The Past as a Multi-perspective Structure in Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers*

Bożena Kucała

Abstract

Matthew Kneale's neo-Victorian novel English Passengers *(2000) is underlain by contemporary, revisionist views of Victorian ideologies. In particular, by placing its action on board a ship headed towards Tasmania as well as in Tasmania itself, the novel examines colonial attitudes and relations between cultures. Accordingly, it has been analysed as a novel about national identity and imperial politics (Boccardi 2009). This article takes the novel's form as the starting point for analysis. Told in twenty voices, with events developing on two temporal planes which continually intersect and eventually converge,* English Passengers *foregrounds the co-existence of multiple perspectives and the simultaneity of events in its representation of the past, and by doing so it disrupts the convention of narrative. The article argues that, rather than relying on linearity and causality, Kneale's novel constructs an image of the past as a structure with many dimensions, in which temporal change depends on a variety of overlapping, conflicting or convergent points of view and attitudes. Ultimately, the discussion attempts to demonstrate that through its structure* English Passengers*, without being overtly metafictional or metahistorical, addresses the problem of representing the past.*

Keywords

historical fiction, postcolonial fiction, neo-Victorian fiction, multiperspectivity, Matthew Kneale

It is a critical axiom today to speak of the renaissance of the historical novel. In 2001, A.S. Byatt wrote about "the sudden flowering of the historical novel in Britain."[1] A few years later, Suzanne Keen argued that "a historical turn" had recently occurred in British and anglophone fiction.[2] This "flowering," as Keen demonstrates in her overview of recent historical fiction, includes both a revival of traditional forms and the search for new ways of representing the past. According to Ina Bergmann, the new historical fiction at the turn of the twenty-first century ranges from old-fashioned forms, imitative of nineteenth-century models, to "more inventive" novels, using devices such as double plots, different temporal levels, the present tense and intertextuality.[3] Andrew James Johnston and Kai Wiegandt suggest that, in parallel to such developments, the critical reception of the contemporary historical novel "is rapidly becoming more inclusive, more tolerant and, above all, more diverse."[4]

1 A.S. Byatt, *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2001), 9.

2 Suzanne Keen, "The Historical Turn in British Fiction," in *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. James F. English (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 167.

3 Ina Bergmann, "The New Historical Fiction: Between Tradition and Innovation," in *Narrative Is the Essence of History: Essays on the Historical Novel*, ed. John Cameron (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 145.

4 Andrew James Johnston and Kai Wiegandt, "Introduction," in *The Return of the Historical Novel? Thinking about Fiction and History after Historiographic Metafiction*, ed. Andrew James Johnston and Kai Wiegandt (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH Heidelberg, 2017), 14.

Matthew Kneale's novel *English Passengers* (2000)[5] testifies to the recent historical turn as well as corroborates the observation that the contemporary historical novel searches for adequate forms to convey "the alterity of the past."[6] Johnston and Wiegandt contend that currently historical novels have moved beyond the intense self-reflexivity characteristic of historiographic metafiction, and have returned to more traditional forms.[7] I suggest that *English Passengers* is representative of those neo-Victorian novels which, in the words of Kate Mitchell, "while demonstrating a vivid awareness of the problematics involved in seeking and achieving historical knowledge, remain nonetheless committed to the possibility and the value of striving for that knowledge. They are more concerned with the ways in which fiction *can* lay claim to the past, provisionally and partially, rather than the ways that it cannot."[8]

While it would certainly be far-fetched to call this novel experimental, the kind of narrative which Kneale deploys highlights the question of representation. *English Passengers* features two locations and two temporal planes, and in the course of the story both its spatial and temporal settings gradually converge. Alternate chapters of the novel shift back and forth between the two contexts. Chronologically, the story begins in the 1820s, depicting the early days of the British colonisation of Tasmania, while the other part unfolds in the late 1850s on board a ship headed towards the island. The latter part of the story emerges as a continuation of what happened back in the 1820s and 30s. Besides tracing the stories of several fictional characters, the novel reflects the cultural context in which it is set by being firmly rooted in nineteenth-century ideologies, which are expressed in the discourses of science, religion, race and imperialism.[9] The form of Kneale's novel ultimately serves to convey a sense of how history is experienced by the men and women living at a given time, as well as to tacitly imply a critique of Victorian ideologies.

The novel's mode of verisimilitude combined with its revisionary approach to history is typical of a sub-genre of the historical novel which Elodie Rousselot has termed "neo-historical fiction" (which in her analysis is a broad term, comprising other "neo's," such as neo-Victorianism). She defines neo-historical narratives as works that "are not solely set in the past, but conduct an active interrogation of that past."[10] Rousselot's definition is derived from Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's understanding of neo-Victorianism, the scope of which they limit to historical novels

5 Matthew Kneale, *English Passengers* (London: Penguin Books, 2001 [2000]). The novel won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award and was shortlisted for both the Man Booker Prize in 2000 as well as The Miles Franklin Literary Award in 2001. Kneale (b. 1960) is a British writer, the author of six novels and a collection of short stories; *Sweet Thames* (1992) is his other neo-Victorian novel, set in nineteenth-century London. His most recent novel, *Pilgrims* (2020), portrays medieval life.

6 Johnston and Wiegandt, "Introduction," 12.

7 Johnston and Wiegandt, "Introduction," 12.

8 Kate Mitchell, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction. Victorian Afterimages* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.

9 By the writer's own admission in the Epilogue to his novel, he "tried to represent this era as truthfully and precisely as possible." Accordingly, a number of the characters are based on real-life figures (Kneale 455).

10 Elodie Rousselot, "Introduction: Exoticising the Past in Contemporary Neo-Historical Fiction," in *Exoticizing the Past in Contemporary Neo-Historical Fiction*, ed. Elodie Rousselot (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.

which are not merely set in the nineteenth century, but are "*self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*."[11]

In *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire* Elizabeth Ho discusses *English Passengers* as indicative of "postcolonial neo-Victorianism"[12] and summarises the novel as a dramatisation of "the extinction of the full-blooded aboriginals of Tasmania."[13] Mariadele Boccardi's study *The Contemporary British Historical Novel: Representation, Nation, Empire* (2009) emphasises the thematic aspect of recent historical fiction by examining its critical reconstruction of the past. Accordingly, Boccardi's own analysis of Kneale's novel focuses on its censorious engagement with imperialist and nationalist ideologies. Observing that it is "structured around a voyage out towards the Empire," Boccardi argues that this and the other novels discussed in her chapter on "Empire and the Politics of Representation" dissect "the means by which national narratives function, and the ways in which the imaginary communities they engender define themselves."[14] In her analysis, *English Passengers* juxtaposes England and the English with the antipodean territories and their native inhabitants, placing Tasmania as the cultural Other against which the nineteenth-century English define themselves as superior.[15] Boccardi's discussion of the novel, although undoubtedly insightful and illuminating, also involves a degree of interpretative reductivity since it is based on binarism: the prejudiced, racially tainted attitudes of the English are contrasted with the perspective of Peevay, a character representative of the aboriginal population.

In my own reading of *English Passengers*, I would like to depart from this binarism and explore the multiplicity of perspectives inherent in the novel. The novel's interrogation of the past is grounded in the structural interplay of a range of discourses which go beyond the colonial and the anti-colonial. It is the formal aspect of the novel, in my view, which deserves special attention. Its structure serves not only to critically juxtapose diverse, occasionally conflicting points of view, but also to represent the past prior to its conversion into historical narrative.

While revisionism may be regarded as fairly common in contemporary historical fiction, overt epistemological reflections would appear to be less frequent now than in novels written in the late twentieth century. In his overview of recent historical fiction, Joseph Brooker suggests that "it might be that the energies of the historical novel have lately moved from the explicit to the implicit; that the formal pendulum has swung from loud authorial intervention to more seamless fictional diegeses."[16] In a similar vein, championing the notion of "neo-historical fiction," Rousselot draws on comparable observations when she distinguishes between the neo-historical novel and Linda

11 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, "Introduction. Neo-Victorianism and Post-Authenticity: On the Ethics and Aesthetics of Appropriation," in *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999–2009*, ed. by Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4; emphasis in the original.

12 Elizabeth Ho, *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire* (London: Continuum, 2012), 181.

13 Ho, *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire,* 177.

14 Mariadele Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel. Representation, Nation, Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 101.

15 Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel*, 118.

16 Joseph Brooker, "Reanimating Historical Fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to British Fiction since 1945*, ed. David James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 174.

Hutcheon's category of historiographic metafiction[17] by suggesting that the former addresses the problem of historical representation in more implicit ways, without being "overtly disruptive."[18] Johnston and Wiegandt, while acknowledging that the genre of historical fiction is "ineluctably self-reflexive," observe that contemporary authors tend to return to "a style of fiction much more akin to the traditional forms of the historical novel, devoting their attention to historical fiction's capacity for probing the alterity of the past."[19] In this respect, *English Passengers* may be taken as illustrative of this shift in the manner of recounting the past in fiction. The problem of historical representation signified by its multiperspectival structure is incorporated into the fabric of the novel, without being subject to explicit commentary or any other metafictional strategies.

"The Smaller Relationships"

Kneale does not explicitly evoke the distance of nearly two centuries between the events depicted in the novel and the time it was written, but instead tries to convey the experience of some of the men and women who lived at a given time in history by employing exclusively nineteenth-century perspectives. From today's point of view, the major historical change that the novel charts is the colonisation of Tasmania and the concomitant demise of its aboriginal population. However, the novel eschews creating a hierarchy of discourses and makes no distinction between macro- and microhistories, presenting the past as a constellation of numerous life stories. This approach harks back to the traditional tenets of historical fiction. In his seminal study of the historical novel, Georg Lukács asserted:

> What matters […] in the historical novel is not the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality. And it is a law of literary portrayal which first appears paradoxical, but then quite obvious, that in order to bring out these social and human motives of behaviour, the outwardly insignificant events, the smaller (from without) relationships are better suited than the great monumental dramas of world history.[20]

Kneale's novel renounces the possibility of a unified, retrospective, end-driven narrative that the temporal distance affords. His narrative is split into twenty voices and unfolds both diachronically and synchronically, with synchronicity being the prevalent mode. The book spans a period of about fifty years, and its two storylines, as indicated above, proceed from two starting points until the earlier one catches up with the later and so the temporal gap is eventually closed. The constant shifts between the two strands disrupt chronology and create the effect of simultaneity.

17 In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon defined historiographic metafiction as a quintessentially postmodern genre, both self-reflexive and referential, strongly related to empirical reality (Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* [New York and London: Routledge, 1990], 32).

18 Rousselot, "Introduction," 4–5. As early as 1997 Ansgar Nünning voiced his scepticism about the concept of historiographic metafiction as being too limited. He pointed out that there are degrees of self-reflexivity and aesthetic complexity in postmodern historical fiction which exceed Hutcheon's criteria (in Johnston and Wiegandt, "Introduction," 11).

19 Johnston and Wiegandt, "Introduction," 12–13.

20 George Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 42.

Nevertheless, the book's composition depends not only on the co-existence of different temporal levels but also, and primarily, on the near-simultaneous recounting of numerous parallel stories which frequently intersect. This has been achieved by dividing almost every chapter into several individual accounts delivered by first-person narrators. Due to the fragmentation of the narrative, what in retrospect appears as a long-term historical process, is conveyed in the way history is actually experienced by the characters – as a medley of episodes of unclear significance in which they play their own part. Important in the writer's strategy of concentrating on the "smaller relationships" is the disjunction between a character's role in history and the amount of space he or she is allocated in the novel; in other words, the character's impact on long-term historical processes is not correlated with their prominence in the novel. For example, the governor of Tasmania, whose decisions obviously influence both the aboriginal and the European populations on the island, is the narrator in only one chapter.

In accordance with the objective of prioritising a limited, subjective field of vision, *English Passengers* dispenses with the technique of the omniscient narrator and a single, all-encompassing perspective. The narrative has been constructed as a multiperspectival structure in which the events are narrated from different angles, depending on the characters' worldviews and the way they participate in certain events or are affected by them.

Whereas different definitions of multiperspectivity exist (in the broadest sense, it is understood not as a mode of narration, but as "a characteristic which is always at least potentially present in a narrative"[21]), the application of the term here hinges on the meaningful discordance between different points of view, which concurs with Marcus Hartner's suggestion that "[f]or the notion to make sense pragmatically, its usage has to be restricted to cases where points of view interact in salient and significant ways."[22] It is the semantic relationship between different viewpoints rather than their mere existence that determines the concept of multiperspectivity, according to Uwe Lindemann.[23]

Multiple Perspectives

Ansgar Nünning defines "perspective" in narratology as "a character's or narrator's subjective worldview […] conditioned by the individuals' knowledge, mental traits, attitudes, and system of values."[24] "A character-perspective," he specifies further, "is governed by the totality of an individual's knowledge and belief sets, intentions, psychological traits, attitudes, ideological stance, and system of values and norms that have been internalized. […] In short, it embraces everything that exists in the mind of a character."[25] Hence, he argues further, a given text "projects a range of subjective

21 Marcus Hartner, "Multiperspectivity," in *the living handbook of narratology*, created 15 October 2012, rev. 22 April 2014 (http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/multiperspectivity) [n. p.].

22 Hartner, "Multiperspectivity" [n. p.].

23 Cf. Hartner, "Multiperspectivity" [n. p.]

24 Ansgar Nünning, "On the Perspective Structure of Narrative Texts: Steps towards a Constructivist Narratology," in *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*, ed. Willie van Peer and Seymour Chatman (Albany: State University of New York, 2001), 207–208.

25 Nünning, "On the Perspective Structure," 211.

private world-models."[26] Nünning explores the notion of a text's "perspective structure," which is defined as the system constituted both by all its character-perspectives and narrator-perspectives as well as their mutual configurations and relationships.[27] The greater the differences between individual character-perspectives, the more complex is the overall perspective structure of the narrative. Nünning ascribes a crucial role to the reader in the actualisation of a novel's perspective structure since, in his opinion, it is in the process of reading that individual perspectives are identified and coordinated with the other perspectives.[28]

Kneale's novel confronts the reader with a slightly modified task. As the novel takes the shape of an array of narratives delivered by different first-person narrators, the individual perspectives need not be disentangled from one another – the novel immediately presents itself as an object requiring stereoscopic vision.

For Illiam Quillian Kewley, the captain of the Manx-registered ship on which three English passengers travel to Tasmania, the journey is a series of comic mishaps. In his view, the voyage itself takes place by accident. All he originally intended to do was to earn some money by smuggling goods from France to England. Yet his encounters with customs officers and his unsuccessful attempt to pass on the contraband to his cousin, followed by a comically inept burglary, force him to escape from several ports. Even after he is compelled to take on passengers in order to earn the money to pay the fine and port fees, he still has no intention of taking them all the way to Tasmania, but further misadventures cause him to fulfil the contract. While in the Antipodes, he takes very little interest in the local affairs, all the time being preoccupied with the seemingly hopeless task of selling his contraband.

Interspersed with the captain's account of the voyage are the versions of the eponymous English passengers, each of whom sets out on the journey for very different reasons. The Reverend Geoffrey Wilson's ambition is to counteract the current scientific theories which clash with his religious worldview. His peculiar combination of religious commitment, together with an amateur's interest in geology, cause him to believe that Tasmania is the garden of Eden described in *Genesis*. He hopes that the expedition will provide empirical proof of the validity of the religious story. Consequently, Wilson's strong faith compels him to interpret all the incidents on the journey as elements of the divine plan. A competing grand narrative is represented by another passenger, Dr Thomas Potter. As a scientist, he views human history in terms of evolution and the struggle between different races, of which the aborigines are supposed to be the lowest; hence, Potter stands for "the complicity of Victorian science with the imperial enterprise."[29] He joins the expedition to find evidence to support his theories. Even before his arrival in Tasmania, he secretly carries out

26 Nünning, "On the Perspective Structure," 212.

27 Nünning, "On the Perspective Structure," 214. The term "perspective structure" was originally coined by Manfred Pfister (cf. Nünning, "On the Perspective Structure," 222).

28 Nünning, "On the Perspective Structure," 215.

29 Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel*, 123. Potter is based on the Victorian racial theorist Robert Knox, the author of *The Races of Men, a Fragment* (1850), which put forward a model of history as a story of racial conflicts (cf. Kneale's Epilogue to *English Passengers*, 456). In the eyes of a number of other Victorian writers and politicians (e.g. Charles Wentworth Dilke, James Anthony Froude, J. A. Roebuck), the spread of the Anglo-Saxon race and the disappearance of indigenous peoples in the territories conquered by the British Empire were naturally correlated processes (cf. Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003], 6–7).

observations on board the ship by categorising and analysing in racial terms the other passengers and members of the crew.

The agonistic relations between the parson and the doctor reflect the central debate that preoccupied Victorian intellectuals, which "primarily concerned two subjects: religion and science."[30] Both Wilson and Potter initially perceive each other as misguided rivals, then as enemies, and both in turn are treated by the down-to-earth Captain with a mixture of annoyance and amusement. The third Englishman, Timothy Renshaw, has little interest in and little commitment to the expedition, having been sent on it by his family, who were pleased to dispose of a young man whom they perceived as both idle and superfluous. For him, the journey is pointless and futile from the start, yet it is he who eventually benefits from it the most. At the end, he willingly settles down in Tasmania. He is also the least prejudiced against the Tasmanian aborigines and the ex-convicts.

The racial and cultural antagonisms in the novel concern not only the relations between the colonisers and the colonised in Tasmania but are replicated, on a smaller scale, in the relations between the Manx crew and the English passengers, as well as between the crew and the customs and port authorities in England. The juxtaposition of points of view reveals mutual suspicion and prejudice. Hearing that he has been heavily fined by what he calls "Her Majesty's Royal English Spying and Conniving Customs Service,"[31] the captain feels an affinity with the colonised nations: "This wasn't real law, mind. This was just raw revenge for their being beaten. Forget all their talk, there's no bad losers like Englishmen, especially Englishmen in uniforms. No wonder all those Indian Hindoos had mutinied against them with the likes of this going on. I wished them good luck."[32]

The constant interweaving of the individual narratives during the voyage precludes an overarching perspective, enabling the reader to view the events from different angles simultaneously. Likewise, a range of diverse perspectives is used to depict life in Tasmania. The European characters manifest a spectrum of attitudes which, if put into practice, would result in the total annihilation of the aborigines. For Jack Harp, an escaped convict, the sole purpose in life is to survive and achieve a degree of material comfort; he treats the aborigines as subhuman creatures that can be exploited, killed or raped with impunity.[33] A minor character, George Baines, newly arrived from England, guiltily observes the cruelty and injustice with which the natives are treated, yet for the sake of his career makes himself complicit in the hypocrisy of the colonial authorities. George Alder, the governor of Tasmania, shares a commonly held patronising attitude towards the aborigines, assuming it is his duty to "protect and improve them."[34] Their present miserable condition, in his view, results from their obstinate resistance to the civilising influences.[35] In order

30 John Kucich, "Intellectual Debate in the Victorian Novel: Religion, Science, and the Professional," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. Deidre David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 213.

31 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 30.

32 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 31.

33 At the time when Kneale's novel is set, a dehumanising attitude to the aborigines was by no means limited to the lowest of the white classes; colonial exploitation was "scientifically" vindicated. For example, the Reverend John George Wood compared the Australian aboriginals to wild animals in his survey *Uncivilized Races of Men in All Countries of the World* (Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*, 7).

34 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 100.

35 The view that "primitive races" were doomed to extinction when in contact with superior Western civilisation was quite widespread in the nineteenth century. Savagery was considered to be self-destructive. "The fantasy of auto-genocide or racial suicide," writes Patrick Brantlinger, was "an extreme version of blaming the victim" (*Dark Vanishings*, 1–2).

to prevent further warfare between the black people and the white settlers, he decides to divide the populations by capturing the blacks and relocating them to secluded areas – an action which he represents as a benign gesture, aimed at ensuring their survival as a race but which, as other narrators reveal, in practice rapidly increases their death rate. Ben Hayes, a farmer, takes part in the governor's campaign with the openly expressed intention of killing as many of the "bloody savages"[36] as possible. Mrs Denton, the wife of another governor of Tasmania, stands for superficial and totally ineffective charity. She claims to sympathise with "the poor aborigines"[37] and decides to alleviate "their lamentable fate"[38] by inviting some of them to her Christmas party and "offering them the same fare that would be found at Christmas time in England."[39] By the late 1850s the race seems doomed to extinction, therefore Mrs Denton devotes herself to preserving its memory by collecting the aborigines' artefacts and having daguerreotypes of them taken.[40]

Not all of the twenty narrators are fully rounded characters; as Steven Poole notes in his review of the novel, "many letter writers are there purely as a sly way of shoe-horning in background information."[41] Taking into account the number of times particular narrators appear in the novel, they may be placed on a continuum from major to minor, or even marginal narrators, which necessitates different degrees of emphasis being given to their points of view. This unequal treatment of character perspectives reflects the importance of given characters in the action of the novel, but not necessarily the validity or representativity of their views.

The perspectival plurality of the novel is increased by the evolution of the views of certain characters. Peevay, who is the narrator in as many as fifteen segments, changes his attitude towards the white settlers from a belief in the possibility of reconciliation and the white man's benign intentions to open hostility as well as a recognition of the inevitability of the aborigines' defeat. The son of an aboriginal woman and an escaped English convict who kidnapped and raped her, Peevay is alienated among his tribe and learns late in life about his mixed parentage. He initially complies with Mr Robson's scheme[42] to relocate his tribe to Flinders Island: "I was thinking, you see, of that white man's warm fire and his meat to eat, and how blissful these things would be. Then I was thinking of his promised place with kangaroo to hunt, where we would be safe."[43] His lack of familiarity with English procedures causes him to misconstrue the treatment to which he and his people are subjected.[44] Subsequently, realising his error, he decides to "learn num [white]

36 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 142.

37 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 312.

38 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 313.

39 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 314.

40 Her attitude may be described as "sentimental racism" – a fusion of the acceptance of the demise of savage races and the mourning of this process (cf. Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*, 2).

41 Steven Poole, "All Hands on Deck. Matthew Kneale, *English Passengers*," *The Guardian* 4 March 2000 (https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/mar/04/fiction.bookerprize2000).

42 This character resembles the real-life George Augustus Robinson who, as "Protector of Aboriginals," tried to save as well as to civilise the remaining indigenous people of Tasmania. His methods, however (e.g. forcing them to move to a reservation), in practice hastened their demise (cf. Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011], 48–49, 53).

43 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 155.

44 E.g. "… I was glad when we got into a big house made from rocks, whose name was GAOL" (*English Passengers*, 228).

ways and words and every other white men's shit so [he] could fight them."[45] This plan, however, fails – his letters to the governor, in which, using his poor English, Peevay describes his people's predicament, remain unanswered and are even taken as "suggestive of a disordered mind."[46] His last act of revenge, which is only partially successful, is to lead the English explorers astray while they are searching for the Garden of Eden. Having abandoned them in the wilderness, Peevay lurks nearby, hoping they will die by his hand or perish in the hostile environment. He remains puzzled as to the causes of the white men's invasion of Tasmania, or "the world," as he calls his island: "Truly it was a mystery to confuse how they ever could kill all my ones and steal the world."[47] If "perspective" is defined as a worldview, then with regard to the relations between the Europeans and the aborigines Kneale's novel depicts a resounding collision of different worlds.

Nünning points out that "[i]n multiperspectival novels, several character-perspectives may [...] be juxtaposed without a narrator acting as a mediator, and the different perspectives may qualify and relativize one another." These "subjective perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and recollections that make up the various character-perspectives are not coordinated and controlled by a superordinate narrator-perspective."[48] *English Passengers* lacks such an organising and evaluative perspective insofar as it has neither a heterodiegetic nor a dominant homodiegetic narrator. However, this claim has to be qualified when taking into account the fact that this is a historical novel depicting or hinting at changes the result of which is already familiar to the reader. As Boccardi notes, "the past gains its completeness, intelligibility, even aesthetic coherence from the fact that it can be considered from the perspective of its future."[49] In the case of *English Passengers*, the retrospection which is missing from the novel itself can be supplied by the reader, to whom the outcome of the historical processes indicated in the fragmentary narrative is known, and whose own beliefs (in all likelihood) differ from those voiced by the nineteenth-century men and women. For instance, Boccardi's own analysis of the novel, including claims about the validity of the views expressed by the main characters, is informed by a contemporary ideological stance regarding race and colonialism along with the Victorian conflict between religious and scientific discourses.

Spatial Configurations

Marcus Hartner observes that Nünning's notion of "narrative perspective" entails the view that "literary minds are not self-contained entities but always imply the notion of reference. Accordingly, fictional mental states and motivations take up a position relative to the fictional world including the actions, psyches and intentions of other characters in all instances."[50] In order to better understand how the multiple perspectives function in *English Passengers*, more must be said about how they

45 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 235.

46 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 313.

47 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 354.

48 Nünning, "On the Perspective Structure," 220.

49 Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel*, 21.

50 Marcus Hartner, "Constructing Literary Character and Perspective: An Approach from Psychology and Blending Theory," in *Blending and the Study of Narrative: Approaches and Applications*, ed. Ralf Schneider and Marcus Hartner (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 87–88.

are related to one another. The examples cited above, based on the characters' ideological stances, illustrate both convergence and divergence. Yet there are fields of vision which are too distant from each other to enter into any interaction. The twenty different subjective worldviews vary in terms of their scope. Some characters' perspectives are very narrow, limited to their immediate circumstances, whereas other characters have a more comprehensive understanding of their social and cultural milieu as well as of their own part in other people's stories. At one end of the spectrum is Mrs Emily Seaton, who is a narrator on only one occasion, and who is completely marginal to the main storylines and to the other narrators' lives. She is the wife of a Tasmanian doctor who was once friends with Potter in their student days. Her participation in and understanding of what is going on is limited to a concern with her husband's long absence after he has been asked by Potter for assistance. The worst possibility she can think of is marital infidelity whereas, as the reader discovers from other accounts, Seaton in fact is taking part in the dismemberment of the body of an aboriginal woman as part of Potter's scientific research. A comparably marginal character is Mr P.T. Windrush, who describes his encounter with an anonymous religious fanatic on the Isle of Wight in 1866, i.e. several years after the Manx ship returned to England. However, as a narrator Windrush is more important than Mrs Seaton in that, inadvertently, he provides the conclusion of the story of Reverend Wilson. The lives of these two character-narrators run quite independently of each other and there is no overlap between their fields of vision, which are in any case only tangentially related to the main events.

By contrast, several other life stories in the novel intersect, with the result that the respective narrators' perspectives include or are included in other characters' worldviews. An apposite example is the lot of the escaped convict Jack Harp. He suspects that his re-capture is due to the new governor's strict policy towards criminals. What he is unaware of is that he is a pawn in the governor's larger scheme, designed to assure the government in London that every measure is being taken to protect the native population; as the governor boasts in his letter, "I organized a most extensive campaign to apprehend the runaway convicts who comprised the natives' chief prosecutors."[51] What Jack is also ignorant of is that he is being sought by the aboriginal woman he once kidnapped and raped, as well as his own mixed-blood son Peevay of whose existence he knows nothing. Complaining about his wretchedness after his re-capture, Harp does not realise that imprisonment has saved him from the tribe's revenge. Peevay, however, devotes much space to his account of the revenge mission against his father.[52]

The novel also features multiple, simultaneous accounts of the same events. This is particularly true of Chapter XIII, which is structured as an alignment of several angles of vision. Reverend Wilson, Dr Potter and Timothy Renshaw participate in an expedition into the interior

51 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 101.

52 Hartner suggests that a useful approach to understanding characters would be to conceptualise their viewpoints as "nodes of a dynamic cognitive Blending Network" ("Constructing Literary Character and Perspective," 88). Within the Blending Theory, each viewpoint may be regarded as "an individual input space." The relations between different mental spaces are established by the reader in a process which may be described as "cross-space mapping" (97). One of his examples are the relations between Jack Harper and Peevay in *English Passengers*. While the text creates no explicit link between their accounts (these characters never meet, and Jack does not even know of the other's existence), "a blended space" emerges from the reader's analysis of both narratives. This space "not only contains the explanation of [Peevay's] mother's behaviour but also implies a powerful illustration of the white colonizers' unthinking cruelty towards the indigenous population" (99).

of Tasmania, led by Peevay acting as their guide. Each of them pursues his own goal and interprets the incidents of the arduous journey differently. What to the Reverend is "a Christian expedition,"[53] for the Doctor is an occasion to continue his biased anthropological observations, and for Peevay is an element in his revenge plan. The Englishmen's eventual rescue is, from the aborigine's point of view, a frustrating collapse of his scheme ("when I was so nearly finished, SHIPS were there and took them from the shore"[54]). However, for the Manx captain who has accidentally found and rescued his stranded passengers this unwanted encounter is a piece of bad luck, which gets in the way of his smuggling plans.

Once again, the reader's role in the apprehension of the overall alignment of perspectives must be emphasised. The differences between particular perspectives, including their errors, misunderstandings and limitations emerge from the juxtaposition of the numerous partial accounts. The reader is also in a position to appreciate the dramatic irony inherent in the characters' conflicting plans and ideas. What appears contingent to the individual narrators looks quite different from the vantage point of the external observer, who can see that seemingly chance happenings in fact result logically from the intersections of different plans, motivations and intentions.

Temporal Configurations

Hayden White argues that the past has no inherent meaning; it is endowed with meaning retrospectively by those who write about it. His seminal work *Metahistory* is underlain by the assumption that the historian provides his narrative of the past with a certain plot structure, thereby offering "explanation by emplotment." White defines emplotment as "the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind."[55] The same material may be conceptualised, structured and narrated in a variety of ways, with the effect that "[t]he same event can serve as a different kind of element of many different historical stories, depending on the role it is assigned in a specific motific characterization of the set to which it belongs. The death of the king may be a beginning, an ending, or simply a transitional event in three different stories."[56]

Kneale's work of fiction appears to be underpinned by similar assumptions. The novel's multiplicity of perspectives illustrates the fact that those who participate in the same events may subjectively configure them into disparate plots. The above cited incident on the shore is construed differently and assigned a different meaning by the respective parties. To Peevay, the arrival of the English ship signifies the end of his scheme as a self-appointed avenger of his tribe and simultaneously the end of all his relations with white people. To Reverend Wilson, this is a moment of nearly miraculous rescue, ending the failed search for the Tasmanian Garden of Eden. To the stranded Englishmen, this is also a point of transition, and the beginning of their journey back

53 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 350.

54 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 394.

55 Hayden White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Fortieth-Anniversary Ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 7.

56 White, *Metahistory*, 6.

home. But to the Manx captain, this encounter with his former passengers is a minor, accidental and annoying obstacle.

A given narrator's point of view determines the designation of beginnings and endings. The novel opens with Captain Kewley's musings on the arbitrariness of beginnings:

> Say a man catches a bullet through his skull in somebody's war, so where's the beginning of that? You might say that's easy. That little moment has its start the day our hero goes marching off to fight with his new soldier friends, all clever and smirking and waving at the girls. But does it, though? Why not the moment he first takes the shilling, his mouth hanging wide open like a harvest frog as he listens to the sergeant's flatterings? Or how about that bright sunny morning when he's just turned six and sees soldiers striding down the village street, fierce and jangling?[57]

Although the stories told by the major characters to a certain extent converge or intersect, for each of them the beginning and the ending differ, just as each locates himself in his own kind of plot.

Reviewing the novel, Adam Hochschild considers its divergent modes: "As a whole, 'English Passengers' feels a bit too much like two separate novels, because one stream of its action is essentially foreordained and tragic, the other unpredictable and comic."[58] But the novel contains material for a more diverse classification. Following Northrop Fry's taxonomy expounded in *Anatomy of Criticism*, White distinguishes four principal modes of emplotment in historical narratives: Romance, Tragedy, Comedy and Satire.[59] It is possible to demonstrate that in *English Passengers* all of these are identifiable in the experiences of the major character-narrators. Romance is "a drama of self-identification symbolised by the hero's transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it"; it concludes in "the triumph of good over evil, of virtue over vice, of light over darkness."[60] Timothy Renshaw's own narrative may be said to fulfil this pattern. This young unformed man, after being practically expelled from England, changes and matures during the journey. After falling down a cliff in the Tasmanian mountains, he is left for dead by the other members of the expedition. Suffering both from physical injuries as well as an acute sense of being abandoned, and haunted by hallucinatory visions of his reproachful parents, he nevertheless bravely makes his way towards the coast. His harrowing progress eventually leads him to a safe place, but on arrival he is a man not only saved but also transformed. Gone are his self-doubt, his non-committal stance, his earlier prejudices – he is prepared to marry an ex-convict's daughter (just as he earlier felt some kinship with the aborigine Peevay) and make his home in Tasmania: "There was something about this place that made me feel alive, in a way I never had done back in London."[61] All he has experienced becomes emplotted as an optimistic and uplifting narrative of a successful search for identity, liberation and a victory of light over darkness.

57 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 1.

58 Adam Hochschild, "The Floating Swap Meet," *The New York Times* 28 May 2000 (https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/05/28/reviews/000528.28hochsct.html).

59 White, *Metahistory*, 7.

60 White, *Metahistory*, 8.

61 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 445.

By contrast, Peevay's story lends itself to emplotment in terms of Tragedy, which typically ends with "the fall of the protagonist and the shaking of the world he inhabits."[62] He makes the tragic mistake of trusting white men. Peevay's is a story of alienation, delusion and defeat. The encroachment of the unstoppable white men on his land and the quick extinction of his people create a sense of doom, which hovers also above the last section of his narrative, depicting his determination to continue his hopeless war against the invaders.

The plot of Satire is cast in the ironic mode, its theme being "a drama of diremption, a drama dominated by the apprehension that man is ultimately a captive of the world rather than its master."[63] The stories of Wilson and Potter, the proponents of the two grand narratives of the Victorian age, instantiate this type of emplotment. The convergent mode of these stories is not surprising, since, as John Kucich observes, "Victorian religion and science can actually be seen to coincide in their quest for some grounds of consoling belief in either social or moral order."[64] Wilson and Potter alike believe themselves to be protagonists in a plot, but the endings of their respective stories belie their delusions. The devout Christian Reverend Wilson, who persists in interpreting all the incidents of the journey as components of the divine plan, fails in his mission to corroborate the Bible by finding the Garden of Eden. His story has a fittingly ironic ending: as a deranged religious fanatic, dubbed "the Messiah" by the locals on the Isle of Wight, he amuses his visitors with his grandiose ideas: "When a visitor appears the Messiah delights in showing him a little overgrown patch of land, close beside his simple home, where the pigs used to bask in the sun, and which he quite insists is the Garden of Eden!"[65] Potter, Wilson's secular counterpart, throughout the journey seeks confirmation of his pseudo-scientific ideas, including a master narrative of progress understood as the advancement of the most civilised nations (of which he is supposedly a representative) and the extinction of the most backward ones (such as the Tasmanian aborigines). His model of history entails "imperial expansion [as] simply the fulfilment of racial (and national) destiny."[66] Potter is accidentally killed just before his return to England. His collection of aboriginal artefacts is subsequently hailed as a major scientific achievement and his great contribution to the study of mankind. However, what makes the celebration supremely ironic is the fact that the prize exhibit, which is thought to be the body of a Tasmanian aborigine and which serves to prove the doctor's racial theories, is in fact the body of the scientist himself. The former captain is the only visitor who recognises the mistake, but has his own reasons for not exposing it.

Finally, the Captain's story carries the potential for a comic plot. Viewed through his eyes, the journey is a sequence of comic misfortunes, which, however, end relatively well for the protagonist. As his plans are constantly thwarted, he is prepared to accept that life is governed by good or bad luck. Whereas Wilson and Potter construe their narratives in terms of the predictable unfolding of a pre-existent pattern, from the Captain's perspective life is random and haphazard. White comments that at the end of Comedy one may expect "reconciliations of men with men, of men with their world and their society; the condition of society is represented as being purer,

62 White, *Metahistory*, 9.

63 White, *Metahistory*, 8.

64 Kucich, "Intellectual Debate," 217.

65 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 448.

66 Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel*, 123.

saner, and healthier as a result of the conflict among seemingly inalterably opposed elements in the world."[67] In the Captain's experience, the ways of the world have not changed at all, but his own situation has radically and unexpectedly improved. Although on his return to England he goes into hiding, fearing that he may be held responsible for the ship's sinking and the death of Dr Potter, when he appears at the exhibition of Potter's collection he is cast by the public in the opposite role – that of a hero. From his perspective, there is no logic to this, it is merely another instance of the operation of chance. At the end he enjoys his unexpected and undeserved reversal of fortune: "I was free. Why, I'd never even needed to lock myself away in that basement all this while. The mad stupid foolishness of it."[68]

Thus, being a configuration of several narrative strands, *English Passengers* effectively has a corresponding number of equivalent endings, which means that the diverse character perspectives do not ultimately converge in the novel.

Conclusion

While *English Passengers* is of course not unusual in creating a wide spectrum of social, racial, moral and ideological attitudes, it stands out due to the fact this plurality is manifested formally as well. Following Bakhtin, Nünning distinguishes between a monologic and a dialogic perspective structure in multiperspectival novels. In the former, "perspectives are identical or complementary and converge in a single normative worldview." By contrast, a novel with a dialogic structure will sustain "unresolved conflicts between discrepant world-models," which "challenge and relativize one another and thus undermine the notion of an authoritative worldview."[69] The multiplicity of subjective perspectives employed in Kneale's novel projects several individual "world-models." Hence, the "actual textual world" constructed by the reader[70] has to encompass the divergences and contradictions. Indeed, the reader's own, superior vantage point corresponds to the position normally occupied by the omniscient narrator. It may be suggested that the reader's both temporal and ideological distance from the events and attitudes represented in the novel provides the extratextual vanishing point at which the multiple perspectives may be assessed and configured into a fairly representative image of Victorian ideologies. While forgoing overt metafictional and metahistorical comments, the novel nevertheless implicitly makes a contribution to the debate about the adequacy of historical narrative. By switching among subjective points of view, *English Passengers* intimates that the past yields a coherent narrative only in retrospect, when the individual perspectives are readjusted and aligned into an entity by an external observer.

67 White, *Metahistory*, 9.

68 Kneale, *English Passengers*, 454.

69 Nünning, "On the Perspective Structure," 217.

70 Nünning, "On the Perspective Structure," 211–212.

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Bożena Kucała is Associate Professor at the Institute of English Studies, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. Her academic interests include contemporary fiction, especially the historical novel and neo-Victorian fiction. Main publications: *Intertextual Dialogue with the Victorian Past in the Contemporary Novel* (2012), co-edited books: *Writer and Time: James Joyce and After* (2010), *Confronting the Burden of History: Literary Representations of the Past* (2012), *Travelling Texts: J.M. Coetzee and Other Writers* (2014), *Powieść brytyjska w XXI wieku* [The British Novel in the 21st Century] (2018).