PRIVATE, PUBLIC AND HISTORICAL SPHERE

– in Kate Atkinson's *Behind the Scenes at the museum*

Veera Rautavuoma

The role of material culture in fiction has been given relatively little attention within the field of literary studies. This is surprising, since fiction provides interesting and at times revealing clues with regard to the way people experience the world and make sense of it. From this point of view, contemporary 'postmodern' fiction especially seems worth exploring. Kate Atkinson's novel is 'popular' in the sense that it deals with themes that are common and close to 'ordinary' British (English) people: it explores family ties, the encounters of generations and the over-all relations to the past, the present and the future. But at the same time it is also a highly complex and self-reflective 'postmodern' novel, which is likely to reveal something in relation to the academic discourses that it has been influenced by. Although fictive worlds are undeniably fictive and personal constructions by the authors, they nevertheless mirror something of the contexts of their production, the contemporary social realities in which the texts are born.

The following is a case study of a fictional process, in which the protagonist Ruby is attempting to make sense of her life, and in so doing, weaving 'words and things' into a personal 'heritage narrative' that combines both private and public elements.

THE NOVEL AND ITS CONTEXT(S)

The story is narrated mainly by Ruby Lennox, starting as an embryo after being conceived in 1951, and extending to the year 1992. Ruby's voice is dominant throughout the chapters, with the exception of the footnotes that widen the focus from the immedi-

ate to the extended family, with the time-span ranging from 1888 to 1992. For the most part, the narrative is set in York, Ruby's hometown, in addition to other locations in Britain. Thematically, the novel is positioned around Ruby's struggles to find justification for her existence and to get over her past traumas; she is attempting to construct an accep-

108 table past, a 'livable' present and a future with some perspective.

The novel can be regarded as a 'typically' postmodern text in its self-reflexivity and (new) historicism. It is political in the way it challenges theory and institutions. It includes allusions to contemporary critical museum theory, and in this sense it could be considered a contribution to the on-going discussion on the ground on which communities and individuals build their identities and sense of the past. It reflects a critical attitude to traditional institutions, such as the museum, the school, even literature itself. At the same time it questions ways of (historical) representation and validation. It is playful and highly intertextual, and it draws on irony in its modes of narration. It contests the linearity of time with breaking up the general body of the narrative with extensive, page-long footnotes, the focus of which is different people in different time, still each adding to the overall story of the extended family.

In a sense, Atkinson's novel lends itself rather easily to museological inspection: the word 'museum' is present already in the title. However, there are very few references to museums as such in the novel. Moreover, the museum in the title appears as a kind of a metaphor of an attempt to establish and maintain a connection with the past as an indispensable element of one's identity. This metaphorical thinking in relation to museums in fact seems to reflect the current museological thinking: whereas formerly museology focused on the museums as institutions embodied in the museum buildings, the emphasis has shifted towards looking at museums as a tool, as a process of posing questions of our identity. At the same time, 'the museological gaze' has been extended outsi-

de the museums, to include the totality of heritage. In a similar fashion, there seems to be an attempt in the novel to use the notion of museum and related practices (e.g. preserving physical objects to communicate past experiences) to question the community's and individual's relation to reality. Thus, the focus of the present study coincides with the focus of museology, but mainly within the microcosm of *Behind the Scenes*.

Ruby, as the narrator of the story, apart from telling, simultaneously composes a heritage narrative that can be abstracted from the text by focusing on certain museological key terms. This deals with the questions of a sense of place and origin, and finding out the cultural meanings of the things that have been handed down by the previous generations, and can thus be considered 'heritage'. Further, this study is conducted with a discursive-narrative approach, which here is taken to mean a specific dynamics between the textual and the discursive features of the novel. The primary interest is not in the text's relation to other texts – intertextuality – but the various discursive spaces that open up in the act of reading, and more specifically those related to museological/heritological considerations. In other words, the aim is to explore how the story can be made more understandable as it is placed more explicitly among the discourses around the museum institution and the heritage as its object.

The tension and dynamics of the two poles of heritage can be sensed in the novel. It involves several encounters with various heritage institutions, which result in clashes between the institutionalised and personal modes of experiencing the past. By analysing the notion of heritage as filtered through the novel on the one hand, and as perceived in theo-

retical literature on the other, more light can be shed on the dialectics of the individual and the collective experience.

WHOSE HERITAGE?

In its broadest and most abstract sense, heritage is a manifestation of "specific relationship of man to reality" as defined by Stransky (quoted in van Mensch 1992 <http://www.xs4all.nl/~rwa/> 31.12.1998). It can therefore function as a useful tool for the ordering of cultured experiences. But heritage is also a problematic and loaded term that is much used and abused. What makes the concept of heritage highly interesting to explore is the tension that it inherently is grounded upon: it appears as constantly moving between the poles of authenticity and fabrication.

Now that it has become clear that the narrative contains elements that can be viewed as (segments of) heritage, the next question is: whose heritage is it that comes through in the novel? The power held by the museum is closely related to the representations of the past, which are then imposed on their public. This issue is intertwined with the idea of different spaces, both discursive and concrete, that vary in accessibility to different groups of people. Bennett (1995:103) talks about "the division between the hidden space of the museum in which knowledge is produced and organized and the public spaces in which it is offered for passive consumption". He believes that this division still prevails in the museum of today, despite the attempts at democratization.

But even though various heritage sites are made more accessible, they do not seem to fulfil the role they have been appointed: instead of evoking a sense of the past, of histo-

ry, they appear as an absurd patchwork, the same way as Ruby sees the entire city of York as "a fake city, a progression of flats and sets and white cardboard battlements and medieval half-timbered house kits that have been cut and glued together" (p. 377). What Ruby seems to be reacting to is the endless preservation conducted in the city. By clinging to all those remains that have survived from the past, unwilling to let any of it go, we may be faced with a heap of absurdities that appear as mere curiosities. Though Ruby feels that she cannot really relate to these images of the past, she does accept parts of it, resorting to the nostalgia of the Victorian fireplaces, the idyll resurrected. She is comforted by this nostalgia but does not feel at home in it. Ruby is forced to look for something of her own.

According to Kern (quoted in Walsh 1992:66), since Einstein's general theory of relativity, there has been an increasing consideration of personal pasts; there has been a shift from homogenous public time to various, private times. Walsh (1992:66), in turn, claims, that this emphasis on personal pasts is mostly articulated through nostalgia – the collection and appreciation of objects often relating to personal history. Also in Ruby's case, the search for a past is turned into several personal projects including words and things: the branches of the family-tree become a collection of poems and the fate of several objects is followed in Ruby's narration, intermingled with the fate of the owners of these objects, or of the individuals interacting with them.

The question "Whose heritage?" entails further divisions and more accurate definitions with regard to the 'consumers' of heritage. Being essentially selective and ideological, heritage is bound to be biased in several

110 respects. One of these biases relates to gender identity and construction. According to Belk and Wallendorf (1994:241), gender can be linked to collecting in three different ways: firstly, through the gendered meaning of collecting activities, secondly, the gender associations of the objects collected, and thirdly, the gendered uses of collections. What can readily be noticed in the novel is that it mostly deals with 'feminine heritage': it is clustered around matrilineal history, around mothers and daughters. Therefore, it is interesting to look at the tension created between parallel heritage representations from the viewpoint of gender.

In the novel, the memories and objects maintained in the personal sphere belong mostly to women, and the array of objects consists to a great extent of 'feminine' objects: trinket boxes, buttons, silver-locket, great-grandmother's clock. Belk and Wallendorf (1994:251) provide an interesting insight into this by their claim that

From a societal perspective, collections represent and enact the achievement orientation of the collector. Achievement may represent different ideas to men and women. Women's collections tend to represent achievement in the world of connection to other people – achievement of sentiment.

Indeed, these objects are entangled in emotions: they are the carriers of 'tears of things' in Pearce's (1992:72) sense.

Further, what requires attention is that the objects in the novel, apart from being feminine, belong mostly to the domestic realm of everyday life, as part of which the women are portrayed. What may grab the reader's attention is the dynamism with which the narration flows, also within this private sphere and everyday activities. In the novel, there are no

references to or depictions of women or people in general being presented in museums, so it is impossible to examine the alienation from 'heritage' judging by their presence or absence in museums. Even though this theme of women's representation in museums does not come up in the novel, it may still be useful to briefly look at the place that women usually occupy in museum displays. Porter (1988:106) has remarked that in Britain, women in museums are mainly represented in the home. This is hardly surprising, since traditionally the home, childcare and housework have occupied the women and tied them to the home or its surroundings. However, Porter (in Lumley 1988:107) believes that it is not enough to simply place women in the house and engage her in needlework; moreover, there appears to be over-representation of the Victorian parlour, as a result of which domestic life seems to be increasingly separated from public life. The displays are, according to Porter, unrepresentative of everyday existence and lacking its dynamics, while museums at the same time are housing sentimental and ceremonial items from a highly specialised, "comfortable and comforting culture" (1988:107–9). If the feminine heritage really can be found in the home, and if museums fail to produce successful representations of it, there are few possibilities to encounter satisfactory representations of feminine heritage that mainly feeds on the realm of the private, the everyday and the domestic. In other words, presenting feminine heritage seems to require turning the private into public to a larger extent than with masculine heritage. Weighed against this aspect, the dualism of the public, often monumental and celebratory heritage and the domestic everyday heritage of Yorkshire pudding and

shepherd's pie appear all the more intriguing. It would be too simplistic to claim that the public and private heritage is felt to be so far apart just because of this gender bias. Anyhow, Belk and Wallendorf's (1994:242) claim is thought provoking:

traits defined as masculine seem especially useful in acquiring objects for collections, while traits defined as feminine are important in curating and maintaining the resulting collection.

Even though Belk and Wallendorf talk about feminine and masculine traits and not women and men, the thought arouses further questions. If men are more prone to collecting, while women ideally maintain these collections, it is possible that, historically, we have come up with 'man-made' (public) collections in which feminine heritage plays only a marginal role. Somewhat polemically, Rigby and Rigby (quoted in Belk and Wallendorf 1994:241) have claimed that

Grand scale, collecting almost always calls for aggressive and material ambition to a degree uncharacteristic of women, aside from women's historic economic position.

If this is the case, it is likely that women as active actors are absent from many a collection.

The portrayal of the Victorian doll's house provides an interesting aspect to the discussion of gendered heritage, more precisely, the make-up of a Victorian reality and the woman's place in it – naturally from the viewpoint of the present. Again, Ruby's voice is highly ironic and playful but through this playfulness, critical undertones clearly come through. Ruby sees "something eerie about it" in its "little, little leather-bound books (*Great Expectations!*)" and she could not

think of a worse fate than being destined to becoming a little girl in the doll's house, playing in the nursery, or the scullery maid blacking the kitchen range (p. 114). Even though she is not contented with her own life, Ruby would not change hers by moving into a Victorian past as she imagines it, despite the socially learnt nostalgic longing she feels for the Victorian fire-place (probably of the 'Victorian parlour') in the Castle Museum (p. 350). Partly her determination is due to the fact that she would not want to adopt the role of the Victorian woman (as she knows it).

As becomes apparent from these examples, there appears to be a tension between the various pasts at different levels. With regard to heritage, it is often the case that 'nation' or some other bigger unit is promoted with the expense of smaller units and localities. The quotation from George VI on the homepage of the City of York is telling: "The history of York is the history of England". This is where much of the problem lies: when some heritage items are elevated as emblems of something even bigger, there is the risk of exhausting the phenomena themselves by pumping them dry of their own special character. If the history of York is made to stand for that of the entire England, it is hardly surprising if some feel 'overcrowded by the past' as Ruby does. This overcrowded nature of the past is made apparent in the opening of the novel, as Ruby introduces York. The swiftly moving images almost seem to parody themselves: it is as if it were from a tourist brochure – colourful, compact and enticing – if the irony is ignored.

These streets seethe with history; the building that our Shop occupies is centuries old and its walls tilt and its floors slope like a medieval funhouse. There has been a building

112 on this spot since the Romans were here and needless to say it has its due portion of light-as-air occupants who wreath themselves around the fixtures and fittings and linger mournfully at our backs. Our ghosts are particularly thick on the staircases, of which there are many. They have much to gossip about. You can hear them if you listen hard, the splash of water from Viking oars, the Harrogate Tally-Ho rattling over the cobblestones, the pat and shuffle of ancient feet at an Assembly Rooms' ball and the *scratch-scratch* of the Reverend Sterne's quill. (p. 10)

If "streets seethe with history", we can be sure that something out of ordinary is going on. Ruby draws a parallel between the building her family lives in and a medieval funhouse with its tilting floors. To the reader, moreover, it is this representation of the city as a whole that resembles a funhouse, or rather, a noisy and colourful carnival that overrides the town – a depiction that goes over the top, turns against itself – or at least turn's its clown's face at the reader.

From this synchronous overflow of historic images, it may appear a good option to turn to a personally experienced past. As Fowler (1992:162) has formulated the possible slogan for today's heritage seekers: "I want to be involved in *my* heritage on *my* terms". Fowler (1992:161) believes that the tendency to promote larger political and economic frames of reference is bound to enforce "the retreat to small pasts at personal level". In the following some of these will be explored.

FROM CABINETS OF CURIOSITY TO THE MUSEUM AND BACK AGAIN

Pearce (1992:1–4) divides the history of museums into four main periods: the archaic, the

early modern, the classical modern and the postmodern. The first one of these refers to the prehistoric European tradition of accumulation and to the temples of the classical world, the 'museia'. The early modern is characterised by medieval treasures, Renaissance collections and cabinets of curiosities. It is only in the classical modern period in the 18th century that the museum proper is born, whereas the postmodern museum refers mainly to museums from the mid-20th century onwards. Although this division cannot be accepted as a norm, these elements, with slight variation, have been rather influential in drawing the major lines of historical understanding of museums.

In her extensive study *Museums and the Shaping of knowledge*, Hooper-Greenhill (1992) begins with the Renaissance period, and presents various accounts of what it is to "know" in museums, and on what grounds the phenomenon called museum bases its ways of classifying the world. Like Pearce, Hooper-Greenhill discusses the cabinets of curiosities as one development prior to the museum. Although she claims that they were constructed from different frames of reference than museums proper and thus are by no means direct ancestors of museums, she nevertheless regards them as a 16th and 17th century project of ordering material to demonstrate knowing of the world, much the same way that museums have done since their birth. Whereas (classical) modern museums are seen as based on Enlightenment ideals of order and rationality, pre-modern museums and cabinets of curiosity are characterised by "jumbled incongruity" to create surprise or provoke wonder (Bennett 1995:2). All the same, the idea behind both can be seen as providing representations of the

world and thus demonstrating its character.

Curiously enough, the theme and image of cupboard persists throughout Atkinson's novel, and these numerous cupboards have a curious air about them. When Ruby tells of her birth, she says: "I spent my first night on earth in a cupboard" (p. 41), referring to a separate space into which she was taken in order not to wake up the other new-born babies. Later on, as a young adult, when her friend Kathleen is making plans for the future and intends to marry her boyfriend, Ruby and Kathleen go through the contents of Kathleen's bottom drawer; the Irish linen towels and the cake forks. When Ruby asks her friend what the point of the whole bottom drawer is, she gets the answer: "To save things for the future" (p. 317). This is when Ruby too begins to feverishly question what she would put in her bottom drawer if she had one, swaying between several and very different possibilities. At one moment, she wants to fill her drawer with sharp objects: "I weigh knives in my hands like strange comforters" (p. 320). But when she momentarily feels she has a hold of things, the insides of the drawer are radically different: "I would put the horizon, and some snatches of birdsong, the blossom like snow in the garden of the Treasure's House and the white ruined arches of St Mary's Abbey below, like petrified lace" (p. 320). Although petrified, this latter scene appears as harmonious and beautiful; "the town laid out below is like a street map (p. 320)" – it can easily be perceived and made sense of. At moments like these the historicity of the landscape does not bother Ruby; moreover, the sight of the centuries old buildings become usable cornerstones for the future. But the strength of these images is not enough on its own. Ruby keeps on looking.

"Somewhere just out of reach", says Ruby, "there is the key" (p. 321). She introduces her 'Lost Property Cupboard theory of life' that she calls a "recent development in my philosophical quest for understanding" (p. 321). This theory has been born out of practise in her school, where Ruby and Kathleen run a real lost property cupboard that was made to work like clockwork according to the ideals of the school. It was open on Thursdays at four o'clock and that was the only possible time for students to reclaim their lost goods. What is interesting is how the location of the cupboard is given in relation to class rooms of Domestic Science, physics, chemistry and biology, as if this new branch of philosophy were introduced in the context of the established sciences.

This theoretical construction seems to be self-mocking, ironic and serious all at the same time. It can be read as including critical remarks on social practices, for instance with regard to name tags – policy that reigned in the school: ownership had to be easy to trace and therefore every possession was to have a tag on it. What is more, there were constant checks that "we were tagged properly" (p. 322). If one was to read this as implied criticism of museum practices, it is not difficult to draw links between the contemporary accumulation of materia in collections, and the worship of quantity at quality's expense. The result is that we end up with unidentified piles of things that no-one claims as their own: "the lost property cupboard remains full to overflowing with abandoned things" (p. 322). The Lost Property Cupboard theory of life is supplemented by that of afterlife, according to which we are taken to a great cupboard after death and given back the things we have lost. Ruby starts with listing concrete every-

114 day objects but moves onto "perhaps less tangible things", patience, meaning, and oceans of time. Interestingly, also these less tangibles have their place in the cupboard. In other words, they are pictured to occupy a certain space in the undeniably tangible cupboard. The attaching of material qualities to abstract concepts is an interesting attempt on the protagonist's part to 'get a hold of things' to come into an understanding.

What can be seen as crucial in Ruby's attempts at understanding is how she seems to be torn between a bundle of representations of the past from different sources: her own memories (and the lack of them), the memories and narratives constructed by her family and friends, and the accounts from the 'public historical sphere' (Bommes and Wright 1982). The latter includes institutions involved in producing and circulating meanings about the past, e.g. museums, heritage sites and historical TV series. Therefore, the combat that Ruby is faced with is partially about choosing between the various voices, with also the individual and collective voices colliding. For Ruby, the cupboard seems to function as a filter, discarding the elements of the past which are not so essential for her in the present, and in this way making more room for the living, which is one of Ruby's major concerns: "There is too much history in York, the past is so crowded that sometimes it feels as if there is no room for the living" (p. 352). So, whereas generally the cabinet of curiosities is discussed as the museum's jumbled incongruous predecessor, in the novel it is a machine that reorders things and makes them seem meaningful. As Bennett points out,

For the curieux, the singular and exceptional objects assembled in the cabinet are valued because they stand

in a special relationship to the totality and, hence, offer a means of acquiring a knowledge of, and privileged relation to, that totality. But this form of knowledge is, like the objects through which it is accessible, a rare one only available to those special few who actively seek it. (Bennett 1995: 40–41)

Thus, if intelligibility is due to familiarity, as Bennett (1995:41) claims, it is a question of congruity and familiarity on the individual level. Obviously, elements from the public historical sphere permeate the individual one to some extent since we all are subject to our time and cultural training, but basically all the elements tend to be arranged according to the individual, to Ruby in the case of the novel.

Eventually, unable to cope with her loneliness, memories lost to the unconscious and the accumulated misunderstandings, she returns to the cupboard of her first night on earth in the form of the airing cupboard in the upstairs bedroom (p. 324–5). She makes her "nest" in the bottom of the cupboard and swallows a fair amount of sleeping pills. This is when a powerful reordering of things begins, and Ruby feels she is floating and rushing through a vast amount of objects and people somehow tied up with her life, and one thing takes her along to another. What is interesting is that in this cupboard-scene there seems to be no over-all structure imposed on the elements from the outside: the objects seem to be bursting out in space with no linear order but rather a web of associations working according to its own logic.

With a bit of oversimplification, the cupboard in the novel can be looked at as a space where the rules of the linearity of text no longer hold. This is of course controversial, since the narration happens through written text

that inevitably positions the elements in a certain order. However, the novel contains elements that both thematically and structurally hint at the problematic nature and the relativity of linearity. In the first footnote, Ruby's great-grandmother Alice experiences a sensation of floating as a sudden consequence of being overburdened with a number of things: the heat, her being eight months pregnant, the heavy housework, her feelings of dissatisfaction with her life. She is in the midst of cutting up the dough, as "she suddenly feels herself being pulled towards the marigolds on a straight, fast trajectory; it is automatic and entirely beyond her control and she has no time to think as she is sucked on her giddy journey towards the heart of the flower that looks like the sun" (p. 34). Two paragraphs down, the narrative voice states: "What the world has lost in sound, it has gained in texture" as Alice moves into the landscape. What is strongly present is the absence of sound, while everything expands into space.

Eventually, the story can be seen as stretching out between two different claims, points of reference: the novel is a journey from one cupboard to the other. In the end of the first chapter, in the atmosphere of great promise and expectations lingering over the Dome of Discovery projecting 'the emerald city of tomorrow', "The future is like a cupboard full of light and all you have to do is find the key that opens the door" (p. 26). In the last chapter, on the riverbank in the Museum Gardens, as Ruby is looking at the 'lost property' left by all those that have been there: "The past is a cupboard full of light and all you have to do is find the key that opens the door" (p. 379). Maybe the cupboard, the cabinet of curiosities, however jumbled and incongruous perceived through the public eye, is the

salvation, the redemption that reorders the things and makes them meaningful. It is the individual effort to come to terms with the various pasts available to us, and through this quest new spaces of personal knowledge may open up.

There is yet one more object that can be regarded as belonging to this 'cabinet/cupboard set' of the novel: the doll's house belonging to Daisy and Rose, Ruby's cousins. It is true miniature:

It has pictures the size of postage stamps and postage stamps the size of dots; it has gilded chairs fit for a fairy-queen and chandeliers like crystal earrings and a kitchen table groaning under the weight of plaster hams and plaster moulded blanc-manges. (p. 114)

As Susan Stewart (quoted in Danet and Katriel 1989, in Pearce 1994:232) points out, "There are no miniatures in nature". Moreover, miniatures are cultural products, a way of perceiving and relating to the physical world. Further, Stewart (quoted in Danet and Katriel 1989, in Pearce 1994:232) claims that "a miniature world is a more perfect world" since it has the ability to hide all the shortcomings that are visible in life-size objects. It becomes clear, however, that Ruby is not drawn to this miniature world. It is rather one more reflection of a system she finds frightening and unfamiliar.

The doll's house is another cupboard embodying the distress Ruby feels in relation to her environment. It is a miniature universe, a representation of a certain world, but at the same time an unfavourable order of things that Ruby, at least not for some time, can neither escape nor has the means to re-order.

In his discussion of heritage in the (post)modern era, Walsh (1992) lays emphasis on the sense of place. He claims that the

116 presentation of the past to the public is being and has been increasingly institutionalised, and at the same time these representations have been removed from the wider public sphere (1992:148). He also explicates his notion of 'timing space', attempting to find a diachronic dimension of a place as opposed to the 'synchronous spectacles' all too common in postmodern representations of heritage. In a similar fashion, also the novel contains similar elements in its narration that for a reason can be called synchronous spectacles, as for instance the passage in the opening already quoted above (p. 10). Therefore, according to Walsh (1992:152), the key to developing a sense of place is to allow people to develop their own understandings, rather than to impose institutionalised meanings onto space, which eventually would only produce artificial places.

One way of developing understandings of our own is to individually compile cupboards and doll's houses – cabinets of curiosities. This production of personal representations based on personal networks of meaning can take a variety of forms, as the novel also proves: there is the fetish collector, the great-grandmother Alice, who is portrayed as an extension of her collection of plaster saints; there is Albert, the carefree young man with the 'cherub-gene', who collected good days. There are also the mass-produced collectables of coronation memorabilia and the sets of photos that tie the family together over generations. However, collecting in the novel is often a mere act of naming and thus "a means of controlling the surrounding material chaos", as Kiuru (2000:66) has put it. Therefore, personal collecting can be viewed as a retreat from the space of institutionalised, canonical and often stiff meanings into a personal space, a room

of one's own. This space may in fact be crucial in order to maintain the balance between the individual and the collective modes of experiencing the past. Also from the viewpoint of material culture, there is a divide between the institutional collection practises conducted by the museum and those carried out on the realm of private collecting. Whereas the museum focuses on the typical and the representational that can easily be generalised and categorised, the enterprise of personal collecting is more dynamic and relies on the merging of the collective and personal values and meanings.

It is evident that historical experience should not be entirely cut off from collectivity, since the community dimension offers a corrective measure in the three-partite communication between the individual, the community and the world of objects (e.g. Kiuru 2000). What is more, the museum still remains the possible forum (at least ideally) for exchanging interpretations of objects. Museums also provide means by which the information embodied in objects can be released and explicated. Despite its long tradition of scholarship and curatorship which is not without its biases, the museum still offers tools for 'reading objects' and thus making them meaningful also in a wider historical context.

It seems that both these spheres of historical experience need their autonomy to a certain extent but also interchange between the two, so that meanings can be communicated. To use Walsh's (1992:152) dichotomy of space and place, it may be worthwhile to ponder over the possibility of having both shared places (i.e. with a sense of place) and private spaces. From this perspective, it is good that Ruby has her figurative collection in her mental bottom drawer, and her poems of the family

tree, and, in the end, the Scottish landscape that she can relate to and recognise as hers. Another question is how this parallel structure of public places and private spaces could be best realised in practise but to go into this would also go beyond the scope of this study. Nowadays there has been much talk about 'coming out of the closet'. Perhaps, in many cases, it may prove to be as useful to go *into* them, at least pay a brief visit. In these cupboards, cabinets, bottom drawers and closets there is a wealth of material that might lead into interesting discourses with the words and things of the public sphere.

NOTE

- The text is based on the author's Master's Thesis at The Department of English, University of Jyväskylä.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Atkinson, Kate 1995 (1998). *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*. London: Black Swan.
- Belk, Russel W. and Melanie Wallendorf 1994. Of mice and men: gender and identity in collecting, in Pearce (ed.) 1994, 240–253.
- Bennet, Tony 1995. *The Birth of the Museum. History, Theory, Politics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Danet, Brenda and Tamar Katriel 1989. No two alike: play and aesthetics in collecting, in Pearce 1994, 220–239.
- Fowler, Peter J. 1992. *The Past in Contemporary Society*. Then, now. London: Routledge.
- Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean 1992. *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Kiuru, Elina 2000. Yksityiset ja yhteiset esineet: keräilijän ja museon kokoelmat esineellisen kulttuuriperinnön säilyttäjänä, in Vilkkuna (ed.) 2000, 64–71.
- Koven, Seth 1994. The Whitechapel Picture Exhibitions and the Politics of Seeing, in Sherman and Rogoff 1994, 22–48.
- Lumley, Robert (ed.) 1988. *The Museum Time Machine. Putting cultures on display*. London: Routledge.
- Pearce, Susan M. 1992. *Museums Objects and Collections. A Cultural Study*. London: Leicester University Press.
- Pearce, Susan M. (ed.) 1994. *Interpreting Objects and Collections*. London: Routledge.
- Porter, Gaby 1988. Putting your house in order: representations of women and domestic life, in Lumley (ed.) 1988, 102–127.
- Sherman, Daniel J. and Irit Rogoff (eds.) 1994. *Museum Culture. Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*. London: Routledge.
- van Mensch, Peter 1992. *Towards a methodology of museology*. PhD thesis, University of Zagreb. <http://www.xs.4all.nl/~rwal/> 31.12.1998
- Vilkkuna, Janne (ed.) 2000. *Näkökulmia museoihin ja museologiaan*. Ethnos-toimite 10. Saarijärvi: Gummerus.
- Walsh, Kevin 1992. *The Representation of the Past. Museums and Heritage in the Post-modern World*. London: Routledge.
- Veera Rautavuoma is Master of Arts.*
Adr. Jánosi utca 80, 4033 Debrecen, Hungary
E-mail: veera.rautavuoma@freemail.hu