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Palimpsests from the Past and Within: The Unburied by Charles Palliser

الرق الممسوح من الماضي وفي الداخل: رواية (غير المدفونين) للروائي تشارلز بوليسر

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Palimpsests from the Past and within: *The Unburied* by Charles Palliser

Charles Palliser is a contemporary British novelist whose famous ***Quincunx*** won him a reputation as a contemporary Victorian novelist. ***The Unburied*** was about a history professor who had to travel both geographically and historically to uncover a secret for one of his research topics. He was the narrator of his own travels which involved him in other historical epochs and shown him murders, ghosts, re-written manuscripts, many-versions stories, and palimpsests from the past and the present at rather a gothic atmosphere.

This paper attempts to discuss how; in parallel with his outside physical journey, the protagonist/narrator leads another self-discovery journey. While failing to notice the clues to solve historical mysteries, he succeeded in finding missing palimpsests in his past life to re-evaluate his inner understanding of himself and therefore to change his entire perspective of life.

Key words:

Charles Palliser - *The Unburied* - Palimpsests - Multi-layered plots - Crime story

الرق الممسوح من الماضي وفي الداخل: رواية (غير المدفونين) للروائي تشارلز بوليسر

تشارلز بوليسر هو كاتب انجليزي معاصر يتم تعريفه على أنه كاتب فيكتوري بسبب روايته الأشهر (الخماسي العجيب). أما رواية (غير المدفونين) فهي تحكي عن أستاذ جامعي للتاريخ يسافر مكانيا وزمنيا لكشف سر يتعلق بأحد أبحاثه الأكاديمية. والبطل هو الرواي لأحداث أسفاره التي يتعرض فيها لحقب تاريخية مختلفة، وجرائم قتل، وأشباح، ومخطوطات مكتوبة من جديد، وقصص لها نسخ مختلفة عن بعضها البعض، ورقوق ممسوحة من الماضي والحاضر. وتحدث كل تلك الأحداث في جو قوطي.

يناقش هذا البحث كيف يعبر البطل/الكاتب رحلتين في آن واحد: الرحلة الخارجية، وأخرى داخلية يكتشف فيها نفسه. وبينما يفشل في تفسير العلامات التي تحل الألغاز التاريخية، ينجح في العثور على الرقوق المفقودة في حياته الماضية مما يساعده على إعادة تقييم فهمه الداخلي لنفسه، ومن ثم يقوم بتغيير منظوره العام للحياة.

Palimpsests from the Past and Within: *The Unburied* by Charles Palliser

Charles Palliser's novels have always been analyzed as a pastiche to Victorian fiction, and himself as a new Charles Dickens rather than Charles Palliser. His ***The Unburied***, also told in a Victorian setting, was furthermore criticized as a crime novel, campus novel, gothic, or historical. However, the novel was not attempted as a meta-literature palimpsest both in its technique and in its thematic concerns.

Palimpsests have formed quite an interest in the theories of both structuralists, and post-structuralists. Gerard Genette's book ***Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*** is all about structuralist understanding of the relation between two or more texts. Reviewing the book, Andrew Raynolds says,

> Genette undertakes a structuralist analysis of major elements of 'transtextuality', that is, the 'textual transcendence of the text', or 'all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed with other texts.' (Raynolds 324)

What Charles Palliser's ***The Unburied*** deals with is a text within, under, above, after, or before another, and another, text. According to Genette, many techniques are connected directly to transtextuality. Genette has divided and re-divided them, and defined almost each one as clearly as possible. Yet, he has put a stress on the idea of hypertextuality.

> ***Palimpsests*** is a study of what Genette terms hypertextuality, that is, 'any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary. (Raynolds 324)

It is noteworthy to be aware when analyzing texts that, "many literary works do not advertise their hypertextuality within their pages" (Raynolds 325), and that the hypotext can be more than one, or a

collection of many texts intermingled altogether. According to Raynolds, Genette usually gave examples from writers who provided clear texts that can easily be interpreted in structuralist terms. "Genette prefers those authors who make the intertextualist's work easier, or less susceptible to the reader's subjective interpretations" (Raynolds 325). Then, Raynolds continues that this does not mean that other authors are "less . . . intertextualist or . . . palimpsestualist" (Raynolds 325) only because they do not publicly declare the existence of a hypotext.

This leads to the poststructuralist view of palimpsests as well.

> For poststructuralist literary critics, the palimpsest provides a model for the function of writing. Like Freud's discussion of *The Mystic Writing Pad*, the palimpsest foregrounds the fact that all writing takes place in the presence of other writings - that it is not people who "speak" language, but language which "speaks" people. (Keep)

This puts Genette's structuralist theory to more open interpretations of each text. It also opens the relation between a hypotext and a hypertext to an endless number of connections. Poststructuralist theory concerning palimpsests centralizes the role of language and makes it even more important than people. It is language written on the manuscript that speaks people, and when it is changed, people are spoken or told in other versions. "Palimpsests subvert the concept of the author as the sole originary source of her work, and thus defer the 'meaning' of a work down an endless chain of signification" (Keep). ***The Unburied*** by Charles Palliser is a good example of a palimpsestic novel in which the past versions are revisited, reinterpreted and rewritten in different ways both historically and personally.

The Unburied is about a history professor who had to travel both geographically and historically to uncover a secret for one of his research topics. Dr Courtine who lives in Cambridge in the late 19th century, is the narrator of his own travels, and his "account is presented as having been discovered in a manuscript. This is only opened after his death" (Merritt). He travels to Thurchester to solve a clue connected to

King Alfred of the 9th century. His research in the library of the Cathedral, and his conversations with his host and old friend Austin involved him in other more recent historical epochs and interested him in the famous murder of Canon Burgoyne, which has taken place during the 17th century. While searching in both stories, Professor Courtine experiences palimpsestic versions of history. Each and every story about King Alfred and Canon Burgoyne's murder is told in divergent versions by different narrators. Once the reader believes a version of the story, another version appears, the palimpsest gets erased, and the new version is written instead.

The most exciting event however is when in the unsolved dilemma of the two stories from the past, a new murder takes place in the quiet town, and the murdered, Mr Stonex had hosted Dr. Courtine only half an hour before his death. The new crime involves many stories of witnesses and initiates many imagined versions of how the crime took place and who the murderer would be; a parallel technique to the palimpsestic past. Added to all those is the palimpsest of Courtine's life which is discovered "and edited with an all-important epilogue by a character who . . . proves to have a pivotal role in the Stonex murder" (Merritt).

The structure of ***The Unburied*** is complex. It is neatly organized with consideration to all elements techniqually and thematically. That is the reason why Claude Lalumiere called it an "edifice" in her review. "***The Unburied*** is a skilfully structured edifice, a story within a story within a story . . . but the storytelling and the structure are more reminiscent of the work of 19th-century writers of the macabre" (Lalumiere). What made the process of structuring the novel more difficult is that it did not only include two accounts, two narrators, three murders, four time periods; but 42 characters, plots of stories within stories, and many manuscripts and inscriptions as well. All those elements flavored with a Victorian Gothic atmosphere of darkness, fog, keys, clocks, and ghosts are structured in a palimpsestic genius narrative technique. The relationship between all those elements

is usually a relationship between a hyper and a hypo text, and antithetical or parallel plots, characters, or motifs. In an Interview with Susana Onega, Palliser discusses structuring his novels saying,

> So a lot of the time I was just working on the plot and I didn't actually start writing the book itself, until I was absolutely certain that every part of the plot was absolutely necessary. (Onega 270)

The novel is well structured following a system of palimpsestic plots, and narrators. According to Catherine Mari, it is "a predetermined text organised by the eventual resolution of the mystery" (Mari). Palliser framed the novel in a Forward at the beginning and an Afterword at the end. Both are narrated by a minor character/narrator called Barthram, who was described in the novel as the editor of the Courtine Account. This frame by Barthram has been written about forty years after the Courtine Account has taken place.

> Not only does Barthram's frame narrative relegate Dr Courtine's Account to the past and transform it into a historical document but it also symbolically closes the story on itself. Indeed, the wheel goes full circle with Barthram's providing the missing piece of the puzzle. (Mari)

This makes the Account a palimpsest because it has Courtine's many versions, and Barthram's amendments and corrections.

Then, there is the main story of Courtine that takes a short time in its span but the account lies in a big volume. The time of Courtine's visit to Thurchester is

> three days in all, from "Tuesday Evening" to "Friday Night". However, this display of speed is obviously contradicted by the length of the narrative (some 350 pages) and the forty-year ellipsis between the end of "Dr Courtine's Account" and the actual elucidation of the mystery in the Afterword. (Mari)

Both the Forward and the Afterward are only 45 pages. Although the two accounts are different in volume, they are parallel to each other in an organized way that proves how accurately predetermined the novelist has structured his novel. Both narrators are characters of their accounts. Both of them had to travel in order to uncover an old secret, and both secrets involved death or murder. Moreover, both narrators travelled in place and time. Barthram went to Geneva to investigate what happened decades before. He writes in the first page of the novel and of his Forward, "The circumstances in which the Courtine Account became available are described in my 'Afterward', where I explain the reasons why, . . . I had to take a journey to Geneva" (Palliser 1). And Courtine went to Thurchester to find the lost manuscript of King Alfred, where he met townspeople and discussed their different accounts of Burgoyne's death, and to also become a central witness to Mr. Stonex atrocious murder.

Although the two accounts are parallel, the two narrators are antithetical. They follow almost the same system to fulfill the needs of their research; into old history in Courtine's case, and into recent history in Barthram's; yet, Barthram was able to uncover Stonex's murder, while Courtine was not. Courtine, the history professor did not succeed in proving his theory about King Alfred, did not come to conclusion concerning the 17th century murder of Canon Burgoyne, and did not solve the mystery of the contemporary crime that took place when he was in Thurchester. By no means did Courtine – as a narrator – satisfied the curiosity of his readers at all.

As a narrator, Courtine is accused of being a narrator of his own imaginations rather than a narrator of matters of fact. In a conversation with his old friend Austin, the latter tells him, "You don't see what's in front of your nose. You're so eager to look beyond it that you miss things that are obvious to less perceptive people" (Palliser 141). The voice is that of the novelist who has structured the novel to show his readers how the narrator of the longer account is absent-minded about many signs and keys that reveal facts. In an Interview with Charles

Palliser, Susana Onega asked him about his style of writing and he answered her with what another novelist, Allan Massie, said about Palliser's novels. Commenting on one of Palliser's novels, Massie asked, "is this the real voice of Charles Palliser?" and about the novel that followed he said, "the best thing about it is that at last we are hearing the real voice of Charles Palliser" (Onega 274). The two novels were written and published before ***The Unburied***; so, it seems clear that Palliser's voice got stronger in his more recent novels. Although he was against the existence of the voice of the novelist in the interview, ***The Unburied*** carries his voice astoundingly.

The voice of Palliser and the comment of Austin are confirmed by an actual behavior that shows how Dr. Courtine is losing his way in his journey in Thurchester. "I was also lost myself. For some minutes I wandered the silent streets in bewilderment. Was this the way I had come?" (Palliser 149). Until the end of the novel, readers are frankly told that this narrator's account has a lot of imagination rather than a real history. Palliser is skillfully voiced in the narrator's conversation with Dr. Locard, the librarian, and a historian himself. Locard asks Courtine,

> "Then what would satisfy your requirements, Dr Courtine?"
> "A narrative which though bizzare in some of its elements – accounts for every anomaly. And the creation of such a narrative often requires the exercise of the imagination." (Palliser 311)

The "narrative" here, does not refer to the case of Stonex that the two men are discussing, but rather ironically to the account of Courtine which describes every anomaly in 350 pages but is bizzare because it does not reach at any solutions to the 3 murders in history and present time.

A closer look at the plots takes the reader to a more complex structure depending on a palimpsestic deconstruction. A story wipes out

another story, and this goes all along in the main plot and sub-plots as well. According to Lalumiere,

> The main story is generously enlivened by other interwoven stories, some of which give way to yet more stories. Both Machen and Stevenson explicitly borrowed that narrative device from ***The Thousand and One Nights***, and Palliser makes very good use of that technique here. (Lalumiere)

There are no lost endings in Palliser's plots, yet they are similar to ***The Thousand and One Nights*** in the "interwoven stories" narrative technique. With wit, the author's voice is again clearly heard at the beginning of the novel referring to this. When Courtine arrived at Thurchester and told his friend who lives there that he wanted to visit the Close and the Cathedral, the friend told Courtine about the church organ and old building. Courtine said, "Once you start to interfere with an old building you never know where it will end." Then about the organs of churches, he says, "The introduction of steam-power for ecclesiastical organs in the last thirty years has led to extensive demolition" (Palliser 19 – 20). If 'building' refers to structuring the novel, and 'organs' are the stories within it, then the reader should expect an endless series of plots and a demolition or wiping out of many stories in favour of others.

The introduction of two parallel plots comes with the beginning of Courtine's Account. When Courtine tries to tell his old friend and host Austin Fickling about the topic that brought him to Thurchester, Austin insists to tell Courtine another murder story that he thinks would interest the professor of history. Courtine's story goes back to the 9th century, the heroes of it are King Alfred and Bishop Wulflac, and the story was written by a Grimbald whose account represents the research interest of the professor. Austin who is not interested in King Alfred's story says to Courtine, "You are creating your own stories to console you" (Palliser 37). Courtine, therefore, is obliged to listen to the other story that his host yearns to tell; the story of the murder of Canon Burgoyne in the aftermath of the 17th century Civil war. A story that

involves also the disappearance of the Cathedral mason Gambril, and a few years later the murder of Burgoyne's opponent Freeth.

The struggle between the two stories is clearly expressed in the way they are told. Austin insists to silence Courtine to tell him the Burgoyne story. After dismissing Courtine's account of King Alfred, he says to him, "Well, be quiet for now and listen"; then Courtine interrupts, but Austin insists to continue. He says, "But let me continue with my story and then you can tell me yours" (Palliser 39). Whenever Courtine tries to add a comment, Austin prevents him, "Tell me when I have finished my own story. It's complicated enough without your interruptions" (Palliser 40). The conversation about the two stories and the different versions of each takes more than 13 pages of ***The Unburied***. This is only considered an introduction to the stories whose many other versions are both told and wiped out throughout the novel. As the novel moves slowly with the narration of stories within stories in each plot, the reader comes through parallelism, sometimes antithetical and in other times synonymous. "Each of these intersecting plots holds evidence of venal conduct, unscrupulous motives, religious factionalism, scholarly infighting and sexual secrets" ("The Unburied" Publishers Weekly).

King Alfred's story contains his death, and the martyrdom – or mysterious death – of his close friend Bishop Wulflac, according to a narrator called Grimbald. At the beginning of the novel, Dr Courtine seems certain of this Grimbald account, although, Courtine says, "its authenticity has never been accepted. But I hope to establish that it is genuine and to write my own biography of Alfred drawing upon it" (Palliser 44). The Grimbald story of King Alfred makes a saint of the king. "You see, his account confirms how extraordinarily brave and resourceful and learned Alfred was, and what a generous and much-loved man," Courtine says, and continues, ". . . the story of Wulflac's martyrdom is a true account and a very moving one" (Palliser 40). Then for about 8 pages, Courtine reads to Austin excerpts from Grimbald account, and both Austin and the readers begin to be bored of this long

story within a story, and of the hypotheses of the history professor. However, what is interesting in his hypothesis is that Grimbald, the narrator, could be – according to Courtine – the young chaplain who had a minor but important role in the history he narrated about the king. Courtine says to Austin, "I believe the young chaplain was none other than Grimbald himself" (Palliser 54). An idea that brings to the mind two other character/narrator (s): Courtine and Barthram, and that shows how imaginative the professor is.

That was on Tuesday night, when the two friends told the stories from history to each other. Soon after that, Wednesday morning, Dr Courtine visits the library of the Close to ask the librarian Mr Locard to search for the manuscript that – he thinks – will prove his hypothesis. He tells Locard the whole story, and the latter seemed unconvinced. He even hinted to Courtine that he is more willing to believe the opposite account of King Alfred's story. When the two men discussed the credibility of different versions of history, Locard raised quite an interesting issue. He said,

> My principle as a historian when I am faced with a conflict of evidence, is to work out what view of events each witness regarded it as being in his own interests to promote. That seems to me to be the best chance one has of arriving at the truth. (Palliser 78)

The plot moves towards doubt. The source of doubt is the narrator. The reader becomes bewildered whether to agree with this version of the story, or that. A palimpsestic cycle begins with the different versions and narrators of each version. The plot draws the attention of the reader to the subjectivity of narrators. Each narrator writes down his own version of the story, and of history, with his own perspective, motives, or interest.

The story of King Alfred and Bishop Wulflac goes to more and more doubt. Courtine's hypothesis does not prove right. After a long search in the old library, and almost when he was losing hope of finding anything that proves his theory about the narrator, Grimbald; Courtine

finds something of value. Thursday morning, he found "a folio of manuscript from . . . about the eleventh century" (Palliser 174). Reading the very first line, he recognized that this is about "the story of the siege of Thurchester and the martyrdom of St. Wulflac. With an extraordinary calm, I told myself that I had found what I had been seeking" (Palliser 175). Dr Courtine did not reveal his discovery, but rather put the manuscript back in its place and left the library because he had to meet Mr. Stonex and have tea with him and Austin this afternoon.

That afternoon, they visited Stonex and at the beginning of the evening, they went to the cathedral, where they heard that Stonex whom they had seen less than an hour ago, has been killed. The whole evening was devoted to the investigation and Dr Courtine had to wait till Friday morning to go to the library, read, and translate the manuscript. The reader has to read more than 80 pages to come to the manuscript reading and translation from Latin. The palimpsestic nature of history appears ironically when Courtine tells his readers that his hypothesis proved wrong.

> As I began to translate the faded script it became clear to me that I had been correct in my first assumption yesterday: I was indeed looking at a manuscript written in the about AD 1000 . . . and yet as I read on, my conviction . . . began to waver . . . The events were broadly the same but the interpretation of the motives of those involved was completely different. (Palliser 237 – 8)

This is quite interesting. The word "motives" is paralleled by the librarian's word "interests", which he used when he first heard Dr Courtine's hypothesis. What enlightens the reader here is the voice of the assistant in the library coming quickly with a shocking announcement. "I had been working . . . when I heard running feet on the stairs and, barely giving me time to slip the manuscript under one of the volumes lying on the table, Pomerance came bursting in. 'They've found a body!' he cried" (Palliser 238). This was not Stonex's of course.

It was the body of the murder of the 17th century; the Burgoyne account.

It is noteworthy to connect "they've found a body" with what Courtine has just found out. The unburying process began and all secrets are coming out to the light all at once. "Palliser's novel thus highlights, in a post-modern way, the elusiveness and indeterminacy of truth and effectively diverts the reader's interest from the unburied to the unburying process" (Mari). Both King Alfred's account and Burgoyne's account are being unburied. Another secret is also being investigated at the same time: the murder of Stonex. Is it the murders of Wulflac, Burgoyne, and Stonex that are to be revealed, or the palimpsestic versions of each of them which will be investigated? This is a question that Palliser will not answer until the end of the novel. The journey of Dr Courtine will end up with a more important result than discovering a manuscript ,or proving a version of history.

Another parallel journey, also full of palimpsests and many versions that confuse the reader, and deconstruct each other, is the plot of Canon Burgoyne. A seventeenth century account connected to the Civil war, the plot begins with one version told by Austin to his friend Courtine when he arrived at Thurchester. "About two hundred and fifty years ago, William Burgoyne was the Foundation's Canon-Treasurer" (Palliser 39). The version of the story that is told by Austin shows Burgoyne as a hero; a saint who refused all kinds of evil and therefore had two enemies Freeth, the sub-Dean, and Hollingrake, the Librarian. At this point, the reader is drawn to parallel between the way Austin sees Burgoyne, and the way Courtine sees King Alfred. This is clearly considered since the two men tell their accounts to each other at the same time, and the two heroes are killed.

However, later the sympathy of Austin with Burgoyne is uncovered when the reader learns that both the narrator of the sympathetic version and its protagonist have secret love for young men! Courtine listens carefully to Austin's version of Burgoyne's story. When

the story is told, "the room was still very close – with the smell of the gas, the food, the coal and something else that was not quite nice" (Palliser 32). Then later, Courtine found a note from Austin telling him that he will be engaged in something and Courtine can dine alone. So the professor went to the Public Bar and overheard some men talking of a scandal and they mentioned "the sly devil Slattery" (Palliser 103). One of the men said about Slattery, "Him and his wife". Saying this, "he stared around the table and then gave a wink which almost wrenched his face in two. The other two men laughed at this sally" (Palliser 104).

Unfortunately, neither the reader nor Courtine understands the wink, but both get to know later that Slattery has no wife, and that the reference here was to Austin! Courtine goes directly after supper and the Bar conversation to the Cathedral again. And that was what he said, "Then I thought of the conversation I had just overheard and mounted the steps. As soon as I entered I gasped for breath and nearly fainted for there was a strong and very distasteful smell" (Palliser 105). The bad smell in the Cathedral where the memorial of Canon Burgoyne is, invites the reader to reconsider the bad smell at Austin's house together with Courtine's memory of the talk about Slattery. What does the motif of bad smell have to do with those characters?

In the same evening, Sisterson, the Sacrist invites Courtine to visit him and meet the Chancellor Sheldrick to hear from the latter his own account of the story of Burgoyne. A lot of details are told, and many of which do not coincide with the version of story that Austin insisted to tell Courtine of. Yet the most important part of this version of the story is about Canon Burgoyne's secret passion for both music and a boy who sings beautifully in the choir! At the beginning, the Canon was against music in the church, "For according to his strict Calvinist lights, music was a sensual pleasure which, under guise of inducing spirituality, was only too likely to encourage gross and carnal thoughts" (Palliser 114). Yet, "he was impressed enough by the boy's singing" to accept him in the choir with a grant, and to lodge him in a

quiet and almost private place. "From this moment Burgoyne abandoned himself to his passion for music with all the force of his austere personality" (Palliser 118). The bad smell then, connects Austin and Slattery's relationship to that of late Canon Burgoyne and the boy of the choir. Ironically, Slattery is a music teacher in the choir. It is noteworthy also to mention that Palliser insists to involve the narrator of every story in his or her own version of the story. "Dr Sheldrick has a very generous way of interpreting Burgoyne's conduct" (Palliser 119).

Another motif that connects Austin to Burgoyne is the story of the ghost. In Austin's conversation with his newly arriving guest, Dr Courtine, he mentions "the Cathedral ghost. The vergers are all terrified of it" and he makes it clear to Courtine that this is "The Treasurer's Ghost. William Burgoyne"(Palliser 31). When the ghost appears, according to the people of the town, "He walks . . . about the Cathedral and the Close at night frightening people" (Palliser 31). In the version of Dr Sheldrick, the reader learns that Canon Burgoyne's conduct has changed almost since his music passion was revealed. Symptoms are many: "he stayed awake all night pacing up and down his room," and he was seen standing at night "on the north side of the Close" (Palliser 126 - 7). Immediately before Dr Sheldrick account, Courtine was in the Cathedral with some other townspeople talking about the murder of Burgoyne, and

> something strange happened. The corner of the Cathedral was about fifty yards away and I [Courtine] was sure that there was a figure standing there, only very dimly apparent through the twilit gloom. As I approached, it vanished round the corner. I was almost sure it was Austin" (Palliser 97-8).

The connection between three components in Burgoyne story is paralleled in Austin, precisely the same way. The bad smell, the pervert sexual conduct, and the ghost like behavior are found in the two men's lives. One more addition to this is that they both loved men of music. Palliser helped his narrator in order to see these connections, but

Courtine did not notice. After being told about Burgoyne's ghost twice, by Austin, and by Sheldrick, Courtine saw Austin like a ghost in the Cathedral and did not connect this to Burgoyne. So Palliser took him in a night journey to help him to notice the similarity. Wednesday night, after Courtine had gone to bed in his friend Austin's old house, a creaking of the old stairs awakened Courtine. He discovered that Austin was sneaking out of the house and Courtine thought that his friend might be "a sleepwalker" (Palliser 148). He followed Austin but lost him in the darkness and snow. Courtine went to the Cathedral to know his way back, and there in the darkness, he says he saw "a face which seemed to be gazing straight at me. A cold, white, empty face with eyes that were two pieces of glass . . ." He describes it saying, "It was the face of a creature not of our world" (Palliser 151). The face disappeared but after a very short time, it reappeared and Dr Courtine did not want to admit it but he knew well that it was the ghost of Burgoyne. "I had seen William Burgoyne, I was sure of it" (Palliser 153).

In a review of ***The Unburied***, the novel is described as "a very atmospheric book with lots of gothic elements from . . . to the obligatory 'ghost' supposedly haunting the Cathedral" ("Review: ***The Unburied*** by Charles Palliser"). However, this is completely unfair. Palliser meant to bring the ghost of Burgoyne in the eyes of Courtine just before he sees his friend Austin Fickling whom he had lost in the fog in a situation that connects Austin to Burgoyne. So, after seeing the ghost, Courtine walked all over the town and suddenly saw Austin from between the curtains in a house. He thought his friend was seeing a woman but could not see except a part of Austin who was sitting on a chair drinking with his unseen companion. Courtine describes what he saw saying,

> And then as I watched, a hand which seemed too large for a woman's but whose fingers were slender and delicate, reached towards Austin and rested for a moment on his knee in a strangely intimate gesture. Austin smiled at his invisible companion with such

> tenderness, his face illuminated with such evident happiness. (Palliser 155)

Is it possible that Courtine had not seen that the big hand with the delicate fingers is that of a man who is a good organ player; a musician whose name is Slattery? Is it possible that Courtine did not connect all the events of the evening to what he saw now: from the conversation in the Bar, to Austin who is like a ghost, to the bad smell, to the endless list of similarities between Burgoyne and Austin? James Kincaid says, "we've read Victorian detective and ghost stories, and this is not one" (Kincaid). Yes this is not one; it has a ghost that sends signs to the protagonist to understand what is going on, but he does not.

The novel is neither Victorian, nor detective but it contains many murders. The murders from history, which have many versions are accompanied at the last third of the novel by a recent murder that Courtine attends in Thurchester. This murder does not only confirm the palimpsestic nature of life plots, but also initiates illumination about the murders in history, and reveals the illumination of the protagonist from within as well.

> Palliser . . . does give us in ***The Unburied*** a delayed-action novel . . . Palliser knows what he is doing, and he does it with grace. Involving us in one of the most complex and multilayered plots we have ever been mystified by, he allows us finally to realize that it's the questions we don't ask that matter and the solutions we cannot find that make for a life we can tolerate living. (Kincaid)

This is quite clear. The multilayered plots of King Alfred and Canon Burgoyne were not enough to illuminate the protagonist about the palimpsestic nature of truth. He always asked the wrong questions and never saw the solutions. So Palliser had to shock him with a new murder to involve him in a new investigation that would help him to discover the solution to his life not to the murders.

Courtine runs into a Mr. Stonex, an old banker who lives alone in the old house of his family very much near the Close and the Cathedral. The reason they met was an inscription connected to the murder of Canon Burgoyne, and this inscription was on a marble wall in the house of Stonex, which used to be the house of Burgoyne two centuries before. When Courtine tried to read the inscription from behind the gate, Stonex saw him. He went to Courtine, welcomed him, and showed him the words on marble. Of course, Stonex told Courtine another version of the story of Burgoyne, Freeth, and Gambrill. Readers are more lost and the words of the inscription are amazingly mysterious.

> *All things revolve and man who is born to labour revolves with them. And therefore in the Ripenesse of Time shall they that are on High be brought Low, and they that are Low be raised on High. Then shall the Guilty be shattered into pieces like unto the Innocent . . .* (Palliser 95)

There are clear references to the cycle of history, and the punishment of the sinners. As if it was a warning. Seeing those words, was Wednesday afternoon; and after showing Courtine the words, and telling him his version of the story, Mr Stonex invited the professor to tea on Friday.

The details of the tea invitation are strange. Thursday morning, Austin tells Courtine that he would go to the tea at Stonex's with him, and that it was going to be today, that is Thursday, and not Friday. Then Courtine noticed many signs but was never able to understand them until later. When he and Austin met to go to Stonex's, he noticed that Austin "was pale and seemed nervous," and he also says, "We walked in silence for Austin seemed as preoccupied as I was" (Palliser 177). The reader knows why Courtine was preoccupied. It is because he had just discovered the King Alfred manuscript and hidden it in the library. Yet why Austin is preoccupied?! Then occasionally, Courtine brings the Burgoyne ghost story saying something about burying the corpse, and Austin is terrified.

> 'The corpse. The body of the murdered man.'

> 'The murdered man?' he stammered, looking at me in dismay. (Palliser 179)

Why did Austin repeat the words "murdered man" in dismay?

The answer to all those questions is not discovered by Courtine until a long time after the murder of Mr. Stonex, whose body, or "corpse" is discovered a short time after the tea Courtine and Austin had with him. The reader discovers in the Afterward that Slattery, the one involved with Austin in a pervert relationship, together with his mother killed Stonex because the mother is Stonex sister who wanted to inherit the old man. Austin knew everything and played a part in covering the whole issue by accompanying Courtine to the house to involve him as a witness with a highly academic background. He used Courtine and the latter did not understand the signs. Adam Kirsch who describes the novel as a "Half Victorian mystery, half contemporary psychological thriller, this is a tale of murders in several centuries," believes that,

> The parallel between the historian's work and the detective's is clear as Courtine tries to solve the 17th century and 19th century crimes simultaneously, while the reader has to keep an abundance of names, clues and motives straight. (Kirsch)

But Courtine was successful in neither role. Mari believes that, "the performance effectively highlights the similarity between the participants and the roles they play" (Mari), however Courtine did not solve the puzzle.

The tea at Mr Stonex was quite strange. Stonex looked nervous and different from the man Courtine met one day before. Why? Because it was not Stonex but his sister who had killed him and acted his role so that Courtine would witness seeing the man and having tea with him. That is why "Austin was trembling" (Palliser 180) because he knew the whole scene before. "The room was in great disorder" (Palliser 181), and the gentleman asked his two guests to play with him a scene from history involving the murder of Freeth, Burgoyne's enemy. The roles given to Austin and Courtine are intended to hint at Courtine as a victim

to Austin. Stonex (that is his sister who killed him but the reader does not know yet) says to Austin,

> 'Did you know that what you were getting involved in would result in a man being butchered?'
>
> Austin replied in a leaden voice: 'Yes, I did know. Though I somehow made myself not know it.' (Palliser 190)

This is highly ironic because an innocent young man will be framed for the crime and will commit suicide before they sentence him to death. Strange enough, when Courtine asks them about the scene they will all play, the answer is also highly ironic and mysterious.

> 'What is the plot?' I demanded. They both turned to look at me.
>
> 'Oh no,' the old gentleman cried. 'You're to be kept in the dark for the moment. But I promise you, you're going to find out very soon!' (Palliser 191)

The accumulation of references is clear. The gentleman says to Courtine, "A witness does not always understand what he is seeing and in this case he most certainly did not" (Palliser 193). Also Austin who knows that he is doing evil says sadly, "Murder is the ultimate evil and its perpetrator cannot hope to escape eternal damnation" (Palliser 198). This is another clear sign to the crime perpetrators on one side, and on the other side it juxtaposes Austin to Burgoyne. They both are religious and sinners; and they feel guilty because they cannot defeat sin.

Mari believes that

> Departing from the singleness of purpose of the detective novel, ***The Unburied*** switches from one plot to another, accumulating theories intended to account for the crimes but actually contradicting and cancelling one another. ***The Unburied*** is thus constructed on a paradox as it uses the dynamic of a genre oriented towards the solving of an enigma while playfully undermining its rules. (Mari)

This is partly right, partly wrong. Mari categorizes ***The Unburied*** as a crime novel and criticizes Palliser, on this basis, as departing from the purpose, and as undermining the rules of the genre by introducing plots "cancelling" each other. However, this is not true. The novel is intended to be palimpsestic; and the plots, the many versions, and the many narrators are intended not "towards the solving of [the] enigma" of crimes, but the enigma of the protagonist, Dr Courtine. The palimpsestic nature of the stories is also a reference to the palimpsestic identity of human beings. The narrator's journey into all those details and signs illuminates him about the identity not of the narrator, but of the protagonist. In his article about Sense and Sensibility in writing 19th century history, Andrew Cayton wrote,

> The lessons of literature . . . lie less in technique than in tone, less in information than in sensibility. Historical novelists have clearly learned much from us . . . It is rather to consider the role of individual, to confront the power of emotion, to view with skepticism the all-pervasive power of hypotheses, and to write about love and misery as well as politics and economics. (Cayton 340)

This is more expressive of ***The Unburied*** than what Mari stated.

The identity palimpsest is another type of wiped out and rewritten versions. Only Courtine – Barthram may also be included – has rewritten his future when he was illuminated during the psychological journey he led into his identity. The approach Palliser uses in ***The Unburied*** is that of history. So when history is seen from different perspectives in what we can simply call subjective viewpoints, it reflects the downfalls of those who tell it; in other words, its narrators. "History is thus wrapped by the characters and reflects their personality . . . The existence of a final truth is actually put to the test in ***The Unburied***" (Mari). Readers are invited not to solve the puzzles of history as Courtine tried, and failed, but to reconsider the future by burying personal history, and re-writing a new version in the identity palimpsest as did Courtine at the end of the novel. Keep's quote is re-

invited: "it is not people who 'speak' language, but language which 'speaks' people" (Keep).

James Kincaid describes the process of re-writing an identity palimpsest saying,

> It's very tempting to plunge into a tangle of irrelevant narratives that captivate us not because they are captivating in themselves . . . but because we simply want to solve puzzles. So does Courtine, and he only gradually begins to understand that his devotion to the complexities of history is a way of distracting himself from his own past. (Kincaid)

A closer look at Courtine's geographical journey from Cambridge to Thurchester, and the historical one from the 19th to the 11th and 17th centuries, calls for another more important journey within his own history and identity. Even if he has failed as a narrator, he achieved success as a protagonist. "It is a measure of this novel's weight, though, that we come to see that Courtine's weaknesses are rooted in strengths as well as delusions" (Kincaid).

Two parallel lines draw Courtine's character and develop into what reshapes his new identity. The first is his change from being an observer to an action taker. And the second is his change from sticking to the past and searching for the truth of the past into a writer and narrator of his own version of the present and the future. The journey within illuminated Courtine and developed the character of this professor at the end of the novel and at a late age of his own. Kirsch says that Courtine, "is not a fully developed character (he is really an observer . . ." (Kirsch). At the same time, Catherine Mari calls this role, one of a "detective" (Mari) because she is considering the novel a crime novel. Kincaid also sees that Courtine "fails to notice how his detective work, smart and unfailingly misdirected, is leading him steadily back into his own personal history" (Kincaid).

It is true that Courtine is an observer who detects history and the present, trying to analyze the events and proofs to reach the truth. It is also true that he fails to reach an absolute truth in history or in the present, which leads him to some enlightenment about his inner self investigation; an antithetical technique that goes through the whole novel. Courtine's self-enlightenment began when he faced his past. He says, "People sometimes attempt to shield themselves from painful memories by adopting a fixed pattern in their lives" (Palliser 167). He admits to himself that this is what he did when he shielded himself from the twenty years old memory of his young wife who left him. He also compared his empty life to the family life that some people had in Thurchester, and thought that he was a dull person. "But as I had grown older I had increasingly found others more interesting than myself" (Palliser 147). Although he felt so humiliated when his wife eloped with his friend, Courtine now is reconsidering the whole issue differently. He sees himself as an uninteresting and a "rather stupid" (Palliser 249) person. So he says, "Distance softens memories" (Palliser 248), which refers to his memories of the humiliation that now have been softened. This led to a decisive change from observing and analyzing to decision making and action taking. "I had a sudden impulse to act boldly and decisively for once in my life, and my heart started pounding" (Palliser 332).

The second line that defines the development in the character of the protagonist is his change from indulging himself in the past and analyzing its palimpsests to find historical facts, to a writer of a new version of his personal identity on a clean manuscript. This change involved the process of burying the past with its versions and ghosts in a proper way, which is equal to a palimpsestic erasing of an old writing neatly, to be able to write a new story for the future. In the Forward, Mr Barthram, the other narrator meets a Miss Stonex in Geneva. We learn later that she is the sister of the murdered Mr Stonex. She talks to him about the real meaning of 'being alive'; saying, "I'm talking about being alive. Otherwise you're dead without the dignity of burial" (Palliser 7). She draws the attention of the reader to the title of the novel and also to

whomever characters; the reader will meet in the novel. A first reference was quickly made when Courtine is introduced by his friend Austin to the readers with the sentence: "You're the one who knows about the past" (Palliser 17).

When Courtine meets Mrs Locard and they talked about history, she thought he was good at telling the stories of history and he admitted it saying, "I certainly try to make the past alive again" (Palliser 135). She warned him in a rather delicate way, saying, "Don't you think that we read our own desires into the figures from the past about whom we reflect because, as erring mortals, we cannot be dispassionate?" (Palliser 135). Kincaid confirms the fact that Courtine's "resolute idealizing of Alfred is a way of protecting himself", and he explains this with: "to protect himself from the evil of others" (Kincaid). It is therefore, living in the past, trying to revive it, and hiding behind its characters that make Courtine dead rather than alive. When he meets Slattery, the son of Miss Stonex who with his mother killed Mr Stonex as the reader knows in the Afterward, Courtine talked with him about being content with "The safest life". But Slattery said, "Most people spend their lives half asleep leading an existence devoid of passion, never taking risks. They might as well be dead" (Palliser 206). A statement that made Courtine feel "angry" because he knew that it is directed to him, and that it describes his half dead life.

When the journey of Dr Courtine comes to an end, his inner journey as well results in the meeting of the two lines which reshape his character in a more developed way. All the clues come together in his last conversation with Mrs Locard in the evening before he leaves Thurchester. He gets enlightened, makes decisions, and takes actions. He confesses to her that he did not give his wife a divorce although she had left him almost 20 years before and had a daughter from the man she lives with. He says, "You can't leave the past behind . . . You are your past". But Mrs Locard comments on this with a key sentence; "Isn't it rather like delaying the funeral after a death? It's only when the burial is over that the process of grieving can begin" (Palliser 327).

When he became alone at night, he thought of his life again, decided to divorce his wife, and to marry a widow with two small children who "was a kind, sweet-natured woman" (Palliser 334) and liked the professor. He realized that he had "built" an image of his old wife in his "imagination", and that now when he faced this, he feels he "was free" (Palliser 335). Moreover, he was able "then to start a new chapter in [his] life" (Palliser 335). He is the writer of his story, not the narrator of the past.

The final enlightenment at the end of the novel is seen by critics as connected both to Courtine's development and to the title. Kirsch says,

> Thus the multiple meanings of the title: The unburied is both the murdered man whose ghost cries out for justice and the traumatized man who needs to lay his "issues" to rest. (Kirsch)

When he did lay his issues to rest, Courtine was "finally able to read the darkest of all histories, his own" (Kincaid). It becomes clear to the reader, though only at the very end of the novel that the palimpsestic identity means that man writes down his own story. The hero was now ready, after burying his past in a proper way to write a new story. It is not an easy process, however he "triumphs . . . by resolving his own psychological problems" (Kirsch). He did not notice the signs and did not solve the mysteries. He did not answer the questions of the murders of the past, nor that of the present time; yet all those questions that were not answered are never important. History and present time stories will always have many versions according to the many narrators. The only thing that matters is how every person writes his own story. "Courtine is both defeated and redeemed" (Kincaid).

One major clue that Palliser has put and no critic mentioned is the example of Miss Stonex. It is all written in the first 7 pages which compose the Editor's Forward to the novel. Palliser gives the example of a lady who wrote her own story from beginning to end. She chose to leave her family and marry an older man so she can elope with him and

be an actress. She had Slattery but his father was replaced by another man whom his mother married. Then, when she was alone again with her son, and had no money, they both killed her brother Mr Stonex and she acted his role at the tea to which Courtine was invited, so that she makes a fool of him by witnessing he has seen the dead man and had tea with him. She was also able to hide Stonex will, and wipe the note that he wrote to poor Perkins, so that Perkins becomes accused and guilty of killing Stonex. She wiped written words and wrote the story she wanted, took the money and went to Geneva and lived there.

Yet in the Forward, and before all these events are known to the readers, Mr Barthram visits her in Geneva, trying to get any confession from her as he already knows the story and the crime she had committed. He asks her about "that day . . . which changed your life dramatically as it affected mine" (Palliser 5). She was able at that very old age of hers to act professionally and to show him no sign of understanding what he said. However, the reader is shocked by Barthram's reaction. Although she did not confess anything, he says, "It was enlightenment more than anything I sought . . . Meeting you has enabled me to comprehend things that have puzzled me for more than four decades" (Palliser 5). She tells him the wisdom of the whole novel:

> '. . . if I was frightened, it didn't inhibit me from doing what I wanted. That's the difference, isn't it, between those who go through their lives merely repeating their lines and those who invent their role as they at it?'
> 'You were good at that'
> 'I was magnificent'
> 'Are you confessing?'
> 'Confessing? My dear man, I'm boasting. The greatest actors can create a human being before the very eyes of spectators – not show them something fabricated beforehand like a puppet.' (Palliser 6)

She gave it away clearly: you should not act what others write for you; but "invent" and "create" a "human being" not a "puppet". That is why Barthram was enlightened.

The Unburied by Charles Palliser is a palimpsestic novel that depends on a well-organized structure. Palliser has built his novel on a plurality of plots on one hand, and the multi-versions stories both in history and present time on the other. This technique reflects palimpsestic nature of truth; therefore, the readers are lost through those many stories until all mysteries are solved at the very end of the novel. This type of a multi-versioned story is connected to hyper-textuality and writing about writing, account about account, manuscripts that prove a version and disprove another, and being lost in explaining both history and present time. It also brings to focus the subjectivism of perspective especially when the hero is the narrator at the same time.

The end of the novel also brings illumination to both the narrator/protagonist Dr. Courtine, and the readers as well. The secrets of the past are revealed and the crimes of both the past and the present are solved. More importantly, the physical journey of Dr Courtine was accompanied by another psychological journey in which he rediscovered his inner palimpsest and rewrote new perspectives of life that he has gained.

When one reads ***The Unburied*** with all those manuscripts written and re-written, explained but not fully understood, and murders witnessed but never seen from the same perspective; we recall this amazing maze of Charles Dickens: ***A Tale of Two Cities***

> *It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us…*
> (***A Tale of Two Cities*** – Charles Dickens)

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