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ARTICLE

Arms and the Woman: The Public Intellectual in Zoe Lambert's *The War Tour*

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This article explores Zoe Lambert's short story collection, *The War Tour* (2008), in relation to the debates surrounding the public intellectual and the literary response to the War on Terror. It makes a claim for Lambert's collection to be considered not only as the work of a public intellectual but that it also contests what it means to be an intellectual at a time of historical crisis. In dwelling upon real-life figures such as the revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg and the physicist Lise Meitner, Lambert also reflects upon her own position as a supporter of the Stop the War Coalition. The relationship to the public sphere is complicated by Lambert's gender, and of the women that she writes about; a complication which not only unsettles the definition of a public intellectual but is also articulated through the oblique strategies of the short story collection.

Keywords: Zoe Lambert; public intellectual; Stop the War; Lise Meitner; Rosa Luxemburg

Zoe Lambert's *The War Tour* (2011), shortlisted for the 2012 Edge Hill Prize, is a collection of fifteen short stories thematically linked around the subject of war. As Lambert has written, there were two starting-points for the book. One was the UK's 'treatment of asylum seekers […] and the Kafkaesque and dehumanising asylum process'; the other was disaffection: 'Back in 2003 there was a moment of public outrage at Iraq and a moment when we thought it does concern us, but then public apathy seemed to settle in again' (Lambert 2012). If *The War Tour* is a continuation of Lambert's campaign work on behalf of political refugees, it could also be considered a riposte to the insularity and disconnection that emerged following the perceived failure of the Stop the War Coalition. In that sense, Lambert assumes some of the contrarian qualities ascribed by Edward Said to the intellectual, in particular, a risky

commitment to universalism: 'Universality means taking a risk in order to go beyond the easy certainties provided us by our background, language, nationality, which so often shields us from the reality of others' (Said 1994: xii).

Although Lambert regards the events of 2003 as a political watershed that led eventually to the writing of her collection, this article places her fiction within the historical context of the public intellectual: from its emergence in the late 1980s to its apparent diminishing in the twenty-first century. In comparing Lambert's work with that of novelists such as Ian McEwan, I argue that the short story form is integral to the moral and ethical issues that her writing explores. As Martin Randall argues, the events and legacy of 9/11 have been most effectively represented 'in other, more mixed forms': 'discursive non-fiction, film/poems, graphic novels, opera and fine art' (Randall 2011: 15). Crucially, however, he omits the short story from this list.

Lambert and the Public Intellectual

The term 'public intellectual' was coined in the US towards the end of the 1980s during the so-called culture wars that resulted in such books as Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987). As Helen Small suggests, the concept can be understood as 'a defensive manifestation' (Small 2002: 2), an attempt to counteract the charge of conservative critics such as Bloom and to re-assert the value of intellectual thought to a wider society outside of academia. The increasingly common usage of 'public intellectual' by the start of the twenty-first century paradoxically describes academia's separation from the civic society to which the publically employed intellectual – the university professor – ostensibly communicates. As Said claims, advocating for the amateurism of the intellectual, 'proper, professional behaviour' means in effect 'making yourself marketable and above all presentable, hence uncontroversial and unpolitical and "objective"' (Said 1994: 55).

Such a paradox echoes Zygmunt Bauman's distinction between two historical phases of intellectual life: the modern, in which the intellectual's unique access to knowledge allows him/her to legislate 'in controversies of opinion', and the postmodern, in which the legislative role is contested by competing areas of knowledge so that the intellectual's chief function becomes one of interpretation: 'translating statements, made within one communally based tradition, so that they can be

understood within the system of knowledge based on another tradition' (Bauman 1987: 4–5). In Bauman's schema, the public intellectual can aid communication and amelioration of the social order, but the radical reformism espoused by the earlier legislative role is largely abandoned. The instrumental logic in which the public intellectual operates has been further entrenched by the penetration of managerial practices into the academy so that, as Bruce Macfarlane has recently observed, 'The realities of casualization and the pressures of performativity have shaped a more inward-looking "academic profession"' (Macfarlane 2015).

Drawing on Bauman's ideas, Frank Furedi has argued that the decline of British intellectual life is due to a series of convergences: the professionalization of academia, a facile emphasis upon inclusivity and participation, and a diminishing of cultural values. The result, Furedi contends, is not only the discrediting of the intellectual but also the inculcation of an 'anti-democratic and patronizing underpinning of contemporary education and cultural politics' by a newly philistine elite, in which the public is treated 'like children that need to be protected from more disturbing cultural and intellectual challenges' (Furedi 2004: 23). While Furedi criticises the corrosive effects of public policy, he also condemns 'the compliance of the world of art and education with a philistine social engineering agenda' (Furedi 2004: 156). Despite the nature of his lament, Furedi closes his account by charging those who would seek to be intellectuals with the need of 'reclaiming the autonomy for which their predecessors fought in previous times':

> Such autonomy can best be constructed by engaging with the public's own aspiration to be taken seriously, and helping to cultivate that aspiration. In an era of the infantilization of culture, treating people as grown-ups has become one of the principal duties of the humanist intellectual. (Furedi 2004: 156)

How to approach this task has been partially addressed by Stefan Collini's attempt to redefine the intellectual as 'ordinary':

> In the sense that they are indeed part of the cultural landscape of all complex societies; ordinary in the sense that it is neither unthinkable nor shocking

> to recognize that the noun 'intellectual' might regularly be applied to some of one's friends or one's colleagues or even, in some circumstances, oneself; and, above all, ordinary in the sense that carrying on the activities characteristic of intellectuals should not be seen as exceptionally heroic or exceptionally difficult or exceptionally glamorous. (Collini 2002: 222)

In this reinterpretation, Collini is as much against the anti-intellectualism of journalistic commentators as the exceptionalism ascribed by Said to the intellectual: 'an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public' (Said 1994: 9). Although this 'de-Othering' of the intellectual is advantageous for Lambert's critical stance, whilst she in turn exposes the Othering of exiles and refugees, she retains the amateur ethos proposed by Said:

> Intellectuals are individuals with a vocation for the art of representing, whether that is talking, writing, teaching, appearing on television. And that vocation is important to the extent that it is publically recognizable and involves both commitment and risk, boldness and vulnerability. (Said 1994: 10)

Said's description speaks directly to both the writer and the creative process, but even more so to the short-story writer where, due to the constraints imposed by the vagaries of the publishing industry, 'commitment and risk, boldness and vulnerability' are almost inherent qualities. Lambert's collection not only proposes her as an intellectual as conceived by Collini and Said but it also, in stories about Rosa Luxemburg and Lise Meitner, reflects upon what it means to be an intellectual at historical crisis-points.

For her part, Lambert has operated both in and out of the academy. Currently a lecturer in creative writing at Lancaster University, she has also taught at the University of Bolton, Edge Hill University and Manchester Metropolitan University, where she completed her PhD in 2010. She has also worked as a freelance teacher, offering both workshops and online courses on short fiction, and as a campaigner

for the rights of refugees. Consequently, despite her academic background, Lambert does not fit exclusively into the institutional role of the public intellectual but instead, like others with experience of being associate staff, sits awkwardly with the university hierarchy. In that sense, she not only shares the ordinariness of the intellectual, as described by Collini, but also common characteristics with other members of the precariat. Yet, these identifications are further accentuated by her status as a woman: the dichotomous position of the female intellectual in which, as Mary Evans has argued, 'the Enlightenment "settlement" [...] gave to women (as female human beings) and to the female (as a form of subjectivity) a place in the development of the "interiority" of the public mind, but that that place was one in which the female and the feminine was essentially a position of defence and/or replication' (Evans 2009: 33). This marginalisation of the female intellectual, by incorporation into the male-led practices of the academy, not only disturbs Collini's attempt to erase the exceptionalism of the intellectual – since, by dint of her physical and psychological being, the female intellectual is exceptional – but also the universal humanism to which Said appeals.

Consequently, Lambert's ambiguous relationship towards the academy, fractured along lines of vocation and employment, political commitment and above all gender, and hence towards her role as a public intellectual associates her with generations of other women writers, most famously Virginia Woolf, for whom the male-dominated institution of education was an impediment. Lambert's liminal status can be equated with the women that Gillian Rose finds beyond 'the boundary wall of the city of Athens' (Rose 1996: 35): Antigone, her sister Ismene and the wife of Phocion. Rose associates these 'mourning women' not with an act of transgression but a renewal of the polis:

> Mourning draws on transcendent but representable justice, which makes the suffering of immediate experience visible and speakable. When completed, mourning returns the soul to the city, renewed and reinvigorated for participation, ready to take on the difficulties and injustices of the city. (Rose 1996: 36)

Lambert's fiction also assumes a mournful rather than a melancholic function as a result of her relationship to the academy. Instead of the inward-looking that has characterised much post-9/11 literature and academic institutional practice, the trajectory of Lambert's collection is to work outwards from the specific to the universal, and then back again across geographical and world-historical terrains. In this sense, Lambert carves out for herself an intellectual role dissimilar to her academic and literary contemporaries.

Lambert and the Literature of Terror

As Randall has argued, novels written in response to the aftermath of 9/11, such as Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) and Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), are marked by what he terms 'a pronounced timidity' (Randall 2011: 135); a failure, on the one hand, to assume the mantle of the nineteenth-century novelist as a moral and political sage, and on the other hand, to move beyond the melancholic and traumatised mentality of the first weeks after the terrorist attacks. As DeLillo wrote in December 2001:

> Today, again, the world narrative belongs to terrorists. But the primary target of the men who attacked the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre was not the global economy. It was America that drew their fury. It was the high gloss of our modernity. It was the thrust of our technology. It was our perceived godlessness. It was the blunt force of our foreign policy. It was the power of American culture to penetrate every wall, home, life and mind.
>
> Terror's response is a narrative that has been developing over years, only now becoming inescapable. It is our lives and minds that are occupied now. This catastrophic event changes the way we think and act, moment to moment, week to week, for unknown weeks and months to come, and steely years. Our world, parts of our world, have crumbled into theirs, which means we are living in a place of danger and rage. (DeLillo 2001)

The binary logic of DeLillo's article, in which he speaks for all Americans in contrast to the terrorists whose thinking he claims to understand, is replicated in McEwan's immediate response to the events of 9/11: 'Our way of life, centralised and machine-

dependent, has made us frail. Our civilisation, it suddenly seemed, our way of life, is easy to wreck when there are sufficient resources and cruel intent' (McEwan 2001). Although such comments can be partially understood by the sheer immediacy of the events, the fact remains they continue to underwrite novels written after the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the global protests, and the unpicking of the British and US governments' decision to invade without a further UN mandate. The questionability of their politics aside, writers such as DeLillo and McEwan can be seen, via their exaggerated references to 'our world' and 'our civilisation', as attempting to claim the role of public intellectual.

In seeking to perform one of the functions ascribed to the intellectual by Bauman, of interpreting the world for an audience of readers from the perspective of a secular, humanist, Western art, the contemporary literature of terror becomes enmeshed in the endless mediations of 9/11: its impossibility to be brought to book within a single narrative account. As Randall remarks, in terms that echo the debates that underpin DeLillo's earlier *Mao II* (1991), 'In the "society of the spectacle", where disturbing images are quickly and consistently accommodated into the crowded sequences of mediated reality, both the artist and the terrorist are confronted with the central problem of how their "art" or "act" can, however briefly, grab an audience's attention' (Randall 2011: 95). This dilemma can help to explain – if not excuse – the alleged description of avant-garde composer, Karlheinz Stockhausen, that 9/11 was 'the greatest work of art that has ever existed' (quoted Hänggi 2011). As the opprobrium levelled on Stockhausen reveals, such comments almost inevitably backfire on the artist, in suggesting that s/he is morally complicit with the act of the terrorist, but they also indicate the difficulty experienced by the intellectual in seeking to transcend the mediated spectacle of violence and outrage and, at the same time, claim the equally outrageous position of the lone figure who resists orthodoxy and speaks truth to power. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that novelists such as Martin Amis, while looking to assume the unorthodox role of the intellectual, did so by reclaiming the mythical hero of the 'intransigently and unenlargeably individual' writer against 'the lonely crowd' of militant Islamists (Amis 2002), even though such a position meant they were, in effect, also siding with the British and US administrations.

This double-bind can be seen at work in McEwan's *Saturday* set on 15 February 2003, the date on which coordinated mass demonstrations against the imminent invasion of Iraq were held across the world, and during which over a million people marched through the streets of London. In invoking other city-texts set on a single day, most notably Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), McEwan focuses his narrative around the character of Henry Perowne, a neurosurgeon who has also operated in Iraq. The day's political events are mostly mediated to Perowne via the mass media; their significance dependent upon their relative position within the changing headlines. Repeatedly, Perowne experiences the city as deserted, due to the flow of people away from its commercial to its political centres, except when his route to work is diverted by the traffic police; a diversion that leads indirectly to the car accident that, in turn, shapes the final part of the narrative. Perowne, then, is less of a witness more an onlooker to world-historical events; a detached perspective mediated by the novel's shifts into free indirect speech.

This story-telling strategy is arguably key to the novel. Encouraged by his student daughter, Perowne reads Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1877), two novels that famously make extensive use of free indirect narration and interior monologue. Perowne, though, is 'unmoved' by 'these sophisticated fairy stories': 'The details were apt and convincing enough, but surely not so very difficult to marshal if you were halfway observant and had the patience to write them all down' (McEwan 2006: 67). Such a judgement, like his subsequent failure to recognise the protestor's 'reference to Shakespeare's St Crispin's Day speech' (McEwan 2006: 125), would seem to point to Perowne's lack of sensibility and cultural acumen. However, when the reader moves onto Perowne's incomprehension at the magical realists, McEwan undercuts this apparent criticism by implicating himself via an allusion to *The Child in Time* (1987): 'One visionary saw through a pub window his parents as they had been some weeks after his conception, discussing the possibility of aborting him' (McEwan 2006: 67). The anxiety of this metafictional moment implies that, for all of Perowne's prosaic intellect, McEwan's real unease is with his former artistic self. Instead, it is to Flaubert and Tolstoy, writers who were able to move between the domestic and the political via a surety 'of representing a

recognisable physical reality' (67), whom McEwan aspires. Consequently, he employs their techniques of free indirect narration so as to render Perowne's thoughts but baulks at the more experimental strategies of modernist successors such as Woolf. Instead, in McEwan's tendency to construct a binary opposition between the stolid, hard-working doctor, who cares for others not through empathy but hard-won knowledge and practical skill, and the lonely crowd of well-meaning but futile protestors, he equates the experimental writer with the latter. To be a public intellectual for McEwan is, arguably, to side with the former, thereby positioning the intellectual as an individualist whose authority arises from his/her authentic experience, but whose pragmatism effectively sides with the government: 'The one thing Perowne thinks he knows about this war is that it's going to happen. With or without the UN' (McEwan 2006: 62). The ambivalence that McEwan ascribes to his protagonist is as much a comment on his own intellectual position as it is on Perwone's typicality as a character.

For the fantasy writer China Miéville, whose own claims to being a public intellectual are embodied in the essay *London's Overthrow* (2012) and the more recent history *October* (2017), *Saturday* represented a 'paradigmatic moment in the social crisis of litfic':

> It seemed to me that *Saturday* quite bolshily said, "OK, you accuse us of a neurotic obsession with insularity and a certain milieu. I'm going to take the most extraordinary political event that has happened in Britain for however many years and I am going to *doggedly* interiorise it and depoliticise it with a certain type of limpid prose" [...] It was a combative novel that met that sense of there being a crisis and de-crisised it through its absolute fidelity to a set of generic tropes. (Miéville 2011)

Although Miéville's critique has in turn been criticised by other genre practitioners (Priest 2011), *Saturday* can be said to be representative of the ideological confusion that Randall finds prevalent within other post-9/11 fictions, and which can be related to the formal constraints of literary realism within the novel. Such failings also contribute to *Saturday*'s presentation of the Stop the War Coalition as a useless

gesture, a view strongly contested in Amir Amirani's recent documentary *We Are Many* (2014). Instead, as with Amirani's interpolation of interviews with contemporaneous film footage, music and statistical data, Lambert's *The War Tour* offers a mixed approach out of this impasse.

Reading *The War Tour*

Lambert's short story collection is thematically linked around the subject of war. Consequently, it qualifies to be read as either a short story cycle or short story sequence, insofar as each successive story refines and deepens the presiding theme. As a whole, however, it lacks the defined time period, setting and recurrent characters of such classic cycles as Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914). As Lambert has herself acknowledged, 'some of the stories are connected through being set in Salford and Manchester on the same day' (Ryan 2012), but these stories, for example 'From Kandahar' and 'Lebensborn', do not by themselves resolve the collection into one single totalising work. Although when read in conjunction with one another, the stories appear to be in dialogue, since both stories feature a brief but unwitting encounter between their respective protagonists, the lack of any overdetermined meaning from this connection means that they can also be read separately. Consequently, although war acts as the focal-point for the collection, Lambert does not permit her reader the luxury of reading for, and settling into, an overarching coherence that makes sense of the individual stories. Instead, in their irresolution, it is almost as if the stories represent fractures radiating from a central but undefined tragedy or trauma.

Despite what might be taken as the collection's melancholic incompleteness (and it is significant that Lambert cites Tim O'Brien, author of the equally melancholic Vietnam text, *The Things They Carried* (1990), as an influence), the arrangement of the stories is arguably strategic. The opening story, discussed below, acts as a way into the collection by addressing the reader in the second person, and inviting him/her to contemplate the narrative about war, loss and dispersal that they are told. The following story, the aforementioned 'From Kandahar', shifts between a squaddie's return home to Manchester and his memories of serving in Afghanistan. The

Mancunian setting of the fourth story, 'Lebensborn', complements 'From Kandahar' and, as discussed above, suggests an oblique unity with the earlier story. However, as the title indicates, the story also shifts between contemporary Manchester and the final years of World War Two, the period of the story-within-a-story of the opening tale. In-between these stories, the third tale, 'Turbofolk', offers a train-ride through the former Yugoslavia, a setting and cast of characters that appear to intersect with the title story, the seventh story in the collection and which is discussed below. Between those stories lie a vignette, 'My Sangar', and a longer story, 'Her Blue Shadow', which returns to the landscape of Afghanistan of the second story, but is told from the perspective of a family caught up in the fighting. The eighth story, '33 Bullets', focuses upon the attempts of an Iranian refugee to avoid deportation from the UK.

The ninth story, 'The Spartacist League', is placed more or less in the middle of the collection and is the first of the stories to be set exclusively in the past, in the immediate wake of World War One. The tenth story, 'The Breakfast She Had', returns to contemporary Manchester to focus upon a child refugee. 'Down Duchy Road', the eleventh story, moves only slightly geographically to Salford but, temporally, switches to the period just after World War Two to describe the memories of an American war bride. The twelfth story, 'When the Truck Came', crosses to the borders of Rwanda to concentrate upon the experiences of a child soldier. 'Crystal Night', the thirteenth story (discussed in more detail below), turns to the topic of nuclear research in World War Two. The final stories, 'Our Backs to the Fort' and 'We'll Meet Again', focus respectively on the main couple from the title story, now touring the site of the Battle of Austerlitz, and the residents of an old people's home in Salford.

From what can be gained from this brief overview of the content is that the collection zig-zags both between and within stories to explore different time-zones, primarily from the end of World War Two to the present day, and different geographies, but primarily tracing the movements of people between the local community of Manchester and sites in the US, Europe, Afghanistan and the Middle East. Not only does the collection seek to find links between past and present, the local and the

global, it also takes the figure of the title story to 'tour', or to trace, the diasporic effects of historical and contemporary conflict. This, however, is not a guided tour. Due to the structure of the short story collection, there is not an overarching third-person narrator, but rather a mixture of first-person voices and subjective viewpoints. As a result, it resembles more the unplanned and improvised touring of the backpackers who feature in the title story, 'Turbofolk' and 'Our Backs to the Fort'. Yet there is also a compulsion to relate the narratives that echoes the forced and restricted movements of the many characters who, unlike the tourists, are either the victims or defenders of military conflict. Consequently, the question of freedom – of what Lambert is permitted to explore and relate as an imaginative writer as well as the more self-evident themes of confinement, detention, persecution, forced labour, duty and complicity – is also central to the collection's exploration of war. Since the formal compression also invites multiple responses to its material, I will, in concert with my overall approach of the public intellectual, focus on two of the stories, 'The Spartacist League' and 'Crystal Night'. However, to understand Lambert's motivations in placing these historical tales within predominantly contemporary settings, we need to consider Lambert's own reflections upon the writing process of the collection.

Writing *The War Tour*

As Lambert acknowledges, part of her inspiration was her sense of dismay at the political apathy that novels such as *Saturday* fed into. This frustration is dramatized in the opening story to the collection, 'These Words are No More Than a Story About a Woman on a Bus'. The anonymous passenger is unable to follow or to comprehend the story that the old woman, a refugee from Lithuania at the time of the Russian reoccupation in 1944, tells him being more concerned with his own sense of property and propriety, his own 'personal space' (Lambert 2011: 2). Lambert, though, also implicates her role as author within the story. The passenger's anxiety, 'what to do with this story, or what to say to Elena' (8), echoes Lambert's own position: 'While I was writing the book, I was continually beset by doubt. What do I know about war? What gives me the right to write these stories?' (Lambert 2012). What, indeed, is Lambert 'to do with this story' except, like her internal narrator, to retell it? As she

further comments: 'But at the same time I was compelled to write it' (Lambert 2012). Such a sense of compulsion invokes not only an obligation to a higher ethical authority but also to a Romantic feeling of inspiration: 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' (Wordsworth 1998: 358). Whereas other post-9/11 writers associate such emotionalism with the de-individuated crowds of protestors and fanatics alike, Lambert regards it as demarcating the limits of her success as a writer: 'But can you ever write outside of your own political moment? The book could never be the ideal book I wanted it to be; it was destined to be a failed project' (Bray 2012). Unlike McEwan's evocation of a transcendent humanism towards the end of *Saturday*, when Perowne's daughter calms the violent Baxter with a recitation of Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' (1867), Lambert sees herself as always writing through a nexus of ideological, historical and political contexts. It is this sense of embedding that Lambert brings most powerfully to her collection. As she records in the accompanying notes: 'I have come to believe that in connecting these silences and rendering them vocal, fiction can reveal our own implication in such acts of silencing, either in our present position or via our cultural and national histories' (Lambert 2011: 200). So, in the opening story, the inability of the passenger to make sense of the tale he has been told, and to understand the mixed feelings that it has aroused, describe not only Lambert's ethical dilemma but also the internal contradictions through which her writing operates.

Lambert's self-awareness means that her fiction remains poised between its emotional content and her need for clarity. This ambition not only counters the binary logic of other post-9/11 writers but also calls into question again her authorial role. She acknowledges the thin line between the contemplation of war and its pornography: 'To write about the effects and causes of war, it is necessary to become a "war tour" voyeur, and to adopt others' texts and histories, some of which were the histories of marginalised and disempowered groups' (Lambert 2011: 199). The title-story can be read as an ironic reflection on this dichotomy where the would-be journalist, Yvonne, has the vague semblance of a writing project that involves interviewing people whilst travelling across the historical territory of Mittel Europa. Her boyfriend

James, already disgusted at the heritage industry built around Sarajevo, upbraids Yvonne for her ignorance: 'You don't know what you're talking about. You don't know the first thing about war' (73). However, although James may be more knowledgeable, he too lacks insight and conceals his blindness with 'words like "discourse" and "ideology"' (69). Lambert, who acknowledges her reading of critical theory in the notes where she quotes from Said, Benita Parry and Gayatri Spivak, offsets the perspectives of both James and Yvonne with that of Aida – a character briefly introduced earlier in the collection – who conducts Yvonne on her own tour of war-sites: the places where her family and neighbours sheltered during the Bosnian conflict. Yet Lambert does not slip into the false logic of authenticity: Aida's childhood memories are recalled in broken fragments ('a lot of it is a blur' (74)); their incompleteness signalling the impossibility of transcribing the totality of Aida's experience. By contrast, in writing the collection, Lambert 'didn't do many interviews or "use" real people's stories' because she 'didn't feel comfortable doing that.' Instead, working from 'texts, letters, documents and quotations', 'the impossibility of research and writing about this subject ended up being dramatized in the stories themselves' (Ryan 2012). If both James and Yvonne are ironic portrayals of the authorial figure, Aida's fractured memories and enigmatic presence ('*were you in the war?* I usually say I wasn't' (Lambert 2011: 74)) embody a crypt of half-concealed revelations. Yet, at the same time, the narrative works against this melancholic closure. Yvonne searches for her camera, 'amidst the streets and houses' where 'there were other cemeteries, lit like this one', but is disturbed by 'a loudspeaker tied to a lamppost': 'The call to prayers' (80). This burial ground is set into historical and cultural fault-lines that instead crack open the present moment and resonate with more immediate conflicts.

The mosaic-like nature of Lambert's collection is drawn to 'the small fragments of the large fresco' (Hafez 2008: 38) that not only tends to be the proper business of the novel but which can also be seen as the ambition of novelists such as McEwan aping their nineteenth-century predecessors. Instead, as Lambert has argued, the short story 'is the form that doesn't claim to give you the whole history or grand narrative' (Vowler) whilst she herself 'likes that outsider, or outside of the mainstream, status' (Ryan 2012). While this lack of narrative coherence results in 'a lot of the

meaning-making' being passed 'over to the reader' (Vowler), the production of the stories was also more random: 'the collection grew bit by bit; each story seemed to "spawn" a couple more stories' so that Lambert did not 'always know what the images might "mean"' (Vowler). The rhizomatic growth of the collection over a period of six years not only indicates Lambert's unease with the authorial role, 'Sometimes I wish people would remember "The Death of the Author"' (Bray 2012), but also the spontaneity of her imagination towards photographs, news stories, travel locations and other printed materials. By Lambert's admission, 'the process was piecemeal, very organic [...] Not very well planned' (Shukla 2012), but driven by a need to immerse herself: 'I am still left with the worry that I didn't do enough research; that I didn't dig deep enough' (Vowler).

This immersion meant that Lambert developed clear designs for the finished collection. Initially inspired by Ali Smith's *Hotel World* (2001), she 'tried to connect the stories around a fire at an airport' but 'that felt too contrived'. Instead, the final arrangement in which, as discussed above, there is 'no obvious [...] structure' (Ryan 2012), retains not only the process of its composition, with stories moving across geographical regions or backwards and forwards in time, but also Lambert's conviction that the short story 'is a partial form' in which the reader is inveigled into the role of an uncertain listener 'overhearing these stories [...] not sure what to do' (Ryan 2012). The self-consciousness here, such that the bus passenger from the opening story now embodies versions both of the writer and the reader, contrasts with the earlier appearances of some of these stories, first as part of a predominantly lyrical sequence in *Ellipsis 2* (Comma, 2006), and then in Lambert's PhD thesis written with the more didactic purpose of situating women's domestic fiction within contexts of war, persecution and violence. Instead, the calculated open-endedness of Lambert's final text means that the reader must pay especial attention to the order in which the stories appear.

Luxemburg, Meitner, Lambert

Of particular note are the two historically-set stories, 'The Spartacist League' and 'Crystal Night', the former being placed exactly midway into the collection. In one sense, it is the portal through which the reader must pass from the first to the second

half of the book; in another sense, it is the partition that both severs and unites the two halves. And in that sense, 'The Spartacist League' echoes the Mittel-European fractures upon which other stories, such as 'Turbofolk' and 'The War Tour', turn as well as dramatizing the political chaos of the early Weimar Republic that paved the way for the anti-democratic forces at work in the chronologically later 'Crystal Night'. If elsewhere, in the writing of the collection, Lambert displaces her role as author for a more archival function, in these stories she cedes her authority to the two protagonists, Rosa Luxemburg and Lisa Meitner, women who also represent two versions of the intellectual.

Lambert's attraction to Luxemburg is two-fold. On the one hand, 'she was one of the few women revolutionaries and Marxist theorists'; on the other hand, 'she was a woman with hopes and dreams' (Bray 2012). As a consequence, the story presents two aspects of Luxemburg. It begins with her release from prison in November 1918 – as an intellectual and political activist she has suffered for her views – and an imaginary speech, inspired by a photograph of Luxemburg in performance, that summarises her grasp of world events:

> The World War confronts society with the choice: either continuation of capitalism, new wars, and imminent decline into chaos and anarchy, or the abolition of capitalist exploitation. The means of production have been destroyed on a monstrous scale. Millions of able workers, the finest and strongest sons of the working class, have been slaughtered. Awaiting the survivors' return stands the leering misery of unemployment. (Lambert 2011: 99)

Luxemburg's linking of capitalism, empire, militarism and class conflict resonates not only with the Stop the War Coalition but also the banking crisis of 2008. Her final written words on the inevitability of political revolution, 'I was, I am, I shall be' (117), here included within a premonition of her death, are reclaimed as a riposte to the political apathy following the invasion of Iraq and the later financial meltdown. Lambert also reconstructs the domestic details of Luxemburg's life as well as the mystery surrounding her assassination not so much to humanise the individual as to set her ideology within a social context. In drawing her material from biographies

and photographs of Luxemburg, as well as her letters and political writings, Lambert adopts the role of Bauman's intellectual interpreter only in order to legislate for a change in public consciousness. Although Lambert is naturally modest about the scope of her collection, 'I wasn't trying to write perfect short stories, I was trying to write half-decent stories about war' (Bray 2012), the partiality of the short story form necessarily allows her to present her characters objectively and to transfer moral judgements to her readers. The imaginative capacities of writing fiction, and short fiction in particular, permits Lambert to elide Bauman's distinction between legislator and interpreter just as Luxemburg's public and private sides are elided in the story.

Furthermore, the placement of 'The Spartacist League' within the collection means that it cannot be read in isolation. Instead, it has to be read alongside 'Crystal Night' and another version of the intellectual, the theoretical physicist Lise Meitner, who coined the term 'nuclear fission' and who first realised the explosive implications of Albert Einstein's formula $E = MC^2$. Unlike Luxemburg, Meitner was not a public figure and, as the story records, she concealed her Jewish identity by giving sole credit to her colleague, Otto Hahn, before emigrating to Sweden in 1938. Although the very real threat of anti-Semitism pervades the narrative, the story, originally commissioned for Ra Page's anthology *Litmus* (2011) featuring short fictions about science, concentrates more upon Meitner's single-minded pursuit of atomic physics. Instead of Luxemburg's rallying cry to the working classes, Meitner's response to Nazi claims of a Jewish conspiracy is to dismiss it as 'foolish nonsense' (Lambert 2011: 160). Her self-absorption could be compared with that of McEwan's surgeon-hero, Perowne, and her actions described as an evasion of historical reality. It could also be argued that, between them, Luxemburg and Meitner represent twin versions of the intellectual – the heroic and sacrificial versus the persistent and pragmatic –that Lambert either ideally aspires to or declines from; an anxious oscillation that again points to Lambert's sense of her politics as a lived contradiction.

In real-life, Meitner refused to join the Manhattan Project, an act of non-committal that prefigured Robert Oppenheimer's more famous self-comparison with Vishnu, the Destroyer of Worlds. Although the story's title alludes to the *Kristallnacht*, the Nazi pogrom on Jewish properties in November 1938, it literally refers to the

frozen landscape that concludes the narrative and which acts as a portent for the atomic blast:

> Lise shielded her eyes: over the water she could see the white orb of the sun, its fierce rays igniting the ice and quayside; merciless, searing light, blinding and burning from a fiery ball of incalculable energy that scorched and left parched whatever lay in its path. (176)

At the point at which this story is set, the force of the nuclear chain-reaction is but an abstraction in Meitner's thought, as clear and as pure as crystal. Neither she nor her colleagues can be held solely accountable for what will instead be the machinations of scientists, politicians, military and industry. Instead, Meitner occupies a position not unlike UN weapons inspectors such as Hans Blix or (more controversially) David Kelly whose judgements were useful to the British and American administrations as far as they were politically expedient. In fictionally reconstructing the history, Lambert uses short story techniques to uncover the ambiguous relationship of the intellectual towards his/her society.

What then do these stories reveal about Lambert's own position? Besides her ability to slip between Bauman's designations of legislator and interpreter, Lambert can also be seen as effectively taking up Furedi's challenge to reclaim serious intellectual debate for her readers. In offering dual representations of the intellectual, she can be regarded as not only responding to Collini and Said's divergent definitions of intellectualism but also criticising the assumptions that underlie them. In particular, in recovering Luxemburg and Meitner from obscurity, Lambert reclaims two female intellectuals who neither followed their male predecessors nor, in Luxemburg's case, stayed within the bounds of the patriarchal academy but actively pursued new political programmes and pioneered new understandings of the physical universe. Although Lambert would broadly agree with Evans' description of the marginalisation of the female intellectual, she seeks ways in which this historic pattern can be inverted, for example, in reclaiming domestic fiction both for modernist experiment and political discourse (Lambert 2008: 22–3; cf. Lambert 2010: 152–7). In particular,

her ambiguous collection of stories not only counters the totalising strategies of the novel – a characteristic feature of the short story cycle – it also challenges the binary logic that typifies the work of many male authors, such as Amis, DeLillo and McEwan, in the wake of 9/11. Instead, *The War Tour* incorporates a mixed approach to its subject-matter that, as with other more successful responses to the War on Terror, 'eschew[s] simplistic oppositions' (Spencer and Valassopoulos 2010: 334).

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare. This article forms part of the research project *'Women's Tales': The Short Fiction of Contemporary British Women Writers, 1974–2013*. Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, Government of Spain. Ref. FEM2013-41977-P.

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