CONTENTS

Acknowledgements vi
Notes on Contributors x

Introduction Jeff Birkenstein, Anna Froula & Karen Randell 1
Terry Gilliam Interview: Karen Randell 9

1 Steampunked: The Animated Aesthetics of Terry Gilliam in Jabberwocky and Beyond Anna Froula 16

2 Grail Tales: The Preoccupations of Terry Gilliam Tony Hood 32

3 ‘And Now for Something Completely Different’: Pythonic Arthuriana and the Matter of Britain Jim Holie 42

4 The Baron, the King and Terry Gilliam’s Approach to ‘the Fantastic’ Keith James Hamel 54

5 The Subversion of Happy Endings in Terry Gilliam’s Brazil Jeffrey Melson and Eric Sterling 66

6 The Fissure King: Terry Gilliam’s Psychotic Fantasy Worlds Jacqueline Farley 79

7 ‘You can’t change anything’: Freedom and Control in Twelve Monkeys Gerry Canavan 92

8 ‘It shall be a nation’: Terry Gilliam’s Exploration of National Identity, Between Rationalism and Imagination Ofir Haivry 104

9 ‘Won’t somebody please think of the children?': The Case for Terry Gilliam’s Tidelands Kathryn A. Laity 118

10 Divorced from Reality: Time Bandits in Search of Fulfilment Jeff Birkenstein 130

11 Celebrity Trauma: The Death of Heath Ledger and The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus Karen Randell 145

Filmography 158
Bibliography 163
Index 173
CHAPTER EIGHT

'It shall be a nation': Terry Gilliam's Exploration of National Identity, Between Rationalism and Imagination

Ofir Haivry

A major theme, perhaps the major theme, of Terry Gilliam's films is the tension within the human mind between what is to be perceived as reality and what as fantasy (see Morgan 2004: 41). Since our senses convey to us a great deal of information, much of it contradictory, our mind is constantly attempting to interpret it. One method of interpretation is by rational process – examining all information using deductive logic only – and another by imagination – forming mental images, sensations and concepts, in a moment when they are not perceived through the senses. The different methods often result in diverging interpretations, thus producing in the mind an inner conflict about the true shape of the world around us.

In some Gilliam films, like The Fisher King (1991) and The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus (2009), the aspect of the conflict addressed is principally psychological or spiritual, while in others, like Brazil (1985) and Twelve Monkeys (1995), moral, social and political aspects are more prominent. However, it is one film in particular, The Brothers Grimm (2005), which presents most comprehensively, in terms of both images and ideas, an interpretation of the political dimension. It does so by addressing the significance and the consequences of this conflict, as they relate to national identity – the pattern of values, symbols and memories that individuals identify as being distinctive to their nation (see Smith 2007: 214–15). By this approach, Gilliam also offers what is possibly a way to bridge the tension – national tradition. In this way, he proposes, in effect, that setting the rational and the imaginative within established patterns of a tradition may restrain their excesses.

This chapter looks at The Brothers Grimm's exploration of the interplay of imagination and rationalism with political identity. It proposes that the film inventively outlines three approaches to political identity, by associating each with a corresponding character who embodies their respective national character. Moreover, it illustrates how, to a great extent, the three approaches outlined by Gilliam dovetail, to a surprising degree, with the three groups of scholarly interpretations concerning national identity (modernist, anti/post-modernist and traditionalist). Finally, this chapter suggests that the film implies that, while neither of the first two identities can supply a stable and decent political identity, it is the third, the traditionalist approach, which may offer such a possibility.

The scholarly debate about modern national identity is wide-ranging, with many different approaches and interpretations on offer. For our purpose these can be divided into three main groups: the first, which we may call 'traditionalist', regards national identity as primarily an effect of a community's long-term cultural developments, and as such, the beneficial expression of cultural self-definition on which the state should be founded. The second group, which we may call 'modernist', views any kind of national identity that is not contingent on the state as a deliberate invention intended to manipulate popular sentiments towards serving petty interests, and, as such, a false and detrimental political element that should be challenged and preferably replaced by a state-identity. The third, which we may call 'anti/post-modernist' includes a number of quite divergent approaches, which nevertheless share the rejection of the central role assigned to the state by both previous groups, preferring instead political and cultural identities that are either sub-national (like tribal or regional ones), or supra-national (like multi-cultural or universalist ones).

Despite their many disagreements, the different approaches concur in assigning to the consequences of the French Revolution a defining role in the debate about modern national identity. Between 1789 and 1814, French armies, first revolutionary and then Napoleonic, occupied most of Europe, ostensibly in the name of Enlightenment ideals. Foremost among these is rationalism, the political version of interpreting the world through rational process – proposing that human society is best ordered according to strict rational principles (thus, the period is also known as the Age of Reason). This invasion shattered the old, unsystematic baroque European political system and erased many existing traditions, laws and loyalties, thus ushering in an era in which the search for identity, including a national one, played a far more prominent role than it had previously.

In the ensuing contest about the preferable principle around which political communities should organise and identify, which to some extent continues to this very day (such as with the ongoing debate about the nature and future of the European Union), two opposing approaches emerged: on the one hand is the approach that rejects rationalism in politics and suggests instead that political identity should be rooted in the heritage of national imagination, such as historical narrative, religious symbols, popular folktales and, first and foremost, the national language(s). On the other hand is the approach that rejects such an 'imagined' heritage as essentially false and proposes instead that society should strive for an order that is as rational as possible emphasising elements like uniformity, centralised planning, and often a belief in the liberating power of technology (see Oakeshott 2010).
Before turning to The Brothers Grimm, a brief overview of Gilliam’s treatment of imagination and rationalism in previous films will provide the frame for discussion of these themes. The heartless and malevolent nature of political rationalism is a feature of many Gilliam films. An outstanding example is Brazil, his most straightforwardly political film, set during a dystopian regime. Beneath a thin, shiny veneer of efficiency and consumerism, a stiflingly rationalist bureaucratic regime is revealed to be spectacularly cruel and inept. Its consecration of mechanistic logic makes it a slave to procedure and incapable of adapting to contingencies. Unable to admit mistakes, it proceeds by crushing everything in its path, impervious to circumstances or to countless lives destroyed in the process. Unable to cope with this harsh reality, the protagonist, a naïve minor bureaucrat, increasingly finds refuge in his fantasy world. Eventually, when the dissonance becomes unbearable, he disconnects completely from reality and loses his mind. Surrendering the political struggle is the only way left for him to escape the cruel grasp of the regime (see Christie & Gilliam 2000: 131, 134).

The same hostility to rationalism is evident in the less overtly political The Adventures of Baron Munchausen (1988), the tale of a storyteller left old and weary ‘by his battle against the Age of Reason’ (McCabe 1999: 131). It opens with the captions, ‘Late 18th century. The Age of Reason. Wednesday’, followed immediately by a cannon-blast. Soon we learn that an unnamed European city besieged by the Turks is governed by ‘the Right-Ordinary Horatio Jackson’, who enforces a rule of reason as uniform and passive obedience to rules. His political creed is epitomised by his response to the latest Turkish proposal for peace: ‘No, the Sultan’s demands are not yet sufficiently rational. The only lasting peace is one based on reason, and scientific principle.’ Later, when guards escort a wounded soldier to Jackson’s presence, the following monologue ensues:

Ah, the officer who risked his life by singlehandedly destroying six enemy cannons, and rescuing ten of our men held captive by the Turks ... the officer about whom we heard so much ... who is taking risks far beyond the call of duty ... have him executed at once! This sort of behavior is demoralizing for the ordinary soldiers and citizens who are trying to lead normal, simple, unexceptional lives. Things difficult enough as it is, without these emotional people rocking the boat.  

However Gilliam’s evident aversion to political rationalism by no means entails a belief in imagination as panacea. In earlier films, like Time Bandits (1981), Brazil and The Adventures of Baron Munchausen, imagination is the manifest antidote to the evils of extreme rationalism. But later works, like his ‘American’ trilogy of The Fisher King, Twelve Monkeys and Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas (1998), present a more ambiguous attitude, with imagination facilitating confusion, disintegration and defeat. Gilliam acknowledged this trend explicitly, commenting that, while in early films he clearly identified with the protagonist’s point of view, the later ‘trilogy’ films ‘have had split protagonists’, and he can identify with both (McCabe 2004: 139).

Although never as completely negative towards imagination as he is towards rationalism, Gilliam increasingly exposes the ambiguous nature of an uncontrolled imagi-

nation with a potential for both salvation and destruction. While in Brazil and The Fisher King, the imagination that leads to madness is nevertheless a way to escape even worse ills; in Twelve Monkeys and Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas it has become a prison, even a kind of hell. With the protagonists unable to fashion narrative coherence out of the events they face, imagination becomes the agent of confusion instead of an antidote to rationalism. Without a cohesive story, reality loses meaning and purpose, dissolving into a flux of disconcerting incoherence.

The Brothers Grimm, while reiterating once again Gilliam’s unremitting hostility to rationalism in politics, also confronts, more than any previous work, the other side of the coin: the disintegration of all inhibitions when imagination becomes morbid and self-obsessed. Imagination, always the antidote to extreme rationalism in Gilliam films, also carries a sting-in-the-tail: a proximity to, indeed affinity with, insanity. However, the film goes further, presenting a kind of imagination that can be as malevolent (if not more so) than unfeeling rationalism. The film received mixed reviews, with many critics lauding visual aspects while panning plot and direction, such as Roger Ebert (2005) describing it as a ‘work of limitless invention, but it is invention without pattern, chasing itself around the screen without finding a plot’. A sizable minority of critics gave overall praise to the film, such as Jim Flusilis’s (2005) comment: ‘The Brothers Grimm is a celebration of the power of stories. Legends and myths, it tells us, should never be mocked or ignored. They may turn out to be real.’

Set in the Germany of 1811, which is under Napoleonic rule, The Brothers Grimm — very loosely inspired by the real-life compilers of German lore — tells the story of two brothers, William and Jacob Grimm (Matt Damon and Heath Ledger), who start the movie as co-artists and use Jacob’s collection of folktales to orchestrate apparitions of malevolent supernatural creatures of local lore to trick gullible communities into paying them to fight off the spectres. The authorities, represented by the French General Delatome (Jonathan Pryce) and his Italian henchman Cavaldi (Peter Stormare), apprehend the brothers and offer pardon if they employ their expertise in deception to uncover who is behind the mysterious disappearances of children in a forest adjacent to a Thuringian village. Having accepted the mission, the brothers gradually realise that they are not witnessing another scam but rather the attempt by the ‘Thuringian queen’ (Monica Bellucci), a long-dormant sorceress inhabiting an ancient tower in the forest, to regain her full powers. A showdown ensues in which French military forces trying to destroy the forest are overpowered and scattered by the queen’s magic, and Delatome himself is killed while attempting to execute the brothers. The Grimmer and Cavaldi then cooperate in foiling the queen’s bid for rejuvenation, finally breaking her power.

The movie thus unfolds as a conflict between a new French uninhibited rationalism (the general), and a primval German morbid imagination (the queen). These two evil powers each attempt to gain overall political dominance, while the protagonists (Germans and Italian) struggle with and ultimately succeed in finding an alternative path. The connection of the political dimension of this struggle with the theme of national identity allows important insights into its wider significance, including relevance for the debate about national identity in today’s European Union, and beyond.
The characters in the movie are clearly (often comically) identified along national lines, setting Delatombé and his soldiers as French, the brothers and the rest of the local population (including the witch-queen) as Germans, and Cavaldi as Italian. This national characterisation, not peripheral or accidental to the movie, is underscored by visual and plot features, as well as by systematic assignment of stereotypical national accents to all characters. Even more significantly, differences of national identity are associated with different political approaches. Delatombé regards Frenchness as rational, cultured and sophisticated, justified in its political dominance of the superstitious, uncouth and primitive Germans. The Italian Cavaldi starts the movie as an unmitigated acolyte of Delatombé’s political vision, uncannily obsequious to his French superiors and brutally contemptuous to his German subordinates. The Germans, including the Grimm brothers, are torn between a politically impotent resentment of the French domination and the allure of a more ancient but also more sinister power represented by the possible re-establishment of the queen’s rule.

The national identity conflict emerges early in the movie, when (after a prologue set in 1796) the principal narrative storyline opens with the captions: ‘15 years later, French-occupied Germany. The town of Karlstadt.’ The story then unfolds in the ostensibly independent ‘Kingdom of Westphalia’ (one of Napoleon’s puppet-kings), in fact a thinly disguised French military dominion with the supreme power resting in the hands of General Delatombé. In these circumstances, the daily life of the German population is marred by the conspicuous and heavy-handed presence of French soldiers. The French occupation is not only a harsh military oppression but also an overt attempt to ‘Frenchify’ the Germans. As the brothers ride into town, the old welcoming sign over the gate is replaced with a new one, bearing the caption ‘Bienvenue a Karlstadt’; the flags seen around town are only those of France, never of nominally independent Westphalia, and Karlstadt’s mayor sits with an oversize picture of Napoleon looming above him.

Delatombé (whose ruthlessness is represented by his name, translating to ‘from the grave’) repeatedly makes his mission clear by addressing his German subjects as ‘citizens of France’. His goal is most explicitly presented when he welcomes a party of Parisian guests: ‘Your shining example illuminates this dark German forest of ignorance and superstition.’ An obvious metaphor for the General’s vision of his mission – bringing French Enlightenment culture to illuminate the darkness of German superstition – it also encapsulates his eventual attempt to literally extirpate the forest and all it stands for by setting it on fire. But Delatombé’s cultural identity is only superficially French, mostly displayed in a comic obsession with cuisine. He repeatedly declares his loathing for German food (even sending a German cook to the guillotine for ‘crimes against cuisine’); revels in the extravagantly elaborate dinner he throws for his Parisian guests; mutters after shooting Cavaldi, ‘Italian never agrees with me;’ and offers as his dying words: ‘All I wanted was a little order. A slice of quiche would be nice.’ Even from his caricatured obsession, the real character of Delatombé’s project surfaces in his dying refrain about wanting ‘order’: a fanatical attempt to impose postrevolution tidiness over an untidy reality and a murderous willingness to extirpate any deviation from this vision of ‘progress’.

Thus, Delatombé’s identity cannot be said to be French in any meaningful way for his true ‘nationality’ is effectively some kind of supra-national state in which its inhabitants would subscribe to the ideals of the revolution. That is, rather than identifying with anything inherently French, the general is the patriot of the enlightenment: the universalising, rationalising and organising vision, regarding as the apex of human achievement the contrived construct called the ‘Age of Reason’. Such a vision, seeing itself as manifestly superior, requires all to conform to it. While breeding intrinsic hostility to other national, cultural or religious identities, it is an inherently obscurantist and backward-looking opposition to the march of progress and enlightenment (see Vincent 2002: 56–60).

Delatombé embodies the extreme rationalist qualities seen in earlier Gilliam movies: the inept cruelty of the bureaucrat-rulers in Brazil, the myopic self-regard of the scientists-rulers in Twelve Monkeys, the narrow, stifling vision of the citizen-ruler in The Adventures of Baron Munchausen. To be sure, Delatombé is very much a version of the latter film’s ‘Right-Ordinary’ Horatio Jackson (indeed, played by the same actor). Now he is military overlord rather than city-ruler but espouses the same principles of strict rationalism and order at any price with a fanatical willingness to mercilessly impose them. Jackson executes a soldier for heroism beyond the call of duty. Delatombé shoots Cavaldi when no longer useful to him, and both persecute storytellers, regarding their imagination as a threat to the next rational order they wish to erect. Delatombé represents a political vision seeking reason in uniformity. Regarding the state as the instrument for attaining this goal, as well as the only permitted recipient for the individual’s identity, all other agents of identity — tradition, language or religion — are to be erased. Not incidentally, this vision best suits a dictatorial political system. Its goals of reason and order can be fully delivered by an enlightened despot (Napoleon, or in his more circumscribed sphere, Delatombé). Ignoring as immaterial if not downright contemptible the will of his German subjects, the French overlords actively strives to erase their folktales, their gastronomy, even their language, in order to ‘illuminate’ them, and the essence of this critique is evident even earlier — in Gilliam’s depiction of Napoleon in Time Bandits (see Klawans 2004: 158).

Delatombé’s ideology leads him to regard national identity as the most serious threat to his objective. His greatest worry is that the latent national identity of his German subjects may intensify and grow to become political. This apprehension fuels his hostility to any expression of German culture, but is most obviously displayed in an exchange with the Grimm brothers about the disappearances in the Thuringian forest. When confronted by Delatombé with the demand to rationally explain the forest events or suffer torture and death, the brothers find the only path before them is to play on the general’s fears. They suggest that the culprits behind the forest incidents are not a gang of swindlers, but rather a group of armed men — potential competition to French control over the land. The danger from the forest thus becomes no more criminal but political:

Jacob: These are backward people, ignorant peasants. They cling to their folklore, because it gives them strength. The more this goes on, the more Germans will
talk like her [Anjelika, warning that the forest is enchanted], and then arm themselves, and then organize.

William: And then the problem won't just be one forest, any more. It shall be a nation.

Unsurprisingly, the general is immediately convinced of this explanation, catering as it does to his deepest anxieties. Thus Delatombe's goal is exposed as attempting to impose rationalist identity on the subjected population while regarding their developing national self-awareness as his greatest fear.

At the other extreme from Delatombe's Age of Reason, state-based identity is the ancient witch-queen, representing the resurrection of a primitive, feral, female, self-obsessed power. When the villagers of Marbaden gather in their local church to tell the Grimm brothers of ten children disappearing in strange circumstances, they connect the resurgence of the forest's ancient magic to the simmering but impotent German hostility to the French occupation:

Woman: Our people always knew that the forest was enchanted, but it never turned against us.

Man: Until now.

Old Man: Until the French occupation!

This short exchange establishes that the magical properties of the forest were a long-accepted reality to the villagers, that until recently they went unharmed by these, and that only lately a turn for the worst had occurred - in suspect proximity to the advent of French military presence. The renewed intensity and malicious intent of the forest's magic are soon traced back to an ancient witch-queen, sleeping in a high tower in the midst of the forest. The queen was the wife of a 'Christian king', who centuries ago ruthlessly conquered the surrounding lands from its original pagan inhabitants and felled their sacred forest. His victory was, however, fleeting for within a year he died of a plague, and the forest rapidly grew back. The queen is the true mover behind these events: she tortured the locals (the villagers' ancestors), wresting from them spells controlling magical powers, including one for immortality. Ageing, as a result of having gained eternal life but not eternal youth, she has since lain in waiting, looking for the opportunity to rejuvenate her body and her power. The queen's connection to primeval, pre-Christian powers is indicated by her identification with prominent elements of Teutonic mythology, such as ravens serving as her emissaries and her control of the forest's power. Moreover, while her husband is termed 'Christian king', she is never associated with Christianity and referred to only as 'queen' or 'Thuringian queen'.

Indeed, there are many indications that she is to be regarded as an anti-Christian figure: she displays marked disinterest in her church marriage (the king's hand resting on his chest during the marriage, suggests he, too, might have been spellbound by her, as later others are); the plague arriving on the very day of the wedding implies she was behind it, planning to seize power over the land; and attempts to fend off her evil magic repeatedly feature the use of Christian symbols. Thus, while the village's evolving tradition and identity has come to include Christianity, the queen and her magic represent an identity that is both pre- and anti-Christian, one that is unchanging and anti-traditional and seeks to obliterate everything that has occurred in the centuries since the queen went to sleep.

Besides the queen's associations with bloodthirsty pagan magic and ancient Teutonic mythology, the full import of her revival is made explicit at least twice. First, when the brothers enter the village, announcing they have come to save the land from enchantments, an old woman answers: 'Too late. The old ways have returned.' Later, the political dimension of the queen's return is highlighted when, while undergoing her process of rejuvenation, she declares: 'When the moon again becomes full, so will I. And your kingdom will once again be mine!' In political terms, the queen symbolises the resurgence of long-lost 'old ways' that are not only opposed to the French rationalistic approach but also to the traditional (and Christian) culture that developed in Germany over the centuries. The queen's awakening after sleeping for five hundred years represents the revival in Germany of long-dormant, arystocratic forces as a direct result of the French destruction of existing traditions, conventions and institutions. Demolishing the traditional framework of German culture and politics sweeps away all the aged but solid devices, which over the centuries had accrued into a complex mass that buried under its weight ancient barbarism.

The revived queen offers Germans an alternative to the rationalistic French oppression but at the price of an even worse moral abyss: the rule of a primitive, uninhibited and self-obsessed power that asserts a sub-national, even tribal, identity, defined only by ties of ancestry and blood. The price for this rejuvenation - the blood and lives of twelve innocents - leaves little doubt about the nature of a power thus resurrected. One does not have to dwell too much on the propensity of Fascism and of Nazism to represent themselves as revivals of an ancient pre-Christian past, Roman or Teutonic, to recognise the parallels in European, and especially German, history. Thus the film connects to the extensive discourse, about the problematic long-term consequences of the French occupation of Germany and the dangerous reactions it produced to the ideals of the revolution. As early as 1791, Edmund Burke, a contemporary adversary of the revolution, warned that, as a result of the attempt to impose on Germans liberties and laws of the French revolutionary 'mode': 'A great revolution is preparing in Germany, one likely to be more decisive for the 'general fate of nations', even than the French Revolution (1980: 348).

In Gilliam's film the German population, primarily represented by the brothers Grimm, finds itself placed between two evils: the general's unfeeling, cold rationalism and the queen's morbid, heated nativism. At first accepting unquestionably, if reluctantly, the seemingly triumphant French rationalism and later lured into the irrational, mesmerising world of the queen, the brothers struggle to find an independent foothold. Convinced by early exposure to a hoax, that all supernatural claims are fraudulent, the brothers attempt for the greater part of the movie to rationalise the strange occurrences they are witnessing, repeating that 'there must be a rational explanation to all of this'. They look for hidden mechanisms and mirrors behind strange creatures, wheels and tracks under moving trees, until finally Jacob realises the truth:
I remember the rest of the story... it's an ancient folk-lore which was passed down... the tower, the queen's curse story... you see before the plague, the queen tortured and killed the village's ancestors, to get her hands on their spells. One of them was a spell for eternal life.

The brothers recognise that the old stories are not simply inventions but real memories, part of their reality, indeed of their identity. By the end of the movie they embrace their role as part of a continuous story, still unfolding in Jacob's words: 'All my life I had been studying these folktales, and now I found one that is real.' This connection with an ongoing tradition that wishes neither to return to the past nor to leap into the future but to continue a story, provides the brothers with a national identity that is culturally as well as politically independent from both the general's imperialistic rationalism and the queen's backward-looking nativism. Effectively, the argument for a balance between rationalism and imagination is developed in The Brothers Grimm into a validation of national identity.

However, the most significant exploration of identity in the film is not realised by the titular brothers, but rather by the Italian baroque 'torture artist' Cavaldi. While the brothers start the movie as decent if misguided characters who are restored to their senses, the Italian torturer undergoes a far more extensive process of personal and moral discovery. Perhaps this is because the brothers' role is to represent the viewers' perspective and to further the plot, while the three approaches to identity are elaborated through other main characters, or perhaps because of Gilliam's personal affinity with Italy, Cavaldi is certainly the most complex of the characters, and the one who develops most during the film.

Starting out as a pathetic, cruel and cowardly slavish figure, totally subservient to his French master, it soon emerges that the Italian is not quite what he appears. There are indications from early in the film that Cavaldi is a mercurial, conflicted character, harbouring reservations about his servitude to the French and not as ferocious and cruel as his trade would suggest. Indeed, despite his deference to his overlord, Cavaldi certainly does not regard himself as French, proud as he is of his Italian identity and family heritage, as evident in the way he presents himself: 'I am Mercurio Cavaldi, of the great Cavaldì of Parma.'

As the movie progresses, Cavaldi is confronted with supernatural occurrences that shake his confidence in the General's rationalism. For example, his instinctive raising of a crucifix to repel a menacing werewolf (that he is even secretly carrying a crucifix under his shirt is itself important) indicates that he is only outwardly adhering to French revolutionary ideals. Later, confronted by Delamorbe with his failure to explain what is happening in the forest, the Italian answers: 'They try to blind Cavaldi, with their fairy tales of devouring trees and flying wolves. But I use my logical brain.' Cavaldi increasingly realises that the French-style abstract 'logical brain' is actually distorting the reality he is witnessing. Eventually, he comes to reject entirely the rationalistic French outlook, its methods and goals. Indeed he is the first to grasp the true nature of the situation and dons the 'magical' armour used by the brothers in their scams as a 'precaution', while they still look for 'rational explanations'. Cavaldi's doubts about his services to the French mount until Delamorbe's attempt to burn the forest. The Italian comes to truly believe the Grimms and their stories and acquires to the general's orders out of fear. Finally, when directly ordered by Delamorbe to execute the brothers, Cavaldi finds the courage to confront the general and announce his wish to resign from service. For his trouble, he is immediately shot. However, he is saved from the bullet by the 'magical' prop armour that he secretly wears, despite the general's scorn (thus 'magically' saved by the Grimms' false-magic). Freed of his submission to French rationalism, Cavaldi witnesses the full power of the queen's ancient magic. But having discarded one master the Italian is not about to submit to another. No longer cowering before supernatural occurrences, Cavaldi finds his true voice.

Upon discovering that William has apparently been murdered by the queen, instead of escaping when presented with the full force of the ancient dark power, the Italian courageously confronts it and directs at the queen's tottering tower his very own magic, a forceful, heartfelt curse: 'Demon queen, hear me. Swallow my curse, from the dark hearts of my ancestors: Malefettet Maledettet' ('Damn you! Damn you!'). His words appear to give the tower its coup de grâce, and the whole ancient edifice collapses. Cavaldi's restored bond to his national and familial tradition is further emphasised by the restoration of his memory. When viewing Jacob leaning over William's seemingly dead body, the Italian suddenly realises: 'Wait! I know this story, from my childhood. There is still time, Jacob. Look, [points to the moon] the spell can be broken with a kiss of true love.'

Having found the courage to reject both enlightenment rationalism and obscurantist primitivism, Cavaldi presents an alternative version of national identity, one that might be termed 'baroque', stemming as it does from loyalty to continuing familial and national tradition with all their complexities. The Italian accepts his role as part of an ongoing story, neither repudiating the past nor remaining a slave to it. Instead of yielding to or attempting to erase the past's darker features, Cavaldi chooses to recruit them to serve a higher moral purpose, to aid his stand against evil. Thus, national differences have a decisive role in furthering the movie's examination of political identity. The French, and especially Delamorbe, represent a view proposing the ideals of the French Revolution and a particularly strict rationalism as the focus for a supranational identity, in effect suggesting the prospect of a uniform and stifling future. The Germans in the movie struggle against the temptation offered by the Thuringian queen (significantly, only Germans ever see her), representing a power-hungry, primitive and self-obsessed identity, its focal point tribal or rather racial, and the consequences of its success too appalling to contemplate. The Italian Cavaldi represents the baroque, a national identity based primarily on culture and memory that can successfully engage with outsiders without losing its own character and can confidently look to the future without severing its connections to the past.

Gilliam explores the moral and practical consequences of cold-hearted rationalism and its counterpart, over-heated imagination, in many of his films. In his own words:

I like movies that are full of a lot of conflicting and interesting things. I want to make films that inspire people to explore their imagination. We live in a world that is defined
by numbers and calculations – and there is very little room for myth and dreams. I think we need both of those things in our lives, to make life worth living.\[1\]

*The Brothers Grimm* carries this examination squarely into the political sphere. Its identification of extreme rationalism with a supra-national even imperial identity and of unbound imagination with a sub-national even tribal identity is instructive, for it intimates that neither of these two principles can provide a stable national identity. It suggests that in their pure form, both rationalism and imagination produce inherently unhealthy and unstable political identities, tending either to extend ever outwards or to collapse inwards into self-obsessive purity. Only something like an independent national idea can deliver durable political identity (see Hazony 2002).

As we have seen, the traditionalist approach stresses the importance of elements like culture, language and customs in sustaining national identity. But in *The Brothers Grimm*, Gilliam assigns the crucial role to another factor: narrative. Story-narratives and their preservation are important in all of Gilliam’s movies, especially so in *The Brothers Grimm*. Abstract, a-temporal rationalism, which is inherently anti-narrative, is often set in his films against the continuity-narrative that is the story. However, the opposite of rationalism – imagination – is not necessarily the solution. A degree of imagination is essential to establish a storyline, but in excess it accrues until it overwhelms the narrative, shattering the story into incoherent shards and images – as happens in *Twelve Monkeys* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Thus, the impact of the Baron’s tales in *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, and the restoration of national self-identity by Cavaldi and the brothers in *The Brothers Grimm*, are explicitly connected to their regaining memories of stories and to their acknowledging themselves as participating in those stories. A story establishes temporal sequence, necessarily tied to the past but also possibly projecting into the future. In this way the individual can intertwine with community – the familial, the regional and eventually the national story. As an American, Gilliam has repeatedly commented that the connection with a continuing story is why he prefers to live in Europe: ‘In Europe you get the feeling of belonging to a very, very long history.’ This connection, he believes, gives stability which he highlights by pointing out that his houses in England and Italy are hundreds of years old, which for him means that ‘I can keep going back to the past’ (Costa & Sanchez 2004: 180).

The enduring importance of the debate about the French Revolution and its legacy in European history enables Jordi Costa and Sergi Sanchez (2004) to explore political approaches that are relevant to this day. It reflects the political battle over the European hearts and minds between, on the one side, Delatombé’s ideal of the supra-national state, which strives to make Italians and Germans into citizens of the French Revolution, and, on the other, the Thuringian queen’s sub-national vision wishes to draw Germans into a native past which is fixated with notions of power and blood so dear to twentieth-century totalitarian ideologies.

Faced with the battle over European identity, waged between enlightenment and obscurantist visions, the film offers a third, baroque alternative. It shows the brothers Grimm and Cavaldi awakening to the true nature of the political struggle around them and rejecting both malevolent options presented to them in favour of a tentatively hopeful, old/new path of national identity. These three political alternatives differ, first and foremost, about their attitude to the past: the first (rationalism) attempts to erase it, the second (nativism) tries to return to it, and the third (national tradition) proposes to live with it as part of a shared, ongoing story.

**Notes**


2. The same approach is evident in the dying Baron Munchausen’s presentation of the cause for his approaching demise (eventually averted) as his apparent redundancy: ‘Because it’s all logic and reason now, science, progress … laws of hydraulics, laws of social dynamics, laws of this, that, and the other. No place for three-legged Cyclops in the South Seas, no place for cucumber trees and oceans of wine. No place for me.’

3. Ehren Kruger is credited for the script of *The Brothers Grimm* due only to the rules of the Writers Guild of America. In his DVD commentary, Gilliam states that he did not like the original Kruger script and that when he agreed to do the movie, he extensively re-wrote it (together with collaborator, Tony Grisoni).

4. In the DVD commentary, Gilliam describes his decision to stress differences of nationality, by intentional and conspicuous (indeed, often comical) use of differing accents: French and Italian characters speak English with their respective accents, while Germans speak with accents from various parts of England.

5. In the voice commentary, Gilliam states: ‘The ravens are the messengers of the Queen, I guess going back to Norse mythology. The sacred forest and Irminsul tree are central elements of pre-Christian Germanic myth.’

6. Christian symbols and artifacts are repeatedly placed in opposition to the evil forces of the film: when Karlstadt’s mayor is shown sitting under a picture of Napoleon, a crucifix can be seen cast aside near the window, representing the displacement of the old order by the new oppressive regime; and when the villagers gather to tell the brothers about the disappearances, they do so in their local church, hoping its sanctity defends them from the forest’s magic. Moreover, throughout the film crucifixes are used to repel evil: when the brothers battle the false witch, William raises a prop-crucifix which ignites into flames; when Cavaldi is threatened by a werewolf, he grasps the crucifix he is carrying about his neck; when Delatombé is about to kill William, the latter raises the igniting prop-crucifix previously used against the false witch (causing the general
to sneer). The bursting flames momentarily blind the Frenchman, allowing the German to kill him. In a deleted scene, when Cavaldi is reluctantly forced by Delatome to show him the way to the witch's tower, the Italian crosses himself. The comical effect accompanying the use of the cross in these scenes (and the obvious reference to horror film conventions of crucifixes stopping vampires and other monsters) does not deny its effectiveness.

7 Intriguingly, scholars currently most supportive of the fragmentation of national identity into smaller identity groups tend to be those inclined to post-modernism (see Vincent 2002: 51–2).

8 In the introduction to their *Kinder und Hausmärchen* ('Children's and Household Tales') published in 1812, the real Jacob and William Grimm explicitly acknowledge that many of the collected tales were not exclusively German ones, but particular national versions of stories shared for centuries by other European nations, extensively recorded for the first time in Giambattista Basile's *Pentamerone* (1634–1636).

9 Gilliam resides part of the year in his house near the Umbrian town of Montone, where he also helped to establish a yearly film festival.

10 In the DVD commentary, Gilliam describes Cavaldi at the time of his first appearance as a conflicted character: 'Cavaldi, an Italian torture artist, tortured artist', later adding, 'This pathetic creature, Cavaldi, tries to be murderous and has in fact a sweet heart.' Also on the DVD is a deleted scene where Delatome airs his suspicion of the Italian's true nature: 'Cavaldi, when I scoured Italy in search for a torture artist, they warned me you was [sic] the weakest of all the great Cavaldis. No stomach for it; Sometimes I wonder if you have ever dismembered any virgin at all.'

11 From the press conference presenting *The Brothers Grimm* at the Venice Film Festival on 4 September 2005.

Works Cited


