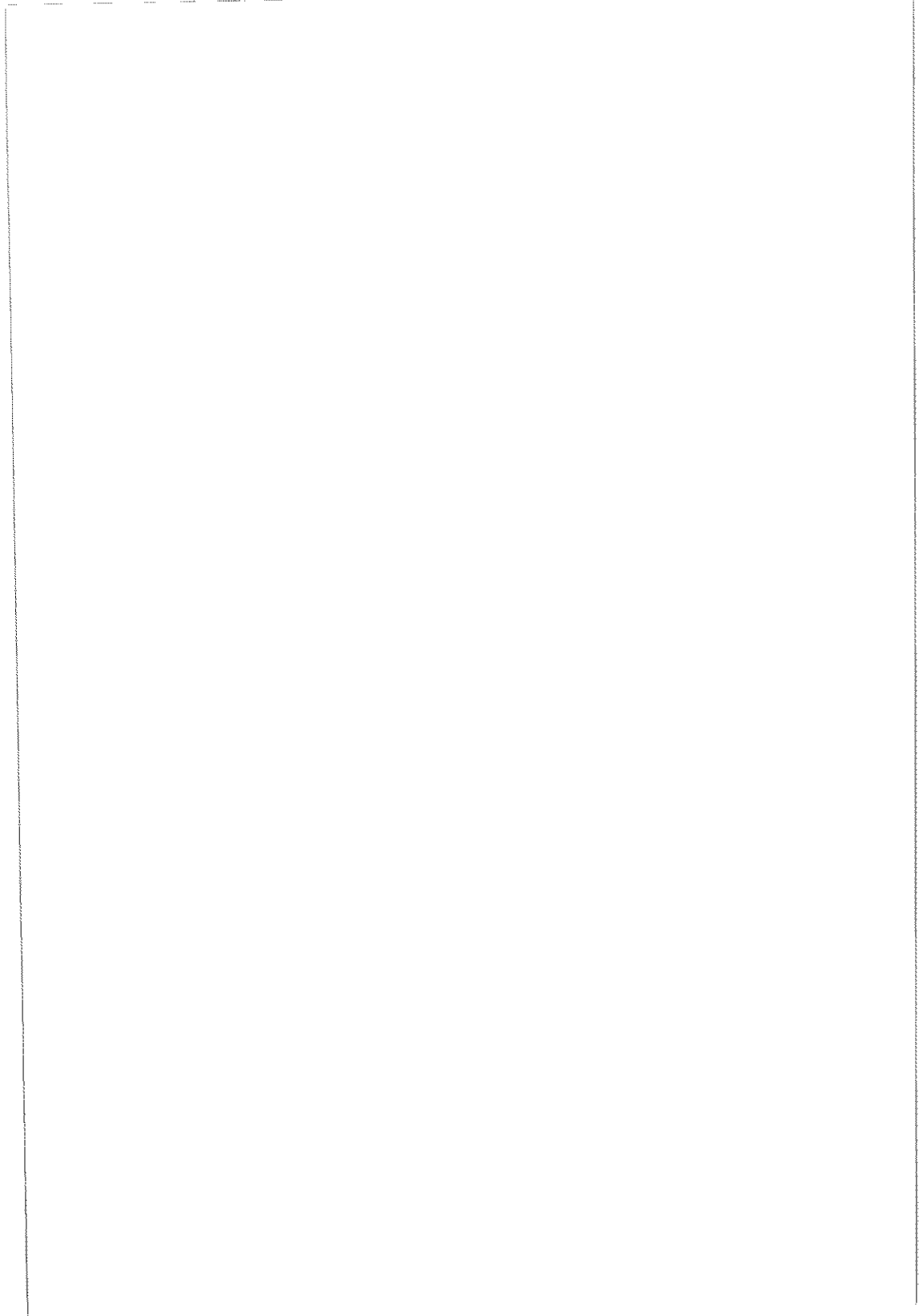


*D<sup>a</sup>. Susana Onega*

**TEXTUAL SELVES/WORLDS AND THE  
TREACHEROUS NATURE OF WRITING:  
A MISREADING OF CHARLES  
PALLISER'S *BETRAYALS***

UNIVERSITY OF ZARAGOZA



## Textual Selves/Worlds and the Treacherous Nature of Writing: A Misreading of Charles Palliser's *Betrayals*<sup>1</sup>

In an interview that took place while he was finishing *Betrayals* (1994a), Charles Palliser referred to his admiration for Faulkner in general and for the technical achievement of *As I Lay Dying*<sup>2</sup> in particular. As he explained, what he found most extraordinary was Faulkner's ability to integrate into one what appeared to be five totally unrelated stories:

If I remember correctly, each of the following five chapters seems to be completely unrelated to anything that has come before, so it seems the reader starts five completely separate novels, then the reader gradually begins to put things together. That's very much a Conrad device. In *The Secret Agent* he does rather the same sort of thing. (In Onega, 1993a: 280).

In the same interview, Palliser insisted that *Betrayals* was not a collection of short stories but rather a novel 'made up of ten texts which appear to be unrelated [but are in fact] linked in very bizarre ways. And the idea is that the reader will have to learn how to put it all together' (277). In *Betrayals*, therefore, Palliser was consciously trying to emulate this Conrad-cum-Faulkner formula of knitting together a series of apparently unrelated texts belonging to different genres, both fictional and non-fictional: an obituary;

- 
1. The research carried out for the writing of this paper has been financed by the Spanish Ministry of Education (DGICYT; Programa Sectorial de Promoción General del Conocimiento, no. PS94-057)
  2. Palliser explained in a private communication (Letter to Onega, 12th May 1966), that instead of *As I Lay Dying* he should have said *Light in August*, but the point he makes remains valid.

an unsolved murder mystery; a nursing-romance; a scholarly 'Introduction' to a book of literary theory; a collection of letters; a diary; a literary review; a convict's 'briefing paper' (284) for his defence; a spy thriller that reads like a pastiche of Geoffrey Archer; a Moorish tale in the tradition of *The Arabian Nights*, and a postmodernist critical essay. However, as soon as we establish this differentiation between fictional and non-fictional texts, we are surprised by the instability of this categorization: stories that are told as 'true' accounts are later revealed as fictional and viceversa, for example, Chapter 9, 'The Catch', is not a convict's 'briefing paper' properly speaking, but rather a fictionalized 'autobiographical account' based on it (284). As Jeremy Prentice the convict and a writer of whodunnits, explains, he has decided to 'write this like a novel. It's the only way I know how to tell a story' (239). At other times fictional and non-fictional versions of the same story are found co-existing with each other and often the characters enjoy a puzzling double status of being real and unreal simultaneously.

This ontological hesitation already appears in the epigraph to the novel: 'alas for both his victims and his readers!', a quotation signed by 'Auberon Saville'. When we reach page 285 of *Betrays* we discover that Saville is the author of Chapter 10, 'A Review from *The Daily Scot*', and that the quotation has been taken from his review of *Down on Whores*, the posthumously published novel of a character who appears in Chapter 7, called Horatio Quaife. Auberon Saville is, then, the author of Chapter 10 and a highly respected Scottish writer, winner of the Booker Award and the 'real' chief fiction reviewer of *The Daily Scot*. A 'literary' version of this character appears in Chapter 9 'The Catch' where the former Tory cabinet minister and writer of whodunnits turned murderer, Jeremy Prentice, calls him 'Aubrey Sackville' (240), a pseudonym he uses to refer to his most hated competitor and the man who had set a trap for him to expose him as a plagiarist. The identity of Saville becomes more complicated when one realizes that *The Daily Scot* is in fact a fictional newspaper that, however, strongly echoes the real newspaper, *The Scotsman*, and that Saville might indeed be a persona for real Scottish novelist and reviewer known to Palliser, who remarked in an interview: 'there is this novelist in Scotland who is very respected, called Allan Massie who is the leading fiction reviewer in Scotland.' (in Omega, 1993a: 274). The same character may, therefore, be said to belong to three different ontological levels: as Allan Massie, to the external ontology of the flesh-and-blood Charles Palliser; as Auberon Saville, to the internal 'reality' of *Betrays*; and as Aubrey Sackville, to the internal 'fictionality' of Jeremy Prentice's narrative. This structure of embedded character roles likewise affects the other characters in the novel and echoes

the complex embedding of plots within plots cutting across fiction and reality that, it might be said, provides the structural unitary pattern of *Betrayals*. This characteristic ontological hesitation is evident even in the dedication of the book and acknowledgements printed after the table of 'Contents', where we find the following:

*For 'William Herbert Dugdale', 'Graham Speculand', 'Angus MacMaster', 'Sholto MacTweed', 'Ramsay McCoo', 'Drummond Gilchrist', 'Jeremy Prentice', and 'Auberon Saville'*

Thanks for your help with this novel —unwitting through it was. Don't read 'your' chapter out of sequence or you'll be even angrier with me. Read the chapters in the right order and then decide who has been betrayed by whom.

Thanks also, to Ruth, Judy, Frank, Ronald, Marcus, Leona, Shira, and Chris.

17 January, 1994

This compound dedication and acknowledgements poses the reader a question about why it should appear after, instead of before, the table of 'Contents' and the epigraph, which is its conventional place, and where, interestingly, we find another much shorter dedication 'to Leona', who was, as we know, a friend of Charles Palliser's in real life. The existence of two dedications separated by the epigraph and the table of 'Contents' suggests the existence of two different authorial voices, a real one outside, and a fictional one inside the diegesis. Theoretically, we can distinguish between a 'flesh-and-blood' writer, Charles Palliser, the author of the external dedication 'to Leona', and a 'cardboard' author existing —like Booth's 'implied author'— at the highest level within the novel's diegesis. However, the fact that the internal dedication is printed in italics while the acknowledgements proper is printed in roman type, suggests a further authorial duplication. In Palliser's second novel, *The Sensationist*, the alternation of italic with roman letters was used to express a change of narrative level<sup>3</sup>. In *Betrayals*, the internal dedication in italics is exclusively addressed to some of the fictional protagonists and/or internal authors/narrators of different chapters, and so could have been written by Charles Palliser's fictional *alter ego*. However, the acknowledgements proper, written in roman type, are addressed both to these fictional authors/characters and

---

3. On this see, Omega, 1993b: 6-11.

to a series of unknown people we must assume to be real, because they do not appear in the novel, and also because one of them is 'Leona', the addressee of the external dedication. In other words, the acknowledgements are addressed to people who belong to two different ontologies: the external reality of the flesh-and-blood writer, Charles Palliser; and the diegetic reality of *Betrayals*. Therefore, while the duplication of dedications suggests the existence of two separate authorial voices, the alternation of italic and roman letters, as well as the mixture of fictional and real addressees in the second dedication and acknowledgements work in the contrary direction, conveying the puzzling suggestion that, for all its theoretical impossibility, the flesh-and-blood and the fictional authors are in fact collaborating in the writing of the second dedication and acknowledgements, a collaboration that brings to mind that of John Huffam and the puppeteers in *The Quincunx*<sup>4</sup> and would only be feasible if we accept the circularity, interchangeability and interpenetrability of the external and the diegetic worlds.

This hinted at circularity and instability between 'external reality' and 'fictional reality', and between 'flesh-and-blood' and 'cardboard' authors collaborating or perhaps fighting each other to make their own voices heard and have their own friends thanked in the acknowledgments, can be further complicated if we add the third diegetic level of the first-person fictional authors/narrators of individual chapters mentioned in the second dedication for their 'unwitting' contributions. Or even a fourth level, if we take into account the authors/narrators that will appear within the chapters themselves telling other embedded stories that sometimes also function as frames for further embedded stories, and so on and so on.

In Chapter 8, 'A Nice Touch' (207-38), we find a possible clue for the personality of Palliser's *alter ego*. The chapter consists of a series of letters written over a period of twelve months by a writer of whodunnits called Cyril Pattison, addressed to a younger colleague, Drummond Gilchrist, with hilarious and often outrageously patronising comments and suggestions for 'improving' the manuscript of a novel Gilchrist is writing. Cyril Pattison is a thinly disguised satiric persona of Palliser, as is suggested by the phonetic similarity of the names and also by the fact that he is the author of *The Quintessence*, a spy-thriller he published with Cowgate (p. 214) —where Palliser's *The Quincunx* was published with Canongate—, and which, like Palliser's first novel, became an international best-seller and was nominated for an important literary award (218). Pattison has also written '*The Sensation-Seeker and The Finger Man*' (214), but, as he explains to Gilchrist,

---

4. On the narrative structure of *The Quincunx*, see Onega, 1993c: 131-41

his 'big idea' was 'to take up crime by writing a series of whodunnits with a new twist' (214), a remark that we can easily read as an ironic metacomment on *Betrayals*. Although the reader only knows Drummond Gilchrist's manuscript and his reactions to Pattison's comments on it through Pattison's letters, it is easy to see that neither writer is capable of keeping fiction and reality apart. On the one hand, Pattison gets more and more involved in a scheme suggested by Gilchrist designated to outwit Pattison's earlier literary agent, Morag Frobister, whom Pattison now hates; this eventually turns out to be an elaborate trap set by Gilchrist and Frobister to expose him as a plagiarist. *Pari passu* with this involvement, Gilchrist's manuscript undergoes a parallel progressive transformation from what was originally a combination of a hard-core sex and a heavily plotted whodunnit set in the Chinatown of Los Angeles, into the lampoon 'of Chartres Pettifer as worldly, oily, charming, well-connected, pompous, two-faced, manipulative, and so on' (225), that is, a barely disguised caricature of Cyril Pattison, betraying lots of embarrassing confidential autobiographical details naïvely provided by Pattison himself in his letters. In a further characteristic ironic twist, Palliser himself is ready to admit off the record that the whole Pattison/Gilchrist affair is based on real autobiographical material.

Ironically making use of Pattison's formula for the successful whodunnit as requiring a final 'twist', the setting and characters of this final version of Gilchrist's manuscript unexpectedly shift from the exotic underworld of Los Angeles Chinatown to the equally treacherous and murderous world of Scottish creative writers, literary editors and the Glasgow Council for the Arts, one of the recurrent *topoi* of *Betrayals*. In this new version, Chartres Pettifer becomes 'Chalmers Pettitson [...] a ruthless crack-dealer running an empire of sex and drugs by the exercise of terror' (237). Giving vent to his wildest dreams of revenge, Gilchrist shows Pettitson at the end of the novel tortured to death by Torquil, the fictional persona of Tarquin Bone, Cyril Pattison's London-based, new literary agent (236-37)<sup>5</sup>.

In keeping with its satirical tone, Gilchrist calls the Chinatown saunas/brothels after Pattison's bestsellers: *Quin-too-sensual*, *Sensations*, and *Fingers*, and decides to entitle this new version of his novel *The Quintain* (235). Interestingly, however, Pattison would have liked it to be entitled *A Nice Touch* (234) —like the chapter of *Betrayals* we are reading— and the

---

5. Jenny Brown has pointed out how, after the great success of *The Quincunx*, 'instead of demonstrating gratitude suitable to his Scottish publisher and host, he [Palliser] returned from the [Frankfurt Book] fair with a different publisher, from London.' (1994: GH).

chapter itself ends with Pattison's outcry that Drummond Gilchrist has incorporated into his manuscript the letters he had written to him, that is, the very letters the reader of *Betrayals* is reading (225). This provides an unexpected metaleptic final 'twist' to the chapter, for it suggests the disquieting possibility that what we have so far taken for a collection of 'real' letters written by a 'real' writer called Cyril Pattison, is in fact fictional, that somehow what we are reading might in fact be Gilchrist's *The Quintain* under Pattison's proposed title. This interpretation seems to be corroborated by the fact that, in the second dedication and acknowledgements, thanks are given to 'Drummond Gilchrist' —but not to Cyril Pattison— 'for your help with this novel'. If we accept the interpretation that at least part of the second dedication and acknowledgements has been written by the fictional persona of Charles Palliser —that is, by Cyril Pattison— we can better understand Pattison's warning to the eight characters who 'unwitting[ly]' helped him to write the book not 'to read «your» chapter out of sequence or you'll be angrier with me. Read the chapters in the right order and then *decide who has been betrayed by whom*' (my italics). If we recall that Gilchrist has betrayed Pattison by incorporating his letters into his novel and accusing him of being a plagiarist, we can read the fictional author's cryptic remark in the acknowledgements as evidence that Pattison has succeeded in giving the situation yet another unexpected 'twist' (his speciality in whodunnits), outwitting Gilchrist —and the other seven characters— by incorporating Gilchrist's manuscript (and the stories of the other characters mentioned in the dedicatory) into his own fiction. From this perspective, Chapter 8 becomes a *mise en abyme* of the whole novel, while the novel itself, fittingly entitled *Betrayals*, is now revealed as an extreme case of multiple plagiarism —or literary betrayal— carried out *en abyme ad infinitum*, that is, in an endlessly recessive specular structure cutting across the boundaries between fiction and reality.

In the acknowledgements, as we have seen, each unwitting contributor is asked to read his chapter in the right order. We soon learn, however, that this order has nothing to do with the traditional left-to-right reading order, for each chapter is linked to the others by a complex net of cross-references that constantly forces the reader to stop reading and go back to re-read other chapters, even though, thematically the stories refer to such widely divergent and apparently unrelated times and places, as, for example, medieval Moorish Spain, the Scottish Highlands during the First World War or Glasgow University in the late 1970s and 80s. Indeed, the different plot lines appear to be so totally unrelated at first sight that Palliser himself felt compelled to admit in an interview on *Betrayals* screened on BBC2 in February 1994



that their thematic unity only functions 'at a very high level of abstraction in that they are all stories of betrayal, revenge, entrapment and so on'. However, in the same interview Palliser further explained that the very abstract *topos* of 'betrayal' is ambiguous: 'it functions in the novel in the double sense of 'treachery and revelation —especially revelation in the sense of self-betrayal [...] slips of the tongue, deliberate misprints, people saying more than they intend to'. Taking this second meaning of 'betrayal' into account the reader soon realizes that, as the title of a review (Dyer, 1995: 58) of *Betrays* suggests, even the most apparently unrelated stories are in fact 'ingeniously knotted' in what Palliser himself has described as 'very bizarre ways' (see above).

Chapter 1, 'An Obituary from *The Daily Scot*' (1-3), may be taken as an example of the 'bizarre ways' in which this story is related to the other stories in *Betrays*. This short chapter contains the obituary of William Herbert Dugdale, the Pierre L'Angelier Professor of Immuno-Toxicology at the University of Glasgow, who has unexpectedly died 'under mysterious circumstances' (3), written by an ex-colleague of his, Prof. Ritchie, just before his own unexpected death of rabies, 'a macabre coincidence' (3), as the obituaries editor explains in a footnote. As we will see, this is only one of many apparently 'macabre coincidences' that will eventually be revealed as being highly motivated rather than coincidental. Thus, for example, at the very beginning of the obituary, Prof. Ritchie mentions the fact that William Herbert Dugdale 'was born in Perth, Scotland, on March 11th., 1916, the son of a railway guard who died in an accident just a few months before his birth' (p. 1). This apparently banal information is in fact a prolepsis that anticipates and confirms the death of a guard in Chapter 2, 'The Wrong Tracks'. In this story, a train guard is lost in a snow storm in the Scottish Highlands, near the Killiecrankie Glen, on a Christmas Eve during the First World War, a few hours before one of the train passengers, an elderly lady called Mrs. Armytage, is murdered in an episode the newspapers will call the 'Killiecrankie Mystery', one of the most famous 'real' unsolved murder mysteries in Scotland. Prof. Ritchie's remark in the obituary opens up the possibility that Prof. Dugdale might be the son of the railway guard who disappeared just about the same time Prof. Dugdale's father died, a possibility that would also help us date the Killiecrankie events precisely in 1915. In other words, the apparently futile information in the obituary has the important structural function of establishing a thematic connection between Chapters 1 and 2. What is more, this reference to the railway guard also relates the obituary to Chapter 7, 'An Open Mind', where we find another University of Glasgow scholar, this time a teacher of philosophy, called

Horatio Quaife, who has written a fictional version of the 'Killiecrankie Mystery' entitled 'The Right Lines' — a title in clear opposition to that of Chapter 2, 'The Wrong Tracks' —, that has become a best seller.

Built on the classical formula of the tale-within-the-tale, Chapter 2 may be said to reflect *en abyme* the structure of the whole novel. The frame story, 'The Wrong Tracks', contains three subsidiary stories told by three of the four train passengers, which in their turn contain other subsidiary stories. The frame story is reported in the first person by what appears at first sight as a nameless eye witness. However, the narration, like the dedication and acknowledgements, puzzlingly alternates italics and roman letters. The solution to this riddle has to wait until Chapter 7, where the internal author-narrator, Sholto MacTweed, a bookshop seller with a taste for real murder who happens to be the great-nephew of the railway driver — 'Great-uncle Hamish' (108) —, refers to *Scotch Mysteries*, a history book on famous murders written by Mr. Archibald Peddie. As MacTweed explains, '[o]ne chapter has what Mr. Peddie claims is an account written by the Major and the Parson of the events of the fatal night when Mrs. Armytage died which they wrote at the request of the Procurator Fiscal' (107). According to MacTweed, 'the two men were so anxious to tell the whole truth that they collaborated on the account, adding passages if it seemed to one of them that the other had forgotten something important which could throw light on what happened' (168). We can therefore conclude that the alternation of italic and roman type in 'The Wrong Tracks' signals the alternation of narrative voices and that, like the chapters in *The Quincunx* written by the two Punch and Joan puppeteers, it is the combined account of the Major and the Parson, a kind of 'briefing paper' for their defense, written for the Procurator Fiscal and printed by Mr. Peddie.

Also scattered through Chapter 7 are a series of references to Prof. Dugdale that can help us reconstruct the stages of his past life. One is a passing remark MacTweed makes on Madelaine Smith, the woman who gave a fatal dose of arsenic to 'her, lover, Pierre L'Angelier' (109). As Prof. Richie explains in the obituary, in 1984 William Herbert Dugdale 'returned to his native land to become Pierre L'Angelier Professor of Immuno-Toxicology at the University of Glasgow' (3). The logical implication that Dugdale might have been involved in the murder, because he was the person who benefitted from Prof. L'Angelier's death is enhanced by another passing remark made by MacTweed's friend, Horatio Quaife. According to him, Dugdale 'died of his own venom' (173). As Quaife further explained, Dugdale 'was poisoned by a red sand scorpion in his laboratory. Said something about how he was probably killed in revenge for having murdered

the man' (173). The man here referred to is not, however, Prof. L'Angelier, and neither is it the technician who died in the United States in a laboratory accident which, according to Prof. Richie 'cut short his [Dugdale's] career in the USA' (2). Horatio Quaife is referring to a similar recent accident, the death of Dugdale's assistant attacked by an electronic cat the professor had invented (151). According to MacTweed's report of Quaife's version of the accident, 'there was a really juicy bit of scandal attached to it in that the technician's wife was rumoured to have been having an affair with Dugdale. He [Quaife] said something rather similar once happened involving Dugdale thirty years ago or more when he was in the USA' (154). In other words, although there are literally no substantial accusations against Prof. Dugdale, both Prof. Richie's obituary and Horatio Quaife's account strongly suggest a parallel development with the stages of Dugdale's academic career, his four marriages, and his involvement in a series of fatal accidents suffered by Dugdale's academic and sexual competitors, including Prof. Richie, the ex-husband of Prof. Dugdale's third wife—who also died unexpectedly—. As we learn in the footnote, Richie died of rabies after having read Dugdale's controversial paper 'suggesting that there was immunological evidence to support the belief [...] that an individual who survives the highly toxic sting of the red-sand scorpion (my own [Prof. Richie's] specialism for the last decade) thereby acquires immunity to the otherwise fatal disease of rabies' (3).

It is clear from Richie's parenthetical remark, as well as from the fact that he was the wronged ex-husband of Prof. Dugdale's third wife, that Prof. Richie hated his colleague and was terribly jealous academically and sexually. In other words, Richie's apparently flattering obituary is in fact full of spiteful ironies and figurative displacements of meaning that betray Richie's jealousy and hate and suggest the immorality of the methods used by Prof. Dugdale to promote himself and eventually obtain the Nobel Prize for Medicine 'despite the fact that many of those best qualified to know the facts believed that I myself [Prof. Richie] had made the crucial breakthrough' (2). The obituary, therefore, written in the apparently transparent and denotative language characteristic of the genre, eventually reveals itself as opaque, complex and multilayered, a kind of self-conscious and ironic text, whose final message works against the overt function of the obituary—to pay a homage to a deceased person—asserting instead not only the immoral and murderous nature of Prof. Dugdale but also Prof. Richie's own deviousness, jealousy and immorality: the fact that Prof. Richie died of rabies suggests that his research methods were no better than those of Dugdale, that he was as ready as his competitor to plagiarize the theories of his colleague. In

other words, the play of significations between the literal and the implied meanings contained in the obituary reveals the plagiaristic and murderous activities of Dugdale as well as the jealousy and treachery of Prof. Richie and, by extension, the amorality, hypocrisy and deviousness of the academic world at large.

Describing the genesis of *Betrayals*, Palliser has said that one of the longest and most complicated stories in the novel came about because he 'was asked to contribute to a collection of pieces being published as one of the events in connection with the fact that Antwerp is European City of Culture in 1993' (in Onega, 1993a: 278). This story, entitled 'The Medicine Man', is reproduced in Chapter 4 of *Betrayals* in a slightly different version<sup>6</sup>. 'The Medicine Man' is the 'Introduction' to a scholarly book written by Prof. Graham Speculand, about Prof. Henri Galvanauskas, '[o]ne of the leading theorists of Post-structuralist psychoanalysis' (53) and also about 'the Galvanauskas affair', the series of scandals and suspected murders that eventually brought about the downfall of Henri Galvanauskas and the transference of his 'Institut des Recherches Galvanauskasiennes' (55), first from the Sorbonne to the University of Glasgow, and then to Spain (80).

In his 'Introduction' Speculand tries to summarize the basic tenets of Galvanauskas's theory with reference to the latter's seminal article, 'Kipling's «The Tongueless Boy»'. As Speculand explains, he has felt it necessary to reproduce the article as an 'Appendix' to his scholarly book. However, in the middle of his exposition he unexpectedly asks the reader to stop reading and jump forward to the 'Appendix', which he says, appears on 'pp. 289-96' of *Betrayals* (58). If, despite its metaleptic incoherence, the reader follows Speculand's suggestion and reads the 'Appendix' after page 58, s/ he will find that it beautifully complements Speculand's explanation of Galvanauskas's theory. As Speculand explains, Galvanauskas, in this seminal article, makes a crucial distinction between 'phallic' and 'emasculate' texts, and between 'phallic' and 'emasculated' readers: '[t]he phallic text is dominant and duplicitous while the emasculated is submissive and unambiguous' (58). Misreading Jacques Lacan's theory of the phallus as the symbol of power, Galvanauskas literally confuses the phallus with the penis and equates sexual intercourse with symbolic dominance. Likewise,

---

6. 'The Medicine Man' was first published in English separately in *Wordlessness* (Verschaffel and Vermick, eds., 1993: 138-68), this story is split in *Betrayals* into Chapter 4, 'The Medicine Man' (53-80), and the 'Appendix', a reprint of 'Henry Galvanauskas's 'Lo(o)sing the Signifier: Silence, Worldlessness, and Desire in Kipling's «The Tongueless Boy»': A Summary by Graham Speculand' (289-96).

misreading Lacan's study of the role played by the child's acquisition of language, Galvanauskas further literally equates the penis with the tongue and concludes that the cutting off of a man's tongue is equivalent to emasculating him, while women are by definition both emasculated and silent. Initiation into his theory, therefore, involved the material performance of 'the ritual of the insertion of the Signifier into the Woman-as-Other' (76). Inevitably, this absurd and hilarious confusion of theory and practice soon turns into a deadly business. In line with other internal author-narrators, who betray themselves through their use of language while attempting to justify or hide their actions, Speculand's 'defence' of Galvanauskas progressively reveals the latter as a very dangerous fanatic with a long list of murders to his credit that go back to his origins in 'a remote part of Lithuania or Poland (for even this was unclear) many years ago and whose alleged victims, by definition, are not alive to give evidence' (76). Invariably, the victims are ex-disciples who, according to Galvanauskas, have attempted to betray their master and are asked to expiate their guilt by making the 'voluntary sacrifice' of their lives. In Scotland, Galvanauskas's disciple, William Bentley, apparently commits suicide in this way, after having been sodomized (and also probably castrated) by Galvanauskas (72), the master's way of giving 'his disciples the opportunity to acknowledge the power of his Signifier' (76). Speculand himself is likewise asked to 'submit to the ultimate voluntary sacrifice which was required as proof of my loyalty' (75), just before he flees to the United States.

In a lecture he gave in Valladolid in December 1992, Palliser pointed out the importance he attributed to the relation between the academia and the creative writer and gave the 'de Man affair' as an example of the crisis of the academia in the 70s and 80s. According to him, the U.S. academics' 'high-minded denunciations of de Man have revealed very little sense of the complexity of the situation in Belgium immediately after the German invasion and occupation.' (1994b: 35-36). It is easy to see that Henri Galvanauskas shares many traits in common with Paul de Man, the world-famous deconstructivist accused of having a pro-Nazi past by the American academia. But the founder of 'Poststructuralist psychoanalysis' also combines features of Freud and Lacan as well as of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and even of Ferdinand de Saussure, as can be guessed from the fact that his theories were published by his disciples from their notes taken during the seminars, like Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*. But he is much more than that, he is the satiric exponent of all that Palliser finds absurd, futile, destructive and transient in contemporary theory.

With these ideas in mind we may conclude that the whole novel has

been written as a joking demonstration of the practical possibilities afforded by post-Saussurean theory. As is well known, Saussure's contention that language, as a system of binary oppositions, entails a whole intricate network of established significations that prevents direct access to knowledge provides the starting-point of structuralist and deconstructive theory: the relativity of thought and meaning. Jacques Derrida further developed Saussure's insights into a theory of the basic rhetorical nature of all kinds of writing and contended that writing is the *precondition* of language and that all forms of writing run up against perplexities of meaning and intent that reveal its own dialectic of what Paul de Man has called 'blindness' and 'insight', preceding all the categories that conventional wisdom has tried to impose on it. Accordingly, deconstruction denounces the Western prejudice which tries to reduce writing to a stable meaning equated with the character of speech and defines writing as 'the endless displacement of meaning', 'the 'free play' or undecidability within every system of communication' (Norris, 1983: 28-29). As Christopher Norris (1983: 32) explains, where Derrida breaks new ground is in this idea 'that meaning is always *deferred*, perhaps to the point of an endless supplementarity, by the play of signification'.

Following Derrida, Roland Barthes, in 'The Death of the Author' (1977: 145), reduces the role of the author to that of mere 'scriptor', someone who 'is born with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing', while in *S/Z* (1974: 10), Barthes attacks the traditional notion of the reader as 'an innocent subject anterior to the text', concluding that the reader is 'a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite'. Thus scriptor and reader become part of the text and the text becomes the only test of reality. In sum, Barthes and deconstructivism in general argue for the acceptance of the existence of an all-enveloping world of signs without truth or origin, independent and prior to the existence of writers and readers.

As the reader of *Betrayals* moves from one story to the next, s/he gets entangled in the self-begetting, ever-convoluted narration of subsidiary stories-within-stories arranged *en abyme* that retell the same tale of jealousy, plagiarism and murder either in slightly different and complementary or in blatantly incompatible, as well as in 'real' and 'fictional' versions, co-existing with each other against all rules of verisimilitude, and offering the bewildered reader a concrete enough version of the Derridean concept of 'writing', a text that grows on its own displacement and deferral of meaning and is the source and origin of writers and readers alike, a kind of Borgesian 'Tower of Babel', infinitely reflecting itself in a plethora of distorting mirrors. Consequently and also ironically, Palliser seems to suggest that the only way out of the prison-house of language would be to behave like Henry

Galvanauskas's 'phallic reader': if we cannot make *Betrayals* yield a univocal 'true' meaning, we may instead attempt to 'emasculate' Palliser's 'dominant and duplicitous phallic text' assuming the active role of 'phallic reader', a male chauvinist reader who simply tries to impose on the text his masterful 'phallic' power, that is, his own subjective 'misreading', no matter how false and distorting, a reader, that is, who 'emasculates the phallic text and forces him to speak—to speak, not in any literal sense but *to utter what he, the reader, desires him to say*' (296, my italics).

In Palliser's fable, as we have seen, creative writers and critics alike are devious and jealous creatures with a ludicrous superiority complex and an overriding hunger for power, who turn into murderers as a result of their incapacity to distinguish fiction from reality. Ironically enough, the character Palliser proposes as an alternative to these two kinds of human beings is Sholto MacTweed, the narrator of Chapter 7, a bookseller specialized in real murder mysteries, a fanatical admirer of Jack the Ripper and a real serial killer. MacTweed is an obscure clerk in charge of the 'Crime' section of a pornographic bookshop called 'Gargantua and Pantagruel'; in contrast to theorists and creative writers, he is simply interested in murder as a real activity. He despises fiction and is trying to reorganize the 'Crime' section in the bookshop, because he hates 'the way «Crime» covers «True Crime» and «Crime Fiction».' (96). His only friend is Horatio Quaife, a teacher of Philosophy at Glasgow University and also the author of a bestseller entitled *The Right Lines*, based on a 'real' unsolved murder that obsesses MacTweed, the 'Killiekrankie Mystery', that appears in the novel in what might be the version from Mr. Peddie's *Scotch Mysteries*, in Chapter 2 (see above). MacTweed's relation with Horatio Quaife is based upon misunderstanding: MacTweed is nonplussed when he discovers that the murders in the two television series that Quaife has told him to watch, never took place in real life. And he is even more disappointed and angered when he discovers that *The Right Lines* is a fiction and that what he had taken for carefully researched new material, throwing light on the mystery, had in fact been plagiarized from Mr. Peddie's *Scotch Mysteries* or had been invented by Quaife himself (166-67).

Horatio Quaife is also working on a scholarly book entitled *The Detective Novel as Philosophy* (184), in which he is attempting to '*formalise the structure of the whodunnit into a combinatorial series of logical propositions using a computer program*' (184, italics in the original). Significantly, it is the philosopher-cum-novelist's elaborate theory about the basic requirements for the perfect murder that seduce MacTweed into carrying out a series of real murders to impress his friend. In keeping with his usual incapacity to

understand Quaife's theoretical and figurative use of language, MacTweed kills several of Horatio Quaife's friends because he believes they are his enemies, and ends up killing Horatio himself, enraged by Quaife's incapacity to value him, in a way that MacTweed hopes would meet all the theoretical requirements of the 'perfect murder' (204). In a final ironic twist, MacTweed's murders are attributed to Quaife (who is then thought to have committed suicide) by a policeman with a taste for literature, after finding the incriminating manuscript of the new novel Quaife had been writing, in which the protagonist is a satiric version of MacTweed.

In *Betrayals*, therefore, Palliser satirizes the excesses of contemporary theory and the pettiness, jealousy and murderous nature of academic and creative writers alike, as a way of expressing his fear that 'the temptations of theory are seducing literary intellectuals away from literature (1994b: 33). For Palliser, the way out of formalist closure necessarily involves the rejection of detachment, rationality and the capacity for analysis in order to become 'open to emotional, aesthetic, and imaginative experience (30). It also entails the recovery of 'more perceptible and less literal ways of reading the most complex and interesting texts (33) and the understanding by 'teachers and writers' alike that they 'have to make decisions about their moral relation to society' (36). In other words, Palliser advocates the recuperation of the values of liberal humanism (33), a position that appears all the more contradictory in the light of the structural and thematic sophistication of *Betrayals*.

In this respect it might be interesting to recall that Linda Hutcheon, in *The Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988: 124), signals the rejection of formalist closure as the defining trait of postmodernist literature. According to Hutcheon, the only alternative to it is the recuperation of the 'world', of history and of the story-telling potential of fiction. But, as she further explains, postmodern literature 'seems to have found that it can no longer do so in any remotely innocent way', and so attempts to recuperate the world ironically and parodically, refusing to surrender its autonomy as fiction, levelling 'world' and 'literature' to the same status. Accordingly, in *Betrayals*, Palliser recuperates the whodunnit, the most attention-gripping genre, the one in which plotting and suspense are oriented towards the final unravelling of some univocal and essential 'truth'. He seizes the reader's attention with a virtuoso display of unsolved murder mysteries, revenge tales and hair-raising ghost stories that enhance the story-telling capacity of writing, while at the same time he undermines the willing suspension of disbelief of the reader, showing the unreliability of his narrator-characters, the multiplicity of literary and non-literary versions of the same events, his playful capacity



for stylistic variation and, in a word, the impossibility of reaching an overall, univocal truth beneath the evermore-envoluted and endlessly transformable free play of language, turning the novel into a Borgesian 'Tower of Babel' or 'Labyrinth of Paper and Ink', an all-enveloping, self-begetting linguistic house of cards, for ever mirroring itself *ad infinitum*.

From this perspective, *Betrayals*, like John Fowles' satiric novel, *Mantissa*, may be described as the paradoxical and contradictory (and hence quintessentially postmodernist), product of a writer who knows that he has been trapped within the prison-house of language by contemporary theory, and can only attempt to get out of it ironically and parodically: by deconstructing deconstruction, turning the very theory against itself.

## REFERENCES

- Barthes, Roland. 1974. *S/Z*. New York: Hill and Wang. Transl. from the French (1970) by Richard Miller.
- . 1977. 'The Death of the Author,' in *Image-Music-Text*. London: Fontana.
- Dyer, Richard. 'Twisted Tales, Ingenuously Knotted'. *Boston Globe* (11 April 1995): 58.
- Norris, Christopher. 1983 (1982). *Deconstruction. Theory and Practice* London and New York: Methuen.
- Omega, Susana. 1986. 'The Unreal Reality of John Fowles' Fcitional World: A Misreading of *Mantissa*.' *Actas del VIII Congreso de A.E.D.E.A.N.* Imprenta de la Universidad de Málaga: Málaga, 121-26.
- . 1989. *Form and Meaning in the Novels of John Fowles*. U.M.I. Research Press: Ann Arbor and London.
- . 1993a. 'An Obsessive Writer's Formula: Subtly Vivid, Enigmatically Engaging, Disturbingly Funny and Cruel. An Interview with Charles Palliser,' *Atlantis* XV 1-2 (November): 269-83.
- . 1993b. *Charles Palliser: 19 Post-war Literatures in English. A Lexicon of Contemporary Authors*. Bohn Stafleu van Lohgum and Wolters-Noordhoff: Groningen.

— . 1993c 'The Symbol Made Text: Charles Palliser's Postmodernist Re-writing of Dickens in *The Quincunx*,' *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* 6 (November): 131-41.

Palliser, Charles. 1993. 'The Medicine Man', in *Wordlessness*. Eds. Bart Verchaffel and Mark Vermick. Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 138-68. Publ. in Dutch by Kritak/Meuleuhoff: Leuven/Amsterdam, 1993.

— . 1994a. *Betrayals*. London: Jonathan Cape.

— . 1994b. 'Revisiting the Past: Correcting the Future'. In *Actas del XVI Congreso de la A.E.D.E.A.N.* Eds. José M. Ruiz, Pilar Abad and José M. Barrio, 29-42.