
Archive, Empathy, Memory: The Resurrection of Joyce Reason

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Abstract

This paper uses the prism of archival, ancestral research to consider the nature of our relationship to the lives of the Others that we find in the past. The particular Other within this paper, the intergenerational haunting that appears in words and in walks, in stones, photographs and in memories, is Joyce Reason. My Great Aunt, whom I never met, Joyce was a writer, an idealist, an evangelist, a bluestocking, a spinster, a crank, and a missionary.

In reflecting upon the attempted resurrection that lies in all historical writings, I return to the question at the heart of Emmanuel Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*: how can the I “enter into relationship with an Other without immediately divesting it of its alterity”? With this question the investigation of personal archives and family memory intersects with considerations of public memory and produces two interlocking concerns. What is the articulacy, or otherwise, of the archival trace? And how can we know the life of another, without subsuming it into our own preoccupations and perspectives?

Presented as a collage of fragments, this paper explores walking, the body, place, photography and memory in the performance of the biographical archive. It asks ethical questions, exposes its own loose ends and involves time travel, but does not result in a resurrection.

It begins with a walk. A pilgrimage even.

Keywords: archives, biography, empathy, Levinas, memory.

While my purpose is to consider how the archive ‘speaks’ to us of the lives of others, I will begin elsewhere. I will begin with a walk. A pilgrimage even, although it is hard to think of something as pilgrimage when it takes place in Guildford, a county town in the heart of Surrey. Should I be calling it a pilgrimage at all? My destination was neither holy nor celebrated; my journey had not been arduous. If it was an act of devotion it was a purely personal one. Still, the pilgrim has been articulated as the “archetypal seeker” and there I was, undertaking a kind of quest. Indeed, Zygmunt Bauman describes the pilgrim as “a restless seeker for identity”,¹ a description that resonates strongly with this particular journey.

The street was distinctly ordinary, so much so that I initially walked straight past my destination—not noticing—and had to backtrack. But there it was, 102 Addison Road. A semi-detached house, set a little back from the road, with a blue half-glazed front door. There was a Vauxhall in the driveway, figures moving in the kitchen. I paused and looked, wondering what I would say if asked what I was doing.

After debating internally how long I should stand and look to make this pilgrimage complete, I turned—without making any form of votive offering—and made my way down the hill and back into Guildford. I do not know what I had been expecting, although certainly not a blue plaque² reading: Joyce Reason—author and great aunt—Lived here—b. 1894 d. 1974.

Figure 1. Joyce Reason Blue Plaque. Manipulated photograph: Matthew Reason 2013.



After all, unlike the lives of the famous, Joyce’s archive has not been meticulously reconstructed and made public; instead, like most lives, it has sunk into time. To me Joyce was the substance of family rumours and forgetful rememberings, by which I mean her absence was marked by fragments, not memorials. But while I had not expected any form of tangible presence, perhaps I had desired some tangible *absence*. Some gap in the world where she had been. That I did not find this at 102 Addison Road was not because she had never been there, but perhaps because other people now were. The house was no longer hers. It was full of

another family's stories, the mess and detritus of other people's existence. Yet the objective of my walk had been to 'find' Joyce, or possibly to invent her for myself. It is this sense-making, identity-building pilgrimage into the archive of an Other that is this essay's focus, as I ask myself what are our possible relationships with the lives of the Others that we find in the past.

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Motivated by that familiar desire to seek out our ancestral past, to construct our own origin myths, to find out (to paraphrase a British television series) who we think we are³, I began seriously attempting to construct and make sense of the archive of Joyce Reason in around 2012. I had grown up reading the historical novels she had published for children, enjoying the sensation of having an author in the family, but never questioning who she was as a person. In following traces of her life, through both public archives and private collections in attics and cupboards, I discovered that as well as a writer she was an idealist, an evangelist, a bluestocking, a spinster, a crank, and a missionary. Moreover, as this personal quest intersected with considerations of public and cultural memory, two key interlocking questions emerged, both relating to the theory and practice of archival research.

The first question relates to the articulacy, or otherwise, of the archival trace. The thing unearthed from the archive often seems bursting with voice. It seems — axiomatically, metaphorically, poetically, wishfully — to speak to us directly from the past and yet it is also silent. The image of stones is useful here, as objects that are proverbially speechless (as silent as stone, as dumb as stone) and yet which are also evoked as communicating history and knowledge (these stones can speak, if you have ears to hear).

Stones feature as imagistic metaphors for archives and the reading/writing of history in two contrasting texts. First, in *A Chorus of Stones*, Susan Griffin suggests that the close study of stones will reveal the history of what they have witnessed, in both human and geological time. They hold traces of fires, the pressures of the earth, the working of hands. "Perhaps", writes Griffin, "we are like stones; our own history and the history of the world embedded in us".⁴ Second, in *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida argues that the axiom 'Stones Talk'! is the product of a desire for a history, an origin or an archive that speaks by and for itself. For Derrida this is the conceit of an archive that effaces the archivist, and thereby also effaces interpretation, mediation, translation, omission and *desire*.⁵ For both writers, stones provide a metaphor for historical presence and articulacy — the sense that the past speaks to us; that the past is somehow present for us — with a tension between contrasting perspectives on the relationship between ourselves now and this historical past. In this essay, I am interested in *both* the embeddedness of history within the archive and the problematic effacement of ourselves in the desire for authentic or unmediated voices from the past.

I am therefore interested in exploring how it is possible to traverse a path that recognises the legitimacy of both these perspectives, specifically through

making *overt* the ways in which a researcher's relationship to archival objects and voices is performative. By which I mean that, to engage in the archive is an active *doing* that constructs and re-constructs the archive. Explicitly highlighting this performativity—through drawing attention to *acts* of doing, acts of speaking and of remembering—has the potential to be both a methodological and an ethical process. Methodological in the manner that it changes how we present archival research, requiring us to find ways of writing that do not efface the archivist but rather make the *performance* of sense-making apparent. And ethical in the manner that it recognises the complex relationship between the archivist and the lives embedded within the archive.

For connected to this concern for the articulacy of archival traces is a second question, with the archive (almost always) a trace of the life or lives of others which the archivist encounters within or through material traces. The archival objects speak or are spoken-for and in so doing it is life that is speaking or being spoken-for. The life of an Other—from another time, another place, another consciousness and another sensibility—is a life like ours but not ours. This life can be subsumed all too easily into our own preoccupations and perspectives.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas asks how the I can “enter into relationship with an Other without immediately divesting it of its alterity? What is the nature of this relationship?”⁶ Of course the I is never *not* in a relationship with otherness, and it is this connection that determines for each of us that we are not infinite. The problem, as Diane Perpich puts it, “is whether an I and an Other can be in relationship without one of the terms absorbing or determining the meaning of the Other”.⁷ As I set about attempting the resurrection of my Great Aunt, I have been wondering about this question, and how it relates to Others from the past, from one's own family, the Others that we find within and through the archive.

This essay explores these questions in the context of my attempts to resurrect the archive of my Great Aunt Joyce—an attempt to bring a life back to life without either naïvely presuming it speaks for itself or hubristically believing that I can speak for its totality and alterity. At stake here is how we tell stories of, about, and through the lives of Others no longer living and the sense-making, identity-building that is involved in archival research.

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I began with that walk in Guildford not because it was the beginning but because it had a certain pathos. It referenced formal acts of memory in order to implicitly critique them; it usefully introduced themes of trace and walking and place that I will return to; and because it made the act of doing self-evident. And already I have started crafting this life story, making choices that give shape to the narrative and thereby also give meaning and have affect. Started, perhaps, making it mine and about me.

If I had chosen to begin somewhere else, I would have begun with a page from a family photograph album, artefacts which Halla Beloff describes as one of the vehicles that enable the continuation of previous generations.⁸ By enabling

memories, or memories of memories, to be passed between generations the family album is a familiar way of holding the past in our present. Perhaps photography, maybe particularly family photography, “is best understood as the return of the departed”.⁹

Figure 2. Page from Reason family photograph album. c.1894-1904. Author’s own collection.



The year is 1894. In one photograph, Joyce lies on the lap of her mother. Just a few months old, she was born in Canning Town where her father was warden of the Mansfield House Settlement, founded to counteract the extreme poverty that existed in east London. Districts such as Canning Town, wrote Congregationalist minister Andrew Mearns in 1883, were “pestilential human rookeries, where tens of thousands are crowded together amidst horrors which call to mind what we have heard of the middle passage of a slave ship”.¹⁰ Family rumours relate that a combination of poor diet, lack of exposure to sunlight and the environment of Canning Town led to Joyce contracting rickets as a child. Anatomically rickets softens bone, permitting a marked bending and distortion of the skeleton, which left Joyce with a slight bow in her legs and an almost imperceptible limp.

The year is 1900. Joyce reads to her younger sister Hazel. They now live in the North London suburb of Friern Barnet, where the streets are lighter, the houses

further apart and even the sun seems to shine more brightly. Joyce's father was the Reverend Will Reason, a radical Congregationalist minister who wrote and campaigned against poverty and inequality: "Sometimes it is said", he declared at the International Congregational Council in 1908, "that Socialism would only work with a population of angels. But only angels could make life possible under the conditions in which the great mass of our people have to live".¹¹

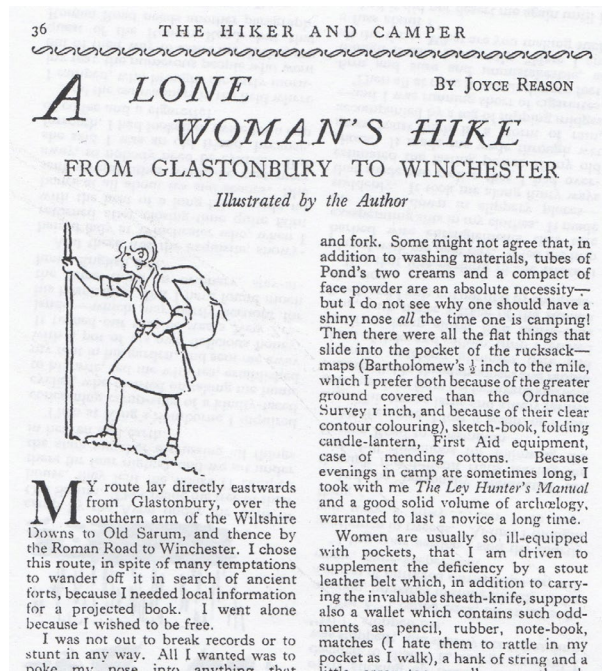
The year is... and my eye is caught by the empty space, the blank circle in the photograph album where a picture has become detached and lost. For Carolyn Steedman a key characteristic of the archive is as much what is missing, "its emptinesses", as what it does contain.¹² It is therefore appropriate to pause on the omissions and, in considering why this gap draws my attention so strongly, I am reminded of artist Sophie Calle's *Last Seen...* (1991), which consisted of an exhibition of the physical gaps on gallery walls where stolen or otherwise absent paintings had previously hung. In Calle's work the paintings are replaced by descriptions provided from memory by gallery visitors and staff. For Peggy Phelan, such description "does not reproduce the object, it rather helps us to restage and restate the effort to remember what is lost".¹³ Disappearance, either in fact or in potential, therefore generates the energy and dynamic power of memory, it generates the longing for memory.

In this instance I cannot know what the missing photograph might have depicted, which makes the longing all the more seductive. By virtue of not being present, it is an empty space that has great potential, prominent in its noisy silence. It feels like a fissure that at once highlights the distance between myself and any absolute knowledge and simultaneously reduces this distance down to zero. I can fill the gap with whatever I want, imagining the photographs, the stories and knowledge that I cannot find elsewhere.

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The year is 1930 and Joyce takes a hike—perhaps a pilgrimage—from Glastonbury to Winchester. I can accompany her on this walk with uncanny detail because she wrote about it in an article published in *The Hiker and Camper* magazine. "My route", she writes, "lay directly eastward from Glastonbury, over the southern arm of the Wiltshire Downs to Old Sarum, and thence by the Roman Road to Winchester. I chose this route, in spite of many temptations to wander off it in search of ancient forts, because I needed local information for a projected book. I went alone because I wished to be free".¹⁴

Figure 3. A Lone Woman's Hike,
Illustration by Joyce Reason.
The Hiker and Camper. 1930.



As she walked Joyce noted the traces of people that had been there before—the Roman Roads, the ancient burial mounds, the well-worn ridgeways. This sense of the distant past is accompanied by a warm engagement with the people she encountered along her way. Incidents of life observed, remembered, written down and turned into micro-narratives: Mr and Mrs May at Kingsettle, where she camped on sweet and springy turf; a kindly mother of nine children, all flaxen-haired and as numerous as chickens, who talked about being a suffragette; the game-keeper who mistook her for a gypsy.

I found myself taking walks that Joyce took, visiting sites where I know she visited and paths that I know she trod. I wanted to place myself in the same location—the same geographical landscape—that Joyce experienced and wrote about. I saw in this something of what Lucy Lippard describes as the multifaceted experience of overlay within landscape: human time on geological time; the contemporary on the prehistoric; human habitation on the landscape; Christianity overlaid on paganism; urban on rural. Such encounters of overlay in the landscape produce, Lippard suggests, a “juxtaposition of two unlike realities combined to form an unexpected new reality”.¹⁵ For my great aunt Joyce this overlay of unlike realities included her own contemporary ‘now’ of 1930s England, the traces of previous prehistoric, Roman and Saxon inhabitations she encountered and the fictional narratives she placed upon all of these. Now, through telescoping time, Joyce is also accompanied by myself. As I trace my great aunt’s footsteps we are both walking through and on landscapes; both walking through and on time. And there is also, in both Joyce’s walks and my re-visitations, an echo of the rites of pilgrimage—they produce a kind of ‘kinetic ritual’¹⁶ in which walking, seeking and journeying “allows ‘pilgrims’ to discover a sense of contact with the past”

even if only on a temporary basis that cannot be held known outside the act of pilgrimage itself.¹⁷

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The year is 2013. I am sitting on a bench, amongst the geraniums and tobacco plants outside my parents' house, talking to my aunt Ann about her aunt Joyce. That is, I am gossiping across generations.

The conversation is filtered across time as I listen to the recollections of a woman in her 70s half remembering conversations she half overheard as a child. What she recalls most are snippets of speech, judgements made about Joyce by other relatives, retained and relayed voice-to-voice in defiance of the ephemerality of the oral:

"It's a shame Joyce never married".

"Joyce had a fiancé once. But nothing came of it. So careless of her".

"What person wears a cape and carries a staff in this day and age"?

"That sounds like just the sort of thing that Joyce would do".

"I cannot see why she would want to be so solitary".

"You know the reason she walks with a limp, don't you"?

In these rumours there is none of the authority of the archival document or mechanical objectivity of the photograph. There is instead only mutable memory and disembodied voices. The rumours speak of a generation of what were called 'surplus women', women destined to be spinsters by the slaughter of men in World War One. Women who had no choice but to invent a new template for what it meant to be a woman beyond the home and outside marriage, whose sexuality went unspoken and who were often judged harshly for the choices they made. These women in many ways were the pioneers of contemporary gender politics; although, as I come to 'know' her, I suspect that Joyce would never have viewed herself in this manner. Yet I cannot help but speak for her.

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The year is 1925. On the Friday morning of the Easter weekend, a group of men and women gathered in Chinley Station, at the edge of the Derbyshire Peak District. All were dressed in a jerkin, cowl and wimple, in dark greens, greys or browns. A Saxon-looking outfit, a Robin Hood costume. Although it was early April, the men all wore shorts, with thick socks pulled up high almost to their knees. The women wore one-piece kirtles, shapeless dresses cut to the knee, a leather belt around the middle. Both men and women had sheath knives in their belts, rucksacks on their backs and a rough ash staff in their hands. As they walked the wind caught their cowls, tugging and whipping the thick woven cape around them. The walkers made their way through Chinley and were soon out into the countryside, quickly rising above the valley and making for the heights of Kinderscout.¹⁸

Figure 4. Women's Easter Hike.
c. 1925. Courtesy of the Kibbo
Kift Foundation.



This strangely dressed ensemble were members of the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift, a camping, hiking and handicraft movement that dressed in vaguely medieval clothing, mixed Saxon words in their daily language, carved their own totem poles and published leaflets with titles like ‘Can the Kibbo Kift Come to Power’? They considered themselves the inheritors of an English tradition of rebellion that included Wat Tyler, Robert Ket, Jack Cade, Robin Hood and the Levellers. They were a folk movement in a country that has largely neglected its folk traditions and at the same time genuinely believed that they were the vanguard of the future.¹⁹

The year is 2013. In a pale brown folder in the archives of the London School of Economics, I find Joyce’s name.²⁰ Her handwritten signature is in a list of members of the Kibbo Kift attending an annual gathering called the Al-Thing. First something with great familiarity — for her name, Reason, is also of course my own — but then something much stranger. Each member of the Kibbo Kift also took a woodcraft name, or as they termed it a ‘name of truth’. They would address each other solely by this name, often not knowing the normal everyday name of other kinsfolk. Joyce’s name of truth was Sea Otter.

Joyce, as Sea Otter, became a prominent member of the Kindred bearing at various times the titles of Skald (storyteller), Folklorist and Nomad Chief of the North.

Figure 5. Sea Otter, Nomad
Chief of the North. c. 1926.
Courtesy Kibbo Kift Foundation
/ Museum of London.



The year is 1928 and Sea Otter writes unto all of them that are of the Northfolk....

“Greetings.

“A night hike will take place on Saturday, February 18th, starting at Chinley. Hikers will assemble at Chinley Station, central platform waiting room at 10 pm Saturday. The route will be by Lower Crossing, Bole Hill and Tideswell, returning by Peak Forest. Two or three night hikes have been already held in the South, and it is quite time that the North showed itself to be not behind the South in hardihood.

“It has not been possible to arrange for shelter, so bring tents or be prepared to construct a wikiup when required. Kinsfolk should bring with them a blanket, refreshments for a wayside halt and breakfast.

“All hikers will wear Kin costume. Wearing of stockings that are not regulation colour is taboo. See that all packs are neat and workmanlike. No extras strapped outside.

“WOK formation will be adhered to for the majority of the route. A Wedge of Kinsfolk is a triangle headed by the campswarden and followed by two marching abreast, then three, then four. A WOK is completed by a solitary walker following two steps behind. A WOK should hike silently, keeping their eyes and ears open for every sight and sound. People who are jabbering do not notice much as they go along.

“To many this appears mere childishness—a form of play-acting. They say it savours of the “secret gangs” of boyhood. So it does, and perfectly rightly. The boy’s instinct, though not his mind, perceives the binding effect of forms and ceremonies used only by the elect. There is herein both a binding and a severing—a binding of Kinsfolk, on to the other—a severing from the outside world. I am sorry to have to put this into words at all, it is a matter that should be felt.

“Grith and Waes Hael. Sea Otter”.

Figure 6. A Wedge of Kindred.
c. 1930. Courtesy of the Kibbo
Kift Foundation.



Over eighty years later, on the moors above Swaledale, I attempt to recreate a WOK with a group of arts students. They are dressed in a myriad of colours, their clothes decorated with slogans and logos, their packs far from neat and workmanlike. There is much giggling, much assertion of individuality, a fair amount of rolling of eyes at the childishness of it all. They struggle to keep silence as they fall out of step, treading on each other’s heels, their strides of different lengths and their hearts not really in it.

They persevere dutifully with the exercise, but it is an effort, fitting uneasily with their contemporary consciousness and attitudes. Can it be anything otherwise? Can we be more than sceptical outsiders, reading the past only in the light of our own preoccupations? As Levinas asks, can we enter into a relationship with an Other, without immediately divesting it of its alterity? I have been thinking about this question as I follow archival clues, rumours, half remembered stories and imagined possibilities, as I walk in the footsteps of my Great Aunt.

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According to Henry James this attempt to enter into the consciousness of another time and another place is impossible and cursed by a fatal cheapness: “You may multiply the little facts that can be got from pictures and documents, relics and prints, as much as you like”, he wrote, “the real thing is almost impossible to do, and in its absence the whole effect is nought”.²¹ James was referring specifically to the historical novel, that attempt to write about *those* days instead of *these* days; to comprehend what is the ultimate foreign country; to project ourselves way back, to the olden days, a long time ago, to once upon a time, when they not only did things differently but also thought differently. “I mean the invention”, James continued, “the representation of the old consciousness, the soul, the sense, the horizon, the vision of individuals in whose minds half the things that make ours, that make the modern world, were non-existent”. We cannot write ourselves, think ourselves, imagine ourselves into an old consciousness. The attempt, James argues, requires an effortful *tour de force*—“and even then it’s all humbug”.²²

It’s all humbug. The accusation almost feels directed straight at me and my attempt to enter the consciousness of Joyce. Come back to the palpable present, demands James.

It is of course the little facts, the scraps, traces, relics, pictures and documents that I have been using to attempt to reconstruct and inhabit the consciousness of Joyce. And she is a very distant consciousness, in terms of time, gender, attitude, values, and faith. What is the modern apparatus, as James puts it, through which we look when we look back to those days from these days? Witnessing Joyce’s engagement with faith, with idealism and esoteric spiritualism, I have found myself more and more aware of the positions of rationalism, secularism and skepticism that are often typical of the contemporary Western mindset. From this perspective the missions to which Joyce attached herself—with creativity, with zeal, with her whole individual spirit—are manifestly out of step with time.

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The year is 1928. A group of Kinsfolk meet at Piltdown, Sussex. They have brought with them a replica model of the Piltdown skull, cast out of plaster in careful consultation with the Natural History Museum. Together they walk to Barkham Manor Farm where the original skull, celebrated as the fossilized remains of an early human, had been discovered in 1912. Four Kinsfolk carry the skull in a carved oak kist to the site of the diggings, while the other Kindred recite the Psalm of the Piltdown Man.

“Who was he that brought fire out of sticks”?

“Who was he that gave flight to an arrow”?

“Who was he that digged down, and digged deep, till the water gushed up; an everlasting well”?

“He that digged the deep well is forgotten, but the traveller of today stops to drink”.

“A man’s name shall go down into the darkness and be forgotten, but his life shall live amongst those who build where he built and live where he lived”.

Figure 7. Dedication of the Long Man Banner. Wilmington, Sussex. c. 1929. Courtesy of the Kibbo Kift Foundation.



The Kibbo Kift, and Joyce among them, made regular pilgrimages to sites of prehistory. They felt a presence at such locations, in the traces left in the earth and in the stones that had been shaped and handled; in the dolmen and cromlech; in the trackways and green roads. For the Kibbo Kift, such stones did indeed carry the history of what they had witnessed. In June 1930, Joyce participated in a Kibbo Kift “motor hike” that visited the Blowing Stone and White Horse at Uffington, camped on the edges of Avebury, carried a banner up Silbury Hill and finally squabbled with druids over access to Stonehenge:

“Stonehenge was in possession of the Ancient Order of Druids, whose stiff collars and P.T.U.’s showed at either end of their surplices. Their faces, talk and headgear were as depressing as their portable harmonium. The Kinsfolk, however, wokked to the Stone Circle and, forming trail, followed round until they stood behind the Slaughter Stone and the Arch Druid. His addressing showing no signs of sense of ending, the circuit was completed and the Kinsfolk left the Temple”.²³

The tracing of human habitation through the prehistory of place was taken by the Kibbo Kift as a means of connecting the contemporary to the past, an identification symbolized explicitly as The Psalm ended with the line: “I am the Piltdown Man, so art thou”. These were pilgrimages in the most evocative sense of the term, attempts to connect to the past and to construct identity through the land and across history.

Although the Piltdown Man was definitively proven to be a hoax in the 1950s, doubts about its existence were circulating in the 1920s. The Kibbo Kift were not alone in wanting to believe, but the ritual and meaning with which they invested

this belief were dramatic. It is easy to smirk with contemporary superiority, to point out that the Piltdown Man was a glorious grotesquery of human skull fused with the lower jaw of an orangutan and the fossil teeth of a chimpanzee. In seeking connections through the land and the prehistory of place the Kibbo Kift fell victim to a now notorious hoax. The Kibbo Kift were particularly susceptible to the hoax because they so desperately *wanted* it to be true; like Christian pilgrims venerating human relics, they wanted the sense of trans-historical lineage to place and land that the Piltdown Man suggested. There is an appropriate irony in this, and a reminder of danger of attempting too blindly to find the connections that we want—that serve our purposes—in the traces of the past.

The Kibbo Kift burned brightly during the 1920s before transforming themselves—in one of the strangest metamorphoses in history—from pacifist folk movement into the paramilitary Green Shirts, who in 1930s London demonstrated under placards declaring “No More Bloody War” and “Down with Banker-Fascism”, fighting running battles with both the fascist Black Shirts and communist Red Shirts. Within their eclectic mix of ideals—which included a cult-like leadership; an over-fondness for uniforms, rituals and insignia; similarities to German youth movements such as the Wandervogel; their environmental awareness; their participation in anti-war demonstrations; their staging of dramatic anti-banking protests and proposal for the introduction of a national dividend for all—the Kibbo Kift might trace lineage variously to fascism, the Green Party, the Woodcraft Folk, the Occupy Movement, and esoteric spiritualism. They sit outside the left wing/right wing binary which we often use to avoid having to think about things; from our point in history neither the Kibbo Kift nor indeed the Green Shirts sit easily within our contemporary consciousness.

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This politicisation drove out many members, including Joyce, who left in the 1930s to begin a new career as a writer, publishing works ranging from political pamphlets and missionary biographies for the London Missionary Society to historical novels for children. In her historical and biographical writing, Joyce attempted that same act of imaginative resurrection that I am attempting here: seeking to write a life back to life. She did her research, drawing upon first person reports, letters and other official documents along with published histories. At the same time, the form of narrative required her to invent characters, extrapolate dialogue, bend and telescope chronology and interweave research with imagination. She often filled the gaps with what she thought *might* have happened, drawing upon her sense of cause and effect, and her understanding of human psychology. These are gaps where the writer constructs what novelist Margaret Atwood terms “plausible whoppers”—that is narrative bridges that adhere to our expectations and understandings of what would be plausible according to character, time and place, but which are essentially fictions nonetheless.²⁴ This is what narrative requires when the archive inevitably fails, and in doing so operates within what Jerome Bruner describes as a particular mode of narrative knowing:

concerning relationships, intentionality and the particularities of experience located within time and place that convince through ‘verisimilitude’ and ‘goodness as a story.’²⁵ Considering the role of storytelling within history, Hayden White similarly points out the need for narrative devices: tropes, figures, schemata of thought, characterization, personification, emplotment and so on. Through such techniques events are made into stories that adhere to the real if not to the true.²⁶ It is through such devices that Joyce, as a writer, placed herself in minds and in places that were inherently Other to herself.

One example of such imaginative emplotment is *The Bricklayer and the King*, Joyce’s history of Henry Nott and the 18th century Congregationalist missionaries to Tahiti and the South Sea Islands. Published in 1938, her book begins with the King of Tahiti riding down to meet the missionaries when they first arrive on the island, imagery carefully selected to evoke the exoticism and strangeness of the place and its people: the King’s royal robe is a kirtle of bark-cloth, his jewels shark’s teeth and shells, his crown a bunch of feathers. Delayed in the description is the revelation that the King—and his wife at his side—rode men; they were carried on the back of servants who acted as their steeds. “They were young and full of high spirits”, writes Joyce in a dart of impossible empathy “and burning with curiosity to see the strangest thing that had ever happened on their island”.²⁷

In the archives of the London Missionary Society, held by the School of Oriental and African Studies, there is a pale brown box containing journals from missionaries to the South Sea Islands between 1796–1803.²⁸ Many are written on brittle paper, the ink faded brown with age, the text often illegible. It is these journals that Joyce used when she conducted her research and she describes two in particular, noting: “Between them we can build up that first missionary voyage almost as if we had been there”.²⁹ In searching for my Great Aunt Joyce I found myself doing something similar. Like her I am writing a true story of a real person, although in doing so I am interested in constructing a different kind of relationship between the consciousness of now and the consciousness of my subject—one that does not seek identification, but rather a more nuanced kind of entwined empathy.

The scene Joyce depicts, on that beach in Tahiti, is full of detail, all designed to imply this *is* how it was. The missionaries are dressed in tailcoats, high stock, knee-breeches and buckled shoes. It is, Joyce writes, a scene worth printing on the memory. From her perspective, the missionary encounter with the savage other was a brave and idealistic expansion of Christian enlightenment. By contrast, we read this history of Tahiti as an example of colonialism, seeing the subjugation of the islanders as a dehumanising act of othering. The missionaries seem as exotic and strange to us now as the native King appeared to them *then*. We read the *then* through the ideology of the *now*—which is of course a further act of othering. And so equally with my Great Aunt, a figure exotic and strange to me now, whom I cannot contemplate except through a kind of othering.

According to historian Harry Shaw this view that all historical fictions are “a mere projection of present day concerns (...) has become automatic”. It has become an orthodoxy, a default position that reflects James’s assertion that all attempts at historical representation are destined to fail. A consequence of

this perspective, continues Shaw, is that “there becomes no real history to deal with, only the present” with the past only ever conceived in terms of our own individual or collective ideology and desires.³⁰ Everything that occurred there and then, becomes instead about the here and now.³¹ The past becomes our contemporary because we force it to be, surrendering to our own self-fascination and unable to countenance its essential otherness. For Shaw there is the need for a counterbalance, the need to “hold on to the idea that history remained out there, confronting us in its otherness”.³² If we do not attempt this impossible task then we will forever be repeating a form of colonisation of the past, through which we claim it as our own property and part of our own identity. I wonder again if I can be anything but a tourist, a colonialist, a missionary in my excavation of the archive of Joyce Reason. In re-making her through the archive do I inevitably make her mine; and in making her mine do I commit a figurative murder of her as herself?

I am thinking again of Levinas’ challenge to consider how we can relate to the Other without immediately divesting it of its alterity. I recognize in myself a desire for ‘possession’, to have, to hold, to know and thereby to somehow own the story (and thereby also the life) of my Great Aunt. Levinas describes this desire to possess the Other as a “total negation” (even a murder).³³ Yet Levinas also asserts an absolute “responsibility for the Other”, which stems from the very otherness of the Other. In the asymmetrical relationship of the archive this becomes, I would argue, a responsibility for otherness as otherness. That is, the responsibility to keep it strange and exotic; to keep it always fluid and unknowable even in the act of loving and empathetic knowing.

Levinas’ *Totality and Infinity* presents two conceptual fields through which this responsibility for otherness might be demonstrated: the face-to-face encounter with the Other; and the conversation.³⁴ With neither of these does Levinas imply an actual face or an actual conversation, but rather the ethical meaning of such as relationship—to be face-to-face with the Other; to be in conversation with the Other. Both assert at once exchange and distance, separation and relatedness; to be in conversation with an Other entails recognition of the limits of both the self and the self’s ability to comprehend the Other. A conversation entails recognition and acceptance of difference and investment into our encounter with that difference. The images of the face-to-face encounter and the conversation can be used as conceptual—even metaphorical—frameworks to describe the encounter with the Other that occurs with the lives discovered through the archive. For me the objective then becomes the attempt to construct a reciprocal relationship between then and now—between Joyce and myself—that produces a kind of knowledge more akin to a friendship than ownership; more like a conversation than a monologue.

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During a research conference on Cultures of Memory in 2013 I had the privilege to meet Ross Hemera, an artist and Professor of Māori Art and Design at Massey

University, New Zealand, whose work expresses the cultural values and beliefs of the Ngāi Tahu Māori people. He introduced me to the Māori word ‘whakapapa’, which means both genealogy and more than genealogy. ‘Papa’ is anything broad, flat and hard such as a flat rock, a slab or a board. ‘Whakapapa’ is to place in layers, one upon another. Whakapapa includes not only the layers of family relations but also the spiritual, mythological and human stories that accompany our ancestral history. Hemera described how in Māori culture this ancestral history is connected to objects (taonga) that carry cultural meaning precisely because they are genealogically connected to people. Since this encounter I’ve been curious about the extent, appropriateness and usefulness of the concept of whakapapa to my own investigation of Joyce’s archive—which engages with genealogy through story, through place and through the material objects of the archive.

The cultural challenge of transliterating a Māori concept to my own discourses within a Western paradigm is of course huge—to do so runs the risk of accusations of at best cultural naïveté or at worst colonial appropriation. On the other hand *not* to enter into dialogue with Māori concepts is similarly problematic, for such exclusion suggests they are in some sense entirely Other and unintelligible, that they must always be outside a global conversation.

In the context of the archive of Joyce I am also conscious that it was perhaps some kind of intergenerational whakapapa that the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift were evoking as they sought to find identity within their pilgrimages to prehistorical remains and sites. Within the human overlay of history upon the English landscape; finding their sense of self within quasi-mythical stories of England’s past. In a European context this often inspires fears and concerns of folk movements that slide too easily into nationalist or ethnic structures. Within this framework the Kibbo Kift’s folly at Piltdown Farm, the ancestral worship of a monstrous fake, becomes at once ironically appropriate and also a powerful warning. Indeed, perhaps within the English/European context processes of urbanisation, generational fragmentation and post-colonialism mean we are at once alienated from and cautious of situating identity too strongly within land or history.

Such a perspective, however, feels like a negation of the possibilities of reconfiguring the relationship with the lives of Others that we find within the archive. Another route might be to parallel the concept of whakapapa with what might seem cognate ideas within Western thought. Here we might consider Derrida’s concept of “hauntology”, a typically elusive idea that articulates the unfixing of historical time. Colin Davis discusses hauntology in terms of the being and presence of “the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive”. Davis continues to describe hauntology as an ethical turn in engaging with a historical Otherness that “is not comprehensible within our available intellectual frameworks, but whose otherness we are responsible for preserving”.³⁵ In the work of resurrection – in the archival work of reconstructing the life of an Other—this preservation of otherness feels both a methodological and ethical way of counteracting the desire for the possession and negation of the Other.

There is a conceptual meeting point here: between the Māori evocation of *whakapapa*, Lippard's artistic notion of overlay in the juxtaposition in space of unlike realities and Susan Griffin's *Chorus of Stones*; between hauntology, ghost stories and the face-to-face encounter with otherness.³⁶ Without conflating the differences between these concepts I am drawn to them as divergent iterations of intersubjective relationships: whether between people and places; I and other; objects and subjectivities; between present and past consciousness. Each also marks an attitude, a kind of perception, with which to approach the encounter with the personal, historical, archival and ancestral past. This can be described as an attitude of participatory perception, that is not a singular or one-directional relationship (subject to object) but one in which we are *infected* and *touched* by the act of perception.

In engaging with the archive of my Great Aunt, the idea of a participatory perception seems to accurately describe the affective and empathetic qualities of the objects, stories and memories that I encountered. This is the archive as lived, as a hauntological experience in which the unfixing of time results in the archivist becoming possessed by the archive. It is the archive as a conversation or face-to-face encounter with an Other, in which there is a relational exchange, a going out and reaching between the archive and the archival researcher. Within this process the archivist is not effaced, but rather becomes a player within an overt performance of cultural memory. In the intersubjective exchange between the archive and the archivist, both construct each other: the archive makes us, just as much as we make the archive.

Figure 8. Joyce Reason. From Reason family photograph album. c.1901-1904. Author's own collection.



Endnotes

1. Simon Coleman and John Eade (Eds). *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion*. (London: Routledge 2004), 5.
2. In the United Kingdom ‘blue plaques’ are signs erected to commemorate a famous person who was born, lived or died in that location. There is no blue plaque on Joyce’s former home.
3. *Who do you think you are?* is a UK genealogy documentary series, featuring celebrities tracing their family trees, broadcast on BBC since 2004.
4. Susan Griffin, *A Chorus of Stones: The Private Life of War* (New York: Doubleday 1992), 88-89.
5. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1995), 95.
6. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 1969), 38.
7. Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2008), 30.
8. Hella Beloff, “Immortality Work: Photographs as Memento Mori”. In *Remember Me: Constructing Immortality*, edited by Margaret Mitchell (New York: Routledge 2011), 179-192.
9. R. McGrath, cited in Beloff 2011, 179.
10. Andrew Mearns, “The Bitter Cry of Outcast London” (1883), cited in Nigel Scotland, *Squires in the Slums: Settlements and Missions in Late Victorian London* (London: IB Tauris 2007), 7.
11. Will Reason quoted in *The Guardian*, ‘Christianity and Labour’, 9. Jul 9, 1908.
12. Carolyn Steedman, “The Space of Memory”, *History of the Human Sciences*, XI/4 (1998). 67.
13. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge 1993), 146-7.
14. Joyce Reason, “A Lone Woman’s Hike”. *Hiker and Camper* 1 (1931), 36-8.
15. Lucy R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (New York: The New Press 1983), 1.
16. Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press 1978).
17. Coleman and Eade. *Reframing Pilgrimage*. 2.
18. Less a mountain than a plateau, Kinderscout is the highest point in the Peak District. It has a particularly rich position in the history of walking given its proximity to nearby cities such as Manchester and Sheffield and as the scene of the mass trespass of 1932 demanding greater public access to open country.
19. For further discussion of the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift, particularly within their political context, see Mark Drakeford *Social Movements and Their Supporters: The Green Shirts in England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 1997), Annabella Pollen, *The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift: Intellectual Barbarians* (London: Donlon Books 2015) and also the unpublished thesis Josef Craven “Redskins in Epping Forest:

John Hargrave, *The Kibbo Kift and the Woodcraft Experience* (University College London 1998).

²⁰ All quotations and references to the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift taken from unpublished material held at the London School of Economic Archive running to over 200 boxes (collection YMA/KK). In relation to Joyce Reason (as Sea Otter) this includes various articles for official Kindred publications (such as *Broadsheet*), playscripts, poems, manifestos and a series of weekly newsletters signed as ‘Nomad Chief of the North’ over a period of several years.

²¹ Henry James, in P. N. Furbank “On the Historical Novel”. *Raritan* 23:3 (2004), 94.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ “Motor Hike to Stonehenge”. *Broadsheet* 54. July-August 1930.

²⁴ Margaret Atwood, “In Search of Alias Grace: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction”. *The American Historical Review* 103:5 (1998), 1503.

²⁵ Jerome Bruner, *Active Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press 1986), 11-12.

²⁶ Hayden White, “Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality” *Rethinking History* 9:2/3 (2005), 147-157.

²⁷ Joyce Reason, *The Bricklayer and the King* (London: Eagle Books 1938).

²⁸ LMS collection 4.3. Box 1.

²⁹ Joyce Reason, *The Story of the Duff*. (London: Livingstone Press 1946).

³⁰ Harry E. Shaw, “Is There a Problem with Historical Fiction”. *Rethinking History* 9:2/3 (2005), 178.

³¹ For example Robertson Davies remarks, “we all belong to our own time, and there is nothing whatever that we can do to escape from it. Whatever we write will be contemporary, even if we attempt a novel set in a past age”. Cited in Atwood 1998, 1504.

³² Shaw 2005, 179.

³³ Levinas, 194-8.

³⁴ See for example Levinas, 39-40. For a full discussion of Levinas’ ethics see Perpich, 2008.

³⁵ Colin Davis, “État Présent: Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms”. *French Studies*. 59:3 (2005), 373-79.

³⁶ I am also tempted to add here the notion of an “intergenerational habitus”, a development of Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ – that is, our disposition or world view, our proclivity to think and do in the particular way in which we think and do – that Brigit Fowler describes as “the product of your family’s experience over generations”. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans Richard Nice. (London: Routledge 1984) and Brigit Fowler, “Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological theory of culture” Variant 8. 1999.

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