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Unearthing the Past: The Archaeology of Bog Bodies in Glob, Atwood, Hébert and Drabble

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**Unearthing the past: the archaeology of bog bodies in Glob,
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In 1965, the Danish archaeologist Peter Vilhelm Glob published his study of beautifully preserved Iron Age bodies found in the peatbogs of North-western Europe. Quickly translated into French and German, then into English a few years later,¹ the work soon became a classic, its resonant voice amplified and broadcast in several languages, not only by archaeologists but also by poets and novelists moved by Glob's descriptions and intrigued by his speculations. Within a few short years, the tropes and topoi of a recognizable poetics were well established, all of them originating in Glob's book, the founding text of a narrative genre characterized by the conflicting constructions of discourses running the gamut from forensic to lyric.² First, the moment of physical discovery, most often by peat-cutters, and the attendant confusion and speculation; then the archaeological encounter proper when the body is 'placed' in time as the messenger of a lost culture; the competing 'folk histories' that circulate as local people persist in 'identifying' a body against the evidence of science, claiming it as their own; the body's unsettling contemporaneity that sits disquietingly at the confluence of the different discourses of appropriation – legal, scientific, popular; its relative state of preservation and intactness as established by an inventory of body parts, clothes and artefacts; the body's aesthetic qualities, often encapsulated in tropes of sleep or meditation; the topos of the last meal, revealed by scientific analysis but quickly invested with pathos and poetic resonance; the thematics of ritual sacrifice proposed by Glob and embroidered (or contested) by subsequent writers.³ There is even a *dramatis personae*, a set of characters whose stories and images have acquired almost mythological status, thanks to Glob's literary flair and the astonishingly moving photographs that accompanied his text.

Chief among these is Tollund Man, found in May 1950 near Silkeborg in Central Jutland. 'On his head he wore a pointed skin cap fastened securely under the chin by a hide thong. Round his waist there was a smooth hide belt. Otherwise he was naked. His hair was cropped so short



Plates 1 and 2 The Tollund Man. Reproduced courtesy of Silkeborg Museum, Silkeborg, Denmark.

as to be almost entirely hidden by his cap. He was clean-shaven, but there was very short stubble on the chin and upper lip' (Glob, p. 20). Even more poignant were his attitude and expression, fixed for posterity by Glob who was on site within hours of the find: 'He lay on his damp bed as though asleep, resting on his side, the head inclined a little forward, arms and legs bent. His face wore a gentle expression – the eyes lightly closed, the lips softly pursed, as if in silent prayer. It was as though the dead man's soul had for a moment returned from another world, through the gate in the western sky' (p. 18). But the impression was fleeting, since the man's air of gentle tranquillity was shattered when the removal of a small lump of peat revealed a rope 'made of two leather thongs twisted together, which encircled the neck in a noose drawn tight into the throat and then coiled like a snake over the shoulder and down across the back. After this discovery the wrinkled forehead and set mouth seemed to take on a look of affliction' (p. 20). Tollund Man had been hanged before being deposited in the bog 'as a sacrifice to the powers that ruled men's destinies' (p. 20). And there he had lain for well over 2000 years.

It is the amazing state of preservation of Tollund Man's head and face that renders him emblematic of the powerful tensions embodied in bog bodies in general – tensions between economic and scientific rationality, on the one hand, and premodern magico-religious perceptions of the enchanted natural world of the peatlands on the other.⁴ The inevitable triumph of 'timid archaeology' that Richard C. Poulsen detects in the bog section of the Danish National Museum is also reflected in his description of the museum at Silkeborg, which is home to Tollund Man. What had been, at the time of Poulsen's first visit in 1968, a dark, mysterious and awe-inspiring Wunderkammer, 'almost a collage of discordant ages', is transformed by the time of his second visit twenty years later into a well-lit place of science and commerce, a disenchanting tourist destination.⁵ My own visit to Silkeborg in the summer of 2001 left a different impression. Today, Tollund Man is housed in a tall glass case in his own apse-like room in the museum. There he lies on a bed of peat against a background of large black and white photographic panels of the bog where he was found. The floor is made of wooden bricks, the brick walls are painted the same yellow as traditional Danish houses, and the ceiling is of large grassy tiles. The subdued lighting, that comes on only when someone enters the room, contributes to an aura of reverence and meditation more in keeping with a church than a modern scientific museum. (This lingering quality of what Walter Benjamin called 'cult value' is foregrounded in the photographs made available through the museum. For Benjamin, the human countenance was the last site of resistance in early photography for cult value against the encroachments of exhibition value: 'The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the

picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy, incomparable beauty.’⁶) Tourist attraction though he undoubtedly is, Tollund Man retains his extraordinary capacity to move.

In April 1952, eleven miles east of Tollund, a second man was discovered by peat-cutters. Again the body was in excellent condition with ‘beautifully preserved hands and feet’ and perfectly clear fingerprints (Glob, p. 49), though the head had been flattened by ‘the weight of the peat that had pressed down on it for centuries’ and the man’s expression was ‘not one of tranquillity but of pain and terror’ (p. 39). His throat had been cut. Once again Glob was on hand to pronounce the body a victim of ritual sacrifice, but this time the authority of science would be fiercely contested by local opinion which, encouraged by the empirical evidence of red hair (in fact brown hair reddened by the bog acids) and a remarkable state of preservation, would persist in the belief that the man was in fact Red Christian, a peat-cutter who had disappeared without trace in 1887. It was not until 1956 that a carbon-14 dating from the National Museum in Copenhagen was able to establish beyond all doubt that Grauballe Man was indeed another Iron Age bog body.

If Tollund Man and Grauballe Man take the leading roles in the drama according to Glob, a broader view would embrace a supporting cast of hundreds and would most certainly include Elling Woman of the curiously braided hair, found in 1938 less than a hundred yards from where Tollund Man would emerge twelve years later; Windeby Girl, found in northern Germany in 1950 with a woven band covering her eyes; the Werdingerveen Couple, found in Holland in 1904, originally thought to be a man and a woman but since identified as two men; and Lindow Man, found at Lindow Moss near Manchester in 1983 and now on display in the British Museum.⁷ While some of the bodies undoubtedly found their way into the bogs by accident, misadventure or foul play, Glob argues strenuously that the majority were sacrificial offerings and the bogs sacred groves. Relying on a curious mixture of empirical evidence from archaeological finds and a reading of Tacitus’ *Germania*, he paints a vivid picture of fertility rites and human sacrifice to the Earth Goddess Nerthus. Similarly, the multiple injuries sustained by Lindow Man at the time of his death have, in conjunction with other material evidence, fuelled scholarly speculation concerning Celtic traditions of ritual human sacrifice.⁸

While it is true that the theme of human sacrifice figures prominently in literary representations of bog bodies, I would argue that it is not the defining feature of such treatments. What is specific to bog bodies lies neither in the circumstances of their deposition in the bog nor in the reactions to their discovery, though both moments are central to archaeological and literary accounts alike. Far more important than either the Iron Age

world of the bog people or the modern world of their archaeological reappearance is the very particular way the bodies mediate the relationship between the two. The specificity of the bog bodies resides in the extraordinary power they have to abolish temporal distance, to make the past present. They are not skeletal remains; they have flesh on their bones, and that flesh bears the marks of their living and their dying. They have faces with expressions we think we recognize. They have stomachs that still contain the grains and seeds and plants they ate at their last meal. And while that meal was indeed their *last* meal and is therefore invested with ritual or dramatic significance, it was also their last *meal* in the same way I can say that I ate my last meal at seven o'clock this morning and this is what it was. In other words, with their peculiar capacity to compress time, collapsing centuries into hours and years into minutes, the bog bodies are profoundly, touchingly human and speak of a life anchored in an everyday that was then but is also now. They render the distant past immediate and breathe unsuspected life into the abstractions of history and eternity. It is for these reasons that I propose to treat the bog body as a special kind of chronotope, a site of temporal compression, a space in which one time comes alive within another. To an extraordinary degree, the bog body allows us to *see* time. And because the bog is a sacred place, the time we see is sacred too: a glimpse of eternity, a promise of reconciliation perhaps, in which some of the ruptures of our modernity might be repaired. But reconciliation comes in many forms, and one of the tasks this article sets itself is to trace some of the variations on that theme.

As with any chronotope, the bog body is 'the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied', where '[t]ime becomes, in effect, palpable and visible'; it functions as 'the primary means for materializing time in space', 'makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins'.⁹ The 'Concluding Remarks' to Mikhail Bakhtin's long essay 'Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel' are of particular interest here in that they turn away from the major chronotopes of the essay proper, which provide the basis for distinguishing between genres, to focus attention on minor chronotopes or chronotopic motifs. As motifs, these chronotopes are coextensive with the texts in which they appear, as are the literary bog bodies I wish to discuss. Since the bog body chronotope's primary function is to materialize a past in the present, to serve as a vehicle for personal and cultural memory, I will refer to it as a *mnemotope*, a term that should be fairly transparent but which I will define provisionally as a chronotopic motif that manifests the presence of the past, the conscious or unconscious memory traces of a more or less distant period in the life of a culture or an individual. Of course, the mnemotope might come in many guises and be inflected by attitudinal values ranging from nostalgia and desire through obsession to horror and denial. Its preferred genre might be

pastoral, but it might equally well be ghost story or fantasy, historical romance, satire or memoir. For the purposes of this article, I will confine my field of enquiry to the mnemotopic motif of the bog body as it appears in a small corpus of selected fictional texts.¹⁰

Margaret Atwood's short story 'The Bog Man' tells of a summer affair between a final-year Toronto undergraduate and her archaeology professor.¹¹ Set in the early 1960s – when, we are told, such things were more common and had fewer professional repercussions – the story unfolds first on Orkney, where Connor had taken Julie as his 'research assistant', then on the Scottish mainland at the site of a newly discovered bog body.¹² It is here that, for reasons more intelligible to the reader than to the young and inexperienced Julie, she picks a quarrel with Connor and catches the next plane back to Toronto. Once back on familiar territory, she takes a temporary job and a lover of her own age, and life becomes easy again until Connor's brief but disruptive reappearance at the end of August. A phone call, an encounter in the street, followed by a farcical pursuit that ends with Julie barricading herself in a phone booth and calling the police, and the affair's short and shabby postscript is brought to a merciful conclusion. But the story, of course, is never really about the affair itself, nor even about the confused transactions of love, sex and power which take place between Julie and Connor; for neither character is allowed to rise above the level of the type, to engage the interest or command the sympathy or respect of the reader. Not that they are, in any way, evil people; it is just that they seem to have very little comprehension of what they are doing or why. Julie has all the blinkered self-absorption of the young and will never achieve any real understanding either of Connor or herself; while Connor, who is seen only through the eyes of Julie, is granted no dimensions beyond those of the stereotypical middle-aged, married-with-kids-and-a-dog, sexually restless professor finding release and rejuvenation through an attractive and willing student. The story is not, then, about the affair. It is about memory and the passage of time, about our relation to our own past, its negotiated and constantly renegotiated presence in our daily life.

In 'The Bog Man', this shifting relationship is brought into sharp focus by Julie's telling and retelling of the story over a period of some thirty years, at first to herself, then later, usually after a few drinks, to women friends as 'part of an exchange, the price she was willing to pay for hearing other, similar stories' (p. 97). As the story gradually finds its place in a circuit of symbolic exchange and sympathetic sharing, it loses its ambition of introspection and self-knowledge to take on a function of self-construction for others, of self-presentation and self-deprecation in the interests of community, of what works in the context of its telling. It becomes Julie's party piece. This entails a process of revision, announced at the very beginning of the story – 'Julie silently revises' (p. 79) – and intensified at its end as Julie edits

and polishes, playing up the atmosphere and the comic elements, cutting or skimming over what 'does not really fit into the story': 'the worshipping love she once felt for him, which would sound mawkish out loud'; the wife, 'who is no longer the menacing rival of the piece'; the grief; the damage, however severe, she may have caused Connor (pp. 97–8). 'The story has now become a story about her own stupidity, or call it innocence, which shines at this distance with a soft and mellowing light. The story is like an artefact from a vanished civilization, the customs of which have become obscure' (p. 98). In other words, the story has become like the bog man of its title.

But what does this mean? What are the implications of the analogy? What kind of metaphorical work does the bog body perform in Atwood's story? We might start to answer these questions by pointing to the system of symmetrical exchange and transfer that the story sets up between different bodies. Before Julie ever sees a real bog body, she has an idea of what they are like from the photographs Connor has shown her: 'The bog water has tanned their skins and preserved their hair, but often their bones have dissolved and the weight of the peat has squashed them flat, so that they resemble extremely sick items of leather gear' (p. 85). This loss of flesh and bones contrasts pointedly with the transmutation of Connor's wife, who goes from being 'a negligible shadow' in Julie's eyes in the early days of their affair to the woman of heft and definition who appears in the family photo Julie finds tucked away behind the driver's licence in Connor's wallet: 'It's astounding to her, the way this invisible wife has put on flesh, has gradually acquired solidity and presence' (p. 85). Over the years, after Julie has married and raised children herself, she too will put on weight around the face and see her waist solidify. Only Connor will fade, will shrink with the telling, losing 'in substance every time she forms him in words. He becomes flatter and more leathery, more life goes out of him, he becomes more dead' (p. 98).

While it might at first blush be tempting to interpret these symmetries along gender lines – the women gain in solidity and presence while the men rot from the inside – such a reading would not do justice to Atwood's story which, as I have suggested, is much more about the role of time and memory in the constructions of the self than about relationships between men and women. After all, it is not Connor who comes to resemble the bog man, but Julie's narrativized memory of him. And if the women – the older Julie and Connor's wife – become more rather than less substantial, it is precisely because they do *not* figure in the anecdote, are *not* preserved in Julie's narrative. The bog man mediates Julie's memory of an episode from her past that she does not fully understand. More, he fulfils his historical function of scapegoat – 'this bog man died by being strangled with a twisted leather noose and sunk in the bog, probably as a sacrifice to the Great

Goddess Nerthus, or someone like her, to insure the fertility of the crops' (p. 85) – allowing Julie to sacrifice both Connor and her younger self every time she tells the story and thereby take her place in the community of women, the network of symbolic exchange, without ever plumbing the depths of what really happened that summer. Julie's anecdote, which gradually becomes the memory, is essentially a rhetorical strategy, a way of shaping events and feelings until they become manageable and convertible, until they can be exchanged for 'other, similar stories'.

As such, Julie's memory work might be seen as functioning in a very different way from psychoanalysis, for while it undoubtedly helps her to deal with a painful incident from her past and gives it significance of sorts, it leaves whatever repressed material there might be intact. The bog body is ritually dredged up and trotted around for display, but such narrative exhibitionism becomes rote, its emotional charge drained away as the very price of its preservation. In this respect, Julie's experience could not be more unlike that of Elisabeth Rolland in Anne Hébert's 1970 novel *Kamouraska*, who spends the long night of her second husband's 'peaceful' death reluctantly reliving, in a drug-induced, semi-hallucinatory dream state, the violent and passionate events leading up to her first husband's murder some twenty years before. Despite all the barricades she erects against the insistent resurfacing of the repressed, and in spite of all her attempts to control and manipulate her memories, to shape them into the story she wants and needs to hear, Elisabeth finds she is no longer capable of repressing the pain (and the excitement) of the past which, once resurrected, overflows the narrative and rhetorical structures within which she strives to confine it. The novel's closing image for this resurfacing of a past self thought to be safely buried for many years provides an unmistakable echo of the bog body finds and the superstitious fears that so often surround them:

Under the stones in a barren field they have dug up the dark, living body of a woman from a wild and distant past. Curiously preserved. They have let her go in the small town, then barricaded themselves in their houses. So deep and great is their fear of this woman. They tell themselves that, buried alive so long ago, this woman must be ravenous for life, her appetite undiminished, grown voracious by centuries spent beneath the earth. Like nothing they have ever seen before. And when the woman runs begging through the town, they sound the alarm. She finds nothing but closed doors and deserted streets of beaten earth.¹³

Hébert's 'bog woman' differs from Atwood's bog man in several key respects. First, she functions very clearly as an avatar of the protagonist's

own past that she has consciously tried to repress and bury: the 'bog woman' figures a former self rather than an old lover. Second, the 'bog woman' exists in a purely metaphorical mode, her appearance totally unmotivated by any archaeological find in the diegesis. The bog man, on the other hand, circulates metonymically in both Atwood's and Julie's stories, anchoring the anecdote in a particular time and place while, at the same time, metaphorically embodying the memory work involved in Julie's production both of Connor and the story as she tells it. Third, Julie's bog man is part of a story that has currency in an informal system or network of circulation and exchange: he is her ticket to acceptance in a community of women with similar stories to tell. Elisabeth's 'bog woman' has no such status; she rises up from the depths to disrupt the very foundations of human society, the *polis* represented in the quoted passage by 'the town' and 'the alarm'; resurrected, she threatens to destroy Elisabeth's carefully cultivated respectability and undermine the social position she has laboured to carve out for herself as Jérôme Rolland's wife.¹⁴

Taken together, these differences underscore a crucial distinction in the ways not only bog bodies but archaeological motifs in general may be used to represent the work of memory and the representation of the past. The fundamental question here would seem to be whether archaeology is used to figure, as in *Kamouraska*, a bringing to the surface of buried truth (with the implication that the deeper it is buried, the more truthful it is) or whether, as in 'The Bog Man', it serves to represent a process of what Tony Bennett has called, in relation to the museum disciplines, 'backtelling': the speculative construction or invention of a past of which there is no written record.¹⁵ Clearly, both uses are open to abuse and misrepresentation, but that is not the issue I want to address here, since my immediate concerns are epistemological rather than pragmatic. From this point of view, the first use of archaeology may be said to privilege the dimension of *depth*, seen not only as a spatial figure of verticality, but also as 'spatialized time, the past (whether personal and psychological or collective and historical) deposited in strata'.¹⁶ Brian McHale reminds us, in this context, of 'Freud's use of archaeological tropes for the "stratified" structure of the psyche and the "excavatory" work of psychoanalysis' with its project of 'digging' for buried truth. Aligning Freud's appropriation of the archaeological model with his positivist side and with the discourse of epistemological mastery that it underwrites, McHale recognizes that there are other, more constructivist models in Freud's psychoanalytic writings 'whereby truth is not recovered by excavating the deep strata of the patient's psyche, but rather constructed in the therapeutic encounter – not so much an archaeological dig, then, as a kind of collaborative novel'.¹⁷ While I would be in large agreement with such an assessment of Freud's methods and the rhetoric deployed to characterize them, I would argue that the distinction between retrieval and

construction does not necessarily invalidate the archaeological master trope, since archaeology, like psychoanalysis, can encompass both retrieval and construction. We see this in a novel such as *Kamouraska*, where a buried self is unwillingly recovered through a tangle of competing discursive constructions. We see it in starker form in 'The Bog Man', where the archaeological 'primal scene'¹⁸ – the encounter with the past in the form of the excavated bog body – is but the impetus for a protracted narrative (and more generally discursive) transaction through which the self will be gradually elaborated and its relations with others negotiated. In neither case does it make much sense to speak of positivism or epistemological mastery, since whatever truth or meaning is 'brought forth' (in a Heideggerian sense) in these texts cannot be reduced to, or encapsulated in, the moment of archaeological discovery. The bog body laid bare is a powerful mediator between past and present, but whatever is learned from it is achieved through elaboration, not epiphany, and this is just as true of *Glob* as it is of Atwood or Hébert.¹⁹

Kamouraska and 'The Bog Man' both use the figure of the bog body and the trope of archaeology to explore questions that are usually thought of as personal and psychological: the work of memory, for example, and its role in defining and policing the boundaries of the self and its relations with others. In *A Natural Curiosity*, Margaret Drabble chooses to foreground the social and historical aspects of her excavation as she attempts to uncover the 'condition of England' in the late 1980s. Set in 1987 in Thatcher's Britain, the novel offers a dismal view of that society but, according to its intrusive narrator, stops short of a politics: 'No, not a political novel. More a pathological novel.'²⁰ That England is diseased is beyond doubt. What remains to be seen, as one character puts it, is whether it is still alive: 'Is this the human race, or are these shadows, ghosts, lingering afterthoughts?' (p. 129). In such a context, it seems natural that characters should visit the British Museum to see Lindow Man, '[a]geless, timeless, rescued from the bog' (p. 22), 'a link and a messenger from the underworld' (p. 59). Or that they should sit around discussing *Glob*, Tacitus, Seamus Heaney, archaeological digs, and the violent rituals of the Ancient Britons. By comparison, 'the Bog Man of Tollund, smiling his sweet smile of everlasting anguish, of enigmatic resignation' (p. 120) from a museum postcard seems positively angelic.

The novel is diffuse, following the paths of a large cast of characters, of which two are allowed to occupy the foreground. Liz Headleand, a successful London psychoanalyst, asks if one is not 'sometimes led to suspect that the whole of human history is nothing but a history of deepening psychosis? That something went wrong at the beginning of human nature, of human nurture, that humanity mistook itself fatally, for ever?' (p. 24). By her own admission, she suffers from curiosity, a natural curiosity; she

wants to know 'what really happened. . . . At the beginning. When human nature began. At the beginning of human time' (p. 75). She knows she will never know, but cannot stop looking, waiting for the revelation. Her friend Alix Bowen lives in the North and is not a psychoanalyst but pursues her own enquiry, has her own case study, driving regularly over the moor to visit Paul Whitmore, a convicted serial killer incarcerated in Porston Prison, 'sited in the heartland of the ancient territory of the Brigantes' (p. 5). This meek, vegetarian son of a butcher and a psychotic hairdresser, who reads books on the Celtic tribes of Roman Britain, had taken pleasure less in killing than in dismembering his victims after death: 'He knows there had been a need for sacrifice, for appeasement. The gods had wanted a sacrifice. But of what nature? Had it been accepted? One does not worship at close quarters. It is not safe to go too near the sacred grove' (pp. 69–70). And now he is in the hands of the media, 'the Horror of Harrow Road', on display at Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum: 'the people of Britain are still in the process of making him up, of inventing him. He had offered himself up to their imagination, as he had offered up his victims' (p. 70). But the role of 'folk monster' (p. 6), of scapegoat for a people, is not enough. He needs his own Glob, someone to take him out of the clichés of folk history, to explain and restore him and lay him to rest: 'Sometimes he thinks that Alix Bowen will be able to invent him, that her story will make sense' (p. 70). For her part, Alix has difficulty explaining her own obsession, wondering at times if her interest expresses 'her other darker ever-repressed self' (p. 5): 'I suppose one can argue that he's a kind of – a kind of living experiment. A kind of Lindow Man in a glass coffin' (p. 62). She accepts, too, that 'it is almost as if she had invented him, as an illustration of whatever it is she wishes to discover about human nature. . . . He is like a theorem. When she has measured him, she will know the answer to herself and to the whole matter. The nature of Man. Original Sin. Evil and Good' (p. 5). And so she struggles with her problem, perhaps motivated less by curiosity than by the hope of reconciliation and redemption: 'She would like to acquit Mankind, and if she can acquit P. Whitmore, then she can acquit absolutely anybody' (p. 21).

While both are capable of self-deception, neither Liz Headleand nor Alix Bowen are naive. For all their talk of origins and their implied mapping of phylogenesis on to ontogenesis, they remain aware that they are engaged in a process of invention, of construction, both of the past and of what the past deposits in the present. 'Ancient crimes arise to declare themselves, to invite detection. Graves weep blood, sinners return to the fatal scene, the primal crime' (p. 8). But the kind of detection invited is, once again, of the 'backtelling' variety, a combination of archaeological dig and collaborative novel. In their investigations of both the troubled psyche and a bloodstained human nature, Liz and Alix delve beneath the surface of Thatcher's Britain,

seeking clues in a family romance which is at once individual and collective. But the strata they expose in the course of their separate digs are strata of discourse, and while the past may offer clues it is in the present that sense is made (and not found). For, as Walter Benjamin well knew, there is no re-membering without dis-membering and our sense-making allegories depend upon an invention of the past that in turn requires a corpse.²¹ The various bog bodies of Drabble's novel are links with that past, messengers from what civilization pretends to have repressed. Sometimes, like Lindow Man, they stay dead, safe in their glass coffins. At others, they walk, like P. Whitmore, and kill. But, dead or alive, they are British to the core, a fact that is underscored by the title of a poem written by a minor character, 'the ancient poet Howard Beaver, the Grand Old Man of Yorkshire letters' (p. 7), himself 'a living fossil' (p. 44). Obsessed by death and human sacrifice, and devouring books on the Ancient Britons since being taken at the age of 11 to see a recently discovered bog body, Beaver had written a poem about him, 'The Bog Man of Buller'. If Mrs Thatcher embodies for many the stolid and sensible virtues of John Bull, the Bog Man of Buller reminds us of the cut-throat values underpinning her Britain and the social carnage that was its price.²² A pathological novel, certainly. But a political one, too.

In the end, Alix will find reconciliation of sorts, though not with the archaeological meanings of the past, the buried shards and *disiecta membra* of deep time. Instead, she will make her peace with the present in all its unredeemed ugliness, embracing a surface strewn with the debris of future excavations, untouched by myth and allegory alike: 'England's not a bad country. It's just a mean, cold, ugly, divided, tired, clapped-out post-imperial post-industrial slag-heap covered in polystyrene hamburger cartons. It's not a bad country at all. I love it' (p. 308). We are a long way from Tollund Man, 'smiling his sweet smile of everlasting anguish, of enigmatic resignation' (p. 120), a long way, too, from the Museum at Silkeborg or Glob's photographs with their aura of melancholy beauty. Perhaps it is no coincidence that, of the three works of fiction examined here, *A Natural Curiosity* is the only one to include an actual museum visit, a visit permeated not with the cult values of Silkeborg but with the exhibition values of the British Museum with its 'morbid sightseers', Japanese tourists and parties of irreverent schoolchildren (pp. 22, 58–9). No coincidence either that Lindow Man, though not headless, is largely faceless, not much more than a 'strangely preserved, smooth, brown, plump, patterned immortal skin' (p. 22). Not much for the imagination here, then, just an empty carcass that needs the sheer excess of discourse, story, caption to bring it to life in the viewer's imagination as a 'multiply wounded, overslaughtered sacrificial corpse, the corpse of a victim who had been bashed on the head, stabbed in the chest and garrotted, whose throat had been cut, and who had been left

to lie for two millennia in a boggy pool' (p. 58). In a novel in which tropes of depth and origin are treated with suspicion or overtly destabilized, it is scarcely surprising to find memory represented as a site of conflict and negotiation, a disputed territory in the battle for the present, reconstructed with the best and worst intentions but denied the poetic authority of Glob's renderings, the auratic presence of the *face* of the past.²³

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Notes

- 1 Peter Vilhelm Glob, *Mosefolket. Jernalderens Mennesker bevaret i 2000 aar* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1965); *Les hommes des tourbières*, trans. Eric Eydoux (Paris: Fayard, 1966); *Die Schläfer im Moor*, trans. Thyra Dohrenburg (Munich: Winkler, 1966); *The Bog People. Iron-Age Man Preserved*, trans. Rupert Bruce-Mitford (London: Faber & Faber, 1969). Page references to the English translation will be given parenthetically in the body of the article.
- 2 The poetic charge of Glob's text is legendary. Commenting on his 'virtual invisibility' in the Danish National Museum in Copenhagen, which he directed, Richard C. Poulsen argues that 'Glob was too passionate, his readings too *lively* for the normal dust of archaeology. He was a scientist, but one open, at least in tone, to the passion always present in the readings of the folk.' As a writer, his influence was similar to that 'exerted by Frazer's *The Golden Bough* outside its specific discipline: a poetic influence' (Richard C. Poulsen, *The Body as Text in a Perpetual Age of Non-Reason*, New York: Peter Lang, 1996, p. 88).
- 3 After Glob, the most useful archaeological sources are: Wijnand Van der Sanden, *Through Nature to Eternity: The Bog Bodies of Northwest Europe* (Amsterdam: Batavian Lion International, 1996); Richard Turner and Robert Scaife (eds), *Bog Bodies: New Discoveries and New Perspectives* (London: British Museum Press, 1995); Don Brothwell, *The Bog Man and the Archaeology of People* (London: British Museum Press, 1986); I.M. Stead, J.B. Bourke and D. Brothwell (eds), *Lindow Man: The Body in the Bog* (London: British Museum Publications, 1986). A list of scholarly articles may be found in Poulsen, pp. 151–2, and Van der Sanden has a useful bibliography. Van der Sanden draws a clear distinction between the Danish school of thought, with its emphasis on human sacrifice, and German theories favouring the *Wiedergänger* interpretation, according to which the bodies were placed in bogs to prevent their returning to haunt the living (Van der Sanden, ch. 12). The nationalist stakes in bog body archaeology came to the fore after the

discovery of Lindow Man, when British archaeology entered the lists in barely concealed competition with the more established German and Danish schools.

- 4 The ironies associated with the discovery and display of bog bodies are many and might be usefully examined in the context of a more general interrogation of the implication of the museum disciplines of archaeology and anthropology in the modern construction and exploitation of a premodern world as scientific object and exotic Other. Van der Sanden's concluding observations (p. 181) represent no more than a first step in this direction.
- 5 Poulsen, pp. 98, 81, 110–11. Similar sentiments animate Geoffrey Grigson's poem 'Tollund Man', in *Collected Poems 1963–1980* (London: Allison & Busby, 1982), p. 56.
- 6 Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), p. 228.
- 7 For an early systematic catalogue of bog body finds see Alfred Dieck, *Die europäischen Moorleichenfunde (Hominidenmoorfunde)* (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 1965). However, Dieck's inventory is unscientific and uncritical; the most reliable information about bog body finds is in Van der Sanden.
- 8 For a particularly sensationalizing and highly speculative account, see Anne Ross and Don Robins, *The Life and Death of a Druid Prince: The Story of Lindow Man, an Archaeological Sensation* (London: Rider, 1989). More breathless than breathtaking, Ross and Robins' narrative offers a wildly imaginative example of 'Zadig's method' – the art or technique of 'retrospective prophecy' that Thomas Huxley saw at work in the deductions of both Sherlock Holmes and scientists like Cuvier who explored deep time in order to make visible scenes and events that no human being had ever seen (Thomas Henry Huxley, 'On the method of Zadig: retrospective prophecy as a function of science', in *Science and Culture and Other Essays*, London: Macmillan, 1882). Zadig's method is discussed by Tony Bennett in relation to the stories told by the museum disciplines of archaeology, palaeontology, geology, anthropology and natural history (Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 177–9).
- 9 M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 250. The 'Concluding remarks' (pp. 243–58) date from 1973 and constitute a late postscript to the essay proper.
- 10 The most famous literary treatment of bog bodies is, of course, to be found in Seamus Heaney's cycle of bog poems: 'The Tollund Man' and 'Nerthus' were published in *Wintering Out* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), pp. 47–8, 49–50; 'Come to the Bower', 'Bog Queen', 'The Grauballe Man', 'Punishment', 'Strange Fruit' and 'Kinship' all appeared in *North* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), pp. 31, 32–4, 35–6, 37–8, 39, 40–5. Given the political context of their publication, the poems were controversial and the critical response wide and varied. Useful starting points for thinking about Heaney's bog bodies from an archaeological point of view may be found in Jon Stallworthy, 'The poet as archaeologist: W.B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney', in Robert F. Garratt (ed.), *Critical Essays on Seamus Heaney* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1995), pp. 172–86, and in Brian McHale, 'Archaeologies of knowledge: Hill's middens, Heaney's bogs, Schwermer's tablets', *New Literary History*, 30.1 (winter 1999), pp. 239–62. See also the companion piece to this article: Anthony Purdy, 'The bog

body as mnemotope: nationalist archaeologies in Heaney and Tournier', *Style*, 36.1 (spring 2002), pp. 93–110.

- 11 Margaret Atwood, 'The Bog Man', in *Wilderness Tips* (Toronto: Seal Books, 1992), pp. 77–98. Page references for quotations will be given parenthetically in the body of the article.
- 12 The body is a composite, clearly modelled on Tollund Man but incorporating features from other finds chronicled by Glob: 'The bog man is lying on a piece of canvas, curled on his side. His hands have deft, slender fingers, each finger-print intact. His face is a little sunken-in but perfectly preserved; you can see every pore. His skin is dark brown, the bristles of his beard and the wisps of hair that escape from under his leather helmet are an alarming bright red. The colors are the effects of the tannic acid in the bog, Julie knows that. But still it is hard to picture him as any other color. His eyes are closed. He does not look dead or even asleep, however. Instead he seems to be meditating, concentrating: his lips are slightly pursed, a furrow of deep thought runs between his eyes. Around his neck is the twisted double cord used to strangle him' (p. 88).
- 13 Anne Hébert, *Kamouraska* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p. 250. My translation. 'Dans un champ aride, sous les pierres, on a déterré une femme noire, vivante, datant d'une époque reculée et sauvage. Étrangement conservée. On l'a lâchée dans la petite ville. Puis on s'est barricadé, chacun chez soi. Tant la peur qu'on a de cette femme est grande et profonde. Chacun se dit que la faim de vivre de cette femme, enterrée vive, il y a si longtemps, doit être si féroce et entière, accumulée sous la terre, depuis des siècles! On n'en a sans doute jamais connu de semblable. Lorsque la femme se présente dans la ville, courant et implorant, le tocsin se met à sonner. Elle ne trouve que des portes fermées et le désert de terre battue dont sont faites les rues.'
- 14 The Gothic image of the bog body that walks, that 'rises from the grave' to haunt the local population, is reflected in Glob's account of folk superstitions concerning the need to 'secure' certain restless spirits by pinning their bodies with stakes. See, for example, his account of a body found in Haraldskjaer Fen in 1835 and 'identified' by folk legend as that of the Norse Queen Gunhild, the cruel and dissolute consort of King Erik Bloodaxe (Glob, pp. 70–9). See also Van der Sanden on German archaeology's foregrounding of the *Wiedergänger* motif (pp. 168–70). Atwood's bog man walks, too, but only in Julie's dream, where he is anything but terrifying: 'she dreams of the bog man, climbing in through her window, a dark tender shape, a shape of baffled longing, slippery with rain' (Atwood, p. 93). Altogether more monstrous is the description of Connor trying to reach Julie in the telephone booth: 'He's no longer anyone she knows; he's the universal child's nightmare, the evil violent thing, fanged and monstrous, trying to get in at the door. He mashes his face frontways into the glass, in a gesture of desperation or a parody of a kiss. She can see the squashed tip of his nose, his mouth deformed, the lips shoved back from his teeth' (p. 96).
- 15 Bennett, pp. 177–81.
- 16 McHale, p. 240. Few would object to McHale's contention that depth, in this double sense, is 'arguably one of modernism's master-tropes' (p. 239). For a close reading of *Kamouraska* as a late modernist text which privileges such a trope, see Anthony Purdy, 'An archaeology of the self: narrative ventriloquism in Anne Hébert's *Kamouraska*', in *A Certain Difficulty of Being: Essays on the Quebec Novel* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), pp. 109–33.

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- 17 McHale, p. 240.
- 18 Ibid., p. 242.
- 19 The archaeologist's elaboration of meaning, as exemplified in Glob's study, is a complex process, part scientific, part cultural. The technology of modern archaeology is indispensable to the accurate dating of the bodies, their analysis and proper preservation, but Glob's approach is also deeply cultural in that it involves a *reading* of the bodies that places the emphasis squarely on their aesthetic and literary qualities and aspires to an imaginative reconstruction of their world in terms of a unifying tragic vision of sacrifice and scapegoating (Poulsen, pp. 88–97). One is reminded of Heidegger's distinction between, on the one hand, technology as an act of enframing (*Gestell*) that reveals, unveils or 'unconceals' truth through a challenging forth (*Herausfordern*) that involves the ordering of nature as standing reserve (*Bestand*) and, on the other, the bringing forth (*Her-vor-bringen*) of *poiesis* that effects no such transformation of nature (Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, pp. 10–21).
- 20 Margaret Drabble, *A Natural Curiosity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 194. Page references for quotations will be given parenthetically in the body of the article.
- 21 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: New Left Books, 1977), pp. 217–18.
- 22 A passage on pages 207–8 of the novel details a whole series of crimes of senseless violence registered by Alix as she watches a television news programme.
- 23 The lifelike model of the head of Lindow Man, prepared by R.A.H. Neave of the Department of Medical Illustration at the University of Manchester and reproduced in many publications as well as on postcards available at the British Museum, might serve as an emblematic figure for such archaeological reconstruction: remarkable for its museum exhibition value, it lacks completely the cult value of the photographs of Tollund Man. Similarly, the extensive archaeological writings about Lindow Man have often sought, sometimes none too soberly, to reconstruct the circumstances of his life and death without ever coming close to the imaginative power of Glob's poetic accounts of earlier bog bodies.