Historical Dispossession in Adam Thorpe's Ulverton

Alexandre Privat

Historical dispossession in Adam Thorpe's *Ulverton*

Alexandre Privat (EMMA EA741)

Abstract: The purpose of this article will be to analyse in Adam Thorpe's first novel, *Ulverton* (1992), the implications of the notion of 'dispossession', both in terms of politics and ethics, in relation to the (un)recordability of England's modern history, that is, as of the mid 17th century. As a literary example of ventriloquism, the novel illustrates the ethical commitment to restoring the humble voices of anonymous past lives, made 'bare' by relations of power and, as a result, obliterated from English official historiography. However, this ethical restoration is shown as linguistically and historically precarious. 'Precarity' is indeed the social and ethical result of a life made 'bare', submitted to the repressive power of dispossession which, from a historical perspective, is equated to the deprivation of traces and the condemnation to oblivion. The voice of the lost other hovers between presence and absence, thereby emphasising the trauma of loss and impossible mourning which appears as the ethical quality of having one's life made bare by the absence of the other. *Ulverton* illustrates this state of ethical dispossession showing the attachment to the other's memory and confirming elegy as an ethical mode of expression.

Keywords: Dispossession, Englishness, Ethics, History, Mourning, Oblivion, Precarity, Recordability, Trace, Trauma.

La dépossession historique dans *Ulverton* d'Adam Thorpe

Résumé : L'intention de cet article sera d'analyser dans le premier roman d'Adam Thorpe, *Ulverton* (1992), les implications soulevées par la notion de « dépossession », dans ses sens politique et éthique, par rapport à la (non) archivabilité de l'histoire moderne anglaise, c'est-à-dire à partir du milieu du dix-septième siècle. Comme exemple littéraire de ventriloquie, le roman illustre l'engagement éthique consistant à ressusciter les humbles voix des vies anonymes du passé, rendues « nues » par les relations de pouvoir qui ont vu, par conséquent, leur effacement de l'historiographie officielle anglaise. Toutefois, cette résurrection éthique se révèle linguistiquement et historiquement précaire. La « précarité » est en effet la conséquence sociale et éthique d'une vie « nue », soumise au pouvoir répressif de la dépossession qui, d'un point de vue historique, équivaut à la privation de traces et à la condamnation à l'oubli. La voix de l'autre perdu oscille entre présence et absence, mettant ainsi l'accent sur le trauma de la perte et le deuil impossible qui apparaît comme la qualité éthique du dénudement d'une vie par

l’absence de l’autre. *Ulverton* illustre cet état de dépossession éthique qui se manifeste par l’attachement à la mémoire de l’autre et qui confirme l’élégie comme un mode éthique d’expression.

Mots-clés: Anglicité, Archivabilité, Dépossession, Deuil, Ethique, Histoire, Oubli, Précarité, Trace, Trauma.

After the publication of ten novels and two collections of short stories, British writer Adam Thorpe is still regarded as the author of only one novel, whose publication in 1992 earned him international fame.[1] *Ulverton*'s recent republication in the prestigious collection 'Vintage Classics' in 2012 testifies to its labelling as a modern classic, though the tone of the novel is hardly modern. The narrative relates the fragmented stories of an English fictional village, Ulverton, set in central southern England, over a period of three centuries. The novel is divided into twelve chapters, each one of them corresponding to a pseudo archive. Though the action spans a considerable length of time, from 1650 to 1988, *Ulverton* is not a historical novel, but rather concerned about the writing of history and its opposite, oblivion. If one had to give a sketchy précis of Adam Thorpe's works, one could say that all his novels, despite apparent thematic differences, are singularly haunted by the unsaid.

This set of pseudo archives ironically plays on the divide between unrecorded history and English official history, between the archival said and unsaid, thus recalling Linda Hutcheon's notion of 'historiographic metafiction'. The novel's emphasis on historical textuality through the re-writing of archives and the ensuing political contestation it gives rise to, is evidence of *Ulverton*'s indebtedness to the theoretical debates of the 1980s. Linda Hutcheon defines 'historiographic metafiction' in relation to her own theory of postmodernism, which she sees as a 'paradox' (xiii), using and abusing the conventions of historical discourse, through metafictional self-consciousness and parodic intertextuality, in order to problematize any given discourse. The influence of so-called 'postmodern theory', or general scepticism towards discourses, is most visible in Adam Thorpe's first two novels.[2] Like many other writers, Adam Thorpe's political sympathy leans towards the marginal voices of history to which he intends to give pride of place in his novel, as he says in an interview. Yet, the notion of 'historiographic metafiction', however convenient it may be, tends to screen the specificities of Adam Thorpe's works. *Ulverton* is concerned with a particular type of unsaid, the archival unsaid, putting the notion of dispossession into historical perspective.

The notion of dispossession, as developed by Athanasiou and Butler, questions power both in its relation to political deprivation and ethical surrender of the sovereign subject (2). Deprivation is originally related to 'bare life', for Agamben, as it is what unties *bios* (political life) from *zoè*, also known as 'bare life' (biological life), whose mutual exclusion and inclusion constitutes for Agamben the foundation of Western politics.[3] Dispossession is therefore both a negative process disconnecting *bios* from 'bare life', and a positive one helping rethink *bios*. The novel *Ulverton* examines the historical implications of the superiority of *bios* over *zoè* through historical dispossession. By 'historical dispossession' I mean the deprivation of the

material resources and abilities to inscribe one's life in history, which results in anonymity and utter oblivion. In this sense, the archive, as the repository of textual traces, is contested on the grounds that it is partially built on the silenced voices of those dispossessed of recordability, that is, the ability to leave traces of oneself. As one might expect, the novel deconstructs the authority of the archive, assimilating it to a product of 'power-knowledge' (Foucault), that irreversibly distorts English history. In doing so, Adam Thorpe's intention is to deromanticise the history of England so as to deconstruct the myth of Englishness whose creation runs parallel with the development of English historiography in the 19th century. The challenging of the archive is coupled with the need to say the archival unsaid, which explains the author's acute attention to restoring the other's voice. The novel is animated by an ethical 'resurrectionist' project, that is, giving voice to the forgotten humble lives, dispossessed of historical traces, which are brought back from oblivion. If political criticism is one salient aspect of the narrative, another one that is not to be neglected is the importance of the wound as both an ethical and historical form of dispossession.

Historical dispossession can also be interpreted in terms of 'ethical dispossession', that is, the surrender of the sovereign subject in a post-Levinasian ethics (Athanasiou and Butler ix). Ethical dispossession is mediated through the memory of the traumatic wound that can be seen as an unsettling power affecting the subject. The memory of the wound is an example of ethical dispossession by which the subject reconnects himself or herself to the other. But this memory is never-ending, thus coinciding with loss and impossible mourning. The novel is pervaded by a self-conscious melancholia, expressed through elegy, which resonates with an 'ethics of mourning' (Spargo). What I would like to demonstrate is that historical dispossession includes a political resistance to archival power and also an ethical surrender to the dead other's memory through the wound. To do so, I will first address the saying of the archival unsaid, then the making of oblivion with the deconstruction of the archive, and finally the wound as an ethical form of historical relationality.

The saying of the archival unsaid

The notion of the archive, contrary to what is commonly believed, does not simply refer to the whole corpus of the said, preserved from the ravages of time, but also implicitly points to the unsaid, that was either lost over time or never recorded. In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben, distinguishing the archive from testimony,[4] considers the archive in its relation to the unsaid, thus showing his debt to Foucault.[5] *Ulverton* politicises the dual nature of the archive, namely the relation between the said and the unsaid, making it a source of political and

social conflict between the ruling classes and the lower classes, a sort of class struggle for recordability. The novel connects the ability of inscribing one's life in history, or recordability, to the possession or dispossession of power-knowledge. The latter is, for Foucault, a productive type of power, regulating relations of power through the production of discourses, which he opposes to a juridical form of repressive power (Foucault 119). In *Ulverton*, power-knowledge takes several forms in the different chapters and evolves as the reader travels through time. For example, chapter 5, set in 1775, describes power-knowledge as the mastering of literacy, while chapter 11, set in 1956, shows the emerging importance of media power with the radio. Adam Thorpe undoubtedly takes sides with the victims of power-knowledge by restoring the archival unsaid, made of the humble voices silenced by official history. The novel, therefore, opens up the textual space to those who were dispossessed of historical traces. That is the reason why the novel is polyphonic, presenting the reader with a set of 'auditory records' (James 53) or 'compositions vocales' (Porée 16). All the chapters—except for the first one—are written in an elaborate and well-researched 'historicised period pastiche' (Reinfandt 278), mimicking the narrator's subtle vocal variations in rhythm, grammar, and vocabulary according to his or her social status. For example, some chapters exemplify the coarse and seemingly authentic orality of craftsmen's and peasants' unrecorded voices (chapter 5 'Dissection 1775', chapter 6 'Rise 1803', and chapter 9 'Stitches 1887'), taking the form of vernacular language, while other chapters ventriloquize the high-flown and literate style of the ruling classes.

Terms such as 'pastiche' and 'ventriloquism' are now inextricably associated with postmodern theory, as they were used to describe the late twentieth-century fiction of some British novelists, among whom Peter Ackroyd's and A. S. Byatt's.[6] It is obvious that *Ulverton* similarly resounds with the echoes and successive alterations of past voices, testifying, like many other novels of the contemporary British cannon, to a spectral possession or, more specifically, a 'dis/possession' (Bernard 16, 2003), as spectrality entails a mutual destabilization of the 'self' and the 'other', so that there is a general indeterminacy as to who possesses whom, and who is possessed by whom. Though this haunting phenomenon of echoes elicited many contradictory explanations,[7] one possible reason might be the disrupted relationship between the origin, the speaking subject, and the voice, so that echoes are the spectral expressions of an unlocatable origin, of which echoic texts constantly lament the loss.[8] But, in *Ulverton*, the echoes of past voices do not so much emphasise the haunting effect of literary tradition, as is the case in Ackroyd and Byatt, as widen the socio-political divide between the possessors and the dispossessed, giving a fractured image of English culture, as represented by historiography and literary tradition. The echoes of past voices are then invested

with political and ethical values, transforming reading into an ethical act of listening to the other's unrecorded voice. Voice, in this respect, becomes the vocal instrument of what Butler and Athanasiou called 'political performativity', also known as the fragile capacity of making one's voice and life heard against dominant repressive power:

> We might say: the performative emerges precisely as a specific power of the precarious—unauthorized by existing legal regimes, abandoned by the law itself—to demand the end of their precarity (Butler and Athanasiou 121).

If one adapts political performativity to historical questions, it designates the political contestation of archival power in order to resist oblivion. Within the textual space and through ventriloquism, Adam Thorpe performs—in the aesthetic sense—the historical restoration of the traceless, granting them the possibility of speaking and telling the historical unsaid, made of violence and wounds. However, this ethical restoration of voices is not without posing certain problems.

The traceless may be repossessed as historical speaking subjects, but their status is nonetheless precarious. Their voices are heard again by a literary and somewhat artificial construction—the novel—but their lives and voices are historically lost for ever. This obviously raises the question of the legitimacy of speaking on behalf or instead of the other, a highly polemical issue that was first discussed in the field of postcolonial studies[9] and more recently by Guillaume le Blanc.[10] Indeed, the mistake would be to consider the novel as a simple mouthpiece (or 'porte-voix') for those who were deprived of historical traces. In fact, those voices are under the threat of becoming extinct, desubjectified, which makes them precarious. The meaning of 'precarious' here is to be connected to 'political performativity' which designates a vulnerable struggle, always exposed to failure and violence (Athanasiou and Butler 130). The fragmented form of the novel and the numerous textual blanks are evidence of the text's self-conscious awareness of how precarious the author's resurrectionist project is.

Indeed, the fictionalisation of the archive, as staged by the novel, points to the precarious nature of the archive. The latter is, for Derrida, an exterior tool for recording that can preserve the said as easily as it can efface it (12). In other words, the functioning of the archive is predetermined by the possibility of its own effacement, which makes it a precarious form. Transposed to the historical context of *Ulverton*, the precarity of the archive and its foreshadowed loss are dramatized into a tragedy. Indeed, the reader can intuit which voices will be preserved and archived and which ones will be unarchived and forgotten. This explains why *Ulverton* is pervaded by elegy, imparting to the reader a feeling of melancholia for the irretrievable loss of those unarchived voices. Elegy, in this regard, is the mode of expression of

melancholia whose affective symptoms are similar to impossible mourning in which the grief felt by the loss of the object cannot be overcome.[11] This dispossession of traces is presented not as a state but as a process, so that one can say that the novel deconstructs the authority of the archive in order to display the production of oblivion.

The production of oblivion: the dispossession of historical traces

The dispossession of historical traces is dramatized into a tragedy of anonymity, which accounts for the deeply elegiac tone of *Ulverton*. Some chapters describe what French philosopher Guillaume le Blanc, in *Vies ordinaires, vies précaires*, called the 'overlaying of voices' ('recouvrement des voix' 151), or the gradual process of inaudibility. The overlaying of voices is the first step towards social exclusion, as inaudibility entails, for Guillaume le Blanc, social invisibility and not the reverse.[12] From a historical perspective, the overlaying of voices means the blanking from official record and, as a consequence, national historiography. In doing so, Adam Thorpe deconstructs the authority of the archive, laying bare the social causes—namely power-knowledge—for the historical recordability of a person's life. To illustrate my point, I would like to concentrate on the most political chapter of the novel, chapter 7, which is concerned with a historically recorded event, scarcely known today, i.e. the 1830 rural rebellions in the south of England, called the 'Swing riots'.

The 'Swing Riots', which are the rural counterpart of the 1811 Luddite riots, were caused by a general impoverishment of farm labourers in the 1830s that was accelerated by the introduction of agricultural machines, named 'threshing machines' (151), in the context of nascent capitalism.[13] Like their Luddite counterparts, they involved a good deal of machine-breaking, but also black-mailing and financial extortion. They were recorded in the annals of English history for their violent repression, since about two thousand rioters were held prisoners and, for the most part, deported to Tasmania, a tragic end that is alluded to several times in the chapter (160, 170). Although recent historians are reluctant to analyse the 'Swing Riots' as an early example of class struggle (Griffin), Adam Thorpe describes the aftermath of the event as if it had been one, extending the social divide to spatiality and culture. In chapter 7, entitled 'Deposition', he resorts to the collage method, juxtaposing the rioters' transcript depositions with a solicitor's private correspondence to his fiancée. The mingling of these two types of archive, combining the private with the public spheres, lays bare the different reasons why the labourers' voices have grown extinct from historical record. The main reason is, in this chapter, literacy and, above all, power-knowledge. Given that illiteracy was widespread among the rebels, as the first deposition incidentally suggests ('he had a sign on a pole, he told me before

it read—"No machines"—, 152) their recordability is dependent on the scribe's power-knowledge. The reader is led to impute the responsibility for the production of oblivion to the solicitor's class prejudice as well as his mastery of juridical discourse.

The solicitor is a caricatured member of the London urbane and contemptuous elite. He is held responsible for the ethical, linguistic and historical desubjectivation of the rioters. His perception of the country and its inhabitants is modelled on the classic opposition between 'barbarity' and 'civilisation' (156). He applies the age-old stereotypes of the animal-like Barbarian to the labourers: he calls them 'wretches' (164) and compares their houses to 'pigsties' (157). As for linguistic desubjectivation, the chapter is replete with examples of discursive alterations and faulty translations, to the point that the labourers' voices become more and more inaudible. The solicitor frequently complains about the incomprehensibility of their accent ('sometimes I am in a fog of accent', 164), or the dialect ('a dialect so ripe as to be barely comprehended', 172). He is therefore obliged to translate 'thick grunts into some semblance of Rationale discourse' (152), appropriating and altering their voices, and even asks for the assistance of an interpreter ('a local fellow of some education who lights my way by translation', 165). His judgement of eloquence as a moral value ('that essential quality of eloquence that once parted us from the Barbarians', 156) prompts him to exaggerate his narrative just 'for effect' (154) in order to entertain his addressee in London ('I colour the description somewhat', 162). His mediation of the labourers' voices gradually turns in his favour and that of the elite he is standing for, to the point that the labourers' transcript voices are close to mere extinction. For example, all the labourers' transcript depositions begin with a truncated sentence, silencing the subject of the clause, so that the reader is unable to know the identity of the speaker: 'said they had nor warmth nor sufficient bread' (160); 'said to him that we have no tatoes [potatoes] nor bread and our children cannot sleep' (161). The gist of the labourers' depositions mainly consists of pathetic complaints about famine and material want, which stresses their social destitution. The absence of personal pronouns reinforces the anonymity of the rioters who seem to have already sunk into oblivion. By contrast, the landowners' depositions always start with the pronoun 'I' or the name of the speaker: 'John Stiff, Farmer, saith' (157). As for textual space, the rioters' transcript speeches take up less and less space, as the action unfolds, thus revealing their gradual fall into silence and oblivion. The beginning of the chapter opens on a two-page deposition delivered by a woman named Hannah. As the narration proceeds, the successive depositions become scarcer and scarcer, turning into fragments in the middle of the chapter, and verging towards the end on nothingness, as the solicitor reports: 'he has nothing to say'; 'no answer to this Charge' (162). In the meantime, the

solicitor infuses his letters with a ridiculous rhetoric of courtship, accumulating more and more personal and tedious details about his future marriage, the meals served at the squire's, his futile distractions and all sorts of marginal comments. The reader is witness to a vocal struggle that is inevitably lost at the expense of the vanquished rioters. They are victims of total dispossession, since they are not only deprived of their vital resources, but also bereft of any historical traces. Chapter 7 illustrates one of Benjamin's bitter pieces of criticism levelled at historicism and historiography in general: history is always written by the victors.[14] If the chapter exposes the social causes for historical oblivion, the pathos and elegy that one might have expected from such a tragedy is only suggested and, for the most part, repressed. By contrast, chapter 9, entitled 'Stitches', can be seen as an elegy to the traceless, as it is set in the dying moments of oral tradition that underpins Ulverton's collective history.

The wound or the ethics of mourning

Of all chapters, 'Stitches' can be analysed as the 'echo chamber' of the novel, since it is dedicated to the memory of the traceless. The chapter illustrates what Clifton Spargo called the 'ethics of mourning', referring to the dedication to the other's memory beyond death. In his study, *Ethics of mourning*, Spargo rehabilitates melancholia, which imparts to the wound an ethical quality that can be connected to historical dispossession. Through the ethically relational function of a simple ploughman's wounded memory, the traumatic history of *Ulverton* is momentarily revivified and recalled to the reader's memory. But the reminiscence of Ulverton's collective oral history is bound to become extinct with the ploughman's coming death.

The chapter is set in 1887 and constitutes, from the author's own admission, the core of the novel.[15] Indeed, the chapter presents itself as an aged ploughman's dialect elegy, written like a Modernist unpunctuated stream-of-consciousness monologue, vying with Joyce's canonical Molly Bloom in terms of form, but radically diverging from it in terms of content.[16] If the chapter constitutes the core of the novel, it is because it is permeated by elegy and melancholia, insofar as the protagonist, the illiterate ploughman, cannot overcome his mourning for a child he was particularly attached to, the son of his landowner, Daniel Holland. Melancholia, since Freud's essay on that topic, has been studied in relation to impossible mourning and grief (47-49). Likewise, Jo Perry's monologue is punctuated by sorrowful claims of impossible 'disremembering' as he confesses: 'I want to remember only I casn't disremember' (224). The loss of the child he feels partly responsible for, is expressed by some *topoi* of classic elegy, which is, according to Spargo, the 'most persistent sign of dedication to the time and realm of the other' (11). Mourning, indeed, can be equated to an ethical form of

dispossession which, for Butler, results in the subject's experience of 'precariousness', that is, the ontological condition of vulnerability.[17] In 'Stitches', the mourning for the child is expressed through a specific type of elegy, combining classic *topoi* with emotional vernacular language. For instance, Perry addresses the late young boy and mentions the joyful moments spent with him ('oh we'd have some laafs boy', 216) and the unknown pleasures of life due to his early death ('oh age age you on't know arn o' that', 205). He tries to find some solace by resorting to the *consolatio* genre, comparing the child to an angel and expressing the classic contempt for the world: 'now thee be an angel upperds one o' they host wi' feathers o' gold flied out o' this sturvin stinkin world' (210). Yet, impossible mourning does not mean for the ploughman to retreat into solipsistic self-pity. On the contrary, his wound is a point of juncture between intimate and collective history, revealing the ethical value of the wound.

The emotional wound triggered by the child's sudden death arouses in him a host of memories related to the traumatic history of the village, as he paces his forty acres of field (207). His constant addresses to the child remind him of the various stories he used to tell him, like for example the 'Swing Riots' (chapter 7) and or other minor stories like Agnes Plumm's suicide (chapter 3), that were passed on through oral tradition, as he says: 'my gramver had it from her own gramver's mouth herself boy aye oh there be us and others here as on't never disremember that till Doomsday boy won't never disremember that till the clang o' Doom' (216). Perry's memory is, in this regard, dependent on the traumatic paradigm of the double wound, according to which the repression of the initial wound is reawakened by the occurrence of an unrelated second wound.[18] In Perry's case, the child's death works like a second wound, awaking the first one which is collective. Therefore, the double wound is a means for Jo Perry to relate himself to all the past wounds and traumatic events of the village. His adamant refusal of forgetting (see the triple negation: 'o*n't n*ever *dis*remember' [my emphasis]) expresses how painfully the wound is still felt, making it a relational medium between oneself and the other.[19] The function of the chapter, as its title suggests ('Stitches'), is to connect all the half-healed traumatic wounds ('stitches'), that are thus made resonant through the reader's memory. Perry's melancholia proves ethical, as it is a means to relate oneself to the other's wound, but also political, since Ulverton's collective wounds were partly caused by political oppression. The memory of those deported and executed after the 'Swing Riots' is so vivid that it is an outlet for the ploughman's anger, who cannot help abusing the local elite ('they lordyshits' 216). The politicization of the wound, if it is not turned into violent retaliation, can be a factor for the building up of community (Butler 2004, 22). But the primacy of the other in Jo Perry's

melancholia is, however, threatened by the impossibility to record Ulverton's traumatic history, as felt by its inhabitants.

Because of his illiteracy, the ploughman's memory is condemned to oblivion, as he says: 'weren't never no scholard boy' (212). Though he is one of the only keepers of oral tradition in the village, his illiteracy prevents him from recording Ulverton's wounded history. In addition, his approaching death, that is expressed by the metaphor of the waggon, signals the future rupture of oral tradition, sinking all the past wounds into oblivion. This is suggested by the next chapter, set in 1914, presenting a narrator, a former civil servant from the Indian colonies. His personal history is disconnected from the ancestral families of the village (253), which prevents him from knowing Ulverton's traumatic and collective history. The reader is thus made aware of the tragic and irreversible loss, embodied by Jo Perry. The chapter functions like an echo chamber of all the past wounds whose historical unrecordability constitutes the essential part of the elegy to the traceless.

After analysing some significant chapters of Adam Thorpe's *Ulverton*, one can say that the novel could be read in the light of historical dispossession. By rehabilitating those who were deprived of historical traces, *Ulverton* criticises the political power of the archive in an attempt at saying the archival unsaid. In doing so, Adam Thorpe deconstructs the various forms of power-knowledge, making lives 'bare', that is, deprived of historical traces and condemned to oblivion. The small world of Ulverton serves as a microcosm for a wider macrocosm, that of England and its history on which the novel sheds a pessimistic light. England's history, as in any other country, is made of wounds that are glossed over by today's heritage industry, as the final chapter 'Here, 1988' suggests, with an extract from a script for a documentary about Ulverton's turning into a simulacrum of the perfect English village. The satire on the consumerist commodification of English history is part of a common preoccupation that Adam Thorpe shares with other contemporary writers, among whom Julian Barnes with his famous novel *England, England* (1998). But 'bare life' is not only the site of political oppression, but also refers to the experience of mourning triggered by the wound. The latter is the medium through which one can reconnect with the other's unsaid life, and yet turns out to be an experience of the other's loss, whose disconcerting effect can be compared to an ethical dispossession, unsettling one's self-power and revealing the subject's precariousness. Elegy as the traditional genre associated with mourning proves to be the ethical expression of historical dispossession, showing the attachment to the other's memory while lamenting the lost bare lives of English history.

Works cited

Primary sources:

THORPE, Adam. *Ulverton*. 1992. London: Vintage Classics, 2012.

Secondary sources:

AGAMBEN, Giorgio. *Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. D. HELLER-ROAZEN. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.

————. *Remnants of Auschwitz*. Trans. D. HELLER-ROAZEN. New York: Zone Books, 1999.

BENJAMIN, Walter. *Sur le concept d'histoire*. Trans. O. MANNONI. Paris: Petite bibliothèque Payot, 2013.

BERNARD, Catherine. 'Forgery, Dis/possession, Ventriloquism in the Works of A. S. Byatt and Peter Ackroyd'. *Miscelanea* 28 (2003): 11-24.

————. 'Écriture et possession : la voix du fantôme dans la fiction de Peter Ackroyd et d'A. S. Byatt'. *Sillages critiques* 7 (2005): 1-12.

BUTLER, Judith. *Precarious Life: the Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London and New York: Verso, 2004.

BUTLER, Judith and Athena Athanasiou. *Dispossession: the Performative in the Political*. New York and London: Polity Press, 2013.

CARUTH, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.

DERRIDA, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Trans. E. PRENOWITZ. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996.

FOUCAULT, Michel. 'Truth and Power'. *Power / Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Ed. Colin GORDON. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. 109-133.

FREUD, Sigmund. *Deuil et mélancolie*. 1917. Trans. A. WEILL. Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 2010.

GRIFFIN, Carl. 'The violent Captain Swing?'. *Past and Present* 209 (2010): 149-180.

HAGENAUER, Sabine. ''I Don't See Much Point in Writing a Novel Unless the Reader Works': an Interview with Adam Thorpe'. *'Do You Consider Yourself a Postmodern Author? : Interviews with Contemporary English Writers'*. Eds. R. FREIBURG and J. SCHNITKER. Münster: LIT Verlag, 1999. 219-235.

HUTCHEON, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London and New York: Routledge, 1988.

JAMES, David. *Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space: Style, Landscape, Perception*. London: Bloomsbury, 2009.

LAPLANCHE, Jean. *Problématique VI: l'après-coup*. Paris : P.U.F., 2006.

LE BLANC, Guillaume. *Vies ordinaires, vies précaires*. Paris: Seuil, 2007.

————————. *Que faire de notre vulnérabilité?* Montrouge: Bayard, 2011.

PORÉE, Marc. 'La paille et le grain'. Rev. of *Ulverton*. *La Quinzaine littéraire*, 1994. 16.

REINFANDT, Christoph. ''Putting Things Up Against Each Other': Media History and Modernization in Adam Thorpe's *Ulverton*'. *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 52.3 (2004): 273-286.

SPARGO, R. Clifton. *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2004.

SPIVAK, Gayatri. 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Eds. C. NELSON and L. GROSSBERG. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1988. 271-313.

THORPE, Adam. 'Turning the Confusion into Art: History and Fiction'. *History is Mostly Repair and Revenge, Discourses of/on History in Literature in English*. Ed. Liliana SIKORSKA. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010. 13-24.

[1] See for example some of the most laudatory reviews by: Fowles, John. 'Thank the Gods for Bloody Mindedness'. *The Guardian*, 28 May, 1992; Coe, Jonathan. 'Palimpsest History'. *The London Review of Books*, 11 June, 1992; Banville, John. 'Big News from Small Worlds'. *New York Review of Books*, 4 July, 1993.

[2] 'And I think part of the political programme of *Ulverton* was bound up with allowing voices that have been suppressed or are suppressed even now, when you look at history, to have their say' (Hagenauer 228).

[3] 'The fundamental categorial pair of Western politics is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare life/political existence, zoè/bios, exclusion/inclusion. There is politics because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusion exclusion' (Agamben 1998, 8).

[4] 'In opposition to the *archive*, which designates the system of relations between the unsaid and the said, we give the name *testimony* to the system of relations between the inside and the outside of *langue*, between the sayable and the unsayable in every language – that is, between a potentiality of speech and its existence, between a possibility and an impossibility of speech' (Agamben 1999, 145).

[5] As Agamben explains, the archive is for Foucault the unsaid or sayable whose meaning can emerge from the difference between Benveniste's 'énonciation' and 'énoncé': 'the archive is the unsaid or sayable inscribed in everything said by virtue of being enunciated; it is the fragment of memory that is always forgotten in the act of saying 'I'' (Agamben 1999, 144).

[6] Among the considerable number of critical works devoted to these two authors, one can cite for Peter Ackroyd, Susana Onega's *Metafiction and Myth in the Novels of Peter Ackroyd* (Columbia: Camden House, 1999) and Jean-Michel Ganteau's *Peter Ackroyd et la musique du passé* (Paris: Michel Houdiard, 2008) and for A. S. Byatt, Christian Gutleben's *Nostalgic Postmodernism: The Victorian Tradition and the Contemporary British novel*. (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2001).

[7] Linda Hutcheon, in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, summarizes the controversy about the use of pastiche, which in fact reflects the two opposing camps of what she calls the 'postmodern wars' (16). For the neoconservative camp, pastiche is the sign of the dehistoricization of late twentieth-century culture, while for the innovative camp, of which Linda Hutcheon is part, pastiche is a powerful means of political criticism. This explanation which reduces the controversy to politics does not take into consideration the influence of deconstructive philosophy in the emergence of pastiche (see the note below).

[8] 'En s'appropriant la voix d'un autre, le pasticheur reconduit en effet cet effacement d'une voix originelle, puisque ce n'est ni la voix de l'auteur fantôme, ni celle de l'auteur possédé qui se laisse entendre, mais une voix plurielle et impersonnelle. En se condamnant à la redite, le pasticheur convient aussi que toute écriture est appropriation d'un lieu commun, lieu commun culturel, mais aussi lieu commun moderniste selon lequel l'écriture serait toujours en deuil de l'absolu littéraire de la parole incarnée' (Bernard 2).

[9] Gayatri Spivak, in her classic article 'Can the Subaltern speak?', radically denies the possibility of speaking on behalf of the subaltern, which she interprets as a neo-colonial form of dominancy through power-knowledge.

[10] Guillaume le Blanc makes a useful distinction between 'prête-voix' and 'porte-voix'. For him, the 'prête-voix' are those who claim to speak on behalf of the subaltern voices, but further contribute to their inaudibility. As for the 'porte-voix', they should facilitate the audibility of the subaltern, in giving them the material and cultural means to speak for themselves. See the chapter 'Voix subalternes et porte-voix' (le Blanc 2011, 106-122).

[11] Freud's view on melancholia, as stated in his eponymous essay, related the symptoms of melancholia to a sort of 'pathology' in which the loss could not be overcome, as opposed to mourning (59). This view has now been challenged by Clifton Spargo, for whom melancholia is 'evocative of an ethical concern for the other elaborated by the mourner's objections to the cultural practices presiding over grief' (11).

[12] 'Si le visible sous-tend l'audible, seul l'audible rend cependant visible. Ainsi, une vie invisible est déjà une vie inaudible, une vie dont la voix a été perdue' (le Blanc 2007, 165).

[13] The 'Swing Riots' attracted the attention of mostly Marxist British historians who famously promoted a 'history from below', as E. P. Thompson said in his eponymous essay ('History from below'. *The Essential E. P. Thompson*. Ed. D. Thompson. New York: The New Press, 2001. 481-9). The two Marxist historians who wrote the only study on those riots were E. Hobsbawm and G. Rudé, in *Captain Swing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973). For a more recent, unbiased and comprehensive overview on the historiography of the 'Swing Riots', see Carl Griffin. 'The violent Captain Swing?'. *Past and Present* 209 (2010): 149-180.

[14] 'La nature de cette tristesse devient plus claire lorsqu'on se demande dans la peau de qui se met au juste l'historiographe de l'historicisme. La réponse est inéluctablement : dans celle du vainqueur. Mais les dominants du moment sont les héritiers de tous ceux qui ont vaincu un jour' (Benjamin 62).

[15] 'Oh, it's my favourite chapter, definitely' (Hagenauer 228).

[16] In the afterword of the Vintage Classic edition of *Ulverton,* Adam Thorpe says that his initial intention in writing the chapter 'Stitches' was to imitate Molly Bloom's monologue in Joyce's *Ulysses*: '[…] his [Jo Perry's] genial dialect written in imitation of Molly Bloom's final chapter in *Ulysses*' (Thorpe 2012, 408). This imitation is a political contestation of the Modernist literary cannon, from which the figure of the peasant is generally absent: 'There is one in particular who never usually has a central role at all in fiction, not even in Thomas Hardy: the peasant, the ploughman, the farm labourer. He speaks in an unpunctuated dialect that demands as much from the reader as the more difficult passage in Joyce' (Thorpe 2010, 15).

[17] Butler makes a distinction between 'precariousness' and 'precarity'. 'Precariousness' designates for her an ontological form of vulnerability, inherent in human beings, which precedes the formation of the subject: 'Although I am insisting on referring to a common human vulnerability, one that emerges with life itself, I also insist that we cannot recover the source of this vulnerability: it precedes the formation of 'I'. This is a condition, a condition of being laid bare from the start and with which we cannot argue' (2004, 31). 'Precarity', on the other hand, refers to the politicisation of precariousness and its unequal social distribution (2013, 20).

[18] In the wake of Freud's concept of *narchträglichkeit* that was never fully developed, Jean Laplanche theorised the temporal effect of the double wound as 'après-coup': 'Avec le trauma, nous retrouvons bien sûr le problème du temps qui est notre fil conducteur. Nous retrouvons bien avec cette idée de « en deux temps » le problème du temps. Avec un énoncé qui pourrait être paradoxalement celui-ci : pour faire un trauma, il en faut au moins deux. Ce que Freud exprime de façon moins paradoxale de la façon suivante : 'un souvenir ne devient trauma qu'après-coup'' (49).

[19] 'But we can also read the address of the voice here, not as the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past, but as the story of the way in which one's trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound' (Caruth 8).