DISORIENTALISM: THE COUNTERNARRATIVES OF JIM CRACE

AN INVESTIGATION INTO A PERSONAL STRATEGY OF POLITICAL PROSE FICTION

By

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study is to provide an analysis of selected prose fiction by Jim Crace and present the work as political commentary. The intention is to highlight this generally overlooked aspect of Crace's first novels by investigating the development of his fabulist methodology. This interpretation is then employed to inform readings of further works with the additional layer of meaning as symbolic allegory. As a result, this investigation will refute criticisms of Crace's work being removed from political discourse. The study defines Crace's individual mode of defamiliarization as *disorientalism* to emphasize the critical concept of Crace's strategic mode. As this study illustrates, Crace initially developed his methodology to counter misrepresentation of African countries in literary fiction and subsequently applied the mode to critique the dominance of neoliberal ideology with counternarratives. The study begins with a brief biographical overview and summary of literary characteristics within the context of contemporary British fiction, as well as providing definitions of key terms. This leads into the second chapter examining political inspiration and motivations for Crace's transition from journalistic writing to a parabolic fabulism informed by magical realism, while the following section assesses Crace's debut novel, *Continent*, as allegory rather than abstract invention. These first sections also provide a theoretical framework and literature review. Further chapters employ close readings to investigate the novels *The Gift of Stones*, *Arcadia,* and *Quarantine* as sociopolitical commentary of post-Thatcherite urban Britain and counternarrative to the cultural shift toward globalized neoliberalism. The next chapters continue this analysis with close readings of Crace's more refined mode of critical mythopoeia for *The Pesthouse* and *Harvest* to frame these works as contemporary fables rather than dystopian and historical

genre fictions respectively, as they are often presented and critiqued accordingly. A final reading of the more explicitly allegorical *The Melody* further illustrates the political credo informing Crace's fabulism and explains the disorientalist method as a socially conscious form of symbolism. These readings seek to address issues of literary misrepresentation and cultural appropriation prominent in contemporary discourse by championing a single author's personal strategy for ethically addressing global themes of exploitation, inequality, and dehumanization beyond his own ethnic and social background. This may hopefully add to the fledgling body of academic work exploring the works of Jim Crace and help elevate the status of both his prose and methodology within the field of contemporary British fiction.

Table of Contents

1.1 ***Introduction*: Biography, Intentions and Definitions**

Jim Crace was born at Brocket Hall in Hertfordshire, 1946 and grew up in Enfield at the northern urban edge of London. He attended Enfield Grammar School and Birmingham College of Commerce (now Birmingham City University) as an external student at London University, reading English Literature. During this time, he met his future wife, Pamela Turton, and they married in 1965. After graduating, Crace worked as a VSO[1] volunteer in Khartoum, assisting in Sudanese educational television. He then travelled through Africa and around the Indian Ocean, a period which included a village school teaching position in Molepolole, Botswana. After returning to the UK in 1970 he worked as professional writer, initially on radio scripts for BBC Schools, then producing literary criticism and feature journalism, continuing to travel worldwide on assignments. He began writing fiction in 1974 with his first published story, 'Annie, California Plates' (1974) in *The New Review*. This success led to a book deal contract with his career-spanning editor and agent, David Godwin, for which Crace would eventually produce his debut novel, *Continent* (1986). As a full-time author, Crace lived and worked in the south Birmingham suburb of Moseley with his wife and two children, until moving to rural Worcestershire with Pamela in late 2013. Little of his personal life is evident in his prose. As summarized by Adam Begley for *The Paris Review* (2003), Crace 'insists that his books are wholly invented, that his life is too dull and contently settled to make decent fodder for fiction'.[2]

[1] Voluntary Service Overseas, a not-for-profit international development charity organisation.
[2] One notable exception to this rule would the death of his father, Charley Crace, in 1979, the subject of his early short story, *Seven Ages* (1980), as well his uncompleted and abandoned autobiographical novel *Archipelago* (2008-2011). His father's disability, a withered left arm resulting from childhood osteomyelitis, was also a clear inspiration for the fatherly storyteller's physical affliction in *The Gift of Stones* (1988).

The novels of Jim Crace, twelve to date, have been both lauded and awarded as emphatically imaginative works of poetic prose. An impressive collection of international awards includes being twice shortlisted for the Man Brooker Prize. Despite this, Crace does not quite enjoy a similar cultural status or academic focus as such contemporary British authors as Julian Barnes, Kazuo Ishiguro or Ian McEwan. His fabulist fiction has been generally considered disconnected from political and cultural discourse. Frank Kermode's review of *Quarantine* (1997) for *The New York Times*, for example, ventured that 'when many profess to believe there can be little interest in art that has no obvious political bearing, it may seem remarkable that Crace's chosen topics are so devoid of political reference… If this is politics, it is very abstract politics' (1998).

This perception was widely held despite the topics of Crace's five novels published by 1998 being primarily allegorical for political issues relating to social effects of globalization and neoliberalism, as this dissertation aims to address. Consequently, Crace's personal strategy for political fabulism was more explicit by the time of his most recent novel, *The Melody* (2018), but often criticized as ineffective. David Sexton reviewing in *The Evening Standard* complained that 'in the past [Crace's] eloquence has made his dislocated, alternative worlds resonate more powerfully than real world reference could. This time, though, the approach seems self-indulgent, even evasive. The real subject might have been better and more bravely tackled realistically' (2018). This study hopes to allow a greater appreciation of Crace's pluralistic method and his strategic goals rather than be deemed subordinate to 'realistic' representation in terms of political discourse.

Crace's oeuvre of major novels published in the UK consists of *Continent* (1986), *The Gift of Stones* (1988), *Arcadia* (1992), *Signals of Distress* (1994), *Quarantine* (1997), *Being Dead* (1999), *The Devil's Larder* (2001), *Six* (2003), *The Pesthouse* (2007), *All That Follows* (2010), *Harvest* (2013) and, despite a preceding announcement of retirement, *The Melody*.[3] As fabulism, Crace's works can be read, in words of Calvino, as 'work conceived from outside the self, … that would let us escape the limited perspective of the individual ego, not only to enter into selves like our own but to give speech to that which has no language'[4], seeking to circumvent partisan politics with poetic imagination without explicitly presenting a divisive personal ideology or any adversarial credo. Crace has said of his methodology that 'I am always looking to dislocate the subject', (Begley, *The Paris Review*, 2003), as opposed to relocate through a mimetic representation of an existing place. The non-specificity and parabolic settings serve to resolve Crace's ethical concerns of misrepresentation in his writing. In the introduction for *The Melody* (2018), Crace states this fabulist methodology quite clearly. After describing the inspiration of being kept awake at night in an Indian hotel room by the sounds of child poverty in the street below:

> A realist, autobiographical writer, employing the pen as a camera, might have set the novel in 21st century Chennai. I was wary of that. I was a white, privileged tourist there. Whatever I wrote would seem like a narrow, judgemental, post-colonial misrepresentation of a diverse nation about which I knew very little. India is so much more than poverty, of course. Besides, if a book were to be written on the subject of destitution in the sub-continent, there were plenty of talented Indian writers who would make a truer job of it than I ever could. Many have already done so. No, what I needed was a setting out of Asia and one which could not offend the citizens of any actual

[3] While excerpts of these novels have been published or reprinted as separate collections, such as Slow Digestions of Night (1995) and On Heat (2008), this dissertation will concentrate on the major novels as listed above.
[4] Calvino, I (1988) *Six Memos for the Next Millenium*

> place. That meant making up an unnamed nation of my own, something I am very fond of doing.[5]

This study also intends to define both the fabulist and fundamentally political nature of Crace's work, which has occasionally been critiqued by reviewers as being frustratingly vague and apathetic, with a regressive indulgence in pre-modernist pathetic fallacy and poetic expression[6]. It is my intention to illustrate Crace's methodology as 'disorientalism', an essentially journalistic mode of allegory to highlight and recontextualize political and cultural developments in post-Thatcher Britain (specifically within English marginal urban communities) with narratives intended to exhibit a stylistic alternative to both contemporary British literature and the materialism inherent within the dominant post-capitalist ideology of neoliberalism.

Crace has thus far received disproportionately limited attention from academic literary critics. The only lengthy single critical study of his work to date has been by Professor Phillip Tew's *Jim Crace* (2006), covering Crace's literary works up to an unpublished draft of *The Pesthouse*. This critical study drew on the primarily sources of interviews with Crace, as well as personal readings of the novels themselves. Tew's own secondary critical sources largely amounted to online articles and previous interviews, particularly a lengthy feature by Adam Begley for *The Paris Review* (167, 2003), which coined the term 'Craceland' for Crace's meta-novel fabular setting with reoccurring characters, subsequently adopted by Tew's study. Tew himself took a no-nonsense, post-theory approach of 'plain criticism', drawing instead upon close-reading and biographical interviews. There has more recently

[5] Reproduced as promotional material ahead of publication on the semi-official website, www.jim-crace.com
[6] A review for *Harvest* by Alex Nazaryan for *The New Republic* (28/02/2013), for example, lamented the lack of contextual historical detail and 'casual' style, and recommend retirement for the author..

been further scholarly research on Crace's prose, building upon Tew's critical study. Areti Dragas in *The Return of the Storyteller in Contemporary Fiction* (2014) has also written of Crace revitalizing the mythopoeic mode of the storyteller, based on Walter Benjamin's reflection on Leskov. Dragas focuses on *The Gift of Stones* as a commentary on the social role of storytellers in an age of industrialized mass entertainment. Additionally, an anthology of literary analyses of Jim Crace, *Into the Wilderness* (2018), edited by Kate Aughterson and Katy Shaw, further updated Crace scholarship and further expanded academic study of the author. The collected essays identify Crace's elements of Romanticism and Transcendentalism by discussing Crace's work in terms of the Pastoral, ecocriticism, feminism, and secular spirituality. While there is an emerging wealth of study of Jim Crace, little has addressed his prose from the perspective of political commentary, which is the primary aim of this survey.

As noted by Tew, the novels of Crace range in theme but are characterized by a distinct, deliberate rhythmic style of percussive disyllables (p.29) and flowing fragments of compound sentences, often approaching freeform verse. An example from *Quarantine* illustrates this style of rhythmic, mythopoeic personification:

> Musa picked his way through the debris of the night. The storm had lifted stones to show their hidden faces. It had made firewood from bushes, and pulled up roots and soil. Lice and termites tumbled in the daylight where the earth was scarred, busy with repairs (p.201).

The poetic phrasing of the 'debris of the night' and the 'hidden faces' of stones evoke the figurative, repetitive phrases of oral storytelling whilst being vivid and novel as to suggest these phrases are being coined for the first time, creating a sense of mythopoeia and historical dislocation. The staccato lines of monosyllables and

disyllables, meanwhile, convey an informality that can more closely connect the reader to the subject among this unfamiliar imagery. The making of ‘firewood from bushes’ suggests a mysterious transformative force intervening in mortal affairs, reflecting the religious theme of the text but also the traditional gods of epic poetry. Crace continues in his style, stringing complex sentences of staggered clauses, which could be typeset as free verse, hybridising naturalistic realism and poetic style. The *Melody*, the most recent published novel covered by this monograph, maintains this form:

> A moment later and the child had gone, back through the door, departing to the tinkling of bells, back through the communal yard, too hurried to be careful with the bin, which crashed against each other as they fell again, back through the twanging shrub and scrub of the bosk, back beyond the hill into the deep, embracing cavern of the trees (p.21).

On initial reading, Crace is also characterized by an impassive tone, with little familiar idiomatic or emotive language, and employing minimal dialogue. The opening of *The Melody* offers a typical example:

> It was not unusual for Alfred Busi – *Mister Al* – to wake up in the shallows of the night and overhear a cacophony of animals, hunting for food in his neighbours’ metal rubbish bins or drinking from the open drain, water that that the residents had used to clean their teeth or wash their clothes and dishes. When he was a married man, he tells me, such shadowy disorders were not at all disquieting. He only had to press his nose again into the warm cloth of the woman in his bed and there could be a pair of minotaurs at his bins for all he cared (p.3).

Rather than a short, sharp opening line to convey sudden alarm, the first sentence establishes a rhetorical flourish with a triplet of clauses, indicating the former career of Busi as a composer, as well as the recurring theme of music. In keeping with this

theme, the ‘cacophony’ of animals conjures the sound of an orchestra tuning up as a performance begins to open. The details of ‘metal’ and an ‘open drain’ suggest sound and smell, as well as poverty, while ‘warmth cloth’ against ‘nose’ evokes intimacy without internalized description of emotion. The realist details speak for themselves. Also evident are Crace’s characteristically inventive turns of poetic phrase, such as ‘shallows of the night’ and ‘shadowy disorders’, which project a subtle unfamiliarity as night might be typically described by its depth of darkness and disorder as close and obvious. The mention of ‘minotaurs’, mythical and symbolic of common animalistic impulse, foreshadows the novel’s depiction of feral children as dehumanized objects of fear, literally considered subhuman. It also indicates the underlying mythopoeia of the narrative as a fable of urban social inequality. The free indirect style of narrative voice is also subtly clouded by ‘he tells me’, immediately injecting unreliability into these omniscient details with the shadowy presence of an anonymous, inventive, and almost comically impassive storyteller. The uncertainty of setting, time, and truth in this reported event, despite the prominence of realist detail, indicates the allegorical form of Crace’s narratives, a technique which this project intends to explore.

As *The Melody* illustrates socio-economic inequality, his study will explore Crace’s development of fabulism, or disorientalism, as a personal strategy for political engagement and counternarrative within the literary novel, preempting key issues of contemporary discourse concerning representation, cultural appropriation, and the relevancy of the novel. The primary novels selected for this study (*Continent*, *The Gift of Stones*, *Arcadia*, *Quarantine, The Pesthouse*, *Harvest*, and *The Melody*) best

illustrate a strategy of satirical socio-political fabulism as it develops over the course of Crace's writing career.[7]

[7] Works such as *Being Dead* and *Six* are essentially omitted as these are more self-reflective illuminations on grief and middle age respectively. *The Devil's Larder* and *All That Follows* are notable as more experimental efforts in literary technique and genre transgression, before a more critically and commercially successful return to social fabulist satire with his most recent two novels, and thusly less relevant the scope of this study.

1.2 ***Disorientalism*: Journalistic Fabulism**

The term ‘disorientalism’ is introduced and used here to frame Crace’s method of dislocation as fundamentally political, exploring a method of depicting themes of global economic inequality beyond the personal experience of the author while being cautious against appropriating indigenous or local narratives of real-world communities. This exploration is intended to provide a better appreciation of Crace’s prose in terms of both the artistic objectives and political discourse. This may also serve to address common criticisms of Crace based on expectations of a more conventional and recognizable form of realism. For the purposes of the study, realism as a literary concept is based upon definitions supplied by David Lodge’s *The Modes of Modern Writing* (2015): “discourse broadly consistent with historical fact as known and meditated by the contemporary historical consciousness” (p.32) or framed within a fundamentally factual setting [8]. Lodge also notes the mythopoetic mode counters the ‘illusion’ of historically based realism with ‘imagination’ (p.33), as the narrative is not presented as factually based. However, as this study will illustrate, Crace’s novels have allegorical aspects in addressing contemporary social issues.

The mythopoeic mode is presented is this study as a personal alternative strategy of realism rather than antirealism, with explicitly imaginary details and settings employed to circumvent perceived creative obstacles associated by Crace with the conventional British realist novel as a medium. Rather than being artistically abstract,

[8] Lodge of course acknowledges the problematic oversimplifications with reducing both “realism” and “historical” to binary positions within literature according to a Marxist definition of history itself.

Crace's novels are grounded in political discourse with contemporary cultural changes and conditions local to the author, depicted using an inventive methodology to engage with themes in global terms. To achieve this, Crace's prose adopts a stylistic pastiche of iambic oral storytelling as a method for bypassing what could be defined as the bourgeois literary production and the championing of individualism of the English canon. This methodology of invention and strategic ambiguity adheres to Viktor Shklovsky's dictum of *Verfremdungseffekt,* or 'making strange', as an essential feature of art, translated into English as defamiliarisation: 'literature should aim to estrange and disrupt modes of ordinary linguistic discourse… Defamiliarising the world' (1998). Critic James Wood in his *How Fiction Works* (2008) notes this mode as 'the technique made famous by the Russian formalists, *ostranenie,* or defamiliarisation' and critiques it as 'extravagant' in its distractingly counter-intuitive employment of disparate metaphor (p.157). However, rather than being rhetorical indulgence, this study will illustrate Crace's personal method of defamiliarization as attempting to displace the reader to a neutral, liminal space between objective representation of social realities and idealized ideological metanarrative.

Rather than writing fiction to show how things really are (or historically were) or how things really should be, Crace employs fabulism to cloud both these perspectives with ambiguity to question the cultural authority inherent in the logic of neoliberalism. As Wood also notes, the use of metaphor 'floats a rival reality' (p.107). Crace's fabulism emphasizes rival realities with unfamiliar or culturally inconsistent metaphors to challenge conventional, mechanical thinking, such as neoliberal assumptions of progress. This emphasis on counter-intuitive metaphor is a strategic stimulant for actively considering the socio-political changes undergoing the reader's

social environment and an effort to advance communication concerning these changes, as metaphor is central to our conceptual system when it comes to defining reality.

Crace can also be read as a journalistic author, exploring topics outside his personal experience. The mode is employed in this study intends to illustrate Crace's literary fiction as more an extension of his previous political journalism rather than being an entirely separate form of commercial writing. This fabulist methodology can be read as incorporating elements of social realism, Romanticism, transcendentalism and magical realism to offer counternarratives to the dominant individualistic ideology of neoliberalism, or what Mark Fisher defined as 'Capitalist Realism'[9] (2010), as evident in Crace's development of a personal strategy of fabulism. According to this strategy, Crace's novels present fantastical imaginary details and settings rather than entirely verisimilar representations of recognizable locations, defined historical periods or any idiomatic vernacular.

The term 'journalistic fiction' here, and its differentiation from literary journalism, is taken from Matthew Carl Strecher's *The Forbidden Worlds of Haruki Murakami* (2014), referring to prose fiction grounded in current events rather than internalized autobiographical narratives, in this analysis of another contemporary author associated more with fabulism and magical realism. The term journalistic was used more dismissively by Iris Murdoch in her essay *Against Dryness* (1961) referring to less imaginative, uninventive, and factually descriptive styles of fiction. However, this

[9] Mark Fisher, later echoed by Zizek, described "the widespread sense than not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it" (p.2). The book's subheading of 'Is There No Alternative?' references a campaign slogan of Margret Thatcher stating, "The is no alternative".

study employs the term journalistic fiction to emphasis the political and social relevancy of Crace's fabulism, often inspired by news reports and journalistic investigations.

While crafted as commercial literary fiction, Crace's prose continues the journalistic investigations of his previous career, chronicling social changes at the hands of global economic forces by way of a technique of dislocation rather than reporting details of real-world settings. However, while the contemporary novel can and does still accommodate realism and externalized journalistic investigation, Crace's personal goal is not to reveal or describe reality but to invent it, ultimately highlighting the constructed nature of all social, economic, and moral values and interrogating them by adding ambiguity and recontextualization.

As Walter Benjamin noted in *The Storyteller*, 'storytelling as it has long flourished in the world of manual labour – rural, maritime, then urban – is itself a form of artisanal labour, so to speak. It does not aim to transmit the pure, intrinsic nature of the thing like information or a report. It plunges the thing into the life of the teller and draws it out again (p.56). To this end, Crace adopts his form of fabulation to emphasize imagination and invention: he does this to convey political issues, with the aim of influencing political discourse. His register features the counterintuitive authenticity derived from the storytelling mode, as indicated by Benjamin and the artisanal nature akin to working-class trade. While a working-class and/or Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) author might incorporate autobiographical detail within a realist mode to directly engage with social issues in a literary mode to counter assumptions and stereotypes in the cultural discourse, a white, middle-class author such as Crace

might feel conscious of residing in bourgeois suburbia and seek an alternative mode. By blending elements of realism and fabulism, Crace has consistently worked to 'dislocate' the reader, adhering to Shklovsky. This is an alternative mode to defamiliarization or estrangement, however, as it is explored as a means of universalist allegory rather than conveying the alienation of an individual character. This serves to create counterpoints to Crace's perception of the conventional British novel, as well as conventional thinking relating to social and political issues, in a process of literary disorientalism. The effect of self-reflexivity is the familiar postmodern feature of demanding the reader be conscious of the act of actively reading fiction rather than being a passive consumer observing through mimetic description. By disorienting the reader with an ambiguous setting, the reader is encouraged to apply the action to their own perspectives and experiences.

The term 'fabulism' itself is used to label Crace's inventive, mythopoeic methodology of prose without confusing it with any distinct mode of fantasy genre fiction. The word as originally employed by Robert Scholes in *The Fabulators* (1967) referred in generally experimental terms to works that responded to contemporary literary trends with 'a return to a more verbal kind of fiction… a less realistic and a more artistic kind of narrative' (p.12), and so presented his collected 'Fabulators' as avant-garde authors. A more recent definition by Trent Hergenrader in *Collaborative Worldbuilding for Writers and Gamers* (2019), positions fabulism within the literary genre of fantasy: 'Though magic, monsters, and medievalism might be what most people think of when they hear the world fantasy, it is only one type of the genre. Other kinds of fantasy fiction are settings much closer to our primary world but include fantastic elements. These include the retelling of fairy tales and myths and

fables, known as mythic fiction and fabulism respectively' (p.23-24). While genre classification is more nebulous and impractical in terms of literary critique rather than book industry marketing, this study regards Crace's work within the context of contemporary literary fiction. Crace's fabulism incorporates a feature of what Charles Newman in *The Postmodern Aura: The Act of Fiction in an Age of Inflation* (1985) might term entertainment genre writing, as Crace would incorporate other genre elements within his literary prose during his career.

Benjamin's figure of storyteller declined due to the industrial mass production of the novel, along with the loss of oral culture and folklore to industrialization, cultural imperialism and Enlightenment materialism. The concept of storytelling can be associated with a communal and cultural act of narrative as a means of environmental adaptation and survival, with the storyteller serving a fundamental social role. The concept of an author can be more associated with modernity, with the medium of printed media and the transactional economics of commercial fiction, as well as more individualistic representations of artistic talent and vision. However, as novels are not written in a cultural vacuum, the practice of literature can be seen more as a technical reformatting of narrative rather than entirely removed from the traditional concept of storytelling.

The necessity to separate the author from textual analysis of their literature and avoid reductive biographical interpretation has of course been prescient since Roland Barthes' essay 'Death of the Author' (1967). Literary analysis cannot be limited to single levels of meaning, however, in the case of Crace, an emphasis on the author's political sentiments can add an additional social relevancy to works

often critiqued as vague and rhetorically 'self-indulgent'. The elements of emulated oral storytelling in Crace's work can also be seen as a method of enacting this post-structuralist removal of biographical interpretive tyranny, inviting an interrogation of exclusionary cultural narratives with strategic ambiguity.

The paradox of political commercial fiction can be said to be reflected in the style of orality typeset as printed prose. According to Robert Alter in *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (1975), fabulism concerns 'parables and paradoxes…; metaphysical enigmas about identity, recurrence, and cyclicality, time, thought, and extension' (p.227), opposed to more 'naturalistic textures of experience' of realism. Crace appropriates and incorporates the methodology of fabulism to varying degrees with the fundamental self-consciousness of literature, embellishing the artifice with style, and emphasizing the fictional settings with ambiguity as he is not describing his own experiences but countering the dominant ideology.

Crace's style of course also features much realist description, particularly of nature and the pastoral, whether imaginary or factual. Crace incorporates pastoral traditions throughout his novels with a technique which recalls romanticism, presenting a binary opposition of the rural as a natural state verses an encroaching urban capitalism, which dislocates characters from their sense of community. The pastoral is used in *Continent* to represent this disruption of rural tradition by urbane modernity but also its adaptation and resilience, which is further explored in *Arcadia*, *Signals of Distress* and *Harvest.* The fabulist mode offers one alternative method of engaging with political themes without presenting a divisive or reductive diatribe or detracting from the aesthetics of poetic language. The personal strategy of poetics employed

by Crace's prose, relating to Longinus and the rhetorical sublime of poetry/oratory, are not an exclusive feature. As Newman noted of modern (Twentieth Century) fiction,

> It goes without saying that the novelist has encroached out of necessity upon territory once thought to be the exclusive domain of other genres. And it is clear over the past fifty years that the sentence as a synaesthetic unit can accomplish anything a line of poetry can – in terms of rhythm, heightened metaphor, or metonymy – prosody has become the province of the prose… there is not a single poetic convention or effect, including closure, which has not been reconstituted and amplified by contemporary fictional technique' (p.116).

With the storyteller style and creative and imaginative freedom of fabulist magical realism, postcolonial concerns of representation and binary euro-centric discourse can be addressed subtly, without distracting from the narrative or embellished language. As noted, Crace's work is often moralistic allegory, as later chapters will discuss. The more communal tone of the storyteller among *Continent*'s narrators, for example, makes any moralism more palatable than a realist diatribe on postcolonial exploitation. The tone of orality developed for *Continent* is reminiscent of Plato as characterized by Harold Innis in *Empire and Communication* (1950), therefore perhaps lending itself to dialectic debate. However, Crace's fabulism can be regarded primarily as a practical personal strategy for the task of completing commissioned fiction rather than simply adversarial.

Crace incorporates autobiographical elements, such as his Africa memories in *Continent,* and a more empirical mode of realism, such as the detailed decompositions within *Being Dead,* so is not ideologically opposed to such writing. He has also produced prose imitating 'entertainment' genre fiction, such as the thriller emulating *All That Follows* but, as the relative failure of that book

demonstrated, Crace's artistic strengths are better served by more fabulist strategy befitting the poetic prose. Definitions of fabulism are fluid and, as seemly with all literary terminology, problematic. As Charles Newman pointed out,

> It is epistemologically as absurd to think that one can create a novel from words alone as it is to suppose that one can journalistically slice up a life and pass it off as a triumph of the imagination. It is psychologically absurd to think of a work of art as completely self-contained. Fiction is always in a primary sense derivative, reciprocally evocative in spite of itself.' (p.90).

Terminology such 'realism' and 'fabulism' may seem redundant, or at least reductive as such forms of fiction are too interrelated and intertextual to be diametrically opposed. In this study these terms are employed as strategic emphases rather than separate, alternative modes.

1.2 Neoliberalism: A Grand Narrative

It is with some irony that Crace's change of career from journalism to literary publishing was enabled by the revived affluence of post-Thatcherism in the UK and growing market for multicultural literary fiction following the success of Salam Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). While Crace would benefit from this development as professional author, his works subtly nip the hand which feeds it with counternarratives to post-capitalism and the myth of individualism, emphasizing the influence of community over the individual and the often-devastating loss of such a social system to economic forces of profit-driven progress, from the redundant stone-crafters of *The Gift of Stones,* the exploited social outcasts of *Quarantine,* to the Elizabethan villagers of *Harvest* losing their homes to Tudor land enclosure as open fields were claimed as private property and given to more profitable sheep, heralding the beginnings of modern capitalism. To analyse Crace's romanticism of unfortunate communities undergoing post-industrial social change, it is important to define the ethos of neoliberalism and Crace's opposition to it as evident in his work.

The terms neoliberalism and capitalist realism are employed throughout this study to denote the shifting social, cultural, and economic conditions during the time of Crace's writing and publishing of literary fiction. This is done with the proviso that such terms are as controversial and problematically unclear as definitions of 'realism' and 'postmodernism', without simple or standardized meanings. The exact nature or even the indisputable existence of 'neoliberalism' are subjects for monographs of their own, but I will attempt to explain as follows for the purpose of this survey.

Neoliberalism[11] as the ethos first emerged within academia from the University of Chicago, and later cultivated as an ethos by the Mont Pelerin Society—a think tank of intellectuals, academics, and business leaders, convened in 1947 by economist Friedrich von Hayek, and included Milton Friedman and Karl Popper. Inspired by the classic liberalism of the Enlightenment[12], the gathering's utopian goals were partly in response to European fascism and Soviet collectivism, advocating for individualistic free enterprise to replace many of the functions of government and avoid another world war between competing nation states. The more radical political philosophy of Hayek in particular would influence world leaders such as Ronald Regan and Margret Thatcher, guiding the gradual shift towards deregulated, privatized market-driven globalization in a western-dominated capitalist post-war world following the failure and collapse of the Soviet Union.

Months before the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Francis Fukuyama was already speculating on an epochal victory of 'Western Liberalism' over 'updated Marxism' is his essay 'The End of History?' for *The National Interest* (1989, pp.3). While generally triumphant in tone, Fukuyama concluded that this predicted finale of geopolitical contest between economic systems and philosophies would be 'a very sad time' (p.15), characterized by nostalgia, and with a loss of both diametric political identity and the affirming cultural production inspired by Cold War division. Crace's characters can also be seen to reflect the uncertainties of Neoliberalism's assent. His protagonists are largely cynical or disillusioned, mostly devoid of active political ideology and concerned instead with practical survival, environmental changes and

[11] The existence and dominance of Neoliberalism was acknowledged by the International Monetary Fund in their critical report '*Neoliberalism: Oversold?*' (2016) by Jonathan D. Ostry, Prakash Loungani, and Davide Furceri: https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2016/06/ostry.htm

[12] Namely the individualist principles of civil liberty, economic freedom, and betterment through education, combined with more social liberalist ideals of equality and justice. The post-war balance of free-market economics with social welfare and state financial regulation

their loss of future from such existential forces as globalised economics (*Continent*), land reform (*Harvest)*, wavering faith and sanity (*Quarantine*), or simply their own mortality (*Being Dead*).

Without the binary opposite of Soviet communism during the Cold War, the ethos for critical politics in an emerging global neoliberalism became opaque and open to speculation, as noted by Mitchum Huehls and Rachel Greenwald Smith in their *Neoliberalism and Contemporary Literary Culture (2017)*:

> Authors of literary fiction have been wrestling with similar questions for at least two decades, producing texts that challenge readers to imagine what it would mean to mean differently, for meaning and value to derive not from referential acts of representation but from being's relation to other beings, as well as its relative position in space' (p.15).[13]

The ethos of Neoliberalism as it has emerged in practice essentially counters the principle of Keynesian state-governed economies of centralized expertise by framing society as an open marketplace, to be checked and balanced primarily by the forces of international competition and foreign investment. Dynamic individualism and entrepreneurism, with an individualist profit motive, were promoted as key social drivers. As a result, this ethos also idealizes economics and the market model as an objective science, with the guiding quantifying principle of profit akin to natural law, rather than utopian, in direct opposition to the communal organisation understood of early human hunter-gatherer societies. It also posited the priority of government to be more *laissez-faire* economic financial management and minimizing national debt

[13] Huehls and Smith do not include Jim Crace but this study will illustrate the above citation can effectively summarise his methodology of fabulism.

rather than equilibrist interventionism or social welfare. The natural and objective adaptability of the free market would set prices, which therefore determine value without moralistic or ideological interference. This can be considered in terms of Gregory Claeys' definition of the postmodern utopian impulse as, with the declining theocratic promise of a rewarding afterlife, 'humankind seizes its own destiny. It recognizes human deficiencies and attempts to contain them within a system of regulations and customs enforced by public opinion' (*Utopia,* 2020, p.18).

The emphasis of neoliberalism is on improving human efficiency and increasing luxury, quantified by economic value.[14] This philosophy found traction during a profit-motivated decline of 'embedded liberalism', the rise of 'stagflation' in the 1970s within western economies, and the ideological push of the Cold War to oppose the socialist extreme of the Soviet Union. The 1980s marked the gradual shift towards the subsequent 'dis-embedded' period, phasing out post-war policies of wealth distribution and financial regulation, and instigating a general disenfranchisement of labour unions. The paradigm shift of this period also heralded a new global market apparatus. In the UK in the 1980s, against the backdrop of economic woes and social unrest, Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her government implemented a neoliberal project which would profoundly alter British society, as observed by such contemporary journalists as Jim Crace. This ascending neoliberal ideology opposed the more interventionist and centralist practices of the preceding 'embedded liberalism' by reorganizing society around principles of the free markets, private property rights and the democracy of consumerism.

[14] initially produced embedded liberalism, or the 'Keynesian Compromise', while Neoliberalism emerged in the 1970s as the uneasy balance finally tipped in favour of free-market economics.

For the UK-brand of neoliberal ideology that became known as Thatcherism, deregulated private enterprise and the individualist entrepreneurial spirit were the key drivers of wealth and innovation. This can be seen in stark contrast to the postwar socialist reforms of the welfare state, based on the 1942 Beveridge Report, and the values held by lifelong Labour supporters like Crace. As noted by Patricia Waugh (2010), "towards the end of Thatcher's period of office… writers began to signal the emergence of a 'new world order' (p.120). Works such as Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* (1987), Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989), Malcolm Bradbury's *Doctor Criminale* (1992) critiqued the nostalgically imperialist British national identity fostered during Thatcherism as a reaction to both postcolonial multiculturalism and an increasingly challenged working-class identity with the reduction of local British manufacturing during this period of neoliberal globalization. *Continent*, would certainly fall into this category, which links Neoliberalism with colonialism. Neoliberalism was more explicitly characterized as a dominant and imperialist ideology by David Harvey in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005).

> Neoliberalism has has meant, in short, the financialization of everything. Through the development of new markets in areas previously thought of beyond market reach – land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution – new financial instruments and new institutions have emerged, entrenching the dominance of market logic in every aspect of social life" (p.33).

A critique of neoliberalist policy and its social consequences could argue that there is an inherent discrepancy between the championing of individual freedom and the demand for state coercion to protect such entrepreneurial rights, property, and liberties. Critics would also attest that, despite an idealistic utopia of competition within a free market, neoliberalism is little more than a political project for maintaining

and protecting a small economic global elite. For those engaged on the political left, such as Jim Crace, the result of economic neo-liberalization has only exacerbated the polarization of wealth and exploitation of labour created by the classism of industrialized social hierarchy, facilitating financial debt, and increasing job insecurity for the vast majority within developed populations, as well as potential cataclysmic climate change from consumerist demands for natural resources.

Neoliberalism as understood in this study is an ethos concerned with idealized macro-economics and profit-maximalization as integral to social progress, framed as an empirical reordering of reality. Following the Cold War and the supposed 'end of history', this dominant quality was noted by Fredic Jameson in *The Seeds of Time* (1994): "It seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; perhaps that is due to some weakness in our imaginations" (p.xxii). As concurringly noted by Slavoj Źižek in the political aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, during which democratic governments were obligated to immediately support failing private banks with state expenses long denied to publicized environmental and heath crises, "it is Capital which is the Real of our lives" (*Living in the End Times*, 2011, p.334), Meanwhile, the observable negative consequences of neoliberalism's exploitation and economic polarization can be presented as inevitable and common features of human civilization regardless of ideology, and so can only be challenged, according to Mark Fisher, "if it is shown to be in some way inconsistent or untenable; if, that is to say, capitalism's ostensible 'realism' turns out to be nothing of the sort" (*Capitalist Realism*, 2009, p.16).

As if in response to Jameson's lament for imaginative alternatives, the novels of Jim Crace counter the capitalist realism of market logic with alternative realities to explore neoliberalism's detrimental consequences to local communities, environments, and human values not so easily quantifiable by market price. This study seeks to interpret the novels of Jim Crace from this critical ideological perspective and build on existing scholarship by exploring Crace's mythopoeic technique in a tradition of postmodern fantasy and storytelling narrative style relating to post-capitalism. Works such as *Arcadia* provide a fantastical illustration of the disenfranchisement of workers within a deregulated marketplace without describing any real-world social environments, while *Quarantine* serves as an allegory for public mental health issues. With non-autobiographical fabulism, such works can be read as the product of a political author consciously removed from the narrative. According to Žižek, the Lacanian concept of psychological fantasy is 'to be reduced to a gaze observing the world in the condition of the subject's nonexistence' (P.80). By employing a mythic mode of fabulism in his prose, presenting imaginary settings rather than verisimilitude representations of actual places and primary world politics, Crace effectively removes his political self to observe socio-economic power relations in a mode of epistemological and philosophical fabulism, without falling into a divisive or distracting formal exposition on such topics.

1.3 ***Academia*: Contemporary Post-War Fiction**

Crace's works can be read as being influenced more by postmodernist texts of world literature rather than canonized classics of any British literary tradition (most of which Crace openly admits to not having read and thusly not responding to with his own work) [17]. Crace's use of the storyteller mode can be read as a subversive detournement by recontextualizing a narrative style associated with the developing world to critique the cultural assertions of western neoliberalism. In his 1988 *The New Yorker* review of Adbelrahman Munif's novel *Cities of Salt* (1984), John Updike critiqued the text as being 'insufficiently Westernized to produce a narrative of that which feels much like what we call a novel. His voice is that of a campfire explainer'[18]. This didactic and authoritative narrative voice of a 'campfire explainer', alluding to a concept of premodern universalist storytelling, rather than a more modern form of internalized and purposefully unreliable narrator. The fable-like narrative voice is characteristic of Crace: modern English prose but uncommonly rhythmic, lacking familiar colloquialisms or idioms, without overt irony or intertextuality. Such features evoke this older tradition of oral storytelling in what could be said to be a style of romantic logocentrism, to borrow Derrida's term; the appropriation of an oral storytelling mode to evoke an authenticity outside the dominant ideology. In Marxist terms, it could be defined as an emulated pre-class narrative voice, encoded as if to predate the commercial novel, and offering a

[17] A typical remark being used as the headline of the following interview: Evening Standard. 2013. *Jim Crace: 'I've never read a Dickens and I've never read a Hardy. Or a Brontë. Or a Virginia Woolf. Or a Henry James'*.
[18] Cited by Deb Siddhartha in her online article, *The Rise of The Global Novelist*, 2017.

counterpoint of tradition against progress, as a more conventional style of realist literary narrative denotes the transactional modernity of the publishing industry.

A criticism of Crace's style might be that he is not clear or assertive in his allegories when critiquing contemporary politics and does little to push the creative limits of the medium. However, by avoiding divisively overt predilections, Crace also maintains ambiguity in heavily symbolist and didactic narratives. As noted by Robert Hodge (1990), literary style is obviously integral to its meaning, and 'a marked style is normally formed in a situation of opposition' (p.95). Mythic modes of narrative can evoke a primal function of storytelling to construct social meaning, solve enigmas and address transgression of knowledge. The process can offer some comfort for dramatic social change.

Crace has repeatedly emphasized his own prose as fabulism rather than autobiographical realism by framing his prose as unrelated to his personal life. However, as Crace does incorporate realist descriptive technique to counterbalance his poetic style, this study does not intend to posit realism and fabulism as being in opposition or as mutually exclusive modes. As illustrated by Murdoch's polemic against her definition of journalistic dryness, it might be easy and invitingly dramatic to reduce post-war literature to reductive dichotomies of essentially good verse bad, new verses old, experimental verses traditional, or relevancy verses redundancy. Much literary commentary has been framed accordingly. Maureen Duffy, for example, in her 1988 lecture, 'New Trends in British Fiction', presented a developing dichotomy of resurging 'Middle Class Realism'[20], exemplified by David Lodge's *Nice*

[20] As cited by Mark Currie in *Metafiction* (1995), p.93.

Work (1988) and Margret Drabble's *The Radiant Way* (1987), against a regurgitation of established style and convention, as well as an unimaginative 'retreat into history' to reaffirm inherited and ethnically exclusive concepts of identity, which included Crace's *The Gift of Stones.* However, such categorization can be said to be arbitrary, as the work of Lodge is more roundly satirical than slice-of-life traditional realism, for example, and *The Gift of Stones* is more parabolic and allegorical in its prehistoric setting, with Crace's novels generally unconcerned with historical detail beyond employing enough (often invented) to conjure a sense of mimetic authenticity.

As another example of forced dichotomy within journalistic literary discourse, in her provocative piece for the *New York Review*, 'Two Paths for the Novel' (2008), Zadie Smith commented on a diverse yet simultaneously homogenous camp of bourgeois 'lyrical realism', as opposed to more avant-garde experimental fiction being written by authors such as Tom McCarthy. While the 'lyrical' quality refers to a more heightened dramatic and stylized form of realism, which might categorize Crace, the piece echoed a previous dichotomy by the reviewer Dale Peck that the two pre-dominant strains of Anglophonic fiction were 'recherché postmodernism and recidivist realism'[21], with the implication that contemporary fiction could be summarily dismissed as one or the other. While any such arbitrary categorization is subjective and amounts to sensationalist journalism and contrary to the pluralism of literature analysed by scholarship, it does serve to illustrate a continuingly inaccurate and even unfair assessment of Crace's allegorical satire as most studies of the author have been journalistic to date, influencing the critical reception of his work as being antirealism and removed from political discourse.

[21] Cited by Richard Bradford in *The Novel Now* (2009), p.70.

The framing of polarized style has not been exclusive to literary journalism. Both Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) and David Lodge's *The Novelist at the Crossroads* (1969), as well as other works championing a certain style of fiction, such as Robert Scholes' *The Fabulators* (1967), have presented such reductionist dichotomies that have since been revisited and readdressed by their authors. While such dichotomies represent a simplification, they are also contrived more provocatively as dramatic devices for engendering public discussion rather than advancing academic study of the subject. An alternative was proposed by Irish novelist Rob Doyle: literature being either broadly conventional or broadly experimental with established boundaries in accordance with Pound's maxim of 'Make It New'[22]. While Crace's prose is not modernist in the sense of conveying fragmentary internalized experiences, it does represent a form of experimentation with narrative mode to create 'newness'. It would be productive to consider Crace in terms of individual authors' approaches to broadly mimetic fiction, or realisms, rather than through labelling or categorization to be placed in binary relationships. As Gasiorek (1995) puts it, realism is a capacious form commited to the representation of ever-changing circumstances and understanding, allowing a diversity of narratives. I would argue, therefore, Crace's approach should be discussed as an individual strategy for novels rather than belonging in or outside any literary or theoretical camp.

As Tew notes, Crace has endeavoured to produce self-reflexive, experimental postmodernism is the manner of Rushdie, J.G. Ballard or B.S. Johnson but he has cited the playful experimentation from world literature by Calvino and Primo Levi as a

[22] As cited during Rob Doyle's Shakespeare & Company lecture, '*An Introduction to Experimental Writing'*, 2017.

strong influence, and in terms of context his works remain responses to social change within postmodern culture (albeit from a position of marginality), even if not direct applications of theory, with several prominent features of postmodernism: contradiction, permutation, discontinuity, randomness, extreme descriptions and contrasts. Crace has spoken of the act of walking being key to his creative process and how ambulation features in all his works (Tew, p.5), with his imaginary landscape wrought with invented detail. A connection can also be drawn to the Situationist methodology of psychogeography, with walking as a subversive act against urban planning and diverging from designated paths, as well contemporary literary works by Iain Sinclair, Ballard and Will Self critiquing neo-capitalist, Thatcherite redevelopment, with psychogeography's characteristic political opposition to authority.

While critics such as Frank Kermode often fail to detect a political position in Crace's prose, the narratives continue a tradition of political art with dislocation and mischievous subversion. Another concern of Psychography is the loss of tradition and community to the uncaring forces of modern capital, a prominent theme in Crace's work and evident in his embellished stylings meant to conjure the spirit of oral storytelling. The resulting dislocation is an escape from modernity in search of authentic experience, eulogizing nature and the natural (though not the geographic) landscape with fresh meaning, free from the familiar matrix as well as reflecting the loss of historicity in a postmodern culture of recycled iconography of mass reproduction.

Crace's prose is fundamentally postmodern with its confluence of narratives, double-coding of old with new, rumination on the effects of technological progress on cultures, counterpointing to late-capitalism, and the instability of identity – 'wrestling with the world', as J.G. Ballard put it.[34] There also elements of a twenty-first century post-postmodernism. Crace's strategically undefined metaxis between real-world and imaginary setting, parabolic style of myth and neo-romanticism in his use of the pastoral adhere to a definition of 'metamodernism' proposed by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010)[35], who emphasize a sense of placelessness between modern reordering and postmodern disordering (p.12). This metamodern atopognosia can be recognised in Crace's style of disorientalism.

Crace also incorporates subtle elements of satire, such as invented and entirely fictional epitaphs. The very opening framing device of *Continent* began this tradition with a quotation by the ancient historian Pycletius, a fictional creation of Crace but accepted as genuine by certain unwitting critics, after which Crace continued with the satirical tradition, as he admitted in *The Guardian* (2006):

> My first seven novels were flattered by sham epigraphs from invented works by counterfeit authors, including Pycletius, Emile Dell'Ova, and the 'excavationst' Sir Harry Penn Butler. It always cheered me up when my books were badly received to learn that the scholarly critic was nevertheless more than familiar with the works of my bogus epigrapher. The Toronto Star informed me that Pycletius was 'the Greek historian and geographer', while the TLS, as you'd expect, considered his works to be 'arcane and irksomely septimal'. The Washington Post judged Dell'Ova to be 'a sadly neglected aphorist' and the New York Review of Books swallowed 'the real archaeologist, Sir Harry Penn Butler' hook, line and sinker. Even Frank Kermode (in this paper) fell for 'Harry' (evidently believing that as a fellow knight he could abandon formality and drop the 'Sir'). It was only after I succeeded in smuggling a solus entry

[34] As recorded in *Extreme Metaphors: Collected Interviews* (2014)
[35] Vermeulen, T. and van den Akkar, R., 2010. 'Notes on Metamodernism', *Journal of Aethetics and Culture*, 2(1). This article is primarily concerned with cultural theory and fine art criticism but has been applied here to literary study as it appears relevant.

> about Pycletius into the Oxford Companion to English Literature that I decided critics were too easy game and that I should direct my mischief elsewhere.

Such irreverence recalls the famous Sokal hoax of 1996 and displays an undermining of hierarchal authority befitting Crace's personal political leanings, as does the implied derision of the literature industry and British honours system. It also illustrates a self-conscious discomfort with the perceived pompousness and class associations of the traditional English novel, which Crace's writing stylistically works to bypass with its parabolic evocations of oral storytelling.[37]

Another notable trait at odds with contemporaries is Crace's focus on community in his works. Francis Booth (2012) states the novel as a medium is

> Necessarily suited to individualism, not just because it is historically linked to the rise of bourgeois individualism and so tends to depict the individual set against society (not necessarily antagonistically) but because of this capacity to set free the individual's imagination, and because the activity of reading is usually conducted in private (p.60).

A pre-class style appropriating storytelling is part of a strategy to avoid this association with bourgeois materialist individuality. Booth also makes the point that in the conventional novel, the individual undergoes change where the society does not. However, in Crace's novels, the emphasis is on the society or community confronting change rather than the individuals, necessitating a less conventional, less internalized narrative voice with a greater association of communal tradition to best illustrate this. By adopting elements of a pre-class 'campfire explainer' fabulist

[37] It should be remembered that mischievous deception has long been a hallmark of the novel, dating back to the earliest examples in European culture, such as *Robinson Crusoe and Don Quixote*, originally being presented as genuine memoirs documenting genuine experiences.

form of storytelling as an alternative to more individualist realism, Crace provides a counter-narrative to the promoted capitalist fantasy of progressive self-regulating globalization. It also addresses an interregnum of political identity in the wake of the cultural shifts of Thatcherism and post-capitalist globalization, an identity crisis on a scale difficult to comprehend or articulate.

While socially conservative Thatcherism promoted a reactionary nostalgia for tradition and historical values as a remedy for contemporary social issues, the storyteller mode of Crace's counternarratives allows an exploration of premodern tradition to illustrate community and parity as essential social features, rather than the self-reliance and individualism promoted by neoliberal consensus. The orality of the fabulist mode presents a means to identify what shared cross-cultural values can rival the empirical logic of profit. Crace presents counter-narratives and alternative perspectives within the political context of neoliberal globalization, specifically individualistic Thatcherism within the UK and the loss of communities and the undermining of post-war welfare state to the forces of global economic progress.

2. *Non-Continental:* A Postcolonial Style

While discussing his methodology for *Continent*, responding to how Anglo-Western writers have freer rein to appropriate African imagery and essentially plunder the landscape for symbolism, Crace elaborates on his theory of long-established cultural exploitation in his 'Imaginary Africa' article for *Quarto* (1981):

> The cavalier imagination of the white novelist is rooted in the non-fiction of the Victorian era when a vast European audience first encountered Africa, vicariously of course, through travelogues and exploration dairies. Hefty volumes from Livingstone, Burton, Baker and Stanley sold by the cart-load. The '"long walks" of African exploration appealed to the Victorian taste for the energetic and bizarre and, particularly, to the literary cult of rugged individualism.'

As the journalist and writer JM Ledgard noted in *The New Yorker* (2013), 'journalism speaks essentially to the moment, literature has the long reach'. Crace's move away from realism was also a move away from political meta-narrative and dominant social discourse, focusing instead on the marginalized communities of globalization. By appropriating and applying a more experimental form of fabulism informed by international postcolonial texts, Crace has been able to offer subtle counter-narratives during the rise of post-Thatcher neoliberalism alongside the decline of British industries and the consensus-based post-war political project of Labour. These works are in aesthetic solidarity with magical realist narratives challenging authoritarian oppression and thus stylistically political by nature. While Crace repeatedly states he is 'hardly an autobiographical writer' and his prose fiction

instead 'tend(s) to spring from something puzzling or troubling from beyond my own experience rather than events in my own life.'[40]

Continent developed from more formally realist short stories based on Crace's experiences in the Sudan and Botswana, and the location is evoked even with specific reference. The local characters do not dwell on pastoral descriptions as their surrounding would not be exotic to them and their unromantic concerns of making a living and navigating social hierarchy are commonly applicable. Therefore, rather than being an artistically adversarial fabulist and devotedly anti-realist, Crace's can be seen as a particular style of realism among other realisms of Contemporary British fiction, with an individual strategy of disorientalism (an as anti-Orientalism), emphasizing the poetic possibilities of prose to achieve his artistic aims while satisfying his own ethical and political concerns, as well as producing a commercially viable novel. Alan Sinfield (1997), discussing postwar literary criticism and predominantly middle-class readership, noted how 'the leisure elite felt confident enough in its superior civilization to universalize its culture' (p.329). This sense of conventional literary realism representing Western hegemonic logic is what Crace reacted against while developing a fabulist alternative mode for presenting dialectics of globalization that would not inherently position the forces of economic progress in a favourable binary opposition to disappearing traditional cultures.

As previously mentioned, the explicitly invented settings of *Continent* are partly a response to Africa's traditional representation in English literature. As Crace pointed out his *Quarto* reviews of Dambudzo Marechera's *Black Sunlight* (1980) and Stanley

[40] promotional material, www.jim-crace.com homepage

Nyamfukudza's *The Non-Believer's Journey* (1980), 'Fictional Africa has been largely a creation of the European imagination, an overseas posting for Caucasian dilemmas' (p.19), and Crace resolves this ethical issue of misrepresentation with an explicitly imaginary creation for his own dialectical dilemmas, as the primary focus of the novel is not directly related to any African politics. Within the historical context of neoliberalist economic social changes of Thatcherism and Reaganomics, this employment of fabulist technique can also be taken as domestic social commentary. In John J. Su's *Imagination and the Contemporary Novel* (2011), the point is made that 'If (Richard) Kearney is correct that capitalism has managed to affect a basic subversion of reality, such as that it has become difficult to distinguish between reality and advertisement, then questions about where a person acquires knowledge and how he she verifies truth becomes important (p.4).

The *Quarto* articles do mark Crace's change in style towards enigmatic fabulism and away from the detailed clarity of Crace's prior journalism, as his prose addresses a different set of objectives to his previous professional reporting. Newman described a form of mimetic realism depicting the primary world as journalistic, and the epistolary origins of the modern novel are well established. Rachael Scarborough King in *Writing to the World* (2019) details the development of the British novelistic narrative voice (or 'classic' narrative voice, as Newman might put it, as appropriating epistolary narrative from print media during the eighteenth century:

> Epistolary narration provided a mimetic way to represent this sphere, as the novel could be transmitted in the mode of communication – the letter – that symbolized the networked media of 'the world,'… But the letter genre, because of the bridges it built to the varieties of epistolary print… also presented a lack of authority (p.160).

While simple characterizations of style are palpably problematic, and popular classical authors, such as Jane Austen, are notable for drawing upon and appropriating a range of alternative narrative modes, such as the gothic and the pastoral, the epistolary form was clearly predominant in the development of what one might conceptualize as conventional realism. Scarborough King describes the epistolary mode of eighteenth-century novels granting a sense of accessibility to the reader in a recognizable mode of discourse but also adopting the fleetingness, factiousness, and controversy of letters in print, as the novel developed into a mode of individualistic, subjective interpretation. The 'worlds' depicted in these novels by authors such as Fielding and Austen 'continued to be composed of its media: it was the London social sphere of public entertainments, private letters, and border-crossing gossip' (p.160).

David Lodge writes in *The Modes of Writing* (1977) that, while 'realism' is a problematically reductive term for categorizing literature (p.32), it could be said that realism can be understood as fundamentally historiographical, with literary narrative considered more realistic the more it adheres to the dominant historical record. Lodge further comments that "all varieties of nineteenth-century historiography can be seen as shades within the spectrum of a general orthodoxy" until radical philosophical challenges to historiography came from Nietzsche and Marx (p.33), as well as other vital theorists such John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft influencing suffragettes and women's rights. These shifts in the understanding of reality would allow a great plurality of interpretation, with studies of morality and civil duty from Victorian critics moving to a focus on class, economics, gender roles and critiques of

empire. Furthermore, these radical alternatives to historical references could be seen as helping inspire more non-realistic literary modes such as deconstructionist metafiction and a more imaginative mythopoeia. This can be seen as relevant to capitalist realism's connection to the political orthodoxy of neoliberalism, with authors such as Crace also seeking alternative counternarratives.

Crace's prose takes a further step of omitting details of geographic location, with a deliberate lack of description concerning the ethnicity of his invented continent's inhabitants. This maintains the intended dislocation, hence lending a more mythical sense of universality, and also a counterpoint to the traditional eroticization of Africa in English literature, as noted by Crace in his *Quarto* reviews. These criticisms of African appropriation agree with Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), in which Said observed the constructed 'Orient' and non-western peoples in colonial fiction were portrayed as "mysterious and exotic, but… inferior and needing domination" (p.207)[43]. The lack of stated skin tones in *Continent* avoids the binary opposition to European whiteness and associated advanced civilization, such as the blackness of Africans in Imperial British literature denoting a primal masculinity and an exotic savagery. The colonial dichotomy was neatly summarized by McClintock in Imperial Leather (1995) as a reinforcement of perceived moral superiority in accordance with the historical narrative of the time:

> Racial difference was figured in the Victorian imagination as both the threat of a return to a savage, atavistic state and as an alluring mystery – both primal and exotic. This binary opposition served to legitimate imperial domination as a civilizing mission (p.24).

[43] The term Disorientalism for this study was conceived in direct opposition to the othering Orientalism as articulated by Said of colonial literature, as I argue Crace evokes cultural parity and universal applicability in his fabulist style, countering cultural hierarchy.

While *Continent* is drawn from Crace's experiences, observations and writings about time spent in Sudan, Botswana, and Africa generally, with a critically postcolonial perspective of representations of Africa, the developed style bears an obvious connection to African oral traditions. While *Continent* deliberately does not address any specific countries or cultures, its origins are in Crace's experiences of Africa, a continent through which he travelled extensively, including periods living and working in Khartoum and the Botswanan village of Molepolole. An earlier fiction by Crace, 'Refugees' (1977), published by the Socialist Challenge as the winner of its short story competition, used Molepolole as its setting and socio-political context. The competition judge, Terry Eagleton, noted an unobtrusive realism while Crace has dismissed the early work as being thin and didactic. Stylistically, there are similarities to Crace's later fabulism, particularly in the vivid imagery of metaphor and simile: however, the narrative voice is in keeping with a more conventional free indirect third-person descriptive style than the emulated oral storytelling featuring prominently in Crace's novels.

3. *Continent*: Fabulist Realism

Continent is a set of seven embedded stories connected only by their setting across a fictitious, unnamed continent, hence the non-specific title. The title may also refer to the seven stories as individual 'countries' forming a whole and being unspecific enough to essentially apply to any culture, as a continent is a geographical entity rather than a political one. While Crace's eventual approach to *Continent* as allegory can be taken as a partial response to postcolonial theory and critiques of European fiction misrepresenting African countries, his subsequent approaches to literary fiction have not been deliberately written according to parallel developments in academic literary theory or as part of any artistic collective.

James Wood has written that allegory exists to 'literalize and simplify' and when employed for political commentary may prevent the narrative becoming overwhelmingly didactic by remaining abstract, as allegory must 'stop at ultimacy' to avoid specific referencing of real events while tackling broader themes. The use of allegory in *Continent* also served to help Crace avoid the postcolonial imposition of Eurocentric knowledge over a stylized depiction of Africa where enlightenment is represented by colonizing forces, while the indigenous cultures are misrepresented as primitive or savage. As a counternarrative, Crace's fabulist invention of a fictional and allegorical 'seventh' continent presents the validity and authenticity of local narrative without appropriation or misrepresentation.

While Crace has acknowledged Joseph Conrad as an influence, he has also described the cultural legacy of *Heart of Darkness* as the kind of negative association he wished to avoid. The structure of *Continent*, as a nest of allegorical parables, evades such orientalism with the 'anti-novelistic' nature of allegory, as Wood put it, by directing meaning from the narrative itself. *Continent* thusly ceases to be a commentary about the globalized Africa and becomes an abstraction of globalization itself. In the opening story, 'Talking Skull', a Swedish film crew arrive by helicopter to fetishize the quaint pastoral scene of a local farm, which is actually a cynical business run the narrator Lowdo's father to exploit native superstitions. The modernity of the helicopter does not inspire awe as Lowdo's father is more concerned with practical commerce than culture:

> My father is unimpressed (or so he claims) by the fuss and commotion. It is all inconvenient. Already, he complains, customers have been scared away. He has lost money; he has lost time; his milk does not last for ever [sic]; the clatter of the helicopter has upset his herd (p.19).

The farmer feigns indignity to secure valuables from the film crew, thus exploiting the exploiters. The narrative tone of storytelling, rhythmically composed as oral rhetoric, adds the *ethos* of local authenticity rather than external observation. With the dislocation of allegory, the ambiguity of setting mirrors the moral ambiguity of the characters without projecting it onto any specific community, presenting it instead as a common trait in all cultures.

Continent developed from Crace's earlier and more conventionally realist short stories, including 'Cross-Country' (1976), successfully published in *The New Review* but drastically rewritten for inclusion in *Continent* with inspiration from the magical

realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Crace would develop his own fabulist techniques while combining mimetic, realist, real-world cities and details as offered at the beginning of the novel with narrator Lowdo's address to fellow students, establishing a liminal locale but not an entirely fantasy setting:

> You talk of trips to Paris and New York; you sit in cafes, unembarrassed, and ordered wines and beers and shallow cups of coffee in French and English; you talked politics and business and literature; you made liaisons; at private dinner parties you were at ease with artichokes and avocadoes, with cigars and charades. For you this is one world' (p.3-4).

The orality of rhetoric is evident in traces of blank verse meter, paired alliterations, and monosyllabic beats, both playful and confrontational, stating an intent to be aesthetically pleasing in style and, with a subtle touch of metafiction, challenging the assumed middle-class, bourgeois readership of the book itself, as a work of literary fiction. Crace also circumvents any reader preconceptions, or misconceptions, about his source of inspiration by dislocating the narrative with an allegorical setting. This also prevents Crace of misappropriating any native narratives for his own, an increasing concern of postcolonial literary studies.

In an article for the digital publication *Electric Literature*, literary editor Alexandra d'Abbadie, while praising the graphically uncompromising depictions of the Herero and Namaqua genocide in Thomas Pynchon's *V* (1963) and *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), detailed a sense of cultural colonization in 'Western' literature's depictions of Africa that still resonates:

> As a brown, Créole métisse from the African island of Mauritius, raised on Edward Said, Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, I'd lost hope that white writers could produce

> something on us so-called “Others” without me choking on my own bile’ (*Electric Lierature*, 2017)

The article also detailed how she felt that, as an African author, ‘the threat of a foreign white writer taking my stories away from me is real’. Crace acknowledged this concern over misappropriation and misrepresentation through reductive or stereotyping narratives in his own online introduction to *The Melody,* as shown above. While Pynchon’s approach was one of overwhelming historical detail and postmodern ironic emotional distance, very much in contrast with Crace’s fabulist dislocation, the same concerns are acknowledged in the same *Quarto* article as Crace criticizes the more common approach of Western realist writers (specifically Michael Crichton, Philip Caputo, William Boyd, David Pownall, John Updike, V.S. Naipual, Frederick Forsyth and, the original sinner, Joseph Conrad) to invent and name a fictional country or region as a symbolic backdrop to avoid obvious postcolonial pitfalls.

As a means of sympathising with native narratives without misappropriation, Crace’s fabulist approach can be considered as English-language variations of magical realism, or ‘epistemological magical realism’ as defined by Maggie Ann Bowers (2004, p.91). In this context, writers like Marquez can be said to employ an ‘ontological magical realism’ that blends literary fiction with the superstitions and folklore of a specific culture to evoke a more metaphysical description of that place. Crace’s draws upon the influence of magical realism as an element of his personal literary technique without any specific geo-cultural associations. As Bowers notes, Calvino can be categorized as the same fabulist mode of Magical Realism as Marquez, as Calvino himself states, his stories, like those of Borges, do not rely on a

recognizable version of reality to support their magical aspects, but are structured around their own 'internal logic'. Calvino's work is often categorized more simply as postmodern narrative and frequently as meta-fiction, due to the attention given in his narratives to the act of writing, reading and artistic creation' (p.64-5). While Crace's novels may not feature the experimental and metafictional structures generally associated with Calvino[50], Crace does pepper his prose with inventions to wryly emphasize the fictional, denaturalized internal world. As Begley commented in *The Paris Review*, Crace 'is a liar. His novels are peppered with invented detail cunningly disguised as fact: Tarbony trees, Boulevard Liqueur, manac beans, Panache automobiles, swag flies, a wise old poet named Mondazy. A careless reader will mistake the make-believe for realist detail—which is all part of the plan' (2003).

The stories of *Continent* are thus free to ruminate on the friction between tradition and modernity without falling into the orientalist trap of misappropriation and depicting Africa as the savage Other to western civilization. As with many of Crace's novels, *Continent* also explores the intended changes imposed upon communities by economic progress. In *Continent*, this relationship ranges from competition and threatened hierarchy in 'Cross-Country' and mutual economic cooperation and (similarly mutual) exploitation in 'Sins and Virtues'. There are obvious themes of third-world exploitation, conflict previously illustrated in Crace's earlier fiction, but in *Continent* this conflict can also be universally interpreted as between the resistance of social conservatism and the more liberal globalism of social mobility, a cultural divide that can apply equally to contemporary Britain as to postcolonial Africa. This culture clash is presented almost immediately in *Continent* with the opening, 'Talking

[50] with the obvious exception of the directly Calvino-inspired *The Devil's Larder*

Skull'. The story and novel begin with a spoken address in the second-person, with the protagonist Lowdo addressing both an audience of fellow students, as well as the reader, immediately establishing a tone or orality, addressing his audience (and the book's readers) as 'internationalists', beneficiaries of globalisation and social mobility through the privilege of university education. The opening also establishes themes of the underlying inequality, privilege and corruption of such social mobility. While Lowdo, budding biologist and ardent advocate of the empirical method, is joining the ranks of globalist graduates, his father continues the family business of freemartin milk based on exploited rural superstitions, dismissing his son's education as 'chatter' without practical or material merit, as illustrated by the fable-within-a-fable of the titular talking skull. Later, wrestling with his lofty aspirations of (Western) empirical scientific principles and the ethical issue of continuing the family trade of charlatanism for profit, Lowdo cynically resolves the dilemma by relating how tradition and modernity are, in some regard, essentially the same:

> You and your science would tell me that coffee doesn't sober, doesn't relax, doesn't relive, doesn't welcome, that it shortens my life, costs a fortune, disrupts the economy of Brazil, and if left too long in the coffee pot will corrode the silver. But try to stop my drinking it! I don't care for the dictatorship of science. Nor do your neighbours. Freedom of choice. Deceive yourself at will, that's the motto of the nation. Harness superstition. Turn it to your advantage. Milk it dry!" (p.24)

The imagined effects of coffee are compared with the superstitions of freemartin milk here illustrate the interrelated nature of tradition and modernity. Likewise, the implied influence of science as inherently transitional social progress is portrayed as naïve and problematic, liking it to an encroaching colonialist supremacy. While not contradicting the benefits of scientific progress, the allegory illustrates how atheism and progressive politics could be misapplied as an ethos as equally dogmatic, exclusionary, and hierarchical as any dominant religion. Crace acknowledges how

superstitions, and religious 'narratives of comfort' can serve a secular social function in later novels, rather than adopting an adversarial atheist perspective, suggesting an internal dialectical argument within the novel through the storytelling mode. The observation also reflects the universalities of truth being explored in the novel, although tradition trumps modernity throughout the book. As Crace himself elaborated in an interview with Andrew Lawless for *Three Monkeys Online* (2005):

> *Continent* is a much more conservative book, with a small c, than I am personally. It takes the way, as all narrative it seems to me does, of the old ways of humankind, of the old man over the young man, as folk tales always do, whereas in my political self I'm a modernist, I'm someone who believes in technological change. So, it was inevitable really unless I was to write lifeless tracts, that I would have to shrug off my political beliefs and allow the books to express their own opinions'[51].

Accordingly, Crace has described his narratives as being more conservative in nature, with storytelling favouring tradition, imparted wisdom, and fateful outcomes rather than individual agency or social mobility, than his own personal progressive political views. This application of storytelling as realism serves to illustrate a dynamic and transactional depiction of social progress. Gains of newness come at an equal cost of traditions and identity, rather than a deterministically Darwinian triumph of social evolution.[53] As noted by Colin Manlove (1999),

> English fantasy is conservative. Even Orwell in *Animal Farm* is effectively so, in portraying any revolutionary ideal as hijacked by tyrannical pigs. English utopias - those of Jefferies, Hudson, Morris or Herbert Read - often look backward to a pastoral ideal, even when set in the future: it is English dystopias that usually portray futuristic societies' (p.198).

[51] Lawless, *Three Monkeys Online* interview
[53] As discussed by Jim Crace in conversation with Sameerah Mahmood. Writers in Conversation Vol. 2 no. 1, February 2015.

As the closing line of ‘Talking Skull’ relates, the sense of tradition represented by Lowdo’s father is intractable to an almost supernatural (therefore illogical) degree:

> My father, rather than weakening and aging, seems, to grow stronger and more vigorous. Has he grown a little taller, even? He has no grey hairs. His back is square and straight. His teeth and eyesight have not deteriorated. I fancy that he fears his heirs and determined to live forever (p.25-26).

This dialect between tradition and modernity could also be seen as articulating a lack of social progress in the face of conservative values (a tempting interpretation in the socio-political context of Thatcherism). It can also be read as Crace giving his narrative over to the technique of storytelling rather than the social realism he originally attempted with earlier short stories in this collection. The success of the oral storytelling technique as a vehicle for vivid poetic imagery is quite evident in the cited example and his debut novel’s commercial success. The discourse is of an internalized dialectic over the progressive qualities of globalization, with Crace and his characters debating the false logic of a science-verses-superstition binary opposition within a market-driven economic framework.

The inspiration from Marquez’s *One Hundred Days of Solitude* (1967) on the tone for oral storytelling is also evident and repeatedly acknowledged by Crace. The effect of dislocation, primary world details and thematic impact of modernity on traditional community is also a clear inspiration from Marquez’s seminal novel:

> In March the gypsies returned. This time they brought a telescope and a magnifying glass the size of a drum, which they exhibited as the latest discovery

> of the Jew of Amsterdam. They placed a gypsy woman at one end of the village and set up the telescope at the entrance to the tent. For the price of five reales, people could look into the telescope and see the gypsy woman an arm's length away. "Science has eliminated distance," Melquíades proclaimed. "In a short time, man will be able to see what is happening in any place in the world without leaving his house." (p.2)

The perception of imported science as almost indistinguishable from magic without an accompanying educational frame of reference is similar in the *Continent* story 'Electricity', with electrical power brought to a modernizing village in 'mangoes of light all along the veranda' (p.129). Similar is the statement of science eliminating distance, electricity is explained to village children in almost magical terms: 'The children do not understand. How can electricity be instantaneous, no sooner in the town centre than on its fringes? How can it be so heedlessly rapid when it has taken so many years to reach us here at all?' (p.130). The explanation is organic: electricity is 'like a message from the brain, no sooner sent than received' (p.130). Again, the generational conflict in the story illustrates the destructive element of modernity on established hierarchy, conveyed sympathetically: 'At home that night, by candlelight, mothers and fathers gravely twitch and shake for their educated children' (p.131). However, the village is not built to accommodate electrical power and the effects are destructive, making the villagers wary of further progress.

The well-intentioned but counterproductive upgrade to electrical power serves as a cautionary tale against asserting modernity and economic development, told from a traditionalist perspective in the storyteller mode to offer an alternative perspective. In acknowledgement of the Marquez influence, *Continent* concludes on a magical realist note, with the delusional company man of 'The Prospect from the Silver Hill'

hallucinating his family being with him after his own capitalist quest of exploitation has driven him insane (a counterpoint of the local influence of Africa corrupting Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*): 'And in the morning when the sun came up and the colours of the hill and its valley accelerated from grey and brown, to red and green, to white, the company agent gathered stones for his family and they breakfasted on snow' (p.167). The agent is an otherwise nameless, allegorical figure denoting a moral lesson in the style of disorientalist local lore, although the exact moral is deliberately left ambiguous.

By comparison, Crace's first attempt at an opening for his first commissioned novel, *The Village of Elder*, abandoned early into the writing process, illustrates a lack of dialectic conflict as being significant:

> Keetley spread his fingers and simultaneously rang the three door-bells. He waited. Nobody answered immediately. Woodlands was silent – no radios, no creaking boards, no dirty water falling through Victorian pipes and flooding at neglected drains. Even the street, falling away in a line of privet and parked cars from the shops to the park, was quiet. Elder Village, at the end of summer, was having a mid-morning nap. Keetley put his ear to Woodlands and then once again tried the three bells, separately and carefully, making sure that each was sounding resolutely.
>
> One plain bell, unmarked, buzzed close by, on the ground floor. Another, marked CHERR, Y., was more distant, an attic bell. The third, marked ALICE, CINDY, LIZ, made no sound at all. Keetley took a chance and put his shoulder to against a once-fine door of Canadian pine. It opened. He entered. And Keetley, limp and throat and migraine, tightened up in the cool of the flagstoned hallway and became unrecognizably alert and catlike and professional. Somewhere in Woodlands was money for bus fares.[54]

There is a hint of fabulism in this early effort with the retelling of the Goldilocks fairy tale as the petty criminal tries three doorbells before deciding one to be 'just right'.

[54] Taken from the archived manuscript for the abandoned novel, viewed at the Harry Ransom center, Austin, Texas.

However, such early prose writing is flat, with a the free-indirect narrative voice tediously and slowly building detail. The location is also invented, with the Elder village meant as a fictional version of the Birmingham suburb of Moseley, with its ironically prosaic-sounding addresses of ‘Woodland’. Crace’s development of a fabulist mode would liberate him from these cluttered suburban realist details with a more direct transmission of themes through unspecified imaginary settings.

This early effort shows the familiar style of impassive descriptive details of landscape, pathetic fallacy, and moral ambiguity as a downtrodden petty criminal is imbued with enough misfortune to invite sympathy. The transition in setting of *Continent* from the specific to the general allows a more direct microcosm of globalization. From ‘Cross-Country’, the following extract illustrates a more economical approach:

> And so ‘Isra and the young poor men of his age were the last ‘brotherhood’ and the old gossips whom the mayor didn’t fear put their hopes on them. It was foolish, for the younger, uncircumcised brothers and sons of the ‘brotherhood’ were better for the village. They read and wrote and spoke English with the runner at the school as if it were their own language. But still the old men preferred ‘Isra and his friends. And secretly they mistrusted the ponderous troupe of pupils who left with their pens and books for the school at eight each day. (p.55)

Technical elements of classical oral rhetoric lend urgency and authority to the narrative voice, such as the triplet of ‘read and wrote and spoke’ and alliteration of ‘ponderous troupe of pupils who left with their pens and books’. The gravitas of oration presents an almost comical contrast to the mundane image of children walking to school, together with the unsettlingly intimate detail of ‘uncircumcised’. This evokes an absurdity to a common scene of modernity, with the English language of narrative ironically presented as an alien, encroaching force. Beginning

the paragraph with the conjunctive phrase ‘And so’ is also an effective contrast to the formal English composition being taught to the children, again evoking dramatic oration or a didactic biblical sermon. The defamiliarization achieved reflects the impact of disorientation from rapid progress on a traditional hierarchy.

By removing the specifics of statehood and nation, even an imaginary nation, Crace not only avoids the ethical issue of misrepresentation but also the process of manufacturing nationalism historically associated with the novel. Katie Trumpener commented in *Bardic Nationalism* (1997) that British literature developed with an ingrained nationalism to address concepts of empire and identity during both international and domestic colonization: ‘Throughout the nineteenth century, indeed, in the new context of the British overseas colonies, the Anglo-Celtic model of literary nationalism that arose in response to British internal colonialism (and that used a conservative model of memory to buttress a movement of radical self-assertion) continues to manifest in its characteristic political strengths and weaknesses’ (p.xiii). Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983) made that point that all nations are imaginary, which further associates the cultural origins of nationalism with the representations of nations within novels:

> The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind… While it has long been a truism within literary studies that the cultural institution of the novel endured well after the official end of European colonialism, how postcolonial authors inherited European notions of a creative imagination as the basis for literary production is less well recognised (p.4,7).

Crace himself made a similar observation of postcolonial African writers while a reviewer for Quarto, critique what he identified as inherited traits of representation. Of Dambudzo Marechera, he commented: 'His mainsprings may be Zimbabwean, but here is a formless fantasy owing more to an overdose of Eng Lit and to loquacious seminars at New College, Oxford, (where the author has studied)'. By omitting nationhood from his prose, Crace avoids any such colonial trappings of inherited imagination. Rather name create a fictional nation or nations, he frames his collected stories as a unifying 'continent', evoking a borderless inclusivity.

In 'Cultures of the Sublime' (2011), edited by Cian Duffy and Peter Howell, English romanticism is characterized as being concerned with the un-representable, and natural phenomena of the divine/infinite. The ubiquitous tropes of Romanticism, as well as the related decline of religious and transference of spirituality, are representations of nature responding to industrialization and mass urbanization as a possible psychological basis within man-made urban environment for maintaining a culture traditional based on interaction with the natural world. Crace's universalist settings, and concern with rural traditions and natural history, both factual and invented, can be seen as a similar response to globalization, explored throughout his early works, exploring impacts of a neoliberal and postcolonial modernity on tradition and community while avoiding specific geographic imaginaries and to emphasize universality and the representation of euro-centric binary cultural dynamic identifiable in the early English novel tradition and the development of realism from the Enlightenment period to eighteenth and nineteenth-century romanticism. One seminal example would be the championing of Anglo-Saxon culture in *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), in which, from a critical postcolonial reading, the protagonist single-

handedly colonizes the fictional Island of Despair and converts his savage companion Friday to Christianity in a consoling affirmation of imperialist culture for its intended contemporary British readership. In contrast, *Continent* adopts the perspective of the vanishing native culture impacted by colonialism and modernization but without romanticizing native cultures by inverting binary dynamics.

The lamentation of lost communities is also prominent in canonical literature. As noted by Ryan Poll (2012), verse such as Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* (1770), 'exemplifies a pervasive literary trope of the vanishing in the late eighteenth century due to an aggressively expanding capitalist modernity' (p.28), with the once communal space reduced to a romanticized memory following the privatization of land enclosure, erasing traditional communities and values. *Continent* depicts tradition as more symbiotic and resilient to the forces of commercial progress (in contrast to Crace's later works in which his own political views are more assertive, as will be discussed in later chapters, particularly with the depiction of land enclosure in *Harvest*) and the pastoral resistance to modernity is devoid of the imagined nostalgia common to conservatism and nationalism, which Crace again avoids with his fabulist dislocation. As Poll also notes, 'in the pastoral imaginary, the processes of production, distribution, and consumption occur, for the most part, in the same space" (p.59), although neither *Continent* nor *The Gift of Stones* present this as any utopian ideal, sharing the same charlatanism, corruption and exploitation as the forces of modernization. This can be taken as in keeping with postmodern literature's resistance to materialism in its scepticism of grand narratives and objective truth. In *Continent*, tradition is as much a mediating power as commercialization.

In *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Fredric Jameson describes realism in literature as 'traditionally in one form or another the central model of Marxist aesthetics as a narrative discourse which unites the experience of daily life with a properly cognitive, mapping or well-nigh "scientific" perspective' (p.90). This might suggest that a self-described leftist author would be more inclined towards a nineteenth century mode of social realism rather than a less 'scientific' mode of storytelling. The promises of salvation via scientific progress are even ridiculed in *Continent*, for example with Lowdo's education in biology derided as unprofitable and ultimately hypocritical chatter and the recorded anthropological observations of Professor Zoea in 'On Heat' being reductive and in opposition to the 'true' nature of the tribal subjects and human sexuality being repressed by the modernised outsiders, as well as omitting the true origin of the narrator. Crace's narrators are typically unreliable in their recollections and reported second-hand experiences, frequently acknowledging the artifice or embellishment of fiction in the telling, a feature of Crace's orality.

Tew references Schopenhauer in relation to the 'On Heat' chapter of *Continent* and how the story illustrates the observation than human understanding requires intuition and imagination as well as rational observation, a duality Crace's work attempt to balance with an infusion of realist detail and fabulist symbolism. This interplay of narrative modes results in a more dialectical text rather than a personal political tract, which can be seen as key to Crace's more artistically successful works. The non-specificity of time and location in *Continent*, as well as the fragmented story structure, reflects the lack of linear progress superseding traditional community. While Crace has described this as a feature of *Continent*'s inherent conservatism,

the prevailing resistance of tradition in the text can be read politically as championing egalitarianism. As Jameson notes on traditional modes,

> the association of Marxism and romance does not discredit the former so much as it explains the persistence and vitality of the latter, which [Northrop] Frye takes to be the ultimate source of and paradigm of all storytelling. On this view, the oral tales of tribal society, the fairy tales that are the irrepressible voice and expression of the underclasses of the great systems of domination, adventure stories and melodrama, and the popular or mass culture of our own time are all syllables and broken fragments of some single immense story (91).

This further illustrates both the universality and political relevancy achieved by adopting fabulism. However, Crace's novels are intended to be parables beyond a simplified presentation of a moral argument, adding ambiguity rather than ideological certainly, and countering the dominant creed of progressive capitalism, as observed locally as Thatcherism in Crace's adopted home of Birmingham and previously chronicled nationally in his journalism, and across the developing world in the form of neoliberal globalization. Neoliberalism can be said to have originated as 'theoretical utopianism' (Huehls and Greenwald Smith, 2017, p.4) with utopia in this context suggesting a fantasy of secular ideas and positive science dispelling traditional myth and religion, as well as collectivist ideology, in the cause of global progress.

By adopting the fabulist mode to hybridize the local and the global, Crace's novels can be seen as journalistic parables of neoliberalism countering this cultural myth of aspirational, progressively western civilization, continuing a tradition of parodying idealistic empiricism and misappropriations of scientific method in the novel dating back to *Frankenstein* (1818) and *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). The worldly natives of *Continent*'s microcosmic universe, for example, are largely ambivalent to the encroaching western forces of science and globalized economies rather than being

awed or terrified by them, recognizing their insights and opportunities, and hypocrisies, as continuations of traditional power dynamics. The exploitative binary of civilization and savagery, traditionally upheld by colonial Western literature, is thusly countered, and levelled with a strategy of inventive ambiguity. With the non-specific temporal and geographical locations, Crace avoids the interpretation of any such lost golden age or idealized future characteristic of romantic or nationalist narratives.

With *Continent*, Crace injects traditional and more romantic forms of orality into literary fiction to counter linear expectations of modernization and social mobility. This counternarrative to liberal progressivism might be interpreted as a conservative, traditionalist perspective. It could also be framed as postmodernist critique by emphasising traditional social dynamics as reoccurring and recontextualised, interrogating the progressive narrative of neoliberalism. With a synthesis of social realism and folkloric storytelling, Crace can explore traditional and progressive cultural forces as symbiotic rather than dualistic. The fabulist approach provides space for alternative, simultaneous interpretations and pluralist discourse.

This can help account for the more poetic elements of Crace's prose. According to Nicholas Roe (2002), the poetic and pastoral Romanticism of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries illustrated the inseparability of politics, nature, science and the imagination during this period, when poetry was a means of social and political intervention. Romantic imagery which draws upon the natural and pastoral can be read as a rejection of socio-political modernity, hierarchy and the status quo, instead presenting liberty and parity as a natural state, opposed to absolutism and tyranny.

Of this period of intellectual disillusionment following the French Revolution, Roe noted among the Romantics a 'dislocation of common purpose, comparable in some respects to the increasingly troubled post-1989 period' (p.6), referring to the eclipse of Marxism as a political force This political dimension can be read in Crace's prose, not as explicit intertextuality but as being similarly motivated with a form of poetic dissent, adhering to Shelley's championing of poetic imagination essentially as a mode of critical thinking. As Coleridge responded with a call for poetry, Crace can be seen as reacting to the decline of British post-war socialism and the rise of Thatcherism, neoliberalism, including a globalist New Labour, in similar fashion[57]. As Coleridge once wrote in correspondence, recorded in *Memoirs of William Wordsworth* (1851):

> Write a poem, in blank verse, addressed to those, who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising the same under the soft titles of domestic attachment and contempt for visionary "philosophers". It would do great good…' (p.159)

In this sense, Crace can be seen as drawing upon a personal romanticisation of natural history, landscape and traditional vocations (such as the shamanistic freemartin milk of Lowdo's father, the stonecutters of *The Gift of Stones,* the traders of *Arcadia* and *Quarantine*) to counter another dominant ideology of 'epicurean selfishness'. His own poetic and storytelling elements can also be seen as part of this romanticisation, emphasising his literary prose as a continuation of primal narrative tradition.

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[57] Crace has discussed Romantic poets in interviews in terms of sharing the inspiration of walking the natural landscape, and his reading of poetry for pleasure. In conversation with Dr Katy Aughterson, when asked if the character Mistress Beldam in *Harvest* was referencing the Keats poem 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', Crace replied that it was not a conscious connection and, "I prefer Shelley in my brain, but my heart goes to Coleridge" (21 October, 2016).

Continent can also be said to belong in the literary vein of British contemporary magical-realist fiction facilitated by *Midnight's Children* (1981). In the tradition of novels (and art generally) being responses to social change, much British fiction of this period continued to hybridise established traditions of logical, mimetic realism with alternatively fantastical and postmodern approaches as a reaction to the Thatcherism of the time and what Patricia Waugh characterizes as the Conservative 'attempted revival of Britain's imperial identity (especially during the Falklands War of 1982) and a ludicrous attempt to revive the myth of imperial greatness' (p.120). Crace, once a card-carrying Young Socialist campaigner for colonial freedom while a volunteer worker in the Sudan, would be one such writer wishing to challenge colonial and imperialist discourses. David Lodge noted the raising influence of South American magical realism in his address *The Novelist Today*, initially describing such 'fabulation' as a marginal contingent of British fiction, limiting the influence of Marquez to fellow post-colonial Rushdie, and feminist writers Angela Carter and Fay Weldon. Lodge aligned magical realism with minority perspectives.[60] Magical realism lends itself especially well to the depiction of oppressed minorities as a defiance of reality with a form associated with local folklore evoking a freedom of imagination, such as the villagers of Marquez's fictional Macondo, as the fantastical form articulates the malleable nature of reality under the totalitarianism, such as those of South American dictatorships.

As the calligrapher of the 'Sins and Virtues' chapter-story ruminates on the influence of international commerce on his traditional craft, ascribing an alien monetary value to his work which he ambivalently exploits, ideological certainties are naïve and

[60] Lodge later reconsidered when revising the address and identified other British authors of fabulist fiction such Crace, as noted in 'The Novelist Today: Still at the Crossroads (1996), p.8n

fleeting in the face of a mythically timeless moral ambiguity: ‘The quest for meaning in form belongs to an age long past. I often draw a forest of trees, almost bare and leafless, with the moon hovering on the horizon. Is it dawn or dusk? Soon we all shall know’ (p.101). Any validation of western scientific progressiveness is denied here by omitting mimetic representation of a developing country and maintaining the mythopoetic style. The quest of scientific rationality, rather than being a modernizing influence, is considered as arcane as superstition is typically portrayed. This parabolic tale subtly counters the representation of evolving global social reality as typically illustrated in literature, noted by Auerbach in *Mimesis* (1953, p.459), with the calligrapher’s art being ultimately unaltered by, and unfathomable to, the hegemonic logic of consumerism.

In conclusion, the fabulist disorientalism developed by Crace for *Continent* not only offers an alternative perspective to the global market forces of neoliberalism but also produces a dissonance of uncertainty by countering notions of technological and economic commonly framed within a linear narrative of progressiveness. With Crace’s wily and cynical characters reversing the exploitation seeking to dominate traditional communities, these counternarratives invite the reader to question the triumphalist political ideology of neoliberalism as neocolonialism.

4. *The Gift of Stones*: Fantasizing the Birth of Civilization

Crace's second novel continued the technique of embedded narratives, again consciously imaginary and allegorical rather than rooted in historical research. A narrator reports the fabulist exploits of her adopted father in and around an imagined prehistoric community at the end of the Stone Age as the first storyteller. As with later works, the characters are enigmatic and mythically nebulous, and the community is devoid of representative religion or moral authority, allowing a parabolic universality. The storyteller tone inspired by Marquez also continues in *A Gift of Stones*, with the depiction of travelling gypsies trading seemingly magical scientific wares from the opening of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* again recalled, with the nomadic horsemen offering exotic perfumes refined with technical skills beyond those of the stoneworkers (or indeed the horsemen themselves):

> One of the riders – a man as old and bald as Leaf – gathered up the bones from the rubbing thumbs around him and placed all but one before him on the mat. He took a finger of flat wood and, holding the bone high in the candlelight so that all could see, he scraped a hardened fat from the bone's hollow. Now he was careful that no one else should grasp the bone. He held it upright at his nose and sniffed. Perfume, he said. Those villagers who stood behind his back could lean forward and see a blinking disc of green fluid and smell the unmistakable fume of orris plus the honeyed redolences of new, dramatic odours. It made their hearts beat fast. It made them blush and pass uneasy smiles. The bone of perfume was passed across to those traders whose flints the horsemen had inspected. They assumed the expression of experts as they each lifted the perfume to their nostrils and, a little shakily, passed on the bone. Their mouths were watering. (p.25)

The section begins with descriptive storytelling, conveying interaction with observational detail with journalistic technique which then transitions to embellished details such as ‘their mouths were watering’. This subtle shift in perspective to internalized thought and emotion with an imagined intimacy employs storyteller techniques of invention, which have been previously established as untrustworthy with the narrator’s critical note of caution concerning her father’s tales, ‘Here we might raise an eyebrow’ (p.9), alternating from the direct narration common to realistic writing to the postmodern self-reflexivity of the story’s narrator. There is heavy symbolism at play in the passage, with the phallic bones and horses lending a dreamlike quality.

The passage also serves as political commentary, effectively satirizing capitalist consumer culture. The comical seductiveness of the exotic products contrasts the brutal means of securing the product by force, an obvious illustration of hostile corporate takeovers and the exploitation of resources under globalization. While the pastoral and romantically nostalgic depictions of the traditional community as described by Poll were of production, distribution and consumption being self-contained, this passage demonstrates a historical reality of trade being ever-present and predominant in human history. The primordial community of the story is not self-sufficient, which can be read as countering the nostalgic and nationalist narratives of conservatism predominate in the national political discourse when Crace was writing in the later 1980s. The salesmanship of the prehistoric horsemen is a recognizable feature of modern commerce, again establishing the setting as one of universality.

The empirical details of the scene are infused with traditional oral storytelling, being recounted from reported experience by the adopted daughter of the storyteller character. This recalls the comment of the psychosomatic desire for coffee ruining the economy of Brazil from *Continent* and continues the theme of tradition and progress sharing a perpetual, primal relationship. The scene also injects dramatic tension from the underlying aggression and implicit threat from the horsemen if the stonecutters decline to trade, with the boy already being wounded. The community of stoneworkers themselves can be read as representing unionized labour, confident in their trade being fundamentally required and secure within the economy of trade. A theme carried over from *Continent* is the compliancy of the older generation and their commercial dependence on tradition, as critically described by the younger, wilfully ignorant to the impending forces of change. Also carried over is the omission of localizing details concerning geography or ethnicity, further emphasizing a social relevancy and applicability for the contemporary reader.

The prehistoric village community of stoneworkers is strategically unrealistic in the sense that there is no recognizable mythological or spiritual culture detailed for a plausible micro-civilization. The village is more allegorical as the deliberate ambiguity emphasizes a subjectivity of meaning to be actively considered by the reader, rather than an objective symbol to be accepted. Observed from the outside perspective of a storyteller, the village ‘was obsessed with work, with industry, with craft’ (p.9), suggesting some Marxist utopia of a self-governing proletariat. The allegory is taken to an absurdist extreme as the community exists purely as an organized workforce: ‘No one got drunk, no one had drink. The fabric of the village was made strong by the warp and weft of rules. Intoxicating drink was not allowed. It produced bad flint’

(p.21), exaggerated by the storytelling to appear as stoic and inflexible as the stones they painstakingly craft and even resemble while caked in chalk and dust. While the village might consider itself an orderly ideal of production, the storyteller's perspective reveals it be petty, materialistic, and unimaginative, unable to adapt and survive inevitable technological progress, its only value being productivity. The villagers' assumed ownership of the stones around them, and their ironically magnanimous gifting of them, can be easily read as an absurdist critique of the quantifying nature of capitalism regarding natural resources.

The villagers are contrasted by the counterculture of nomadic horsemen, unconcerned with manual labour: 'There was more laughter amongst this dozen than amongst the hundred on the hill. They blew birdsong with blades of grass. They were in no hurry to begin the business of their day' (p.10). Instead of resembling stones, these outsiders are described as being sculpted by the wind. The storyteller claims to have lost his arm as a boy to a poisoned arrow from one of these marauding nomads, describing his assailant in almost supernatural terms: 'You'd think it [his face] was a leather purse with teeth. You never saw his eyes. He had a horseman's squint. He was only young, but he was weathered as a piece of bark' (p.32). Just as the villagers are not romanticized in utopian terms, the horse riders are violent and untrustworthy, while the creative exaggeration and ambiguity of truth from storytelling seeks to oppose the determinist realities of other nascent prehistoric cultures. Just as the villagers try to shelter and preserve their orderly hierarchy from the turbulent winds of the outside world, they refuse to acknowledge their own injustice with their indifference towards Doe. Principles of social justice being disrupted by the influence of aggressive traders can be read as an allegory for individualistic neoliberalism and

consumerism affecting traditional communities, but Crace does not portray the villagers as any idealized state.

The multiple unreliable narratives embedded in the text thread a subjectivity of truth as the storyteller maintains his existence with entertaining fictions. The perspective of the outsider is of altered reality: ‘The sea viewed from the clifftop is a world that’s upside down. Its gulls have backs. You’re looking down on me’ (p.38). Fundamental to the creation of storytelling is the conflict between two antagonistic realities: the immovable stone crafters, and the unstoppable horse riders. The fluidity of fiction allows the storyteller to understand the significance of such impending change. ‘Was I the only one to see that, all around, the world was tumbling, spinning, wild? The bats were flying in the sun, the butterflies at night. You only had to briefly lift your head above your parapet of stones to see that where the village ended mayhem ruled and danced’ (p.133).

When presented with the final evidence of the bronze arrowhead which killed Doe, the exposure to the storyteller’s fictions allows most the villagers to gradually understand the true ephemeral nature of their reality and abandon their home to ensure their survival. The storyteller’s final imparted wisdom of ‘you can’t eat stone’ (p.164) is very reminiscent of the truism attributed to Native Americans, ‘you cannot eat money’. The narrative itself can be taken as parabolic concerning this them of claiming exclusive ownership of natural resources, as Doe’s reported defiance illustrates:

> “These stones are ours,” he said. “Who said that you could take these stones?”

> "These stones are mine," she said. "I found them on the hill. I brought them here. They're mine. How are they yours?"
>
> "You're not far from here. That hill is ours, not yours."
>
> "And the air round here is yours as well," she said. "I breathe; I steal your air. And the wind that's making such a skimpy harvest on your head? Is that your wind? How can it be that it blows my hair, too?" (p.116)

The storyteller gradually works against this dominant tribal ideology through counternarrative rather than direct opposition. While the storyteller's narratives and moral objections are stubbornly rejected by the villagers whenever he confronts them with the emotionally charged truth of their injustice towards Doe, his string of contradictory entertaining fictions prepares most of them for critical and adaptive thought necessary to perhaps survive their loss of livelihood and consider alternative values, reflecting the disorientalism of Crace's style.

The intention of dislocation and disorienting the reader to address and reassess these themes was discussed by Crace in the magazine *Quarto* prior to the publication of *Continent,* establishing the groundwork for literary counternarrative strategy. Crace's main criticism of much Africa writing by Western authors centred on how the location has been homogenized and appropriated as a symbolic setting for the projection of European cultural dilemmas. The use of invented African countries by some authors was condemned by Crace as an inadequate response to a postcolonial understanding of orientalism and/or as a means of avoiding research on actual African countries. In a promotional interview with The New York Times for *The Gift of Stones*, Crace stated "I'm not interested in truths, like an accurate picture of the real world… I'm interested in exploring the varieties of the human condition" (1989). The accompanying review still introduced the novel as historical fiction, as if

the narrative were chiefly concerned with hypothesizing prehistoric human existence at the dawn of the Iron Age and rooted in established empirical knowledge of the time. However, the stated intention is more focused on the universality of an imagined and hypothetical narrative in the cultural tradition of myth rather than history. Within the form of the novel, Crace continues the tradition of narrative hybridity by exploring a dislocated heterotopia (in the Foucauldian sense of exploring power dynamics) as an imagined space functioning in contrast to the dominant societal order.

To this end, the traditional oral storytelling form (traditional in the sense of applying a culturally historical narrative mode predating the epistolary printed media origins of the modern novel) is infused with more experimental literary elements of postmodern literature, recalling Crace's frequently cited inspiration of Italo Calvino, employing structure as well as style. While the short chapters of *The Gift of Stones* reflect the crafted stones of the prehistoric community, the narrative is structured around a multi-layered *mise-en-abyme* of stories within stories, with the adopted daughter conveying her orphan father's storyteller narrative while interjecting a self-reflexive commentary on his unreliability and consequently interweaving her own ambiguities on the value of truth. The diegetic levels therefore emphasize the contemporary perspective of the text as neo-historical (or neo-prehistorical in this case) and counterbalance the more moralistic reading of novel as an allegory for the effects of Thatcherism and neoliberalism on Birmingham's industrial local economy, as commonly identified in reviews and interviews with Crace concerning the text.

A more overt historical allegory or realist depiction of industrial decline in Birmingham with an explicit political stance, it could be argued, would have detracted from the text's artistic merits as commercial literary fiction, proving overly divisive, alienating, or didactic for a general readership. Leaf's disability, losing a hand and most of an arm as a boy, leaves him redundant as a stone worker but also presents an origin of civilization as Leaf as a boy was able to survive with the aid of his community, rather than be left to die like an injured animal. Leaf's development of storytelling as an alternative trade also represents a fundamental aspect of civilization and its imagined starting point, framing the narrative as universal while also specifically address the effects of Thatcherism on post-industrial Birmingham.

Rather than directly engage with political developments within his novels, most of Crace's work is concerned more with exploring the concept of storytelling as moral reflection, as defined by Walter Benjamin, with his application of rhythmic and iambic style to conjure the aura of oral storytelling and mythopoeic fable. This technique can be viewed in more practical terms in words of one Crace's citied influences, Italo Calvino, when he stressed his strategic appropriation of traditional folktales for the personal aim of conveying ideas directly, unhindered by realist representation. As also noted by Nicholas Roe in *Politics of Nature* (1992), 'William Hazlitt, at least, later claimed to have been aware in 1798 of a 'new spirit in poetry' and significantly, he compared this to 'the turning up of fresh soil: it has sprung out of the ground like a flower' (William Hazlitt, 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', Howe, xvii, p.117). The conjunction of revolution and resurgent nature, remarked by Hazlitt, can speak to our own times and conditions too. With neoliberalism as the dominant ideology, poetic imagination of the pastoral can offer an alternative perspective.

As discussed within ecocriticism, the concerns of environmentalism and green politics can be seen as a viable update, or replacement, of Marxist ideals of the state as a force for activism towards a more global form of socialism, in opposition to neoliberalism or more isolationist popularism. As mentioned, the pastoral can also be seen to articulate these political concerns in Crace's prose. With the unpublished failure of *The Village of Elder,* intended as satirical depiction of jaded baby-boomer contemporaries but frustrated with perceived limits of portraiture, Crace's fresh start with a personal take on magical realism and the political poetics of Romanticism suggests a solution to what Pound termed the 'clog of the mimetic', more directly engaging with thematic concerns. William Empson in *Some Versions of the Pastoral* (1935) noted that the pastoral is employed in 'the process of putting the complex into the simple within the proletarian … the Worker, as used in proletarian propaganda, is a mythical cult-figure' (p.22).

Although Crace's storytelling father figure in *The Gift of Stones* may appear unheroic in any traditional sense, consistently weak and deceitful, and the character can also be regarded as the first civilized human. Emasculated by the loss of his arm and unvalued by the stoney patriarchy due to his poor productivity, and with a disability also endured by Crace's father, his survival in creative fiction and care for his adopted daughter who would have also perished as an outcast both represent the true birth of humanity rather than the craft of the indifferent villagers or violent conquest of the horse riders. As noted by Ira Byock MD in her memoir *The Best Care Possible* (2012):

> Anthropologist Margaret Mead was once asked what she considered the earliest evidence of civilization. She answered that it was a human thigh bone with a healed fracture that had been excavated from a fifteen-thousand-year-old site. For an early human being to have survived a broken femur, living through the months that were required for the bone to heal, the person had to have been cared for — sheltered, protected, brought food and drink. While other animals care for their young and injured, no other species is able to devote as much time and energy to caring for the most frail, ill, and dying of its members. (p.422)

With this citation reminiscent of the invented one by Crace at the beginning of the novel, the craft of storytelling is depicted in *The Gift of Stones* as unglamorous but essential as the novel laments the loss of traditional livelihoods and communities to social change, and also representing the imagination and plurality of values required for diverse, dynamic and adaptive societies.

5. *Arcadia*: Defamiliarization and Dystopia

Arcadia is an extended work of narrative hybridity, combining the allegorical fabulism of his previous two novels with more historical and realist elements to create a greater sense of socio-economic totality. As with its predecessors, the novel explores a clash of modernity and tradition in a nameless location, in this case an oneiric, symbolic fictional city, in a parable of communal urban living, as noted by the author in conversation with Tew, 'less ambiguous, less ambivalent' (p.75) than earlier works. The tragic morality tale of Victor, a self-made autocrat with hubristic ambitions to redevelop the open-air market where he originally rose to success, is explicitly introduced in the novel's opening lines: 'No wonder Victor never fell in love. A childhood like the one he had would make ice-cubes of us all. He lived on mother's milk till he was six, and then thrived on charity and trade (p.3).' It soon becomes obvious that the financial success of Victor, whose very name embodies personal triumph, fails to address a psychological lack; a clear critique of governance concerned entirely with economic growth at the expense of social support. The familiar moral that money cannot buy happiness is therefore overtly stated at the offset, before the story begins. Rather than the narrative serving to illustrate this moral at its denouement (barely necessary as an artistic aim with such an oft-repeated truism), the overt form of a traditional morality tale will serve as an allegory for social and economic realities of post-Thatcherism in Crace's Britain.

The mythic mode of storytelling and abstract depiction of urban setting reflect the central fantasy Victor maintains as he plans his eightieth birthday celebrations:

> He wanted a simple country meal. The fiction in his mind was this: that he would sit surrounded by his friends beneath a canvas awning. There'd be white cloths on a shaky trestle. A breeze. The guests would push off their slippers and rub their bare toes in the dust. They'd twist round on their stools and spit olive stones in the air. Some cats and chickens would take care of crumbs and peach skins. With just a little teasing and some cash, the cook's fat son would play plump tunes on his accordion. This was Victor's ideal birthday meal. Simple, cheap and attainable for county people living earthbound on a farm, say thirty years ago; but a dream beyond the reach of cheques and fax machines for a man whose home is twenty-seven storeys and a hundred metres up, with views all round, through tinted, toughened glass, and tinted, toughened air, of office blocks and penthouses and malls (p.3-4).

The above passage again illustrates Crace's continued blank verse prose style, peppered with Proustian realist details of mimetic observation to trigger sense responses of idyllic rural scenes. However, the realist details are also disorienting. The conjured sense of 'bare toes in the dust' harks back to *The Gift of Stones* and stoneys 'hunting scallops with their toes'. Here, a timeless and primal evocation of being rooted and connected to the earth is evoked, a connection for which Victor yearns from the lofty isolation of his financial realm. The mythopoeic detail of dust rather than 'grass' or 'soil' signifies a warmer climate and could be a detail taken from Homer's Iliad, evoking both past time and timelessness. The Flaubertian taste of olive stones, as well as the peach skin, offer a continental, Mediterranean flavour to the pastoral fantasy of a 'simple country meal', subtle dislocating touches as these foods would not signify traditional English country fare, continuing in the style of dislocation.

Crace's repeated technique of listing images and sensations for a poetic synthesis of location could be critiqued as indulgent or distracting. Crace's inspiration for imaginative storytelling, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, in *The Fragrence of Guava* (1982), once complained of such 'rhetorical excess' in much writing attempting to depict Latin America, championing instead Graham Greene's strategy of 'a few disparate elements connected by an inner coherence both subtle and real', with which a location can be effectively evoked by the symbolic 'fragrance of a rotten guava' (p.71). However, Crace's intent is again not so much verisimilitude in the representation of a particular place but rather a sensory, visceral dislocation from the primary world. The highlighted passage above establishes a fragmented sense of reality with an immediate uncertainty of time – the 'thirty years ago' almost implies a recent pre-industrial period at odds with Victor's skyscraper and modernity. The geographical disorientalism created by these disparate details suggests an historical uncertainty of location which Crace has cited as a feature of Birmingham's identity.[64] With this mode of fabulism, Crace can represent socio-political aspects of the city and its Thatcher-era development as both utopia and dystopia.

Victor's skyscraper home, informally 'Big Vic', located close to the Soap Market, is possibly based on the Rotunda building by the BullRing in Birmingham. The hardened, recycled air of Victor's domain is also reminiscent of the BullRing shopping mall occupying the city's centre, an artificial environment insulated from natural indicators of time and location, such as daylight or the weather outside. Victor is a patriarch and self-made hero by neoliberalist metric of wealth, also depicted as a

[64] In an interview with Steven Richard Jukes, Crace commented: "I mean one of the problems about Birmingham and one of the reasons I think that it gets mocked as a city is that it doesn't have any, erm, geographical raison d'etre. I mean it's not on the coast, it's not between hills, it's not on a river. You know, there's no geographical reason for it to have been there" – Jukes, P.83.

tragic king of epic verse. In the words of Lukács in *The Theory of the Novel* (1916), such a character is

> A socially dominant figure… whose conflicts, while retaining the sensuous illusion of a symbolic existence, grow solely out of the tragic problem; because only such a figure can be surrounded, even as to the forms of its external appearance, with the required atmosphere of significant isolation' (p.67).

Victor's fantasy of an ideal birthday, foreshadowing the later plans for the Acadia redevelopment, is immediately presented as comically fanciful by underling Rook with a more cynical realism, clearly depicting the true power relations behind the proposed scene of rural unity with a contrastingly unpoetic list of details:

> The man we knew as Rook had done his best to cater for old Victor's dreams. White tablecloths were easy to locate. Rook had the cats. The breeze was air-conditioning. The old men could shake their slippers off and rub their toes in carpet wool. They could spit their olive pips at waitresses. Why not? They'd have to go without the chickens, reasoned Rook. Victor could not have free-range hens clucking amongst his halting guests. He was not Dali, yet' (p.4).

The cynical compromise of Victor's fantasy idyll, as well as the idealized pastoral generally, is absurd enough to approach satire. The desire to associate with the pastoral reflects an egoistic drive to be a good shepherd for the people expected to dutifully follow, to justify the wealth accumulated through exploitation. Victor's grand fantasies from his position of socio-economic dominance are almost Shakespearean in scale, with Rook also introduced with a touch of Iago-like treachery as a devious, exploitative subordinate 'bleeding Victor's purse, bleeding purses everywhere' (p.5). The pastoral fantasy, which a reader can assume from the opening lines is some

attempt to create a sense of humble serenity denied to Victor as a child, recalls Lear's doomed visions for his kingdom during the play's interregnum in how, as noted by Barbara Hardy in *Shakespeare's Storytellers* (1997), Lear's fantasy, though unique in Shakespeare, has features common enough in the literature:

> The European novel habitually constructs minds liable to fashion dangerously ideal narratives of future time and ends… It imagines a stasis, a present neither developing nor deteriorating, in which father and child live the impossible dream of enclosed and secluded loving, a dream the more touching for its touches of reality (p.155).

In this sense, Victor's mindset could be seen as metaphorical for literary fiction, searching for romanticised representations of his own ideals with the wealth of means at his disposal, but far removed from the realities of the streets and markets by his status, and chronologically distanced from the commonality of his lowly beginnings. A critic of bourgeois literary fiction might suggest the same of the medium, or genre of literary fiction, and it could be seen as a concern for a working-class and self-identifying socialist former journalist such as Crace.

For his cynicism, again representing Crace's own, Rook is soon expelled after exploiting his position, for the original sin of sullying Victor's imagined Paradise with human vice, and, primarily, for acting with his own agency against Victor's, in the manner of Lucifer. Moreover, Rook's activities inject a harsh realism into Victor's personal romantic narrative, exposing the true nature of the Victor's market. Rook's name, like Victor's, is glaringly symbolic, simultaneously evoking a supporting chess piece close to the king, a farmland pest amidst Victor's pastoral aspirations and the dark wings of a fallen angel, recalling the Biblical Lucifer as the mythic narrative

mode plays with storytelling archetypes. Rook is also motivated by fantasy, in his case for revenge. These fantasies also prove tragically ironic, and fatal, with Rook dying in the riotous Soap Market uprising he helps instigate. The votive candle left in the street to commemorate Rook ironically resembles the Big Vic skyscraper from which he was cast down.

With a further thematic use of structure, the novel is divided into four parts, suggesting construction with a square plaza or marketplace, or four supporting columns, or four towers of a housing estate (as well the four Gospels of the New Testament). As one of completing architects for Victor's redevelopment, who has 'no time for curves', says to Victor, 'Let's not disguise, but celebrate, the probity of rectangles and cubes', and envisions 'a bold and simple slab' for the redevelopment (p.208). This is rejected in favour of the ego-boosting flattery of architect Signor Busi (a surname to reappear as the protagonist of *The Melody,* suggesting some internalisation from the author) whose plan for the new Soap Market constitutes 'four spectacular glass ovals which seemed both like cakes and the domes of viscous mosques' (p.123), a description blending extravagant indulgence and the sacred as self-worship.

The plans, evidently, as with Victor's birthday party, are visionary but impractical, and adhering to a pastoral ideal which denies the democracy of urban space: 'There are no straight lines in our design, no matching planes or pitches. Instead, we have the horizontal disunities of the natural landscape' (p.214). The idealized pastoral evoked in the design is ironically at odds with the functional needs of the fruit and vegetable market itself and requires the true market's destruction to be built. This

symbolism is quite explicit in the narrative, and while Crace's novel presents ambiguity and nuance rather than intentionally promoting any specific ideological view, it is possible to take the narrative as socio-economic allegory. Busi's design attempting to mimic a naturalistic ideal can be read as representing the creed of laissez-faire late-capitalism to allow a free market to function naturally, without constraining regulations. With Victor representing the super-wealthy elite, his designs are clearly self-serving and ultimately oppressive of the true democratic working of the Soap Market, with Crace indirectly critiquing dominant neoliberal policy and absence of social consciousness in authority.

Arcadia is hardly a futurist celebration of city life but neither does it demonize the urban landscape of industry of commerce as in the manner of William Blake's satanic mills or the rural romanticism of the nineteenth century. Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) was an inspiration for *Arcadia* (Tew, p.77) ,which predated the ideological conquest of neoliberalism but challenged modernist urban planning policies of separating, relocating and isolating communities at the cost of diversity, which informed the post-war redevelopment of cities such Birmingham:

> If it appears that the rebuilt portions of cities and the endless new developments spreading beyond the cities are reducing city and countryside alike to monotonous, unnourishing gruel, this is not strange. It all comes, first-, second-, third- or fourth-hand, out of the same intellectual dish of mush, a mush in which the qualities, necessities, advantages, and behaviour of great cities have been utterly confused with the qualities, necessities, advantages, and behaviour of other and more inert types of settlements (p.6-7).

Crace explores this amorphous communal vitality of the urban and pastoral, both under threat from reductive ideological redevelopment. The Soap Market as seen by

Rook is a place of vibrant and dangerous disorder governed by unspoken understandings and customs, while modernist architects who celebrate ‘the probity of rectangles and cubes’ (p.208) misinterpret the market’s layout as a hierarchical religious symbol when viewing detached and high in the air by helicopter. He also counters the reactionary aesthetic binary of manmade environments representing ugliness, vice, and corruption while the countryside is pastoral beauty and natural order. In *Acadia*, the city also offers freedom and progression. The faults in the design are human rather than inherent to urbanization and modernity. As scathing symbolism of urban redevelopment, Victor’s lack of empathic understanding, his isolation from any community, and the naivety of his own personal narrative are the cause for his project to ultimately fail in its original inclusive, magnanimous intentions.

The novel also explores the destructive force of egos, with the tallest buildings representing ‘Great Men make their mark by blocking out the Sun’, as established in the novel’s opening epitaph (fictitious in typically Cracean fashion). The narrative is thus more a comment against autocracy than urbanization. As noted by the story’s narrator, the population is complicit in the constraints imposed by their urban surroundings and socially polarizing environment, and economically the eponymous mall is an ironic success. ‘Yet, *Arcadia* is a triumph. Let’s admit it. It weathers as I watch; it settles in’ (p.333). The triumph in question can be read to represent the shift to Thatcherism and neoliberalism as observed as Crace in Birmingham, as local industry gave way to consumerism and globalized retail. The complicity of the populace in the new mall’s economic success, rather than any romantic boycotting and resistance, which died with Rook, has broader allegorical implications. When

Rook dwells on his revenge fantasy, inspired by a film in which an English lord takes collective vengeance against his wife rapist but in which the true culprit is overlooked due to his lowly social status, he notes ‘the English love these ironies’ (p.189). Irony is abundant throughout *Arcadia* but perhaps a final ironic note, in a book which openly declares its subject to be the socially harmfully follies of ‘great men’ is the narrator’s closing vision of how general population has willingly accommodated such a folly. As noted by contemporary fabulist JG Ballard in his collected interviews, *Extreme Metaphors* (2014),

> The point is that what I see as threatening about the all-pervasive and all-powerful consumer society is that it’s not any specific individual who is responsible for anything nasty that may happen in the future. This is a collective enterprise. All of us who are who are members of consumer society; all of us are responsible in a way. I think that these are the sort of almost seismic movements that drift through the collective psyche, and which facilitate the emergence of ultra-right-wing groups like the Nazis and the fascists in Italy (p.419).

The example is indeed extreme but Crace’s works have repeatedly illustrated destructive consequences of complicity and lack of collective action. However, such moralizing can be implied and more pleasurably deciphered within the mythic storytelling mode than didactic socialist realism.

While Crace has set his style apart from many of his contemporaries, he is also continuing in a long tradition of oral storytelling in the English novel. In *The Practice of Writing* (1996), David Lodge referenced the authoritative lecturing tone of Henry Fielding and George Elliot when directly addressing the ‘reader’ on the page, being a natural feature of narrative, both oral and literary:

> By apostrophizing the reader, the act of writing is transformed here into a kind of speaking… The novel therefore has a family resemblance to other narrative forms, both the purely verbal, such as the classical epic, the books of the Bible, history and biography, folklore and ballads; and those forms which have non-verbal components, such as drama and film.' (p.181-2).

While Crace's fabulism was inspired by Marquez's Latin magical realism, there is also a tradition of fantasy inherent in the European literary novel. Lodge also notes that Freud saw the reading of novels as akin to daydreaming and similarly escapist (P.183), escapism being one of the most common accusations levelled against fantasy, and therefore an inauthentic mode of communal communication. This again recalls Benjamin's lament for traditional communal oral-aural storytelling and the industrialized process of isolation required of both a novel's author and reader as bourgeois leisure (p.83). Storytelling styles such as that employed by Crace can be read as efforts in part to address and counter this perception while still realizing their aesthetic intentions.

While an internalized and empirical mode of realist narrative might serve to convey individualist pursuits and psychological motivations of relatable protagonists, characters such as *Acadia*'s Victor functions primarily as a symbolic figure as typically found in parable and myth, whose deluded efforts to be a benign autocrat serve as a critique of neoliberal economic progress. The mythic and parabolic can therefore help rekindle a sense of shared history and reassessment of values while engaging with socioeconomic development, a conservative challenge to progressive economics in defence of shared social values, as can be said of Crace's objections to the BullRing planning, ironically from an outspokenly socialist author.

The strategy of appropriating a premodern aesthetic to illustrate contemporary socioeconomic trends might seem counterintuitive but the more conservative form of storytelling employed by Crace can be read in Trotskyist terms as revolutionary counternarratives, illustrating values lost to neoliberal globalisation, as well the psychological effects of consumer culture. Such a radical political nature is not explicit or openly didactic in Crace's works. Rather, the fabulist ambiguity invites a more playful interpretation as an intellectual game with the reader. This also follows a tradition of literary fiction. As Benjamin noted on ambiguity in his essay 'Franz Kafka' (1934, p.122), the unfolding of meaning in fiction is foremost an aesthetic reading resembling poetry, not a direct or dogmatic parable. As noted in Benjamin's interpretation Kafka, Crace's early novels also concern themselves the 'question of how life and work are organized in human society' (p.123), and the ambiguity of meaning can represent a loss of communal purpose during industrialized globalization. Kafka equated bureaucratic organization with classic mythical depictions of ironic fate and unavoidable destiny. While surreal and disorienting, these narratives can also be seen as comforting in that they do depict a higher authorial order, rather than the work of contemporary fabulist H.P. Lovecraft depicting a conflict of mystic and modernity but within a universe dominated by malevolent and inhuman forces, the attempted comprehension of which only invites insanity, with rationality both tragic and futile. *Acadia* also portrays the powers of modernity as removed and irrational but unlike such nihilistic fantasies as Lovecraft's, Crace also offers some optimism in the resilience and adaptability of tradition. *Arcadia'*s stall traders and greengrocers to accommodate themselves in the shadow of autocratic wealth and vanity projects, secure in their own economic necessity.

Benjamin also characterized ‘The Storyteller’ as a communal figure engaged in a public activity while the medium of the novel is rooted in isolation: ‘The birthplace of the of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounselled and cannot counsel others’ (p.87). Victor’s isolation, away from criticism and pushing away reminders of reality such as Rook, can also in some respect represent the plight of the isolated author within storytelling in the struggle to address the desired audience. By adopting fabulism and storytelling, Crace could be seen to be reengaging with communal narrative combined with the isolated introspection of the novelist.

In *The Birmingham Post*, a guest column by Jim Crace, headlined (possibly not by the prize-winning author of poetic fiction in question) with ‘New Buildings Have No Beauty or Courage’ (2000), directly relates *Arcadia* (1992) to Birmingham’s then planned BullRing shopping centre redevelopment:

> My immediate reaction to the latest Bull Ring scheme is that this is the same old story of Birmingham’s lack of confidence in its architecture. Because it has no confidence, it wants to look like other places. All that does is to encourage the homogenisation of this city, I’ve just come back from Chicago, an immensely distinctive and beautiful city which has its own vernacular style (p.13).

This last line is interesting to note as, while disapproval for urban redevelopment can be a conservative and reactionary response, Crace is calling for idiosyncratic design with its ‘own vernacular style’ similar to the fabulist, poetic writing style to which he strives as an appropriate response to hegemonic globalisation. The final point of a generic aesthetic lacking local identity reflects the sense of lost community which permeates throughout Crace’s works and greatly informs his fabulist storytelling

style. The evoked sense of 'dislocation' from invented settings within *Continent* onwards can be seen to reflect a loss of regionality to generic gentrification, continued with *Arcadia*. While taking direct inspiration from his surroundings, the parabolic narrative mode liberated Crace's insights from a specifical location and any divisively contrived representation of real subjects, allowing a more philosophically universalist approach.

The Jim Crace archive contains an import research artefact on the post-war new towns, specifically Harlow[74]: 'Are the new towns successful in terms of human happiness and in terms of economics? Happiness, "yes", in so far as happiness can be related to living and working conditions and, as the towns grow, to opportunities for entertainment.' The brochure's article measures success in terms of commercial activities, personal income, GDP and returns on capital investment. An accompanying promotional photograph of Harlow New Town's 'Market Place' with some irony shows a mostly empty and barren concrete plaza, ringed with the generic, utilitarian, featureless post-war architecture of office buildings, with a silhouetted public statue in the foreground. The Harlow brochure's title, again with some unintended irony, is 'Planners of Utopia'. Harlow New Town, as noted in the brochure, borrowed its name and identity from an older community. Crace's urban ecosystem of the Soap Market, with its animalistic images and cycles of traders, scavengers and roosting night folk, was conceived as the antithesis to such an image. Crace presents a microcosm which illustrates a natural social state beneath an ideological level. *Arcadia*'s counternarrative to the Neoliberalist ethos of freedom through markets is thus depicted not as an idyllic utopia but an arena of moral

[74] Archive material: publicity material quoting planning expert Evelyn Denington, 1950, 'New Towns for Whom?'.

conflict against greed and exploitation, The vitality is to be found in the common struggle, the ‘blessing of the multitude’ (p.345). The novel is also addressing the concept and idea of the city as an interdependent community rather than a simple economic hierarchy, presenting contradictions and conflicting politics to emphasise plurality. There is the conflict between city and countryside, constraints and freedom, memory and reality, utopia and dystopia, poverty and affluence, discussed with the moral ambiguity available from mythopoetic fabulism, all countering the rigid certainties of political ideology.

6. *Quarantine*: A Personal Jesus

The implicit Christian imagery implicit within *Arcadia*, with themes of paradise, suffering, and salvation through legacy, are obviously a great deal more explicit with *Quarantine* as the legend The Temptation of Jesus briefly detailed in Matthew's gospel is retold as literary fiction. While the novel is concerned with realism in depicting the physiological effects of total fasting in a desert environment, and observing the micro-society which emerges among the characters, the established Cracean style is rich with blank verse and personification. The Biblical geographic features of Moab and Jericho are dropped in the first few pages, before the name Jesus confirms the appropriated narrative. The environment however is described with metaphorical flavour rather than historical detail, depicted as a barren, sulphureous hellscape in no uncertain terms as 'the devil's kingdom' (p.149), befitting Musa's claims of ownership of it.

While the very act of reimagining such a culturally significant Biblical narrative might be decried as sacrilege by the devoutly religious, the novel has not been widely interpreted as attempt to demystify or debunk its subject and might even be understood to support the original miraculous legend and reaffirm the spiritual value for readers so inclined, with Crace's ambiguous description of his Jesus walking from the caves following his physical death. As Bradley and Tate, authors of *The New Atheist Novel* (2010), observe, Crace (an outspoken atheist) writes post-atheist novels that emphasize the cultural significance of such narratives: '...contemporary British novelists as different as Nick Hornby, Jim Crace and David Mitchell have all

produced fictions that test the moral capacities of humanity in an era 'after God' without ever been mistaken for religious confessors' (P.109). The biblical imagery of *Quarantine* may be repurposed as ironic allegory but, 'when compared to an adversarial, polemical works by Richard Dawkins, Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, Philip Pullman and Salman Rushdie that fall foul of the same irrational intolerance as fundamentalism and only exacerbate the dearth of public discourse on religion' (P.109). While Crace would undoubtedly side with the authors listed over personal atheism, the ambiguity of his prose again stresses a dialectical approach to discourse, such as the accommodation of religion within secular society, rather than promoting his own ideological views, as well as the cultural importance of mythical narrative. *Quarantine* is not a critique of a Christian parable but a secular dislocation of the moral message. The teachings of Jesus in the *New Testament* can be interpreted as mirroring certain socialist ideals in their condemnation of extreme personal wealth and concern for the meek and marginalized, and so with the ambiguous nature of his allegorical Jesus figure, Gally, Crace can explore how these ideals have been superseded by neoliberalism as political ideology but remain present in society.

As noted in various interviews on the book, including with Tew (p.116), *Quarantine* was conceived as an allegory for the Thatcherite 'Care in the Community' programme, as personally witnessed by Crace at the Palm Court institute near his home in Moseley. The use of Biblical narrative for political critique is also mischievously ironic given the contemporary Conservative championing of traditional Christian values but not necessarily provocative or antagonistic. Rather than adopting a binary position of religious scepticism, the use of a familiar narrative is

also an inclusive invitation to reconsider the mythical as modern with an investigation into the value of community. Crace's narratives remain more concerned with the plight of communities than the internalized psychological narratives of individual protagonists. The oral tradition of the Bible, both within the text as with the sermons and parables of Jesus, and also with the traditional transmission of doctrine in Christian communities, therefore, offers an ironic mode for counternarrative against didactic conservative scripture and ideological dominance.

Quarantine considers the socio-economic influences on mental health, framing it as a political and social responsibility. As Mark Fisher later remarked in 2012 for *The Guardian*:

> Mental illness has been depoliticized, so that we blithely accept a situation in which depression is now the malady most treated by the NHS. The neoliberal policies implemented first by the Thatcher governments in the 1980s and continued by New Labour and the current coalition have resulted in a privatisation of stress. Under neoliberal governance, workers have seen their wages stagnate and their working conditions and job security become more precarious.

In this spirit, Crace's narrative expresses the mental anguish of its characters in crisis as more the result of unfulfilled social expectations and their economic isolation. The storyteller narrative mode can challenge the assumed objectivity of 'capitalist realism', as Mark Fisher termed the lack of accepted viable alternative to neoliberal globalisation in popular culture to provide the global supply chain. Christopher Lasch in *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979) suggested that metafictional literary novels of the late twentieth century were primarily concerned with artifice, form, and process, framed with crafted randomness, while the postmodern

internalized narratives dwelt on fate and the lack of agency. This interiorization of fiction can be said to reflect the zeitgeist of neoliberalism, with increasingly unaccountable global forces determining socio-economic change and individual wealth being the dominant metric of success. Crace's application of fabulism to a familiar Biblical, pre-modern, moralistic parable, therefore, can be read as a challenge to find an alternative to cynical postmodern materialism. By appropriating a Jesus myth, Crace as the author is required to defer his own scepticism of the divine and maintain a strategic ambiguity for the narrative to be successful.

The Cracean Jesus is presented as suffering from a personality disorder and ultimately experiences a major psychotic episode during the fateful climatic storm, although is too self-obsessed as elicit as such sympathy as the other pitiful characters. This can be read as mischievous as the Biblical Jesus is characterized as being without ego and an idealised selfless personality, although Crace creates a nuanced character for his Jesus rather a satirical caricature. While ambiguous and far from iconoclastic, the reappropriation of Jesus as the fictional Galilean character, derisively dubbed 'Gally' in a manner amusingly reminiscent of 'Brummie', is inherently provocative and continues the Cracean trait of invented details as minor acts of subversion. Crace's penchant for positing invented epigraphs to serve as statements of intent for his novels, both in introducing a main theme and upholding imagination over historical accuracy in his objectives, continues in *Quarantine.* The fictional literary citation attributed to 'The Limits of Morality' asserts with assumed academic certainty that the fabled forty-day fast of Christ would be medically impossible: 'an ordinary man of average weight and fitness embarking on a total fast – that is, a fast during which he refuses both his food and drink – could not expect to

live more than thirty days, nor to be conscious for more than twenty-five.' The epigraph serves primarily to state an intention to retell a familiar cultural legend in a realist narrative mode rooted in a scientific, empirical notion of truth, as Crace's Jesus fails to survive his physical ordeal despite that his spiritual devotion remains tragically unwavering. The epigraph could also reaffirm a reader's religious devotion to the narrative's literal meaning, however, if taken literally, since the emphasized medical impossibility of an average person's survival presents the opportunity for divine intervention.

The citation also introduces the theme of mundane humanity, explored in the novel as figures of evil and good. The title 'The Limits of Mortality' also foreshadows Crace's Jesus ultimately surpassing his mortal limitation through the art of storytelling as Musa vows to report and repurpose the events for profit at the novel's conclusion. The divine is thusly commercialized in what Musa considers a benevolent, if self-serving, act, representing a neoliberalist entrepreneurial spirit.

By conspicuously avoiding capitalising 'god' as a proper noun (p.22), *Quarantine* can be read as an atheist novel with an ironically godlike omniscient point of view. This contradiction serves to further build strategic ambiguity and brings to mind the Taoist principle of how opposite creating one another, as artistic strategies emerge in opposition to preestablished forms to avoid mimicry and further discourse. The opening chapter establishes a culture in which true feelings and free will are repressed, with Miri, an abused and pregnant wife, dutifully praying for her dying husband Musa's recovery but internally wishing for the opposite as his death would amount to divine justice, which is not delivered. The role of religion here may be

taken as an oppressive performative custom and contrary to true desires or a sense of parity.

The prevailing hypocrisy is further illustrated by the caravan patriarchs visiting to ‘mumble their regrets’ (p.1) before seizing his possessions and casting them both out into the desert, all the while disapproving of Miri expressing her husband’s true character – truth being taboo within a strict social hierarchy. Miri’s voice notably goes unreported in the text to reflect she has no say in the matter. However, despite this cynicism towards tradition, religion here is also real is the sense of defining events and described as existing with visceral, corporal language, such as the sulphureous scent of ‘the devil’s eggy dinner’ (p.1). The free indirect style – with Miri’s voice mediated entirely by the narration – illustrates a woman’s lack of agency in this scene, but also the sagacious and pervading presence of a religious reality in her innermost thoughts: ‘She sang her litanies all night. But the fever was deaf. Or, perhaps, its hearing was so sharp that it had eavesdropped on Miri’s deepest prayers and knew that Musa’s death would not be unbearable. His death would rescue her’ (p.1).

The poetic personification of the fever as an infernal essence reoccurs as the novel’s conclusion when Musa burns his tent and leaves as ‘his fever devil stayed, below the caves, its feet in flames, its body shrouded in yellow smoke’ (p.231). The fever can be seen as personified in a work of poetic imagination, recalling the romanticism of Shelley, but the matter of literal or figurative meaning is deliberately left undefined. Within the novel’s realm of ambiguity presented by Crace, the ‘fever devil’ can be taken as an ironic analogy within an atheist reinterpretation of a scared narrative or

conversely as a literal possession of Musa by a satanic spirit, and indeed the ambiguity invites alternative interpretations to be considered rather than be in opposition. As the fever devil is left behind at the caves 'shivering and abandoned, insubstantial and attached to no one, biding its time' (p.231) while the spirit of Jesus will continue to travel via storytelling (or even literally depending on the interpretation of Musa's final sighting of him in the distance), this poetic detail can be seen to echo the original mythical triumph of good enduring against evil but also their symbiosis. The novel's conclusion, although ambiguous about whether Musa has been left delusional and hallucinating, suggests a future working relationship between the mystical Gally and the profiteering Musa, both required to spread the word of their story, stressing community and cooperation over the individual religious journeys than began their fasts. The final words of *Quarantine* emphasize that this is not salvation granted by supernatural agency but from 'the one-time, all-time truces of the land' (p.242), again stressing environmental commonality and natural history, further countering the neoliberal narrative of self-making individualism.

The abandoning devil could also metaphorically signal the end of Musa's subjugation of the women as they flee. The fever devil also personifies the hallucinatory, visionary motif of the novel, partly inspired by Crace's own experience of malaria in the Sudan, with severe illness at the limit of mortality sometimes providing a visionary experience, or at least an acute awareness of mortality. Again, the ambiguity of the mythopoetic mode allows both a critical rumination on the validity of parable or a reaffirmation of faith within the crucible of a realist examination. In a utopian reading, it discusses how an increasingly multicultural society of conflicting

values and faiths can coexist to ensure mutual liberty, with this storytelling mode offering one means of exploring religious themes without any overt dichotomy. While the omniscient narration allows a deeply dramatic presentation of the whole quarantining community, fittingly recalling the 'Hell is other people' premise of Jean Paul Sarté's *No Exit* (1944), the focus of novel is on Musa and, despite the infernal association introducing the character that could be read as a supernatural possession, Crace offers a study of mundane, social evil.

As Musa's fever is personified as a devil, Musa himself can be read as a personification of amoral, exploitative neoliberal economics. A critique of a capitalist, profit-driven approach to social services is that modern capitalism does not prioritize stability and social harmony as socialism ideally might but rather it engenders a progressive sense of conflict and competition. The long-term patten of financial growth is more a fluctuation of economic booms and slumps, enabling buying and selling of assets for maximized profits, which can be seen reflected in Musa. Having boomed successfully in his marketplace by projecting confidence, much as financial value is assigned on the stock exchange, in his preferred self-image of 'sitting neatly and cross-legged beside some market booth dispensing deals and judgements like a priest' (p.28), Musa is reduced in value as a crash of devilish fever leaves him a social outcast, as is his long-suffering dependant of a wife,

Rather than adapt with a more cooperative approach, Musa irrationally and almost pathologically maintains his entrepreneurial behaviour to exploit and manipulate those around him and ultimately, as the expense of those toiling beneath him in his micro-society, he ultimately succeeds, reflecting the financial boom-and-bust cycle.

This recalls the observation made by the documentary *The Corporation* (2003), directed by Mark Ashba and Jennifer Abbot, that if the legal entity of a major company was analysed using a psychological personality test, profit-driven corporate behaviour could be defined as clinically psychotic, or at least fundamentally antisocial. In this sense, Musa unsubtly represents the neoliberal exploitation of the vulnerable and isolated in society as another form of mental illness afflicting the community, the devil fever of greed, as he and Miri are cast out of their family, effectively left for dead, to quarantine in the desert, with Musa attempting to trick his peers to become his tenants and endure his domineering abuse.

As a study of evil, Musa is less a romantically rebellious character than John Milton's Lucifer of *Paradise Lost* (1667), whose tenet of 'better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven' can easily be read as ironically heroic in its defiance of autocratic or parental authority. While Musa is depicted as charismatic, the free indirect mode of narration allows Crace to fully expose Musa's lack of humility and dispel any danger of admiring the strength of his convictions prior to his rape of Marta. Musa embodies the Christian sins: greed in his profiteering; gluttony in his corpulence compared with his undernourished pregnant wife; lust and envy in his desiring and violation of Marta, another man's wife; wrath in his brutality against both his donkey and Shim; sloth as he coerces his tenants into carrying his wares and performing unfairly exchanged labour, and leaving Miri to the 'women's work', and pride in his selfish duplicitous assertions of being the local landlord to retain his entitlement to social status. Yet despite such a litany of sinfulness, Crace emphasizes the humanity and mundane nature of Musa's evil, maintaining a recognizable, relatable internal logic to justify his own actions and deflect blame. His crimes are all too familiar everyday

occurrences associated with patriarchal authority and the mundane nature of Musa's sins invites the reader to consider their own culpability in everyday banal evils.

Musa, following the miraculous blunder of his ironically undeserved and accidental resurrection by Jesus, introduces the theme of duality. 'He was large even as a child – two hearts, two stomachs, twice the bones, twin temperaments… he had learnt to suppress the lesser, tearful twin.' (p.29). As noted in Crace's interviews with Tew, Musa's name is the Latin for muse and thus ironically serves as the muse of abstinence in his temptation of Jesus to break his fast and join his community, opposites creating each other in a way befitting the Zen enlightenment sought by Shim. With his 'lesser self' banished as a survival strategy for the marketplace, Musa emotes no kindness or empathy but rather indulgent, delusional self-pity and territorial greed. Crace may suggest these are the qualities of the materialistic free marketeer and the bourgeois landlord without any true right or basis for his projected power, even deriving sexual gratification from his wares but these are also relatable failings most readers should recognize in themselves. Described repeatedly as bread or dough (p.26) not only to illustrate his domineering corpulence, and the fleeting mortal substance of the body, but also perhaps as an ironic reference to the Biblical body of Christ in the tradition of Catholicism, being a dualistic counterpoint to a selfless Christ, the anti-Christ.

The duality of Musa is reflected in the other characters in crisis. From an initial jealous unspoken rivalry over each other's bodies reflecting their relations with patriarchy, pregnant Miri and childless Marta reject these identities and enter a relationship of female solidarity and intimacy which will ultimately be their salvation.

The young, opinionated and loquacious Shim seeks a privileged concept of enlightenment while the aged, humble Jew, Aphas, seeks a simpler notion of spiritual peace or, failing that, a miraculously cure to his terminal cancer. While Shim is the most cultured and formally civilized, he is least helpful or practical in the harsh environment, as opposed to the Badu tribesman, seemingly crazed and feral, is the wisest in the ways of desert survival. All these characters illustrating how the dominant values of their culture are at odds with their natural states, exacerbating their spiritual and mental anguish.

A duality of life coming from death is further presented by Musa's grave, dug by Miri with dutiful optimism and by fateful good fortune becoming the communal well. Life almost magically, or miraculously, springs forth as Miri investigates birds gathered to drink the groundwater, and the isolated pilgrims are forged into a community. The image of the fasters gathered around a grave for water is reminiscent of a religious festival. As with the accidental resurrection of Musa, there is a traditional spiritual association with water reoccurring throughout the novel. In *A Philosophy of Walking* (2011), Frédéric Gros remarks that,

> Behind every pilgrimage we find a utopia and a myth: the myth of regeneration and the utopia of presence. I like to think the St James embodies the virtues of pilgrimage so well because he is identified as the first witness to the Transfiguration of Christ. Internal transformation remains the pilgrim's mystical ideal: he hopes to be absolutely *altered* on his return. That transformation is still expressed in the vocabulary of regeneration: very often there is a spring, stream or river close to holy places, the lustral element in which pilgrims can immerse themselves, to emerge purified, as it were cleansed of themselves (p.121).

Although the novel does feature miraculous transfiguration in accordance with this mystical ideal, from Musa's resurrection to Marta's subsequent pregnancy, these are

presented as ironic or almost random events and not as divine rewards for abjuring faith. The novel presents a more fatalistic or deterministic version of the narrative, with the transformations of characters being the causal results of individual actions but as unintended consequences of selfish, ego-driven actions.

The final transcendental realization reached by Gally-Jesus is the futility of exercising his free will for the attention of a rational parental god:

> This was his final blasphemy. He begged the devil to fly up and save him from the wind. He'd almost welcome the devil more than god. For the devil can be traded with, and exorcized. But god is ruthless and unstable. No one can cast out god' (p.193).

While the depiction of a chaotic, indifferent universe might appear defeatist and dystopian, the absence of an interventionist divine authority demanding worship and deference, especially when tested with hardship, could be read as an optimistic advocation of free will, which can be said to be incompatible with an omniscient deity, and even with a naïve delusional Jesus meeting a tragically pointless death due to his self-imposed isolation during a storm, the narrative does not exclude the existence of the supernatural or divine.

Paradoxically, and further adding to the duality, the role of supernatural originator is the role adopted by Crace himself as the author employing an omniscient narrative mode of mythopoeic storytelling to test his own belief in a godless universe, adding a layer of satirical metafiction as Crace ironically assumes a godlike perspective in a godless narrative. Here a dystopian perspective can be read as a positive endorsement of humanity and a challenge to paternalistic authoritarianism. As noted

by Gregory Claeys' survey *Utopia* (2020) 'Western utopianism is rooted firmly in Christianity' (p.29), with images of Eden and Heaven as rewards for obedience, and where free will and personal desire results in banishment for mortal and angel alike. In Crace's universe, Musa's salvation, as undeserved as his resurrection as it might be, would come from his imagination and storytelling as form reflects ethos in a dénouement of metafiction. The tradition and power of storytelling is considered within the novel as it is one of Musa's primary assets. Even the seemingly savage Badu tribesman appears captivated by Musa's oratory: 'even if he didn't understand a single word, he recognized the storyteller's tone' (p.100). However, the reader's insight into Musa's true character invites all narratives to be questioned and challenged for their moral worth and ultimate cost, including the notion of socioeconomic progress.

While Crace's work is not presenting an explicit political stance, just as *Quarantine* does not express an openly atheist reinterpretation or rejection of Jesus, the narratives do seek to question and challenge the dominate ideology of individualistic neoliberalism with an alternative perspective, lacking familiar idiomatic language to suggest linguistic distance and blending Biblical details with fabulist invention to disorient a familiar parable. The effect is a sense of otherness, or assumed translationese, as if the text and its meaning originated outside a western literary tradition. As the *New Testament* scripture emerged from multiple translations predating any western modernity, this style appears apt for the material. It also implies alternative cultures and ideologies to dominant globalization. In *How the World Thinks* (2018), Julian Baggini characterizes East Asian traditions as predominately pro-social and collectivist, with a fundamental relationality, where 'the

nature of any individual is determined by how that individuals stand in relation to others' (p.192). The storyteller mode emphasizes this relationship between self and community, or individual being defined by co-operation with the state, rather than individualist self-actualization or Christian persona salvation, appropriating the culturally ingrained parable as an anti-individualist counternarrative.

In *Quarantine*, faith does not reward salvation or divine favour. Rather, the cooperation between characters and rebellion against their social roles provides salvation, such as the escape of Miri and Marta from Musa, while the isolation of Jesus proves almost comically tragic, depending on one's reading. The self-destructive religious faith can easily be seen as allegorical for socio-economic faith in market forces and the 'invisible hand' of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). This appropriation can also be seen as a reassertion of the socialist ethos as fundamental within a central myth of western culture, with cooperation being the basis for social insurance, as defined in The Beveridge Report and the post-war Welfare State in Britain. As remarked by Baggini,

> The dissident writer Xu Zhiyuan made an intriguing connection between the rational self in China and its historic absence of theism. "In the western tradition, individuality is part of your relationship between you and God," he said, "Individualism starts with Christianity, which stressed personal salvation, the individual's relationship with God, the fact that God cares for each one of us"' (p.198-9).

Crace is thusly positing a socialist counternarrative at the very cultural and moral core of individualism and colonialist neoliberalism.

Mark Fisher, building upon Jamerson's concepts of postmodernity, articulates the possible psychological impacts of neoliberalism in *Capitalist Realism*. These included a loss of ego due to the schizophrenic nature of capitalism, with personal egalitarian values in direct opposition to hierarchical social structure and consumerism still dependent on slavery for resources and manufacturing. The cognitive dissonance can therefore trap individuals within a cycle of hypocrisy and self-hating ideological cynicism between fatalistic compensations of pleasure (p.21-22). This maddening duality can be seen in the suffering of *Quarantine*'s characters, such as Marta blaming herself for her husband's infertility as she cannot fulfil her prescribed social role, and Shim's futile search for truth and self-worth, seeking enlightenment and ironically suffering the opposite of depersonalization in Musa's debt. The causes of their delusions and anxiety are societal and exacerbated by a loss of community. The narrative begins Musa and Miri ejected from their travelling community when Musa's sickness becomes a burden, their microcosm of society lacking any form of welfare.

As allegory, the uncertain and increasingly strained mental states of the characters can be read as representing a schizophrenia of political division and conflicting discourse, due to the individualism of the dominant ideology at the expense of social care and justice for those most vulnerable to its structural changes. For Crace, the privatization of the post-war Welfare State and socialist ideal to reform British society, and seeming loss of the labour movement to neoliberalism, can relate to Mark Fisher's concept of the future being gradually cancelled through cultural stagnation, increasing mental illness and impending environmental disaster, all secondary socio-economic concerns to the profit motive. However, as there are

fledgling alternative concepts to free-market capitalism within the public discourse, such Universal Basic Income and Green Politics, there are also alternative artistic modes to canonical realism to challenge the dominant ideology. Fisher insisted a social and political explanation is required for the physiological symptoms of mental illnesses such as depression, as biological explanations promoted throughout contemporary culture only benefit the pharmaceutical industry (p.21). Rather, the mental health pandemic suggests capitalism is inherently harmful and dysfunctional while presenting itself as natural, as reflected in Crace's quarantine community which attempts to illustrate such an explanation. The reader is invited to pity the characters as they are manipulated and exploited by their entirely illegitimate landlord Musa, as Crace elicits sympathy for the similarly exploited and isolated within society, stigmatised with mental illness presented as biological malfunction rather than relating to their social environment and economic status. While there is a liminal space of ambiguity to accommodate the divine (and infernal) in Crace's counternarrative, there is no interventionist or parental saviour, or benevolent wealth-creator, in this reimagining. There is only the countercultural community the characters can create to survive.

7. The Pesthouse: The Inversion of Neoliberal Progress

The Pesthouse is the first of Crace's novels to address America and transatlantic politics as a direct subject, and the first to appropriate elements of genre fiction as a work of dystopian science fiction. In a chronologically uncertain future, countering a linear framing of history, the United States of America are disoriented into preindustrial-European conditions following some forgotten environmental disaster, with the remaining descendants ironically seeking to flee east across the Atlantic in the hope of fertile land. In *Contemporary Crisis Fiction* (2014), Emily Horton identifies a post-9/11 shift in British literary fiction from traditional political realism to more experimental and psychological critiques of late-capitalism, such as genre-influenced works by contemporaries McEwan, Graham Swift and Ishiguro (p.1). These works argue for democratic egalitarianism and social justice as political priorities, in opposition to the neoliberal consensus of subordinating the state, environment and public amenities to the global market, resulting in the crises inherent in this boom-and-bust financial model. In the case of *The Pesthouse*, the crisis is not only ecological but also ethical with the loss of the egalitarian utopia promised by the Enlightenment and the American Dream of the popular imagination. The exact nature of the apocalyptic event, or combination of crises, prior to the narrative is left ambiguous, which reflect the loss of knowledge for the protagonists and implies a cautionary inevitability. However, for the reader, it can easily be read that the neoliberalist system simply consumed all wealth and natural resources before collapsing and vanishing, taking our familiar modernity with it. This is illustrated but

the almost surreal lack of memories and artefacts of late-capitalism throughout the novel, stressing that a realistic, linear depiction of apocalyptic conditions was not a priority for the narrative.

Atypical of dystopic fiction, the novel is also essentially romantic as the love between seemingly mismatched protagonists, social outcasts Franklin and Margret, endures to the novel's conclusion, a starkly bright contrast to the brutal deconstruction of Winston Smith's devotion to Julia in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) or the tragic fate of the father in Cormac McCarthy's similarly premised *The Road* (2006), reflecting a final enduring optimism for the novel's subject. The novel's contrived romantic conclusion, with lovers reunited and settling down with their adopted child, is more reminiscent of the conclusion of Ragnarök from Norse mythology, with the sole surviving humans, Líf and Lífþrasir, hiding in woods during the apocalyptic twilight of the gods to emerge and eventually repopulate the human race, representing a cyclical eschatology rather than the linear Judeo-Christian tradition based on a notion of order and thus natural hierarchy. Crace, rather than an apocalyptic future resulting from some deserved divine wrath in a biblical tradition, instead explores a mythic mode alternate to the presumed inevitability of progressivism, with a technological destiny mysteriously negated. With elements of dystopian fiction, the novel is also a Cracean fable of endurance without modernity and neoliberalism, as a political counternarrative.

The novel's opening sets an impassive tone of daily disaster with, 'Everybody died at night' (p.1). The opening again employs a fabulist dislocation of detail with cougars positioning narrative in North America before the statement of, 'This used to be

America'. 'America' immediately suggests allegory as a loss of political ideals as well as nation state, alluding to the events of 9/11 with vivid descriptions of 'a heavy, deadly, surface-hugging cloud, not as high as the pines but higher, certainly, than animals' (p.2) from the initial landslide. As well as being allegory of post-9/11 American geopolitics and cultural identity crisis, the America of *The Pesthouse* is itself symbolic for modernity as the novel investigates what is left of society after its inexplicable destruction. Crace provides an abstract alternative to sociocultural evolution and the idealized 'End of History', in which progressivism has been irretrievably reversed. This strategy also utilizes an atheist sentiment of reinventing the world through poetry rather than expressing faith via the pastoral. Robert Scholes noted of his American author subjects that, 'modern fabulators are post-realist and post-romantic as well. They lack that Coleridgean belief in the ultimate order of the world' (p.106). However, Crace retains a romanticism of the natural world and his sublime imagined landscapes, as a secular pastoral alternative to the empirical materialism informing late-capitalist ideology, sympathising with Coleridge if not fully agreeing.

The opening language of *The Pesthouse* is more parochial than apocalyptic. The more British term 'landslip', rather than landslide, serves to dislocate the reader from modern America immediately and the description of 'one great flatulence' (p.2) is visceral and uncomfortably intimate, reminiscent of the transgressive bodily functions of *The Devil's Larder*. The comical and absurd imagery contrasts the human tragedy, setting a stoic tone. Nash's ill-fitting coat bartered from the 'giant' Jackson immediately illustrates the desperate conditions, with the loss of industry and the absence of modern consumerism. Medieval details such as 'flagon' mirror an ironic

fairy-tale logic from the boy's imaginative perspective, reflected by the narrative mode, with giants being a key feature of prehistoric British mythology. The premodern conditions are also denoted from such details as a coat being like chieftain robes and that 'a mule was wealth' (p.4). The notion of fearful travellers heading to the coast, seeking refuge and escape is reminiscent of the novel's comparable contemporary, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), similarly symbolic but differing in realist technique. In McCarthy's novel, the journey towards the coast is a father's survivalist logic in response to an extreme existential crisis, with the dramatic tension generated from an impending sense of tragic futility within such an empty world, an extreme metaphor for the pressures of parenthood. *The Pesthouse,* by contrast, presents the scenario more satirically, as an ironically inverted cultural narrative with Americans seeking to return to Europe for their salvation.

The walking within *The Pesthouse* continues the Cracean motif of transformative ambulation across a disoriented landscape. As Musa was an ironically unsaintly witness to Jesus in *Quarantine*, the opening pilgrimages of *The Pesthouse* are ironically dystopic and regressive, as the doomed descendants of puritans and pioneers seek to return to Europe and forgotten source of social subjection, satirising the reactionary nostalgia of a conservative mindset. The post-apocalyptic scenes conveyed by the narrative voices are more akin to myth than science fiction:

> The far side of the river was an odd, perplexing place, he'd heard, haunted, wrecked and hard underfoot, with prairies of rubble where people had once lived in bastions and towers. The way ahead would be difficult beyond imagining (p.5).

The use of terms ‘bastions and towers’, suggesting gated communities and apartment blocks, illustrate a loss of knowledge and contextual framework for understanding the past, reducing ruins to mysterious ancient sites as the reader might regard Stonehenge, inverting the narrative of historical progress. However, the narrative also stresses human commonality and presents an apocalypse in vaguely optimistic terms, with constants of human behaviour and culture enduing ideology and economic. This scenario again recalls the Fredric Jamerson remark about how it is easier to imagine the end of human civilization than the end of capitalist relations, as *The Pesthouse* attempts the latter with the former.

For neoliberal post-capitalism to be forgotten, America has reverted to a prehistoric dark age reserved for myth. The opening chapter presents this primeval framework with dramatic irony: ‘He was a victim of magic, possibly, or fever… Or a curse, the sort that storytellers knew about…’ (p.4). In this America, superstition, culturally remembered medical science and storytelling cohabit and offer alternative meanings and strategies for survival but without a dominant ideology. As with McCarthy’s novel, and Norse mythology, all that remains of value in the absence of society are intimate personal relationships and the failure of such love would signify the totality of the imagined apocalypse. The couple fleeing a ruined America together also recalls the mythic quality of Adam and Eve leaving Eden, in a further reapplication of Biblical imagery,

While a self-contained parabolic narrative, *The Pesthouse* is clear also intended as a cautionary parable, although also absent from this landscape is a clear transferal of meaning. However, while some reviewers have critiqued such vagueness from

Crace, the opaque political subject of allegory is befitting the narrative mode. As Scholes remarked, the ‘contemporary allegorist is likely to be both arbitrary and tentative. His world will be idealized but unsystematic, full of meanings but devoid of meanings’ (p.107). This description is apt for Crace’s strategy of disorientation, positioning the reader somewhere between secular parable and political commentary but adding ambiguity rather than ideology. Again, the emphasis is more on symbolism than representation of objective reality and therefore explores a more similar narrative mode to religion and Jungian mysticism rather than the conventional realism of reporting fictional experience, inviting the reader’s individual interpretation. Interestingly, this novel of catastrophic neoliberal collapse was published the year before the 2008 global financial crisis and the mass foreclosure of homes in the US, which did temporarily reduce millions of people to homeless nomads.

With the opening landslip, the characteristic pioneering optimism and hope for a better future one might associate with American culture is lost beneath the toxic landscape. The detail of a ferryman, as well as the name Ferrytown, adds an ominous association with death and mythological purgatory, the River Styx also being associated with memory loss. The reference suggests an underworld of drifting amnesiac spirits, as no state was left following neoliberalism’s collapse aside from a common language and instinctive survival skills. As counternarrative, this can reflect a loss of domestic industry and labour skills to globalised outsourcing, as well as the cultural identity of a parity in economic opportunities. The almost cinematic reveal of the preluding ‘this used to be America’ and the eastward emigration and destitution immediately reverses the American mythology of the westward Gold Rush or Steinbeck-esque migration to escape the Depression Era Dust Bowl Oklahoma to

California and the Pacific coast. As a further contrast to *The Road*, Crace's narrative moves between characters before focusing on the eventual neo-biblical couple of Franklin and Margret, creating a sense of community, while McCarthy's novel is firmly rooted on a father trying to keep his son alive in an individualist quest of genetic preservation.

While characteristically dense with poetic imagery, Crace balances his symbolism with the realism of physical details to illustrate the desperate conditions. Meanwhile, the pastoral personification of nature is decidedly malignant:

> Once summer turned and limped away, its sack crammed full of leaves, the route was challenging. Within a month the weather would have mugged the final stragglers, and the roads and ways would be empty again, untrodden till spring (p.9).

While names and social identities are erased for the reader from *The Road's* former-America, Crace adopts character names of heavily ironic significance: Franklin Lopez, named after (now forgotten) legendary Founding Father Thomas Franklin, with an added Hispanic name suggesting migration and even Texan colonial history. Likewise, brother 'giant' Jackson's name might well suggest US President Andrew Jackson, also tragically forgotten in this dystopia of ignorance. With such culturally significant names, the desire to cross the ocean and escape the land might almost seem sacrilegious, with a promised land of pilgrims now offering such ignoble details as shallow graves to be torn up by wolves and 'stew made from a hand-caught rabbit too diseased to run away, with nettle tops as greens' (p.9), With a tragically comic final detail of attempting to maintain a semblance of civilization, the hunter-gather

skills of pioneering ancestors, as well as the presumably now extinct native inhabitants, are also lost.

The arguing Lopez brothers is a further ironic reference to Biblical creation myth, leaving their home and mother on a journey. This heroic symbolism is somewhat ironic with Franklin being physically incapable and insufficiently masculine in the eyes of his brother. Their dialogue styled with Americanist contractions, more parabolic than verisimilitude but convincing in its folkish tone of premodern fraternal hierarchy: ‘You hear me, little brother? Little brother?’ and ‘they had never been the sort to disoblige their ma’ (p.14). The brothers also introduce the Cracean regular features of a journey by foot as the utopia of rebirth, an ironic pilgrimage, with crippling physical injury, as well as shaved heads. Details of their travelling items blend medieval supplies with ‘ground tarps’ from pre-apocalyptic industry as they travel. Frederic Gros comments again on walking:

> The inescapable is there to show that discipline is not only a passive habit. It makes us feel a destiny of will, through which Nietzsche defined freedom. The inescapable thing about walking is that once started, one is forced to arrive (p.158).

This self-determining freedom is foolhardy in ‘Craceland’. For Jackson, his discipline and triumph of will has tragic consequences, while Franklin is ironically saved by his own physical weakness and failure to complete their journey. Jackson’s fate is foreshadowed by the weak-willed trading of his family heirloom coat for temporary pleasures of apple juice, again ironically wasted as urine as Franklin meets his fate in another subtle touch of Cracean tragicomedy.

The character of Red Margret, the Apricot, is present immediately contrary to American beauty standards as such standards have long since changed according to living conditions, with obesity now coveted: '…local men, attracted by her colour, and her plumpness…' (p.19). As fat is now a luxury, the detail suggests starvation is common, as another reversal of modernity. The description of Margret's significant appearance might also suggest a drab, austere culture lacking colour, with premature greying denoting brutally stressful living conditions. With medieval conditions for disease control and remedies without antibiotics, the shaving of hair as an invented social practice is a detail simultaneously alienating and uncannily familiar for the reader as signifying ostracization and a punishment for transgression. A further Biblical detail of forbidden wool suggests puritanical religion has been taken to its medievalist extreme.

The Pesthouse location, inspired by the historical 'pest house' isolation hospital and graveyard for plague afflicted sailors in the St Helen's Isle of Scilly, a regular holiday destination for the Crace family, is another method of disorientation, at once both recognizable and unfamiliar outside an historical context. *The Pesthouse* continues Crace's interest in the unjustly marginalized and disenfranchised within an alternative mythology. In this invented culture, customs appear based on cruel commercial logic as Margret is forced into hiding to protect the community's micro-economy. The dangers of the local wildlife – snakes, wolves, ants, even the trees – are malevolent personifications in the spirit of gothic horror. Coins of the lost American neoliberal economy are reduced to symbolic talismans as an image of Abraham Lincoln is conflated with his biblical namesake and presented in equally mythological terms, given the mythical status of King Arthur as he is believed to

‘come back to help America one day with his enormous promises’ (p.27). The modern neoliberal American Dream of individualistic emancipation, gone along with the vanished value of fiat currency, both mirror the empty promises of Margret’s father.

James Wood, as part of a review for *The New Republic*, commented that Crace’s prose in *The Pesthouse* was noticeably avoidant of banality, therefore distracting and contrived to resist a more utilitarian style verisimilitude which might enable an easier immersion within the text. Presumably an example might be, ‘this was the kind of rain that wouldn’t rest until its job was done’ (p.29). Rather than a free indirect styling closer to the character’s perspective such as, for example, ‘the rain wasn’t gonna quit’. The somewhat antiquated authorial style of third person narration, or the storyteller mode, is employed to convey a sense of universality with a fundamentally recognizable metaphor from the natural world, emulating the chronological distance and transcultural ethos of a fable in translation, rather than a more internalized and less reliable individual experience. While the style might be disagreeably self-conscious to some readers, it serves to reflect the conditions of this historically inverted America, in which all that is left of the real America are the myths of oral storytellers. Crace’s style is also not about so much about representing the primary world or articulating its experiences as it is encouraging alternative perspectives, as well as exploring pluralistic variety within literature as an expression of multiculturalism rather than attempting to hone an ideal form.

The mythopoeic narrative style presents an emphasis on striking personification and a prominently oratory rhythm of alliteration and clear cadence, as well as a

storyteller's roaming omniscience over his characters rather than an internalized and subtly dynamic presentation of mundane details expected of realist convention, although obviously no less artificial. Crace continues to stress dislocation as counternarratives to late-capitalist realities. As an example of the storyteller mode, the budding relationship between Franklin and Margret is presented as parabolic symbolism as if featured in a retold myth, albeit with a note of ironic romanticism, rather than internalized psychological character development:

> For the time being, she and Franklin were happy anyway to be together on Butter Hill and amused to be playing piggyback, despite the fear of which they might find below. Were they in love? Well, no, not yet. He was too young and inexperienced; she was too old and inexperienced. They were, however, getting there with every step' (p.64).

The omniscient narrative enables an expediency of motif with the characters determined by their ignorance to exist as Adam and Eve in the ironic Eden of the pesthouse and surrounding hill, illustrating the 'quickness' noted by Italo Calvino of traditional folktales and the 'economy, rhythm, and hard logic with which they are told' (p.35). While Franklin and Margret are central characters, the true protagonist determining the narrative is the mythical geographical setting of dystopic, future-primeval America, malevolent and magical as if rejecting its intrusive human inhabitants, so the emphasis is on imagery as experienced through the characters rather than their psychological development.

While *The Pesthouse* features such inhumane dangers as enslavement and rape throughout the novel (although such dangers are obviously not exclusive to post-apocalyptic hypotheticals), there are also examples of ingrained civilized social

practices persevering, as embodied by the main characters. Franklin joining Margret in the pesthouse after the initially fearful approach is notable in the honoured civility of hospitality, a contrast from the nightmarish savagery of other dystopian texts, with actual cannibalism and psychotic brutality illustrating complete social collapse. While these fears are expressed in this America, society has still endued. Rather than being a flimsy presence of civility that vanishes during an extreme existential crisis, the concept of society endues in Crace's narratives even as individuals and assumed certainties of consumerism perish and disappear. This is in defiance of the Thatcherite credo of there being no such thing as society. Similarly, Margret's femininity endures and remains attractive to Franklin despite being shaved of her hair, being more than a superficial feature. This is also demonstrated by Jackson's experience of dining in the guest house as the civilised customs endure despite the scarcity of resources: 'such good manners seemed excessive for that quality of food but necessary in the company and under the scrutiny of strangers (p.40).' Again, far removed from the paranoid horror fantasies of other dystopian texts and closer to the author's own experiences of third world hospitality. The absence of late-capitalism does not result in brutal post-apocalyptic anarchy, suggesting functional alternatives to capitalist realism.

However, while not as graphically horrific as many examples of the genre, the America of *The Pesthouse* is still an abstract dystopia. Travellers yearn for 'the country their grandpas and grandmas had talked about, a land of profusion, safe from human predators, and welcoming beyond the hog and hominy of this raw place...' (p.42). The humorous talk of 'naked cannibals' and 'dwarfs' a short distance beyond Ferrytown is reminiscent of New World fantasies of anthropophagi as

referenced by Shakespeare in Othello in another reversal of cultural progress. While modernity is consigned to the dim lore of forebearers, the lack of specific setting and historical positioning allows room for allegory.

Written towards the end of the George W. Bush administration and during the transatlantic neoliberal political commitment to 'The War of Terror', often justified as western modernity defending itself against medievalist fanaticism, *The Pesthouse* can be read a direct inversion of this binary, with American/Western culture symbolically reverted to its historical origins and increasingly abandoned for lands of imagined historical certainty. The very identity of America has been obscured by disaster, leaving a fearful reversion to the medievalist zealotry and the brutally absolutism of the Crusades, as an allegorical critique of the neo-conservative War on Terror. The implication is beneath the assertions of righteous modernity lurks the very medievalism the west claims to oppose. This is more explicit with the arrival of the fanatical Finger Baptists representing the fundamentalist Christian right commandeering political discourse in the United States, with their religious opposition to metal in denial of modernity and industry also reflects Dark Age ignorance with the collective loss of cultural memory, recalling superstitious explanations for bubonic plague during the Black Death as a toxic miasma spreads across Ferrytown.

The details of invented remedies within the narrative conjure a medieval reality with a sense of ignorant desperation to counter pestilence.

> Diseases depart the body through the soles of the feet. That's why – when pigeons were so plentiful and decent meat was served at every meal – the people of his parent's generation had strapped a living pigeon to a sick child's feet (p.53).

While an amusingly absurd image, the added realism of a remedy dependent on the relatively luxurious resources available. There has not been an immediate descent into barbarism following the loss of scientific modernity but rather a gradual adaption of culture, reverting to previous modes of superstition and symbolic interpretation. This is represented, almost as a metanarrative, by Crace's mythopoeic mode but removing the primary world and disorienting the reader in a post-apocalyptic setting as symbolic allegory. The symbolism of pigeons continues with Margret's subsequent pet-name for Franklin, with an ironically common and urban bird for the reader having assumed a superstitious association.

However, while the America of *The Pesthouse* is desolate and dangerous, with contagion and marauders rampant, Crace does not aggressively depict an authoritarian or hopeless mirror dystopia as political protest, Crace instead emphasizes the positive and shared elements of society and community with politics, and Crace's own political self, removed. Just as Franklin yearns to leave this ruined America for opportunity abroad, the common aspirations of liberty which still inspire immigration to the United States are revitalized. The tragic empiricism and muscularity of Jackson, which can be read as representing a distinctly American sense of unilateral optimism predominant during the Bush administration, are proved powerless against chaotic fate after asserting to fellow travellers that 'tomorrow you can see it for yourselves' prior to the landslip. Like the contemporary geopolitics, the future is absent to emphasize the importance of the present and a reappraisal of common values against the ideological and economic polarization of post-capitalism.

Indeed, the novel culminates with this reassertion of the American mythic and a return to lost community as its conclusion: ‘They could imagine striking out to claim a piece of long-abandoned land and making home in some old place, some territory begging to be used. Going westward, they go free’ (p.309).

As Crace illustrates, the everyday experience of realism and symbolism of cultural myths cannot be separated in literature or indeed in any other arena of life. However, the emphasis on dislocating mythopoeic expressions of themes rather than metonyms of verisimilitude and presents a strategic counter-position to the dominant ideology of free market progressivism and the metric of empirical economics. The restructuring of realism with poetic invention attempts to illustrate uncertain social, cultural, economic and environmental consequences of the unchecked governance of capital and individualism. The questions of what is being lost are posited without the presumption of answers. Disorientalism is conveyed by dislocating the America from a progressist historical narrative, inverting the triumphantly individualist culture, founded on Enlightenment utopian ideals, into a hypothetical medievalism seeking a reverse pilgrimage, with ironically more equality than at its founding with a lack of racially justified slavery.

As Crace often describes narrative in evolutionary biological terms, serving an essential and practical function in human development, the practical application of the oral storytelling Crace emulates should be noted. In Jem Bendell’s apocalyptic paper on sustainability management, ‘Deep Adaptation’ (2018), for example, Bendell cites the themes of storytelling values as vital for community and grassroots political action when faced with massive existential threat:

> In my work with mature students, I have found that inviting them to consider collapse as inevitable, catastrophe as probable and extinction as possible, has not led to apathy and depression. Instead, in a supportive environment, where we have enjoyed community with each other, celebrating ancestors and enjoying nature before then looking at this information and possible framings for it, something positive happens. I have witnessed a shedding of concern for the status quo, and a new creativity about what to focus on going forward.[80]

These values of natural appreciation and retold ancestral wisdoms to engender political engagement are the essential of storytelling prose, introduced with *Continent* and more directly discussed in *The Pesthouse*. However, this engagement can be seen as fundamentally paradoxical. Despite political motivations and environmental concerns, the novels of Crace remain industrially produced commercial products, made with deforested paper, illustrating H. Abram Veeser's observation in *The New Historicism* (1989) of the fifth of his five ley assumptions that a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture capitalism participate in the economy they describe (xi). For a narrative mode to critique neoliberal globalization in the form of the commercial literary novel, the creativity and aesthetic pleasure of poetic prose offers at least offers an initial artistic impact during the participation, following Barthes' 'le Plaisir du texte'. In a similar vein, Jon Klancher in *English Romanticism and Cultural Production* (1989) described such political literature as emblematic of "a postmodern culture powerless to resist" (p.77), attempting to subvert the commercial with the polemical but essentially remaining entertainment, which may help to explain Crace's repeated dismissals of his own prose in favour of championing journalism.

[80] Not an peer reviewed academic paper but essentially a personal scientific essay on impeding social collapse from climate change, in general agreement with other such recent studies as David Wallace-Wells' *The Uninhabitable Earth* (2019), New York: Tim Duggan.

8. ***Harvest* and *The Melody*: Historical Critiques of the Present**

Harvest presents the pastoral setting of a Tudor England farming village, which within a different narrative might be romantically depicted as a utopian and idyllic community of self-sufficient manual labour and the antithesis of post-capitalist consumerism. However, Crace does not indulge in any such social realism. The narrative concerns the breakdown and displacement of a traditional working community, but the villagers are entirely culpable and complicit rather than simply downtrodden and exploited. Crace's statement of intent occurs immediately with the (genuine, this time) opening epitaph taken from Alexander Pope's '*Ode On Solitude*', ironically employed as the land so jealously guarded by the villagers, 'our village' as narrator Walter habitually refers to it with the same irony, is not owned by any of them, and the actual ownership belonging to Master Kent soon revealing their protected lifestyle to be self-delusion.

The villagers of *Harvest* are secretive, hypocritical, indulgent and xenophobic, quick to blame outsiders for their own transgressions. As the narrative develops, it is these self-destructive and qualities which undoes the community. The residing noble, Master Kent is the old order of feudal hierarchy while his cousin Jordan is the profiteering usurper, conspiring to reappropriate the land for profit. The villagers prefer to blame others, in the form of traveling outsiders, than their own previously beneficiary system of servitude. The result is their own impoverishment. As an allegory of anti-immigration sentiment, *Harvest* can be seen predicting post-neoliberal (and anti-neoliberal) popularist trends of isolationism and pre-empting

such political events as Brexit. Crace also portrays protectionist popularism as tragically self-defeating due to the failure of an inclusive community.

The ahistorical absence of a church in the village emphasizes their individualistic self-preservation rather than any governing moral authority. The villagers are bawdy and salacious, with many partial to shirking their communal responsibilities to get intoxicated on local mushrooms. While the depiction is too comically dysfunctional to be idealized, the working villagers appear satisfied with their lot. According to Walter's narration, there is no aspiration of social mobility beyond their village life. Mr. Quill is introduced as a familiar embodiment of modernization, empirically quantifying the land for ascribing monetary value. In contrast to the self-contained and earthily utopian community of shared labour, the mechanics of globalizing commerce are gothic in their external influence. *Harvest'*s narrator, passive observer Walter Thirsk, is originally from outside the village and essentially the non-biological brother of Master Kent, both wet-nursed together as infants, despite their adult divide of social status. From his mediating position as travelled villager and confidant to nobility, as well as narrative storyteller, Walter articulates the reluctance of the villagers to adapt:

> We know enough to understand that in the greater world, flour, meat and cheese are not divided into share and portions for the larder, as they are here, but only weighed and sized for selling… Now each barking deer or woodcock call was a warning. Each darkling cloud reminded us how nothing in our fields was guaranteed (p.18).

This continues the Cracean motif of a traditional working community collectively under threat from looming modernity. The extended metaphor of the village is also a

multifaceted and strategically ambiguous symbol open to multiple concurrent interpretations. Most broadly, the ephemeral sense of security in the village's routine evokes a universal human condition of mortal uncertainty. Perhaps most specifically, the historiographical context of the text, written in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, suggests the instability of Neoliberal credit-based finance. As counternarrative, the village conditions also reflect an assertion that quality of life for the working class did not necessarily improve with modern industrialization, countering the received wisdom that life under Neoliberal consumerism represents linear progress. The rustic village provides full employment, sufficient nourishment, purpose and camaraderie, and even free all-natural narcotics. Walter functions as narrator and protagonist but remains detached and distant as a storyteller, conveying the ephemeral state of the community.

In the opening pages of *Harvest*, the destruction of the village, as well Walter's own ceremonial burning of the manor, and the fate of the villagers as displaced refugees, are foreshadowed by the ominously gothic campfire smoke of the travelling Beldams: 'Our land is topped and tailed with flames' (p.9). This campfire smoke is mirrored by that rising from Master Kent's stables due to the revelries of mushroom-addled villagers, (according to the narrator), for which the newcomers will be scapegoated, with their fates intertwined as the 'two twists' in the opening sentence. The invented custom of announcing one's presence with a campfire incorporates the primal symbolism of smoke to signal danger immediately sets a mythic, universalist mood to the narrative, off-set by the weary cynicism of Walter's narratorly tone: 'it says, New neighbours have arrived; they've built a place; they've laid a hearth; they know the custom and the law. The first smoke has given them the right to stay. We'll see'

(p.9). As with *Signals of Distress,* there is no intention to emulate any literary vernacular from historical texts or locate the reader in the specific period. The strategic aversion to contemporary idiomatic language and specific setting again disorients the reader away from daily discourse, situating the nameless village outside any dominant cultural narrative as if there were events not recorded by historical orthodoxy. This can be seen as an alternative strategy to readdressing historical narrative otherwise accepted as inexorable linear progress towards modernity, adding the moral ambiguity of consequences for traditional communities. Crace's disorientalism dislocates the past to the present to question the notion of socio-economic progress when not measured or quantified by economic growth.

Another strategy adopted by other authors might be to emulate an historical text to present the possibility of a previously undiscovered document. David Mitchell's genre pastiche *Cloud Atlas* (2004) for example, opens with an epistolary chapter presented as a mid-nineteenth century diary entry, written in a vernacular reminiscent of Herman Melville:

> Thus it was, I made the acquaintance of Dr Henry Goose, surgeon to the London nobility. His nationality was no surprise. If there be any eyrie so desolate, or isle so remote, that one may there resort unchallenged by an Englishman, 'tis not down on any map I ever saw (p.3).

While Mitchell employs a similar ironic tone to Crace to readdress historical narrative, the emulation of chronologically distanced language orients the reader in a specific established period. There is also a similar motif of musicality as a metaphor for storytelling (and for Michell's own personal strategy of arranging disparate short

stories into unified novels), with the contrasting genres of *Cloud Atlas*' embedded narratives working as stylistic counterpoints to covey the universality of its themes. This is reflected by the metonymic model of the 'Cloud Atlas Sextet' composed by the character of Robert Frobisher within the novel, a piece for overlapping soloists 'each in its own language of key, scale and colour' (p.445).

The formal stylistic arrangement emphasized by *Cloud Atlas* is more akin to classical music than the improvisational jazz conjured by Crace's imaginative personification and poetic imagery but both styles present prose as a medium of emulation drawing upon other forms of writing and artistic creativity, associating with narrative modes predating the artefact of the printed novel while not presenting orthodox history. While the novel is endlessly adaptable and individualistic in style, such authors can paradoxically be seen to also regard the form and its cultural class associations as an obstacle to personally circumnavigate, in Crace's case by engaging with a vital, universalist concept of pre-class storytelling and counter the exclusivity of literary fiction. The personal strategies of such contemporary postmodern authors as Mitchell and Crace can be seen as alternative methods to engage with this universality of storytelling and transcend the medium of the novel whilst maintaining its commercial form.

While *Cloud Atlas* strategically implements varying degrees of chronological distanced language, both researched and invented, as a device for conveying reoccurrence and universality in history, *Harvest* does not feature familiar period-specific vernacular or a detailed historical setting. A similar approach with direct modern language within a Tudor setting was taken by Hilary Mantel in her neo-

historical Thomas Cromwell trilogy, *Wolf Hall* (2009), *Bringing Up the Bodies* (2012) and *The Mirror and the Light* (2020), the commercial success of the foremost having undoubtedly aided sales of *Harvest*. Mantel's strategic avoidance of more period-accurate emulated historical dialogue lends her trilogy a contemporary relevance in its themes of political power, as well as enabling a subtly revisionist depiction of her protagonist version of Thomas Cromwell as embodying secular values and realpolitik in the face of dogmatic conversative authority, and thusly engaging with modern political discourse. The inherent inaccessibility of the chronologically distanced language and social mores necessary for a more historically accurate depiction would have negated the artistic aims of socio-political engagement within a work of fiction. The appropriation of historical narrative, without any disingenuous pretence of depicting actual history, can be seen as another strategic method of emulating and incorporating other narrative forms to access a universality of story. While Mantel utilizes familiar cultural figures of high society to explore her own themes, the imagined historical events of *Harvest* are obscure without a specific date or location to emphasize the historical insignificance of commoners, unrecorded by contemporary chroniclers and can be seen to mirror the political disfranchisement of individual workers in modern postcapitalist society.

The thematic universalism of *Harvest* is alternatively crafted through symbolism and a disconnect between the ideal of pastoral village life and the secretive, self-destructive pursuits and prejudices of the villages as observed by Walter. The villagers are not romanticized as downtrodden pastoral peasants but active agents of their community. The following extract characterizes the village as unwelcomingly provincial and xenophobic, assuming any arriving outsiders intend to exploit the

harvest leftovers which sustains the villagers, which can be taken as a caricature of popularist incitement against open immigration policy:

> Anyway, what can you tell about a newcomer from smoke, except that he or she is wanting? Or demanding? We've heard from the occasional peddler, tinker or walk-through carpenter – who've hoped, and failed, to make a living in our midst – how there are cattle thieves beyond the woods, how travellers are stopped and robbed, how vagabonds and vagrant families descend upon a settlement to plunder it, like rooks and crows, and then move on. We have to ask ourselves, why have these people arrived just as the harvest is brought in. Is this another act of God? Bad luck, in other words, and not a soul to blame? A saint might think it so. A saint might want to welcome then and shake them by the hands. But we, more timorous than saints, might prefer to keep our handshakes to ourselves… My land-born neighbours are now ditched and fenced against the outside world. They are too rooted in their soil, too planched and thicketed, to be at ease with newcomers. They are not used to hospitality and do not want to be. (p.30-31)

The allegorical aspect of the village is strongly emphasized by the rhetorical techniques employed in its description. The tone is oratory as if a transcribed speech, reminiscent of the register of *oratio togata* 'toga speech' devised by Marguerite Yourcenar for her *Mémoires d'Hadrien* (*Memoirs of Hadrien*, 1951), as a compromise between translated classical Latin and modern French. This evokes the rhetoric of Cicero or Seneca to create the mannered, theatrical voice of a Roman Emperor addressing the public while keeping the text accessible for the modern reader.

Taken as a speech, Walter opens this extract with a rhetorical question to hook his audience with a note of competitive paranoia, repeated for effect with the extended, 'or demanding?', engaging with the emotional persuasion of pathos as might a politician. This is followed by listing trios of assumed undesirables in accordance with the classical rule of three, '*omne trium perfectum'*, continuing in a parody of a right-wing political diatribe, with the ethical standard of hospitality mocked and

undermined as unrealistically saintly for humble working folk, with the new arrivals framed as adversaries seeking to exploit rather than equals to empathize with and assist, with any more charitable attitude characterized as extremism.

The persuasive tone is also knowingly ironic as Walter is not a native villager and is aware of the provincial small-mindedness of such an attitude,

> We have tenancy to spare, and could easily provide some newcomers a place to live, if the village was only minded to be less suspicious of anyone who was not born with local soil under their fingernails… These are the moments when I miss greater places… (p.31).

Likewise, Crace ironically parodies the xenophobia of popularist politics with the remoteness and pettiness of a tiny nameless village, embodying contemporary opposition to immigrants and asylum-seekers vilified as Other. The ultimate fate of the villagers, becoming the same vagrant travellers themselves by fleeing their village after Master Kent's manipulation of their prejudice and superstitions leads to the loss of their privileged subsidies, is a further ironic critique of contrived binary oppositions in political discourse.

With the villagers, Crace here asserts his characterization of 'Little England' nationalist tendencies as hypocritical and self-defeating without any direct persecution or reductive framing of real-world multicultural tensions in twenty-first century Britain. The blank calfskin parchment carried by Walter during his cathartic exit represents an open future for redundant working communities, both optimistically blank and tragically uncertain. Crace's narrative is characteristically reticent with meaning and can be read as concluding with a rejection of static tradition, or an

acceptance of change, as well as call for empathy for the dispossessed as the reader is not immune to the same forces of history. There is also an overt cautionary parabolic tale of a micro-society reaping their own seeds of xenophobia, intolerance and scapegoating in a titular moral harvest. The villagers look to blame newcomers but the external economic forces of land-ownership threatening to convert their farming land are ignored in a further allegory for neoliberal dominance.

The unstructured historical context of *Harvest* is sufficiently abstract to allow fluid, multifaceted fabulist allegory and remain unhindered from the social context of the period, emphasizing contemporary political commentary rather than historical trends. While the guarded and morally bankrupt villagers can be seen as satirizing the political right, the landed gentry of Master Kent and profiteering cousin, Edmund Jordan, can be seen as critiquing progressive neoliberal attitudes as patronizing and equally self-serving:

> Now I am required to listen to a lecture on the principles of stewardship. The province of a hundred and one is to take and not provide direct, he says. He mentions Profit, Progress, Enterprise, as if they are his personal muses. Ours has been a village of Enough, but he proposes it will be settlement of More, when finally he's fenced and quick-thorned all the land and turned everything – our fields, the commons and "the wasted woods" – into "gallant sheep country." (p.231)

The gentlemen frame their venue as progress via the metric of profit, with the 'personal muses' perhaps referencing Adam Smith's invisible hand metaphor for self-regulating free market economics. The self-satisfied nobles comically characterizing sheepishness as gallantry might well represent careerist politicians implementing welfare reform with little sympathy for the communities they claim to be empowering, and little respect for their traditions.

In *Harvest*, Crace can be seen as exploring the political divisions and shifts in neoliberal Britain with the emergence of nationalist popularism, that would soon lead to political parties such as UKIP and, later, Reform campaigning for white working-class votes with anti-globalist and anti-immigration rhetoric, and successfully winning parliamentary seats. Justin Guest, in *The New Minority* (2016), describes how a working-class, white, self-perceived minority, antagonistic to international business and cynical of unionism, are increasing drawn to anti-immigration politics precisely as communicated in Walter's conniving speech:

> Immigration represents the single greatest issue of political salience in Britian and Europe today. While the flames of this obsession were fanned by the difficult years after the 2008 global recession, the 2015 European refugee crisis ignited them more intensely. Monolithically, they view immigrants as opportunists who will compete for the jobs and benefits to which Britons are entitled, but also a group that profits from sympathy and unfounded favoritism [sic] (p.196).

The disconnect between the socialist politics championed by Crace and this disillusioned working-class bloc can be explained by the perceived socialist distain for tradition and patriotism, as social progressivism inevitably involves the criticism of established traditional values as well as the status quo. Crace attempts to find a middle ground with a mythopoeic mode of storytelling incorporating English history to connect traditional wisdom with communal issues without seeming revisionist. Reconnecting working-class voters to socialist politics must emphasis universality but also engage with communities, the value of which Crace repeatedly emphasizes in his prose. The distrustful, self-serving villagers or *Harvest* are doomed to

dislocation due to their lack of functional community and united resistance and adaptation to global economic disruption and increasing inequality.

The Melody continues to question the cost of progress and fate of those communities unwilling or unable to adapt, seeking to dispel the binary of civilization and savagery. Set again in a non-specifically fabulist time and place, although vaguely Mediterranean and early twentieth century, the narrative is the report of retiring songwriter Alfred Busi's attack by a feral homeless child and the resulting redevelopment and gentrification of his neighbourhood. His assailant is described as literally feral and subhuman, a commentary on the dehumanizing hyperbole often referenced in discussions about the social underclass. As a protagonist, Busi is another ruminative, reflective widower, like Walter Thirsk, flirting with in a mildly scandalous relationship that remains unfulfilled, despite fateful consequences. He responds to the trauma of an assault by seeking out the social conditions of his assailant, effectively returning to the scene of the crime as an act of self-therapy. However, rather than enjoying an idyllically liberal denouement by bonding with his assailant's social group over shared interests, he is promptly assaulted again and brutally mugged.

One might read a parallel of Crace returning to literary fiction after his stated retirement during the promotion of *Harvest,* Busi ruminates on his own innate savagery as a child (p.79-80). This is a subtle rearrangement of the elements of prose: simple sentences are countered with run-on sentences of distinct but irregular syncopated pattern of disyllables and trisyllables, with an undulating cadence reminiscent of improvisational jazz. The text remains accessible by being free of

obscure or elaborate vocabulary, also strategically avoiding familiar contemporary idioms. Not solely mimicking the simple, direct and idiomatic language of formal speech or vernacular dialogue. The improvisational style of rhythm is primarily focused on creativity and imagination rather than technical precision. The very use of an aural medium such as music as a literary device in print is an invitation for the reader's imagination.

The musicality of Crace's prose is self-consciously referenced by the theme of 'melody' in this most recent novel. The free-form style of jazz was also incorporated into *All That Follows* as the profession of protagonist Leonard Lessing, the somewhat hapless British musician specializing in the most American of artforms to reflect the motif of transatlantic geopolitical power dynamics. The music of Alfred Busi in *The Melody* is suggested to be more conventional as part of the dominant culture within the novel rather than innovative or avant-garde. Unimaginative realism can be taken as capitulation to the status quo, while the poetic imagination is a demand for alternative perspective for cultural discourse. As Jameson noted in *The Political Unconscious*,

> It is clear that the work of art cannot itself be asked to change the world or to transform itself into political praxis; on the other hand, it would be desirable to develop a keener sense of the complexity and ambiguity of that process loosely termed reflection or expression (p.223).

The Melody indulges in details of a shared Cracean mythos, or *über-book* as David Mitchell as termed his own creative universe. Mondazy the poet is referenced, as are reoccurring rooks, and the Panache brand of saloon car mentioned in the opening

pages of *Six* (p.109), for example. The journalist Soubriquet, who embellishes the story as frame the homeless assailant as a Neanderthal, is also a personal reference to Crace's own experience with journalism, specifically his reporting of the Broadwater Farm community. The missing 'o' of his typewriter serves to represent how the sensationalist journalism misses the complete truth.

The Melody is very much a coda in its musical motif as Busi prepares for a final public performance, reflecting on unrequited passions with his late wife's sister, the fleeting nature of glory, and talent and the loneliness and vulnerability of age. Busi can be read as Prospero figure as Crace ruminates on his creative powers approaching his own retirement (again). After some criticism by reviewers of his reliance on pathetic fallacy, and efforts to expand his technical range following on experimental structuring in *The Devil's Larder* and thriller genre realism in *All That Follows*, Crace very much doubles-down and reaffirms his commitment to his personal strategy of disorienting poetic personification. The bourgeois exotic pastiche of picturesque Mediterranean coastal towns which constitutes the novel's setting, an otherwise idyllic location for impending retirement, is given an adverse gothic persona by such description.

As Busi contemplates his mythopoetically strange doom of violent assault, approaching displacement and increasing alienation within his hometown, the elements are depicted as a Greek chorus commentating on the tragedy:

> An ocean breeze had picked up, giving muscle to the tide and setting off a timpani of pebbles on the beach. It rattled for attention at his villa's shutters and window frames. The forest leaves were rustling, a susurrating chorus for the sea (p.133).

The use of music as literary device, with Busi frequently self-referencing lyrics from his oeuvre (mirroring how Crace reasserts his own technique of invented cultural details), provides a particular tragic effect as the imagined music is silent for the reader, prefiguring the obscurity Busi fears for his work, as well as the encroaching sense of mortality he is confronting. He also struggles to reach for reticent emotions he has failed to fully express in life, which can be interpreted as reflecting Crace's regret of not being more explicitly political in pervious works.

The lost, incomplete melody of Busi's elegy for Alicia, 'Persian Bells', is also reflected by the inversion of presenting inaudible lyrics to represent wordless melodies and incomplete songs. As Busi comments resignedly, 'Some melodies are never meant to find their words' (227). The inaudible quality of literary music, as also employed with *Cloud Atlas,* is countered by a unifying universality as the reader must actively imagine the melodies according to their shared cross-cultural understanding, accompanying the unifying elements of myth within the narrative. Busi is facing the demolition of his birthplace, marital home and neighbourhood at the hands of enterprising property developer Joseph, Busi's figurative and possibly literal illegitimate son with Terina. This ironically melodramatic fate is befitting an aged Odysseus dying in battle against his own illegitimate son, Telegonus, in a fateful demise of his own unwitting making.

The character of Busi is described by the removed and enigmatic narrator, a tenant of Busi's at the end of the narrative and a beneficiary of the town's economic development, who can be seen to stand in as the reader indulging in leisurely

bourgeois literary fiction, with an incomplete knowledge but lingering awareness of the historical exploitation and injustice which made it possible. The motif of incompletely remembered music articulates this incompleteness of history and enlightened rationality, as well as the metric of progress. As the narrator notes about the tourists visiting the site of the now mythical Neanderthal boy:

> Yet even I, for all my rationality, for all my certainty, that everything that's true is intelligible and provable, cannot dismiss entirely what these tourists have come here to encounter for themselves, a 'people' summoned from the past. There's what occurred to Mr Busi at the villa's bins; there are the rumours from that dawn of animal evictions; there is folklore (always based on something real)… I have the sense, though not the proof – the sense in nonsense, probably – that something other than ourselves persists (p.261-2).

The passage illustrates the embellishment of reported incidents into myth via oral storytelling, as well as the comforting role such narratives offer compared to the stark facts of inequality. Crace does not present any ideological opposition to rationalism or value systems of empirical data, nor any indication being a luddite or sceptical of science. His prose in packed earthy details, invented and otherwise, with an overt influence of natural history. The mating cycle of imagined fire crabs in *Continent* and the meticulously itemized produce of the Soap Market in *Arcadia*, by way of examples, are impassioned tributes to the scientific method. Through his mythopoeic method, however, there is also an effort to explore the disconnect between liberal progressiveness and the pathos of traditional cultural and national identity, as associated among working class communities. With the political dominance of neoliberal market forces and globalist politics, traditional identities can be said to have devalued in favour of economic progressive and consumer-driven technological development, the resentment of which among the increasingly redundant manual

and unskilled workforce has been exploited by nationalism and popularism. The ethos of capitalism is that it is the only truly successful and social system for security, progress and upward mobility if measured by the metric of economics.

The irrationality of the mythopoetic mode adds ambiguity to this assertion by questioning the metric with alternative values of community and questioning the promise of self-actualization via individualism. The characters of Cracean prose are determined by their social environments and the power structure, rather than by an individual's will with a stable, self-correcting environment (a free society, the free market, or a God-given climate) as promoted by Thatcherism and neoliberalism, or post-capitalism. The central characters of these narratives are unheroic but rarely irredeemable, as even *Quaratine*'s Musa is allowed another chance once his devilish fever passes. Crace's disorientalism critiques the system of neoliberalism rather than the people lost within it. Also questioned are the values of literature as Crace emphasizes the irrationality and ambiguity of the poetic imagination over more commercial aspects of entertainment such as heroism, inspirational narratives and reaffirming historical identity for the reader.

The essence of myth and fantasy, a postmodern genre, is a universe of irrational chaotic forces beyond human agency, perhaps which strikes a chord with contemporary readers of late capitalism, delusional and powerless against the unaccountable forces of neoliberalism. The certainty of the economics is also questioned as Crace expresses such contemporary anxieties with metaphors of outdated feudal peasants manipulated of profiteering nobles into fleeing their village in *Harvest,* and feral children of extreme poverty framed as prehistoric and

subhuman. With a reassertion of his personal strategy of disorientalism in his later novels, Crace illustrates the inevitability of unfortunate and unwanted communities lost in the linear progress of history while working to avoid misrepresentation, inviting the reader to empathize and consider whether they might meet a similar obscure fate. Crace also works to find a secular, practical optimism rather than accusatory criticism.

For Crace, the most comforting response to the incomprehensible change, uncertainty and the loss of communal identity resulting from neoliberalist forces are not reiterations of familiar proxies and the reassuring narratives of religion, ideology or commodified culture. Instead, Crace champions the imagination, casting for innovative metaphors to question what is most valuable and most enduring in culture, even when there is no objective answer. The primal function of storytelling, predating the industrialized profit-driven world, presents possibilities rather than deduces from empirical data as might a scientific investigation, although the description of mimetic imitation combines both thought processes. Poetic rhythm and patterns without an obviously direct or literal representation emphasizes a lack of meaning within materialist late capitalism.

With strategic ambiguity, Crace's works refrain from presenting any empirical reality suitably ordered to be shaped and remain conquerable by individuals. However, with this ambiguity, there is still room for morality and community. The emotionally reticent style emphasizes the influence of external forces in determining reality rather than individual feelings. The process of poetic creation suggests the means for addressing society beyond financial pressures.

9. Conclusion

After close analysis, Crace's personal strategy of fabulism can be seen as political negotiation for the values of progressivism and, as storytelling, a concession to the cultural importance of tradition. The hybridity of magical realism is strongly associated with postcolonial multiculturalism, however, while directly inspired by Gabriel Garcia Marquez to develop a strategy of fabulist invention, Crace's works are difficult to define as magical realism. His works do not incorporate recognized folklore or depict supernatural elements, or any magic realization of metaphor in the style of Salman Rushdie's metafiction. This adaptation of Marquez and Latin American 'marvellous realism' can be seen as a politically sensitive process. The cultural non-specificity of Crace's fabulism avoids any judgmental binary of superstitious tradition and realist modernity, as the works consistently explore the traditional and modern as interrelated and codependent.

As disorientalism, positing a certain ambiguity of location and cultural heritage[81], this novel device also avoids the exoticism and misrepresentation of other societies as romantically quaint escapism for a western readership. The mythopoeic mode also facilitates the brevity of ideas being explored. A realist novel investigating British post-war urban redevelopment, even set in a wholly invented city, would demand great authentic detail relating to the legal, economic, and political processes of city planning, which might easily overwhelm the narrative drive of the story. As Crace's

[81] Even with more specific cultural heritage of *Quarantine,* it is strategically ambiguous whether the events are biblical, historical, or entirely fictional.

regularly cited inspiration Italo Calvino spoke of the mythic storytelling mode, and his own transition from neorealism to fabulism:

> If during a certain period of my career as a writer I was attracted by folktales and fairytales, this was not the result of loyalty to an ethnic tradition (seeing that my roots are planted in an entirely modern and cosmopolitan Italy), nor the result of nostalgia for things I read as a child (in my family, a child could read only educational books, particularly those with some scientific basis). It was rather because of my interest in style and structure, in the economy, rhythm, and hard logic with which they are told. In working on my transcription of Italian folktales as recorded by scholars of the last century, I found most enjoyment when the original text was extremely laconic. This I tried to convey, respecting the conciseness and at the same time trying to obtain the greatest possible narrative force (p.35-36).

The fairytale elements of such works as *Arcadia* and *The Pesthouse* allow a certain economy of expression and a pleasurably rapid pace of rhythmic blank-verse imagery while exploring real-world social issues more abstractly as poetic fantasy, removed from a linear context of history and modern progress. Even while some of Crace's works have been presented as historical fiction, such as *Signals of Distress*, *Quarantine* and *Harvest*, the emphases of the texts have been imaginary invention and universal symbolism rather than any overriding concern for historical accuracy.

Crace's style developed from artistic appropriation of magical realism with parabolic allegory, blank verse and oral storytelling as an alternative to the predominant internalized individualism of contemporary British fiction and Crace's own journalism, with this parabolic element elevating the fiction above the factual imitation of verisimilitude. For Crace, this strategy has served to create a counterpoint to the insularism and the bourgeois class associations of contemporary literary fiction and the often-challenging accessibility of experimental postmodern literature from such

prominent authors as Iain Sinclair and Will Self, as well as countering conventional thinking relating to social and political issues. By strategically reverting to a mode of narrative aspiring to pre-modern oral storytelling, themes of neoliberal globalization can be expressed without orientalist misrepresentation of minorities and non-western cultures while also being immediately accessible and aesthetically pleasing for leisurely reading.

Crace does not speak of his works following a literary tradition of prose but in more anthropological terms as continuing an oral tradition of narrative which can be taken as a desire for the authenticity of global literature, particularism the magical realism synonymous with political oppression. Crace appears to deliberately avoid being in conversation with the literary canon of middle-class British literature in favour of a more universal aesthetic. Indeed, he talks of the creative process in shamanistic terms, citing the abstract force of narrative. The form of the novel, or at least the British novel, is an innately middle-class medium, generally celebrating predictable sensibilities. Indeed, Parrinder comments that the novel originally developed as a middle-class alternative form of entertainment to the more aristocratic pursuits:

> Novels, lacking the ceremonial value of poetry and drama, appealed to booksellers who stood to make money out of them rather than aristocratic patrons… The novelist as literary newcomer can easily be seen as a social intruder. The novel is famously a product of the commercial middle classes, describing the pomp and privilege of office for satirical effect but glorying in its protagonists' ability to stand on their own two feet and rise on their merits (p.12).

As the commercial product of the novel suits an educated middle-class audience with an appropriate amount of leisure time, the artistic form of narrative fiction lends

itself to liberal inclusivity by, as Rushdie argued, taking 'the privileged arena of conflicting discourses *right inside our heads'*, thus determining the form through the demands of the readers. An emphasis common in British fiction is an authorial notion of a similar conviction of the innocuousness of liberal attitudes; even where there might appear superficially to be a literary transformation – subject matter, inclusion of new cultural values and fashions, generic shifts, self-consciousness – many writers retain a conceptual world view based on liberal values and the cultural significance of the middle-class. As well as addressing issues concerning political identity in post-Thatcher, late-capitalist Britain, Crace is addressing his own identity as a writer of commercial literary fiction, benefiting from the same rising affluence among the middle class as he is countering in his fiction. By adopting a fabulist mode, Crace can at least present his prose as internationalist while producing bourgeois entertainment.

While this study is intended to champion the work of Crace, it endeavoured to avoid overstating the artistic significance or cultural relevance beyond what the author himself might consider reasonable. In interviews referenced in this dissertation, Crace has repeatedly downplayed his own cultural standing and personal impact on political discourse when compared to the work of leading political journalists. However, with future studies of Crace's personal strategies, as well as those of contemporary authors, the form of the literary novel can be better appreciated as relevant to socio-political discourse. Further study can illustrate how strategic literary responses to socio-political challenges, such devices as Crace's disorientalism, can offer alternative means to construct non-autobiographical narratives to address globalist issues without cultural appropriation or misrepresentation. The methodology

of mythopoetic storytelling can be considered within contemporary discourse concerning decolonization and representation.

The mythopoeic mode places the narratives above the everyday world, while the realist elements allow moderation in the style. The strategy of disorientation as defamiliarizing metaphor presents an ambiguity which challenges certainties of authority and invites reassessments of current political discourse. As noted by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980),

> Political and economic ideologies are framed in metaphorical terms. Like all other metaphors, political and economic metaphors can hide aspects of reality. But in the arena of politics and economics, metaphors matter more, because they constrain our lives. A metaphor in a political or economic system, by virtue of what it hides, can lead to human degradation' (p.236).

The need to revitalize the imagination by weaving new metaphors to embed within communicative language is essential in the discussion of reality and values, ideally ensuring the inclusive plurality of liberalism amidst constant socio-political change. Crace's disorientalism advocates this imaginative mythopoetic enterprise in response to neoliberal hegemony rather than wallowing in nationalist or nostalgic tropes. As the storyteller realizes migrating from the stoney village at *The Gift of Stone*'s conclusion:

> He knew what no one else had guessed, that this salt heath was the limit of his knowledge of the outside world, that all he knew of better days was those few times with Doe. He looked out at the night beyond the heath where, next day, we would go. The stars were the same, the moon, the wind. No doubt they had a sun there too. The stories that he'd told were now our past. His new task was to invent a future for us all (p.169).

The harsh salt of the heath evokes a sensory grounding in the liminal coastal location and relates to ‘salt of the earth’ working communities faced with redundancy and so should claim their own alternative reality. The suggested response from Crace to crises of identity is to seek new meanings, rather than cling to a romanticized sense of the past, with new metaphors to articulate experience and perspectives but imposing no answers, as per the method of disorientalism rooted in the essential human communicative function of storytelling.

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