

A vast, sprawling, endlessly stimulating cathedral of a novel

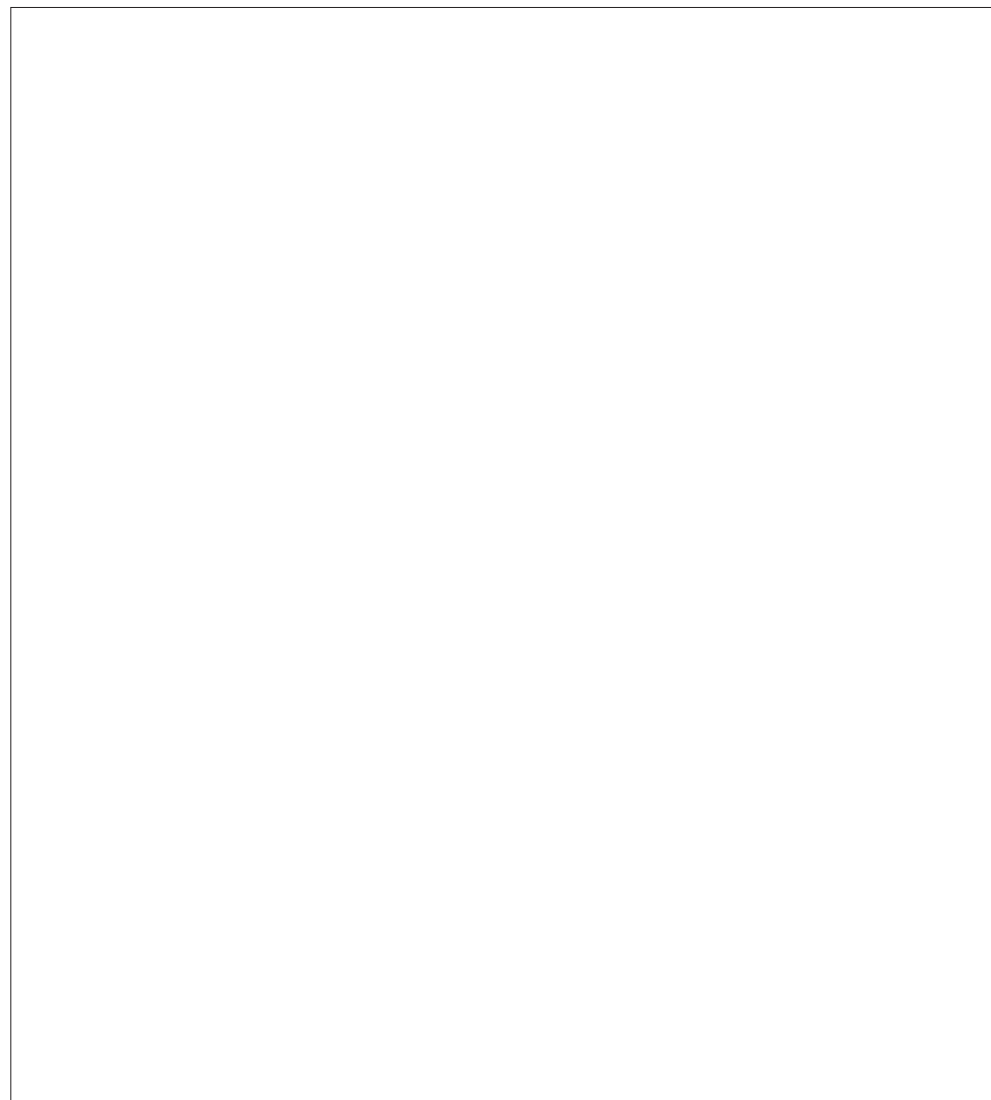
Gothic agglomerations

MICHAEL KERRIGAN

Luis Goytisolo

ANTAGONÍA
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On February 6, 1854, John Stuart Mill castigated Goethe in his diary for his desire that life and human nature be “rounded off”: “As well might he attempt to cut down . . . a Gothic cathedral to the Greek model, as to give a rounded completeness to any considerable modern life”. Rather, the philosopher insisted, what the “instincts of the modern mind” demanded was “bold, free expansion in all directions”. That same centrifugal tendency had already attracted Ruskin to the Gothic: famously, he’d found in it a democratic affirmation of the craftsman and his skill. Collective efforts that nonetheless afforded scope for individual creativity, the great Gothic cathedrals were agglomerations of hand-worked detail. Each one was its own revolution: a riotous assembly of artistic endeavour brought to, at best, unruly order, and infused with an exuberant spirit of the carnivalesque. H. G. Wells’s Mr Polly has, we’re told, a “blood affinity” with the Gothic: “in the Middle Ages he would no doubt have sat upon a scaffolding and carved out penetrating and none too flattering portraits of his superiors on the capitals”. Typically, these monuments were built over generations – too long to be defined by any single patron’s vision, or any architect’s or craftsman’s style; too long even to be pinned down to any one historical moment. Time, taste, social atomism: the Gothic goes spilling over all these boundaries, uncontainable in its energy, unlimited in its horizons. It’s not just that, as is often said, its spires and pointed arches strain towards heaven: its extravagantly broken outline seems to dissolve into the sky. Reading Luis Goytisolo’s description of Barcelona’s medieval cathedral, we don’t so much see stonework as watch the continuing spectacle of its melting before our eyes. The “cascade of gargoyles, the watery sparkle of cornices; the trickling viscosity of the stained glass”. The boundaries broken here aren’t just those between one architectural detail and the next, but between the built structure and its



The nave of Saint Eulalia Cathedral, Barcelona

environment, the air and rain.

This passage comes from *Recuento* (“Recounting”), the first novel of an ambitious tetralogy, *Antagonía* (“Antagonism”), which Goytisolo began writing secretly in prison in May 1960 and finally concluded on June 16 (Bloomsday), 1980. Cathedrals have been built more quickly, and while *Antagonía* is not for the most part a tale of horror, it’s a “gothic” novel in several other senses, not least in its slow and cumulative construction, the gradual accrual of details, of recollections, of ironies. Each new novel as it appeared threw the work as a whole into a new perspective; the tetralogy as a whole re-reads all its component parts. Though *Recuento* didn’t appear until 1973 (and then in a Mexican edition), significant gaps still followed before the appearance in turn of *Los verdes de mayo hasta el mar* (The Greens of May Towards the Sea, 1976), *La cólera de Aquiles* (The Wrath of Achilles, 1979) and *Teoría del conocimiento* (Theory of Knowledge, 1981). For the first “proper” edition of *Antagonía* as a whole, readers had to wait until 1993, and even then the tetralogy was published in four volumes. While a two-volume edition appeared five years later, it is only now that Anagrama has brought out the entire work as a single book – the 500th title

in their influential “Hispanic Narratives” series.

It is a fitting fanfare for what is arguably at once an established classic and a brand new novel – one that may at last secure this important novelist the recognition he deserves. Until now, he has been overshadowed by one sibling, José Agustín Goytisolo, revered as one of modern Spain’s greatest poets, while international readers are likely to be more familiar with his brother Juan. Juan Goytisolo has won worldwide attention for his radical and resourceful fiction and his outspoken political activism. The youngest of the three, Luis has been more retiring, content – like the action of *Antagonía* – to remain in Catalonia, apart from a period of youthful exile in Paris. If Luis can have remembered little of the Spanish Civil War itself, he was marked like his brothers by its aftermath – by the absence of their mother, killed in a Nationalist bombardment of 1938, and by the hypocrisies of a conservative bourgeois family that nevertheless embraced Franco’s cause. Juan has recalled this upbringing in a memoir, *Cotos vedados* (Forbidden Territories, 1985), which offers intriguing points of contact and comparison with Luis’s work. Though autobiographical in a great many of its details, however, *Antagonía* is at the same

time a gloriously inventive work of fiction.

Recuento has as its protagonist a man who bears striking similarities to Luis Goytisolo himself: the novel tracks Raúl Ferrer Gaminde’s growth to manhood – and, more specifically, his development as a writer. A chronologically tortuous narrative of flashbacks, forward leaps, present observation, recollected conversation and abstract musing isn’t made any easier by the absence of temporal markers – the “meanwhile”s, the “then”s, the “that night in the bar”s. We pass unguided from moment to moment, place to place. Conversations, too, flow freely, unsignposted and uninterrupted by the usual apparatus of reported speech. As if all this were not confusing enough, the narrative voice keeps wandering off into lengthy similes – always explicitly signposted to advertise their artificiality – which are often so developed that they amount to mini stories in themselves, branching out into sub-similes of their own. Goytisolo’s limpid style seems to tease us, his text remaining determinedly resistant to being read as a coherent whole. Gothic juxtaposition is the ordering principal here.

This is undoubtedly difficult – even aggravating. Yet it is also arresting in the immediacy with which it introduces the variety of experiences and stimuli crowding in on a creative and gradually maturing mind: boyhood games of soldiers; long summers in the family’s house in the Pyrenean foothills; the arrival of the Nationalists to general celebration; the dismissal of a maid (her head sheared) for fraternizing with Red militiamen. Back in Barcelona, at school, there’s bullying and an unending round of Mass, Benediction and the recitation of the rosary; there are cinema trips, and practical jokes at weekends. Long-standing family feuds continue; arguments over unwise investments and mis-spent youths; an elderly relative’s child-molesting is witnessed with amused tolerance. Raúl experiences a stifling home life in what already feels like a hopelessly backward and decadent society. Then come the discomforts, the tedium and the camaraderie of military service and the excitements (and very real dangers) of a radical awakening in Franco’s Spain. This comes at a time (in the early 1950s) when the Left in Barcelona was just starting to find its feet and flex its muscles. Changing passions and priorities are vividly evoked: first love, the compromises of a deeper commitment to a woman called Nuria, whom Raúl will eventually marry, despite reservations – and underneath all this there is the gathering conviction of an artistic vocation.

Formative ideas and developing thoughts come streaming out in seemingly interminable sentences that flow elegantly on for pages at a time. One meditation sparked off by a visit to Barcelona’s History Museum (as it happens, the cover for a meeting with a Communist co-conspirator) takes us through the city’s whole history – from the Stone Age

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to the 1950s – in some twenty pages. *Recuento* resonates on every page with the imagery of Catalan culture – as, frequently, its sumptuous Castilian prose does with Catalan expressions. But Raúl, like Goytisolo, is the highly educated product of a Castilian-speaking family: medieval ballads, modern pop songs, saints’ lives, psychoanalytic theory, seventeenth-century poetry, local folk customs and the cello-playing of Pablo Casals all feature as our protagonist grows up. Catalan culture is despised in its more parochial aspects, though: the self-important bookshop browsers who end up in a conversation vaunting the achievements of the Catalan nation seem every bit as ridiculous as the elderly aunt who regales Raúl with her elegiac outpourings on the fallen Falangists of her youth. Communism is at once an inspiration and a bore: the last best hope of another sort of Spain and the spur to screeds of bombastic rhetoric. (In bed with Nuria, Raúl rehearses his friends’ Marxist maxims as a way of warding off ejaculation.) But the Party is also – as it was for Goytisolo – the sponsor of the subversive activities that bring about Raúl’s arrest and imprisonment, the crucial mechanism that allows him to take stock, to discover himself as a writer and start planning his great work. It’s all marvellously portentous, impressive and self-parodic at the same time, the author both wryly aware of the young writer’s grandiosity and conscious of the real ambition of his project. In a climactic scene in prison, one thundery afternoon, a mass for inmates is celebrated on the very spot used for the garrotting of the condemned. This Golgotha is the heart of the prison – as, of course, it was of Franco’s state. The prayerful exhortations of a nun over the tannoy become the echoing voice of God, inspiring an apocalyptic vision of the world as the sixteenth-century mystic Fray Luis de Granada saw it: “What a striking representation of Hell the world affords”.

It is significant that Raúl experiences his vision in Barcelona’s “Model Prison”, just as it is noteworthy that this jail stands in a square block of the Ensanche. Barcelona’s nineteenth-century development area, regular and elegant, was the prospering city’s answer to Haussmann’s Paris. For Goytisolo, as for Mill, this sort of regularizing scheme embodies a dream of order – like that of the “Ideal City” imagined by Renaissance artists. Back in his cell after the service, Raúl sees the criss-cross shadow of the barred window superimposed on the lines of the flagstoned floor – as regular as the Ensanche’s street plan – and wan and weak in contrast with the strange and imposing cityscape of ruined castles and cathedrals he sees in the towering storm clouds when he looks out. Despite the best efforts of its bourgeoisie, modern Barcelona has more in common with the city in the clouds than it does with the Ensanche. Over and over again in *Recuento* we’re shown the city in panorama, Raúl looking out from one vantage point or another to see a continuous mesh of structures, each building the unruly part of a greater whole. But if the city is a jumble of masonry, so, too, are its inhabitants: as Raúl and his then-girlfriend Aurora look out across the city, we find the young woman represented in architectural terms, her face described – unromantically – as “una proyección del cuello” (“a projection of her neck”). Again, Gothic juxtaposition prevails,

each art form flowing effortlessly into another: so we find the cathedral represented in the illuminated imagery of Saint Eulalia’s Missal manuscript – held in the very building its picture represents. This revelation in turn prompts Latin passages from the Requiem liturgy and a scene in which Raúl and his friends sit around chatting with Mozart’s *Requiem* on the record player. Then comes a view of Aurora sitting listening at the feet of another writer, a rival of Raúl, looking “como si formara parte de un grupo escultórico” (“as though she were part of a sculpted group”), and we’re back once more with the cathedral stonework.

Everything, everyone has its place, on a vast disorderly canvas whose juxtapositions are not just in space, but in time too. The cityscape, as Goytisolo’s narrator sees it, isn’t just a jumble of architectural styles but the passage of time given concrete form – and a comparison with the way memory maketh man. Looking back, he suggests, is like

visiting one of those cathedrals built upon an earlier one, constructed in its turn from the remains of pagan temples, stones belonging to that other city excavated underneath the present city; subterranean ruins one could wander through contemplating what were streets and houses and cemeteries and protecting walls, held together almost invariably with the remnants of preceding cities.

Not content with a remodelled city, nineteenth-century Barcelona began a second great church, too. Antoni Gaudí’s Sagrada Familia may be the most recognizable monument of modern Barcelona, but its status in *Recuento* is ambiguous, to say the least. On the one hand, we see it as Raúl does: for the serious-minded young Marxist, it’s a symbol of the bourgeoisie’s investment in the cult of the family; for the student of Freud, it represents an oppressive Trinity (patriarchal father, pure mother, put-upon son). At the same time, its Gothic qualities are stimulating in all sorts of ways: then (and even now) still under construction, it’s a creation the visitor can see taking slow and gradual shape, an *obra trabajosa* – literally a “workful work”. Posing as a tourist to escape the attention of the police when out pamphleteering, Raúl finds the Sagrada Familia a revelation, “un templo inconcluso de inusitadas perspectivas” (“an uncompleted temple of unaccustomed perspectives”). As he explores “a strung-together series of walkways”, the labyrinth of “hyperbolic arches, short and contorted galleries, little staircases, convoluted corridors, intestinal cavities, passageways which smelt of urine, full of inscriptions and graffiti allowed one to look out over the foreshortened reliefs of the façade”. The Sagrada Familia is Janus-faced, still unfinished yet already sullied, written-over; prophetic as it points towards the future. Its status is ambiguous too, with its official inscriptions and its popular graffiti. Still more important, it’s a work that can be surveyed from a standpoint within itself. It invites us into a world like that of Velázquez’s most celebrated painting, “Las Meninas”.

This is why *Recuento*, not content with interrogating its own construction as it proceeded, had to be just the first volume of a quartet. *Los verdes de mayo hasta el mar* – the title is obscure – describes the struggles of the writer (now renamed Ricardo) to turn the experiences we’ve just been reading

about in *Recuento* into a creative work. He and his wife (now Camila) have come to the seaside town of Rosas, a little way up the coast from Barcelona, in the hope of saving what is already a foundering marriage and giving the ambitious young author space to write his book. Ricardo’s notes and jottings are sprinkled throughout the text, much of the material familiar from *Recuento*, though often radically reimagined and recast. In between comes a chronicle of Ricardo’s daily life, seen through the deadening headache of the hangover he replenishes each night in a never-ending crawl through the clubs and bars of Rosas with a rabble of other young couples making the most of the new climate of sexual permissiveness and tourism along the Costa Brava. While only secondarily a social satire, *Los verdes de mayo* is withering in the way it portrays the debauching of a beautiful coastline by speculative development, and that of a newly liberated middle class and their foreign friends by lust and greed. The idea of the orgy appeals to Goytisolo rather as the Gothic does, in the way that it breaks down boundaries while agglomerating individuals; and in its open-endedness, its ceaseless self-renewal. Life, art, real and imagined landscapes, experience and dream all come together triumphantly in a final unforgettable sequence in which a drunken cruise on a German magnate’s yacht becomes a voyage of the *Argo*.

La cólera de Aquiles comes at the artist’s life from a completely different angle: Goytisolo has described it as “the earth, viewed from the moon”. It’s essentially a comic novel, despite the seriousness with which it is narrated by Matilde, the distant cousin with whom Raúl/Ricardo had an affair in Paris during his period of political exile. A peripheral, passing episode, if earlier volumes are to be believed, here it’s related as a pivotal experience in Raúl’s life. Matilde, a wealthy divorcee, lives in Cadaqués, another former fishing village corrupted by the tourist trade. For years now, she has amused herself with exclusively lesbian affairs, seducing rich young wives, fresh up from Barcelona. An inveterate plotter, she has discovered that her long-term lover is cheating on her with an Argentinean Lothario – the sort of sleazy opportunist who haunts the new resorts. Like the avenger in a Jacobean drama, Matilde establishes quasi-authorial control over her betrayer’s destiny, leaving diary notes that she knows her lover will read and react to, until she’s effectively directing the whole affair. But Matilde is more literally an author too, treating us to the entire text of “The Edict of Milan” – the novel she published some years ago, a fictionalized account of the affair with Raúl, with whom she is still evidently obsessed. Her return to the novel she wrote as a reader prompts some searching reflections on the relation between the two functions – along with some delicious ironies when the real-life narrative she has been weaving out of her lover’s affair escapes from her control.

One of the running jokes in *La cólera de Aquiles* is the contempt Matilde repeatedly registers for Richard Burro (“Donkey”), the reviewer who gave “The Edict of Milan” a scornful thumbs-down in the *TLS*. One would never dream of confusing so sophisticated a novelist with his character, of course, but it is not perhaps entirely far-fetched to suspect

that Goytisolo may be enacting his own little revenge-plot here. Could it really be a coincidence that it was Richard Burrows who roughed up *Recuento* in this paper when it first appeared? Burrows took the view (*TLS* May 23, 1975) that the novel was really just the “exhaustive” memoir of “a very ordinary, middle-class Catalan youth”; that its formal complexity did not grow “from any originality of insight but from a systematic *dérèglement* of all the rules of clear writing”. John Butt, reviewing *Los verdes de mayo* (*TLS* February 4, 1977) tried hard to give Goytisolo the benefit of the doubt, even making a heartfelt call for these novels to be supplied with “a reader’s guide”. He was hardly enthusiastic in his conclusions, however; and it is easy to see why, in the anglophone world of the 1970s, *Antagonía* might have been read as nothing more than an explosion of narrative nihilism; an adolescent rebellion against the realist fictions of Franco’s era. But time can hardly be said to have borne out that view: thirty-odd years of postmodern experimentalism in fiction have helped to open this text up for the reader, challenging as it remains. That it’s done so without making the scale of Goytisolo’s undertaking any less awe-inspiring is an indication of the tetralogy’s artistic stature.

Teoría del conocimiento is the book it has all been about: Raúl/Ricardo’s novel – the one he planned in prison, worried about in Rosas and, now finally completed, sends out into the world. Yet how far that “real”, extra-literary world can actually exist we now have reason to wonder. While *Teoría* makes no acknowledgement of its status as the concluding work of a tetralogy, we cannot un-read what we’ve read before. The text is full of reminders, with old acquaintances reappearing, experiences relived, long-remembered settings evoked, debts of friendship repaid and scores settled. Intellectual influences bear fruit; images conceived long since and ideas developed over decades find their final expression (or so we’re invited to imagine). Yet this “novel by Raúl Ferrer Gaminde” isn’t slow in calling into question its own status as *Antagonía*’s somehow definitive final word. The confidential “diary” that constitutes the opening chapters is soon revealed as the work not of some “real” or fictive Raúl, but of Carlos, the son of one of Raúl/Ricardo’s Rosas friends from *Los verdes de Mayo*. This becomes clear when a character called Ricardo Echaves (an architect, but in all other obvious respects very much like the Ricardo/Raúl we’ve come to know) takes up the narrative reins. The novel’s next narrator, an elderly and misanthropic patriarch, was entrusted with the young man’s writings (and his own notes on them) by his friend Ricardo (Echaves), who had received the diary from Carlos’s father, Carlos Sr. Since they had subsequently been transcribed by Ricardo, this latest narrator is conscious that the manuscript may now seem like a work of fiction, written by Ricardo; or as a work by Carlos Sr, whom the narrator has asked to transcribe it all into a single text. Yet young Carlos may still in some sense be the writer of the work we’re reading: the narrator tells us he’s going to ask him to transcribe the autobiographical tapes he’s been dictating as he feels his life approach its end.

Who is the “author”, then – the father or the son? It is a fitting question for a fiction

Grateful digressions

SEAN O'BRIEN

Ciaran Carson

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that has from the start concerned itself with the influence of the family on the individual, of the past on the present, of artistic tradition on living creativity. Just as Virgil guides Dante through the Inferno, Dante guided later writers as different as Nerval, Baudelaire and Balzac. Yet they in their turn have helped to change the way we have read *The Divine Comedy* – all writers adding to each other's efforts, like Ruskin's artisans. Prefiguration and "post-figuration" are equally important in a novel whose nominal author we encounter as a dead soul. The only reason the elderly narrator has these various texts is that Raúl Ferrer Gaminde's alter ego, Ricardo, has been killed in a car accident, we're told.

Narratives within narratives, worlds within worlds, the past within the present: we're at once at home and thoroughly adrift in a universe of infinite regression. It is Ricardo, it seems, who takes us back to the very beginning of *Recuento* with his memory of a boyhood moment, standing looking at his own reflection in a pool beneath a blue but cloud-studded sky. What, he asks himself, if his whole universe were just the cell in the eye of a boy looking at his own reflection in a pool, and so on, ad infinitum? The image of the pool as pupil, reflecting what it perceives – and, at the same time, mediating a deeper reality – is familiar from the *Paradiso*, at whose empyrean heights we see the ultimate circle of salvation lodged within God's self; "iris reflecting iris", and heaven reflecting hell. While for the modern Christian the main challenge may be that of accepting that the sufferings of the Inferno are underwritten by divine love, for Goytisolo there's a different antagonism. Dante, the old narrator of *Teoría del conocimiento* suggests, was the first writer to venture through the mimetic mirror while retaining a standpoint firmly on this side. This "paranoiac genius" reconciled the opposing strands of human life, putting "the reality into fiction and vice versa".

Dante didn't just give Goytisolo the inspiration for a literary structure that would be at once vast and lapidary, elaborate in its architecture, yet exquisite in its detail. More importantly, he provided a paradigm for the sort of work that might do justice both to the integrity of the individual consciousness and to the infinity of experiences and influences that made up his universe. With all his scepticism, Luis Goytisolo has been attracted to the imagery of the Age of Faith because it seems more responsive to life's complexity than the accomplished classicism to which humanists have more conventionally been drawn. But he is anachronistic in other ways as well – not at all what we've learned to expect in an age of postmodern playfulness. With all his wit and humour, he has the "high seriousness" of the Victorian sages; and the nineteenth-century novelist's desire to trace the sources of the self. With a Romantic's conviction of the centrality of art, he is utterly uncompromising in his aesthetic, and unembarrassed by the demands he makes on his reader's time and trouble. Reading *Antagonía* is, in the real world, almost an impossibility, requiring great intellectual commitment – not to mention a month or so off work. But the rewards are immense: this is an endlessly stimulating gothic cathedral of a novel, a world to wander in – surprised, affected, diverted and perplexed – for weeks on end.

Since hitting his stride as a poet twenty-five years ago, Ciaran Carson has made dazzling use of memory and its cousin, digression. He shows immense care for the facts – the brand of a whisky or perfume, the cut of a jacket, the turning of one street or district into another and the historical cartography of both – but the work of definition is often accompanied by a movement at least as much sideways as forwards or back. It may be impossible to finish the process of recall; indeed, it would be disastrous to do so, for where would the imagination go?

With no end in sight, the dual narrative of Carson's new novel *Exchange Place* moves fluidly between Belfast and what turns out to be its twin city, Paris. In Belfast, Kilfeather, a sixtyish dealer in watches and bespoke marijuana, is looking for a lost Muji notebook (one of many, not written in sequence, hard to tell apart) and simultaneously contemplating the disappearance of a friend some years previously, a painter and magician called Harland. After a time this apparent framing narrative is interspersed with episodes connected to the book Kilfeather intends to write. In these sections the central character (Kilpatrick) resembles Kilfeather, both in his preoccupation with memory, identity and stylish items of second-hand clothing, and in his sense that someone or something is missing.

Rather than echo the teeming exuberance often found in his poems, Carson's language in *Exchange Place* is quietly elegant and agreeably precise, even as events and settings duplicate and ramify to similarly dazzling effect. There is a cinematic quality

to his prose, in both its stylized dreaming and technical assurance, and there are several evocations of Jean Cocteau's *Orphée*. The work of Patrick Modiano is also adduced, in particular *Rue des boutiques obscures* (1978), which features a hero searching for a lost identity. Kilfeather's planned book involves much piecing together of other people's writing. Like Walter Benjamin's *Passagenwerk* ("Arcades Project"), it does not seem the kind of project whose point is to be finished. Glenn Gould's recording of Bach's *Contrapunctus XIV* is listened to several times, and *Exchange Place* is itself a chamber work, its motifs recurring in altered form. It is also full of doubles. As well as resembling the ostensible narrator and his third-person equivalent in Paris, the vanished Belfast painter Harland is also in some respects like Francis Bacon, while his equivalent in the Parisian sections is a blind art librarian named Bourne, formerly from Belfast, whose name continues a series of references to *Hamlet*. A comment attributed to Bacon, "the hinges of form come about by chance", crops up several times in a novel in which the idea of multiple universes rubs shoulders with spiritualism and a charmingly old-

fashioned (and rather Eco-like) Illuminatesque conspiracy theory. The story also insists on a formal resolution, even if, like the Chinese box that Kilfeather manages to open, it points towards an infinite recession of further pairings and associations.

With Bourne as a Borges figure, we do sometimes seem to be straddling the border between chaos (as in "The Library of Babel"), the sense that intention and chance are identical ("The Lottery in Babylon") and the sense that the artwork eventually consumes the world it was meant to describe ("Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"). Just as Borges's dissolution of the assumed world is presented in an insistently logical manner, so is the end of Carson's novel in which earlier material reappears as "the hinge of form", closing the book but not completing it.

It would not be a reason for adverse criticism if *Exchange Place* were difficult going, but it isn't. The phrase "literary thriller" is at times too loosely applied, but Carson's book is a "true" example of the form at the stage of saturation. It is exhilarating and yet, in its entirely masculine and asexual world, melancholy. This is a milieu of collectors, knowledge and expertise, amounting to what Derek Mahon in a more hopeful context called "infinite preparation". The novel itself is a fugue, and at least one of the characters occupies that state, which we learn is akin to a migraine. *Exchange Place* is a treat which shows that, if meaning is not to be had, then there is always the next thing and the one after that, in a meantime that is both the prison and liberation of the rememberer.

As is appropriate to its Central European setting, *The Jump Artist* is a *Bildungsroman*, or perhaps more accurately an anti-*Bildungsroman*: a tale about the draining of its protagonist's youthful hopes and ideals and his discovery of a new set of beliefs and passions. Austin Ratner's subject is the true story of a Latvian Jew, Philippe Halsman, who went on to become one of the great photographers of modern America. Wrongly accused of murdering his father on an Alpine mountainside, Halsman was convicted of the crime largely on the basis of the prejudiced character portraits of fellow travellers who had found the father-son pair strange and uncongenial (in other words, foreign and Jewish). He was incarcerated in Austria for some years before receiving a final pardon. He then moved to Paris, and escaped to America just before the Nazi invasion of France.

In the author's note, in which he outlines the relationship between his character Philippe and the historical Halsman, Ratner describes the story as "an early chapter of the Holocaust". But the novel is better seen as a final chapter in the long pre-Holocaust history of European anti-Semitism, a prejudice that was harnessed, but not invented, by the Nazi Party. The rich and ominous scene-setting of the opening chapter introduces an Austria caught between the old and the new, still clinging to its former greatness with its

Austin Ratner

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princedoms and hunting parties. The prince in question is shown to be obsessed with pure-bred hounds, foreshadowing the preoccupation in Austria with Philippe's perceived impurity as a Latvian Jew. Nothing remains for this "pygmy state" but to cling to its lineage and the standing of its forefathers, and given this, Philippe's presumed crime is unbearable: a *Vatermörder* must receive the severest punishment possible. But Ratner is more concerned with exploring the psychology of his subject than with these grander themes of European history. The drama is internal and personal, shifting between various modes and moods as the sensational story is channelled through Philippe's sensibility. Kant, for example, initially looms large: evidence of Philippe's enlightenment *Bildung* and his youthful belief in a universal reason. Yet his first cruel experiences of adult life cause Kant to disappear; Philippe instead turns to Christian Morgenstern's *Galgenlieder* and Freud's Oedipal musings.

Philippe's *Bildung* runs through four stages, the headings of these four acts moving from German via French into English. During the early parts, the prose is constantly interrupted by German interjections: "Poliz-

ist" to denote Philippe's captors and persecutors; the jailors' staccato German phrases; "der Keller", to which Philippe is banished while in prison. This linguistic disturbance signals Philippe's sudden sense of alienation in this foreign country, despite his mastery of several European languages and his extensive travels throughout the continent. By the final part, though, the linguistic unevenness has disappeared and Philippe emerges from these dark chapters of European history into an America that allows him to build from meagre beginnings to great success.

If this sounds like a homage to the American dream, then perhaps it is; but, sadly, *The Jump Artist* does not convey the full power of Halsman's story. Ratner's Philippe is curiously bloodless and the writing suffers from its mass of different styles, including literary and historical quotation, italicized reminiscences and long passages of dialogue and philosophical reflection. A great deal of ground is covered quickly, in particular during Philippe's Paris years when he discovers his passion for photography and joins the delinquent yet visionary filmmaker Jean Painlevé's Club des Sous L'Eau; but the narrative is not expansive enough to make full use of these vignettes. By the time Philippe's journey ends in America and he photographs Marilyn Monroe, the reader's patience has worn a little thin.

CHARLOTTE RYLAND