

Forgetfulness and Remembrance in Gail Jones's "Touching Tiananmen"

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Abstract: The proliferation of trauma fiction has given rise to a debate about the ethical challenges of representing and responding to trauma. An abuse of this theoretical framework may lead to an unethical appropriation of the trauma of others. The main aim in this article is to study Gail Jones's use of poetic indirection in her short story "Touching Tiananmen" (2000). This strategy raises awareness about the historical trauma of the Tiananmen massacre, and takes how its victims may be represented into consideration. Firstly, the ambivalent meaning and relevance of silence in the short story will be explained. This discussion is supported by a detailed analysis of the formal and stylistic strategies used in Jones's narrative to evoke the 1989 traumatic event. Secondly, the story's construction of temporal, place and positional forms of circumspection will be examined. Finally, Homi Bhabha's notion of "now knowledge" will be used to comment on the story's anti-climatic turning-points and ending. By way of conclusion, it will be argued that Jones's choice to "speak shadows" proves to be a powerful strategy to denounce forgetfulness and call for our recognition of responsibility towards the victims.

Key words: poetic indirection; forgetfulness; recognition; Gail Jones; trauma

From my grandmother Bridget I inherited a vision [...] A ship. The Titanic. The sinkable Titanic. There it is sailing through darkness, slow and magisterial, with all lights ablazing. It is absolutely resplendent [...] And it proceeds, cumbrous and steady, sailing forward into a more dazzlingly white embrace, smack into its fatal icy rendezvous, smack into history. See it shudder, tilt and slowly submerge. It upends with a kind of sigh as though the sea opens a mouth. Tiny human beings fling themselves from it. Screams. Drownings. The gradual engulfment. Those lights in an eerie and wavering descent. The sea at last sealing lips over its watery secret and shock waves going sshh!, sshh!, sshh! (Jones 1992: 148)¹

This is the powerful vision which opens Gail Jones's short story "The House of Breathing". As the short-story collection is published under this title, so this vision illustrates the collection's main concerns: history, loss, forgetfulness and memory. The metaphorical association of history with the iceberg against which the Titanic collided,

together with the personification of the sea as an open “mouth” that swallows the ship, represents not only its factual sinking, but also its becoming a historical record. Two different readings could be possible depending on whether this vision is read horizontally or vertically. While the former would offer closure to the historical event, the latter would bring to the fore its ambivalences. Looking at it horizontally, the vision privileges an embellished and depersonalized narrative in which the factual solidity of the historical present used is emphasized: the majestic ship crashes into the iceberg, sinks and disappears. At the end, it is only the iceberg – history – that remains. However, the vertical reading allows for an appreciation of the double nature of icebergs. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, an ice-berg is “a huge floating mass of ice, often rising to a great height above the water,” but the word is also “used allusively with reference to the larger portion of an iceberg being unseen (and hence a largely unknown quantity, problem, etc.)” (McCracken). Bearing this idea in mind, it will be the unseen – the gaps and breaches of history – which will be brought to the fore. The “sealing lips” (148) of the sea may erase the ship and the screaming sound of the victims who fall into it. Yet this silence of the sea is challenged by the whispery sound that the shock movement of the waves produces. These waves may be regarded as channels of communication whereby the victims strive to raise their voices so that their unheard personal stories of loss be heard and remembered.

Similarly, *The House of Breathing* itself gathers fourteen short stories in which multiple breaths/ whispers can be heard. Ordinary people’s intimate and repressed experiences of loss and grief are anachronistically interwoven with historical events such as Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor in “Other Places”, the Peterloo massacre in “Dark Times”, or the wreck of the Titanic in the aforementioned “The House of Breathing”. Family authority and hegemonic discourses are challenged in stories such as “Knowledge” or “These Eyes”. Forgotten and unknown characters arise from the biographical accounts of prominent authors. Thus, like William Godwin at the end of “The Piteous Death of Mary Wollstonecraft”, readers can hear “footfalls soft as feathers and curiously ghostly from the two strangely silent, strangely grave, and irreparably motherless *daughters* of dead Mary Wollstonecraft” (120; my emphasis). In “Life Probably Saved by Imbecile Dwarf”, the narration of the health risk run by the “*patient* doctor Freud” (77; my emphasis) turns out to be the heroic and bittersweet story of his hospital room-mate Jacob and his wife Bertha, Karl Kraus’s employee. Generally speaking, it could be said that, like the “shock waves”, these stories draw attention to the unnoticed and forgotten; to that which haunts and unsettles both characters’ lives and history.

This article will focus on “Touching Tiananmen”, a story which narrates the experiences undergone by Anna, an Australian tourist, who keeps on visiting Tiananmen Square while she is in Beijing. In two of these visits, a young man addresses her by saying “yoon faw; yoon faw” (134, 138). Anna cannot understand the man’s enigmatic words and no further relationship is developed. It is only at the end of the short story that Anna realizes that the man was commemorating the date of Tiananmen massacre (June four). Like other stories within the collection, this short story plays with the characters’ expectations and deals with forgetfulness. Yet what makes it especially interesting is that it is built upon the other’s direct appeal for acknowledgment and its protagonist’s lack of response. It is a narrative that confronts its protagonist not with repressed memories of her own life or of her direct relatives, but with the stranger’s direct appeal

for remembrance and acknowledgement. It is a narrative that confronts Western witnesses with their own complicity in the censorship that surrounds the traumatic event as it was broadcast to the world. My main endeavour will be to analyse and discuss the formal and stylistic strategies on which this story relies and with which it defies this complicit forgetfulness or guilty amnesia.

On the nights of the third and fourth of June 1989, Chinese military troops opened fire on the crowds of civil demonstrators who were peacefully gathering in Tiananmen Square to mourn Hu Yaobang and demand that the government should make economic and socio-political reforms. As a consequence, thousands of civilians died, or were accused of being counter-revolutionary and imprisoned without having a public trial (Amnesty International; Jose, *Chinese Whispers* 147-149). The rigid censorship measures enforced by the government of the People's Republic of China, such as the blocking of the internet webpages which contained allusions to the massacre, erased the Tiananmen massacre from the country's public sphere. Twenty-two years later, the Chinese Government still refuses to acknowledge its guilt and offer a public apology to the victims (Watts). Literature and other artistic practices have played an important role as a counter-discourse to this misleading and oppressive official discourse of erasure and denial. As far as Australian literature is concerned, poems such as Fay Zwicky's "Tiananmen Square June 4, 1989" (1990), or those collected in *Earth Against Heaven: A Tiananmen Square Anthology* (1990), open up some space for the recognition of unmourned losses and forbidden expressions of sorrow, dissent, and freedom. Poems such as David Coleman's "Bitter Harvest" (1990) or Nicholas Langston's "Dreamers of Tiananmen Square" (1990) lament the brutal repression and re-enactment of another missed chance of revolution. Similarly, defying the Chinese Government's censorship and the negative image they projected of the demonstrators, Hum's "The Ghost in the Square: To the Martyrs of Beijing" (1990) and Henry Gilford's "At the Flower Stall" (1990) advocate the right to talk freely, bear witness and keep the Tiananmen spirit of *peaceful* revolution alive: "I saw, I was there, / I fell, I will rise again" (1990: 22, 23, 24, 25). Nicholas Jose's short story "Ha Ha Ha!" (1993) also offers a witty denunciation of the Chinese censorship by exposing the ways in which a Chinese artist tries to cope with the lack of freedom and fear under which he is forced to live.

In contrast, Gail Jones's short story "Touching Tiananmen" seems to lack that revolutionary impulse and even appears to favour a discourse of forgetfulness similar to that encouraged by the Chinese Government. Unlike the aforementioned examples, Jones's narrative does not offer a clarification of the Tiananmen massacre, and does not allow the voices of the victims to be heard either. Instead, the short story overlooks the facts and effects of this historical trauma, and exclusively centres its narrative on the perceptions, feelings and successive experiences undergone by Anna, an Australian tourist who visits Beijing one year after the massacre. The traumatic event is nevertheless directly mentioned twice. The first direct reference is made in the middle of the short story when, at a belated stage, Anna remembers the tragic event only to end up reaffirming her own forgetfulness of the historical trauma:

This was where, only one year ago, hundreds of thousands of students had taken up occupation. *This was where* a Styrofoam Statue of Liberty, ten meters high, had been utopianly erected. *This was where* the military had murderously advanced through the darkness. Where tanks had entered and

bayonets been raised [...]. She was aware of repressing memories derived from television: she would simply not allow herself to consciously recollect. Below her all was sunlit and apparently ahistorical. (135; my emphasis)

On the one hand, the repetition of the anaphoric phrase “this was where” suggests proximity, recognition and specificity: the time (“one year ago”), the place (Tiananmen Square), the participants (the students and the military), and their actions are explicitly stated. However, as Anna observes, there are no “tell-tale signs” (135) of the event in the square. Thus, her memories become reduced and confined to the realm of simulacra, since they are nothing but holographic TV images. Furthermore, just as the square shows no “scars” of the event, Anna consciously forces herself to forget about it. The second direct reference to the Tiananmen massacre will not occur until the very end of the narrative. This is the moment when Anna decodes the slogan that the young man who approached her in Tiananmen Square was shouting at her. As she *belatedly* acknowledges, this young man was commemorating the date of the massacre. Therefore, it could be argued that the repressed events of the historical trauma largely *seem* to go unnoticed by Anna during her stay in Beijing and, by extension, by the short story itself.

The circle of silence and mystery which enshrouds this young man seems to corroborate this idea. Little information about him is provided and the only words he utters are “Amerika?” (134), when he asks the amnesiac protagonist about her nationality, and “Yoon faw, yoon faw”, the phrase which he reiteratively shouts at her (134, 138). Like the characters’ personal narratives told in “Other Places” which seem to allow space only for a timeline that will “pare” the narrative of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor “to its bones” (Callahan 2010: 407), the tourist’s experiences and perceptions seem to push the young man into the background. As is the case with Mary, the Aboriginal character in Jones’s novel *Sorry*, this young man’s testimony never gets told in the short story. If *Sorry* narrates Australia’s shameful historical past through the story of Perdita’s (the white settler’s) trauma, “Touching Tiananmen” focuses on Anna’s stay in Beijing. In other words, it is the story of the witness who forgets, and not of the victim who suffers, that is highlighted. As Dolores Herrero argues in an article on *Sorry*, there are two ways in which the silence of the other can be interpreted. In the first, silence may be read as a means to exert dominance over the other, who is therefore relegated to a subaltern position (286). This seems to be the case with the young man, “whose face had a distracted or agitated look, as though he himself was anxious or under surveillance” (134). This surveillance is double. As we belatedly find out, the enigmatic character was not shouting a “slogan” (134), but “commemorating the date upon which the Tiananmen massacre occurred” (139). This connection with the historical event, together with the anxiety he evinces, might plausibly suggest that he was one of the event’s victims, and thus subject to the would-be imposition of an ideologically repressive narrative on the part of the perpetrators. As noted already, the Chinese Government imposed a discourse of silence which is still in force, to the extent that the Tiananmen massacre seems to have been consigned within internal discourses to oblivion, transmuted into an insignificant incident. In Jones’s account, Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City’s ancient and spotless appearance is presented as an exponent of this imposition, of the turning of a loss into an absence. This absence, as Dori Laub (81) and Dominick LaCapra (45-46) argue, imposes a discourse of melancholia that prevents mourning and working through the historical trauma,

problematizes the possibility of any outside witness, and blocks any ethically responsible socio-political response.

In addition, this young man is also subject to Anna's focalization, which filters his depiction in the narrative, and to her "idiotical[...] misunderstandings]" (139). It could be argued that Anna fails to obey Derrida's "law of friendship", that is, "proleptic mourning". According to this notion, it is grief, and more specifically, the subject's responsibility for "prescient grieving" of his/her friend's loss and death, that lies at the heart of friendships. Friends become bound to this predated responsibility (Dalziell 54). In "Touching Tiananmen", a similar relationship is established between Anna and the young man:

It was on, perhaps, the sixth or seventh day that the young man approached her. With no subterfuge at all he simply walked directly to greet her, as if a meeting had been arranged [...] Anna imagined for a moment that this man would become her friend, that he would guide, translate, and at last open up the secrets of Beijing. (138)

The fact that the Young Man uses the date of the massacre to address her suggests that, as in "proleptic mourning", their friendship is rooted in loss. Furthermore, he asks her about her nationality and relies on the sense of *touch*. As Edith Wyschogrod affirms,

unlike sight, which alters size in inverse proportion to distance, the information provided by *touch* remains constant. What is more, there is a chiasmatic or crossover effect of touching and touched when, for example, one hand touches the other". (107; my emphasis)

It could therefore be argued that, by strongly gripping Anna's hands and making her *touch* the warm pavement of the square the second time he sees her, this unnamed man is attempting to make her wake up and realize that what she saw on TV were not just abstract or distant illusory images, but historical facts which occurred in a specific place, and which affected flesh-and-blood individuals like him. In other words, he is asking her not to be drawn by the sensation of what Nicholas Jose describes as a "postmodern culture" which soon forgets, "where everything is believed and disbelieved with equal half heartedness". Like many ordinary Chinese, who were numbed by their Government's censorship, with the apparent complicity of the West (*Chinese Whispers* 154), he is asking her to be his sympathetic listener and witness. To quote from Zwicky's Tiananmen Square poem, he could be said to be inviting her not to "turn back" but "to look hard" and "move into the frozen swarming screen" (12). This appeal and interweaving of bonds through loss is a recurrent theme in the collection and in Jones's fiction as a whole.

In Jones's *Black Mirror* (2002), Victoria, one of the novel's protagonists, wants Anna, her biographer and the novel's narrator, to be her sympathetic listener. As a consequence, both characters develop a relationship of mutual "understanding and responsibility" whereby Victoria, and subsequently Anna through her writing, start disclosing their own stories of grief. Anna's writing of Victoria's biography becomes her attempt at mourning her friend's loss (Dalziell 56). Similarly, Robert Dixon explores the friendship relationship which is interwoven between the two main

characters of *Dreams of Speaking*: Alice and Mr Sakamoto. In his view, Alice's project of writing a book about the aesthetics of modernity eventually turns into her mourning and sympathetic witnessing of the other's pain (132-33). Within the collection under analysis, characters also become engaged with each other's repressed stories and grief and losses. Both in "Other Places" and "The House of Breathing" a tentative narration of the other's pain is offered. In contrast, in "Touching Tiananmen", the young man's story never gets told. Anna fails to be the young man's sympathetic listener and no mutual understanding is achieved.

But, as was said before, this young man's silence and lack of testimony within the short story could be interpreted in two different ways. Silence may also be read as a sign of respect (Herrero 2011). According to Tanya Dalziell, "proleptic mourning" raises the question of "how to mourn" (54). While mourning may seem necessary, it also runs the risk of illegitimately appropriating the other's voice. In Dalziell's words, it "runs the risk of ventriloquizing the other, of speaking on their behalf, of reducing the alterity of the subject to the same, to the self" (53). Jones is well aware of these limits and, even in the examples I have just mentioned, successful conclusive mourning is avoided. For example, in "Other Places", the narrative self-consciously draws attention to the limits and gaps of memory (Callahan 406), and both *Black Mirror* and *Dreams of Speaking* leave some space for uncertainty in such a way that the other's alterity is respected (Dalziell 56-57; Dixon 133). Gail Jones indeed advocates a type of writing which resists foreclosure and remains mindful of traumatic experience through the use of poetic indirection. In her view, this strategy allows writers to raise awareness of the other's pain without actually appropriating his/her voice ("Speaking Shadows" 79).

Jones can be said to privilege Derrida's "reformulation of mourning as a necessary, interminable, and ethically demanding haunting" ("Sorry-in-the Sky" 159). However, haunting here does not equal LaCapra's use of the term as "acting out" (2001: 21). As she suggests ("Sorry-in-the-Sky" 167-168), the haunted subject should not be mistaken for the melancholic person who remains static and pathologically possessed by his/her self-identification with the lost loved object. Instead, she celebrates the Derridean notion of hauntology and the figure of the ghost as a "strategic discourse" ("A Dreaming" 16), a "justice claim" ("Sorry in the Sky" 166). The ghost functions as the ungraspable figure whose insurrection brings the claims of the repressed and the dead into the present. To quote Jones, it "assess[es] the claims the dead have on us to be heard and acknowledged, the claim, moreover, of unreconciled alterity" ("A Dreaming" 17). While successful mourning may be a premature celebration and hegemonic version of what happened in the past and thus bring about forgetfulness, this type of mourning keeps remembrance and responsibility alive (Dalziell 55). Likewise, the mystery and silence which enshroud this ghost-like man in Jones's short story (136-137), together with his words, are required for maximum effect against forgetfulness. They create and maintain the tension throughout the narrative. Despite the fact that Anna's encounters with this man never reach their climax, she feels unbreakably bound to him; she cannot remain ignorant of his presence: "and each day, moreover, she watched the young man [...] Anna never approached the man, nor he she, but began to look out for him, as though to locate his figure in the crowd was the actual purpose of each visit" (137). Likewise, since there is only one point of view, it could be argued that the readers' knowledge becomes restricted to that of the female protagonist: readers can only see what she sees. In this sense, some may identify with her, thus experiencing a related

sense of uncertainty and intrigue to that which she experiences. If some perceptive readers were to decipher the sound-game from the very beginning (the phrase “yoon faw” and “June four” sound very similar), the memories that this phrase conjures up might also come to their minds, and they might similarly, although more eagerly, wish that Anna should respond to this man. It could therefore be argued that the Tiananmen massacre and an implicit appeal to acknowledge and understand the young man prevail throughout the short story, and that his voice does not get stolen.

Apart from the figure of this young man, “Touching Tiananmen” makes use of other recursive elements which demonstrate that the Tiananmen massacre is a haunting presence throughout the text. The crickets, whose drumming Anna has been hearing since her very first day in Beijing, function as a metaphor for the repressed dissident voices of the massacre. Like these invisible voices, their chirping sound blocks the idyllic vision of Beijing that Anna “had imagined” (130). As soon as she arrives in the Chinese city, she becomes struck by “the dense green wood of unfamiliar trees from which issued the drumming of millions of hidden crickets” (131). Secondly, the fact that these insects remain hidden in the “backstreets” of the city, and confined “in bamboo birdcages” (132) could be said to evoke the thousands of people who were imprisoned after the massacre. Significantly enough, the more Anna starts “perceiving by degrees the particularities of the city” (132), the more noticeable this drumming becomes. Finally, it is worth highlighting that it was precisely at the moment when she associated Tiananmen Square with the place where the historical trauma took place in 1989 that “the sound of crickets drifted upwards from emerald trees” (135). This final allusion clearly suggests an association between the crickets and the unheard voices of the victims of the massacre.

Similarly, the story of the Empress dowager and the Princess that Anna hears during one of her visits to Tiananmen Square works as a reminder of the repressed event. This story functions as a “screen memory”. As Michael Rothberg remarks, this type of memory has a double purpose: “they serve both as a barrier between consciousness and the unconscious and as a site of projection for unconscious fantasies” (13). To put it differently, as in an allegory these memories make use of other more simple and understandable memories whereby the repressed and/or incomprehensible memories can be channelled and conveyed. It is for this reason that Rothberg goes on to affirm that

screen memory is, in my terminology, multidirectional not only because it stands at the centre of a potentially complex set of temporal relations, but also and perhaps more importantly –because it both hides and reveals that which has been suppressed. (13-14)

According to this, the story of the Empress dowager could be regarded as multidirectional. On the one hand, its telling by the English tourist guide brings this story, which occurred in “1900, almost the end of the Ching dynasty” (136), into the present moment of Jones’s short story. It offers tourists a historical explanation of who the person was whose funerary pagoda is exhibited in one of the halls of the Forbidden City. On the other hand, the story of the Empress Dowager has been used by folk literature and film-makers such as Tian Zhuangzhuang and Jiang Wen as a way to elude censorship and denounce the Government’s abuse of power and brutality against the Tiananmen demonstrators (Jose, *Chinese Whispers* 150). Some readers may

conceivably establish such links between the story of the Empress Dowager and the 1989 traumatic events. Like the students who peacefully gathered in Tiananmen Square and were killed by the Chinese government's military forces, the Princess is punished for her "reforming zeal and rebelliousness" (137) by a member of her closest circle: the Empress, her mother-in-law. Both events occurred unexpectedly at night: "in the dead of the night four of her [the Empress dowager's] eunuchs stole silently into the splendid bedroom, seized the Princess, and dragged her screaming to the well" (136-137). Similarly, as mentioned above, the military troops broke unexpectedly into Tiananmen Square and started firing on the civilians who were gathered there. Special attention should be given to the fact that it is not the relics of the Princess that are shown in the Forbidden City, but those of the Empress (the perpetrator). Thus, the mourning of both events (the Princess's death and the Tiananmen massacre) has been censored. It would therefore be no exaggeration to affirm that, despite the fact that there are not many direct references to the Tiananmen massacre within Jones's short story, the event is the silenced spectre that repeatedly haunts the narrative through metaphors and indirect allusions. In Jose's story "Ha Ha Ha!", the protagonist, who is under the threat of Chinese government censorship and repression, uses trivial answers such as "ha ha ha!" and "hee hee hee" to respond to, and thus avoid, those uneasy questions which two members of the Chinese security department ask him, and any other question which could place him in a compromising and risky situation. However, as is said at the end of Jose's story, "talking to him, you knew you were near the facts of the matter when he started to laugh" (132). As has already been argued, Jones's short story also seems to place us in a "trivial" context. Yet, in tune with this "hee hee hee" response, the indirect allusions in "Touching Tiananmen" also contribute to deceiving and disrupting the hegemonic discourse of censorship and forgetfulness that official power had attempted to institute.

At the end of *Spectres of Marx*, Jacques Derrida ordered Horatio: "Thou art a scholar; speak to it [the spectre], Horatio" (176). Jones's "Touching Tiananmen" poses a similar challenge. By focusing on the role of the witness and pushing the historical trauma and its unheard voices to a spectral position, the short story could be said to claim the complex though necessary need to respond to those voices. According to Jones, "an aspiration to justice is an aspiration to full responsiveness to those forms of address that remind us that we exist in 'a community of the question'" ("Speaking Shadows" 82). Justice can only be achieved through a discourse which "speaks shadows"; that is to say, through "a mouth that will go on shaping meaning in the face of senseless annihilation" (83). In other words, Jones speaks in favour of a discourse based on uncertainty, one which allows for a constant state of reflection and questioning of established ideas. The main aim of that constant reflection is to progressively achieve a level of justice, that is, "the full responsiveness" to those uncertainties (82). In keeping with her assertion that "in the best of all possible worlds writers may offer forms of circumspection that create responsiveness at the basis of thinking justly" (82), it could therefore be argued that in "Touching Tiananmen" Jones creates a narrative world which resists the type of fixed definitions and foreclosure associated with official discourses.

As in other short stories within the collection and other novels by Jones, "Touching Tiananmen" favours anachronism. At first sight, the narrative seems to have a flashback structure. It opens with the waking of the protagonist from a nightmare. Next, it tackles

the moment of Anna's arrival in the Chinese city, follows her successive visits to the hutongs, Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City, to finally provide an explanation of the nightmare. This return to the starting point is made clear by the similarities between the beginning and the ending. In both cases (130, 139), the female protagonist wakes up in a state of "lostness" and fear; needs to relocate herself; and repeats the words "China", "Beijing". However, at the beginning, Beijing is for her "an actual city [...] in which she now sought her annual vacation" (130), whereas, at the end, it is the city from which "she resolved to leave" (139). This change of mind clearly establishes chronological distance between the two events, as if her first nightmare marked her new beginning in the city, while the latter marked the end of her journey. However, can that starting point be specified? The recurrent undefined references to the story time, as conveyed by the use of the indefinite article "one" in "one Beijing day" (133), or the dubitative adverb "perhaps" in "it was on, perhaps, the sixth or seventh day" (137), clearly imply some time disruption. This temporal uncertainty makes it impossible to locate this moment exactly. Furthermore, the repetitive pattern of the story equally creates "the illusion of a continual, sufficient present" (137), which disrupts the chronology of the story. Moreover, Anna is continually visiting Tiananmen Square and postponing her departure from Beijing.

Anna did not leave Beijing at her travel-agent appointed time. She lingered, without particular cause or purpose, moving first to a smaller and less expensive hotel (*that of the fifties-totalitarian facade*) delaying her flight to Hong Kong again and again. (132, my emphasis)

The use of the deictic pronoun "that" does not imply *new* knowledge but *old* knowledge, as if *that* hotel had already been mentioned before. In effect, this is the hotel that was mentioned at the very beginning of the short story (130). Furthermore, given the fact that the Australian tourist is constantly delaying her departure for Hong Kong, there is no guarantee that she will indeed leave Beijing at the end of the story. Her relapse into a longing state at the end of the short story sows a seed of skepticism about her actual departure. Would not her final yearning "for orientalist clichés" (139) equal her compulsive search for an annual vacation?

Place estrangement accompanies this temporal uncertainty. The short story is constantly playing with Anna's expectations and disappointments. Beijing is described as a city of contrasts: "the face of the hotel manager (perpetually *smiling*)" versus "the facade of the hotel", which, as has just been pointed out, is described as "fifties totalitarian" (130; my emphasis); the most *touristy locations*, which are kept in an immaculate state, versus "the *hutongs*, or backstreets", where "*looming apartment blocks*" rise above "*shanty houses made of sticks*" (132; my emphasis). As was previously highlighted, Anna's (non-) remembrance of the massacre is reduced to the holographic simulated realm of television. According to Jean Baudrillard's remarks on television, it could be said that, in Anna's case, the massacre is not a repressed memory, but rather a repressed hyperreality. In keeping with Jose's aforementioned warning against "postmodern culture", these assertions may "perversely, unseriously" (Sontag 111) suggest that the massacre never took place: the spectacle becomes "more real than the real, [and thus] the real is abolished" (Baudrillard 80). However, paradoxically enough, the dreamlike narrative world created by the short story does not emphasize the spectacle of the historical trauma being broadcast, but rather Anna's actual tourist experience in Beijing.

This idea is suggested by the blurring of boundaries between reality and fiction at the very beginning of the story, when she is compared with “some monster in a movie, new to the very world” (130). Significantly enough, this simile does not describe her while she is dreaming, but after she has actually woken up. In addition, the use of verbs such as “trudge” (131) or “roam” (135), and of adverbs such as “tentatively” (132) to describe her movements around the city, not only suggests that she has problems moving, but also conveys the impression, as was said before, that she is “half-dreaming” (130). Secondly, in keeping with Baudrillard’s idea of hyperculture and hypercommodity (67), Anna is identified with “a kind of object, conspicuous and inhuman, inaccessible to them [the people who live and work in the hutongs] as they were to her, without insides, a doll” (132). Notwithstanding the multiple objections that could be made to Baudrillard, I would like to emphasize the deconstructive function of his use of the concept of the “simulacra” as a form of parody. According to him, the simulacrum proves to be a useful tool which, by bringing to the fore its own very superficial absent nature, challenges the discourse on which it relies (21). Given the propagandistic nature of the description of Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City, it could be argued that the short story is well aware of the functionality of this notion. Rather than inducing a feeling of majesty and admiration, the well-preserved and geometrically distributed imperial buildings and courtyards turn into “tyrannical orderliness” (135). The falsity of the objects displayed is constantly brought to the fore: “she was aware that she dealt merely in pre-visions and exteriorities” (131). The objects exhibited in the pagodas of the Pavilion of the Pleasant Sounds are said to be “oddities, spectacles, artifacts preposterous” (136). The use of flattering words, detailed descriptions and extremely long enumerations contribute to emphasizing the baroque aspect of a place that has the potential to leave many readers, like the tourists, “both awestruck and suffocated, both enchanted and repulsed” (136). The tyrannical quality of the amnesiac state of the place is highly emphasized: Anna becomes trapped “in the illusion of a continual, sufficient present” (137). Far from being “no delusion at all but an actual city, inveterate and substantial”, the tourist locations of Beijing turn out to be a kind of simulacrum, whose tyranny of silence, forgetfulness and illusion is revealed. Contrary to what she expected, the Forbidden City cannot provide any “refuge” (135).

By the end of the story she has a nightmare in which she relives her visit to the Forbidden City and the “mirror story” she has heard from the tourist guide. Interestingly enough, in her nightmare Anna moves from the position of witness—the same position she occupied when she was a TV spectator—to that of participant, thus becoming both/neither victim and/nor perpetrator: “she was not sure which character she played. She was *simultaneously* the evil dowager and the tragic princess; she was either or both” (139; my emphasis). Similarly, throughout the story, she is constantly asked to discard her position as spectator or tourist in order to approach the other. The first example takes place when she visits “the *hutongs*, or backstreets” (132). Although Anna is the main focaliser, she concludes her visit being subject to “the gazes of others” (132). A similar unexpected transgression of borders takes place during one of her visits to Tiananmen Square. On this occasion, a family who is being photographed starts “calling [Anna] over to be included in their family snapshot” (134; my emphasis). She is somehow forced to abandon the position which allowed her to “see photographically”, that is, the position of the photographer, to become “instantaneously memorialized, there, anonymously, in Tiananmen Square” (134). The other two significant occasions on which some responsibility is demanded from her are, as has

been stated, the moments when, much to Anna's surprise, the young man catches her attention (134-135; 137).

It is obvious that these occasions on which Anna is invited to approach the other place her closer to the position of the victim. Yet even if she seems to wish to listen to the victim, she also shows a deep feeling of guilt, which in some way prevents her from responding:

the more keenly she listened the more the language was complicated [...] Only in her dreams did she speak Chinese, and then it was of some imperial and antique form, denoting not equitable discourse but that of a foreign devil somehow evilly collusive with old regimes. (133)

Anna always shows similar escapist behaviour: she fails to understand, feels disturbed or frightened, and either goes back to her hotel (132) and retreats "with uncivil haste" (134), or is "alarmed" and escapes (134), thus refusing to establish empathic bonds with the other. For Emmanuel Lévinas, responsibility "goes beyond being" (15); it means being opened up to vulnerability, not only to the other's happiness, but also to the other's pain (49). Anna's identification with the Princess in her nightmare might be said to illustrate this openness: like the Princess, she is "thrust down the well" (139). Conversely, her behaviour can be regarded as being closer to that of tourists, who, according to Zygmunt Bauman, "want to immerse themselves in a strange and bizarre element—*on condition*, though, that it will not stick to the skin and thus can be shaken off whenever they wish" (29; my emphasis). At first, "the gazes of others which rest upon her" provide her with some kind of comfort; they are "like the lightest of touches on the nape of the neck, like a lover's caress". However, once these gazes become "disturbing", she "trace[s] her route back again to the hotel" (132). As this example suggests, Anna enjoys the company of others as long as they help her to make up for the disappointment that she felt after having visited the tourist attractions of Beijing (132), and having fought the loneliness or "lostness common to many travellers" (130). Her escape to the hotel clearly shows that she is reluctant to abandon the territory where she feels safe; the place which, despite all "its false luxuriousness" (132), allows her to remain unbothered. Likewise, when she is photographed, she becomes part of the Chinese family whom she has been describing as typically Chinese. However, as soon as the members of the family start talking, she loses her privileged position; they stop being an image whose description she can control, to become full individuals by speaking a language that she does not understand (134). Finally, Anna's thought that the young man "would become her friend, that he would guide, translate, and at last open up the secrets of Beijing" (138), becomes truly ironic when contrasted with his feelings of discomfort and disturbance. Her behaviour suggests that, to use Bauman's terms again, she is, like most tourists, "a seeker of experience" (29) who shows no concern for the other. Like the Empress, Anna occupies the position of the onlooker who remains undisturbed by the other's cries.

The lack of any direct response within the story does not diminish the power of these appeals. The succession of turning points in the short story demonstrates that, no matter how hard Anna tries to escape, these calls are unavoidable; responsibility cannot be erased. Furthermore, despite this repetitive pattern, the succession of "now" moments denotes progression. In "On Global Memory" Homi Bhabha defines "the temporality of

the now” as a temporality of recognisability which displaces the subject and produces a “sense of disorientation”. As he goes on to explain, the subject undergoes a state of “both possession and dispossession”, which allows for the creation of “a new angle of vision”. In keeping with these ideas, as long as Anna’s sense of dislocation increases, her vision of Beijing also changes. She realizes that “people now seemed possessed of captivatingly individual features” (133), and becomes “now struck for the first time by [the edifice’s] quality of obsessive artifice” (136). Similarly, after her disturbing first encounter with the young man, the second one turns out to be “shocking now precisely because it had a precedent” (138). Besides, as stated above, she becomes more and more sensitive to the sound of the crickets as she starts to remember the massacre. Finally, the dislocation experienced in her nightmare leads her to decipher and understand the mysterious man’s password. This resolution comes as a form of awakening, both for the Australian tourist, who becomes aware of her own forgetfulness,² and for those readers who, like her, did not understand or gave no importance to the man’s words. From their “superior” position, some readers might have thought that they were cleverer than Anna, entitling them accordingly to play the role of judge with respect to her irresponsible behaviour and unreasonable lingering in Beijing. However, the unexpected solution to the man’s enigmatic phrase demands that these readers should re-think their own opinions of the two main characters, while becoming aware of their unnoticed complicity with Anna’s behaviour. To quote James Phelan’s observations, “surprise means that the configuration we have developed on the basis of the progression needs to be revised, needs, in other words, to be reconfigured” (345). Accordingly, for both Anna and many readers, Beijing changes from being the place where Anna “now sought her annual vacation” to the place where the young man appears to be a “now” indelible image (139). Thus, a degree of recognition which demands a reconfiguration of the characters’ and the readers’ ethical positions is achieved.

In sum, “Touching Tiananmen” is a narrative that “speaks shadows”: it brings about some remembrance and does away with a discourse of forgetfulness; it achieves a certain progression through repetition; and it always keeps some ethical distance from the victim, while claiming that the victim must always be born in mind. The use of direct and indirect allusions to the Tiananmen massacre, the temporal uncertainty and place estrangement, the blurring of boundaries between dream and reality, and the continual succession of turning points and “now moments” contribute to creating a narrative in which many readers, like Anna, are continually invited to react against the delusional discourse of silence with which power attempts to enshroud the massacre. No definitive answer might be offered. However, the powerful effect of these successive calls makes mourning possible, an ethically demanding mourning that, as Gail Jones argues (“Sorry-in-the-Sky” 159), calls for limitless recognition and responsibility.

Notes

1. Subsequent references to *The House of Breathing* are to this edition and will be cited by page number.
2. Awakening is used in Lacan’s terms, as the ethical imperative to confront trauma and bear witness (Caruth 1996: 99).

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