the identity of the deceased, is a powerful reminder of man's apparent need for connection to physical matter in order to achieve definition. Indeed, while each writer here has creatively and formatively sought to transform or transcend fixed physicality in order to approach undefinable inner essence, place has remained a vital part of that expression, suggesting that our deepest insights may be unrecognisable without it.

Indeed, from Pope's self-burial under the ground, to Sebald's discovery of formerly inaccessible insights in the deepest basements of forts, to Abulhawa's placing of acute emotional experience in holes and abysses, ironically the essentiality of self is utterly enclosed in the physicality of place, making recognisable that which is impenetrable within the human mind.

Our sense of dislocation from the physical world in which we must exist involves an impossible irony, so that each novel studied here, in questioning the nature of self in place, faces the inherent struggle of a double bond. On the one hand, approaching true insights - about valuable meanings behind loss, pain and love - must involve a relinquishment of the limiting nature of physicality, of fixed identity, linear language, imprisoning body, wall, building, or state. We are all, on the other hand, inescapably bound to exist within those limits set by the physical world around us, so that matter and truth must seem unreconcilable, especially to the uprooted and dispossessed. It is that inescapable contradiction, in the nature of our physical beings and the nature of our deepest questionings, which creates the tension, or struggle, providing each of these novels with their energy and volition. Brought together in this same way too, these are novels which, in the noted differences within their striking similarities, are as Derrida has put it, 'bound to one another by the band of their opposition' (Derrida 39).

But there is a discernible sense, by the time we reach *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, of an increasing boldness, or blatancy, in the formative delivery of the ideas around our relationship to place. The addressing, for example, of how we escape the physical and the mortal aspects of our existence in place - which Pope personally embodies through

his own self-burial in the fortified ephemerality of the grotto, and which Sebald continues with dead figures traversing the landscape in low light - brings us a free-range-corpse-flaneur in Baghdad. In progression from the body as a trap, to the body as vehicle, to the body as multiple, porous and dripping, the struggle born of placed-related loss of self leads to increasingly transformative ideas around our existence within it.

Pope himself, Saadawi's exiled monster, Amal, and Austerlitz, all operate as beings where the validity of living is (ironically, because it is a result of displacement) re-conceived and re-contained in forms of moving on. The self-removal of a disappearing act, of the escape artiste, and a new, externalised self-positioning, are like getaways from the old perceptions of fixed interiority which imprison and decay. Amal's proud embracing, for example, of violent displacement in the scar across her belly, or her memories, in the removal of self across continents, of the bonds made in the suffering and squalor of impermanence in the refugee camps, as a means of self-definition, are reminiscent of Lamming's idea that 'to be an exile is to be alive' (Lamming 14) where, in the end, the effects on the self of dispossession are what most allow the exile to experience the essentiality of existing.

While each writer deals with forms of geographical dispossession, the subsequent experiences of belonging in the face of, or indeed *because* of, dislocation, start to burgeon, with an increasing formative confidence, into what could be perceived as hope in Abulhawa's case, defiance in Saadawi's. It is somehow through place, too, in the fluidity of change and ephemerality of life in Saadawi's Baghdad, that all that which anchored the self before is inverted and jettisoned. It is that stance of a final

relinquishment - of almost literally taking no prisoners (because physical matter could no longer hold them) - which, while lending a frightening chaos to reality, also hints at a cathartic sense of transformative possibility.

The connection between loss and place is pinpointed in my own novel by the image of Zarathustra's tree on the mountainside.⁴⁰ It grows at an angle that suggests its desire to be free of all earthly things, yet its roots still cling to the physical landscape, and thus to the mortality of material existence. It is evident that the writers studied here experienced personal loss early in life or beyond, and then, like me, went on to express a relationship between loss and physical place through creative endeavour. From Pope's crippling disease, disinheritance and exile, Abulhawa's parental estrangement and orphanage among Jerusalem's ruins,⁴¹ to Saadawi's immersion in Baghdad's horror-show of human body parts,⁴² in each case the pain of experience is consequentially expressed through formative manipulations of physicality.

Sebald alone has a personal background from which the symptoms of loss appear 'referred', or indirect. Indeed, Sebald can be seen to harbour a kind of suffering like that of Austerlitz's – 'some inexplicable sense of loss' (Gee, *Patience (After Sebald)*) – unnamed yet haunting, and possibly connected to unspoken elements in Sebald's formative years. Born to parents whom, according to Sebald himself, had a tacit

⁴⁰ From Chapter 8, *On the Tree on the Mountain*, from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche).

⁴¹ 'Abulhawa's parents were refugees of the 1967 war. Her father, according to one account, "was expelled at gunpoint; the couple reunited in Jordan before moving to Kuwait, where Abulhawa was born in 1970." Since her parents did not remain together for long, and the family was dismantled following the war, Susan was sent to live with an uncle in the U.S., where she stayed until she was five years old. She was then "passed between various family members in Kuwait and Jordan; at 10, she was taken to Jerusalem but ended up in an orphanage." At age 13, she was sent to Charlotte, North Carolina, where she was a foster child. ...Abulhawa herself has described her return to Palestine as a reawakening, saying that "when I heard the adhan for the first time and realized how much I'd missed it, I broke down in tears"' (<http://www.tag.global/>).

⁴² Saadawi was born in 1973 in Baghdad, where he still lives. "I saw unimaginable things...I saw many dead bodies," Saadawi says matter-of-factly in a thick Iraqi dialect. "Not just dead bodies—body parts. Many body parts." (Hankir).

agreement not to discuss the horrors they witnessed during World War II, Sebald seems disturbed by that which is inherited from history itself. 'I grew up in post-war Germany where there was...something like a conspiracy of silence...attached to these experiences, so one kept them under lock and seal and I, for one, doubt that my mother and father, even amongst themselves, ever broached any of these subjects' (Gee). Pain resulting from such 'indirect' past experience, present both in the character of Austerlitz and in Sebald's own life, is directly connected to place by Katie Mitchell in *Patience (after Sebald)*: 'There's an undertow, isn't there, of some sort of despair, or some inability to connect to where he is, some attempt to belong somewhere in some place?' (Gee). Sebald's opening words in *The Rings of Saturn*, too, support the idea of movement through physical place as an antidote to the pain otherwise quelled by creative endeavour: 'I set off to walk the county of Suffolk in the hope of dispelling the emptiness that takes hold of me whenever I've completed a long stint of work' (Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*). Adam Phillips also relates such feelings to the anchors of physicality and inherited memory: 'And they're people who try and locate this in history, as in, "Why am I feeling so fundamentally at a loss and so unattached?"...And it's as though the history gives you some sort of story about this... He doesn't quite know where it comes from, and it colours the landscape' (Gee).

Speaking of Sebald's wanderings around his home county of Norfolk, Lise Patt connects one's position in place with life's fundamental struggle. 'I think it was Diane Arbus...who said that the gods...put us down in the wrong place and that we spend our entire life trying to...not find the place where we're supposed to be, but to find who we were supposed to be' (Gee). This seemingly inescapable human urge to connect the self to physical location, like an anchor to reality, is the fight against our ultimate

ephemerality. In being faced with our final, great loss, our connection to the palpable world appears to fade. In clinging to the earth at the hour of one's death, like an outwards-leaning tree on a mountainside, we regard place as our last means by which to pull ourselves down into the only space in which we know ourselves able to exist, to have validity as beings.

Sebald himself illustrates our perceived connection between place and existence with his signature indirectness. '.... in the Holland of his time, it was customary in a home where there had been a death to drape black mourning ribbons over all the mirrors and all canvases depicting landscapes or people or the fruits of the field. So that the soul, as it left the body, would not be distracted on its final journey. Either by a reflection of itself or by a last glimpse of the land...now being lost, forever' (Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*). For Alexander Pope, part of that sense of historical - or inherited - loss, must surely have come from his awareness of that previous 'A. Pope' who, unlike him, was not disabled, and whom our Pope thus regarded as perhaps more deserving of the right to exist, in spite of no longer belonging to the physical world. In building the grotto, with its fantastical luminescence, its occluding and concealing darkness, its rendering ephemeral the starkness of outside reality via the camera obscura's mirroring walls, and through immersion as a kind of self-burial, Pope recreated the sublime quality of the unknown we all face. And that is what each of these writers has done, in the end, in creating the immersive space of a book. Their formative approaches to the physical demonstrate that one must jump, off the mountainside, out of the corporeal, outside of defining geographical boundaries, to defy loss, the dying of the light, or the *Dunciad's* 'universal darkness' (Pope, *The Dunciad in Four Books*), in order to feel liberated from fear.

The novels studied here actively create new meaning, in the face of dislocation or dispossession, through transformed varieties of perception to place: of identity in spite of invisibility, of truth discernible in the fog of injustice, of home in impermanence. In their exploration of the effects of displacement, the stories embody the human ability to imagine new 'places', and new senses of self in place beyond the fracture, beyond the pale.

If one considers that perhaps our pain and struggle come from mistaking matter for that which is fixed and permanent, when it is then taken away or destroyed, then what these writers do is remind us that in fact nothing is truly fixed in this way. The enclosing grotto, as a kind of grave, is also an ironic freedom, or escape. Even the disturbing underground aspects of the fortresses Sebald describes, where containment is not shelter, but death, finally allow truth to be approached and exposed through the darkness. In both cases, and through the likening of fortifications to the human motivation for their construction, we are invited to view the physicality of place either as a construct of fear or as a means to quest for truths which lay inside. Movement, ironically the movement even of displacement - in a quest for answers in Austerlitz's lifetime of peripatetic wandering; in an ethereal grotto interior of dancing light and water; in Amal's deep sense of home and belonging in a temporary refugee camp; in loyalty as a shedding cat; in transformation through the talking shadows of a painted saint - in all of these, movement in place is the bridge these writers use to span the unbridgeable chasm between self and matter.

Like fixed language, and indeed through the fixing, amnesia-inducing language of colonising 'histories', colonisation of place is, after all, an 'act of geographical violence

through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control' (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 271). But as Said has also remarked, '[t]o leave the historical world for the metaphysics of essences like negritude, Irishness, Islam, and Catholicism is, in a word, to abandon history' (Said, *Yeats and Decolonisation* 82). This is where our *creative* connection to physical place maintains our essential link with the world. In the new fluidity of place conjured by all these works, we are reminded of Dash's description of *Explosion in a Cathedral* (Carpentier), a 'field of vision [which] does not focus on the concrete and the static, but on a world of infinite metamorphosis that seems to defy language itself' (Dash 25). Indeed, in Saadawi's sense that fixed language is incarcerating and not to be trusted, in Pope's mistrust of direct assertions of meaning, or indeed Sebald's view that books fail to teach us the lessons of history, the *Post-colonial Studies Reader* asserts that 'in some sense place is language, something in constant flux, a discourse in process. The sense of lack of fit between language and place is what propels writers...to construct a new language' (Griffiths, Ashcroft, and Tiffin 391).

What is evoked in these novels are 'the spatial forms and fantasies through which a culture declares its presence. It is spatiality as a form of non-linear writing: as a form of history' (Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* 376). Perhaps the ultimate question, however, is whether it is possible within the nature of what it is to be human to fully internalise this new form of language, to accept this history as an effective means of self-definition. To this end, looking back at the fundamental templates Pope offers might bring the essay full circle in a helpful way.

In a revisiting of a remembered place, like Yehya's to his stolen homelands, ingrained in early memory and therefore also fixed forever as part of one's personal definition of self, you can tell exactly where the grotto's tunnel has been extended since Pope's day. It comes in an indefinable sea change in the feel of the space. From the sense of envelopment in a deep, enclosing womb, you notice with a slight chill that it – and you – are becoming elsewhere; somewhere announcing daylight, and uphill, and modernity: manhole covers covering stagnant waters; car tyres on the wet roads overhead. You are led upwards, away, back up into a kind of reality, right in front of the brutalist convent swimming baths. Here, in creative formation of place, and in personal experience of place, the physical narrative is also a biographical history, and it is possible to see how we are constantly reflected in place as a form of – and means to – self-recognition. In turn it shows how we reflect place too, in our inner world and emotions, like a constant dance between a set of double mirrors.

Pope's resistance to the ultimate unknowability of our mortal human lot was ironically manifested in his refusal to accept direct assertions of any kind, either in his poetry or in the construction of his grotto. It is this fluidity of matter and meaning which maintains the energised tension, across centuries, required for the novels explored here to keep that resistance of absolutes alive. The novels themselves, indeed, are all twins and inheritors of each other, in their each existing on the brink of one another's similarity, yet opposed by their differences. They are thus reflected back and forth infinitely by one another, as we all are as inheriting creators, as if by the two opposing mirrors of the camera obscura in Pope's grotto.

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