**‘Sometime the Hating Has to Stop’: Liberation and Reconciliation in *The Railway Man* (Teplitzky, 2013)**

*The Railway Man* (Teplitzky, 2013), a biopic based on Eric Lomax’ eponymous memoir (1995), recreates Lomax’ experience as a British signals officer during the Second World War. Following the fall of Singapore in 1942, Lomax was captured and sent to a prison camp in Kanchanaburi, Thailand, to work on the notorious Thailand-Burma railway. There he was tortured by the Japanese military police, the Kempeitai, who accused him of concealing radios and plotting to escape. Though traumatized by his experience, Lomax returned to Kanchanaburi in 1993 and was reconciled with Takashi Nagase, the Japanese interpreter present during his interrogation. The event was widely reported across the media (Kennedy 1993: 17). The rationale for giving Lomax’ story the biopic treatment was strengthened by the perceived marginalisation of Far East POWs (FEPOWs) in popular memory and the implications of Nagase’s and Lomax’ reconciliation for the controversy regarding a formal Japanese apology for their treatment of FEPOWs. The adaptation addresses the suffering of FEPOWs and also offers a route towards their psychological ‘liberation’ by asserting that recuperation from wartime trauma is possible if figures from both nations engage in shared remembrance. This is achieved in a climactic, cathartic scene in which Nagase’s traumatic memories are shown through a subjective flashback, a device utilized to suggest a wider Japanese interrogation of their national history. *The Railway Man* contends that it is through this act of remembrance, and recognition of the Far Eastern conflict as a shared trauma, that peaceful Anglo-Japanese reconciliation can be achieved.

*The Railway Man*’s place in the history of the British Prisoner of War (POW) biopic, and contemporary debates regarding the possibilities of Anglo-Japanese reconciliation, are considered first. The subsequent analysis centres on how *The Railway Man* situates Nagase as a ‘phantom’, a ghostly apparition who appears in the narrative present to lead Lomax back into his wartime experience. This is examined in light of Lomax’ own writing which itself features traumatic flashbacks and hauntings. The analysis goes on to consider the role of a group of FEPOW veterans in Berwick-upon-Tweed, a collective absent from the memoir. This group serves to illustrate the marginalisation of FEPOWs, an ‘army of ghosts’ bonded through unspoken trauma, and serves further to stress the necessity of reconciliation as a means of processing traumatic experience. Finally Nagase’s subjective flashback – which imagines his post-war experience – is contextualized in light of contemporary debates regarding reconciliation. As this experience is narrated by Nagase to Lomax, *The Railway Man* imagines the smoothing of Anglo-Japanese tension through articulating wartime events as a trauma shared by both nations, with Nagase’s personal remembrance and acknowledgment acting as a substitute for a wider, absent, Japanese remembrance of wartime past.

**The contexts of adaptation: recognition and reconciliation**

Both POW films and biopics make powerful claims to authenticity; dramatizations of POW life were frequently based on accounts of lived experience with former POWs acting as advisors to strengthen claims to veracity (Cull 2002: 283). Similarly biopics have generally sought to authenticate their depictions via references to the extensive research undertaken in producing them (see Custen 1992: 41, 44). Hence many POW films can be understood as biopics, a generic overlap which underscores the biopic’s hybridity and ‘contestable boundaries’ (Anderson and Lupo 2002: 91). The POW biopics released in the 1950s formed part of a wider surge in production which reflected the British war film’s success during the decade (see Ramsden 1998: 36). Examples include *Odette* (Wilcox, 1950) and *Carve Her Name with Pride* (Gilbert, 1958) which reimagined the lives of Odette Sansom and Violette Szabo respectively as spies working within the Special Operations Executive in Nazi-occupied France. *Reach for the Sky* (Gilbert, 1956) and *The Password is Courage* (Stone, 1962) showed the various attempts by RAF pilot Douglas Bader and Charles Coward respectively to escape from Colditz Castle and a German POW camp.

*The Railway Man* switches the focus from Europe to Thailand, depicting POW life under Japanese occupation during the Second World War. This, and the adaptation’s emphasis on the prisoner/officer dynamic, bear superficial resemblance to *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (Lean, 1958), itself an adaptation of Pierre Boulle’s novel *Le Pont de la Rivière Kwai* (1952). However, that film focuses on the determination of Commander Nicholson to demonstrate British discipline to the Japanese commanding officer through the building of the bridge and lacks *The Railway Man*’s emphasis on post-war reconciliation. *The Railway Man*’s construction of the war from both Lomax’ and Nagase’s perspective shares more in common with *Flags of our Fathers* (Eastwood, 2006) and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (Eastwood, 2006), two films which depict the same conflict – the Battle of Iwo Jima – from the different perspectives of American and Japanese soldiers. Though both films emphasize the horrors of battle ‘the central revelation is that neither side really knows much of the human nature of the other’ (Braudy 2007: 17). A similar revelation is offered in *The Railway Man*’s representation of Lomax’ and Nagase’s meeting in 1993, suggesting the film was part of a wider contemporary interrogation of the Far Eastern conflict which sought to balance different perspectives.

*The Railway Man*’s producers located the contemporary relevance of Lomax’ story in the perceived marginalization of the FEPOW experience in popular memory and the continuing debates regarding formal reconciliation between Britain and Japan. Lomax’ memoir had already been adapted by the BBC (*Prisoners in Time*, Walker, 1995) but *The Railway Man*’s ‘prestige’ credentials were reflected in its status as an international co-production (between British producer Andy Paterson and Pictures in Paradise in Australia) and its reported $20 million budget (Dawtrey 2011: 6). Biopic production is frequently motivated by a desire to ‘set the record straight’ (Minier and Maddalena 2014: 13) and although the FEPOW experience is a consistent part of the cultural memory of the war (see Makepeace 2014: 257; Pattinson, Noakes and Ugolini 2014), the myth of a ‘forgotten army’ is nevertheless perpetuated in the adaptation (Pattinson *et al*. 2014: 186). Unlike POWs held within Europe, FEPOWs benefited from their representation in national organizations, such as the National Federation of Far East Prisoner of War Clubs and Associations (NFFCA), which were ‘long-lasting, successful, and inclusive’ (Makepeace 2014: 261). The NFFCA, for instance, was involved in the campaign which led to the UK government contributing a £10,000 ex-gratia payment in 2000 to each surviving Briton who had been held captive by the Japanese (Makepeace 2014: 261). However, following Lomax’ death in 2012 Paterson argued that the FEPOW experience remained a ‘forgotten’ history which the adaptation sought to rescue:

Eric spoke for thousands of men who felt their service and sacrifice had gone unnoticed … this new version of his story will help ensure that the men who suffered with him – and the families who had to cope with the legacy – would never be forgotten. (quoted in Anon. 2012)

Such comments evoke the concept of ‘organised forgetting’ (Bromley 1988: 22) and how popular memory reflects the values of dominant groups: ‘since the images which shape our memory of the past define its ‘reality’, the issue of who decides what is remembered is crucial’ (Bromley 1988: 2). The death of Emperor Hirohito in 1989 raised interest in the veterans’ accounts which offered an alternative interpretation of a conflict associated primarily with the US (Rose 2009: 142). Lomax felt the FEPOW contribution had been ignored, especially in the inadequate post-war psychological support provided to veterans: ‘[g]et on with your life, the doctor seemed to say, as though it was the easiest thing in the world’ (1995: 238).

Furthermore, the nature of Lomax’ interrogation by the Japanese, specifically his experience of ‘waterboarding’, provided the adaptation with contemporary resonance in light of the release of the ‘torture memos’. These memos, which were leaked to the press, detailed the Bush administration’s legal justification for the controversial practices used to interrogate suspected terrorists following the 9/11 attacks. For instance, in the waterboarding of Abu Zubaydah the memos argued that Zubaydah experienced no ‘lasting psychological harm’ which would violate the statutory prohibition (quoted in Greenberg 2009: 6). The memos’ impersonal analysis contrasts with Lomax’ vivid personal account – ‘[y]our humanity bursts from within you as you gag and choke’ (1995: 163) – and though films such as *Zero Dark Thirty* (Bigelow, 2012) prompted debates on the ethics of waterboarding (see Bowden 2013) *The Railway Man* is notable for portraying the ‘authentic’ experience of the victim.

The second debate informing *The Railway Man* concerns the absence of a formal apology from Japan for their treatment of FEPOWs. Japanese remembrance, and ‘Japan’s dreadful record about coming to terms with its past’ (1995: 278) are a recurring theme of the memoir, and this was grasped by producer Chris Brown: ‘[o]ne of the main reasons for the film is the Japanese never talk about it and the British don’t want to talk about it either’ (quoted in Carter 2013: 12). Brown emphasized the broader significance of Lomax’ and Nagase’ reconciliation:

[o]ne of the great things was to actually perform that almost ritual of forgiveness with a Japanese actor and with an English actor … it was only actually while we were doing it that we suddenly realized that there was almost a bigger importance to what we were doing. (Quoted in Seikaly 2014)

This ‘bigger importance’ reflects how films about history ‘put individuals at the forefront of the historical process’, substituting the character’s personal problems, and their solution, for larger ‘insoluble’ historical problems (Rosenstone 1995: 57). Tensions in the Anglo-Japanese relationship were highlighted in May 1998 when Akihito, the Emperor of Japan, made a state visit to Britain. FEPOWs used the occasion to stage a protest regarding the lack of substantial compensation (see Kosuge 2007: 177–178). Their protest, which included turning their backs as the emperor and empress travelled along the Mall, was reported alongside commentaries which stressed the need for cultural understanding between both nations in view of Japanese investments in Britain’s economy (Murakamai and Middleton 2006: 274–275). Though expressions of remorse were offered by successive Japanese Prime Ministers, Japan’s stance was complicated by several factors: ‘[o]ne of the reasons why the apologies issue is contentious and invokes strong emotions is because it is a battle over memory and history’ (Cunningham 2004: 567). Nagase received media coverage for his post-war efforts to atone, building memorials near the bridge on the river Kwai where he organized the first of a number of reunions between ex-POWs and Japanese soldiers. Nagase controversially claimed that new generations of Japanese shared the burden of war and that ‘[t]he shame belongs to the whole Japanese race’ (quoted in McNeill 2004: 28–29). The Japanese Right, who enjoyed a resurgence in the 1990s, were opposed to an apology, and the controversy was reflected in debates about the representation of the Second World War in school textbooks in Japan (Cunningham 2004: 568).

The adaptation widens Lomax’ personal narrative through various filmic inventions to reinforce the notion of FEPOWs as a forgotten army, marginalized in public memory. Inventions, including the ‘compressing’ of multiple historical figures into one, are necessary to make filmic representations of history comprehensible and indicate ‘how the particular film relates to, reflects, comments upon, and/or critiques the already existing body of data, arguments and debates about a topic at hand’ (Rosenstone 2006: 39). *The Railway Man*’s inventions include the group of FEPOWs based in a veterans club in Berwick and their former Commanding Officer, Finlay, whose suicide leads to the final act of reconciliation between Lomax and Nagase. Further examples include a phantom Nagase, an apparition which haunts Lomax in the 1980s, and a subjective, traumatic flashback from Nagase’s perspective. As Nagase recalls his post-war work with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the film constructs Japanese remembrance of wartime brutality and represents Nagase as a further victim of the Far Eastern conflict. Thus *The Railway Man* suggests Anglo-Japanese reconciliation is possible through an act of shared remembrance in which representatives of both nations interrogate their past together.

**‘An army of Ghosts’**

The adaptation portrays Lomax’ (Colin Firth) life from the 1980s in Berwick-on-Tweed, his marriage to Patti (Nicole Kidman) and her learning of his wartime experience, through to Lomax’ reconciliation with Nagase (Hiroyuki Sanada) in Thailand in 1993. A series of flashbacks recreate the fall of Singapore, Lomax’ imprisonment, and his interrogation by Nagase in 1943 (Lomax and Nagase are played here by Jeremy Irvine and Tanroh Ishida). These flashbacks are linked to the narrative present through the device of a phantom Nagase who escorts Lomax from the narrative ‘present’ into wartime Kanchanaburi. The device visualizes the recollections in Lomax’ memoir, where traumatic memories suddenly intrude into the narrative.

The phantom first visits Lomax at a hotel where he and Patti are staying following their recent wedding. The sequence begins with Lomax lying on the hotel bed while Patti showers in the adjacent room. The camera moves slowly around Lomax’ body until it is positioned behind his head, while the sound of the shower is replaced by shellfire. The camera tilts up as Lomax raises his head to see Nagase enter the room dressed in green Kempentai uniform. The sound of a Shakuhachi flute, an ominous leitmotif that recurs whenever Nagase enters a scene, replaces the softer string-led score used in the previous scenes where Lomax and Patti meet on a train and fall in love. The blending of sounds signals the movement into traumatic memory. The uniformed Nagase forms a hallucination and an anachronic intrusion: a visual rupturing of time and place, strengthened through the sound of the flute. Nagase orders Lomax to get dressed and the scene then cuts to Nagase marching Lomax out of the hotel. The camera faces Lomax as he walks along the hotel corridor, followed by Nagase. As the camera draws back, Lomax body appears rigid, creating the impression that he is not walking but floating in a trance-like state. The pair move through the hotel entrance past guests who are unaware of Nagase’ presence, and they march down a path lined with dense foliage. Lomax is led into the Kanchanaburi prison, forced by guards into a room, and the sequence concludes with the sound of water dripping as Lomax writhes on the hotel floor.

Flashbacks fulfil various functions in biopics. In the Hollywood studio biopic, flashbacks construct the biopic’s representation of history from the perspective of specific narrators, either the leading figure or someone close to them, which ‘allows the narrator to frame the life not just in terms of the order and content of events, but to frame its significance’ (Custen 1992: 183). Flashbacks may also be incorporated to represent a figure’s traumatic past, such as those used in *The Notorious Bettie Page* (Harron, 2005) to suggest the familial abuse experienced by the 1950s pin-up model (Bingham 2010: 352-353).*The Railway Man*’s phantom also has echoes of the ‘post-traumatic flashback’ used in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Resnais, 1959). Typically, biopic flashbacks are signified through visual and aural cues which indicate the transition into memory. Such cues include dissolves, captions detailing a certain time period and location, and characters’ voice-overs which are layered over the flashback sequence. *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, by contrast, employed sudden cuts and withheld contextual knowledge of the flashback’s content which ‘worked to surprise the spectator with both the painful content of the flashback’ and the ‘formal disturbance’ of the sudden movement to a different period in time (Hirsch 2004: 98). Similarly, the appearance of Nagase, dressed in Kempentai uniform and accompanied with the sound of the Shakuhachi flute, is rendered jarring precisely because the adaptation withholds contextual knowledge: this is Nagase’s first appearance within the film and *The Railway Man*’s version of the ‘formal disturbance’ is achieved through the flute’s encroachment into this previously peaceful, non-threatening scene.

The film’s use of a phantom, a figure who orders Lomax to revisit traumatic events from his past, reflects the wider tendency to address traumatic memory through ghosts. This tendency was increasingly apparent in the 1990s following the publication of Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* (1987) (Luckhurst 2008: 93). The ghost in Morrison’s novel ‘embodied the idea of the persistence of traumatic memory, the anachronic intrusion of the past into the present’ (Luckhurst 2008: 93) and though his memoir lacks the figure of the ghost, Lomax portrayed his own life as characterized by persistent, unwanted flashbacks which similarly suggested the past’s anachronic intrusion. For example, after the Japanese officers discover the POWs’ radio Lomax and the other prisoners experience ‘a desperate haunting fear’ (1995: 126) and once he returned to Britain he experienced nightmares in which he was transported back to prison: ‘I would be doing something perfectly innocent and would suddenly find myself back in Outram Road’ (1995: 242). These traumatic recollections frequently manifest as aural and visual intrusions which cannot be confined to the past: when an incendiary bomb explodes nearby Lomax ‘can still hear the dry rattle it made as it hit the roof’ (1995: 52), while the skin conditions the POWs developed at Outram Road are ‘a spectacle that still awakes me at night, the nausea still fresh’ (1995: 193). In the film adaptation Nagase enters the hotel room to escort Lomax back to Kanchanaburi in 1943 and although the flute signifies the past’s encroachment into Lomax’ post-war life, the absence of an editing transition to distinguish ‘past’ from ‘present’ creates a seamless movement between the periods, a sensation Lomax repeatedly described in his memoir.

The phantom symbolizes the anachronic intrusions presented in Lomax’ account while also illustrating a generic shift in how biopic filmmakers negotiate representations of traumatic memory. Indeed, other contemporary British biopics utilize the phantom to convey a figure’s traumatic memories. In *Creation* (Amiel, 2009), for example, Charles Darwin writes *On the Origin of Species* (1859) while struggling to come to terms with the tragic death of his daughter Annie, who appears as a phantom in his dreams and hallucinations (see Pietrzak-Franger 2012: 74). Thus, *The Railway Man*’s phantom is indebted to both the biopic’s recent generic history and wider textual expressions of traumatic memory presented in literary forms as well.

*The Railway Man* portrays former FEPOWs as further phantom-like figures who exist on the margins of society. Lomax himself described how following Japan’s surrender he began gathering testimonies: ‘we could tell how close we were to being forgotten already’ (1995: 229). The veterans’ association places Lomax within a homosocial collective of former prisoners absent in the memoir, reflecting Paterson’s ambition to represent the struggles of ‘forgotten’ FEPOWs. Introduced with close-up images of medals and photographs of the veterans as younger men, subsequent shots frame them silently drinking beer in a club located on the coast overlooking the North Sea, a visual sign of their post-war marginalization. When the veterans enter the club they return to wartime hierarchies in which Finlay (Stellan Skarsgård) is still referred to as ‘uncle’ in remembrance of the paternal support he provided in the camp. The fixed, static shots of the club visually connote the sense of stasis in the veterans’ experience and the faded photographs suggest a further anachronism, reinforced by Finlay’s description of the veterans as an ‘army of ghosts’. Post-war reintegration was a concern ‘not just because of the problems of readjusting to family life but also because it meant leaving particular forms of companionship and hierarchy’ (Geraghty 2000: 175–176). *The Railway Man* offers a vision of men unable to sever their wartime bonds, bonds cemented through their shared (but unspoken) traumatic experience. Both the Nagase phantom and the phantom-like veterans reflect the inability of Lomax and other former FEPOWs to process traumatic memory. However, Finlay’s inclusion serves an additional purpose, namely, to express the urgency of Anglo-Japanese reconciliation.

**Breaking the ‘code of silence’**

Devising biopics ‘involves a process of selection and (re)arrangement, based on interpretation, on the makers’ take on the subject’ (Minier and Pennacchia 2014: 11). *The Railway Man* omits the contribution of the ‘Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture’ to Lomax’ post-war psychological recuperation – ‘I could hardly believe that I was beginning to talk’ (1995: 274) – and Patti’s role in making contact with Nagase, after which Lomax remarked: ‘I began to appreciate more fully how damaged he [Nagase] must be by what he had done’ (1995: 294). Instead, the adaptation foregrounds the ‘fictional’ Finlay who helps Lomax locate Nagase. Finlay’s inclusion reaffirms the adaptation’s commitment to emphasize the wider FEPOW experience, but also signifies the filmmaker’s ambition to stress forgiveness over retribution.

Finlay bridges Lomax’ past and present, acting as his commanding officer in wartime and later as the organizer of the veterans’ meetings. Seeking to break the ‘code of silence’ she perceives between veterans, Patti learns of Lomax’ POW experience from Finlay. Whereas Ronan MacEwan suggests the representation of Lomax’ bond with Finlay and the other soldiers continues a tradition of ‘mateship’ at the heart of numerous Australian films about the Second World War (2014: 92), the male bonding in *The Railway Man* also draws heavily from depictions in the British POW film. As Finlay describes their incarceration in Kanchanaburi, a series of short scenes, accompanied by a menacing string score, shows the POWs causing diversions while they retrieve materials to construct a radio, which evokes the ingenuity and improvisation characteristic of 1950s POW films (Cull 2002: 288). The collusion between prisoners, and Lomax’ use of the radio to disseminate updates of the war’s progress, recall *The Camp on Blood Island* (Guest, 1958) in which FEPOWs seek to withhold the news that Japan has surrendered from the brutal camp commander (see Murphy 2000: 231).The bond between Lomax and Finlay (played here by Sam Reid) is foregrounded as they huddle in a jeep to listen to the radio, a candle bathing them in light. Such scenes evoke those 1950s war films which contain at their narrative core an emphasis on male bonding, typically shown in the relationship between an older and younger man (Plan 2014: 278). Once the radio is discovered, Lomax takes sole responsibility and the flashback ends with Finlay gazing at Lomax’ beaten body. In showing the fatherly Finlay as powerless to prevent the young officer’s beating, *The Railway Man* suggests the barbaric realities of POW life and crucially, that Finlay’s trauma is rooted in his failure to protect Lomax.

After telling this story to Patti, Finlay shows Lomax a newspaper detailing Nagase’s post-war work and encourages the reluctant Lomax to seek revenge. Informing Patti that he intends to send Lomax a ‘message’, Finlay then hangs himself from a railway bridge. Finlay’s inclusion in the adaptation serves to embody two aspects of the debate regarding Anglo-Japanese reconciliation, namely, the veterans’ ongoing resentment, and the urgency of finding a resolution in light of their advancing age. Finlay’s suicide symbolizes the *futility* of hatred: Lomax subsequently returns to Thailand intent on violent revenge as Finlay urged; but instead he is reconciled with Nagase and thereby overcomes his trauma.

**Reconciliation through remembrance**

The later scenes of *The Railway Man* display a further significant instance of cinematic invention: a traumatic flashback from Nagase’s perspective, which expresses Japanese guilt and suffering. This flashback occurs after Lomax has travelled to Thailand to confront Nagase. The changing economic landscape in Kanchanaburi is illustrated via a tracking shot of Lomax leaving a train and walking through a bustling tourist area. A ‘modern’ score of guitars and Thai vocals contrasts with the flutes which connote wartime experience. Lomax pursues Nagase as the latter provides tours around shrines and war museums for Western and Asian tourists, images which foreground Nagase’s role in facilitating remembrance between different nations and maintaining the history of the FEPOW experience in Kanchanaburi. Within the courtyard of the Kempeitai war museum Lomax imprisons Nagase in a bamboo cage and walks into the adjacent room where he was interrogated. This triggers a flashback recollection accompanied by a pulsating bass score which mimics a rising, panicking heartbeat.The framing, camera movement and setting form a counterpoint to the opening scene of the film, set in Berwick-upon-Tweed in the 1980s, where a slow tracking shot moves from Lomax’ shoes to his face as he lies on the floor of his darkened living room; in the later sequence, set in Kanchanaburi in 1943, the camera moves along the younger Lomax’ body strapped to the table as a guard covers his face with a towel and presses a hose to it. The similarities between the two scenes serve to illustrate the ‘lasting psychological harm’ of Lomax’ experience of waterboarding, from the 1940s to the 1980s.

Lomax and Nagase are reconciled by sharing their experiences of different types of repression, the silence from Japan regarding their treatment of FEPOWs and the ‘code of silence’ between British veterans who sit silently drinking, unable to communicate. Lomax asks Nagase what he tells visitors about the Japanese treatment of FEPOWs and Nagase responds ‘We do not talk about it. No one will talk about it’. ‘Nor do we’ says Lomax. *The Railway Man* manages the contentious question of a formal apology from Japan by affirming that Nagase himself is traumatized by the interrogation: ‘I don’t want to live that day anymore’. His burden of guilt is manifested in campaigns for reconciliation and the daily revisiting of wartime events as a guide – ‘I will not let them forget the tragedy of war’ – which construct him as both an agent of remembrance and trauma victim. Whereas earlier scenes employ the phantom Nagase as a visual signifier of Lomax’ unprocessed traumatic memories, these later scenes portray Nagase’s own unprocessed trauma, which takes the form of the routine repeated and renewed each day of Nagase’s return to the war museum, a routine which mirrors the veterans’ habitual return to the club and its wartime hierarchies.

It is within the war museum sequence, before Lomax imprisons Nagase, that *The Railway Man* introduces its crucial intervention into contemporary Anglo-Japanese relations. As Nagase describes his life following the Allied liberation, his voice-over narration is layered over images which show his younger self unearthing bodies with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Nagase kneels and unearths a skull, before rising and gazing along a line of uncovered, shallow graves. The Shakuhachi flute, previously utilized to signify Lomax’ terror, conveys Nagase’s mournful realisation of Japanese brutality. Japanese remembrance of the war is here imagined through Nagase’s subjective flashback which details *his* experience of confronting Japanese atrocities.

Whereas his memoir recounts the war from Lomax’ perspective, this flashback offers Nagase’s experience as an alternative. In her study of film flashbacks Maureen Turim suggests they offer both images of memory and history – ‘flashbacks in film often merge the two levels of remembering the past, giving large-scale social and political history the subjective mode of a single, fictional individual’s remembered experience’ (1989: 2) – and in showing Nagase as a lone soldier uncovering graves *The Railway Man* constructs Nagase as a symbolic representative of the Japanese nation, confronting the war crimes of the Imperial Japanese Army. However, this sequence can also be understood through Rosenstone’s formulation of ‘inventions’ and the role of compression – ‘the process by which several historical characters or moments are collapsed into one’ (2006: 39) – without which filmic representations of history ‘would not be dramatic, but a loose, sprawling form far less able to make the past interesting, comprehensible and meaningful’ (2006: 38).

In *The* *Railway Man* Takashi Nagase serves as both a representation of a single historical figure and also a representative of the Imperial Japanese Army, seeing himself as part of larger national entity (‘*We* do not talk about it’) and acting as a tour guide recounting the wartime experience of the Japanese. *The Railway Man* employs the device of the flashback to portray a broad national history in personal, subjective terms and presents Nagase as a symbolic representative of Japan. In Nagase’s flashback to his work with the War Graves Commission, the film imagines Japan interrogating an element of its national history which it has previously sought to suppress. Nagase’s role as mouth-piece for wider Japanese acknowledgement is reaffirmed in a letter he sends to Lomax after the latter has returned to England. Narrated in voice-over, Nagase’s words – ‘[w]e treated you and your countrymen very, very badly’ – are layered over images of Lomax walking alone in Berwick-upon-Tweed. Reconciliation is then formally achieved in the final sequence: Lomax returns to Thailand with Patti to offer Nagase a letter of forgiveness in ‘Hellfire Pass’, a railway cutting on the former railway now memorialized as a site of remembrance. As Lomax consoles a tearful Nagase, a closing remark taken verbatim from the memoir is read by Firth and layered over the image in voice-over: ‘[s]ometime the hating has to stop’ (1995: 319).

**Conclusion**

*The Railway Man* adaptation exemplifies how a narrative about personal trauma can be shaped through cinematic conventions as a commentary upon contemporary international relations. The film’s producers identified the ongoing tension in the Anglo-Japanese relationship as a significant contemporary issue which informed the process of adaptation and this is exemplified in the various instances of invention presented in the film. The creation of a homosocial collective led by Finlay in war and peacetime reveals how the screen adaptation responded to a wider narrative outside Lomax’ specific story, stressing the marginalization of veterans and the need to recognize their continued suffering. *The Railway Man*’s flashbacks serve various functions; flashbacks to the POW camp evidence the genre’s porous boundaries and how the themes of the POW sub-genre inflect Lomax’ story. The phantom Nagase illustrates the reworking of the biopic’s generic traditions and uses the ghost, a figure which haunts the present, to visualize Lomax’ own horror when experiencing lapses into traumatic memory. A third, brief, flashback from Nagase’s perspective exemplifies *The Railway Man*’s specific contribution to public history, stressing that rehabilitation on both sides is only possible through recognition of the Second World War as a trauma shared by figures from both nations. These flashbacks exemplify two different forms of repression which the adaptation highlights: the perceived repression of British FEPOW experience from public memory in Britain, and also the repression in Japan of responsibility for that experience. The adaptation shows how the ‘personal’ repression of traumatic experience by Lomax and Nagase is lifted through cross-cultural dialogue. In doing so, *The Railway Man* imagines the possibility of a wider healing between nations.

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